The national executive of the strife-torn Democrats last night appointed little-known West Australian senator Brian Greig as interim leader – a shock move likely to provoke further conflict between the party's senators and its organisation. In a move to reassert control over the party's seven senators, the national executive last night rejected Aden Ridgeway's bid to become interim leader, in favour of Senator Greig, a supporter of deposed leader Natasha Stott Despoja and an outspoken gay rights activist.

Cash-strapped financial services group AMP has shelved a $400 million plan to buy shares back from investors and will raise $750 million in fresh capital after profits crashed in the six months to June 30. Chief executive Paul Batchelor said the result was "solid" in what he described as the worst conditions for stock markets in 20 years. AMP's half-year profit sank 25 per cent to $303 million, or 27c a share, as Australia's largest investor and fund manager failed to hit projected 5 per cent earnings growth targets and was battered by falling returns on share markets.

The United States government has said it wants to see President Robert Mugabe removed from power and that it is working with the Zimbabwean opposition to bring about a change of administration. As scores of white farmers went into hiding to escape a round-up by Zimbabwean police, a senior Bush administration official called Mr Mugabe's rule "illegitimate and irrational" and said that his re-election as president in March was won through fraud. Walter Kansteiner, the assistant secretary of state for African affairs, went on to blame Mr Mugabe's policies for contributing to the threat of famine in Zimbabwe.

A radical armed Islamist group with ties to Tehran and Baghdad has helped al-Qaida establish an international terrorist training camp in northern Iraq, Kurdish officials say. Intelligence officers in the autonomous Kurdish region of Iraq told the Guardian that the Ansar al-Islam (supporters of Islam) group is harbouring up to 150 al-Qaida members in a string of villages it controls along the Iraq-Iran border. Most of them fled Afghanistan after the US-led offensive, but officials from the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), which controls part of north-east Iraq, claim an "abnormal" number of recruits are making their way to the area from Jordan, Syria and Egypt.

Washington has sharply rebuked Russia over bombings of Georgian villages, warning the raids violated Georgian sovereignty and could worsen tensions between Moscow and Tbilisi. "The United States regrets the loss of life and deplores the violation of Georgia's sovereignty," White House spokesman Ari Fleischer said. Mr Fleischer said US Secretary of State Colin Powell had delivered the same message to his Russian counterpart but that the stern language did not reflect a sign of souring relations between Moscow and Washington.

A gay former student of a Melbourne Christian school is taking legal action under equal opportunity legislation, claiming the school discriminated against him because of his sexuality. Tim, 16, alleged a staff member at Hillcrest Christian College in Berwick told him he "had the devil in him", and constant bullying by students prompted the principal to tell him to hide his sexuality. He left the school several weeks ago and is continuing Year 10 by distance education after he said homophobic bullies threw rocks at his head, spat on him, called him names and slashed his belongings.

Senior members of the Saudi royal family paid at least $560 million to Osama bin Laden's terror group and the Taliban for an agreement his forces would not attack targets in Saudi Arabia, according to court documents. The papers, filed in a $US3000 billion ($5500 billion) lawsuit in the US, allege the deal was made after two secret meetings between Saudi royals and leaders of al-Qa'ida, including bin Laden. The money enabled al-Qa'ida to fund training camps in Afghanistan later attended by the September 11 hijackers. The disclosures will increase tensions between the US and Saudi Arabia.

Palestinian hired gun Abu Nidal, whose violent death was reported last week from Baghdad, was murdered on the orders of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein after refusing to train al-Qa'ida fighters based in Iraq, reports said yesterday. Iraqi intelligence chief Taher Jalil Habbush said last Wednesday Abu Nidal had shot and killed himself after being discovered living illegally in Baghdad and facing interrogation for anti-Iraqi activities. But Western diplomats believe the radical militant was killed for refusing to reactivate his international terrorist network.

Hunan province remained on high alert last night as thunderstorms threatened to exacerbate the flood crisis, now entering its fifth day and with 108 already dead and hundreds of thousands evacuated. On the flood frontline at Dongting Lake, the water level peaked at just under 35m on Saturday night, then eased about 3cm during the day under a hot sun, with temperatures reaching 35C. But with the lake still brimming at dangerously high levels, and spilling over the top of its banks in some places, locals were fearful that a thunderstorm and high winds forecast to hit the region last night would damage the dikes. About 1800km of dikes around the lake are all that stand between 10 million people in the surrounding farmland and disaster.

A U.S.-British air raid in southern Iraq left eight civilians dead and nine wounded, the Iraqi military said Sunday. The military told the official Iraqi News Agency that the warplanes bombed areas in Basra province, 330 miles south of Baghdad. The U.S. Central Command in Florida said coalition aircraft used precision-guided weapons to strike two air defense radar systems near Basra "in response to recent Iraqi hostile acts against coalition aircraft monitoring the Southern No-Fly Zone."

Iraq and Russia are close to signing a $40 billion economic cooperation plan, Iraq's ambassador said Saturday, a deal that could put Moscow at odds with the United States as it considers a military attack against Baghdad. The statement by Ambassador Abbas Khalaf came amid indications that Russia, despite its strong support for the post-Sept. 11 antiterrorism coalition, is maintaining or improving ties with Iran and North Korea, which together with Iraq are the countries President Bush has labeled the "axis of evil."

U.S. intelligence cannot say conclusively that Saddam Hussein has weapons of mass destruction, an information gap that is complicating White House efforts to build support for an attack on Saddam's Iraqi regime. The CIA has advised top administration officials to assume that Iraq has some weapons of mass destruction. But the agency has not given President Bush a "smoking gun," according to U.S. intelligence and administration officials.

Drug squad detectives have asked the Police Ombudsman to investigate the taskforce that is examining allegations of widespread corruption within the squad. This coincides with the creation of a special unit within the taskforce to track the spending of at least 10 serving and former squad members. The corruption taskforce, codenamed Ceja, will check tax records and financial statements in a bid to establish if any of the suspects have accrued unexplained wealth over the past seven years. But drug squad detectives have countered with their own set of allegations, complaining to the ombudsman that the internal investigation is flawed, biased and over-zealous.

Queensland senator Andrew Bartlett has launched a last-minute bid to rescue the Australian Democrats from a split that threatens to destroy the party. With nominations for the party leadership to close on Wednesday night, Senator Bartlett met last night with deputy leader Aden Ridgeway to offer him a place on a unity ticket and set up a reform process to begin healing the party's wounds. Party sources said Senator Ridgeway, who turned against former leader Natasha Stott Despoja, is still expected to contest the leadership against one of her two supporters: Senator Bartlett or Brian Greig, installed as interim leader by the party's executive last Thursday.

Very few women have been appointed to head independent schools, thwarting efforts to show women as good leaders, according to the Victorian Independent Education Union. Although they make up two-thirds of teaching staff, women hold only one-third of principal positions, the union's general secretary, Tony Keenan, said. He believed some women were reluctant to become principals because of the long hours and the nature of the work. But in other cases they were shut out of the top position because of perceptions about their ability to lead and provide discipline.

The Bush administration has drawn up plans to escalate the war of words against Iraq, with new campaigns to step up pressure on Baghdad and rally world opinion behind the US drive to oust President Saddam Hussein. This week, the State Department will begin mobilising Iraqis from across North America, Europe and the Arab world, training them to appear on talk shows, write opinion articles and give speeches on reasons to end President Saddam's rule.

Beijing has abruptly withdrawn a new car registration system after drivers demonstrated "an unhealthy fixation" with symbols of Western military and industrial strength - such as FBI and 007. Senior officials have been infuriated by a popular demonstration of interest in American institutions such as the FBI. Particularly galling was one man's choice of TMD, which stands for Theatre Missile Defence, a US-designed missile system that is regularly vilified by Chinese propaganda channels.

The United Nations World Food Program estimates that up to 14 million people in seven countries - Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia, Angola, Swaziland, Lesotho and Zimbabwe - face death by starvation unless there is a massive international response. In Malawi, as many as 10,000 people may have already died. The signs of malnutrition - swollen stomachs, stick-thin arms, light-coloured hair - are everywhere.

In Malawi, as in other countries in the region, AIDS is making the effects of the famine much worse. The overall HIV infection rate in Malawi is 19 per cent, but in some areas up to 35 percent of people are infected. A significant proportion of the young adult population is too sick to do any productive work. Malnutrition causes people to succumb to the disease much more quickly than they do in the West, and hunger forces women into prostitution in order to feed their families, making them more vulnerable to contracting the disease. Life expectancy has been reduced to 40 years.

The United Nations was determined that its showpiece environment summit - the biggest conference the world has ever witnessed - should be staged in Africa. The venue, however, could not be further removed from the grim realities of life in the rest of Africa. Johannesburg's exclusive and formerly whites-only suburb of Sandton is the wealthiest neighbourhood in the continent. Just a few kilometres from Sandton begins the sprawling Alexandra township, where nearly a million people live in squalor. Organisers of the conference, which begins today, seem determined that the two worlds should be kept as far apart as possible. Tight security surrounds Sandton's convention centre and five-star hotels, where world leaders will debate poverty, the environment and sustainable development while enjoying lavish hospitality.

The Iraqi capital is agog after the violent death of one of the world's most notorious terrorists, but the least of the Palestinian diplomat's worries was the disposal of Abu Nidal's body, which lay on a slab in an undisclosed Baghdad morgue. Abu Nidal's Fatah Revolutionary Council is held responsible for the death or injury of almost 1000 people in 20 countries across Europe and the Middle East in the three decades since he fell out with Yasser Arafat over what Abu Nidal saw as Arafat's willingness to accommodate Israel in the Palestinian struggle.

The Federal Government says changes announced today to the work for the dole scheme will benefit participants and taxpayers. Federal Employment Services Minister Mal Brough says that from July 1 those taking part in work for the dole will be able to perform extra hours to complete their mutual obligation more quickly to access training credits.

The biowarfare expert under scrutiny in the anthrax attacks declared, "I am not the anthrax killer," and lashed out today against Attorney General John Ashcroft for calling him a "person of interest" in the investigation. For the second time in two weeks, the scientist went before a throng of reporters outside his lawyer's office to profess his innocence and decry the attention from law enforcers that he contends has destroyed his life.

China said Sunday it issued new regulations controlling the export of missile technology, taking steps to ease U.S. concerns about transferring sensitive equipment to Middle East countries, particularly Iran. However, the new rules apparently do not ban outright the transfer of specific items — something Washington long has urged Beijing to do.

Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo said he will weep if a single mother sentenced to death by stoning for having a child out of wedlock is killed, but added he has faith the court system will overturn her sentence. Obasanjo's comments late Saturday appeared to confirm he would not intervene directly in the case, despite an international outcry.

An Islamic high court in northern Nigeria rejected an appeal today by a single mother sentenced to be stoned to death for having sex out of wedlock. Clutching her baby daughter, Amina Lawal burst into tears as the judge delivered the ruling. Lawal, 30, was first sentenced in March after giving birth to a daughter more than nine months after divorcing.

How did 2,300 allegedly unregistered missile warheads come to be stored on a Canadian businessman's anti-terrorism training facility in New Mexico? U.S. and Canadian officials are still trying to figure that out, but one security expert says the mystery is a "chilling" one. David Hudak, 41, was arrested in the United States more than a week ago when, according to court documents, agents searching his property found the warheads stored in crates that were marked “Charge Demolition.”

The Saudi Interior Ministry on Sunday confirmed it is holding a 21-year-old Saudi man the FBI is seeking for alleged links to the Sept. 11 hijackers. Authorities are interrogating Saud Abdulaziz Saud al-Rasheed “and if it is proven that he was connected to terrorism, he will be referred to the sharia (Islamic) court,” the official Saudi Press Agency quoted an unidentified ministry official as saying.

Sri Lanka's government will lift a four-year ban on Tamil Tiger rebels on Sept. 6, paving the way for peace talks with the insurgents scheduled for later that month in Thailand, a government minister said Saturday. "We will lift the ban as promised," Minister for Rehabilitation Jayalath Jayawardena told The Associated Press. The lifting of the ban is one of the key rebel conditions for resuming peace negotiations with the government after a hiatus of more than seven years.

A man accused of making hidden-camera footage up the skirts of women also made child pornography of the worst kind, featuring the rape of children as young as 6, police said Friday. The latest allegations suggest there's nothing humorous about voyeurs who some may perceive to be making secret videos as a joke, Staff-Insp. Gary Ellis said. “Approximately 20 per cent of voyeurs have also committed sexual assault or rape,” Ellis said, reading from a recently released federal government report on criminal voyeurism.

Police are combing through videotapes trying to spot the gunman dressed in black who shot a 30-year-old man to death at a downtown massage parlour. The victim was hit in the stomach and upper body and died about 3 1/2 hours later in hospital. The woman was not hurt. Police urged business owners to turn over any security-camera videotapes they might have that recorded people on the street at the time. Several such videos are now being reviewed.

The Federal Government did not regret its actions 12 months on from the Tampa asylum seeker crisis, Small Business Minister Joe Hockey said today. Mr Hockey said the Government was not embarrassed by the Tampa issue, which began on August 27 of last year when the captain of the Norwegian cargo ship rescued more than 400 asylum seekers from an Indonesian ferry north of Christmas Island.

At least three Democrats are considering splitting from the party while no-one has yet nominated to contest the leadership. Three of the "gang of four" senators who ousted Natasha Stott Despoja from the leadership are considering forming a new "progressive centre" party in the fallout from last week’s turmoil. This would leave the Democrats with a rump of three or four members. West Australian Senator Andrew Murray said yesterday unless the Democrats left wing gave ground the party would split.

A young humpback whale remained tangled in a shark net off the Gold Coast yesterday, despite valiant efforts by marine rescuers. With its head snared by the net and an anchor rope wrapped around its tail, the stricken whale was still swimming but hopes for its survival were fading. A second rescue attempt was planned for dawn today after rescuers braved heavy seas, strong wind and driving rain to try to free the whale.

Prince William has told friends his mother was right all along to suspect her former protection officer of spying on her and he doesn't want any detective intruding on his own privacy. William and Prince Harry are so devastated by the treachery of Ken Wharfe, whom they looked on as a surrogate father, they are now refusing to talk to their own detectives.

The spectre of Osama bin Laden rose again today, urging Afghans to launch a new Jihad, or holy war, and predicting the fall of the United States, in a hand-written "letter" posted on an Islamic website. There was no hard proof that the scruffy missive was genuine, but IslamOnline.net said it had been received by their correspondent in Jalalabad, eastern Afghanistan, from an Afghan source who asked to remain anonymous. The source claimed it was the "most recent letter" from the world's most wanted man.

The Johannesburg Earth Summit is set to get under way with the promise that leaders will take action on the environment, debt and poverty. South African President Thabo Mbeki, speaking at the opening ceremony, said: "Out of Johannesburg and out of Africa must emerge something that takes the world forward." But the absence of US President George W Bush was threatening to overshadow the summit.

Robert Mugabe strengthened his hold on the Zimbabwean government yesterday by retaining the most combative hardliner ministers in a cabinet shuffle which offered little hope of a moderation of the land seizures and other policies that have kept Zimbabwe in crisis and brought international condemnation.

They dress in black and disguise their identities with bandannas and sunglasses. Their logo is an image of the Southern Cross constellation, superimposed with a pair of crossed boomerangs, which resembles a swastika. The Blackshirts are former husbands aggrieved by their treatment at the hands of their ex-wives and the courts, who regard themselves as the vanguard of a "men's rights" movement in Australia and say that their actions will be remembered as marking a turning-point in history.

The real level of world inequality and environmental degradation may be far worse than official estimates, according to a leaked document prepared for the world's richest countries and seen by the Guardian. It includes new estimates that the world lost almost 10% of its forests in the past 10 years; that carbon dioxide emissions leading to global warming are expected to rise by 33% in rich countries and 100% in the rest of the world in the next 18 years; and that more than 30% more fresh water will be needed by 2020.

Researchers conducting the most elaborate wild goose chase in history are digesting the news that a bird they have tracked for over 4,500 miles is about to be cooked. Kerry, an Irish light-bellied Brent goose, was one of six birds tagged in Northern Ireland in May by researchers monitoring the species' remarkable migration. Last week, however, he was found dead in an Inuit hunter's freezer in Canada, still wearing his £3,000 satelite tracking device. Kerry was discovered by researchers on the remote Cornwallis Island. They picked up the signal and decided to try to find him.

Russia defended itself against U.S. criticism of its economic ties with countries like Iraq, saying attempts to mix business and ideology were misguided. “Mixing ideology with economic ties, which was characteristic of the Cold War that Russia and the United States worked to end, is a thing of the past,” Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman Boris Malakhov said Saturday, reacting to U.S. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's statement that Moscow's economic relationships with such countries sends a negative signal.

Pope John Paul II urged delegates at a major U.N. summit on sustainable growth on Sunday to pursue development that protects the environment and social justice. In comments to tourists and the faithful at his summer residence southeast of Rome, the pope said God had put humans on Earth to be his administrators of the land, “to cultivate it and take care of it.” “In a world ever more interdependent, peace, justice and the safekeeping of creation cannot but be the fruit of a joint commitment of all in pursuing the common good,” John Paul said.

The Russian defense minister said residents shouldn't feel threatened by the growing number of Chinese workers seeking employment in the country's sparsely populated Far Eastern and Siberian regions. There are no exact figures for the number of Chinese working in Russia, but estimates range from 200,000 to as many as 5 million. Most are in the Russian Far East, where they arrive with legitimate work visas to do seasonal work on Russia's low-tech, labor-intensive farms.

Australian spies listened to conversations between Norway's ambassador and its foreign office during the Tampa crisis, a soon to be published book will reveal. Phone calls were tapped by the Defence Signals Directorate when Norwegian ambassador Ove Thorsheim visited the freighter during the stand-off. A book, Tampa, to be published in Norway in October, recounts the events which triggered Australia's Pacific Solution and transformed Tampa Captain Arne Rinnan into a homeland hero.

Batasuna, a political party that campaigns for an independent Basque state, faces a double blow today: the Spanish parliament is expected to vote overwhelmingly in favour of banning the radical group, while a senior investigative judge is poised to suspend Batasuna's activities on the grounds that they benefit Eta, the outlawed Basque separatist group.

The river Elbe surged to an all-time record high Friday, flooding more districts of the historic city of Dresden as authorities scrambled to evacuate tens of thousands of residents in the worst flooding to hit central Europe in memory. In the Czech Republic, authorities were counting the cost of the massive flooding as people returned to the homes and the Vlava river receded, revealing the full extent of the damage to lives and landmarks.

The European Parliament is spoiling for a fight with Israel. It has voted to review the EU's diplomatic links with the Jewish state, to impose an arms embargo and to threaten wider trade sanctions. Many MEPs want to go further and dispatch a European military force to the region in order to "protect the Palestinian people".

Australia's Commonwealth Bank on Wednesday said it plans to cut about 1,000 jobs even as it reported its profit rose 11 percent last fiscal year. Workers reacted angrily to the planned cuts, which Australia's second largest bank said were designed to control costs. The cuts will take effect this financial year. The bank reported net profit of 2.66 billion Australian dollars ($1.4 billion) in the year to June 30, up from 2.4 billion Australian dollars in the previous year.

Labor needed to distinguish itself from the Government on the issue of asylum seekers, Greens leader Bob Brown has said. His Senate colleague Kerry Nettle intends to move a motion today - on the first anniversary of the Tampa crisis - condemning the Government over its refugee policy and calling for an end to mandatory detention. "We Greens want to bring the Government to book over its serial breach of international obligations as far as asylum seekers in this country are concerned," Senator Brown said today.

" The Federal Government says Australians do not want to take an overly-patriotic approach to celebrating 100 years of nationhood. The first festivities of a total of 2000 official events begin tomorrow with a dawn ceremony in Alice Springs, then a huge parade in Sydney. The Federal Minister, for the Centenary, Peter McGauran says government research showed Australians wanted a limit on the razzamatazz. ""They've told us no fireworks. It's to be done seriously with the dignity it deserves,"" he said. Mr McGauran promises Sydney will not hog all the parties during the year with more than 2,000 events planned across the country. ""This is their opportunity wherever they live to celebrate the fact that we're one of only five continuing democracies over the last 100 years, something to be very proud of."" ""This is not a year of celebration that belongs to any capital city or state instead all Australians wherever they live will be involved as its been intended. ""There's been great cooperation between the three levels of government between local communities to make sure that Australians can be involved and feel pride in their country."" Centenary of federation councilor, Betty Churcher, says the organisers aimed to ensure that Australians know more about their history by the end of next year. Ms Churcher says the council wanted to avoid the perception which followed the bicentennial events, that the focus was too strongly on Sydney. ""We're trying to have it move through rural communities through every state and territory of the country so that people's awareness is raised,"" she said. ""I find it very depressing that Australians know so little about their own history and this is one of the things that I hope is an offshoot that people do start to think what a miraculous thing that was that in 1901 all of those separate colonies could actually agree."" Ms Churcher, hopes the nation revisits the republic issue soon after the centenary celebrations. She says on a personal level she hopes it leads to a new debate. ""I would be very bitterly disappointed and amazed if my ghost looking down from heaven should see the next celebration of the country not a republic,"" she said."

" The former prime minister, Malcolm Fraser, says Australia should lift its population to about 45 million. Mr Fraser says next year's centenary of federation is the right time to consider the issue. He says Australia is at grave risk of being seen as selfish if it does not accept more migrants. ""I think the values and ideals that Australian society tries to uphold are very important and I also believe that we'd be in a much better position to advance those values if we were a nation of 40-45 million people and if we could set that as a target as we move through this next century,"" he said. ""That would be a lesser target than the one which the nation of 7 million people set themselves in the immediate post World War II era."" Mr Fraser says a further change of attitude towards migrants would continue the extraordinary strides Australia has made since its first years. ""The dictation test, which could be given in any language to someone who the Government or the department wanted kept out, still existed until 1959,"" he said. ""It wasn't until sometime after that the white Australia policy was finally dead and buried. ""When you look at Australia at the beginning, we're a very different country at the end, a very much better country more tolerant, I hope more generous and I hope more understanding."" Mr Fraser says the next century of nationhood will also require more work on reconciliation with indigenous Australians as well as continuing efforts to cooperate with neighboring nations especially Indonesia."

" Ausmaid has become the first South Australian boat in 50 years to take overall handicap honours in the Sydney to Hobart yacht race. Ausmaid was eighth across the line, ending a run of several near-wins in recent Sydney to Hobarts. She finished third in 1999 and second in 1998. Skipper, Kevan Pearce, says despite the thrill of winning the race he has other ambitions to achieve on the water. ""Obviously we'll still keep going, we'll also contest the Sydney to Gold Coast race in July which we got second this year and next year we'd like to win that,"" he said. ""There's the Sydney to Mooloolaba race which we'd like to have a crack at and we'll continue on the blue water series out of Sydney."""

" The father of an Australian woman being held in a Laotian jail has called on the Federal Government to cut all ties with Laos until his daughter is released. Kay and Kerry Danes have been detained in a jail in Vientiane for more than a week, without being charged. They are being investigated for activities relating to security at a sapphire mine, called Laos Gem Mine. Kay Danes' father, Ernie Stuart, says the Howard Government should introduce sanctions against Laos. ""I believe that foreign aid to a country like this should be frozen immediately because there are innocent people involved,"" he said. ""There's no thoughts of these kids being guilty in any way whatsoever and it is my belief that the whole world agrees with that."""

" A passenger who attacked the pilot of a British Airways jet en route to Kenya had been cleared by police in London to board the flight. Paul Mukonyi was said to have been ""confused"" at the check-in desk at Gatwick airport and later asked for police, claiming someone was following him. A British Airways spokeswoman says Mr Mukonyi was escorted to the gate and the police were called at his request. After talking to him, police decided he was fit to travel. Several hours later during the overnight flight, Mr Mukonyi burst into the plane's cockpit and fought with the pilot. The fight lasted around two minutes, during which the 747 dived almost 3,000 meters. The man was overpowered and the plane landed safely in Nairobi."

" Northern Territory expertise in crocodile handling will be put to use, when the Australian Federal Police (AFP) remove a saltwater crocodile from an inland mountain community in East Timor this week. Territory police officer Chris Kilian, on secondment to the AFP, says a member of the militia brought the crocodile to the village of Ainaro but he has left it behind. Senior Constable Kilian says a Territory Parks and Wildlife officer has provided advice on how to remove the reptile. He says the crocodiles are sacred to the Timorese people, who want it returned to the coast, but do not want to touch it. ""In fact we've got to get permission from the local priest and have it blessed and things like that before we can move it and they've asked us to do it and we're happy to help out,"" he said."

" Traditional Japanese rice cakes have choked and killed two people in the lead-up to the new year. The authorities in Japan are warning old people against eating the gluggy cakes alone. Called ""Mochi"" the glutinous rice cakes have stuck in the throats of four elderly Japanese people since boxing day, killing two of them. Authorities are concerned that more deaths are to come, as most Mochi are eaten on the first two days of the new year. Known as Japan's silent new year killers, they are reported to kill as many as ten senior Japanese citizens each new year season. Authorities say old people should have family members with them when they eat the Mochi and make sure they are drinking soup at the same time."

" The Civil Aviation Safety Authority says a crack found in part of the tail of one of Ansett's grounded Boeing 767 aircraft was not an immediate safety threat. The crack was discovered during the safety inspection on one of the six 767s grounded on the weekend. CASA is investigating how Ansett managed to overlook the required safety inspections. CASA spokesman Peter Gibson says it is unclear how long the plane had been flying with the fault. ""We don't know at this stage how long the crack had been there for but the point to emphasise is that the design of these aircraft is such that these cracks can appear and when they do they will not cause an immediate failure of these components,"" he said. ""They were obviously picked up by inspections, repaired and the aircraft can go back into service quite safely."" Mr Gibson says the plane with the cracked tail has been repaired and is back in the air. ""The regime of inspections is there to obviously pick up these sorts of cracks at the earliest possible date. It does show that the systems are working."" ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Prime Minister says there will be no Federal Government involvement in the decision about whether naval dockyards are in Melbourne or Adelaide. The two cities both have naval dockyards, but it is possible the industry could be consolidated in Adelaide, leaving Melbourne with job losses. Mr Howard has told Sydney radio 2GB the decision is a commercial one for the companies bidding for naval business. ""I can say again to the Victorian Government - we're not pushing in one direction or the other in relation to the location of ship-building capacity in Australia,"" he said. ""That will ultimately be decided by companies and will ultimately be determined by commercial considerations. In no way are we going to say we'd rather have it in Adelaide or we'd rather have it in Melbourne."""

" Meanwhile, Mr. Howard says petrol prices have fallen by about six cents in capital cities and he expects them to fall further. The price of petrol was a major political hurdle for the Government this year as it hit nearly $1 a litre in many places. Mr Howard says conditions are right for fuel costs to continue to fall. ""With a stronger Australian dollar and also falling world crude oil prices, I'll be looking to the Australian oil companies for further reductions in the weeks and months ahead."" ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Government is calling on Laos to let Australian officials see two Australians detained since Saturday in the country's capital Vientianne. Consular officials have tried to visit Kerry Danes, an SAS officer conducting security work for a Laotian sapphire mining company, but have not been given any access to him. They visited Kay Danes on Christmas eve but have had no access to her since then. Australia's Ambassador to Laos Jonathon Thwaites has told the Laotion Government that Australia wants its officials to be given access to the couple as soon as possible and also called for the reasons for their detention. Foreign Affairs staff have delivered food and clothing to the detention centre for the couple. Foreign Affairs Minister Alexander Downer has urged the embassy to continue the effort to see the couple and determine the reasons for their detention. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A thorough search of a department store at Bondi in Sydney has failed to find four armed men who earlier held cleaning staff hostage. Police have the spent two hours combing the Grace Bros store at Bondi Junction looking for four men who held five cleaning and security staff hostage earlier this morning. The men, who were armed with knives, entered the building through the roof shortly after 6:00am AEDT and threatened staff. One worker escaped by jumping through a window and had to be treated for a broken leg. The remaining staff were released a short time later. Two were taken to St Vincent's Hospital with minor injuries. The area was cordoned off while officers from the State Protection Group searched the building, but no sign of the men was found. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Immigration officials will interview a group of about 50 illegal immigrants who were onboard a boat intercepted by Australian Customs off Western Australia. The Indonesian fishing vessel was intercepted on Wednesday near Ashmore Reef. Immigration Minister Phillip Ruddock says there is a change in where the immigrants are coming from. ""The composition of the arrivals is showing significant change. Whereas it was primarily Iraqi and Afghani, we're now seeing people from a number of other countries being trafficked,"" he said. ""With the reduced numbers it would suggest to me that the smugglers are having difficulty filling their boats with people from Afghanistan and Iraq and are now in the business of market development."" Mr Ruddock is to visit the Middle East in the new year to discuss the flow of immigrants to Australia. He will also go to Sweden to inspect accomodation for women and child immigrants."

" Meanwhile the Federal Opposition has criticised the Immigration Department's new high risk visitor list. The Federal Government has added Afghanistan, Armenia, North Korea, Brazil and Mongolia to its list of 50 nationalities which are statistically more likely to overstay visas. The Government says the list does not prevent visas being granted to people from those countries, but is intended to alert immigration officers to the risk factor. However, Shadow Immigration Minister Con Sciacca says the list may cause Australia to be perceived as discriminatory by not including countries such as the United Kingdom. ""I understand that people from Britain and the United States in terms of numbers are the highest overstayers, particularly backpackers,"" he said. ""It shows up the discrepancies and it shows and highlights the perception that exists out there amongst the 50-odd countries that are on the list of possible bias against them."" ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Prime Minister has rejected suggestions that a lack of national confidence will prompt Australians to celebrate the centenary of Federation in a low-key way. The celebrations begin on Monday with a ceremony in Alice Springs and several major events in Sydney, including a parade. Mr Howard says it is true that Australians celebrate nationhood in a different way than other countries. But he has told radio Sydney 2GB that is not caused by a lack of confidence. ""I think Australians are very self-confident, they are people who are increasingly interested in and curious about their history and they are displaying their patriotism in an Australian fashion,"" he said. ""I mean we are not Americans, we're not Europeans, we're Australians and we demonstrate our passion for this country in our own particular style and we shouldn't change it."" ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Pauline Hanson's attempts to repay an outstanding debt to the Queensland Electoral Commission have been thwarted because the office is closed for the Christmas break. Miss Hanson went to the Commission's offices today to repay $250,000 owing, due to the party's fraudulent registration, ahead of the December 31 deadline, but found the door locked. The office is due to reopen on January 2."

" National Party president Terry Bolger has conceded preferences may be directed to One Nation or its offshoots in some seats at the Queensland election. Mr Bolger says he has asked all National Party electorate councils to carefully consider where preferences should be directed. He says some councils have informed him they want to put Labor last on how-to-vote cards because of the electoral rorting allegations made at the Shepherdson Inquiry. ""Someone's got to go last, you can't have two or three parties going last,"" he said. ""I'm just asking them to give it some thought and don't try and make a snap decision when the day arrives. I'm not giving them any directives."" ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Rough weather in Tasmania's Storm Bay is slowing progress for the yachts in the Sydney Hobart. Four yachts have already finished, with each telling horror stories about the conditions. Most years, yachts are becalmed in Storm Bay. This year the stretch of water leading into the Derwent has shown a different face with gale force winds up to 70 knots recorded overnight. Most of the fleet is stretched down Tasmania's east coast and yet to enter the bay, but the finished yachts, Nicorette, Wild Thing, Illbruck and Tyco have described the conditions there as the worst of the trip. Race record holder Nokia has contacted officials saying it has a torn mainsail and two injured crew members, but is continuing to race. Doctel Rager has pulled out with a busted forestay. The next yacht expected in is News Corp with an estimated time of arrival sometime after 2:00pm AEDT."

" While the fleet from the Sydney Hobart has begun arriving, the 11 yachts in the Melbourne to Hobart race are still making their way down Tasmania's west coast. The last position update put the two leading yachts Wild One and Tevake, South of Macquarie Harbour, with 170 miles of sailing left. Victorian sloop Wild One holds a slender lead over Tevake, with Sea Eagle in third place. Kevin Williams from the race office says the fleet was saved from the gale force conditions which have battered the Sydney to Hobart fleet. ""They had last night 25 to 30 knot west-south-westerlies and it turned round to the south-southwest with gusts of up to 40,"" he said. ""At 6:00am this morning things got a little quieter and they were easing sheets a little and starting to go very fast."""

" All yachts in this year's Melbourne to Devonport race have finished the event. Twenty-three yachts, mostly from Victoria, took part in the 197 nautical mile race. Geelong-based yacht Volantewas first to cross the line yesterday morning while Sandringham entry Ruthless took handicap honours. The last yacht arrived in Devonport about midnight. A Mersey Yacht club representative, Martin Agatyn, says all in all it has been smooth sailing. ""It's been a fairly uneventful race, the conditions were trying, but there's been no reports of any injuries or any serious damage to the vessels,"" he said. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australia has extended its world record for consecutive Test wins to 14 after beating the West Indies by 352 runs in the fourth Test in Melbourne. The West Indies was dismissed for 109 in its second innings, Marlon Samuels top scoring with 46. Jason Gillespie finished with nine wickets for the match, claiming 6 for 40 in the second innings. Australia now has a 4-0 lead in the series with only the Sydney Test to be played. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" There has been another setback for peace in the Middle East. The BBC reports a summit of three regional leaders due to be held in Egypt has been cancelled. Its standing was placed in doubt this morning when a key Palestinian figure declared that peace proposals put forward by the United States were unacceptable. This summit in Sharm el-Sheikh was to have given a critical push for peace at a crucial time as both Israelis and Palestinians weigh up whether to agree to American proposals to solve their 50-year-old conflict. Egyptian officials have given no reason for the sudden cancellation of the meeting, but Palestinians had expressed reservations about the American proposals. Yasser Arafat is now due in Cairo for consultations with President Mubarak, but the Israelis are not expected. -------------------------------------------"

" Swedish maxi Nicorette still has the lead and is off St Helens on Tasmania's east coast, closely followed by Wild Thing in the 56th Sydney Hobart bluewater classic. The remainder of the fleet is stretched across Bass Strait in seas of up to three metres, with a south-westerly of up to 30 knots making the going tough. The first boat is expected in Hobart tomorrow morning. The next radio sked for a position update is 2:00pm AEDT. Meanwhile, the four round the world yachts taking part in this year's Sydney to Hobart may have a longer stay in the southern capital than was first planned. Originally the boats were only stopping in Hobart for a three hour pit stop. Illbruck, News Corp, Assa Abloy and Tyco are using this year's race to prepare for the 2001 Volvo Round the World Race, in which the Sydney Hobart will make up a race leg. It was originally planned they would only have a three hour pit stop in Hobart, before continuing to Auckland. Currently the four boats are in third, fourth, fifth and sixth position, 60 nautical miles behind the race leaders. It had been likely they would be leaving Hobart in the dark tomorrow night. But Round the World Race organisers are concerned there may be danger of collision. The four will now leave as a group, no more than six hours after the last boat arrives. ------------------------------------------"

" A 42-year-old Internet consulting company employee, accused of shooting seven of his co-workers to death, will be held without bail until his trial on murder charges. Michael McDermott, handcuffed and wearing an orange prison jumpsuit and a bulletproof vest, showed no emotion as the charges against him were read in court. McDermott pleaded not guilty. His lawyer, Kevin Reddington, asked he be allowed to continue psychiatric treatment while in jail. Tom O'Reilly, an assistant Middlesex County prosecutor said a heavily-armed McDermott walked into his Edgewater Technology office in nearby Wakefield, Massachusetts, on Tuesday and methodically shot seven co-workers in less than eight minutes. ""There were very little, if any, missed shots,"" he said. ""This was a methodical undertaking with deliberate premeditation and the method of shooting also rises to the issue of extreme atrocity and cruelty."" O'Reilly says investigators believe McDermott was angry over the company garnisheeing his wages for unpaid taxes owed to the US Internal Revenue Service. He said one of the seven people killed was a company vice president of human resources. Police later found McDermott sitting on a chair in the building lobby, armed with a shotgun, an AK-47 rifle and an automatic pistol. Beside him was a tote bag full of ammunition. O'Reilly says police found another rifle and more ammunition at his workstation and explosives and bomb-making materials at his home. Martha Coakley, Middlesex County district attorney, says authorities have no reason to believe he was planning any other violence. An ongoing investigation hopes to determine a motive for the shooting and how McDermott obtained the weapons. ""It is our goal to understand as much as possible about what happened in this tragic incident to attain a just result as quickly as we can, so that we can hopefully try to prevent it in the future,"" Ms Coakley said. The Boston Herald newspaper reported McDermott, a large, bearded man, was a US Navy veteran who served as an electrician's mate on a nuclear attack submarine. Neighbors interviewed by local reporters have said he lived alone and described him as aloof and sometimes hostile. He was divorced, with no children. The shooting capped a year of bad news for Edgewater, which has been reorganizing its staff and operations in recent months to evolve from a provider of human resources to an Internet consulting and services business. In November, Edgewater shed its staffing divisions, some of which had lost more than one third of their profits in the first nine months of 2000, the company reported. Public financial filings indicate Edgewater had begun buying back shares from stockholders, a common practice for companies trying to bolster share prices. ----------------------------------"

" The national road toll has moved to 33 following the death of a 74-year-old woman from Kotara South on the New South Wales central coast. Police say she was seriously injured on Boxing Day, when her car veered off the Pacific Highway, south of Hexham. The woman died in a Newcastle hospital. The death brings the New South Wales holiday road toll to 21. Victoria's toll stands at two following the death of a 33-year-old truck driver near Dixon's Creek overnight. Police believe the Seymour man's truck left the highway on a wet right hand bend and rolled down an embankment. The national toll reached 30, when two people were killed in separate motorcycle accidents in New South Wales, the first a 70-year-old man at Picton, southwest of Sydney, and the other a 19-year-old man at Wingello, on the state's south coast. A 17-year-old girl died in hospital from injuries sustained in an accident at Bathurst on Friday night. A woman was killed when her car hit a tree on the side of Wellard Road in the Perth southern suburb of Calista this afternoon. South Australia has recorded three deaths while the ACT has one. Tasmania and the Northern Territory remain fatality free. ----------------------------------------"

" The United Nations Security Council says child soldiers who have committed atrocities in Sierra Leone should not be prosecuted. The Security Council says children cannot be held responsible for all of their actions. The United Nations Security Council says juveniles should not be forced to appear before a war crimes tribunal. The Council has sent a letter to UN secretary-general Kofi Annan, recommending that child soldiers be exempt from prosecution. In October, Mr Annan said children as young as 15 should be brought to justice. But the members of the Security Council say only those who bear the greatest responsibility for war crimes in Sierra Leone, should be placed on trial. The UN estimates that more than 5,000 children have been forced to become soldiers in Sierra Leone's civil war. -----------------------------------------"

" Tasmania police are expected to decide today whether to call off a search for a Sydney woman, missing in the state's remote and rugged central highlands. Clare Hutcheson, 20, was last seen a week ago at Lake Elysia in the Du Cane Range within the Lake St Clair National Park. Heavy snowfalls have hindered the searching over the past few days and while the snow is expected to be lighter today, rescue teams will still face very cold weather and strong winds. Police intend to alter the course of the search this morning, and will explore the bush near Long Creek in the area known as the Dome. About 50 people including volunteers have helped in the search effort, with much of the area blanketed by snow, as a cold front crosses. Among the volunteers is Corinna Tolson, 20, from the Launceston search and rescue unit. ""It was very cold wet and windy, it snowed a lot, visibilty wasn't all that good most of the time,"" she said. ""The bush is very scrubby...a lot of the bush we were pushing through was very thick and really hard to push through with our packs on. ""It was a lot of hard work most of the time."" -----------------------------------------"

" About 500,000 people are homeless and five dead after a cyclone swept through Sri Lanka, compounding monsoon flood havoc for the second time in five weeks. The cyclone, which struck the north-eastern port district of Trincomalee yesterday, exited the island early today, leaving a trail of massive destruction in the region. The Social Service ministry says about 500,000 people were affected by the twin affects of the floods and the cyclone. Local officials have confirmed 75,000 families were rendered homeless while 6,600 homes were completely destroyed. The Government has cancelled leave for all public services required for relief operations as water levels eased, raising fears of water-borne diseases spreading in several areas. President Chandrika Kumaratunga, currently visiting Europe, has expressed sympathy for the victims. A statement says she is closely following the relief operations. A Social Services Ministry spokesman says five people, including two children, died from falling trees and rising flood waters. Fifty-seven people have been admitted to hospital in Trincomalee after being hit by trees and flying debris during the peak of the cyclone. ""There are serious communication problems in some of the worst-affected areas and we are yet to get a clear picture from those villages,"" a police spokesman said. He says several police stations and military camps had their roofs blown off due to strong winds of 150 to 180 kilometres an hour, but the worst appeared to be over. Coastal districts of Ampara and Batticaloa were already under water when the cyclone brought more rain. Ministry officials say tens of thousands of people have been housed in temporary shelters in schools, temples and public buildings since Saturday when the winds swept away roofs. Official figures show 74,957 families are homeless in the districts of Ampara, Batticaloa, Anuradhapura, Trincomalee, Mannar and Polonnaruwa. Some of the worst-hit areas are inaccessible and it is difficult to get information of the damage. About 20,000 hectares of rice fields went under water while in the north-central Anuradhapura district farmers have lost their crops. It is the second time in five weeks that Ampara and Batticaloa districts have been flooded. In Ampara district alone, 94,000 people were left homeless on November 20 when monsoon rains lashed the district. Neighbouring Batticaloa and Polonnaruwa districts were also badly hit last month. ----------------------------------------"

" Australian tennis star Mark Philippoussis has been banned from buying any more cars until he has won a grand slam tournament. Philippoussis has sold most of his stable of almost 20 sports cars, which included a number of Ferraris, after making a pact with new coach Peter McNamara. McNamara says his charge's next car purchase will be as a reward for winning a major tournament."

" A push is underway for Australia's naval shipbuilding to be consolidated in Adelaide, putting the future of dockyards in two other states in question. The ABC understands there is some support within the Federal Government to move much of the the naval shipbuilding industry to Adelaide, where the submarine project is due to finish next year. South Australia's Premier John Olsen is keen for consolidation in Adelaide. But a spokesman for Defence Minister John Moore, who retires next month, says the Government has no plans to rationalise the industry. The Defence white paper recommends projects including three new destroyers which Mr Moore says leaves plenty of opportunities for the Australian industry. But where that work is done depends on which companies win the contracts. The Victorian Government wants a Federal Government guarantee that Williamstown dockyard, owned by Tenix, will get some of the new work. But Mr Moore's spokesman says it will go to the best tenderer. The ADI company, which is due to finish building navy minehunters in Newcastle in 2002, will also be bidding. Both companies also plan to bid for the submarine corporation in Adelaide which is to be sold next year. -----------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Organisers of the first Centenary of Federation event, on New Year's Day, are playing down suggestions the event has been moved to Alice Springs because it was not relevant to Aboriginal people at Uluru. The New Dawn event was to involve the handing over of a boomerang from Alice Springs Arrerndte traditional owners to Uluru's Anangu owners, inviting them to the Yeperenye Cultural Festival next September. Instead, an Arrerndte family member will issue a message at the Old Alice Springs Telegraph Station before handing the boomerang to traditional owners from Sydney. The event's producer, Lex Marinos, says the death of an Anangu elder is the major reason the location's been changed. ""It's not entirely true to say it didn't have anything to do with them [Uluru's Aboriginal people],"" he said. ""I think they were a fairly significant part of it, in as much as the event is the issuing of an invitation by the Arrerndte people to the people of Australia to come to Alice Springs in September of next year, and it was felt appropriate that invitation should start by being issued to near neighbours."" -----------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Workers at an Internet consulting firm in Boston, in the United States, are struggling to explain today's shooting deaths of seven colleagues by another employee. The alleged gunman, Michael McDermott, 42, had worked at Edgewater Technology since March. Amid the shock of the mass killings, other workers of the company have expressed bewilderment, variously describing McDermott as amiable, jocular and easy to get along with. Authorities say the killings were workplace-related, but have not disclosed any detailed motive. The company itself says it had not laid off staff recently and had no such plans for the future. Police say McDermott was armed with an assault rifle, a hand gun and a shotgun when they entered the company's offices this morning. He was tackled by officers and disarmed. Prosecutors say he will be charged with seven counts of murder. -------------------------------------------------------------------- ---"

" The lead yachts in this year's Sydney to Hobart are well into Bass Strait and facing gale force winds. Race organisers do not expect a finish before Friday morning as conditions worsen. At the moment organisers are giving the lead to Swedish maxi Nicorrette from Melbourne yacht Wild Thing. All yachts are facing a stiff southerly breeze, with gale force winds and predictions of seas between three and five metres in Bass Strait. Already five boats, including early leader Shockwave, have pulled out and it is predicted more boats will return to Eden on the New South Wales south coast to ride out the rough conditions, rather than enter the region which, in 1998, took the lives of six yachtsmen. To be inside the record the first yacht would have to cross the line before 9:00am AEDT tomorrow. To do that would take a miracle, with organisers not expecting a finish before early Friday. -----------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The West Indies was 1 for 6 in its first innings chasing Australia's 364 on the second day of the fourth Test at the MCG in Melbourne. Daren Ganga is the man out, edging Jason Gillespie through to Adam Gilchrist for 4. It took the Windies' openers six overs to get off the mark, with their first run coming from a Glenn McGrath no-ball. In the Australian innings, Steve Waugh remained unbeaten on 121, his 23rd Test century. And New Zealand is four for 367 on the second day of the one-off Test against Zimbabwe in Wellington with Nathan Astle 102 and Craig McMillan 142. -----------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A meteorite on display at the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery for more than 30 years has resurfaced as a popular attraction. The museum's Peter West says the latest scientific finding which points to bacteria in the meteorite, has led to new speculation that life exits far away from earth. ""It had fallen to Earth about 30 years ago but scientists have just suddenly done some work on it and discovered these little microscopic things that had come from outer space, which sort of has given rise to this whole new speculation about life somewhere else,"" Mr West said. -----------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Ansett and aircraft manufacturer Boeing are to meet the Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA) on Thursday to determine why maintenance inspections on six planes were not carried out when they should have been. Ansett grounded the Boeing 767s on Saturday after it was discovered the checks had not been carried out. CASA's Peter Gibson says the inspections were for older planes and it is hoped the meeting will prevent further problems with ageing aircraft. ""They weren't defect inspections,"" he said. ""There's nothing wrong with these aircraft and in fact we've done normal checks on these aircraft in the last few days and found out that they are in fact fine. ""They are safe to fly and that's why they are back in the skies,"" Mr Gibson said. ""But we do need to get to the bottom of why scheduled inspections that the manufacturer, Boeing, required weren't carried out at the time they should have been."" -------------------------------------------"

" At least 45 people have been injured in bomb blasts in several cities in Pakistan, while at least eight people have been killed in Indian-administered Kashmir in a car bomb explosion. The first bomb ripped through a market in the Pakistani city of Lahore, injuring at least 36 people. A bomb at a railway station in Faislabad injured three, while another explosion in a bus in the southern city of Sin, wounded six. The serial blasts came within hours of a car bomb blast in Kashmir, outside the Indian army's local headquarters. Pakistani authorities say the serial explosions are retaliatory strikes by India. Last Friday, militants from Pakistan-based outfit Lashka ul-Toiba had stormed New Delhi's historic Red Fort, killing one soldier and two civilians. The explosion comes during a time when both countries have announced steps to ease tensions in the disputed state of Kashmir. ----------------------------------------"

" Israel and the Palestinians are today deliberating last-ditch proposals by US President Bill Clinton for a peace accord, but Palestinian leader, Yasser Arafat, has cast doubt on the ideas, saying major hurdles still stand in the way. ""There are still many obstacles to be lifted before a peace agreement,"" Mr Arafat said, returning to Gaza City after talks with Egyptian President, Hosni Mubarak. Mr Arafat says the Palestinians need to examine President Clinton's proposals more closely, before they can give their response, but he says some ideas had not been modified since Mr Clinton's July Camp David summit, when the Palestinians rejected Israeli offers. Top adviser to Mr Arafat, Nabil Abu Rudeina, says a response will be forthcoming to US proposals, but they are not far-reaching enough to find an agreement. ""We need further details,"" he said. Mr Clinton has asked the two sides to deliver their verdicts on his proposals by Wednesday, as the outgoing President makes an 11th-hour bid to secure an agreement."

" In Israel, caretaker Prime Minister Ehud Barak and members of his ""peace Cabinet"" met overnight to study Mr Clinton's outline solutions, public radio has reported, while an opinion poll showed Israelis deeply divided on the plan. Foreign Minister Shlomo Ben Ami, back from a five-day round of talks with the Palestinians in Washington, spoke of a ""breakthrough"" and recommended that Israel accept the peace plan. But the report revealed Mr Barak, who is facing an election in February, that is seen as a referendum on any peace deal, had reservations about the US President's plans. ""Israel will not rush blindly on the path to peace,"" Mr Barak was quoted as saying. Mr Clinton's proposals reportedly involve Israel turning over control of Arab neighbourhoods of occupied east Jerusalem, to the Palestinians, along with the al-Aqsa mosque compound, or Haram al-Sharif, known to Jews as Temple Mount. However, the Western Wall, the holiest site in Judaism, would remain under Israeli sovereignty. In return, Palestinians would waive the right of return for some 3.7 million refugees, with only a small number allowed back to Israel for family reunification, the reports say. In addition, Israel would withdraw from 95 per cent of the West Bank and 100 per cent of the Gaza Strip, territories the Jewish state has occupied along with east Jerusalem, since the 1967 Arab-Israeli war."

" Meanwhile, a survey in the top-selling newspaper has found Israelis are split over the merits of the plan put forward by Mr Clinton, five months after the collapse of the peace summit he hosted at the presidential retreat at Camp David, in July. The poll says 48 per cent of the 501 Israelis questioned are opposed to the proposals and just 43 per cent are in favour, with strong objections to the return of refugees in particular. Jerusalem Mayor Ehud Olmert made a stinging attack on Mr Barak over the idea of shared sovereignty of the holy city with the Palestinians. In statements broadcast on Sunday, he accused Mr Barak of ""lying to the nation, capitulating and wanting to divide Jerusalem"", in planning to give up the eastern part of the city, conquered and annexed by Israel during the Six-Day War of June 1967. ""What Barak is doing is unconstitutional and not democratic,"" he said, alluding to Mr Barak's lack of a majority in Parliament. The US President's peace push was also attacked on Monday by hardline Arabs, with Syria denouncing the proposals as too pro-Israeli."

" In other news, Israel announced yesterday it was constructing an alarmed fence along the 1967 ceasefire line with the West Bank, complete with concrete blocks to stop cars. Deputy Defence Minister Ephraim Sneh says the $25 million project was meant to prevent ""terrorist infiltrations,"" although Israeli officials say the move does not mean recognition of 1967 lines of control. An official told news agency Agence France Presse the fence was in response to the 12 weeks of fighting in the region that have left more than 350 people dead. Sporadic shooting incidents have continued overnight, although the Holy Land was relatively calm for Christmas. In Bethlehem, where the gospel says Jesus was born 2,000 years ago, there was little sign of Christmas cheer, with rain keeping pilgrims and Palestinians indoors. ---------------------------------------------"

" Police are continuing to investigate the death of a man who was struck by an arrow yesterday, while sitting in his backyard at Rye, on the Mornington Peninsula in Victoria. Police say a 16-year-old was using a professional bow on an adjoining property, when the arrow missed its target and went through a corrugated iron fence, killing the 58-year-old neighbour. Homicide detectives have spoken to the youth, and say an investigation into the incident will take several days. Senior Detective Ron Iddles says police have seized the bow and arrows, which are believed to be legally owned, but the death is not being treated strictly as an accident. ""He is a member of an archery club and I need to check the legal requirements as to where you can actually use the type of apparatus that he has,"" Detective Iddles said. ""There are many...different legal issues involved in this and it's not just straightforward."" -------------------------------------------"

" The crews in this year's 82-yacht Sydney to Hobart fleet have begun arriving at the Cruising Yacht Club (CYC) of Australia. The weather bureau is predicting freshening winds for the start, possibly as strong as up to 25 knots, but the weather pattern for the whole event is not expected to see the race record broken. The boats will hit strong to gale force winds near Bass Strait, making it unlikely that any lighter boats will cross the line first. This year, a number of Volvo 60 boats will be using the race as a trial for their around the world event next year. In 2001, the Sydney to Hobart will be a leg of the international event. Brindabella skipper George Snow says it is definitely going to be a race for the heavier boats. ""I don't think it'll really play into the Volvo 60s' strong points, which we saw last year, which were very heavy reaching and I don't think those conditions are going to be there,"" he said. ""So it will favour the more conventional upwind heavier boats, but we'll just have to see."" This year marks the 56th time the race has been run and will be the safest ever, following the inclusion of a number of recommendations from the coronial inquest into the 1998 event. One of the changes involves all yachts reporting their operational status and safety checks before crossing Bass Strait. The CYC's Glen Burke says boats that do not radio in will be disqualified. --------------------------------------"

" The new tax system and cashflow considerations will be at the back of retailers' minds as the annual post-Christmas sales get underway from today. The major chains are open, but not in all states and not in all locations. In a year when the new tax system has put an added premium on cashflow management, the Christmas trading season is even more critical. The Australian Retailers Association is tipping record levels of activity to push total December retail turnover to $16.8 billion. The association's Bill Healey says this year's sales should also be the best ever. ""We expect a very, very strong sales period,"" Mr Healey said. ""People are looking for bargains out there, and we expect that the strength of these sales that have been built up now over a number of years will continue."" Mr Healey says the Christmas period can account for up to 40 to 50 per cent of a retailer's income, with the sales an important part of that. ""It's also important for cashflow reasons. They've invested in stock, and obviously they have to get their money back,"" he said. ""It's very important, particularly for small retailers, however, to take account of their tax commitments when they look at their cashflow."" The second business activity statement under the new tax system is due in February. ----------------------------------------"

" Yugoslavia has called on the United Nations to clear armed Albanian militants from the demilitarised zone between Kosovo and Serbia proper. The BBC reports, Yugoslavia has warned that if the United Nations does not act quickly, it will. The statement was issued at a meeting of Yugoslavia's Supreme Defence Council, which brought together senior officials from Serbia and Montenegro for the first time in two years. Bad relations between the old regime of Slobodan Milosevic and the reformist government in Montenegro, led to a kind of cold war between Belgrade and Podgorica. For more than two years, the Supreme Defence Council and other federal bodies have not been working properly. With Mr Milosevic gone, the federation is starting to function again. Top state officials are expected to dismiss the commander of Yugoslav forces in Montenegro, General Milorad Obradovic, as well as the head of the army, Admiral Milan Zetz. Belgrade newspapers report the defence council may also decide to disband a military police battalion, which was formed in Mr Milosevic's time to exert pressure on the Montenegran leadership. --------------------------------------"

" Police in Indonesia say they have identified two suspects in the spate of Christmas Eve church bombings in eight Indonesian cities that have killed at least 14 people. Officials say the two were among a group of five people who were building bombs in a house in West Java when one exploded accidentally. Three of the alleged bombers died, and the survivors are in hospital. Indonesia's top security minister has warned more bombings could follow the well-planned series of Christmas Eve blasts. Suspicion for the bombings has fallen both on dissidents in the military and on anti-Christian Islamic extremists. The head of Indonesia's largest Muslim organisation, believes the likeliest suspect is a military group trying to return the army to its former dominant position. ---------------------------------------"

" Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock says Australia is being marketed overseas as an ideal destination for asylum seekers. Mr Ruddock made the claim after police on Indonesia's resort island of Bali detained 14 foreigners, believed to be from Iran or Iraq, as they tried to board an Australia-bound flight with fake or stolen passports. Indonesia's state-run Antara news agency said the group attracted the suspicion of airport immigration officials because they held Canadian or Dutch passports but none could speak English. Mr Ruddock says the 14 were on their way to Australia to seek political asylum when they were stopped. He says the incident illustrates a desperate battle by people from many different backgrounds who were willing to break the law to move to Australia. ""The groups of people who were coming were primarily from Iraq and Afghanistan, but those numbers are falling,"" he said. ""There are new groups of people, some Palestinians, some Iranians or Syrians. ""That suggests to me that the smugglers are in fact, in what you would call in business, market development. ""They are out endeavouring to sell unlawful travel in a much wider range of countries than we've seen before."" Australia has seen a big jump in the number of people seeking asylum in the past two years, many arriving on boats which set out from Indonesian ports. In the past financial year more than 4,300 illegal immigrants arrived aboard 78 boats, compared with 920 the previous year. ------------------------------------------------------------------------- -------"

" Top Israeli and Palestinian negotiators have ended a week of peace talks in Washington split on how much progress was made, but agreeing to consider further meetings with US President Bill Clinton. Chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erakat told reporters after a White House meeting with Mr Clinton that major gaps still exist. However Israeli Foreign Minister Shlomo Ben Ami says both sides will brief their respective leaders, and a new Middle East summit involving President Clinton is still a possibility. ""We have had a week of fruitful and very serious discussions, inevitably differences remain, but I feel that it was a very encouraging round of talks,"" he said. The Middle East negotiators will let President Clinton know by the middle of the week if there is a basis for continuing, and PJ Crowley, from the Clinton administration's National Security Council, says it is a positive sign. ""There is a historic opportunity here, and we also understand that the United States' interest in the Middle East will not end on January 20, but there is an opportunity here to take advantage of the expertise our Middle East team has gained over eight years,"" he said. Mr Ben Ami says his next step is to report back to his Government colleagues in Israel. ""This is still too early to confirm. We need to deliberate between ourselves on whether we see these ideas that were raised here as a basis for an end gain,"" he said. -------------------------------------------------------------------- -------------------"

" Australian fast bowler Brett Lee has been ruled out of the Boxing Day Test match and will have further scans on his back next week, but is unlikely to play in the fifth Test against the West Indies in Sydney in the new year either. Lee hopes to be fit for the one day series next month. Captain Steve Waugh has been given until tomorrow to prove his fitness. Meanwhile, key West Indies batsman Brian Lara has survived an injury scare at practice. Lara top edged a ball into his face yesterday at training but x-rays have revealed no bone damage Meanwhile, Australian opener Michael Slater has hit back at an accusation that selfishness on his part cost the wicket of fellow opener Matthew Hayden in recent matches. Former Test opener Kepler Wessels says Slater has been selfish between the wickets, causing Hayden to be run out twice during the current Test series against the West Indies. However Slater says the partnership is going well while the two batsmen are learning each other's games. He says everyone is entitled to their opinion, but he is surprised at the criticism. ""There's being a lot made out of successful partnerships and I mean we've batted four times, two century stands, one of those 156, and the other 50,"" he said. ""So if you like there's been one innings where we haven't made 50 or more, I think that [criticism] is a pretty harsh call."""

" Victor Borge, the pianist whose whimsical approach to the classics earned him the nickname the ""clown prince of Denmark"" has died, aged 91. His longtime manager, Bernard Gurtman, says Borge died at home in his sleep. He says the world famous entertainer had just returned from Copenhagen, the city of his birth, and was excited about spending Christmas with his family. He would have turned 92 on January 3. -------------------------------------------------------------------- -"

" Up to 500 motorists are stranded for Christmas in the tiny outback Queensland town of Camooweal by floodwaters which have left the township isolated for the past fortnight. Nightly storms across much of the Gulf Country have swollen rivers, cutting the Barkley Highway. The Georgina River is almost 1.5 metres over the road on one side of the town and the Buckley River is blocking access on the other side. John Wilmott, from the local roadhouse, says the stranded motorists can look forward to a country Christmas, whether they like it or not. ""You can't go forward and you can't go back,"" he said. ""We've got them lined here in the streets living in tents, it's just unreal. ""You find the bushies aren't too bad but the city people can't handle it. ""They get uptight and stressed out, which is natural, everybody's trying to get somewhere for Christmas,"" Mr Wilmott said. ------------------------------------------------------------------------- ---"

" Ansett Australia says it does not yet know when six of its grounded aircraft will be back in the air to avoid chaos to its customers' travel plans over the Christmas-new year period. The airline has not yet revealed why the aircraft have been banned from flying. Ansett grounded six Boeing 767-200 aircraft this morning after an engineering directive ordered precautionary inspections on several areas of the planes. The airline says it recognises the move will severely disrupt the travel plans of many customers. It says it will notify affected passengers as soon as possible, and will try to transfer them to alternative flights. In the meantime it is trying to obtain extra aircraft for short-term use, and permission to operate some services outside normal schedules. Meanwhile, a Qantas BAE 146 aircraft which made an emergency landing at Adelaide airport last night has been repaired. The Canberra bound-flight with 46 passengers on board was forced to turn back shortly after take off when fuel was noticed pouring from the left wing. Qantas has not revealed the exact source of the leak, but says an investigation is underway. ---------------------------------------------------------"

" Top Israeli and Palestinian negotiators are scheduled to meet President Bill Clinton in Washington tomorrow, despite doubts over whether talks so far have yielded progress. Contrary to reports in the region of substantial headway on key issues, Palestinian officials were decidedly pessimistic, and violence has again flared in the West Bank and Gaza, claiming at least four lives. A US security spokesman says it is at least encouraging that the sides are back at the negotiating table. He says the President will have the opportunity to hear from them where there has been progress, where differences remain and decide where to go from there. Clinton, who leaves office on January 12, is anxious to seal a deal before the end of his term and has reportedly suggested January 10 as a date for a summit with Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat. US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright has dismissed speculation she would be travelling to the Middle East to spur peace talks between Israelis and Palestinians. ""There are no travel plans,"" Dr Albright said in an interview with MSNBC television. The Secretary of State was speaking ahead of a White House meeting with Israeli and Palestinian delegates who have been negotiating since Tuesday. Dr Albright says time is running out on efforts to reach a peace deal following nearly three months of clashes between Israelis and Palestinians in which more than 350 people have died. ""Everyone knows there is a window here that will close,"" Dr Albright said. Dr Albright played down reports of a near fist-fight between negotiators as tension mounted on Thursday, saying ""I am not sure it's quite accurate."" She says Mr Clinton had been ""listening and thinking"" about the peace talks but would not discuss whether he has any proposals to put forward at Saturday's White House meeting. ""I think that he wants to know what is going on,"" she said. ""He wants to meet with (the negotiators) periodically. But I think we all know that time is running out and we need to use the President and he wants to be used in a way that is most helpful at the right time."" Dr Albright and National Security Advisor Sandy Berger will be in attendance at the White House for Saturday's talks. -------------------------------------------------------------"

" The head of the CSIRO's forestry division, Dr Glen Kile, has called for greater focus on the science of sustainable timber harvesting. Dr Kile says demands from some conservation groups to lock up large tracts of native forests will not necessarily prevent their degradation. He says it is possible through science to protect habitats and at the same time accommodate the needs of the timber industry. ""We do have a significant network of reserves and protected areas which is obviously part of managing our forest for bio-diversity,"" he said. ""We do have a capacity to manage other areas, which we use for multiple use in a complementary way to help manage bio-diversity across the landscape, but also at the same time allowing the use of forests for other uses."" --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The World Health Organisation (WHO) has expressed concern that BSE (bovine spongiform encephalopathy), or mad cow disease may have spread beyond Europe. Officials say they are concerned that BSE-infected animal feed may have been sold around the world because of the delay by European Governments in taking measures to stop the sale of such products. The World Health Organisation fears that mad cow disease may have spread much further than Europe, where the majority of cases have so far been reported. The agency is preparing to spread its own message that many countries which previously thought they were immune may be at risk. Britain has by far the biggest number of BSE cases in Europe, but the disease has also struck in France, Ireland, Portugal and Germany. Eighty-seven Britons have died from the human variant of the disease. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Britain's newspapers have given an unusually publicity-shy Madonna a right royal roasting over her wedding in Scotland. The tabloid <i>Daily Star</i> led the indignation by calling the pop diva a ""stuck-up prima donna"" for failing to make an appearance in front of the massed ranks of reporters and photographers. <i>The Star</i> claimed the singer had ""put two fingers up to all her fans"" while the upmarket <i>Independent</i> newspaper ran with the headline ""The Ritchies kindly invite you to...keep your distance"". The media could only speculate about whether Madonna and film director Guy Ritchie had tied the knot as no information leaked out from the Scottish castle where nuptials were held. <i>The Daily Telegraph</i> reported media organisations with deep wallets had arranged to hire helicopters to hover over the castle grounds and snatch a glimpse of the happy couple but thick fog rolling in meant the helicopters were grounded and their plan was spoiled. -------------------------------------------------------------------- ---------"

" The management of Sydney's Star City Casino says it accepts the recommendations of a report into activities at the complex. Peter McClelland QC inquired into whether Star City should continue to hold its casino licence. Mr McClelland's report states problems, including money laundering and loan sharking, existed at the casino, particularly in the private gaming area - the Endeavour Room. A spokesman for Star City management says a small group of about 15 to 20 people were involved in such activities and they have since been excluded from the Endeavour Room. Despite the problems the McClelland report concludes the casino operators should continue to hold the licence - a recommendation welcomed by Star City management. The spokesman says changes are being put in place to ensure the casino passes another review at the end of next year."

" There is just mild and scattered gains on the Australian sharemarket after yesterday's biggest slide since September. At midday the All Ordinaries index is up 12 points to 3,146 following positive moves on Wall Street overnight. But chief investment officer at Zurich Financial Services, Michael Kenyon, says it is not taking much to move the market around on the last trading day before Christmas. ""So I doubt that anyone is seriously bargain hunting at the moment because bare in mind we're going into a holiday period and a lot of markets will be closed at different times through that periods, so people will tend to normally sit on the sidelines in that sort of situation,"" he said. -------------------------------------------------------------------- -------"

" A date has been set for a committal mention for the man charged over the paracetamol extortion case. 62-year-old Dennis Donald Fountain was charged with 10 offences on Tuesday relating to the alleged extortion bids against two Australian drug companies. Today the Brisbane Magistrates Court directed that the committal mention be heard on February 26. Fountain remains under police guard in a Brisbane hospital, after suffering a recurrence of a pre-existing medical condition. His lawyer, Lindsay Lawrence, says an application for bail, which was refused on Tuesday, is likely to be resubmitted at a later date. ------------------------------------------------------------------------- --"

" The number of new cars coming onto Australian roads has fallen again. New motor vehicle registrations for the month of November have dropped 1.8 per cent. That follows falls of more than 5 per cent in October, and 9 per cent in September. In the latest month, road authorities registered a seasonally-adjusted total of just over 65,000 vehicles. Compared with November last year, that is up 4.5 per cent. -------------------------------------------------------------------- -------"

" The Australian Democrats have released their annual survey on the attitudes of young people - finding two-thirds want the Prime Minister to say sorry to the Stolen Generations. A similar number are still supporting Australia becoming a republic, but overwhelmingly through the direct election of a president. The survey of 15 to 20 year olds also found 62 per cent of respondents knew someone who had committed or attempted to commit suicide. But the family has emerged as the most important issue for the young people who were surveyed. Democrats deputy leader Natasha Stott Despoja says 62 per cent of respondents said family was most the important issue to them. Senator Stott Despoja, says one of the more surprising results is a drop in support for the decriminalisation of marijuana, from 59 per cent last year to 45 per cent this year. ""That might just be one of those statistical issues that next year may even out,"" she said. ""But I think watching young people and the attitude to drugs is something that has ebbed and flowed over the past eight years."" ------------------------------------------------------------------------- --"

" Members of an Aboriginal Tent Embassy have been ordered off Cockatoo Island in Sydney Harbour because they are trespassing. Ten Aboriginal activists began occupying the Island almost a month ago. Led by Isabel Coe, the Aborigines want to heal Cockatoo Island of its contamination and find where their ancestors are buried. The Commonwealth wanted the Aboriginal Tent Embassy off the Island because the site of a former shipyard is unsafe. Justice Robert Hulme today found the Embassy members are trespassing as the Commonwealth owns the Island. In response to the Embassy's claim that Governor Phillip did not claim the Sydney Harbour Islands, Justice Hulme said it is inconceivable Governor Phillip made an exception of one or more Islands. The eviction date has yet to be determined. -------------------------------------------------------------------- -------"

" The New South Wales Treasurer, Michael Egan, has declared the year of the Olympics the strongest ever for the state. Mr Egan has announced the state's operating surplus after abnormals of $5.5 billion, or $2.9 billion before abnormals. The figures are contained in the Consolidated Financial Statements for 1999-2000. However, a mid-year review of the 2000-2001 budget shows the projected budget surplus of $659 million has been revised down to $391 million, mainly due to increased spending on rail. But Mr Egan points out the state is on track to chalk-up its fourth successive budget surplus. ""That's the first time that's ever been done,"" he said. ""There are only two previous governments that have ever chalked up a surplus at all and each one of them only managed to get one surplus."" -------------------------------------------------------------------- -------"

" Sydney to Hobart yachts will be able to plot the best course using the latest satellite images of the ocean's currents. CSIRO scientists have identified currents that could give yachts a three or four knot advantage as they make their way down the New South Wales-Victorian coast. Marine scientist Dr George Cresswell says yachts using the currents displayed in image form on the Internet will have a competitive edge. ""If they come out of Sydney they are set back a little bit, then they get down to Jervis Bay,"" he said. ""If they are off the continental shelf they'll be picking up a strong current, which decreases as you go towards shore, so they want to be off the shelf."" ------------------------------------------------------------------------- --"

" Technology, media and telecommunications stocks have led a two per cent slump on the Australian share market. The local sell-off follows global jitters over the slowing US economy. Triggered yesterday morning by commentary from the US Federal Reserve, the economic growth concerns in America underpinned a plunge this morning in the Nasdaq composite index of seven per cent. The Dow Jones index was down 2.5 per cent. Geoff Wilson from Wilson Asset Management says it is a very nervous climate at the moment. ""The Australian economy is slowing and the US economy is slowing and the question is how low will the market go?"" he said. Today at its weakest, the All Ordinaries index was down 70 points, or 2.2 per cent, which is its biggest drop since April's so-called ""tech wreck"". The media sector is down more than five per cent, with News Corporation dropping around $1.13. Lend Lease Corporation has been punished again for its earnings outlook, its shares crashing 13 per cent to below $16. Just before 12:00pm AEST, the All Ordinaries index was down 61 points to 3,130 - a slide of 1.9 per cent. The Australian dollar remains above 55 US cents at 55.37. -------------------------------------------------------------------- ------------"

" As many as 2,000 people may have died during East Timor's bloody transition from Indonesian province to fledgling nation last year, a United Nations investigator says. James Dunn, a former Australian consul to East Timor when the territory was a Portuguese colonial possession, and now a member of the UN team investigating militia killings, says 2,000 people may have died at the hands of pro-Jakarta militia fighters. ""They're still finding people, there's been a discovery in a well,"" he said. ""My investigation suggests quite a few people were killed in the mountains and their bodies were probably taken away, by relatives and buried privately. ""They've said nothing about them because they didn't want them disturbed,"" Mr Dunn said. ""I have to say I also have a very strong feeling and some evidence, a bit of it is personal, that some bodies were dumped out at sea."" Mr Dunn was in the capital, Dili, when the militias embarked upon a scorched-earth rampage across East Timor, after more than three-quarters of voters opted for independence from Indonesia, in a UN-supervised poll on August 30 last year. Mr Dunn says authorities officially estimated that about 1,000 people died in the violence. ""But my investigations suggest that we don't really know and that in fact the figure could be twice that number,"" he said. ""A lot of the killings outside the capital haven't been thoroughly investigated."" More evidence would come to hand when refugees held by the remnants of the militias in squalid camps in West Timor returned, he said. ""We certainly can't say that only a thousand were killed."" ------------------------------------------------------------------------- -------"

" The Queensland Labor Party has been accused of funding the campaign of an independent candidate in a crucial by-election, which led to the downfall of the Goss Government. A former ALP organiser, Lee Bermingham, claims his party helped meet the campaign expenses of independent candidate, Teesha Crossland, in the 1996 Mundingburra by-election. Mr Bermingham, who has since admitted to electoral fraud, says another Labor Party worker and self-confessed electoral rorter, Andy Kehoe, paid the money to Ms Crossland. He says the then ALP state secretary, Mike Kaiser, was aware of the situation and reimbursed Mr Kehoe. Mr Bermingham says Mr Kehoe submitted false claims for work done to the cars of Labor Party workers at his Townsville service station. ""I think that was the way in which the money was laundered into the Crossland campaign,"" he said. ""Well in fact, that was how the money was laundered into her campaign to help fund her expenses."" Ms Crossland, Mr Kehoe and Mr Kaiser will not comment to the ABC."

" Peter Beattie says he does not support the use of so-called stooge candidates and wants an investigation. ------------------------------------------------------------------------- -------"

" The National Centenary of Federation Committee has expressed its displeasure with a deal done between the New South Wales Federation Committee and News Limited, over coverage of a special parade on New Year's Day. News Limited will distribute an official program and its photographers will have access to the assembly areas and will be allowed to walk along the parade route inside the barricades. State Federation Committee executive director, John Trevillian, has defended the deal, saying there are many other areas where photographers will be able to get good coverage. He says News Limited has not paid any money to the committee. ""We're not being paid, we're getting support to get the information out there that this is a truly magnificent event."" But the head of the National Council, Tony Eggleton, says he is not pleased by the decision because it is not consistent with the policy of the national body. ""I think this distraction with a debate over this media arrangement is something, I think, we could have done without and I think it's a pity,"" he said. ------------------------------------------------------------------------- -------"

" Up to 30,000 Australians who suffer from Alzheimer's disease are expected to benefit from a new subsidy on medication. The drugs, Aricept and Exelon will be included on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme from February 2001. The subsidy will reduce the cost of treatment from $200 a month to about $4 a month for pensioners. The Federal Health Minister, Michael Wooldridge, says the scheme will cost the Government $25 million. ""When we fund a new drug like this it does not mean something else doesn't get funded,"" he said. ""This is new funding into the health portfolio into the pharmaceutical benefits scheme and reducing the cost for consumers."" -------------------------------------------------------------------- ------------"

" Maxi yacht Shockwave has emerged as the outright favourite for the 2000 Sydney to Hobart yacht race. The 80-footer, owned by Neville Crichton, is paying just $1.30 for a $1 according to odds listed this week. Second in the betting, at 4-1, is another 80-footer, Swedish yacht Nicorette skippered by Ludde Ingvall. Melbourne yacht Wild Thing, which has been lengthened since last year's race, is third at 9-1 along with George Snow's Brindabella. At longer odds is Xena, an Open 60, which is listed at 21-1. ------------------------------------------------------------------------- -------"

" The Federal Opposition leader Kim Beazley says he does not expect an upcoming by-election in the Queensland seat of Ryan to have a big impact on Labor's election chances. The by-election for the safe Liberal seat will be held next year when Defence Minister John Moore retires. Allegations of branch-stacking within the Liberal party emerged during a previous pre-selection battle in which Mr Moore was endorsed. Mr Beazley says Mr Howard should tackle the long-running claims and follow the Opposition's handling of similar allegations involving Labor. ""It's not good enough. John Howard is responsible for a clean Liberal Party in the way that I'm responsible for a clean Labor Party and the time has come for an end to double standards in analysis in these affairs,"" he said."

" The new Workplace Relations Minister, Tony Abbott, plans to contact the Australian Democrats soon regarding his plans for the portfolio. The Democrats leader, Meg Lees, reacted warily to Mr Abbott's appointment and warned him he would need to adopt a more moderate approach. Mr Abbott says his new job is a big challenge which he is looking forward to immensely. He says he will be talking to the Democrats about resurrecting the unfair dismissal legislation. ""I'll be calling Meg Lees fairly soon to tell her that I'd like to work constructively with her but obviously we've got an agenda and the best place to start would be to see what we can do to get the unfair dismissal laws through the Senate,"" he said."

" The Seven Network's share price plummeted today after the news that it may be losing the AFL broadcast rights. Seven still has the right to a final bid. Channel Seven's share price was down almost 7 per cent at its lowest, a slump of $114 million in the value of the company. It follows news the AFL has awarded its broadcast rights from 2002 to the News Limited led consortium, worth $500 million over five years. The Ten Network shares are up six cents and Publishing and Broadcasting Limited, which owns Channel Nine, is up 18 cents. The AFL's chief executive, Wayne Jackson, says Seven can still make a counter bid, after paying the league $20 million for that right. But Mr Jackson says the pay-tv rights will remain with New Limited. ""Channel Seven had the right to bid last specifically for the free to air rights. We don't share a view they have the right to bid last for pay,"" he said."

" A South Australian Supreme Court judge will give his ruling tomorrow on an application by media outlets to have suppression orders lifted in the committal hearing of the Snowtown mass murder case. Justice Brian Martin is expected to release parts of the prosecutor's opening statement from Monday last week, although it will be heavily edited. The ruling comes after almost two days of legal argument about the suppression orders from lawyers for the defence, prosecution, and media. The orders were imposed last week by Magistrate David Gurry. Justice Martin is also expected to announce whether orders will be lifted or varied on the evidence of three forensic pathologists who examined the ten bodies. Meantime, Magistrate Gurry today adjourned the committal hearing for the four men accused until January next year."

" Australian stocks have closed weaker, as investors reacted badly to a gloomy United States economic outlook, and the absence of an interest rate cut there. The US Nasdaq plunged 4 per cent overnight, after the US Federal Reserve warned of further economic weakness ahead. Regional markets were similarly unnerved. Tokyo's Nikkei index closed down 218 points, or 1.5 per cent, to 13,914. The Hang Seng in Hong Kong is down 273 points, or around 1.8 per cent. The All Ordinaries index fell 13 points to 3,191, with only banks and building material issues spared the declines. The big corporate news came from the property group, Lend Lease, which slumped 15 per cent on a shock profit warning to the market. Lend Lease has downgraded forecasts for its full-year net operating profit to between $210 and $230 million, around $100 million below market expectations. Its real estate investment arm has been hit by lower transaction volumes and delayed capital raisings, caused by volatility in interest rates and on the share market. The stock closed down a massive $3.41, to $18.30. Shares in the Seven Network dropped nearly 7 per cent early on news it may have lost the broadcast rights to AFL football, to a consortium of Channels Nine, Ten and Foxtel. Seven has another 14 days to try to match their offer. The stock closed down 15 cents, or 2 per cent. Publishing and Broadcasting Limited, which owns Channel Nine, rose 20 cents to $13.00. News Corporation, a partner in Foxtel fell 12 cents to $15.53, while the other partner, Telstra, fell 8 cents to $6.46. Hazelton Airlines fell 17 cents to $1.38, with the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission announcing it will oppose the takeover bids of both Qantas and Ansett. Qantas eased 1 cent to $3.57. Among technology stocks hit today were E-trade, down 13 per cent, Looksmart, down 20 per cent and BMC Media, down 13 per cent. Banks did better with the National up 42 cents to $29.37 and the Commonwealth, up 17 cents to $30.77. BHP eased 2 cents to $18.87. The Australian dollar rallied strongly, on weakness in the US greenback following the US Federal Reserve's comments. The currency was trading at 54.75 US cents in late afternoon trade, up nearly 0.25 of a cent on this morning. It is worth 37.25 British pence, 61.8 yen and is at 50.5 on the trade weighted index. Spot gold is at $US270.45."

" Surf lifesavers have expressed frustration over beachgoers who continually place themselves at risk of drowning. New research commissioned by Surf Life Saving Australia shows more than a third of beachgoers do not swim between the flags, despite knowing it is dangerous. The group says lifesavers, collectively rescued 10,000 people last summer, and 13 people have already drowned this season. Volunteer lifesaver Paul Booth says the figures are disappointing. ""What we want to do is make sure that people leave the beach with good memories. We don't like patrolling the beaches to be aggressive and tell people what to do,"" he said. ""We tell people to swim between the flags because it is important for their own safety. We don't like placing our own lives at risk trying to rescue people once they have ignored our warnings."""

" The death of the Carlton Soccer Club is expected to be confirmed tonight, when the board of Soccer Australia meets to terminate the club's licence. The Player's Union is today moving to have all 23 Carlton players listed as free agents, and a meeting of the club's creditors will be held tomorrow. But it is up to the Soccer Australia board to officially end Carlton's involvement in the national league, with results of all the club's games this season being declared null and void."

" There is mixed reaction to the Federal Government's new frontbench, which sees John Herron dropped from Aboriginal Affairs and Tony Abbott taking over the Workplace Relations portfolio. The new ministry will be sworn in next year. The promotion of Tony Abbott to Cabinet and the Workplace Relations Minister is most controversial. The Prime Minister has high praise for Mr Abbott. ""I think he's been a standout junior minister,"" he said. Kim Beazley says the opposite. ""Putting a junior headkicker and not a terribly effective one at that, in the portfolio is simply a provocation,"" he said. Aboriginal Affairs is the other notable change. Mr Howard has added it to Philip Ruddock's Immigration portfolio. ""This is putting reconciliation and indigenous policy in the Cabinet fully, totally for the first time ever,"" he said. Labor says its downgraded because it no longer has a separate minister. Among other changes are the recall of Amanda Vanstone to Cabinet to be Family Services Minister and Peter Reith's move to defence. Three new junior ministers, Eric Abetz, Mal Brough and Ian Macfarlane have been appointed. Jocelyn Newman and John Moore are retiring and John Herron lost his ministry."

" Mr Abetz, who has been appointed Special Minister of State, says he is nervous about facing his first question time. Senator Abetz says while he is honoured to take on the role, he is expecting his first question time to be a nerve-wracking experience. ""I've seen ministers from both Labor and Liberal answer questions now for six years, so I've had plenty of experience on the sidelines,"" he said. ""The challenge will be to actually get in there and perform on behalf of the people of Australia."" --------------------------------------------------"

" The pharmaceutical companies at the centre of an extortion threat have congratulated police in Queensland and New South Wales on the arrest of a person over the threat to poison painkillers. The praise comes after a Brisbane man was remanded in custody on charges stemming from the extortion threat, against Herron Pharmaceuticals and SmithKline Beecham International. Dennis Donald Fountain, 62, faced 10 charges, including two of attempted murder, when he appeared in the Brisbane Magistrates Court yesterday. Herron and SmithKline Beecham both say police worked tirelessly on their investigation and look forward to an end to what has been an uncertain time. ----------------------------------------------------"

" Official interest rates in the United States are poised to start coming down in the new year. The latest policy meeting at the US Federal Reserve has signalled a change in thinking. Although keeping American interest rates unchanged for the moment, a statement from the US Federal Reserve says demand and profits are being hit by rising energy costs. It says declining consumer confidence, reports of lower sales and some financial market stress, point to a further slowing in economic growth. Prices on American equity markets have fallen heavily since the release of the statement by the Federal Reserve. After being well ahead just before it was posted, the high-tech Nasdaq composite index was down 78 points, or 3 per cent, just before 9:00am AEST. The Dow Jones index is down 15 points. ---------------------------------------------------------"

" The AFL has in-principle awarded its broadcast rights from 2002 to a consortium headed by News Limited. The AFL's chief executive Wayne Jackson says the deal is worth $500 million over five years. ""The deal represents the most significant financial broadcast rights deal in the history of Australian sport,"" he said. Foxtel has secured the pay television rights, previously held by Channel Seven. The AFL also prefers the News Limited consortium's bid for free to air rights, which would see coverage split between Channel Ten and Channel Nine. But Channel Seven has two weeks to match the offer under its contractual arrangement with the League. Seven has issued a statement saying it is obviously disappointed with the decision but would review and analyse the rival consortium's bid. The network says if it is not successful it has other scheduling plans for 2002. ------------------------------------------"

" Europe's Airbus Consortium has officially announced it will begin production of the new superjumbo passenger jet. But the US has warned the project could spark a new trans-Atlantic trade war. The new superjumbo A 380 will carry 555 people and according to Airbus, it will change the way people think about travel. The two storey interior could include stand up bars, gyms, bedrooms and shops. The decision to go ahead with production comes after the airbus consortium received 50 firm orders from world airlines, including Qantas. It will cost between $US10-12 billion to develop, two thirds of which will be paid for by Airbus and one third by the German, French, British and Spanish governments. The US has warned that it believes this is an unlawful subsidy and could spark a new trade war, but Airbus says the money will be given as repayable loans, that are legal under the current GATT agreements. ----------------------------------------------------------"

" Israelis and Palestinians are reopening peace negotiations in Washington, with US President Bill Clinton, offering to help them reach a settlement in his last weeks in office. The two sides will set the pace for the talks, which begin with separate meetings for Israeli and Palestinian delegations with US mediators Dennis Ross and Aaron Miller. Observers say three-way talks appear likely later on, but whether Mr Clinton or Secretary of State Madeleine Albright will participate is undecided. State Department spokesman Phil Reeker says the Clinton Administration believes the talks could be its final chance to broker a peace deal. --------------------------------------------------"

" US President-elect George W. Bush has held a meeting at the White House with outgoing President Bill Clinton, that has focussed on the challenges he will face on assuming power, next month. Mr Clinton received the same courtesy from outgoing president George Bush, the President-elect's father, after the 1992 elections. And the President-elect has admitted his visit to the White House was different from anything he had ever experienced. ""It's vastly different, it's such a huge honour to come as the President-elect and I don't think I fully realise the impact until I swear in,"" he said. ""I suspect the President could say the same thing and I am humbled and honoured and I can't thank the President enough for his hospitality, he didn't have to do this."" ---------------------------------------------------"

" The record-breaking Australian cricket team can look forward to the return of captain Steve Waugh and possibly fast bowler Brett Lee for the fourth test against the West Indies starting in Melbourne on Boxing Day. Waugh is recovering well from a buttock injury that kept him out of the Third Test in Adelaide, while Lee's injured back is also responding well to treatment. Australia retained the Frank Worrell Trophy by winning the Adelaide Test by five wickets, its 13th Test win in a row. Acting captain Adam Gilchrist says the outstanding performances of replacement players Colin Miller and Damien Martyn in the Test shows the player depth in Australian cricket. ""You know the guys that came in fulfilled their role admirably and the result was still there so we're pleased with that and we're sure that we've got depth in our squad,"" he said."

" Federal Family Services Minister Jocelyn Newman has retired from the Ministry. Senator Newman told the Prime Minister of her plans this morning. The 63-year-old Minister has been in Federal Parliament since 1986. Senator Newman revealed the Government's plans for changes to the welfare system last week, which was expected to be her final major project before her retirement. Prime Minister John Howard is expected to announce a Ministerial reshuffle this week. The Defence Minister, John Moore, also plans to retire, but has not announced it yet. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Chief of the Australian Defence Force, Admiral Chris Barrie, has played down reports a small number of soldiers from the elite parachute regiment 3-RAR had connections to an extreme right wing organisation. Three members, who have since left the regiment, were part of a heavy metal band with a civilian leader who was alleged to have neo-Nazi associations. While announcing details of an audit team to look into disciplinary processes in the army, Admiral Barrie said the defence force does not interfere with its members political beliefs. ""The Australian community would find that very offensive, you know it's not that long ago we had a constitutional referendum about outlawing the Communist Party in this country for God's sake, it's not on in this country,"" he said. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australian maritime rescue authorities are on stand-by in case they are called to rescue a lone yachtsman in trouble in the Southern Ocean. Organisers of the Vendee Globe around-the-world yacht race, say Frenchman Yves Parlier's boat Aquitaine Innovations has lost its mast in heavy seas about 1,500 nautical miles south-east of Perth. British yachtswoman Ellen Macarthur has been diverted to rescue the 40-year-old, with organisers fearful the broken mast could do further damage to his boat. Ms Macarthur says she will continue to check in on Mr Parlier over the next few hours. ""Knowing Yves, it's unlikely he will want to get off but if there is major damage and there's a big storm coming he might want to rethink,"" she said. ""I will speak to him on the radio and see how things go from there."" Australian authorities were forced to intervene in the race in 1996 to rescue Englishman Tony Bullimore and Frenchman Thierry Dubois who were stranded in the same area. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A man whose murder re-trial was the first in Victoria to be aborted because of the Crimenet website, has now been sentenced to nine years jail. John Andrew McLaughlin, 33, was found guilty by a Supreme Court jury of the manslaughter of Derek Jones at Bayswater in June 1996. McLaughlin's earlier re-trial on a murder charge was aborted in May, after the defence argued jurors may have accessed information about him on Crimenet, a database about Australian criminals. Justice John Coldrey said McLaughlin had repeatedly kicked and punched Mr Jones during an argument. He ordered him to serve at least seven years of the sentence. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) has decided to seek a new trial for alleged insider trader Simon Hannes. The decision comes despite the Macquarie Bank executive director having almost completed his original jail term. The Commonwealth DPP has confirmed that Hannes will be retried on insider trading and other charges in the New South Wales Supreme Court. A date is yet to be set. Hannes was convicted in August last year of illegally trading in TNT Securities, making a $2 million profit. However, earlier this month the Court of Criminal Appeal quashed his convictions, criticising part of the judge's summing up to the jury. Hannes was released on bail, only two months short of completing his minimum prison term. The Australian Companies and Securities Commission has welcomed the decision, saying it is in the public interest to retry the charges. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The ABC has rejected claims that the budget for Triple J's musical talent contest Unearthed has been slashed saying the program will not be cut. It follows reports that ABC management had cut the Unearthed budget from $100,000 a year to $28,000. But ABC management says the Unearthed budget has been re-allocated into a number of categories. A spokesman says the figures were confusing. In a statement today director of radio Sue Howard says funding for Unearthed and all other important regional initiatives, like Haywire, is assured. She says Unearthed will be fully funded."

" Federal Family Services Minister Jocelyn Newman has retired from the Ministry. Senator Newman told the Prime Minister of her plans this morning. The 63-year-old Minister has been in Federal Parliament since 1986. Senator Newman revealed the Government's plans for changes to the welfare system last week, which was expected to be her final major project before her retirement. Prime Minister John Howard is expected to announce a Ministerial reshuffle this week. The Defence Minister, John Moore, also plans to retire, but has not announced it yet. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Chief of the Australian Defence Force, Admiral Chris Barrie, has played down reports a small number of soldiers from the elite parachute regiment 3-RAR had connections to an extreme right wing organisation. Three members, who have since left the regiment, were part of a heavy metal band with a civilian leader who was alleged to have neo-Nazi associations. While announcing details of an audit team to look into disciplinary processes in the army, Admiral Barrie said the defence force does not interfere with its members political beliefs. ""The Australian community would find that very offensive, you know it's not that long ago we had a constitutional referendum about outlawing the Communist Party in this country for God's sake, it's not on in this country,"" he said. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australian maritime rescue authorities are on stand-by in case they are called to rescue a lone yachtsman in trouble in the Southern Ocean. Organisers of the Vendee Globe around-the-world yacht race, say Frenchman Yves Parlier's boat Aquitaine Innovations has lost its mast in heavy seas about 1,500 nautical miles south-east of Perth. British yachtswoman Ellen Macarthur has been diverted to rescue the 40-year-old, with organisers fearful the broken mast could do further damage to his boat. Ms Macarthur says she will continue to check in on Mr Parlier over the next few hours. ""Knowing Yves, it's unlikely he will want to get off but if there is major damage and there's a big storm coming he might want to rethink,"" she said. ""I will speak to him on the radio and see how things go from there."" Australian authorities were forced to intervene in the race in 1996 to rescue Englishman Tony Bullimore and Frenchman Thierry Dubois who were stranded in the same area. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A man whose murder re-trial was the first in Victoria to be aborted because of the Crimenet website, has now been sentenced to nine years jail. John Andrew McLaughlin, 33, was found guilty by a Supreme Court jury of the manslaughter of Derek Jones at Bayswater in June 1996. McLaughlin's earlier re-trial on a murder charge was aborted in May, after the defence argued jurors may have accessed information about him on Crimenet, a database about Australian criminals. Justice John Coldrey said McLaughlin had repeatedly kicked and punched Mr Jones during an argument. He ordered him to serve at least seven years of the sentence. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) has decided to seek a new trial for alleged insider trader Simon Hannes. The decision comes despite the Macquarie Bank executive director having almost completed his original jail term. The Commonwealth DPP has confirmed that Hannes will be retried on insider trading and other charges in the New South Wales Supreme Court. A date is yet to be set. Hannes was convicted in August last year of illegally trading in TNT Securities, making a $2 million profit. However, earlier this month the Court of Criminal Appeal quashed his convictions, criticising part of the judge's summing up to the jury. Hannes was released on bail, only two months short of completing his minimum prison term. The Australian Companies and Securities Commission has welcomed the decision, saying it is in the public interest to retry the charges. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" One of Australia's biggest bands has blasted the ABC in light of threatened budget cuts to Triple J's regional Unearthed talent competition. ABC management has reportedly cut the Unearthed budget by just over a quarter from $100,000 a year to $28,000. The competition has led to successful discoveries such as Violet Town's Killing Heidi, Lismore's Grinspoon and Endorphin from Cairns. Killing Heidi's guitarist Jesse Hooper says he is sickened by the news. ""Unearthed was our initial exposure,"" Mr Hooper said. ""It was awesome in that gave us our first sort of recording experience at the ABC studios in Melbourne and then from there it got us some airplay. ""So of course it got us interest and that is how we signed on to our record label Wah Wah now, it all began from Unearthed."" But Triple J's network program director, Stuart Matchett, has down played the Unearthed cuts. ""I can say that we obviously want to keep on doing it and we want to do it in the best possible way we can,"" he said. ""As with all these things though, you are always limited by the amount of money you actually get to do them. ""We will just have to do it to the best level we can with the best funds that get provided."" ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Federal Labor leader, Kim Beazley, has called for the party to put the preselection row for the seat of Robertson behind it. . Mr Beazley organised his party's national executive to intervene in the battle yesterday. The meeting backed him, by 14 votes to seven, to endorse Trish Moran as the candidate over the former senator, Belinda Neal. Mr Beazley failed to win the majority of votes from his own right-faction. But most national executive members said 14 votes to seven had to be seen as a substantial victory, especially when Ms Neal's husband, John Della Bosca, leads the New South Wales right. Mr Beazley says it is a good result and time for the party to move on. ""The important thing about how we conduct ourselves in the Labor Party is that we keep to the forefront of the public, those concerns, which are their real concerns and not our own internal practices,"" he said. ------------------------------------------------------------------------- -------------"

" Children in detention centres may soon be provided with schooling, under a plan currently being investigated by the Federal Government. Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock told a public forum in Adelaide last night about options currently being considered. Mr Ruddock has called for an urgent report into the possibility of enabling children, whose families are in detention centres, to attend a local school. Under the proposal, the principle male member of the family would be detained, while the women and children would be housed in a group home, with the chance of education. Mr Ruddock says he hopes implementation will take place next year. ""It's a compromise but it's one worth looking at,"" he said. ""There are some people who believe you ought to be able to because you're...able to institute it immediately. ""It does require a comprehensive review."" Mr Ruddock is hoping to receive the report by the end of the year. ------------------------------------------------------------------------- -------------"

" Israeli and Palestinian delegations will meet American officials separately in Washington today, commencing the most crucial talks since the start of the three-month-long conflict between the sides. The talks are expected to focus on ways of reducing the violence so a formal leadership summit can be held. But the talks are being overshadowed by developments in Israeli domestic politics. Israeli Foreign Minister Shlomo Ben Ami played down expectations of the Washington talks, saying there were no guarantees the renewed dialogue with the Palestinians could deliver a peace treaty before Israel is due to go to the polls. An election now appears more likely to be held in early February and without the involvement of the most popular potential candidate, Benjamin Netanyahu. Under Israeli law, Mr Netanyahu can only run if the Parliament dissolves itself and holds general elections, or if a special law is passed, allowing non-members of Parliament to stand as prime minister. Mr Netanyahu says he would not run under the latter option and today the orthodox Shas Party, which holds the deciding parliamentary numbers, said it would not vote for parliamentary elections. If both decisions hold, Mr Netayahu's move for the prime ministership will be over before it has begun. -------------------------------------------------------------------- ------------------"

" Indonesia's President Abdurrahman Wahid will fly to the strife-torn province of Aceh today to try to heal decade-old wounds. However, his plans have already gone awry, with the Government's intention of declaring Islamic Sharia law being dropped from the agenda. When President Abdurrahman Wahid came into office 14 months ago, he said finding peace in Aceh was one of his priorities. But in the past year there have been more than 800 deaths - double the previous year. The military has been accused of carrying out most of the killings."

" An additional 2,000 troops have been flown into Banda Aceh, ahead of the President's arrival. His two-hour schedule has now been revised. While he is set to visit the capital's mosque, Jakarta has decided against imposing Islamic Sharia law. Instead he will hand over millions of dollars in humanitarian aid. -------------------------------------------------------------------- ------------------"

" The Australian Government will today urge Solomon Islands to move forward on implementing the peace agreement that ended the country's two-year ethnic war. Foreign Minister Alexander Downer arrives in the Solomons later this morning for meetings with the Government. Mr Downer says the peace agreement reached in Townsville, earlier this year, was a significant achievement, but implementation is going slowly and needs to advance. He says the surrender of weapons by Malaitan and Guadalcanal militias is a positive step, but he is concerned about its slow pace. Australia and New Zealand jointly maintain a peace monitoring group in Solomon Islands and the Minister will visit that force today for a first-hand briefing on the peace process. Australia resisted intense pressure to intervene at the height of the crisis and Mr Downer says it was the right decision to stay out and have Solomon Islanders come up with the home-grown solutions. -------------------------------------------------------------------- ------------------"

" The Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) says a new program for older, unemployed people repeats the mistakes of the work-for- the-dole scheme. The Federal Government program will put volunteers aged over 40 into environmental projects, mostly in rural and regional areas. The program, to be known as Green Reserve, starts next March. ACOSS president Michael Raper says it will create worthwhile activities, but like the compulsory work-for-the-dole, it will not help people get paid jobs. ""We welcome the fact that the Green Reserve will in fact be voluntary and we've always said work-for-the-dole itself should be voluntary,"" he said. ""Its flaw of course is that it doesn't have the structured training so it suffers in the same way as work-for-the-dole."" -------------------------------------------------------------------- ------------------"

" A 26-year-old Sydney man is being held in custody in Canberra over the death of a two-year-old child in his family's stolen car at Cabramatta, earlier this month. The man was arrested yesterday in a joint New South Wales-Federal Police operation and charged with manslaughter. Two-year-old Leo Nguyen was alone in his family's car when it was stolen on the afternoon of December 4. The child died from heat exhaustion after the car was abandoned a short time later with the windows wound up. Police spokeswoman Raveena Carroll says the man was arrested in the Canberra suburb of Tuggeranong. ""He was conveyed to the Canberra City police station where he was charged under the interstate arrest provisions with the offence of manslaughter in New South Wales,"" she said. ""He was refused bail and will appear in the Canberra Magistrates Court today where New South Wales police will seek his extradition to Sydney."" -------------------------------------------------------------------- ------------------"

" Australia goes into the final day of the third cricket test against the West Indies in Adelaide today, needing 32 runs for victory with six wickets in hand. The home side will resume at 4 for 98, with Justin Langer on 43 and Damien Martyn 18. Australian spinner Colin Miller, who claimed 10 wickets in the match, says to pass 50 test scalps is a bonus so late in his career. ""Over 50 is nice isn't it?"" he said. ""I wouldn't have imagined it two years ago and as a 36-year-old, this be on the way to 100, so another couple of tests and I'll look at the three figures then."" ------------------------------------------------------------------------- -------------"

" A report into allegations that a 12-year-old boy was raped by his father and traded to other men at the Woomera Detention Centre for cigarettes last March, has found the claims cannot be substantiated. The investigation by the South Australian Family and Youth Services Department was ordered last month after the allegations were raised by two former nurses at the centre. The nurses claimed that evidence about the allegations was suppressed by the centre's management. The claims are still being looked at by another inquiry ordered by the Federal Government. ------------------------------------------------------------------------- -----------------"

" The killers of Liverpool toddler, James Bulger, could be set up with new lives in Australia or New Zealand, under a plan reportedly being considered by the British Home Office. Jon Venables and Robert Thompson shocked Britain when in 1993 they abducted James and bludgeoned him to death on a Liverpool railway line. They were aged 10 at the time. Today, <i>The Mail on Sunday</i> reported ""senior sources"" had outlined a plan to give the killers new identities and secretly take them out of Britain. The move was being arranged for the new year, when the parole board makes its final decision on their release. Australia, New Zealand and Canada were under consideration as new homes for the pair, the newspaper reported. They would go separately, to English-speaking countries. The public and the press would be told only after they had left the country, probably in mid-2001. The British Government would fund the operation, arranging new names, paying travel expenses, start up accommodation costs and provide a Home Office-appointed counsellor to oversee their rehabilitation. They would be under constant supervision. Their parents would be offered the chance to join them overseas, at their own cost. It is reportedly the first time the British Government has provided new identities for murderers, although police informants have been spirited abroad to protect them from reprisals. James Bulger's parents are upset by the plan, and called for them to serve a 15-year term in jail. ""It is wrong to use public money to give them a comfortable life abroad,"" Denise Bulger said. ""For such a wicked and premeditated crime, they should be locked up for 15 years -- not eight. ""They could marry under these false identities and their families would be at terrible risk,"" she said. ""More lives will be wrecked when the truth comes out - as it will."" Lawyers for the pair last month took High Court action aimed at them being granted anonymity for life. After their convictions for murder, the media were banned from publishing details about their detention. That ban was to expire when they turned 18, in August this year, but it was extended by the High Court Family Division. A Home Office spokeswoman said no decisions had been made about release arrangements. Venables has flourished academically while in detention, with a university career an option. The Home Office is said to be keen to show how well they have done. There are fears of revenge attacks against them, with Ralph Bulger, the father of the murdered boy, saying he would ""hunt them down"". New Zealand Prime Minister Helen Clark said today there had been no approach to authorities in New Zealand about the possibility of repatriating James Bulger's killers here. ""This was news to the Minister of Immigration and the entire cabinet,"" Miss Clark told reporters. ""We have no knowledge of it, we have no advice of it, we have no information. ""I would have thought the days of the penal colony were over,"" she said. ------------------------------------------------------------------------- ----------------"

" The ACT had the lowest death rate in Australia last year with the highest in the Northern Territory. The latest figures show men in the ACT can expect to live longer than their counterparts in the rest of Australia, while women in Western Australia have the highest life expectancy for females. Women are still living longer than men. In 1999 females could expect to live to 82 years of age, nearly six years longer than Australian men. Getting married appears to help those wanting to live longer, with those Australians who do not marry, dying at almost twice the rate of their married counterparts. Overseas born Australians have lower death rates than the Australian born population and last year, Vietnamese born Australians had the lowest death rate in the country. The death rate declined in 1999 while the infant mortality rate rose slightly. ------------------------------------------------------------------------- ----------------"

" The Victorian Government has ordered an early election for the Melbourne City Council, nine months ahead of schedule. The announcement came just hours after a Government-appointed panel asked to investigate bitter infighting within council, suggested wide-ranging changes. They include stronger leadership and more effective government. The election will now be held next winter. The Local Government Minister, Bob Cameron, says the panel's recommendations confirmed that there are systemic problems within the council. ""What's recommended is internal written arrangements, internal protocols have to be put into place,"" Mr Cameron said. ""That suggests to us that we haven't got a council that's necessarily sustainable in the long-term future and the best thing that could happen, the best democratic thing that could happen is that we have a fresh start in the winter."" However Lord Mayor Peter Costigan has accused the Government of acting too quickly. ""Ijust find it hard to believe that a fair-minded government should make a decision like that after this process has gone through and before they have properly studied the report."" -------------------------------------------------------------------- ---------------------"

" Two of the biggest names in global financial markets are backing a new online investing service launched today in Australia. North American investment bank Merrill Lynch and the banking group, HSBC, have committed up to $US1 billion to the online joint venture. It was launched earlier this month in Canada and Australia is the second of up to 20 countries where it will be available. Merrill Lynch HSBC Australia is aimed at self-directed investors, who will be able to trade in Australian listed securities and on 15 foreign markets. Banking products can be linked to the trading account while the Internet site will offer institutional quality research, as well as educational resources. -------------------------------------------------------------------- ---------------------"

" The Prime Minister is tipped to announce a frontbench reshuffle this week. The change to the Government frontbench is expected to be sparked by a decision by the Family and Community Services Minister, Jocelyn Newman, to stand down. The question is how widespread the changes will be. Some are not expecting wholesale changes, arguing that sort of reshuffle is likely to wait until after the election next year. But if Senator Newman goes, that effectively means at least two changes - someone to fill her portfolio vacancy and the need to put another woman in Cabinet. It is expected Justice Minister Amanda Vanstone would be put back into Cabinet ranks creating a vacancy in the outer ministry and the opportunity to shuffle some junior ministers. There may not be too much change in the Cabinet although the Workplace Relations Minister, Peter Reith, has made it clear he is not wedded to his portfolio - a signal he would not resist a change. ------------------------------------------------------------------------- ---------------------------"

" Israel's Foreign Minister, Shlomo ben Ami, will head a delegation flying to Washington later today in the latest diplomatic moves to restart Israeli-Palestinian peace talks. A Palestinian delegation will follow and the Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat has not ruled out a summit with Israel's Prime Minister, Ehud Barak. ""If it is needed, why not?"" the Palestinian leader said today, when asked if a meeting with Mr Barak could happen. So far renewed talks between the two sides have simply been about getting higher level talks off the ground - a move given new urgency by the imminent departure of the potential mediator, US President Bill Clinton. Both sides seem in reality to be easing their pre-conditions for a return to ditente, even if they are not saying so. The Palestinians are still insisting on a winding down of Israel's military response and the Israeli Government line remains that talks will not occur while the conflict continues. Violence continues to threaten the new diplomacy with two Palestinian men killed by Israeli troops in Gaza. According to Palestinian radio, an 18-year-old Palestinian was also murdered by Israeli settlers near Ramallah. One Israeli, a West Bank settler was seriously injured in a shooting attack. -------------------------------------------------------------------- -------------------------------"

" In the United States, President-elect George W Bush has named his second member of his White House team, National Security Advisor, Condoleezza Rice. Ms Rice's appointment follows that of former General Colin Powell as Secretary of State. Both Ms Rice and General Powell are African-American. President-elect Bush, who portrayed himself as a Washington outsider during the election campaign, is currently travelling to the American capital, after naming the two to the next administration. Ms Rice, an expert on the former Soviet Union, grew up in segregated Alabama. Both Ms Rice and General Powell served in the previous Bush administration. -------------------------------------------------------------------- ---------------------------------"

" Federal Labor leader Kim Beazley will today move to end party in-fighting over preselection for the federal seat of Robertson. Mr Beazley used his powers to call a special national executive meeting for this afternoon in Sydney. He wants the issue settled before Christmas, because he is worried about the damage the row is causing and does not want it dragging on into the new year. The 20 national executive members will consider the row between Labor's former senator, Belinda Neal, and the other candidate, Trish Moran. They are expected to endorse Ms Moran, ending Ms Neal's hopes of a new preselection contest. Ms Neal's husband, Labor's right-faction power-broker, John Della Bosca, is expected to stand aside from the meeting, because of his conflict of interest. ------------------------------------------------------------------------- ------------------------- It is not clear if he will send a proxy to the meeting."

" Australia will resume at nine for 403 this morning, a lead of only 12, heading into day four of the third Test against the West Indies in Adelaide. Damien Martyn is on 46 and Glenn McGrath is not out on one. Australian vice-captain Ricky Ponting, who scored 92 yesterday, says he is confident his side can play itself into a winning position. In domestic cricket, South Australia will resume at three for 243 in its second innings this morning, when play begins on the final day of the match against Queensland in Brisbane. The Redbacks still trail the Bulls by nine on the first innings. Greg Blewett is 123 not out."

" The Australian retail industry is entering its most critical week of the year. The new tax system will ensure that the last-minute Christmas shopping rush is more important than ever. Small businesses have now struggled through one Business Activity Statement under the new system. But it is the second, due in February, that could be all-important, with the key to business survival being cashflow. Last December almost $16.2 billion went through the tills of retailers. The Australian Retailers Association's Bill Healey says the industry is hoping for better this year. ""Well we estimate the December retail sales this year will be around $16.8 billion, which will be the highest sales in history,"" he said. ""Five point six billiion dollars is expected to be spent on Christmas-related purchases."" Mr Healey says some of the more popular items have been Sony Playstations, scooters, Pokemon products, mobile phones and other communications technology. -------------------------------------------------------------------- -------------------------------"

" At least 10 mountain climbers and skiers have been killed in northern Italy's alps by icy, unusually treacherous, conditions compared to normal standards. The worst single accident happened on Mount Arera, north-east of Bergamo. One climber was killed trying to rescue a dog, then three companions died one by one trying to rescue the last man to fall. A fifth man died climbing a nearby mountain for a ski run down. Five more people were killed in accidents on peaks around Lecco, north-west of Bergamo. Most deaths in Europe's mountains during winter are caused by avalanches. But this season early snow, followed by rain and sun, has brought dangerously deceiving conditions, with almost invisible ice covering large areas of the alps in Italy. -------------------------------------------------------------------- ---------------------------------"

" Two passenger trains have crashed head-on in western Japan, killing one person and injuring 27 others. Brake failure is being blamed for the accident which a survivor has described as ""a nightmare"". Passengers were thrown through the air and dumped onto the floor as the trains collided. The brakes on the passenger train failed as it approached a station on the Sea of Japan coast, 350 kilometres west of Tokyo. Instead of stopping, the train continued and hit head on another train heading toward it on the same track. Both drivers' compartments caved in and one of the drivers was rushed to hospital in a coma where he died a short time later. Railway accidents are rare in Japan, but last March confidence in the system was shaken when a peak hour Tokyo subway train ran off the rails and into another train, injuring more than 30 people. -------------------------------------------------------------------- ---------------------------------"

" Foreign Minister Alexander Downer says Pacific nations are now better equipped to deal with crises in the region. Mr Downer says the coups in Fiji and Solomon Islands this year prompted a rethink by member nations of the Pacific Islands Forum. Speaking at the start of an official visit to Vanuatu, Mr Downer says Forum countries now have greater political will to assist their neighbours in times of crisis. And the Minister says Vanuatu helped create the mechanism by which that political will can be implemented. ""What the countries of the Pacific, including Vanuatu, are all saying, is if there is a problem in one of our countries, we're no longer going to do nothing about it,"" he said. ""There is some capacity to trigger certainly political assistance and intervention and I think that is a very important step forward."""

" Another boatload of illegal immigrants will be escorted to Australia today, after being intercepted aboard an Indonesian fishing vessel at Ashmore Islands, off Western Australia's far north coast. Customs Minister Amanda Vanstone says 113 people, believed to be of Middle Eastern origin, were detected yesterday by a Coastwatch flight. The Customs vessel, <i>Wauri</i>, which is on long-term patrol in the Ashmore Islands area, was then directed to the area, and the navy patrol boat, <i>HMAS Launceston</i>, has also been called upon to assist. The people are to be transferred to the ferry, Samson Explorer, for the journey to the mainland, where they will be handed over to Immigration officials. Yesterday's interception brings the number of vessels detected this year to 40, with a total of 2,282 illegal immigrants on board."

" A refugee support group says it fears some illegal immigrants may sign forms agreeing to be returned to their home country, without fully understanding their legal rights. The Immigration Department has confirmed that a 30-year-old illegal immigrant from Iran, Mohmmadreza Farschian, was escorted aboard a Malaysian Airlines flight from Perth to Iran yesterday, after agreeing to be deported. The Refugee Action Network's Ana Kailis says the man was a student activist in Iran and is almost certain to face reprisals in his home country. ""In this case we found out that Mohmmadreza Farschian was in detention for 14 months, which was an extensive period of time,"" she said. ""It's over a year and what that does to a person's psychological state is really hard for us to imagine, especially given that he left Iran in a situation where he could have been imprisoned."""

" The Federal Labor party's national executive is expected to endorse Trish Moran as its candidate in the federal seat of Robertson on the New South Wales central coast. Former Labor Senator Belinda Neal is contesting the pre-selection after losing the original ballot to Ms Moran. Ms Neal later won the right to a new vote. But Labor leader Kim Beazley has intervened in a bid to end the row, by calling a meeting of the party's national executive in Sydney tomorrow."

" Health officials in Zimbabwe say nine people have died from an outbreak of anthrax. At least 600 people have become infected with the disease. The Zimbabwean Health Department says the outbreak has been discovered 100 kilometres west of Harare and health workers are distributing information about the disease to local residents. Veterinary officers have begun vaccinating cattle and sheep in the area. The disease, which infects livestock, can also be passed on to humans, with symptoms including a high fever and swelling of the throat and spleen. Zimbabwe's Commercial Farmers Union says unless strict quarantine measures are put in place, the disease will spread to other districts."

" Amnesty International is calling on the Federal Government to release all children held in immigration detention centres. The organisation today ""liberated"" Christmas presents from a steel cage outside Victoria's Maribrynong detention centre for the nine children detained there. Amnesty International's Georgie Costello says more than 200 children seeking refugee or asylum status are being detained in similar centres around Australia. Most are held at remote facilities such as Woomera and Curtin Airforce Base. Ms Costello says the Federal Government is contravening the human rights of the children. ""The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child says that a child should be imprisoned only as a matter of last resort,"" he said. ""At the moment when asylum seekers arrive in Australia, they're put into detention as a matter of first resort."""

" Australia's Olympic silver medal-winning long jumper, Jai Taurima, has been hurt in a car accident near the Brisbane Airport. The 28-year-old's hire car collided with a truck yesterday when he was on his way to a celebrity golf tournament on the Sunshine Coast. Taurima withdrew from the tournament and has flown back to Sydney with his manager. A spokesman for Athletics Australia says Taurima is undergoing medical tests on one of his knees today, but the injury is not believed to be serious."

" The head of an European Union investigation into the cyanide spill in Romania earlier this year says there is no doubt the Australian owned mine was responsible for the environmental disaster. A special EU task force has delivered the findings of its investigation into the incident. The EU investigation is the second report of its kind to link the environmental damage seen in the major waterways of Hungary and Yugoslavia with the cyanide spill at the Bai Mare Mine upstream in Romania. A UN report earlier this year also linked the Aural Gold Mine - half owned by the Australian company Esmerelda - with what was described by one member of the Hungarian Government at the time as the worst environmental catastrophe in Europe since Chernobyl. The company admitted that cyanide spilled from one of its tailings dams but refused to accept there was any connection with the environmental damage. The head of the EU taskforce, Tom Garvey, says it is clear the mine was at fault. The report says the immediate environmental impacts of the spill were serious particularly on the fishing and tourism industries. ""No doubt what ever it was a direct result of a hundred tonnes plus of cyanide going into the Pau, the Somas and the Tisza River and killing everything in its wake,"" he said. The investigation concluded that the accident was caused by the inappropriately designed tailings dams, the inadequate monitoring of the construction and operation of those dams and by severe - though not exceptional - weather conditions."

" United States Republican President-elect George W Bush has given a short news conference, where he again stressed the need for a new spirit of conciliation and cross party co-operation. With him was the Democratic Senator John Breaux, who traveled to Texas for talks with Mr Bush. Mr Bush has indicated that retired general Colin Powell will be named as secretary of state, when he makes some announcements later today. Mr Bush is under pressure to put in place a team to help bridge the gap between Democrats and Republicans, at a time when the nation is strongly divided. ""I can't wait for you to find out who is going to agree to serve in my Cabinet,"" he said. ""I think America will be pleased and of course over the next couple of weeks we hope to get most of them named, assemble the White House staff, a group of extraordinary Americans who've agreed to serve the country."""

" The Foreign Affairs Minister Alexander Downer says New Zealand should not scale down its defence force. Mr Downer says New Zealand should continue its role as an important contributor to stability in the Pacific region. Mr Downer was commenting on the debate about New Zealand's current low levels of defence expenditure. He told Radio New Zealand that recent events in East Timor, Bougainville and Solomon Islands show New Zealand has an important role in regional security, and should maintain a defence force capable of dealing with that role. Mr Downer arrives in Vanuatu later today, on the second leg of a four nation South Pacific tour. He heads on to two of the region's recent trouble-spots, Solomon Islands and Bougainville, next week. In the Solomons, he will check the progress of a peace deal that ended a two-year ethnic conflict, and in Bougainville, he will be briefed on negotiations to find a political settlement between Bougainville leaders and the Papua New Guinea Government."

" \* Diplomatic efforts to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict appear to be gathering pace with two meetings taking place between the sides in the past 24 hours. There are suggestions a summit could also be held in Washington in the next few weeks. Two key dates appear to be driving the resumption of negotiations, even while the violence continues. According to Israel's Foreign Minister, Shlomo Ben Ami, who met Paelstinian leader, Yasser Arafat, in a surprise late night meeting in Gaza, the Palestinian leader says he wants to reach a final peace before President Clinton leaves office on January 20. The Israeli Government has its own time pressure, needing a peace deal to save its electoral hopes before elections which could be held as early as February 6. United States State Department spokesman, Richard Boucher, says negotiators could head to Washington as early as this week and Israeli media reports say the Prime Minister's office is suggesting a leaders' summit could follow. But these early negotiationg are held against a background of continuing violence, which today alone saw riots in Jerusalem, reports of the shelling of a Palestinian town north of Ramallah and the shooting deaths of six more Palestinian men."

" The judge presiding over President Joseph Estrada's senate trial in the Philippines has ruled that confidential bank records be admitted into evidence. Prosecutors believe the records will prove their case against the President. On Monday, the people of the Philippines will see the first real test of President Estrada's support among the 22 senators, who are now jurors in a trial which could topple him from power. Justice Hilario Davide has ruled that secret bank records be admitted into evidence, but he said his ruling could be overturned by the senators. Star prosecution witness, Governor Luis Sinsong, produced one of the black bags he claims was used to deliver $200,000 in illegal gambling payoffs to the president's office in Malakanang Palace. Governor Sinsong said every time he entered the palace President Estrada's secretary would instruct the guards by telephone to usher him through without inspecting the bags. Governor Sinsong has displayed the imitation leather black attachi cases for the benefit of the media in the past."

" Media lawyers are appealing against several suppression orders in the Snowtown mass murder case, on the grounds that the Magistrate who made the orders, erred in several ways. The matter will be heard in the South Australian Supreme Court next week. Magistrate David Gurry placed suppression orders on the prosecution's opening address and evidence given by three pathologists. Thirteen media outlets are appealing those orders and the appeal will be heard by Justice Martin on Tuesday. Justice Martin also agreed to a request by defence lawyers for time to prepare to respond to the appeal. As a result the committal hearing for the four men accused will not resume until Wednesday."

" The Queensland Electoral Commission says the withdrawal of legal action in the High Court does not mean the automatic registration of One Nation in Queensland. Pauline Hanson cancelled her legal appeal against One Nation's deregistration, after Electoral Commissioner Des O'Shea refused to reregister the party in Queensland while the appeal was on-going. Miss Hanson has now demanded the commission approve the party's registration before the end of the year, but Commissioner Des O'Shea says there are still a number of outstanding issues. Meanwhile Miss Hanson says she is struggling to find the remaining $250,000 in public electoral funding she owes the commission, and is not ruling out asking for another extension of time to pay. ""Well we'll see what happens at the time, I've still got a couple of weeks before that final payment is required by the Electoral Commission,"" she said. ""But the payment of the $250,000 by the 31st of December has got nothing to do with the registration of the party and therefore they are two totally different issues."""

" The building and construction industry is calling on the Reserve Bank to break with tradition and meet in January and announce a cut in official interest rates."

" Australia's birth rate has fallen to an all-time low. During the past year nearly 250,000 babies were born in Australia, around a third in New South Wales. But in 1994 the figure was nearly 10,000 more, with a fertility rate of 1.8 per cent, compared to 1.7 per cent this year. ------------------------------------------------------------------------- ---------------"

" The ANZ Bank has reopened the debate on foreign ownership, saying allowing a 100-year-old Australian company to fall into foreign hands would be a loss of national identity. At the ANZ's annual general meeting in Melbourne, chairman, Charles Goode said certain leading companies need to make sure their headquarters remain in Australia. The country's four major banks have complained that the Federal Government's ban on mergers between them makes them vulnerable to foreign takeover. The ANZ's chief executive, John MacFarlane says the Government has two concerns. ""Whilst they're concerned about the Four Pillars here, I think they're equally concerned about not losing head offices of the major Australian companies, not just banks, overseas. And I would have thought that it would weigh heavily on their minds as to whether, you know, it's in the national interest of Australia or not,"" he said. -------------------------------------------------------------------- --------------------"

" Lawyers representing the National Crime Authority (NCA) have asked the Industrial Relations Commission in Perth to throw out a claim of sexual discrimination against the authority. An employee has filed a complaint claiming the authority threatened to sack her unless she works full-time, despite her request for more time off to look after her child. But lawyers for the NCA say the issue is not an industrial dispute and the commission does not have the power to arbitrate the claim lodged by the Community and Public Sector Union. The commission is yet to make a decision on the parties' submissions. ------------------------------------------------------------------------- ---------------"

" One Nation President Pauline Hanson has demanded the Queensland Electoral Commission approve the registration of her party in the state by the end of the year. Miss Hanson has today withdrawn her High Court appeal against the deregistration of her party. It follows the Commission's refusal to register the party because, had she won her legal battle, there would be two parties with similar names registered in Queensland. Miss Hanson says Electoral Commissioner Des O'Shea should act immediately. ""Hopefully, once he has been informed of that and any other information that he requires, there is no reason why the party should not be registered in Queensland considering that all the membership has been passed by Des O'shea, and we do have the required numbers in Queensland who are members of the party,"" Miss Hanson said. But Mr O'Shea says he has had no contact with One Nation and a number of issues still need to be dealt with. ------------------------------------------------------------------------- ---------------"

" An investigation into the crash in Indonesia three years ago of a Silkair Boeing 737 has failed to establish the cause of the disaster. The relatives of the 104 killed are seeking legal advice. Frustrated and disappointed. That is how Arron Ing has responded to the final report from investigators, three years after Silkair Flight MI 185 inexplicably nose dived to the ground during a short trip from Jakarta to Singapore. Arron Ing's girlfriend was a stewardess on the Silkair jet and she died along with all others on board. The investigation into the cause of the crash has been crippled by a lack of useful data and much debate has centred around allegations that the crash was caused by the suicidal tendencies of the jet's pilot. In a statement, Indonesia's National Transportation Safety Committee said there was no concrete evidence to support he theory that a troubled pilot deliberately caused the tragedy. But the committee said deliberate pilot action remains a plausible hypothesis. -------------------------------------------------------------------- --------------------"

" The Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) has been found guilty of contempt of the Federal Court, for going ahead with a national strike in February. The strike was called after BHP announced it had accepted a 5 per cent reduction in the price of its coal exports to Japan. The CFMEU called a 24 hour national stoppage on February 7. At the same time, BHP was applying to the Australian Industrial Relations Commission in Brisbane for an order to prevent the strike. It was granted however, there was no attempt by the union to comply. BHP then applied to the Federal court for an injunction to stop the strike. Again the union failed to comply. Today in the Federal court Justice Kiefel found the CFMEU guilty of contempt and ordered the union to pay BHP's costs. She then adjourned the matter to a date to be fixed to decide the question of penalty. ------------------------------------------------------------------------- ---------------"

" The United States Federal Trade Commission (FTC) has today approved the merger of America Online and Time Warner, creating the world's biggest media entertainment group. The commissioners voted 5-0 to approve the deal, an FTC statement said. The approval, a key regulatory barrier, came 11 months after the world's largest Internet group, AOL, and Time Warner, the giant media group, agreed to merge. AOL and Time Warner said in a joint statement they were pleased with the decision and that they expect the merger to close ""by the end of this year or the very early days of 2001"". The statement said the firms were ""engaged in constructive discussions with the Federal Communications Commission, which is the final regulatory agency whose approval is needed to close the merger"". The transaction, worth $155 billion at the time of the announcement, is now estimated to be worth about $100 billion based on current stock prices. The deal had raised numerous objections from critics who claimed a merged AOL Time Warner would have too much control over Internet and cable television as well as the ""content"" delivered over the networks. The merger approval included an agreement by the two firms guaranteeing that the Time Warner cable system, the second largest in the United States, would be open to competing Internet providers, the FTC said. Under the terms of the FTC order, AOL Time Warner would not only open up its cable system to competing Internet service providers (ISPs), it would also be ""prohibited from interfering with content"" from competitors using its networks."

" It will also be prevented from discriminating against competing services or from entering into exclusive arrangements with other cable companies on Internet access or interactive television. Additionally, AOL high-speed or ""broadband"" service would have to be offered at the same price in areas where the group has a cable monopoly as in regions where it competes with other providers. ""In the broad sense, our concern was that the merger of these two powerful companies would deny to competitors access to this amazing new broadband technology,"" FTC chairman Robert Pitofsky said. ""This order is intended to ensure that this new medium, characterised by openness, diversity and freedom, will not be closed down as a result of this merger."" The merger will create the prototypical ""new media"" company, with the provider of ""content"" such as film, music and television, but also systems for ""delivery"", such as Internet access and cable. The merged firm will have have 26 million Internet subscribers as well as cable systems delivering Internet, television channels such as HBO, TBS and CNN, Hollywood studios, music labels and publishing operations that include magazines such as <i>Time</i> and <i>Sports Illustrated</i>. The open-access deal was apparently a last-minute arrangement intended to secure FTC approval. Until now, the companies had agreed only to open the Time Warner cable systems to high-speed Internet access from rival Internet firm EarthLink. However, critics contended the deal should have a more enforceable ""open access"" provision. The AOL-Time Warner statement called the deal ""a win for consumers"" and said it expects the arrangement ""will become a model for other cable systems throughout the country"". The FTC could have voted to allow the merger to proceed or challenge the merger in court, where the outcome would be unclear. The deal has been approved by European Union regulators on condition that AOL and Time Warner fulfill their offer ""to sever all structural links"" with Bertelsmann AG of Germany. ---------------------------------------------------------------"

" The resumption of Iraqi oil exports has increased the likelihood of lower petrol prices for motorists in time for Christmas. Prices for crude oil have dropped to four-month lows overnight. This morning on the New York Mercantile Exchange, West Texas crude futures have been as low as $US27.53 a barrel. That is more than $10 below their post-Gulf War high recorded as recently as September. Overnight at a Gulf port in Iraq, another tanker has been loaded with oil following the previous day's resumption of exports after a 12-day suspension and without a threatened surcharge. Commodities head at Westpac Institutional Bank Simon Klimt says developments are encouraging for Australian motorists. ""We've had a double whammy of recent times - we've had both an appreciating Australian dollar and a reduction in the crude oil price, so hopefully that will feed through to pump prices in the not too distant future,"" he said. ---------------------------------------------------------------"

" Leaders around the world have congratulated the United States President-elect George W Bush, and promised to work closely with him, predicting that American foreign policy would remain relatively unchanged. But there are some concerns emerging about the different policy priorities of the new administration. The relationship between Europe and the US is extremely important. The US has long been the main guarantor of European security and many European leaders were quick to stress their hope that the new administration would continue to ensure an active US foreign policy and support for peace and security in Europe. There is some concern that a Bush administration would be less willing to involve itself in European affairs. German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder praised the contribution of George Bush Sr to the reunification of Germany and said in a statement that with George W Bush a candidate has been elected who stands for the continuation and the cultivation of the trans-Atlantic partnership with Europe and that is against isolationism. ---------------------------------------------------------------"

" There are three witnesses scheduled to appear in the Snowtown bank vault bodies case in Adelaide today. Less time was spent on legal argument over suppressions orders during yesterday's proceedings. Yesterday five witnesses gave evidence, the largest number so far in the committal hearing, which has been tied up with legal argument on what can be reported by South Australian media. Yesterday, a witness, Sharon Ball, gave evidence. She was a friend of victim Elizabeth Haydon whose remains were found in the bank vault at Snowtown. Ms Ball broke down under cross examination about attempts to call the victim's mobile phone after she disappeared. She suspected the voice on the phone was a recording. Elizabeth Haydon was married to the accused Mark Ray Haydon. Meanwhile, another of the accused, Jamse Spyridon Vlassakis, was yesterday excused from proceedings until January because of ill health."

" Lawyers for the media will make an appeal in the South Australian Supreme Court this morning, against suppression orders made during the case. Magistrate David Gurry has banned any reporting of Crown prosecutor Wendy Abraham's opening statement heard on Monday, which contained the prosecution's case against the four men accused. Mr Gurry has also banned reporting of the evidence given by three forensic pathologists, who performed post-mortem examinations on the 10 bodies found in Snowtown, north of Adelaide; and in the backyard of a home in Salisbury, in Adelaide's northern suburbs. ---------------------------------------------------------------"

" One Nation is to change its name in New South Wales and delete all references to its national leader Pauline Hanson. The move follows the revelation that the Election Funding Authority has decided not to try to recover $550,000 in public funding from the party, after its initial de-registration in May. The party's State MLC, David Oldfield, is the only person who can legally re-register Pauline Hanson's One Nation in New South Wales after its latest deregistration last month. Mr Oldfield has decided to cut her out and register One Nation - New South Wales as the state organisation's new name. ""Pauline will not ever again be able to inflict her whimsical approaches to things and she will not have any authority over the people in this State,"" he said. ""It should be run and it should be operated and it should be maintained by people in New South Wales and that's how it'll be from now on."" Mr Oldfield says the Election Funding Authority decision is a moral and just one. ---------------------------------------------------------------"

" A new species of rainforest tree, dating back to prehistoric times, has been found in northern New South Wales. The new species, which is yet to be given a name, is being hailed as a living fossil. Only 17 mature trees have been found so far. The trees were discovered in the Nightcap Range, north of Lismore, and their exact location is being kept secret. New South Wales Environment Minister Bob Debus says it is a fascinating find. In 1994, the Wollemi pine was the last living fossil in the Blue Mountains. ---------------------------------------------------------------"

" Spain's Paralympic basketball team will hand back gold medals won at the Sydney Games after 10 of their players were found to have no disability. The Spanish Paralympic Committee, or CPE, has ordered the medals to be handed back, after an inquiry found 10 of the 12 members of the basketball team suffered no handicap. The CPE is continuing investigations to determine the eligibility of three other athletes, two of them medallists. It says it will implement immediate procedures to ensure all Spanish Paralympic competitors met the criteria for participation in Paralympic sports and were legally registered as handicapped. The Australian Paralympic Committee says it is pleased with the decision. Communications manager for the Australian committee, Bronwyn Campbell, says the result does not lessen the credibility of Paralympic competition. ""The fact that it's come out so quickly and actions have been taken and investigations have been done and hopefully there will findings come out of that final investigation, so I feel it does justify the sport and certainly doesn't lessen the credibility of it,"" she said. ---------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Government has been criticised for not providing detail and costing in its reform paper on welfare, released today by Family and Community Services Minister Jocelyn Newman. The paper has promised a broadening of mutual obligation, taking in all unemployed, and affecting parents and others receiving welfare. Patrick McClure, the chief executive of Mission Australia, chaired the Government's reference group on welfare reform. He is unhappy at the broadened emphasis on mutual obligation and has criticised the Government for attaching neither funding nor costings to its new directions on welfare statement. He says at least $1 billion is needed for disadvantaged families and individuals. The president of the Australian Council of Social Service, Michael Raper, says today's reform paper achieves little. ""We'll be pressing the Government to actually meet its commitments to turn its broad commitment to the McClure report direction into real commitments, with real dollars. But until that's done the Government's job is not done, and the ball remains in the Government's court,"" he said. -------------------------------------------------------------------- --------------"

" The Australian Council for Civil Liberties says Australia's extradition laws are far too lax and favour the prosecution far too much. President Terry O'Gorman has expressed concern about the proposed extradition of alleged war criminal Konrad Kalejs to Latvia saying he has strong reservations about the strength of the case. Kalejs, 87, has been charged by Latvian authorities with genocide and war crimes over his alleged role at a Nazi concentration camp. But Mr O'Gorman says Australia's extradition laws should be tightened to give the power to inquire into the case before a person is extradited. ""In Australia before a person can be sent to a jury trial even in their own city they're entitled to a preliminary hearing at which the prosecution have to make out a prima facie case,"" he said. ""That protection doesn't even exist for people who are to be sent, not from a Magistrates Court to a jury trial in their own city, but from their own country to another country way over the other side of the world."" ------------------------------------------------------------------------- ---------"

" Texas Governor George W Bush, now the President elect, has called on Americans to put politics behind them. Both Mr Bush and the unsuccessful presidential nominee, Al Gore, have made prime time television speeches. Al Gore has given up his bid for the White House and accepted Mr Bush as President elect. Mr Gore said while he strongly disagreed with the decision of the Supreme Court to stop the vote count in Florida, he would accept it. In a generous concession speech Mr Gore called on his supporters to unite behind President elect George W Bush. ""There is a higher duty than the one we owe to political party. This is America and we put country before party. We will stand together behind our new President,"" he said. Mr Bush then appeared before the television cameras promising to govern for all Americans, Republicans and Democrats alike. ""Republicans want the best for our nation and so do Democrats. Our votes may differ, but not our hopes,"" he said. As Mr Bush prepares to move into the White House, Mr Gore, after 24 years in public life, says he does not know what is next. -------------------------------------------------------------------- --------------"

" One of the four accused men in the Snowtown mass murder case has tried to address the presiding magistrate, resulting in the court being closed to the public. A suppression order banning reporting of the incident has been lifted in the Adelaide Magistrates Court. Minutes into proceedings this morning, James Spyridon Vlassakis stood up in the dock and spoke the words ""What I'm about to say should not reflect on my co-accused"". When directed by Magistrate David Gurry to speak to his lawyers, Vlassakis said ""I would like to say I'm terminating my counsel."" His counsel, Rosemary Davey, then went to speak to Vlassakis and soon after the court was closed. Vlassakis has since been excused from the hearing for health reasons. He will not reappear until January 22 next year. Vlassakis is charged with five counts of murder. Three other men are charged with 10 counts. ------------------------------------------------------------------------- ---------"

" Papuan independence leaders have urged Australia to take a more proactive role in independence for the province of Papua, formerly known as Irian Jaya. The Papua Council has made a renewed call for direct talks with the Indonesian President, Abdurrahman Wahid. It also wants the United Nations to play a more active role, and says governments like Australia can no longer afford to sit on the sidelines. Council chairman, Franzalbert Joku, says violence is escalating in Papua, and Australia's relationship with Indonesia should not be the priority. ""In order to avoid the experience of the East Timorese, governments like Australia and others cannot afford to wait longer, and I think here I commend the more proactive kind of approach being pursued by the Labour government in New Zealand,"" he said. -------------------------------------------------------------------- --------------"

" The Navy claims five of its Collins-class submarines are now ready for service, after an extensive refit and testing over the last 12 months. Dubbed ""the dud subs"", the Collins class submarines have been plagued by problems, not least of which were ineffective combat systems and a significant noise signature. The Navy says it is now confident five of the Collins class submarines are quieter, more reliable and less vulnerable to counter detection. However there is still extensive work to be done on the combat system, due to be replaced in 2003. The Navy also needs to recruit a significant number of submariners to take the pressure off existing crews. ------------------------------------------------------------------------- ---------"

" A number of Sydney to Hobart Yacht race vessels may be forced to withdraw from the event, following a directive from the organisers. The race committee has warned competitors they will not be allowed to start on Boxing Day, if they use particular brands of lift rafts. The directive follows the release of the coronial findings into the deaths of six sailors in the 1998 race. A spokesman for the Cruising Yacht Club says the RFDME-Petrel and Pro-Saver rafts were considered by Coroner Abernethy as unsuitable for the 630-nautical mile race. -------------------------------------------------------------------- --------------"

" One-hundred-and-sixty-three people are believed to have drowned this week while trying to enter Australia illegally by boat from Indonesia. The Immigration Minister, Philip Ruddock, says the people were from various countries in the Middle East. Four people are believed to have survived and been picked up by a Japanese tanker. Mr Ruddock has ordered a search for any other survivors. He says Cyclone Sam made conditions very perilous as the crossing was attempted. Mr Ruddock says the people smuggler who organised the boats is thought to have left Indonesia fearing reprisals over the deaths. He could not explain how the news of the deaths had been passed back to Indonesia. He says the incident justifies the warnings the Government issued in a bid to deter boat people."

" All evidence given so far in the Snowtown bank vault killings case remains suppressed. The ruling has been given at the committal hearing in the Adelaide Magistrates Court. Magistrate David Gurry banned any reporting of the opening statement, given on Monday by Crown Prosecutor Wendy Abraham QC and the evidence given by three witnesses. The new suppression order replaces an interim suppression order that has been in place since Monday. Mr Gurry also banned any reporting on his reasons for making the order. Lawyers for the media appealed against the decision and will take the matter to the South Australian Supreme Court on Friday. Three men are charged with 10 counts of murder. A fourth is charged with five counts. Eight bodies were found in barrels inside a disused bank vault in Snowtown, north of Adelaide, and another two in the backyard of a home in Adelaide's northern suburbs in May last year."

" A New South Wales regional airline carrier says expansion plans for its country network will be affected by the decision to develop Bankstown airport. Corporate affairs manager with Impulse Airlines, Simon Westaway, says his company only has limited slots into Kingsford Smith. He says if Impulse wants to expand its country network, it will have to split its operations with Bankstown, which would adversely affect its operations. Meanwhile, the shelving of plans to build Badgerys Creek Airport has caused uncertainly for regional airlines and anger in the city. Paul Reece from Yanda Airlines in the Upper Hunter says he had only be lured to Bankstown if infrastructure, transport links and financial assistance were forthcoming. ""It would take some years to re-establish our business. It would mean changing the way people fly and work in the minds the people who use in country areas,"" Mr Reece said. The mayor of the inner-western suburb of Marrickville, Barry Cotter, says it is too late for protest, but indicated there would be some lobbying in the Prime Minister's electorate of Bennelong. ""The electors are very conscious of their Prime Minster and the promises he made to them twice at the election about Sydney airport. We're going to remind the electors of those promises,"" he said."

" Police fear a 31-year-old man they claim was at the centre of one of Australia's largest armoured vehicle robberies may have met with foul play. After a day of searching a property at Cooma in New South Wales' south-east, police have yet to find any clues to his whereabouts. Matthew Charles Kelly has been missing since early September when his car was found abandoned near Captains Flat, north east of Cooma. Mr Kelly has been of interest to police since March last year when he was the driver of an amoured vehicle in Brisbane, which was robbed of $2.7 million. Mr Kelly was found several hours later, handcuffed inside the vehicle. During questioning he told police he had been attacked by four men who stole the money. A search near Captains Flat last month failed to locate Mr Kelly, but after receiving new information police have been led to a property believed to be north of Cooma."

" The Bougainville leadership says there will be no disarmament process on the island, unless the Papua New Guinea Government allows a referendum on independence for the island. Negotiations between the two sides ended in deadlock over the weekend. The two sides are trying to reach an agreement on future political and administrative arrangements for Bougainville. Both sides agree a referendum should be held, but the PNG Government wants to delay setting a referendum question for several years. The Bougainville side wants the question set now and wants the independence issue included in the referendum. In a joint statement, Bougainville Governor John Momis and Peoples Congress president Joseph Kabui says the only way to settle the independence issue is to give Bougainvilleans a democratic choice. Without democracy there will be no disarmament and support for the peace process will fade away."

" One in 12 Canberra people have been identified as living in poverty in a landmark poverty task force report. The task group comprising more then 40 community organisations has spent the last six months developing a snapshot of a largely hidden aspect of life in Canberra. More then 25,000 Canberrans are regarded as living in poverty, mostly unemployed single and single parents and mostly living in Belconnen and Tuggerenong. Task group chairman Bishop Patrick Pat Power says the extent of poverty is not as bad as other regions, but cannot be ignored. The Chief Minister, Gary Humphries, says he will not allow the report's recommendations to gather dust."

" Paediatricians have called for child death reviews to be extended to all children, rather than just those who have been notified officially at risk. The call is part of a comprehensive policy paper on child abuse for paediatricians and the wider community released today by the Royal College of Physicians. There are 25,000 confirmed cases of physical, sexual and mental abuse annually in Australia, but health workers think many cases go undetected. Launching the booklet, child health specialist, Dr Jill Sewell, says extending child death reviews would help to expose the true extent of the abuse problem."

" The New South Wales coroner has been highly critical of the weather bureau and the Cruising Yacht Club of Australia in his findings into the deaths of six sailors in the Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race. Six sailors died in the 1998 race, one of natural causes. Coroner John Abernethy handed down 14 recommendations, including calling on the NSW Government to order a recall of some safety harness equipment and he called for better personal and life raft safety equipment. But he was scathing of the Bureau of Meteorology for not making more effort to get weather messages out to the fleet. He was also critical of the Cruising Yacht Club of Australia. Coroner Abernethy says it was inexcusable that senior race officials had a basic lack of understanding of weather formulas used by the bureau."

" Nine detainees from the Woomera Detention Centre who were being held at the Adelaide Remand Centre after a disturbance at Woomera in August have been moved to the women's section of the Port Augusta prison. A representative of the South Australian Correctional Services Department, Bill Power, says the remand centre had a sudden influx of prisoners last week, forcing the change. ""I don't know how long they'll stay in Port Augusta, for if a lot of people are released off remand it may well be they'll come back,"" he said. ""It's all a matter of juggling the system to where accommodation is available - that's what its all about."" Mr Power says charges faced by the detainees, as a result of the disturbance at Woomera, are still being resolved."

" A Queensland soldier injured in a suspected militia attack in East Timor will spend two days recovering in the United Nations military hospital in Dili. Private Christopher Carter, of the First Battalion, has minor shrapnel wounds in the leg and buttock from what is thought to be a grenade. Major David Munro from Army Public Relations in East Timor says Private Carter should be fit for duty shortly. ""At this stage he is in a good stable condition. His injuries are being classed as minor by the doctors operating in Dili,"" he said. ""He is likely to convalesce and recover in Dili and be returned to his unit as soon as possible."""

" Labor leader Kim Beazley says he will not intervene in the preselection row in the federal seat of Robertson. Former Labor senator Belinda Neal last weekend successfully moved to overturn an ALP preselection ballot for the New South Wales central coast seat after initially losing the ballot by two votes. A fresh ballot was recommended but senior party officer bearers have now decided to refer the row to the party's review tribunal. Mr Beazley says he will not intervene. ""As the leader of the Labor Party, except in very exceptional circumstances like trying to get a seat...[for] Cheryl Kernot for example when she decided to join the Labor Party, you don't interfere in preselections, you'd be a mug to do it,"" he said. ""Any appeal process must consider a case on its merits. ""If this ultimately gets up to the national executive it should be considered by the national executive on its merits."""

" The Northern Territory Shadow Attorney-General, Syd Stirling, has drawn attention to two recent jail sentences he believes are inadequate for the crimes committed. Mr Stirling believes the Territory's sentencing regime has been tainted by mandatory sentencing. He says he is outraged a man, who pleaded guilty to manslaughter after violently killing his sister, received a three-year sentence suspended after 11-months. ""We've got a real problem in sentencing when people do more time in prison for stealing a towel than they do for killing someone,"" he said. A spokesman for the Attorney-General says an approach has already been made to the Director of Public Prosecutions over the sentence."

" The Federal Opposition has called on the Government to guarantee that it will protect free-to-air coverage of two major football codes. Pay television and free-to-air networks are currently negotiating broadcast rights for Australian Rules football and rugby league. The Government's anti-siphoning laws preventing exclusive pay TV broadcasts of major sporting events expire in 2004. The Government has written a letter to all parties seeking an assurance that free-to-air coverage will not be eroded. However, Opposition Communications spokesman Stephen Smith says the Government has failed to guarantee in parliament that it will protect free-to-air broadcasts of AFL and NRL games. Mr Smith says the Government should give that commitment immediately."

" Another Australian soldier has been hurt in a suspected militia attack in East Timor. Private Christopher Carter was serving with the United Nations' peacekeeping force when he was injured in an explosion last night. Private Carter suffered minor shrapnel wounds to the lower left leg and buttock. He is in a stable condition in hospital in Dili. The United Nations and the Australian National Contingent are investigating the incident. It follows an incident where Signalman Scott Shepherd from the 7th Signal Regiment in Toowoomba was ambushed near Balibo on December 1 and shot in the leg. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The first indictments for war crimes committed in East Timor after last year's autonomy ballot have been filed in a court in Dili. Eleven people, including an Indonesian Army officer, have been charged with offences ranging from murder and torture, to forcibly moving people from their homes. Ten militiamen, known as team Alpha, and an Indonesian Special Forces officer are the first to be charged with crimes against humanity. Members of team Alpha are accused of murdering five clergymen, two church workers an Indonesian journalist and a Timorese teenager. The Indonesian Army officer is accused of the torture, mutilation and murder of an East Timorese man. Nine of the 10 members of team Alpha remain in custody after being captured in the early days of the arrival of Interfet peacekeepers. The whereabouts of the tenth militia member is unknown. The UN is seeking the extradition of the Indonesian soldier. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The US Supreme Court has begun deliberating on the fate of the US presidency, after hearing arguments on disputed Florida ballots from lawyers for rival candidates, Democrat Al Gore and Republican George W Bush. The nine justices have not said when they will rule on whether to allow manual recounts that threaten to wipe out Governor Bush's small lead in Florida. The next United States president could well be decided today by the Federal Supreme Court. Republicans have asked the court to rule that the hand count of votes in Florida should stop, delivering victory to Mr Bush. Lawyers for Mr Gore, who believes a recount of votes would put him ahead of Mr Bush in Florida, say Mr Gore will accept the Supreme Court ruling. Today the court, in 90 minutes of argument, asked if it had the right to intervene in the Florida ballot. It ruled by a slim five to four majority at the weekend to halt the vote count ordered by the Florida Supreme Court. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A fact-finding team led by the United States has arrived in the Middle East to examine the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict that has already cost more than 320 lives. The mission, headed by former US senator George Mitchell, has met separately with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak. The mission finally arrived to begin its work two months after the Sharm el Sheik summit on the Israeli Palestinian conflict agreed it should investigate the explosion of violence. Mr Mitchell vowed the team would be impartial in its examination of the conflict. It was Mr Arafat's insistence that forced the formation of the investigation team, even though it fell short of the multinational inquiry he sought. Today, he announced the mission was important to protect the peace process. A spokesman for Mr Barak promised full cooperation, despite Israel's weeks of resistance to the move. In truth, neither side is likely to be satisfied with the results. Palestinian representatives are suggesting they expect nothing less than outright condemnation of Israel's military tactics and Israel is keen to limit its powers. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" There are more signs of deepening pessimism among Australian businesses reflected in a quarterly survey by Dun and Bradstreet, which shows the lowest confidence in a decade on profits, sales and employment. In the three months ahead, Dun and Bradstreet's trend index of employment shows just 15 per cent of employers looking to put on more staff, while 16 per cent say they will shed positions, a negative net result. The sales outlook has also turned negative in net terms. Dun and Bradstreet's local managing director, Christine Christian, says it is the first time either has been negative since the last recession. ""We don't want to be seen as purveyors of doom, but what we are doing is simply reporting the views of the 1,000 different businesses we survey each quarter, and these 1,000 businesses do not feel very optimistic at all about the economy,"" she said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Federal Opposition leader Kim Beazley has promised to change Labor Party rules to make sure they are fair and transparent. His comments were prompted by the row in the federal seat of Robertson, where former Labor senator Belinda Neal, lost a preselection ballot but has since won the right to a new vote. The dispute has placed Mr Beazley in a difficult position because Ms Neal is married to Labor powerbroker John Della Bosca. He insists that relationship will not affect the outcome of any appeals. Mr Beazley told Channel Nine the present process was not good enough. ""When there is a dispute over a ballot and it doesn't matter whether it's Belinda Neal or Belinda Smith, but there is a consciousness in the party, that if you need to appeal the results of a particular ballot or there's been something wrong with the process that's brought you to where you were, that that is going to be examined in a dispassionate fashion, independent of judgments about factional interests,"" he said. ""Now I don't think we've got those judgments in place."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The committal hearing for the Snowtown ""bodies in the barrels"" case will continue this morning. On the opening day yesterday, Crown Prosecutor Wendy Abraham's case against the four men accused of the killings, was suppressed under interim orders by Magistrate David Gurry, as was testimony from the first witness, forensic pathologist Dr Ross James. Earlier, the four men accused refused to answer the charges against them, which Mr Gurry took as not guilty pleas. John Justin Bunting, Robert Joe Wagner and Mark Ray Haydon are charged with 10 counts of murder, and James Spyridon Vlassakis is charged with five counts of murder. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The inquest into the deaths of six sailors in the 1998 Sydney to Hobart yacht race moves into its final stages today. State coroner John Abernethy will release his findings into what is, in terms of loss of life, the worst race in the event's 54 year history. Day two of the 1998 blue water classic saw the fleet leaders sailing into winds greater than 165 kilometres an hour and near vertical waves as high as 30 metres. Only 44 boats finished the race and six lives were lost, the body of one sailor has never been found, boats were destroyed and many more damaged. Since that race there have been several new safety measures put in place. Several more are expected to be recommended by Coroner Abernethy today. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Federal Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock has accused former prime minister Malcolm Fraser of being out of touch with immigration issues. Mr Fraser yesterday criticised the Federal Government's arrangements for detaining suspected illegal immigrants, labelling the Woomera Detention Centre in South Australia, a ""hell hole"". Mr Ruddock says Mr Fraser has not even visited Woomera and he maintains the Government's policies are responsible. Meanwhile, Federal Opposition leader Kim Beazley has again called for a full judicial inquiry into the situation, saying Mr Ruddock has taken a cynical approach to the matter. ""I don't know if it's a hell hole or not, but the reports are pretty awful and they're not being properly investigated,"" he said. ""[Mr] Ruddock is constantly trying to just see if there's an opportunity to tweak the tale a bit to elevate in the public mind, the fact that they don't like illegal migrants, it's not an issue of illegal migrants. ""They ought to be detained, but they ought to be detained properly."" -------------------------------------------------------------------- -"

" Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat says peacemaking efforts in the Middle East will be put on hold until the next elections in Israel are held. Prime Minister Ehud Barak resigned yesterday, triggering a vote for the post that will have to be held within 60 days. But elections for Parliament are now also likely and former prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu plans to contest them as part of his comeback. Mr Netanyahu announced his candidacy for the prime ministerial poll, even though he cannot legally stand at the separate election forced by the resignation of Mr Barak because he is not a member of the Israeli Parliament. Mr Netanyahu's hastily called press conference on his return from the United States was essentially a direct appeal to the Parliament which in the next few days could force parliamentary elections or change the basic law of Israel to allow him to run. Mr Netanyahu was trounced by Mr Barak at the elections a year-and-a-half ago, but now holds a commanding lead over him in opinion polls. The central issue of the election is the current conflict with the Palestinians that has left 320 people dead in the past 10 weeks. Mr Netanyahu has attacked the policies of the Barak Government for seeking a final peace deal with the Palestinians through territorial concessions. He suggested adopting a tougher security line and moving away from the Oslo peace process if elected. -------------------------------------------------------------------- -"

" The first witness has been called in the committal hearing at the Adelaide Magistrates Court in the Snowtown 'bodies in the barrels' case. Parts of the prosecution's opening statement were suppressed before forensic pathologist, Dr Ross James, took the stand. Crown prosecutor Wendy Abraham outlined the case against the four men charged with the killings. Magistrate David Gurry granted an interim suppression order preventing details from Ms Abraham's statement being released. Counsel for the accused also applied unsuccessfully for the committal hearing to be closed to interstate and overseas media. Earlier, the accused, John Justin Bunting, Mark Ray Haydon, Robert Joe Wagner and James Spyridon Vlassakis refused to answer the charges and the magistrate took them as not guilty pleas. The 10 bodies were found in a bank vault at Snowtown and others at suburban Salisbury in May last year. ---------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Legal action between the competition watchdog and the National Australia Bank (NAB) over interchange fees for the credit card system has been adjourned until the New Year. When the case first went to court in October, the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) alleged the NAB has engaged in price-fixing in the way the interchange fees are set. Justice Catherine Branson today adjourned until next year to consider the bank's assertion that the arrangements are defendable under the Trade Practices Act as a joint venture. The ACCC's legal action would come to an abrupt end if the court agrees with the NAB on the joint venture question. -------------------------------------------------------------------- -"

" An agreement has been reached at a crucial European Union (EU) summit held to push through institutional reforms, paving the way for the union's enlargement. Agreement was reached as the talks went into a fifth tough day, the longest summit in the history of the 15-nation bloc. The negotiations had continued well into the night after a dispute broke out between the smaller and larger nations over a new decision-making formula in an enlarged EU. At issue was the re-weighting of votes assigned proportionally to each member state when they take decisions at ministerial meetings in Brussels and Luxembourg at which European laws are adopted. The accord came after Belgium, the last holdout, apparently gave in on its last demand, an end to voting parity between France and Germany, summit sources said. Officials said there was no decoupling in the agreement in voter parity between Germany and the other three big nations, France, Britain and Italy. ---------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Qantas has denied it failed to warn passengers about the so-called ""economy class syndrome"", saying it has been advising people of the health risks for more than 10 years. Ten people are suing Australian and International airlines. The passengers claim they were not properly informed of the health risks while travelling in cramped seating conditions for long hours. Melbourne lawyer Paul Henderson says his clients are seeking more than $10,000 each in damages. He says some of his clients ended up in hospital for up to 10 days, having their conditions stabilised by the use of blood thinning products. However, Qantas says it has provided passengers with information about the health risks. -------------------------------------------------------------------- -"

" Plans to make cannabis-based drugs available to treat diseases such as multiple sclerosis have taken a major step forward with the development of water-soluble compounds. A team of researchers at Scotland's Aberdeen University is aiming to develop a cannabis compound which could be injected or used in aerosols or sprays. The breakthrough means patients would not have to smoke or eat the drug, methods which doctors say are either damaging to health or unreliable. However, the compound does not tackle the other major problem of cannabis-based medicine - separating its capacity for pain relief from the ""high"" it produces in users. -------------------------------------------------------------------- -"

" Pharmaceutical manufacturer Herron says its paracetamol products are this afternoon being returned to open shelves across Australia. All Herron painkillers and Panadol, made by rival firm SmithKline Beecham, were taken off supermarket shelves and placed behind cigarette or checkout counters in the wake of extortion threats. Herron chief executive Euan Murdoch says there has been an 80 per cent drop in sales as a result, and staff cuts would have been likely if the products were not put back on the shelves. Around 2.00pm AEDT, the Therapeutic Goods Administration gave the all-clear for both Herron and SmithKline Beecham to return their goods to open shelves. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" There are more indicators today of a slowing in the economy. The number of people taking out new home loans has fallen again. During October, the number of home buyers securing a new loan fell by a seasonally-adjusted 3.9 per cent, defying predictions of a recovery. The number of new commitments stood at just under 41,000. Apart from the pre-goods and services tax slump in June, that is the weakest monthly total since February, 1999. Finance for the construction of new homes has has dropped to its lowest level since 1987, and loans taken out to buy newly completed homes have plunged 18.5 per cent to a 10-and-a-half year low. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" Prime Minister John Howard says he expects fuel prices will be lower by the middle of next year. Mr Howard told Southern Cross Radio if the Australian dollar remains firmer than it has been, and if world oil price trends continue, bowser prices should come down throughout 2001. ""There's already been just a little bit of softening,"" he said. ""I naturally hope that softening becomes a big bit of softening and I hope it comes sooner rather than later because I don't like these high petrol prices. I know the motorists of Australia find them difficult."" Meanwhile, Mr Howard has awarded his Government an 8 out of 10 rating for policy performance this year. Federal Parliament has wound-up for 2000 after a 21-hour sitting which ran through until dawn this morning. Mr Howard says his Government has had a very active year, with major achievements in tax reform, defence and the environment. He says he does not want to sound smug, but believes the Government has ended the year in good shape. ""I thought we would have been, by the poll measurements, significantly behind as the year ended, that was my feeling in the middle of the year, but it has gone better than expected,"" he said. ""I think what happened was that the public warmed to the idea that we'd had a go at changing something that deep down they felt needed changing."" -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" Indonesia and Australia are to consider creating a west Pacific forum It would link the two countries with East Timor, Papua New Guinea, New Zealand and the Philippines. The forum, proposed by Indonesia's President Abdurrahman Wahid, was discussed at ministerial talks between Australia and Indonesia in Canberra. A joint statement said the ministerial meeting agreed the west Pacific forum was a constructive idea. Indonesia's Foreign Minister, Alwi Shihab, says Indonesia will hold a meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the six countries early next year to discuss the forum proposal. Mr Shihab says the west Pacific forum could deal with economic, political and social issues. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Melbourne Storm is denying claims it has been found to be in breach of its salary cap. Melbourne is one of several clubs reported to have exceeded its cap this year, but the club claims the NRL is still considering its submission on the matter and there has been no decision made. The NRL has been considering the salary cap this week, with the Storm asked to provide more information. But a club spokesman says there is nothing to worry about, and the all-clear is expected some time next week. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" Tropical Cyclone Sam is expected to cross the Kimberley coast in Western Australia's north within the next 36 hours. Sam is now located more than 100 kilometres out to sea, west of Broome. The bureau of meteorology's deputy regional director, Alan Scott, says the storm has intensified to a category five cyclone, but has significantly slowed, moving south, south-west at two kilometres an hour. ""Because it's a severe cyclone with category five characteristics I guess the wind speeds have gone up so that now maximum gusts near the centre [are] probably about 280 kilometres an hour and central pressure [is] about 920 hectapascals,"" he said. Janice Bell's family, at Barn Hill Station, 50 kilometres south of Broome, spent last night in a bedroom that survived the last cyclone. Mrs Bell says the property was devastated when Cyclone Rosita swept through in April. ""We've been here for 40 years and we haven't had cyclones that have done this much damage...so it's taken a bit [to] get going, [to] get back on your feet and start to rebuild and now six months later we've kind of been put in the same position,"" she said. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" Federal Opposition leader Kim Beazley believes Australia is not as fair now as it was at the start of the year. Prime Minister John Howard summed up his Government's achievements after the last Parliamentary sitting this morning, giving the Government an eight out of 10. He said Australia was more at ease with itself over Aboriginal reconciliation. Mr Beazley says the Sydney Olympics and Paralympics have made Australians more accepting of society's complexities, but claims the broader picture is not as rosey. ""I think Australia is a less fair place now than it was at the beginning of the year, and with the GST [goods and services tax], of which he is inordinately proud, we're now beginning to see some of the economic consequences flow through,"" he said. Mr Beazley denies he has had a bad year, despite a series of damaging incidents, including the electoral rorts allegations, which have seen frontbencher Wayne Swan stand aside. Mr Beazley says the year or so after Labor's defeat at the 1996 election was his hardest as Opposition leader. He says the difficulties this year are simply part of politics. Mr Beazley says he is not concerned about the consequences of the coming year, should he lose the next election. ""I look positively at these things - what's in the back of my mind is that at the end of next year I could be prime minister of this country and I have to be absolutely certain that the policies that I have in place contribute to a fair society, equality of opportunity for our people and a decent long-term future for the nation,"" he said. ""I'm getting more and more confident about that."" -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" In the United States, lawyers for Democrat Al Gore and Republican George W Bush are ready to file written arguments to the US Supreme Court on the recount of votes in Florida. The Supreme Court halted the count at the weekend and will hear oral arguments tomorrow. America's highest court stepped in during the weekend to stop the count of disputed votes in Florida. In a five to four vote, the court granted a request from Mr Bush to put the count on hold, a move that could wipe out Mr Gore's hopes of becoming president. Today, Democrats and Republicans are both urging the court to be the final arbiter in the 33 day election battle. The Florida legislature is threatening to provoke a constitutional crisis by meeting on Wednesday to bypass the courts and name Republicans to the electoral college that meets on December 18 to select a president. -------------------------------------------------------------------- ----"

" Former Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu says he will stand for the leadership of Israel's main opposition party, the Likud, and for the job as prime minister. Mr Netanyahu - who is the most popular politician in Israel, according to polls - attacked current Prime Minister Ehud Barak's resignation earlier today, a move that could stop Mr Netanyahu from contesting the election. Mr Netanyahu returned from the United States and immediately held a press conference at which he called Mr Barak's decision to resign, bringing forward separate prime ministerial elections, a cynical political trick. Mr Netanyahu's political fate now rests with the Israeli Parliament, unless it votes either to dissolve and have simultaneous parliamentary elections or to change the law that stops him from contesting a separate prime ministerial poll, he will be locked out of the race. Mr Netanyahu attacked Mr Barak's political record, saying while the current Prime Minister repeatedly says there is no alternative to the Oslo peace process, he is now effectively barred the Israeli public for voting for an alternative. -------------------------------------------------------------------- ----"

" Federal Cabinet will today begin its final meeting of the year, again trying to resolve the difficult issue of Sydney's future airport needs. Cabinet is scheduled to meet for two days, with the airport decision high on the agenda. The Prime Minister has promised a statement on the Government's airport plans will be made before Christmas, but it is unclear whether it will reveal a final decision or merely give an update on some of the options being considered. The Government will also give what it calls a ""directional statement"" on welfare reform this week. The president of the Southern Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils is heading a delegation to country New South Wales to campaign for the second airport to be built at Badgerys Creek. Councillor Barry Cotter is hoping to broaden the campaign for Badgerys Creek. He says the Prime Minister's suggestion of an airport at Kurnell in Sydney's south is a smoke screen. ""Well it's a cruel joke, there's not going to be an airport at Kurnell - never will be, never can be,"" he said. ""There are too many barriers to it, it is a cynical exercise by a Government's that's trying to pretend to make decisions, trying to pretend to look for solutions, when in fact what it's about is trying to buy time."" ------------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Government is refusing to confirm or deny reports it is negotiating with Qantas and British Airways (BA) for a change in ownership restrictions on the Australian airline. Press reports in Britain say British Airways has been in discussions with the Prime Minister and the Transport Minister to lift its stake above the 25 per cent foreign ownership limit. Qantas chief executive Geoff Dixon is publicly backing a lift in the cap, but says the company's attitude is not related to the reports about BA's position. A spokesman for the Federal Transport Minister, John Anderson, says the Government does not discuss issues of a commercial nature. He said the Government had always said it would only consider a change in foreign ownership restrictions after a public debate. ------------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australia's Lleyton Hewitt succumbed to Juan Carlos Ferrero in a thrilling four-sets match to hand Spain its first ever Davis Cup tennis title in the final in Barcelona. Hewitt, who ground past Albert Costa in five sets in the opening rubber on Friday, could not quite reproduce that form as he lost 6-2, 7-6, 4-6, 6-4 to give Spain an unbeatable 3-1 lead in the five-match series. While Hewitt fought off three match points against his own serve in the last game, a sizzling backhand winner on the fourth one from Ferrero finished the match. The 20-year-old was then mobbed by captain Javier Duarte and his team-mates, who formed a human mound on the red clay of the Palau Sant Jordi while the crowd went wild. The impressive form of 12th-ranked Ferrero against world No 7 Hewitt gave Spain its breakthrough win on its favourite clay surface, following two losing final appearances against Australia on grass in 1965 and 1967. It also denied Australia a 28th Cup, two in a row, and a winning farewell for captain John Newcombe, coach Tony Roche, and doubles star Mark Woodforde. The Aussie team will also leave behind a less than favourable impression on the Spanish public, after its complaints about the crowd and Spanish captain Javier Duarte's ""cheerleading"" in this most spiteful of finals. While the Australians said the crowd and Duarte had behaved beyond the bounds of Davis Cup spirit, the media here dismissed the storm as sour grapes. ""Australia demonstrated yesterday that it didn't know how to lose,"" said one headline in <i>Marca</i>, Europe's biggest selling sports newspaper, after last night's dramas. Hewitt, 19, took his time to warm up today against Ferrero in the battle of the youngest members of both sides. He lost the first set in just 35 minutes, but will long regret the missed chance of two set points when receiving at 5-6 in the second set. He squandered both with errors which summed up his troubles with his range and finishing today, and Ferrero went on to go two sets to love up by taking the tiebreak 7-5. Hewitt fought back to take the third set with a single break in the seventh game. But Ferrero rebounded to seize the first break of the fourth, in the eighth game for a 5-3 lead, then struggled to serve out for the match, being broken back to 15 by Hewitt for 5-4. Ferrero rebounded strongly to break Hewitt for the match. Ferrero's victory followed his win on Friday when Pat Rafter retired in the fourth set of the second singles match, and the doubles win by Alex Corretja and Juan Balcells over Woodforde and Sandon Stolle yesterday. The team captains agreed not to play the second of today's reverse singles matches between world No 8 Alex Corretja and 15th-ranked Pat Rafter. ------------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) has called on the Reserve Bank (RBA) to improve the transparency of its decision-making processes. In its latest newsletter, the ACCI has issued a five-page critique of the RBA, questioning whether inflation has been the problem the Reserve has perceived it to be. The report also suggests international factors have been the main cause of interest rate rises, as Australia's Reserve Bank moved in tandem with the US Federal Reserve and other central banks. The ACCI says it wants the RBA to publish forecasts for employment and economic growth, and to explain the process used to forecast inflation a year or more in advance. ------------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Government would be likely to win bipartisan support for any move to relax immigration rules for skilled migrants. Prime Minister John Howard has signalled the Government's innovation statement, to be unveiled early in the new year, will include an initiative to attract talented migrants. Mr Howard says such an approach has been successful in the United States and Australia could do with a more flexible approach. Labor's Immigration spokesman Con Sciacca says a change in skilled migration rules is overdue. ""We need to make, if you like, a concerted effort to train up our own people, but in areas where we don't have those skills and where it will take some time, apart from training measures, what we need to do is market ourselves overseas...I've recently come back from a conference in the UK and one in Italy where I actually asked the question 'why is it that people from European countries are not coming to Australia'?"" he said. ""The answer I invariably got was, 'well we frankly don't think you want us anymore'."" ------------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Bougainville leaders have called for international intervention after the latest round of negotiations with the Papua New Guinea Government ended in deadlock. The negotiations were supposed to come up with the framework of an agreement on future political and administrative arrangements for Bougainville. But the PNG Government and the Bougainville leaders were unable to resolve key differences on the issues of independence and autonomy and the negotiations have been adjourned until next year. Bougainville Peoples' Congress president Joseph Kabui says the PNG Government has missed an opportunity to reach a political settlement. ""We are bitterly disappointed that these negotiations have gone astray, they have been completely mishandled,"" he said. ""We have no secret agendas whatsoever. The formula that was needed to solve one of the biggest problems of Papua New Guinea was on the table, but the Papua New Guinea Government refused to listen."" -------------------------------------------------------------------- ----"

" Florida Supreme Court justices have grilled lawyers for Al Gore and George W Bush with tough questions at a critical hearing over the disputed US presidential election. Opening the 70-minute hearing, Chief Justice Charles Wells asked Gore lawyer David Boies whether the court even had jurisdiction, in light of a recent US Supreme Court decision. Mr Boies replied the Florida court had a right to interpret Florida laws, and urged the seven justices to overturn an earlier ruling against further recounts in Florida. However, Bush lawyer Barry Richard said that in light of the US Supreme Court ruling, the Florida court would have only limited ability to review the case. Mr Richard said the justices must find that the lower court erred in its decision. Outside the court, Mr Gore's campaign spokesman, Bill Daley, said the Democrat campaign had simply been based on the premise that every vote should count. -------------------------------------------------------------------- -------------------"

" A Senate inquiry into changes to the Sex Discrimination Act, which would allow states and territories to restrict access to fertility treatment, now will not deliver its report until next year. The committee had been expected to report its findings earlier this week. Moves to change the law came after a successful Federal Court challenge to Victorian laws, which prevent single women having access to fertility treatments like in-vitro fertilisation. The Prime Minister announced the plans during the Labor Party conference this year, prompting division among Labor MPs, and suggestions he was exploiting the political advantage. The Government's bill has been delayed pending the findings of the Senate inquiry. Those findings are not expected to be released until early next year. Also in the new year, the Catholic Bishops will challenge the Federal Court ruling in the High Court, a move expected to be opposed by women's groups. ------------------------------------------------------------------------- --------------"

" Further allegations have been raised in the New South Wales Parliament concerning federal Labor frontbencher Laurie Ferguson, and electoral rorts. New South Wales Liberal MP Charlie Lynn last night claimed in Parliament that Mr Ferguson had tried to intimidate a former ALP staffer who has made claims implicating him in vote rorting. Mr Ferguson yesterday denied any involvement in, or knowledge of, false electoral enrolments. Mr Lynn claimed last night the former staff member, Janice Hamilton, received a ""chilling"" phone call from Mr Ferguson's stepson earlier this week, in which she was allegedly threatened with ""severe retribution"". Mr Lynn told Parliament the woman's former employer, a man named Paul Matters, had received a similar call. ""[In the calls] they were called loony. She [Ms Hamilton] was challenged that they'd pay severe retribution and I would hope that Mr Ferguson would call off his troops and desist from this sort of intimidation,"" he said. -------------------------------------------------------------------- -------------------"

" Queensland Premier Peter Beattie will not say how many members of the Labor Party may have to be to be expelled because of their involvement in electoral rorting. Mr Beattie has described the year 2000 as his ""annus horribilus"". Party members, from the grass-roots level to office bearers, have told the Shepherdson Inquiry of their involvement in rorting, and Labor has begun moves to expel them from the party. Mr Beattie says he has asked the party's new troubleshooter, Tim Gartrell, to work out how to force those who do not resign voluntarily to show cause as to why they should not be expelled from the Labor Party. But Mr Beattie will not say who he has in mind for expulsion or how many may be expelled. However he has reflected briefly on the year that brought him inquiry after inquiry into electoral fraud. ""This has certainly been an annus horribilus for me and in some senses for the Labor Party, but out of this will come a new Labor Party,"" he said. ""The Labor Party will never be the same again."""

" Meanwhile, self-confessed vote rorter Lee Bermingham has fired a final shot at the Labor Party, while officially handing in his resignation. The former Australian Workers Union (AWU) faction organiser told the Shepherdson Inquiry how he witnessed false enrolment forms and organised for others to be falsely enrolled. In his letter of resignation from the Labor Party, Mr Bermingham apologises for being part of a culture that puts factions before the interests of the party. But he has warned the ALP that it needs to rid itself of what he describes as the sinister influence of factions, especially his former faction, the AWU. ------------------------------------------------------------------------- --------------"

" Indonesian security forces have been accused of killing three humanitarian workers and a torture victim the aid workers were escorting in the troubled province of Aceh. The claim has been made by the chairman of a welfare organisation called Rehabilitation Action for Torture Victims in Aceh. The chairman of the welfare group says a survivor of the attack witnessed the deaths of the three men. He says police ambushed four members of his organisation who had picked up a torture victim for medical treatment. Three of the four-member team were executed along with the victim they had come to assist. The fourth aid worker escaped and reported the killings to the Red Cross. The reported deaths follow an escalation in violence by Achenese separatists against military and police installations which have left three people dead in recent days. -------------------------------------------------------------------- -------------------"

" An historic senate trial in the Philippines has been told President Joseph Estrada is the head of a criminal syndicate committed to the collection of gambling proceeds. In outlining their case against President Estrada, prosecutors said he broke the law regularly like clockwork. They said President Estrada had betrayed the hopes of the poor and broken their dreams. President Estrada's defence team countered by attacking the credibility of the prosecution's key witness, Governor Luis Singson. Lawyer Estelito Mendoza said Governor Singson was a liar by his own admission and turned on President Estrada only because the President threatened to legalise the illegal gambling game he is accused of profiting from. The defence likened President Estrada to Julius Caesar, saying he was being destroyed by gossip and innuendo and not hard facts. The defence said overturning the mandate granted to President Estrada by 10 million voters should not be done without indisputable proof. -------------------------------------------------------------------- -------------------"

" The oil company Shell has blamed shrinking margins for the loss of 350 jobs in the next 18 months. Most of the 100 head office jobs to go are in Melbourne, with another 200 shed from commercial marketing nationwide and a further 50 from other areas. Shell's chief executive Peter Duncan says both the commercial marketing and the refining divisions will make losses this year. He says while oil producers may like high crude oil prices, refiners and marketers do not. ""You've got to buy that crude oil, and you've got to see your refiners' margins squeezed, and in our country they've been squeezed anyway because of the regional surplus of refining capacity,"" he said. ""Then you've got to take those products at those high prices and get them into the market, and those margins get squeezed as well. ""So indeed that side of the business does not like high prices at all, and neither does its consumers."" -------------------------------------------------------------------- -------------------"

" Australian captain John Newcombe says he is surprised Spain has opted not to play its highest-ranked player Alex Corretja in the first singles rubbers of the Davis Cup final in Barcelona this weekend. The Spanish have selected Albert Costa to play Lleyton Hewitt, while Juan Carlos Ferrero will meet Pat Rafter. Corretja will play in Saturday's doubles, and is expected to clash with Hewitt in Sunday's reverse singles. Newcombe says the move shows the home team expects to win the final comfortably. ""They understandably feel quite confident about the result, in fact they're freely predicting they're going to win 4-1,"" he said. ""I'm only too happy to go along with that and I agree with them, I hope they do get a little bit overconfident."" Newcombe says whoever plays for Spain will be a formidable opponent. ""I think it's going to be very tough. I've got a good feeling, I think we'll win, but I don't think it's going to be that easy. ""If we don't win the doubles it means we've got to win three out of four singles which is a really big ask."""

" The Prime Minister has virtually ruled out any reconsideration of the Federal Government's position on a treaty with Aboriginal people. The final report of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation calls on the Government to enact a process through which an agreement or treaty could be established for resolving reconciliation issues. Mr Howard has previously opposed the idea of a treaty, claiming it can be divisive. He says the Government is committed to reconciliation, but it still has reservations about a treaty. ""There are many areas of agreement in relation to reconciliation,"" he said. ""It is true that there are some different views about the concept of a treaty and I note that the Leader of the Opposition has focussed on something where we disagree. ""I think it's more important to focus on things where we agree."" --------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australia has won its dispute in the World Trade Organisation (WTO) over the United States' lamb import restrictions. The WTO's dispute panel has handed down a decision in favour of Australia and New Zealand, which both challenged the quota and tariff regime put in place last year. Australia's Trade Minister Mark Vaile says the Government will seek the immediate removal of the tariffs after the expiry of the appeals period. He says the decision vindicates Australia's campaign against the United States. ""This is a very good outcome as far as Australia is concerned, and particularly Australia's lamb industry,"" he said. ""From day one on the 22nd of July last year when the US administration applied the tariff quota regime to our lamb exports we believed that was an unjustifiable action. ""Our belief has now been vindicated with this final report."" --------------------------------------------------------------"

" There has been a sudden deterioration in Australia's unemployment rate, jumping back up to 6.6 per cent. During November, 59,200 jobs have disappeared, that is the biggest drop in total employment since the height of the last recession in July 1991. The impact on the official jobless rate has been somewhat muted because far fewer Australians were looking for work during the latest month. Even so, the national unemployment rate has jumped from 6.3 per cent to a seasonally-adjusted 6.6 per cent. The vast bulk of the job losses have been part-time: 53,000 of them. Federal Employment Minister Peter Reith says employment has grown by about 2 per cent during the past year, despite the recent weakness in the jobs growth. Mr Reith says the Government's view remains that jobs growth will slow during the rest of this financial year after strong growth in July and August."

" The teenage jobless rate for November has risen by nearly 1.5 per cent. The seasonally-adjusted youth unemployment rate is now 22.3 per cent, compared to last month's figure of 20.9 per cent. The rise is partly due to a jump in the number of young men looking for work. The number of young women looking for work has remained the same."

" Meanwhile, market interest rates have dropped sharply following the employment data. The Australian dollar had fallen about one-fifth of a cent just before 12:00pm AEDT to 54.64 US cents. Markets now see an official interest rate cut next year as increasingly likely. --------------------------------------------------------------"

" Employers are opposing a 7 per cent wage claim for Australia's low-paid workers. The ACTU claim is being heard by the full bench of the Industrial Relations Commission. The claim seeks a $28-a-week pay rise for almost 2 million low-wage earners. ACTU secretary Greg Combet says Australia has enjoyed strong economic growth during the past four years, with executive salaries rising by 68 per cent last year. However, he says increasing interest rates, high petrol prices and the goods and services tax have resulted in the emergence of the working poor. ""That is people who haven't got bargaining power and who depend on minimum wages - those working families fall further behind,"" he said. Reg Hamilton from the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry says while there may be a case for a small rise, the claim for 7 per cent is unsustainable. ""Business is slowing, the capacity to pay is not as great as it could be, an increase of 7 per cent to our minimum wage system is not sustainable and will damage jobs,"" he said. A decision on the claim is not expected until late March. --------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Government has dismissed claims about the treatment of children in Australia's detention centres, despite growing evidence of handcuffing and solitary confinement. One agency claims the situation is so bad staff do not even know what they are doing is wrong. The Catholic welfare agency Centacare says children are regularly handcuffed, put in solitary confinement and separated from their parents. Dale West works with detainees at the Woomera centre in South Australia and says it is a culture of abuse. ""As sad as it is to say this, I would need to say that nothing would surprise me now of an allegation that people might make,"" he said. It comes amid Amnesty International claims that children being transported to the Port Hedland Detention Centre went without food for 32 hours, and an 11-year-old girl with a broken wrist was not treated for two weeks. But a spokesman for Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock says the claims cannot be proven and are being made by a small group of dissidents. Amnesty says a public inquiry is the only way to address the issues. --------------------------------------------------------------"

" The majority report of a year-long Senate inquiry into public hospitals has recommended a $450 million increase in funding during the next two years. The report, endorsed by the Labor Party and the Democrats, calls on the Federal Government to provide the extra money, with the states and territories matching the increase on a percentage basis. It also proposes a new model of cooperation between the states and the Commonwealth, under which funding for various health programs would be combined into one account to avoid cost-shifting. The Coalition has lodged a dissenting report. The chair of the committee, Labor Senator Rosemary Crowley, says there is strong community support for improving the public hospital system. ""The community very much wants to see adequate funding for our public hospitals. It wants the support, security and backup that the great public hospitals have provided them, and still do, but [the hospitals] are straining at the edges at the moment,"" she said. --------------------------------------------------------------"

" Media executive James Packer says his father is back in hospital for minor surgery but his newly-transplanted kidney is functioning normally. Kerry Packer was admitted to Sydney's Royal Prince Alfred hospital yesterday and was visited today by his son and by Nicholas Ross, the helicopter pilot who donated his kidney. In a statement James Packer says his father is well and is free of rejection. He says the medical staff caring for him are pleased with his progress since the transplant. --------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australia's Olympic champions are maintaining their form at the World Cup Swimming meeting in Melbourne. Michael Klim made it two wins from two events by taking out the 50 metres butterfly final to add to his freestyle win last night. Klim won in 23.32 seconds, just four-thousandths of a second outside his Commonwealth record, with Adam Pine in second place, and Burl Reid third. Grant Hackett won the 200 metres freestyle from fellow Australians Leo Biggs and Anthony Matkovitch. Meanwhile Sarah Jane D'Arcy took out the women's 400 metres freestyle, from Elka Graham and Amanda Pascoe. The meeting is now over for Hackett, while Klim is yet to decide whether he will swim both of his scheduled events tomorrow. --------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Government is standing firm on its Internet gambling moratorium, despite threats of legal action from at least one state. Laws imposing a 12-month ban on gaming websites have been passed by the Senate. The 12-month moratorium is backdated to May this year and affects sites which were not up and running before that period and which allow punters to bet on games such as poker and blackjack. It does not apply to betting on sporting events. The Tasmanian Government is considering its legal options because the moratorium affects five betting licences it granted this year. The Northern Territory and Queensland say the Commonwealth would be better off regulating Australian sites instead of trying to ban something that will still be available through international operators. Communications Minister Richard Alston says the main aim of the moratorium is to halt the expansion of the Internet gambling industry while the Government investigates the feasibility and consequences of a permanent ban. He says it is the appropriate time to be reviewing the industry while it is still in its infancy."

" Australia will seek to repair relations with Indonesia at Ministerial talks due to to be held in Canberra today. Up to six Indonesian Ministers are scheduled to attend the meeting at Parliament House. For Australia, the meeting is the message - a symbol of resumed dialogue laying the way for a future visit by Indonesia's President, Abdurrahman Wahid. The Ministerial talks were abruptly cancelled by Jakarta in October, and continuing problems mean that even the opening statements today will be made behind closed doors. Australia wants to put a ministerial seal on a new aid agreement with Indonesia, and the Defence White Paper released yesterday seeks to resume military links. Defence Minister John Moore says Australia briefed Indonesia last week ahead of the policy statement. ""That was very well received and I'd anticipate that the next step would probably be a visit by myself to Indonesia at some stage,"" he said. Mr Moore said any further fragmentation of Indonesia would be against Australia's interests. Instability in Indonesia is one of the regional factors behind the Government's decision to commit an extra $23 billion to defence during the next 10 years. Mr Moore says Indonesian officials have been fully briefed on the new defence policy, and support it. He says Australia's foreign policy interests are best served by Indonesia remaining as it is. ""The last thing Australia wants, the very last thing Australia wants, is any further fragmentation of the Indonesian states,"" he said. ""Small island states find it difficult to survive in economic terms. It's much better for Australia to have the current state of Indonesia, succeed."" Meanwhile, a long-time Darwin-based supporter of East Timor, Rob Wesley-Smith, says today's meeting falls on a significant anniversary. ""As a long-time Timor supporter I'm very pleased that the Indonesian Government Ministers are talking to the Australian Government,"" Mr Wesley-Smith said. ""But [it is] ironic on this day it's the 25th anniversary of the invasion of East Timor which has caused so much grief for the East Timorese and between the two nations. ""So I hope they at least reflect on that at the beginning of their meeting,"" he said."

" A national report on the financial accounts of major charities calls for new uniform accounting standards to make the charities more transparent and accountable. The Institute of Chartered Accountants found the accounts of almost half of 60 leading charities had qualifications by their auditors concerning the accuracy of accounts. The institute describes the qualifications in the charities' accounts as disclaimers by auditors - effectively saying that they are unhappy with controls over charities' revenue. The report's author, Kimberley Smith, says the qualifications highlight the need for uniform accounting standards for charities. He says without uniform standards accounts are open to manipulation. ""It means that you can manipulate figures and financial results and financial performance can be manipulated to show a result that perhaps isn't quite true and fair in the generally accepted,"" he said. He says it is important that charities' accounts are more transparent and accountable"

" Cyclone Sam is still moving slowly in a south-westerly direction off Western Australia's Kimberley coast. At last report, the cyclone was situated 190 kilometres west, north-west of Cape Leveque and 245 kilometres north, north-west of Broome, moving south, south-west at 10 kilometres per hour. The weather bureau's Gary Boterhoeven says the category-two system could be upgraded later today, but is currently driving winds gusting to 160 kilometres per hour. He says its movements are unpredictable, but it is likely to change direction soon and head towards the Kimberley coast. ""It does look like it should cross the coast between Broome and Port Hedland, I guess around the Wallal area,"" he said. ""It must be in the higher risk zone, and the indications are it would be late Friday night or early Saturday morning."""

" Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock has refused to comment on the latest allegations of mistreatment of children at immigration detention centres. After recent allegations of child sexual abuse at Woomera, in South Australia, Amnesty International has now broadened the accusations of mistreatment of children to include other detention centres. The Minister's office says if Amnesty International has any evidence, it should take it to the Commonwealth ombudsman. The group says children being transported to Port Headland were not given food for 32 hours, and that a four-year-old girl at Marrenbenong waited for weeks for a psychiatric assessment, and suffered with a broken wrist for a fortnight before it was X-rayed. And at Woomera, they allege an 11-year-old girl and a young boy were held in an isolated cell for nine days in June. A spokesman for Mr Ruddock says he has not seen the Amnesty allegations, and say they should be directed to the appropriate authorities. ACM, the private operator of the centres, says while the company understands the concern being expressed, it abides by the rules laid out by the Government in the most humane way possible."

" A United States federal appeals court has rejected a bid by Texas Governor George W Bush for an injunction to halt manual vote recounts in Florida. Vice-President Al Gore considers the manual recounts crucial to his fading hopes of winning the White House. In a 128-page opinion, the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals in Atlanta has upheld a Miami US District Court ruling issued in November. In the lower court ruling, the judge said the recounts appeared to be neutral and were proceeding according to the law, and he saw no reason to intervene. However, the manual recounts were ended before the appeals court handed down its ruling. As well, Florida has already certified Governor Bush as the winner of the state by a margin of 537 votes."

" Significant relief could be in the pipeline for Australian motorists, with a further slide in world prices for crude oil. Falls in pump prices are expected to follow. Some analysts in the United States are calling it the end of the two-year bull run on oil prices. Back in September, west Texas crude futures hit a post-Gulf War high of $US37.80 per barrel. Overnight, they have been as low as $US28.25. Markets are reacting to growing stocks of crude in the United States. Commonwealth Bank commodity strategist David Thurtell says Australian motorists should benefit. ""They can expect that petrol prices will come down fairly significantly not only from lower oil prices, but from the higher dollar as well,"" he said."

" London's The Guardian newspaper has declared it will run a campaign for a referendum in Britain over the role of the monarchy. The newspaper is also planning to support a legal challenge to a ban on Roman Catholics, or those born out of wedlock, from succession to the throne. Risking life deportation under the 1884 Treason Felony Act, The Guardian's editor has announced his intention to run a campaign in the newspaper advocating a British republic, and questioning the need for what it describes as an ""indefensible"" hereditary institution. Alan Rushbridger says the paper has also briefed Australian-born Queens Counsel Geoffrey Robinson to run a court case under the European Human Rights Act challenging the 300-year-old ban on Roman Catholics and illegitimate children from succession to the throne."

" Michael Klim will spend time in traction in an effort to be fit for the last night of the World Cup meeting in Melbourne. Klim won the 50 metres butterfly last night to add to his freestyle win on Tuesday. Other winners included Grant Hackett in the 200 metres freestyle, Matt Welsh in the 200 metres backstroke, Giaan Rooney in the 100 metres backstroke and Rebecca Creedy in the 50 metres freestyle. Meanwhile, Dutch swimming stars Pieter van den Hoogenband and Inge de Bruijn have arrived in Sydney for their appearance at the swimming skins on Saturday night."

" The West Indies will play five bowlers and two wicketkeepers in the Prime Minister's XI match as injuries within their squad mount. Brian Lara will not play, while several other team members arrived in Canberra yesterday with injuries. Adam Gilchrist captains the PM's side."

" Socceroo defender Hayden Foxe has been denied a work permit to play in England with premier league club West Ham. The club was denied a third appeal over Foxe's case and looks set to take legal action against the Department of Employment. Meanwhile the Australian under-17 soccer team has beaten Western Samoa by a record 30-0 in a World Cup qualifier in Samoa. And Soccer Australia is expected to decide on a bid by a Melbourne businessman to buy the Carlton club."

" Defending champion Craig Parry and star teenager Aaron Baddeley are the favourites heading into today's start to the South Australian Open in Adelaide Baddeley has rejected advice from Parry to tone down his confident pre-tournament predictions, instead saying he will win the tournament. Other players expected to be high on the leaderboard include Greg Chalmers, Geoff Ogilvy, Nick O'Hern and Adam Scott."

" The Australian Rugby Union is confident there will be a Super 12 team based in either Perth or Melbourne by 2002. A two-day meeting of Australian, New Zealand and South African rugby officials ended in Perth yesterday with a consultant appointed to review the Super 12 competition."

" Australia is to spend an extra $23 billion on defence over the next decade. The Defence White Paper presented to Parliament calls for an immediate increase of $500 million next financial year. Military spending is to rise by an average of 3 per cent a year in real terms for the rest of the decade. The Prime Minister, John Howard, says the comprehensive reappraisal of Australian defence capability is a major Government achievement. ""It sets new standards in the clarity with which the fundamentals of our strategic policy are explained, it sets new standards in the detailed program we have set down for the development of our defence forces,"" he said. ""It sets new standards by providing specific and unambiguous long term funding guidance for defence."" Mr Howard says Indonesia's political transition and economic problems pose major challenges for Australia. He says the Government is steadfast in its commitment to supporting Indonesia's stability and territorial integrity. The Prime Minister says Papua New Guinea and many of the Pacific island states also face domestic challenges. ------------------------------------------------------------------------- ---------"

" The Prime Minister says differences within the Coalition over the taxation of trusts will be resolved. The National Party is opposed to the draft version of a bill which seeks to treat trusts the same as companies. It wants the bill scrapped or heavily modified, to ensure family farming operations using trusts are not unfairly affected. Mr Howard says he supports the use of trusts for legitimate family and business purposes. He has told Perth radio 6PR, the Government will introduce laws to stop tax avoidance through trusts as promised. ""This matter will be resolved. People have some concerns about some of the things in the exposure draft, that's fair enough,"" he said. ""But when it is resolved you'll see it stacks up against what I've said."" ------------------------------------------------------------------------- ---------"

" Queensland scientific police are continuing to search a home in Brisbane's west in relation to the Panadol extortion case. SmithKline Beecham re-located panadol products to behind the counter positions, a month ago, following an extortion demand. Police asked the company not to release details of the threat while investigations were underway also calling on the media to keep the operation, codenamed ""Jake"", under wraps. The company says police believed there had been no contamination and that the risk to the public was minimal. SmithKline Beecham says the decision to re-locate the products was only an added security measure and expects Panadol to be returned to self-serve shelves soon. Meanwhile, police are still searching a home in Chapel Hill in Brisbane's west, after executing a number of search warrants yesterday. Three people, who were interviewed by officers at length, were allowed to go home last night and police will speak to them again today. Up to 33 potential witnesses are also being interviewed. ------------------------------------------------------------------------- ---------"

" There is further speculation Australian interest rates could be heading lower next year. Similar thinking in the United States has seen a powerful rally on New York equity markets. The highlight has been a surge on the high-tech Nasdaq exchange, with share prices there registering a record single-day rise of 10.5 per cent. Sparking the activity has been a speech by Federal Reserve head Alan Greenspan, in which he has said the US economy is slowing appreciably. Markets see that as a hint US interest rates could be lowered next year. Australian interest rates remain on hold with the Reserve Bank silent this morning in the wake of yesterday's monthly board meeting. -------------------------------------------------------------------- --------------"

" United States Vice President Al Gore remains optimistic about his legal actions challenging the certified results of the voting in Florida. He has told reporters at the White House that he feels he has a 50/50 chance of securing Florida and the presidency. The Florida Supreme Court will hear his appeal on Friday against an earlier decision rejecting his challenge to results in three Florida Counties. Mr Gore says he feels that everything is likely to be resolved in the Florida Supreme Court and he doesn't feel as though the odds are against him. ""I don't really feel that way. I don't feel anything other than optimistic and the team down in Tallahassee feels that way also."" -------------------------------------------------------------------- --------------"

" The ABC is to seek more than $37 million in extra, ongoing funds from the Federal Government. With ABC staff just returned from a 24-hour strike, chairman Donald McDonald emerged from a board meeting to make the announcement. Mr McDonald says the money will be spent on four projects of national significance across the mediums of radio, television and online services. They include beefed-up services for rural and regional Australia, children and schools and business and personal investors. Mr McDonald says a further $2.8 million will be sought for a pilot of the online educational service. ""Obviously it's up to government to decide when they react to it,"" he said. ""We would hugely prefer to have them act on this submission, should they accept it, within this current financial year."""

" But the Prime Minister John Howard says while the Federal Government has a warm regard for the ABC as an institution, it is not bound to meet the national broadcaster's budget demands. Mr Howard has been asked in Parliament when the Government will restore adequate funding. He says the ABC had a 10 per cent funding cut when the Coalition came to office, but has enjoyed stable funding since then and extra payments to help in the transition to digital broadcasting. ""The Government has complete confidence in the board of the ABC, but that does not mean that we will always share the board's view of the funding priorities that we have to meet of different government responsibilities,"" he said. ""Any funding submission that the ABC makes will be considered by the Government carefully and courteously in the budget context, as has been the case in the past."""

" ABC managing director Jonathan Shier, says the national strike by staff was disappointing because it preceded the board's approval of the bid for extra funding. Mr Shier also revealed he had imposed a January 1 deadline for managers to finalise staff numbers. ""January the first is for me the drop dead date,"" he said. ""I mean I really want to know from my divisional directors by then exactly which people will be affected and what numbers will be affected in each division."""

" Meanwhile staff representatives have called on Jonathan Shier to resign. Graeme Thomson, the ABC section secretary of the Public Sector Union, says staff support the board's push for extra funding. But they are concerned at the way Jonathan Shier is spending existing funds. ""Jonathan Shier issued a press release yesterday saying that he didn't really know what staff were on about,"" he said. ""He said that we hadn't issued him with a log of demands. There's a very simple log of demands for Jonathan Shier. ""After the motions of no confidence were passed, the log is very clear - we want Jonathan Shier to quit."" -------------------------------------------------------------------- --------------"

" A national moratorium has been imposed on new licenses for Internet gambling. The moratorium will run through to May next year and will force a number of operators who established sites since May this year to close them down. The legislation passed the Senate with the support of Greens Senator Bob Brown and two Democrats. It includes an exemption for online betting services on racing and other sports. Debate on the bill exposed sharp divisions between Democrats Senator John Woodley, who supported it, and Natasha Stott Despoja, who opposes a moratorium. Senator Woodley says such differences are tolerated in his party. ""We reflect the community in Australia,"" he said. ""Not everybody is as opposed to gambling as I am. ""It's a personal issue that for me has been a lifelong crusade, but I don't expect my colleagues to have the same view as I have, and I respect that."" ------------------------------------------------------------------------- ---------"

" Queensland police are questioning three people in relation to an extortion attempt against makers of Herron paracetemol. Another 33 people have been identified as potential witnesses following raids in the Brisbane area earlier today. The investigation into the extortion attempt has been running parallel to a similar case in New South Wales involving the manufacturers of Panadol, SmithKline Beecham. ------------------------------------------------------------------------- ----"

" Employees of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) have walked off the job over fears budget cuts are destroying the broadcaster's independence and integrity. The strike has affected radio and television news bulletins, online production and forced the cancellation or rescheduling of programs for 24 hours from noon AEDT. It follows an unprecedented plea from some of the ABC's high profile employees for public support in their fight to halt what they fear may be a full-scale commercialisation of the ABC. In a statement issued yesterday, ABC managing director Jonathan Shier said the ABC is not obsessed with new media but he says he believes the organisation must have a substantial presence in new media if the broadcaster is to remain relevant. He also says the ABC will not undertake commercial activity that breaches its Chart or Act, and he is not interested in earning money from advertising online. ABC supporters have vowed to make ABC budget cuts an election issue by campaigning in government-held seats at the election due by the end of next year."

" The head of the federal parliamentary inquiry into electoral rorts has ruled out any examination of alleged false enrolments at the homes of two Ministers. The Labor Party has accused the Environment Minister, Robert Hill, and Sports Minister Jackie Kelly of having people enrolled at their address who lived elsewhere. Both have rejected the allegations. Liberal MP Christopher Pyne, who chairs the parliamentary inquiry, says the claims are an attempt to smear the Ministers and his committee will ignore them. ""These allegations are just smear from the Labor Party,"" he said. ""There's no substance or base to them. My inquiry doesn't have a watching brief to cover that particular issue and we won't be investigating them, "" he said. ------------------------------------------------------------------------- ----"

" The Federal Government has announced a $216 million two year flood relief package. The money will go help those in flood ravaged zones in New South Wales and southern Queensland. It includes cash grants of up to $60,000 for replanting crops, interest subsidies for farmers, income support for farm families and grants of up to $10,000 to small and medium sized businesses to help with the costs of flood repairs. <b>Crop production slashed</b> Flooding and drought are estimated to have slashed Australia's main crop production to a six year low. The Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics has released its December Crop Report with a forecast that the 2000/2001 winter crop will be just 30 million tonnes. The bureau says that would be the smallest in six years. Wheat production is estimated to be down 22 per cent to less than 20 million tonnes. Drought has affected yields in Western Australia and southern Queensland. Heavy rains have caused major losses and downgrading in central and southern New South Wales. ------------------------------------------------------------------------- ----"

" The Federal Opposition leader, Kim Beazley, has challenged the Treasurer, Peter Costello, to stand up to Coalition MPs trying to change new laws for the taxation of trusts. The National Party has voted to oppose the bill, which would tax trusts as companies. The bill is an important source of revenue in the Government's business tax package, which Labor has pledged to support. Mr Beazley says Mr Costello should bring the bill into Parliament and have it passed with the support of the Labor Party, even if Coalition MPs cross the floor. ""This is his test. He's got the numbers in Parliament but has he got the ticker to push this through. If he fails, a major hole in the taxation system will persist,"" he said."

" The National Party want the bill changed with one MP warning it would result in the revival of de facto death duties. But the concern does not appear to be repeated in the Liberal Party. The matter is still before a backbench committee and has not yet gone to the Coalition party room for approval. The National party action has been criticised by some Liberals as grandstanding because the process of approving the bill is so far from completion. Liberal MPs are confident if changes need to be made to the legislation to ensure trusts are treated fairly, they will be accepted by the Treasurer. ------------------------------------------------------------------------- ----"

" Another survey has highlighted a sharp fall in business confidence. The Westpac-Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) survey of industrial trends shows a drop in new orders, employment and overtime and the outlook for the general business situation over the next six months. The ACCI says the survey reflects concerns about higher interest rates, petrol prices, the dollar, post-GST and Olympics slowdown in demand. Westpac economist Bill Evans says there is clear evidence the economy is slowing, supporting the bank's view that the Reserve Bank is unlikely to increase interest rates following today's board meeting. ------------------------------------------------------------------------- ----"

" Police in Indonesia's province of Irian Jaya have arrested a fifth leader of the independence movement, an officer said today. The Rev Herman Awom was formally detained at police headquarters in the province's capital Jayapura yesterday, following more than five hours of questioning, police sergeant Wahyudi said. ""Mr Awom is now in detention and sharing a cell with his colleagues from the Papua Presidium,"" Mr Wahyudi said. Mr Awom presented himself at police headquarters shortly before nightfall yesterday, dressed in a flowing black preacher's robe, clutching a bible and flanked by a fellow preacher, his lawyers, wife and three daughters and several members of his congregation. Police have charged him with subversion for his alleged separatist activities. Four other leaders of the Papua Presidium, Irian Jaya's non-governmental separatist council, were charged with the same offences last week. The four included the chief, Theys Eluay. Mr Eluay, Presidium secretary general Taha Al-Hamid and members Don Flassy and John Mambor were arrested between Wednesday and Thursday last week. Speaking to AFP through their cell bars yesterday, the four detainees said they were taking their arrests as ""part of the struggle"". The four said they were being treated well. All four said police had finished questioning them and they were awaiting their release pending a trial, as promised by the police. They said police asked them the ""usual questions"" about which country the province belonged to and whether they recognised it as the Indonesian province of Irian Jaya, rather than the sovereign state of West Papua. The arrests were part of a concerted crackdown on the independence movement coinciding with last Friday's 39th anniversary of an unrecognized declaration of Papuan nationhood. On December 1, 1961, as former Dutch colonisers departed the western half of New Guinea island, native Papuans declared independence. Indonesian troops began infiltrating Irian Jaya in 1962, and in 1969 a UN-organised referendum ratified Indonesian sovereignty over the province. Independence leaders maintain the vote was flawed and unrepresentative. Irian Jaya is home to a native Melanesian population of 1.8 million people, most of them Christians, plus another 700,000 settlers from other parts of Indonesia. ------------------------------------------------------------------------- ----"

" A Florida circuit court has rejected Vice-President Al Gore's request for a hand recount of 14,000 disputed ballots in two Florida counties for the hung presidential election. Judge Sanders Sauls of the Leon County Circuit Court in Tallahassee, issued the ruling in response to Mr Gore's lawsuit to contest the certified Florida tally. Mr Gore asked the court to order Miami-Dade and Palm Beach counties to recount the disputed votes, claiming the certified Florida tally is incorrect. About 10,700 votes went uncounted through machine counters in Miami-Dade and 3,300 in Palm Beach, many of which the Gore campaign believes should go for Gore and thus reverse Republican candidate George W Bush's paper-thin 537-vote lead under the official tally. The Gore campaign is expected to appeal the ruling to the Florida Supreme Court. ------------------------------------------------------------------------- ----------------------"

" Both sides of politics are continuing to make tit-for-tat allegations about electoral rorting. Labor has questioned voter registrations in the electorates of two ministers in a bid to deflect some of the pressure arising out of allegations of vote-rigging in Queensland. The Sports Minister, Jackie Kelly, was forced to make an explanation to Parliament last night about the electoral enrolment of a former staffer, after the Opposition had earlier claimed he was registered at her address when he actually lived elsewhere. Ms Kelly said that he moved into her share house when he began working for her in 1996 and he did not tell her until yesterday that he was registered there until October 1998. But Opposition leader, Kim Beazley says the explanation is inadequate. He is also unhappy with Environment Minister Robert Hill's confirmation that his son and daughter-in-law were enrolled at his home in South Australia when they were living in Sydney. Mr Beazley says the Government has been quick to refer to Labor MP Wayne Swan to the Federal Police but it is reluctant to have its own members investigated. ------------------------------------------------------------------------- ---------------------"

" Today's monthly board meeting at the Reserve Bank comes amid heightened expectations that official interest rates in Australia could soon be on the way down. A cloud over employment prospects is the latest pointer to a slowing economy. Official interest rates in Australia have remained at 6.25 per cent since they were last raised in August. Last Friday, Reserve Bank Governor Ian Macfarlane indicated there was no overwhelming case for a change. At the same time he would not quibble with Treasury forecasts of a 4 per cent economic growth rate. But yesterday, the ANZ Bank's job advertisement survey showed an 8 per cent slump in newspaper employment notices. ANZ chief economist Saul Eslake said: ""I think today's meeting will see the Reserve Bank deciding to leave interest rates unchanged, with a watching brief on the evolving slowdown in the world and Australian economies"". ""At some time in the not too distant future the issue for the Reserve Bank will be ""When should we cut rates?"" But that won't be the discussion today."" Meanwhile, Master Builders Australia (MBA) says today's meeting of the Reserve Bank should announce that its tight fiscal policy has eased in response to the slowing of the Australian economy. The peak building and construction industry body says the Reserve should start moving to ease interests by early in the new year. The MBA's chief economist, Wilhelm Harnisch, says there are clear indications that the economy is slowing down. ""We would like rates to be lowered as soon as possible. Certainly when you look at the economic surveys and all the other economic indicators, it's certainly showing that the Australian economy has peaked and is heading for a slowing next year,"" he said. -------------------------------------------------------------------- ---------------------------"

" The Federal Government is facing a revolt within its ranks over a key measure in its business tax package. The National Party has voted not to support a bill designed to tax trusts as companies. They want the bill changed, claiming trusts would be taxed more heavily than companies, unfairly affecting thousands of farm businesses which commonly use family-owned trusts as a vehicle for holding assets and income. The National Party has agreed the matter should be further negotiated by leader John Anderson and the Prime Minister. The National Party's stance puts the Treasurer in a difficult position, having agreed to implement the bill in a deal to secure the Opposition's support for its business tax package. The Opposition leader, Kim Beazley, says the use of trusts to minimise tax is one of the most offensive features of the tax system. With Labor pledging to support the legislation, Mr Beazley has challenged the Treasurer to disregard opponents of the bill and bring it into Parliament. ""The tax system, if this doesn't go through, will be rotten,"" he said. ""This is the thing you've got to understand, if this doesn't go through it will be rotten. He's got the numbers, Costello and Howard, they've got the numbers - have they got the guts?"" ------------------------------------------------------------------------- ----------------------"

" Police are continuing to appeal for public help after a two-year-old boy died yesterday after his mother's car was stolen. The black BMW was taken from a shopping centre at Cabramatta, in Sydney's west, yesterday afternoon, it was found three hours later. The boy, Leo, had been left in the car while his mother went into a supermarket, he was found unconscious in his child car seat and died later in hospital. Sergeant Terry Newman says inquiries are continuing. ""Police are still conducting inquiries in the vicinity of the location of the motor vehicle,"" he said. ""They've been canvassing the area overnight and they'll be continuing that canvass today with residents around the vicinity."" -------------------------------------------------------------------- --------------------------"

" Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat has carried a weapon in public for the first time since his 1994 return from exile, accusing Israel of violating an agreement to cool down the situation. His comments have come after heavy Israeli-Palestinian gunbattles raged near a holy shrine in Bethlehem, known to Jews as Rachel's Tomb. Israeli helicopters also fired two rockets at a refugee camp near Bethlehem. Palestinian medical officials say 12 Palestinians were injured, including two, who remain in a serious condition. The Palestinian Minister for Jerusalem, Ziad Abu Zayyad, says he is disappointed at the latest outbreak of violence. ""Unfortunately, we're used to hearing positive statements from the Israelis, but when it comes to practice we see something totally different,"" he said. -------------------------------------------------------------------- -------------------------"

" The European Union has formally agreed to ban meat-based animal feed, in an effort to calm consumer concern over mad cow disease. The ban will take effect from the January 1 and will last for six months. A meeting of agriculture ministers of the 15 EU member states has moved to restore confidence in the beef market and among consumers with a blanket ban on all meat based feed for livestock. The ban comes amid growing panic over mad cow disease. In the past few weeks, the disease has been found in countries that had been thought to be BSE free and the beef market has almost completely collapsed after it was revealed, despite careful screening procedures, meat from an infected herd was sold through three French supermarkets. A European Commission spokeswoman said the feed ban was not based on science but was rather a response to community concern. The ministers have also agreed to ban the sale of meat from all cattle over the age of 30 months. -------------------------------------------------------------------- ----------------------------"

" Australian captain John Newcombe has admitted Lleyton Hewitt will not be 100 per cent fit for the Davis Cup final against Spain starting on Friday in Barcelona. The teenager is still being troubled by a mystery virus which he has had for several weeks. But Newcombe says Hewitt is determined not to let his illness stop him playing at his best. The team captain says Hewitt knows the ailment will not disappear this week, but says he is prepared to play with it. ""What Lleyton has said is...'it's not killing me to play with it, it's uncomfortable but I'm just going to go out there and forget about it',"" he said. As the build-up to the final continues, Hewitt is refusing to get involved in a public slanging match with Spain's Alex Corretja. Corretja branded Hewitt arrogant when they played at last week's Masters Cup in Lisbon. The Spaniard also says Hewitt snubbed him when the two Davis Cup squads met on the weekend. But Newcombe says Hewitt enjoys being baited before important Davis Cup ties and says the youngster is enjoying the psychological battle."

" The Federal Opposition has raised allegations of electoral anomalies in the Liberal Party. The Deputy Opposition leader, Simon Crean, claims two people who live in Sydney have been enrolled to vote at the private address of Environment Minister Robert Hill in Adelaide. Mr Crean has told Parliament the two people only changed their enrolment address two weeks ago. The Prime Minister says he is unaware of the enrolments. He says the Opposition is trying to confuse normal preselection techniques with the kind of criminal rorts perpetrated in Queensland. ""It is not criminal behaviour to have a preselection battle,"" he said. ""It is not even criminal behaviour to recruit people to membership of your party. ""It is criminal behaviour to do what the member of the Australian Labor Party in Townsville did, which led to her conviction and her jailing."""

" The Opposition has also raised allegations of false enrolments at the former home address of Sports Minister Jackie Kelly. Labor claims a former member of Ms Kelly's staff, who allegedly lived in Parramatta, had been enrolled at Ms Kelly's Penrith address for more than a year. The Minister says the staff member did sometimes live at her address. Mr Beazley has called on the Prime Minister, John Howard, to refer the allegations against Senator Hill and Ms Kelly to the Federal Police. Mr Howard says he will look at Labor's claims. ---------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Government's latest employment forecasts are being called into question. The ANZ Bank sees a sharp slowdown in job creation looming with employment advertising slumping in November. During the month, the number of ""positions vacant"" notices published in the major dailies has fallen 8 per cent. Apart from holiday-affected months and the record slump in the Olympic month of September, that is the steepest decline in a decade. The ANZ Bank's chief economist, Saul Eslake, says achieving the Federal Government's new employment target now appears a difficult task. ""The Government in its mid-year economic and fiscal outlook forecast growth in employment of 3 per cent for the 2000/2001 financial year as a whole,"" he said. ""To get that you would now need employment to grow by 25,000 a month over the balance of the financial year. ""We think that employment could grow by as little as 10,000 a month on average over that period."" ---------------------------------------------------------"

" ABC staff representatives have accused the managing director, Jonathan Shier, of hiding, from the public, the real depth of his budget cuts to the organisation. Eleven staff representatives met with Mr Shier this morning to be briefed on his plans for the national broadcaster. They say after eight-and-a-half months the managing director was still unable to articulate his vision and the future of programs. Television journalist Kerry O'Brien says the group also has grave concerns about Mr Shier's obsession with new media at the expense of core programing. ""You know we can all worship at the altar of new media but, at the ABC, the leadership of the ABC has a responsibility to do more than just worship at the altar,"" he said. ""They have to think it through clearly, carefully and responsibly and they have an absolute obligation to consult the staff and consult the public and to put us all in the picture."" ---------------------------------------------------------"

" The United States Justice Department has sent representatives to Florida to gather information about alleged voting irregularities. A spokeswoman in Washington says the department has received complaints that blacks and other minorities in several parts of Florida were impeded by voting officials when they tried to cast ballots. A major civil rights organisation says it has gathered 486 complaints and taken more than 300 pages of sworn testimony from people who say they were blocked from voting. The organisation plans to file a lawsuit this week alleging voter intimidation and other violations of voting rights. ---------------------------------------------------------"

" In cricket, South Australia has beaten Tasmania by 162 runs in the four day match at the Adelaide Oval. Chasing 337 runs for victory, Tasmania was dismissed today for 175, with Peter McIntyre taking four wickets and Mark Harrity three for South Australia. Meanwhile, Western Australia is struggling at six for 60 on the final day of the game against New South Wales at North Sydney, needing another 81 runs to win the match. Don Nash and Nathan Bracken have two wickets each. ---------------------------------------------------------"

" The Prime Minister has indicated the Federal Government is collecting more GST revenue than it expected. The Government has assumed it will have to give top-up payments to the states and territories for up to seven years, to ensure they are no worse off during the early years of transition to the GST. Mr Howard has hinted some states might make the transition faster than expected, due to larger GST collections. ""On current indications, the transition period, whereby we guarantee they get the same amount of money as they would have got under the old formula, before the benefits of the GST click-in, is certainly well on target,"" he said. ""Possibly, in the case of one or two states, certainly in the case of one, it may arrive ahead of time."" ---------------------------------------------------------"

" A conference of international scientists in Buenos Aires, Argentina, has predicted that the massive hole which has occurred in the earth's protective ozone layer will largely disappear by about 2050. The chairman of the conference, Professor Allan O'Neil, said the scientists are confident this will happen because of the international ban on the use of chloro-fluro carbons (CFCs) that were often used in aerosols. ""On our calculations about how these chemicals affect ozone, we can make a prediction that in roughly 50 years the ozone hole will be pretty well recovered,"" he said. ""Not necessarily back to how it was before, but much better than it is now."" ---------------------------------------------------------"

" Prime Minister John Howard is playing down concerns about the effects of a projected slowing in the economy. Mr Howard says the Government's own forecasts suggest economic growth will slow down but not enough to be of concern. He has told Bloomberg's Information Television the situation has to be seen in the context of a long period of very healthy growth. ""We've had 13 successive quarters of growth above 4 per cent - that's the best economic performance in this country for 40 years,"" he said. ""We've factored in some coming off of that performance but not a great deal and our current forecasts from both the Treasury and the Reserve Bank are to that effect and their track record over the past few years has been very good."""

" Indonesian police have arrested 47 people in a renewed crackdown on separatists in the troubled province of Papua, also known as Irian Jaya. The arrests follow a weekend of bloodshed in which police opened fire on independence supporters and seven people died. Yesterday, Indonesian riot police stepped up a campaign to crush separatism in Papua, storming an arts centre in Jayapura which has served as a headquarters for pro-independence militiamen. Dozens of militiamen were arrested and bows and arrows as well as axes and spears were seized from the building. On Saturday seven people were killed, six shot by Indonesian troops in the town of Merauke after separatists replaced a national flag flying in the town's centre with a pro-independence morning star flag."

" Queensland ALP backbencher Grant Musgrove will today resign from the Parliamentary Labor Party, five days after meeting the Premier to discuss his political future. Premier Peter Beattie has thanked Mr Musgrove for doing what he called ""the decent thing"" after the Springwood MP was implicated in electoral fraud at the Shepherdson Inquiry. Mr Musgrove joins former deputy premier Jim Elder in having to quit the party since the inquiry began, although both men will remain in Parliament until the next election. Meanwhile, the inquiry is expected to take evidence from former ALP organiser Lee Bermingham who has been branded responsible for widespread electoral rorting. Mr Bermingham has previously given evidence at a closed hearing of the inquiry."

" Residents from a housing estate near Wollongong have made an urgent plea to at least eight banks and finance institutions to make sure their relocatable homes are not at risk. The plea comes as 200 mostly elderly residents from the Lakeline Estate found their relocatable homes, valued at $70,000 to $100,000 each, were morgaged without their knowledge. Most were morgaged by the estate owner Bruce Maples who owns the land the homes are built on, but not the homes themselves. Patrick O'Rourke, from the group Lakeline Estate Action Power, says he wants all the lending bodies involved to remove the homes from the morgages taken out by Mr Maples. ""This is a situation where a developer has morgaged other people's homes in order to carry on his business,"" he said. ""That should not be allowed to happen."" Mr Maples has refused to comment on the issue."

" Israel says it will cooperate fully with an international inquiry into the recent violence in the Middle East in which nearly 300 people, most of them Palestinians, have been killed. An Israeli spokesman says Cabinet ministers will work with an international fact-finding mission led by the former American Senator George Mitchell. Senator Mitchell himself says the first need is for an end to violence. ""It's very difficult when the violence is running high, when there's so much grief, sorrow and bad feeling,"" he said. ""So my hope is and our commission has urged that there be an immediate end to violence and a return to negotiations. ""I think they came fairly close at the Camp David summit and I think with a renewed push and good faith on all sides it is possible to reach an agreement."""

" Astronauts from the American space shuttle, Endeavour, have started the complex task of attaching huge solar panels to the new international space station. Saturday's flawless docking between Endeavour and the space station high above Kazakstan as each craft travelled at a speed of eight kilometres per second was but the first stage of the mission. Now comes the complex challenge of three separate space walks during which the shuttle astronauts will attach giant solar panels covering an area of a fifth of a hectare to provide five times the level of power the station has had so far. That power will allow the $60 billion space station, Alpha, to play host to space laboratories. The solar panels themselves are wider than the wings of most jet airliners. The space walks conducted by two astronauts will turn station Alpha into the third brightest object in the night sky after the moon and the star Sirius."

" In East Timor, Australian soldiers are continuing intensive border patrols after shooting dead a suspected militiaman yesterday. Peacekeepers from the first batallion exchanged fire with two gunmen near the border town of Balibo. While one suspected militiaman was hit, the other escaped along a creek bed heading towards the border. No Australians were injured. The clash occurred during a hunt by more than 50 United Nations peacekeepers, backed by helicopters and armoured vehicles for those responsible for an ambush of two Australian soldiers on Friday. One of the soldiers, a signaller from the first batallion, was hit in the leg and is being treated in a military hospital in Dili. He is now in a stable condition."

" ALP president Greg Sword has defended the practice of making donations to competing political parties. Labor is embroiled in the cash-for-preference affair, which has already left the Queensland Beattie Government in a minority position with a new deputy premier. It has spread to Western Australia, Victoria and lead to a walk out by Labor in Federal Parliament last week. Mr Sword has told Channel Nine there is nothing wrong with giving financial support to minor parties. ""It's only normal for parties to negotiate with other parties and independents about their preferences,"" he said. ""It's one thing to do that and then from time to time it's not unknown that from time to time either an independent or a smaller party may not have the resources to distribute their how to vote card or resource it. ""If you've got an agreement with them about getting their preferences it's obviously in your interest to assist them."""

" Mr Sword denies the affair will damage Kim Beazley's chances of becoming the next prime minister. He says most of the issues that have arisen, particularly in Western Australia and Victoria, will be sorted out quickly. Mr Sword said the party is committed to cleaning up the mess in Queensland. ""There's a two part program to make sure that no one's left in any doubt that the Labor Party, that the leadership of the Labor Party at state and federal levels, are absolutely committed to making sure that the party gets its house in order, that the party's honest and its processes are honest,"" he said."

" Tens of thousands of people have joined Melbourne's Walk for Reconciliation. People from all walks of life began converging on Flinder's Street Station early this morning. The area surrounding the famous Melbourne landmark quickly became a sea of coloured balloons, flags and hats. Deputy chair of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, Sir Gustav Nossal, says the turnout has made him immensely proud and excited. ""It's black and white, old and young, famous and not so famous all walking for what the real people's movement,"" he said. Victorian Premier Steve Bracks says the symbolism of the walk and the bi-partisan approach is crucial. ""It's an essential part of healing wounds that have past and the wrongs done to Aboriginal communities and also moving forward with positive steps for reconciliation,"" he said. ATSIC chairman Geoff Clark says today's walk is a chance for the community to vote with their feet and show there is strong support for reconciliation. ""It's something you will remember and one day you will sit back and reflect as to why and the reasons behind it and you will realise you were part of history, you're part of the turning point in the history of this country as we now forge together as part of a united nation,"" he said. ATSIC councilor Troy Austin says despite the absence of the Prime Minister John Howard, the Government is well represented in today's walk. ""We're disappointed that he won't be walking but certainly he will have senior officials there and that's a good commitment from the Government,"" he said. The walk will end with a concert at the Myer Music Bowl in the King's Domain."

" A Queensland Labor backbencher, embroiled in electoral rorting allegations will quit the ALP tomorrow. It means the Beattie Government has now lost two MPs in the last week. Premier Peter Beattie says Springwood MP Grant Musgrove contacted his chief of staff last night indicating he will quit the Labor Party tomorrow. Mr Musgrove is Labor's youngest MP and was elected to Parliament in 1998, despite quitting the ALP he will remain in Parliament until the next election. Meanwhile, Mr Beattie says there will be an internal audit of all Labor Party membership lists in Queensland to ensure people are not listed at addresses where they do not live."

" The Law Reform Commission is to conduct an inquiry into traditional forms of punishment under Aboriginal customary law as part of a move to incorporate Aboriginal law into Western Australia's Criminal and Civil Justice System. WA is the first state to attempt to incorporate Aboriginal law into the judicial system. Wayne Martin from the WA Law Reform Commission says research will be undertaken to see how traditional Aboriginal laws are applied in communities across the state. ""The ideal outcome would be one that enables Aboriginal law to be recognised and enforced where appropriate so it continues to exist alongside and within white law without being inconsistent or in conflict,"" he said."

" The Victorian Turf company, being sued by the Australian Capital Territory Government for the bungled re-turfing of Bruce Stadium, is reportedly having its contract with Melbourne's Colonial Stadium terminated. A spokesman for the company Strathayr is refusing to confirm the reports and claims to have won a contract to maintain the playing surface at Sydney's Stadium Australia. The ACT Government announced last month it is suing the company Strathayr for cost of installing two Olympic standard soccer surfaces at Bruce Stadium. The cost of resurfacing the stadium blew-out to $1million, four times the amount the Government had budgeted for."

" In the latest violence in Indonesia's province of Papua, also known as Irian Jaya, eight people have died, six of them shot by Indonesian troops. Troops opened fire after independence supporters went on a rampage in the town of Merauke. It was the the first violence since an agreement to lower separatist flags across Papua province went into effect yesterday morning. In Merauke, flags were pulled down, but an angry group of 500 pro-independence supporters tried to hoist one of the flags again. Rioting broke out and Indonesian security forces opened fire. Merauke hospital confirmed six pro-independence supporters were shot dead and a taxi driver was killed with a spear."

" The Federal Government has approved the expansion of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, as part of its plan to include 28 previously excluded areas in the World Heritage area. The expansion will be officially proclaimed at the end of January. The six new areas from between the far north of Queensland to Gladstone will add an extra 1,300 square kilometres to the world's largest World Heritage area. They are the Weymouth, Bathurst Head, Cooktown, Clump Point, Broad Sound and Curtis Island sections. Federal Environment Minister Robert Hill says the new areas include important fringing reefs and significant dugong habitats. He says recreational and commerical fishing will generally not be affected but permits for building constructions like pontoons and mooring facilties will be required. Mr Hill says the six new areas will help safeguard the Parks biodiversity."

" Police are appealing for help in tracking down those responsible for a drive-by shooting in Sydney's west last night. A woman, standing on the front lawn of her Noel Street home at Marayong, was wounded in the stomach, as a green holden HQ or HZ drove past. She is in a stable condition in Westmead Hospital. Sergeant John King from Quakers Hill police says the motives for the attack are unclear: ""The scientific police have been there. At this stage police are making further inquiries in relation to where it was alleged an early model holden left the scene immediately after they heard the noise of the bang,"" he said."

" The Australian Federal Police have been asked to investigate a donation made by Labor frontbencher, Wayne Swan, to a Democrats campaign official during the 1996 election campaign. Mr Swan has insisted the payment was not made in return for securing Democrats' preferences in the federal seat of Lilley. The Australian Electoral Commission has referred the matter to the police following a preliminary investigation by the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP). After examining a newspaper report and radio transcript, the DPP ruled he could not conclude, on that information, that the payment had breached the Electoral Act. The Electoral Commission says it has not formed any conclusions about the matter and it is up to the police to investigate the facts. Federal Opposition Leader Kim Beazley has said Mr Swan would be stood down from the front bench if he becomes the subject of a formal inquiry. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Hardline separatists in Papua, also known as Irian Jaya, have fallen short of declaring independence from Indonesia at a flag-raising ceremony in the capital Jayapura. In the presence of more than 1,000 armed Indonesian security forces, separatists raised the Morning Star flag to commemorate the unsuccessful declaration of independence from Holland in 1961. The following year, Irian Jaya was handed to Indonesia by the United Nations. But there are concerns clashes could erupt following a police warning that, as of tomorrow, the flag will be banned. Independence leaders, however, have appealed for calm. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Caution is evident in the latest spending patterns among Australian households. Retail trade turnover figures for October have just been released. They are showing a small decline in spending levels. Seasonally adjusted turnover has dipped just 0.2 of 1 per cent Retail activity has fallen the most in Western Australia and New South Wales. The Bureau of Statistics says the decline follows increases in August and September which were influenced by the Olympics and the introduction of the GST. Some private sector analysts have suggested that households would have been preparing to meet Telstra 2 repayments during October. Other figures for the month show a rise in residential building approvals after eight consecutive falls. They are up 6 per cent in October but they are still down 39 per cent on a year ago. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A new scandal has rocked the Queensland Labor Party, with police called in to investigate irregularities in party bank accounts for the Federal seat of Bowman. A Labor Party state candidate, John Budd, yesterday gave a statement to the party's state secretary about the matter. The Premier has now sacked Mr Budd, who was a ministerial adviser, from that position and says he will also lose his endorsement as an ALP candidate. Premier Peter Beattie says he is certain the Federal Member for Bowman, Con Sciacca, knew nothing about the irregularities. Meanwhile Queensland Labor Party President, Shirley Mellor, says the issue relates to what she has described as a ""family problem"". ""I guess you can tell by my voice that I'm quite upset about it,"" Ms Mellor said. ""It's very sad, it's sad for his family what's happened. ""Nobody knew about this problem until John actually came to us yesterday."" --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Government is being urged to reconsider its position on a Stolen Generations reparations tribunal. The Government has rejected a Senate committee's call for a tribunal, saying it is unnecessary and would require the same burden of proof as the courts. But Michael Schaefer, one of the lawyers who represented two Northern Territory members of the Stolen Generations in a landmark compensation case, says that is not so. He says a tribunal set up under appropriate guidelines could save the Federal Government millions. ""There's a major concern that there's an enormous number of claims waiting to be processed and if they have to go through anything like the sort of process that the two lead claims have had to endure then it's going to be many years and many millions of dollars before these matters are appropriately dealt with,"" he said. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australian fast bowler Glenn McGrath has become just the third Australian to take 300 wickets, and has taken a hat-trick on the first morning of the second Test at the WACA in doing so. In his fifth over of the morning, McGrath removed Sherwin Campbell, caught at first slip by Ricky Ponting. It was his 299th Test wicket. That brought Brian Lara to the wicket. McGrath has dominated Lara in clashes between the two, removing the West Indies' premier batsman in both innings in the first Test at Brisbane. Lara became McGrath's 300th victim when he edged a perfect off-cutter to Stuart MacGill in the slip cordon. The ball came out of MacGill's hands but he took the catch at the second attempt. West Indies captain Jimmy Adams completed the sequence, popping a catch to Justin Langer at short leg to leave the West Indies reeling at 4-20. Earlier Brett Lee had secured the first breakthrough, with a dubious leg before wicket decision against Daren Ganga. The only other Australians to claim 300 Test wickets are Dennis Lillee and Shane Warne. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Australian Electoral Commission is expected to reveal today, whether there will be a formal investigation into a donation to the Democrats from the Federal Labor front bencher Wayne Swan in 1996. At the same time the Democrats are distancing themselves from the incident. Mr Swan has admitted giving the money, but has denied it was an attempt to influence the Democrats. The Opposition Leader, Kim Beazley, says Mr Swan will have to stand aside if a formal inquiry is established. In the meantime, the Democrats have accused the media of perpetuating the view that the volunteer who allegedly received the money and the party are synonymous. Democrats Senator Andrew Bartlett says there is no record of the party receiving the money and the party has not broken any rules. ""All we are saying is that it is the alleged individual who received the payment who can answer those questions,"" he said."

" Two more Queensland Labor MPs will give evidence to the Shepherdson Inquiry today, Gary Fenlon and Mike Reynolds. Greenslopes MP Mr Fenlon is accused of involvement in electoral fraud. Self confessed vote-rorter Warwick Powell says Mr Fenlon supplied him with addresses where people might be falsely enrolled in East Brisbane in 1996. Premier Peter Beattie is refusing to stand Mr Fenlon aside as chairman of a Parliamentary committee promoting electoral reform because the claims are untested. Mr Fenlon will be given the chance to respond at the inquiry today. Also taking the stand will be Townsville MP Mr Reynolds, who fought out a bitter preselection battle with Townsville Mayor Tony Mooney in 1996. Meanwhile, ALP president Shirley Mellor says at least self-confessed electoral rorter and former Deputy Premier Jim Elder has had the courage to admit his mistakes to the inquiry. ""Unfortunately he has done some foolish things but he has accepted that and he's doing the one thing that we want him to do: resign and let the party get on with it,"" she said."

" Separatist leaders and officials in Indonesia's province of Papua have held talks to avert violence, ahead of today's anniversary of a Declaration of Independence nearly four decades ago. As the talks progressed, heavily-armed troops patrolled Jayapura, the capital of Papua, also known as Irian Jaya, in a show of force. Today is the last day the separatist Morning Star flag will be allowed to fly in the centre of Jayapura. It will then be banned in all but five of the province's 14 districts. Today is also the 39th anniversary of a unilateral declaration of independence in 1961 by Papuans, before the former Dutch New Guinea became a part of Indonesia. Tensions increased this week, when police arrested the head of the pro-independence Papua Council and two of his colleagues, and charged him with subversion."

" A global awareness campaign has been launched to address the role of men in the AIDS epidemic. The new campaign has been announced to coincide with World AIDS Day. Men outnumber women in terms of both HIV infections and AIDS deaths in every continent except Africa. Robin Gorna from the Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations says while men have been at the forefront of AIDS prevention in Australia, its time for another wake-up call. ""We need to remind men - gay men, bisexual men and straight men - throughout Australia that HIV remains a very real threat for us and they need to carry on making a difference and carry on preventing HIV,"" she said."

" Democratic vice-presidential candidate Joe Lieberman says Florida lawmakers are wrong to seek a special session to intervene in the disputed White House race. The Republican-held body has recommended a special session which would see Florida's legislature appoint the state's 25 electors, who would then break the the tie between Republican George W Bush and his Democratic rival Al Gore. Senator Lieberman has appealed to Florida's Governor Jeb Bush not to allow the action, which he says threatens to place the country in a constitutional crisis. ""For the Republican majority in the legislature, to say that they are prepared to put their judgement in place of the judgement of the 6 million voters of Florida is just wrong and sets a terrible precedent,"" he said."

" After three defeats in the House of Lords, the British Government has resorted to rarely-used powers to pass legislation lowering the age of consent for homosexuals from 18 to 16. Labor invoked the Parliament Act to force through the new Sexual Offences Bill, which makes the age of consent the same for homosexuals and heterosexuals. The law also lowers the age at which a man can commit buggery with a girl from 18 to 16. The bill brings Britain into line with most other European Union nations."

" The vice-president of the Spanish Paralympic Committee has resigned, amid accusations that some members of the medal-winning Paralympic team in Sydney were not disabled. Fernando Martin Vicente has also resigned as the head of the Sports Federation for the Intellectually Handicapped, which was responsible for screening some of the participants in the Sydney Paralympics. Last week, journalist Carlos Ribagorda, a member of Spain's gold medal-winning intellectually handicapped basketball team, claimed he and other medalists were not mentally deficient. Ribagorda also says up to 15 members of Spain's paralympic team, in categories such as athletics, table tennis and swimming, were not disabled. The Australian Paralympic Committee's chief executive, Brendan Flynn, had said he was suspicious of Spain's intellectually disabled basketball team."

" The Speaker of the House of Representatives has survived a no-confidence motion moved amidst three hours of uproar in Federal Parliament. The disarray followed Employment Services Minister Tony Abbott's refusal to withdraw comments made about Labor frontbencher Cheryl Kernot. There was confusion over a tied vote with Labor claiming Government MPs were allowed in to vote when they should not have been and the Government claiming MPs were not given enough time to get into the chamber. The Speaker refused to exercise his casting vote and called for another ballot. Labor walked out, possibly the first such action in the Parliament's history, and after that moved a no-confidence motion in the Speaker. The motion was lost , but Labor frontbencher Bob McMullan says that is not the end of the matter. ""We will all remember this day with sadness and until the Minister withdraws the allegations he's made about Cheryl Kernot, the Government won't get any cooperation from us,"" he said."

" Ms Kernot, the former leader of the Australian Democrats, has categorically denied being involved in any decision to accept a donation from Labor MP Wayne Swan during the 1996 election campaign. Mr Swan has admitted making a payment, but says it was not in exchange for preferences. The Democrats have said the funds were used for campaign material. Mr Abbott has challenged Ms Kernot to reveal her role in the deal. Ms Kernot told Parliament that whilst she participated in telephone hookups about the allocation of preferences to both sides of politics during the campaign, Mr Abbott has smeared her. ""I was not involved in the campaign for Lilley or in the State discussions about those allocations, I know nothing about any donations, about any donations and I join [ALP national secretary] Gary Gray, [Senator] Robert Ray and [Democrats leader] Meg Lees who speak with authority on this matter,"" she said. ---------------------------------------------------------------"

" Just over three weeks after the presidential election in the United States, Florida's Palm Beach County has reached a final vote tally. The manual recount of ballots shows the Democrats would-be president, Al Gore, made a net gain of 188 over his Republican rival George W Bush. The original count was done by machine. But whether the swing to Vice-President Gore means anything remains to be seen. Because Palm Beach failed to submit its final figures to meet a deadline four days ago, Florida's secretary of state, a Republican appointee, certified the original machine count. Now the fate of votes cast in Palm Beach and another county, Miami-Dade, is the subject of a complex court battle. More than 1 million ballots from Miami-Dade and Palm Beach counties will be sent to a Florida Circuit Court under armed police escort. Representatives from both the Democrat and Republican campaigns will accompany the convoys. Yesterday, circuit court judge Sanders Sauls ordered that the ballots be delivered under police escort to his court in Tallahassee by Saturday morning. But the judge did not order an immediate recount, instead setting a hearing for Sunday. Lawyers for Mr Gore have appealed against that decision, arguing for an immediate recount. ---------------------------------------------------------------"

" Former Queensland deputy premier Jim Elder has confirmed he will not be contesting the next state election. Mr Elder has written an open letter to the voters in his Brisbane electorate of Capalaba, telling them it is with great sadness that he will not be contesting the next election. He also says he will be resigning from the Labor Party, but does not make it clear when this will happen. Mr Elder resigned as deputy premier last week and today gives evidence to the Shepherdson Inquiry into electoral fraud. ---------------------------------------------------------------"

" There has been a big blowout in Australia's foreign debt. The decline in the value of the dollar has been the chief culprit. During the September quarter, Australia's net foreign debt has surged by $25.8 billion, the biggest quarterly increase on record. It takes the nation's foreign debt to a total of $294.5 billion. As a proportion of gross domestic product, the debt is now 46.6 per cent - that is also a record high. The slide in the value of the Australian dollar accounts for about $14 billion of the deterioration. At the same time, the current account deficit for the quarter has improved to $5.5 billion. ---------------------------------------------------------------"

" In central Queensland, detectives are still at a property between Comet and Rolleston where they have found the body of murdered schoolgirl Shelly Lee May, also known as Shelly Frost. Edward Walter Morgan, 35, has been remanded in custody after appearing in the Rockhampton Magistrates Court charged with murder and burglary. Regional crime co-ordinator, Inspector Russell Janke, says officers are carrying out a thorough investigation of the site ""At the present time, scientific officers and photographers are examining the scene."" ""We hope to retrieve the body today and transport it to Rockhampton. ""We also hope to have a post-mortem examination conducted in Rockhampton tomorrow."" ---------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Indonesian military today put on a a show of force in Jayapura, the capital of Papua, formerly known as Irian Jaya. It did so as independence activists prepared to protest the jailing yesterday of some of their leaders. About 1,000 soldiers and police in riot gear, including special force members, gathered near the police headquarters. The streets remained calm. Tomorrow is the 39th anniversary of the declaration of independence from the Netherlands. Independence never came, though. The following year, the United Nations sanctioned the handing over of Irian Jaya to Indonesia. ---------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australian Open golf champion Aaron Baddeley has made a good start to his quest to become the first player to complete the Australian Open-Australian PGA double since Greg Norman in 1985. Baddeley, fellow youngster Adam Scott, along with Steve Conran and Euan Walters are in the Royal Queensland clubhouse leading the tournament, after their first round, on 4-under-par. Five players, including Peter Lonard and Greg Chalmers, are in the clubhouse at 3-under-par. Former British Open champion Ian Baker-Finch has made the perfect comeback to tournament golf, eagling the par-four first hole. He is 2-under-par after three holes, as is tournament favourite Robert Allenby. Greg Norman finished at 1-over-par, while last year's Players Championship winner, Brett Rumford, carded a 3-over-par 75. ---------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Liberal Party has denied a former Senator offered to pay for Shooters Party how-to-vote cards in the 1996 Lindsay by-election. New South Wales Shooters Party MP John Tingle has claimed former senator Bob Woods approached the party's candidate about redirecting preferences to the Liberals. But the Liberal Party's federal director, Lynton Crosby, says Mr Woods and the party's state director completely rejected the claims at the time. Mr Crosby has accused the Labor Party of trying to dredge up the matter to distract from the controversy over a payment made to the Democrats in 1996 by frontbencher Wayne Swan. Meanwhile, Prime Minister John Howard told Adelaide Radio 5DN that of all the claims raised about electoral matters, the ones in Queensland about rorting of the electoral roll are the most serious. ""That is the most serious issue involved in this whole matter as far as I am concerned and I think we have to direct our minds to that,"" he said. ""These other issues are important and I think they need to be investigated, but it is the illegal use of the electoral roll which is the most serious issue."" --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Democrats leader Meg Lees says a check of the Party's records in Queensland has found no trace of any donations from the Federal Labor frontbencher, Wayne Swan, during the 1996 election campaign. Mr Swan has told Parliament the payment was not made in exchange for preferences. Senator Lees says the only people who would know what happened with that payment are the former candidate and the then-campaign manager for the seat of Lilley, and they are no longer members of the Party. ""We have checked records and we have rechecked records, there is no record of money being donated to the Democrats from anyone in Queensland in any way related to the Labor Party,"" she said. ""And not only is there no record of any incoming money coming to the Party, there are no records of any outgoings to the seat of Lilley beyond that that went to any other seat. ""They got the same proportion of how-to-vote cards, there is no evidence of any other posters or material that we can track through."" Meanwhile, the Federal Liberal Party director, Lynton Crosby, says the practice of one political party helping another with practices such as manning voting booths is not unusual. He is keeping up the pressure on Labor over a payment made to the Democrats in 1996 by ALP frontbencher, Wayne Swan. Mr Swan has strongly denied the payment was made in exchange for preferences, saying it was done after a national decision on preferences. Labor sources say assisting Parties like the Democrats with handing out how-to-vote cards, and even helping with printing costs, is part of the process. Mr Crosby says that while he does not know what every Party member does, he is not aware of the Liberal Party extending financial assistance. ""There have been occasions in the past, I've acknowledged this, no-one would deny it, where there has been a need for a Party to man polling booths, to assist in getting a preference message out or whatever it may be to provide some such assistance and that's an accepted practice,"" he said. ""But conditional support - no way."" --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Israel is going to early elections again, but the exact date next year is yet to be decided. Both sides of politics are likely to campaign on their policy for achieving peace with the Palestinians. Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak addressed his country's Parliament knowing it was about to vote against his Government by a large majority to move for early elections. Mr Barak said while the Israeli public was against that move, he was confident of winning and announced that he would move for a poll for both the prime ministership and the Parliament, setting a date in the next few days. Mr Barak is now likely to pursue a last-ditch peace accord with the Palestinian leadership to take to the election. Opposition Likud Party leader Ariel Sharon attacked the Barak Government's handling of the peace process with the Palestinians, which saw the failure of the Camp David peace talks and two months of violence in which nearly 300 people have died. Mr Sharon said his party would propose a series of interim peace deals with the Palestinians as his election platform. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Immigration Minister claims that detainees at the Woomera Detention Centre in South Australia have not been force fed but rather ""intravenously rehydrated"". He says his department has the right to take such action under the Immigration Act. Philip Ruddock was responding to news that five of the detainees were handcuffed to beds so that they could be given water. Mr Ruddock says the department has an obligation to ensure that those on the hunger strike get medical attention. ""I'm not going to comment on what the general law is, but I'm going to say that there is specific law under the Migration Act to deal with this situation, because you do have a group of people who are intent on using these methods of protesting, to try and force decisions that they may not be entitled under the law to receive,"" he said. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Health Minister, Michael Wooldridge, says although he still supports an apology over the Stolen Generations, the public is not ready. He will join Ministerial colleagues Peter Costello, Richard Alston, David Kemp and John Herron at a reconciliation walk in Melbourne on Sunday. Only two ministers took part in the reconciliation walk in Sydney in May. Mr Costello's decision to walk is a signal of his support for reconciliation and has the blessing of the Prime Minister, John Howard. But Mr Howard will not be walking - he has a prior engagement in Sydney and ministers say Sunday's walk is a Victorian affair. Dr Wooldridge says Victorians strongly support reconciliation but there is not general support for an apology. ""The Australian public is not yet ready for a national apology,"" he said. ""The Australian public is not yet supportive of that but I think the Australian public is very supportive of trying to make a difference say in my area of health care - to give Aboriginal Australians what every other Australian takes for granted."" --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australia's trade accounts are still benefiting from the Olympic Games. The nation has achieved a second monthly trade surplus in a row. The main impact of the Olympics was registered in September with a net boost to the trade ledger of $1.4 billion. But figures released today for October show another net effect of $160 million in Australia's favour. In addition, exports of crude oil and base metals are up, as are rural exports. On balance, the month has produced a surplus of $324 million seasonally adjusted. That is a far cry from the expectations on financial markets of a $650 million deficit. Meanwhile, the Australian dollar has risen in the wake of the trade data. Just before 12:00pm AEDT, it was being quoted at 52.50 US cents, up about one fifth of a cent since the release of the figures. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Israel's Prime Minister Ehud Barak has announced he will send the country to early elections. The Israeli Prime Minister has told Parliament he will announce an election date within the next few days. Seventy members of the 120 seat Israeli Knesset were set to vote for early elections, a process that would have taken some months to achieve, but in the end Mr Barak chose to pre-empt that move. Mr Barak told the Knesset he was not afraid of elections, that he had been successful whenever he had stood and that if the Knesset wanted early elections he was prepared. He says a date will be set within a few days for polls for both the Knesset and the prime ministership. The move comes after two months of crisis for Mr Barak's Government after its central policy of reaching an Israeli-Palestinian peace accord collapsed amidst fighting. Mr Barak is now expected to attempt to reach either a full or partial peace accord with the Palestinians in the lead-up to the poll to make the central platform of his electoral campaign."

" Illegal immigrants at the Woomera Detention Centre are being force fed after being on a hunger strike for the past two weeks. The ABC has been told up to 50 detainees have been involved in the hunger strike over delays in processing their refugee applications. It is claimed 10 people yesterday were taken to hospital to be forcibly rehydrated, with five of them handcuffed to their beds. A lawyer involved in refugee matters, Nick Poynder, says ordinary Australians would need a court order to be force fed, but special laws have been put in place to allow force feeding of detainees. ""Detainees are subject to a particular regime which allows for them to be force fed in a way that doesn't apply to other Australians,"" he said. ""My understanding is that doctors in general do not approve of force feeding and there's been plenty of international opposition from medical groups to the force feeding of hunger striking prisoners."""

" An immigration agent has angrily rejected claims by Immigration Minister Phillip Ruddock that he was not told about alleged sexual abuse in the Woomera Detention Centre before July. Mr Ruddock told Federal Parliament yesterday that the woman spoke to one of his advisers in April, but no mention was made of sexual abuse, and he says his office has no record of the woman's letter. The immigration agent, Mary Lindsay, says she spoke to the Minister's staffer in April, telling him about the abuse. ""He suggested that I put it in writing, which I did, and I sent a copy to the state director telling him that I'd spoken to the press secretary, who suggested this, and asking him if he would pass my comments on to the Minister, "" she said. ""Twice in the letter I asked that they be sent on."""

" The head of the joint Parliamentary Committee on Electoral Matters says Labor frontbencher Wayne Swan should stand down now that he has admitted making a donation to the Australian Democrats during the 1996 election campaign. Mr Swan told Parliament the payment was not intended to influence a decision on the exchange of preferences. The Democrats say the money was used for campaign material. Christopher Pyne says Mr Swan did not declare the donation as required under the Electoral Act. ""There is a DPP [Director of Public Prosecutions] investigation into Wayne Swan so he should stand aside now while that DPP investigation is going on and [Opposition leader] Kim Beazley should have the intestinal fortitude to sack him if he doesn't stand aside, "" he said. ""He should take the advice of his Labor colleagues which we're hearing about on a daily basis and do the right thing by the party and take...[him] off the political stage."""

" The chairman of NRMA Insurance, Nicholas Whitlam, has been overwhelmingly re-elected to the board. At the company's inaugural annual general meeting in Sydney last night, Mr Whitlam apologised for his mishandling of proxy votes in 1998, which resulted in the passing of a resolution to increase directors' fees. Mr Whitlam says he was very pleased to be re-elected, along with two other sitting directors, despite what he called a ""campaign"" against him. ""I don't think you have to be a media expert to work out that there has been a press campaign against me for the last couple of weeks and very clearly institutional and retail investors rejected the nonsense that's been printed,"" he said. Meanwhile, investors approved the issuing of up to 1 million shares to the managing director Eric Dodd, subject to performance hurdles. But more than 20 per cent voted against the share plan, with many shareholders saying it was overly generous."

" Democratic White House hopeful Al Gore has reiterated his call for Republican rival George W Bush to agree to a statewide manual recount in Florida that he says would be completed in seven days. Mr Gore has also rebuked the Texas Governor for rejecting the suggestion he says he first made two weeks ago. Mr Gore, who has challenged the vote certification in Florida, says the nation needs to be able to say there is no legitimate question about who won the election. ""This is not a time for delay, obstruction and procedural roadblocks,"" he said. ""As I've said, I believe it's essential to our country that there be no question, no cloud over the head of the next president, whether it be me or Governor Bush. ""We need to be able to say that there is no legitimate question as to who won this election so that we can bring this country together."" Meanwhile, Mr Gore's running mate, Senator Joseph Lieberman, has reiterated key points of the Vice-President's address to the nation yesterday, in which he asked Americans for patience, and demanded that all the votes be counted. The Senator says a matter of principle is at stake."

" The Australian Tax Office (ATO) has received nearly all the quarterly business activity statements it expects to be lodged. Federal Treasurer Peter Costello says the ATO has 1.5 million statements and expects about 100,000 more to be sent in. Mr Costello says those figures are a very high return. He has noted today's Yellow Pages Small Business Index which shows 54 per cent of small businesses found implementation of the goods and services tax to be very easy or quite easy. He says 13 per cent found it very difficult."

" The Law Council believes federal legislation to prevent single women from having access to in-vitro fertilisation (IVF) technology would be likely to breach international law. The council has put its case to a Senate committee, which is inquiring into the Government's proposed law. The council's president, Anne Trimmer, says there is a significant risk the bill is in conflict with the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women. Ms Trimmer says Australia is bound by that treaty and should abide by it. ""It's arguable that the bill in amending the act does conflict with the very treaty that it was meant to implement,"" she said. ""Our role is to assist the committee to identify some of the risks inherent in the bill."""

" France's Lower House of Parliament has given its final approval to a law allowing schools to hand out morning-after contraceptive pills to pupils who have had unprotected sex. The law went through a first reading early last month, and is now expected to sail through its final hurdle in the Senate. It authorises school nurses to provide the pills to young women who ask for them. The French Health Minister has said the measure will be accompanied by an intensive training program for health professionals, who will work with the national family planning agency in applying it. Supporters of the law have stressed its role in avoiding the trauma of an abortion or an unwanted child for young women still in school. The law will also allow pharmacists to provide the pill without prescription to minors without parental approval."

" Australia's Lleyton Hewitt has defeated Pete Sampras at the Masters tournament in Lisbon, Portugal, this morning. Hewitt won the first set 7-6, winning a tight tie breaker 7-5, and then overwhelmed the former world number one 6-0 in the second set. In the other match played so far today, Russian Marat Safin has defeated Spain's Alex Corretja 6-7, 7-5, 6-3. The Masters Cup will be played in Sydney next year in November."

" Federal Opposition leader Kim Beazley has acknowledged the party faces a serious problem in Queensland with allegations about electoral rorting and questions about one frontbencher's campaign activities. The problems in Queensland are now dogging federal Labor, with questions about a payment frontbencher Wayne Swan made to the Democrats during the 1996 election after a national agreement over preferences had been reached. But Mr Beazley is giving his full support to Queensland Premier Peter Beattie and his federal colleagues, telling the backbench he has no reason to have anything but total confidence in the way every single Caucus member operates electorally. He is not yet giving in to pressure to stand Mr Swan aside, although he has indicated the conditions under which he would do so may be getting closer to being met. ""The situation has moved on...and is beginning to get into the realm of triggering that particular concern that I've had,"" he said. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" US Vice-President Al Gore has launched legal challenges to the vote tally in Florida, after Republican George W Bush was yesterday certified the winner of the key state. In a state circuit court in Tallahassee this morning, lawyers for Mr Gore filed contests to the elections results in three counties. Two of them the Democrat leaning counties of Miami Dade and Palm Beach, where they argue crucial votes were either not counted or unfairly rejected. In a conference call to senior Democrats, Mr Gore said the issues at stake were accuracy and fairness. ""It is about the integrity of our system of government,"" he said. However, Republicans continue to call for the Vice-President to concede the election. Yesterday's certification saw Florida officials declare Governor Bush the winner by a slender margin of 537 votes. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Immigration Minister, Philip Ruddock, has denied receiving any written or verbal advice of alleged sexual abuse in the Woomera Detention Centre before July. An immigration agent has claimed she sent a letter and phoned the minister's office in April to report the allegations. Mr Ruddock says the woman spoke to one of his advisers in April but no mention was made of sexual abuse. He says his office has no record of the woman's letter. Mr Ruddock maintains he was first told of the allegations in July. ""In August or at the end of July, I was briefed on the fact that certain allegations had been made and that they were being investigated by police and by the South Australian Department of Family and Youth Services,"" Mr Ruddock said. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" A senior United Nations official has called for international observers to be sent to the Palestinian territories to monitor what she called ""the bleak human rights situation"". Mary Robinson, the UN's Human Rights Commissioner, spoke to reporters in Geneva after presenting to the UN a submission she wrote following a tour of the territories. Ms Robinson's report to the UN General Assembly on the deteriorating human rights situation in the occupied territories makes for bleak reading. She says her recent visit to the region left her with the impression of a hardening of Israeli-Palestinian positions and a reluctance to negotiate. She recommends the setting up of an international monitoring presence in the territories, where she accused Israel of using excessive force. Nearly 300 people, mainly Palestinian, have died in the past two months of violent clashes. The Israeli ambassador to the UN disputed many of the report's findings. He also questioned the usefulness of sending international monitors to the West Bank and Gaza. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" A strike by oil workers in Nigeria is threatening to disrupt vital oil production. Nigeria is the world's sixth largest producer of oil. The strike has already taken hold. Angry oil workers have walked off the job across the country. The workers say they will shut down Nigeria's oil industry if their demands for increased wages are not met. Nigeria exports more than 2 million barrels of crude oil per day, and is Africa's largest oil producer. But unions claim the industry is not passing on its earnings to workers. The workers are demanding a pay rise of 40 to 60 per cent. They say their decision to strike follows failed negotiations with the oil companies. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" Approval has been given for the first human trials of a vaccine to treat people with HIV in Australia. The ethics committee has given the go ahead for the 12-month study, to be conducted in Melbourne and Sydney and involving 36 patients infected with HIV. Robin Gorna from the Australian Federation of AIDS organisation says tests with the vaccine on laboratory animals has proven successful. But Ms Gorna says it will be at least five years before doctors know whether the treatment on humans is effective. ""This is the first time in Australia we have trialled a vaccine with people living with HIV, so it is a very important first step,"" she said. ""This is an early trial and we hope in about five years we'll know whether this vaccine can truly help people with HIV to stay well."" -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" Lleyton Hewitt goes into tonight's lucrative Masters Tennis Tournament in Portugal still battling a mystery virus, and drawn in a group including former world number one Pete Sampras and US Open winner, Marat Safin. The tournament brings together the top eight players in the world this year, with the top two players from the groups of four progressing to the semi-finals. Hewitt will play Sampras tonight, but is still feeling the effects of his mystery virus. ""It's just annoying when I get out on the court,"" he said. ""I forget now, because it's been going on so long, I actually forget how I was breathing normally back a few months ago."" The year's top eight players will compete in the tournament, with Hewitt taking on Sampras tonight. Hewitt says making the field for the tournament has been a priority for all the top players. ""There was a lot of spots up for grabs, sort of the last four spots I think towards the end of the season, and luckily enough Stuttgart probably made it for me,"" he said. ""Making the final there and beating a couple of guys, especially Henman who was one of the guys who was a big rival for those last couple of positions, I feel like under those pressures I've come through very well."" -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" The transition team of the self-declared United States president-elect, George W Bush, will use private funds to prepare to succeed the administration of President Bill Clinton. The move was announced by Mr Bush's vice president-elect, Dick Cheney, who said US law makes provision for raising money and contributions from private sources to supplement public funds. But the campaign managers of Democrat Al Gore are unfazed by the Republicans. Less than a day after Florida's senior election official named Mr Bush the winner, Mr Gore's lawyers went to State Court in Tallahassee to final a contest for the result. They argue that it is incomplete and inaccurate, in part because some 10,000 votes in Miami-Dade County were never counted at all, and because there was not time to complete manual recounts in some areas. As well as opening a new front in the legal war, Mr Gore is stepping up the public relations battle. He staged a somewhat bizarre telephone conference call with Richard Gephardt and Tom Daschle, the minority leaders of the House and the Senate, designed to show that the party is fully behind his determination to keep fighting."

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" Software giant Microsoft has asked a Federal Appeals Court in Washington to find that a lower court was wrong in deciding it had an unfair monopoly and should be broken up. It has submitted a brief criticising the lower court of a district judge for perceived mistakes in handling a move by by the Justice Department and several state attorneys-general to split Microsoft in two. The brief states Microsoft did not engage in anti-competitive conduct, and that consumers like Microsoft products. In response, a Justice Department spokeswoman said the lower court judgment was well supported by evidence offered during the lengthy trial this year, including thousands of pages of Microsoft's own documents. The department is due to file its brief with the appeals court in early January, and Microsoft will reply a couple of weeks later. Oral arguments are set for late February."

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" Mr Beattie does not believe any more of his Labor MPs are set to face allegations of electoral fraud. Four MPs are under scrutiny at the Shepherdson Inquiry. Three Labor MPs have been implicated in electoral fraud, and former deputy premier Jim Elder is under investigation by the Shepherdson Inquiry. Premier Beattie says he has complete trust in his remaining MPs and he would be surprised if further allegations were raised. The Labor Caucus meets tomorrow afternoon to ratify the appointment of veteran Minister Terry Mackenroth as Deputy Premier and the elevation of Bundaberg MP Nita Cunningham to the Ministerial vacancy, both caused by Mr Elder's resignation. Opposition leader Rob Borbidge says Mr Elder should be banned from the meeting. ""Now Mr Beattie's all very good at talking the talk it's about time he walked the walk,"" he said. Mr Borbidge says he has put the Coalition on ""war-footing"" for an early election, hitting the campaign trail himself in Cairns tonight."

" Mitsubishi Motors Australia is expected to announce good news about the future of its plant in Adelaide today. Unconfirmed leaks to media outlets suggest Mitsubishi's parent company in Japan will invest at least $100 million to expand car production at the Adelaide factory. It follows recent comments from the Japanese company's president which raised fears the Australian operation could be closed if it did not become more profitable. The local company has vigorously denied the speculation, saying the earlier reports have damaged the company's sales. Mitsubishi Australia's managing director Tom Phillips is expected to make an announcement to the factory's workers today."

" Sri Lanka's Tamil Tiger leader has reportedly offered to hold unconditional talks with the Government to end the country's ethnic bloodshed. Velupillai Prabhakaran has made the offer in his annual Heroes Week speech, to commemorate the deaths of about 16,000 rebel fighters in the past 18 years. He says his Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam are keen to bring the drawn-out conflict to a peaceful conclusion. Mr Prabhakaran says the Norwegian Government - which has been working to bring the rebels and the Government to the negotiating table - has proposed several confidence-building measures."

" Welfare groups in South Africa are offering help to more than 1,000 families who have been left homeless after a fire at a squatter camp. Many families have spent the night sheltering at a local hall. The Red Cross and the Salvation Army are struggling to provide assistance to the victims of the fire. Up to 1,300 families lost their homes in the blaze, which destroyed a squatter camp outside Cape Town. Many families are now without food, shelter and clothing. Some are camping in the open, outside the ruins of their former homes. Police say the cause of the blaze at the squatter camp is unknown and forensic investigators have already begun gathering evidence. It is suspected that an open fire used for cooking may have spread out of control. Several people are recovering from burns and smoke inhalation after being caught in the blaze."

" The Australian and West Indies cricket teams will arrive in Perth this afternoon to prepare for the second Test, starting on Friday. Australian fast bowler Jason Gillespie is fit and should make his long-awaited return to Test cricket on a fast and bouncy WACA wicket, while Glenn McGrath needs just two wickets to reach 300 in his Test career. WACA curator Richard Winter is confident there will be no repeat of the incident earlier this month, where a one-day match between WA and Queensland was called off after just five overs because large cracks made the pitch unsafe."

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" A Sicilian television show featuring female strippers who kiss and fondle a male newsreader has proven so popular, the station is planning to broadcast an even racier version. Station owner Sergio Petta says he will go ahead with the new show next month, despite condemnation from the clergy, and alleged threats from the local Mafia. <i>News Pouts</i> features dancing women in revealing lingerie, and a newsreader who satirises current events. Several infuriated Roman Catholic priests have raged against the program, urging their parishioners not to tune in. Russian television currently features a program called <i>Naked Truth</i> in which an anchorwoman strips while reporting events, and politicians line up to be interviewed by topless reporters."

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" Sri Lanka's Tamil Tiger leader has reportedly offered to hold unconditional talks with the Government to end the country's ethnic bloodshed. Velupillai Prabhakaran has made the offer in his annual Heroes Week speech, to commemorate the deaths of about 16,000 rebel fighters in the past 18 years. He says his Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam are keen to bring the drawn-out conflict to a peaceful conclusion. Mr Prabhakaran says the Norwegian Government - which has been working to bring the rebels and the Government to the negotiating table - has proposed several confidence-building measures."

" Welfare groups in South Africa are offering help to more than 1,000 families who have been left homeless after a fire at a squatter camp. Many families have spent the night sheltering at a local hall. The Red Cross and the Salvation Army are struggling to provide assistance to the victims of the fire. Up to 1,300 families lost their homes in the blaze, which destroyed a squatter camp outside Cape Town. Many families are now without food, shelter and clothing. Some are camping in the open, outside the ruins of their former homes. Police say the cause of the blaze at the squatter camp is unknown and forensic investigators have already begun gathering evidence. It is suspected that an open fire used for cooking may have spread out of control. Several people are recovering from burns and smoke inhalation after being caught in the blaze."

" Democrats have kept up the volume outside Vice-President Al Gore's residence in the capital, with a dwindling crowd of supporters insisting their man had won. Meanwhile, George W Bush supporters cheered for ""President Bush"" after certified vote results were announced in Florida. The noisy demonstration saw protesters face each other on opposite pavements across from the mansion on Massachusetts Avenue, with Republicans chanting ""Get out of Cheney's house!"" and Democrats shouting, ""Joe's moving in!"" The 200 or so demonstrators were referring to Republican vice-presidential nominee Dick Cheney, a former defence secretary and his Democratic rival, Connecticut Senator Joe Lieberman. In Florida's state capital Tallahassee, pandemonium erupted among an already noisy crowd of several hundred people outside the capital as George W Bush was named the victor in the state's disputed presidential election. As Florida Secretary of State Katherine Harris announced the certification of the November 7 election and with it Bush's win, the crowd, most of them supporters of the Texas Governor, exploded in cheers and chants. ""President Bush, President Bush, President Bush,"" the demonstrators screamed at volumes so loud they could be heard in the basement-level state cabinet room where Harris was making her announcement at around 7:45 pm local time. She awarded Florida's crucial 25 electoral votes to the Republican candidate, having certified that Bush had won by 537 votes. Shortly afterwards, at a Washington hotel, Joe Lieberman announced that he and Al Gore would contest the Florida result. Simultaneously, across from Gore's mansion, a camera light suddenly shone onto a silent and immobile Gore supporter dressed up as the Statue of Liberty, the symbol of US democracy that stands in the New York harbor. ""Bush is afraid. Finish that count,"" Gore's backers shouted, as Republicans proffered a myriad of slogans, including, ""Kiss my chad!"" ""I'm not disappointed,"" said Bruce Spiva, 34, a Washington-based litigation attorney. ""I don't think this is the end. I assume that Secretary Harris illegitimately declared the vote for Bush. But a lot of legitimate votes were not counted."" Republican stalwart Chris McCullough, 29, a landscape gardener, called the Florida vote result ""predictable."" ""We knew the result two and a half weeks ago,"" he said, adding that the outcome had been postponed only by ""mangling and wrangling of the law"" by the Democrats. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Prime Minister says the Federak Government will not name a Federal Labor frontbencher accused of allegedly rorting electoral rolls in Queensland. The MP's name has been supressed by the Shepherdson inquiry, which is investigating allegations of vote-rigging within the ranks of the Queensland Labor Party. The claims were made during hearings last week. John Howard says the Government will respect the inquiry's ruling. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Federal Opposition Leader, Kim Beazley, says there was nothing unusual in the Labor Party assisting the Democrats in the Queensland seat of Lilley during the 1996 federal election campaign. A former Labor organiser says that Federal Labor MP, Wayne Swan, asked him to deliver an envelope filled with cash to a Democrats campaign office. Mr Swan's solicitor says a national agreement was entered into with the Democrats regarding preferences. It is understood the assistance was offered after that agreement was made. The Democrats say the money was for printing election material. Mr Beazley says it is a lie to suggest the ALP exchanged money for preferences. ""And it's an out-and-out lie because we know where the preference arrangements were made,"" Mr Beazley said. ""The preference arrangements were made by Robert Ray and Gary Gray, discussing this thing through with the national Democrat party counterparts in all agreements in relation to preferences were made there and no other agreements were made."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Federal Government has unveiled its road funding package, worth more than $1.5 billion. The roads package is an effort to quell anger over higher petrol costs. The Government ruled out calls to freeze the fuel excise, instead it is dipping into the surplus to spend an extra $1.2 billion over four years on local roads, and $400 million on national highways. The bulk of the money, $850 million, will go to roads in regional Australia. The money will go to local councils which will determine where it should be spent but it will be given under tied grants and a defined formula to prevent money being siphoned off for other activities. The Federal Government will also seek an assurance from states and territories that they will not use the extra funding as an excuse to cut their own spending. The Prime Minister says the Government will seek to have a special funding bill through Parliament before Christmas. ""There's no reason if the legislation is passed why some of the money can't begin flowing in January. "" The Government also says the spending will have broader economic spin offs, boosting growth and jobs. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Australian Paralympic Committee is demanding tough action after claims that athletes with no handicap competed for Spain in the Sydney Paralympics. A Spanish magazine claims that up to ten able-bodied athletes competed in the country's intellectually-disabled basketball team, which won the gold medal in Sydney. The magazine says one of its journalists joined the team, with Spanish officials providing fake IQ documents. The chief executive of the Australian Paralympic Committee, Brendan Flynn, says the allegations are as serious as drug taking, and if proven, four year bans should be enforced. Mr Flynn says he had his suspicions about the Spanish team during the Games. ""We were a little bit concerned at the Games and obviously when you look at teams like the Spanish intellectually disabled basketball team, they just had too much skill and too much court prowess."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" A Federal Coalition backbencher has revealed his taxpayer-funded Telecard has been improperly used by someone who made around $13,000 worth of calls. Queensland National Party MP Bob Katter has told Parliament the calls were made over a three week period in 1997. He says he was alerted to the high usage by a Finance Department official, and police were immediately called in to investigate. Despite an investigation lasting many weeks, Mr Katter says the person or persons who used the Telecard could not be found. Official figures released last week show $29,000 worth of calls were billed to Mr Katter's card since 1996, the second highest of any Member or Senator. He says his office had failed to mention the illegal use of the card when journalists inquired about his high Telecard bill last week. ""Members of my family have never had access to the Telecard numbers,"" Mr Katter said. ""For security reasons I have always only carried it by way of memory. ""As soon as I became aware [of the bill] on Friday, this account it was referring to went all the way back to 1997, I contacted your office, Mr Speaker, immediately and asked for permission to make a statement to the House."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Israeli commandos have killed four Palestinians in an ambush in the West Bank. An army spokesman said the four belonged to the military wing of Fatah, the organisation controlled by Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat. According to the Israeli defence forces, a team of army sharpshooters ambushed a group of armed Palestinians who the army said had earlier opened fire on an Israeli car. Four Palestinians were killed. The incident occurred near the West Bank town of Qalqilya. As yet, the Palestinian side has not produced its version of events but an incident such as this is likely to inflame Israeli-Palestinian tensions once again after a day in which clashes between the two sides in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip had seemed to moderate somewhat. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Environmental groups have accused the United States and Australia of wrecking the Climate Change Conference in The Hague after it collapsed with no resolution. Last minute negotiations at the conference, for a compromise deal to cut greenhouse gas emissions, has failed. Now delegates from 180 countries head home with nothing more than an agreement to meet again in six months. Environmental groups claim that is the fault of the US and Australia for insisting on flexible rules in meeting a target to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 5 per cent by 2010. The European Union would not accept their arguments. Efforts for a compromise collapsed when EU countries could not come up with a united approach and the British Deputy Prime Minister, John Prescott, stormed out in disgust. ""We were so close, I'm gutted that we didn't make it, but particularly for all those people who wanted to see change. But that's life, we'll just keep on going,"" Mr Prescott said. The failure of the nations to reach agreement has been condemned by environmental groups. Jennifer Morgan of the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) laid the blame squarely at the door of countries that tried to compromise on the ambitious plan for cutting greenhouse gas emissions. ""The WWF is incredibly disappointed, sad and angry today,"" she said. ""The stakes are high for the climate for polar bears and coral reefs and we place the blame on, for this meeting, strongly on the shoulders of the United States, Japan and Canada, because they've tried to weaken this protocol too much."" The Climate Action Network, which represents 30 Australian environmental groups, says Australia has failed to show any leadership during the conference. The network's spokeswoman, Anna Reynolds, says the outcome is a disaster for the environment. ""The governments of Australia, the US, Japan and Canada have put in a persistent effort to weaken the Kyoto protocol,"" she said. ""Even though we walked away from the Kyoto protocol meeting three years ago with the right to increase our greenhouse gas emissions that wasn't good enough. ""We have been looking for more loopholes and weak rules and many nations of the world frankly said to those governments that is not good enough and that's why the talks have broken down."" -------------------------------------------------------------------- ---------------------------"

" The Prime Minister has refused to rule out using Federal Parliament to reveal the name of the Federal Labor frontbencher who has been named in a Queensland Criminal Justice Commission inquiry. The inquiry, into allegations of electoral rorting, has suppressed the man's name. John Howard has told Channel Nine he will seek advice about whether the frontbencher might be named in Parliament. He has indicated the Government will pursue the Federal Labor Party over Queensland Labor's problems, saying the Labor leader, Kim Beazley, carries some political responsibility for not using his authority to clean things up. ""People are alleging breaches of the law, you've had the Deputy Premier resign, you had somebody sent to jail [and] you've had Federal MPs named,"" Mr Howard said. ""Now everybody's entitled to due process and I'm not going to go overboard about this, but I am going to be emphatic about saying that any attempt by the Labor Party to say 'oh well we've all got the same problem' is quite wrong."" Meanwhile, Queensland Premier Peter Beattie admits the electoral rorts scandal engulfing his Government is driving people away from the Labor Party. Mr Beattie says as a result, around 50 members have resigned from the party in the past few days. He says he understands why they are upset, but hopes the imminent release of the first round of his electoral reforms will stem the tide. ""It's absolutely imperative that I maintain good faith with those people because they are the life-blood of the party, the life-blood of the movement,"" he said. ""I say to them it is absolutely imperative that they stay with me to ensure that this reform package which I will announce over the next few days is in fact implemented and supported."" ------------------------------------------------------------------------- -----------------------"

" Welfare groups say greater access needs to be given to Australia's detention centres to ensure illegal immigrants are not being subjected to human rights violations. Amnesty International says allegations of prostitution and sexual abuse at the Woomera Detention Centre in South Australia warrant a full investigation into Australia's detention policy. Amnesty wants Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock to follow through with an idea of segregating women and children from men at the centre, to avoid further human rights violations. Amnesty International's Alistair Gee says many of these problems could have been dealt with sooner, if welfare groups were able to talk to the refugees. ""One of the major issues is there is no access for us and many groups into these detention centres,"" he said. ""So this information is not coming out quickly enough and this has probably been going on for a very long time without any accountability, without the proper structures, so this information can be heard and things can be done about it."" ------------------------------------------------------------------------- -----------------------"

" The Prime Minister has intensified pressure on the banks to help flood-ravaged communities. Federal Cabinet discusses the Government's latest flood-aid package tomorrow. Mr Howard says it will be aimed at helping farmers plant another crop and assisting the small-businesses that are dependent on farmers. He will not reveal the size of the Government's aid package, but says it will need ""lots of money"". Mr Howard has told Channel Nine he expects banks to help too. ""The people deserve help from the rest of the Australia through the Government,"" he said. ""But separately from that, in relation to existing loan arrangements, I want the banks to be sympathetic, I want the banks to very positive and constructive. ""They do have an obligation because Australian banks are profitable."" Meanwhile, the flood situation in the north-west of New South Wales continues to improve and it appears isolation for the town of Wee Waa may end tomorrow. The massive bodies of floodwater are now slowly making their way down the Namoi Valley to Walgett. It is now hoped that the main road into Wee Waa will be flood free and re-opened sometime tomorrow. But for many property owners in the district, the isolation will continue for some days yet. Helicopters continue to deliver food and essential supplies to farming families and over the weekend have played a vital role in dropping in sandbags to property homesteads where levees holding the water back were beginning to fail. ------------------------------------------------------------------------- -----------------------"

" A Florida judge is to rule on Saturday whether hundreds of rejected overseas military ballots must be counted, a decision that could affect the outcome of the US presidential election. Republican candidate George W Bush, who had brought the suit before a Florida circuit court, suffered a legal blow on Friday when Judge Ralph Smith told his lawyers that he saw no evidence of wrongdoing by vote counters who rejected the ballots. Mr Smith was expected to announce his decision later on Saturday, after reviewing additional evidence presented by the Bush camp. In his written complaint filed on Wednesday, Mr Bush said the overseas military ballots clearly favored him, and that the Democrats were bent on rejecting those votes. The stakes are high as Mr Bush currently holds a thin lead over his Democratic rival Al Gore in Florida, the State that will determine who becomes the next US president. During a court hearing on Friday, Mr Bush campaign lawyer Fred Bartlit criticised what he called ""an automatic rejection of ballots based on an over-technical interpretation of the law"". Lawyers for the electoral boards of the 13 counties named in the motion argued that they had counted ballots in a fair and nonpartisan manner, rejecting only those that were not legally cast. Unofficial tallies show that 1,547 overseas absentee ballots, or 40 per cent of the total received in Florida, were declared invalid, notably because they were not dated, lacked a signature, or were not filed by registered voters. But since the motion was filed, vote counters in several counties had a second look at the rejected ballots, and decided to include them after all. Attorneys for Mr Bush had earlier made it clear they could contest the official results in Florida counties where military votes have been rejected. The last official results of the presidential election in Florida gave Bush a 930 vote-lead over Democrat Al Gore, but as manual recounts continued in two counties, unofficial figures showed that the lead narrowed to 631. In his motion, Mr Bush claimed the Democratic Party sent memos to its attorneys, in which it ""urged recipients to seek to invalidate as many overseas military ballots as possible and provided advice as to possible grounds for invalidating such ballots"". The motion is only one of the many cases that have tied up the November 7 US elections in legal wrangling, mainly over the legality of manual recounts of ballots. The ultimate decision is now in the hands of the US Supreme Court."

" Vote counters in Florida resumed work this morning in a race against an approaching deadline to complete a hand recount that could decide the next US president, but a decision by the US Supreme Court to intervene has practically ensured the unresolved election will stretch into December. On the 18th day of the increasingly acrimonious battle for the White House, attention is focused today on wrapping up hand recounting in two counties in a bid to beat a 0900 AEDT, Monday deadline. Lawyers for both sides also faced the task of preparing arguments to present to the nation's highest court over whether the state's final tally should include amended totals from hand recounts. Shortly after 8am Saturday (2400 AEDT), the Palm Beach County Canvassing Board began examining more than 8,000 questionable ballots still to be counted, having already reviewed 1,900. According to a county spokesman, board officials vowed to stay late today and resume as early Sunday as needed to beat the deadline. Indeed, counters clearly picked up the pace in the first hour today, tallying three to four ballots a minute from two ballots a minute at its slowest pace yesterday. ------------------------------------------------------------------------- ----------------------"

" Former Yugoslav president Slobodan Milosevic was re-elected as leader of his Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS) during a special party conference in Belgrade on Saturday, SPS officials said. ""Milosevic has been re-elected party president by a large majority, it's official,"" said Zivorad Igic, a high-ranking SPS official. Mr Milosevic won 2,047 votes, representing 86.5 per cent of the ballots cast by 2,368 SPS delegates who attended the conference at Belgrade's Sava Centre, another official said. Mr Milosevic was the only candidate for the position. The official said the exact result would not be officially released until after the end of the session. ""The conference will not wind up before midnight (local time),"" the official said, although he did not rule out they could drag on longer. Mr Milosevic founded the SPS 10 years ago. He plans to consolidate the party's position after its resounding defeat in Yugoslav federal elections in September which saw him lose his post as Yugoslav president. He also hopes to whip the SPS back into fighting form to contest the December 23 elections for the Serbian assembly, the real seat of power in the federation formed by Serbia and the tiny republic of Montenegro. ------------------------------------------------------------------------- -----------------------"

" Australia maintained its 25-year domination of the rugby league World Cup, beating New Zealand 40-12 in the final at Manchester today. Frank Endacott's Kiwi side battled a dearth of possession and the tough Australian defence, staying within a try of the Australians for 66 minutes. But winger Wendell Sailor's try 14 minutes from the end shut the door on New Zealand's hopes of winning a historic first World Cup in front of 44,329 people in only the Kiwis' second final. Instead, the Kangaroos will remain world champions for the next four years. The Australians led 6-0 at the break and went further ahead in the 44th minute when Kangaroos winger Mat Rogers dragged his opposite number Nigel Vagana into his own in-goal. From the next set of six, young second-rower Nathan Hindmarsh crossed after being put into a gap by his captain Brad Fittler. Rogers' conversion gave the Australians a 12-0 lead. But the Kiwis fought back six minutes later with a try to winger Lesley Vainikolo, making up for some first half fumbles, to bring the score closer at 12-6. The Australians moved further ahead in the 53rd minute when halfback Brett Kimmorley stepped through the tiring defence and, with only fullback Richie Barnett to beat, turned the ball inside to fullback Darren Lockyer to score. However, the Kiwis weren't ready to give up and they struck back with a try down the sideline to centre Tonie Carroll. But the game slipped from New Zealand's grasp with man-of-the-match Sailor's try in the 66th minute. The score blew out when Sailor bagged a double and tries were added by Fittler and his likely successor at five eighth, interchange back Trent Barrett. Rogers kicked six from seven attempts, while Paul kicked two from two."

" The Prime Minister has been taken on a tour of Tamworth, in the north-west of New South Wales, as part of his inspection of flood damage in the region. Mr Howard has been shown just how high floodwaters came in Tamworth earlier this week. Tamworth Mayor Warren Woodley took Mr Howard to the industrial area of Taminda, where flood waters entered a number of businesses. He was also shown the potential of more serious damage if the Peel River had crept higher than it did. A local lucerne farmer told the Prime Minister he had lost his entire crop. ""My whole farm went under, see we're lucerne producers so we've lost the lost,"" he said. Meanwhile, the Namoi River is expected to reach a flood peak this evening at the township of Pilliga, in the north-west of NSW. Workers from the State Emergency Service (SES) and other agencies are continuing to erect sandbag levees and deliver food to outlying homesteads. Upstream, the town of Wee Waa remains cut off, and will remain so for several days, although SES spokesman Angus Ferguson says the town is dry. ""Wee Waa is very fortunate that it has a large levee bank system right around the town which has prevented the water from entering the township,"" he said. ""There is a section where the road does not meet the town and SES flood rescue boats are being used there to ferry food and supplies across the flooded causeways into the town."" -------------------------------------------------------------------- ---------------------"

" The highest court in America is to consider the legality of recounts now underway in Florida, which may decide the next president of the United States. The US Supreme Court has announced that it will consider one application by lawyers for Republican George W Bush at an expedited hearing next Saturday. Republicans have argued in a petition before the court that the recounts now underway in Florida are unconstitutional, saying the selective nature of only recounting in a few counties conflicts with the enshrined principle of equal protection. Democrats had argued the Federal Court had no role in resolving the dispute, which it argued was purely a state matter. The appeal hearing will come nearly a week after a deadline set by the Florida Supreme Court for vote counts to be certified. Meanwhile, Democrat vice-presidential nominee Joe Lieberman has expressed concern at reports that Republican-led demonstrations caused the halt of a vital ballot recount in Florida. He says an electoral commissioner has told him the recount in Miami-Dade county would still be going on, but for the rowdy protest earlier this week. ""This is a time to honour the rule of law, not surrender to the rule of the mob, this is a time for patience and respect, not intimidation and violence,"" he said. -------------------------------------------------------------------- ---------------------"

" Continued fierce clashes in the Palestinian territories have left at least 10 people dead, including an Israeli officer. Israeli troops and Palestinian security forces in Gaza have been engaged in a day-long battle over territory which Israeli forces want to re-occupy. One Israeli soldier has been killed at Kahan Yunnis in Gaza, Palestinian casualties are unclear, but dozens are reported injured with Palestinian security forces attempting to hold a position against an Israeli announcement that the Army would advance about 100 metres into Palestinian territory. Earlier, an Israeli settler was shot dead while driving near the West Bank Jewish settlement of Ariel. Palestinian television is reporting in the past few hours that an Israeli bombardment near Nablus has killed two people and injured five more sheltering in a house that was struck by a shell. At least four other Palestinians were shot dead in fighting in the West Bank and Gaza with claims a member of the dissident Palestinian Democratic Front was assassinated by Israel in Nablus. Two more Palestinians died from wounds received overnight. -------------------------------------------------------------------- -------------------"

" European and American negotiators remain locked in talks at the climate change conference in The Hague as they struggle to salvage an agreement to curb global warming. The conference of government ministers from 160 nations has already gone past its scheduled finish time and organisers have set a deadline of just one more day to reach a compromise. The deadline is designed to put pressure on delegates to resolve their differences, but there is no sign of that happening yet. The European Union has dug its heels in, rejecting a push by America and Australia for maximum flexibility in the rules to cut greenhouse gas emissions. The Kyoto protocol three years ago set a target obliging industrialised countries to reduce emissions by 5 per cent by 2010. This conference was expected to ratify the agreement, but could end in failure. While nations remain deadlocked, environmentalists say they are struggling to have their voices heard. Anna Reynolds from Australia's Climate Action Network is among the activists outside the conference centre and says local police have brought a halt to any gathering of activists near the venue. She says it is frustrating, because delegates need to know the people of the world want their governments to finalise a deal and address global warming. ""While environment groups are really frustrated that this will lead to such small reductions, what we're looking for is the governments of the world to send a message that the era of fossil fuels is over, that this is the beginning of the end for fossil fuels,"" she said. -------------------------------------------------------------------- ---------------------"

" Western Australia's Wayne Smith and Greg Chalmers are the biggest movers early in the third round of the Australian Golf Open in Melbourne. Smith has picked up four shots after 16 holes today to be even-par while Chalmers is 5-under-par after 16 holes to be even with the card overall. Tournament leaders Aaron Baddeley and New Zealand's Greg Turner will tee off later this afternoon at 6-under-par, while Greg Norman and Englishman Nick Faldo are expected to draw big galleries as playing partners this afternoon."

" Comments by the Immigration Minister, Philip Ruddock, that he is considering a proposal to allow women and children to be released from immigration detention centres has drawn support from political rivals. Both the Federal Opposition and the Democrats are in favour of the idea. Concerns for the safety of women and children in the centres have been highlighted following allegations of occurrences of child sexual abuse. Mr Ruddock says although he is considering the idea, he will not guarantee its implementation. Shadow Minister for Immigration, Con Sciacca says Mr Ruddock should move on the issue as a matter of urgency. ""Well there's no doubt at all that it has merit and I would in fact urge him to take that course of action,"" he said. Democrats spokesman on immigration, Andrew Bartlett agrees. ""The Government has been slow but nonetheless any movement, any indication that there's even the potential for them to reconsider is something that the Democrats would welcome,"" he said. ------------------------------------------------------------------------- ----------------"

" The Queensland Premier says he has had preliminary discussions about who will become the next deputy leader of the Labor Party and who will fill the ministerial vacancy, both caused by the resignation of Jim Elder from the Government frontbench. Premier Peter Beattie says he will use the weekend to consider whether to call a special Labor caucus meeting to settle the two positions. ""Let me assure you that neither of these positions will be settled on a factional basis,"" he said. Mr Beattie has sent a letter to all his MPs, warning them that once the public hearings end at the Shepherdson Inquiry, he will personally move to expel from the Labor Party anyone who has not met what he calls his high standards. And Mr Beattie says he has not discussed the implications of the political fallout with federal leader Kim Beazley, who needs to snare key Queensland seats to win the next election. ------------------------------------------------------------------------- ----------------"

" A test case aimed at winning casual staff maternity and parental leave has taken its first steps towards a hearing. The Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) says 20 years ago maternity leave rights were granted to full-time employees. But for 27 per cent of the current workforce, which is made up of casual labour, those entitlements do not exist. Recently, fast food chain McDonald's became the first major corporation to freely offer its casual staff unpaid maternity and parental leave. The ACTU says it will use five federal awards as a vehicle for a test case to win some workers those rights. If successful the council says it will apply for the entitlement to be inserted into all federal awards. -------------------------------------------------------------------- --------------------"

" The ALP's former Queensland secretary and the chairman of a Parliamentary committee looking into electoral fraud have been implicated at the Shepherdson Inquiry. Mike Kaiser and Gary Fenlon can now be named. Inquiry head Tom Shepherdson today lifted suppression orders on the pair. They join Springwood MP Grant Musgrove to make it three MPs accused of being involved in electoral fraud in the 1990s. The allegations come from self-confessed electoral rorter Warwick Powell. Lawyers for Mr Kaiser and Mr Fenlon today questioned his memory and honesty, accusing him of lying and making up evidence. Mr Powell denied it. The lawyers say their clients will vigorously defend the claims. Mr Powell will be recalled as a witness and Commissioner Shepherdson warned him against taking any trips away from Brisbane."

" Workplace Relations Minister Peter Reith has denied Opposition claims that he misled Parliament over repayments for telephone calls made by his son on his taxpayer-funded Telecard. Finance Department officials have told the Senate estimates committee that the department never endorsed the figure of $950 Mr Reith had originally calculated as the liability incurred by his son. The committee also heard Mr Reith had not been shown all of his Telecard accounts when he made the calculation. The Minister has since repaid the full $50,000 charged on the card. Mr Reith said he had never claimed the $950 was a precise calculation of his son's phone calls. ""When I paid them the $950, I said 'well we will obviously need to sit down and be more exact than what I've been able to be,"" he said. ""Now that conversation never transpired because it was overtaken by events and the final payment of the full amount."""

" The well-known Australian broadcaster Paul Lyneham has died today, aged 55. Paul Lyneham was best known to ABC audiences as the political correspondent for the <i>7:30 Report</i>. He joined the Nine Network five years ago, making his last appearance in April this year when he revealed he had been diagnosed with cancer. A statement from Channel Nine has paid tribute to Mr Lyneham, describing him as a tough journalist who could ask the bluntest question without making enemies. Paul Lyneham is survived by his wife, author Dorothy Horsfield, and his three children."

" Australia continues to dominate the first Test against the West Indies after two days of the match in Brisbane. The West Indies are 2 for 25 at stumps in their second innings, still trailing Australia by 225. Campbell survived just two balls to be out for a duck while Lara made just 5. Australia was dismissed for 332 today, with Brett Lee top-scoring with 62 not out, Michael Slater made 54 and Adam Gilchrist 48. In domestic cricket, Victoria is in a powerful position after two days of the four day match against South Australia at the MCG. At stumps, Victoria was two for 138 in its second innings, an overall lead of 273. South Australia was dismissed earlier in the day for 96."

" Defending champion Aaron Baddeley and New Zealand's Greg Turner are the clubhouse leaders in the second round of the Australian Open golf tournament in Melbourne. They are on 6-under, two strokes ahead of Scott Laycock, while Greg Norman, Peter O'Malley, Mike Harwood and Robert Allenby are in the clubhouse on 3-under."

" Florida's Supreme Court has denied Vice President Al Gore's appeal against the stopping of hand recounts in the county of Miami-Dade. Lawyers representing Mr Gore had filed a petition seeking an order to force the county to resume its recount. Miami-Dade had earlier decided it could not complete a recount in time to meet a deadline for the certification of votes. Florida's Supreme Court spokesman Craig Waters made the announcement today. ""The writ is denied without prejudice to any party raising any issue presented in the writ in any future proceeding,"" he read. ""No motion for rehearing will be allowed, it is signed unanimously by all seven justices."" Meanwhile, lawyers representing Republican candidate George W Bush have petitioned the nation's highest legal body, the US Supreme Court, seeking to have all manual recounts stopped. They are arguing that the Florida Supreme Court ruling which allows manual recounting to be included in the final election vote tally is in breach of the constitution. -------------------------------------"

" The Queensland Premier has conceded that circumstances beyond his control could force him to call an early state election. Peter Beattie has arrived back in Brisbane after abandoning an overseas trade trip. Despite three State Labor MPs being implicated in electoral fraud this week, Mr Beattie says he is not panicking. ""Anyone who has rorted has got more than Tom Shepherdson to fear, they've got me to fear,"" he said. He will read inquiry transcripts this morning but warns he is ready to throw people out of the Labor Party, although he still does not know how many will suffer that fate. And Mr Beattie concedes there are a couple of scenarios regarding the timing of an election, which is due by mid-next year. ""My intention is to go to May, now whether that remains possible or not depends on a range of issues and a range of circumstances some of which I will not control,"" he said. Mr Beattie also has someone in mind for Deputy Premier, although the Labor caucus will have to meet to ratify the appointment. ------------------------------"

" A top level meeting today will explore new levels of relief for the flood-stricken north of the New South Wales. The New South Wales Premier, Bob Carr, will meet farming groups, banks and the Deputy Prime Minister, John Anderson, to discuss what arrangements can be put in place. The meeting will come as the massive sea of floodwater continues to move down the Namoi Valley towards Wee Waa. Floodwaters at Narrabri have begun to drop after reaching a peak yesterday below the expected levels. The damages bill in the shire is expected to be millions of dollars. The local council only recently finished repair work worth $10 million on roads which had been badly damaged by the last major flood two years ago. At Wee Waa, the eight metre levee which protects the town is expected to cope with today's floodpeak. --------------------------------"

" A meeting of health ministers in Sydney today will consider whether to adopt a proposed new set of food labelling standards. The nine Australian ministers and New Zealand's Health Minister will discuss a code prepared by the Australia-New Zealand Food Authority over the last six years. After lengthy consultation and debate between scientists, consumer groups and the food and beverage industries, two key issues remain outstanding: <ul> <li>The industry opposes the proposed new mandatory nutritional information labels, claiming a compulsory system could cost producers up to $400 million a year. <li>The industry is also opposed to compulsory percentage labelling, which would require the amount of a key ingredient, such as fruit in jam, to be disclosed. </ul> ----------------------------------"

" Israel's Deputy Defence Minister Ephraim Sneh has held talks with a senior Palestinian official in the Gaza Strip for the first time since violence broke out nearly two months ago. Officials say Mr Sneh's one hour meeting with Tayeb Abdel Rahim, the secretary-general of the Palestinian Authority, focussed on how to implement the Sharm el-Sheikh accord as soon as possible. An agreement to take steps to end the violence was reached in the Egyptian sea resort town last month but fighting continued. In another development, the United Nations special envoy, Terje Roed-Larsen, has held talks with Yasser Arafat, to discuss the hardships and difficulties faced by the Palestinian people. ""The situation is increasingly desperate and, I would like to add, completely counterproductive to efforts to cool the situation down,"" he said. There is an absolutely urgent need for medicine, medical supplies and ambulances. There's also a need for gas, food, fuel, shelter and clothing. ""I'd like to put it this way living conditions are falling like lead."" ------------------------------------"

" The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) says businesses are not equipped to deal with a court ruling that allows drug addicted employees to take them to court. A landmark ruling by the Federal Court means employees can now use the Federal Disability Discrimination Act against employers. The court ruled drug dependency is a legally recognised disability. The case was brought by a man on a methadone program who was expelled from an ex-services club in NSW. The head of the chamber, Mark Paterson, says the decision is another example of employers having to take responsibility for society's problems. ""No-one's suggesting that people ought not be treated fairly in the workplace,"" he said. ""The challenge is for individual employers to be able to deal with the behavioural changes and mood swings and impact on other employees and customers that drug dependence and substance abuse can have."" ""All of the inadequacies that might flow from not being able to handle that situation could place employer at risk and that's not reasonable."" --------------------------------------"

" The Sydney Opera House has won a copyright case against an alleged cyber squatter. The United Nation's copyright protection agency has ruled that the famous Australian landmark has the right to its own domain name. In May, 1999, a Sydney based web and card technology company, called Trillings, registered the domain name, Sydney Opera House.com. The company argued that the Sydney Opera House was a generic symbol reflecting the cultural heritage of Sydney and Australia, much the same way as the Eiffel Tower, Statue of Liberty and the Great Wall of China do for their respective countries. But the UN's copyright protection agency, acting for the Geneva based World Intellectual Property Organisation, has ordered that the name be transferred to the Sydney Opera House Trust. There is only one Sydney Opera House, the arbitrator said, and the Trust is the registered owner of the trade mark. Four million people visit the Opera House every year and merchandising bearing the trade mark generates over $1 million a year. ---------------------"

" Trade on global financial markets has been very subdued, with the United States marking Thanksgiving Day. The Australian dollar has shown some signs of resilience in the face of a renewed slide in the European single currency. The euro has slipped back below 84 US cents. There had been some conjecture, central banks might have taken advantage of the US holiday to intervene in the thinner market to support the euro but that has not happened. There have been further warnings the euro could head even lower. The Australian dollar, meanwhile, has managed to hold its ground above 52 cents for most of the night, after the previous night's surge. That earlier jump is now being attributed to the National Australia Bank's sale of its Michigan National Corporation in the United States for $5.3 billion. In the latest offshare session, the currency has traded in a narrow range of about one-third of a cent. Around 8:15am AEDT, it was sitting at 52.17 US cents. That is down about one-eighth of a cent on yesterday's local close. On the cross-rates, it is at 0.6225 euros; 57.54 Japanese yen; 37.30 pence Sterling; and against the New Zealand dollar, it is at 1.303. In Britain, share prices have partially recovered after the previous day's big falls, thanks to firmer drug and telecom stocks. London's FT-100 index has finished 66 points up at 6,287. Yesterday, Tokyo was closed for a national holiday but other Asian markets suffered after yesterday's slump in New York on the Nasdaq exchange, where high-tech share prices finished more than 4 per cent lower. In Hong Kong yesterday, the Hang Seng was down 1.4 per cent. In Australia, the market moved only slightly lower overall. The National Australia Bank enjoyed strong support with its sale of Michigan National to ABN Amro yielding a profit of $2.1 billion. Woodside also finished ahead on renewed takeover speculation. But the All Ordinaries index ended the day 4 points lower at 3,230. To overnight trade on the Sydney Futures exchange, which has closed early due to the US Thanksgiving holiday. The Share Price Index contract has finished 3 points up on yesterday's day settlement at 3,304. The ten-year bond contract is down half a point at 94.13, with the implied yield rising to 5.87 per cent. The gold price has closed in London after a quiet session at $US265.75 an ounce. ------------------------"

" The Federal Government's latest claims that mining poses no risk to Kakadu National Park's world heritage values have been rejected by traditional owners of the Jabiluka mine site. The United Nations World Heritage Commitee will meet next week to consider the impact of uranium mining on Kakadu. The Environment Minister, Robert Hill, has seized on an independent scientific report which says the proposed Jabiluka mine does not threaten the world heritage values of Kakadu. He says the report to be presented to the UN Committee is an overwhelmingly positive endorsement of the work done to protect Kakadu. The Gundjehmi Aboriginal Corporation's Jacqui Katona has accused Senator Hill of trying to pre-empt the outcome of next week's meeting. She says traditional owners will tell the committee the Government has done very little to protect the cultural values of Kakadu. ""The Australian Government has not negotiated with Aboriginal people about the protection of cultural heritage, they have rejected every suggestion that we have made and they have closed the doors on any consultations,"" she said. -----------------------"

" A first half onslaught has led Australia to a comprehensive 73-33 win over South Africa in the first tri-nations netball Test in Cape Town. The world champions turned a tentative opening few minutes into a one-sided mismatch for the hapless South Africans in the first two quarters. Tenacious through-court defence by the Australians enabled them to keep a stranglehold on play. The in-circle defensive play of captain Kathryn Harby and Liz Ellis was a feature, the duo proving almost impenetrable for the struggling South African shooters. South Africa wilted under the relentless pressure, creating a high turnover rate and an avalanche of goals for Australian shooters Sharelle McMahon and Catherine Cox. Australia had the luxury of using all 12 of its team members after the strongest lineup had laid the winning foundation. It strolled to a 39-14 halftime lead but the hosts made slight inroads in the second half as the sting went out of the rearranged Australian lineup. South Africa regained some respectability after losing the second half by five goals but earlier damage inflicted by Australia gave them no chance of recovery. Megan Anderson and Alex Hodge made their international debut for Australia in the second half of the match. ----------------------"

" There have been more legal moves today involving the protracted count of votes in the United States presidential election. It means that two weeks after the election, the world's most influential democracy is still no closer to knowing whether the Democrats' Al Gore or the Republicans' George W Bush will be the next president. Escalating their fight to stop the recounts of votes being included in the final tally for Florida, lawyers for Governor Bush have filed two motions with the US Supreme Court asking it to intervene in the election. Their argument -- the recount being carried out in just a few counties breaches the right of other voters to equal standing in the election. Meanwhile, Vice-President Gore has had a potentially important win in a Florida circuit court, with the judge ruling that the Palm Beach Canvassing Board must consider all ballots where it can reasonably infer voter intent, even if the card has not been punched through. That clears the way for thousands of disputed votes to be considered by the board. But, the Democrats are having to fight another county, Miami Dade, which today decided to discontinue a recount as it couldn't guarantee finalising the count in time for a court order deadline of early next week. -------------------------------------------------------------------- -------"

" At Narrabri, in north-western New South Wales, floodwaters have peaked at 7.7 metres, half-a-metre below the level expected. But water has entered about 20 homes and a further 200 are surrounded. The water did not reach the business area, where more than 15,000 sandbags had been used to protect shops. Wee Waa, further downstream, remains isolated, as do more than 300 farming families. Meanwhile, the number of New South Wales local government areas declared natural disaster zones has risen to 35. After visiting Narrabri this morning, Premier Bob Carr announced the Bogan, Cabonne, Moree and Wakool shires had been added to the list. Mr Carr reported to Parliament this afternoon that there was still scope for further extensions which would enable families and farms to apply for a range of Government assistance. The Premier congratulated State Emergency Service workers who had put down the 15,000 sandbags to help protect Narrabri. -------------------------------------------------------------------- -------"

" The Queensland Opposition has promised not to move a motion of no confidence in the Beattie Government, if it recalls Parliament early next month. Opposition leader Rob Borbidge claims former Deputy Premier Jim Elder and Labor backbencher Grant Musgrove should be expelled from the Labor Party as the Criminal Justice Commission's inquiry into electoral fraud allegations continues. He says even if that happens, Parliament should be recalled to pass laws to reform the electoral system. ""We'll retreat from the politics of attempting to bring the Government down if Mr Beattie is prepared to bring the Parliament back,"" he said. Meanwhile, Premier Peter Beattie says he has not decided on who will be the next Deputy Premier. ""I'm not anointing anybody, we are simply going to get on with the day-to-day business of government and every Minister will be told by me to do that,"" he said. ------------------------------------------------------------------------- --"

" The Immigration Minister, Philip Ruddock, has defended the detention of asylum seekers, following allegations of child sexual abuse at the Woomera Detention Centre in South Australia. The Federal Government has ordered an inquiry into the alleged rape of a 12-year-old boy. The inquiry was called after it was revealed evidence relating to the alleged rape was withheld from the SA Department of Family Services in March. Immigration minister Phillip Ruddock says the inquiry will find out who had the documents. Shadow Immigration minister, Duncan Kerr, says the terms of reference are inadequate. The Democrats say the issue of keeping children in detention should be examined. Mr Ruddock says Australia's borders must be protected. ""We'll ensure that the arrangements are appropriate for the best interests of the child."" -------------------------------------------------------------------- -------"

" Top seed Magnus Norman bounced back from the flu which has plagued him all week to crush Norway's Christian Ruud 6-1, 6-2 in the first round of the Stockholm Open. With his history of a heart valve problem - completely repaired several years ago by surgery - any attempt to play with a sore throat could have seriously compromised his health. ""It would have been potentialy life-threatening,"" Norman said. ""But I felt a lot better today. The sore throat is gone, but I still have a bad cold,"" the 24-year-old added. Earlier third-seed and reigning champion Thomas Enqvist crashed out, the Swede going down for the first time ever against compatriot Thomas Johansson who won 6-2, 6-2. This defeat means the second successive first round defeat in as many weeks for Enqvist, who crashed out of the Paris Masters after defeat to Italian veteran Gianluca Pozzi. Norman, meanwhile, was unswerving in his march to victory against Ruud, whom the Swede has now swept aside three times out of four meetings. ""It was an easy match, one of my best indoors of the year. It was good for my confidence for the Masters in Lisbon next week,"" Norman said. Norman is one of eight men who will play the season-ending Masters Cup next week in Portugal and is hoping to reverse a string of recent average indoor form and attempt to step up a gear for the year's finale. That task was given early momentum as he whipped through the first set against Ruud and held a 3-0 lead in the second before the Norwegian registered a game. Ruud finally held for 1-5 and again in the seventh game before Norman clinched victory. Also looking forward to the Lisbon finale was second seed Yevgeny Kafelnikov of Russia, who powered confidently into the quarter-finals, crushing Swedish teenager Jonas Froberg 6-4, 6-2. Kafelnikov, the reigning Olympic champion, joins Marat Safin, Gustavo Kuerten, Norman, Pete Sampras, Andre Agassi, Lleyton Hewitt and Alex Corretja in the Portugese showpiece. ""I need to pick up my game from here,"" said Kafelnikov. ""I want to get in as much high quality tennis as I can this week. ""This would be a good event to win heading into the Masters. I'll be giving 100 percent and trying to play as well as I can."" Also through to the last eight is Holland's Sjeng Schalken, the eighth-seed who won in Tokyo last month, who eventually dominated flamboyant Australian Andrew Ilie, coming back after dropping the first set to win 4-6, 6-4, 7-5. Romanian Adrian Voinea also caused an upset, knocking out fourth seed Juan Carlos Ferrero of Spain 6-7, 6-2, 6-3. Ferrero, who reached the semi-finals at the Paris Masters Series last week, will now be able to concentrate his efforts on the Davis Cup finals struggle with Australia in Barcelona on December 8-10. Another upset, though this time to injury, was fifth seed Australian Mark Philippoussis, who pulled out overnight with acute inflammation in his left knee. ------------------------------------------------------------------------- --"

" Telstra has completed investigations into its handling of the Peter Reith Telecard affair. The communications carrier told a Senate estimates committee it wanted to ensure it had followed the proper procedures in dealing with the $50,000 phone bill. John Stanhope says as far as he is aware, Telstra dealt with the Department of Finance and Administration, and had no direct contact with Mr Reith's office. ""We believe right throughout we've handled the Telecard issue that has attracted attention just like we would any other, and with total probity,"" he said. ------------------------------------------------------------------------- --"

" The National Australia Bank is planning to accelerate digital technology use and expand its United Kingdom operations following the $5 billion sale of one of its American operations. The National Australia Bank is selling Michigan National Corporation to the Dutch bank ABN Amro for $A 5.29 billion. The National says it will reap a net gain of $A2.1 billion dollars. Michigan National is the third biggest banking group in the state of Michigan, and the 68th largest in the US, with assets of $A16 billion. -------------------------------------------------------------------- ------- National Australia Bank shares have been as high as $A30 dollars at 10:00am, on the announcement of the sale."

" The Florida Supreme court has ruled manual vote recounts sought by United States Democratic presidential candidate Al Gore must be included in Florida's final vote tally. The court's verdict was unanimous, with recounting to continue until November 26. The decision reverses Katherine Harris's earlier decision not to include the recount in the official Florida tally. The seven judges of the court have been weighing a decision on whether manual vote recounts in Florida should be included in the state's official vote totals. The court spokesman Craig Waters announced, ""the court has consistently held that the right of people to cast their vote is a paramount concern overriding all others."" ""The court holds that amended certification from the county canvassing boards must be accepted by the election canvassing commission through 5:00pm on November 26,"" Mr Waters said. -------------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Entire towns and hundreds of property owners in north-west New South Wales are reliant on helicopters for food and essential supplies as floodwaters continue to move through the area. It has been estimated that more than 300 property owners are now stranded on their holdings and Wee Waa remains cut off by road. The main concern at this stage is Narrabri, where the floodwaters are expected to peak tomorrow at lunchtime. About 40 families in Narrabri have already been driven from their homes and many businesses will be flooded. SES executive officer Bob Allen says helicopters are now playing a vital role in the flood operations. ""They'll continue for at least the next three weeks, we've got over 300 properties in the Namoi Valley that are isolated and they're only modes of resupply is now by helicopter,"" he said. ""We have a fleet of helicopters that are being passed for those purposed plus for any emergency situations."""

" Meanwhile, the Australian Bankers Association (ABA) has pledged banks will do all they can to help victims of the New South Wales floods. Deputy Prime Minister John Anderson says banks should be lenient with people whose cashflow has been affected by the floods. The ABA's acting chief executive, Jeff Oughton, says customers should contact their banks as soon as possible if they are facing financial difficulties because of the floods. ""There is a range of offers, of options being offered to customers in difficulties, like deferring repayments on loans and restructuring loans and waiving fees and providing additional loan funds,"" he said. ""We're working with the Federal Government on putting together an assistance package. ""We're providing some information on the nature of the problems in the flood areas and as I understand it the minister's looking at putting together an assistance package."" -------------------------------------------------------------------- -----"

" The Prime Minister will unveil the Government's road funding package on Sunday. The package is a response to calls for fuel tax to be cut, something John Howard has refused to do. He says increasing road funding is a better investment than cutting the petrol excise. Mr Howard says he and the Deputy Prime Minister, John Anderson, will announce a significant roads package which gives a fair go to Australians in the cities and in the regions. -------------------------------------------------------------------------"

" It is claimed the inquiry into child sexual abuse allegations at the Woomera Detention Centre in South Australia does not have sufficient powers to find out what is happening at the centre. The Federal Government has announced it will undertake an inquiry into the claims. Australian Refugee Association director Kevin Listrum says they are relieved an official government inquiry is being launched. ""We hope it will bring it into the open and clarify procedures for the future as well, so that we don't have events happening such as what have been happening in the past,"" he said. However, Centacare director Dale West says while it is a step in the right direction a general inquiry is needed into the wider operation of the centre. ""There's an opportunity here to push this to an open inquiry and if its just focusing on the one issue then I think that opportunity may be lost,"" he said. Shadow Immigration Minister Duncan Kerr agrees, saying the terms of reference for Philip Flood to investigate are inadequate. ""He would not have any powers to compel the giving of evidence as I understand it and his terms of reference are quite narrow so while I welcome the inquiry I doubt that it's going to be wide enough,"" he said. -------------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australian surgeons have today released the first results of a groundbreaking heart surgery procedure. The Austin and Repatriation Medical Centre in Melbourne says the technique could eventually reduce the need for heart transplants. The centre's cardiac team has developed a technique where the heart is wrapped up in a tight polyester mesh to stop the heart muscle from stretching. An enlarged heart is a common symptom of congested heart failure and is often caused by a heart attack, scarring the muscle. Team leader Dr Jay Ramen says the early results of surgery on six patients is positive with the new procedure preventing progression of heart disease, improving symptoms and reducing the heart size. The technique will now go through a full randomised trial in several countries while a United States company has secured the rights to the procedure. -------------------------------------------------------------------- -----"

" Coles Myer is promising to retain its popular shareholder discount card, while flagging changes such as linking it to financial products. The shareholder discount card was last month suspended to new investors due to high administration costs and from next Monday the existing discount on tobacco products will be dropped for all shareholders. Chairman Stan Wallace has told the annual general meeting, Coles Myer remains committed to the card but it may in future cover a range of services including financial products. Mr Wallace declared himself well satisfied with the past year and a 9 per cent rise in net pre-abnormal profit to $484 million. This was despite a number of unprecedented factors that affected retail sales, including the new GST, five interest rate rises, Y2K, higher petrol prices, a falling dollar and lower consumer confidence. -------------------------------------------------------------------- -----"

" Dual Olympic gold medallist Susie O'Neill has officially announced her retirement from international swimming. After 35 national titles, eight Olympic medals and a 200 metres butterfly world record, O'Neill says early morning training sessions no longer have much appeal. O'Neill joked she may still turn up at a state swim meet just for fun but her days competing for Australia are over. Breaking the 200 metres butterfly world mark that has stood for 19 years was a career highlight and she wants to be remembered as a swimmer who always gave her best. ""Probably just as someone who was very consistent, I'm really proud of the fact that my times haven't varied that much over the last six years,"" she said. ""Consistency and I suppose someone who always gave her best and loved competing for Australia."" O'Neill says her only regret was finishing second in the 200 butterfly at the Sydney Games. -------------------------------------------------------------------- -----"

" The tide of global foreign exchange markets has turned against the Australian dollar again with the local currency falling to a record low. The new low-water mark has been reached in the New York trading session overnight. The dollar dropped to 50.85 US cents, a level never before seen in its 17 year history as a free-floating currency. The latest move down is rumoured on markets to have prompted the intervention of the Reserve Bank. Dealers this morning say the local dollar has again been the victim of a firming US dollar. Despite a record US trade deficit in September, it has made ground against the euro and yen, as investors see better prospects for the American economy than elsewhere around the globe. Around 7:50am AEDT, the Australian dollar was being quoted at around 51.10 US cents, still down almost one-quarter of a cent on the night. -------------------------------------------------------------------- -----------------------"

" The Indonesian Government has expressed anger at reports that pro-Jakarta East Timorese refugees have attacked Australia's ambassador, John McCarthy. The incident occurred while the ambassador was on a trip to the city of Makassar on the island of Sulawesi. Mr McCarthy was in Makassar to attend the opening of a new branch office of an Australian insurance company. As he walked from the office, a group of Indonesian journalists stopped Mr McCarthy for an interview. As Mr McCarthy answered questions, a group of about 20 East Timorese refugees still loyal to Jakarta, arrived and attempted to attack Mr McCarthy as well as some Australian businessmen. Kicks and punches were thrown but a spokesman for the Australian Embassy says no Australians were injured and the cause of the demonstration is not clear. -------------------------------------------------------------------- ----------------------"

" Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak has expressed regret at Egypt's decision to recall its ambassador from Tel Aviv. The diplomat is returning home for consultations in protest at Israel's massive air and sea strikes on Palestinian targets in Gaza. Mr Barak met Jewish settlers and soldiers in Gaza a day after a roadside bomb killed two Israelis and wounded nine others. Another settler convoy came under Palestinian fire in almost the same spot. The Army says one young man was shot in the head. Israeli soldiers killed three Palestinians in separate clashes in the West Bank and Gaza, the Army killed two other Palestinians it claims were planning terrorist attacks. The Arab world reacted angrily to Monday's strikes on Gaza, Egypt, Israel's oldest Arab peace partner says it is recalling its ambassador indefinitely. -------------------------------------------------------------------- ---------------------- But it stresses it is still committed to the peace process."

" There is concern a new wave of water could hit the northern New South Wales town of Gunnedah within days. The State Emergency Service (SES) says it is concerned about the risk of further flooding if rain now falling south of Gunnedah spreads into the headwaters of the Peel and Namoi River systems. The Namoi River reached its peak at Gunnedah overnight and is not expected to drop for some days. Around 30 people have now been evacuated, most are being housed in hotels and motels until they are able to return to their homes. Helicopter drops to isolated properties in the Gunnedah area will begin today. The SES's Colin Howath says the Namoi River reached its peak of close to nine metres faster than expected overnight ""We still had one or two people who tried to stick it out for as long as they could in their homes,"" he said. ""It got to the point we had to ship them out but other than that it was pretty routine, is the way of putting it."" Emergency Services Minister Bob Debus will tour the Namoi Valley today with visits to Gunnedah, Narrabri and Wee Waa, which is already isolated because of flooding resulting from heavy rain last week. -------------------------------------------------------------------- ---------------------"

" A second former nurse from the Woomera Detention Centre in South Australia has spoken out about her knowledge of an alleged cover-up of child sexual abuse at the centre. The latest claims follow allegations from a nurse yesterday, that medical records were altered as part of a cover-up. Both nurses have asked not to be named because they were contractually bound not to speak out. The second nurse says she was on duty when an abused boy was brought to the centre's medical unit. Immigration authorities say the incident was investigated in April but nothing was proved. ------------------------------------------------------------------------- -----------------"

" Australia's mandatory sentencing laws have been condemned yet again by a United Nations committee. The UN's Committee Against Torture says it is also concerned about the treatment of refugees and aspects of the prison system. It is the fourth committee this year to express concern about mandatory sentencing. It says mandatory minimum sentencing has had a discriminatory effect regarding the indigenous population, who are over-represented in statistics for the criminal justice system. This committee, like the others, has urged the Federal Government to ensure that all states and territories are at all times in compliance with the obligations under the convention. The Committee Against Torture has also expressed concern about the apparent lack of appropriate review mechanisms for ministerial decisions in respect to asylum seekers. The committee has recommended the implementation of a mechanism for independent review in these cases. It also says it is concerned about allegations of excessive use of force or intimidation by police and prison guards. -------------------------------------------------------------------- -----------------------"

" The Australian cricket board has confirmed it has been requested not to interview Mark Waugh until the International Cricket Committee's anti corruption unit has fully investigated the claims made in an Indian match fixing report. The report named claimed Waugh accepted $US20,000 to provide information for an Indian bookmaker. A meeting in London on December 4, involving Australia's anti- corruption investigator Greg Melick will determine whether Waugh will be interviewed about the allegations. Meanwhile the reunion dinner for the teams from the 1960 tied Test between Australia and the West Indies was held in Brisbane last night. West Indies fast bowling great Wes Hall has high hopes for the coming Test series , beginning in Brisbane tomorrow, despite the Windies poor lead up form. ""Australia is the strongest side in the world, there is no doubt about that but that doesn't mean they're impregnable,"" he said. ""We need to be competitive, they're only young boys and they will do well, you mark my words."" ------------------------------------------------------------------------- ------------------"

" Federal Cabinet has approved a $10 million package to help the flood stricken areas of New South Wales. A spokeswoman for the Deputy Prime Minister, John Anderson, says the assistance package will be on top of money which is provided from the national disaster fund. She says it is too early to say how much will be needed from the national disaster fund yet, because it is not known how much damage has been done. The spokeswoman says the $10 million will be to provide extra flexibility where money is needed that is not covered by the national disaster fund guidelines. Mr Anderson is now flying from Melbourne to Tamworth to inspect the flood damage. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The United States presidential candidates, Governor George Bush and Vice-President Al Gore, are waiting on a court ruling that could determine their fate. After more than two hours of testimony, the US Supreme Court adjourned to consider whether or not to compel Florida's Secretary of State to include manual recounts, which are now underway in three Florida counties in the final tally for the state. Democrats hope Vice-President Al Gore will collect enough extra ballots in such a process to overcome a lead of more than 900 votes for Governor Bush in figures as they stand. But as the legal battle goes on, there are also signs that the recounts are not yielding enough extra votes to change the result, even if supplementary figures are allowed. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Prime Minister, John Howard, has defended the Government's decision to put money into roads instead of freezing the fuel excise, saying if he has made the wrong decision he will suffer the consequences. Cabinet will decide today on how much extra the Government will spend on roads. The Prime Minister says the money will be given to local and rural roads instead of being spent on one big project. He says Sydney's Western Orbital road will be effectively separate from this roads package and says there is already enough money in the budget to cover that because the road would be a national highway. Mr Howard says there is little point cutting excise by one or two cents a litre and the Government cannot afford to substantially cut the excise. ""We have conscientiously looked at this and we do think it's a better investment to spend the money on road funding because good roads continue for a long time,"" he said. ""A minor adjustment in the price of petrol can disappear overnight."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Foreign Affairs Minister, Alexander Downer, is flagging a new approach to relations with Indonesia. The outgoing ambassador to Indonesia, John McCarthy, says the Timor crisis and Asia's financial woes have delayed a more positive relationship between the two nations. But he says it is now a realistic objective and Mr Downer says there is a need for change. ""We want to have a relationship if you like based on mutual respect, and not a relationship where the perception is of Australia fawning to Indonesia, or for that matter to any other country,"" Mr Downer said. ""I think that Australians generally felt that we had taken that approach in years gone by. ""Once we have a relationship built on mutual respect, we'll in the end be able to get on better with each other."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Prime Minister, John Howard, has promised the Government will change the Business Activity Statement (BAS) if businesses find it too difficult to deal with. The first reporting period for the goods and services tax for most businesses has just passed with some groups complaining the forms were too complex and the process too time consuming. Mr Howard says the Government will not be reluctant to simplify the system where it is needed. ""It doesn't represent any retreat from what we've done, it's just common sense,"" he said. ""If we can make the system work in a simpler fashion then we will do so and we will listen to people and I will, over the course of the next few weeks, be talking to a lot of representatives of small business groups and if there are ways we can simplify it then we'll do so."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" A French court has given California-based Internet giant Yahoo three months to block French users from online auction sites selling Nazi memorabilia. The legal action began seven months ago when several anti-racism groups sued Yahoo. The groups claimed the company was trivialising the Holocaust and breached France's strict anti-racism laws, which make it illegal to display or sell racist material. Yahoo will be fined $A25,135 fine for every day after the three-month deadline that it does not comply with the French court's order. The judgement has raised concerns about freedom of online expression and the technical ability of Yahoo to block French access to the sites. However, the anti-racism groups that sued Yahoo say the company is trying to avoid its moral responsibilities. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Australian women's basketball coach Tom Maher is being considered for the United States coaching job for the women's Washington Mystics side. Maher is seeking a two-year deal and is one of three candidates for the position. His wife and former Opals captain Robyn says a decision is expected next week. ""It would be a fantastic opportunity for him, it's a fantastic league you know he is a coach and coaches don't last forever so I guess he's got to take his opportunities when they come,"" she said. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The State Emergency Service has released figures showing more than a quarter of New South Wales is being affected by flooding. It says the area covered by floodwaters now totals more than 215 thousand square kilometres, with more than 300 people forced to leave their homes. The worst flooding is on the Namoi River and its tributaries in the State's north where bridges have been washed away, crops destroyed and many homes extensively damaged. At Gunnedah, the Namoi River is expected to peak at close to nine metres tonight, forcing more evacuations. -------------------------------------------------------------------- ----------------------"

" The United States is urging both Israel and the Palestinian Authority to end attacks following the heaviest Israeli bombardment of Palestinian targets during the past seven weeks of violence. Scores of Palestinians have been wounded in missile strikes on Gaza, Israeli retaliation for an earlier roadside bombing which killed two Jewish settlers and wounded 10, many of them children. Palestinians came under fire from the air and the sea as Israeli helicopters and gunboats unleashed a furious bombardment for two hours. Witnesses say at least 10 missiles struck the Gaza headquarters of the Palestinian Security Forces, also targeted the police academy and the offices of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat's Fatah faction. Israel's Prime Minister Ehud Barak says Fatah is responsible for the bus bombing. ""We find no way but to respond the same way that any other free world democracy would in our case,"" Mr Barak said. Three, little known, militant groups have claimed responsibility for the roadside blast. The Palestinian Authority has denied any involvement and says the latest Israeli strikes underscore the need for an international protection force. -------------------------------------------------------------------- ---------------------"

" Florida's highest court is expected tomorrow to hand down a decision which could decide who becomes the 43rd president of the United States. The seven judges, who stopped Florida's Secretary of State Katherine Harris from certifying results on the weekend, have finished hearing arguments and questioning counsel about whether she must include new figures coming out of handcounts in the final tally. Democrat Vice-President Al Gore's counsel David Boies argued the statutes allowed for amendments after the seven day deadline. ""What you have is a requirement of the counties to come forward with their returns seven days after the election,"" he said. ""Those returns will then be supplemented by manual recounts, by absentee ballots."" Counsel for Florida's Democrat Attorney-General argued the provisions for a recount made the seven day deadline a physical impossibility. However, secretary Harris' lawyer Joseph Glock disagreed. ""Justice I don't known that the recount couldn't be done in that period of time and of course we have no trial record to know whether the recount could be done in that time,"" he said. Mr Glock also argued that Secretary Harris was simply complying with statutory responsibilities. -------------------------------------------------------------------- -------------------"

" Japan's embattled Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori survived a no-confidence motion earlier today as rebels from his own party withdrew their threat to back it at the eleventh hour. The motion submitted on Monday by four opposition parties was rejected 237 to 190 in the powerful 480 seat lower house. Fifty-eight members abstained, including rebels in Mori's multi-faction Liberal Democratic Party, led by senior politician Koichi Kato, who withdrew his support for the motion after earlier meeting with senior ruling party colleagues. The voting was delayed for more than four hours amid an opposition boycott after an LDP lawmaker threw a cup of water at opposition members who were jeering his speech from the podium. ""We might have miscalculated several points,"" Mr Kato told a news conference after the vote to dislodge Mr Mori, whose public support has plunged amid a series of verbal gaffes and questions over his leadership. ""We did not have enough time or sufficient strategy,"" Mr Kato said. ""But we will never end this fight."" Ahead of the voting, Mr Kato had promised a dignified retreat. ""We are not in a position to secure a victory because the situation is very sensitive. Now, we would like to make a dignified withdrawal and regroup our forces,"" he said. If the motion had passed, Mr Mori would have been forced to either dissolve the lower house or step down with his entire cabinet within 10 days and call a general election. ------------------------------------------------------------------------- ---------------"

" At the global warming conference underway in The Hague, the United States has offered to reduce its demand that all its forests be counted against its target to reduce greenhouse gases. Negotiations at the climate conference had stalled over a demand by the United States, backed by Australia, that commitments pledged at Kyoto to reduce greenhouse gas emissions be offset by the effect that forests have in swallowing up carbon dioxide. The United States wants wall to wall discounting, including native and planted forests and even crop land - something that the European Union and others call a treaty loophole. Now the US has offered to discount the effect of forests by two thirds, accounting for nearly 20 per cent of its Kyoto commitment to reduce greenhouse emissions. -------------------------------------------------------------------- ---------------------"

" One of the world's busiest Internet cables, which links a number of countries including Australia, has been damaged. At this stage, it is not known what happened to the 38,000 kilometre cable which stretches between Australia, Asia and Europe More than 650, 000 customers across the country rely on the link, however re-routing by Telstra means they can still log on. Telstra spokesman Stuart Gray says the incident has put a strain on the system. ""Essentially what it does is loads up the rest of the system, opening it to 100 per cent capacity, instead of having spare capacity"" he said. ""We're also looking for additional capacity to restore the capacity we don't have so we can provide 100 per cent service."" -------------------------------------------------------------------- ---------------------"

" European Union nations have pledged to provide up to 100, 000 troops for a Rapid Reaction Force. The idea of a rapid reaction force was first raised after the Kosovo conflict and first agreed to by the 15 EU leaders at a summit in Helsinki last year. But it is only now that the promised hardware and personnel have become a reality. Europe has often been criticised by Washington for failing to be able to respond collectively to European crises. Now EU defence ministers say, that for the first time, Europe will be able to make an effective contribution to its own security. The force will not be a standing army, but will be able to be mobilised within 60 days. It will be used mostly for peacekeeping and peacemaking operations. The EU says the new force will operate independently from NATO but NATO will be still be the main guarantor of European territorial defence. -------------------------------------------------------------------- ---------------------"

" Racing trainer Clarry Conners has been fined and his horse Skalato stripped of its win in the Caulfield Guineas. Connections will appeal against the decision, which has cost them close to half a million dollars. Racing Victoria stewards last night found that Skalato was presented to race with a prohibited drug in its system. The penalty shocked the horse's trainer and owners, and left them all out of pocket. Conners was fined $12,000 and his son and stable foreman, Heath, $4,000, while the horse was disqualified from the race, costing the owners their share of the $480,000 winner's cheque. Their lawyer, Jeremy Rosenthal says they will challenge the decision. ""We anticipate, unless there's something extraordinary that comes across our way we'll be lodging an appeal within 48 hours,"" he said."

" The high cost of petrol prices is now the single most important concern to motorists, according to a national opinion poll released today. The poll, commissioned by Australian motoring clubs, shows 52 per cent of city drivers and 56 per cent in regional areas, nominated high prices as a major concern and wanted the Government to provide relief. This is an increase of 25 per cent since the last poll 12 months ago. According to the poll, only 19 per cent supported extra road funding, with 68 per cent insisting petrol taxes should be cut. Releasing the figures, ANOP Research Services' managing director Rod Cameron said the Government needs to take the issue seriously or risk losing voters. ""You wouldn't write off the chances of the Government at the next election by any means, however if it allows an issue like this to get any worse for it then its job will be made very, very difficult indeed,"" he said. Meanwhile, the truckies' blockade of oil terminals in Melbourne and Geelong has ended. The blockades were set up yesterday at Shell, Caltex and Mobil in a protest against rising fuel costs. The drivers are demanding cheaper fuel, increased freight rates and safer roads. The blockades caused panic buying of petrol with some service stations running out of supplies. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The New South Wales Government has declared the State's north-west region a natural disaster area following extensive flooding. Premier Bob Carr made the disaster declaration following a Cabinet meeting at Kempsey, as flood warnings remain current for several northern rivers. The declaration triggers the release of natural disaster relief funding for low-interest loans, emergency transport and fodder subsidies. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" There are up to 92,000 people using heroin each day in Australia. A study by the University of New South Wales has found up to 92,000 people were dependent heroin users in 1997-98, with a national estimate of 74,000 in 1997. The study, published in the <i>Medical Journal of Australia</i>, shows the number of dependent users has doubled in the past decade, up from an estimated 34,000 people in the period from 1984 to 1987. The latest figures equate to seven users per 1,000 people. The usage rates match those in the United Kingdom and European Union countries. The study shows 75 per cent of the estimated users in Australia live in either New South Wales or Victoria. -------------------------------------------------------------------- --------"

" Carlton Football Club president John Elliott has lost his driver's licence for two years after being convicted of a drink-driving charge. The Melbourne Magistrates Court was told Elliott was pulled over in June this year while driving along Royal Parade in Carlton. He took a preliminary breath test, but refused to take a further test when he was taken into a booze bus. Elliott's lawyer said the situation was a misunderstanding and a costly mistake on his client's behalf. He was disqualified from driving for two years and fined $500 plus costs. -------------------------------------------------------------------- ------"

" A new report has found discrimination and prejudice faced by indigenous Australian children is amongst the worst in the world. The study, by the Save the Children Alliance, examined the performance of 27 countries on issues such as health, education and juvenile justice. The author of the report and human rights lawyer, Andrew Johnson, says research shows the infant mortality rate among Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders is three-and-a-half times higher than that of the non-indigenous community. ""What we're finding in Australia is that the gap between the indigenous and the non-indigenous community is still quite wide,"" he said. ""For example, in education, measured in students at 15 in full-time education, for the indigenous community it's 73 per cent, for the non-indigenous community it's 91, so you're seeing a nearly 20 per cent difference in access to education for students in full-time education at 15."" -------------------------------------------------------------------- ----------"

" The former owner of the Dreamworld theme park in Queensland has been jailed for seven years after being convicted for fraud offences. Queensland property developer Bruce David Jenkins was convicted in the Victorian Supreme Court of 10 charges relating to a series of frauds against the former OST Friendly Society which was based in Victoria. It was alleged 43-year-old Jenkins used inflated valuations to obtain loans to buy properties, including the Dreamworld theme park in 1988 and 1989. Justice John Coldrey said Jenkins had plundered the funds of OST, which had harmed thousands of members. He said Jenkins used deceptive practices in pursuit of his desire to be a multi-millionaire. Jenkins will be eligible for parole in three-and-a-half years. -------------------------------------------------------------------- ------"

" The Eastern Pride National Soccer League club will send a protest to Soccer Australia after losing to Carlton last night 3-1. The match was delayed for 90 minutes because the goal posts at the Carlton ground were unsafe. Officials had to find tent pegs to hold the posts in position. Eastern Pride chief executive Peter Quirk says if a protest is successful competition points could be transferred from Carlton to his club. ""We'll be making a formal complaint to Soccer Australia today, I understand that is a possibility but certainly the least we would expect would be a replay,"" he said. -------------------------------------------------------------------- -------"

" Truck owner drivers are maintaining blockades at oil terminals in Melbourne and Geelong, which could lead to a shortage of fuel in Victoria later this week. The blockades were set up yesterday at Shell, Caltex and Mobil in a protest against rising fuel costs. A small blockade at Caltex in Spotswood ended at 3:00am AEDT today when the company called police after threatening legal action. Protest leader Jerry Brown Sarre says truckies will be back. ""We'll be back at Caltex with a lot more strength and we will target Caltex directly any way we can,"" he said. The blockades at Shell plants in Spotswood and Corio and at Mobil in Yarraville remain in place, with no movement into or out of the terminals. The Victorian Opposition leader, Dr Denis Napthine says the Government must act to protect Victorian motorists. ""Clearly these renegade truck drivers mustn't be allowed to cut off Victorian fuel supplies,"" he said. ""If necessary the Bracks Labor Government should use the Essential Services Act to keep petrol flowing across Victoria."" -------------------------------------------------------------------- ----------------------------"

" As flooding continues in the north-west of New South Wales, scores of homes have been evacuated, towns and villages are now isolated and the damages bill already runs into millions of dollars. Tamworth itself is today bracing itself for major flooding. Water is already inundating low-lying areas of the city and by early this afternoon it will be cut in half by the floodwaters. Upstream of Tamworth, the entire population of 50 in the village of Woolomin has been evacuated and water has entered virtually all homes. The 3,000 residents of the village of Calala, on the outskirts of Tamworth, are now isolated. Further downstream in the Namoi Valley, the cotton growing town of Wee Waa is isolated, while in the adjoining Gwydir Valley, 21 families have been moved from their homes in Ashford, which is also isolated. Emergency services say the damages bill for homes, agriculture, roads and other infrastructure already runs into tens of millions of dollars. Meanwhile, insurance assessors are starting to count the costs from almost four days of rain, that has caused extensive flood damage to property and crops in the north Queensland sugar district of Mackay. The damage bill is expected to top $1 million. Queensland Emergency Services Minister Stephen Robertson will inspect the drenched district today and is expected to enact natural disaster relief arrangements for people hit by floods. The water is starting to recede on many farms, but canegrowers still have not been able to gauge the full impact of the downpour that has dumped more than 430 millimetres of rain in Mackay since Friday. Unofficial totals have topped 600 millimetres. The sun is breaking through today, as residents start to mop up, but the weather bureau's Geoff Douel says more rain is on the way. -------------------------------------------------------------------- -----------------------------"

" Australia's Environment Minister, Senator Robert Hill, who is attending a climate change conference which is underway at The Hague, says he is now more optimistic that a treaty to combat global warming will be concluded. Earlier, Senator Hill had expressed concern that the US election impasse might hinder a treaty outcome. Australia, like the US, wants a treaty with maximum flexibility. Senator Hill says that after a meeting with key counterparts he is now more hopeful about a possible outcome. ""I was largely pessimistic because I couldn't see how the United States could seriously negotiate,"" he said. ""After talking to them today they say they have the mandate from President [Bill] Clinton, he's still in office and they can make commitments, so I'm a bit more optimistic in that regard. ""Where we are so far, however, is a text with some 1,300 sets of brackets, so you'd have to say that that's a massive task."" There is still a possibility the treaty might flounder altogether, but of greater concern to environmentalists is that it will be unenforceable. -------------------------------------------------------------------- -----------------------------"

" Israeli Army officials say military and economic action has helped reduce violence in the territories. Israel has closed the major commercial crossing into Gaza, a move one Palestinian Minister called 'political suffocation'. Palestinians in Gaza rely on imports of food, fuel and other goods, but with the Karni crossing closed there are fears that supplies already short could run out in a few days. The Israeli Government last week froze millions of dollars in tax revenue due to the Palestinian Authority. It says it will resume payments only when Palestinians abide by signed peace agreements. A Palestinian Minister says the economic squeeze could backfire on Israel by fueling resentment. But Israel's Army chief, Lieutenant General Shaul Mofaz, says military and economic blockades of the territories and targeted attacks on alleged Palestinian militia leaders are working. The army reports a three-quarter drop over the weekend in shooting attacks. -------------------------------------------------------------------- ---------------------------"

" Japan's Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori faces a no confidence vote tonight that is too close to call. If all of the factions of his own party who have pledged to cross the floor and vote against the Prime Minister tonight do so, Mr Mori will lose the vote and be forced to either step down as Japan's Prime Minister or call a new election. Mr Mori's party machine is exerting heavy pressure on members of those factions not to cross the floor, saying they will be expelled from the party and forced into an election they will not win. The challenger, former diplomat and economic reformer Koichi Kato, says that will not happen. He says expulsions and an election would be suicidal. -------------------------------------------------------------------- -----------------------------"

" Avalanches in Austria's Tyrol region have killed four people - three skiers and a mountain climber. The skiers died in the resort of Obergurgl, south-west of Innsbruck near the border with Italy. Witnesses said they had gone on to runs that had been closed because of avalanche warnings. A second snowslide struck later in Goelbner, a tiny resort also in the Tyrol region, killing the mountain climber. -------------------------------------------------------------------- -----------------------------"

" In Huddersfield, England, Australia has beaten Wales 46-22 in the second semi-final of the rugby league World Cup, but not before the Welsh gave the favourites a fright. Wales led 20-14 at half-time and it was not until the second half wore on that Australia showed why it is expected to win the tournament. Australia eventually scored nine tries, two each going to captain Brad Fittler and Darren Lockyer. Australia will play New Zealand in the final next weekend."

" The Palestinian leadership says it will mount an investigation into the killing of an Israeli soldier by Palestinian policemen in Gaza this weekend. The latest attack comes a day after Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat moved to restrict firing on Israelis. The Palestinian policeman entered the Jewish settlement of Kefar Darom in Gaza in the early hours of Saturday. He shot dead one Israeli soldier and injured two others before being killed himself. One soldier is still in a critical condition in hospital. Palestinians at the policeman's funeral say he wanted to avenge the killing of someone close to him. A day earlier, Mr Arafat called on his people to stop shooting at Israelis from Palestinian controlled areas. The Jewish settlement is controlled by Israel, but Palestinians say the land should be theirs. The Israeli Prime Minister says he wants actions not words from the Palestinian leader and the army says it reserves the right to retaliate."

" The inaugural Arab Women's Summit has opened in Cairo with an expression of support for the Palestinian uprising. The Arab World's first ladies gave a standing ovation to a speech praising Palestinian mothers for sacrificing their children. The summit brings together the wives of Arab leaders, their aim to discuss ways of improving Arab women's social and political standing. Suzanne Mubarak, the wife of the Egyptian President, called participants the female voice of protest railing against alleged Israeli injustices against Palestinian women and children. Arab League secretary general praised Palestinian mothers for sacrificing what is most dear to them in the name of Palestinian liberation."

" Republicans have stepped up their criticism of the on-going manual recounts in three Florida counties, which could decide the next president of the United States. With the deadline for absentee ballots now passed and George W Bush's lead stretched to more than 900 votes, Republicans are frustrated at an order preventing any certification of the result until the Florida Supreme Court can settle what votes should be included in the final tally. Today, aides to Governor Bush renewed their criticism of the conduct of hand counts now underway in the State, saying there was clear evidence ballots were being tampered with to favour Vice-President Al Gore. Republicans have also accused Democrat counties in Florida of seeking to disqualify large numbers of absentee ballots for Governor Bush. A spokesman for Mr Gore rejected the charges as raw, crass partisan politics."

" Evacuations are expected to begin at Gunnedah, west of Tamworth, as the Namoi River begins to flood following days of heavy rain. The State Emergency Service is expecting major flooding at Gunnedah within 24 hours and will begin moving people from low lying homes in the town this afternoon. At Tamworth, flood levels in the Peel River have dropped and are now making their way west to join flooded streams and rivers flowing into the Namoi River further west. The State Emergency Service has expressed concern at the latest weather forecasts for the region where severe storm activity is expected again today, with the potential to send another surge of water through the already saturated catchment. The major highways are still open but some have water over them, and many back roads are closed. Meanwhile, in Queensland, moderate to heavy rain has fallen in most regions over the past 24 hours. A torrential downpour in Charleville overnight has caused local flooding, with police keeping a close eye on nearby rivers which are starting to swell. The road is still closed at Ward River between Charleville and Quilpie and police say they will probably have to shut down the road to Augathella sometime this morning as well. Flood warnings are current for the Paroo, Warrego, Thompson, Barcoo, Macintyre and Connors rivers. The weather bureau's Geoff Doule says most districts have had their fair share of rain. ""Just to the south of Mackay around St Lawrence they've had in the order of 60 mm of rain and there has also been some very active thunderstorms in the Longreach, Charleville and even getting down to St.George,"" he said. ""Charleville's recorded a further 66 mm overnight. And the tropical areas they haven't really escaped either, there has been some pretty good falls up there as well."" The bureau's predicting the rain will continue until early in the week and may even worsen in area north of Mackay."

" Investigations are continuing to try to identify those responsible for lighting a series of fires at Port Hedland's Detention Centre in Western Australia's north-west. Five fires were lit in a number of the facility's buildings early yesterday. Immigration authorities say the fires may have been lit by people whose claims for refugee status have been rejected and who are about to be deported. Federal Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock says given their imminent removal from Australia, it is not surprising some may have chose to vent their anger and frustration by misbehaving. ""We have something like 1,100 people in detention at the moment and around about 400 or so are people who would have been the subject of claims that have been rejected and are at the point where we may well be taking steps to remove them from Australia and that makes them in management terms a more difficult cohort of people with which to deal,"" he said. Due to fire damage to some residential buildings, about 170 detainees spent the night in alternative accommodation last night. Five detention centre staff and two detainees were taken to Port Hedland's Regional Hospital suffering from smoke inhalation but were released a short time later."

" The Perth Wildcats have continued Townsville's poor weekend, winning their National Basketball League encounter 121-106 in Perth. After a sluggish start to the season the defending champions are showing they will be a force again this season, while for the previously undefeated Crocs the loss completes a winless weekend after Friday night's trip to Adelaide. Forward Scott Fisher, the top scorer with 25 points, says the team is finally starting to gel. ""I think with our bad pre-season and the fact that we weren't together its taken us this long to sort of get some sort of unification and we had that tonight,"" he said. The Sydney Kings, Brisbane and Wollongong also posted victories. The Kings defeated Melbourne in a high-scoring encounter, 129-119, with Shane Heal scoring 31 points. Brisbane posted their first win of the season, beating Cairns 97-88, while Wollongong were 14 points too good for Canberra, 102-88."

" The Northern Territory's Health Minister, Steve Dunham, has welcomed a move by Aboriginal communities in Central Australia to raise funding for their own health care. A week ago, more than $1 million was raised from an auction of Aboriginal paintings, to set up renal dialysis facilities at Kintore, near the Western Australian border. Mr Dunham says he is pleased to see it, but additional funding will be needed, and it is not assured from the Territory Government. ""We would wait to see what sort of submissions we received. We wouldn't be in the position of funding services for citizens of Western Australia,"" he said. ""We would want to see who the beneficiaries are, how it's to be run, what role the independent health service has to play and whether such a service is one viable and two safe."""

" The New South Wales Government is planning to crackdown on access to credit cards after it was revealed the average Australian owes nearly $5,500 on credit cards. The State Minister for Fair Trading, John Watkins, says the Government wants to ban banks from sending unsolicited credit cards to people. ""I'm very disturbed at the irresponsible offers of credit card companies that is causing hardship and misery for New South Wales consumers,"" he said. Mr Watkins says a state-wide phone-in survey will be launched today asking people to discuss their problems with using credit."

" The coming-of-age film, Looking for Alibrandi, has taken out the major prizes at the Australian Film Industry Awards last night. Looking for Alibrandi won five awards, including best film, best adapted screenplay, best editing, best supporting actress for Greta Scacchi and newcomer Pia Miranda was genuinely surprised by her best actress award. ""I really loved it cause it didn't patronise young people, it showed a young girl with inspiration and a dream and she had brains and that's really great,"" she said. Best Actor went to Eric Bana for his portrayal of the infamous hitman and author Mark Chopper Read. "" I just tried to be him. You know the job, a film like that is to be anyone other than your self,"" he said. ""I am so bloody relieved cause never in my life have I been favourite for anything."" Chopper also took out best director for Andrew Dominik and best supporting actor for Simon Lyndon. The modern musical, <i>Bootmen</i>, claimed the honours for best costume, best cinematography, best sound and best music score categories, while Russian Doll won best original screenplay. The ABC's Grass Roots was the big TV winner taking out five AFI's, including best episode in a drama series and best screenplay."

" The ABC has confirmed it commissioned a report to explore ways of pursuing commercial opportunities for the national broadcaster. The report was written Keith Bales, an Australian marketing consultant based in Britain. A front page story in today's <i>Australian</i> newspaper claims the ABC board has given managing director Jonathon Shier approval to pursue a co-branded credit card, and says the Commonwealth Bank has indicated an interest in becoming the partner bank. It also claims there are proposals to create a commercial web site with links to services like online banking, shopping and travel, and plans to license food like breakfast cereals and easter eggs based on Bananas in Pyjamas. A corporate spokesman refused to coment on anything contained in the report but says the the organisation is talking to a number of people in the new media environment and there is no player the ABC is not prepared to hold talks with."

" The killers of British toddler, James Bulger, could soon be released without the public's knowledge. Jon Venables and Robert Thompson, who were ten when they murdered the two-year-old in 1993, hope to win parole next year. The two boys are now in their late teens and Lord Chief Justice Lord Woolf has ruled that they have served the minimum term necessary of their life sentences. If they succeed in winning parole next year, then the police will issue them with new identities, including names, licences and birth certificates, and their whereabouts will be kept secret. Today, the High Court reserved judgement on their application to conceal the date of their release. The lawyer representing the Home Secretary told the court that no decision has yet been made on their date but in this particular case there may be reason to be more circumspect than usual."

" Republican George W Bush's hopes of a swift conclusion to the United States presidential battle in Florida have been dealt a blow. The Florida Supreme Court has ordered that no results be certified, until it has looked at the controversy surrounding the count. Republicans had been hoping that with the deadline for absentee ballots passing later today, Florida Secretary of State Katherine Harris would be able to move quickly to officially announce George W Bush's victory in the state, which now holds the key to winning the US presidency. But as hand counts continue in Broward and Palm Beach counties and with Miami-Dade County voting today to begin a manual recount the Supreme Court has intervened, saying the state result cannot be certified until it considers related issues on Tuesday. The Democrats want the court to compel Secretary Harris to include the results of manual recounts in those final figures, overturning her earlier declaration they would not be considered."

" Relatives of two French victims of mad cow disease have begun legal action against the British and French governments and the European Commission. The families of two French victims of new variant CJD, the human form of mad cow disease, have filed the first suit for compensation in a Paris civil court. The families accuse Britain of knowingly exporting possibliy contaminated material; and France and the European Commission of failing to take the threat of the disease seriously enough. The case comes just days after the French Government banned the sale of T-bone steaks and the use of all bonemeal and meat in animal feed. Last month, it was revealed that meat from an infected herd had been sold in three French supermarkets."

" Italy, Europe's largest consumer of French beef has now joined Spain and banned the sale of all French beef products. The Italian Agriculture Minister, Alfonso Peceraro Salio, says his country wil now join Spain and ban the importation of all French beef products. ""In one country, like France, they decided that the meet with bones are no good for French consumers, of course, it is no good for Italian consumers, it is very clear,"" he said. Greece and Germany say they are also considering a ban."

" The Federal Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations, Peter Reith, has unveiled a controversial discussion paper outlining proposals for a completely new Industrial Relations system. Mr Reith has told a Business Council of Australia seminar that there is a need for a simpler federal system based on certified workplace agreements. He says the current abitration and conciliation system is too costly. ""We have said in the discussion papers we're going to keep the commission, we're going to keep awards, the unions will have rights to collectively bargain,"" he said. But the New South Wales Attorney-General, Jeff Shaw, says the proposed national system would be frought with legal and political problems in federal-state relations. While Democrats Workplace Relations spokesman Senator Andrew Murray says he supports a federal system, he says it would have to ensure human rights are protected."

" Immigration officials and police are questioning a group of detainees at Western Australia's Port Hedland Detention Centre about a series of fires lit early this morning in the facility's buildings. Emergency services were called to the centre about 2:30am WST when the first fire was found in the reception area. After that blaze was extinguished, four other fires were lit in other areas of the complex. No-one was hurt in the fires. The immigration department's Phil Mayne says he understands that those responsible for starting the fires will be charged by police. ""Apparently the fires were lit by people whose protection visa applications were rejected by the Refugee Review Tribunal,"" he said. ""In other words, those people who had applied for asylum."""

" The film dramatising the life of hitman Mark ""Chopper"" Read leads the nominations going into tonight's annual Australian film and television awards - the AFI's, the Australian Film Industry. <i>Chopper</i> with Eric Bana in the lead role has 10 nominations, closely followed by the coming of age film <i>Looking for Alibrandi</i>with nine. Its star Pia Miranda is up for Best Actress, as are Julia Blake, Rachel Griffiths and Susie Porter for <i>Better Than Sex</i>. The ABC features strongly in the TV categories, with the local government drama <i>Grass Roots</i> receiving 13 nominations. <i>Seachange</i>, <i>Something in the Air</i> and <i>All Saints</i> round out the Best Drama nominations."

" Australia's top-ranked female tennis player, Jelena Dokic, has become a Yugoslav citizen, but she will keep playing for Australia for now. The 17-year-old has been travelling on an Australian passport for four years, after she and her family left their native Yugoslavia six years-ago. Dokic received a Yugoslav passport at a ceremony in Belgrade but under International Tennis Federation rules, she cannott compete for Yugoslavia for three years. Dokic vowed never to play for Australia again following an article in a tennis magazine that suggested her father needed psychological help to control his temper. Damir Dokic has been banned from the women's tour as a coach and a spectator. The sanctions came after he was thrown out of this year's Wimbledon and US Open tournaments following confrontations with authorities."

" Legal experts say the Florida Supreme Court ruling does not address the key issue of whether the hand counts, once tallied, will be included in the state's final vote count. Secretary of State Katherine Harris announced earlier she had already certified the vote count and ruled out including late recounts. Bush's campaign manager, Don Evans, has also reiterated the manual recount can never be accurate. ""The more these punch cards are handled the more errors we see,"" he said. ""Last night in Brawer County as these ballots were passed from hand to hand 78 pieces of chad were dislodged from the very ballots that were being counted. ""How can a manual recount be accurate when the ballots themselves are changing before our very eyes."" -------------------------------------------------------------------- --------------------"

" A Supreme Court judge has described the child sex crimes of former Labor MP Bill D'Arcy as unforgivable. D'Arcy, 61, has been sentenced to 14 years jail. Crown Prosecutor David Bullock submitted that D'Arcy should receive between 13 and 15 years for the 18 rape and indecent dealing offences he was found guilty of earlier this month. The charges stem from D'Arcy's time as a teacher in central western Queensland in the 1960s. The defence said the time period suggested by the prosecutor was too much, and instead recommended between eight and 11 years. Defence barrister Kelly Macgroarty said anything over 10 years would be crushing. In submissions from Mr Macgroarty, the court heard medical evidence that D'Arcy would die in jail in the next five years Justice Bob Douglas dismissed submissions about D'Arcy's heart condition, saying he would get the same treatment in jail as he would at home. He said D'Arcy had show a total lack of remorse and declined to make any recommendation for parole. In sentencing, Justice Bob Douglas said D'Arcy's crimes were arrogant and audacious in the extreme and that it was hard to imagine a worse case. D'Arcy spoke quietly to his family from the dock before being taken back to the cells. Outside the court, D'Arcy's solicitor, Terry O'Gorman, said his client would be appealing the sentence. ------------------------------------------------------------------------- ---------------"

" Telstra chairman Bob Mansfield has defended the company's struggling share price at the annual general meeting in Melbourne. T2 shareholders booked paper losses and the stock is trading below $7 compared to over $9 early last year. But Mr Mansfield has told the meeting that Telstra share prices are at the same level as six months ago, compared to United States telcos, which are down an average of 20 per cent. On service standards, the chairman quoted from the generally positive Besley report but omitted to say that rural service standards were criticised, prompting the Government to pledge there would be no further privatisation, until the problems were addressed. Shareholders are concerned the Federal Government, as the majority shareholder, will install the directors it wants at today's meeting. Shareholder ""Pat"" has these concerns. ""I do have concerns about the amounts paid to senior executive and board members whilst putting off staff,"" he said. ""The fact is that this not only affects the staff but it affects the service that we, the users, get. So that definitely concerns me."" -------------------------------------------------------------------- --------------------"

" The Deputy Prime Minister John Anderson says he does not believe farmers are whingers and he has warned farming leaders they should present a balanced view of what the Federal Government is doing for the sector. The National Farmers Federation is continuing its push for a freeze on the fuel excise, a case they say is supported by the projected budget surplus. But Mr Anderson says the campaign ignores the real cause of the high fuel prices. He says he is angry the Federation has not given the government credit for the gains made in the bush. ""Farmers are not whingers, I do not believe that and I fully support them in their difficult battle,"" he said. ""But they need to be careful that their farm leaders are not always looking as though it's just a handout and never 'thanks for the things that you've done'. ""And many of the things that we've done have been done because farm leaders have pushed them so hard, from tax reform through to economic management through to salinity packages."" ------------------------------------------------------------------------- ---------------"

" Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat has held out the hope of an end to the violence between his people and Israeli forces, after a new round of international diplomacy in the region. Mr Arafat was speaking after meeting the special American envoy Dennis Ross in Gaza as the BBC's Jeremy Cooke reports. The Palestinian leader said he still hoped there could be a peace agreement in the Middle East before President Clinton leaves office in the United States in January, acknowledging the fact that Mr Clinton is still deeply involved in the process. But the Palestinian leader's analysis is a sharp contrast of that of the Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak who has said he believes the conflict will continue. He has ruled out an immediate prospect of a peace summit saying there is no miracle solution to the current crisis. -------------------------------------------------------------------- --------------------"

" McCafferty's management has conceded a driver of the bus, which crashed near Marlborough in Central Queensland, could have been on a mobile phone during the time of the accident. The Greyhound bus, with 31 passengers on board, slid off the road and rolled down an embankment into two trees about 30 kilometres south of Marlborough. Spokesman for McCafferty's Holdings Peter Sawyer says drivers have mobile phones to report road conditions back to their base and the driver could have been doing exactly that. Mr Sawyer says the driver's actions prevented more serious injuries. ""This coach, which was a new coach, less than 12 months of service, was travelling south,"" he said. ""It came to a landslide, which had obviously been loosened by the rain, and at the same time the driver saw a semi-trailer approaching from the other direction so he had no option but to hit the rocks and the landslide and pull the coach to the left which was an extremely sound reaction."" ------------------------------------------------------------------------- ---------------"

" One of Australia's biggest non-bank lenders believes home loan interest rates have peaked and could begin falling early next year. The head of Aussie Home Loans, John Symond, says there is mounting evidence that world economies are slowing and may need to be stimulated within six months. ""My confidence is that there are signs the economy is slowing, inflation seems to be in check and looking abroad,"" he said. ""Even in the US, they're talking now that interest rates have peaked and the next move by the Federal Reserve may well be down, so I'm prepared to stick my chin out and predict that the next move in interest rates will be down."" -------------------------------------------------------------------- --------------------"

" In the United States, electoral officials in Palm Beach Florida have voted against starting a hand recount of votes until a court rules on the legality of the process. The canvassing board of the heavily Democratic county again deferred giving the green light to the recount sought by the Vice-President, until the state supreme court has ruled on whether it can ignore an order by Florida Secretary of State Katherine Harris prohibiting the recount. Also in Florida, Democrats were back in another court today, asking a district judge to compel Secretary Harris to reverse her ruling that no revised figures arising out of handcounts would be accepted. Meanwhile, the Republicans, who expect George W Bush to hold his lead in official figures when the deadline for absentee ballots is reached on Saturday, say they have decided against seeking a recount in another close race in Iowa. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Today's annual general meeting of Telstra has been clouded by shareholder disquiet, even before it begins. The Australian Shareholders Association is refusing to vote on the election of new directors, saying the Federal Government has already decided them. The group, representing small investors, says the Government has used its majority holding to install the four directors, all top business people, it wants. That would cut out other candidates, among them, a shareholder activist, a union leader, an Olympics coach and a schoolteacher. Association spokesman Stan Mather says no problem can be addressed by investors going along and voting, which he says highlights the need for full privatisation. ""There will be someone at the meeting, holding a proxy on behalf of the government, and any motions they want passed will be passed, regardless of what the other shareholders say,"" he said. Other issues likely to be raised include service standards, investment strategies and the weakening share price. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Fiji remains in a state of uncertainty following Wednesday's ruling by a High Court Judge that the 1997 pre-coup constitution is still in place. The judge ruled that former president Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara is still President and should appoint a Prime Minister as soon as possible. Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara is in New Zealand having a regular medical check up and is expected to return to Fiji at the weekend. The interim government says it is still in charge and that there will be an appeal against Judge Gates' ruling. The divisions within the High Court are stark. In his judgement, Judge Gates was highly critical of the Chief Justice and two other Judges whom he said could be criticised for aiding and abetting the abrogation of the Constitution and acting with what he called indecent haste to see it gone. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" A British woman who gave birth to triplets after treatment at fertility clinic has won damages in the High Court. Patricia Thompson was implanted with three embryos instead of two. The Sheffield Fertility Clinic has been found guilty of a breach of contract with Patricia Thompson and her husband Peter, after implanting three embryos not two, all of which were carried successfully to term. The couple have had a subsequent and unexpected natural birth, since the birth of the triplets. They sued for the amount equivalent to the cost of bringing up the third baby. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Economists are dismissing figures that suggest stronger-than-expected wages growth and a surge in imports. The Bureau of Statistics has revised up its original estimate of average weekly earnings, to a rise of 1.9 per cent in the September quarter, the highest quarterly increase in 10 years. Separately, imports leapt by more than $1 billion, or 11 per cent, to $10.5 billion in October, largely due to a surge in fuel imports. Such information could raise fears of rising inflation and interest rates, but many economists have played down their significance. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Six people have been taken to Rockhampton hospital after a Greyhound bus crashed on the Bruce Highway north of Kunawarara in central Queensland. The bus was carrying 31 passengers. Police say they don not know what caused the accident which happened at about 10pm AEST last night. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Qantas has defended its share price at the airline's annual general meeting, saying the sharemarket has overreacted to the entry of two new players. Chairwoman Margaret Jackson says the drop of roughly $1, down from a $5 high, will settle down as Qantas is able to hold its own against Impulse Airlines and Virgin Blue. Ms Jackson says Qantas will protect its market position through discount fares. Qantas posted a record after-tax profit of $518 million in the last financial year, a 23 per cent increase."

" The leaders of the Asia Pacific are debating the details of a new round of world trade liberalisation. Australian Prime Minister John Howard is criticising the plans of Malaysia and the United States. The APEC leaders, all wearing blue silk shirts, are spending a day in talks under the chairmanship of the Sultan of Brunei. Mr Howard says Malaysia's call for agenda changes in the World Trade Organisation risks losing focus and momentum. But Mr Howard is also attacking the United States' effort to introduce environmental and labour issues into a new trade round. ""If you want to enlist the aid of developing countries, you don't intrude those issues into a trade forum, it's a mistake,"" he said. ""Now if that puts me at odds, on that aspect of things, with the United States, then so be it."""

" The United States and four other APEC countries have reached a trans-Pacific open-skies agreement, lifting all restrictions on the operation of airlines from within each other's territory. The agreement was completed by the United States, Brunei, Chile, New Zealand and Singapore during the APEC meeting in Brunei. Open-skies removes restrictions on where carriers fly, the number of flights they operate, and the prices they charge."

" A large earthquake has shaken parts of northern Papua New Guinea. Aftershocks and tidal surges are being reported around parts of east New Britain province. A tsunami alert has been declared in at least one island. The earthquake hit between East New Britain and New Ireland this afternoon. Residents in Rabaul say the ground shook strongly for 40 or 50 seconds and aftershocks continued for two hours. Tidal surges have been reported in low lying coastal areas. A US seismology station placed the quake about 30 kilometres under the seabed between Rabaul and New Ireland. The preliminary magnitude is being put at eight on the Richter scale. There are no reports of injuries so far but there has been some property damage in Rabaul town. Electricity supplies had been cut in Rabaul when powerlines came down during the earthquake. In 1998 a tsunami in northern PNG killed around 2,000 people."

" Champion jockey, Jim Cassidy, has been cleared by stewards of all charges relating to his Melbourne Cup ride on Diatribe. The connections of Diatribe had complained Cassidy deliberately ignored riding instructions given before the race."

" Falls in NewsCorporation and a spate of earnings downgrades have pulled the Australian sharemarket lower today. The All Ordinaries index fell 16 points to 3,251. Overnight the Dow Jones added 27 points to 10,708, while the Nasdaq also rose 27 to 3,165. At home, NewsCorp dropped 95 cents to $17.65, the preferred stock down 70 cents to $15.90. Cable and Wireless Optus jumped 24 cents to $4.41 after yesterday's news that the $30 billion telco is up for sale. But Qantas slumped 20 cents to $3.30 after shareholders were told fuel costs would keep first-half operating profit in line with last year's. Macquarie Bank showed it underperformed in its sector, unveiling a half-year net profit of $107 million, up 18 per cent, but below expectations of a $115 million profit. The stock plunged $1.40, or 4 per cent, to $28.50. Building materials group James Hardie also announced a disappointing interim result, warning its full-year profit would fall below last year's. The stock dropped 21 cents to $3.50. The Australian dollar is buying 52.13 US cents, up marginally from this morning. It is worth 36.57 sterling, 1.187 marks, $NZ1.303 and at 48.6 on the trade weighted index. Spot gold is at $US265.65 an ounce."

" The father of Australian tennis star Jelena Dokic says he does not want his daughter to represent Australia in the Federation Cup. Dokic is in Belgrade and wants to become a resident, according to newspaper reports there. Damir Dokic has told Channel Ten he is unhappy with how sections of the media have treated him and his daughter should not play for Australia. Earlier today, Tennis Australia President Geoff Pollard wanted to set up a face-to-face meeting with Dokic as soon as possible to clarify her playing future in Australia."

" The Federal Government is expecting stronger economic growth and a bigger surplus than forecast at Budget time. Higher world growth and the lower Australian dollar are the driving factors behind a higher than expected growth rate at 4 per cent for this financial year, but it is expected to moderate in the years ahead as factors like higher interest rates take hold. The budget surplus is up, as well, to $4.3 billion as the result of a higher tax take, particularly from company tax. Employment is expected to be stronger, with unemployment slightly down, averaging 6.25 per cent. But amongst the good news is the prediction inflation will be higher than originally forecast with the headline rate averaging 6 per cent and when the effects of the GST are taken out, averaging 3.25 per cent. The Federal Treasurer, Peter Costello, is optimistic about the outlook for unemployment. ""I would expect in the next financial year, if we keep the current growth rates continuing, you will see an unemployment rate with a five in front of it, which would be the lowest unemployment rate in 25 years,"" he said. ------------------------------------------------------------------------- ----------------------"

" Florida's chief electoral official has announced Republican George Bush has won a re-count in that state by 300 votes, excluding only overseas ballots which must be in by the weekend. But the legal wrangling is continuing. A week after the United States election ended in deadlock, Florida Secretary of State Katherine Harris announced the results with Governor George Bush, 2,910,492, and Vice-President Al Gore, 2,910,192. But the Democrats continue to push for hand recounts in several counties and today a court declared any amended results should be considered by officials. However, Ms Harris says she wants the three counties preparing to hold such recounts to put their case justifying such a process by tomorrow or the existing figures will stand. -------------------------------------------------------------------- ---------------------------"

" A judge in Fiji has maintained the validity of the island nation's constitution and democratically elected Parliament. High Court Justice Tony Gates has ruled that the Fijian Army abrogated Fiji's constitution in July this year, two months after George Speight's coup. His ruling also states that all elected MPs should be recalled to Parliament. The military-appointed interim government has consequently been put under legal pressure to resign and to uphold the sanctity of the constitution. Although the army is reportedly going to appeal the decision, the judgement places the validity of previous interim government actions in question. -------------------------------------------------------------------- ---------------------------"

" There have been more job losses in Melbourne's manufacturing sector, this time 500 workers are set to lose their jobs at South Pacific Tyres. Workers at South Pacific Tyres have been told the company plans to scale down its truck tyre factory in Somerton, north of Melbourne. Workers were told this morning that its truck tyre division was no longer economically viable and that 500 jobs will have to go. Charlie Donnelly from the National Union of Workers says the announcement is a major blow. ""Our delegates here today are absolutely devastated, for 500 of our members to be losing their jobs, a couple of days before Christmas is absolutely devastating,"" he said. It follows yesterday's announcement by Plastics company Qenos to shed 120 jobs from its Altona factory. The union says the manufacturing industry is in crisis and has called on the Victorian Government for urgent assistance. -------------------------------------------------------------------- ---------------------------"

" The Federal Government is coming under added pressure to reduce penalties for people who break social security laws. More than 20 charities, church, welfare agencies and community and consumer groups have signed a joint statement demanding the Federal Government overhaul the current system of social security penalties. They say the current system is neither fair nor comprehensible and that penalties are too harsh compared to the infringements. Last week, the Australian Council of Social Service released research showing a 250 per cent increase in penalties over the last three years. But the Federal Government insists it has never unfairly persecuted people receiving welfare benefits. ------------------------------------------------------------------------- ----------------------"

" The Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) has defended the integrity of the electoral system it has overseen for the last 16 years. Commissioner Andy Becker has told a Federal Parliament inquiry the AEC has detected only 71 cases of illegal enrolments to vote in the last decade, and each case was investigated. Mr Becker says recent media reports suggesting the electoral system is being widely rorted are not supported by the facts. ""The enrolment fraud cases investigated by the AEC, the AFP and the Director of Public Prosecutions over the past decade and already reported to this committee do not reveal any underlying organised conspiracy against Federal elections,"" he said. ""The AEC is willing to assert once again that there is no evidence that any Federal election since the establishment of the AEC in 1984 has been subjected to any widespread and organised conspiracy that would have affected the results of those federal elections."" ------------------------------------------------------------------------- ----------------------"

" Pat Rafter and Lleyton Hewitt have been named in Australia's Davis Cup tennis squad for the final against Spain next month. The squad of nine also includes Mark Woodforde and Sandon Stolle, who are likely to play doubles in the tie. Australian captain John Newcombe says Hewitt will be fit for the final, despite withdrawing from the Paris Masters overnight with a virus. ""The doctor said he should take this week off because he's just not going to get better unless he rests his body up,"" he said. ""But I don't think there's any doubt at all that he will be 100 per cent ready for Davis Cup."" ------------------------------------------------------------------------- ----------------------"

" After a week of waiting, Americans appear to be no closer to knowing who will replace William Jefferson Clinton next year in the White House. The fight for the United States presidency, between Democrat Vice-President Al Gore and Texas Governor George W Bush, has come down to the results in one state, Florida. After days of turmoil and legal action, a Florida court today upheld a deadline for an end to the contentious vote count. However, allowing the deadline to stand, the court also left the way open for a manual recount of votes. Democrats had gone to court seeking an extension of today's deadline, which would make it all but impossible for several counties to hold or complete time consuming hand counts of ballots. But despite failing to get such an extension, Mr Gore's aides have seized on the judge's direction that although results after today can be rejected, officials can not do so arbitrarily. Democrat lawyer David Bios said: ""What the judge said is that under the statute, she could not simply say it ends at 5:00pm, that is arbitrary."" The Florida Secretary of State's office says it still expects to certify results today, and says any decision on late returns will not be on a case by case basis. Lawyer Donna Blanton said: ""But we're not going to speak of what facts or what circumstance would constitute her to exercise her discretion in a particular fashion. ""We don't know at the moment what counties may say to us after 5 o'clock today."" -------------------------------------------------------------------- ----------------------------"

" The Federal Treasurer will reveal the size of the budget surplus today when he unveils the updated economic outlook. The Government has already indicated the surplus is healthier than the $2.8 billion predicted in May, estimates are as high as $5 billion for this financial year. The bigger surplus is partly due to higher company tax revenue, but the Opposition argues it has also been substantially boosted by windfall GST revenue on fuel. The better than expected result comes despite blowouts in the cost of private health insurance and the pensioner savings bonus. It will be used mostly to repay debt but the Prime Minister has changed tack somewhat, a week ago, he said using it for anything else would put pressure on interest rates and the dollar. He has now said part of the surplus will be used for road funding. The mid-year economic review will also reveal the latest predictions for Australia's growth, likely to be stronger than the May forecast, and inflation and unemployment rates. ------------------------------------------------------------------------- --------------------------"

" Australia and Singapore will today announce plans to create a bilateral Free Trade Agreement. Prime Minister John Howard will meet Singapore's Goh Chok Tong at the Asia Pacific summit in Brunei. The free trade arrangement being considered covers goods, services and investment with an emphasis on new technology and electronic commerce. A similar deal was signed between Singapore and New Zealand yesterday. -------------------------------------------------------------------- -----------------------------"

" Indonesia's security forces will protect a United Nations team as it tours the border region between east and west Timor today. The UN wants to know if militia groups still control camps containing tens of thousands of refugees. The security council team will visit the border town of Atambua, where militiamen went on a rampage on September 6 and slaughtered three international aid workers. After the killings in a UN office, all foreign aid workers were evacuated from Indonesia's West Timor. The UN Security Council passed a resolution demanding Indonesia restore law and order by disarming and disbanding the militias. The security council team will investigate claims from the families of refugees that militia gangs still control the camps and are preventing refugees from returning home across the border to their homeland. -------------------------------------------------------------------- ------------------------------"

" Australian tennis player Lleyton Hewitt has withdrawn from the Paris Masters Series because of injury. The Adelaide teenager had a first round bye and was then due to play American Michael Chang. But he pulled out with an allergy that has been troubling him for several months. Hewitt said he did not want to jeopardise his chances of playing in the Davis Cup final against Spain next month. Andre Agassi has also withdrawn from the tournament because of injury."

" Foreign Minister Alexander Downer is continuing an historic trip to the North Korean capital, Pyongyang. While this is a largely symbolic trip, ending 25 years of diplomatic isolation, there are serious messages the Foreign Minister wants his host to hear. The north must halt its missile and nuclear weapons programs and end 50 years of festering tension with the south. Mr Downer will also meet trade officials, visit the United Nations aid projects, including a childrens' biscuit factory, and he will meet Australians from the Snowy Mountains electricity corporation, who are working on Pyongyang's water system. Mr Downer is bearing a gift for the leader, a large photo of the joint Korean OIympic team entering the stadium in Sydney just two months ago. He will leave Pyongyang for Hong Kong tomorrow. -------------------------------------------------------------------- ------------------------------"

" French Prime Minister Lionel Jospin has announced an increased ban on beef products as public concern grows over the spread of mad cow disease. Reacting to increased public and political pressure, Mr Jospin has announced a suspension of all animal based feed for livestock and an immediate ban on T-bone steak. The ban comes just weeks after it was revealed that meat from a herd infected with bse, or mad cow disease, was sold in three French supermarkets. The revelation had caused widespread consumer panic in France, a nation well known for its love of beef. Beef sales have plummeted, beef has been taken off the menu in schools and French farmers have called for compensation. The French Government was initially reluctant to issue a ban for fear of spreading consumer anxiety but the French President Jacques Chirac, a political opponent of the Prime Minister, had made considerable political mileage out of the issue. Mr Jospin has also promised more money for testing and research. -------------------------------------------------------------------- ------------------------------"

" The Speaker of the Papua New Guinea Parliament has called for the establishment of a nonviolence movement. The Speaker described violent crime in PNG as a contagious disease. Speaker Bernard Narakobi was commenting on the attack by criminals on Supreme Court judge Gibbs Salika outside his home. Justice Salika is recovering from stab wounds. One man has been charged over the attack. Speaker Narakobi says a nonviolence movement should be set up to teach Papua New Guineans how to get on in life without resorting to violence. His call comes amid another wave of violent crime in PNG. In the past week, an Australian businesswoman was murdered in Lae, a group of Australian bushwalkers was attacked near Port Moresby, three men were shot dead while playing cards in Goroka and the mutilated body of a young woman has been found in bushland in Port Moresby. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Catholic welfare agency Centacare has joined Amnesty International in calling for an urgent review of security provisions at the Woomera Detention Centre, in South Australia's north. The calls come as South Australian police investigate allegations of child sex abuse at the centre. Centacare director Dale West says the Federal Government must review its mandatory detention policy or at least ensure children are separated. ""What we have is an ethnic mix that's dangerous - we have criminals living with non-criminals,"" he said. ""And children are thrown into that situation as well in congregate living in outback Australia and that's just not acceptable."" Amnesty International has also called for women and children to be kept away from the general detainee population. However, Immigration Minister Phillip Ruddock says the child abuse allegations have been fully investigated and insufficient evidence was found to prosecute. He says separating groups at the centre is not ideal in all situations and a further security review is not necessary. ""We've endeavoured to put in place a regime that is humane and is appropriate for administrative detention."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Israeli Army is sealing off all major Palestinian towns in the West Bank, after four Israelis were killed in several shooting incidents. Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak has instructed his Army to take what he has termed the necessary steps following the shootings. What the Israeli Army describes as closure will in effect cut movement between the main Palestinian towns, including Bethlehem, Hebron, Jerico, Ramallah and Nablus. The chief of the Israeli Army's general command, Yitzhak Eitan, announced other military action would follow the shooting of two Israeli soldiers, and a woman civilian north of Ramallah, but refused to describe what form that would take. A fourth Israeli man was shot dead in Gaza, making this the worst single day for Israeli casualties since the Palestinian Israeli conflict erupted in late September. Three Palestinians were also killed in the day's fighting, shot dead by Israeli soldiers in incidents in Gaza and Qalquilya. More than 220 people have now died in the more than six weeks of fighting - the vast majority Palestinian. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The man who steered the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) through its dispute with Patricks and the Federal Government, has resigned. John Coombs is to stand down as Secretary of the MUA in December. Mr Coombs joined the Waterside Workers Federation in 1968 and was elected as secretary in 1992 - taking the union through its merger in the years after with the Seamen Union to form the Maritime Union of Australia. Mr Coombs said the Patricks dispute of 1997/98 was one of his biggest moments. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The battle for AFL broadcasting rights is intensifying, with confirmation that negotiations are well underway. The league is keen to make a final decision before Christmas but chief executive Wayne Jackson will not confirm that Channel 9 and Foxtel have made a joint bid for the broadcast rights. However, Mr Jackson says free-to-air television coverage of AFL games will be protected, regardless of who wins the rights. ""We're sufficiently advanced in our negotiations to be very confident that there will be as much free-to-air football on television going forward as there has been in the past,"" he said. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" An expected post-Olympic revival in Australian business activity has seemingly failed to materialise. The National Australia Bank has described as ""disappointing"" its latest survey of business conditions. The release of the bank's October business survey follows yesterday's semi-annual statement from the Reserve Bank, with its forecast of a slowdown ahead for the economy. It also comes after the more dire warning from business information provider Dun and Bradstreet of a possible recession next year. The National's survey indicates a further deterioration in business conditions in October, even after a big drop-off in the Olympic month of September. ""That's fairly disappointing and we're just going to have to watch it because if conditions continue to disappoint then confidence is going to follow it down,"" the bank's chief economist Alan Oster said. Mr Oster says official interest rates could now remain on hold until the second half of next year, when they might even be eased. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The wife of former Queensland senator Mal Colston says the pursuit of her husband over alleged travel rorts is nothing but harassment by the Labor Party. An inquiry into the allegations was abandoned two years ago, after it was revealed Dr Colston was suffering from terminal cancer. Dr Colston has been re-admitted to a Brisbane private hospital. This follows advice from the Director of Public Prosecutions earlier this month that alleged travel rorts involving Dr Colston were being reviewed. In a prepared statement, Mrs Colston accused the Labor Party of harassing her family. ""The lack of privacy being experienced by my family is the direct result of a hateful campaign of political harassment on the part of the Australian Labor Party - that campaign has touched everything we have experienced in the last four years,"" she said. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" A new foetal testing procedure is expected to make testing for genetic disease in unborn babies safer and more accessible. Melbourne-based company Genetic Technologies is developing the procedure, which involves taking a blood sample from the expectant mother's arm. Current testing methods involve either inserting a needle into the mother's belly to collect fluid, or cutting tissue from the placental wall. Dr Mervin Jacobson from Genetic Technologies says the new procedure should be available within two years. ""What we're talking about here is something entirely different,"" he said. ""We're talking about simply taking a blood sample from a mother's arm and using genetic labelling, so in other words...it's non-invasive, it's safer, it's easier, it's earlier and it's cheaper."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" A nationwide general strike is to be held in the Philippines today as pressure mounts on President Joseph Estrada to step aside. The President has been impeached by the House of Representatives. President Estrada's fate now lies in the hands of 22 Philippine Senators who are now committed to trying him on charges of bribery and corruption. Yesterday, the Philippines 13th President became the first in the country's history to be impeached by the Lower House and maybe the first to face a Senate trial. A two-thirds majority of Senate votes against Mr Estrada will be enough to move him from office. The conclusion of such a Senate trial could be months away. Philippines' Vice-President Gloria Arroyo praised the Lower House decision to impeach, but renewed her calls for the President's resignation before the Senate trial begins. A general strike today by unions and business associations is pressuring for the same. -------------------------------------------------------------------- ---------------------------------------"

" In the United States, a Federal Court judge has refused to block the hand-counts of votes in Florida, rejecting Republican arguments that the counts would be unconstitutional. There is still no decision in the US presidential race. The decision not to grant an injunction to lawyers for Governor George W Bush means the hand counts can either begin or continue in four counties where the Democrats claimed there are signs of irregularities. However, in a blow to the Gore campaign today, Florida's top election official announced the state would not extend a deadline of tomorrow for all counties to certify their election results. Lawyers for Vice-President Gore had joined a legal challenge to that deadline now before a Florida court. Officials in Palm Beach said it would take days to complete a hand count of more than 400,000 votes in that county alone. -------------------------------------------------------------------- --------------------------------------"

" A noted economist has raised the spectre of a recession next year. This follows a new survey showing business confidence is falling faster than in the lead-up to the 1991 recession. The Dun and Bradstreet poll of 900 firms shows another sharp drop in October of expectations for increased sales, selling prices, profits and employment. Pollsters blame concerns over the weak Australian dollar, high fuel prices, interest rate uncertainty, and goods and services tax compliance. The Reserve Bank, Federal Government and most private-sector economists see growth as moderating, but still not far short of 4 per cent, into next year. But Dun and Bradstreet's consulting economist Duncan Ironmonger says if the external shocks continue, business pessimism itself could produce a recession. ""It's only got to get that to continue for another few more months, and we will be seeing a very slowly growing economy, and it could even be a negative, which if we have it for six months, would be [in] a recession,"" he said. -------------------------------------------------------------------- --------------------------------------"

" Rescue teams in Austria have been recovering bodies from the scene of last weekend's alpine train disaster, in which more than 155 people died. Authorities say they still have no idea what caused the fire. Almost two days after the fire on the funicular ski train in the Austrian Alps killed at least 159 people, rescue workers have finally begun to retrieve the bodies of the victims. Attempts to reach the train had been hampered by smoke and poisonous fumes and by fears that the burnt-out wreckage could be unstable. The recovered bodies have been taken to nearby Salzburg for DNA testing. The heat of the blaze was so intense that most of the bodies are said to have been burnt beyond recognition and pathologists say it could take up to four weeks to complete the identification process. Investigators say they still have no idea what caused the blaze and have refused to comment on speculation that it could have been caused by sabotage or by a short circuit, or even by fireworks carried by passengers. -------------------------------------------------------------------- ------------------------------------"

" Former Indonesian president Suharto has suffered yet another stroke at his home in Jakarta. A spokesman for the former president has been reported as saying Mr Suharto suffered a stroke early yesterday. Suharto's lawyer late last night confirmed the 79-year-old was ill. The former president, who ruled Indonesia for three decades, collapsed after suffering a stroke last year. His lawyers successfully argued earlier this year that he was unfit to stand trial on medical grounds. But that decision was overturned by a higher court last week. Suharto's youngest son, Tommy, remains the only member of Indonesia's one time first family ever to be brought to trial and convicted. He has been declared an international fugitive after failing to turn himself in. -------------------------------------------------------------------- -------------------------------------"

" The future of an international treaty on climate change may be decided at a two week conference which is now underway in the Hague. There is still doubt that the Kyoto Protocol drafted three years ago will ever be implemented. The world's biggest polluter, the US, is demanding tougher action from developing countries; in any case, America, Canada and Australia, amongst others, are proposing a global trade in carbon credits, whereby nations can buy and sell things like forests to offset their industrial pollution. But environmentalists and even the European Community, concerned by growing evidence of global warming, are demanding firmer commitments to reduce existing greenhouse emissions. Officials are working this week to develop a consensus on the complex treaty before their ministers arrive at the weekend. -------------------------------------------------------------------- ---------------------------------------"

" Racing Victoria's chief steward is confident an investigation of champion jockey Jim Cassidy's Melbourne Cup ride will be resolved quickly. The connections of Diatribe have complained Cassidy deliberately ignored riding instructions given before the race. It is understood they are particularly concerned about Cassidy taking the pre-race favourite close to the lead about the half-way mark. Cassidy will face a panel of stewards in what is believed to be the first such incident in Melbourne Cup history. Chief Steward Des Gleeson says his experience has shown bringing the parties together tomorrow will help resolve the matter. ""Each party hears a full explanation as to why a rider rode the horse in the manner he did, he said. ""On many occasions the connections have accepted the explanation of the rider and on other occasions they have accepted it with some misgivings, but I'm sure that the best way to resolve the issue is to get the parties together."""

" Authorities in Kaprun in Austria have established the identities of most of the people who were killed in the weekend fire in an Alpine train tunnel. The names have not yet been released, but of the 155 victims known to have died, the vast majority were Austrians and Germans and many were children. Ten Japanese skiers are also believed to be among the dead and eight members of the US military and their families. Emergency teams have begun the task of recovering the badly burned remains so forensic tests can help the process of identification. -------------------------------------------------------------------- -------------------------------------------------------------------- ------------"

" Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and President Bill Clinton have ended a two hour meeting in Washington, but the outcome of the talks remains unknown. Mr Barak gave few details of the meeting, which was aimed at ending violence in the Middle East and implementing the peace deal with the Palestinians that was reached at an emergency summit in Egypt last month. However, Mr Barak said he would not be pressured into making more concessions to the Palestinians. The talks follow a day of continuing clashes on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in which four Palestinians were killed and a UN convoy was attacked. -------------------------------------------------------------------- -------------------------------------------------------------------- ----------"

" Legal moves are taking centre stage in Florida - the state that will determine the outcome of the American presidential election. Lawyers for Republican candidate George W Bush will be asking a judge to rule manual recounts unfair, following a sample hand recount that favoured Democrat Vice-President Al Gore. Although Governor Bush is still marginally ahead in Florida, his camp is clearly worried about the possibility that hand recounting could give Mr Gore enough extra votes to award him the presidency. His lawyers are going to the Federal Court to argue that the manual counts are unconstitutional. Governor Bush's spokesman James Baker said the country was on a slippery slope. But Mr Gore's team is maintaining that these painstaking scrutinies of each and every ballot sheet are both constitutional and necessary to establish exactly which way Florida intended to vote. -------------------------------------------------------------------- -------------------------------------------------------------------- ------------"

" The Reserve Bank appears confident inflation can be controlled in the near future but it is wary of the effect of a lower Australian dollar and higher world oil prices. The bank has released its second assessment of the national economy for the year. The statement on monetary policy seeks to predict the track of inflation and the subsequent effect on interest rates. The statement notes the abnormal impact of the Olympic Games and the introduction of the goods and services tax (GST) this year, but finds with solid domestic and export activity giving annual growth of 4.75 per cent it is expecting an inflation rate of about 3 per cent by the end of the next year. CPI will be higher as the GST rolls through, over 5 per cent it expects in June next year, but should then drop back. The threats to those predictions are if the Australian dollar falls further, making imports more expensive, and possible further rises in international oil costs. -------------------------------------------------------------------- -------------------------------------------------------------------- --------------"

" Two American fighter aircraft have collided in midair in a military exercise off Japan. One of the pilots has been rescued, while the other is missing at sea. The two American F-16 fighter pilots collided over the sea of Japan off Japan's main northern island of Hokkaido. Both ejected from their aircraft and parachuted into the sea. Japan's coastguard has rescued one of the pilots and US helicopters are searching for the other. The American military training excercise is the first to be conducted jointly by Japan and America under new rules which allow Japan's self-defence forces to assist with US training exercises. -------------------------------------------------------------------- -------------------------------------------------------------------- ----------"

" The Federal Opposition leader, Kim Beazley, has defended his use of the word ""boondoggle"" in relation to new announcements about road funding. The Federal Government will use its larger than expected budget surplus to fund improvements to country roads and outer-metropolitan areas. Mr Beazley says the money should be used to forego the next round of fuel excise increases. The Macquarie Dictionary describes boondoggle as ""pointless or time wasting activities"", but Mr Beazley says he was referring to the American meaning of pork barrel. The Opposition leader says the rural electorate understands it is being blackmailed. ""The Australian electorate understands boondoggle and it understands pork barrel and they understand exactly what's going on here,"" he said. ""Don't treat the Australian electorate as fools - they're not fools."" -------------------------------------------------------------------- -------------------------------------------------------------------- ----------"

" A high-level United Nations delegation visiting East Timor has been told militia incursions across the border from West Timor have stopped but peacekeeping troops remain on alert. The 21-member Security Council team visited the town of Suai close to the border with West Timor today. Briefed by New Zealand peacekeepers that guard the region, the council was told that after months of militia incursions from West Timor, there is little evidence of militia activity. But the number of refugees crossing the border from camps in West Timor back to their homeland has increased significantly, with almost 200 refugees returning in the last month. Meanwhile, Australia has warned of a bloodbath in Indonesia if there is international support for breakaway movements. The Foreign Minister, Alexander Downer, has used the Asia-Pacific talks in Brunei to emphasise Australia's support for Indonesia's territorial integrity. Mr Downer says outside backing for independence movements in Aceh and Papua, formerly Irian Jaya, risks unravelling Indonesia. ""Now, it is not in Australia's national interest to see the fragmentation of Indonesia,"" he said. ""It is not in our national interest because the fragmentation of Indonesia will lead to a bloodbath."" -------------------------------------------------------------------- -------------------------------------------------------------------- -------------"

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" Democrats in the United States have been bouyed by the decision of one Florida county, Palm Beach, to order a manual recount of presidential votes. It could be enough to tip the presidency in Al Gore's favour. But feelings are running high. A noisy group of Republican supporters is staging an afternoon rally outside the public offices in Palm Beach, demanding an end to the manual count of votes going on inside. For a vote to be valid, the square that is punched out when people vote, must be separated from the rest of the ballot. So electoral officers are holding each disputed ballot up to the light to see if daylight shines through and so determine if the vote is valid or invalid. It is a painstaking process, with Republican and Democrat observers debating each call. Meanwhile, cars draped with banners, and supporters from both parties are camped outside awaiting the results. Republicans will be in the Federal Court tomorrow trying to stop the manual count in Florida from proceeding."

" Officials in Austria say they have confirmed the identities of many of the victims of the alpine ski train tragedy. But DNA testing and dental records will be needed to establish the identity of some of those who died. The death toll from the weekend alpine tragedy in Austria now stands at 155, but a final toll will not become clear until rescue teams reach the burnt-out wreckage. That operation is still being hampered by poisonous fumes and fears that the wreckage could plunge further down the tunnel. The governor of the Salzburg region says the identity of those killed has been established with 90 per ent certainty. Most of them were Austrian or German citizens. 17 Japanese, eight Americans, a Croatian and two Slovenians were also known to be among the dead. The nationalities of another 33 people have not yet been confirmed. The accident has been described as Austria's worst post-war tragedy."

" Employment Services Minister Tony Abbott has defended the Federal Government's welfare policies in the wake of a critical report from one of Australia's biggest charities. The Saint Vincent de Paul Society has released a survey of people seeking its help which states the Government's ""punitive"" stance on welfare contributes to welfare dependency. The society says this puts greater pressure on charities. Mr Abbott says charities have been given resources to help those in need, but there will always be shortages. ""Governments have finite resources just as charities have finite resources,"" he said. ""In the end, charities have to make choices and governments have got to make choices."""

" The three Australians have all received byes into the second round at the Tennis Masters series in Paris. Patrick Rafter, fresh from his finals appearance in Lyon and back to some encouraging form ahead of next months Davis Cup final in Spain, will meet either Zimbabwe's Byron Black or French wildcard Julian Be in the second round. Lleyton Hewett will play either American Michael Chang, or Frenchman Arnold Depas, and a win will almost certainly cement his place in the eight strong field for the Masters Cup, while Mark Philippoussis will clash with Slovakia's Dominik Hrbaty or Swiss star Roger Federer. Defending champion Andrew Agassi will decide on Wednesday whether to play after suffering a hip injury in Lyon."

" The Australian Government's policy to force developing nations to reduce greenhouse gas emissions has been slammed by environmentalists. Environment Minister Robert Hill is representing Australia at a meeting in the Hague, which aims to develop global rules for meeting greenhouse gas targets set in Kyoto three years ago. Australia will push for countries like China, India and Brazil to be included in any agreement to lower emissions. But Anna Reynolds from the Climate Action Network says it is ridiculous for big polluters like the US, Canada and Australia to expect developing countries to clean up their act, when their own emissions are increasing. ""China for example, its emissions have dropped and india which is another big developing nation, their emissions are not increasing at the same rate as Australia's, so it's very hypocritical and greedy for us to be targeting these countries when we still have a lot to do here at home,"" she said."

" The long running Slip, Slop, Slap anti-skin cancer campaign is heading for retirement. Australia's anti-cancer councils have been told the campaign is old and tiresome and is no longer working. New research shows that half of those who got sunburnt last summer had forgotten sun protection, while 12 per cent could not be bothered. Advertising lecturer at Adelaide University Pascale Quester is urging that the new campaign shocks people into action, by showing the effects of melanomas. She says Slip Slop Slap is too ""cute"", and outdated. ""On one hand it's positive because they are very consistent, but on the other hand, it's also somewhat tiresome and people stop noticing - it doesn't break through the clutter of all the hundreds of messages that people get exposed to every day, "" she said. ""So at some stage, you have to somehow change things, so that people can notice you again."""

" Republican candidate Texas Governor George W Bush's lead over Democrat candidate Vice-President Al Gore in Florida has been cut to less than 350 votes. That is with 62 of the state's 67 counties completing their recounts. American cable network CNN says Mr Bush's lead is just 359 votes out of the nearly 6,000,000 cast. Florida's 25 electoral votes will decide the winner of the 2000 presidential contest. The Vice-President's campaign manager, William Daley, has also said the courts may find the voting irregularities in the Florida results are an injustice unparalleled in the United States' history. Allegations of voting improprieties range from missing and confusing ballots to problems with tabulations and voter intimidation. Mr Daley says the Democrats will seek a hand recount of ballots cast in four Florida counties, but Republican officials say they may request a recount in the state of Iowa, following Mr Gore's narrow victory there. Meanwhile, former US president Jimmy Carter has backed the US justice system to resolve the growing crisis."

" Away from the Florida voting debacle, the election uncertainty produced a volatile night on Wall Street. The leading indicator of stock prices, the Dow Jones index, has been as much as 289 points lower in the latest session, a slide of 2.6 per cent. However, there has been a recovery in the latter stages of trade, with the Dow now having closed just 73 points lower at 10,834."

" The Fatah branch of the PLO has vowed revenge over the assassination of one of its leaders in an Israeli rocket attack. Israel has been forced to defend the attack, in which two Palestinian female bystanders were also killed, and another 10 people wounded. Israel says the helicopter attack accurately targeted Hussein Abayed, a man they say coordinated attacks by the Palestinian paramilitary group, Tanzim, around Bethlehem, but the missile also killed two women in their 50s. Israel's Deputy Defence Minister Ephraim Sneh denied the attack involved excessive force and promised to prove that Israel was the world champion of guerilla warfare if Palestinian gunmen continued fighting. The United States State Department says the attack rose serious issues in the hours before Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat is to meet US President Bill Clinton in Washington. Fatah officials have vowed revenge for the attack. West Bank leader Marwan Baguti, saying an end to the Palestinian uprising would not come through Israeli attacks. ""I think the Israelis are trying to put an end for this peace Interfada by force succeeded,"" Mr Baguti said. ""There is one solution for this violence, for this Interfada, to put an end for the Israeli occupation."""

" The Reserve Bank Governor, Ian Macfarlane, says he is confident the Australian dollar will recover, but has ruled out using official interest rates to prop it up for its own sake. He is not concerned by recent weak economic data. Addressing a Melbourne business function last night, Mr Macfarlane was bullish over the dollar. ""It can't keep moving forever in one direction if inflation is under control,"" Mr Macfarlane. He said one reason for the lack of capital flows into Australian assets is the country's ""old economy"" image, which is invalid and will not last. While the dollar's link to the sliding euro will not continue indefinitely. Interest rate rises generally boost a currency, but Mr Macfarlane stressed the medium-term inflation outlook would continue to drive monetary policy. ""We have no intention of departing from out medium term approach in an ad hoc attempt to push up the exchange rate for its own sake,"" Mr Macfarlane said. Despite recent weak data on retail sales, job vacancies and jobs growth, he said the Reserve stands by its forecast of 4 per cent plus economic growth in the coming year. Mr Macfarlane, had this observation on the market's response to Tuesday's US election. ""Everytime Bush pulled ahead, the US dollar went up, and everytime Gore pulled ahead, the US dollar went down,"" Mr Macfarlane said. ""That doesn't mean in my view, that does not imply any assessment of the personal worth of the two parties concerned, but that was the way the foreign exchange markets were behaving."""

" Investigations are continuing into what is alleged to be the largest automatic teller machine (ATM) fraud in Australia. Three men and a woman have been charged following the discovery of about $4 million of cash in a house at Kilburn in suburban Adelaide. Detectives from the Serious Fraud Investigation Branch found the money under the floorboards of the house yesterday. The home was one of several raided in the northern suburbs as part of extensive investigations into the alleged theft of millions of dollars from ATM machines throughout Adelaide over the past three months. Four people believed to be from the same family, appeared in the Adelaide Magistrates Court yesterday each charged with one count of conspiracy to steal. Police say they are still hunting for at least two more people. The four did not apply for bail and have been remanded in custody until their next court appearance next week."

" In South Africa, six white police officers accused of viciously assaulting several black men have appeared in court. The police arrived at the court house under heavy guard. The members of the police dog squad were driven to the court in two armoured vehicles. Heavily armed riot police with automatic weapons cordoned off the area. A small group of demonstrators gathered outside the magistrates court in Pretoria for the appearance of the disgraced officers. The six police were arrested on Tuesday. They were charged with attempted murder, after they were captured on video, brutally assaulting three black men. The police set their dogs onto the black men during the 1998 attack. Five of the officers have been remanded in custody. One has been granted permission to seek medical treatment for a viral infection. The case will resume on November 17."

" The latest twists in the tightest US presidential contest in more than a century have unsettled American equity markets. Amid claims of misleading ballot design and unfairly disqualified votes, the Democrats are going down legal avenues in their pursuit of the White House. On the New York Stock Exchange, the Dow Jones industrial average has been as much as 289 points lower during the session. However, a late rally has now seen it close down just 73 points to 10,834. That is a slide of 0.7 per cent. The high-tech sector has again been hit, after the previous session's slump of more than 5 per cent. The Nasdaq composite index has finished down 31 points to 3,200. The US bond market appears to have been something of a safe haven. Rising prices have pushed down the yield on 30-year Treasury paper to 5.86 per cent, a fall of almost 2 points. In Britain, the sharemarket has lost ground. London's FT-100 index has surrendered 35 points to 6,442. Yesterday, Tokyo's Nikkei index moved sharply lower, dropping 340 points to 15,060, as high tech shares followed New York's Nasdaq index. In Australia, the market also fell back. The All Ordinaries index finished 18 points behind at 3,280. On overnight trade on the Sydney Futures exchange, the Share Price Index contract has closed down 25 points on yesterday's day settlement at 3,341. The 10-year bond contract is up 2 points at 93.89, with the implied yield easing to 6.11 per cent. The Australian dollar has moved higher, with the euro strengthening on further central bank intervention, and the US dollar slipping on the election uncertainty. The local currency was being quoted in morning trade at 52.77 US cents. That is up more than one-third of a cent on yesterday's closing level. On the cross-rates, it is at 0.6091 euros, 56.69 Japanese yen, 36.86 pence sterling, and against the New Zealand dollar, it is at 1.320. The gold price is at $US265.75 an ounce. West Texas crude oil has jumped to $33.94 US a barrel."

" The political drama in the United States presidential election continues. Three people are taking legal action challenging the result and there are claims the voting was flawed. In Democratic Palm Beach country, one woman says the ballot papers were so confusing that she is worried she may have voted for the Reform Party candidate Pat Buchanan. ""I'm not sure if I punched the right hole so this of course has been nagging me ever since,"" she said. ""I'm still totalled because I would just absolutely drop dead if my vote went for Buchanan."" The vote recount underway in Florida is expected to be completed tomorrow morning and more than 2,000 absentee ballots are still drifting in. Texas Governor George W Bush says he is still confident of winning the presidency. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Another fall in the monthly job figures has cast doubt over Australia's continued economic growth. Employment fell in October for the second straight month, including more than 25,000 fewer full-time jobs. But a lower participation rate kept unemployment steady, at 6.3 per cent. With New South Wales experiencing the biggest falls, some analysts say employers may have again delayed hiring in the wake of the Olympics. But HSBC senior economist Anthony Thompson says a slowdown in employment and the general economy may be underway, with implications for interest rates. ""This really allows the RBA to keep rates on hold,"" he said. ""As to rates going forward beyond the end of this year, that's really going to come down to the data flow between now and the first board meeting in 2001, which takes place in February."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" An Israeli rocket has been fired into the Palestinian town of Beit Sahour, killing at least one man and seriously wounding four more. The attack appeared not to have been preceded by any fighting in the area. The missile struck a small truck in a valley in Beit Sahour, a town adjoining Bethlehem. A helicopter could be heard overhead for some minutes before the attack, but there was no gunfire in the area at the time. The driver of the vehicle Hussein Abayed, 37, was killed. Another man appeared fatally wounded. The attack comes just hours before Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat is to meet United States President Bill Clinton with Israel demanding Palestinians end the violence. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Reserve Bank Governor says official interest rates will not be raised simply to prop up the weak Australian dollar. Australia's top central banker Ian Macfarlane was addressing a business study in Melbourne. Mr Macfarlane says the currency has behaved this year in a way no-one could have predicted as a higher exchange rate would tend to flow from a bouyant domestic economy, rising commodity prices and higher interest rates. He said the reasons the currency has fallen is the stronger United States dollar and the reduced overseas demand for Australian bonds. Australia's image as an old economy was also brought up in the address and Mr Macfarlane said Australia rated highly in the spending of and usage of new technology. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" A second attempt to shift a Malaysian container ship from the Great Barrier Reef Queensland reef has failed but maritime authorities say it has moved a little. Authorities shifted cargo weight before this evening's attempt but it was not enough to move the vessel. The ballast configuration was changed overnight as part of a revised plan to free the vessel but it remains wedged on Sudbury Reef, south-east of Cairns. Transport Minister Steve Bredhauer says a deep-sea salvage tug is on its way from Port Moresby in Papua New Guinea to help with the salvage efforts. It is believed maritime authorities will wait until the salvage tug arrives on Saturday before trying to refloat the ship again. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" A least 17 people have died in Indonesia's western most province as tens of thousands of people continue to try to make their way to the capital of the province of Aceh for a massive pro-independence rally. Indonesian troops have tried to prevent the gathering by blocking major routes into the capital, Banda Aceh. Local reports say at least six people were killed yesterday in two separate incidents after troops first fired warning shots into the air to prevent traffic heading for the rally. But the toll has now risen with confirmed reports of a further 10 fatalities. The majority of those killed were pro-independence supporters, according to police although three policemen also died. A key student group in Aceh has claimed that the death toll is much higher, although their reports of 115 people killed cannot be independently verified. Amnesty International has called on authorities to allow the rally to proceed, warning it could end in tragedy if security forces prevent it going ahead. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Federal Workplace Relations Minister, Peter Reith, has accused Opposition frontbencher Lindsay Tanner of breaking laws on litigation by undertaking a case on behalf of the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA). Mr Tanner is involved in a Federal Court case seeking documents on the 1998 waterfront dispute. Mr Reith says his department has advised him that Mr Tanner is receiving more than $100,000 from the MUA and the Australian Council of Trade Unions to cover legal expenses. Mr Tanner has disclosed the matter in the register of interests. Mr Reith says it appears Mr Tanner is engaging in champerty - a situation where a person undertakes legal action on behalf of another and shares in the proceedings of litigation. ""I have sought legal advice on the legality of a deal which provides him personally with over $100,00 to fund a political campaign where he is the dummy, as usual, for the MUA,"" he said."

" Federal Opposition frontbencher Lindsay Tanner has denied allegations he has personally received any money from unions to conduct a legal battle for documents on the 1998 waterfront dispute. Mr Tanner says he has only received an undertaking from the MUA, its lawyers, and the ACTU - but so far no money. He says he has disclosed the arrangement on the register of interests. ""I have no knowledge of what the legal bill will ultimately be. The MUA, the ACTU, and Morris Blackburn themselves will be contributing to that,"" he said. ""Peter Reith is desperately running scared to avoid being in the witness box in the Federal Court having to account for his actions, for his deceit and for his orchestrating one of the biggest industrial disputes in this nation's history."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" For the second consecutive year a John Hawkes trained horse has won the Victoria Oaks race at Flemington. Lovelorn won the race from the horse that was ridden by Melbourne Cup hero Kerrin McEvoy, Lan Kwai Fong. The Hayes trained Lolita Star came in third. The Hayes family will have to wait another year for a shot at the one feature race that has eluded them, after LoveLorn outstayed the pack in the $500,000 Oaks race. The John Hawkes trained filly was at 15-1 at the beginning of the day but by the start of the race was out to 20-1. John Hawkes was not at the track to see his third Oaks win. His son Wayne Hawkes says he always thought Loverlorn always had the ability to win the 2500-metres race. It is the biggest win of the spring carnival for jockey Brett Prebble. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" It is election day in the United States and everyone agrees the result remains too close to call. The US election campaign is over, today Americans will have their chance to say what they think of Democrat Vice-President Al Gore and Republican George W Bush. As well as voting for a new occupant of the White House, the other end of Pensylvannia Avenue is also up for grabs. All 435 seats in the House of Representatives are being contested in this election, plus one-third of the Senate. A handful of seats will decide both congressional race. Republicans hold control. In his last rally of the campaign, Mr Gore, in his home town of Carthage, Tennessee, urged Americans to keep a Democrat in the White House and give his party control of the Congress. Mr Gore had just ended a manic 30-hour dash through key swinging states in the hope his 13-year long pursuit of the presidency is realised today. As the Republican party staged a massive get out the vote drive across the country, Mr Bush settled into the Governor's mansion in Austin, Texas, to wait for the outcome of a race he began in the middle of last year. Governor Bush says he is relaxed and confident, but said he had to reassure his nervous parents in a phone call this morning. ""They were nervous because they haven't seen what I've seen,"" Mr Bush said. ""For example, obviously last night in north-west Arkansas was a huge crowd. ""Secondly, it's much harder to be the loved one, than it is the candidate."" The Governor did do some campaigning from home, calling radio stations in key west coast states of Oregon, Washington and California, where Governor Bush is hoping for an election clinching upset. Meanwhile, Hillary Clinton is favoured to win the race for the Senate seat representing New York. If successful, she would become the only first lady to win a Senate seat while her husband was still in office. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Finance Minister, John Fahey, says a review of the Government's information technology outsourcing program is timely and part of the normal course of events. The review comes after an Auditor-General's report revealed a 300 per cent blow out in costs and a large shortfall in savings. Mr Fahey says invitations to tender for the next round of contracts will be delayed until the review is carried out. He says he believes the review will show the Government is on the right track. ""I'm confident there won't be a bad report,"" Mr Fahey said."

" The Federal Opposition has called on the Government to abandon further outsourcing of information technology services. The Opposition's IT spokeswoman Kate Lundy says the tenders should be stopped altogether. ""This is the first time we've seen effectively a confession from the Coalition Government that they've made a mistake with their IT outsourcing program,"" she said. Senator Lundy is also demanding that the inquiry be made public. ""Last week John Fahey said there's nothing wrong with this programme,"" Ms Lundy said. ""This week he's announced an independent inquiry. ""It wouldn't surprise me if the Government finally acknowledges that in fact this program doesn't have a future."" ------------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Opposition has applauded the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) for reconsidering last year's decision to drop fraud charges against former senator Mal Colston. The DPP, Damien Bugg QC, has announced he is reviewing the charges, which had been dropped on the basis of expert medical opinion that Dr Colston was not fit to stand trial. Mr Bugg says the review was underway before the Labor Party began calling for the 28 travel fraud charges to be reinstated. The Shadow Justice Minister, Duncan Kerr, says it is appropriate the charges be reviewed, in light of the apparent improvement in Dr Colston's health. ""It seems to me that well over a year on from the point at which a decision was taken that it would not have been possible for him to stand trial, at least the issue should be looked at again,"" Mr Kerr said. ""And I'm pleased that the DPP, by the DPP's own statement, indicates that his thinking also must have run along the same lines."" ------------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Doctors in Britain say it may be some days before they know the results of a controversial operation to separate Siamese twins. The weaker of the two girls died during the operation. The 20 strong team of medical specialists at the Manchester Hospital operated on the two girls for 20 hours and in a statement issued later said that despite all their efforts, sadly, Mary had died. Jodie is in a critical, but stable condition in the hospital's intensive care unit. The twins' separation came after a unique legal battle in the British High Court, where their parents' opposition was overruled on the basis that Mary could not live independently of her sister, but her continued existence was killing Jodie. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Queensland Transport Minister Steve Bredhauer is quietly confident attempts today to refloat the Malaysian container ship, aground on the Great Barrier Reef, will work. The 25,000-tonne vessel has spent the past six days stuck on Sudbury Reef, about 22 nautical miles south-east of Cairns. Mr Bredhauer says fuel and ballast was yesterday moved to the rear of the ship in preparation for today's attempted refloat. ""I guess I'm quietly confident,"" he said. ""Both the representatives of the salvage operators and the experts in my maritime division have indicated that they believe there's a strong likelihood that this afternoon's refloat will be successful. ""So on that basis I'm working on the basis that by about 7:00 tonight, or a little thereafter, we'll be seeing the vessel come free of the reef."" ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The salvage operation on the Russian nuclear submarine Kursk has ended, despite the recovery of only 12 of the 118 bodies thought to be on board. Conditions were deemed too hazardous for the operation to continue. The salvage operation has been terminated after 18 days and the recovery of 12 bodies. The divers held a ceremony in memory of the 118 men who died on the submarine and then the offshore platform ship which served for the base for the operation departed for Norway. The Russian Navy says it ended the operation because it was becoming too dangerous for the divers. Though they had been able to enter the rear compartments of the submarine, gaining access to the middle section was more difficult. The Navy also says that continuing could jeopardise the lifting of the submarine, scheduled for next year. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Flooding and heavy rain continues to cause havoc across Britain, forcing more residents to evacuate their homes. The hardest-hit areas of the country are the south-east, the north-east, the northern county of Yorkshire and the central Midlands. The Environment Agency has issued severe flood warnings of ""imminent danger"" to life and property on 29 rivers. Rising waters on the River Thames are beginning to threaten the historic Hampton Court Palace in south-west London. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" This year's Melbourne Cup champion jockey will spend this morning reviewing his winning race. The 20-year-old South Australian, Kerrin McEvoy, joined the trainer and owners of Brew at a small restaurant in Melbourne's suburbs. While McEvoy had yet to see footage of his Melbourne Cup debut, he said last night he could remember the moment he thought the race could be his. ""About at the 200 I was pretty confident,"" McEvoy said. ""Nothing seemed to making much ground and my horse seemed to hitting the line pretty well so I was confident about then."""

" United States presidential candidates Democrat Al Gore and Republican George W Bush are winding up the final day of campaigning in the race for the White House. The race is close with many opinion polls favouring Mr Bush in the last days of the campaign. However, a new independent poll on the eve of the vote has found 48 per cent of voters are supporting Mr Gore while 46 per cent backed Mr Bush. Mr Bush has returned to his home state in Texas after campaign stops in Clinton-Gore country, Tennesee and Arkansas. Mr Gore stopped for votes in the Mid West before flying to Florida, which he hopes to capture from the Republicans. Mr Gore will end his trip with a 4:00am visit to a coffee shop before returning to Tennessee to vote. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Brew has won the 2000 Melbourne Cup, giving young jockey Kerrin McEvoy a dream debut in Australia's biggest race. Brew won from Yippyio by one and a half lengths with Second Coming in third place. Once again a New Zealand born horse has taken out the Cup, making it 30 times in the last 51 years the winner has come from accross the Tasman. Twenty-year-old jockey Kerrin McEvoy, who came to Melbourne two and a half years ago, finished his apprenticeship less than a week ago. McEvoy told Channel 10 winning in front of his family was the best feeling imaginable. It is also a great day for trainer Michael Moroney, who had three starters in the race which ended up in first and third place. While bookmakers report an even result for the day, Brew's win will prove popular with thousands of punters, who backed the gelding in from 20/1 at the start of the day to as short as 10/1 by start time. Tabcorp says Victorians have bet almost $26 million on this year's Melbourne Cup. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) is reviewing his decision last year to drop fraud charges against former Senator Mal Colston. The DPP says the decision to drop the 28 travel fraud charges was made on expert medical advice that Dr Colston was unfit to stand trial at the time, and that there was no prospect he would be fit in the future. The director says the decision to review the charges was made before the Federal Opposition raised the matter in parliament yesterday. Labor's Shadow Justice Minister, Duncan Kerr, had called on the DPP to reinstate the charges, claiming Dr Colston is in good enough health to go through a court trial. However, the wife of former Senator Mal Colston has disputed claims her husband is well enough to face charges related to the travel rorts scandal. Dawn Colston says the claims are absurd as her husband is very sick. ""For a period of three months on and off he was in hospital; this year for periods of three weeks and a month at a time having procedures done,"" she said. ""His health and quality of life is not good so I don't know what Duncan Kerr is basing this on."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Australian Federal Police (AFP) has denied it has downgraded investigations into child sex tourism offences overseas. The AFP has shut down a specialist unit formed to investigate such offences. Operation Morocco was established after Federal Parliament enacted laws making it possible to prosecute in Australia a resident who travels overseas to engage in sex with children. The Attorney-General, Daryl Williams, says the AFP has decided to shut down the team as a separate unit. ""Any decision taken to allocate or reallocate resources is a matter for the AFP,"" he said. ""It is not subject to political decision-making or interference."" A spokesman for the AFP says the work of the Operation Morocco team will continue. He says allegations will be assessed by a case management centre and allocated to investigation teams, as is done in other areas of AFP work. The Shadow Justice Minister, Duncan Kerr, says shutting down the unit sends the wrong signal to paedophiles and would-be sex tourists. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Federal Government has ordered an independent review of its information technology outsourcing project. The review follows a report by the Auditor-General showing a cost blow out, lower than expected savings and delays in carrying out the process. The managing director of the Australian Stock Exchange, Richard Humphry, will conduct the review reporting to a group of senior federal public servants. Finance Minister John Fahey says the government remains committed to the IT outsourcing project, but will put the next round of tenders on hold until Mr Humphry finishes the review. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Australia's attempts to meet its Kyoto greenhouse gas targets have been slammed by a Senate committee. The environment committee's report on global warming says Australia has the highest emissions per capita in the world and is already well over the target set in Kyoto in 1997. It says that is despite having received a much more generous deal than other developed nations. Labor's environment spokesman and committee member, Nick Bolkus, says the committee's recommendations are a blueprint for lowering emissions substantially. ""They are extensive, they go to domestic and international action, they go to Australia needing to restore a leadership role on this issue and they go to Australia introducing domestically effective programs,"" he said. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Skeletal remains of as many as three babies have been found in a wall cavity in a house at Queenstown, in Adelaide's north-west. A builder was renovating the house when he found a small skull and took it to police. Police went to the house and discovered more remains, but are now waiting on a forensic examination to find out how old the bones are and exactly how many babies have been found. Detective Superintendent Paul Schramm says the discovery is not believed to have any link to the missing Beaumont children or to any other missing persons investigation. He says at this stage it is not clear if the babies were murdered, or if they died soon after birth. Port Adelaide police are in charge of the investigation and a police archaeologist may be brought to the site tomorrow to try to help piece together what happened. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" After weeks of doubt, Flemington has produced a dry track for Melbourne Cup day with Freemason going in as the favourite. Most of the horses enjoyed a pre-dawn run on the track, noticeably missing was Geelong-based TAB favourite Diatribe. After weeks of concern, trainers say the track is ready for the big race. Freemason's trainer, John Hawkes, says the track is in excellent shape and his horse is progressing well. ""He's great, he's done everything perfect and if he's good enough he'll win,"" he said. Trainer Gai Waterhouse says Coco Cobanna also had a good morning on the track. It is one of the most open Cup fields in years. When champion trainer Bart Cummings, a man who has won the race 11 time struggles with the form guide, you know it could be anyone's race. ""I'm like the rest, trying to find the winner. If you find one, let me know,"" he said. Cummings has no horses in the race for the first time since 1995. The Cup's king says it is never easy to pick the winner, but a few horses stand out. ""Three or four there have got a good chance, particularly Kaapstad Way,"" he said. ""The horse that looks as though it's been set for the race and never had any pressure on him this time around is Freemason and probably it'll be the hardest to beat."" Freemason is currently 6-1 favourite, with Kaapstad Way on the second line of betting at 8-1, and Diatribe at 9s, but likely to shorten after strong support at yesterday's call of the card. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The US presidential election race is being described as the closest since John F Kennedy beat Richard Nixon in 1960. The battle between Texas Governor George W Bush and Vice-President Al Gore is also being described as the most expensive in US history. According to the Centre for Responsive Politics, a Washington think-tank, $US3 billion has been poured into the presidential and congressional races. Spending has increased by 50 per cent on what was an astonishingly expensive campaign four years ago. Analysts say the closeness of both the presidential and congressional races and the booming US economy have helped donors from all sorts of special interest groups and lobbies open their coffers. Actress Jane Fonda was one of the larger individual donors, contributing $US12 million to a group backing abortion rights. Both candidates are in the middle of an intense final campaign blitz with only hours until election day. Although polls continue to show a tight to moderate lead for Governor Bush, the picture in key states remains uncertain. Mr Gore began a 30-hour campaign sprint to the finish in Iowa, urging supporters at a rally to get the Democrat vote out. ""I'll end with the saying that's never been more appropriate, early to bed, early to rise, work like hell and organise, thank you,"" he said. Mr Gore will also hit Missouri and Florida before ending his campaign in Tennessee. Governor Bush, who held the last of five rallies in Florida this morning, has a campaign schedule that includes Tennessee and Arkansas, the respective home states of Mr Gore and President Bill Clinton. He will fly home to Texas this evening. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Prime Minister has increased the pressure on Queensland's Premier over allegations of vote rorting within Labor ranks, asking him to widen the Criminal Justice Commission's (CJC) powers so it can investigate federal electoral activities. John Howard has referred allegations of electoral rorting in federal campaigns to the Australian Federal Police (AFP). Mr Howard wrote to Peter Beattie last night asking him to consider amending the CJC's legislation so that the Shepherdson inquiry, which is currently investigating allegations of rorting in state seats, can also examine claims relating to federal electorates. The CJC has no jurisdiction over federal matters. As a result of a referral from the Prime Minister, the AFP is investigating allegations that rorting helped former Labor minister, Michael Lavarch win the seat of Fisher in the 1987 election. Meanwhile, overnight, former Labor MP Brian Courtice claimed vote rigging in the seat of Hinkler was responsible for his loss to the National Party in 1984, a claim the Nationals have denied. ----------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The deputy chairman of a parliamentary committee investigating allegations of brutality within the armed forces has called on the Defence Minister to ensure whistleblowers are protected. Roger Price's call follows death threats against Army Corporal Craig Smith, who has given evidence about abuse in the crack 3RAR unit to the committee's inquiry. Mr Price says the threat constitutes a contempt of Parliament and he will be raising it with the Speaker tomorrow. ""There's a need for us to recall Corporal Smith to again find out just precisely what's happened to him and to then demand some accountability from those in the ADF [Australian Defence Force] who are responsible,"" he said. ""It is an offence to make threatening calls to put this sort of graffiti on walls and to destroy people's property."" ------------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A further rise in official interest rates is being given long odds ahead of today's Melbourne Cup Day board meeting at the Reserve Bank. Central bank board members will decide whether a sixth tightening of policy is required to ward off inflation. Seen of greatest immediate risk to inflation in Australia is the low level of the dollar. There is also some question about rising wages. But the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry is among the many who say there does not need to be further policy action to slow the economy down. Yesterday, the ANZ Bank's latest job advertisement survey indicated a significant moderation ahead in employment. ""This combined with other signs of continued softness in household spending, in the aftermath of the introduction of the new tax system, the subdued outlook for business investment, and signs that the world economy may be in the process of slowing all suggest the Reserve Bank will vote to keep interest rates on hold,"" ANZ chief economist Saul Eslake said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Authorities will set out today in search of a white pointer responsible for Perth's first fatal shark attack in 75 years. The five-metre shark was last sighted late yesterday morning after Fisheries WA monitored its movements following the attack which claimed the life of 49-year-old Ken Crew at North Cottesloe Beach. Authorities may use a special permit to destroy the shark, a protected species, if it is spotted again close to shore. Vanessa Joynt from Surf Lifesaving WA says beaches from Fremantle to Hillary's will remain closed until further assessments are made. ""Obviously we're not sure where the shark is at this stage and we're not prepared to risk opening one beach in case the shark happens to be in that area,"" she said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Israel has repeated its refusal to allow international intervention in its conflict with the Palestinians. A Palestinian call for the UN intervene is likely to be debated in the Security Council tomorrow. The push for an international force to halt fighting between Israeli troops and Palestinians and the renewed Palestinian drive for an international mission of enquiry into the violence so far comes as Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat prepares to leave for a crucial meeting in Washington with US President Bill Clinton. The Israeli Government says it does not believe Washington supports any level of international intervention and Israeli Prime Minister, Ehud Barak, who is to meet President Clinton on Sunday, said he would oppose an international force in whatever form it took. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The operation to separate Siamese twins Jodie and Mary, which was opposed in the British High Court by their parents, is continuing in Britain. The court ruled that the operation should proceed,in order to save the life of one of the twins, even though it means the certain death of the other. A surgical team of 20 are performing the complex operation, which has attracted international attention after a unique hearing in the British High Court. The court ruled in effect that it was lawful to end the life of one child to save the other, and have consented to the operation despite the parents' opposition. Both children would have died without the separation. If the procedure is successful, the stronger child Jodi has the chance of a relatively normal life."

" Federal National Party leader John Anderson is standing firm against the Queensland National Party's demand for a freeze on the petrol excise next February. The Queensland National's Central Council further increased the pressure on the Federal Government yesterday when it voted unanimously to demand an excise freeze. Western Australian Premier Richard Court also vowed to keep up pressure, although the push he led at last week's Premiers' Conference was defeated. Mr Anderson insists the Government cannot afford to freeze excise because doing so would put pressure on interest rates. ""We do it not because we don't care, not because we're not conscious of the pain,"" he said. ""I'm a farmer in one of the most rural electorates and most rural parts of the country. ""I know first hand and from being told by my constituents what a concern it is, but I also know when given the choice the first thing people say to me is whatever you do don't lose control of the economic levers, we cannot afford any more pressure on interest rates at the moment."" -----------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Special Minister for State, Chris Ellison, has accused Queensland Premier Peter Beattie of hypocrisy over his calls for an electoral fraud squad after claims vote rigging helped former Labor minister Michael Lavarch win the seat of Fischer at the 1987 election. Senator Ellison says he has referred the allegations to the Joint Parliamentary Committee on Electoral Matters. Mr Beattie, who was the Labor Party secretary at the time, says he has no knowledge of the matter and has called for an electoral fraud squad to be established. But Senator Ellison says Mr Beattie has been resisting the Federal Government's moves to reform the electoral laws. ""We want to bring in regulations which will enable or provide that, [a] person wanting to vote would have to provide an ID and there would be a class of witnesses who would have to witness that enrolment procedure,"" he said. ""At the moment it's harder to get a video out of a video store than it is to enrol to vote and we think that enrolling to vote is a very important process."" Federal Opposition leader Kim Beazley says if anyone has any allegations of vote rigging or electoral rorting in federal seats in Queensland, they should refer them to the police. Mr Beazley says he is confident all sitting federal Labor members have been elected on a fair basis. ""The rules in Queensland now are good, and the rules at the federal level are good, so I am happy about their situation,"" he said. -----------------------------------------------------------------------"

" In Fiji, there is some uncertainty over the next court appearance of coup leader George Speight. Schools are still shut in the greater Suva area today as the military hunt goes on for 10 rebel soldiers who took part in last Thursday's mutiny. Speight makes a fortnightly court appearance, but there is no sign so far today of the naval patrol boat that would bring him and his co-conspirators into Suva from their prison island of Nukulau. Some of the members of the Counter Revolutionary Warfare Unit, who were originally locked up with Speight, took part in last Thursday's mutiny at the army barracks. They had been released into military custody to face court martial, but somehow managed to get hold of their weapons. Ten of those involved in the attempted takeover of the barracks are still at large. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" With two days to go until the US elections, the latest polls have Republican George W Bush ahead. The CNN <i>USA Today</i> tracking poll gives Governor Bush 47 per cent, Vice-President Al Gore 43 per cent and Greens' candidate Ralph Nader 5 per cent. It is believed 5 per cent may just cost Mr Gore the presidency. With just a few points separating the Democrats and Republicans, the Green vote would on today's poll results give Mr Bush the presidency. Given that most Green voters almost certainly came from the ranks of the Democrats, it would be an ironic result but not one that Mr Nader, who is holding his last big rally in Washington today, apologises for. ""People should vote [for] their dreams, their hopes, their conscience, their interest, rather than just trying to manoeuvre some sort of tactical exchange,"" he said. One thing that is not lost on Mr Nader, or his supporters, is that if he can achieve the 5 per cent today's polls give him, it will mean he will qualify for millions in federal funding at the next presidential election. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Former Israeli leader Shimon Peres says he is convinced Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat is making sincere efforts to reduce the violence in the Palestinian territories. The focus for the hope for peace in the Middle East will switch this week to Washington. Both the Israeli leader Ehud Barak and the Palestinian leader have accepted an invitation from US President Bill Clinton to travel to Washington this week in an effort to restart the stalled peace process. Mr Arafat will meet Mr Clinton on Thursday following an Arab conference on the crisis in Qatar on Monday and Mr Barak will fly to Washington on Sunday. The talks are a sign that both sides are now ready to make a concerted effort to find a way to stop the continuing violence. In an interview with Israeli radio, Mr Peres said he was convinced Mr Arafat was making sincere efforts to end the violence. A spokesman for Mr Arafat said the visit to Washington would be important because it would focus on the continuation of Israeli attacks on Palestinians. Meanwhile, two Palestinians have been killed in the latest clashes with Israeli troops in the Gaza Strip. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The latest survey of business expectations suggests a pronounced drop-off in activity is looming for many individual enterprises. The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry has published the results of a national survey, indicating improved sentiment about the economy as a whole. But businesses are feeling increasingly gloomy about their own prospects for sales, profits and employment. The chamber's chief executive, Mark Paterson, says that most worryingly, more firms than not are planning to cut back on investment. ""People are thinking about the economy generally and saying, `things are fine, but I'm doing it tough',"" he said. ""Now this is more than 2,000 businesses, every size, every industry sector, so it is saying that the impact of interest rate changes, the impact of the Australian dollar, is having an effect."" The survey results come ahead of tomorrow's Melbourne Cup day meeting of the Reserve Bank Board. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" An organic garden pesticide widely considered safe for human health and harmless for the environment may cause Parkinson's disease, scientists fear. Lab rats intravenously injected with Rotenone, a plant-based pesticide used to eliminate unwanted insects, kill ticks on household pets and cull pond fish in water management programs, developed Parkinson's-like symptoms and brain damage, they report. Parkinson's, which strikes about 1 per cent of all people over the age of 65, is a notorious degenerative disease characterised by shaking, immobility and difficulty in speaking. Famous sufferers include Pope John Paul II, Muhammad Ali and screen actor Michael J Fox. Some cases of Parkinson's have been pinned to genes, but most cases remain unexplained, causing scientists to ponder whether there could be an environmental factor. The scientists, from Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia, report their work in the December issue of <i>Nature Neuroscience</i>, a US specialist journal. They say the degeneration occurred in dopamine-containing neurons in the substantia nigra, part of the brain that helps to coordinate movements. The rats developed clumpy proteins, called Lewy bodies, in this area and also suffered some of the characteristic symptoms of Parkinson's. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Adelaide teenager Lleyton Hewitt has lost a tough five-set final to South Africa's Wayne Ferriera in the Masters tournament in the German city of Stuttgart. Three sets went to tie-breakers. Hewitt, seeded eighth, had led two sets to one, but dropped the fourth in a tie-breaker, then the fifth 2-6. Despite losing, Hewitt says his goal is to be one of the eight qualifiers for the Masters Cup final in Lisbon later this month."

" Two soldiers are confirmed killed and 11 others have been reported wounded following a gunfight and explosion at the main military barracks in Fiji's capital Suva. Nine of the wounded suffered gunshot wounds while two female soldiers received shrapnel wounds from the blast. Fighting broke out when eight members of the army's counter-revolutionary warfare unit took over the Queen Elizabeth II barracks. The renegade soldiers were key members of a group that stormed Fiji's Parliament on May 19 this year. Two weeks ago they had been facing treason charges along with coup plotter George Speight. Treason charges were dropped and the men were charged with mutiny and placed into military custody. They were released a week ago to resume duties on Monday pending recommendations from a military board of inquiry. As many as 30 other soldiers are believed to have joined the renegades who are no holding hostages in the officers mess of the barracks. Former Fiji prime minister Sitiveni Rabuka is negotiating with the renegades. The demands of the Counter Revolutionary Warfare Unit are unclear. An officer who spoke to Fiji Radio said he was being held at gunpoint and the Counter Revolutionary Warfare Unit members were demanding that all officers up to the rank of colonel go to the barracks to negotiate with them."

" Israel is withdrawing its tanks from around Palestinian towns in the West Bank following a deal to end the violence reached earlier today. The deal was announced after former Israeli prime minister Shimon Peres held talks with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat in Gaza to try to end more than a month of violence. There are now reports that Israel has begun pulling back tanks from some Palestinian towns. The military pullout was part of the original Sharm el Sheikh agreement that fell apart within days. It is now the basis of a new agreement reached between the former Israeli prime minister Shimon Peres and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat. The deal is meant to be formerly announced later in the day and will require a ceasefire and renewed security cooperation. It will be tested almost immediately at the funerals for six Palestinian men killed yesterday in some of the fiercest battles in a month. Three Israeli soldiers also died, and the Israeli security cabinet authorised a military response. But the office of Ehud Barak says that action has been frozen now, while the success or failure of the Peres-Arafat deal is assessed."

" The Australian Cricket Board (ACB) has announced a full inquiry into fresh allegations of corruption made against Mark Waugh. The ACB's special investigator Greg Melick and the International Cricket Council's anti-coruption unit will investigate the allegations made in the Indian report into match-fixing. Waugh has been accused of accepting $38,000 for providing information to a bookmaker - well above the figure he admitted to in 1998. ACB chief executive Malcolm Speed says the allegations are serious and must be examined. ""I think it has come from a credible source, a well respected police force, it's on the record, it needs to be investigated,"" he said. But Waugh will not be stood down for the upcoming test series. The ACB says every player named in the Indian report is innocent until proven guilty."

" Mark Waugh has rejected the allegations. Waugh took time out from the Australian team camp on Queensland's Sunshine Coast to stand by statements made in earlier inquiries. ""I'd just like to say that these unsubstantiated allegations from India are totally untrue,"" he said. ""I've been through two inquiries, the Pakistan inquiry and the Regan inquiry and all my evidence is there. ""But of course I'm willing to cooperate to any further investigations with the ACB or the ICC."""

" Efforts to refloat a Malaysian container ship that has run aground on the Great Barrier Reef have been hampered by a poor high tide. Air and sea exclusion zones are in place to avoid interference with the refloating effort. The ship has been stuck on Sudbury Reef, 22 nautical miles south-east of Cairns, since 7:25am AEST this morning, and all efforts to refloat it have so far been fruitless. Several agencies are involved in the attempt including the Australian Maritime Safety Authority, the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority and the Maritime Division of Queensland Transport. There is still no word on exactly what type of dangerous chemicals may be on board, but it has been confirmed the cargo is a safe distance from the damaged part of the hull. State Transport Minister Steve Bredhauer says it is not likely this afternoon's growing winds will affect the refloating attempt. ""The vessel and all of its cargo does appear to be well intact and we're not anticipating that the weather would play a significant role in changing that situation,"" he said."

" The Prime Minister has relented and will allow discussion about petrol pricing at tomorrow's Premiers conference. However, the states are unlikely to change the Commonwealth's mind on freezing the fuel excise. After initially refusing to put the matter on the conference agenda, Mr Howard now says if the Premiers want to raise it during general business at the end, they can. But the Government is giving no ground on the issue itself with the Treasurer, Peter Costello, again challenging the states to use their own money to subsidise petrol costs. ""If the premiers were really serious about it, they have the capacity to fix it tomorrow,"" he said. The leader of the Premiers' push for a fuel excise freeze, Western Australia's Premier Richard Court, is promising to come up with some positive suggestions on the issue of petrol, but he is more negative about the conferences themselves. ""Quite frankly, with the agenda largely set by the Federal Government, it really does give a signal that federal governments aren't keen to sit down and discuss matters of national importance with premiers,"" he said."

" The New South Wales Premier, Bob Carr, has urged the Commonwealth to work cooperatively with the states and territories on the issue of the level of petrol excise. The Prime Minister has agreed to talk about the matter at tomorrow's Council of Australian Governments (COAG) meeting in Canberra. Mr Carr says petrol prices are placing a burden on rural residents in particular and any solutions COAG can up with would be welcome. ""The people of Australia want to see state and federal politicians get on with one another and solve problems by working together and that's what we got to strive to see out of this forum,"" he said. ""And if there's a bit a goodwill from the Commonwealth for example on petrol, the Prime Minister will find the mood from the state and territory leaders is cooperative."""

" The head of the Australian National Council on Drugs says marijuana should not be promoted as a medicine. Major Brian Watters from the Australian National Council on Drugs is concerned the introduction of legal cannabis for medicinal purposes promotes the drug without offering the negative side effects. He says if introduced it needs to be strictly monitored. ""I don't think we ought to be allowing people to grow it themselves,"" he said. ""Perhaps they need to look at some way of making it available through a government-controlled system."" He agrees cannabis may help with pain relief but says smoking it causes other health problems such as respiratory problems."

" The Australian Democrats in South Australia want a national approach towards a proposal to trial cannabis as a pain reliever for the terminally ill. The New South Wales Premier Bob Carr has indicated he would support a two-year trial in his state, which would involve legally giving a small number or patients access to the drug to alleviate pain and loss of appetite. The Australian Medical Association says a clinical trial is a commonsense approach and other states should look at the idea. The Democrats' Leader in South Australia, Mike Elliott, says a South Australian parliamentary committee recommended the therapeutic use of cannabis several years ago. He says the most effective approach to a proposed trial would be to involve all states."

" The Finance Minister, John Fahey, has rejected Labor claims that first-time shareholders did not understand the potential losses when they bought Telstra Two shares. The Federal Opposition says shareholders in Telstra Two have made a loss ""on paper"" of $1.02 per share or $153 on the minimum shareholding. Mr Fahey says small and first-time shareholders were not misled. ""The Government made it abundantly clear that when the prospectus was issued for the sale of shares in the second tranche of Telstra that all who sought to invest should seek their own advice, seek the advice of a broker, they should read the prospectus carefully,"" he said. ""It's also clear that the overwhelming majority of those who invested in Telstra saw it as a medium or long-term investment."""

" Official figures just released show Australian consumers spent record amounts during the Olympic Games. Retail trade rose by a seasonally-adjusted 0.8 per cent during September to $12.76 billion dollars. The Bureau of Statistics estimates the Games delivered a net boost to retailers of $170 million. Phil Naylor of the Australian Retailers Association says overall, the sector remains reasonably buoyant, but sales growth is slowing. ""A lot of retailers, especially those in Sydney, had one of their poorest trading months during the Olympics because no-one was shopping, they were all watching the Olympics or at the Olympics,"" he said. ""So whilst there was a lot of sales done, souvenir-type sales done as a result of the Olympics, that may well have just been a substitution for trade that was lost by other retailers."""

" Israel's security cabinet is about to meet in emergency session to discuss the growing conflict with the Palestinians. The meeting comes after another day of explosive violence, raging gunbattles and angry funerals, with the latest fighting centred on the town of Bethlehem. A day long battle broke out in El Khader, just south of Bethlehem, a Palestinian security officer and another Palestinian civilian were shot dead and by late afternoon five Israeli soldiers had been evacuated under fire. Several Arab television networks are reporting that two of the Israeli troops were killed. Israel responded by rocketing a nearby refugee camp as well as the town of El Khader. Around 20 houses were destroyed, according to Palestinian sources. The fighting spread into Beit Jala, Bethlehem and the Israeli settlement of Gilo on the edge of Jerusalem and continued into the night. Two more Palestinians were shot dead in Gaza. Israel's military is not commenting on its casualties, but Israeli Prime Minister, Ehud Barak, immediately ordered an emergency security Cabinet meeting. The meeting is expected to consider escalating retaliatory military action."

" A Singapore Airlines jumbo jet en route from Sydney to Singapore was forced to divert to Brisbane last night after a warning light indicated technical troubles. The airliner was heading for Cairns to fuel before going on to Singapore. It had been unable to leave Sydney with full tanks due to a mishap yesterday involving a plane from China East Airlines. A spokesman for the airline, Steven Foreshore, says when the warning light indicated problems, the crew requested a diversion to Brisbane airport. ""I hasten to add that passengers were not in any danger at all,"" he said. ""The captain elected to turn the aircraft back to Brisbane, because Brisbane has engineering staff that are used to dealing with 777 aircraft. ""The aircraft landed in Brisbane, the enginnering staff looked at the generator fault and rectified the problem, refueled the aircraft and the aircraft ended up departing the airport at 1:10am this morning."""

" Financial results have just been released for two of Australia's biggest companies. The National Australia Bank has reported an annual profit after tax and abnormal items of $3.2 billion. An increased final dividend to shareholders of 64 cents a share will be paid. Meanwhile, resources giant BHP has announced a profit for the first quarter of $715 million - a record quarterly result for the company."

" In New Delhi, five Indian and nine foreign players have been named in the long-awaited report into match-fixing and gambling in cricket. Among them are Australians Mark Waugh and Dean Jones. The preliminary report relies heavily on evidence provided by prominent Indian bookie, Mukesh Gupta, who is widely known as MK, or John. He told match-fixing investigators he paid Mark Waugh $US20,000 for pitch and team information. The report says an offer of twice that amount to Dean Jones was turned down. The 162 page document concludes there have been close links between at least five Indian players and an organised gambling syndicate. Indian cricket officials are also strongly criticised for their resolute indifference towards match-fixing. The Indian Government is studying the report before deciding what action can be taken against those players named."

" Meanwhile, a squad of elite former Scotland Yard investigators has joined the battle to fight corruption in cricket. The head of the International Cricket Council's anti-corruption unit, Sir Paul Condon, says he will closely examine the evidence collected by Indian investigators and liaise with other national cricket boards. Sir Paul has recruited three senior investigators from Scotland Yard with extensive experience in anti-terrorism, as well as an expert on information technology to staff his anti-corruption unit. ""Anyone involved in malpractice should realise now that there is one; there is a resolve within world cricket to do something about it, and two; we now have the capacity to do something about it in a way that we didn't two or three years ago,"" he said. Sir Paul says he has an unqualified commitment from the national cricket governing bodies to stamp out corruption, and that he will be liaising with them over the latest report from Indian authorities."

" The Prime Minister, John Howard, has indicated frustration with state leaders over tomorrow's Premiers Conference. State and territory leaders are insisting that petrol prices should be on the conference agenda. Mr Howard says it will not be because there is nothing the conference could do about petrol costs, because they are caused by the world oil price. Mr Howard says Premiers Conferences are no longer supposed to be about funding issues since the states have been given all the proceeds from the GST. ""We're going to the meeting with a major plan to tackle salinity and water quality. We can actually tomorrow do something historic for Australia's future about that issue,"" he said. ""If these meetings, which are pretty rare, are to mean anything, surely they should devote their time to talking about things that we can acutally improve rather than a forum for what are essentially political exchanges about something we can't address."""

" The Australian dollar has been trying to push higher overnight, assisted in part by a firmer euro. The European single currency has managed to hold onto its latest gains. It is now sitting at above 86 US cents, amid further signs the US economy is slowing. The main index published by the National Association of Purchasing Management in the US has fallen again in October, as activity in the manufacturing sector declines for the third consecutive month. At the same time, the US Federal Reserve's so-called ""Beige Book"" describes the American economy as growing moderately in September and early October, but with additional signs of slowing in some areas of the country. Also assisting the euro overnight have been further hints that central banks might intervene to support it - this time from the head of the German Bundesbank. The Australian dollar meanwhile has traded as high as 52.74 US cents. In early morning trade, it was back to 52.41, still 0.33 of a cent above yesterday's closing level. On the cross-rates this morning, it is at 0.6084 against the euro; 56.70 yen; 36.11 pence Sterling; and against the New Zealand dollar, it is at 1.322. On US equity markets there has been a general decline in share prices. The latest session has seen investors unsettled by sales warnings from telecommunications leader, WorldCom, and chip-maker Altera Corporation. The high-tech Nasdaq composite index has closed down 36 points to 3,333. That is a dip of 1.1 per cent. The Dow Jones industrial average has finished 72 points lower at 10,899. The US bond market is little changed. The yield on 30 year Treasury paper is 5.78 per cent. In Britain, the sharemarket has chalked up a seven-week closing high. London's FT100 index has risen 19 points to 6,458. Yesterday, Tokyo's Nikkei index jumped 333 points to 14,872. In Australia, resource stocks were finding some buying support. The All Ordinaries index finished 20 points ahead at 3,224. In overnight trade on the Sydney Futures exchange, the Share Price Index contract has closed up 1 point on yesterday's day settlement at 3,303. The 10 year bond contract is up 3 points at 93.86, with the implied yield easing to 6.13 per cent. The gold price is at $US264.30 an ounce. West Texas crude is at $US33.11 a barrel."

" Today is the deadline for around 1.5 million Telstra 2 investors to pay their final instalment, with the second instalment expected to net more than $6 billion. The final payment for Telstra 2 shares must be received by 5:00pm AEST today, and any late payments will be penalised. Investors can still lodge their payments through the electronic BPAY system. Investors will end up paying $7.40 per share for Telstra 2, well above Telstra's closing price yesterday of $6.38. The T2 offer was well subscribed after Telstra 1 resulted in a boon for investors, who saw their shares quickly rise in value from the $3.30 they originally paid. But since the T2 offer began, Telstra has suffered a share plunge, with markets questioning key management decisions."

" At least 65 people died when a Singapore Airlines Boeing 747 jet plunged to the ground and burst into flames shortly after take-off from Taiwan's capital, Taipei. Taiwan authorities fear the death toll could reach 100. Singapore Airlines says 65 bodies have pulled from the wreckage At least 30 more people among the 159 passengers and 20 crew were still to be accounted for, airline spokesman James Boyd said at a press conference in Los Angeles, the planned destination of flight SQ 006. A number of people, including a crew member, were injured in the crash. Emergency crews on the scene were still trying to locate more than 30 people so far unaccounted for, he said, adding that 27 people escaped the burning wreckage unharmed. ""We have the passenger list. Our office in Los Angeles is dialing through that list,"" he said. ""Once that process is complete"" the airline will release the names and nationalities. Early reports suggested the winds brought by Typhoon Xangsane, which continued to batter the island late on Tuesday, could have caused the crash. A police spokesman in Taipei said shortly after the crash that the plane crashed because of a sidewind. But Singapore Airlines spokesman Innes Willox told a briefing in Singapore ""the flight commander on board the aircraft reported hitting an object on the take-off run"". No other details about the possible cause of the crash, which happened at 11:19 pm (1519 GMT), were available, he said. Chang You-heng, head of Taiwan's Civil Aeronautics Administration, said the causes of the tragedy were ""still not clear"" but said ""take-off was allowable under the weather conditions."" He said a black box flight recorder recovered from the wreck would be examined by the flight safety commission. The airport remained closed for six hours after the crash. The accident is the first fatal air crash involving Singapore Airlines, which has one of the most modern fleets flying. The crashed jet was less than three-years-old, the airline said. The Foreign Affairs Department says a woman from Perth and a man from New Zealand, who lives in Australia were both on the Singapore Airlines jet. A spokesman says both are being treated in hospital for their injuries and both have been in contact with their families. He says Australian officials will be in contact with the two soon. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Prime Minister, John Howard, has accused those pushing for a freeze in the fuel excise of being irresponsible. Some Government backbenchers calling for the freeze are warning high oil prices are causing problems in the electorate. Others, including motoring groups and the Western Australian Premier, Richard Court, are also calling for changes to the excise. But Mr Howard has told Adelaide radio 5DN that if the Government cuts the excise, it will have to dip into the surplus and that could lead to interest rate rises. ""And if we put upward pressure on interest rates we'll be doing a great disservice to not only the motorists of Australia, we'll be doing a great disservice to people generally,"" Mr Howard said. ""And I say to all of those people who are grandstanding on this issue, like the motoring organisations and some of the Premiers, you're not being very responsible, you're being very narrowly focused."" Meanwhile, Mr Court plans to call for the removal of the next inflation-linked rise in fuel excise at this week's Premiers' Conference, even if the matter is not on the agenda. Not all state premiers are backing Mr Court's call for the matter to be raised during the talks. Mr Court says he does not care whether he receives support from his counterparts. ""It doesn't matter whether it's on the agenda or not, it's going to be raised because I'm going to raise it,"" he said. -----------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Israel is threatening even harsher action against Palestinians after its helicopters attacked PLO headquarters in three cities yesterday. Meanwhile, street violence has continued with six more Palestinians dead. Most of the deaths again occurred in Gaza where Palestinian rioters are now throwing stones from areas with no cover having been swept off trees and buildings by Israeli soldiers. A Palestinian policeman was killed near Bethlehem and another man shot dead at Ramallah. An Israeli spokesman said the air raids were a warning to the PLO Fatah faction that it could hit it anywhere. Israel says Fatah and Tanzim paramilitaries have conducted 600 shooting attacks in the past month. Palestinian leaders appealed for international intervention against the air attacks. Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat was defiant, saying the raids would not shake one eyelash from a Palestinian child holding a stone to defend holy Jerusalem. Meanwhile, the former Israeli prime minister, Shimon Peres, may meet Mr Arafat tomorrow, in a bid to find a way to end the escalating violence in the Middle East. Now a junior minister in the Israeli Government, Mr Peres is said to be the only government member that his fellow Nobel Prize winner Yasser Arafat can stand. Israeli television has reported that Mr Peres is determined to go to Gaza to meet the Palestinian leader tomorrow, hoping to arrange a return to peace negotiations. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" About 10,000 US troops in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait have been put on the highest state of alert because of ""credible"" threats of possible attacks by anti-Western guerillas, the Pentagon said today. Defence Department spokesman Ken Bacon said forces in the two Gulf states yesterday had been placed on ""Threat Condition Delta"" - the highest protective alert status in the US military - following threats involving unspecified targets. The latest step in the volatile Gulf and Middle East region followed the October 12 deaths of 17 US sailors in an apparent suicide bombing against the destroyer <i>USS Cole</i> in Yemen. US troops in Bahrain and Qatar were also put on the highest alert after the attack in Aden harbour. Under the highest alert, US troops carefully screen visitors to bases where they are located and make sure that vehicles that might contain explosives are not parked close to buildings. Mr Bacon confirmed a report from the US Embassy in Kuwait City earlier today that the alert level of around 5,000 troops each in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia had been increased. ""In both Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, US forces are at the highest alert level, which is Threat Condition Delta,"" he said. ""It is due to credible-threat information involving unspecified targets."" ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Currency dealers say it is too early to pronounce the worst is over for the Australian dollar despite a one cent recovery overnight. The local currency yesterday fell to a record low of 51.10 US cents. That appeared to be in defiance of official figures showing an Olympics-generated trade surplus in September of $677 million, Australia's first trade surplus in almost three years. The head of institutional foreign exchange at Citibank, Nigel Dobson, says overnight the currency has headed steadily higher. ""Since we made an all-time low yesterday around 51.10, the Aussie has quietly moved higher, partly because the market was short and oversold but also because the euro dollar had moved strongly higher overnight, up towards 85 again,"" he said. At 7:00am AEDT the dollar was being quoted at around 52.16 US cents. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" An Italian registered tanker carrying highly toxic chemicals has sunk off the coast of France, raising fears of an ecological disaster. The Ievoli Sun was being towed to a French port by salvage crews when it finally succumbed to rough seas and sank 19 kilometres north-west of the channel island, Alderney. A day earlier, the crew of 14 had been winched from the vessel, as it took a pounding from winds blowing up to 160 kph. The ship is carrying 4,000 tonnes of styrene used in the making of plastics, which is insoluble in water and highly toxic and corrosive. The company that owns the tanker said in a statement there was no risk of any leakage for the time being. Navy pilots have reported seeing an oil slick near the site but they believe it came from the stricken vessel's engines. Authorities say it could be many days before they can assess the extent of the danger. The sinking has sent a scare through the coastal towns of Brittany on the French coast, which less than a year ago suffered extensive environmental damage when the oil tanker, Erika, went down near their shores. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Western Australian Opposition has called for a united front from all political parties to prevent One Nation entering the State Parliament. The WA Liberal Party has ruled out One Nation from its preference negotiations, but Premier Richard Court will not rule it out in some seats. The State's National Party says One Nation will be placed last on its how to vote cards. The Prime Minister, John Howard, says all Liberal branches in Australia should put One Nation last. The State Labor leader, Geoff Gallop, says the Opposition has a commitment to put One Nation last and Mr Court should do the same. ""The one thing Richard Court won't say in relation to this issue is that One Nation will be behind Labor, behind the Greens, behind the Democrats, behind the mainstream political parties in Western Australia today,"" he said. A spokesman for the Premier says both Labor and the Liberals know preferences cannot be organised until nominations close. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Sweden's Sven Goran Eriksson has been named as the first foreigner to coach England's national soccer team. The 52-year-old was picked by the English Football Association to replace Kevin Keegan. Keegan resigned after the side suffered a 1-0 loss to Germany in a 2002 World Cup qualifier at Wembley Stadium. Eriksson coached Italian team Lazio to the Serie A title last season and has also won titles in Portugal and Sweden. He was one of three candidates on a short list reported to include Arsenal's French coach Arsene Wenger and Englishman Roy Hodgson."

" Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak appears to have succeeded in delaying attempts to topple his minority Government. The religious Shas Party has agreed to protect the Government for the time being. Shas has said it wants to give Mr Barak the chance to return to the peace table in the next month and the Prime Minister repeated his desire to implement the Sharm el-Sheikh ceasefire declaration and go to talks in Washington after the US elections, but only if violence ceases. Today in Gaza, Israeli tanks again opened machine gunfire on Palestinian protesters, injuring scores and a Palestinian man shot by Jewish settlers today near Nablus is reportedly in a critical condition. In East Jerusalem, two Israeli security guards were shot in an attack claimed by two previously unheard of Palestinian groups. One of the men died later. Meanwhile, the bound and stabbed body of a Jewish settler from the suburb of Gilo, just outside Jerusalem, was found in a valley near the city. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A federal Liberal backbencher has broken ranks with the Government over petrol excise. Despite the Prime Minister's opposition so far to freezing fuel excise, the Member for McEwen, Fran Bailey, wants no inflation-linked rise next February. She says the high cost of petrol is already hurting people in her electorate. ""These are people on low, fixed incomes, grandparents usually who can't get down to Melbourne to see their grandkids,"" she said. Mrs Bailey believes the cost of petrol will continue to be a huge political issue and says she will keep up the campaign. ""This is an issue I feel very strongly about on behalf of people I represent,"" she said. -----------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A massive car bomb killed a Spanish supreme court judge and two other people and wounded 30 others in the boldest and bloodiest attack attributed to the Basque separatist group ETA since it ended a ceasefire last December. Judge Francisco Querol Lombardero, 69, a member of the court's military tribunal, died instantly along with his driver and a police bodyguard in the explosion, which struck a deadly and symbolic blow to the heart of Spanish state institutions. Around 30 people were injured in the morning rush-hour blast, which set a passing bus alight, destroyed nearby parked cars and blew out windows in a residential area that houses embassies, shops and several schools. Police said the bomb, containing 20 to 30 kilograms of explosives, was planted in a parked car and was detonated as the vehicle carrying the judge passed by. No group claimed responsibility for the attack, but it bore all the hallmarks of the ETA, an underground group that has killed hundreds in a 30-year-old war for independence in the Basque country of northern Spain. Monday's bombing brought to 19 the number of people killed in attacks attributed to ETA since the movement ended a 14 month ceasefire in December. The judge, who held the rank of army general, had sat on the supreme court's military branch since 1992 and had been due to retire at the end of next month. The others killed were his driver, Armando Medina Sanchez, 57, and policeman Jesus Ascudero Garcia, 53. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Britain is struggling to get back to normal today after the worst storms to hit the country in more than a decade left a legacy of death, travel chaos and serious flooding in their wake. Six people have died in weather-related incidents in the past two days in Britain and Ireland, according to a provisional toll and another in France as the foul weather moved east. Much of Britain's railway network was brought to a standstill by debris and floods, many roads were shut and tens of thousands of people suffered power cuts. Parts of northern France and Belgium also suffered under the severe weather conditions and rail, ferry and air services were badly disrupted. However travel is beginning to recover. In Taunton, south-west England, a motorcyclist was killed when he hit a tree, while in Bantry, southern Ireland, a woman died when her car was swept away by a swollen river as she tried to negotiate a ford. Her boyfriend escaped. Meanwhile, a man was reported missing near Ballyshannon, a north-west coastal town. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Labor leader Kim Beazley says he did not expect that the Prime Minister would have sacked Workplace Relations Minister Peter Reith from breaching ministerial guidelines over his Telecard. Mr Reith yesterday paid back the money and apologised to Parliament for the harm done to all politicians' reputations by his actions. Mr Beazley says he will continue to probe the Government over the issue. ""We're just going through the ordinary processes of accountability, trying to find exactly what lies at the bottom of this murky tale,"" he said. ""One thing that we do know is that every time we ask a question, something else seems to come out."" ------------------------------------------------------------------------"

" As the US election campaign enters its final week, Republican candidate George W Bush and Democrat hopeful Al Gore are concentrating their efforts on the state of California. California, the largest electoral prize in the US, is a must for Vice-President Gore if he is to win on November 7. Long considered a Democrat certainty, new polls show Mr Gore's lead is dwindling. Mr Bush is to spend the next 36 hours in California, blitzing the state with a multi-million dollar advertising campaign in the hope of a Republican coup. Mr Gore will be in California tomorrow for a talk show appearance. Even President Bill Clinton, who has been told by Mr Gore to stay in the background during the campaign, has been called on to get votes in California this week. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" International electoral officials have confirmed that Ibrahim Rugova's moderate nationalist Democratic League of Kosovo has won Kosovo's first post-war municipal election. The result has not been welcomed by Belgrade, which sees it as a step toward Kosovo's permanent separation from Serbia. While Kosovo's neighbours are describing the vote as a step towards democracy, they are steering clear of the independence argument. Western diplomats are suggesting the international world could delay or even oppose Kosovo's ambitions. They argue that while a dictator ruled in Belgrade, the provinces had the sympathy of the West. But now that Serbia is celebrating democracy, they will more carefully consider other issues such as Kosovo's ability to secure its borders and guarantee the safe return of Serbian minorities. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The teenage swimming sensation, Siobhan Paton, has been named Paralympian of the Year. The award has been announced tonight at an Australian Paralympic Committee dinner for the entire Australian team. The 17-year-old Canberra school girl won six gold medals in the pool, a record at any single Paralympics Games. Meanwhile, equestrian competitor Julie Higgins has been named the Best Female Athlete of the Year and track athlete Tim Sullivan is Best Male Athlete."

" Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat says the uprising against Israel will continue until the flag is raised over Jerusalem as four more Palestinian deaths were registered today. While the Palestinian leader will return to Sharm el-Sheikh for talks with Egyptian President Hosi Mubarak later this week, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak has again been frustrated in his attempts to form a national unity coalition. Mr Barak again met opposition Likud Party leader Ariel Sharon, but again without success, reportedly because Mr Sharon continues to demand veto power over peace and security issues if a national unity coalition is formed. Israel's Parliament resumes later today with Mr Barak in minority government, but he appears unlikely to be unseated by a no confidence vote for now. Mr Arafat, speaking in Gaza, said the uprising against Israel would continue until Jerusalem was a Palestinian capital. Three Palestinians were killed today, one in Gaza, where protesters tried to block the arrival of more Israeli tanks and two were shot dead in Nablus, while another Palestinian died of wounds received earlier. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Leaders of the 16 Pacific Islands Forum nations will today put the official seal on a decision to expand the forum's powers to deal with coups and other threats to democracy. This year's forum meeting marks a significant turning point for the 30-year-old organisation. Much of what will be released in the official communique at the end of the leaders' meeting today had already been agreed upon at their retreat on the island of Biketawaw on Saturday. There it was decided the forum would establish a set of democratic ideals. If member countries breached those rules, the forum will condemn them, intervene in other ways and reserve the option of imposing what is called targeted measures. These measures could include explusion or suspension. The communique will also send a message to Indonesia and West Papuan separatists calling for an end to violence. Australia's Prime Minister John Howard will put a proposal to the forum to restrict the availability of weapons in the region. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Opposition will continue to pursue Workplace Relations Minister Peter Reith over the Telecard affair when Parliament resumes today. There has been a two week break since the last time Labor had a chance to question the Government over the affair in Parliament. During that time, more has been revealed about the affair. Labor says it wants to ask Mr Reith about discrepancies in his version of what happened. It will also push its proposal for an independent auditor into parliamentary entitlements and allowances by introducing it in the form of a private member's bill in both houses of Parliament. Labor Senate leader John Faulkner said it would be a low cost measure which would deal with a long standing problem. It is unlikely to win Government support and Senator Faulkner has guaranteed introducing the scheme would be one of the first acts of the next Labor government. ------------------------------------------------------------------------"

" There are further dire predictions for the residential construction industry. A drop in housing starts of almost one-third is being predicted for this financial year by industry forecaster, BIS Shrapnel. The firm expects commencements to fall to just 118,000, compared with 171,000 in 1999/2000. BIS director of building services, Robert Mellor, says with about 15,000 starts being ""pulled forward"" into the earlier year, goods and services tax distortions are the significant influence. ""That's the most dominant factor leading to this 31 per cent drop likely in commencements this financial year and at this stage that is predicated upon a possible further rise in interest rates,"" he said. ""If that interest rate rise didn't come through, well then we could see more of a bounce back in activity in the second half of the year and might go closer to a shade over 120,000."" --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" In Russia, families of the 118 men lost aboard the Kursk nuclear submarine have attended a memorial service for their loved ones as divers recovered more bodies from the wreck. Armoured personnel carriers carried four coffins wrapped in the Russian Navy flags through the snow-covered Arctic port town of Severomorsk. The four bodies, recovered last week from the wreck, were delivered to the mainland just hours before the ceremony began. A note recovered from one of the victims showing that not all seamen died instantly as the Kremlin had suggested, has renewed speculation that Russian authorities missed their chance to save at least some of the crew by their slow response. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" In the United States presidential election, Governor George W Bush is claiming he is on the cusp of victory with only nine days to go until the poll. But Democrats are questioning whether the Governor is ready for office. At a campaign stop in Michigan today, Vice-President Al Gore told a union crowd, the future prosperity of the country was at stake next week. Mr Gore and Governor Bush are ready for a hectic final week barnstorming across a country where polls showing a mixed picture - some a dead heat, others a Bush lead. The Texas Governor was having a day off at home in Austin, but in recent days has heightened his attacks on the Vice-President's integrity and credibility. However, Democrats say there is widespread uneasiness about whether Governor Bush has the experience or capacity for the White House. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Sydney 2000 Paralympic flame is out. The capacity crowd at the closing of the Games heard International Paralympic Games president Robert Steadward give a moving speech. He echoed the words of his IOC counterpart, Juan Antonio Samaranch, by declaring Sydney's Paralympic Games the best ever. Then with a tinge of sadness, he declared the Games over. An amazing lazer display followed and the crowd was under a canopy of light that washed like a wave over the stadium, extinguishing the flame. The capacity crowd was treated to a spectacular evening of entertainment and the best thing about it was it was funny. From the Upside Down Games Down Under with an acrobat singing the national anthem backwards to a round-up of those kangaroos on bikes. Athletes partied in the middle of the stadium, while spectators danced on their seats. No-one wanted it to end. Australian bronze medal winning swimmer Melissa Willson said she had bigger things to worry about than feeling depressed tomorrow. ""I will have a hangover,"" she said. Governor-General Sir William Deane says the Sydney Olympic and Paralympic Games will be remembered as the friendliest ever held. Sir William paid tribute to the thousands of people, among them athletes, officials, transport workers, police and entertainers, who helped to make both the Games possible. He said the large volunteer force played a special role in presenting the Games to the world. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australia is battling injury concerns with four players after their first round win against England in the rugby league World Cup. Wendell Sailor, Gordon Tallis, Bryan Fletcher and Darren Britt all in doubt for Wednesday's match against Fiji. In matches played overnight, New Zealand has thrashed Lebanon 64-0, the New Zealand Maoris beat Scotland 17-16, Fiji beat Russia 38-12 and Wales downed the Cook Islands 38-6."

" US President Bill Clinton has expressed his disappointment at another upsurge of violence in the Palestinian territories, saying while it continued it would prohibit any immediate return to peace negotiations. Israeli soldiers have shot dead four Palestinian protesters and used tank and helicopter fire on a number of Palestinian towns. Thousands of Palestinians marched towards Israeli checkpoints after Friday prayers. The Palestinian Authority had used radio and television to request that weapons not be taken to the protest areas. In the first few hours at Ramallah, one Palestinian youth was killed by Israeli gunfire, although the Israeli response was largely limited to tear gas and rubber bullets. The four were killed in separate incidents in Gaza and in the West Bank at Tulkarem, Qalqilya and Ramallah, where there were exchanges of machine gun fire. During gun fights in Jericho, Israeli tanks fired two shells, and Palestinian forces said the target was a Palestinian security forces buiding. Israeli helicopters flew over Beitjala, near Jerusalem, firing at least one missile."

" President Clinton described his frustration at the increased conflict. ""I'm very disturbed about today because we actually had two or three good days here where there was very little violence,"" he said. ""We're trying to get to the bottom of seeing what happened and seeing what, if anything, we can do to undermine the causes of today's violence so that it won't recur. ""But we've got to get the level of violence down before there can be a resumption in negotiations."""

" Well over 100 people have died - most of them Arabs - since violent confrontations erupted throughout the Palestinian territories a month ago. Dr Moustapha Bhargouti, from Palestinian Medical Relief in Ramallah, where one of the latest victims was killed, says the Israelis are shooting unarmed civilians. ""Palestinian demonstrators, the most they can use is stones and the Israelis are shooting at them with live ammunition with metallic bullets,"" he said. ""And the [Israelis] shoot in the head, they say that they shoot to defend themselves, but I was with the American physicians for human rights yesterday, we talked about it and they said if you shoot somebody in the head that doesn't means your life is not threatened really, but you are really shooting to kill."""

" Pressure is mounting among Pacific Island leaders to abandon a proposal to adopt rules and sanctions for dealing with threats to democracy in the region. The 16 leaders of the South Pacific Forum nations will head to an island retreat today to fine tune what will become known as the Biketawa Declaration. The declaration is in response to this year's coups in Fiji and the Solomon Islands. If Prime Minister John Howard, his New Zealand counterpart Helen Clark, and others get their way, the Biketawa Declaration would include santions the forum could impose on undemocratic countries, including expulsion or suspension from the forum. But resistance to the measures is growing among the small and medium-sized island nations weary of being dictated to, or punished by larger nations. The outgoing chairman of the Pacific Islands Forum has warned against voting to resolve difficult issues such as the recent crises in Fiji and Solomon Islands. The President of Palau says the forum is facing a dilemma, partly because of its traditional method of resolving matters by consensus. President Kuneeevo Nakamura said the member nations of the Pacific Island Forum were divided on how to respond to the coups in Fiji and the Solomons and that when the coups happened, different nations wanted to support different sides. He told the opening ceremony of the forum meting in Kiribati that he was against getting rid of the current consensus approach but that one day it may be abandoned. ""When that day comes, I fear that this special alliance will suffer as a result,"" he said."

" In Indonesia, police have been orded to shoot to kill to end ethnic fighting on the island of Borneo. Police and soldiers in the West Kalimantan provincial capital of Pontianak were outnumbered by mobs armed with machetes, daggers and homemade rifles. The armed gangs, made up of ethnic Malays, hacked to death two migrants from the island of Madura, bringing the death toll to seven after three days of violence. The bodies were then decapitated. Police say the violence was triggered by a traffic accident on Wednesday involving people from the rival ethnic groups. Six hundred fresh troops have been sent in to try and restore order. Violent clashes involving Malays and Madurese have flared several times in recent years, claiming more than 300 lives."

" Police from the Child Protection Enforcement Agency yesterday charged three 16-year-old boys from a Sydney private school in connection with alleged assaults against other students. The students are from Trinity Grammar in Sydney's inner-west. The three will appear in Bidura Children's Court in November after being bailed yesterday. Two of the boys are facing five counts of aggravated sexual assault and one of aggravated indecent assault, while one boy was charged earlier this week with similar offences. Police and the Department of Community Services were called to the school two weeks ago after a student complained to a counsellor of being tied up and assaulted. Fifteen students were then interviewed, which revealed further alleged assaults. The Anglican school at Summer Hill is one of Sydney's most exclusive, charging fees of $25,000 a year."

" The Northern Territory's Resource Minister, Daryl Manzie, says he is disappointed by calls on Rio Tinto to abandon the proposed Jabiluka uranium mine in the Territory. A coalition of green groups have told Rio Tinto the Jabiluka project should not go ahead, claiming the majority of Australians do not support the controversial project. Following a recent takeover of North Limited, Rio Tinto now owns the Jabiluka lease, which is surrounded by the Kakadu National Park. Mr Manzie says there would be major losses for the Territory if the mine does not go ahead. ""The whole ranger process would have to be shut down and that just does away with a number of jobs, thousands of jobs directly and indirectly and it loses hundreds of millions of dollars in royalties for Aboriginal people,"" he said. ""It also deprives the world of a cheap source of energy so it would be a down side for everybody. ""It [uranium] will probably come from other countries such as South Africa, Russia and South America, who actually have less environmentally strict processess for mining so it would be a down side for everybody."""

" Financial analysts believe the Australian dollar and other foreign currencies may gain some breathing space following the release of the latest US economic figures. There are new signs that the long anticipated slowdown in the US economy is underway. The country's Gross Domestic Product grew at almost 3 per cent during the September quarter, less than half the pace of the previous quarter. John Ryding, a senior economist at Bear Stearns in New York, says if the slowdown is sustained, other currencies will strengthen. But he says the upcoming US election could change all that. ""That election on a Bush win, which looks the most probable outcome judging by the polls right now, could lead to significantly lower tax rates, and that in turn could re-invigorate growth, raise the rate of return on capital, and in turn, attract more investments into the US,"" he said."

" Champion Kiwi mare Sunline will attempt to capture a second consecutive Cox Plate at Moonee Valley this afternoon . Only a few horses have managed to win consecutive Cox Plates, but Sunline's trainer Trevor McKee says the mare is in perfect form to do just that. ""She's 100 per cent at this stage of things so it's a very, very, very strong field but she is going to be very, very competitive,"" he said. Victory would make Sunline Australasia's highest stakes winner, but jockey Greg Childs is not feeling the pressure. ""I do have experience on my side, I've ridden all around the world, ridden in a lot of major races so it's just a case of letting the gates open and let the race begin,"" he said. Shogun Lodge will be a threat if it's dry, while Sky Heights and Testa Rossa will be leading contenders if the track is wet."

" Another international sporting festival opens today as the Paralympics draw to a close. Thousands of athletes from around the globe have gathered on Queensland's Gold Coast for the Asia Pacific Masters Games. Just over half the 11,000 athletes expected to attend have already settled into the Games village on the Southport Broadwater. Wearing their national costumes, they will march to the welcoming ceremony this afternoon where Queensland Sports Minister Terry McKenroth will declare the Games open. Forty sports are listed for competition and participants of all ages will vye for top honours. The Games, which continue until November 5, are expected to inject more than $20 million into the Queensland economy."

" The Prime Minister, John Howard, says the Workplace Relations Minister has not broken any guidelines covering the use of mobile phones provided to politicians. Peter Reith says it is irrelevant that his wife left a voicemail greeting on one of his taxpayer-funded mobile phones, claiming he has used it in accordance with the rules at all times. Mr Reith says the phone has been mainly used by electorate office staff. Mr Howard has told Sydney Radio 2UE that he is not aware of any federal politician breaking the rules regarding mobile phones. -------------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Israeli tanks have opened fire on the West Bank town of Ramallah, the first time Israeli armour has been used against the town. The fire has come from tanks stationed near a Jewish settlement which has come under frequent attack over the past three weeks. The tanks launched their bombardment from a Jewish settlement on the outskirts of Ramallah, which had been the target of automatic weapons fire from Palestinians. The Israeli soldiers also sprayed the area with heavy machine-guns, and a gunfight ensued. Witnesses say ambulances have been rushed to the area but there are no immediate reports of casualties. Earlier, a Palestinian youth was shot dead by Israeli troops in clashes in the northern West Bank town of Jenin and a 16-year-old was fatally shot in clashes near the Erez crossing point in the Gaza Strip. Clashes have also erupted in the divided West Bank city of Hebron. Meanwhile, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak will not be meeting right-wing Likud opposition leader Ariel Sharon on Tuesday for further discussions on forming an emergency government, his office said. Asked about a meeting between the two leaders, a spokeswoman for Mr Barak said they would not be meeting today. And no other encounter has been scheduled for later in the week, she said. Mr Barak held talks with Mr Sharon on Monday in a bid to broaden his narrow coalition government after announcing a ""time out"" in peace talks with the Palestinians after almost four weeks of deadly violence. But the negotiations stumbled over the Likud leader's demands for the right to a veto over any resumption of peace talks with the Palestinians. Nevertheless, Israeli television reported that Communications Minister Binyamin Ben-Eliezer was holding talks on Tuesday evening with Likud MP Meir Sheetrit. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" There is a growing view the initial GST impact on Australia's inflation rate might not be as great as forecast by the Federal Government. Treasury predictions have been for a lift of 3.75 per cent in the September quarter Consumer Price Index (CPI) attributable to the new tax. The overall CPI movement will be published today and the median market forecast is for a rise of 4.2 per cent in the quarter and an annual rate of inflation of 6.6 per cent, the biggest surge in the cost of living since December 1990. That would be the highest figure in a decade. A number of economists believe the GST effect will be more muted than Federal Treasury has predicted, a view shared by businessman and Reserve Bank board member, Dick Warburton. Mr Warburton says today's figures will be just the first indication of how the GST is affecting prices. ""I think you'll find, and the evidence seems to suggest, that it's going to be lower than we thought,"" he said. ""I think people have probably held back a bit on all the increases and so overall I think you're going to get a lower effect."" But a separate quantification of the GST impact will not be known until a follow-up study by the Bureau of Statistics is published at the end of next month. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Secrecy surrounds an operation to separate Siamese twin girls at Brisbane's Royal Children's Hospital. The hospital says it cannot release any information about the world first operation, which is scheduled to finish in a few hours. It is not known at this stage if the girls have survived. Tay-lah and Monique Armstrong were born joined at the back of their heads in April this year. The babies share a small portion of skull, about the size of a 50 cent piece. Hospital authorities are not able to release information until the parents give their permission. An exclusive deal was signed with a magazine and television station when the babies were born. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" North Korea has accepted the idea of working toward restraint in its missile program, US officials said today. They cited progress on a critical issue dividing the two countries as they explore reconciliation after 50 years. US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said she took seriously a remark by President Kim Jong-Il - delivered seemingly offhand at a gymnastic exhibition - that his state would refrain from long-range missile launches. Mr Kim had raised the issue when an image of a Taepo Dong I missile was flashed before the audience. ""He quipped that this was the first satellite launch and it would be the last,"" Dr Albright said. Asked if she interpreted that as a pledge for a permanent moratorium on missile launches, Dr Albright said: ""I take what he said as serious as to his desire to move forward to resolve various questions."" Ms Albright was going to Seoul tomorrow to tell South Korean and Japanese officials about her talks with President Kim. President Bill Clinton is considering whether to visit North Korea himself, a trip that could come next month. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" American space shuttle Discovery has landed at Edwards Air Force Base in California's Mojave Desert. The shuttle, carrying seven crew members, had been trying to return to Earth since Sunday. But strong winds and rain on both the east and west coasts of the United States had delayed the landing until now. During this 100th shuttle mission, the astronauts upgraded the International Space Station with two new segments. The first crew to live on the station is due to arrive there tomorrow week. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Relative newcomers, Killing Heidi and Madison Avenue, cleaned up at last night's ARIA music awards in Sydney. Killing Heidi won four major prizes at last night's awards. Their debut LP <i>Reflector</i> was named best rock album and best album overall, and they also took out the honours in the categories of best group and best new artist - album. Madison Avenue won record of the year for <i>Don't Call Me Baby</i>, best new artist - single, best video and highest selling Australian single. Alex Lloyd won the ARIA for best male artist for his debut solo record <i>Black The Sun</i>. Despite his award, Lloyd said he felt a bit underwhelmed by the whole thing. ""Yes, no, it's nice I guess, I honestly don't take this thing amazingly serious,"" he said. Despite taking the year off, silverchair managed to pick up the night's only publicly-voted award for Australian artist of the year. And The Dirty Three's <i>Whatever You Love You Are</i> took out best alternative release. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Canadian Paralympic Committee is celebrating after successfully appealing against a re-race of the women's 800-metre wheelchair event. Canada's Chantal Petitclerc won the event and then had the race cancelled by a referee, becauase of a crash affecting other competitors. However, she successfully appealed to the Court of Arbitration for Sport and will keep her gold medal."

" A new controversy has arisen over the entitlements of Members of Federal Parliament. In the wake of the outcry over the Workplace Relations Minister, Peter Reith's $50,000 phone card bill, there are now allegations that the minister's wife is using his mobile phone. Media organisations who called the number discovered a voicemail message recorded by Mr Reith's wife, Julie. A spokeswoman for the Minister responsible for Parliamentary entitlements says that there are no guidelines preventing MPs allowing other people to use their mobile phones. Mr Reith, says he has used the mobile phone assigned to his electorate office in accordance with the rules. Mr Reith says the fact his voice was not on the message service is irrelevant. He says the phone has mainly been used by electorate office staff, but has occasionally been used by him. Mr Reith says his wife has access to other mobile phones which are paid for privately. A spokeswoman for the Special Minister of State, Chris Ellison, says there are no guidelines preventing MPs allowing other people to use their phones."

" The Australian Communications Authority has welcomed two new entrants into the telecommunications market, saying it can only be good for consumers. The Federal Government has reaped $112 million from its first auction of the mobile communications spectrum, with newcomers A-KAL and New Zealand's Walker Wireless joining Austar as successful bidders. They each have a 15-year licence to run services such as wireless telephony and the Internet, within the 3.4 Gigahertz band. The authority's David Brumfield says the result bodes well for future bidders, consumers, and the Government. ""I think it says that there's potential there for new providers to provide services to customers on a profitable basis,"" he said. ""And I think we'll be seeing more of this sort of thing over the next couple of years."""

" Australia says it will restore special trade privileges to Fiji if Suva gives a firm guarantee that democracy will return within 18 months. The Foreign Minister, Alexander Downer, says Fiji's interim government has responded to Australian pressure by halving the timetable for elections from three years to 18 months. Mr Downer says if that timetable is followed, he will look at helping Fiji's garment industry, which sells 70 per cent of its product to Australia. Last month, Australia scrapped its import credits for Fiji's clothing exports as a further sanction for the overthrow of democracy. Mr Downer says Australia could restore trade privileges to Fiji's textiles, clothing and footwear industries through SPARTECA - the South Pacific Regional Trade and Economic Cooperation Agreement. ""If they were to give a cast iron guarantee of a return to genuine democracy after 18 months, we wouldn't reintroduce the import credit scheme, we're not prepared to do that,"" he said. ""But we would put in place a much more modest scheme which we'll call for the purposes of this discussion the 'SPARTECA TCF' scheme."""

" Former governor general Bill Hayden has criticised Australia's recent involvement in East Timor. Mr Hayden has described the Howard Government's change of policy on East Timor as ""risky"". Mr Hayden's speech tonight at the Univeristy of Tasmania in Hobart delivered a wide-ranging critique of Australia's East Timor policy over the past 25 years. He has described the decision to send troops to East Timor as ""a thinly thought out frolic"". Mr Hayden says that without the support of the United States, the situation could have escalated to a point where it could have exhausted and humiliated Australia's armed forces. While he says he does not dismiss the efforts of the Australian forces, Mr Hayden says Australia needs to recognise its limitations in being able to meet certain levels of military commitment. Mr Hayden has paid tribute to Indonesia's former President Suharto. He says President Suharto's leadership lifted Indonesia out of the social and economic chaos of the Sukarno years and gave cohesion and stability to the country as well as boosting regional stability. He says Australia should be grateful for what was achieved under Suharto's rule. Mr Hayden says it is up to the Indonesian court system to decide whether President Suharto has been corrupt but says he should be remembered for the benefits he provided to the Indonesian people."

" Australian share prices have ended mixed, as stronger banking and retail stocks offset weakness in media and telecommunications issues. The All Ordinaries index shed 7 points, to just under 3,210. There was no firm lead from Wall Street overnight - the Dow Jones rose 45 points to 10,272. But profit-takers held sway among the high-tech stocks, the Nasdaq down 14 to 3,469. In the region today, Tokyo's Nikkei index has closed up 50 points to 15,148, while the Hang Seng is broadly unchanged in late trade, down 3 points. In Australia, market heavyweight News Corporation weakened 22 cents to $20.40, the preferred stock is down 34 cents to $17.30. Telstra added 3 cents to $6.27. Market debutante OneSteel added 8 cents to $1.07 but remains well below BHP's valuation of $2.64 a share, before yesterday's listing of the group's steel long-products unit. BHP added 26 cents to $18.76, today launching AURIAS, its first move into online diamond retailing. The ANZ Bank added 19 cents to $14.26, ahead of its full-year results, which are due out on Thursday. Other major banks were stronger - the National up 5 cents to $27 and the Commonwealth up 7 cents to $28.87. Technology stocks weakened in line with Wall Street - Solution6 taking a second day of huge losses, down 35 cents to $1.26. Sausage Software fell 17 cents to $1.12 and Telemedia Networks dropped 40 cents to $4.25. In the currency markets, the Australian dollar is buying 52.5 US cents, down 0.15 cents from this morning. On the cross-rates, it is at 36.12 sterling, 56.86 yen and 1.227 marks. It is worth $1.301 New Zealand, and 0.627 euros and at 49.2 on the trade weighted index. Spot gold is at $US270.35 an ounce, steady on this morning."

" Australia's music industry is turning it up tonight for the 14th annual ARIA awards. The Melbourne duo, Madison Avenue, are up for awards in eight categories, followed closely by Killing Heidi with seven. Madison Avenue's track ""Don't Call Me Baby"" and Killing Heidi's album, <i>Reflector</i> between them have the most nominations. Artists with three nominations include Powderfinger, Alex LLoyd, 28 Days, Shihad and Bardot. In the pop category, the nod has been given to a wide range of artists from Kylie Minogue to Frenzal Rhomb. Meanwhile, the ABC has artists up for awards in almost every genre. There are 16 ABC nominations in eight categories including classical, children's, country, jazz and world music."

" Richmond Football Club has named Wayne Campbell its new captain for season 2001. Campbell takes over from Matthew Knights, who held the position for the last four seasons before losing the post recently. Campbell, 28, says it is the greatest honour of his life. ""Being a Richmond suporter when I was young, I wanted to play my first game for the club or get drafted by the club and that happened,"" he said. ""I didn't know whether I was actually going to make it to play league footy and then did that. Then I played 50 games and when I played my 200th game against Carlton in round 22 last year I thought that was about as good as it got individually, but this certainly surpasses that by far."" Tigers coach Danny Frawley says Campbell is the right man for the job. ""He's a champion player. He works harder than probably any other player at the club. He leaves no stone unturned to his pursuit of excellence,"" Frawley said. ""He wants to be succesful, he's talking about playing in a premiership and that's why we're all here."""

" Negotiations on forming an emergency coalition government in Israel have stalled on what level of peace negotiations would be acceptable to all parties. Senior members of the Barak Government say they will not accept demands by the right-wing opposition to abandon earlier understandings reached with the Palestinians. Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Opposition Likud leader Ariel Sharon headed a meeting to discuss the possibility of joining in power. The talks broke down when the Likud group insisted that understandings reached at the Camp David Summit earlier this year must be abandoned. While another meeting is scheduled for tomorrow, several Barak Government members say they will not be part of a merger on that basis. Meanwhile, a roadside bomb attack has been launched against a convoy of Israeli cars driving from a Jewish settlement in the Gaza Strip. An Israeli Army spokesman says no-one was wounded in the attack on the vehicles from Netzarim, but he has described the bomb used as very powerful. Earlier, an Israeli tank fired a shell at the West Bank village of Beit Jala, after Palestinian gunmen sprayed Israeli apartment buildings on the outskirts of Jerusalem with machine-gun fire. Clashes between Palestinians and the Israeli Army have continued sporadically elsewhere in the territories. At least 127 people, nearly all of them Palestinians, have died in more than three weeks of violence. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Deputy Prime Minister John Anderson has backed the Workplace Relations Minister, saying he has tried to right the public outrage over his $50,000 Telecard bill by making arrangements to pay for it. Peter Reith is under pressure to stand aside from his portfolio because of the ongoing row over the bill. Mr Anderson said he understood public concern about the issue but would not be drawn on whether he would apply the high standards he had set for National Party politicians to Mr Reith, if he were a member of his party. ""Look, I've made the comments that I'm going to make on that matter, I support the ongoing work that Peter Reith is engaged in,"" he said. ""He is a good Minister, I support the approach that the Prime Minister is taking and I have nothing further to add."" ------------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Federal Treasurer Peter Costello has been meeting some of the world's biggest investment houses in New York, selling the message that Australia's economy is in a stronger shape than the struggling dollar suggests. The Treasurer, who is en route to the G-20 meeting of finance ministers and central bankers in Montreal, says those paying attention to Australia realise the underlying strength of its economy and the differences between Australia and Europe, which has currency woes of its own. ""Nonetheless we have to observe on exchange rates that they've been moving together in recent times, although perhaps more recently there's been a bit of a break and it's just worth re-emphasising the differences amongst those that don't follow things as carefully as others,"" he said. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" An arrest warrant has been issued in Latvia for alleged Nazi war criminal Konrad Kalejs, who is currently living in Melbourne. Extradition proceedings are now expected against the 87-year-old. Mr Kalejs has already been deported from the United States and Canada after lying about his Nazi past. He fled Britain for Australia last year to avoid a deportation order. He is now living in Melbourne, where, his lawyer says, he has developed cancer, dementia and is going blind. Last month, Latvian prosecutors charged him with genocide and after an initial setback they have now obtained an arrest warrant, meaning that extradition proceedings are now imminent. However, it could be a slow process with the warrant likely to be appealed, amongst other things, on the grounds of ill-health. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright has held talks with North Korean leader Kim Jong-Il in Pyongyang, marking the first time an American official has met the chief of the Stalinist nation. Dr Albright and President Kim greeted each other with smiles and handshakes at the guest house where the secretary is staying. A State Department spokesman says during their three hours of talks, the two agreed to meet again tomorrow. Dr Albright has also pledged Washington's continued humanitarian support, with 62 per cent of the North Korean population chronically malnourished. ""These children and their brothers and sisters around the country should be able to grow up without fear of emergency, shortages, or famine and international donors should be assured that the supplies they send are used for the purposes intended,"" she said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Indonesia is to grant special autonomy next year to two of its most restless and resource-rich provinces, in a bid to end Separatist struggles. People from Papua Province, formally known as Irian Jaya, and the devoutly Muslim Province of Aceh will gain a greater say in their own affairs. The Indonesian Parliament is currently debating the extent of the powers to be handed over to Aceh, on the northern tip of Sumatra Island, and Papua Province, the western half of New Guinea Island. Indonesia's co-ordinating Minister for Political and Security Affairs, Bambung Yudiona, says the move will take affect from next May. The separatist Free Aceh Movement has been waging a war against Indonesian rule for more than 25 years. Despite a ceasefire signed between the two sides earlier this year, daily violence in Aceh continues to claim lives. In Papua, separatists have fought a long-running guerilla campaign against Jakarta and recently threatened to declare independence from Indonesia on December 1. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australia's ambassador to Japan has warned young Australian women against accepting work as bar hostesses in that country. Police investigating the disappearance of a British-born hostess have uncovered evidence suggesting that numerous foreign bar hostesses in Tokyo have been drugged and raped. Australia's ambassador in Tokyo, Peter Grey, says Australian women should think very carefully before accepting work in Japan's so-called entertainment industry. ""We would ask Australians, particularly Australian women who might be thinking of working in bars as hostesses in Japan, that they need to be very very careful indeed,"" he said. ""People shouldn't be misled by the fact that Japan as a whole is very safe, into believing that that applies even to bars, it doesn't."" --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The chance of Australian Paralympian Louise Sauvage getting a second opportunity to win the 800 metres wheelchair event will be decided later today. The Canadian team is appealing against the decision to re-contest the race. Canadian Chantal Petitclerk was first across the line in Sunday's final with Sauvage second, but a collision early in the event led the race referee to call for a re-run on Thursday night. Canada is appealing against that ruling, arguing the race was won fair and square by Petitclerk because the interference did not impede the leading competitors. Sauvage says she expects the court action to fail and the race to go ahead. Canadian officials says if they lose the case, Petitclerk is no certainty to compete in the new final due to a busy program."

" The junior minister to Federal Workplace Relations Minister Peter Reith says Government backbenchers understand the need to support Mr Reith in the telecard affair. Sustained pressure is being applied by the Opposition, the Democrats and the media for Mr Reith to either stand-down pending an independent investigation, or be sacked. The Employment Minister, Tony Abbott, says Mr Reith is an effective minister who cannot be handed over to media lynch mobs. ""Obviously people in marginal seats are always conscious of what's helping us and what's hindering us, but I think they all understand that sacrificing a very senior minister like this will end up doing much more harm than good."""

" The Community Services Minister, Larry Anthony, has acknowledged welfare agencies are under more pressure, but says part of the answer is to reduce the number of people relying on their services. Mr Anthony was responding to concerns expressed by the St Vincent de Paul Society about the number of government agencies referring clients to it for help. He has downplayed the impact the increase in the number of people being breached for welfare overpayments is having on the agencies, saying Governments have been making referrals since the 1970s. ""Eighty-six per cent of Centrelink customers who are on a Newstart allowance and Youth Allowance are not breached, they do the right thing,"" he said. ""In the past it should also be remembered that when customers were breached, they would go off total payment altogether; the current policy that we have is that if you are breached, it's two times then you lose your payment for a certain period of time."""

" A Brisbane court has heard witnesses would testify that former Queensland MP Bill D'Arcy raped and indecently dealt with them when he was their teacher in the mid-1960s. Bill D'Arcy has pleaded not guilty to 18 charges in the Brisbane Supreme Court. Crown Prosecutor David Bullock told the court that four of the accused's former students from a central-western Queensland town school would give evidence detailing sexual encounters with their teacher. He said they would allege most of the alleged offences occurred in the school's library and store rooms. The charges include three counts of rape, and 15 counts of indecent dealing involving three girls and a boy. The court heard one of the alleged victims would testify that Bill D'Arcy had sex with her while she sat on his lap behind his desk during a class."

" The ACT Magistrates Court has heard a 25-year-old Canberra man who belted his 10-week-old baby because he was having a bad day, should go to jail. Prosecutors say a message needs to be sent to people who consider taking their anger out on defenceless children. Earlier today Wayne Michael Steedon was sent to jail for one-and-a-half years for burglary and theft. This afternoon he was back before the court for assaulting his then 10- week-old son a year ago. It is claimed Steedon hit and then threw the baby at the child's mother. The court had previously heard Steedon was angry because it was his birthday and his wife had been unable to afford a present and his family had not phoned him to wish him happy birthday. The court has also heard that the incident happened at 7:00am. Prosecutor Margaret Hunter said Steedon's jail sentence should be increased, saying it was Steedon's job was to protect the child, not to belt it. Steedon will be sentenced tomorrow."

" Shares in the newly-listed OneSteel Limited have had a modest first day's trading on the Australian Stock Exchange. OneSteel is the former steel long-products division of BHP, which issued one share in the new company for every four BHP shares held. OneSteel opened at just 79 cents, well below BHP's valuation, and closed 20 cents higher at 99 cents. BHP rose five cents to $18.50. Analyst Michael Slifirski of Credit Suisse First Boston says he expects OneSteel's price to climb, but only after steady selling by BHP investors. ""BHP is held, about 40 per cent, by offshore institutions. The guys offshore who are natural holders of BHP - holders of a large worldclass minerals and petroleum business - certainly aren't natural holders of OneSteel,"" he said. ""They will be progressive sellers over the, I guess over the first month or so."""

" The Australian sharemarket has enjoyed broad-based gains today after last week's News Corporation-driven volatility. The All Ordinaries index rose 29 points, or 0.9 per cent, to 3,217. Wall Street gave a positive lead on Friday night, with the Dow Jones up 83 points, to 10,226, while the Nasdaq put on 64 points, or 1.9 per cent, to 3,483. In the region today, Tokyo's Nikkei index has shown more weakness, closing 100 points lower at 15,098. The Hang Seng in Hong Kong is down marginally in late trade. At home, gains for News Corporation helped propel the market - the ordinary stock up 27 cents to $20.62 and the preference shares are up 34 to $17.64. The market focus was on the debut of OneSteel, the former steel long-products division of BHP. OneSteel opened at 79 cents, compared to BHP's valuation of $2.64 a share, gaining steadily through the day to finish 20 cents higher, at 99 cents. Some brokers expect the share price to remain soft for the first month, as overseas institutions who were issued one new share for every four BHP shares held sell out. BHP added five cents to $18.50. Solution6 plummeted 17 per cent or 33 cents to $1.60 after the business software group became the latest high-tech company to slash its earnings forecasts. The new chief executive, Neil Gamble, has ordered a restructure, including a review of loss-making businesses, and closer scrutiny of managers. Telstra gained 21 to $6.24 and rival, Cable and Wireless Optus added 11 to $4.21, while Hutchison Telecommunications, which has announced a 13 per cent rise in digital mobile subscribers, closed up 10 cents to $2.72. On the currency market, the Australian dollar is buying 52.86 US cents, up marginally from Friday's local close. It is at 36.34 sterling, 57.6 yen and 1.229 marks. It is worth 1.316 New Zealand dollars, 0.628 euros, and at 49.1 on the trade weighted index. Gold is fetching $US271.40 an ounce."

" More than 500 people have gathered in a Mackay park to welcome Olympic gold medallist Cathy Freeman back to her home town. Freeman was guest of honour at a civic reception, attended by her family. She says she plans to spend a week in Mackay catching up with family and friends. ""I saw the newest edition to my family today, eight-week-old Katherine - actually my youngest brother's daughter,"" she said. ""I've seen some aunts and cousins and nieces and nephews. It's great to be home, this place is filled with so many childhood happy memories for me."" Freeman says she is embarrassed by the attention she has received in the wake of winning the 400 metres in Sydney. Freeman says appearing before her family is always nerve-wracking and says she was overwhelmed by the response. ""I'm not one for official events. When the local council offered to put this on for me I was quite sure I didn't want to do it,"" she said. ""I'm just tired, I'm all worn out, I'm tired, tired of all the attention a little bit I think it's fair to say. It's just my way of thanking everyone for their support."""

" Israeli combat helicopters have fired rockets on inhabited areas close to Bethelehem after shots were fired at a Jewish suburb. At this stage, there is no indication of casualties. ABC reporter Ben Wilson watched the assault from the suburb of Gilo, overlooking the scene. ""The action began a few hours ago when shots were fired from the town of Beitjala, towards the suburb Gilo on the outskirts of Jerusalem,"" he said. ""The Israeli military has hit back with far superior force, we've had helicopter gunships firing missiles into the suburb of Beitjala, the Arabic suburb on the other side of the valley. ""And then...Israeli tanks opened up with their heavy machine guns and their main canons firing a shell into the town of Beitjala."" Meanwhile, the British-based human rights group, Amnesty International, has accused Israel of using excessive lethal force against Palestinian demonstrators. Of at least 125 people killed in a three-week wave of violence that has dealt a bloody blow to peace efforts in the Middle East, all but eight have been Palestinians. The Amnesty statement came as Israel took what it called a ""time out"" from the peace process, freezing negotiations with the Palestinians on their future until the violence stops. Amr Moussa, the foreign minister of Egypt, which hosted a summit on the weekend that strongly supported the Palestinians, says the Arab nations will put a similar hold on their dealings with Israel. ""There is no more relations to be opened until they go back to the right path of peace but there's a time out so we have decided to vote for a time out as well,"" he said. ""This is a message for a message. Israel is not going to call the shots in the region."" --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Health Minister, Michael Wooldridge, says he will be surprised if discussion of the Workplace Relations Minister's $50,000 Telecard bill takes up much of Cabinet's time when it meets tomorrow. Doctor Wooldridge says Peter Reith continues to enjoy the support of his colleagues, despite growing pressure from the Opposition for him to stand down. And he says the affair does not merit a judicial inquiry. ""The Government acts, not reacts, and it has in this situation by bringing in the Solicitor-General, by bringing in the Director of Public Prosecutions and I think Labor's finding difficulty keeping it going,"" he said. -------------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The United States Secretary of State will begin two days of historic talks with the leader of North Korea. If successful the talks will lead to a visit by the US President. It is the first time a US official has met a North Korean leader on North Korean soil in the nation's 55 year history. Madeleine Albright's visit follows an unprecedented diplomatic offensive by the traditionally closed communist North. Earlier this year, Australia and Italy granted it diplomatic recognition, in June the leaders of South and North Korea met for the first time and in September both countries marched together at the Sydney Olympic Games. Britain and Germany now say they will recognise the North and Dr Albright says her visit may be followed by one from her President. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australia's Louise Sauvage was beaten for the first time in eight years in the 800 metres wheelchair final last night at the Paralympics but the race has been declared null and void. A collision in last night's final led to the competition referee deciding the race will be re-contested. Canadian Chantal Petitclerc crossed the line first ahead of Sauvage but it was a crash at the back of the field, not involving the leading pack, that dictated the race's importance. A protest from a Japanese competitor led to the referee ruling Irish competitor Patrice Dockery caused the collision involving three competitors and should be disqualified, with the race to be re-contested. Subsequent appeals from Canada and Ireland followed but were dismissed handing Sauvage a second chance to win gold on Thursday night. Sauvage will compete today in heats of the 1,500 metres. Spokesman for the Canadian paralympic team, Justin Kingsley, says Petitclerc is disappointed and is still to decide whether to take part in the rescheduled race. ""There was a great race at the track, won by Chantal Petitclerc of Canada,"" he said. ""We Canadian officials, including the coaching team and Canada's Chef de Mission believe it was a fair race. ""The officials off the track believe it was a fair race and the rules state clearly that on track officials have absolute authority at that point of the race."" ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Health officials in South Africa have confirmed more than 40 new cholera infections in one of the nation's worst outbreaks of the disease. More than 3,500 people have now become infected. The outbreak in the Kwa Zulu-Natal province has already claimed 30 lives. South African health officials are hopeful the number of infections will decline but the health department concedes it is too early to tell. Around 47 new cases of cholera have been reported since Saturday. The outbreak began in a series of rivers and dams north-east of Durban two months ago. But it has now spread to other districts south of the provincial capital. Water tanks have been installed in several villages and residents are being urged not to drink from local waterways. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" American film star Liza Minnelli is reported to be fighting for her life in a Florida hospital after suffering a series of strokes. Friends have been quoted as saying that the 54-year-old film star she is conscious, but very weak. She collapsed in her mansion in Fort Lauderdale late last week and since then has been in intensive care. Minnelli won an Academy award for her role in the 1972 film <i>Cabaret</i>. She is the daughter of Hollywood screen icon Judy Garland and film director Vincente Minnelli. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" India's cricket match-fixing investigators are due to hand over their long awaited report to the Government in New Delhi this week. There have been suggestions that several Australians may feature in it. The Central Bureau of Investigations inquiry, which has been plagued by delays, reportedly names four Indian players as being involved in match fixing. Three Australians and two senior West Indian players are also said to feature in the 210 page document. But it is not clear if the full report will be made public. It must first go to India's Sports Minister who says he can not guarantee the report will be released in full. ""That I can't say at this stage because I have to study it first,"" he said. The match fixing report is likely to be unveiled next month when the Sports Minister tables it in Parliament. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The United States has clinched the Presidents Cup golf title against the international team, winning the three matches it needed to reach an unbeatable points total of 16-and-a-half. The Americans had lost the cup the last time it was played, in Melbourne two years ago. In the final round of singles matches this morning, the US sealed victory when David Duval beat Zimbabwe's Nick Price 2 and 1, Loren Roberts defeated Australia's Stuart Appleby 3 and 2 and Davis Love accounted for South Africa's Ernie Els 4 and 3."

" Shell says a new report proves rising petrol prices are not due to profiteering by oil companies. An Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) report shows fuel prices did not rise as much as feared in the first three months of the goods and services tax (GST). The commission cites global price rises, the low Australian dollar and government excise and taxes for the increases, but says they have been moderated by competition, cost savings from the GST, and consumer resistance to prices above $1 a litre. Shell spokesman Ian McKenzie says oil companies feel vindicated. But the commission is still investigating whether the oil companies are pocketing the Commonwealth's $500 million fuel rebate for country motorists."

" The Acting Treasurer, John Fahey, says the ACCC's report confirms the Government's position that petrol prices in Australia have been largely driven by international oil prices and the low Australian dollar."

" The Prime Minister has warned that the Coalition is in for a tough fight at the next Federal election. Mr Howard was speaking at a Liberal Party fundraiser in Sydney, which was attended by 650 politicians and key business people. He told the gathering that the party will deliver new reforms, which some may find controversial, adding that New South Wales is a crucial element in a future federal victory. ""We do need to hang on to every seat the Liberal and National Parties hold,"" Mr Howard said. ""Some of them will be difficult, Larry Anthony sits on a fairly slim margin up in the electorate of Richmond. Many of our members sit on thin margins. ""We are very well served by the fact that we have very good marginal seat holders in all of our marginal seats."""

" There will be a state funeral at the Sydney Town Hall next Wednesday for the late Kumuntjayi Perkins. The Aboriginal activist and leader died in a Sydney hospital on Wednesday morning, after a long illness. An Arrernte man, Dr Perkins was born at the Bungalow on the Todd River in Alice Springs in 1936. The Arrernte Council Governing Committee says he was a man of extraordinary vision and tenacity, who came from poor circumstances to fight for the rights of indigenous people. After the service there will be a procession from Sydney Town Hall to the Opera House where a wake will be held. ATSIC says the ashes of Kumtjai Perkins will be scattered over a spot in Alice Springs."

" The Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock has rejected new allegations refugees have been beaten at the Port Hedland Detention Centre, in Western Australia. The Northern Territory's Opposition says three refugees released in Darwin on temporary protection visas allege they were beaten with clubs by detention centre staff. Mr Ruddock denies staff have behaved inappropriately, but substantial complaints should be made to the Commonwealth Ombudsman or the Human Rights Commission. ""Unsubstantiated allegations have little worth and quite frankly I'm disappointed when people in responsible positions give voice to them,"" Mr Ruddock said. ""The reason they do is the individuals that make the allegations are often trying to put pressure on me, to get different outcomes to that which they're entitled. and one ought not to be playing into their hands."" Mr Ruddock has ruled out providing more support for refugees on temporary protection visas, arriving in Darwin. More than 50 refugees have been released from detention and taken to Darwin in the past three months, with $218 to last a fortnight until welfare benefits become available. The Territory's Opposition says Darwin's Islamic society has spent thousands of dollars paying for food and accomodation, and cannot afford to continue. Mr Ruddock says it is worth noting the refugees had the means to arrive illegally, and Australia should not be seen as a soft option. ""Half those released in the Northern Territory seem to have been able to find the funds to move elsewhere,"" Mr Ruddock said. ""We know often they're able to engage in discretionary spending on other factors including mobile telephones."""

" A welcome rally in US high-tech stocks has bolstered News Corporation and Australia's overall market today. The All Ordinaries index rose 40 points, or nearly 1.3 per cent to 3,188. This follows a 1.7 per cent increase on the Dow Jones last night while the technology-laden Nasdaq added 7.7 per cent or 247 points. Key Asian markets have also recovered; the Nikkei has closed up 387 points or 2.6 per cent while the Hang Seng is up 595 points or 4.1 per cent. The ""new economy"" spike in New York helped News Corporation, which on the local market rose $1.32 to $20.35. Telstra rose three cents to $6.03. Southcorp shareholders have been told the company expects to sell the packaging division by early next year. The stock is up three cents to $5.20. Amcor says it is still interested in some of these assets and the packaging group put on 16 cents to $5.49. The electronic commerce and smartcard group, Keycorp, has plunged 43 cents to $8.27 after warning of a loss for the year to December. Major banks were mixed; the National Australia Bank fell 44 cents to $26.27 but the Commonwealth Bank added seven cents to $28.52. BHP rose 25 cents to $18.45 and Rio Tinto fell 13 cents to $24.27. The Australian dollar has made headway in local trade, rising 0.7 cents from this morning, to 52.75 US cents. It is worth 36.4 sterling, 57.27 yen and 1.218 marks. It is at 0.623 euros and at 48.3 on the trade weighted index. Gold is at $US271.30 an ounce."

" A boycott by New Zealand and Australian rugby league players of the World Cup has been avoided. A meeting today between the Players Association and the National Rugby League, that included a phone hook-up with the new owner of the Auckland Warriors, Eric Watson, led to the breakthrough. The players' association recommended to its members in a phone hook-up that they compete in the Cup, after they claimed progress in the talks over player payments and contracts at the Warriors. That recommendation was accepted by the players. A further meeting involving the players' association, the NRL, the New Zealand Rugby League and the new owners will take place in Auckland on Tuesday."

" Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak has described a gun battle in the hills around the West Bank town of Nablus as a flagrant violation of the ceasefire agreement reached earlier this week. One Israeli and a Palestinian have been killed in the fighting. What triggered the shootout remains unclear, a group of Israelis climbing a hill outside Nablus, under military escort, say they came under fire from a nearby Palestinian refugee camp. While Palestinians on the other hand say the Israelis began shooting at people picking olives. The battle lasted more than five hours by the time the Israeli army managed to pluck the final seven Israelis from the hillside, two people were dead and more than a dozen injured. Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak says the shooting represents a flagrant violation on the Sharm El-Sheik truce agreed to in Egypt earlier this week. The Palestinian Authority has also accused Israel of failing to live up to its obligations by refusing to withdraw its forces from Palestinian cities."

" Israeli cabinet minister Yossi Beilin has defended the military's action. ""When there is fire which is opened against our citizens, our role of course is to rescue them and if it involves helicopters and other means we will use them in order to save our citizens,"" he said. ""That is of course obvious, our role as a government is ready to make peace and ready to pay the price for peace."""

" However, Palestinian legislator Hanan Ashrawi, has blamed the settlers for staring the latest violence. ""These are vigilante groups that have been raging a reign of terror against the Palestinians,"" he said. ""They have been terrorisiing Palestinian villagers, towns people, they have been shooting into people's homes. ""They have been carrying out rage, they are fully armed and entirely above the law. ""They kill Palestinians with impunity, they abduct and torture, they get away with it."""

" The main United Nations human rights forum has adopted an Arab-Islamic resolution condemning Israel for ""war crimes"" and ""crimes against humanity"" in the occupied Palestinian territories. Nineteen states voted in favour, 16 against, with 17 abstentions and one delegation absent from the 53-member body, the Nepalese chairman announced after the public roll-call vote. ""The draft resolution is adopted by a vote of 19 in favour, 16 against with 17 abstentions,"" he said. The UN Commission on Human Rights wrapped up a special three-day session in Geneva on recent violence in the Middle East as an Israeli and a Palestinian were killed in a firefight that raged for hours near the West Bank town of Nablus. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Prime Minister has conceded an official in the finance department had been alerted two years ago to irregular use of Peter Reith's Telecard. Mr Howard says Telstra contacted the department in 1998 questioning the use of the card, but he says neither Mr Reith or the Special Minister of State were told about the matter at the time. The Government has previously denied any knowledge of abnormal use of the phone card until around August last year. Mr Howard has told Southern Cross Radio the finance department official cross-referenced the Telecard use with Mr Reith's travel movements and concluded the minister must have been using the card. On that basis, Mr Howard says no further action was taken. ""Apparently a query was raised as to the use of the card in one part of the country as opposed to another,"" he said. ""On investigation, so I am told, it was found that Mr Reith had in fact visited the part of the country in which the card had been used so the use of the card was not irregular."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The high-tech sector has led an upward charge on United States equity markets, 13 years to the day since the Wall Street crash of 1987. Regional markets, including Australia's, are poised to follow suit. Prices on New York's Nasdaq exchange have roared ahead, investors fired up by a buoyant earnings report from software colossus, Microsoft. The Nasdaq composite index has climbed 247 points or 7.8 per cent. Yesterday, the memories of October 1987 were rekinkled on the New York Stock Exchange, when the Dow Jones index initially plunged more than 4 per cent. But overnight, the Dow has bounced back a further 1.7 per cent or 168 points. In Australia, overnight futures trading sees the Share Price Index up 39 points indicating a solid rally later this morning on the physical sharemarket. On currency markets, the Australian dollar has avoided further lows despite the euro remaining soft with the European Central Bank failing lift interest rates. Just before 8:00am AEDT the local currency was being quoted at 52.27 US cents, up almost half a cent on the night. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" There are conflicting reports about whether the operation to recover bodies from Russia's <i>Kursk</i> submarine will be completed. The commander of the Russian Navy says the operation will have to be cancelled if it is too risky. Two months after the <i>Kursk</i> sank, with the loss of all aboard, an international rescue team is sailing into the Barent Sea to lift the bodies of the crew. But Russia's military appears reluctant for the expensive operation to begin. First saying the weather was unsuitable, a claim disputed by the international team, and now saying the operation must be cancelled if it becomes too dangerous. The international contractor says that whatever the politics it simply intends to do its job but with the Russian military politics often wins out. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Australia's husband and wife shooters, Libby and Stan Kosmala, will compete against each other in today's mixed standing air rifle Paralympic event. The South Australian couple are in a field of 56. The day will see a number of gold medal chances for the host nation with women's team captain, swimmer Priya Cooper a chance in the 200 metre individual medley. While Libby Kosmala has won nine gold medals in five previous Paralympic games, husband Stan only took up the sport in recent years. ""I've only been shooting the prone for about four years,"" he said. ""I started in '96 when Libby was training for the Atlanta Paralympics and I thought if I'm helping her with her equipment I may as well do some shooting while I'm out there and that's where it started."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Northern Territory Parliament has heard claims that refugees at the Port Hedland detention centre, in Western Australia, have been beaten and intimidated. Labor's Paul Henderson reported the allegations last night. Mr Henderson says he has been meeting Darwin's Islamic community members to talk about the refugees who have been coming to the Top End city on temporary protection visas. He says the refugees are leaving Port Hedland with just $218 to last them a fortnight and most of that money is spent during the first week on rent, leaving them without money to buy food. Mr Henderson also says he received several reports of brutality at the Port Hedland Detention Centre. ""The allegations are of beatings, of people being put in isolation cells and verbal harassment and intimidation,"" he said. Mr Henderson says he is writing to the Federal Immigration Minister, Phillip Ruddock, to advise him of the allegations. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Health officials in Uganda say more than 100 people have now contracted the deadly ebola virus. Efforts to contain the disease have failed, with the ebola virus is continuing to spread in Northern Uganda. The Ugandan Government claims to have the outbreak under control. But health officials have confirmed that 41 people have now died from the disease. Medical experts from the World Health Organisation and Medicine Sans Frontiers are arriving in the town of Gulu to offer their assistance. The United States Centers for Disease Control have also set up makeshift laboratories in Gulu. At least 111 people have now contracted the ebola virus, since the outbreak was confirmed last week. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Prime Minister has ruled out a judicial inquiry into Workplace Relations Minister Peter Reith's $50,000 telecard bill. The Opposition says a full judicial inquiry is the only way to get to the bottom of the telecard issue because of the conflicting version of events that keep dribbling out about the affair. Labor's Leader in the Senate, John Faulkner, says whilst an Upper House inquiry is a possiblity it would be a second-best option. ""The public would have a great deal more confidence in an inquiry of this nature if it was conducted by a judge, if it was an independent and public inquiry, not a Parliamentary inquiry,"" Mr Faulkner said. ""It's the Government that should take the initiative, Mr Howard as Prime Minister who should take the responsibility and set up a full, public judicial inquiry."" The Opposition says Mr Reith should be stood down pending the outcome of such an inquiry. Contradicting statements made by Peter Reith, his son Paul and Ingrid Odgers, the woman who has admitted to using the Minister's Telecard account, have prompted the Australian Federal Police (AFP) to review earlier evidence gathered about the case. The AFP will examine statements made by Ms Odgers and some of her friends and family this week. A friend of Ms Odgers claims a statement she made to police in London about a warning being made in 1994 about her use of the Telecard has been lost. Mr Reith has refused to respond to the Opposition calls for an inquiry. However a spokesman for John Howard says the call for an inquiry is a piece of political rhetoric because the Opposition has nothing new of any substance to say."

" Matthew Gray has won the mixed one kilometre time trial LC1, setting a new world record in the process. Gray clocked 1:09.929 minutes to claim the gold, with fellow Australian Paul O'Neill winning bronze. O'Neill looked to have cost himself any chance of a medal in the event after an error at the beginning of his lap, but officials granted him a second start."

" A major consumer group has critisised some of Westpac's changes to its retail transaction fees. Westpac has followed the National Australia Bank, in raising fees on excess over-the-counter transactions for some account-holders. But fees for phone and electronic banking, which cost Westpac less, will fall. Westpac says the changes better reflect the costs of providing services, and will help customers reduce their costs of banking. But Louise Petschlet of the Australian Consumers Association says there are still concerns. ""We really have an issue I think with the cost of transaction banking in branches because that is where we've seen these very big increases in fees for consumers,"" he said. ""It really comes down to whether the banks feel they have a responsibility to provide affordable, over-the-counter services through a branch network."""

" The Australian Capital Territory (ACT) Labor Opposition says it will revive its no-confidence motion against former chief minister Kate Carnell if she is appointed to a ministerial post. The ACT Chief Minister Gary Humphries says Mrs Carnell's talent and energy would be wasted on the back-bench. However, he says the scope of her ministerial responsibilities would need to be limited due to her intention to leave the assembly within the next six months. Mr Stanhope says Labor no longer has the numbers to support a no-confidence motion, but must make a principalled stand. ""It shouldn't have ever come to this stage,"" he said. ""There shouldn't have even been a suggestion that Mrs Carnell could simply waltz back into the ministry. ""There shouldn't have been a suggestion that the chief minister can bolt out the back door and march back in the front door as if nothing has happened, as if there was no responsibility for her to accept, as if there was no blame to bare."""

" About 350 Rebels Motorcycle Gang members have arrived at their clubhouse in the north eastern Perth suburb of Malaga this afternoon. The group spent a relatively trouble-free night in Kalgoorlie with the exception of an alleged assault at a local pub last night. Police have followed the bikies as they have made their way from South Australia to Western Australia for this weekend's bike and tattoo show at the southern Perth suburb of Naval Base. Commander of ""Operation Isolate"", Darryl Balchin says even though the bikies have been behaving themselves police still need to be prepared. ""Since 1997/98 we've had some gang warfare which has involved a death and a lot of people being injured and also a lot of people being arrested,"" Mr Balchin said."

" Wall Street's jitters have transferred to Australia, with the local sharemarket shedding 1 per cent today. The All Ordinaries index fell 33 points, to 3,147 as News Corporation again proved a drag on the market. The decline followed more overnight volatility in New York, where the Dow Jones plummeted 425 points or 4 per cent, before rallying to close down 115 points, or 1.1 per cent to 9,975. The Nasdaq also fell heavily early, to be 200 points down before recovering to 3,172, ending the day 42 points down. The Hang Seng in Hong Kong is down another 284 points, or nearly 2 per cent. Tokyo's losses have been more moderate, with the Nikkei down 61 points. News Corporation followed up yesterday's 7 per cent slide, falling another 92 cents or 4 per cent, to $19.03. The preferred stock is down 63 cents to $16.35. Concerns over a weakening US outlook and a possible delay to the float of its satellite arm have been cited. Elsewhere Telstra eased 12 cents to $6.00 and BHP fell 30 cents to $18.20. Embattled Internet media group, Liberty One has moved up nearly 3 cents to 8.7 cents, after the $6 million rescue plan by unlisted Hong Kong firm, I-Reality. One of Australia's largest dairy processors, National Foods says the New Zealand Dairy Group has bought a 7 per cent holding. National Foods has rallied 18 cents to $2.49. Retail giant Harvey Norman is down 50 cents to $3.70, after warning this week of tighter margins and higher prices. The Australian dollar is bracing for more heavy selling overnight. The currency is trading at 51.9 US cents, after finding a new record low last night of 51.52 US. It is worth 35.9 sterling, 55.96 yen and 1.206 marks. It is trading at $NZ1.315, 0.617 euros and 48.4 on the trade weighted index. Spot gold is $US270.50 an ounce."

" One of the world's biggest oil and chemical refineries has been caught in the downdraft of the global markets sell-off. The Chinese giant Sino-pec listed publicly today on the Hong Kong stock exchange. The state-owned oil company has been the backbone of the Chinese economy for nearly half a century, but investors have been giving it mixed reviews on its first day as a public company. The stock barely surpassed its 45 cent issue price before trading down for most of the day in Hong Kong. Analysts say a continued down-turn in the markets will not help China's economic prospects, given that one of the Government's reform planks is to encourage more state-owned enterprises to seek capital injections for restructuring by listing on the stock market."

" The New South Wales Rugby Union has been ordered to hold urgent talks with union officals following the retrenchment of 18 people. The staff members were told yesterday they had lost their jobs as part of a restructure ordered by the Australian Rugby Union. The state organisation has fallen into financial difficulties with debts in excess of $4 million. Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance officer Mark Ryan says the union is looking for a better deal from NSW Rugby."

" Australia's most experienced Paralympian begins her quest today to add to the nine gold medals she has won during her sporting career. Libby Kosmala who first attended the 1960 Rome Paralympics as an official will be competing in the women's air rifle. Another regarded as a medal chance is cyclist Greg Ball in the mixed one kilometre time trial. Kosmala says how the Games are staged have changed a lot. ""It's more competitive now, of course, and in the early days there were many of us out there having a go at everything and we were recognised as people with disabilities that were having a go,"" she said. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Australian dollar has re-established itself back above 52 United States cents after being driven to a new all-time low overnight. Wobbles on Wall Street have been a key factor in the currency's latest decline. Hitched once more to the European single currency, the Australian dollar formed an inverse relationship with stock prices on Wall Street. Higher than expected US inflation figures and an IBM revenue warning triggered an initial collapse of 435 points, or 4.3 per cent, on the Dow Jones index. That sent the euro and Australian dollar higher until a subsequent recovery on Wall Street. The share market turnaround then sent both the euro and dollar to all-time lows, the local currency bottoming at 51.52 US cents. The Dow Jones index has, at around 9:00am AEDT, now closed at 115 points lower and the dollar is back to 52.14 US cents. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" An emergency session of the United Nations General Assembly is underway to consider the violence in the Middle East. Sources say the session is likely to end with the adoption of a resolution condemning Israel. Diplomatic sources say the General Assembly is likely to adopt a resolution drafted by Arab countries condemning Israel for using excessive force. Two weeks of violence has resulted in the deaths of more than 100 Palestinians. In tough language, the resolution affirms the UN's responsibilty over the Palestinian issue and calls for an investigation into the cause of the violence. The session, due to last several days, was convened at the demand of Arab nations who took their case to the assembly after the US vetoed action in the security council. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Church leaders and human rights activists in Indonesia's eastern province of Papua, formerly known as Irian Jaya, have reported a build-up of troops, which they fear will be used to crackdown on separatist supporters. The warning comes as police back away from an order to have all separatist flags pulled down by today. Police say their action was made in an attempt to avoid bloodshed. Independence leaders had promised to mobilise tens of thousands of supporters to prevent Morning Star flags from being lowered from town squares and prominent buildings. The Morning Star flag is a potent symbol of Papuan identity and struggle for self-rule. Almost two-weeks ago, police attempts to lower one of the flags resulted in a rampage by villagers and the killing of 40 people, mainly Indonesian settlers. In an effort to re-open dialogue, police have promised Indonesia's President Abdurrahman Wahid would meet independence leaders face-to-face and hear their demands for a greater share of Papua's rich resources and an end to human rights abuses. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Australia and India have signed a commitment to step up cooperation and information technology. During his two-day visit to New Delhi, Australia's Trade Minister Mark Vaile has signed a memorandum of understanding with India on information industries cooperation. The agreement comes as part of Australia's attempts to take advantage of India's booming IT sector, estimated to be earning $160 billion in revenue by 2008. The trade mission, led by Mr Vaile includes 30 business leaders. India's leading software sector and a range of planned economic reforms has attracted a wave of commercial interest from around the world to India over the last 18 months. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Western Australian Premier, Richard Court, has given fuel companies until the end of next month to lower fuel prices before imposing government regulation and price capping. Mr Court told Parliament that unless the fuel companies reduce the price difference between city and country retailers the Government will enforce price controls. The Western Australia Premier says the Government will closely monitor the price of fuel over the next six weeks. He says the Government accepts the recommendations of a Parliamentary committee into fuel prices, but is giving fuel companies the opportunity to amend their operations. ""We are setting a dealine in six weeks time and if the differential, if it's demonstrated on average that that hasn't come down we are prepared to use the existing legislation to bring that differential down,"" he said. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" A North Queensland couple has been forced to evict two noisy intruders, after a marathon love-making session started to rattle the rafters of their Mackay district farmhouse. Cecil and Ann Gakowski were originally happy to offer the two-metre lovers a roof over their heads, but when the thrashing continued for a second sleepless night it was time to get tough. Cecil feared the lure of love would eventually encourage the carpet snakes to put the bite on him to stay longer, so his wife Ann, got the broom and showed them the door. ""They came in the night before and we heard all the ruckus up in there and thought it was a possum jumping up and down,"" he said. ""The next night it was sort of worse and what not and we went to bed about nine o'clock and couldn't sleep for all the noise. ""When we got them out of the ceiling we watched them on the bedroom floor for about an hour, curling around and they were sitting up about two foot up in the air, curling up and around each other."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The South African King Commission into cricket corruption has been postponed indefinitely. The King Commission was scheduled to resume its hearings within the next month but commission secretary John Bacon says proceedings have been suspended. The delay will allow investigators to gather further information from police and cricket officials in India and South Africa. Last month, the commission's senior investigators travelled to India to obtain copies of a taped conversation between former South African cricket captain Hansie Cronje and a bookmaker. Cronje is appealing against a life ban proposed by South Africa's United Cricket Board. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Stadium Australia at Homebush Bay in Sydney has been filled for tonight's Opening Ceremony of the 11th Paralympic Games. It has begun with a flyover from a Royal Australian Airforce jet. The F1-11 signaled the start of tonight's Opening Ceremony performance, a rock opera involving a choir of over 2,000 singers and more than 2,000 school children. The athletes are arriving to enjoy this show. They are representing a record of 121 countries. Earlier tonight the capacity crowd were welcomed to the Stadium by Aboriginal elders and were entertained by ABC Radio Triple-J personalities Merrick and Rosso. The good-natured and noisy crowd are primed for a big night and the rain has subsided."

" The family of Aboriginal leader Charles Perkins has described him as a passionate defender of the rights of indigenous Australians. Mr Perkins died this morning in Sydney's Prince of Wales Hospital of complications from kidney failure. He was 64-years-old. In a brief statement outside the family's home in the inner Sydney suburb of Newtown, his eldest daughter thanked everyone who had supported him. Hetty Perkins also gave an insight into what motivated her father's struggle for justice. ""The last 30 years of his life were made possible by a kidney donation,"" she said. ""This miraculous gift made him determined to make a difference for our people, whether it was in the boardroom or marching the streets or on the soccer field, his other love. ""He was a passionate defender of our people to the very end and he touched many lives."""

" Mr Perkins' colleague at the ATSIC Sydney Regional Council, Chris Williams, says she was inspired after meeting him when she was a girl in Walgett in the 1960's. Ms Williams says his ability to ruffle feathers was a means to an end. ""He ruffled 'em plucked 'em, he did whatever had to be done, and if there was something do to then he certainly set out to achieve it, he did that,"" she said."

" ATSIC chairman Geoff Clarke says Aboriginal leader Charles Perkins will be missed for his tireless fight for indigenous rights. ""The board will, as a sign of respect, adjourn tomorrow and we'll be flying back to the eastern states to make arrangements we think which will be a very significant funeral for Mr Perkins,"" Mr Clarke said."

" News Corporation chairman Rupert Murdoch has used the company's annual general meeting to attack the Federal Government over its datacasting laws. Mr Murdoch took another swipe at the Government over its decision to restrict datacasting on digital television as well as criticising current laws and policies. Mr Murdoch noted that the expansion of Foxtel in Australia is being curtailed by protracted negotiations with Telstra. He made no apologies for not rushing into the dot-com market. ""I've been criticised for being very slow, no-one's quite got around to praising me for that and having lost a fraction of what all our competitors lost in this area,"" Mr Murdoch said."

" The Federal Government has rejected the criticisms made by Mr Murdoch. A spokesman for the Communications Minister, Richard Alston, has pointed out that both Houses of Parliament passed legislation in 1998 requiring data-casting to be innovative and offer services instead of being used to create a fourth, defacto free-to-air broadcaster. He says video and audio-streaming is permissable over the Internet and the legislation allows Australia to be at the cutting edge of new technology."

" Mr Murdoch says he is still hopeful of floating his multi-billion-dollar Sky Global Network by the end of the year. Sky Global, which reaches 85 million homes around the world, is valued at $US 40 billion. Mr Murdoch says negotiations are taking place with potential strategic partners and he is hopeful of a very successful float of Sky Global in the near future. ""If everything went like lightning it could be three weeks, so I just said we're going to do it as soon as possible and I wouldn't want to put a time on it,"" he said. ""We are still hoping to do that but I'm not going to promise."""

" News Corporation shareholders have voted to give Mr Murdoch 24 million preferred limited voting ordinary shares in the company. The annual general meeting also agreed to the further distribution of many millions of shares to executive and non-executive directors. The decision to allocate extra shares to Mr Murdoch and other company directors was widely supported. The only dissident voice was from proxy shareholder, Stephen Mayne, who questioned the allocations describing them as excessive."

" The Prime Minister, John Howard has referred to the Solicitor-General a statement by a woman accused of making unauthorised phone calls on the taxpayer funded telecard of the Workplace Relations Minister, Peter Reith. Ingrid Odgers has identified herself as the ""Miss X"" named in the Soliticor-General's advice on the use of Mr Reith's telecard. But her statement contradicts some statements made in the advice. She maintains she was given the telecard number by Mr Reith's son Paul, the Minister is standing by his son's version of events. ""He has adamantly denied ever giving this person the card,"" Mr Reith said. Ms Odgers also says she was informed by a government department in 1994 not to continue using the card. Mr Reith says he did not know until last year others were using the card, and acknowledges he forgot he had given it to his son to use in emergencies on a trip. The matter is continuing to cause the Government headaches, but Mr Reith says he has not given any thought to resigning."""

" A tax and accountants organisation has rejected Tax Office claims it will be ""flexible"" about late business activity statements. The National Tax and Accountants' Association estimates 400,000 small businesses will miss the November deadline for GST payments. The Tax Office has disputed the figures and says it will not impose fines on those businesses genuinely attempting to comply. However, the association's Ray Regan says the tax legislation means a financial penalty will automatically apply to late statements. ""There's only one victim here let me be clear, that victim is small business,"" Mr Regan said. ""I've been in tax law for 20 years and I can be certain of one thing. ""Clients are infuriated if they get a penalty and every penalty that is imposed by the Howard Government will lose them a vote."""

" An agreement has been signed pledging $480 million of tax-payers money towards the Alice Springs to Darwin rail link. The Prime Minister, John Howard, the South Australian Premier, John Olsen, and the Northern Territory's Chief Minister Denis Burke have taken part in the signing ceremony in Adelaide. The Asia Pacific Consortium will start building the $1.2 billion line in December. The Prime Minister says the project, first mentioned more than 100 years ago, demanded Federal Government support because it is adventurous and visionary. ""It's going to provide 7,000 jobs during the construction phase for workers,"" Mr Howard said. Mr Olsen says in direct economic terms, the construction phase will provide $500 million worth of contracts, 70 per cent of them going to South Australia and the Northern Territory. Mr Burke, says today's signing ceremony marks a triumph for vision over the tyranny of distance and over the people who have knocked the project over the past century."

" The Australian dollar has stabilized at new lower levels after its latest bout of selling overnight. After breaking through the 52 US mark, to post a new record low of 51.5 US, the dollar has steadied to 52.05 USi late afternoon trade, down marginally from this morning, with trading in a fairly narrow range. On the cross-rates, the currency is at 35.91 Sterling, 56.25 yen and 1.189 German marks. It is worth $NZ 1.317 and 0.608 euros and is at 48.5 on the trade weighted index. The weakening dollar, and rising interest rates, are seen as the main reasons for a 4 per cent drop in the Westpac-Melbourne institute index of consumer sentiment for October. Key regional markets have taken a hit, following further falls by both high-tech and blue-chip stocks in New York last night. The Nasdaq dropped 76 points, or 2 per cent, to 3,214, while the Dow Jones shed 149 points, or nearly 1.5 per cent, to 10,098. Tokyo's Nikkei and the Hang Seng index in Hong Kong are both down more than 400 points, or 3 per cent in evening trade. The Australian sharemarket has dipped more than 1 per cent, weighed down by a 7 per cent slide for market heavyweight, News Corporation. The All Ordinaries index dropped 36 points, to 3,180. News Corp's ordinary shares dived $1.67 to $19.95, with the preference shares down $1.12 to $16.98. Brokers cite concerns, not allayed at the annual general meeting in Adelaide about US earnings uncertainty, as well as a possible delay to the float of the digital television arm, Sky Global Networks. Elsewhere, Telstra fell 14 cents to $6.12. BHP dropped 49 cents to $18.50 with the resource group saying it may appeal to the High Court, against a Federal Court ruling on a $213 million claim by the Tax Office. Retailer Harvey Normand has shed 21 to $4.20, despite a 20 per cent increase in September-quarter profits. The National Australia Bank rose 45 to $27.12, Rio Tinto is steady at $24.66. Gold is fetching $US271.25 an ounce."

" The Victoria Amateur Turf Club (VATC) has avoided the controversy of recent years in naming the field for Saturday's Caulfield Cup. The top 16 qualifiers all made it into the field with the VATC committee using its discretion to allow Fuss and Ken's Joy to fill the last two places. The decision leaves Prince Benbara, Go Flash Go, and The Message as emergencies for the $2 million race. VATC vice chairman Peter Young concedes the committee still has some work to do to explain its selection process. ""Probably it's a job we'll have to do a little bit better, but certainly this year we did take a lot of time to spell out the elimination plan, to spell out the discretion and to adopt guidelines,"" Mr Young said."

" Israeli forces have reportedly fired rockets on a refugee camp in Gaza, following gun-battles between Israeli soldiers and armed Palestinians. The violence comes less than 12-hours after the Israeli Prime Minister, Ehud Barak, and Palestinian Authority chairman, Yasser Arafat, agreed to take concrete steps to end more than two-weeks of street battles. Within two hours of the summit being announced, Israeli Interior Minister Nathan Sharansky told a rally in Jerusalem he would resign and take his Russian immigrant party out of the ruling coalition, further weakening Prime Minister Barak's already fragile Government. The speaker of the Palestinian Parliament, Ahmed Koori, believes the summit will be ill prepared and have little chance of success. His colleague, Dr Nabil Shaath, says Palestinians are sincere in their intentions but will not back away from declaring a state by the year's end. ""That forbids we don't reach an agreement, we have to go through because we cannot just continue to be an interim authority over a disputed territory,"" he said. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The woman accused of charging thousands of dollars in unauthorised calls to a taxpayer-funded Telecard owned by the Workplace Relations Minister, Peter Reith, has revealed her identity. The woman has released a statement from London through her lawyers. In her statement, Ingrid Odgers identifies herself as the Miss X referred to in the Commonwealth Solicitor General's report on the Reith Telecard issue. That report had held Ms Odgers and a man, called Mr Y, responsible for making thousands of calls billed to the Telecard. Mr Reith has since agreed to pay the full $50,000 bill. Ingrid Odgers says Mr Reith's son, who she was boarding with, offered her the use of the phone card and even wrote down the card details and the PIN. She says Paul Reith told her not to make overseas phone calls. Ms Odgers says she assumed the card was a pre-paid phone-card with credit on it. She also criticises the Solicitor General's office over its investigation and claims she stopped using the card some time ago. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The might of the American Greenback is still scaring buyers away from the Australian dollar. There has been another night of record lows for the local currency. Once more unsettled by declines in the value of the euro, the Australian dollar took another leg down overnight. At its weakest it was trading at 51.65 US cents. The Federal Treasurer, Peter Costello, has indicated he sees an end in sight to the main cause of the Australian dollar's fall the strength of the US dollar. Mr Costello, who will talk to major Wall Street investors in New York later this week, says he expects there will be a reappraisal of the current demand for the US currency. ""My view is that the US dollar, which is now so strong, will become of concern,"" he said. ""It appeared there were some comments of concern by the Federal Reserve in the United States yesterday, and as the investors take that into account, they'll start to reassess their positions."" About 8:40am AEDT the local currency was being quoted at 52.10 US cents almost half a cent above the night's all-time low. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The National Australia Bank is preparing a formal announcement of more bank closures and fee increases. The bank unveiled its plans to staff yesterday and this morning it is refusing to comment except to say that a formal announcement will be made just before 9:00am AEDT. It is expected to include plans to close 100 metropolitan branches over the next 12 months and raise fees by up to $1 per transaction. The announcement has angered the Finance Sector Union which says the first it heard about the plans, was late last night. Joint national secretary Tony Beck says he is angered and disappointed by the bank's actions. ""We had thought that we had a constructive relationship with this bank...we're very annoyed,"" he said. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Police in Britain say they have not discounted the possibility of terrorism in the derailment of a high-speed train north of London, in which four people were killed. Bomb squad and police anti-terrorist officers have begun a criminal investigation, after admitting a threat was received two days ago. The train, carrying more than 100 passengers, had been heading from London to Leeds in northern England when it derailed, injuring more than 30 people. This passenger reported hearing a loud bang before the train jolted from the tracks. ""There was a lurch and quite clearly the carriage I was in, I couldn't tell what happened to the rest of the train at that stage, had come off the rails and was skidding along in the gravel,"" the passenger said. ""It was like the wake of a boat and gravel was hitting the window and smashing the windows. ""It must have taken perhaps 20 seconds for the train to actually come to a halt and when it finished obviously people were very shocked and panicked and there was dust and debris in the carriage."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" An agreement for the long-awaited Alice Springs to Darwin railway will be signed in Adelaide today. The Prime Minister and the leaders of South Australia and the Northern Territory will sign the agreement with the Asia Pacific Transport Consortium, which plans to build, operate and own the railway for 50 years before it passes into public ownership. The Commonwealth is contributing $165 million from the Federation Fund, with $165 million coming from the Territory Government and $150 million from South Australia. That leaves $750 million to be raised by the consortium. The banks have given in principle support but financial closure is not expected until late November. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The third and final presidential candidates' debate in the United States, between Vice-President Al Gore and Republican George W Bush, later today has been clouded by the death of the governor of the host state. Missouri Governor Mel Carnahan, also a Senate candidate in next months' election, was travelling to a fundraiser in a light plane flown by his son when it crashed in woods outside St Louis. The accident has cast a pall over today's debate in the city but organisers say it will go ahead. Both candidates entered the debate with polls showing a tight race, with a slight lead to Governor Bush. Mr Gore, who was seen as the stronger debator before the first meeting, has faced criticism over his performance in the first two debates. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Officials in Uganda have closed schools and banned funerals, as the death toll from the deadly virus reaches 37. A doctor from the World Health Organisation says medical staff in Gulu, about 360 kilometres north of the capital Kampala, are diagnosing about 10 new cases a day. Ebola victims typically bleed to death within two weeks of showing the first flu-like symptoms. There is no cure for the haemorraghic fever, which kills 90 per cent of its victims, and is transmitted through contact with bodily fluids. Aid worker Anna Borzello, who is in Gulu, says it is still not clear where the outbreak originated. ""It is believed that the first case happened on September 17th and it was a little boy who succumbed about 15 miles from Gulu town, but how he contracted the disease nobody knows,"" she said. ""Even whether he was a first victim nobody really knows, so it's still all a bit of a mystery."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Talks at the Middle East crisis summit are continuing through the night, but so far there has been no direct dialogue between Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat. Attempts to draft a document on conditions for a ceasefire have been dogged by argument. One Israeli minister said the drafting process involving Foreign Ministry negotiators has been mired in dispute over nearly every word and there have been reports of shouted exchanges. United States President Bill Clinton has met at least three times with Mr Barak and twice with Mr Arafat, but the two men are yet to have face-to-face talks. Israel is seeking a Palestinian ceasefire before agreeing to withdraw its forces to positions occupied before the outbreak of violence that has killed more than 100 people, the vast majority Palestinian. The Palestinians want the Israelis to withdraw before giving a commitment to ceasefiring. It is expected the summit will end on its second day, with or without a solution to the deadlock. Meanwhile, two people have been killed in the latest round of clashes between Palestinian demonstrators and the Israeli security forces on the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The public mood is one of both pessimism and defiance. Even as the negotiations in Egypt are grinding on, the death toll on the streets of the Palestinian territories is mounting. A 13-year-old boy and a Palestinian police officer the latest fatalities in deadly confrontations with Israeli security forces. More than 60 have been wounded. The Palestinian policeman was killed in a gunfight at a checkpoint in the Gaza Strip, the cause of which is unknown. The boy was shot in the town of Bethlehem. Palestinian demonstrators have also been marching across the West Bank and Gaza denouncing the summit, while Israel's opposition leader, Ariel Sharon, has publicly called on Mr Barak not to make any concessions that could weaken the Jewish state. ---------------------------------"

" The Australian dollar has been cut adrift again on world foreign exchange markets. Once more in tandem with a sinking euro, the local currency has hit a new all-time low. In local trade this morning it has been down to 52.20 US cents. Just after 8:30am AEDT, it was only just above that at 52.24. That is a fall of four-tenths of a cent from yesterday's local close and the weakest it has been since floating in 1983. On the cross-rates it is at 0.6146 euros, 56.45 Japanese yen, 36.10 pence sterling and against the New Zealand dollar it is at 1.324. The European single currency has also come very close to a record low, dropping as far as 84.58 US cents. The euro came under pressure following published comments from the president of the European Central Bank. He told The Times newspaper it would be inappropriate for the Group of Seven industrialised nations to intervene when market events such as the Middle East crisis led to severe exchange rate volatility. On Wall Street, there has been steadier trade on the stock market, with blue chip share prices comfortably ahead, but technology stocks heading lower. The Dow Jones industrial average has closed up 47 points at 10,239. On the Nasdaq Exchange, high-tech stocks are down 0.8 per cent. The Nasdaq composite index has fallen 26 points to 3,290. The US bond market is a fraction weaker. The softer prices have pushed up the yield on 30-year Treasury paper to 5.81 per cent. In Britain, the share market has rallied strongly. London's FT-100 index is up 76 points to 6,286. Yesterday, Tokyo's Nikkei Index rose 182 points to 15,512. In Australia, the market recorded its first overall gains in nine sessions and they were substantial. With the market as a whole inspired by a weekend surge on New York's Nasdaq exchange, there were notable gains by News Corporation, Telstra and Woolworths. The All Ordinaries index finished 62 points ahead at 3,219. Overnight trade on the Sydney Futures exchange has now closed. The Share Price Index contract was up one point on yesterday's day settlement at 3,293. The 10-year bond contract is up half a point at 93.86, with the implied yield easing to 6.14 per cent. The gold price is at $US272.05 an ounce, and West Texas crude has dropped to $US33.13 per barrel. ---------------------------------"

" The reign of the ACT Chief Minister Kate Carnell has come to an end. Mrs Carnell says she will immediately step down and withdraw from politics before the next election, due in October next year. Mrs Carnell, Australia's longest serving female political leader, was due to face a no-confidence motion tomorrow in response to the findings of an audit report into Canberra's Bruce Stadium. She says the numbers are against her but cannot allow Government to pass to Labor, and will instead hand the Chief Minister's portfolio to her deputy, Gary Humphries. ""I don't think it's fair to look over what will probably be Gary Humphries' shoulder in the longer term, so if I'm going to go I think I really do need to go after a hand-over period and after evrything's settled down a bit,"" she said. ---------------------------------------"

" Torrential rains continue to batter parts of northern Europe, causing mudslides and record flooding. At least 12 people have died and many more are missing, as torrential rain has battered parts of Switzerland, Italy and France. The Swiss town of Gondo was sliced in two by a massive mudslide, which wiped out nearly a third of the village. Further south on the Italian border in Locarno, floodwaters rose to their highest level on record, closing schools and blocking traffic, with a state of emergency declared in northern Italy. Thousands have been forced from their homes throughout Europe as the rain has continued to fall. In Britain, the south-east is still reeling after a week of heavy rain there, with insurance estimators describing the damage caused by massive flooding as Britain's costliest natural disaster yet. -----------------------------------"

" The Commonwealth says it is satisfied the Northern Territory has met its obligations under the mandatory sentencing deal. The deal arose out of the controversy surrounding the death in February of a 15-year-old Aboriginal boy, who was serving a mandatory sentence for stealing pens and paint. The aim is to divert juvenile offenders from the courts, and the Commonwealth will provide $4 million a year for five years for diversionary programs and interpreters. Federal Attorney-General Daryl Williams says the money will start to flow at the end of the week. ""We have been very keen to see ensure that the programs are put in place as agreed by the Prime Minister and the Chief Minister,"" he said. ""We've been provided with details of the financial arrangements, the performance information that will be provided for the Commonwealth to ensure that it is being met."" ----------------------------------"

" The Federal Community Services Minister, Jocelyn Newman, has refused to comment on renewed suggestions she could be in line to become the next Governor-General. The Prime Minister is considering a replacement for Sir William Deane, whose term expires in eight months. Media reports suggest Senator Newman is emerging as a leading contender for the position. However, a spokesman for the Minister says the reports are merely speculation. He says the appointment of the Governor-General is a matter for the Prime Minister, and Senator Newman is continuing to work on delivering welfare reform as part of her Cabinet responsibilities. ---------------------------------------"

" Lawyers representing former South African cricket captain Hansie Cronje say they will challenge a proposed life ban against their client. The lawyers are warning South Africa's United Cricket Board not to push Cronje out of the game. Cronje's legal team says the proposed life ban is unlawful. Cronje's lawyers have given the board until later today to lift the ban. The board announced last week that it plans to prohibit the former captain from taking part in any aspect of the game in South Africa. But Cronje's legal counsel, Leslie Sackstein, says the board must change its mind. Mr Sackstein will not say why he objects to the proposed ban against Cronje, but he says unless it is lifted, legal action may be taken. Cronje was sacked as South Africa's cricket captain in April, after he admitted receiving money from bookmakers. -------------------------------"

" The Paralympic torch will be officially welcomed to Sydney today when it makes its way across the Harbour Bridge into the city. It is currently approaching Manly, on the northern beaches. The torch relay began at 6:30am AEDT this morning at Narrabeen. Donna Ritchie, the captain of the Australian women's wheelchair basketball team, will carry the torch to Manly for this morning's breakfast celebrations. One of the big highlights of today will be when the torch crosses the Harbour Bridge. Marcia Hines, Kieren Perkins and Lousie Sauvage will also be carrying the torch today."

" There has been a late rush of buying in Telstra Two shares on their final day of trade. The overall market has also rallied. Today was shareholders' last chance to sell their instalment receipts, to avoid the final $2.90 a share payment, due next month. But instead, bargain-hunters closed in on Telstra Two, happy in the knowledge the Asian expansion deal with Pacific Century Cyberworks has been resolved. Telstra Two has closed up 19 cents to $3.02. But Reynold's stockbroker Grant Williams says investors who chose to complete their purchase at $7.40 a share, will still make a paper loss, as the fully-paid stock is trading at just over $6. ""They're down by, a $1.50 on what they could've bought the stock at on the market today,"" Mr Williams said. ""The broader market followed Wall Street higher, the All Ordinaries index jumping nearly 62 points, or just under 2 per cent, to 3,219. ""And the Australian dollar is wallowing near its new record low today, of 52.6 US cents."""

" The first money from the Commonwealth to the Northern Territory, under the mandatory sentencing deal, is expected to be released later this week. The Federal Attorney-General Daryl Williams has announced $1 million for diversionary programs and $250,000 for the Aboriginal interpreter service will be made available. Under the deal aimed at diverting juvenile offenders before they get to the courts, the Commonwealth has promised $4 million a year, for five years. Territory legislation giving effect to the deal is before Parliament, and is expected to be passed this week."

" The Federal Privacy Commissioner has found the Treasury Department breached the Federal Privacy Act by failing to protect the security of bank account numbers and other personal information lodged electronically on its Goods and Services website. The Commisssioner, Malcolm Crompton, says people who used the Internet to register for the GST would expect their bank account details would be kept private. Mr Crompton says Treasury did not adequately address the need to protect personal information, but he is satisfied with the action taken to secure the website since the incident."

" The director of ceremonies for the Paralympic Games, Karen Richards, says Wednesday night's opening has benefited from the success of the Olympics opening ceremony. Tonight a full dress rehearsal for the cast, which includes 5,500 school children and performers, will be staged at Stadium Australia. Ms Richards says she is daunted by the prospect of having to follow the widely-acclaimed Olympics ceremony. ""To be honest, I think what it has done has made the stadium sell out and by it selling out that's really helped our show,"" she said. ""If it hadn't been successful, I don't think the interest would have been generated in our opening and I think by having a full audience it lifts the show so dramatically."""

" The Australian sharemarket has posted strong gains, after United States technology stocks staged their second-largest one-day rally on Friday night. After several days of buffeting, the Nasdaq jumped 249 points, or more than 70 per cent to 3,316. The Dow Jones also rose in its wake, up 157 points, or 1.5 per cent, to 10,192. But further volatility is expected in coming days, due to ongoing concerns about Middle East tensions and high oil prices. In the region, Tokyo stocks have risen around 182 points, or 1.1 per cent, to 15,512 just before the close. The Hang Seng index in Hong Kong is trading up 2.6 per cent. At home, the All Ordinaries index jumped nearly 62 points, or just under 2 per cent, to 3,219. Turnover was dominated by Telstra, the fully-paid stock up 11 cents to $6.06, in a continuation of the positive response to Friday's re-pricing of the deal with Pacific Century Cyberworks. Telstra Two was the subject of heavy interest, on its final day of trade before suspension. Instead of a last-minute rush to sell, and avoid the final $2.90 a share payment next month, bargain-hunters closed in, marking the stock up 19 cents, or 6 per cent, to $3.02. Elsewhere, News Corporation also accounted for much of the gains, surging $1.42 to $21.75. The preference shares rose $1.29 to $18.25. Queensland coal miner, QCT Resources added 4 cents to $1.28, after BHP and the Japanese conglomerate, Mitsubishi Corp raised their takeover offer by ten cents, to $1.30 a share. Santos, whose stake in QCT is being sought, still fell 18 cents to $6.35. BHP dropped 19 cents to $19.15. Another takeover target, Ashton Mining edged up one cent to $2.23, announcing it has found Australia's second biggest diamond, from its Merlin project in the Northern Territory. AMP rose 20 to $17.15, Rio Tinto added 35 to $25.20. Brambles rose 55 to $49.75 and Coles Myer rallied 28 to $6.90. The Australian dollar is wallowing near its new record low, struck today, of 52.6 US cents. That is down nearly half a cent from Friday's close. It is buying 36.25 Sterling and 56.8 yen and is sitting at 49 on the trade weighted index. Gold is fetching $US272.25 an ounce."

" The artist, John Perceval, has died in Melbourne aged 77. He was the last surviving member of the group of artists known as <i>The Angry Penguins</i>, the most significant Australian artistic movement of the 20th century. National Gallery of Victoria director, Gerard Vaughan, says Perceval was part of a movement which formed a new visual vocabulary of Australian image-making."

" Western Australia has avoided outright defeat on the final day of the first class match against Queensland in Perth. Unbeaten centuries from Adam Gilchrist and Simon Katich steered the home side out of trouble. At stumps, WA was 5 for 349 with a lead of 102, with Gilchrist on 109 and Katich 105."

" World leaders are lowering expectations of a successful outcome to the emergency Middle East summit which gets underway at Egypt's Red Sea resort of Sharm-el-Sheikh tonight. The summit was called to try to bring an end to 18 days of Israeli-Palestinian violence which has now claimed 107 lives. Against a background of pessimism, United Nations secretary general Kofi Annan has made a last minute appeal for a positive approach. Mr Annan is already at Sharm-el-Sheikh trying to influence an outcome that at the very least ends the bloodshed. But already the Israeli delegation is complaining that it cannot deal with a mob bent on terror and the Palestinian delegation is under extreme internal pressure with fresh demonstrations on the West Bank against its decision to participate at all. As a result, most participants are talking down the chances of success or even progress. The White House is playing down expectations for the summit, saying it knows the talks will be difficult. Despite its role lobbying Egyptian President Mubarak to hold this week's talks, the Clinton administration acknowledges the limited prospects involved. Officials say they hope the talks allow the parties to step back from the current violence, but admit that re-establishing any confidence between the parties is far more difficult. President Clinton announced yesterday he would be attending the planned talks, along with the Israeli, Palestinian and Egyptian leaders. The White House is also giving qualified endorsement to Russia's expressed interest in taking part, but says that is a matter for host Egypt. -----------------------------------"

" The Federal Opposition has renewed its call for Parliamentary entitlements to be independently audited. Labor says the $50,000 bill racked up on the Workplace Relations Minister's Telecard highlights the need for a watchdog. The Solicitor General has cleared Peter Reith of any civil liability for the bill, apart from $950 made in phone calls by his son which Mr Reith has paid for. Mr Reith says he will still repay the full amount, despite the Solicitor General concluding two other people obtained details of the card's pin number, one of them even offering to pay back $13,000 worth of calls at one stage. Mr Reith says he just wants to put the issue behind him. ""A lot of unfair and totally unreasonable things have been said by some people who just did not have the evidence,"" he said. But the Opposition leader is not letting the matter rest. Kim Beazley said the appointment of an independent auditor to check entitlements would prevent such a problem from hapenning again. ""We suggested that at the last election and nothing that has happened since then suggests that that is no longer a requirement,"" he said. -----------------------------------"

" An elderly Perth couple is resting aboard a Turkish cargo vessel after being rescued from a sinking yacht in the Indian Ocean last night. The pair was winched to safety following a three hour operation and are now headed for Cape Town in South Africa. Paul Comley, 71, and his wife Lorna, 69, sent out a distress call on Saturday night after their hull was struck and began taking water. They relied on the vessel's bilge pumps to keep afloat until the cargo ship reached them 1,200 nautical miles north-west of Perth and the WA coast. The Australian Maritime Safety authority says the ship's captain describes the pair as in good health, but exhausted from the ordeal. Search coordinator Andrew Burden says the yacht was nearly submerged when the ship arrived and has probably sunk by now. The ship is due to arrive in Cape Town in 13 days weather permitting. The authority says the Comleys are experienced with long sea voyages and were headed from the Cocos Islands to Perth when they encountered problems. ----------------------------------"

" A reprieve is in prospect for the Australian share market, after a weekend surge in US technology stocks. What should be a firmer session on the local market will coincide with the last day of trade in Telstra 2 instalment receipts. The Australian share market will reopen this morning in the wake of a 242-point leap by New York's technology-heavy Nasdaq composite index at the weekend. The almost 8 per cent surge is its second biggest ever in percentage terms. With the Dow Jones index up 1.5 per cent, the run of eight successive declines on the Australian market might today come to an end. Today also marks the last chance for investors to trade in Telstra 2 stock. They were issued last October at $4.50 and closed on Friday at $2.83, gaining on the reworking of Telstra's pan-Asian deal with Hong Kong's Pacific Century Cyberworks. On foreign exchange markets this morning, the Australian dollar is only just above last Friday's all-time low at 52.78 US cents. ---------------------------------"

" Figures released by the Australian Automobile Association show significant increases in fuel prices across Australia. AAA spokesperson Laughlin McIntosh says it is essential the Government provide relief to motorists. ""We've seen a 25 per cent increase over the last 12 months,"" he said. ""We're now seeing something like almost 80 per cent of the country centre's monitored have average prices of over a dollar a litre. ""And given that motorists have no option but to use petrol for their cars, particularly in the bush, then it's essential that the government doesn't add increased taxes such as indexed excise."" ---------------------------------"

" A Qantas flight from Johannesburg to Perth will arrive 22 hours late today after experiencing technical difficulties. A spokeswoman for the airline says the plane initially suffered a fueling indication problem which was rectified. However, just before take-off, the crew detected an engine power problem. The spokeswoman says by the time it was fixed, six or seven hours later, the runway was preparing to close so the flight was cancelled. Passengers then disembarked and were taken to hotels for the night. ---------------------------------"

" Police in Indonesia have arrested the personal masseur of President Wahid in connection with a multi-million dollar fraud scandal. The masseur is alleged to have stolen the equivalent of $US4 million - that is more than $7 million Australian, from a food agency. Police have so far refused to give any further details about the arrest of Alip Agung Suwondo. But according to some reports he was taken into custody after police staked out his villa for a week, waiting for him to return from a trip to several cities in Java. His arrest brings to an end a police manhunt which began more than four months ago when the scandal first emerged. According to the details given at the time, President Wahid's personal masseur had succeeded in persuading a senior official of the national food distribution agency to hand over the equivalent of $US4 million. The masseur is said to have told the official that President Wahid wanted the money for humanitarian assistance for the troubled northern province of Aceh. ----------------------------------"

" The major private health insurers been accused of misleading large numbers of people who took out private coverage under the Federal Government's incentive schemes. The Australian Consumers Association has surveyed the call centre advice services of the major health insurers, making up 75 per cent of the national market. The association found many were giving inappropriate advice on the type of policy a person should take out. In most cases, elderly people were not advised of limitations on benefits for procedures such as joint replacements. Association researcher Nicola Ballenden says the Government should take some responsibility for operating its ""run for cover"" advertising campaign, and not giving people any other information. ""There wasn't any assistance from the Government or the health funds, in fact, in leading people through that complicated information,"" she said. The Democrats say the Government should protect people who were misled, by taking a tougher approach to the conduct of the health insurers. -----------------------------------"

" Swimmer Lori Munz says she is back to her best after winning four gold medals at the national short course championships in Melbourne. Munz, who failed to gain selection for the Olympics after a serious car accident, won both the 200 metres freestyle and 200 individual medley at last night's final session. The other highlight of last night's final session was Matt Welsh's Commonwealth record in the 100 metres backstroke following his world record on Friday night in the 200 backstroke."

" United States President Bill Clinton has reportedly made no decision on a four-way summit on the Middle East and is now planning instead to campaign in the US presidential election. The White House says nothing has changed in efforts to convene a meeting between Mr Clinton, Israeli Minister Ehud Barak, Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. World leaders are trying to bring about a summit to end the on-going violence between Israelis and Palestinians. Earlier after a meeting with President Arafat in Gaza City the UN secretary-general, Kofi Annan, said he expected a summit to take place in Egypt within 48 hours. But a White House spokesman now says Mr Annan was probably expressing hope, rather than certainty that such a meeting would take place. Around 100 people, most of them Palestinians, have been killed in two weeks of clashes and more than 3,000 wounded. Meanwhile the Russian Foreign Minister, Ivor Ivanov, says he has met with representatives of Israel and the Hezbollah guerrilla movement to try to secure the release of three Israeli soldiers it is holding. ""All I can tell you today is that the leadership of Hezbollah is considering an option of exchanging three Israeli soldiers for 19 Lebanese held in Israel's jails."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The United States Defence Secretary William Cohen has confirmed the sailors still missing after the explosion that crippled a US destroyer in Yemen are presumed dead. The official death toll now stands at 17. Mr Cohen has also reaffirmed Washington's determination to hunt down those responsible for the attack on the <i>USS Cole</i>. ""It appears to be an act of terrorism and that's what we're going to pursue with all of our intelligence community to see exactly what took place, identify individuals, if it was group or individual terrorists,"" Mr Cohen said. ""We are going to identify them and track them down and hold them fully accountable."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Prime Minister, John Howard, has given an election-style speech to a meeting of the Victorian Liberal State Council in Ballarat. He has told delegates, the Federal Government has earned the right to be re-elected because of the enormous turn around in economic fortune it has brought to the country. Mr Howard says even though there is only a year until an election has to be called, his Government does not intend to down tools on policy reform and change. But the Prime Minister has acknowledged his Government has a big challege ahead. Mr Howard has also backed both the embattled workplace relations minister Peter Reith and the Victorian liberal leader Denis Napthine at the meeting. Dr Napthine has spent the last week fending off speculation about a challenge to his leadership. Mr Howard has thrown his support behind Dr Napthine, saying he has done better than anyone else under the circumstances. The Prime Minister also praised Mr Reith, who has been embroiled in controversy over his taxpayer funded telecard. Mr Howard says Mr Reith is responsible for two strong economic figures this week. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" New South Wales MP David Oldfield has predicted the purge will continue within the One Nation Party, with Pauline Hanson likely to sack more people from its New South Wales branch. Three people have been dumped from the party's state executive in the past 48 hours. Since expelling David Oldfield and national director Brian Burston from the party 10 days ago, Miss Hanson has this week sacked New South Wales state director John Cantwell, and two other executive members. Mr Oldfield claims she will continue to remove anyone who holds a contrary view. Mr Oldfield says the sackings have so far slashed state executive numbers from 17 to 12, with another two or three to go. Expelled state director John Cantwell has labelled Miss Hanson a dictator, comparing her to Stalin. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" In Western Australia, two explosions have ripped through a pub in the Goldfields town of Ora Banda, near the campsite where motorcycle gang member William Grierson was murdered two weeks ago. The Gypsy Joker Gang member was fatally shot at a site adjacent to the Inn while camping with fellow gang members. Kalgoorlie police say the explosions occurred just minutes after patrons and the owner of the pub left for the night. The bombing comes as police are preparing for the biggest bikie convoy in Western Australia's history. At least 400 members of the Rebels motorcycle gang are heading to the state via South Australia for their national conference next weekend. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" United States oil giants Chevron and Texaco are in talks on a merger that could lead to the creation of a combined group valued at some $US85 billion, Britain's Financial Times reported today. It said talks between the two were advancing. Senior executives were said to have been discussing a merger for several weeks, with negotiations having been accelerated in the past few days. If they succeed, the talks will mark a new stage in the consolidation of the oil industry. The FT quoted people close to the companies as confirming privately that negotiations were heating up, saying it was the second time they had had extensive talks. The first talks collapsed in June last year after disagreement over price and which company would control the board of the merged group. The paper said that the retirement in January of Kenneth Derr as chairman and chief executive of Chevron had cleared the way for new talks. It said Mr Derr's successor, David O'Reilly, was understood to be willing to structure a deal more acceptable to Texaco. Last month Britain's Sunday Times reported that Chevron and Phillips were understood to be close to concluding a full merger valuing the new company at $US83 billion ($A157 billion). Their chemical businesses combined earlier this year. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" A mystery disease, which causes internal bleeding and vomiting, has killed 40 people in Africa. The World Health Organisation is trying to contain the outbreak, in Northern Uganda and a team of international scientists are trying to identify the disease. At least 40 people, including six members of one family have died from the disease. Doctors say the symptoms include high fever, severe diarrhoea and vomiting fresh blood. Many of the victims have also suffered from kidney failure and shock. Doctors have collected blood samples from several patients at the outbreak site but they say further tests will be needed. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Australia has defeated Japan 3-0 in the Dunhill Cup golf tournament at St Andrews in Scotland, boosting its chances of reaching the semi-finals. Nick O'Hern, Stephen Leaney and Peter O'Malley each won their matches by one stroke. Australia must now beat Argentina to seal a spot in the last four. Meanwhile, Matthew Goggin is the best placed Australian after the third round of the PGA event in Las Vegas. Goggin is at 13-under after a round of 68 today, while American Tom Byrum has a two-stroke lead at 21-under. Of the other Australians, Steve Elkington is 11-under, Robert Allenby and Craig Parry are 10-under and Greg Chalmers is a stroke further back. And Australia's Karrie Webb is 10 shots behind American Juli Inkster who holds the lead after the second round of the world championship tournament in California. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak has announced his intention to form a Government of National Emergency, following an escalation in violence between Israel and the Palestinians. In an address on national television Mr Barak said his Palestinian counterpart, Yasser Arafat, was not interested in peace. The move came after Israeli helicopters launched rocket attacks against Palestinian targets in response to the brutal murder of three Israeli soldiers. Mr Barak said there were no Palestinian injuries as a result of the rocket attacks, but Palestinian medical officers say 36 people were slightly wounded. Mr Barak says if there are any retaliatory suicide bombings he will hold Mr Arafat personally responsible. He is calling on all Israelis to be reserved in their reaction to the day's momentous events. Palestinian leaders say the Israeli air strikes are an act of war. Administration buildings, including Yasser Arafat's offices, broadcasting stations and security structures were on the target list to be attacked The police station in Ramallah, where just hours earlier three Israeli Army reservists were beaten to death by a lynch mob, was the first building hit. The Palestinians claim they were undercover agents, but Israel says they stumbled into the Palestinian controlled town by accident. The United States and Britain are leading calls for restraint from both sides. Israel says the attacks are over for now, describing them as a measured and reasonable response to the killing of its soldiers. It says the strikes are also designed to act as a deterrent. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Five sailors have been killed and 35 others injured in what authorities believe was a suicide attack on a United States destroyer in the Persian Gulf. Naval spokesmen initially reported the <i>USS Cole</i> was rammed by a rubber dinghy loaded with explosives as it docked in the Port of Aden this morning. However, authorities now suggest a more sophisticated operation, with the blast caused by a docking vessel assisting the destroyer. As investigations begin, the US is treating the explosion, which ripped a hole in the side of the ship, as a deliberate attack. US President Bill Clinton condemned the act. ""If as it now appears this was an act of terrorism. It was a despicable and cowardly act,"" he said. Mr Clinton says he has ordered all US naval vessels to pull out of Middle East ports, placing US installations on heightened alert. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Public anger has prompted the Workplace Relations Minister, Peter Reith, to leave open the option of paying all the $50,000 bill for misuse of his telecard. Mr Reith says he will follow due process and wait for the Solicitor General to reveal if he believes the Minister is liable for the money. Mr Reith says he will immmediately pay the $50,000 if is he is found liable, but he might pay it anyway. The decision follows days of Opposition demands and a growing public call for him to meet the cost. Mr Reith says he understands taxpayers' concerns about the size of the bill. Meanwhile, Justice Minister Amanda Vanstone says the five-month federal police investigation aimed at finding out who made the calls cost $15,500. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A leading funds manager believes postponing any further sale of Telstra could be a financial blessing in disguise for the Federal Government. An independent report, which was critical of Telstra's services to rural and remote Australia, has prompted the Government to delay the sell-off until a plan is formed to address the problems. The improvements would meet the concerns of National Party MPs and could push the sale process well into the New Year into an election campaign period, or possibly beyond the election. Wayne Hastings from BT Funds Management says with global telecommunications stocks out of favour and Telstra's share price remaining low, a delay may reap the Government more money. ""There's a few things that investors are looking for Telstra to do, and part of that is more of their short-term direction and clarifying some of their growth outlook,"" he said. ""The conditions within the market at the moment really, to take more telecommunications stocks, probably are not the best."" --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" As many as 15 people have been killed in a car bombing in the Chechen capital, Grozny. A jeep packed with explosives was parked near a police station in Grozny yesterday evening when the explosives were detonated. Eight people were killed instantly, with police and civilians were among the victims. The death toll rose after 20 people were rushed to poorly equipped local hospitals. The attack by Chechen rebels came the day after the pro-Moscow administration announced it was moving its offices back to Grozny. The bombing came despite stringent security measures including curfews, which Russian troops had introduced following the last wave of rebel ambushes 10 weeks ago. This month is the one-year anniversary of the Russian invasion of Chechnya. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Delegates to the Solomon Islands peace talks have been working through the night to try to finalise a peace agreement. The warring parties to the ethnic conflict have each produced their own draft agreement. The talks were supposed to have concluded yesterday and the delegates were scheduled to be flown back to the Solomons on board Royal Australian Air Force Hercules aircraft this morning. However, the Isatabu Freedom Movement only produced its draft agreement at about 6.00pm AEST yesterday in response to one brought to the meeting by the Malaita Eagle Force. Nevertheless, Solomon Islands Deputy Prime Minister, Allan Kemakeza, remains confident a compromise will be found this morning. ""What will be happening is a consensus agreement will come out from both submissions and that will be the final draft,"" he said. However, doubt remains about whether all parties will sign the final agreement. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The family of Sir Donald Bradman has appealed successfully to the Prime Minister to have its name protected. The move follows attempts to use the name of the cricketing legend by a New South Wales property development and by businesses in South Australia. Burbridge Road in Adelaide is being renamed Sir Donald Bradman Drive, while an adult bookshop and cafe along the strip have also sought a name change. Prime Minister John Howard says changes to the Corporations Law will ensure that Sir Donald Bradman's name is not exploited. The changes mean businesses will not be able to use the Bradman name without establishing a valid connection with the family or with the Bradman Foundation charity. Mr Howard says it is an unusual but necessary step. ""I have no compunction about the Government having taken the decision and I believe the Australian community will support it,"" Mr Howard said. -------------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The domestic four-day cricket competition begins today with Western Australia to host Queensland at the WACA ground in Perth. The Warriors will be without injured fast bowler Brad Williams, while the Bulls will be minus their best paceman, Michael Kasprowicz. Western Australian opening batsman Mike Hussey says Queensland has selected some good replacements to cover for Kasprowicz and the other injured paceman, Scott Muller. ""Joe Dawes is a fantastic bowler and there's been big wraps on Nosske so we are not going to get an easy game that's for sure,"" he said. ""We're going to have to be right on our game to make sure we're successful against the Queensland Bulls."""

" Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak has put his security forces on a high state of alert, saying the Palestinian Authority is releasing militant prisoners who may launch terrorist attacks against Israel. At the same time, Mr Barak claimed two weeks of violence were showing some signs of diminishing. Mr Barak said at this stage the lull in conflict could just be a short-term fluctuation in the violence that has now claimed over 100 lives of mostly Palestinians and Israeli Arabs. Israel has pointed to comments by Palestinian activists that they had orders from Yasser Arafat not to seek confrontations with the Israelis as evidence that the Palestinian leader can the violence. Two more Palestinian youths were killed in separate incidents in Gaza and at Tulkarem on the West Bank. A funeral near Nablus for Jewish settler became a gunfight between Palestinians and settlers, with Israeli tanks and soldiers joining in. European Union foreign policy chief Javier Solana says a compromise could be close on Palestinian demands for an international inquiry into the fortnight of violence. United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan is continuing his efforts to end the violence, delaying a trip to Lebanon to hold further meetings with Israeli and Palestinian leaders."

" Former governor general Bill Hayden has accused Aboriginal leaders of divisive tactics which risk a backlash from the general community. In a speech in Hobart last night Mr Hayden also criticised the <i>Bringing Them Home</i> report on the Stolen Generations, which he says is based on ""faulty memory syndrome"". Mr Hayden says the call for an apology and the tactics used by Aboriginal leaders have not helped the cause of Aboriginal people. He has also questioned calls for the Prime Minister to apologise, describing tactics used to highlight Aboriginal issues as often having the subtlety of sabre slashing. ""The whole notion of compelling the Prime Minister to apologise over previous adverse experiences of Aboriginals in Australia's earlier history is going nowhere it does not attract majority public support it even evinces hostility in some areas,"" he said. ""Telling non-indigenous Australians that they are the heirs and successors of, and, apparently not that much different from, their allegedly mass murdering, racist, repressive ancestors of our not so far back colonial past adopts the subtlety of sabre slashing."""

" The Solicitor General is investigating whether the Workplace Relations Minister, Peter Reith, has a civil liability over the misuse of his taxpayer funded telecard. Mr Reith says he will immediately repay the $50,000 if he is found to have a liability. The Director of Public Prosecutions has found insufficient evidence to lay any criminal charges over the matter. Mr Reith has admitted breaching the ministerial guidelines by giving the card details to his son - but says that only led to $950 of the calls - which he has since paid back. He says he does not know who ran up the other $49,000 on the card. The Prime Minister, John Howard, is still strongly supporting Mr Reith. ""Mr Reith does enjoy my full confidence. I think he made an error of judgement some years ago in providing this information to his son,"" Mr Howard said. ""I guess other parents on occasions make errors of judgement in relation to the welfare of their children. There's no evidence that Mr Reith gained in any way from this."""

" The independent report on the state of Australia's phone system will be released in Canberra today. The Communications Minister, Richard Alston, will release the Besley inquiry, which will then be used by the National Party to decide whether to approve any further sale of Telstra. National Party MPs are divided about whether to support any further sale, but all agree the phone system needs major upgrading. They expect the Besley report to reveal a range of problems, including slow upgrading of exchanges, delays in fault repairs and poor Internet access. The National Party member for Kennedy, Bob Katter, says the report is a stunt aimed at gaining approval for the further sale by recommending some service improvements. He remains opposed to any further sale. ""We've been offered all sorts of bribes and wonderful things that are going to follow from it but we all know that if Telstra is privatised we will not have technicians in the bush and when our phones break down you will not have it fixed,"" he said."

" The announcement of final election results in Sri Lanka are expected today after delays and reports of widespread vote rigging. Sir Lanka's election commission decided to delay announcing the results of Tuesday's parliamentary elections amid reports of voter intimidation, fraudulent voting and violence. Polls in several districts have already been annulled. Early results point to a hung parliament with Sri Lankan Marxists and armed rebels, the People's Liberation Front, possibly holding the balance of power. The People's Liberation Front say they are not yet ready to decide whom to support. The election has been widely viewed as a referendum on President Chandrika Kumaratunga's plans to give greater powers to Tamil majority areas and her handling of the civil against Tamil Tiger rebels in the north."

" Share prices on Wall Street have been under pressure again with the technology sector that is bearing the brunt of the selling. The market has been unsettled by a number of warnings about next year's earnings prospects, including cautionary statements from Lucent Technologies and Motorola. The high-tech Nasdaq composite index is 50 points lower at 3,190, a slide of 1.5 per cent. The Dow Jones industrial average is substantially above the night's lows, but is still down around 98 points at 10,426. The US bond market has weakened a little. The softer prices have pushed up the yield on 30-year Treasury paper to 5.83 per cent, a rise of just over one point. In Britain, sharemarket jitters about technology stocks have set in. London's FT-100 index has slumped 130 points to 6,118 in a 2 per cent decline in the value of leading stocks. Yesterday in Asia, technology stocks were also the focus with Tokyo's Nikkei index dropping 314 points to 15,514. In Australia, the overall market succumbed to the weight of News Corporation and Telstra, with the All Ordinaries index slipping four points to 3,217. At 7.00am AEDT, the Share Price Index contract was down 12 points on yesterday's day settlement at 3,274. The 10-year bond contract was down half a point at 93.85, with the implied yield rising to 6.15 per cent. On foreign exchange markets, the Australian dollar has been fairly steady overnight ahead of today's official employment figures for September. The dollar was being quoted at around 53.47 US cents, up 0.1 cents on yesterday's local close. On the cross-rates, it is at 0.6150 euros, 57.54 Japanese yen, 36.53 pence sterling, and 1.318 New Zealand dollars. The gold price is at $US271 an ounce and West Texas crude oil is at $US33.16 a barrel."

" The United Cricket Board of South Africa says it will impose a life ban against former captain Hansie Cronje. The board has given Cronje seven days to respond to its decision to ban him from any official involvement in South African cricket. The United Cricket Board says Cronje will not be allowed to take part in any of its activities or those of its affiliates. Two of his former team-mates have already been suspended from the game. Batsman Herchelle Gibbs and bowler Henry Williams have been banned for six months. The players were disciplined for agreeing to accept bribes from Cronje. Cronje has admitted receiving payments from bookmakers on five separate occasions during his captaincy."

" A freestyle wrestler is in line to become the third athlete from the Sydney Olympics to be stripped of a gold medal after failing a drug test. A senior Olympic medical official says two wrestlers, one a gold medallist and the other a non-medallist tested positive for banned substances during the final weekend of the Sydney Games. Their identities have not been revealed but of the eight gold medals awarded in freestyle wrestling, four were won by competitors from Russia and one each by wrestlers from Azerbaijan, Iran, Germany and Canada. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) medical commission will hold a closed-door hearing with the two wrestlers and their representatives on Monday in Lausanne, Switzerland. The positive test results were confirmed the day after the Games, but the IOC did not take action at the time because the athletes had already left Australia and were not available for a hearing."

" United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan has held talks with Israeli and Palestinian leaders as part of a diplomatic effort to save the Middle East peace process. However, with both sides questioning the future of the process, Mr Annan agrees diplomatic moves are at a delicate stage. Kofi Annan led the negotiating charge with Russian and European Union envoys following close behind. He has held talks with both the Palestian Authority President Yasser Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak to try to find common ground between the countries. Earlier Palestinian leaders rebuffed Israel's offer to extend the deadline for Palestinian protesters to end their campaign against Israeli security forces by a few days."

" Meanwhile, Israel is trying to gather international support for its actions against the Palestinians, with former prime minister Shimon Peres making a tour of European capitals. Peres, who received a Nobel Peace Prize laureate in 1996 for his contribution to the Middle East peace process, says the purpose of the trip is to clarify the Israeli position to European leaders. He is presently in Rome and plans to travel to Berlin, London and Paris."

" Arab nations are closely watching the latest fighting between Israel and the Palestinians. In Iraq President Saddam Hussein's eldest son, Uday, has volunteered to join Palestinians in a holy war against Israel. His name topped a list of 75 Iraqi intellectuals, journalists and sport figures who want to fight alongside the Palestinians in an Iraqi newspaper. Ihe Iranian Foreign Minister is to visit Syria and Lebanon to review the situation and the threat it poses to regional stability. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" France has begun to rebuild its relations with Yugoslavia following the popular overthrowing of the regime headed by Slobodan Milosevic. France's Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine has travelled to Belgrade for talks with Yugoslavia's new president. The meeting between Yugoslav President Vojislav Kostunica and Mr Vedrine is a first step towards France re-establishing its traditionally strong influence in Belgrade, which was shattered by its involvement in NATO's bombing campaign last year. It is also the first step towards Yugoslavia receiving desperately-needed financial aid, as Yugoslavia need for cash is desperate as foreign exchange and central bank reserves are low. Although France did not offer any immediate aid, it is believed that the European Union will provide tens of millions of dollars in aid after a new Yugoslav Government is formed. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Claims have been raised in New South Wales state parliament that a baby-selling racket may be operating in Sydney. New South Wales Democrats MP Arthur Chesterfield Evans has raised the claims, following an advertisement in a local newspaper offering ""financial assistace"" to expectant mothers who consider adoption. Mr Chesterfield Evans sent an email to the group which calls itself 'Caring Mums'. He says while the group denies it is involved in baby-buying, it appears to be offering money to women who give up their children. He has called for the scheme to be investigated. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) is predicting widespread community anger at a decision to allow United States nuclear submarines into the Great Barrier Reef. The Federal Government is allowing the submarines in as part of a US defence exercise at Shoalwater Bay near Rockhampton in May next year. WWF spokeswoman Imogen Zethoven says the proposal should have been floated with the public before a decision was made. ""There's likely to be protests about this in local communities along the coastline,"" she said. ""Almost every Australian would be extremely concerned about the Great Barrier Reef being exposed to a risk like this. ""I don't think it's consistent with the community's expectations of the uses that are permissible and acceptable at a community level within the marine park."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" With a week to go before the start of the Sydney Paralympic Games, Olympics Minister Michael Knight, says the public response to the event has already been fantastic. Mr Knight says the Paralympic torch arrives in New South Wales tomorrow and public enthusiasm for the Paralympic Games has translated into strong ticket sales. He says the opening ceremony is sold out and the closing ceremony is selling strongly. Mr Knight has encouraged people with day passes to the Paralympics to move around to enjoy what he says will be a smorgasbord of sport, including wheelchair rugby - known as murder-ball. ""Go and cheer on the athletes in every sport because if you thought the Australian team did well at the Olympics you ain't seen nothin' yet,"" he said. ""Australia is aiming to be the dominant nation in these Games and improve on our second place finish in Atlanta."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Phillips Petroleum says it would like to see Australia, the United Nations and the East Timorese reach agreement on aspects of the new Timor Gap Treaty by the end of the year. Talks on the treaty, governing the sharing of seabed resources in an area of the Timor Sea are occurring in Dili this week. Phillips is developing the huge Bayu-Undan fields in the Zone of Cooperation and is trying to secure markets for the gas. The company's president, Stephen Brand, has told a conference in Perth that the treaty's current terms provide a clear fiscal regime for oil developments, but not for gas. He says there has been no agreement on how or where in the processing gas will be valued and contracting parties cannot calculate their share of revenue from gas sales. He says this is unsettling producers and potential customers and could delay gas development. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" South Africa has swept aside England in their ICC Knock-out Trophy quarterfinal cricket clash, marching to an easy eight-wicket victory. The South Africans matched a superb fielding performance with some great batting and outclassed a disappointing England side, which was bowled out in the 40th over for 182. Jacques Kallis led the South Africans to the 183-run target with a chanceless 78. Boetha Dippenaar made 65 and both were unbeaten as they put on 132 for the third wicket. England did not bowl too badly but its total of 182 was never going to be enough on a good batting track at Nairobi's Gymkhana ground. At 4-154 England was in the game but was undone by a typical late collapse, losing its last six wickets for 28 runs. Only Graeme Hick stood firm against the South African onslaught, hitting 65 off 68 balls. Marcus Trescothick's 26 was the next highest score. England's batsmen put themselves under pressure by scoring too slowly - they made just four runs off the first seven overs as Shaun Pollock and Roger Telemachus exploited early movement off the seam. Four of England's batsmen were caught on the square-leg boundary as they tried to step up the pace. England captain Nasser Hussain, who made just five before he edged to keeper Mark Boucher off Alan Donald's bowling, acknowledged the inferiority of his side. ""From the first ball to the end, we were outplayed,"" he said. ""We didn't even come second. It was just class bowling from the South African front line. We were never really in the game."" Pollock, who was the pick of the bowlers taking 3-27 in 9.1 overs, says South Africa's performance in the field was one of the best he had ever seen. ""We didn't let the pressure drop and in the end with the runs they did get, it meant they had to come at us,"" he said. South Africa now meets India in the second of the semifinals on Friday. In the other semifinal, on Wednesday, New Zealand plays Pakistan. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak has extended the Palestinians' deadline to end the violence in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. ""We have bowed to the requests of many world leaders and we have agreed to extend the delay by three or four days,"" Mr Barak said in an interview on public radio, referring to a two-day ultimatum which expired last night. ""If the violence does not end, it will mean that the Palestinian Authority and [leader] Yasser Arafat want to abandon the process for a political settlement."" Mr Barak dismissed the perception that he was showing weak resolve by extending his ultimatum to Mr Arafat, saying that peace was the ultimate goal. ""If we fail,"" he warned. ""We are going to be led by events into much tougher moments than each of us can now imagine. Mr Barak, who said hopes for peace in the Middle East were fading ""at least for the near future,"" said he had done more than any of his predecessors"" in contemplating ideas that might lead to a solution. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Labor Party has accused the Federal Government of covering-up Workplace Relations Minister Peter Reith's use of a taxpayer-funded telecard. Federal Police are investigating the use of Mr Reith's taxpayer-funded telecard, after the minister discovered $50,000 had been spent on the card over five years. Mr Reith has repaid around $950 charged to the card by his son. The Special Minister of State, Chris Ellison, says the Finance Department checked the use of telecards after the Opposition asked questions about it last year. He has rejected Opposition claims Mr Reith's case was hushed-up for nine months. ""In relation to this matter, the Minister for Workplace Relations has acted in a most forthright manner,"" he said. ""He has been upfront, he has spoken to the press this morning in an interview in which he has explained the situation fully. ""There is no aspect, and I repeat no aspect, of corruption on the part of Mr Reith."" The Prime Minister has criticised Mr Reith over the use of his taxpayer funded telecard, although he says it is not a grave matter. John Howard says Mr Reith has not commited a hanging offence. ""I wouldn't have done that and it occurred at a time when he was not a minister in my Government,"" Mr Howard said. ""I don't regard that of itself, particularly as he's explained the circumstances and has paid that money, I certainly don't regard that as a hanging offence."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Western Australian Premier, Richard Court, wants compensation for WA landowners who are prevented from clearing because of salinity. Mr Court says he would like to see the Federal Government's $1.5 billion salinity package, announced today, address two major issues, compensation and water quality. The Queensland Premier, Peter Beattie, has tried to legislate against freehold land clearing but could not get any compensation from the Commonwealth. Mr Court says land clearing is still allowed in Queensland, but states which prevent clearing should receive first priority for compensation. ""In this state, we have an issue where we are stopping people from clearing, but we do not have compensation measures in place,"" Mr Court said. ""If a package is being put together for Queensland land owners, we would want the same arrangements to apply for Western Australian properties."" The Commonwealth estimates that if salinity is not tackled, Adelaide's water supply will fail World Health Organisation salinity standards on two days out of five, within 20 years. Under the plan put forward by the Commonwealth, river systems will be rehabilitated and native vegetation coverage will be increased, an issue of particular relevance to Queensland which is still trying to finalise controls to stop the rapid rate of tree clearing within the state."

" The Australian Conservation Foundation says it is extremely disappointed by the Federal Government's $1.5 billion package to tackle the national salinity problem. But the ACF says the program falls well short of the money needed to deal with a problem it says costs the country $1 billion a year, based on the Government's own figures. Campaign manager John Connor says around $3.7 billion is needed every year to adequately deal with Australia's salinity problem. ""Now that sounds a lot but let's just put that in perspective because it's a little over 2 per cent of the whole Commonwealth budget,"" he said. ""We're spending far more on defence and health. ""Now is the time to put in the appropriate investment to fix up our backyard otherwise we'll lose both farms and biodiversity."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" A website controller who denies the Holocaust existed, Frederick Toben, claims his freedom of speech is being threatened by a ruling by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission. The commission has ruled his Adelaide Institute website is in breach of federal racial hatred laws. It has ordered that the contents be removed and a formal apology be sent to Jeremy Jones, who lodged a complaint on behalf of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry. Commissioner Kathleen McEvoy ruled the material published by Dr Toben was vilifying, bullying, insulting and offensive and that its dissemination is unlawful. Dr Toben says he will apologise if he is rude, crude, tactless or indiscreet but not if he is expressing an opinion that he thinks is based on the truth. ""This is a new dictatorship via the human rights commission, a new thought control, this is big brother in action,"" he said. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Australian Parliament has deplored political terrorism in Fiji and called for the earliest possible return to democratic rule in Fiji. The resolution moved by the Foreign Minister, Alexander Downer, expressed strong concern at calls by some Fijians for a blatantly discriminatory constitution. The resolution by the House of Representatives marked Fiji Day. Mr Downer says Fiji will not be fully accepted in the international community until it returns to a fair, balanced and democratic constitution. The Opposition spokesman on Foreign Affairs, Laurie Brereton, says Fiji's constitutional review is unlikely to be acceptable. Mr Brereton says the Australian Government is dragging its feet on sanctions against Fiji. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Sri Lanka's matriarch and the world's first female prime minister, Sirima Bandaranaike, has died shortly after casting her ballot in parliamentary elections. The 84-year-old mother of President Chandrika Kumaratunga died as she drove to the capital, Colombo, minutes after going by wheelchair to vote in the poll. Sirima Bandaranaike, who retired last month from politics after a 40-year career, became the world's first elected female leader in 1960. She was forced to retire as prime minister in August when her daughter, President Kumaratunga, inducted a younger minister to lead a robust election campaign. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The New South Wales Government believes that Australian hospitals may be involved in the practice of removing body parts during autopsies, without the family's consent, for medical research. Health Minister Craig Knowles says after inquiries overseas revealed the practice was occuring he ordered health authorities to investigate if it was happening in New South Wales hospitals. He says preliminary inquiries have found that it has been the case. He has written to state, territory and Commonwealth health ministers, urging them to adopt an immediate and uniform response to the issue. ""There is clearly a need for a similiar inquiry in Australia, as there is little doubt, similiar practices have occured here and most likely for decades,"" he said. ""Mr Speaker it is important to stress that these practices have always been linked to issues surrounding research, teaching and the advancement of medical and scientific knowlege. ""However, the critical issue relates to the degree of informed consent by the next of kin"". \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Dual Olympic gold medallist Michael Klim says he will have to move away from the Australian Institute of Sport (AIS) to achieve longevity in swimming. Klim was among athletes and officials who took part today in the final victory parade for the Olympians in Canberra. A crowd estimated at up to 20,000 attended the ceremony. Klim says with the Goodwill Games and world titles coming up, he will be back into training soon and that may mean a move away from Canberra. ""Obviously the institute has been great to me by getting me up here but I need to change environments a bit more now,"" Klim said. ""I spoke to my coach, Gennadi, and we're basically going to do a few different things, we haven't worked out what yet, they require adjusting the program so I can stay mentally fresh for the next four to six years."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak says the Palestinian leadership is not ready for peace and that Israel will have to take counter measures. However, he also called on Jewish and Arab citizens to end the two-way civilian violence, echoing a similar appeal from the Mayor of Jerusalem, Ehud Olmert. Mr Barak was speaking in an address broadcast on Israeli radio and TV ahead of an extraordinary Cabinet meeting to discuss the Middle East crisis after the expiration of his ultimatum to the Palestinians to end the violence or risk the death of the peace process. ""We are ready for anything that could contribute in a substantial way to an end to the violence, but to our regret the Palestinian leadership does not seem ready for that,"" he said. ""In order to achieve peace, the Palestinian people will always be our neighbours and our partners. ""But apparently the current leadership is not ready to make peace...and that will oblige us to take measures we are in the process of discussing. ""I call on all the citizens of the state to refrain from acts of violence. I call on Jewish citizens to avoid at all costs attacks on Arabs and their homes, I call on Arab citizens to not follow an extremist minority."" His comments echoed those of Mayor Olmert, who also made a strong public appeal for restraint, calling for Jewish residents of the holy city to stop attacks on Arabs. ""You have no right to take the law into your own hands,"" the Mayor said in an appeal aimed at the groups of young Jews who earlier the same day stoned cars driven by Arabs in several parts of the city and attacked passers-by. ""If you really believe in the unity of Jerusalem, don't go about upsetting your Arab neighbours who for their part are not seeking confrontation. ""It would be a dreadful catastrophe for Jerusalem if the city became a battleground between Jews and Arabs."" ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" In what has been a turbulent day in Yugoslav politics, the Serbian Government has agreed to resign and new elections will be held in December. The latest developments have strengthened the authority of President Vojislav Kostunica. President Kostunica went to the Serbian Parliament and effectively demanded that it resign. The assembly is dominated by representatives of former president Slobodan Milosevic's Socialist Party and the ultra-nationalists, the Radicals. But even these parties seemed to have recognised that the ousting of president Milosevic means there is a new political dynamic in the country and there must be fresh elections. The Serbian Police Minister, Vlajiko Stojiljkovic, who has been indicted by the Hague Tribunal for war crimes, has resigned from office, so too has the Federal Prime Minister Momir Bulatovic. Mr Milosevic may be gone, but politics in Yugoslavia remains a risky business. Bodyguards protecting a prominent Serb politician in Belgrade have fired their guns into the air to prevent him from being attacked. Vojislav Seselj, who is Deputy Prime Minister of Serbia, is infamous for his role in the Bosnia and Croatia wars. As Mr Seselj emerged from the Serbian Parliament, a crowd of several hundred surrounded him. Stones were thrown, he was heckled and scuffles broke out. His bodyguards fired into the air to force the crowd back. This incident occurred as several thousand students were marching from the city towards one of the former residences of the defeated president Milosevic. A confrontation with police was resolved peacefully. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australian Federal Police are investigating a $50,000 telecard bill belonging to Federal Workplace Relations Minister Peter Reith. Investigations so far show one of Mr Reith's sons is partly responsible for the bill. Mr Reith called for an investigation into the bill last August when he was notified that it had reached $50,000. He says the size of the bill came to light when a Telstra employee became suspicious of the volume of calls. Mr Reith says he believed the telecard had been handed in, in 1994. An initial investigation revealed Mr Reith's son had spent $950 on the card, an amount he immediately repaid. But Mr Reith says he does not know how the massive remaining bill accumulated. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The states have been warned that a permanent ban on Internet gambling is still possible, even though the Senate did not back a 12-month ban. The Government last night fell one vote short of getting its bill for a one-year moratorium on Internet betting through the Senate. It wanted the 12-month ban while it investigated ways of permanently banning the industry. Most states and territories oppose both - many have already sold gaming licences. Greens Senator Bob Brown voted against the 12-month ban last night. But he warned if the states did not crack down, he would probably back a complete ban. ""The majority in the Senate is clearly concerned about the impact of problem gambling,"" he said. ""The last thing we want to do is do nothing. So if the states aren't up to getting in uniform laws which have teeth and which are effective then quite clearly the Government is going to come up with a complete ban. ""Left with no alternative, I feel the Senate is going to be inclined to go that way."" --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Concerns over the low Australian dollar, rising interest rates and the new tax system have led to a slump in the latest measure of business confidence. Dun and Bradstreet's poll of 900 firms shows the positive outlook for sales and profits has reversed, while expectations for jobs and selling prices have also declined. Dun and Bradstreet's managing director Christine Christian says many executives are deeply concerned about the weakening exchange rate. ""Most of them believe that it will continue to decline,"" she said. ""Secondly is interest rates. They have certainly added to the gloom, and their concern is that with higher interest rates comes higher spending. ""Most retailers and wholesales were quite optimistic about [the] GST [goods and services tax] and they felt tax cuts would generate higher disposable incomes and unfortunately we haven't seen that anywhere."" --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The ACT Legislative Assembly takes the first step today towards removing Canberra's minority Liberal Government. Labor is formally tabling its no-confidence motion against Chief Minister Kate Carnell. Labor has tried and failed on three occasions to oust Mrs Carnell using the no-confidence argument, but this time has secured the numbers to get the motion over the line. Mrs Carnell stands accused of overseeing the cost over-runs and illegal expenditure of taxpayer funds, highlighted in the Bruce Stadium audit report. Mrs Carnell says she does not deserve to be sacked for administrative failings she neither had knowledge of or control over. She says she will re-nominate against Labor leader Jon Stanhope when the chief minister's job is vacated a week from tomorrow. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" Police in Zimbabwe have failed in an attempt to arrest Morgan Tsvangirai, the leader of the country's main opposition party. Mr Tsvangirai is accused of making threatening remarks against President Robert Mugabe. Mr Tsvangirai is wanted for questioning but he has managed to evade police attempts to apprehend him. He has returned to Zimbabwe after a business trip to South Africa. Police had erected roadblocks at Harare's international aiport to intercept the opposition leader, but the opposition party - the Movement for Democratic Change, says Mr Tsvangirai has returned home safely. The party will not say how or when Mr Tsvangirai re-entered the country. The opposition leader is accused of treason after warning that Mr Mugabe could be removed from office by force. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Jelena Dokic sped past Swiss Emmanuelle Gagliardi 6-3, 6-0 to move into the second round of the Swisscom Challenge tennis tournament today, setting up a long awaited rematch with world number one Martina Hingis at the WTA Tour event in Zurich. Dokic, who lost the bronze medal match at the Sydney Olympics to Monica Seles, needed just 61 minutes to dispose of Gagliardi, about the same time she needed to upset Hingis in the opening round at Wimbledon in 1999. The second round clash will mark the first meeting between the two since the 129th-ranked Australian stunned Hingis with one of Wimbledon's biggest upsets. Dokic's 6-2, 6-0 victory marked only the third time in the Open era that a grand slam women's top seed has been toppled in the first round. It will also be the first time Hingis and Dokic have met outside a grand slam, the Swiss world number one having beaten Dokic in straight sets earlier the same year at the Australian Open. ""A lot of time has passed but Wimbledon is still a good memory for me,"" Dokic said. ""Of course this will be a different game. I'm looking forward to playing Martina again. ""I still have nothing to lose so I'm just going to attack and take my chances. ""It was good that I had an easy match to start and didn't have to spend much time on court."" Dokic will meet a refreshed Hingis, who chose not represent Switzerland at the Olympics and showed plenty of spark on Sunday collecting her sixth tournament win of the season in Filderstadt."

" The ANZ Bank expects jobs growth in Australia to continue at ""respectable"" levels over the remainder of the year despite an Olympics-related slump in newspaper employment notices last month. The bank's monthly job advertisement series has fallen a seasonally-adjusted 18.3 per cent during September which is the biggest downturn since the survey started 25 years ago. ANZ Bank chief economist Saul Eslake says employers appear to have taken the view that prospective applicants would have been enjoying the Olympics rather than looking for a job. ""Newspaper ads have been soft for a few months but I doubt that that means that employment is about to slow very sharply,"" he said. ""Over the last few months, despite the decline in newspaper job advertising, employment has grown at its most rapid rate for five years. ""It'll probably slow down some towards the end of the year, but I think, not so much based on today's numbers as on other economic evidence, that we're going to see a continued fairly respectable rate of employment growth over the balance of this year."" Job advertising on the Internet increased one per cent but that was the weakest outcome in eight months."

" Illawarra coal miners are to strike for seven days next week. A meeting of union delegates in Wollongong today voted to stop work from midnight on October 18. The strike over wage claims effects the Tower, Appin and Cordeaux collieries, and follows similar action at BHP operations in central Queensland that began this morning. Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union spokesperson Howard Fisher says BHP have not given any ground in negotiations. ""We haven't decided to reach any compromise with them,"" he said. ""We believe that our offer of a 15 per cent wage increase is fair and just and we're not prepared to compromise on that."" A spokesman for BHP Coal, David McDonald says the dispute will cost the Illawarra region $6 million in lost revenue. Mr McDonald says the company is the victim of an orchestrated political campaign being run out of the union's Sydney office."

" The Federal Government has accused another Labor MP of briefing the Macquarie Bank on the Opposition's plans for Telstra. Last week, the Government accused Opposition frontbencher Lindsay Tanner of discussing plans to sell Telstra's retail businesses with the Bank. Labor denies the claim. Today, Treasurer Peter Costello told Parliament that Labor's spokesman on Communications, Stephen Smith has also been in touch with the bank. ""We haven't yet heard an explanation, Mr Speaker, as to why Mr Smith and why the Member for Melbourne are down at the Macquarie Bank,"" he said. ""They just decided there was a good lunch on that day or you liked the wine I suppose, Mr Speaker. ""But we now have the Member for Melbourne and the Spokesman, wasn't this lucky, the Spokesman on Privatisation and the Spokesman on Communications."""

" The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission has lodged a lengthy submission with the World Heritage Committee about Kakadu National Park. ATSIC is calling on the Commission to list the park as ""in danger"". ATSIC has lodged the submission in support of the Mirrar traditional owners of Kakadu. It is calling on UNESCO's World Heritage Committee to consider 27 points, ranging from the effect on mining in the park to Australia's legislation covering world heritage areas. ATSIC wants Kakadu listed as ""in danger"" in the hope efforts will be made to control pollution and rehabilitate the area. It has sent the submission to the Commission's headquarters in Paris. It is seeking urgent consideration on the matter at the Committee's meeting in Cairns in December."

" Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer is flying to Townsville for the start of Solomon Islands peace negotiations. Australian and New Zealand aircraft are flying Solomon Islands delegates to the north Queensland city for the talks. Mr Downer says the ceasefire signed in August is holding roughly but conflict and disorder continue, causing enormous damage to Solomon Islands. The Foreign Minister told Parliament the talks starting tonight are significant for the unity of Solomons Islands. ""If peace is not brought to the Solomon Islands quickly, the country does face economic and social disintegration,"" he said. ""We will do all we sensibly can to support peace efforts but ultimately the success of the Townsville talks and the future of the Solomon Islands itself must lie in the hands of its own people."""

" The Federal Government has again been forced to defend its new funding formula for schools, denying that it favours private institutions over government schools. Shadow Education spokesman, Michael Lee has told Parliament that the Government has taken $27 million away from state schools and redistributed it to 12 wealthy schools, including Geelong Grammar. Prime Minister John Howard says the funding arrangements are determined by enrolments and most of the growth in student numbers is occurring in the smaller independent schools. ""As parents exercise their choice to take their children from government schools to independent schools, the cost burden on state governments is thereby reduced,"" he said. ""I remind the House that 88 per cent of the total cost of running government schools is borne by state governments, only 12 per cent is borne by the Federal Government."""

" A Melbourne science company which produced a re-programmed human cell nucleus using a pig egg says the embryo could never have become a living being. Stem Cells Sciences and a US company removed the nucleus from a pig egg and replaced it with a human nucleus as part of research into the cloning of human stem cells for the treatment of disease. The combined cell then divided, growing into a tiny embryo in a test tube. Stem Cell Sciences' Peter Mountford says there was never any intention to implant the embryo in another animal and has ruled out the possibility it could have developed into a living being. ""It's ethically immoral and it's not something that our company or any respectable scientist would pursue - it's just not a possibility,"" he said."

" Two Perth women are in hospital claiming they received food poisoning on a Qantas Airlink flight. The women, who do not want to be identified, say they both ate a chicken curry and rice meal while on a flight from Perth to Alice Springs eight days ago. They say there was a foul smell in the plane before the meal was served and after landing at Alice Springs they became severely ill. The pair claim that after medical attention at the Royal Flying Doctor Service's Alice Springs post and a stint in the emergency department at Ayre's Rock, Qantas offered to fly them back to Perth via Sydney. ""They had already put our bags on the plane without even asking our permission, so I said there's absolutely no way that I am flying at that altitude with a lady who is as sick as my friend and as sick as I am."" The women have been in hospital in Perth since returning home last week. The incident follows reports that last week, Qantas served 2,000 meals on which the best-before date had expired. A spokeswoman for the airline says there has been no other reports of passengers falling ill on the flight between Perth and Alice Springs. She says Qantas has arranged for its medical staff to speak with doctors treating the two women to find out more about their claims."

" Weakness for Telstra has pushed the Australian sharemarket lower, offsetting a late recovery in News Corporation stock. The All Ordinaries index closed down nearly 19 points to 3,226. This followed heavy falls on Wall Street on Friday night. The Dow Jones is down 128 points to 10,596, its lowest close since August and the Nasdaq is down 111 points to 3,361, its lowest finish since May. Locally, News Corporation rallied after falling sharply in New York on Friday night on an earnings downgrade by Merrill Lynch. Newscorp finished up 11 to $22.55 but the preference shares were down four to $18.90. Telstra is down nine to $6.17 and Telstra Two is down 13 to $3.09. Other telecommunication companies shared the weakness with Cable and Wireless Optus down 19 to $3.93 and OneTel fell 9 to 66 cents. Major banks were lower with the Commonwealth down 23 to $27.56 and Westpac down 10 to $12.90. BHP eased one cent to $19.27 and Rio Tinto added 15 to $25.35. The Australian dollar has stabilized after its series of record lows last week. The ANZ job advertisements series showing a record fall in September of 18 per cent mostly due to the Olympic Games had little affect. The currency is trading at 53.4 US cents up 0.6 cents from Friday's close and an all-time low of 52.8 US cents. On the cross-rates, the dollar is at 36.88 Sterling, 58.19 yen and 1.199 German marks. It is worth 1.323 New Zealand dollars, 0.613 Euros and is at 49.1 on the trade weighted index. Gold is fetching $US270.60 an ounce."

" A huge crowd in Brisbane has welcomed Australia's Olympic athletes. Senior police estimate 100,000 people lined the route of the parade, the biggest crowd to have gathered in the city. Cathy Freeman led the parade accompanied by Australian Olympic Committee President John Coates. Canoeing silver medallist Daniel Collins says the athletes have been overwhelmed by the response from the Australian public. ""It's impossible not to enjoy it, the people have been so great,"" he said. ""I mean it's hard not to enjoy this sort of encouragement and I've got to thank the Australian people, thanks very much."""

" With Israeli-Palestinian clashes continuing in Gaza and the West Bank, less than 24 hours remain until Israel says it will execute its threat to abandon the peace dialogue and use whatever force necessary to end violence. Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak reiterated the Israeli ultimatum as he toured northern Israel, where conflict has spread to the Lebanese border. Lebanese troops have been put on standby as Israel moved tanks and soldiers into the disputed border area where Hezbollah guerillas captured three Israeli soldiers. The Red Cross in Lebanon has asked to see the men, held as hostage, and German mediators have reportedly begun contact between the sides. Syrian Foreign Minister Farouq Al Shara has warned Israel would be the loser if it attacked Syria in response to the Hezbollah attacks. As Israel entered Yon Kippur, its holiest religious holiday, Mr Barak said he would know what to do if the deadline given to the Palestinian leadership passed without an end to violence in the Palestinian territories. After a short lull in consultation in Gaza, Israeli soldiers again fired on Palestinian protesters late in the day and there have been more reports of Jewish settlers attacking Palestinians in the West Bank. In Washington, US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright says it is vital Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat exercise control over his people, as the White House repeated its call for restraint in the Middle East crisis. With the US engaged in what one official called a ""full court press"" diplomatic offensive to calm the violence that has taken Israel and the Palestinians to the brink of war, Dr Albright said she hoped Chairman Arafat had not abandoned the peace process. ""I hate to begin to think that Yasser Arafat is not a partner, he has been a partner, he needs to regain control over what is going on and they need to disengage and get back to the peace track,"" Dr Albright said. The US Secretary of State also defended the administration's decision to abstain from a UN vote aimed at Israel condemning excessive use of force in the conflict. She said the US has criticised the resolution as one-sided, but chose not to veto it in order to maintain Washington's ability to work with all sides in the dispute. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Economic sanctions that had been imposed on Yugoslavia will start being removed almost immediately. France, which currently holds the presidency of the European Union (EU), has signalled that a meeting in Luxembourg tonight of EU foreign ministers will lift the oil embargo and end the ban on commercial flights. Even for Yugoslavia's new President, Vojislav Kostunica, the speed of the political change in Yugoslavia has been remarkable. During his swearing in ceremony on the weekend, he said he sometimes felt as though it was a dream. Mr Kostunica promised to bring the country back into the global community and to continue a peaceful change of power and return to democracy. His inauguration has been warmly welcomed by the West, with both the EU and US promising to provide almost immediate financial relief. The EU is expected to drop its economic sanctions when it meets later today and the US has promised to provide a democracy incentive. The local currency, the dinar, has appreciated considerably on the black market, reflecting the view among ordinary people that the economic hardships of the past decade are finally about to end. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The United Nations Transitional Authority in East Timor (UNTAET) says it is prepared to take Australia to the International Court of Justice if negotiations on Timor Sea oil and gas fields do not favour East Timor. The UN, administering East Timor as it prepares for statehood, will begin negotiations with Australia today for a new agreement on control of oil and gas fields in the Timor Sea area called the Timor Gap. The area has significant gas and oil reserves. It is believed to be the first time the UN will negotiate a treaty on behalf of a territory or country. East Timor could receive a financial windfall of hundreds of millions of dollars from undersea fuel resources within the next decade. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" In Indonesia, police have begun to restore order in the eastern province of Irian Jaya, also known as Papua, after clashes in which 30 people were killed. There is now calm in the highland town of Wamena after days of terror. An Indonesian police spokesman says thousands of pro-independence activists, accused of killing and raping settlers, have fled to surrounding hills. Witnesses say pro-independence supporters, mainly village people armed with bows and arrows, were enraged on Friday when police lowered their flag of independence, the Morning Star. Human rights activists have been warning for weeks of a crackdown by Indonesian security forces on independence supporters. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Dozens of trucks will converge on Federal Parliament today with truck drivers protesting against rising fuel costs and low freight rates. The New South Wales secretary of the Transport Workers Union (TWU), Tony Sheldon, says livelihoods and lives are being lost because of pressures on owner-driver truckies. Mr Sheldon says the delegation will be urging the Federal Government to introduce a system of licensing and a compulsory code of practice in the trucking industry. ""We have licensing for aircraft, we have licensing for shipping, we have licensing for rail and the area where the bulk of fatalities are [is on the road]...the 171 people have died in just one 12 month period...a large number of those [are] directly related to fatigue, we have no licensing system,"" he said. ""[There is] very little regulation and [we have] a Federal Government to this point that doesn't want to make any substantial change."" The TWU's Andrew Whale says although the nation's truck drivers have voted against proceeding with European style blockades of oil refineries, it is important politcians are aware of the human effect of increased fuel prices. ""I would encourage the Prime Minister to meet with these drivers to actually hear what their story is as to what is really happening on our roads,"" he said. Meanwhile, several hundred truck drivers will meet in Melbourne this morning, as their protest over rising operating costs intensifies. The drivers will meet at Melbourne's docklands area, as they continue their campaign over crippling fuel costs and low wages. The TWU expected to meet Victorian Transport Minister Peter Batchelor this afternoon to help settle the dispute. Union spokesman Peter Earle says drastic measures will be taken if a resolution is not reached. ""Maybe we just turn this into a statewide stoppage because this isn't unique to tip trucks, this is actually an industry problem,"" he said. Construction companies, who employ many of the drivers, have been asked to attend today's meeting. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australian women considering having fat injections to enlarge their breasts are being warned they risk a missed cancer diagnosis. The Royal Australasian College of Surgeons says the procedure can lead to calcium deposits in the breast, which are indistinguishable from cancer in X-rays. College spokesman and Sydney cosmetic surgeon Cholm Williams says a misdiagnosis after a cosmetic fat injection can sometimes lead to breasts having to be removed altogether. ""I've carried out a bilateral mastectomy on a patient because the result appeared to mimic cancer which seems unfortunate after a cosmetic procedure like this,"" he said. ""There are cases in America that have been reported where cancer has been missed or mastectomies unnecessarily have been performed also."" --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Lawyers for Christopher Skase have lodged an appeal against two adverse Spanish court rulings which could affect his chances of remaining in Spain. In a surprise decision, the Palma High Court on his island refuge of Majorca ruled Skase had attempted to defraud Spanish immigration officials by presenting an Australian passport which had been declared invalid by the Australian Government. It also said Skase was a fugitive from Australian justice, having fled the country in 1991 after the collapse of his Qintex business empire left him with more than $1 billion in debts. His lawyer Antonio Coll has lodged an appeal but it is not certain that leave to appeal will be granted. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Michael Schumacher has ended Ferrari's 21-year drought, winning the Formula One driver's championship after taking the Japanese grand prix in Suzuka. The 31-year-old German took his third title but only his first with Ferrari as Mika Hakkinen in a McLaren, the only man who could deny him, finished second. David Coulthard in the second McLaren was third followed by Rubens Barrichello in the Ferrari. Williams rookie Jenson Button was fifth with former world champion Jacques Villeneuve finishing sixth in the BAR-Honda."

" Residents of the Yugoslav capital, Belgrade, have woken to a new era in Yugoslavia's turbulent history following the apparent overthrow of Slobodan Milosevic's regime. After hundreds of thousands of protesters spent the night on the streets of the capital, the city is now largely peaceful. AFP reports that many shops are open and locals are making their way to work but there are still clear signs of the changes of the last 24 hours. Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov has left Moscow for Belgrade, following a visit by Russian President Vladimir Putin. There has also been no response from the Yugoslav Army, which has been holding an emergency meeting to consider its response to the massive uprising in Belgrade. Meanwhile, Vojislav Kostunica's Yugoslav opposition has established a crisis committee charged with preparing a new session of the Yugoslav Parliament. After a day of dramatic protests, Mr Kostunica declared he would replace Mr Milosevic as the new president of Yugoslavia. Mr Milosevic has not been seen for more than 24 hours. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The historic agreement between Victoria and New South Wales to increase water flows in the Snowy River has been widely welcomed. The two premiers have agreed to spend $300 million to increase the flow to 21 per cent over 10 years. The money will establish a joint government enterprise to invest in capital projects to save water, and reverse the environmental damage caused by the Snowy Mountains scheme. Premier Steve Bracks says the deal will safeguard the interests of irrigators and protect the Murray Darling basin. ""Once the Commonwealth comes on board there'll be environmental flows into the Murray as well,"" he said. ""It's an outstanding achievement for the environment in Australia."" The agreement is a victory for East Gippsland independent Craig Ingram, who says the pressure is now on the Commonwealth to support the initiative. ""It's essential that the Commonwealth not only agree to this but also match this agreement,"" he said. The Victorian National and Liberal parties have cautiously welcomed the deal but are demanding more detail on its cost and impact. But the New South Wales National Party leader George Souris has accused Mr Carr of ""doing a sleazy political deal"". Mr Souris says Mr Carr has sold out on New South Wales irrigators and producers to stitch up the political future of his Victorian counterpart. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Australian dollar is recovering from its latest bout of selling which took it to new record lows this morning below 53 US cents. The latest attempt to prop up the euro has also failed. Australian importers and travellers abroad are getting closer to paying $2 for each greenback. The currency dropped to 52.8 US cents when the euro failed to respond to a small interest rate rise by the European central bank. Commonwealth Securities chief economist Craig James says the dollar will only improve permanently when the US growth bubble bursts, or the G7 offers substantial support for the euro. He says raising rates just to defend currencies may be counterproductive. ""The market is looking through that and says well does the economy really justify an increase in interest rates and if they feel it doesn't justify an increase in interest rates then they become negative on that currency,"" he said. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Israeli security forces say they are prepared for further clashes with Palestinian demonstrators to mark the one week anniversary of violent protests at Jerusalem's Temple Mount. The West Bank and Gaza Strip have been sealed off after a second round of peace talks in Egypt failed to get off the ground. The militant group Hamas is reported to have called for a day of rage to mark last week's violence at the al-Aqsa Mosque on Jerusalem's Temple Mount. It is feared Friday prayers may be the catalyst for renewed clashes between Palestinians and Israelis. That has prompted a massive security clamp down in Jerusalem with the West Bank and Gaza Strip sealed off until next week. Further sporadic clashes have been reported over the past 12 hours. Attempts by Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak to broker an agreement between Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Palestinian Authority chairman Yasser Arafat failed to eventuate when Mr Barak returned to Israel after the breakdown of earlier talks in Paris. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Anthropologists say arguments put forward by the Reconciliation Minister, Philip Ruddock, to explain Aboriginal disadvantage are seriously flawed. The Australian Anthropological Society has joined indigenous leaders and others in condemning the comments. In interviews with influential newspapers <i>The Washington Post</i> and <i>Le Monde</i>, Mr Ruddock linked Aboriginal disadvantage to their relatively recent contact with what he termed ""developed civilisations"". He described pre-colonial Aboriginal society as hunter-gatherer, and said Aborigines had no knowledge of the wheel. But Julie Finlayson from the Anthropological Society says neither explains Aboriginal disadvantage. ""There is no connection between the invention of the wheel [and civilisation] as far as we know and the kind of conclusion that he's drawn,"" she said. ----------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Minister for Community Services, Larry Anthony, denies the Government is ignoring homeless people, particularly children. The Labor Party has accused the Government of not providing resources to deal with the growing problem after a new report from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. The report shows that in a two week period of 1998, there were more than 8,800 visits to assisted accommodation, with more than half the children involved under six. Mr Anthony says the Government has allocated $800 million to the states and territories for accommodation assistance over the next five years, an 18 per cent increase. ""We recognise there is a need to assist the homeless, particularly families at risk, and what this report indicated is that there does need to be work done on providing facilities for children in crisis accommodation and emergency services,"" he said. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Three houses have collapsed and two people are buried after a major earthquake in western Japan. The quake was felt as far away as Tokyo and hit the Chugoku region near the sea of Japan coast. At 7.1 on the Richter scale, it is Japan's biggest since the Kobe earthquake of 1995. Officials say so far damage appears to be minor but there have been three landslides and at least three houses have collapsed. The nuclear power plants in the region appear unaffected. Japan is one of the world's most earthquake-prone countries because it sits atop four tectonic plates. Typically it experiences about 1,000 minor earthquakes a year. So far this year its had more than 12,000. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The two candidates for the post of vice-president of the United States have held their one and only televised debate. The session between the vice-presidential nominees, Joseph Lieberman for the Democrats and Dick Cheney for the Republicans was a relatively restrained and good natured affair. After Tuesday's sharp clashes between Al Gore and George W Bush, this was a far more gentlemanly affair. It was clear that both Mr Lieberman and Mr Cheney rather like each other despite their political rivalry. But if the tone was gentler, the policy disagreements echoed those of their bosses on Tuesday. Mr Cheney stressed the Republicans policy of deeper tax cuts accusing Mr Lieberman and the Democrats by contrast of favouring big government and big government spending."

" Yugoslavia's president-elect Vojislav Kostunica has addressed the nation on state television, calling for calm and unity in a new democratic Yugoslavia. Slobodan Milosevic has not been seen for 24 hours and there is speculation that he has left Belgrade. Mr Kostunica has used his first speech to make a strong commitment to democracy. He is also calling for sanctions against Yugoslavia to be lifted and the EU has said it is ready to heed his call. The streets of Belgrade remain jammed with hundreds of thousands of people celebrating the end of President Milosevic's 13-year rule. It has been reported that two people have been killed in the protests, while two policemen have been admitted to hospital and 65 people have been treated for injuries. Meanwhile, the Yugoslav army says it will not leave its barracks to intervene against the uprising. A senior Opposition leader also says both Serbia's Interior Minister and Belgrade's chief of police have promised that police will only intervene to protect property and prevent criminal acts."

" News of the Yugoslav uprising has been welcomed cautiously by the Serbian National Federation of Australia. With the United States indicating it is ready to lift sanctions on Yugoslavia, Serbian federation president Ilija Glisic says the reaction of western powers to the change of government will be important. ""It supports the information we've been getting, that there will be a peaceful uprising, and it appears that that's the case,"" he said. ""The other thing this time, and it appeared it would happen, was that the West wouldn't block the people's move towards what they see as greater freedom and democracy."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Tensions remain high in Jerusalem, despite a lull in fighting in the Palestinian territories over the past day. There are fears of a resumption in fighting after Israeli and Palestinian leaders were unable to reach an agreement to end the violence in two rounds of talks. Despite a reduction in the level of violence in which only two Palestinians were killed today, some Palestinian groups have called for today to become a ""day of rage"" for the Al Aqsa mosque, raising fears of an escalation in clashes across the Palestinian tertitories. With talks in Paris and Egypt failing to find a solution, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak has said he doubts he has a peace partner in Yasser Arafat. Meanwhile, Mr Arafat is continuing to demand an end to violence against Palestinians and international inquiry into Israel's military conduct over the past week. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Darwin will today host a street parade for 10 athletes who competed in the Sydney Olympic Games. Olympic 400 metres gold medallist Cathy Freeman, beach volleyball gold medallist Natalie Cook and Northern Territory competitors Nova Peris-Kneebone and Henry Collins will be part of the celebrations. The parade begins at 5.00pm ACST at the Civic Centre and moves through Cavenagh, Knuckey and Mitchell streets before ending at Parliament House. Peris-Kneebone says she is looking forward to thanking Northern Territory residents for their support. ""I got hundreds of faxes from Territory kids right through from Melvill Island up to Alice Springs,"" she said. ""It's just incredible and you don't realise you're out there - you're doing something you love and at the end of the day you thinking you're touching the lives of so many Australians."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Police in Japan are preparing to charge a 64-year-old woman who they believe starved her five children to death. Police say the woman has told them she stopped feeding her children after receiving a message from God. Akiko Wakasa was emaciated when discovered along with the decomposing bodies of her four daughters and one son at their home near Osaka in August. She and her brother were arrested on Wednesday after being released from hospital. Police say she has told them she ordered her children not to eat or drink in June after receiving a message that this would purify them and that God would take care of them. Police say the children, who were aged between 27 and 41, appeared to offer no resistance. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" A joint Victoria-New South Wales announcement on improving the amount of water flowing in the Snowy River is expected today. At Jindabyne, in southern New South Wales this morning, the New South Wales and Victorian Premiers, Bob Carr and Steve Bracks, are expected to reveal what percentage flow they have agreed on. In October 1998 a former NSW Coalition government minister, Robert Webster, delivered a report on the Snowy. He recommended the natural water flow in the river be increased from its current 1 per cent out of Jindabyne Dam to 15 per cent. One scientific committee suggested the environmental flow should be boosted to 28 per cent. Mr Webster warned of the dangers of going higher than 15 per cent. ""To go higher than 15 per cent would have significant economic impact on the irrigators, on the electricity generation and indeed on the health of the Murray and Murrumbidgee Rivers,"" he said. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" A new report says thousands of Australian children are experiencing homelessness and its related effects of trauma, grief and anxiety. The report by the Institute of Health and Welfare says more than 8,800 visits by a child and their homless parent were made to an accomodation assistance centre over a six-week period in 1998. More than half of those children were under six years of age, 16 percent had experienced physical abuse and more than two thirds had witnessed domestic violence. But Julie Oberin from the Federation of Homeless Organisations says the problem has worsened since the report was researched and that many centres are not equipped for children. ""Many agencies don't have children's workers at all and a lot of agencies only have one,"" Ms Oberin said. The organisation says centres are under-resourced and need more government funding to accomodate children."

" Federal Secretary to the Shadow Family and Community Services Minister Anthony Albanese says the report on homelessness shows the government is better at providing statistics, than beds. Mr Albanese says the government is already well aware of the crisis in child homelessness, and has done nothing to help. ""The governemnt had a report, another report, some 18 months ago into the funding of these services,"" he said. ""It recommended an immediate 25 per cent increase in funds just to meet existing demand. ""The government has done nothing about reaching the target that its own report suggested was appropriate."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Pat Rafter has moved a step closer to his goal of finally claiming the Hong Kong Open title after two career near-misses, after reaching the quarterfinals. It was far from easy for the 27-year-old Australian, who had to struggle through three sets and nearly two-and-a-half hours before eliminating occasional doubles partner Jonas Bjorkman 6-4, 5-7, 6-3. Rafter came close to titles in 1994 and 1997, but could not get past crowd hero Michael Chang on both occasions. Chang is the eighth seed this year as he plays the event for the 10th consecutive time. Rafter, a two-time US Open holder and trophy-holder alongside Sweden's Bjorkman at the Australian Open last year, could have ended his day before the sun went down over Victoria Park. Rafter found himself in trouble as he matched his serve-and-volley attack against the steady baselining of Bjorkman, a losing finalist in 1995. He repeatedly found himself being passed late in the second set as the Scandinavian saved a ninth-game match point and carried on to square the contest at a set each. It took a break from Rafter for 5-3 in the third and a final hold to secure victory. ""Jonas played well, if he'd kept up that level, I don't know if I could have gone with him,"" said Rafter. ""He served and returned really well. ""When he gets on a roll, he's hard to stop."" In two later matches, fourth-seed Mark Philippoussis beat American Chris Woodruff 6-7, 7-5, 6-3, while former French Open champion Sergi Bruguera of Spain beat Chile's number six Marcelo Rios 2-6, 7-6, 6-4. Rafter now meets top seed Gustavo Kuerten. The Brazilian, the narrow leader in the season's champions points race with three to spare over US Open winner Marat Safin of Russia, played a welcome daylight match after starting his first career campaign in Hong Kong at night. Kuerten beat Armenian Sargis Sargsian 6-2, 7-5 and said he was glad to have had sunlight on his side even in the humid heat of the afternoon. ""It's very difficult for me at night,"" said the winner. ""I have a tough time seeing the ball, distinguishing between the contrast of light. I can play in the daytime without my contact lenses, but not at night."" The current pace-setter feels things are hotting up in the race for year-end number one status and places in the eight-man Masters Final in Lisbon in late November. ""It's getting exciting now,"" said the 24-year-old Brazilian. ""This part of the season is more realistic. There are four or five guys who have a chance to finish the year at number one. ""Results from now on can decide how things go at the end of the year. This could be one of the closest races of the past few years."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Middle East peace talks are to resume in Egypt later today but without the Israeli Prime Minister, Ehud Barak. The Palestinian leader, Yasser Arafat, will be joined by the United States Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright and Egypt's President Hosni Mubarak. Mr Barak is headed for home, after accusing Mr Arafat of refusing to sign an agreement which had been drafted during marathon talks overnight in Paris. Expectations of a new breakthrough had risen high after six hours of talks in Paris, despite scenes of high drama in the negotiations, the two sides seemed to have reached an agreement. Brokered by the Americans with help from the United Nations secretary general Kofi Annan and the French President, Jacques Chirac, it seemed progress had been made. But at the last minute, Mr Arafat refused to sign, retiring to his hotel and leaving his deputy to continue the talks. The sticking point is the international inquiry into the violence into the West Bank and Gaza Strip demanded by the Palestinians. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Prime Minister is continuing to back his Reconciliation Minister who is under attack over his comments about Aboriginal disadvantage. Federal Parliamentarians from several parties say Philip Ruddock should resign. Mr Ruddock has told two foreign newspapers that one of the reasons Aborigines are disadvantaged is their relatively recent contact with developed civilisations. His comments have been condemned by Labor's Aboriginal Affairs spokesman Bob McMullan, Democrats Senator Aden Ridgeway and Greens Senator Bob Brown and they want him to resign, with Senator Ridgeway saying that along with many Aboriginal people, he was insulted by Mr Ruddock's comments. But John Howard has told commercial radio in Adelaide that is political correctness and his Minister is staying put. ""The public is tired of endless debating about how you describe the past and what they want is some action into the future,"" he said. Mr Ruddock is due to arrive back in Australia from Geneva tomorrow. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Government says it has evidence that the Opposition has a secret plan to abandon its current policy and sell off part of Telstra. Senior ministers have quoted from a Macquarie Bank document which says senior members of the Opposition have talked to the bank about privatising Telstra's retail businesses. The Prime Minister, John Howard, says it proves Labor would sell Telstra if it won government. ""Everybody around this building knows that if Labor wins the next election they'll find a reason to ditch their opposition to the sale of Telstra,"" Mr Howard said. ""The only difference, Mr Speaker, everyone knows that, just as they did [with] the Commonwealth Bank, just as they did with Qantas, just as they did it in relation to Australian airlines, they will do it in relation to Telstra. The ALP has denied it will sell-off Telstra. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Health officials are disappointed with a small national rise in newly diagnosed HIV infections in Australia. The National Council of AIDS, Hepatitis C and Related Diseases released the study in Sydney today. It says from 1998 to 1999 there was a small increase in the number of new diagnoses, rising from 663 to 679 cases. But council chairman Chris Puplick says the figures are disappointing. ""Although the rise is small, it is disappointing given that from 1996 to 1998 the trend was downwards,"" he said. ""I would make the point that I believe we should be aiming to reduce the number of new infections well below the plateau of 600 to 700 cases that we have been seeing in recent years."" ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Indonesia's President Abdurrahman Wahid has called on the country's discredited military to serve the nation and not those who hold power. Addressing a parade marking armed forces day, Mr Wahid said the military had in the past been politicised to serve the interests of individuals. He has urged soldiers to be more professional. But Mr Wahid also said the nation had treated the military ""unfairly"", an apparent reference to criticism over its human rights record. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The tiny goldfields settlment of Ora Banda, 65 kilometres north-west of Kalgoorlie-Boulder, has been abandoned in the wake of Sunday night's fatal bikie shooting. Residents have fled fearing for their lives. About 30 people usually live at the historic settlement. This morning the last remaining resident drove out of town saying it was too risky to stay. The man, who did not want to be identified, said there had been threats to firebomb the town and police had advised everyone to leave. He said the owner of the Ora Banda Inn, former senior policeman Don Hancock, was one of the first to flee. The man questioned how such a thing could happen in this day and age and the level of protection offered by police. Acting Inspector Craig Wanstall said police were aware of the rumoured threats but had not told people to leave town. He said members of the Gypsy Joker motorcycle gang are being spoken to about their behaviour and have been assisting police with inquiries into the sniper-style shooting of their collegue, William Grierson. ""We're aware of the rumours and innuendo and, as I say, we're talking to the head of the Gypsy Joker OMC group and we're just hoping this will avoid any further conflict."" --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A Rockhampton horse trainer has had a lucky escape after a crocodile lunged at him on the banks of the Fitzroy River. Jim Morris was taking a horse for a swim in the river when the large croc came at him. Mr Morris says his horse probably saved his life when it bolted away from the crocodile. ""I just walked towards the river and put my foot in the river and just a big surge of water come straight out of the river and a croc came straight up at me,"" he said. ""I reckon it hit my leg because I felt something hit me on the leg and the mare pulled me back, because she pulled away and I hung on to the rope. ""She pulled me up the bank a bit, that's sort of what saved the croc from grabbing hold of me."" --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat have reached an agreement to end seven days of violence in the Palestinian territories and Israel. Mr Arafat and Mr Barak, preceded by US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, have gathered at the French presidential palace after striking the deal. Mr Arafat and Mr Barak nutted out the agreement after long hours of often-strained talks led by Dr Albright, who had convened the two Middle East leaders to the US ambassador's residence in Paris at the request of US President Bill Clinton. French President Jacques Chirac, who had been in telephone contact with all parties during the tense negotiations, also received UN secretary-general Kofi Annan, who was in the French capital to lend his weight to the hastily-called summit, and French Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine. The entire group of dignitaries were engaged in a session to refine the final deal."

" An Israeli official said under the deal the Palestinians undertook not to allow protesters to approach three sensitive points at Ramallah, Nablus and Netzarim in the Gaza Strip, where there have been serious clashes. The Israelis said they would withdraw heavy weaponry from the Netzarium junction and around the Jewish holy place of Joseph's tomb in Nablus, and promised to ensure that strict regulations were followed before security forces were authorised to open fire on protesters. In addition, a security assessment would be carried out overnight by Israel and Palestinian officials in conjunction with the US Central Intelligence Agency, the official said. The agreement was to be initialled tonight in Paris, and probably signed at a meeting in the Egyptian town of Sharm el-Sheick tomorrow. ""Israel is waiting for the violence to stop before signing the agreement fully in Egypt tomorrow,"" the Israeli official said. He said a Palestinian demand for an international of inquiry on the violence had not been agreed on. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" There has been some stinging criticism of retiring Olympics Minister Michael Knight from the director of ceremonies for the Sydney Olympics, Ric Birch. Mr Birch has described Mr Knight as a good hater who could never be accused of having an over-generous or compassionate nature. This follows Mr Knight's announcement yesterday that he will leave politics in December to pursue a business career. Mr Birch says his relationship with Mr Knight soured after the marching bands controversy, and never improved. ""He would rarely return phone calls but would get other people to return them so that...we got on with the job,"" he said. ""It wasn't like we couldn't get the ceremonies done without him but it would've been nice to have a bit more support and that carried through obviously after the opening ceremony when he didn't call for three days to give me his personal reaction to the opening ceremony."""

" NSW Premier Bob Carr says he will take time to absorb the decision of Mr Knight before deciding whether to reshuffle his Cabinet. The timing of Mr Knight's departure has taken the ALP by surprise. The Premier has until early next year to work out whether to replace Mr Knight in Cabinet or reduce the size of his frontbench to 19. The Left argues if Mr Carr does replace him the ministerial spot belongs to their faction. Many backbenchers will also be arguing the size of Cabinet should be maintained at 20 to bolster their chances of promotion. Mr Carr says reducing the size of Cabinet is an option and there may not even be a reshuffle although he was ready to redeploy Mr Knight in another portfolio. ""I was ready to give him a new responsibility in my Cabinet, so it wasn't my view that he'd reached his use-by date,"" he said."

" In the wake of Mr Knight's decision, the Liberal Party is considering whether to bother contesting his safe seat of Campbelltown in any by-election. It is unlikely it will. The Liberals would have to secure a swing approaching 20 per cent to take the south-western Sydney seat from Labor. The Deputy Liberal leader, Barry O'Farrell, a former Liberal State director says any decision not to run is one for the party organisation. ""But it would be extremely strange for the Liberal Party to run in that sort of seat...you tend not to waste your money in safe seats on the other side,"" he said. The Campbelltown Mayor, Meg Oates, a Knight supporter, could get endorsement for the seat although it is thought her sights may be set on securing ALP backing to run in the local federal seat of MacArthur. There is even talk of parachuting the Special Minister of State John Della Bosca from the Upper House into Campbelltown. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" One Nation's leader Pauline Hanson claims she has received widespread support from within the party for her move to expel David Oldfield. But Mr Oldfield says it is work as usual for him today as a New South Wales MP. Despite his dismissal from the party, Mr Oldfield remains an MP until 2007 and says he will continue to serve the interests of those who voted for him. But Miss Hanson claims most One Nation voters wanted him thrown out because of his moves to register two new political parties. ""We've actually had branches threatening to close down if nothing was done with him and now that he's actually out of the party, the phones are running hot,"" she said. ""People are actually rejoining the party, people who've left the party."" The falling out represents a low point in a relationship which at one time saw Mr Oldfield acting as her adviser. But he has shrugged off suggestions their relationship was also intimate. ""We had a friendship and Pauline's had a friendship with a lot of people,"" he said."

" The national director of One Nation, and former Cessnock councillor Brian Burston, says he will take Miss Hanson to court if necessary to overturn his expulsion from the party. Earlier this week, Mr Burston and Mr Oldfield were involved in a disagreement with Miss Hanson, during which she locked them out of the office and expelled them from the party. But Mr Burston says Miss Hanson gave him no grounds for expulsion and he will take action to have the decision overturned. ""There she told me that I was expelled from the party,"" he said. ""I have received the fax from Pauline Hanson which indicates that I have been expelled, but there's no reason for my expulsion which again is not lawful. ""I must be given reasonable grounds as to why I have been expelled, but I would suggest it's a matter of convenience for her, nothing else."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" East Timor's most notorious militia leader, Eurico Guterres, faces up to six years' in jail after being arrested on weapons charges. Guterres allegedly told his militiamen to defy orders to disarm and to hide their weapons. East Timorese independence leader Xanana Gusmao has cautiously welcomed the arrest of Guterres, but says it remains only an attempt to please the international community if militias remain active in West Timor. Guterres may face more serious charges. On Monday he was named as a suspect in the massacre of refugees in East Timor's capital, Dili, in April last year. Four months later, Guterres' Aitarak militia led the destruction of much of Dili soon after East Timor's independence vote. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" British Airways has suspended 11 pilots for allegedly drinking before flights. Three cabin staff have also been stood down pending an investigation. The carrier suspended the 14 staff after a television documentary team revealed it had filmed them drinking alcohol before flights. The British Air Line Pilots Association said the documentary makers had used former British Airways cabin crew to befriend current staff, who were staying in European hotels. The staff were filmed without their knowledge, which the union described as a ""disgraceful"" journalistic method, akin to entrapment. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" United States presidential candidates George W. Bush and Al Gore are back on the campaign trail after yesterday's debate, which polls suggest was won by Mr Gore although by a narrow margin. With the first of three encounters now out of the way both candidates declared themselves satisfied with yesterday's 90 minute debate, which saw neither a walk-away victor but both men achieving some aims. Mr Bush, who was looking to appear presidential, believes he got his message across. ""Today I leave the great state of Massuchussetts feeling pretty good. I enjoyed our debate last night,"" he said. While Mr Gore, who sought to use his greater policy experience, thinks he connected with voters. ""I thought it was much less a contest or a competition than a chance to speak directly with the American people,"" he said. Early polls suggest some good news for both men - more respondents judged Mr Gore the better debator, but Governor Bush gained a bigger boost from viewers improving their opinion of him. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Paralympic torch has been lit on the forecourt of Parliament House in Canberra and the torch relay is underway. In front of Prime Minister John Howard and several hundred onlookers, three generations of the original indigenous inhabitants of the ACT performed a traditional smoking ceremony - a firestick was passed from the eldest of the community to the youngest, who lit the cauldron as dawn broke on a cool but clear Canberra morning. The torch will now set off on a two-week journey which will include evey capital city in Australia, before arriving at Homebush Bay on October 18. Atlanta Games silver medallist David Hall, the first Australian Paralympic tennis player to win a medal, was the first torch bearer. The flame will head to Melbourne later today. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The local currency market is eyeing a meeting of the European central bank on Thursday for further action to boost the euro and then the Australian dollar. The dollar plunged to a new record low of just 53.37 US cents after the Reserve Bank decided not to raise official interest rates again. Just before 6:00pm AEDT it was back above 53.5 US cents but remains under heavy selling pressure tonight. Westpac currency strategist Robert Rennie says a sixth rate rise today might not have given the dollar much help. ""If we'd seen a rate rise today in conjunction with the rate rise from the European central bank later on this week, I think the combination of both of those would probably have helped the dollar,"" he said. ""I don't think the high rates would necessarily have helped it today, it may have not presented the opportunity for the currency to slip as far as it has today."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Israeli and Palestinian leaders are to take part in emergency talks in Paris early this evening to end the violence in the Middle East. More than 60 people, mostly Palestinians, have been killed in six days of violence on the West Bank in and Gaza and Arab towns in Israel. The talks take place as the Israeli army warns the situation could get much worse. United Nations secretary general Kofi Annan has described the situation as close to all-out war. In the latest violence Israeli tanks and helicopters destroyed Palestinian positions near Rafa in Gaza and two more Palestinians died in gun battles near Romala. Nearly all the dead so far are Palestinians or Israeli Arabs so too are most of the 1,500 wounded. But Israel's Army Deputy Chief of Staff Major General Moshe Yallon suspects worse is to come, suggesting more Palestinian groups could start attacks on civilians. It is not clear if Israel's Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat will meet face to face in Paris. They are expected to have talks with Kofi Annan, French President Jacques Chirac and US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" One Nation MP David Oldfield is accusing Pauline Hanson of being irrational and over-emotional in expelling him from the party. Mr Oldfield says he will continue to act as a One Nation MP despite receiving his dismissal notice. Miss Hanson this morning announced she had sacked Mr Oldfield after an incident yesterday where she locked him and his staff out of their Sydney office. She claims the decision to expel him was taken at a meeting of the party's national executive but Mr Oldfield disputes this. ""The National executive did not meet last night anyway, that is just a furphy on her behalf,"" Mr Oldfield said. ""This is just something they've determined this morning with a bit of a ring around. ""This is just a furtherment of three weeks of emotional and irrational behaviour."" But Miss Hanson says it is him who cannot be trusted and he has to go. ""He's out of the party, the umpire's decision is final and he's got his 'No GST Party' -- let him go and work on that."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The flow of refugees from West to East Timor is reported to be picking up. In the first independently-verified evidence that Indonesian forces in West Timor may be cracking down on milita, Australian peacekeepers near Maliana have observed Indonesian soldiers joining refugees in beating a militia leader who attempted to interfere with a border crossing. Watching the incident across the border with binoculars, Australian peacekeepers saw returning refugees turn on a militia leader until Indonesian soldiers intervened, also beating a militiaman as he was dragged away. At Junction Point Charlie yesterday, 26 refugees crossed into East Timor adding to what has become a steady trickle of people across the border. But the refugees gave no evidence to suggest militia control in West Timor was diminishing. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Indonesia's President Abdurrahman Wahid says he will not grant a pardon to the son of former leader Suharto -- found guilty in a multi-million dollar corruption case. Tommy Suharto has been sentenced to 18 months in jail but appealed for clemency from the President. President Wahid says there will be no pardon for Tommy Suharto. He made the statement shortly after arriving backing in the country after 10 days overseas. Tommy, 38, is a multi-millionaire with a playboy image, and is the first Suharto family member to be convicted of corruption. Last week he was found guilty for his part in a land scam worth more than $20 billion in which poor swampy land owned by his company was swapped for prime real estate owned by the state. He sought clemency from the President, a tactic some observers say was a legal ploy so he would not immediately go to jail. But it is still unclear when Tommy Suharto will be arrested and put in detention. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Prime Minister has told Parliament the Federal Government will by carefully guided by the Reeves review of the Northern Territory Land Rights Act when it proposes changes to the Act. The major recommendation of the Reeves review is that the Territory's two major land councils be broken up and 18 smaller ones be formed. The Opposition asked John Howard to guarantee he would not try to wind back the rights of Indigenous people when proposing changes to the Act. In response, Mr Howard said he would carefully consider the rights of all Australians. Mr Howard says the changes would flow from the comprehensive Reeves report which is written by lawyer and former Labor politician John Reeves. ""Mr Reeves is a person who enjoys considerable respect and I would have thought that the views he's expressed on this matter would commend respect within the Australian Labor Party,"" he said."

" However the Federal Opposition says it is disappointed Mr Howard has passed up the chance to rule out taking away indigenous rights. Labor's Aboriginal Affairs Spokesman Bob McMullan says that answer worried him. ""I was very disappointed in what the Prime Minister said,"" Mr McMullan said. ""I thought he would have endorsed the principles I was putting forward that if people win rights in the courts they shouldn't be taken away by the parlt and that sacred sites should be protected. ""They didn't seem to me to be very radical questions but if the PM is not prepared to even endorse those principles, I'm worried about what the review of the Land Rights Act might mean."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" India and Russia signed a series of multi-million dollar arms contracts, as well as a wide-ranging defence accord on military and technical cooperation. The weapons contracts involved the licensed production in India of Sukhoi SU-30M fighters, as well as the export and licensed production of T-90 battle tanks. A third contract was for a Russian aircraft carrier which Moscow is offering for free, with India picking up the tab for a complete re-fit. Information officer at the Indian defence ministry, Samir Sinha says all three deals were finalised and signed this morning. The signing of the contracts had been delayed amid last-minute haggling over prices, and Mr Sinha gave no details of the final value of the deals which initial estimates had put at well over $1 billion. The defence accord signed by Indian Defence Minister George Fernandes and Russian Deputy Prime Minister Ilya Klebanov envisaged the creation of an Indo-Russian commission on military-technical cooperation. The commission will be headed by Mr Fernandes and Mr Klebanov. India has racked up a mountain of debt through its heavy arms purchases from the former Soviet Union and still owes an estimated $4.5 billion. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" AFL tribunal chairman has called the AFL's anti-doping code ridiculous and has called for the re-writing of some sections. The comments came after he was forced to hand down an ineffective sentence to former West Coast Eagles defender Nicholas Stone, who pleaded guilty to taking amphetamines. The tribunal accepted Stone took the drug last June by mistake but the code does absolve him from responsibility for doing so. However, the code's wording instructs all sanctions imposed must take effect from the date of the tribunal finding. Therefore a six-week ban handed down means Stone will miss no games. However, Stone has missed every game since he tested positive in June and says his experience should serve as a lesson to others not to leave drinks unattended in clubs. ""Be very careful yes, but that's the mistake I made so I suppose I've paid the penalty and now I just want to head back to Perth and hopefully get back on top playing footy next year,"" he said. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Australia's official interest rates remain on hold. Following yesterday's regular board meeting, the Reserve Bank has left the cash rate unchanged at 6.25 per cent. Central banks in the United States and New Zealand have also left their key interest rates unchanged. The US Federal Reserve has decided to leave its funds rate at 6.5 per cent, with demand in the US economy moderating and productivity holding down price pressures. But the American central bank sees strong employment and high oil prices as still posing a risk to inflation. The Reserve Bank of New Zealand has also kept official rates at 6.5 per cent. Meanwhile, the Australian dollar has joined the New Zealand dollar and euro, suffering again at the hands of a strong US currency. The local dollar has been to a low of 53.91 US cents overnight and is still significantly weaker at 54.04. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The chances of salvaging a Middle East peace accord seem slim today, with violence continuing for a sixth day between Israeli troops and Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank. A US-sponsored meeting in Paris, between Israeli leader Ehud Barak and Palestinian chairman Yasser Arafat, is now thought unlikely to end the conflict, which has intensified. Palestinian sources have reported a major Israeli night-time assault on Palestinian security positions at Rafah in Gaza, with tanks shelling buildings, supported by helicopters firing missiles, and tanks are reportedly rolling in to the outskirts of Bethlehem. During the day, a third ceasefire collapsed with more deaths in Hebron, Gaza and Nablus and fierce clashes within Israel at Nazareth claiming more Arab-Israeli casualties, altogether nine have reportedly died today. The summit in Paris in a few hours' time, involving Mr Arafat and Prime Minister Barak, will begin in the worst possible atmosphere. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Serbian authorities are threatening to take action to end a campaign of strikes and protests aimed at forcing President Slobodan Milosevic from power. The warning was read out on state television as columns of protesters from various parts of the country made their way towards the capital, Belgrade. The Serbian Government pledged that so-called ""special measures"" would be taken to prevent violent behaviour that threatened lives, disrupted traffic or prevented the operation of business and education and health facilities. Not long after the announcement there were reports of police arresting union officials and some of the demonstrators who were marching towards Belgrade. Meanwhile, dozens of journalists on newspapers and state-owned television stations have been signing petitions demanding changes to what they say are ""heavily biased editorial policies"" imposed on them by the Government. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Minister responsible for Reconciliation says comments he made to a French newspaper about Aboriginal disadvantage were never meant to be divisive. Philip Ruddock has been criticised for suggesting indigenous disadvantage could be linked to the fact Aborigines did not come into contact with developed civilisation until later than other races. Mr Ruddock, who is in Europe, has contacted the Council for Reconciliation to assure it he did not mean to cause offence. He has pleaded for his comments to be taken in context. ""Any remarks I make are never intended to be divisive and should not be seen to be so,"" he said. ""I wanted to make it very clear that we are very unsatisfied that indigenous people are as disadvantaged as they are. ""That's a matter we want to see redressed."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" There has been another bout of infighting inside the One Nation party, with claims Pauline Hanson locked herself inside a party office. One Nation's New South Wales MP David Oldfield says the party leader tried to change the locks and sack staff at the party's office at Manly in Sydney. Mr Oldfield claims he and colleagues were forced to wait outside yesterday for two hours, until Ms Hanson left. He says internal party disputes can be solved by rational people - but he accuses his party leader of acting irrationally. ""We were locked out because Pauline Hanson arrived with a locksmith to try and change the locks and in the midst of that she caused herself to be locked up inside of her own volition,"" he said. ""Really she locked herself in, it was a bit like the Alamo, I think she thinks she's a Texan."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Mark Chapman, the man who shot dead singer John Lennon in 1980, has been denied parole in his first attempt to gain release from prison. He is serving his sentence at the maximum-security Attica State Prison in New York. The parole board called Chapman's killing of Lennon ""calculated and unprovoked"". It said releasing him at this time would deprecate the seriousness of the crime and serve to undermine respect for the law. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The youngest son of Indonesia's former President Suharto has appealed for clemency after being convicted on corruption charges. Lawyers representing Tommy Suharto have requested a pardon from President Wahid and a delay in plans to arrest their client. Tommy Suharto together with a legal team fronted Indonesia's Attorney General's office appealing for clemency. If granted, it would be an admission of guilt of corruption charges, but he would not have to serve out an 18-month jail term handed down by the Supreme Court a week ago. Tommy Suharto was found guilty for his part in a land scam worth more than $20 million in which poor swampy land owned by his company was swapped for prime real estate owned by the state. Yesterday he failed to surrender himself to authorities who had been ordered to arrest him. Tommy Suharto denies any wrong doing but he is the first member of the Suharto family to be convicted of corruption during his father's 32-year rule which ended two years ago. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" There is an uneasy calm in the West Bank, Gaza and parts of Israel following five days of gunbattles and clashes which have claimed about 50 lives - mostly Palestinians. Reports of a ceasefire agreement between the Israeli army and the Palestinians have been denied. The next major attempt to bring peace to the area will take place in Paris tomorrow when United States Secretary of State Madeleine Albright meets with the Palestinian and Israeli leaders. Meanwhile, a senior Palestinian peace negotiator Saeb Erakat says an Israeli pullout could solve the problem. ""From day one we have asked the Israelis to stop shooting because and to withdraw from their points of frictions at the entrances of our towns, villages and refugee camps,"" Mr Erakat said. ""If they do this I am sure that the no more Palestinians will be killed, no more Palestinians will be wounded and no funerals will take place. ""And I hope that the Israelis will do just that."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" A new report supports claims by oil companies that retail petrol prices in Australia are the lowest in the developed world. The Australian Institute of Petroleum says the findings on pre-tax prices should put to rest and is calling for an inquiry into the issue. The Ernst and Young study shows BP, Shell, Mobil and Caltex made acombined net loss of $61 million from refining last year, while underlying profit more than halved to just $221 million. The institute's executive director, Bryan Nye, says the view that oil companies are making windfall gains from higher pump prices, is wrong. ""There's a misconception out there in the public and in certain levels of Government that petrol companies are making immense profits out of this current petrol crisis or the current rise in crude oil prices,"" he said. ""The fact is there's nothing further from the truth, they are right on the margin and because of the competition in Australia, the consumer is getting the cheapest petrol available."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Reconciliation Minister Philip Ruddock has moved to calm the anger over his comments on indigenous disadvantage. Mr Ruddock, who is in Switzerland, has phoned the Deputy chair of the Council for Reconciliation, Sir Gustav Nossal, to clarify his remarks. Mr Ruddock told a French newspaper that Aborigines came into contact with developed civilizations later than other indigenous groups and they were not familiar with the wheel. Sir Gustav says those comments were not helpful to the reconciliation cause. He says Mr Ruddock has called him to explain and he has defended the Minister's overall intentions. ""I think he would have in no way intended insult or hurt to our indigenous colleagues,"" he said. ""It is clear that his remarks did cause insult and hurt and I feel quite confident that Mr Ruddock will now do everything to put matters right."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Cape York Land Council says the Wik native title decision is a triumph of the spirit and determination of Aboriginal people. The Wik and Wik-Way People were today granted native title over 6,000 square kilometres of unallocated crown land on western Cape York Peninsula. It has taken them seven years of negotiation to settle their claim out of court. But council chairman Richie Ah Mat says the Wik people have been struggling for 20 years for recognition of their cultural and legal rights. ""It goes to show that the Aboriginal spirit can never, ever be broken by whatever decision is made in the High Court in this country or the politicians,"" he said. ""The Aboriginal spirit will never, ever be broken in this country. ""We are here to stay for a long, long time and we will never, ever give up."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Federal Opposition leader Kim Beazley says the Labor Party would not support any changes to Northern Territory's land rights laws without the informed consent of Indigenous people. Mr Beazley was responding to reports the Federal Government is considering changes to the Territory's Land Rights Act as part of its response to the Reeves review. NT Chief Minister Denis Burke is in Canberra to discuss native title issues and other matters with the Prime Minister. Mr Beazley says Mr Howard should not bow to any requests to wind-back land and sea rights. ""I hope one of the things that Mr Howard says to Mr Burke when he meets him over the course of the next couple of days is this -'I'm not going to be part of your election ploys',"" Mr Beazley said. ""And 'the Australian people have spoken on reconciliation, it's time you got the smarts brother'."""

" Federal Member for the Northern Territory Warren Snowdon says plans to amend the Land Rights Act are a political stunt to benefit the Northern Territory Government. Reports say federal Cabinet is due to consider soon proposals to wind back indigenous control over Aboriginal land in the Territory. Mr Snowdon says any attempt to change the Act without Aboriginal agreement has no chance of passing through the Senate. ""It's intended to be used by the Northern Territory Government as an election issue and here we've got John Howard assisting him in that process,"" he said. ""If it happens it'll be a divisive campaign where Aboriginal people will be denigrated. ""Their rights will be denigrated and the interests of the Northern Territory community and the Australian community will be put at the bottom of the pile for the perceived interests of the Northern Territory CLP Government."""

" The Northern Land Council says the Denis Burke is using fishing access to whip up public hysteria. Mr Burke says Mr Howard has assured him Cabinet will discuss plans to amend the Territory Land Rights Act in the next few weeks. Discussions have been held between the two about fishing access on and near Aboriginal land, following lobbying from commercial and recreational fishers. The council's Norman Fry says Mr Burke is conducting a wholesale attack on Aboriginal people and has a hidden agenda. ""It dove tails into the real agenda, which is really the attack on the Aboriginal Land Rights Act leading up to a Northern Territory election,"" he said. ""The kinds of things that Denis Burke was just talking about in terms of land access and waterways has always been the case."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" There have been damning allegations of fraud within the ALP on the first day of a Criminal Justice Commission (CJC) inquiry. Jailed former member Karen Ehrmann gave evidence that there was a culture within the party which encouraged illegal activity. Ehrmann, who is spending nine months in jail for electoral fraud, claimed Lee Birmingham a former organiser for the Australian Workers Union faction showed her the ropes. She claimed she was told -- the party may have had someone on the inside of the electoral commission, that enrolment forms were forged and that ballot papers were stolen from letterboxes to help candidates win pre-selection. She said she did not believe Tony Mooney or Townsville MP Mike Reynolds had done anything wrong but she claims she is in jail because she refused to support Councillor Mooney. She also claimed former State Secretary Mike Kaiser must have been aware of the illegal activity. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Former Indonesian president Suharto's youngest son has sought a presidential pardon over an 18-month jail sentence for corruption but admitted he had been a ""bit negligent"". However, in light of violent public protests over the controversial dismissal of the elder Suharto's own graft case last week, most analysts believe it unlikely President Abdurrahman Wahid will pardon Hutomo ""Tommy"" Mandala Putra. Tommy is free at the moment after the Supreme Court last week overturned an earlier decision and convicted him over an $20 million land scam involving a supermarket the ex-playboy owned. ""Our client has decided to ask for a pardon from the President through the South Jakarta Court, as well as a request to postpone the implementation of the sentence,"" lawyer Bob Nasution said. ""As a citizen, he asked for a pardon. Even God himself forgives his children who have made mistakes. ""It is clear that Tommy as the chairman of the company was a bit negligent in keeping a close eye on his directors."""

" Jakarta is on alert for violence from supporters of the Suharto family should Tommy end up in the capital's Cipinang jail. A series of bomb blasts coincided with attempts to try the elder Suharto on separate corruption charges. That case was dropped last Thursday because of Suharto's ill health, triggering a wave of running street battles between angry students and police that injured more than 50. Last month President Wahid, who is currently overseas, had separately ordered Tommy be arrested in relation to the spate of bomb blasts in the capital, but police have so far ignored the order. Officials at the South Jakarta Attorney-General's office had previously said the racing car driver would be sent to jail immediately unless he sought a Presidential pardon. But today, one Government official said the South Jakarta Court, which last year acquitted Tommy in the case, now had 14 days from the pardon request to decide if he should be jailed anyway, even while President Wahid was making his decision. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Brisbane Broncos winger Wendell Sailor has been named in a full-strength Australian team for this Saturday's rugby league Test against Papua New Guinea in Townsville. Australian team officials have backed Sailor and opted against disciplinary action following his arrest for drunkeness outside a Townsville nightclub early Monday morning. Sailor was charged over the incident and spent four hours in the Townsville watchhouse before joining the team at training yesterday. Brad Fittler will captain the side comprised of Darren Lockyer, Mat Rogers, Ryan Girdler, Matthew Gidley, Sailor, Brett Kimmorely, Scott Hill, Bryan Fletcher, Gorden Tallis, Robbie Kearns, Shane Webcke, Adam McDougall, Jason Croker, Darren Britt and Jason Stevens. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The death toll after five days of fighting between Palestinians and Israeli forces has reached more than 50, with another 1,000 injured. Nine of the victims were killed within the borders of the Jewish state, as Israeli Arabs joined protests underway in Palestinian territories. The Palestinian representative at the United Nations has asked for a UN Security Council meeting to be convened to dicuss the violence and for the UN to investigate Israel's military conduct during the past week. Israeli helicopters rocketed Palestinian buildings in Gaza today as Prime Minister Ehud Barak told his troops to use whatever force necessary to protect to Jewish settlers and soldiers. More funerals will be held tomorrow, with the potential to erupt into further clashes. There has been no further suggestion that the Palestinian and Israeli leadership are close to a ceasefire. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Yugoslav leader Slobodan Milosevic has addressed the country on national television and made it clear he has no intention of resigning, despite opposition claims that he lost last week's presidential election. After days of silence, Mr Milosevic has come out fighting, interrupting television programs to dismiss opposition claims that he failed to get enough first round votes to force a second contest. Mr Milosevic made his nationwide address as supporters of opposition leader Vojislav Kostunica started a campaign of strikes and civil disobedience aimed at forcing the President from power. Roads have been blocked and the country's main coal mines have been closed by striking miners. The supply of coal to power stations has been badly affected and electricity blackouts could follow. Meanwhile, Russia has supported calls by Mr Milosevic for a second round of elections. Russian support is very welcome to Mr Milosevic. Russia endorses the need for a second run-off round of voting, despite the Yugoslav's opposition's refusal to participate. The Opposition claims it won the election outright and that the results were rigged. However, Russian electoral observers dispute this, saying there was no electoral fraud and that a second round must therefore be held. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Official interest rate rise number six is seen as a distinct possibility as the board of the Reserve Bank meets today to review monetary policy. The weakness of the Australian dollar is seen as an important factor. At a post-Olympic board meeting, the central bank must decide whether to raise the bar again on interest rates to curb inflation. Ominously, at the end of last week, the reserve's own credit data showed a 2 per cent surge in personal credit over August - the biggest monthly jump since 1998. Commonwealth Bank chief economist Bruce Freeland says the central bank board faces a difficult decision. ""The key factors perhaps to consider would be the weakness in the currency, which has been quite soft and increasing oil prices,"" he said. Mr Freeland says there is a 60 to 70 per cent chance of official interest rates being lifted one quarter of a percentage point, an announcement that would most likely be made tomorrow morning. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A delegation of farmers is in Canberra today to push for Federal Government action on high petrol prices. The issue is likely to continue to loom large as Parliament resumes this afternoon. The National Farmers Federation is heading the delegation, calling on the Government to freeze the petrol excise, due to go up in February in line with inflation. The group of 12 representatives is set to meet Deputy Prime Minister and National Party leader John Anderson and other MPs and Senators from the bush. The Government has repeatedly ruled out cutting the excise, arguing it would not make a significant difference to prices at the bowser and would undermine the budget surplus. The Opposition is also planning to keep up the pressure though, after a bigger than expected budget surplus, announced last week. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Pro-Jakarta militia leader Eurico Guterres has been named as one of four new suspects in an investigation into violence and human rights violations in East Timor last year. Twenty-two suspects have now been named in a probe which is due to end later this month. Guterres, leader of the feared Aitarak militia group, is due to be interviewed on Friday for his alleged role in a deadly attack on the Dili home of pro-independence leader, Manuel Carrascalao on April 17 last year. Lieutenent Colonel Endarpriatna, the Dili military chief at the time was also named as a suspect in relation to the attack. Two other new suspects, leader of the Mahidi militia, Vasco de Cruz and Motornus, a member of the Laskar were named for their alleged role on the attack on refugees, priests, and others in a church in Suai, days after the people of East Timor voted for independence. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" SOCOG chief executive Sandy Hollway says he bears no grudges for not receiving the Olympic movement's highest non-sporting honour. Olympics Minister Michael Knight moved to stop Mr Hollway being given the Olympic gold order, despite an International Olympic Committee (IOC) executive board decision to award the honour to Mr Hollway. Mr Hollway received a silver order and says he does not feel slighted after being part of such a team effort. ""[I was part] of a very, very wide team that embraces...not just SOCOG [and] Sydney 2000, but the entire community,"" he said. ""I genuinely don't [feel slighted], I just feel privileged to have played a part in delivering something which I will always look back on with immense affections [as] will all Australians...it's been one of the high points of my career to have done that."" --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The winners of the Prime Minister's Science Award say the recognition should help dispel fear about genetic modification techniques. The Prime Minister will present CSIRO scientists Jim Peacock and Liz Dennis with his award tonight for their discovery of the gene that controls flowering in plants. The research can be used to boost the world's food supply by making crops less susceptible to bad weather. Dr Peacock hopes the award will show the benefits of such technology and convince the community to dismiss some opponents of genetic modification. ""Greenpeace is among them, Gene Ethics is another group that often uses shoddy and often misleading information to try and grab the headlines against us,"" he said. ""The organic farming groups in Australia I think have been conned actually into taking a position quite contrary [to what]...they really should be taking. This is a very positive thing for organic farming."" Meanwhile, Dr Dennis says it is imperative that the Government does not allow research funding levels to fall any further. ""If we don't do the research, don't get some of the intellectual property for Australia, we're just going to be left behind,"" he said. ""This sort of research is absolutely critical for modern agriculture and for us...well us being Australian scientists, to actually be able to do this research is critical for the future."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australian Rugby League team management will investigate Test winger Wendell Sailor's behaviour after he was arrested and charged for drunkenness outside a Townsville nightclub. Sailor was held in the Townsville police watch-house for four hours after being arrested on Flinders Street east. He was later released on cash bail. Police are also looking into allegations that Sailor spat at and verbally abused two women in a nightclub, earlier in the evening. Sailor was nowhere to be seen when his Australian team-mates flew into Townsville yesterday for a weekend Test match against Papua New Guinea as a prelude to the World Cup later in the month. Australian team manager Darrell Bampton says the incident will not be taken lightly and there may be disciplinary action. ""When those reports come through we'll address them as they are stated to us,"" he said."

" Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak says the Palestinian Authority bears a ""heavy responsibility"" for the violence that has claimed 36 lives in four days of clashes between Israeli troops and Palestinians. ""Palestinian police acts on direct orders from the Palestinian Authority. It should assume its responsibility: end the violence and restore calm,"" Mr Barak said on Israeli radio. ""The Palestinian Authority bears a heavy responsibility and is compromising the continuation of negotiations that should put a definite end to such violence."" He says the main taks in the coming days would be ""to end the bloodshed,"" but did not elaborate. Mr Barak also insists the causes of this wave of violence are more complicated than the visit of Sharon, referring to a controversial visit that day by right wing Israeli opposition leader Ariel Sharon to the al-Aqsa mosque compound in east Jerusalem. The site, holy to both Muslims and Jews, lies at the heart of the dispute over the future of Jerusalem which has prevented a peace accord between the two sides. Sharon's visit was perceived by the Palestinians as a provocation and sparked off violent demonstrations and clashes. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Sydney airport has experienced its busiest day with a large exodus of atheletes leaving the city after the Olympic Games. Officials say the airport is performing well under pressure. More than 100,000 people will have come through the domestic and international airport terminals by the end of the day. So far 31,000 people have moved through the international terminal, making it the biggest day in the airport's history. More than 22,000 pieces of luggage have been processed. Airport spokesman Greg Russell says they have managed the flow process. ""There have been some queues but we have been getting through them quite well and all our systems are working very well,"" he said. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" A 30 per cent jump in the number of HIV cases this year has prompted a swift reaction from the State Government. The Government has promised to upgrade its safe-sex campaign after it was revealed there has been an increase in unsafe sexual practices. It is believed even higher rates of HIV and AIDS infection could follow. The Health Minister, John Thwaites, has warned against complacency. ""It seems that because treatment for HIV is getting better, some people are forgetting the safe sex message,"" he said. ""But you can't forget the safe sex message, because HIV and AIDS is still something that we only have pharmaceuticals to treat but we don't have a cure for it."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Fifty thousand litres of diesel fuel has spilt from a storage facility in the Torres Strait. Authorities are still working to contain the massive spill which occured on Horn Island last Thursday night. A spokeswoman for the Environmental Protection Agency says it is largely a land-based spill and efforts are underway to prevent fuel reaching the sea. Authorities are concerned about the potential damage to mangroves in the area and experts from the Department of Primary Industries have been sent to the scene. Police are investigating the cause of the spill, which they are treating as suspicious. They have seized several pieces of equipment, including part of the pipe which was carrying the fuel, as evidence. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Some Queensland backpacker hostels are expected to close because they cannot meet the costs of improving fire safety standards. The changes will be phased in over three years. About 1,500 budget accomodation premises have been inspected by fire officers since the Childers backpackers blaze, which killed 15 people in June. State Cabinet has today agreed to impose new safety standards for all low cost accomodation. Such an upgradecould cost backpacker hostels up to $300 per bed, rising to $700 per bed for other styles of budget accomodation. Emergency Services Minister Stephen Robertson says operators will be given time to make the changes. ""We don't want to see places close for economic reasons so you know it's a balance between safety and economics,"" Mr Robertson said. However a government report warns that any closures will put pressure on public housing and could produce a rise in homelessness. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" A battle is underway against what promises to be one of South Australia's worst locust plagues. A spraying campaign is underway in the north of the state. A team of more than 60 will be spraying up to half a million hectares of land across the State in an attempt to control the insects which hatched about four weeks ago. Aerial spraying has already covered 44 square kilometres in the State's north and will eventually extend to the Eyre Peninsula and the Riverland. Heavy rain in Queensland in the last year encouraged the increase of adult locusts, which migrated to South Australia early this year. The locusts now in their hopper stage have the potential to cause millions of dollars worth of damage to the state's crops and grazing land. Spraying will continue until the end of the year. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The chief executive of the Saint Kilda Football Club Don Hanly has quit after six years at the helm. Mr Hanly was responsible for rescuing the club out of a $2.5 million debt. He says his resignation was made easier, following the appointment of a new coach and club president. ""I think it was time for me to move on,"" Mr Hanly said. ""And for a new person to take up the reigns and the new challenges the next season holds in store for them."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Sydney Olympics are over and widely acclaimed as the best ever. Sixteen days of competition have been brought to an end with a closing ceremony that featured prawns on bikes, drag queens and had the feel of an out of control party with some of Australia's best known bands and singers. Indigenous Australia was central to the evening's theme. Five times during the closing ceremony indigenous themes were central to performances - Yothu Yindi with their song, or in the case of Midnight Oil by having ""sorry"" scrawled on their clothes. Prime Minister John Howard enjoyed the performances but would not be drawn on the significance. ""I don't think you want to start getting political messages in these things - look everybody believes in reconciliation, but let's not spoil a fine occasion by dragging political things into it,"" he said. Mr Howard, who attended many events at the Olympics, believes the Games have been a great thing for Australia. ""They've shown that Australia is a modern, sophisticated, capable, warm, friendly country at peace with itself and ready to welcome the world,"" he said. The closing ceremony also included an irreverant and quirky side to the event with Greg Norman hitting golf balls into the crowd, plus athletes jumping on to a giant thong stage for a better view of proceedings. Australia has had its most successful Games in Olympic history. The Australian Olympic Committee (AOC) set a target of coming fifth on the medal ladder, tipping a haul of 60 medals, 20 of them gold. After sixteen days of competition, the Australian team fell just short of that target. Australia came fourth on the medal ladder with 16 gold, 25 silver and 17 bronze. Some Australians fulfilled public expectations, like Ian Thorpe and Cathy Freeman, while others, like Simon Fairweather winning a gold medal in archery, were a surprise. The AOC was counting on more gold medals in tennis, rowing and triathlon. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Prime Minister John Howard says he expects the debate over a formal apology to the Stolen Generations will continue now that the Olympics has ended. Mr Howard says the Sydney Games demonstrated Australia is a cohesive country and Cathy Freeman's win showed Australians are more ""reconciled"" than some people had allowed for. But Mr Howard says there will still be differing views on the issue of an apology. ""That is an issue like 101 other political issues that will go on being debated,"" he said. ""The fact that we have a tremendously positive feeling as a result of the Games doesn't alter the fact and should not alter the fact that proper debate about these issues will resume and will continue."" --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Palestinian Authority has announced it will conditionally accept a ceasefire and Israel also says it will stop firing, ending renewed clashes that left 12 dead today. The prospect of a ceasefire came after fighting left more than 30 dead since Friday. In some West Bank towns and in Gaza there were gun battles between Israeli troops and Palestinian police lasting hours and Israel sent helicopters into action, at one stage firing missiles at a Palestinian command. Twelve people died, one of them the first soldier from Israeli forces to be killed, as the conflict spilt over from the Palestinian territories on to Israeli soil. One seven-year-old and one 10-year-old were among the Palestinians reported dead. With Palestinian suggestions that a further deterioration could see Israeli civilians targeted, Israel has deployed tanks near several towns even as reports emerged of the possible ceasefire. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" West Timor's border-based militia groups remain heavily armed, several days into a promised crackdown by Indonesian police. Police say they are extending their operation for another two weeks. Peacekeeping forces on East Timor's western border believe the militia groups operating from West Timor have access to hundreds of military weapons. But the Indonesian military in West Timor claims only 85 automatic weapons have been handed in in the past week. While hundreds of weapons remain unaccounted for, the militias' leaders and members remain free. Aitarac militia commander Eurico Gueterres handed a single hand gun over to police following threats from Indonesia's President Abdurrahman Wahid that he would be arrested if he failed to comply. However, at the same time Mr Gueterres admits to having other weapons. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Solomon Island peace talks, scheduled for Cairns this week, are now likely to be held at the Australian Airforce base in Townsville, later in the month. The talks are the next in a series designed to broker an agreement between the leaders of two ethnic militias, the Istabu Freedom Movement and the Malaita Eagle Force. A decision on the exact site for the mediations will be made later this week. The Federal Member for Herbert, Peter Lindsay, says the Australian Foreign Minister has indicated Townsville's airbase has the necessary facilities. ""At this stage, the Foreign Minister would like to see these talks held in Townsville and if they're going to be held in Townsville it will be in about the second or third week of October,"" he said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Health authorities are fearful of new outbreaks of HIV sweeping Victoria and New South Wales, after an increase in the number of cases in both states. The number of HIV diagnoses is up about 30 per cent this year. The chairman of the National Council on Aids, Chris Puplick, says similar increases have been reported in San Francisco, Ontario and Amsterdam. He says the increase has been confined to New South Wales and Victoria because of the size of their gay communities. ""I think it relates to [the] fact that there's been a noticable and disturbing increase in reports of unsafe sexual practices, particularly within the gay communities,"" he said. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Reggie Kray, the last survivor of a crime family that rose to the top of Britain's underworld in the 1950s and 1960s, has died of cancer, aged 66. The convicted murderer had been released from jail a month ago on compassionate grounds, due to his terminal illness. Reggie Kray, his twin brother Ronnie, and older brother Charlie, ran protection and extortion rackets in London which they enforced with the threat of fearsome violence. By the 1960s, they were famous and semi-respectable, running nightclubs in the fashionable West End. However, the twins were both eventually sentenced to life in prison for murder. Ronnie Kray died in an institute for the criminally insane. Charlie died earlier this year while serving a sentence for drug dealing. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" American golfer David Duval has won the latest tour event in the United States, the Buick Challenge, at Pine Mountain in Georgia. He shot a four-round total of 19-under par, two strokes clear of fellow American Jeff Maggert and Zimbabwe's Nick Price. ""It's surprising to come back this way,"" Duval, who earned $765,000, said. Even more stunning was the way he won. Trailing by two strokes with three holes to play, Duval hit a wedge to 60 centimetres for birdie on number 17, then hit a wedge over the 18th flag to 1.2 metres for birdie. Maggert lost the lead for the first time since Thursday, but regained it and led by as many as two strokes on the back nine until bogeys on the 16th and 17th doomed his chances. Price also bogeyed the 17th and the look on their faces showed their disgust. As Duval knocked in his birdie putt, Price stood in the 18th fairway with hands on his hips, while Maggert folded his arms and stared at the ground. ""I just made a few too many bogeys,"" Maggert, who finished with a 70, said. Price caught a nasty lie in the first cut of rough on the 17th, not sure whether it would come out six feet long or six feet short. His chip came up short and he failed to save par. He had a 68."

" Today was the last full day of Olympic competition, and the medals kept coming for Australia. The women's basketball team, the Opals, faced the United States in the gold medal match. The sides looked even early, before quick fouls to Jenny Whittle saw the six-foot six-inch centre benched. From there the US took control, leading by 13 at the break. A Kristi Harrower-led revival saw the Opals pull as close as eight, before the margin drew back out into double digits. The US went on to win 74-52 and take gold, with the Opals winning silver. It is the best ever result for an Australian basketball team."

" The US basketball team has won another gold, defeating France 85-75. The French gave the ""Dream Team"" a scare when they got within four points late in the game. Earlier, the Boomers missed out on a bronze medal, losing to Lithuania by 18 points. Saulius Stombergas scored 28 points and Sarunas Jasikevicius added 22 as Australia went down 89-71. It was the second Olympics in a row in which Lithuania defeated the Boomers for a bronze medal to keep them from capturing their first Games medal in men's basketball. Australian flag bearer Andrew Gaze, in his fifth and final Olympics, was again thwarted in a bid to end what has become a 40-year family quest to bring his homeland its first men's basketball medal. Gaze's father Lindsay was an Olympic player from 1960-1968 and coach from 1972-1984. Gaze made his Games debut at 19 at Los Angeles in 1984. Gaze scored a team-high 22 points, but could not rally the Boomers as he did in a quarter-final comeback victory over Italy. Lithuania led 51-35 at half-time and Jasikevicius quickly added back-to-back three-pointers to lift the edge to 59-35. Australia never came within 14 points after that. Lithuania made 22-of-33 shots in the first half, 6-of-11 from three-point range, while the Aussies hit only 10-of-25 and missed all six tries from beyond the three-point line. Jasikevicius scored eight points and Stombergas added seven in an early 26-10 run on the way to that lead. Each finished the half with 14 points. The Aussies scored eight consecutive points to halve the Lithuanian lead to 32-24 but a 12-5 run in the next 3:18 stretched Lithuania's margin to 46-31."

" The Boomers were playing without centre Luc Longley, a three-time National Basketball Association champion with the Chicago Bulls. Longley suffered a knee injury in a semi-final loss to France. Making the blow even worse for Longley was the fact he said before the Games began that one of his most painful memories was being injured and watching the 1996 Aussie Olympians lose the bronze-medal game to Lithuania in Atlanta."

" After the heartbreak of the semi-final loss on penalty strokes to the Netherlands, the Australian men's hockey team was looking for solace in the form of a bronze medal in the play-off against Pakistan. The Kookaburras failed to find the net in regulation time or extra time in the semi, but rammed home six goals to Pakistan's three to take the bronze medal, equalling their effort from Atlanta. Troy Elder socred a hat-trick for Australia. The Netherlands again relied on penalty strokes in the gold medal game, beating South Korea 8-7 after the scores were locked at 3-all."

" The last night of the track program squarely belonged to the United States, with American teams snatching three of the four relay finals on offer. Michael Johnson anchored the US men's 4 by 400 metres squad to gold in his last ever race in Olympic competition, while Maurice Greene stormed home to win the 4 by 100 metres race. The win reclaimed the event for the US, after they had been beaten over the line for the first time in Olympic history by Canada in Atlanta. Nigeria and Jamaica finished second and third in the 4 by 400, with Australia eighth. Brazil and Cuba filled the silver and bronze in the 4 by 100 metres. The US also took out the women's 4 by 400 metres relay, with Marion Jones anchoring to take her third gold of the Games. Jamaica took silver and Russia the bronze, with Australia finishing fifth, again breaking the national record. Earlier, Jones had been denied a fourth gold medal when a poor change saw the US relegated to the bronze in the women's 4 by 100 metres. The Bahamas streaked to the line to take gold, with Jamaica claiming silver."

" Daniel Trenton has taken silver in his over 80 kilogram class tae kwon do final, losing 7-2 Kim Kyong-Hun of South Korea. The 23-year-old battled hard in the final, but found the Korean's six-inch height advantage too much to make up. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Israeli soldiers have killed 15 Palestinians in the worst day of violence between the two sides in years. While 500 Palestinians were wounded, many critically, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak says his troops exercised maximum restraint. What began in Jerusalem two days ago spread throughout the Palestinian territories, the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Palestinian officials have accused Israel of a shoot-to-kill policy, citing the number of head wounds among the casualties. But as Israeli troops opened up on stone-throwing protesters with live rounds, as well as rubber bullets and tear gas, Israel's Prime Minister was insisting the army was acting with restraint. The most deadly exchanges came when Israeli troops and Palestinian police exchanged fire in Gaza and Nablis, among the Palestinian dead from those clashes a 12-year-old boy."

" The Israeli army has admitted that there is no ceasefire agreement with the Palestinians, contrary to previous claims, and officials have predicted more violent clashes. The Palestinians have described the Israeli action as an act of war. The chief of Palestinian security in Gaza reportedly said that at the height of the fighting Israel fired three air-to-ground missiles at Palestinian police, three officers were killed in Gaza during the day's clashes. But Israeli Public Security Minister, Shlomo Ben Ami, has accused the Palestinian leadership of orchestrating the violence - thereby jeopardising the peace process. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" Fuel and power shortages appear likely in Belgrade as opponents of Slobodan Milosevic begin strikes aimed at ending the Yugoslav President's rule. Coal miners and transport workers are among the first to walk off the job as part of nationwide strikes and demonstrations designed to force Mr Milosevic to accept electoral defeat and step aside. But the President appears willing to ride out the upheaval and has reportedly rejected an offer of high-level mediation by close ally Russia. Opposition leaders, using figures from their poll watchers, claim opposition candidate Vojislav Kostunica won the election with 51 per cent to 36 per cent for Mr Milosevic. But the Federal Electoral Commission, in a tally criticised by the United States and other countries, says Mr Kostunica fell short of the majority needed to avoid a run-off on October 8."

" US President Bill Clinton has called Russian President Vladimir Putin to express his concern over the controversial elections in Yugoslavia, according to a White House spokesman. ""President Clinton stressed that it was important that the will of the Serbian people be respected,"" spokesman PJ Crowley said. ""President Clinton stressed to President Putin that, because of the historical ties between the Russian people and the Serbian people, Russia could play an important role in helping to resolve this."" He said Mr Clinton and Mr Putin promised to stay ""in close coordination as this unfolds"". Meanwhile, in the Montenegrin capital Podgorica, Vladimir Chizhov, Russia's special Balkan envoy, called for a comparison of contradictory results from the Yugoslav presidential vote, state television reported. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" At least three Muslim rebels have been killed today in a clash with Philippine soldiers intent on crushing their group and rescuing 17 hostages, the military said. A battalion of infantry troops engaged in a fierce firefight with an Abu Sayyaf rebel unit on Mount Dahu in central Jolo, the southern Philippines military spokesman Colonel Hilario Atendido said. The bodies of three gunmen had been recovered, but ""there are several other bodies in the area"", Colonel Atendido said. ""Soldiers are still in the area to prevent the guerrillas from taking the bodies of their comrades."" He said the gunmen were believed to be members of an Abu Sayyaf faction, led by Mujib Susukan, and holding 12 Filipino hostages. Up to three other rebel factions, elsewhere in Jolo, hold three Malaysians, an American, and one other Filipino."

" A large military and police task force pounced on Jolo two weeks ago to destroy the separatist group and rescue 19 hostages, the remnants of a five-month kidnapping spree in which nearly three dozen captives, including Westerners, were ransomed off for millions of dollars. Two Frenchmen escaped from Susukan's custody on September 19 in the campaign's only significant success so far. Major General Narciso Abaya, commander of the assault, said the operation would ""take quite some time"" as the kidnappers were fleeing and not standing their ground. Fighting was ongoing in the Jolo towns of Talipao, Maimbung and Indanan, as well as in surrounding villages, despite heavy rains pounding the island, he said. The clash raised the Abu Sayyaf death toll to 114."

" A senior Abu Sayyaf leader, Radulan Sahiron, had been reported killed while Susukan and one other commander, Galib Andang alias ""Commander Robot"", were said to have been wounded. Major General Abaya said his intelligence agents had been trying to verify the claimed death. He said the guerrillas had killed one of the agents. The Government has admitted to four soldiers and three civilians dead. However, Jolo residents said many more civilians had been killed by bombing and shelling. Nearly 63,000 civilians have been displaced by the violence and Roman Catholic church groups are questioning the handling of the operation. About 400 residents of Jolo staged a protest rally at a Government university today, calling for a halt to the offensive which they said was affecting mainly civilians. Philippine police chief Panfilo Lacson told state-run TV he could not set a timetable for the assault, but emphasised that the safety of the hostages remained the main priority. In a radio interview, Defence Secretary Orlando Mercado expressed optimism that the assault would ""not last much longer"". ""The order of President Joseph Estrada is not to stop,"" he said. ----------------------------------------------------------------"

" The flood crisis in eastern India continues as officials struggle to get relief to hundreds of thousands of displaced people. In the worst flooding in more than 20 years, the state of West Bengal has been plunged into crisis for much of the past two weeks. More than 10 million people are affected and soldiers are trying to reach outlying villages by boat to take food and drinking water. Reports are emerging of families living on roof-tops for several days and others clinging to trees for up to a week before being rescued. There are growing concerns of illness, with the number of cases of fever and dysentery rising. If more heavy rains hit the region in the coming days the health of displaced people is only likely to worsen."

" Meanwhile, the Vietnamese Army is struggling to provide emergency shelter for thousands more families fleeing the flood-stricken Mekong Delta as the death toll tops 200. A total of 213 people, 170 of them children, have now been confirmed dead in the worst floods to hit the region in nearly 40 years, the assistant director of the regional disaster relief centre, Do Ngoc Thien, said. As the Army pressed ahead with its marathon evacuation effort, authorities struggled to provide emergency shelter for the huge numbers displaced. Already 25,000 families are in need of temporary housing and Mr Thien said the numbers would rise rapidly in the coming days as the Army tried to move 35,000 families still stranded in flooded areas. The Army has deployed large numbers of rescue vessels in the delta, but Mr Thien said the sheer extent of the areas flooded meant more were needed. During a visit to Long An, one of the worst hit provinces, Vietnam's top leader Le Kha Phieu ordered the immediate construction of 5,000 more boats to help the relief effort. With the flood waters receding by just centimetres a day, the authorities expect large areas to remain under water for weeks to come. From a peak of 5.05 metres above normal earlier in the week, water levels fell to 4.92 metres on Friday and 4.90 metres yesterday Mr Thien said."

" Relief officials expect to have to support hundreds of thousands of homeless for several months and Mr Thien said oil for cooking and heating was in short supply as well as shelter. Aid agencies expressed concern on Friday that the poor distribution of relief supplies was compounding the death toll, particularly among children. The United Nations children's agency UNICEF said that during an inspection visit to two of the worst affected provinces it had not met a single family which had received any emergency assistance. Aid pledges continued to come in from foreign donors, reaching a total of $1.2 million today."

" Indonesian police have raided the home of pro-Jakarta militia leader Eurico Gueterres, as a weapons crackdown continues in West Timor. Security forces ordered to seize militia weapons admit that many guns have been stashed and will be difficult to find. So far, only 85 automatic rifles and pistols have been confiscated, as well as about 1,000 crude home-made weapons. Yesterday, Mr Gueterres, the leader of the Aitarac militia, surrendered a pistol which he said was his last weapon. He then declared that he will no longer use guns, but will struggle through diplomatic lines to regain control of East Timor. Police later raided his house and confiscated a knife. It is believed they acted after a warning from Indonesia's President, Abdurrahman Wahid, that Mr Gueterres would be arrested if he failed to surrender all his weapons. Indonesia's security forces have admitted that disarming the militias in West Timor is proving difficult and that many militia weapons have been stashed. International pressure after the militia murder of three foreign United Nations aid workers forced Indonesian authorities to order the disarmament of all militiamen. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" Chinese police have rounded up nearly 1,000 members of the outlawed Falungong spiritual group at a protest in Tiananmen Square on China's National Day. The protest was the largest by the group since it was banned as an ""evil cult"" in July last year. The Falungong members, who had announced their intention to gather several days ago, surged onto the square about 8:15am local time carrying banners and leaflets. They were beaten, dragged and shoved into buses and vans by police. An army unit of 500 soldiers surrounded the centre of the square, stopping people entering. But groups of up to 50 people rushed into the middle of the square, where they unveiled banners and were immediately arrested by police. After one group was arrested, other groups followed."

" Protesters were kicked, punched and pushed on to buses. A woman with a small child in her arms was hit by police. Several children among the protesters were also arrested. The Falungong members continued shouting ""Falun Dafa is good. It's the real law"", using another name for Falungong. An AFP news agency reporter saw about 10 buses with 50 followers aboard and 15 police vans with up to 25 practitioners each on the square, which was filled with tourists. The group's US-based website, Minghui.ca, which is overseen by founder Li Hongzhi, for the first time openly told followers to go to Tiananmen Square on National Day, contrary to previous claims that the group does not organise demonstrations and that members act of their own free will. The movement was banned by the authorities in July 1999. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australia's women's hockey team will undergo major changes after last night winning its second consecutive Olympic gold medal. The Hockeyroos' 3-1 win against Argentina was Ric Charlesworth's last game as coach after guiding the team to every major championship in the past eight years. After eight years in the job, Ric Charlesworth leaves the helm with an 80 per cent win rate. After the match, he said an emotional goodbye to his players and told them they had made him proud. Two time Olympic champion Juliet Haslam described the mood in the changerooms. ""A lot of cheering, a lot of singing,"" she said. ""Ric had a few words, I think he was obviously pretty proud of us. ""We owe a lot to him, he's an absolutely amazing hockey coach."""

" Australia is out of tonight's men's 4x100 metres relay final at the Olympic Stadium. The Australian team was initially disqualified for an illegal baton change but was reinstated after lodging an appeal last night. But the Italian team lodged a protest over the decision. An athletics jury of appeal agreeed with the Italians this morning and ruled them into the final and the Australians out. Australia's head athletics coach, Chris Wardlaw says he is disappointed but respects what the Italians have done. ""We've just got to accept that the jury of appeal has the final call on it,"" he said. ""We were able to change the referee's decision last night and we were relatively confident that that would hold but the umpire on the field of play called them out and the video evidence was inconclusive, so we've lost, that's the bottom line."" Meanwhile, dual gold medallist Marie Jose Perec has slammed French team-mates and officials in the continuing fallout from her dramatic decision to flee the Games ahead of her 400 metres showdown with Cathy Freeman. Speaking on French television, Perec said she had been made to feel like a ""trapped animal"" by the media, her hotel management and ordinary Australians she had met in supermarkets and car parks. Perec said she never really felt part of the French Olympic team and was undecided whether to continue competing. ""Frankly if I had to answer today I would have to say that I don't want to run any more - that's why I don't want to make that decision now,"" she said."

" Australian cyclist Anna Wilson has again missed out on a medal, finishing fourth in the women's road time trial. Wilson finished 58 seconds behind winner Dutchwoman Leontien Zijlaard. Zijlaard also won the indiviual pursuit and the women's road race as well as a silver medal in the points race. Her four medals make her the most successful rider at any single Olympic Games. Wilson's fourth adds to her fourth placing in the road race."

" The International Olympic Committee (IOC) has confirmed another athlete has tested positive to drugs at the Sydney Olympics. The unnamed Russian runner was tested out of competition several days after her event at the Games. The athlete did not win a medal and the IOC is yet to reveal what drug was involved. The athlete was also a member of the Russian relay team, but was not selected to run and has since gone home. The IOC plans to reveal more details about the case tomorrow. IOC director general Francois Carrard confirmed the positive test. However, International Amateur Athletics Federation medical director Arne Ljunqist says at this stage there is no positive case. ""We have a case once we have a positive analysis, an explanation from the athlete which we can evaluate, and a decision of whether or not we will accept that explanation or whether it would require further investigation,"" he said. ""This is not a case yet."" Meanwhile, IOC vice-president Kevan Gosper has welcomed an independent inquiry into allegations USA Track and Field has supressed drug test results. The IOC and the White House have criticised the secrecy surrounding USA Track and Field's doping control program. USA Track and Field has already proposed that the World Anti-Doping Authority take over the Americans' testing program. Mr Gosper says the moves are a step in the right direction. ""I think if USA Track and Field are going to have an inquiry and move forward against the criticism they have been receiving, I think it's a good thing,"" he said. ""The whole issue has been about transparency and openness and there seems to have been a lack of that by virtue of their rules and protocols and if they are going to reivew that, I think it's a good thing - for everybody."""

" Norway's Knut Holmann has won the K1 1000 final on the canoeing course at Penrith Lakes. Holmann was the favourite to win the event, having won gold in Atlanta. Bulgarian paddler Petar Merkov who is competing despite facing drug allegations finished second. Germany's Andreas Dittmer has won the C1 1000 final and the German crew has won the women's K4 1000. The silver medal went to Hungary and the bronze to Romania."

" There is renewed pressure to allow women to have access to the so-called abortion pill, RU-486, following the American decision to approve the drug. RU-486, or Mifepristone, works hormonally to induce an abortion, bypassing surgery. It has been widely available in Europe since it was first approved in France 12 years ago, but in Australia it can only be imported after receiving ministerial approval. Democrats leader Meg Lees says the legislative restriction must be removed. ""This isn't about a termination, this is for a women who has decided she does not want a pregnancy,"" she said. ""She should be able to very early in the piece go to her doctor and say `look this is the situation I'm in or I think I'm in, can I have some medication?' ""It is a pill as opposed to waiting some weeks maybe months down the track for a confirmation of a pregnancy and then a surgical procedure."""

" A spokesperson for Federal Health Minister Michael Wooldridge says no manufacturer has applied to import the drug. However, Senator Lees says they are unlikely to while the issue remains a political football. ---------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Palestinian Authority has called for a general strike to be held today to protest the killing of seven Palestinians by Israeli security forces. An Israeli soldier was also shot dead in retaliation by a Palestinian in the West Bank. Israeli troops opened fire on hundreds of rock throwing Muslim worshippers at Jerusalem's most contested religious site, the Haram ash Sharif, or Temple Mount. The deaths at Jerusalem's holy sites and the injuries sustained by more than 200 unarmed civilians have enraged the Palestinian leadership. The leading Palestinian legislator, Hanan Ashrawi, has put the blame squarely on Israel, and especially on the country's right wing opposition leader Ariel Sharon. Dr Ashrawi has accused Mr Sharon of stirring the violence with his visit to the sites earlier this week. ""What happened was that this was a continuation of the Sharon visit an act of supreme provocation,"" he said. ""Sharon wants to add another massacre to his already full record of massacres. ""It was very clear that there were hundreds of soldiers in and around the mosque, which meant there was already an intention to provoke and to escalate the situation."""

" The US Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, has urged Israel and the Palestinians to push ahead with the peace process, despite a day of deadly clashes. Palestinian Minister Faisal Husseini accuses Israel of incitement. ""I believe the Israelis must understand either they want peace and they want to go to negotiations or they want to go to war,"" he said. But Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak says Palestinian leaders are not curbing terrorism. A Palestinian policeman shot dead an Israeli soldier in an apparently unprovoked attack. ---------------------------------------------------------------"

" Latvian prosecutors will try again to secure an arrest warrant needed to extradite Konrad Kalejs, an 87-year-old Australian of Latvian descent they charged with Nazi genocide against Jews in Latvia during World War II. After years of assembling evidence from half a dozen countries, the first effort to bring Kalejs to trial for allegedly helping administer plans to exterminate prisoners at a Nazi labor camp outside Riga suffered an immediate setback when a Latvian judge refused to sign a warrant for his arrest. ""In my opinion the gravity of this crime should be taken into consideration,"" Prosecutor General Janis Maizitis told the Baltic News Service, commenting on the judge's decision. An appeal is to be launched next week. Latvian prosecutors filed genocide charges against Kalejs on Wednesday, but without an arrest warrant they are unable to request Australian authorities extradite Kalejs, who is living in a Melbourne nursing home and reported to be in poor health. The failure to obtain an arrest warrant has raised concern among Nazi-hunters that the commander in the notorious Latvian death squad blamed for the deaths of more than 30,000 Jews, Gypsies and communists in Nazi-occupied territory could go into hiding. Australia has promised to cooperate with any request to extradite Kalejs, but warned he enjoyed rights like any other citizen. ---------------------------------------------------------------"

" Thousands of Yugoslav opposition supporters have taken part in the second of two major rallies in Belgrade's central square to try to force President Slobodan Milosevic from office. It is the latest in a series of protests across the country, which have included a call for a general strike on Monday. A spokesman for the student group, OTPOUR, Aljiosho Javevic, which has been instrumental in mobilising opposition to the regime in recent months, said the aim was to paralyse the country. ""We are working together with the opposition on the same goal, which is stopping Serbia for a couple of days so Slobodan Milosevic faces the situation where nothing works in Serbia and then he will have no choice but to leave,"" he said."

" Opposition protests are gathering momentum across Yugoslavia in an attempt to force President Milosevic to give up power after he apparently lost elections. Students walked out of schools, taxi drivers blocked traffic, workers at several companies went on strike and cinemas and theatres closed in the capital Belgrade. The demonstrators say opposition leader Vojislav Kostunica won a majority of last weekend's vote, and they have rejected plans by Milosevic supporters for a run-off election. The Milosevic Government has so far not responded to a compromise offer by Mr Kostunica of an internationally supervised re-count. Opposition politician Zarco Korak says mass action is the only way to get President Milosevic to quit. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" Indonesian President Adburraham Wahid says his Government intends to disband militia groups in West Timor, but the process must be gradual and respect human rights. ""The objective is to dismantle militia groups acting in the region, but only while obeying laws and respecting human rights,"" Mr Wahid said. He also said he would respect the decision of Indonesia's courts to suspend the corruption trial against former President Suharto because of the ex-dictator's ill health. The decision triggered violent street protests in Jakarta yesterday. The Suharto trial had been regarded as central to Mr Wahid's agenda of eradicating graft and implementing democratic reforms. President Wahid says his capacity to govern will not be damaged by the decision."

" Mr Wahid's declarations on West Timor came as top UN officials today sharply criticised the results of a massive security crackdown on the militias launched by Indonesia yesterday. The crackdown has so far only netted 21 weapons. Indonesia is under intense international pressure to disband militia groups in West Timor after a militia murdered three UN aid workers in the West Timor border town of Atambua on September 6. The militias groups are the same gangs that laid waste to much of neighbouring East Timor after its people overwhelmingly voted for independence in a UN-sponsored ballot last year. Mr Wahid said the members of the militia groups could not be treated like ""bandits"", but that those who broke laws should be arrested and handed over to Indonesian courts."

" The UN official running East Timor, Sergio Vieira de Mello, reiterated today that he was ""skeptical"" about the ability of the Indonesian Army to disband militias in West Timor. ""Where resolution and a certain degree of ruthlessness would seem to be required, we are witnessing hesitation and prevarication,"" he told the UN Security Council. He recalled that after a disarmament ceremony on Sunday in the West Timor border town of Atambua, militias reclaimed the weapons they had earlier surrendered. The militias were led by Eurico Guterres, whom Mr Vieira de Mello described as ""a well-known suspect of crimes against humanity"". The ceremony was staged by the Indonesian Army in the presence of Vice-President Megawati Sukarnoputri. Mr Vieira de Mello recalled that after Vice-President Sukarnoputri and other Indonesian officials had left, a small delegation which he had sent to the ceremony was threatened by a pro-militia crowd. He said that before the ceremony, an Indonesian Army officer told the delegation that there were still no suspects in the case of three UN relief workers who were murdered in Atambua earlier this month. The murder ""happened in broad daylight in the presence of 10 Indonesian police officers,"" Mr Vieira de Mello said. ""There could hardly be a more eloquent demonstration of Indonesia's current inability, or refusal, to deal effectively with the problem,"" he said. ""This is impunity running rampant. What is required is a coordinated, integrated and comprehensive strategy on the part of the Indonesian security forces, together with the necessary will, to hunt down and break up the militias and bring their leaders to justice."" --------------------------------------------------------------"

" North Korean leader Kim Jong-il has agreed to take dialogue with the United States to new heights, sending his first deputy on a mission to Washington from October 9 to 12, a US spokesman said today. Special envoy Jo Myong-rok, who is first vice chairman of the National Defence Commission, will be the highest-ranking North Korean Government official to visit the United States since the foundation of the communist state after the Second World War. His position makes him number two after the North Korean leader in the nation's hierarchy. He will hold talks with US President Bill Clinton and Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, who will be his official host. Kim Jong-il is chairman of the National Defence Commission, which is considered the highest post in North Korea. Mr Jo's visit marks the culmination of months of negotiations with North Korea over the details of the trip. North Korea agreed to a high-level visit in January but did not immediately set a date or say who the official would be."

" It is in return for a visit to Pyongyang in May 1999 by former US defence secretary William Perry, whom Mr Clinton had asked to review US policy toward the isolated Stalinist state, one of the most inscrutable in the world. The stakes for the United States are high because of the 37,000 US troops based in South Korea, across the demilitarised zone from North Korea, and because it sees danger in North Korea's ballistic-missile programs. US State Department spokesman Richard Boucher, announcing the visit in a statement, said both countries hoped that it would help reduce the tensions on the peninsula. ""The United States and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea believe that Special Envoy Jo's visit constitutes an important step forward in improving bilateral relations and will contribute to the goal of ending the long-standing state of hostility on the Korean peninsula,"" he said. A State Department official said Dr Albright was ""very pleased"" that the North Koreans were sending such a high-ranking envoy. ""There have been historic events taking place on the Korean peninsula and this visit will provide the best opportunity for serious talks and progress that are central to peace and stability in north-east Asia,"" he said. Trade boost Meanwhile, North and South Korea have agreed to set up a joint committee to advance economic cooperation and trade. The agreement was reached at ministerial talks on the southern island of Cheju. Major projects between the two countries include the construction of a railway and an expressway across the heavily fortified border and joint anti-flood work on the Imjin River near the border. The thaw between the two rival Koreas follows a landmark inter-Korean summit in June between President Kim Dae-Jung and Kim Jong-Il. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Cuba's Ivan Pedroso, the world's finest long jumper for the past five years, has finally won Olympic gold, his last gasp 8.55 metres jump denying the Australian home favourite Jai Taurima after an absorbing duel. The bronze medal was won by the Ukraine's Roman Schurenko, with 8.31m. It all came down to the final leap. Taurima had been a man inspired all night, the capacity crowd in Stadium Australia roaring him to a new level of performance, seeing him twice break his own Australian record and taking the lead with a mark of 8.49 metres. In a long jump competition the likes of which has not been seen in a major championship since the duel between Mike Powell and Carl Lewis at the 1991 World Championships in Tokyo, Pedroso needed to summon up all his experience in the sixth and final round to better Taurima's mark. Taurima, who had responded to every opponent's challenge all night, was asked once again to out-jump his previous best. But on this occasion he was found wanting and had to settle for the silver medal. The Australian men's hockey team has failed again in its quest to win its first Olympic gold medal. The Kookaburras lost a dramatic semi-final to the Netherlands. The match was forced into a penalty shoot-out when neither side scored in 85 minutes of regular and extra time. The Dutch won the shoot-out 5-4 when Dutch goalkeeper Ronald Jansen saved Brent Livermore's penalty stroke. Day 14 of the Games will see 12 gold medals decided, with the Australian women's hockey team playing Argentina for gold. The defending gold medallist Hockeyroos take on Argentina for the gold medal tonight. Several Australians are in medal contention in track and field today: Debbie Sosimenko in the hammer throw, Dmitri Markov and Viktor Tchistiakov in pole vault and Nathan Deakes in the 50 kilometre walk. Marion Jones from the US will be hoping to win her third gold of the Games in the women's long jump and world record holder Hicham el Guerrouj from Morocco goes for gold in the 1,500 metres. After two gold medals in sailing yesterday, there is the chance of another medal today. Australia's Michael Blackburn is third in the Laser with two races to go but he is well behind the leader on points. In kayaking, several Australians will be hoping to qualify for finals. Nathan Baggaley is in the semi of the K1 500, Daniel Collins and Andrew Trim in the men's K2 500 and Katrin Borchert and Anna Wood in the women's K2 500. The men's water polo team faces Yugoslavia in the quarter-finals. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Latvian prosecutors have filed war crimes and genocide charges against Nazi-era suspect Konrad Kalejs, but a court has denied their request for an arrest warrant. Charges against the 86-year-old, who lives in Australia, stem from his time as an alleged commander of a concentration camp during the Nazi occupation of the Baltic state. Mr Kalejs has previously denied Nazi hunters' claims that he aided the war-time slaughter of Jews. A spokeswoman says prosecutors believe the crimes are serious enough to call for an arrest, but the court says it has no evidence Kalejs would not cooperate with an investigation. Latvia does not have an extradition treaty with Australia, but Parliament is expected to approve one by the end of the year. A spokesman for Federal Justice Minister Amanda Vanstone says the Government is still trying to confirm the reports that charges have been filed against Mr Kalejs. The spokesman says Australia will not act on the information until it receives an extradition application, which would be assessed on its merits. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" In Indonesia, demonstrators for and against former president Suharto have battled on the streets of Jakarta, after a panel of judges dismissed a corruption case against the former leader. It is unlikely the 79-year-old Suharto will ever face trial, after a team of doctors assessed his state of health as permanently unfit. Yesterday, judges acted on advice from an independent team of doctors that Suharto was not fit physically or mentally and putting him under stress, such as answering questions in court, could endanger his life. Immediately violence broke out on the streets as news of the court ruling spread. Police fired rubber bullets and tear gas into crowds of anti-Suharto demonstrators and there were clashes between pro and anti-Suharto supporters near the home of the former leader. Suharto was accused of syphoning off funds worth more than a billion dollars from state charities. Indonesia's Attorney-General Mazuki Darusman expressed disappointment at the result, saying the justice system had failed the people. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Indonesia claims a period of forcibly disarming pro-Jakarta militia groups has begun in West Timor. However, the militia members have not surrendered any weapons since Sunday. According to Indonesian police in West Timor, the persuasive phase is over, now in line with Indonesia's promise to the UN in New York the repressive phase has begun. Reports from West Timor claim that a refugee camp near Atambua was searched yesterday, but not a single weapon was found. As the repressive phase begins in West Timor the repression of militia continues in East Timor. A heavily armed militia group, which had been operating in the centre and west of East Timor since August, was expelled yesterday. The group is believed responsible for the death of a Nepalese peacekeeper on August 10. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" More than 150 miners are feared dead after a gas explosion in a coal mine in southern China. Authorities are still playing down the disaster, more than 36 hours after the blast. State-run television in China overnight has been showing pictures of workers using picks and shovels and their bare hands to dig away rubble from the collapsed mine in Guizhou province. China's mine safety inspectors are still optimistic that more than 100 miners trapped underground by the gas explosion are still alive. However, local rescuers and doctors say that the extent of the collapse will more likely lead to a far higher death toll. China's coal mines have an appalling safety record, with up to 10,000 deaths a year as a result of inadequate maintenance and ageing equipment. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The captain and three crew members of a Greek ferry boat that sank killing at least 63 people have been charged with multiple counts of murder. Investigators are focusing on reports that the ship, loaded with more than 500 passengers, was apparently on automatic pilot minutes before striking a well-marked rocky outcrop. Those reports bolster accounts by survivors that crew members were watching a soccer match on television on the night the ship sank. Efforts by navy divers and rescue crews to find up to a dozen missing people are being hampered by a fierce gale. Fisherman Andreas Petrides says the ferry route was well known and the rocks were clearly marked by a lighthouse. ""Somebody made a mistake, a real mistake, and this mistake has meant people are lost and the other people could lose their lives,"" Mr Petrides said. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Opposition in Yugoslavia is threatening to call a general strike, shutting down schools, offices and other public institutions until President Slobodan Milosevic steps aside. The call is an attempt to increase pressure on the Yugoslav leader, who is trying to survive after finishing second to opposition leader Vojislav Kostunica in Sunday's election. The State Election Commission says Mr Kostunica earned 48 per cent of the vote to 38 per cent for Mr Milosevic, meaning a run-off election would have to be held. But the Opposition is refusing to take part, claiming Mr Kostunica won outright. Meanwhile, the influential Serbian Orthodox Church has recognised Mr Kostunica's election victory, addressing him as ""President-elect."" While the church holds no direct political power in Yugoslavia its moral influence among Serbs is immense. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Government is defending its distribution of funding to non-government schools. The release of details of the new funding system for the non-government sector has led to claims of inequity by Labor. The Education Minister, David Kemp, has revealed exactly how much each non-government school would get next year. He says the poorest schools will get five times more than the richest schools. The Federal Opposition insists the new system is unfair because the richest schools will still get annual increases of more than a million dollars each a year. The new system does not count a school's assets, even if they are substantial, only the parents' circumstances. Dr Kemp defends that. ""The new system gives parents an open book to raise money for their school in addition to the money that the government provided,"" he said. ""They won't be penalised for that."" He says the aim of the new system is to make it easier for parents to send their children to non-government schools, but he will not force the schools to use their increases to cut fees."

" The first ever Olympic taekwondo gold medallist, Australia's Lauren Burns, says she hopes her performance raises the profile of the sport in Australia. Burns took out the under-49 kilogram class, defeating Urbia Melendez Rodriguez 4-2. She outscored her opponent in the second round, targeting the head and shoulder region. Burns says she took taekwondo up to learn self defence. ""My brother was the one who first started and he used to jump around the house doing flying side kicks and all that sort of stuff,"" she said. ""He just thought it was so fun that dad started and eventually I started. ""I really didn't take it all that seriously and then once I started competing, that was it. That was passion and I've been passionate about it ever since."" Meanwhile, day 13 of the Games will see 17 gold medals decided. Australia has two crews sailing for gold in the men's and women's 470 class. Tom King and Mark Turnbull, along with Jenny Armstrong and Belinda Stowell, had their races cancelled yesterday due to light conditions on the harbour. On the track, Cathy Freeman, Melinda Gainsford-Taylor and Lauren Hewitt have all qualified for the 200 metres semi-finals. Australia also has four crews in the kayaking semi-finals. The men's basketball team plays Italy in the quarter finals and the men's hockey team takes on the Netherlands. Chantelle Michelle has qualified 12th for tonight's three metres springboard final. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The captain of a Greek ferry which sank after hitting rocks is to be charged with the murder of at least 63 people who have drowned. More than 500 were on board the passenger ferry when it ran into into a clearly marked patch of rocks. Authorities say up to two dozen passengers remain unaccounted for, but 12 Australians are confirmed to have been rescued. The ferry has been described by one tourist brochure as a grime bucket. The overnight ferry, carrying 530 people, sank just off the tourist island of Paros. Rescue workers assisted by two British navy ships and hundreds of local fishermen are still struggling to find survivors in heavy seas. The accident has been described as the worst Maritime disaster in Greece for 35 years. The Greek coastguard says they cannot understand how the boat could have hit such a well marked and well lit outcrop of rocks. The Greek Government has announced an investigation into the tragedy alleging criminal negligence. The captain and five officers have been detained. Twelve Australians were among those rescued, a popular tourist guide called, Greek Island Hopping, had warned tourists not to use the ferry, describing it as a grime bucket that should definitely be avoided. The Department of Foreign Affairs spokesman says three Australians were injured, with two of those taken to hospital in Athens. One Scottish tourist, Lisa Torrance, says she spent an hour in the Aegean Sea with her Australian boyfriend before being found. She says they were on the ferry to the last seconds. ""The boat had tipped over and Trevor was climbing on the railings and was screaming for me to catch onto him,"" she said. ""There were just bodies flying in front of us and people trying to hold on and just losing their grip and hearing bodies smash against the railings and then Trevor pulled me over and the ship sank and we cascaded underneath the water."" --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Hundreds of thousands of people are taking part in a protest in the Serbian capital, Belgrade, calling on President Slobodan Milosevic to accept his defeat in the election. Despite earlier fears, the police did not try to stop the huge protest. More than 200,000 people have gathered in the centre of Belgrade, blocking traffic and spilling over into surrounding squares. It is a resounding vote of confidence in opposition leader Vojislav Kostunica, who claims that he won this week's presidential election outright, defeating President Milosevic. The protests, taking place in cities across Serbia, are calling on President Milosevic to admit defeat after 13 years in office. The electoral commission says a second round of voting is required, but the opposition refused to participate, demanding the electoral commission release the poll results which the opposition says were falsified. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A United States court has ruled that an Australian accused of spying against the US is mentally fit to stand trial. Jean-Philippe Wispelaere, 29, is facing a prison-term if he is found guilty of trying to sell top secret documents to spies from an unnamed country. Federal Court Judge Leonie Brinkema, after hearing evidence from medical experts, ruled Wispelaere had been suffering from a mental disease, but said he was fit to stand trial on charges of attempting to sell top-secret US defence documents to a foreign power. The judge rejected evidence from US Government appointed clinical psychologists, who said the former employee of the Australian Defence Intelligence Organisation was not mentally ill and was malingering. Wispelaere's lawyer Nina Ginsberg, told the court she wanted to visit Australia to obtain information being withheld from her by Australian authorities. No date has been set for the trial. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Police in Jakarta are on high alert because of fears of bomb attacks and clashes connected with the corruption trial of former president Suharto. A judge has demanded the 79-year-old former leader appear in court today, but Suharto's lawyers say he is too sick to face questioning. Hundreds of police will guard the courtroom where Suharto is due to appear to face corruption charges. Two previous sessions of the case have been followed by street clashes between pro and anti-Suharto supporters. Suharto was accused of syphoning off more than $1 billion from state charties to enrich his family and business chronies. Today a judge will decide on the findings of an independent team of 24 doctors which examined Suharto to see if he is well enough to be questioned in court. His own doctors say that after three strokes the former leader cannot understand questions or speak clearly. Overnight, an explosion occurred outside a human rights office in Jakarta, but officials say no damage was caused and no injuries were reported. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A small Pacific summit in Sydney today will discuss the security problems of Solomon Islands and Fiji, and calls for independence for Irian Jaya. The Prime Minister, John Howard, will host talks at his residence, Kirribilli House, with the leaders of New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu. The four Prime Ministers will look at joint approaches to Solomon Islands and Fiji ahead of the annual Pacific Islands Forum in a month's time. Even more controversial will be the call by Vanuatu's Prime Minister Barak Sope for the United Nations to consider the issue of independence for Irian Jaya or West Papua, a position opposed by Australia, Papua New Guinea and New Zealand. Papua New Guinea's Prime Minister Sir Mekere Morauta says he will use the Kirribilli House talks to underline PNG's view that West Papua is an integral part of Indonesia. PNG says it supports Indonesia's continued rule of the province, while some pacific nations have lent support to the West Papuan independence movement. Australia and New Zealand will discuss the prospects for merging their economies with that of South-East Asia. A possible link with the ASEAN Free Trade Area is one issue to be considered at talks in Sydney between Mr Howard and the New Zealand leader, Helen Clark. There will also be informal talks on the idea of a common Australia-New Zealand currency. The immediate prospect before the two Prime Ministers is the proposal to join the Australia-New Zealand free-trade area with that being created by the 10 ASEAN economies in South-East Asia. A trade ministers meeting in Thailand next week will receive a report recommending the go ahead for the combined free trade area. The idea of a common Australia-New Zealand currency, recommended by New Zealand's Business Council, is at a much earlier stage of discussion. There is no formal proposal from the New Zealand Government. But Miss Clark says any joint currency should be a merger with a new joint central bank. The Howard Government says New Zealand would have to adopt the Australian dollar. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Relief workers in eastern India are struggling to reach millions of people cut off by floods. As the crisis enters its second week, the official death toll is 880, with the real number expected to be much higher. West Bengal's flood crisis is showing no signs of easing, with overstretched relief teams failing to reach millions of people, some of whom have been completely cut off for five days. In many areas, helicopter drops are the only source of food and medicine. Relief workers are concerned some people have been forced to drink contaminated flood-water, raising fears of the spread of waterborne disease. The state capital, Calcutta, is also threatened. The Hooghly River, which runs through the city of more than 10 million people, is running dangerously high and some areas of the city have been evacuated. Already more than 10 million people have been affected across West Bengal and 1.5 million homes have been destroyed. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The College of Radiologists has launched a push for all Medicare funding for magnetic resonance imagining (MRI) machines to be restored. The Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) has decided not to pursue fraud charges against radiologists. It follows fraud allegations over the way the radiologists bought the MRI machines. The DPP found evidence contracts had been back-dated and some non-binding contracts were made to appear binding. But he was not confident he had found enough evidence for a conviction. The College of Radiologists president Barry Moore argues it is a complete vindication. ""I think we have good indication that the so-called MRI scam was a very vitriolic political exercise which really had no basis in fact,"" Mr Moore said. The Health Minister, Michael Wooldridge, will not agree to the college's demand for restored Medicare funding for all MRI machines. He sees it as a lesson for future negotiations. ""I think we were probably a bit naive in our negotiations with the profession,"" Mr Wooldridge said. The Federal Opposition has vowed to continue pursuing the matter and insists Dr Wooldridge should resign."

" Romanian gymnast Simona Amanar, who won the gymnastics all around silver medal at the Olympics, is set to refuse the gold medal after compatriot Andreea Raducan was stripped of her title. Amanar's mother, Cristina, told a Romanian television channel: ""As far as I know, Simona will not accept this medal."" Speaking on the same program, Raducan's father put the blame on the coaches and team doctors who he says failed to do their homework. Raducan was disqualified and lost her medal after testing positive for use of the banned stimulant pseudo-ephedrine. ""Regardless of how this issue develops, I am happy that the gold medal will come back to Romania,"" Mr Raducan said. Team doctor Ioachim Oana took responsiblity for the postive test: ""Ten minutes before the competition, Andreea was suffering from a cold and I decided to give her a Nurofen tablet without thinking of the consequences."" The International Olympic Committee has banned Oana from the Olympics for four years. The Court of Arbitration for Sport says Raducan is planning to appeal against the decision. The sports tribunal will hold a special three-member hearing at its Sydney office today. Meanwhile, Australia remains in fourth position on the overall Olympic medal tally, despite failing to win any medals yesterday. Australia remains on 12 golds, 20 silvers and 11 bronze medals. In day 11 of competition, cyclist Anna Wilson finished fourth in the road race while Jelena Dokic missed out on a tennis bronze, losing to Monica Seles 6-1, 6-4. The Australian men's hockey team has progressed to tomorrow night's semi-final against Olympic and world champions, the Netherlands. Kookaburras coach Terry Walsh believes the semi-final teams cannot be separated. In water polo, the Australian men's team lost 6-5 to Italy last night and now has to at least draw with Spain tonight to have a chance of making the quarter-finals. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" Opponents of President Milosevic are urging Serbs to blockade all Government institutions in an effort to force him to admit election defeat. The President is continuing to ignore claims the main opposition leader, Vojislav Kostunica, won a majority vote in last weekend's election. A rally in Belgrade was told people should invent their own methods of civil disobediance, but ensure they stick to peaceful means."

" Indonesia's President Abdurrahman Wahid has bowed to intense pressure and pledged to hand responsiblity for the day-to-day running of the Government to his Vice-President, Megawati Sukarnoputri. ""I will charge the Vice-President with executing the daily technical tasks, drawing up the Cabinet working agenda and to establishing the focus and priority of the Government,"" President Wahid told the national assembly. In a speech read out by cabinet secretary Marsilam Simanjuntak, the President said Megawati, the daughter of the country's founding president Sukarno, would be accountable to the President for the implementation of the tasks she carried out. He says that delegation of powers is within the constitutional framework of the presidential system. Immediately after the announcement, Defence Minister Juwono Sudarsono said he was optimistic at the power sharing plan. ""I think there is going to be a clear understanding about the mechanism between the two,"" he said. ""The President will deal with the macro aspects and strategic concerns. The Vice-President will deal with day-to-day policy and coordination."" President Wahid, 60, made the announcement in reply to sharp criticism by the MPR members, who flayed him relentlessly for Government inactivity and accused him of failing to accelerate economic recovery. His leadership and management style during the first nine months of his five year term as Indonesia's first democratically-elected President has been the target of rising criticism. The major factions in the Assembly spent the last two days lobbying for a transfer of authority to Megawati, saying it was the only way he would be given a second chance. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Yugoslavia's opposition party has announced it will boycott second round elections being demanded by President Slobodan Milsevic. Earlier this morning, the State Election Commission released results showing that the main opposition candidate, Vojislav Kostunica, had secured 48 per cent of the vote against Mr Milosevic's 40 per cent. While the government of President Milosevic has conceded that his challenger received more votes than he did, he has called for a run-off to take place on October 8. Candidates must secure more than 50 per cent to win outright. The leader of one of the opposition parties, Zarco Korac, says they have proof that Mr Kostunica won the election outright and are prepared to challenge it in court. ""You can't challenge the will of people,"" Mr Korac said. ""Milosevic politically lost these elections. ""This is so cheap, Milosevic is fighting for his political survival and he gives us the generous offer to go to have a round up, but we don't need that. ""Democracy is respecting the will of people. ""My nation stood up, they have their verdict, it's a political verdict, it was a referendum Milosevic. ""He lost that referendum, nothing can change that."" The United States says it is clear the opposition party in Belgrade has defeated Mr Milosevic and has called on the Serbian leader to step down. President Bill Clinton says the will of the Serbian people should be respected. German Chancellor Gerhard Schrodeder and French President Jacques Chirac have joined Mr Clinton in the call for Mr Milosevic to stand down. The US President says it is clear the opposition party has defeated the Milosevic regime and the will of the Serbian people should be repected. ""And despite the government's attempts to manipulate the vote, it does seem clear that the people have voted for a change,"" President Clinton said. ""And the question is, 'Will the government listen and respond?'."" Mr Clinton has promised to lift economic sanctions against Serbia if Mr Milosevic stands down. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Queensland Government's Petrol Price Watch Committee has blamed the Prime Minister for blockades at oil refineries in Brisbane and Melbourne. Committee chairman Mike Kaiser says John Howard is allowing the issue to fester by continually suggesting nothing can be done about high fuel prices. ""John Howard is almost alone in the Western world in terms of leaders doing something about this issue,"" he said. ""He alone is saying nothing can be done. ""In Britain, Tony Blair has acted, in the United States Bill Clinton has acted, John Howard's alone in not acting. ""Of course there are things the Prime Minister can do to ease this crisis and John Howard ought to be doing them. ""I am not surprised that it has come to this [blockades of refineries and fuel depots] and I fear that truck drivers and others will continue to take matters into their own hands until the Prime Minister acts to lower fuel prices. ""John Howard is refusing to do anything about this issue before it reaches a crisis point."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A land and sea search for the body of a teenager killed by a shark will resume this morning on South Australia's west coast. Jevan Wright, 17, from Port Lincoln was surfing at Black's Point near Elliston when he was struck by what is beleived to be a white pointer shark on Monday morning. He was surfing with his girlfriend's father and an interstate friend about 50 metres offshore when the attack occured. Police and professional fishermen have spent almost two days searching for his remains, to no avail. So far, only the teenager's mauled surfboard has been recovered. The small scale search will get underway today. Although police have conceded it is unlikely his body will be found, they say the area will be combed for the next week. -----------------------------------------------------------------------"

" On Indonesia's troubled eastern island of Ambon, at least nine people have been killed and 15 injured in the latest religious fighting. The attack on the village of Hatavay Pesar was watched by soldiers, according to a Christian lawyer in Ambon. He says hundreds of people fled terror as a Muslim mob, armed with guns and grenades, attacked the village. As many as 4,000 people have been killed in a 20-month religious war on Ambon and the surrounding Maluku islands. In June, President Abdurrahman Wahid declared a civil emergency in the region, but it has done little to stop the conflict. Military and police units sent in to quell the violence have instead joined in the fighting based on their religious affiliation. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Floods are continuing to cause chaos across eastern India and Bangladesh affecting more than 16 million people. Official estimates put the death toll in India at as many as 750. West Bengal's been the hardest hit state, though neighbouring Behar has also been affected by the week of heavy rains. In Bangladesh, which has received overspill from the Indian floods, more than a million people in six border districts are underwater. West Bengal's densely populated capital Calcutta is also bracing itself. Flood warnings have been sounded and several areas evacuated. Across the state, relief efforts have been hampered by looting and rioting in relief camps. There are also allegations of mismanagement and corruption. Road and rail links remain cut and the crisis is showing no signs of easing. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" British Prime Minister Tony Blair has accepted blame for the Government falling behind the Conservative Party in public opinion polls for the first time in eight years. Mr Blair has addressed the Labour Party conference in Brighton. It was an important speech for Mr Blair, whose Government has seen an alarming 20-point slump in the polls in the last two months. Challenged by a petrol blockade which nearly stopped the country, a Millennium Dome costing billions and acknowledged by ministers as a flop and a none too secret brawl with his Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown, Labour's confidence has been seriously shaken. But at the party conference, Mr Blair took responsibility for the blunders and pledged that he was listening to the people. At the same time, he pledged to take the fight up to the Tories in the next election. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A British-Australian human rights activist has been severely beaten for three days in his Burmese prison cell. British diplomatic officials in Rangoon say 27-year-old James Mawdsley was found ""black and blue"" after being beaten with bamboo poles by 15 prison officers. British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook has lodged a stern protest with Burmese authorities in the wake of what he called an ""appalling"" attack, and has called for Mr Mawdsley's immediate release. Mr Mawdsley has been in solitary confinement since he was sentenced to 17 years prison in Burma last year, after protesting against the suppression of democracy and the killing of minorities."

" Cathy Freeman has taken out the gold medal in the 400 metres final at Stadium Australia. Wearing the neck-to-ankle body suit, Freeman won the race by three metres in 49.13 seconds. Michael Johnson won the men's 400 metres to create Olympic history and says he was inspired by Cathy Freeman Just moments after Cathy Freeman won gold, the crowd erupted again this time for an American. Michael Johnson blitzed the field to become the first man ever to win the 400 metres at two Olympics. Australian pole vaulter, Tataiana Grigorieva maintained her composure in the hype to take the silver medal behind American Stacy Dragila. World record holder Colin Jackson finished a dissapointing fifth in the 110 metres hurdles, Cuban Anier Garcia won the gold. But Great Britain had success in the men's triple jump with Johnathon Edwards winning the gold. Australia's Andrew Murphy finished 10th. Mozambique's Maria Mutola defeated Austria's Stephanie Graf to take the gold in the 800 metres. While Ethopia's Hailie Gebrselassie staged a brave fight back to take gold in the 10,000 metres. Today brings a rest day in the athletics program and the first sessions in sports including sprint kayaking and road cycling. There are semi-finals in baseball, with Japan playing Cuba today and Korea versus the US tonight. In softball, it is the gold medal match: Japan against the United States. Men's beach volleyball is also reaching its climax, with the US and Brazil in the gold medal match. It is the first day of sprint kayaking including heats of the men's and women's K4. Road cycling gets underway with the women's road race through Sydney's eastern suburbs. In men's hockey, Australia plays Korea. Victory will put the Kookaburras into the semi-finals. In tennis, Australia's Jelena Dokic plays Monica Seles in the women's singles bronze medal match. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Truck owner-drivers who have stopped fuel supplies in Melbourne from leaving terminals face legal action today. Caltex will apply for a Supreme Court injunction to stop the drivers from blockading its Spotswood terminal. The drivers set up a blockade three days ago to put pressure on the Federal Government to hold an inquiry into high fuel prices and low freight payments. At least one service station in Melbourne has run out of fuel and supplies at others are expected to dry out soon. Richard Beattie from Caltex says drivers should not be targeting oil companies. ""We'd like these drivers to recognise that they don't have a dispute with the oil industry, they have a dispute with the people who need to pay them for their services,"" he said. ""They're the ones who are buying the transport services. ""OPEC has put the price of crude oil up - everybody recognises that the oil industry can't lower its price, we actually have the...[cheapest] fuel in the Western world, before tax."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Opposition has announced it will retain the 30 per cent private health insurance rebate, without means testing, if it wins office. Labor leader Kim Beazley said it would be too complicated to means test the rebate and instead he will insist on getting rid of gap payments and preventing unnecessary premium increases. The Private Health Insurance Association welcomes Labor's decision. But research released by the Australia Institute's tax expert, Julie Smith, shows about half the value of the rebate goes to the richest third of taxpayers. She says the rebate should be scrapped - especially the subsidy for extras cover. ""Because the rebate includes ancillaries, which includes things like gym clubs, dental care and cosmetic surgery, what this means is there's approximately $1 billion of public money going to subsidising the wealthy's private health insurance,"" she said. ""Of that, about a quarter, about a couple of hundred million dollars, is going into subsidising the rich to jump queues to get their teeth fixed and their belly fixed and to pay for their gym club membership."" ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Police are about to resume a search for a teenage surfer taken by a shark on South Australia's west coast yesterday, the second fatal shark attack in the State's west in two days. Up to 10 boats searched the coast near Elliston until dusk last night but crews failed to find any trace of the 17-year-old from Port Lincoln. The only item recovered from the attack was the surfer's board, which was in several pieces. Police, local fishermen and State Emergency Service volunteers will be on the water again today. They will also be checking local coves to see if anything has washed up on the overnight tide. Police are also reviewing a search for a 25-year-old New Zealand man who disappeared after being attacked by a shark at Cactus Beach on the far west coast on Sunday. Reports on both attacks are being prepared for the coroner. Surfers on South Australia's west coast say they will be staying out of the water for the moment. The attacks have shocked the normally laid-back surfing communities, with many of even the most dedicated surfers saying they will be staying on land. Among them Queenslander David Maitland, who is in the region for a three-month surfing holiday, says he will not venture back into the water for at least a few weeks. ""Everybody's in a bit of a shock,"" he said. ""I don't think it's sunk in yet, but it's going to be in people's heads for a while."" -----------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Australian Transport Safety Bureau has concluded that fuel quality and quantity were not factors which contributed to the fatal crash of a Whyalla Airlines plane in May. Eight people died when a Piper Chieftain ditched into Spencer Gulf, after both engines failed. During a court hearing in Adelaide in July, questions were raised about whether the engine failure was caused by use of excessively lean fuel. The suggestion was denied by the airline. An interim report from the Australian Transport Safety Bureau says the aircraft's left engine failed from a crankshaft fracture, most likely resulting from thermal stress. The report says the right engine failed because of a hole in one of the engine's pistons. A final report into the crash is expected this year. -------------------------------------------------------------------------"

" With more than half the votes counted in the Yugoslav presidential election, both sides are still claiming victory. Huge crowds are gathering in Belgrade to celebrate the defeat of President Slobodan Milosovic. Opposition leader Voyuslav Kostunica, a little known constitutional lawyer, declares that he has won by a wide margin ousting Mr Milosovic after 13 years in office. However, President Milosovic's party disputes this, claiming that the President is ahead in the polls so far and that he will win in the first round. With allegations of vote rigging and electoral irregularities, Western leaders are calling on President Milosovic to admit defeat. There are fears the President may resort to violence to maintain his grip on power. The US says the opposition appears to be close to victory, despite massive attempts at fraud by President Milosevic's regime. Washington said it would not place any faith in the official vote tally released by Belgrade, or by Yugoslavia's election commission. US State Department spokesman Richard Boucher says because of President Milosevic's desire to hang on to power, the US believes the most accurate account of voting will come from the opposition. ""First of all there were massive irregularities and reports of fraud of just about every size, shape and colour,"" he said. ""Nonetheless, it's also quite clear the democratic opposition appear to be on their way to a convincing victory."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Czech capital Prague is bracing itself for confrontation as anti-globalisation protesters prepare to march on the International Monetary Fund (IMF)/World Bank meeting later today. An estimated 5,000 demonstrators have arrived in the Czech capital hoping to emulate the anti-globalisation protests seen at the World Trade Organisation meeting in Seattle last year. But Czech police say they are well prepared. Hundreds of suspected trouble makers have been turned away at the borders and any protests will be met by an 11,000 strong force armed with riot gear and water canon. On the streets, small protests have been underway for almost a week. The demonstrators, made up of groups of anarchists, environmentalists and left wing political groups, say they plan to block access to the main congress centre once the meeting gets underway later today. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" It has been revealed that a soldier, shot and killed by police in Papua New Guinea at the weekend, had been charged with murder. Police shot dead 24-year-old Private Bernard Kahusi - they allege he had been involved in a robbery and was pointing a gun at police when he was shot. His death triggered angry clashes between soldiers and police. Police say Private Kahusi was convicted of murder last year and was due to appear in court this week on a charge of attempted murder. The PNG Cabinet has ordered a coroner's inquest into the shooting of Private Kahusi, and has told Defence Force Commander Carl Marlpo to investigate and punish soldiers found to have breached military regulations during clashes with police over the weekend."

" Cathy Freeman is the fastest qualifier and gold medal favourite for tonight's 400 metres Olympic final. Freeman will run from lane six after winning her semi-final last night in 50.01. Australian athletics head coach Chris Wardlaw says Freeman is on track to do her best tonight. ""I mean if we had come in a week ago and said this is the final and this is what you would have done she'd be pretty happy,"" he said. ""We'd be pretty happy I think so tonight she has to do it."" Australia's women's beach volleyball players will lead today's medal charge. Natalie Cook and Kerri Potharst will play Brazil's Adriana Behar and Shelda Bede in the gold medal final of the women's beach volleyball. Lisa Skinner, 19, is competing in the finals of the gymnastics floor exercise. Jelena Dokic will take on Russia's Elena Dementieva in the women's tennis semi-finals. Australia's softballers will play Japan in the semis. The Hockeyroos take on the Netherlands in the medal rounds of women's hockey. Australia will also be represented in men's basketball, diving, equestrian, sailing, syncronised swimming, men's volleyball, men's waterpolo and wrestling. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Caltex is considering legal action to break blockades which have stopped fuel deliveries from three Melbourne oil terminals. Truck drivers angry about skyrocketing fuel prices are calling for similar action around the country. The drivers want Australia to abandon world parity pricing which helps with conservation but pushes up prices and they want a royal commission into pricing. They are targeting terminals at Yarraville, Newport and Altona, saying high prices are making their businesses unprofitable. The protest is based on a British model that crippled the country. At this stage, they are yet to attract support from the transport workers union or motoring organisations. Drivers' spokeswoman Lyn Bennetts says there has been a big jump in trucking costs between Melbourne and Sydney. ""Our increaased price is $200 to $300 a trip and if you times that by a week that's $1,500 a week...a massive $6,000 extra per month,"" she said. The blockade has had little immediate effect, but Richard Beattie from Caltex says the lawyers will be called in today. ""We're keen to get fuel moving from Newport very quickly,"" he said. Meanwhile, the Transport Workers Union is meeting today to discuss the next phase in a campaign for better pay rates and reduced fuel costs. Union secretary Andrew Whale says drivers have condemned the Federal Government over its refusal to introduce minimum pay rates and to freeze the fuel excise. Mr Whale says options being considered include European style blockades. But he says there is concern that stoppages could add to the financial hardships of many truck drivers. ""It's a huge financial burden - some drivers are saying it's cheap if they leave their truck at home because they just can't get enough to keep it going,"" he said. ""Others are so tight that if they take it off the road for a minute then they reckon they'll lose the truck because the margins are just nothing out there."" --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Prime Minister, John Howard, has urged national and international business leaders to look beyond the plunge in the value of the Australian dollar. Speaking at a business dinner in Sydney, Mr Howard argued Australia was able to weather the Asian economic crisis largely due to its flexible exchange rate. The Prime Minister says Australia's economic framework is sound and does not need changing, despite the dollar's weakness. ""It is important to remember that when you operate in the environment of a flexible exchange rate as we do and as we continue to do, it is very important to remember to take a longer view and not to take a short-term view in relation to the relative comparisons of the exchange rate values of the Australian dollar,"" he said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A group fighting for independence from Indonesia in the northern province of Aceh has denied it was behind bombings in Jakarta that have claimed 15 lives. The Free Aceh Movement issued its statement after police sources said that most of the 25 people arrested on the weekend in connection with the bombings were from Aceh. The suspects have told police they put together the bombs using military plastic explosives in a workshop in south Jakarta. The oldest, a 43-year-old man, has told police that after four bombings in the past two months there were further plans to blow up the US Embassy and the Serena department store in central Jakarta. The US Chamber of Commerce in Jakarta said last week that the US Embassy had received information from credible sources that US businesses and offices could be bomb targets. The Australian Embassy was identified as a target too. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Authorities in East Timor have readied themselves for an influx of Indonesian refugees who may join East Timorese returnees fleeing violence in West Timor. United Nations' peacekeepers in East Timor are committed to providing security to anybody who needs it. UN refugee workers in East Timor believe East Timorese refugees in West Timor will begin to repatriate themselves this week if Indonesia holds true to its promise to disarm the militia who control the refugee camps across the border. But the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) also believes Indonesian citizens may seek to cross into East Timor to escape instability in West Timor. If this happens UN peacekeepers have been instructed not to separate Indonesian nationals from East Timorese. This job will be undertaken later by UNHCR workers. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Witnesses to a fatal shark attack on South Australia's far west coast have described how the victim tried to escape on his surfboard. A 25-year-old New Zealand man who was on his honeymoon was killed by the white pointer shark yesterday while he was surfing off the internationally popular, Cactus Beach. Witnesses to the incident say the man was 50 metres offshore and had been in the water for about an hour when the shark attacked. A wide scale search for the man's body located part of his surfboard but failed to find any trace of the man. Tooth marks on the surfboard indicate the shark could be up to 4.5 metres long. Local surfer Brad Feuerriegel says the shark must be caught. ""An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, and this shark is a mean shark,"" he said. Local police and State Emergency Service volunteers will continue their search for the man's body this morning. ------------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Polls have closed in Yugoslavia in an election for a new president and parliament. There are conflicting claims about the legitimacy of the vote. Before the vote, public opinion polls had shown President Slobodan Milosevic was trailing the popular opposition candidate Voyuslav Kostunica by as much as 10 per cent. Most Western analysts and a good few Yugoslav observers as well have already predicted that this weekend's elections in Yugoslavia will be far from free and fair. But as the polls closed it was still unclear how much if any electoral fraud there has been. The head of the Yugoslav Centre for Free Election and Democracy claimed that that the vote had been a complete mess, but a small group of international observers allowed in by the Belgrade authorities to monitor the election said everything appeared to be above board. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australians are reported to be among seven oil experts who have gone missing from the desert in eastern Yemen where they were working. Yemen security officials say the experts lost their way in the Thamoud Desert area and have been missing since Saturday morning. Yemeni Army helicopters are apparently searching in the Empty Quarter, a vast desert region near the Saudi border with potentially lucrative oil deposits. However, Western diplomats say the experts were taken by Saudi armed forces who accused them of surveying inside Saudi territory. The diplomats say contact is being made between Yemeni and Saudi officials to reach an agreement for their release, but Saudi officials say they are unaware of such an incident. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Heavy rain is expected to continue in the north-east of India where more than six million people have been marooned by rising flood waters, which are also running into neighbouring Bangladesh. The late monsoon rains have claimed at least 250 lives in the state of West Bengal and unofficial estimates put the death toll at 400. The situation became critical late last week when sluice gates of at least three major rivers were open to stop dams bursting. Officials in neighbouring Bangladesh say that has also caused a crisis in areas along the western frontier with India. A total of 50,000 Bangladeshis from 30 villages have been left homeless. Across flood hit districts in both countries, road and rail link have been cut with the only relief coming in the form of helicopter food drops. In Vietnam's Mekong delta, the death toll from flooding has hit 100, while close to 140 people have died in flood-related incidents in Cambodia."

" Australia has taken silver in the Olympic men's lightweight coxless fours rowing. Australia's Simon Burgess, Anthony Edwards, Darren Balmforth and Robert Richards were pipped on the line for gold by France's Laurent Porchier, Jean-Christophe Bette, Yves Hocde and Xavier Dorfman. Denmark's Soren Madsen, Thomas Ebert, Eskild Ebbesen and Victor Feddersen were third."

" Naoko Takahashi of Japan has taken the gold in the Olympic women's marathon. Takahashi finished the 42 kilometre course in an Olympic record time of 2:23.13. Kerryn McCann was the best placed Australian, finishing 10th. The silver medal went to Romania's Lidia Simon and the bronze to Joyce Chepchumba of Kenya."

" A Latvian rower has tested positive for the banned steroid nandrolone. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) says 29-year-old Andris Reinholds failed the drug test after finishing eighth in the men's single sculls at the Sydney Games. Nandrolone is a steroid often used by track and field athletes. The IOC has already stripped three Bulgarian weightlifters of their medals after testing positive for a banned weightloss diuretic. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Fuel supplies across Australia are under threat after Victorian owner-truck drivers voted to start a nationwide fuel blockade in Melbourne. About 40 owner-truck drivers have decided to set up blockades at Melbourne's two major oil refineries in protest at high fuel costs and low freight rates. The drivers hope their action will led to a nationwide blockade of refineries. If that happens, fuel supplies would run out in days. The drivers have also called for a Royal Commission into high fuel prices and want a mandatory code of conduct to lock in minimum freight rates of $1.47 and payment within 14 days."

" The Owner-Drivers Association says there are no plans for a fuel refinery blockade in Western Australia. Association president Steve Melville says the Melbourne action will only affect the eastern seaboard. He says while there may be ad hoc stoppages in Western Australia, the association believes a better course of action is to make consumers pay more for freight, to try to force the Government to lower taxes. The local branch of the Transport Workers Union says it has no intention of taking any blockading action in Western Australia. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Indonesia's President Abdurrahman Wahid has reportedly told the Indonesian military that if they cannot restore order in West Timor, the Americans might go in and do it. US officials in Jakarta were quick to say they have no such plan, which would involve sending US troops into Indonesian territory. Unless order is restored in West Timor, where militia roamed freely in refugee camps for East Timorese, Mr Wahid said United Nations and US forces might intervene. He said there are rumours 800 US marines might go to West Timor to protect UN refugee workers, although the US embassy in Jakarta has denied the existence of such a plan."

" Indonesia's President has also accused security forces in West Timor of wrongfully releasing six suspects detained during investigations into the murder of three UNHCR workers in Atambua two weeks ago. Indonesia's Government announced in New York the militia in West Timor have until next Tuesday to surrender their weapons before they are forcibly removed. Indonesian officials in West Timor say hundreds of militia weapons have been voluntarily handed to police in response to Government demands that the groups give up their arms. However, reports of weapons handovers are nothing new in Indonesia's dealings with anti-independence East Timorese militia. Once in East Timor last year, weapons belonging to a militia group were handed to police only to be seen later returned in a vehicle to what was then the militia's Dili headquarters. Now Atambua's superintendent has reportedly claimed that more than 500 weapons have been handed into police by 12 militiamen. The weapons include 485 homemade guns, seven automatic rifles, four grenades and nine grenade launchers. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The United States will demand action rather than words from North Korea at a new round of talks in New York this week. Senior negotiators will meet from Wednesday to wade through a raft of contentious issues, including Pyongyang's missile program, its alleged sales of military technology and support for terrorism. While the Clinton administration welcomed the summit between North and South Korea in June, it has reacted cautiously to subsequent developments. The United States lifted a series of sanctions on Stalinist North Korea after the summit, but says it will not further reward that country's diplomatic emergence without concrete evidence of reform."

" Secretary of State Madeleine Albright has coined the phrase ""balanced euphoria"" to outline the US position and lingering suspicion over the motives behind North Korea's diplomatic coming-out party through the last year. Like much of the rest of the world, the United States is still unclear about Pyongyang's intentions of if its reclusive leader Kim Jong-Il ready to make peace with the South, to welcome foreign influences and permit greater freedoms inside his country. ""North Korea remains the major threat to stability and security in north-east Asia and is the country most likely to involve the United States in a large-scale war,"" a new Pentagon report says. ""There is little or no evidence of economic reform, or reform-minded leaders, reduction in military forces or a lessening of anti-US rhetoric."" US Defence Secretary William Cohen has hinted at US impatience. ""You cannot have a situation where all the economic aid flows into the North and they continue to build up the military and there is no reduction in tension,"" Mr Cohen said. In New York, US officials will be keen to learn more about North Korea's offer to give up its missile program in return for access to satellite launches."

" The apparent concession was offered to Russian President Vladimir Putin during his visit to Pyongyang. But South Korean media executives were quoted as saying later that Kim had told them he made the offer ""laughingly"" and had mocked US concern about North Korea's missile program. Washington also wants to discuss the Agreed Framework, the 1994 deal under which Pyongyang committed to end its nuclear weapons program in exchange for two nuclear reactors worth $4.6 billion. US-North Korea relations have been through a familiar cycle of political manoeuvering, confrontation and damage control in recent months. Pyongyang angrily cancelled its delegation's plans to attend the United Nations Millennium summit last month, after officials claimed they were ""rudely"" searched before boarding an American Airlines flight in Germany. The United States apologised for the incident, but North Korea's Foreign Minister, Paek Nam Sun, decided not to show up for the subsequent UN General Assembly. That spat dashed hopes for a second meeting between him and Dr Albright. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The world's richest nations have ruled out the idea of pushing oil prices lower through tax cuts. Despite protests around the world against rising fuel prices, the finance ministers of the G7 group of industrialised nations decided not to cut oil taxes. The ministers have been gathered in Prague ahead of the World Bank/International Monetary Fund annual meeting. They say increased production is the best way to reduce crude oil prices, which recently hit a 10-year high. US Treasury Secretary Lawrence Summers says oil prices are ""the biggest cloud"" over the global economy. Meanwhile, mounting concerns over soaring oil prices are set to dominate the three-day Asia Pacific Petroleum Conference starting Monday in Singapore. Key speakers from the conference, including the chairman of Caltex Corporation and vice-president of the New York Mercantile Exchange, are likely to call for continued global efforts to calm the relentless surge in oil prices."

" Oil prices have eased somewhat after the United States decided to dip into its emergency reserves, but they remain stubbornly stuck above $US30 a barrel, casting a shadow over the region's recovery from the economic crisis in 1997 and 1998. Benchmark light sweet crude for November delivery shed $US1.32 to close at $US32.68 a barrel in New York on Friday. In London, Brent crude closed down $US1.48 at $US31.25. The move by the US to pump out 30 million barrels over 30 days from its Strategic Petroleum Reserve is only a temporary solution to calm high oil prices, traders said. Economists say high oil prices will hurt the region more so than their Western counterparts because they are not as efficient in the usage of oil. Already, leaders from some of the biggest economies in the region have voiced fears that growth could slow down as escalating oil prices result in higher inflation. Ironically, it is the region's rebound from the financial meltdown that drove up demand for oil as the Asian industrial engines kicked into recovery mode."

" They say Japan and China, the two locomotives driving the region's growth, are vulnerable if oil prices remain high. ""I believe that's something we have to be concerned about,"" Japanese Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori said. China, a net importer of oil since 1993, can no longer insulate itself from global markets, and policy makers are now forced to pay closer attention to changes in overseas oil prices because of the economy's increasing dependence on imported oil. South Korea, one of the countries hit hardest by the 1997 crisis, could see its recovery derailed if prices stay above $US35 a barrel, a report to the Government said. ""If [average annual] oil prices rise to over $US35 per barrel, the country's economic growth rate would be less than 4 per cent, while the current account would show a $5 billion deficit next year,"" the report said. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) warned last week that some economies, already saddled with depreciating currencies and weak income from farm exports, would be hit very hard if oil prices continued to hover around the $US35 a barrel mark during the next few months. ADB chief economist Yoshihiro Iwasaki said if petroleum prices at that level for a year, the negative impact on growth of Asia's oil-dependent economies would be double relative to the rest of the world. There are also fears high oil prices could fuel social unrest in Asian cities, although petroleum exporters in the region stand to benefit from higher export revenues. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" A 25-year-old New Zealand man has died after a shark attack in waters off South Australia's west coast this morning. The victim, who was visiting from overseas, was surfing at Cactus Beach near Penong when he was taken. His surfboard has since been recovered. The man's wife is being treated for shock by ambulance officers. Senior Constable Jenny Barrett says police have been speaking with those at the scene. ""Witnesses at about 7:30am ACDT this morning at Cactus Beach saw the man, who was surfing, taken by the shark and police are searching the area now trying to retrieve his body,"" Senior Constable Barrett said. South Australian shark expert Rodney Fox, who required more than 500 stitches after surviving an attack in 1963, says the area is notorious for the predators. ""Cactus Beach has been renowned for sharks,"" Mr Fox said. ""It's renowned for great surfing over the years and it's one of those places that I certainly wouldn't go comfortably in the water there."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Australia has won gold and silver in the men's 1,500 metres freestyle with Grant Hackett beating two-time champion Kieren Perkins. Hackett won the event in a great time of 14:38.33 minutes, around five-and-a-half seconds ahead of Perkins, who embraced the new champion after the race. Chris Thompson of the United States took bronze. Had Perkins won, he would have become the first male swimmer to win the same individual event at three consecutive Olympics. Hackett made the pace early, quickly establishing a lead of a little more than a body length. Perkins slowly pegged that back, but at the 800 metres mark Hackett began to pull away again. Perkins dominated the 1,500 metres event through much of the 1990s, winning the gold medal in world record time at the Barcelona Games in 1992. He backed up to win again in Atlanta, despite a troubled build-up which saw him almost miss the Australian team. His troubles continued at the Games themselves, and he scraped into the final of the event by less than three tenths of a second. Fellow Australian Daniel Kowalski was the hot favourite going into that race, but Perkins, starting from the unfamiliar lane eight, blew the field away to win comfortably in a time just under 15 minutes."

" Dutch swimming sensation Inge de Bruijn has won her third gold medal for the Games. De Bruijn's swim in the 50 metres freestyle has made her the most sucessful swimmer in individual events at the Games. Therese Alshammer from Sweden took out the silver and bronze went to American Dara Torres."

" The Americans have taken out the last two swimming events at the Olympics winning gold in both the 4x100 metres medley relays. The women's team slashed more than three-and-a-half seconds off the world record. The team of BJ Bedford, Megan Quann, Jenny Thompson and Dara Torres finished in 3:58.3 minutes. The Australians, Dyana Calub, Leisel Jones, Petria Thomas and Susie O'Neill, won silver and Japan won the bronze. The Australians set a new Australian record, finishing inside the former world record. In the men's event the Americans broke the record while the Australians finished four-tenths of a second outside the old mark. The US team, Lenny Krayzelburg, Ed Moses, Ian Crocker and Gary Hall Jr, finished in 3:33.71 minutes taking 1.1 seconds off the old record time. The Australian team of Matthew Welsh, Regan Harrison, Geoff Huegill and Michael Klim took silver, setting an Australian record in the process. Germany won bronze."

" On a day when seven rowing finals were decided, Steve Redgrave hogged the Olympic limelight, winning a fifth consecutive gold as his British crew outclassed the Italians in the men's coxless four. In a thrilling race, the British led from the front, opening up a 0.88 second lead in the first 500 metres before the Italian four stormed back into contention. At 1,000 metres, the British lead was slashed to 0.46 seconds, setting up a nail-biting finish. As Italians pressed hard in the final 500 metres, the British crew responded by lifting their stroke rate to 40 a minute to win by less than half a second in 5 minutes, 56.24 seconds. Australia, which won the event at the past two Olympics but fielded a completely new crew, came third. ""It was close, but that doesn't matter,"" said Redgrave, whose gold tally is bettered only by Hungarian fencer Aladar Gerevich, who won six gold medals between 1932 and 1960. Meanwhile, James Tomkins, Australia's greatest rower, was disappointed after failing to secure his third Olympic gold, but says he will not retire. ""I'm seriously thinking about going on,"" he said after winning bronze. ""I think I'm in pretty good nick at the moment and I think the results, what we've done, have shown that."" Tomkins won gold in Barcelona and Atlanta as part of the now-disbanded Oarsome Foursome. In other races, world champion Rob Waddell gave New Zealand its first gold of the Games in the men's single sculls. ""It was nice in the last 300 to feel I was holding,"" said Waddell who got off to a good start and built up a one-length lead with 250 metres to go. ""I raced well and held my pace."""

" And Ekaterina Karsten of Belarus won her second straight Olympic single sculls title, but needed a photo finish to do it. Karsten went stroke for stroke until the line with Rumyana Neyokova of Bulagria. It took the judges 10 minutes to separate them. ""I tried to go fast at the beginning then ease a bit to leave more strength for the end,"" said Karsten. The women's coxless pairs was won by Romania's Georgeta Damien and Doina Ignat ahead of Australia and the United States while French duo Micheal Andrieux and Jean-Christophe Rolland took the men's title. Meanwhile, Luka Spik and Iztok Cop of Slovenia, won the men's double sculls ahead of Norweigan pair Olaf Tufte and Fredrik Raaen Bekken with Italy's Giovanni Calabrese and Nicola Sartori taking bronze. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" United States President Bill Clinton has authorised the release of 30 million barrels of oil from the nation's emergency reserves. The decision to release the oil comes a day after Vice-President Al Gore publicly called on the White House to take the action as a means of countering soaring costs. After meeting with his advisers, Mr Clinton authorised the first drawn down from the strategic reserves since the Gulf War. Energy secretary Bill Richardson says this is a precautionary and temporary step. ""We use the strategic petroleum reserve very sparingly,"" Mr Richardson said. Mr Gore's call for the release has already been attacked by Republican presidential candidate George W Bush, who argues the reserve, created during the oil crisis of the mid 1970s, is only intended for supply interations, not to manipulate market pricing. However, the White House says this is not an attempt at price manipulation, saying it is only concerned about supply shortages. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Court of Appeal in London has made a landmark ruling that an operation separating Siamese twins should go ahead, despite the opposition of their deeply religious parents. One twin will certainly die with the operation. Without it, both will die. It has been an agonising decision that has caused the judges sleepness nights, whether to kill one twin to save the other. But in the end, they ruled that the scales of justice came down firmly to do just that. The parents, devout Catholics from the Mediterranean island of Gozo in Malta, have leave to appeal. Lawyer John Kitchingham said they must now consider whether to take the case to the House of Lords, or to the European Court of Human Rights. ""No decision has yet been made,"" Mr Kitchingham said. Although the twins are stable, doctors say that without the operation they will both die within months. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Runaway Olympic sprinter Marie-Jose Perec walked out of the Sydney Games because she was attacked three times, her coach has claimed. Perec had been seen as a major rival to Australia's Cathy Freeman in the 400 metres until she pulled out of the Olympics earlier this week and flew home to France. Perec's coach Wolfgang Meier has told a French newspaper that the triple gold medallist had been attacked in a Sydney supermarket and twice at her hotel. He did not specify what the alleged attacks involved. Mr Meier also says he received a telephone call from the runner saying she had been involved in a car accident. Perec initially said she fled the Olympics because a stalker had threatened her in her Sydney hotel room. However, reports say the hotel's security video showed no intruder, and police say no complaint has been lodged. Mr Meier says Perec was capable of a medal. ""She was capable of running between 48.95 and 49.12...if Cathy Freeman wins in under 48.80, she will deserve the gold medal,"" he said. In other news, Perec's sponsors, Reebok France, have decided to withdraw a television advertising campaign featuring the sprinter. In the black and white advertisement, Perec is shown running away from a collapsing building. Perec won gold for France in the 200 metres and 400 metres at the 1996 Atlanta Olympics and the 400 metres gold at the 1992 Barcelona Games. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" East Timorese leader Jose Ramos-Horta says the United States Government is prepared to impose sanctions on Indonesia if it does not restore order in the troubled state. He was speaking at a news conference at the annual meeting of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank in Prague. Mr Ramos-Horta says he has ""assurances"" from the US Government and Congress that there will be serious economic repercussions if the Indonesian Government does not get its act together. Following international pressure over the killing of three UN aid workers in West Timor, Indonesia said yesterday it had begun to disarm the militias."

" Meanwhile, two former soldiers have been jailed for printing more than $4 million in counterfiet banknotes. The pair had claimed that Indonesia's army chief had ordered them to carry out the forgery to pay militiamen in Timor. A judge in Jakarta has sentenced the two ex-servicemen, both in their 60s, to seven and four years in jail respectively. The judge said the sentences for Ismail Putra and Edeh Kereh would have been stiffer if not for both mens exemplary service records. But Putra, a former combat intelligence unit member, claimed he was acting under orders from General Tyasno Sudarto, former intelligence head and now Indonesian Army chief. Putra claimed General Tyasno said former military commander General Wiranto had ordered a counterfeit money operation to fund pro-Indonesia militias in Timor. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" There have been tense exchanges at the United Nations over the flight of a French plane to Iraq. It is the first direct flight between Paris and Baghdad since sanctions were imposed 10 years ago, after Iraq invaded Kuwait. The Dutch ambassador who heads the UN sanctions committee criticised France for rejecting his request to delay the flight while the case was reviewed. The United States and France have long been at odds over the issue of Iraqi sanctions, but rarely have their disagreements been so public. The US State Department felt it had no choice but to speak out over what it described as a blatant violation of UN sanctions resolutions. In a written statement, the department spokesman, Richard Boucher, said the flight was in clear defiance of the UN and its established procedures. ""We failed to understand why the French Government could not wait another 12-hours to gain UN sanctions committee approval for the trip,"" he said. ""The flight represents a major challenge to the Iraqi sanctions regime and underlines the depth of the split over the issue of how to deal with Iraq."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The funeral service of late TV presenter Paula Yates will be held today in the village church where her marriage to Sir Bob Geldof was blessed and where three of her children were baptised. A clutch of celebrities are expected to pay their respects at the church of Mary Magdalene in Davington, near Faversham, Kent, which sits on the grounds of Sir Bob's 12th century home. Among the mourners will be Paula's mother, Helene Thornton, who had been estranged from her daughter for the past five years. It will be the first time that Helene, 63, has ever seen her grand-daughter Tiger Lily. Helene last spoke to Paula in 1995 when she left husband Bob Geldof for INXS star Michael Hutchence. The cortege is then expected to leave for Charing Crematorium, 16 kilometres away. The church is the same one in which Ms Yates and Sir Bob had their marriage blessed 14 years ago. Their three children, Fifi Trixibelle, 17, Peaches, 10, and Pixie, 7, were also baptised in the church."

" Police are expecting hundreds of onlookers. Inspector Lee Russell said the nearby road will be closed, allowing guests entry into the grounds of Sir Bob's home, the Priory. The guests are then expected to file into the church through the main entrance while the coffin enters through the west doors of the church, away from the glare of the media. Ms Yates was found dead on Sunday by Tiger Lily. An inquest into her sudden death has been opened and adjourned while further tests are completed to establish the cause of death. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Two Bulgarian weightlifters will be stripped of their medals in the lastest drug cheating episode at the Sydney Games. It brings to three the number of the Bulgarians caught cheating. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) executive board met this morning and announced they would advise the gold and bronze medal-winning weightlifters from the women's 48 kilogram division and the men's 62 kilogram to hand back their medals. The team-mates tested positive to a banned diuretic used to lose weight. The Bulgarians have decided not to appeal the disqualification from the Olympics. The IOC's Jacques Rogges says disqualification is not a pleasant job but it has to be done. ""I always feel sorry for having to disqualify but at the same time I'm glad we can do that to send a strong message to the cheating athletes and its a matter of natural justice for the athletes that do not cheat,"" he said. Meanwhile, controversial French Olympic sprinter Marie-Jose Perec will arrive back in Paris this afternoon, Australian time, on a flight from Singapore. Perec, the defending champion in the 400 metres, fled Sydney on Wednesday after claiming she was accosted by an unidentified man in her hotel room. On arrival in Singapore, her boyfriend Anthuan Maybank, attacked a cameraman who filmed their arrival. Perec and Maybank were questioned by Singapore police following the incident, but were allowed to leave without charge. In other news, Australia's cycling coach Charlie Walsh bowed out after 20 years in the job last night with the most successful day of his career. Brett Aitken and Scott McGrory won gold in the madison while Gary Neiwand took silver behind Frenchman Florian Rousseau in the keirin. Walsh says he could not have thought of a better way to leave the sport. ""It's not easy to win an Olympic medal and to see these guys come out and to have these guys ride so sensationally well as they did tonight,"" he said. ""They're a superb team. McGrory read the race very, very well and Aiken with his power and everything else. That was a top team."" -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Immigration Minister, Philip Ruddock, denies his criticism of New Zealand's amnesty for long-term illegal immigrants is racist. Mr Ruddock has expressed disappointment at the amnesty, saying unlawful entrants to New Zealand will become citizens who are able to move freely to Australia. The New Zealand Opposition says many over-stayers are Pacific Islanders and it has accused Mr Ruddock of veiled racism. But the Minister says that is not the case. ""It certainly has nothing to do with people's race. I've asserted that you should not reward illegality and that the experience here in Australia, with amnesties has led to more illegal movement of people,"" he said. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Environment Minister, Robert Hill, says the Government will not consider trade sanctions against Japan over its latest breach of International Whaling Commission rules. The United States says sanctions are a definite option after a vessel returned to Tokyo carrying two species of whale that are protected under American law. Senator Hill says while Australia will continue to push for the creation of a South Pacific Whale Sanctuary, the country will not be following America's lead. ""Our response has been political and diplomatic, we haven't engaged in the threat of sanctions because we've never thought that that would effectively achieve our goal,"" Senator Hill said. ""We seek to look for the ways in which we can contribute to a change of attitude in Japan."" --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Security is to be tightened at next week's British Labour Party's annual conference after yesterday's attack on the headquarters of the British intelligence agency MI6. Police have found parts of a rocket-propelled grenade launcher near the scene of the attack. Police say they have stepped up security screening for the Labor conference to be addressed by Prime Minister Tony Blair after the attack on the MI6 headquarters. Dissident Irish Republicans are the main suspects for the missile attack, which shattered windows in the central London building housing the top-secret foreign intelligence service, but caused no injuries nor disruption to its work. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" While the Red Cross Blood Bank faces a critical shortage of supplies, there are claims large amounts of blood are being wasted. The Red Cross will lose about 5 per cent of donors, because of a ban on people who lived in Britain during the outbreak of mad cow disease. However, sufferers from haemochromotosis, a condition where there is an overload of iron in the body, could offer a partial solution. The 60,000 Australians with the disorder are treated by giving blood on a regular basis, often about half a litre a week. The president of the Haemochromotosis Society of Australia, Margaret Rankin, says most of that blood is just disposed of at private clinics. ""If we were better at referring people, may be all the people that would be suitable for the Red Cross to use their blood would be referred to them and those other people, that their blood wouldn't be suitable, would go to other areas but they haven't got their act together on that,"" she said. The Royal Australasian College of Physicians deputy president, Dr Robin Mortimer, says the blood ban will require careful preparation. ""Planning has already started, so there has been a fair bit of preliminary work and in the next three months the blood transfusion services around Australia will train their staff and increase donations from people who've not lived in the UK,"" Dr Mortimer said. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" Shareholders in the failed Internet service provider, Eisa, are unlikely to receive a cent after the business is acquired by its long-time suitor, Austar. Eisa is the most prominent casualty of Australia's Internet boom. The regional pay-TV group, Austar, failed in its offer of $24 million, or 20-cents a share, for the financially crippled Internet service provider (ISP). Now Eisa's administrator Andrew Love will accept just $13 million from Austar, with nothing left for shareholders. ""If a decision hadn't been taken of the nature that I have taken, the business would have run out of money in a very short space of time, and I'm talking, a week,"" he said. He says Austar is not the only winner, trade creditors may get 70 cents in the dollar and around 100 staff will keep their jobs. He has not decided whether to continue Eisa's legal action against former chief executive Damien Brady to recover money spent in the disastrous takeover bid for part of Ozemail. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" An Australian aid organisation says the spread of disease is the biggest problem facing millions of people in South East Asia, hit by the worst flooding in around 70 years. Months of heavy rains have swollen the Mekong River and other rivers in the region causing major flooding in Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos and Thailand. Deputy secretary general of Australian Red Cross Beryl Raufer says aid efforts have been stepped up. ""We're concentrating on trying to ensure that people affected by the floods, which are affecting four countries, are getting sufficient relief supplies,"" she said. ""Our major concern, really at the moment, is the health issue and the availability of safe drinking water. ""So we're putting quite a bit of effort into trying to ensure people have access to safe drinking water."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Just a day after a federal prosecutor announced the end of a long investigation into President Bill Clinton's business dealings, the United States leader is facing a new legal problem. Former White House volunteer Kathleen Wiley Schwicker has announced this morning she is suing Mr Clinton, saying she was the subject of a White House smear campaign. She claims she was harassed after going public with allegations at the height of the Monica Lewinsky scandal that the President had groped her and made sexual advances at the White House. Also named in the suit, being backed by a conservative legal group, are first lady Hillary Clinton and senior White House aides. The move comes a day after special counsel, Robert Ray, announced he was wrapping up the Whitewater investigation into the Clintons' business affairs in Arkansas, saying there was insufficient evidence to press charges against them."

" There are reports this morning French triple Olympian Marie-Jose Perec has left Sydney, throwing into doubt her Olympic Games berth on Friday evening. The 1996 Atlanta 400 metre gold medallist is Cathy Freeman's main rival for the event and since arriving in Australia Perec has steadfastly avoided all media. Agence France Press quotes her agent saying Perec left Sydney on Wednesday after being threatened at her hotel room. The first round of the 400 metre race starts Friday evening. In a shock result last night, American swimmer Misty Hyman has beaten Australian Susie O'Neill in the 200 metres butterfly final. Hyman beat 1996 champion O'Neill in a major upset, while Australian Petria Thomas finished third. O'Neill had not been beaten in the event since taking bronze behind two Chinese swimmers at the 1994 World Championships. O'Neill and Thomas backed up soon after to swim for Australia in the women's 4x200 metres freestyle relay, with O'Neill leading off. The heavily-favoured United States team took out the race, fractionally edging the Australian combination with Germany third. There was further disappointment for Australia in the final of the men's 100 metres freestyle, with Michael Klim finishing out of the medals. World record holder, Dutchman Pieter van den Hoogenband, won the gold in 48.03 seconds, outside the mark he set earlier in the meet. Australia's track cyclists finish their Olympic campaign tonight as several team's face crucial matches today. Eighteen gold medals will be awarded on day six. Australian cycling coach Charlie Walsh has selected veteran Gary Niewand to ride in the kierin ahead of Darryn Hill and Sean Eadie. The kierin along with the madison make their Olympic debut. Scott McCoy and Brett Aitken will pair up for the madison. In team sports. the Australian men's basketball side has a must win game against Russia. The Boomers played them five times in the lead-up to the Games without success. Important matches also face the men's hockey team who play Spain and in softball, Australia take on the USA. In the pool, Dutch world record holder Inge de Bruijn is favourite for the 100 metres freestyle while Australia's main hope in the pool will be Matt Welsh in the 200 metres backstroke. He faces a tough task with a field that includes the United States world record holder Lenny Krazelburg. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" New lows have been recorded by the Australian dollar. It has again fallen victim to gains by the American greenback against the ailing euro. The European single currency has been to a new lifetime low overnight of 84.40 US cents and it has dragged the Australian dollar with it. And in the New York trading session, the local currency has registered a new all-time low of 53.63 US cents. At 7:00am AEDT, it was a little above that at 53.81. Dealers say the market has been orderly and quiet with no sign of central bank activity. Meanwhile, oil prices have been to new post-Gulf War highs with West Texas crude hitting $US37.80 per barrel. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Justice Minister, Amanda Vanstone, says she was briefed about Saturday's police raid on the house of an Opposition adviser. The Shadow Foreign Affairs Minister, Laurie Brereton, has accused the Government of being responsible for the raid on his staff-member's house. The raid was part of an investigation into the leak of top secret documents from the Defence Intelligence Organisation. Until now, the Government has said the raid is a police matter. But Senator Vanstone says she was given a general briefing before the search warrant was executed. ""I'd had a general briefing on that matter, general, I certainly didn't know the specific date that anything was going to happen or the names of people involved in the sense of staffers and things like that,"" she said. ""You would expect that as person responsible for the Federal Police, if there's anything that's likely to hit the newspaper I'm advised of it."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Health officials are expected to announce a ban on blood donors who lived in Britain at the height of mad cow disease. The change comes after a British woman passed on the disease to her unborn baby before dying. The Federal Health Minister, Michael Wooldridge, will announce the decision in Melbourne later this morning, alongside the Australian Red Cross Blood Service. Earlier this week, he asked the states to ban donations from people who lived in Britain for more than six months between 1980 and 1996. Experts agree the risk is minimal. The Victorian Government has agreed to support the ban but has asked that it be phased in, to guarantee blood supplies at the Blood Bank, rather than implemented immediately, as recommended by some other state governments. The Red Cross has admitted a ban could hit hard but does have contingency plans ready. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" Authorities in East Timor are preparing new facilities to assist thousands of refugees, that are expected to try to cross the West Timor border in coming weeks. Yesterday's formal announcement of Indonesia's plans to repress millitia in West Timor has placed United Nations refugee workers in East Timor on a heightened state of readiness. In New York, Indonesia's security minister told reporters that Indonesia will combine persuasive and repressive methods in disarming militia. But if that approach is not successful, security forces will begin forcibly disarming militia. Such pressure could see more repatriations attempted by East Timorese refugees wanting to return or it could result in instability, which may also see refugees flee east. Meanwhile, the chief of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees in East Timor believes there could be a food crisis in West Timor within weeks. Bernard Kerblat acknowledges that there could be 2,000 metric tonnes of rice in storage in West Timor but he doubts whether the infrastructure is still in place to see it successfully delivered to camps occupied by East Timorese refugees. With about 460 humanitarian workers recently evacuated from West Timor, the delivery network has been decimated said Mr Kerblat. Last night the UN in Geneva told the ABC that 2,000 tonnes of rice, enough to feed West Timor's refugees for six months, was still stored in West Timor awaiting distribution. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The long-running investigation into the Whitewater affair, involving the financial dealings of United States President Bill Clinton and wife Hillary, has ended without any charges being laid against the couple. Independent counsel Robert Ray released a six page statement announcing the end of the probe after six years and nearly a $100 million. Mr Ray, who took over the investigation from Ken Starr last year, concluded there was insufficient evidence to warrant any charges against the first couple over their business affairs in Arkansas. Some 14 other people have been convicted as a result of the investigation. Meanwhile, the special counsel has still to decide whether to charge President Clinton with perjury over court testimony about his relastionship with Monica Lewinsky. That decision is expected after Mr Clinton leaves office. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" Telstra workers are considering industrial action over the corporation's plan to record staff telephone conversations with customers. Telstra wants to extend the recording of customer inquiries to all its call centres. Presently, Telstra is trialling the recording of some telephone inquiries to one of its Victorian call centres and says taped conversations assist training. The Community and Public Sector Union strongly opposes the move and communications spokesman Adrian O'Connell says recording conversations breaches the privacy of both customers and staff. And he says unless Telstra is prepared to deal with the union's concerns, strikes will be considered. ""If we have to take industrial action, we will,"" he said. ""It's a last resort but we want to use whatever other means are available to us to try and resolve this issue before we get into industrial action."" ------------------------------------------------------------------------"

" South African President Thabo M'Beki has been criticised for again refusing to acknowledge that Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) is caused by the Human Immunodeficiency Virus. Adressing the South African Parliament, Mr M'Beki has repeated his controversial belief that AIDS is a syndrome and cannot be caused by a virus. Meanwhile, South Africa's Human Rights Commission is threatening to take legal action against the Government over its treatment of AIDS patients. The Human Rights Commission says the Government has failed to provide life saving medication to HIV sufferers. The commission says it is considering taking legal action to ensure that those who are infected receive basic health care. The warning comes amid increasing criticism of the Government's AIDS strategy. The Anglican Church in South Africa says history will judge President Thabo Mbeki harshly."

" There has been another significant slide for the Australian dollar, which has fallen below 54 US cents for the first time. The currency slipped to a new all-time low of 53.93 US cents about 1.30pm AEDT. Dealers say the selling has been broad-based, from a mix of local and overseas institutions. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" An Independent Federal MP is accusing the Federal Government of using Telstra's rationalisation plans to bolster marginal National Party seats. Telstra plans to slash 4,000 jobs over the next three years as it moves call centres from major cities to regional areas. It says the job cuts will be carried out in consultation with the Federal Government. Independent Peter Andren believes call centres will be rationalised and located in marginal electorates. ""Bathurst was described as the most efficient and productive call centre in country Australia by Telstra only 18 months ago,"" Mr Andren said. ""And now apparently it's earmarked for severe downgrading and probable closure to boost the fortunes of National Party seats. ""And I think it'is a cynical exercise at a time when the country needs to hold on to all the jobs it has."" The Federal Opposition says many of the Telstra jobs to be cut will be lost from rural and regional areas where unemployment is already higher. The Shadow Communications Spokesman, Stephen Smith, says it is tragic that the jobs are being lost when Telstra made a $1.9 billion profit. ""There's no doubt that some provincial or regional centres will benefit from the consolidation,"" Mr Smith said. ""But it's also the case that will be offset by the smaller provincial call centres and outlying metropolitan centres suffering the adverse consequences of 4,000 job losses which will come from this consolidation."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Government has welcomed the US Senate's overwhelming vote to normalise trade with China. The US will slash its tariffs on Chinese exports in return for China's huge population having open access to its goods and services. Australia's Trade Minister Mark Vaile says the decision clears the way for China's entry into the World Trade Organisation, which he says would open significant opportunities for Australian exporters. Mr Vaile hopes China can join the WTO at the end of the year or early next year. He called on the United States to follow up its efforts by working towards a new round of world trade negotiations as soon as possible. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" South Australian police now say the deaths of three people, two small children and a 21-year-old woman at Port Lincoln, are being treated as a triple homicide. The deaths were discovered today after housing trust officers found evidence of a break-in in the Pearson Street home. They had gone to the property to check on the welfare of the occupants. Police are appealing for anyone who may have seen anything suspicious in Pearson Street since the weekend to contact them. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Sydney 17-year-old Ian Thorpe may have the opportunity to swim for his fourth Olympic gold medal. Thorpe says he has been placed on standby to swim in the 4x100 metres medley relay. The heats of the race will be held on Friday, with the final the following day. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Justice Minister, Amanda Vanstone, has launched the first national Atlas of Crime in Australia. It shows crime hot-spots in all regions to help those involved in fighting crime. The atlas highlights differences in crime patterns across states and territories, concentrating on five types of crimes; armed and unarmed robbery, residential and non-residential break-and-enter, and motor theft. Senator Vanstone says the atlas explodes myths about crime being concentrated, by such influences as unemployment and ethnicity. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Israeli scientists have developed a tough artificial skin from a widely available natural commodity in the country, human foreskins. The skin is grown in tissue culture from fibroplast cells taken from foreskins, which are enriched with growth factors and grafted on to a cow collagen base, participants at the European Association for the Study of Diabetes symposium were told. The technique closes the open sores from which some diabetes patients suffer. It is performed without anesthesia and does not require hospitalisation. The researcher in charge of the program, Dr Yitzhak Ziv, of Tel Hashomer hospital near Tel Aviv, said the technique has been used on 15 patients and can avert the need for complicated skin transplant operations or amputations. The sores closed in less than a month, he added. Foreskin cells have been in use in Israel for several years to produce Interferon, an expensive cancer-fighting substance. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australia has won its fourth gold medal in the pool, taking out the four by 200 metres freestyle relay. Ian Thorpe, Michael Klim, Todd Pearson and Bill Kirby swam the relay in 7:07.05 minutes, knocking more than a second of the previous world record. The silver went to the United States and the bronze to the Netherlands. Australia's Susie O'Neill has taken out the 200 metres women's freestyle at the International Aquatic Centre. In her first Olympic gold for the event, O'Neill swam in at 1:58.24, silver went to Slovakia's Martina Moravcova and the bronze to Costa Rica's Claudia Poll. ""I'm just glad it's all over,"" she said of the victory, which left her free to focus on her world record 200 fly races. ""What a relief."" Just an hour after her gold, O'Neill won her semi-final of the 200 metres butterfly in 2:07.57 minutes. Compatriot Petria Thomas was second in 2:07.63, qualifying second fastest for the final. Meanwhile, Dutchman Pieter van den Hoogenband has broken the 100 metres freestyle world record in his semi-final at the International Aquatic Centre. The record is the second in three nights for van den Hoogenband, who broke Thorpe's 200 metres freestyle mark in the semi-finals of that event. The Dutch sensation touched the wall in 47.84 seconds, eclipsing the time of 48.18 set by Australia's Michael Klim in the first leg of the winning freestyle relay on the first might of the meet. ""I didn't get any sleep last night,"" van den Hoogenband said. ""I stayed up thinking about the 200. When I got back to the village everyone was congratulating me."" Sweden's Lars Froelander finished second, almost half a body-length astern, with Americans Neil Walker and Gary Hall jnr next. Australia's Chris Fydler was fifth in a time of 49.55. Klim took out the first semi, beating out Russian training partner Alexandre Popov by four-hundredths of a second. Klim touched in 48.8 edging Popov in the last few strokes. He says he was saving himself for the 4x200m free relay final. ""I didn't give it my best,"" he said. ""I still have the relay. I think I can go one-tenth faster tomorrow."" Tom Malchow of the United States has won the men's 200m butterfly swimming gold medal. Malchow, the surprise silver medallist in Atlanta, had dreamed of reaching the top step of the podium ever since. ""For four years I wanted this moment,"" he said. ""The world record was a little taste of how it would feel."" Australia's Justin Norris led with 50 metres to go, but was overhauled in the last lap to take the bronze. And Yana Klochkova of Ukraine has won the women's 200 metres individual medley gold medal, with the silver going to Romania's Beatrice Caslaru and the bronze to Cristina Teuscher of the United States. The win complements Klochkova's gold in the 400 metres medley. Malchow and Klochkova both set new Olympic records in their swims. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" East Timorese are today celebrating the anniversary of the arrival Australian led Interfet troops one year ago. To mark the occasion, September 20 has been declared a national holiday called Freedom Day. But in the wake of the anniversary of last year's ballot few events have been planned. Children will perform in a concert organised by non-government organisations but Australian troops still in East Timor are doing nothing to mark the occasion. An Australian military spokesman said there is no need for East Timor's peacekeeping force to honour an anniversary marking the arrival of its predecessor, Interfet. Although Interfet operations wound up in February this year, the United Nation's peacekeepers in East Timor are still facing daily threats from the militia gangs. The UN yesterday changed its rules of engagement in the troubled territory, giving peacekeepers the right to shoot at armed attackers without warning. Despite the problems, Lieutenant General Peter Cosgrove, who led the Interfet force, says much progress has been made. ""Essentially all the people in East Timor can get on with rehabilitating their lives and getting back to some level of normality,"" he said. ""Their kids can go to school, they can have access to doctors, there is food to eat and shelter is being provided, and work is returning."" ----------------------------------------------------------------"

" Telstra has confirmed at least 4,000 jobs will be axed over the next three years, under plans to move its metropolitan call centres to country areas. Workers will be offered positions in rural areas and others will have the opportunity to take a voluntary redundancy package. Telstra says the downsizing of its call centre operations will improve efficiency. Spokeswoman Jane Sullivan says customers will see the benefits. ""The public want good service from Telstra, they want to ring Telstra, they want to be dealt with properly,"" she said. ""They want to get straight to the issue, they don't want to ring and hang on for 15 minutes and to be put to another operator and another operator, so it's all about customer service and that's what we're trying to improve here."" Meanwhile, the Communications, Electricity and Plumbing Union (CEPU) says Telstra plans to shed thousands of jobs after the Olympic Games. The CEPU's New South Wales secretary Jim Metcher says Telstra workers have told the union of rumours that the corporation plans to shed up to 10,000 jobs as a result of the Government's partial sell-off. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" A small plane from Cuba has crashed in the Gulf of Mexico, killing one person. Originally, the aircraft was thought to have been hijacked, but authorities now believe the passengers might have been defecting when the plane ran out of fuel. The United States Coastguard said that a passing merchant ship, The Chios Dream, picked up nine injured survivors and one body from the water, 300 kilometres south-west of Key West, Florida. According to the Coastguard, all of the people on board the plane have been accounted for, which means it was carrying 10, not 18 people as first reported. There were four men, three women and three children. One of the injured is said to be in a serious condition, the other survivors are reportedly okay. A helicopter has been dispatched to airlift them to hospital. The Coastguard does not yet know who died in the crash. It is not yet certain whether this really was a hijack or an attempt to defect. ----------------------------------------------------------------"

" In an historic and controversial move, the United States Senate has approved permanent normal trade status for China. The decision marks a turning point in a half-century of stormy relations between the world's strongest power and the most-populous nation. The vote effectively ends what has become an annual debate over whether trade should be used as a tool to sanction China for its weapons and human rights policies. China will now permanently enjoy the same low-tariff access to the US market that it has been granted on an annual basis over the past 20 years. In exchange, Beijing will slash tariffs and reduce other import barriers on a long list of goods and services. Human rights activists were opposed to the bill, as were labour unions, who feared that the opening of China's market could cost many US workers their jobs. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" Security has been increased at a western Sydney prison near the Olympics precinct after yesterday's escape by two men. The minimum security facility has seen its fair share of high profile escapes. Literally across the road from the Olympic Games site, two men nearing the end of their sentences hijacked a passing van, leased to South Korea's Olympic Committee. International media descended on the minimum security prison but the inmates were long gone and the four occupants of the Olympic vehicle unharmed. The escape prompted authorities to announce around the clock perimeter patrols by armed guards and dogs. It is not the first time security has been increased at Silverwater Jail following a very public escape. Early last year, a prisoner chose a helicopter as his preferred mode of escape. That prisoner was recaptured more than a month after the escape in which a helicopter landed in the prison exercise yard. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" Divisions are emerging within the Victorian Labor Party and between the Victorian Government and the union movement over last week's World Economic Forum (WEF) protests. The Victorian Premier's own local branch and the Trades Hall executive have passed motions condemning Steve Bracks' endorsement of alleged police violence against protesters. Mr Bracks' unerring support for the Victorian police during last week's World Economic Forum protests has angered the union movement and sections within the ALP. The Trades Hall Council has passed a motion criticising the State Government's endorsement of the violent police crack down, with the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) Craig Johnstone saying it is clear some police behaviour was illegal. ""We thought some of the behaviour was outrageous down at the WEF, against what was predominantly a bunch of peaceful protesters,"" he said. The Premier's own ALP branch at Williamstown has also condemned his praise for police, with several other branches expected to take similar action. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Papua New Guinea's Leadership Tribunal will today consider what to do about a member of Parliament found guilty of misconduct after a bizarre airport incident. Madang Governor and regional MP Jim Kas has pleaded guilty to charges relating to the incident in February, 1998. Mr Kas arrived at Madang airport to see the plane he was to fly on taxiing away. Slightly the worse for drink, he ordered his police driver to drive onto the runway and block the aircraft's take-off run, so Mr Kas could board the aircraft. Lawyers for Mr Kas and the public prosecutor will make submissions today on an appropriate penalty. The tribunal has the power to order that Mr Kas lose his seat in Parliament."

" After three days of competition, the United States has begun to take charge of the medal table. Another two gold to the USA in the pool last night lifted its tally to six gold, five silver and two bronze. France, with four gold and a total of 12 medals, and China, with four gold and 10 medals, have both slipped past Australia. Australia has three gold, five silver and five bronze. One of those bronze came when Australian Maria Pekli took third in the 57-kilogram judo competition. It is the first medal for Australia in the sport since 1964. The Australian women's basketball and softball teams both recorded their second wins from as many matches overnight. In basketball, the Opals defeated Brazil 81-70 while the softball team recorded a convincing 7-0 win over Italy. The Australian women's volleyball team lost to Brazil 3-0. Meanwhile, Dutchman Pieter van den Hoogenband has predicted he can go faster after winning the 200 metres freestyle final in world record time last night. Australia's Ian Thorpe had to settle for the silver medal. Thorpe was a clear favourite to win the race two days ago but when van den Hoogenband came out and broke Thorpe's world record in the semis, a serious challenger had arrived. The Dutchman says he blocked Thorpe out of his race plan for the final. ""I was not really looking at him and thinking about him,"" he said. ""I wanted to swim my own race."" It was another good night for the United States, with Lenny Krayzelburg winning the 100 backstroke from Australia's Matt Welsh. The US's Megan Quann took the 100 breast stroke, with 15-year-old Australian Liesel Jones second. Romanian Diana Mocanu won the women's 100 backstroke. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The spectre of inflation has loomed larger overnight, with a further rise in world oil prices and another slide by the Australian dollar. Another night, another record low for the friendless Australian dollar, which is still hostage to the slumping euro. The local currency has been trading as low as 54.08 US cents. Last Friday, Prime Minister John Howard acknowledged the weak dollar posed a threat to inflation and interest rates. Head of foreign exchange and commodities at Tricom Futures, Jonathan Barrett, says its decline remains a puzzle. ""Recent data has proved that the economy is solid and that essentially the currency should be appreciating,"" he said. Meanwhile, oil prices have shot up to post-Gulf War highs. ""Crude oil for delivery in October rose above the $37 a barrel,"" Mr Barrett added. With Iraq claiming Kuwait has been stealing its oil, markets are worried about disruptions to supply against a backdrop of high demand. ----------------------------------------------------------------"

" Foreign Minister Alexander Downer says Indonesia has offered specific commitments to disarm militias on the Timorese border within an undisclosed time frame. After talks in New York this morning, Mr Downer was positive about assurances being offered by Indonesia's representatives, but said implementation would be the real test. ""We have made the point to the Indonesians that we do believe it important that there is a timetable, not just a general commitment in principle to do something about the militias but some timetable,"" he said. ""And they are indicating to us that there will indeed be a rather specific timetable. So we obviously would welcome that."" The Minister also met with United Nations secretary general Kofi Annan to discuss the recent violence in West Timor, where three UN aid workers were killed in mob violence. In Jakarta, US Secretary of Defence William Cohen has warned Indonesia it faces diplomatic isolation if it does not control the militias. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The orphaned daughter of Michael Hutchence and Paula Yates, four-year-old Tiger Lily, has been placed in the temporary care of Paula Yates' ex-husband, Sir Bob Geldof. The child has been made a ward of the court, with a ruling that she should for the present, stay with Sir Bob and her three half-sisters, Fifi Trixibelle, Peaches and Pixie. If Paula Yates left no will, it will be up to the British courts to decide who will have permanent custody of Tiger Lily. In another development, Scotland Yard police say an initial post-mortem examination of the body of 40-year-old Paula Yates proved inconclusive. An inquest into her death on the weekend will be opened tomorrow in London. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A key consumer group says Telstra should be released from price caps on local calls in metropolitan areas. The Federal Government has ordered the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission to review current price controls, with public hearings set for November. The Telecommunications Users Group says price controls should remain for line rentals, and to ensure regional and city customers pay around the same price for local calls. But spokesman Allan Horsley says excessive controls could inhibit Telstra. ""In urban Australia today, there's fairly substantial competition in local calls, with call prices being as low as 15 to 17 cents,"" he said. ""And I guess what the Minister is saying 'the market has moved, there's many more competitors in the marketplace, let's review the situation to see whether a price cap is still justified'."" ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Prime Minister's announcement of an inquiry into laws on charities has prompted fears for their tax-exempt status. Mr Howard says he is honouring a commitment to the Democrats to review the definition of what constitutes a charity. But the nation's biggest not-for-profit health and aged care group says Mr Howard should first reveal his agenda for such services. Catholic Health Australia's Francis Sullivan says instead, there is a review that will not examine the effect of recent tax reforms like the goods and services tax. ""What we have here now is an inquiry which if the full extent of the terms of reference are taken will mean that some church and charitable organisations will find their tax-exempt status at risk,"" he said. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Red Cross is establishing contingency plans in case Australia's health ministers accept advice to ban up to 30,000 people from donating blood. The group includes people living in Britain for more than six months in the 80s and early 90s. New Scottish research published in the medical journal <i>The Lancet</i> indicates a form of Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease can be transmitted by blood. Australian Red Cross director of blood products Dr Brendan Wylie says a ban would be in the national interest, but at a cost. ""We'd lose about 5 per cent of our current donations and about 25 to 30,000 blood donations,"" Dr Wylie said. ""It would be a decision made of extreme caution, enabling Australia to maintain the safest blood supply in the world."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Philippine military has begun its fourth day pursuit of Abu Sayyaf kidnappers, apparently no closer to finding 19 local and foreign hostages held captive by the rebels. Military sources have said that up to eight of the Islamic guerillas have been killed, while the Philippines' Defence Minister has admitted that four civilians have also died. Reports filtering out of Jolo island, the scene of the fighting, say many civilians fleeing the violence are unable to get food or medical aid because of a military cordon. In nearby Zamboanga, Dr Nelsa Amin is preparing to treat more casualties. ""I am expecting that there will be more casualites,"" Dr Amin said. ""I hope there will be a ceasefire in order that we can penetrate those areas where there are some patients who cannot go to the hospital."""

" The Romanian Olympic team has offered to pay a $US50,000 fine to allow its weightlifting team to compete in the Sydney Games. All Romanian weightlifters were banned from the Games by the International Weightlifting Federation, after three members recorded positive results from pre-Olympics testing this year. The International Weightlifting Federation will meet this morning to decide whether to accept the Romanians' offer to pay the fine. If the federation agrees, the three Romanian weightlifters who have not tested positive will be allowed to compete. Meanwhile, Australia's Ian Thorpe and Dutch swimmer Pieter van den Hoogenband have set the scene for an epic showdown in tonight's final of the 200 metres freestyle. After yesterday admitting he did not expect to come close to challenging the Australian for the gold medal, van den Hoogenband last night broke Thorpe's world record. The Dutch swimmer completed his semifinal in 1:45.35 to eclipse the record of 1:45.51 Thorpe set at the Australian trials in May. In the second semi, Thorpe powered through the final 100m but could not get the record back, finishing in 1:45.37. ""I was surprised, I didn't expect to swim so fast,"" van den Hoogenband said. ""I wanted to break 1:46."" But his euphoria did not see him revise his evaluation of Thorpe, who broke the world record in winning the 400m free gold on Saturday night and anchored Australia's world record-setting 4 x 100m freestyle relay. ""It'll be a great final but I don't think the world record will last that long,"" van den Hoogenband said. ""Hopefully one day."" Van den Hoogenband's Dutch compatriot, Inge de Bruijn, also set the pool alight last night, breaking the world record while claiming gold in the 100m butterfly. The United States now tops the medal tally heading into day three of Olympic competition. The US has 11 medals, including four gold. Australia is second, with three gold, two silver and four bronze, after good performances in shooting and cycling on day two. Fifteen gold medals will be decided today. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The spotlight remains today on the Australian dollar. The currency is trading quietly this morning after new lows at the weekend. While the world's athletes are going faster, higher, stronger at the Sydney Olympics, the dollar is anything but. In New York trade at the weekend, it fell to 54.4 US cents, a level never before seen against the American greenback. Traders today will be watching to see how the Olympic Games affects trading volumes. In terms of direction, local economic data virtually dries up for the next fortnight, leaving the dollar to ride developments offshore. A meeting of the seven leading industrialised nations, the G7, will take place in Prague this Sunday against the backdrop of a euro that has been described by the vice-president of the European Central Bank as ""dangerously undervalued"". Just before 8:00am AEDT, the Australian dollar was being quoted for about 54.58 US cents. Although above the weekend's lows, it is still down more than four-tenths of a cent on where it closed locally on Friday. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" An injunction expires today which is preventing the Australian Federal Police using information gained during a weekend raid on a Labor staff member. Labor is furious at the early morning raid on Philip Dorling, an adviser to its Foreign Affairs spokesman, Laurie Brereton. The raid was one of a series conducted at the weekend as part of an investigation into leaks last year of top secret defence documents on East Timor. Mr Brereton used media reports of the leaks to attack Federal Government policy. Labor says the raid is intimidation. It is considering complaining to the speaker that parliamentary privilege has been breached and it won an injunction preventing the police using the notes made during the raid. That expires today and the Opposition is taking more legal advice about its next move. It is understood that as well as the raids on the weekend, police have warrants to search media outlets that reported the leak. Mr Dorling, a former Foreign Affairs Department employee, will not comment. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Police in London expect to know within 24-hours what caused the death of Paula Yates, who has been found dead at her home in London. The British TV personality had a high-profile relationship with Australian rock singer Michael Hutchence up until the time of his death in a Sydney hotel in 1997. Ms Yates, who had been deeply depressed after the death of Mr Hutchence, said in one interview she was starting to rebuild her life. Neighbours said she and Mr Hutchence's daughter, four-year-old Heavenly Hiraani Tiger Lily, appeared very happy. She leaves three other children by her marriage to Sir Bob Geldof, which ended in an acrimonious divorce. He said today ""we're all so sad, the loss for the children is insupportable"". He appealed for her death to be treated with dignity. Ms Yates' former solicitor said her family were ""absolutely devastated"". ""What is of paramount importance is that her children are being looked after and they are being cared for very well at the moment,"" he said. ""I would ask, if not emplore, that they be allowed dignity and peace in her death."" Police say the death is suspicious, although there was no sign of violence. They are awaiting the results of a post-mortem examination. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Government soldiers in the Philippines are today set to spend a third day searching for Islamic rebels and their hostages, who have vanished into remote jungles on the southern island of Jolo. None of the captives, an American, two Frenchmen, three Malaysians and 13 Filipinos, have been seen since the military launched its assault on Saturday. The Philippines Government says it is certain that none of the hostages have been harmed and President Joseph Estrada says their safety is a top priority. President Estrada has ordered troops to crush the rebels and to rescue the hostages. Government soldiers on the weekend killed six gunmen from the Abu Sayyaf group and captured 20 others during the operation. However, the rebels have withdrawn into the jungle and no hostages have yet been rescued despite two days of military action. The Philippines' Armed Forces Chief of Staff, General Angelo Reyes, said none of the hostages were injured during the operation. ""All of the hostages from all reports, are alive. There have been no reports from within to indicate that any of them have been casualties,"" he said. French President Jacques Chirac has expressed his concern for the two French hostages, saying their safety remains an absolute priority. The French Foreign Ministry says it is in constant contact with Philippine authorities. It says it has been advised that the two French hostages are no longer in the camp that the Army raided. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australia has joined an international anti-smoking campaign aimed at teenage girls. It is based on an American program promoted through soccer. The US campaign has been running for about six years and has seen a drop in the smoking take-up rate among younger teenage girls, one of the few groups in which smoking is actually rising. The Matildas women's soccer side is behind the new campaign. Player Amy Taylor says peer group pressure encourages girls into smoking. ""I'm lucky, I had bigger things to hope for and to dream for, and to achieve things like that, smoking doesn't help,"" she said. The Federal Health Minister, Dr Michael Wooldridge, says in sports mad Australia, the campaign is well suited. ""Having people like Amy willing to be a role model, then we'll have some success in what's been a very difficult bunch of people,"" he said. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Blood donations from people who visited Britain during the outbreak of mad cow disease may be banned after a woman in Britain passed on the disease to her unborn baby before she died. Federal Health Minister Dr Michael Woolridge will ask the states and territories to impose the ban which is already in place in the US, Austria and New Zealand. Dr Woolridge wants the ban as a precaution only and agrees the risk is minimal. ""I think that with the blood supply we should be as precautionary as possible and I would think it wise if people who had a potential exposure to CJD [Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease] were excluded from the blood supply,"" he said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australia's Garry McCoy, riding a Yamaha, has won the 500cc race in the Valencia motorcycling Grand Prix meeting. McCoy came home ahead of American Kenny Roberts Jnr, riding a Suzuki, and the Yamaha of Italy's Max Biaggi. But with his second place, Roberts increased his lead in the world standings to 66 points ahead of Valentino Rossi of Italy and now looks set to emulate his father who won world titles in 1978, 1979 and 1980. ""I am absolutely delighted,"" said McCoy. ""I think that Kenny and Rossi were thinking about the championship and it was hard for them to really fight it out with me as they didn't want to risk losing the title."" Starting from the front row, McCoy got his nose in front early in the race with a daring move on a track notorious for difficult overtaking. It was his third victory of the season, and second in a row after winning two weeks ago in Portugal."

" Those lucky enough to get a ticket to the opening ceremony have begun arriving at Sydney Olympic Park. The transport links which have come under fire over the past week appear to be running smoothly. ""People appear to have taken SOCOG's advice and arrived early. The main Olympic Boulevard is already a sea of excited ticket holders. Over the next couple of hours, 110,000 of them and another 20,000 performers and backstage crew will converge on the stadium, most of them via rail. At its peak there will be 24 trains an hour, 25,000 passengers passing through the station and then through security checks. The remainder are coming by bus on 13 routes from across the metropolitan area. The stars of the show, the athletes, are being shuffled from their village to a holding area outside the stadium until their grand entrance and that of the Olympic torch later tonight. ------------------------------"

" The drug controversy has returned to haunt Olympic organisers on the eve of the Games. The World Anti-Doping Authority says 2043 athletes have been subjected to out-of-competition urine tests since the beginning of the month and results for 1,800 have come back. Twenty have higher than normal levels of banned substances and will undergo further testing but the authority expects at least half will end up positive, resulting in the expulsion of those athletes. The new EPO blood tests are also having an effect, according to the Authority's chief, Barry McCaffrey. About 150 athletes have been tested for EPO. The identities of those who have returned elevated levels are not known. --------------------------------"

" The Prime Minister has backed the Reserve Bank's view that the Australian dollar is undervalued. Many analysts see the dollar's true value as around 60 US cents, given the strength of the domestic economy. But the currency remains near record low levels, trading today just above its all-time low of 54.83 US cents yesterday. Macquarie currency strategist, Jo Masters, says trading has been very light. ""Partly this is a reflection of a public holiday in Japan,"" Ms Masters said. ""But also domestic punters have got their eye both on the Olympic torch relay and awaiting the opening ceremony tonight, and that's taking some of the interest out of financial markets."" ------------------------------"

" The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) is warning businesses who fail to include the GST in advertised prices could find themselves in court. Not including the tax in an advertised price carries a penalty of up to $200,000 for businesses and $40,000 for individuals. But, despite the hefty fines, the ACCC is receiving a significant number of complaints relating to the breach. The consumer watchdog notes a number of examples where businesses have failed to advertise a GST inclusive rate, most notably on restaurant and cafe menus. ACCC chairman Professor Allan Fels says an American system, where the price on the bill differs to that advertised, should be avoided as it can mislead customers. Meanwhile, free information courses will be offered from next month to help small businesses complete their quarterly GST statements. By November, business activity statements must be lodged by all businesses who are registered for the GST. The pratical courses will be held in 90 locations nationwide. -------------------------------"

" Indonesia's Security Minister is to travel to New York at the weekend to brief the United Nations on its progress in controlling violence in West Timor. A United Nations spokesman says Bambang Yudhoyono will appear before the members of the Security Council on Monday. The visit follows strong criticism of Jakarta after the killing by pro-Indonesian militias of three international aid workers in Atambua last week. The two sides are locked in a row at the moment about Indonesia's decision not to cooperate with a planned UN mission to West Timor to investigate the deaths. --------------------------------"

" A coalition of Malaysian rights groups have urged Burma's military junta to lift all travel restrictions on opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi. A spokesman for the Voice of the Malaysian People says while they welcome her release from house arrest, it is not enough. He says the freedom to travel around the country is a fundamental liberty. Suu Kyi and other senior National League for Democracy members were placed under virtual house arrest on September 2 after they tried to attend a party meeting outside Rangoon. -------------------------------"

" Australia's new representative on the United Nations Human Rights committee has been elected in New York. Professor Ivan Shearer was elected in the first round of voting with support from 92 of the 137 participating countries. The Foreign Minister, Alexander Downer, says Professor Shearer's election reflects Australia's long standing record of support for the promotion and protection of human rights. He replaces Justice Elizabeth Evatt, who served two terms on the committee but was not renominated by the Federal Government. Justice Evatt has since warned that the Government's decision to downgrade its involvement with the UN is eroding the nation's international reputation. Mr Downer says Professor Shearer has a strong background in international law and currently occupies the challis chair of international law at Sydney University."

" The Sydney Harbour Bridge came to a standstill this morning with thousands of spectators crowding on to the roadway to see the passage of the Olympic torch. Thousands of people waving placards, cheering and clapping greeted the Olympic torch as it makes its final journey to the Olympic Stadium. In remarkable scenes, the Sydney Harbour Bridge was packed with people and traffic was at a standstill as golfer Greg Norman carried the Olympic torch. He then passed the torch to paralympian Louise Sauvage. One torchbearer was leaping with joy so much so that the torch went out twice and had to be relit from the mother flame being carried on another vehicle. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Prime Minister, John Howard, says the continuing fall in the value of the Australian dollar is surprising, but not a disaster. He says the dollar price does not reflect the fundamentals of the Australian economy, but is a result of the strength of the US currency. Mr Howard says that is proven by the fact the Australian dollar has not fallen against either the pound sterling or the euro and that all other major currencies are also low against the US dollar. He has told Melbourne's Southern Cross radio a low dollar is not all bad news. ""Exporters don't mind a weaker dollar...if it's sustained over a long period of time then it can flow through into import prices and into higher inflation,"" he said. ""It is having a bad effect on the price of petrol because world oil prices are in American dollars and when you see $US32 a barrel that's a lot more Australian a barrel."" At 9.00pm AEDT, the dollar was being quoted at 54.95 US cents. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" As petrol blockades in Britain begin to fade, much of Europe remains paralysed by protesting truck drivers angry at the rising cost of fuel. Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany have been hardest hit, but blockades now seem likely to appear in the Czech Republic, Ireland, Italy, Spain, Poland, Norway and Sweden. In Britain, most blockades are down and the tankers are running again, although shortages and disruptions are expected to last for days. In Belgian cities such as Brussels, roads were blocked for the fifth consecutive day, although a resolution is now in sight. There have been demonstrations in Germany and more are planned in at least six other European countries. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" One Nation MP David Oldfield is to seek legal advice about what he calls an unconstitutional move to suspend him from his party's executive. Party president Pauline Hanson says the executive voted to suspend Mr Oldfield at a meeting in Sydney last night. Ms Hanson later said his involvement in the establishment of two new political parties was unacceptable. Mr Oldfield is vowing to challenge the suspension vote, saying it is not valid and breaches party rules. ""The rules are there to protect the members, the rules are there to make sure that the dictatorial attitude that has been occurring now cannot be successful,"" he said. ""Basically if you disagree with Pauline on anything, sooner or later she will get rid of you and she's using the excuse of the other party situation to remove me from the national executive,"" he said. ""It is all about Pauline Hanson having absolute control and complete power in the party One Nation."" --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" For the first time, a Russian investigator has conceded that a torpedo from a Russian warship sank the Kursk nuclear submarine in the Barents sea. Sergei Zhekov, a member of the Russian Parliamentary Commission investigating the submarine theory, says friendly fire during naval exercises in the Barents Sea sank the Kursk. He says five torpedoes were fired at the Kursk from the Russian warship 'The Peter the Great' during the drill but only four were recovered. If true, this would mean that the vessel, which sank the Kursk, then went on to be the key Russian rescue ship. The Kremlin flatly denies this embarassing version of events, maintaining that the Kursk sank after colliding with another vessel, though there is little evidence to support this. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" South African President Thabo Mbeki says terrorists who have detonated a number of bombs in Cape Town are threatening to plunge the nation into civil war. Mr Mbeki says the Government will allocate extra funds to the police and the courts. He says increased security will also be provided for judges. Mr Mbeki has made the promise after the funeral of murdered Cape Town Magistrate Pieter Theron. Mr Theron was assassinated outside his home last week. President Mbeki says the shooting and a series of bombings are open terrorism. Mr Mbeki says the attacks threaten to destabilise the democratic order in South Africa. He says those responsible for the violence have taken the law into their own hands. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" United States President Bill Clinton is set to make the first visit to Vietnam by an American leader since the end of the Vietnam War 25 years ago. President Clinton has told Vietnamese leaders he will visit their country in November after the US election in one of his final foreign tours as US leader. The trip could generate controversy in America since Mr Clinton has been accused of avoiding military service in the Vietnam War. A White House spokesman says the Mr Clinton has long wanted to visit the country that helped define his generation. The Vietnam War cost the lives of 58,000 Americans and three million Vietnamese. The last sitting US President to visit the country was Richard Nixon, who travelled to Saigon in 1969."

" International investors are continuing to desert the Australian currency market. That has pushed the Australian dollar to another new record low. The dollar was down to 54.9 US today, and dealers are reluctant to pick its low-point, even short-term. Around 5.00pm AEDT, the dollar had slipped even further to a new all-time low of around 54.85 US cents. In the past month, the currency has lost 7 per cent against the greenback, and 4 per cent against the yen. The Federal Opposition leader, Kim Beazley has again laid partial blame with Australia's ""old economy"" image, saying the Government has failed to encourage high-tech development. A key proponent of this view, Zurich Group economist David Hale points to Finland, another small country that has produced Nokia, a listed giant with a market worth three times the country's GDP. ---------------------------------"

" Four time Olympic Gold medallist Dawn Fraser says for the good of her own health she is trying to keep her excitement and emotions in check. Tonight Ms Fraser is running a leg of the Torch Relay through central Sydney, before meeting one of her sporting idols, Muhammad Ali. Tomorrow she will accompany International Olympic Committee President Juan Antonio Samaranch to the Opening Ceremony, march with the Australian team and possibly light the Olympic cauldron. Ms Fraser's last Olympic campaign, as a team liaison officer, was interrupted by a spell in an Atlanta Hospital following an angina attack . ""My resting heart-rate is normally about 32. ""It's about 160 at the moment, but it is pumping. ""The excitement has certainly hit me, I've tried to keep it on a nice even level because I had that angina attack in Atlanta. ""The last four years I've tried to keep myself on a nice even keel,"" she said. -----------------------------------"

" One of Australia's boxing competitors at the Sydney Olympics has failed to make the weight and will not compete at the Games. Bradley Hore from New South Wales was to have fought in the 48 kilo division but was ruled out after this morning's official weigh-in. One other overseas athlete was also ruled out for coming in under his weight division. Hore will remain with the Australian team during the Games. ---------------------------------"

" Protesters injured at the World Economic Forum are gathering evidence for possible legal action against police. Protest organisers say they are still gathering evidence against police, with 500 hours of video tape logged so far. Lawyer Marcus Clayton says officers clearly used excessive force during two baton attacks on Tuesday, when protesters were standing or sitting in front of the entrance to the casino. He says claims by Deputy Police Commissioner Neil O'Laughlin that police were provoked do not carry any legal weight. ""Provocation isn't a defence to an assault, if someone provokes you you're not entitled to hit them,"" Mr Clayton said. ""If someone provokes you, eggs you on at the pub, you're not entitled to lay them out, the police are in no legally different position."" ---------------------------------"

" Money is continuing to pour out of the Australian market with the Australian dollar seemingly unable to halt the flow. The currency has been as low as 54.85 US cents late this afternoon, another new record on constant but fairly orderly selling from Asia and Europe. It is now at 54.92 US, down six-tenths of a cent on this morning, having dropped 7 per cent against the greenback in the past month. Dealers are reluctant to pick its low-point, even in the short-term. On the cross-rates, the dollar is at 39.03 sterling, 58.83 yen and 1.251 marks. It is worth 1.315 New Zealand dollars, 0.639 euros and at 50.9 on the trade weighted index. The local sharemarket has closed slightly higher, the All Ordinaries index up nearly nine points to 3,294. That followed mixed trading on Wall Street last night, the Dow Jones down 51 to 11,182, but the Nasdaq up 44 to 3,893. At home, trading was quiet, with all eyes seemingly focussed on sporting pursuits about to commence in Sydney. But heavyweights News Corporation and Telstra contributed to the gains, News Corp up 25 to 25.45, Telstra, up 15 to 6.23. BHP has continued a recent good run, up 37 to $21.08. Domain-name registrar Melbourne IT, plunged 24 cents to 2.75 on the resignation of its long-standing chief executive, Peter Gerrand. The stock was over $8 just three weeks ago before disappointing half-year profit results and a bearish earnings outlook. Insurer HIH Insurance plunged 29 per cent to a record low of just 58 cents, investors unimpressed with a deal that will see Germany's Allianz AG take a majority stake in a retail joint venture. Major banks were mixed, the National down 22 to 24.84, the Commonwealth, down 15 to 27.49, but Westpac, up 12 to 12.95. Gold is fetching $US272.60 an ounce. ----------------------------------"

" The judges in the Suharto trial have ordered the former Indonesian president to be brought to court on September 28. They ordered the prosecutors to gather a team of doctors to carry out a ""comprehensive medical examination"" and that the results be presented to the court at the next hearing. Independent doctors have agreed the 79-year-old is unfit to face questioning. Suharto failed to show up in court today for the resumption of the case. When the trial began a fortnight ago, Suharto's lawyers argued their client was too sick to appear in court. Today his team of doctors presented evidence to back up that arguement. But independent doctors also confirmed the former president's frail condition. Doctors produced cat-scan and magnetic resonance imaging of Suharto's skull. There was evidence that three strokes have damaged some of Suharto's brain cells. Defence lawyers argue he is unable to understand questions and cannot talk clearly. The judge says that even if Suharto does not appear in court there is enough evidence for the case to continue. --------------------------------"

" New South Wales One Nation MP David Oldfield has been suspended from the party's national executive. The move to suspend him was made by party leader Pauline Hanson, after he and former One Nation adviser David Ettridge registered two new political parties. The motion to suspend Mr Oldfield was carried three in favor, with one abstaining. Mr Oldfield registered his vote against the motion by walking out. Miss Hanson says Mr Oldfield has not been thrown out of the party, only suspended with no set-time period. ""I am sorry that it has actually come to this,"" Miss Hanson said. ""But David's actions have been unacceptable, not only to myself and the national executive, but to the majority of members and every state president throughout the country has given me their full support."" -----------------------------------"

" A Supreme Court Judge in Perth has reserved his decision on whether art critic Robert Hughes should be ordered to stand trial again on dangerous driving charges. Western Australian prosecutors today appealed against a decision by a Broome Magistrate earlier this year to dismiss two charges against Mr Hughes. The charges arose from a near-fatal crash south of Broome last year in which Mr Hughes was critically injured and two people travelling in another car were seriously hurt. It has been alleged Mr Hughes had been driving on the wrong side of the road, but the magistrate ruled that there was not enough evidence to prove the prosecution case. Justice Jeffrey Miller says he hopes to hand down his decision within the next fortnight."

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" Former Indonesian president Suharto has failed to show up in court for the resumption of his trial on charges of corruption. Suharto's doctors argue the 79-year-old former leader is unfit to face questioning. It is the second hearing day and the second time Suharto has not appeared. It was left to Suharto's doctors to explain why their patient was too sick to face questioning. A team of doctors produced cat-scan and magnetic resonance imaging of Suharto's skull as evidence that three strokes have damaged some of Suharto's brain cells. Defence lawyers argue he is unable to understand questions and cannot talk clearly. But he faces charges of funnelling more than $1 billion in public money meant for charities into accounts held by his family and business cronies. The judge says that even if Suharto does not appear in court there is enough evidence for the case to continue. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

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" Malaysia's national airline is continuing talks with Qantas about the sale of a stake to the Australian airline. Malaysia's Transport Minister has quashed reports of an impasse in the negotiations, saying the talks are ongoing. In July, Qantas was set to buy a 20 per cent stake in Malaysia Airlines, but that deal fell through for undisclosed reasons. Malaysia Airlines reported a net loss in the year to March of more than $100 million. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Another $72 million is to be spent on fixing two more of the faulty Collins Class submarines built in Adelaide. The Federal Government says work on the first two submarines earmarked for upgrades last December is progressing well and <i>HMAS Farncomb</i> and <i>Rankin</i> are to undergo the same noise and reliability modifications. The Government says it remains committed to ensuring all six submarines are cleared for full operational service. Federal Industry Minister Senator Nick Minchin has dismissed reports that there is a push within Government to abandon two of the submarines for the sake of cost-cutting. ""That's news to me, we have six submarines,"" Mr Minchin said. ""The sixth one is about to be completed. ""Part of this program will go to ensuring this submarine is upgraded while it is being built. ""We will have six first-class submarines which are a great tribute to the workers at the submarine corporation."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Solomon Island's Government has paid members of one of the country's two warring ethnic militias more than $180,000 to go home. The Malaita Eagle Force and rogue elements of the paramilitary staged a coup in June which led to the resignation of the Prime Minister. The Solomon Islands Government has handed over more than half a million Solomon Islands dollars to encourage members of the Malaita Eagle Force to go back to their villages on Malaita island. The exercise has included chartering a boat. The Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation quotes a government spokesman as saying the payments show the Sogavare Government's willingness to repatriate members of the MEF. On Tuesday, MEF members, frustrated with delays in their promised payments, fired guns into the air outside the Ministry of National Unity, Reconciliation and Peace. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The bodies of 15 people have so far been recovered from the basement of the Jakarta Stock Exchange building after a powerful car bomb explosion. Police say they are questioning five people in connection with the blast. An explosion in an underground carpark sent hundreds of stock exchange workers fleeing in panic. ""We were on the 15th floor and then there was an alarm and they evacuated the building,"" stock exchange worker Paul Adams said. Fires raged for several hours after the blast, with billowing black smoke pouring from ground level air vents. Jakarta's chief of detectives, Harry Montalalu, says the attack might be linked to the resumption of a corruption trial of former president Suharto. There has been fears that attempts to bring the former general to trial could spark a violent backlash from his supporters. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" Prominent forecasting firm Access Economics says the Australian dollar could remain weak for longer than generally expected. The nation's latest measure of economic growth yesterday triggered a slump in the currency to all-time lows. The Australian economy is expanding at a normally impressive annual rate of 4.7 per cent, but growth in the final quarter was about half the rate that markets had been anticipating. Consequently, the dollar was sent spiralling down to an all-time low of 55.20 US cents amid reports of possible Reserve Bank activity in the market. In its September <i>Economics Monitor</i>, Access Economics says a rebound in the dollar could be delayed. After a quiet night, with no further sign of Reserve Bank intervention, the dollar is trading this morning at 55.44 US cents. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The British Army has been put on standby as the country's petrol crisis deepens. Prime Minister Tony Blair is threatening to use troops to break the blockade of petrol refineries by truck drivers across the country. Army petrol tankers are being moved around Britain so they are in a position to provide fuel from Ministry of Defence stocks if the British Government decides it is necessary. The Army has its own fuel distribution system with considerable fuel stocks stored around the country. A Ministry of Defence spokeswoman described the move as a ""precautionary measure"". Mr Blair has expressed his determination to break blockades around oil refineries by truckers and farmers who are campaigning for a big cut in fuel taxes. Protests are also continuing across Europe, with many parts of the continent suffering from protests at high fuel prices. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" More than 600 people are expected to be interviewed as part of an RAAF inquiry into health problems experienced by air force personnel who worked on resealing the fuel tanks of F1-11 aircraft. The inquiry covers workers required to climb inside the fuel tanks to carry out re-sealing work over a period of more than 25 years. Many of those workers have reported health problems ranging from cancer to recurring headaches and gastro-intestinal problems. Senior Counsel assisting the inquiry, Mike Burnett, says the inquiry will not deal with the issue of compensation, but their work may ultimately help people with their claims. He says the inquiry will hold public hearings early next year, but it is already making a difference with procedures. ""The events have had an immediate effect in that the air force has reviewed the respray program and as we talk now a new respray program is about to commence,"" he said. ""It's expected that the new processes will ensure that the crews that are employed to go into the fuel tank will be able to do so in a state of absolute safety."" --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australian Olympic officials are keeping quiet about who will light the Olympic Cauldron at the Games opening tomorrow night. SOCOG officials say the decision has not been finalised and could be made as late as Friday morning. With less than two days before the torch makes it way to the Olympic Stadium, New South Wales Olympics Minister Michael Knight and Australian Olympic Committee president John Coates are yet to decide who will have the final honour of taking the torch and lighting the Olympic cauldron. Mr Knight told Channel Seven they are in no hurry to make the decision. ""Well maybe late tonight, maybe tomorrow morning, it's a matter of when we can get together,"" he said. He says he is confident whoever is chosen will not reject a late offer. The second opening ceremony dress rehersal was held last night and was widely applauded by those who attended. Mr Knight says the real ceremony will be very special and very Australian. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A former United States nuclear scientist has been freed by a judge who has described his imprisonment as an ""embarrassment to the nation"". Wen Ho Lee had pleaded not guilty to 59 charges related to the selling of US weapons secrets to China. After being described as a national security threat and kept in solitary confinement for nine months, Wen Ho Lee has been freed by a US district court judge who described the imprisonment as unfair, and apologised to the nuclear scientist. Dr Lee was fired from the Los Alamos national laboratory and charged with 59 counts of illegally copying the ""crown jewels"" of US nuclear secrets. After the Government case of spying against Dr Lee crumbled, he agree to plead guilty to one count of downloading secrets to a non-secure computer, but said he never intended harm to the US and never passed nuclear secrets to China. Judge James Parker says the case has embarrassed the entire nation. Dr Lee says he is glad his ordeal is over and he now plans to enjoy his freedom. ""The next few days I'm going fishing,"" he said. The Taiwanese-born scientist's supporters say Dr Lee was targeted because of his race. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Cambodia's capital, Phnom Penh, is bracing itself for heavy flooding this weekend as water levels in the Mekong River continue to rise. The floods, which are the worst Cambodia has seen in decades, have already claimed 82 lives. A state of emergency has been declared in Phnom Penh and three other provinces. Thousands of soldiers and police have been utilised to help fortify the Mekong's banks with sandbags. The water level in the Mekong is expected to reach 11.2 metres, which is enough to see the river burst its banks. But worse is expected to come next week with Cambodia's national committee for disaster management claiming the river could peak at 11.44 metres next week. Boats and helicopters are being prepared to begin evacuations. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" A late goal has given Italy victory over Australia in last night's men's Olympic soccer fixture played at the MCG. Andrea Pirlo scored with just five minutes remaining to down the Olyroos 1-0. The Australian women's team, the Matildas, also had a disappointing start to their Olympic campaign, losing to Germany 3-0 earlier in the night. In other matches, the United States and the Czech Republic drew 2-2, Honduras drew with reigning Olympic champions Nigeria 3-3 and Cameroon defeated Kuwait 3-2. In other women's fixtures, Brazil downed Sweden 2-0."

" The Australian economy has continued its strong growth. The Australian dollar fell to a new low after today's figures were released, but recovered to 55.45 US cents a short time ago. The economy expanded by 0.7 per cent in the June quarter and 4.7 per cent for the year. The Treasurer, Peter Costello, points out it is the 13th consecutive quarter that growth has stayed above four per cent. ""We have the prospects to reduce unemployment further, the task for the Australian economy is to continue the strong non-inflationary growth,"" Mr Costello said. But the Opposition Treasury Spokesman, Simon Crean, says the growth is being driven by consumption, not investment. ""The Government has failed to use the opportunities of strong growth to reinvest in the nation's future,"" Mr Crean said. The solid growth was well below finance market expectations which drove the dollar to a record low at 55.25 US cents. The Chamber of Commerce and Industry says the growth figure should warn the Reserve Bank to leave interest rates on hold. The chamber says trying to cool an already slowing economy may be the worst possible policy approach. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Indonesia has promised to send food to tens of thousands of refugees in West Timor who are without international aid. A senior government minister says rice and other food supplies will be sent to the Indonesian-controlled province to feed both refugees from East Timor and local people. The departure of foreign aid agencies, following the death of three United Nations staff last week, has raised fears of food shortages among the refugees. Meanwhile, the Indonesian Red Cross says its staff in West Timor are too afraid to distribute food to refugees because the militias are threatening local aid workers. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The New South Wales fire brigade says the chemical which sparked an emergency at Sydney's international airport was a strong commercial cleaning agent. A brigade spokesman says gas detectors picked up ammonium hydroxide in the immigration area of the departure lounge. The New South Wales ambulance service originally thought the chemical involved was sulphur dioxide. The service says a total of 30 people have now been taken to hospital for check-ups. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Treasurer says Australia is not interested in adopting a new, common currency with New Zealand. New Zealand's Prime Minister has supported the idea of a currency union and Australia's Reserve Bank Governor says Australia would cooperate. But Mr Costello says it would be up to New Zealand to adopt the Australian dollar. ""We're not interested in any new currency, any third currency,"" he said. ""We are happy with our monetary arrangements and we intend to keep them. ""If somebody came along and said 'we would like to adopt your currency and your monetary arrangements', we would look at it."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australian scientists have warned that the Kyoto protocol targets to cut greenhouse gas emissions will do little to stop global warming. Graeme Pearman from the CSIRO says stabilising carbon dioxide in the atmosphere at double pre-industrial levels would require lowering emissions for every country immediately. Dr Pearman says carbon dioxide levels are already 70 per cent higher than 200 years ago. He says on current predictions, temperatures will rise between two and five degrees within the next century. Dr Pearman says the Kyoto agreement targets developing countries and that is not enough to stop the dramatic climate change. ""To stabilise these concentrations we need to emit a lot less of this gas than we were,"" he said. ""It also says that to stabilise at only 100 per cent above pre-industrial levels then we have to do that by slowing emissions almost immediately."" The Kyoto protocol allows countries like Australia to continue to increase emissions, although at a slower rate. Dr Pearman says that is not enough to stop further climate change. ""If the Kyoto protocol was agreed and ratified and adhered to tomorrow, it would actually have not a lot of impact on these stabilisations,"" he said. ""You are really have to make substantial reductions of the emissions globally, not just in the developed country in order to achieve that kind of outcome."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The largest ever corruption scandal in China has made its long awaited debut in court. The case involves billions of dollars and hundreds of government officials. Tight security surrounds court proceedings in the Fujian provincial city of Xiamen, the centre of a case under investigation for nearly two years. Media access is limited and foreigners are barred, but local papers say 200 people will stand trial. A number of former high-ranking officials are facing the death penalty for their role in the smuggling racket, which saw police, customs and local governments bribed to allow billions of dollars in goods to evade taxes. The case is also being seen as a test of the central Government's resolve to tackle corruption that involves party members. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australian actress Rachel Ward has carried the Olympic flame through West Pymble in Sydney's north. The torch is making its way to Macquarie Park at Macquarie University where it will be welcomed by thousands of people. Earlier David Campese carried the flame and said not even Australia's rugby World Cup win could match the moment. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Police have successfully bypassed protesters to move busloads of delegates into the Melbourne venue for the World Economic Forum. Hundreds of police pushed aside about 40 protesters near the Clarendon Street entrance to Crown Casino, the forum venue. Most of the anti-globalisation protesters were blockading an access point on the other side of the complex, which police had used yesterday to move delegates in and out of the forum. One of the protesters, Nick, says he and his colleagues were hopelessly outnumbered by police involved in this morning's baton charge. ""I saw a woman about 40 that went down and people were just screaming to let her out, let her up... just general people getting hurt, a lot of screaming, a lot of young people going down,"" he said. However, Police Minister Andre Haermeyer says police have shown great restraint after being pelted with marbles, ball bearings, urine-filled containers and other missiles. He rejects claims that police have used pressure point or strongarm tactics. ""When you have a situation where police have got to clear access to enable people to get in and out of the building to stop them being falsely imprisoned, then sometimes those sorts of situations will occur where police will have to behave in a way that is a little bit forceful,"" he said. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Strong economic growth figures are being viewed as a potential trigger for an official interest rate increase, even before the next board meeting of the Reserve Bank. The national accounts could be pivotal for market thinking when they are released later this morning. From quarter to quarter continuously for almost 10 years, the Australian economy has been expanding. On Monday night, Reserve Bank Governor Ian Macfarlane told the World Economic Forum that growth had averaged 4.1 per cent per annum. Today's national accounts for the June quarter are generally expected to show an annual growth rate of more than 5 per cent, underpinned by Australia's export performance, investment, consumption, company profits and employment. Macquarie Bank currency strategist Jo Masters says markets will focus closely on the data. ""There is some thinking in financial markets that a very strong GDP data release today could see the Reserve Bank of Australia raising rates before their next meeting on October 3,"" she said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Indonesia says it will not cooperate with a United Nations Security Council team arriving in Jakarta next week to investigate the deaths of three foreign aid workers in West Timor. The Indonesian Defence Minister, Mohammad Mafud, says they will refuse to meet the delegation because Indonesia already has its own programs in place. He says Indonesia is a sovereign country and will not accept any foreign intervention in its affairs. The UN Security Council voted to send a delegation to Jakarta when it unanimously condemned last week's murders of three foreign staff of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. The aid workers were killed by pro-Indonesian militamen in the West Timor border town of Atambua. Foreign diplomats say the mission was to convey a strong message to Jakarta to disarm and disban the militias. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Europe continues to suffer a wave of protest action against the rising cost of fuel, as the price of crude oil stays at near record levels. Truck drivers in Belgium have blocked the centre of Brussels, while protests have also occurred in Germany, Italy and France. Britain has been worst hit, with petrol stocks running out as truck drivers blockade oil refineries for a sixth day. British Prime Minister Tony Blair has vowed to restore supplies within 24 hours. Police have now been instructed to ensure tanker drivers have free access to their refineries, and Mr Blair has told the big oil companies he expects them to resume normal deliveries immediately. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Typhoon-powered storms killed six people as floods forced thousands from their homes, triggered mudslides and halted production at Japan's biggest car company, Toyota Motor Company. Waters nearly reached the tip of signposts in one tree-lined avenue that was turned into a muddy-brown river in Nagoya, the main city of the worst-hit Aichi prefecture in Japan's industrial heartland. Firemen used small metallic boats to evacuate families who sheltered under plastic sheets. Of the six killed, three drowned and three were buried in mudslides, local government officials say. A total of 765 army troops were sent in to help. ""The personnel are rescuing people trapped in houses, ferrying them over the water in boats and piling sandbags on riverbanks,"" said a spokesman for the Ground Self-Defence Forces. Toyota, which has its biggest plant in Nagoya, stopped output as floods hit 13 of its 15 plants and delayed shipments. Typhoon Saomai, packing winds of up to 162 kilometers-per-hour, reached the southern island of Okinawa late Tuesday, the Meteorological Agency says. All air and sea links with Okinawa are suspended. Japan Airlines, Nippon Airways and Japan Air System cancelled 197 flights. Local authorities ordered 180,000 residents to evacuate in the Aichi area. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The CSIRO says it believes that increasing the amount of protein in food could help people with a weight problem. Nutrition scientist Peter Clifton has told a conference in Adelaide that the number of obese in Australia has doubled in the last 10 years, with more young people experiencing weight problems. Dr Clifton says the only diet which has been positively shown to enhance weight loss is a high-protein diet, which is difficult to maintain. He says if the food industry reduced the energy-density of processed food, it would help people lose weight. ""I also suggested adding more protein because a high protein level tends to make you feel fuller, so you stop eating sooner, and don't need to eat for longer, and the amount of energy needed to metabolise the protein is higher so you have to use up more energy to deal with that meal,"" he said. ------------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australia will today host its first Olympic sporting event in 44 years, with play to start in Canberra and Melbourne in men's and women's soccer. After a $20 million upgrade and a rushed re-laying of the troubled turf, a sell-out crowd of 23,000 people will watch this evening's football matches at Canberra's Bruce Stadium. The Australian women's team, the Matildas, will launch the nation's Olympic campaign in its match against Germany. A locally-designed opening ceremony, featuring 1,500 school students, will follow before the men's match between the United States and the Czech Republic. The MCG is sold out for opening night, with the Olyroos and Italy launching the men's competition, after the women of Brazil and Sweden have kicked the dew off the turf, which was laid just nine days ago. Melbourne's spring rains are tipped to dry up today, providing the perfect setting for an Olympic return to the stadium that remains synonymous with the ""friendly Games"". Soccer matches also begin tonight in Brisbane and Adelaide. In Adelaide, defending Olympic champions, Nigeria, take on Honduras. Nigeria became the first African team to win a major football tournament, when it beat Argentina for gold in Atlanta, while Honduras has qualified for the Olympics for the first time. In Brisbane, Cameroon play Kuwait. Cameroon is regarded as a medal contender after defeating Nigeria to be named best African team this year."

" Delegates to the World Economic Forum are being advised not to venture into the streets, despite more subdued protests outside the forum today. Forum organisers are praising police for their tough handling of today's protests, which has allowed almost all 850 delegates to enter the venue safely. But WEF communications director Charles McLean is urging participants not to go outside, saying they are still being targeted by the crowd. ""It's unfortunate that there are some people who are still intimidating the folks, who are trying to come in and out,"" he said. ""I think in general those efforts have been unsuccessful today."" He says some delegates were harrassed by protesters when trying to arrive by boat this morning and while trying to leave the Casino at lunchtime. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Government has released secret documents showing Australia knew about Indonesia's 1975 plan to invade East Timor. Foreign Minister Alexander Downer has released the documents on Australia, Indonesia and East Timor in the period from 1974 to 1976. The 885-page book contains diplomatic cables and documents produced by the foreign affairs and prime minister's departments. The papers show senior Indonesian officials briefed Australia's embassy on every step of the evolving plan from the later months of 1974. One Indonesian General is quoted as saying a conversation between Australia's prime minister at the time, Gough Whitlam, and Indonesia's former president Suharto crystallised Jakarta's thinking. The General was quoted as saying the conversation took place in September 1974 and convinced Indonesia of the wisdom of incorporating East Timor. The documents show Australia had forewarning of an Indonesian attack on the town of Balibo in October 1975, in which five Australian journalists were killed. The Australian Embassy in Jakarta was given details of the timing and place of the attack three days earlier. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Two Australian soldiers have been injured in a road accident while on duty with the United Nations force in East Timor. The soldiers were hurt when their four-wheel-drive vehicle rolled near the West Timor border. A Black Hawk helicopter will fly one of the soldiers to Darwin for medical assessment of head injuries. The two soldiers were driving between Memo and Maliana when the 4WD rolled in loose gravel on the side of the road. An Army spokesman says the soldier with head injuries regained consciousness this morning, while the other soldier sustained hip injuries. They are being treated in the UN hospital in Dili. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Australian Gold Council has welcomed Treasurer Peter Costello's comments that the Australian mining industry is part of the new economy. The council's chief executive Greg Barns says the acknowledgement will foster more certainty in the gold sector. Despite figures released by the Department of Minerals and Energy which show a 9 per cent decrease in gold sales this year, Mr Barns believes the industry will continue to grow and create new investment and employment opportunites. He says 60 per cent of the world's mining computer software is developed in Australia. ""Australia is a very innovative nation when it comes to research and development,"" he said. ""There's an uptake of IT with a number of companies in Australia which have done some outstanding work in the mining software area. ""We are leaders in this field in particular a lot of that work has gone on in the gold sector."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Australian Democrats say comments by the Federal Employment Services Minister, Tony Abbott, have sent a terrible message to gay and lesbian people. Mr Abbott says church-run employment agencies who are members of the Government's Job Network should be allowed to not employ gay and lesbian staff. Mr Abbott was commenting on guidelines issued by the Human Rights Commission to ensure church organisations do not discriminate against non-religious people who apply for jobs. Democrat Senator Andrew Bartlett says Mr Abbott is giving the agencies a green-light to discriminate against gays and lesbians. ""If they're wanting to employ a priest or a spiritual counsellor in relation to religious instruction then that's fine,"" Senator Bartlett said. ""If it's a job that's being funded by the taxpayer to provide employment services to all Australians then they should be subject to the same rules as any other employer or agency,"" he said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" An Aboriginal woman who lost a test case over her care in two children's homes in the 1940s and 50s has lost an appeal on the decision. Joy Williams also failed to have the court agree she was a member of the Stolen Generations. Mrs Williams says she suffered a disturbed and unhappy childhood and later psychiatric illness, as a result of her time in two children's homes. In the original matter, New South Wales Supreme Court Justice Alan Abadee found Mrs Williams' mother had willingly surrendered her newborn child to the Aboriginal Welfare Board to give her a better chance. He also dismissed claims the state was negligent and responsible for her border-line personality disorder. The Court of Appeal in New South Wales this morning dismissed an appeal to that judgment. Justice John Heydon says while the matter is a very sad and very hard case, he found no reason to overturn the original decision. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The number of foreign visitors to Australia in the first seven months of the year is up 10 per cent on numbers that visited Australia last year. New Australian Bureau of Statistics figures show the 440,000 visitors to Australia, who arrived in July, took the total of short term arrivals in the year so far to 2.7 million people. New Zealand and Japan accounted for almost a third of all visitors, while both the United Kingdom and the United States each accounted for around 10 per cent of all visitors. Three-quarters of all visits were for holidays or to visit friends and family, with 10 per cent of visits being for business. New South Wales and Queensland are the most popular destinations. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Senior police have praised members of the force for keeping the peace, despite massive protests outside the World Economic Forum in Melbourne. Five police have been injured keeping thousands of protesters behind the barricades erected outside the entire Casino complex. Police have suffered eye, back and arm injuries while just one protester has been hurt. Deputy commissioner Neil O'Loughlin says police have achieved what they wanted to and has urged protesters to allow the forum to continue uninterrupted tomorrow, saying they have got their message across. ""I think it's been appauling that they've disrupted Melbourne as they have and they've tried to prevent this forum from going on,"" he said. He says only two people have been arrested despite some damage to property, including cars and buildings."

" Inside, WEF delegates from non-government organisations have supported protesters, warning that globalisation will kill democracy. It is one of the few anti-globalisation messages coming from inside the forum. Delegate Vandana Shiva from the Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Ecology says the forum must stop demonising the protesters. She has delivered a blunt message to the diplomatic and business leaders there about globalisation. ""It is actually spelling the death of democracy but we will not have peaceful protests, five years down the line, we will have absolute chaos."" But earlier sessions of the conference have been told that the force of globalisation are irrestible and will shape policy in years to come. Despite the massive changes underway, Goldman Sachs Asia is predicting the world economy will continue to grow strongly, with Asian economies likely to be the outstanding achievers."

" WEF communications director Charles McLean has described the day as difficult. ""We are very disappointed that some 150 to 200 of our participants have been stranded at their hotels and unable to join us at the Crown complex. ""That's an abridgement of their rights and it results from direct violations of the law,"" he said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The federal Treasurer, Peter Costello, says the Government is committed to its economic fiscal policy despite the Australian dollar's slide to near-record lows. Mr Costello has declined to comment specifically on the dollar's weakness, only to say the Government is watching it very carefully. The dollar is trading at about 55.7 US cents. Mr Costello says there are external factors beyond the Government's control. ""There are international factors that are influencing the Australian currency,"" he said. ""In particular, you have seen huge volitility on the US exchange rate and the euro. ""There are some trade imbalances between some of the major players in the world economy. ""That is affecting some of the other currencies in the region."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Queensland-based City-Country Alliance says it has preselected its first two candidates to contest seats in federal Parliament. Small businessman, Audi Geisler, from Ayr, will stand for the north Queensland seat of Dawson, and Bowen businessman, Laurie O'Regan, will stand for the Senate. The City-Country Alliance was formed after the internal collapse of the One Nation party. Sitting Queensland Parliamentarian, Jeff Knuth, says the party is in the process of preselection in Queensland, and hopes to field candidates in other states. ""At this stage we'll possibly stand for around about 10 to 15 [seats],"" he said. ""We're not just going unfettered. ""We're not going to run against politicians we believe that are doing the right job, and some politicians are doing a good job, we're looking at politicians individually."" The Alliance believes it can win two or three Federal seats. Mr Knuth says the preselection process is underway in Queensland, Western Australia, South Australia and Victoria. ""There are 12 Senators in Queensland that are up for, I think, there will be six, in the next election,"" he said. ""We will possibly stand, you know, for all of them, try and run all of them, of course, but if we can [win] just one or two we will be happy."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Police say it could take at least another week to formally identify the eight people killed in last Tuesday's plane crash in Queensland's Gulf country. The Beechcraft Super King Air 200 carrying seven fly-in mine employees and a pilot went down on a property 60 kilometres south-east of Burketown, after the aircraft flew on auto-pilot across three States. Investigators believe there was a problem with the cabin's pressurisation, and suggest the eight people on board became unconscious 30 minutes after the aircraft took off from Perth. Post mortem examinations began in Brisbane last Friday. Air safety experts are still at the crash site on Wernadinga Station and will spend the rest of the day piecing together wreckage. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" International Olympic Committee president Juan Antonio Samaranch has questioned whether there are too many media personnel covering the Olympics in Sydney. He says there are more than 20,000 media representatives, mainly from television and radio. Mr Samaranch says he wants a detailed look at whether the Games can continue to cope with such a large media contingent. ""I am asking the presidents of the press commission and television commission to meet together and begin to study the danger of this increase of numbers of the mass media,"" he said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" An Adelaide study has found that a diet rich in B group vitamins may improve memory capacity and planning ability. Around 211 women, aged between 20 and 92, who took part in the study were given either folate, B-12, or B-6 to take over a 5 week period. The findings will be presented at the CSIRO Food Industry Conference this week. Study co-ordinator Dr Janet Bryan from the CSIRO says taking B vitamins had the most noticable effect on young women. ""We did find an improvement in memory performance for the middle age group who took B6 and also for memory for the older women, who took folate, so the effects were mainly seen for memory performance,"" she said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The S11 Alliance claims thousands of trade unionists will join protests at the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Melbourne today. Scuffles broke out last night as police tried to escort forum delegates through the protest blockade. Most delegates were able to attend the forum, but David Glanz of the S11 Alliance says its protests were enormously successful and will be swelled even further today by unionists. Police have labelled the behaviour of protesters as appalling and they have appealed again for peaceful demonstrations, and say steps will be taken to ensure delegates get into the forum safely today. Protesters aligned with the S11 group have rejected calls by senior Victorian police to stay away from the forum during the coming days. One of the activists, Jasmine Saloman, says the blockade will continue. ""I don't think we've made our point unless we get approached and get some recognition from delegates within the WEF, that they actually listen to us,"" she said. ""They say it's a public forum, that this is getting together and talking about the kind of issues that we're pushing, but we don't get any you know real sense of that."" Only one small section of Crown Casino will be open to the public today after the Victorian and Gaming Authority closed down the complex last night. Crown management says the authority shut down operations because of concerns about the dangers of getting staff in and out of the building. The casino says its too early to start counting the cost of the forum and the S11 protests. A spokesman for Crown Casino, Gary O'Neill, says it is clear the casino and its tenant retailers have already lost a substantial amount of revenue during the past two days. Mr O'Neill says Crown Casino has yet to decide whether it will compensate businesses within the complex. ""Immediately after the forum we will have some better idea as to...how much revenue the whole exercise has cost us, but I really don't think we will have an idea until a week or so,"" he said."

" The Prime Minister has talked up the Australian economy during a speech to international delegates at the World Economic Forum in Melbourne. He has told the audience the nation's economy is performing better than it has at any time for more than 30 years. Mr Howard has also described as a myth the belief that the poor would be better off if globalisation were brought to an end. And he said those protesting against the forum should realise the benefits of globalisation. ""The great irony of the fact that a gathering such as this should be the target of demonstration from people who believe it is attacking the living standards and the aspirations of the poor, is that indeed the reverse is the case,"" he said."

" World oil prices remain stubbornly high. Traders look to be putting little faith in the latest OPEC production increases. On the New York Mercantile Exchange there has been frenzied buying that has seen key contracts for West Texas crude approaching $US36 a barrel. Just before 8:00am AEDT, the benchmark price had settled back but was still over $35 a barrel. After OPEC ministers agreed at the weekend to raise production by 800,000 barrels per day there was some hope petrol prices might eventually start to ease at the pump. However, Treasurer Peter Costello said yesterday it was too early to tell what the impact would be, and overnight trade would indicate the markets remain worried about a cold northern winter and depleted stocks of crude in the United States. Continuing high prices will put pressure on inflation and could ultimately curb economic activity."

" A senior basketball official in Hong Kong, Carl Ching, says he will sue the Australian Government for stopping him from attending the Olympic Games in Sydney. Mr Ching is well-known in Hong Kong as a developer and sports administrator, and weekend news reports quoted him denying past or present links with triad gangs and organised crime. Even though the International Olympic Committee has now effectively given up on the case, the man who is a vice-president of the International Basketball Federation is maintaining his offer of a reward to anyone who can prove he is a criminal. Mr Ching is to outline his defence at a Hong Kong press conference, and will call on Australia to overturn its ruling."

" Indonesian prosecutors have questioned two military commanders about their alleged role in last year's militia attacks in East Timor. The men are the first of 18 suspects, including Generals and Government officials, accused of involvment in the violence. State investigators spent several hours questioning a former East Timorese military commander and a lieutenant colonel who was the regional head of the army's feared intelligence task force. Also questioned was the former local government head in the East Timorese town of Suai. Nineteen suspects were named, but one, a former militia leader, was brutally murdered last week. Another militia leader was not named as a suspect, raising sharp criticism from international human rights groups."

" Four gunmen who robbed a diving resort in eastern Malaysia are thought to be heading for the southern Philippines. Three Malaysians have been taken hostage by the gunmen. For the second time in five months the security of Malaysia's tourism industry has been proven vulnerable by boat-riding gunmen. All but one of the 21 hostages taken from Sipadan Island in April have been released but now three more hostages have been taken from the nearby island of Pandanan. The gunmen and their hostages are believed to be heading towards the southern Philippines island group of Tawi-Tawi just south of the island of Jolo where the Abu Sayyaf kidnapping gang are based. On the weekend four European hostages were released by Abu Sayyaf, which is now engaged in the deadly struggle over ransom money allegedly paid by Libyan negotiators."

" Chinese police are said to have made several arrests in connection with a smuggling ring, responsible for the deaths of 58 Chinese nationals trying to enter Britain. British detectives have been barred from talking to the victims' relatives. Investigators from Kent police have been in China trying to identify some of those who suffocated inside the shipping container found on the Dover wharf in June. Fujian security officials refused them access to the families, citing cultural and language barriers, and instead acted as go-betweens on identification and DNA sampling. One officer said every victim had been identified. The British team says the Chinese side spoke of making several arrests in connection with the case, including some of the ringleaders behind the operation."

" The Australian men's basketball team has had a solid final hit-out before the Olympics, scoring an eight-point win over Lithuania in Wollongong last night. Australia won 88-80, after trailing by two points at half time. In last night's women's match, France defeated Canada by 22 points. Tonight, the Australian women's team plays its final match before the Games, also in Wollongong."

" The first clashes have occurred between police and protesters at the World Economic Forum in Melbourne. Bus loads of security guards and delegates have been turned away by protesters at the Crown Casino complex. The clashes occurred when protesters blocked vehicles from entering. Several protesters suffered minor injuries as mounted police forced the protesters back. One protester blamed police for starting the clashes. ""Well, we were guarding the exit and then we looked behind us and there was a row of dozens and dozens of police walking toward us, so we turned around and linked arms,"" she said. Reinforcements have now arrived at the entrance to tighten security. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" International Olympic Committee (IOC) president Juan Antonio Samaranch has declared problems between the IOC and the Howard Government finished. The announcement on Friday that two Olympic officials were banned from entering Australia angered the IOC. A letter of explanation from the Prime Minister has effectively silenced the criticism from the IOC. Mr Samaranch says he is now relaxed about the decision. ""The comment is that we get the letter from (your) Prime Minister, we accept his letter and for us this problem is over is finished,"" he said. It has also been announced that North and South Korea will march together into the opening ceremony under a common traditional flag. However, the teams will still compete separately. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Organisation of Oil Producing Export countries (OPEC) has agreed to an increase of 800,000 barrels per day, after a meeting in Vienna. The Algerian Oil Minister says the figure had been agreed at the meeting ahead of a formal session of OPEC later in the day. The production increase will take place on October 1 OPEC has been under intense pressure to help ease soaring crude prices that have sparked worldwide concern. OPEC is set to meet again in November to discuss the impact of the rise on the oil markets. Analysts seem divided over whether the increase will be enough to reduce oil prices, with some saying prices could remain around $US30 a barrel, or even increase in the northern hemisphere winter. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" In East Timor, security measures have been increased following last week's murder of three UN workers in neighbouring West Timor. Close to the border, Australian soldiers contributing to the UN mission in East Timor have erected a new 24-hour road block. It is designed to prevent the movement of militiamen and their weapons. The military and UN agencies are currently devising contingency plans in the belief that a mass exodus of refugees could come across the border within the next 10 days. Indonesia has been placed under increasing pressure to take action against East Timorese militiamen accused of murdering three UN workers and conducting a wave of terror in West Timor. UN officials say if the Indonesian military does not take action to disarm and disable East Timorese militia, it may lead to a mass exodus across the border to East Timor. With food and medicine running low, East Timorese refugees in camps inside West Timor want the international aid workers who were evacuated following the murders to come back. But the United Nations refugee agency says aid workers will not return until all pro-Indonesia militias are disbanded. The evacuation meant cutting off supplies of food and medicine to more than 100,000 refugees inside West Timor's camps. At one squalid camp on the outskirts of West Timor's capital, Kupang, refugees say there is only enough food to last three days. In another camp nearby, refugees have eaten the last of their reserve staples of sago and cassava and face starvation. The Indonesian Government has promised to send more than 100,000 kilograms of rice, but it has not yet arrived. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" At least 17 armed rebels and one British soldier have been killed during a hostage rescue mission conducted by British paratroopers in Sierra Leone. The British troops safely rescued six colleagues and a Sierra Leonean soldier who had been abducted by rebels. The rebel group, the West Side Boys, took the hostages more than two weeks ago. It released five of its captives five days later, but further negotiations broke down. The British Ministry of Defence says the West Side Boys were threatening to kill the remaining hostages. The hostages have now been rescued. At least 17 members of the West Side Boys were killed during the operation and the leader of the group was captured. But the Ministry of Defence has confirmed that one British soldier also lost his life and another was seriously wounded. The mission took place at the rebel's headquarters, 40 kilometres east of the capital, Freetown. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A Defence Force board of inquiry begins its investigation in Darwin today into the death of a soldier in East Timor last month. Corporal Stuart MacMillan Jones was based with Two Cavalry Regiment in Darwin. Corporal Jones was serving in East Timor with the Australian contingent of the United Nations' peacekeeping force. He died after being shot by a rifle which accidentally discharged. The four-member board of inquiry will be led by Colonel Wayne Bowen, head of the Army Promotion Training Centre in Queensland. The Commander of the Australian Theatre, Air Vice-Marshall Bob Treloar, says he is confident the board will thoroughly investigate the circumstances to establish the cause of the discharge so the force can ""move swiftly"" to guard against any recurrence. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The longest Olympic torch relay in history makes its arrival in Sydney this afternoon. The torch is travelling north through the Illawarra, on the NSW south coast this morning. A crowd of 50,000 is expected to line the streets of Wollongong to welcome the torch, and Wollongong Council workers have been given an hour-and-a-half off to take in the spectacle. The torch finally enters the Sydney's city limits at Waterfall in southern Sydney about 3:30pm AEDT, after passing through Penrith a week ago. Blind athlete John Ansell carries the torch, while former rugby league player Adam Ritson, former Olympian Michelle Ford and local hero Andrew Ettingshausen also take their turn as the torch passes through Sutherland and Wooloware. Long distance swimmer Susie Maroney then lights the cauldron at Tonkin Park in Cronulla to kick off the first evening celebration in the Olympic city. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Russian tennis player Marat Safin has won his first grand slam title, blasting Pete Sampras off the court in the United States Open. Safin won in straight sets 6-4, 6-3, 6-3. It took Safin only about an hour-and-a-half to beat the defending champion."

" More than 1,000 people have been forced to flee West Timor in the wake of militia violence. Indonesian military sources have confirmed a wave of destruction which followed the deaths of three UN workers earlier this week. Indonesian military sources say East Timorese militiamen have continued their rampage, two border villages and killing 11 people. Since the UN's departure, militiamen have been hunting down relatives of UN workers. In the village of Besikama 70 houses have been burnt, with more than 1,000 West Timorese displaced. In the nearby village, a further 70 houses are believed to have been destroyed and 100 cattle slaughtered. Last night, the UN completed its pull out from Indonesian West Timor. More than 400 staff have been evacuated over the past few days."

" With aid workers now out of West Timor after a fatal militia attack on a United Nations office on Wednesday, Indonesia's Human rights Commission has called for witness protection. That includes protection for the notorious militia leader, Eurico Gueterres. A member of the Commission claims such figures are in danger because of the testimonies they could give in court, linking the actions of the militia in East Timor last year - and now in West Timor - with high ranking Indonesian military officers. Investigators believe evidence about bloody militia violence carried out by men like Eurico Gueterres is so sensitive that it could implicate some of Indonesia's military generals in ordering the attacks. Under questioning by a Human Rights Commission member H.S. Dylan, Eurico Gueterres has revealed he may be in danger. The call for witness protection follows a claim by Foreign Minister, Alexander Downer that Gueterres was actively involved in leading the militias in West Timor and was clearly one of those involved in leading the assault on the UN office in Atambua. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The United Nations' Security Council has stepped up calls for Indonesia to disarm the militias in West Timor. East Timorese leaders meanwhile say Indonesia must seek outside help, if it can't control the violence in its territory. The Security Council went into formal session this morning before issuing the condemnation of the violence on East Timor's borders, which saw three UN aid workers killed this week. The statement calls for Indonesia to take additional steps to disarm the militias, saying relief workers could not return until a credible guarantee of security could be given. Also taking the message to Indonesia next week will be US Defence Secretary, William Cohen. Mr Cohen will tell President Wahid during a trip to Jakarta that international goodwill is at risk. Meanwhile, in a statement issued in New York today, East Timorese leader Xanana Gusmao and Jose Ramos Horta said Indonesia must seek help from its neighbours if it is unable to restore order in West Timor. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Australian Olympic Committee President John Coates says all the relevant groups were informed for some time over the possible banning of two sporting officials from entering the country. International Olympic Committee President Juan Antonio Samaranch is seeking an explanation from Prime Minister John Howard, after Uzbekistan's Gafur Rakhimov and an un-named Hong Kong official were denied visas. Mr Coates says SOCOG Chief Executive Sandy Hollway had been keeping people up-to-date and he feels the matter will end quickly once Mr Howard gives the full details to the IOC President. The Government has cited security reasons for the ban and Mr Coates says the IOC is only ensuring there are no other reasons behind the move. ""They're entitled just to ensure that the Games are not used for political purposes by any host government,"" he said. ""The are doing the right thing by checking that the reasons are valid."" The Prime Minister says a decision to ban two Olympic officials from entering Australia has his full support. Mr Howard says the Immigration Minister Phillip Ruddock has explained the reasons why the bans were imposed and that is the end of the matter. ""The minister has done precisely the right thing,"" he said. ""As he said the paramount consideration is the safety and the security of the Australian community. ""Mr Ruddock has done exactly the right thing and is quite consistent with the letter of the understanding concluded when Sydney won the bid a few years ago."""

" The French President Jaques Chirac has asked International Olympics Committee chief Juan Antonio Samaranch to ensure that French is spoken at the opening ceremony of the Sydney Olympics. The French are hopping mad. They had thought that for the first time in years French would reclaim its equal status with English as the official Olympic language. Francophones within the IOC have been working hard with SOCOG to ensure that French is prominently displayed on all official Olympic signs and brochures. After the linguistic disappointment of Lillehammer, Nagano and Atlanta where only English and the local language was used, Sydney was to be a return to tradition. But reports that the Governor-General plans to speak only English at the opening ceremony has changed all that. The French Foreign Ministry says the independence of the Games would be threatened if English was the only language used and President Chirac has now asked Mr Samaranch to try to convince Sir William Deane to speak French as planned. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" S-11 protesters are adamant next week's World Economic Forum will not turn violent. Unions and community groups say they will support the S-11 protest, in their fight against the effects of globalisation. Student rallies, and a blockade involving people linking arms, are planned during the three-day event. A spokesman for the S-11 Alliance, Steve Jolley, denies fears the protest will get out of hand. ""We do want to win, we do want to blockade, but we want to do it through force of numbers (so) that it becomes impossible for people to carry on with that meeting,"" Mr Jolley said. ""If we wanted to use violence we would use a bomb scare, that's not what we're about."" The Trades Hall Council says a blockade is not necessary, but supports any protest activities. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The National Party says it is keen to see quality current affairs programs on the ABC continue in the current climate of restructuring the organisation. Party leader, John Anderson, says there have been strong feelings about the importance of the ABC expressed at the party's Federal Council meeting in Canberra. The party wants to meet senior ABC management to discuss its concerns. Mr Anderson says programs such as the 7:30 Report provide an information lifeline to rural and regional Australia. ""It is seen as an important means of keeping people informed about current debates and issues of the day, which from time to time,do not get out into rural and regional areas or are the subject of sensationalism and spin that we do not think is particularly useful,"" he said. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" There have been further tributes paid to Bruce Gyngell, the man regarded as the father of Australian television, who has died after a battle with cancer. A 44-year career in television has ended with Bruce Gyngell's death at 71. The former head of three networks in Australia, and others in Britain was the first face on Australian TV in 1956. Prime Minister John Howard paid tribute to Mr Gyngell saying he contributed more to the industry than just about any other Australian. ""He was there right at the creation so to speak of television in Australia, and he contributed an enormous amount here and in Britain."" A UK friend, Mike Morris from Yorkshire Television says Mr Gyngell's management style was characterised by great enthusiasm. His pink shirts earned him the nickname, ""Pink Panther"". ""What he was saying was TV's a visual medium so when you switch on, let's have a warm picture to look at,"" Mr Morris said. Bruce Gyngell was awarded the Order of Australia and inducted to the Logies Hall of Fame this year. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Australian dollar appears to be over the worst of its recent volatility. The dollar has been trading steadily at around 56 US cents today, well above its record lows overnight. That figure, of 55.3 US cents, equalled the worst point of the Asian crisis for our dollar, in mid 1998. And it may have taken heavy Reserve Bank buying to rescue it, with more rumours in the market of central bank intervention. Deutsche Bank currency strategist Richard Yetsenga says another factor may have stopped the selling. ""There is an important finance ministers meeting in Europe this weekend. ""The market is cautious that they may talk up the euro, so that should tend to benefit the Aussie dollar,"" he said. Conversely, he says failure to act on the euro would prompt another slide and potentially take our dollar to new all-time lows next week. Around 4:30pm AEDT, the currency was worth just on 56 US cents, down only slightly on yesterday's close. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The United Nations says there are reports that militia have killed another 20 people in West Timor. The southern town of Bitauni appears to be the most recent target of militia violence. Aid groups in West Timor say militia have gone on a rampage in the south-east town of Bitauni. The town is the base of the militia group responsible for an earlier attack on a UN office in which three foreign aid workers were killed. The UN's Bernard Kerblat says there is several reports of people escaping the violence and as yet an unconfirmed report that 20 are dead. He says even Indonesia's military is describing Bitauni as insecure, which by its standards means the area is out of control. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The president of the International Olympic Committee has written to the Prime Minister asking why two Olympic officials have been denied entry to Australia. A senior member of the World Boxing Federation, Gafur Rachimov, from Uzbekistan, and another member of a national Olympic Committee have been stopped from entering Australia. The IOC says under Olympic rules, agreed to by a host city, Olympic accreditation serves as a visa to enter the host nation. The IOC will not confirm the identity of the two officials, but the IOC director-general, Francois Carrard, wants to know why the host city contract has not been honoured. ""We have asked for explanations as to the reasons to which the Australian Government has decided not to honour this commitment, we are working for explanations,"" he said. Mr Carrad says at the Atlanta Games some officials were initially denied entry to the United States but were later admitted. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The federal Employment Services Minister, Tony Abbott, has played down suggestions the former Liberal leader John Hewson is considering a return to politics. Newspaper reports today say Dr Hewson has been talking to Liberal Party colleagues about running again in the Sydney-based seat of Wentworth. Mr Abbott, a former political advisor to Dr Hewson, says the current Liberal Member for Wentworth, Andrew Thomson, is doing an excellent job. ""I used to work for John [Hewson] and I know from my experience he's a fine man. ""I think he made a unique and original contribution to Australian politics but that's quite a few years ago now. ""As far as I'm aware there are no likely vacancies coming up in the NSW Parliamentary team,"" Mr Abbott said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Australian Medical Association says improved communication between all government departments would go a long way to improving Aboriginal health. The AMA federal president Kerryn Phelps acknowledges more money needs to be spent but she says better co-ordination would also help. ""There's a need for the Commonwealth and the Territory to sit down and work it out,"" Ms Phelps said. ""I'm meeting with the Territory Health Minister this afternoon and I will certainly be putting this to him. ""You can't point the finger and say 'look it's your responsibility'. It's the whole Australian community's responsibility. ""Whichever layer of government and whichever department can best deliver the type of infrastructure these people need, just get on with it."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Nobel peace prize winner Nelson Mandela has declined to call for an apology to the Aboriginal people, saying it is up to Australians to make that decision. Mr Mandela has been the guest of honour at a lunch in Melbourne to celebrate the first ever World Reconciliation Day, the brainchild of a group of schoolboys. He says it is up to Aboriginal and white Australians to decide whether an apology for past injustices is necessary. ""I am not qualified to speak about the position in other countries. ""Whether there is going to be an apology or not is something that should be determined by the leaders of that country. ""In Australia, I have confidence in both population groups,"" he said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" There has been another chemical alert at Sydney airport involving vials of mushroom spores. Police and other emergency service teams were called to the mail handling room off Link Road at Mascot earlier this afternoon. Quarantine officials say 11 vials of the spores were found inside a plush toy whale. The vials are being examined by forensic experts. Similar vials were found in teddy bear toys yesterday. Officials say the spores pose no threat to humans. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The turmoil continues on global foreign exchange markets and the Australian dollar has equalled its all-time low against the American Greenback. Twice during the night the local currency got down to around 55.30 US cents. That is the level it slumped to two years ago at the height of the Asian financial crisis. Dealers say there have been reports of the Reserve Bank intervening in the market, firstly as the dollar slipped below 56 cents and then on its lows. Once more the Australian currency appears to have been a sideline casualty of the sliding euro. Dealers are now looking to a meeting this weekend of European finance ministers to pull a rabbit out of a hat. At about 8:30am AEDT, the dollar was at 55.90 US cents, down half a cent from yesterday's close but six-tenths of a cent above the night's low. On the cross-rates this morning, the dollar was at 0.6406 euros, 58.73 Japanese yen, 38.87 pence sterling and $NZ1.337. --------------------------------"

" Another Olympic athlete has tested positive for drugs. Czech weightlifter Zbynek Vacura was on his way to Sydney when told he tested positive for steroids. Earlier this week, a Canadian hammerthrower also returned a positve sample for steroids and a Canadian equestrian competitior was found with cocaine in his system. Twenty-seven Chinese athletes have been withdrawn after tests showed abnormal levels of the endurance-boosting drug EPO. The string of results has not surprised Australian Olympic Committee president John Coates. He has praised Customs for another incident in which it discovered two vials, one marked human growth hormone. The vials were found in the possession of a coach with the Uzbekistan team. ""If it is what is reported then that's wonderful, it means our Customs are doing their job and our Federal Government is to be congratulated,"" Mr Coates said. Customs hopes to confirm what was in the vials later today. If the official is charged, the International Olympic Committee will exclude him from involvement in the Games. --------------------------------"

" The bodies of three UN workers murdered in West Timor this week have been flown to Dili. The UN says their deaths are the worst tragedy to ever befall the United Nations High Commission for Refugees. The badly burnt bodies of the three UN workers murdered by a rampaging mob of militia members have now been retrieved. Their deaths led to a complete pull-out from West Timor. UN senior officials from the UNHCR's Geneva headquarters last night met with staff who had been evacuated from West Timor to Bali. It is believed officials met to contemplate not when they will return, but if they ever will. As the evacuation of international and locally engaged staff continued yesterday reports of further violence were recieved. UN officials say in one area, it is believed 70 houses were destroyed. It is feared the UN's departure may lead to further violence. --------------------------------"

" New South Wales One Nation MP David Oldfield has dismisssed suggestions that he should quit his party's national executive. One Nation leader Pauline Hanson says she will ask Mr Oldfield to step down from the executive and has questioned whether he should remain a party member because of his involvement in establishing a new party. She says she was not consulted about the move and has serious concerns about it. Mr Oldfield says he will not step down and will explain to the One Nation executive why plans for the new 'No GST Party' were kept secret. ""Bear in mind it wasn't just Pauline that wasn't consulted. There was an overall veil of secrecy with regards to this,"" he said. ""It wasn't like Pauline was on her own in this with not being consulted and the need to not consult under the circumstances of the secrecy required was paramount. ""I believe that's easily explained."" --------------------------------"

" Queensland is today facing its worst bushfire threat in years. Fire authorities are warning people to take extreme caution around bushland areas as a near extreme fire danger continues in the state's south-east today. Temperatures are already 10 degrees above average and fire brigades are preparing themselves for a busy day. Acting Senior Operations Coordinator Darryl King says thus far there have been no problems. ""There's numerous small fires burning at the moment and they're being controlled by crews,"" he said. ""One near Esk is still burning but it's inaccessible and it's being monitored by approxiamtely seven rural fire brigades, that does not pose a threat to homes and that's why the situtation has eased out there."""

" The State Government has revealed more than 95 per cent of the state is at serious risk from bushfires. Satellite maps show more than 95 per cent of the state, bone dry and at extreme risk. The maps show 75 per cent of the State has had little or no rain for months. The Queensland Fire and Rescue Authority (QFRA) admits it is nervous and concerned about the magnitude of the fire threat. It has set up a major incident room in Brisbane, to coordinate a united response, following thousands of bushfires in the past two weeks. In the lead-up to the school holidays from the end of next week, Emergency Services Minister Stephen Robertson has commissioned a blitz campaign to educate school children about consequences of deliberately lighting fires. During school holidays, the number of calls firefighters receive increases significantly and authorities say 80 to 90 per cent of the bushfires in south-east Queensland are believed to have been started by school children. The Government is asking all Queenslanders living near or in bushland to clean up their properties. Acting Chief Fire Commissioner, Mike Hall, says a good downpour of rain will ease the crisis. ""Certainly if it doesn't rain between now the school holidays and we do have adverse conditions, then i think we are in for a difficult time,"" he said. --------------------------------"

" A member of the Nigerian athletics team was killed in a road accident in Sydney last night. Nigerian officials have confirmed Olympic 400-metres runner Hyginus Anugo died in a crash. Police say the 22-year-old man was hit by a car in Hector Street at Sefton in the city's south-west around 9:00pm AEDT last night. The president of the Nigerian athletics association says Anugo was due to run in the 400-metres and was also a reserve for the relay team. Police spokesman Peter Rogers says it is believed Anugo was struck by the car while trying to cross the road. ""The 22-year-old man was believed to be crossing the road when he was struck by a north-bound Holden Torana near the intersection of Waldren Road,"" he said. The Nigerian Athletics Federation has expressed its deep regret after being informed of the accident by team's secretary in Sydney. --------------------------------"

" Colombian police have announced the discovery of a half-built submarine apparently commissioned by drug traffickers seeking new ways of getting cocaine to countries overseas. The submarine was under construction at a factory in the capital, Bogota, about 400 kilometres from the coast. Plans found with it show the submarine would have been 30 metres long when finished, and capable of carrying up to 200 tonnes of cocaine and a crew of 12. Leo Arreguin, who heads a branch of the United States Drug Enforcement Administration in Colombia, expressed astonishment at the discovery. In 32 years of police work, he said he had never seen anything like it. Colombian police have yet to make any arrests. --------------------------------"

" Sixth-seeded Marat Safin has survived a tough challenge from Nicolas Kiefer of Germany to advance to the semifinals of the US Open tennis championships. The 20-year-old Russian won in four sets. Safin will face either American Todd Martin or Swede Thomas Johansson. The Williams sisters have pulled out of US Open doubles semi-finals. Serena Williams informed tournament organisers that she cannot play on, after losing to Lindsay Davenport in yesterday's quarter-final. She is suffering from inflammation of the big toe joint on her left foot. No problem though for Lleyton Hewitt in the doubles, he and Max Mirnyi this morning advancing to the final. Meanwhile, Australia will begin next year's Davis Cup campaign at home in February. At the draw in New York this morning, Australia won the right to host the first round tie against Ecuador. --------------------------------"

" An Indonesian team investigating the killing of three UN personnel in West Timor has arrested 15 suspects. Coordinating Minister for Politics and Security Affairs Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono said ""the team of investigation has already begun work and 15 people have already been arrested and are being questioned"". Mr Yudhoyono also said one other person, suspected of having killed Olivio Mendosa Moruk has also been apprehended and that two local people were also killed in the violence. The decapitated body of Mr Moruk, 45, the leader of the Laksaur pro-Indonesia militia, was found near Atambua on Tuesday. The militia, who attacked the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) office in Atambua, split off from a group of hundreds of machete wielding people who had paraded through the streets of Atambua carrying Moruk's body. They torched the UNHCR office and several other buildings, attacked the staff with machetes and burned their bodies. Mr Yudhoyono, speaking after a coordination meeting at his office, could not give further details on the arrests. The foreign victims were identified as American Carlos Casaeres, Ethiopian Samson Aregaheyen and Croat Peril Simundze. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Senate has passed laws defining the Government's powers to send-in troops to deal with terrorists and civil disturbances. The legislation will be in force for next week's World Economic Forum meeting and for the Olympics. The bill sets out the circumstances in which the Commonwealth can deploy troops against security threats on Australian soil and the processes it needs to follow before and after the decision is made. The legislation also gives legal immunity to soldiers in the event they do kill someone. The Government and Opposition have combined to support the bill, arguing it does not extend existing informal powers for the military and that it includes plenty of safeguards. The Democrats, Greens and One Nation say the legislation leaves the way open for unprecedented use of the military in protests and industrial action. Senator Brown says it is a regrettable transfer of power to Government. ""The terror of this bill itself is that it is a bill that is wide open to abuse,"" he said. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Thousands of truck drivers and motorists expressed their anger at high petrol prices, at a rally outside the Western Australian Parliament today. The Motor Trades Association (MTA) executive director, Peter Fitzpatrick, says the rally was organised to send a clear message to the Federal and State Governments that WA motorists are fed up with being over taxed at the petrol pump. ""If we continue to have a rise in international oil prices and there are windfall gains through the GST then maybe the State Government might look at providing some sort of state subsidy,"" he said. The MTA is calling for a cut in Commonwealth fuel excise, a freeze on the indexation of fuel prices and the scrapping of world parity pricing."

" Ken Jackson employs eight drivers at his trucking company in High Wycombe and says he doubts whether the rally will have any impact on the Federal Government. ""Where's Howard? He's not even in the country to face these issues and I just think that's strange,"" Mr Jackson said. ""We're struggling now as it is, that's why I'm just disillusioned, I've come hear to listen to what they've got to say and take it from there,"" he said."

" The Opposition leader, Geoff Gallop, read the crowd a message from the Federal Labor leader Kim Beazley. ""Everybody in Australia now knows the GST has increased the price of petrol,"" Mr Gallop said. ""The only two people that won't admit it are John Howard and Peter Costello. ""We are determined to make John Howard pay the price for breaking his promise and we support you in your attempts to highlight the unfair burden this Federal Government has imposed."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Chinese Olympic Committee has released a statement explaining in more detail the withdrawal of athletes and team officials from the Sydney Games. The statement says the reduction in numbers is due to the injury of some athletes and a reduction of substitutes, but also some suspicious cases in blood tests. Twenty-seven Chinese athletes have been dropped from the Games. The number of officials also withdrawn has not been revealed but it is in the order of 13. At an International Olympic Committee briefing, board member Jacques Rogge has confirmed a member of the Uzbekistan team is being interviewed by customs officers about the importation of drugs. He says the team official may have his access to the Olympics cancelled if charges are laid. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The establishment of a new political party may cost David Oldfield his position on One Nation's national executive. Mr Oldfield and One Nation's former national director David Ettridge has applied to the Electoral Commission to register a ""No GST"" party. Mr Oldfield has rejected suggestions he plans to dump One Nation for the new party. But, One Nation leader Pauline Hanson is angry over the move and wants Mr Oldfield off the national executive. She has also questioned Mr Oldfield's future as a member of One Nation. ""To actually go out and set up another political party within Australia is of great concern to myself and the members of One Nation,"" Miss Hanson said. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The United Nations believes there are still aid workers hiding from militia in West Timor after yesterday's attack during which three United Nations staff were killed. A group evacuated last night to East Timor are anxiously awaiting their colleagues arrival. A group from Atambua's United Nations High Commission for Refugees kept close together at the back of their Dili headquarters today, talking to friends and relatives as they tried to come to grips with the brutal attack on their office in West Timor. Evacuations have also begun for 96 other UN staff and aid workers who spent last night in Atambua's Indonesian military barracks. But it is believed there is still other pinned down not only in Atambua but elsewhere in West Timor. The UN does not know how many remain but it has requested Indonesian military assistance in bringing them to safety. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The South African Government has announced it will release thousands of prisoners, to create more space in overcrowded jails. More than 18,000 inmates will be freed. The Government says it will only release prisoners charged with minor offences. More than 7,000 inmates will be granted early parole, another 11,000 awaiting trial will also be freed. The release program will begin next month. South Africa's prison system currently holds almost a quarter of a million inmates. The early release of minor offenders is expected to alleviate overcrowding and save money. The Government says the strategy is not an amnesty and that those charged with crimes will still be required to stand trial. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Australia's hopes of having a fit Michele Timms ready to lead the Opals basketball team at the Olympics have taken a blow. Timms says she is pessimistic about being able to play more than a peripheral role after undergoing knee surgery just eight weeks ago. Despite the absence of their skipper, the Opals beat France by 12 points last night in Adelaide, an important result given the French are in Australia's section of the Games draw. Tonight the Australians play Slovakia. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Preparations are underway in West Timor to evacuate a further 80 foreign aid workers after a fatal attack on a United Nations office yesterday. At least four people are now confirmed dead, three of them foreign aid workers, after a savage attack on the UN mission in the town of Atambua. Last night, more than 40 foreign aid workers were airlifted by UN peacekeepers to safety in East Timor. But there are fears a few staff may still be in hiding. Yesterday, a militia mob stoned the Atambua office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, then attacked workers and set the building alight. The bodies of three foreign aid workers were found in the burnt-out office. According to UN workers, another foreigner was dragged from a nearby hotel and burnt to death. Among the dead are believed to be United Nations workers from Croatia, South Africa and Fiji. This is the worst militia attack on foreign aid workers since the United Nations arrived last year to help repatriate tens of thousands of East Timorese refugees. -----------------------------------"

" Strongly rumoured intervention by the Reserve Bank yesterday looks to have paid dividends overnight for the Australian dollar. Despite a fresh onslaught against the European single currency, the Australian dollar has been relatively stable. It was left quietly on the sidelines as the euro dived 1.5 cents against the American Greenback. The euro has been to an all-time low of 86.87 US cents and was only just above that at about 7:30am AEDT. The Australian dollar has stayed comfortably above yesterday's post-Asian crisis low, with dealers expecting a Reserve Bank presence in the markets for the next couple of days. The central bank appeared to intervene yesterday when the dollar sank as low as 56.12 US cents, sparking an immediate move up of about 0.8 cents. After remaining in a very narrow range of one-fifth of a cent in New York trade, by 7:30am AEDT, the Australian dollar was at 56.52. Although that is well above its lows of yesterday, it is still down one-fifth of a cent on yesterday's close. On the cross-rates, the dollar was at 0.6493 euros, 59.86 Japanese yen, 39.27 pence sterling $NZ1.330. On Wall Street overnight, there has been a repeat of yesterday's broad trading patterns. High-tech stocks have been dumped while more traditional sectors of the market have held up reasonably well. Amid continuing concerns about the prospects for growth among computer-related companies, prices on the Nasdaq exchange have fallen more than 3 per cent. The Nasdaq composite index closed down 130 points at 4,013. But new figures indicating strong productivity levels in the US economy have pushed up the Dow Jones industrial average. It finished up about 50 points at 11,311. -----------------------------------"

" A judge in the United States has dealt a major blow to Internet music distributer MP3.com, finding it wilfully ignored the copyright of tracks offered on one of its services. MP3.com stands to lose at least $208 million or almost $45,000 for each compact disc. Music giant Seagrams Universal launched the action against MP3.com over a service called ""my-MP3"", which allowed users to listen to music files provided they could prove they owned the CD. But alleged loopholes in that protection and a lack of licensing agreements with copyright owners, left the company open to court action. Today's ruling that the violations were wilful increased the liability the online distributor faces, with a judge awarding nearly $45,000 per infringement. The next phase will determine how man violations occurred. Universal claims more more than 10,000 infringements, MP3.com says the number is less than half that. Its lawyers had argued during the trial that penalties in the range now likely would bankrupt the company. -----------------------------------"

" Customs officers have seized bullet-proof vest from members of Israel's Olympic team, but have allowed them to keep gun holsters because there are not an illegal import. Australian Police have repeatedly said foreign nationals carrying weapons at the Games will be prosecuted. The Israelis will not confirm the vests were theirs, but the team's media attache, Ronen Haillel, says all security measures for his team are undertaken with the cooperation of Australian authorities. ""We are not smuggling or something like that,"" he said. ""We came here to do our best in the sport."" -----------------------------------"

" Police in the Kenyan capital Nairobi have used tear gas to control a riot at a city market. Thousands of people attacked police after a fire swept through the market. Traders from the market claim an arsonist started the fire. Many of the traders lost all of their goods in the blaze. They then took to the streets. Police arrived to control the crowd, but they were attacked with rocks. At the height of the clashes, several main roads into the centre of Nairobi were blocked. Police then responded with tear gas, and used batons to disperse the angry market stall owners. The riot follows ongoing unrest in the capital. Escalating prices, cuts to water and electricity and the worst drought in 30 years are creating public frustration. -----------------------------------"

" The Olympic torch will leave the Australian Capital Territory this morning after passing through the hands of some 200 runners. The Govenor-General, Sir William Deane, will farewell the flame as it leaves Government House before 9:00am AEDT. It will then be run past numerous embassies, the old and new parliament houses and Lake Burley Griffin. Queanbeyan will welcome the flame before midday, before it continues on to Cooma and Thredbo. -----------------------------------"

" Just a few short years after watching on television as Pat Rafter performed his winning heroics at the US Open, Lleyton Hewitt will be taking the stage as a semi-finalist at the same venue. The 19-year-old booked in to the biggest Grand Slam date of his short, fast-rising career, destroying Frenchman Arnaud Clement, the man who knocked Andre Agassi out in the first-round, 6-2, 6-4, 6-3. Given his tender age, Hewitt's memories of Rafter's trophy runs in 1997 and 1998 are understandably hazy. ""I probably took more interest at that time because he was an Australian playing in the Open final,"" said Hewitt. ""It's tough to win two back-to-back matches in five-set tennis. ""I look up to Pat a lot, he's been a great champion and has done so much for Australian tennis. I think he's got a few great years left in him. ""He's definitely going to win a few more Grand Slams in my opinion. Obviously he's struggled this year."" Hewitt is the youngest man reach the New York semis since Pete Sampras a decade ago on the way to his first Grand Slam title. Hewitt will await the winner between Sampras and Richard Krajicek, the only active player with a positive record - six wins, three defeats - against the American. Hewitt has no complaints about his on-form game, which has improved with each match this summer on hard-court. ""Of course, I'm hitting the ball well. Apart from losing the first set of the tournament, I've won 15 sets on the trot now. Anyone through to the semis feels like they're giving themselves a chance."" Hewitt had a chance to take a break from sport on Tuesday night, when he met Australian Prime Minister John Howard at the Australian embassy. Mr Howard is in town for the UN Millennium summit this week. ""It was fantastic to know that his support is fully behind you, that you've got the nation in your corner as well,"" Hewitt said. -----------------------------------"

" Prime Minister John Howard has rejected claims that Australia is reducing its commitment to the United Nations. Mr Howard, who is in New York for the UN Millennium Summit, says those who believe the claims are being misled. Mr Howard says unlike other countries Australia has always paid its dues to the United Nations on time and has been an active participant in UN core activities, such as peacekeeping. He says those who say Australia is reducing its commitment to the UN are wrong. ""Australia on a per capita basis takes more refugees than any other country except Canada,"" he said. Australia is one of the very few countries in the world that continues to maintain a humanitarian refugee program of any significance."" Mr Howard says Australia has concerns with the way the UN human rights committees operate. For that reason it will not take part in the treaty signing ceremony tomorrow. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A round of pre-olympic drug testing by the Chinese team has produced a series of positive results that has resulted in their games squad cut by 40. International Olympic Committee vice-president Anita DeFrantz has welcomed the development. The reduction in the Chinese Olympic squad is across a range of sports including rowing. The surprise decision to not send so many athletes including in rowing's case a World Cup winner this year is being linked by Olympic insiders to the introduction of blood tests for the endurance enhancing drug EPO. Ms DeFrantz is surprised with the development. ""It greatly disappoints me and I'm glad they're not coming to the Games if they had been using performance enhancing drugs,"" she said. ""Do not come to the Games if you're not coming clean."" A full list of the Chinese athletes withrdrawn from the Games has not been released. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Aviation authorities have been urged to order the installation of audible alarms in all light planes to prevent tragedies like yesterday's north Queensland plane crash. It has been revealed Beechcraft King Air planes are one of the few that do not have audible warning systems to alert the pilot to cabin de-pressurisation. It is thought a lack of oxygen was the cause of yesterday's crash of a King Air plane which killed eight people near Burketown in Queensland's remote Gulf country. A recent inquiry by the Transportation Safety Board (ATSB) recommended the alarms be installed in all light planes. Bill Hamilton, from the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association, says the Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA) should ensure such alarms are mandatory. ""I would have thought in a case like this the right thing for CASA to do was to very seriously push for ATSB recommendations for a horn, it's the duty of CASA to make sure everybody knows about these problems,"" he said. Mr Hamilton says the problems caused by de-pressurisation can be countered but only if the pilot uses emergency oxygen supplies in time. ""It's an absolute defence to the hypoxia, the insidious onset."" ""However you have to know to put it on and it would appear that, I'm speculating once again, the warning systems failed. ""The effects of hypoxia could have overtaken them before the realised they needed to get the masks on. ""No ringing bells, no flashing lights, nothing dramatic to get their attention."" Meanwhile, police investigators and air safety experts today continue to examine the wreckage. Some victims have been identified. Teams of investigators from across the nation were flown to the crash site south-east of Burketown yesterday. Police and air experts will continue to examine the wreckage today to try and pinpoint the cause of the accident. A victim accident identification team is at the scene and will continue to examine the dead. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Australian dollar is again under pressure, dragged down by an embattled euro and awaiting the latest interest rate verdict from the Reserve Bank. At the same time, the central bank has revealed it almost intervened to prop up the currency in April and May this year. The Reserve Bank says it was so concerned about the slide in the currency during April and May it was getting ready to step into the markets to defend the dollar. The disclosure has come in the central bank's annual report tabled yesterday in Federal Parliament. In April and May, the dollar fell from a high of 61 US cents to bottom at 56.45. A half-cent drop overnight sees the currency only just above that level this morning at 56.95. Markets are awaiting what is expected to be confirmation later this morning that yesterday's board meeting at the Reserve Bank decided to leave interest rates on hold. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Inquiries continue into a police shooting in Sydney last night that left one man dead. Police fired a single shot at the driver of a car in King Street in the city. He was killed instantly. Police say they had followed the vehicle from Glebe where a check on it had found it to be stolen. The officers claim to have been advised that the occupants might have been armed. The dead man's identity has not been revealed. The passenger in the car is now under arrest and is assisting police with their inquiries. An independent inquiry has been set up and a brief is being prepared for the coroner. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Negotiations on Bougainville's political future continue later this morning in the northern Papua New Guinea town of Rabal. There is some hope an agreement can be reached on autonomy for Bougainville before the end of the week. Today is the third day of this critical round of negotiations between the Bougainville leaders and the Papue New Guinea Government. The Bougainville leadership arrived here on Monday full of frustration and anger at the government's slow progress. Some had been talking of a potential breakdown in negotiations. But the mood has improved, Bougainville Affairs Minister Sir Michael Somare has decided to stay on, cancelling a trip to Australia for the funeral of a former colonial administrator. His decision is being seen as a sign that some progress can be made and that an agreement could be reached by week's end. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Petrol rationing has been introduced in some areas of France as a blockade of oil refineries by truck drivers enters its third day. The drivers are protesting rising fuel prices. French truck drivers are bouyed by the success last week of French fishermen who won big government concessions after blockading French ports. The truck drivers, supported by some farmers, taxi drivers and private ambulance drivers want the government to deliver them similar compensation for the recent dramatic increases in the cost of fuel. A second day of talks between the government and union representatives ended without resolution but the French truckies have the suport of unions in neighbouring countries and there is a real fear that the dispute could soon spread across western Europe. The French Transport Minister says the European Union as a whole should exert concerted pressure on the oil producing countries to do more to lower the price of fuel at the next meeting of OPEC ministers in Vienna this weekend. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Sweden's Thomas Johansson has ousted big-serving Australian Wayne Arthurs from the US Open 6-4, 6-7, 6-3, 6-4, to reach the quarter-finals. Johansson, who won in 2:35 hours, will next face the winner of a late match between Carlos Moya of Spain and Todd Martin."

" The New South Wales Supreme Court has recognised the public humiliation of radio announcer, John Laws, during his prosecution and eventual criminal conviction for interviewing an ex-juror on-air in 1998. Justice James Wood found a 15-month suspended prison term and a good behaviour bond was an effective deterrent for Laws and others tempted to interfere with the jury system. Justice Wood said the most significant consequence for Laws lies in his public humiliation of having been placed on trial and his conviction which may potentially affect his employment, sponsorship contracts and his capacity to serve as a company director. Justice Wood said periodic detention was not suitable because there is no segregation of prisoners and Laws' high profile and well known stand on law and order jeopardised his safety. Home detention was also ruled out because the Court feared it would be lampooned by cartoonists, which would threaten respect for the law. Also Justice Wood said if given home detention, the Laws would still be able to maintain the comfortable lifestyle to which he is accustomed. Meanwhile the Law Society of New South Wales says the convicted broadcaster now has a Sword of Damocles hanging over him. The society's president, John North, says the suspended sentence might seem unfair to some people, but it is significant. ""The important thing to remember though is that although he was given a suspended sentence, the Sword of Damocles will be hanging over him every day because he runs the risk by being a radio personality - of committing a further offence during the 15 months,"" he said. ""That is a considerable risk and therefore it is not merely a slap on the wrist."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Authorities are securing the site of this morning's fatal aircrash in Queensland's remote Gulf of Carpentaria, in which eight people died. Investigators have started arriving at the remote location, 50 kilometres south-east of Burketown. The remoteness of the crash site is making investigations difficult, as officials take the long trip to north-west Queensland. Local police spent today sifting through scattered wreckage and performing the grisly task of identifying the bodies of those on board. Most were miners travelling from Perth to Western Australia's gold fields. The cabin of the plane is thought to have depressurised, causing it to fly on autopilot across three states before running out of fuel. It is an eerie scenario which local police inspector Jim Mackenzie likens to the crash which killed American golfer Payne Stewart. ""They thought it was absolutely unique when the Payne Stewart incident occurred and it seems at this point anyway, that this is almost an identical thing"" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Federal Opposition has reshuffled its front bench. Labor leader Kim Beazley has given Aboriginal Affairs to Bob McMullan - who is not aligned with a factional group. Labor's left, which has traditionally held the Aboriginal Affairs job, had been reluctant to take the portfolio this time. But Mr Beazley says five people wanted the job and Mr McMullan rejects the view that it is a poisoned chalice. ""I consider it an absolute honor and privilege to have the chance to deal with the greatest social justice issue of our generation, that's why I volunteered."" Carmen Lawrence has officially joined the front bench and will be Industry and Innovation spokeswoman. Mr Beazley expects the Government to attack her over the Marks Royal Commission, but says she will weather that and lead Labor's push for Australia to be a knowledge nation."

" The Federal Government has gone on the attack against the Opposition's new-look front bench. The Treasurer, Peter Costello, says business leaders will think it odd that Labor has left-wing members in charge of the Finance and Industry portfolios. ""This is our team, they say to the business community - two members of the Socialist Left and a trade union official. That'll be popular in the boardrooms. ""It'll be very popular. It will be as popular in the boardrooms as the rollback policy,"" he said. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Federal Government and the Opposition have combined in the Senate to pass a key amendment setting out the circumstances in which troops can be sent in to deal with protests. The amendment is part of the Government's legislation defining the powers to use troops against terrorists and civil disturbances. Under the agreement between the Opposition and the Government, troops could be used when there is a reasonable risk of serious injury or death, or when property is threatened. The Democrats and Greens claim the amendment would give a Government free rein to use troops in almost any situation. Labor's Senate leader John Faulkner says the Opposition has acted to protect the rights of demonstrators. ""We believe that the limits of this power should be clearly and carefully defined. That's the position of the Labor Party,"" he said. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The salinity problem in the Murray Darling Basin could cost up to $2 billion in South Australia alone. A draft strategy released in Canberra today sets tough new salinity reduction targets for the basin. The South Australian Water Resources Minister, Mark Brindle, says he hopes his government will commit up to $10 million this year, but significant funds will need to come from other sources. He says the rest of Australia should realise the Murray Darling basin area in South Australia produces 40 per cent of Australia's horticulture and supplies water to 1.5 million people. ""If you work out the productive efforts of those people in South Australia to this nation, it is worth three to four times the agricultural product of the basin,"" he said. ""So when the eastern states say South Australia is the tail wagging the dog, I look them in the eye and say no you've got it wrong. ""We're the dog, perhaps sometimes you're the tail."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Bangkok's leading English language daily newspaper has published a scathing criticism of Australia's decision to place visa restrictions on United Nations investigators. In <i>The Bangkok Post</i> editorial, Australia's Foreign Minister Alexander Downer has been labelled a whinger. Australia stands accused of stepping back from its usual moral stance in recent months. The editorial says there is fear in the South-East Asian region that the current Australian Government is so fearful of its image that it will risk its entire human rights record. Referring to the Australian Government's decision to stop full cooperation with the United Nations on human rights issues, the editorial says the Australian Government is adopting the same tactics as the world's most brutal nations. It criticised Australia for being largely silent about the recent crackdown on Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy. Foreign Minister Alexander Downer's complaints about UN criticism of Australia's human rights record are labelled 'whinging' in the editorial. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Most of the ABC's new program development unit heads will come from within the national broadcaster. Fifteen people have been named to head a range of units within the ABC's new department of Program and Content Development, making content for radio, television and online. Thirteen appointees currently work for the ABC. ABC managing director Jonathon Shier says the units will produce programs to challenge, inform, educate and entertain with a commitment to quality. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Lleyton Hewitt has achieved his best result at a Grand Slam tennis Tournament by advancing to the Quarter Finals of the US Open. Hewitt defeated Swede Thomas Enqvist in straight sets and becomes the youngest player to make the quarter finals of the US Open since 1993. Hewitt says the windy conditions on court were appalling. ""A nightmare out there, it was the toughest conditions I've every played in,"" he said. ""Sometimes you play your pennant competitions and stuff like that on a Saturday afternoon in winter and Adelaide or Melbourne or whatever, nothing compared to that was tonight."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Eight people are dead following a plane crash in Queensland's north-western Gulf Country. The plane apparently travelled 3,000 kilometres on autopilot across three states for several hours before crashing. Police from Burketown have just arrived at the scene of the crash. Spokesman Brian Swift says the site is very remote. ""There's quite a bit of scrub and a bit of bush and that sort of stuff,"" he said. ""It's a fair step from anywhere and it's taken police a long while to drive from Burketown and we were intending to chopper in some police from Normanton and Mount Isa. ""But we've had to ground the helicopter at Normanton due to heavy fog in the crash area. ""So once the fog does lift we'll probably be able to get that helicopter in and some of the experts to try and start working out what went wrong."" The Beechcraft King Air 200 twin engined plane was travelling from Perth to the mining town on Leonora in the Western Australian goldfields with seven mine workers on board. Western Australian police believe at this stage the plane has depressurised, rendering all those on board unconscious, leaving the aircraft to travel on auto-pilot. Contact was lost with the pilot in Western Australia at around 9:00pm AWST. The Australian Air Search and Rescue Authority tracked the plane across Western Australia, the Northern Territory and Queensland. The Australian Maritime Safety Authority tracked the aircraft across three states. Spokeswoman Beverley Atkins says it was alerted when the plane failed to respond to radio contact. ""Search aircraft were diverted to intercept and establish what the nature of the problem was, but no further communication was received,"" she said. ""Two fixed wing aircraft from Alice Springs were tasked to intercept and continue the report on the status of the flight and they stayed with the aircraft throughout the night."" Two other planes shadowed the stricken craft for several hours, desperately trying to make contact with those on board before it finally crashed at Wernadinga Station, 48 kilometres south-east of Burketown in Queensland's Gulf Country at about 1:20am AEST. The mine workers are believed to be from Western Australia, Victoria and New Zealand. A local property owner was one of the first people to reach the crash scene and he remains in shock. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" French investigators say a piece of metal, thought to be responsible for a burst tyre which led to the crash in July of an Air France Concorde, may have come from another aircraft. Just before the Concorde flight took off from Charles de Gualle airport in Paris, a Continental Airlines DC10 passed through the airport and used the same runway. Continental says that plane was later found to be missing a strip of metal similar to the one found on the runway that investigators say was probably responsible for piercing the Concorde's tyres. The preliminary report into the accident released last week stressed that the burst tyre set off a chain of events that eventually brought the plane down killing 113 people. All Concorde flights have now been suspended and will remain grounded until the inquiry is completed. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Shadow Justice, Customs and Arts Minister, Duncan Kerr, says he has refused to move over to allow Carmen Lawrence to take over some of his portfolio. Dr Lawrence is to return to Labor's front bench today, filling a spot left by Daryl Melham, who resigned from the Aboriginal Affairs portfolio. In-fighting in the party this week has seen some call Aboriginal Affairs the poisoned chalice, with supporters of Dr Lawrence not keen for her to take up the portfolio. Mr Kerr says he was asked by Labor leader Kim Beazley if he would give up the arts component of his portfolio. He says he has so far resisted the push but will ultimately have to accede to whatever decision is made by the Opposition leader. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The chances of the Reserve Bank deciding today to lift interest rates again are considered as unlikely, but not impossible. Financial markets are breathing easier with a range of data pointing to less upward pressure on inflation. Figures last week showed a slump in building approvals and retail sales in July, reduced business investment in the June quarter and a slowing in credit growth and a key wage cost index. But a number of economists will not rule out entirely the possibility that today's meeting will decide on a further rate increase. ""There have been signs the export sector continues to boom and employment growth has been very strong since the last board meeting, the Dresdner Bank's Rob Henderson said. ""The Australian dollar's been weaker and that's been important in Reserve Bank decisions in the past. ""So it wouldn't be a total surprise if the Reserve Bank increased rates this week. But it's more likely they'd remain on hold."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" International Olympic Committee (IOC) president Juan Antonio Samaranch has arrived in Sydney for a series of meetings with officials ahead of the start of the Games next week. The Sydney Games will be the last for Mr Samaranch as leader of the committee. In July next year Mr Samaranch will retire as IOC president. Mr Samaranch is not expected to call for major changes to Sydney's plans when he meets Olympics Minister Michael Knight today. It is just 10 days until the opening ceremony and eight days until the start of the soccer tournament in Adelaide, Brisbane, Canberra and Melbourne. The state of the pitch in Canberra remains a concern for Games' planners, Sydney's cool spring weather is another minor worry for Mr Samaranch who spoke of it when he arrived last night. Sydney's cool spring nights seem to be the only minor concern for Mr Samaranch. ""There can be rain, there can be cold weather but president Knight told me the forecast is very good,"" Mr Samaranch said. The IOC president is confident Sydney will host a successful games. ""We know very well that our Australian friends have worked very well for seven years and now I hope they will get the prize they deserve."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Despite claiming victory in the Lebanese election, former prime minister Rafik Hariri is still not certain of leading the next government. Lebanon's President remains a stumbling block for Mr Hariri's bid to lead the country. Mr Hariri and his allies swept the polls in Lebanon's second and final round of voting at the weekend. This puts the former prime minister in a good position to reclaim the job he lost to Mr Salim Al Hoss two years ago. The outgoing leader blamed political money and sectarianism for his defeat. Mr Hariri is best known for launching a multi-billionaire dollar reconstruction program in Beirut following Lebanon's 15 year civil war. His ascendancy, however, is not guaranteed. He is a political opponent of the nation's President Emile Lahoud, who will be involved in talks to form the next government. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A British Court is seeking expert opinion in the case of Siamese twin girls whose parents have opposed a court order to have them separated. Only one child will survive the operation, but both will die without it. The case of the unnamed eastern European migrants has attracted wide interest in Britain because of the deep moral, legal and ethical dilemma it poses. The parents of the Siamese twins oppose a court-ordered operation whereby one child dies to enable the other to survive, but the alternative, say doctors, is that both twins will die within months. The three law lords hearing the appeal have now ordered a second expert medical opinion on the girls' condition, with Lord Justice Ward in his opening remarks saying he has ""deep sympathy"" for the parents. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australian teenager Jelena Dokic has bowed out of the US Open. Dokic lost to defending champion Serena Williams in straight sets 7-6, 6-0. Dokic held two set points, losing one of them on a line call. In the minds of most it was never going to be as close as the first set was. It went to a tie-break, Dokic holding two set points. A line call went against her to the disgust of the crowd, allowing the defending champion back into the set. Williams won it and then like the breaking of the the storm on a humid New York day she steamrolled Dokic 6-0. ""Getting to the fourth round is great for me,"" Dokic said. Williams now advances to the quarter-finals, along with Martina Hingis and Anke Huber, Huber winning after Mary Pierce retired hurt with a shoulder injury Later this morning Lleyton Hewitt is be playing for a place in the men's quarter-finals."

" The Federal Government has cast doubt on a key recommendation of a report proposing massive new spending and a restructure of the Australian Army. The Parliamentary Committee called for the army to receive a greater share of the Defence budget. The committee has proposed restructuring the army to get four brigades to a state of high readiness, able to be deployed within two months. It says there should also be another eight brigades in various stages of readiness, which could be brought to combat duties within a two-year period. The Defence Minister, John Moore, says he is considering the report's recommendations, but has doubts about the 12 brigade structure. ""I don't believe that recommendation is plausible,"" he said. The committee has exposed what it calls a phantom force in the army, with most units only half full of soldiers and needing up to $4.5 billion worth of new equipment. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Retailers say a move to crack down on credit card fees charged between banks could lead to savings at the cash register. The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) is taking court action against the National Australia Bank (NAB), alleging price fixing on some of its credit card fees. The ACCC claims the NAB is fixing the fees charged by the vendors bank to the consumers bank for credit card transactions. Stan Moore from the Retailers Association says the higher fees are eventually passed on to consumers. ""A percentage of the item that they purchase is the Merchant Service Fee which covers that fee,"" he said. ""We reckon there's something of the order of around about 3,3.5 per cent, and if you could get a saving in there, we'd expect something like 1 per cent savings could be passed on to consumers."""

" However the NAB claims it is being targeted in what it calls an unusual action by competition authorities. The National's Brandon Phillips says he is surprised by the ACCC approach. ""First of all we strongly deny the allegations but second of all we are rather surprised with the way this is being conducted,"" he said. ""We have been actively involved with the discussion with the ACCC to try to resolve its concerns and yet we've had legal proceedings instituted without consultation and despite our participation in an industry review so it seems quite strange to us."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Federal Opposition is demanding to know how more than 132 computers have been lost or stolen from the Defence Department. Labor's Senate leader John Faulkner says more than $291,000 worth of laptops are missing. He says 33 contained departmental documents and in 12 cases, the information was classified or restricted. ""Does the Government have any explanation as to why 132 laptop computers worth over $291,000 have just walked out the door of the department charged with maintaining Australia's security,"" he said. ""Given the defence offices are supposedly secure installations, how is it possible that so much defence equipment gets stolen or misplaced?"" The Government leader in the Senate, Robert Hill, says the matter is of concern and is being investigated. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Nike Australia says it will look into claims that human rights abuses are continuing in its Asian factories. Community Aid Abroad today released a report claiming the Olympics sponsor is not living up to the Games ideals of peace and justice. It is claimed female workers at Nike factories in Indonesia are forced to undergo menstruation checks and that unionisation is actively discouraged. But Megan Ryan, from Nike Australia, says Community Aid Abroad is targeting the wrong company. ""The statements released today to us are concerning and we will be looking into those claims,"" she said. ""But Nike believes that we definitely uphold the Olympics ideal of human dignity. ""We believe it's quite clear that we are meeting our obligations to the over 500,000 people we employ indirectly through our manufacturing."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Qantas has been ordered to appear in the Federal Court in Sydney tomorrow to answer claims it has used Olympic ambush marketing. In affadavits tendered to the court today, Ansett Airlines claimed Qantas was trying to pass itself off as an Olympics sponsor through its advertising campaign. Ansett says the campaign would drastically and immeasurable erode Ansett's long-term brand equity, if it was allowed to continue. Ansett spokesman Mike Rolnick says the court action has the full support of theSydney Organising Committee for the Olympic Games and the Olympic movement. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" A report on science and innovation in Australia, released today, calls for significant investment from business and the Federal Government. The report, called 'Innovation, Unlocking the Future', is the result of a summit held earlier this year, aimed at improving Australia's innovation capabilities. It recommends increasing the tax concession for investment in research and development to 130 per cent, and a doubling of Commonwealth funding for research grants. The report also calls for more seed-funding for universities and research groups, a technology incubator program and a review of remuneration for research staff. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Former South African president and Nobel Peace Prize winner, Nelson Mandela, has been awarded honorary doctorates from two Sydney universities. In a rare joint ceremony, Mr Mandela received two doctorates of Law degrees from the University of Technology, Sydney and the University of Sydney in honour of his struggle against apartheid. Mr Mandela used the occassion to appeal for people to work collectively to eradicate the scourge of world poverty. ""Let us find ways to put the skills and resources we have so abundantly to the service of humanity in its totality,"" Mr Mandela said. ""May this century truly be the one in which science contributes to a better life for all who inhabit our planet."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The parents of a 15-month-old girl, left in a car at the Burswood Casino, have been banned from the Casino for six months. A security patrol found the child alseep in the front seat of the car in the early hours of this morning. It is believed the child was left unsupervised for over an hour. Burswood chief executive John Schaap says incidents like these are viewed very seriously. Mr Schaap says the six month ban is an appropriate response. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Western diplomats continue to be refused access to the home of Nobel peace prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi, raising fears that Burma's Opposition leader may once again be under house arrest. The military has confirmed it ended her nine-day roadside vigil by escorting her back to the capital. But diplomats including the British ambassador to Burma have been unable to directly confirm her situation. Burma's military regime claims the stand-off ended happily after they escorted the Opposition leader and members of her entourage back to their residences in the capital. Sources say at least 200 military personnel were involved in ending the stand-off with authorities who had prevented her leaving the capital. But diplomats have been refused access to her house, which is now sealed off. Diplomatic sources in Rangoon say they fear Aung San Suu Kyi has once more been placed under house arrest. She spent six years under house arrest in the 1990s. At least three other senior party members are also believed to have been placed under house arrest. -----------------------------------"

" Essendon will continue their premiership celebrations at Windy Hill today after claiming its 16th premiership. It will be a more subdued affair at the Demons' family day at Junction Oval, after Essendon took out yesterday's grand final 19.21 (135) to Melbourne's 11.9 (75). Melbourne put on a brave front at its grand final dinner last night, reflecting on what could have been: a premiership for the first time in 36 years. But coach Neale Daniher told his players to move on. ""We have to stay hungry, we have to go again and we have to win a premiership,"" he said. Daniher says he sees his young side as winners over the season, despite their 60-point loss to Essendon. ""We need to still plan medium to long-term,"" he said. ""We won't be going out and say we need to get one of those and sell our young kids. ""We are still going to look medium to long-term and try to build a really strong club so there won't be any sort of knee-jerk reaction."" At the Melbourne Tennis Centre, the Bombers were savouring the moment, especially Kevin Sheedy who has won his fourth flag as coach. ""A little suburb called Essendon started 103 years ago, has grown into one of the most powerful clubs in the AFL and picked up the first premiership in the year 2000, well done,"" he said. Sheedy says this year's Essendon team may be the best he has ever coached. ""I know that they've done very, very well in regard to their performances and getting the best out of themselves,"" he said. ""They've probably won the most games ever in a season of any AFL club and I'm prepared to lose one to get the premiership, don't worry about that."" Essendon captain James Hird says he always dreamed he would captain a premiership team but never imagined he would also win the Norm Smith medal. ""I always thought just in the back of my head and it was very far in the back of my head that this day would come, that I would captain a premiership team,"" he said. ""Along the way there were some hurdles to jump but with the people around me telling me it was going to happen I thought it might happen."" Demons captain David Neitz remained positive despite the grand final loss. Neitz told players they had done well to come from 14th last year to make the grand final. ""A lot of young players are hungry and after today's experience they are going to be hungrier,"" he said. ""We want to be around, we've had a taste of what its like to be around and we want to be around again."" -----------------------------------"

" Organisers of the Royal Adelaide Show say it is business as usual today despite the collapse of a ride which left 27 people injured last night. Ambulance crews treated 37 people at the showground, with 27 eventually transported to various hospitals, after the collapse of the ride the Spin Dragon. Three people, two females and a male, remain in the Royal Adelaide Hospital in a serious condition after suffering chest and abdominal injuries. Show enthusiasts were shocked by the accident. ""The kids were on top of one of the rides ready to go on and they just turned round and heard a loud bang, turned round and just saw everyone on the ground,"" one said. ""We heard this huge bang and we ran over and we just saw it sitting on the ground and everyone was rushing there and getting them out of the harness things they were in,"" another witness said. An investigation has been launched into the incident. -----------------------------------"

" The Press Trust of India says another 23 people have died in floods in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh, bringing the toll from this year's monsoon rains to 267. The news agency says incessant rains over the past three days have also caused widespread damage to property and crops. Federal authorities warn the largest rivers running through the state,including the Ganges, are threatening to burst their banks in several districts. But they say other parts of Uttar Pradesh are in the grip of a harsh drought. At least 140 people died last month in flash floods in the neighbouring state of Himachal Pradesh. Also last month, the worst floods in 46 years in the southern state of Andhra Pradesh left 162 people dead, damaged more than 60,000 houses, and submerged more than 300,000 hectares of farmland. -----------------------------------"

" Most of the bush and grass fires across Brisbane and Queensland's south-east have eased overnight, with lighter winds expected to give fire officers some relief today. A large blaze at Birkdale on Brisbane's bayside kept fire crews busy last night but the Queensland Fire and Rescue Authority (QFRA) says it is now under control. Officers are also keeping a close eye on a fire in the Brisbane suburb of The Gap. The fire is still burning but not threatening homes. About 100 fires stretched QFRA resources to their limit yesterday. Overnight, bushfires and gale force winds left 12,000 consumers without power across Brisbane, the Gold Coast and Gatton, west of Brisbane. There may be some relief in sight for exhausted fire officers and volunteers, with the weather bureau predicting lighter winds today. But there is still very little chance of rain. -----------------------------------"

" More than 2,000 athletes from around the world will arrive in Sydney today, to join the 2,000 athletes already staying in the Olympic village. The Games's first high-profile political visitor, former South African president Nelson Mandela, also arrives today. Teams from countries such as Croatia and Romania will land at Sydney Airport today. Games officials say airport systems worked smoothly yesterday when athletes from countries including Columbia, Egypt, Cuba, Iceland and Indonesia landed in the Olympic city. The athletes will join the 9,000 staff and contractors already at Homebush Bay. The mayor of the Olympic village, Graham Richardson, will host the first official welcoming cermony for some teams this morning. School children will sing national anthems, before officially raising the flag of the teams country. Nelson Mandela arrives in Sydney today, for the University of Sydney's Olympic conference titled <i>Champions of the mind</i>. He will speak to the media this afternoon, in Sydney, along with Prime Minister John Howard. Mr Mandela's will tonight deliver the opening speech at the conference. His speech will be streamed live on ABC Online: http://www.abc.net.au/specials/mandela/default.htm -----------------------------------"

" Australian 15th seed Mark Philippoussis is out of the US Open tennis tournament, after a straight sets loss in his second round match against American Jan-Michael Gambrill. Gambill overpowered Philipoussis 6-4, 6-4, 6-4. Jelena Dokic called for a trainer during her match after feeling dizzy in the humidity but went on to win in straight sets, 7-6, 7-5. Dokic could meet Serena Williams in the next round. Lleyton Hewitt beat Czech Jiri Novak in straight sets to get through to the fourth round in a grand slam for the first time. The Australain always looked in control, taking the match 6-3, 6-3, 6-3. Hewitt says he expects his game to continue to improve this week but believes he is playing better than ever. Russian Anna Kournikova is out after losing her match against Justine Henin in straight sets, 6-4, 7-6. US champion Pete Sampras won convincingly into the third round, downing Argetinian Agustin Calleri. -----------------------------------"

" A group of Australian international law academics have written an open letter voicing concerns at the Federal Government's withdrawal of support for United Nations' committees. The letter, signed by seven leading academics from universities around the country, says the Government risks irreversibly damaging Australia's human rights record. One of the signatories, Associate Professor Donald Rothwell, from the University of Sydney, says the absence of an Australian bill of rights means that UN human rights conventions are sometimes the only means for legal redress. ""The rights that are contained for example in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights do not have the force of Australian law,"" Professor Rothwell said. ""And likewise some of the other provisions with respect to the rights of indigenous Australians also do not have the force of law in Australia. ""Therefore, the committees do provide an opportunity where there isn't that avenue to domestic exhaustion of appropriate local remedies."" -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" Two women remain in the intensive care unit of the Royal Adelaide Hospital, following the collapse of a ride at the Royal Adelaide Show on Saturday night. The preliminary findings into the cause are expected to be released midweek. Inspectors from Workplace Services will continue to liaise with ride operators today to ensure there is not a repeat of Saturday night's freak accident in sideshow alley. The ride, the Spin Dragon, crashed eight-metres to the ground, injuring 27 people. Of those, seven remain in the Royal Adelaide hospital with two women, one aged 20 and 18 both in the intensive care unit. The investigation which has been launched into the incident may take several months, but an intial cause is expected to be released on Wednesday. The show's marketing manager, Francine Connor, says the ball is now really out of their court. ""The society is really removed from the investigation. ""We are certainly co-operating in any way we can and providing information as required to the Workplace Services,"" she said. ""The investigation is now under their control and they will have their results we hope soon so that we can get to the bottom of the problem."" ------------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Prime Minister John Howard flies to New York today to attend the United Nations (UN) millenium summit. The summit will look at the future of the UN. It is expected to be the largest ever gathering of world leaders and heads of State. It is just a week after the Government announced a new hardline stance on UN committees visiting Australia. During the week, Mr Howard will also hold talks with Indonesia's President, Abdurrahman Wahid. Their discussions will centre mainly on East Timor. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Former South African president Nelson Mandela has warned Australia that people of every political persuasion must be involved in the reconciliation debate. While pointing out the problems his country faced were different, Mr Mandela said dialogue between enemies is essential to prevent a country falling into violence. ""If you do not talk to your enemy, this country will go up in flames,"" he said. ""The role of a leader, is to create an environment in which those good men and women, in every commnunity, black and white, can make their maximum contribution because during the times of tensions, it is not the talented people who excel, who come to the top, it is the extremists who shout slogans."" Mr Mandela had dinner last night with the Prime Minister. He is in Australia for a University of Sydney Olympics Conference, titled ""What Makes a Champion?</i>. Mr Mandela is also expected to meet with indigenous leaders this week. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The death of a 10-year-old boy in central Victoria yesterday has led to fresh calls for gun-owners to make sure they are secure and unloaded, with the ammunition stored separately. The boy's nine-year-old brother had surgery for a gunshot wound to the face. The boy was staying with his father and brother on a family property at Woodend. The father, who has been questioned by police and released, has said he found the boys with the gun, but it went off as he tried to take it from them. Police and the Victorian Premier, Steve Bracks, are pleading with gun-owners to know their responsibilities on gun storage. Mr Bracks says Victoria's gun laws do not need review. ""I think the laws are adequate, but you can't have laws which prevent zero accidents in a country,"" he said. ""But nevertheless I think our laws are second to none."" --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Firefighters are catching up on rest this morning, after a long hard weekend battling hundreds of bushfires around south-east Queensland. All the bushfires fires are now under control. The Queensland Fire and Rescue Authority (QFRA) says it was almost impossible to keep count of the fires over the weekend. The worst day was Saturday, when winds gusts reached speeds of 80 kilometres an hour, fanning more than than 100 fires. Under threat were dozens of homes, schools, a sawmill and a nursing home in Brisbane. Residents were evacuated from homes when fires came to close. Some were damaged when fires came within a metre of their walls. There was grave concern at one stage about the safety of the Caltex oil refinery at Lytton. The gale force winds were carrying smouldering embers, but firefighters used high powered water sprays to keep them away. Thousands of hectares of grassland was burnt out yesterday in the Roadvale area south-west of Ipswich and a number of farm outbuildings destroyed. The QFRA says while its resources are being stretched to the limit, it is managing to cope well. A spokesman says it is hoped favourable weather conditions today will allow firefighters to catch up maintenance and rest. Fine conditions are forecast, with only light winds and an afternoon seabreeze. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" An earthquake that hit the United States of America's Napa Valley in California has injured more than 20 people, damaged houses and cut power. The quake was described as moderate, but it was strong enough to remind Californians that they live in one of the world's earthquake danger zones. The earthquake with a 5.2 magnitude left 25 people injured, knocked out windows and cut power in the heart of northern California's wine growing district. Two people were seriously injured, the rest were treated for cuts. Locals, who were used to tremors in the area, say this earthquake was frightening for it created two sharp jolts, rather than rolling through like many others. Some houses were evacuated and thousands of people have been left without power. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A second rain delay at the US Open tennis has prevented the match between Australians Wayne Arthurs and Richard Fromberg from getting underway. Just when the courts had been dried after a one-hour delay, Arthurs and Fromberg were about to start their match when they were called back to the locker-room. But spare a thought for the two men in two matches which are paused in deciding breaks. The seeded players Marat Safin and Juan Carlos Ferrero are ahead. Only on match has been completed today, number 14 seed Nicolas Kiefer winning. The feature of day-seven is the fourth round women's matches with six seeds playing each other. Martina Hingis against Sandrine Testud, Arantxa Sanchez-Vicario versus Nathalie Tauziat, and America's Monica Seles against Jennifer Capriati. Venus Williams is also due on court."

" The United Nations administrator in East Timor says the naming of 19 people as provisional suspects in the violence surrounding last year's independence vote is the first step in bringing those responsible to justice. Sergio Vieira de Mello welcomed the naming of the group, which includes three generals, although the Army chief at the time, General Wiranto, is not on the list. Mr Vieira de Mello met Indonesian Government ministers in Jakarta yesterday. He says he hopes the naming would eventually lead to others being put on trial. ""I think it's a good beginning,"" he said. ""I have heard some say that this falls short of expectations. ""It is true but it's always difficult to feel the glass in the first announcement. ""For us, the glass is half full and will continue to be filled."" Mr Vieira de Mello says investigations have to start from the bottom up, as with war crimes trials in Rwanda. Heading the list of those named is Major General Adam Damiri, the former head of the Bali-based command responsible for East Timor. Also on the list are Brigadier General Tono Suratman, the Indonesian Army commander in East Timor until three weeks before the independence vote, and the general who replaced him. Conspiciously absent were the names of the most prominent militia leaders, including Eurico Guterres, the feared leader of the Dili-based Thorn militia. However, Yushar Yaktar from the Indonesian Attorney-General's office says more people could be summoned when the current investigation is complete. Mr Yaktar says those named will not be arrested at the moment but will be investigated as suspects. ""We have to wait [for] this investigation,"" he said. ""For this time, [there are] only 19 suspects but maybe after that we don't know. We have to wait."" ----------------------------------"

" French air accident investigators say a routine runway cleaning operation was not carried out as scheduled before a Concorde took off, burst into flames and crashed in July, killing 113 people. But officials are not making a direct connection between the two incidents. France's Air Accidient Investigation Bureau this week released a preliminary report into the Concorde crash. Speaking for the first time after the release, the bureau's director, Paul Louis Arslanian said it was now clear a tyre blow-out caused the crash. He said it was also clear a piece of metal lying on the runway punctured the tyre. But Mr Arslanian said it was not clear how the metal came to be there. ""The investigators have, however, revealed that a routine runway cleaning operation was delayed because of a fire drill and was not carried out as planned before the Concorde took off,"" he said. But Mr Arslanian says it is still too early to tell whether the inspection delay had any bearing on how the metal ended up on the runway. ""For the time being we do not know when the spot fell on the runway and we do not know if anybody could ever have helped it to be removed from the runway,"" he said. ----------------------------------"

" Doctors are treating a Sydney teenager with critical head injuries after a drive-by shooting in Sydney's south-west last night. The youth was one of three male teenagers wounded when shots were fired from a car travelling in Arthur Street at Punchbowl around 11:00pm (AEDT). Police say one was critically injured after being shot in the head. A 14-year-old was shot in the arm and a third teenager was shot in the foot. Ambulance crews transported two of the teenagers to St George Hospital and the third to Bankstown. Police spokesman Dave Rose says police are this morning searching for two cars that may have been involved. ""Police believe at this time that a blue Toyota Rav4 vehicle which was seen to leave the area at high speed might be involved,"" he said. ""There's also the possibility a second vehicle, described only as a red sedan, might also have had some involvement."" Police crime scene and ballistics officers examined the scene of the shooting, and residents of nearby homes were also interviewed. Police are appealing for anyone with information about the shooting to contact Campsie detectives or Crimestoppers. Police are also searching for a group of men who tried to abduct a 22-year-old man in Sydney's south last night after forcing him into the boot of his car. Police say three men, two of them armed with shotguns, robbed the man in Bunnergong Road at Kingsford around 7:00pm. Senior Constable Ian Peters says the three then forced the 22-year-old into the boot of his car and drove away. ""The men drove around for about 15 minutes before the victim was able to manipulate the lock from the inside of the boot and escape at Gardiners Road at Kingsford,"" he said. ""He suffered cuts and abrasions as a result of jumping from the moving car."" Police say they are looking for a white Subaru sedan, with the New South Wales registration URQ 198. ----------------------------------"

" Another United Nations panel has criticised Australia after the Federal Government announced plans to restrict UN human rights committees' visits. The UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has found Australia's indigenous people are still disadvantaged in employment, housing, health and education. The UN also attacked Australia for failing to protect tenants from eviction, saying there appears to have been cases of forced evictions in Sydney as a result of the forthcoming Olympic Games. The committee urged the Federal Government to pursue reconciliation with Aborigines and improve their quality of life. The UN report also highlighted positive aspects, praising Australia's role in providing economic and humanitarian assistance in East Timor. It found Australia's 430,000 Aborigines made up about 2.5 per cent of the population and were the most disadvantaged group. It says Aborigines have vowed to stage peaceful protests to draw attention to their plight throughout the Sydney Olympics, which begin on September 15. ----------------------------------"

" The United States has announced a delay in the development of its National Missile Defence System, saying more time is needed for testing. US President Bill Clinton has decided to let his successor decide whether to deploy the controversial system. It now looks set to be an election issue, with Republican George Bush keen to go ahead with the defence system immediately and Democrat Al Gore more cautious about both the cost and the state of the technology. Mr Clinton said although intial tests were promising, more information was needed before the US could commit itself to the shield. ""The system as a whole is not yet proven,"" he said. ""After the initial tests succeeded, our two most recent tests failed for different reasons to achieve an intercept."" In addition to technical issues, Mr Clinton said concerns from Russia and China played a part in his decision. Russian President Vladimir Putin and leaders of NATO countries have hailed Mr Clinton's announcement. Mr Putin says President Clinton's decision reinforces strategic stability and security in the world. Russia has been among several countries warning that the shield could spark a new arms race. ----------------------------------"

" Grand final fever has hit Melbourne, with 95,000 fans expected to watch today's Essendon-Melbourne play-off at the MCG. Melbourne Cricket Club (MCC) members have queued in the rain outside the MCG overnight to get the remaining 9,000 MCC members' seats for the game. Essendon will start odds-on favorite and Bombers captain James Hird concedes the team's brilliant season will be wasted if they fail to secure the premiership cup. ""This is what you play for,"" he said. ""People will say you've won a lot of home and away games but it won't amount to much unless we win. ""That's probably the same for the other 15 clubs - unless you win the premiership then you probably haven't succeeded."" Melbourne appears unfazed by its underdog status. The Demons' David Neitz says the team will not fold under the pressure of the match. ""We're obviously excited about being in a grand final and getting ourselves in that position but if you get into grand finals you've got to win them,"" he said. ""We just want to get out there and take the game on."" Essendon coach Kevin Sheedy says Darren Bewick will be fit for the match. Bewick has been hampered by a virus and tendonitis in his knee but completed a light training session at Windy Hill last night. Sheedy says the team is focused. ""The team's played very well and they have come through a hell of a lot together, played a lot of footy over the last two or three years to be in the final series, and well now it's our chance,"" he said. ----------------------------------"

" The countdown to the Sydney Olympics passes another milestone today with the official opening of the Olympic Village. The village will soon become the fifth largest town in New South Wales. The first international and Australian Olympians are checking in at Sydney airport this morning, before heading to the 800 houses and 350 apartments that make up the Olympic Village. Although the 15,000 athletes and officials may be in for a squeeze, there are many creature comforts on offer. The Village includes a cinema, a dance club, a video arcade and a dining hall that can seat 500. On the menu tonight is a choice of 70 dishes, including Asian specialities, such as Szechuan chicken, to good Australian favourites such as pavlova. During the Games, eight semi-trailers of food will nourish the hungry athletes everyday. ---------------------------"

" A drug to slow down the ageing process may be within reach, after scientists in Britain found they could significantly extend the lifespan of worms through drug therapy. The secret to eternal life may not quite yet be with us but researchers at Manchester University have discovered how to extend the life of a nematode worm by at least 40 per cent. In some cases, the researchers even doubled the worms' lifespans. The researchers used synthetic anti-oxidant drugs. They say it is the first real sign that ageing - or at any rate degenerative diseases like Alzheimers and Parkinsons which accompany the process in humans - may soon be treatable. ----------------------------------"

" Indonesian prosecutors have named 19 army and police officers, government officials and pro-Indonesian militiamen as suspects in last year's wave of murder and destruction in East Timor. Former military commander General Wiranto and prominent militia gang leader Eurico Guterres were absent from the list. Indonesia's chief investigator announced the names, saying the Government was pursuing the matter, not because of international pressure, but due to a sense of justice. Three Indonesian military generals have been included on the list but General Wiranto is not one of them. The most senior military commander to be named, a potential suspect to be called for questioning, is the former chief of the Bali-based military command, Major General Adam Damiri. Only three militia leaders have been named. Prominent militia leaders Eurico Guterres and Moko Soares have not been included. The 19 potential suspects are to be summoned for questioning next month."

" A Liberal backbencher who was instrumental in a mandatory sentencing deal says the Northern Territory has nearly fulfilled its part of the bargain. The Commonwealth has withheld funding under the deal, which sees the Territory divert some young offenders from mandatory sentencing. Dana Vale says the Territory has fulfilled most of the objectives of the agreement, but it is yet to pass legislation to support it. She says the Territory has progressed well with establishing the program. ""There's far more logistic problems that the Northern Territory has in putting some of these programs in to place,"" Ms Vale said. ""I'm informed that there's about 80 different communities that have to be consulted, they have be consulted fairly and they have to be involved which does take a little time."""

" The Northern Territory's Chief Minister says young offenders are being treated differently by police, from today. Denis Burke says police have been fully briefed about changes to mandatory sentencing, which divert juveniles from jail for certain offences. The Commonwealth has withheld its contribution to the deal, which was supposed to come into place today, because it says the Territory still needs legislation to back it. Mr Burke says the Commonwealth money will eventually come and it has not affected the way the Territory's approached the new diversionary system. ""It could be a caution that is issued either formally or informally, it could be the person is referred to a diversionary program,"" he said. ""If it's in some of the more remote parts of the Northern Territory that diversionary program can be settled with involvement with the leaders of the community and police involved and supervised by members of the community with the police involved."""

" The fragile Australian dollar is down nearly half-a-cent, following the release of data which has lessened the chance of another interest-rate rise. Building approvals slumped 14 per cent in July, including the biggest ever monthly drop in approvals for private-sector housing. As well, retail turnover for July fell by a larger than expected 8 per cent, as shoppers deserted stores on the introduction of the GST. ANZ Investment bank economist Karen Pringle says it is now likely interest rates will not rise next week. ""There's been a mixed range of data this week,"" Ms Pringle said. ""Most of it is showing that the economy still remains very, very strong. ""But probably the early indicators for the September quarter, like today's building approvals and retail trade were one the soft side and the wage indicators came in on the soft side, there's probably enough there for the reserve Bank to just go on hold next week."" Our dollar has weakened to around 57.4 US cents."

" Representatives from the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance have been refused entry to journalists staging a protest inside Sydney's Fairfax publishing building. More than 1,000 journalists, artists and photographers have been locked out of their Sydney and Melbourne offices this afternoon. But staff remaining inside the building are refusing to leave their desks and are staging a so called work-in. In a written statement, the company says the lock out of some staff until Monday is due to ongoing industrial action. The union's Chris Warren says he just wants to talk to his members."

" Award winning film maker Frank Michael Howson has escaped a jail sentence after receiving $5 million funding in the early 1990s for a movie he never made. During today's sentencing Justice Ken Crispin issued 48-year-old Howson with a 12-month suspended prison sentence, a $1,000 fine and placed him on a three-month good behaviour bond. Howson, and his company Boulevard Films, raised $5 million from over 100 investors to make <i>The Boy Who Dared To Dream</i>, an animated children's film, but Howson never completed the film and instead changed the title and credits of a different movie in an attempt to pass it off as his original project so his investors would still receive their tax deductions. The deception nearly cost the tax office $2.25 million in claims. Some of the investors cried in court today when the suspended sentence was delivered."

" One of Britain's top equestrian riders is out of the Sydney Olympics after breaking his leg in a fall during training in Sydney today. Rodney Powell had just finished a run on his mount ""Flintstone"" at the western Sydney Olympic site, when the horse took fright and threw the rider. He was rushed to nearby Liverpool hospital and will undergo surgery later today. Powell was due to compete in the individual three-day event."

" The Federal Opposition leader, Kim Beazley, says he has a view on who should move into a vacancy on his frontbench, but caucus will decide on Tuesday. There is support in the Labor party for West Australian Member of Parliament Carmen Lawrence to return to the Shadow Ministry. Yesterday Shadow Aboriginal Affairs Minister Daryl Melham resigned from the frontbench in protest over Labor's support for Queensland's Native Title laws. Today there is support among some Labor backbenchers for Carmen Lawrence. Deputy Labor leader Simon Crean believes the days of the Marks Royal Commission are behind her. ""She would be a terrific adition,"" he siad. Mr Beazley is not annointing a new frontbencher but says he has someone in mind. ""I have a distinct preference but it'll be expressed within the normal party channels and the normal party processes of picking a frontbencher,"" he said."

" The Queensland Premier has written to the mining industry and indigenous people asking for help to make Native Title work. Peter Beattie says it is time to put an end to the negative politics flowing from yesterday's Senate decision on the State laws. In a letter to the Queensland Indigenous Working Group and the Mining Council, Mr Beattie says a draft indigenous land use agreement should be ready soon to deal with the backlog of exploration permits."

" The Federal Attorney-General Daryl Williams has accused the Labor Party of hypocrisy over its deal on Queensland Native Title laws yesterday. The laws have cleared the Senate after a deal between the Federal Opposition and the Queensland Government. Under the deal the Senate no longer has a veto over future changes to the laws, but Queensland has been forced to accept the right of indigenous people to negotiate over most mining and exploration. Mr Williams says Labor is only prepared to consider Native Title laws from the labor states. ""Last year in August the Labor Party knocked out the Northern Territory's Native Title regime,"" he said. ""Three months ago, Labor allowed part of the New South Wales regime through the Senate. ""Without a murmur now Queensland mates get a half-baked deal that delivers some political satisfaction to Mr Beazley and Mr Beattie but nothing to anybody else."""

" Meanwhile, the Northern Territory Chief Minister, Denis Burke, agrees native title may be the trigger for an early Territory election. Before federal Labor's decision yesterday to support changes to Queensland's native title legislation, the Territory signalled it would try again to have its laws passed by the Senate. Mr Burke maintains if the Queensland legislation is good enough for the ALP to support - Labor senators will have to support his. ""I reckon they will have to let it through because they won't be game to trample on Territorians' rights again,"" he said. ""If they are prepared to trample on Territorians' rights on this issue they are totally hypocritical and inconsistent, they've got no morality and if you want to talk about triggers, you're starting to line them up."""

" Telstra 2 instalment receipts are stabilising just above their all-time low, reached today on the Australian Stock Exchange. Telstra yesterday announced a record profit of $3.7 billion, the largest recorded by an Australian company. But investors have been left cold by the results, selling Telstra 2 receipts down to a low today of $3.48. At about 1:00pm AEDT, they were still down 23 cents at $3.52."

" The Communciations Authority has found Telstra is connecting 83 per cent of rural phones on time. That is a 27 per cent improvement since June last year. The Authority says 85 per cent of urban telephones are now being connected on time. It found Telstra's performance improved in every state and territory compared with the same time last year."

" A 74-year-old Olympic torch bearer has died, shortly after running with the flame through the Hunter Valley town of Muswellbrook this morning. Relay organisers say Ron King, a local cycling identity and bike shop owner, took the torch from his son and completed his run before collapsing from a heart attack in the torch relay bus. Torch officials say one minute's silence will be held at lunchtime celebrations in memory of Mr King and his family. Another minute's silence will be held tonight when the torch reaches Tamworth."

" An announcement is expected shortly about whether former Indonesian president Suharto is considered well enough to stand trial on corruption charges. A team of doctors arrived at his residence this morning, along with members of the former president's legal team. They are expected to announce shortly whether Suharto is fit enough to stand trial on corruption charges. A police motor cycle contingent has arrived, ready to escort the former president to the trial venue. Security has been stepped up at the temporary court, following the overnight explosion of a small bomb in an empty bus parked near the venue."

" The New South Wales Casino Control Authority has found evidence of irregular activity at Sydney's Star City casino. The authority has released a progress report on an investigation into the casino. The head of the investigation, Peter McLellan QC, has for the past few months been taking private submissions into alleged criminal activity at the casino. Mr McLellan says a signinficant number of major gamblers are either convicted criminals or are suspected of criminal activity. In relation to money-lending, he says there is evidence of the irregular presence of loan sharks in the casino's Endeavour Room, as well as prostitutes, who frequent the High Roller Room, offering services to patrons. Mr McLellan says there is also evidence of patrons being intoxicated while gambling. However, he has concluded there is little evidence of money-laundering."

" Journalists, with the Fairfax group of newspapers, have staged a demonstration in Sydney, as part of a campaign to increase wages and resources. The journalists are on strike until midnight tonight. About 150 journalists and production staff have held the protest, outside the Fairfax group's offices. Sydney Morning Herald writer David Marr says journalists are unhappy with the proposed cut in wages. ""These are [very] prosperous times, both for the country and for Fairfax papers, so that really seems, to the staff, a bit rough,"" he said. ""But more substantially, the strike is about maitaining resources to the core work of Fairfax newspapers."" The journalists say they are worried that Fairfax management is pouring money into new media projects, at the expense of the group's newspapers. They say today's strike will be followed by a campaign of rolling stoppages until the issues are resolved with managers."

" The Commonwealth Bank has sought to reassure customers a stop-work meeting planned by staff tomorrow morning will not affect banking services. Staff in all states except Western Australia will hold a two-hour meeting to discuss the bank's offer of a 6.5 per cent pay rise and concerns over understaffing. In Sydney, staff will march on the bank's headquarters to demand action, with ACTU president Sharan Burrow to address the rally. But bank spokesman Bryan Fitzgerald says the actions of the Financial Services Union will not affect services, with most branches to remain open all day."

" Cancer specialists say death rates from one of Australia's biggest killers, skin cancer, is finally decreasing in young people. The head of the Melanoma Skin Cancer Research Institute, Bill McCarthy says the number of young people finding they have melanomas is declining. Professor McCarthy says the rates for young women have improved the most, and rates for young men are steadying out. He believes extreme sunbathing is finally falling out fashion. ""People are being more careful, they are not staying out so long, they are not getting as many burns, they are using more sunscreen than they did before,"" Professor McCarthy said. ""So they are getting less sunlight to the skin and every diminution of the amount of sunlight you get, the better your skin will be."""

" The nation's latest airline has begun operations. Virgin Blue's inaugural flight has landed in Sydney after an official launch at Brisbane Airport this morning. The airline's celebrations were slightly marred when the Boeing 737 was delayed by 30 minutes. The plane's maiden flight was due to depart at 9:35am but was forced to return to the gate when the crew found a cabin door had not been closed properly. The glitch was overshadowed by earlier celebrations, which saw Queensland Premier, Peter Beattie, cut the ribbon, separating passengers from the boarding gate. The Premier welcomed Virgin Blue to Australia's domestic airline industry, praising the company's commitment to retain competitive prices. ""The competition amongst domestic airfares as you've seen as a result of Virgin coming on the scene has been dramatic,"" he said. ""There are people travelling today I'm sure on Virgin that've never travelled before or haven't been able to afford to travel before."" The airline sold more than 14,500 seats at the $48 fare offered last weekend."

" Mark Philippoussis has cruised into the second round at the US Open tennis tournament in New York but the on-court action has again played second fiddle to Jelena Dokic's father, Damir. Philippoussis won his first round match in straight sets, beating Spain's Albert Portas 6-3, 6-2, 6-3. Fellow Australian Richard Fromberg downed Switzerland's George Bastl in four sets, 4-6, 6-4, 6-3, 6-2 to move into the second round. But attention was focused on Damir Dokic, who was banned from Flushing Meadows for the entirety of the tournament after a run-in with officials. ""I feel sorry for her. It's a shame,"" Philippoussis said of Dokic. ""She doesn't look like a happy 17-year-old girl. She's not. She's not smiling out there. ""I would like to see her enjoying herself a bit more. She is just so young. She should be enjoying herself. It's tough. ""She is a great player. She has a big future, [but] things are happening to her. To deal with it can definitely be tough. There's enough to think about on the court with you matches to distract you."" Dokic will be without her father-coach when she faces 93rd-ranked Dutchwoman Miriam Oremans for a berth in the third round. ""Obviously if a member of your family can't be there, it's tough - especially when her father has been there from the start, starting her off in tennis,"" said Philippoussis, who is against a ban of Damir from WTA events. ""He has brought her here. He has helped her with her game. She is here because of him,"" Philippoussis said. ""Obviously he understands things a bit more. I don't think he should be banned. It's too harsh."" But Philippoussis was far more upbeat when speaking about his own game. ""I was positive out there, very relaxed and enjoying myself. There were two times I got broken, one where I nearly got broken, so I had three loose games."" The Victorian's draw has opened up with the elimination of Pat Rafter and Gustavo Kuerten, but he says he's only worrying about his own game. ""As long as you go out there and you concentrate on your match anything can happen, things can open up and you can get a little lucky,"" he said. ""Obviously they're tough matches, those guys play to win and you've still got to win to get through."""

" Carmen Lawrence is tipped to emerge from the political wilderness next week and take Shadow Aboriginal Affairs Minister Daryl Melham's place in federal Cabinet. Mr Melham resigned yesterday, after the Federal Opposition agreed to allow sections of the Queensland Labor Government's proposed native title regime through the Senate. Nominations for the vacant frontbench position close tomorrow but Caucus is expected to choose Ms Lawrence when it meets next week. Ms Lawrence is not saying if she is interested in becoming the next shadow Aboriginal affairs minister. ""It's all very premature speculation and no doubt the Caucus will make a decision in due course,"" she said. Mr Beazley may give the chosen person the Aboriginal affairs job or make further changes to Cabinet. Mr Melham quit the frontbench in anger at the party's deal. Labor leader Kim Beazley and Queensland Premier Peter Beattie struck a last-minute deal which prevented the Senate from striking down all of Queensland's native title laws. Mr Beazley rejected those parts of the state laws that would have stripped native title holders of rights to negotiate on mining and exploration. Miners and the Coalition wanted Mr Beattie's laws left in tact and label the new deal unworkable. Aboriginal groups are also unhappy with the compromise. Mr Melham was first elected in 1990 and has been on the frontbench since 1996. He believes the Opposition should have overruled the entire package because it does not do enough to protect indigenous rights. --------------------------------------"

" Police have banned rallies in Jakarta as they prepare for the trial of former president Suharto. A senior Jakarta police superintendent announced the ban, saying it was effective from today until the trial ends. The trial is set to begin this morning, although lawyers for Suharto continue to express doubts about the health of the former president and whether he will attend. Senior lawyer Juan Felix Tampubolon says a decision on Suharto's health will be made just hours beofre the trial. He said the former president is keen to attend but he has cast doubts on Suharto's ability to understand complex questions. Government doctors will be given the chance to dispute any unfit verdict pronounced by the former president's private physicians. -------------------------------------"

" Indonesian West Timor is edging towards the same sort of lawlessness which engulfed East Timor in the lead-up to last year's United Nations-sponsored ballot on independence. Unconfirmed reports out of West Timor's city of Kupang claim about 2,000 members of pro-Indonesian militias went on a rampage through the city yesterday. The reports from Indonesia's state-run news agency say the disgruntled militia members converged on the city, attacking journalists and cars and vandalising buildings. There had been fears leading up to yesterday's anniversary of East Timor's vote for independence that militia activity would be heightened on the West Timor border. However, a UN peacekeeping spokesman says there were no cross-border incursions yesterday. Instead, it appears the militia's frustrations have been unleashed within Indonesian territory. -------------------------------------"

" Virgin Blue will take to the skies this morning for its first commercial flight within Australia, as a national union campaign against competitor Impulse Airlines gains momentum. The New South Wales Labour Council and Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) have backed action following accusations Impulse exploits its workers. Newcastle Trades Hall secretary Gary Kennedy says unions in New South Wales's Hunter Valley will vote on the issue at a meeting tonight. Mr Kennedy says Impulse hires pilots and flight attendents through Newcastle company Air Crews Control but the workers are not covered by an award and have substandard conditions. ""These people are part of a trust and that's how they get paid but they don't have any sort of set hours of work, set breaks, superannuation etc,"" he said. ""There is ... award coverage or even collective agreement coverage for these people."" Impulse spokesman Simon Westaway says the airline has a very good industrial record and its method of employing staff is not new. ""Just like many companies, we actually outsource some labour and that's not a new concept in the year 2000,"" he said. ""Impulse has a very happy workforce. We have zero levels of industrial disputation across our workforce."" There will be celebrations at Brisbane airport this morning when Virgin Airlines takes to the skies for its initial Australian flight. The first flight leaves Brisbane for Sydney at 9:30am AEST. There will be music, entertainment and the cermonial cake and ribbon cutting at gate 25. Queensland Premier Peter Beattie and Virgin Blue chief executive officer Brett Godfrey will be among those toasting the new airline. Those making the inaugural flight will be presented with small gifts to mark the occasion. -------------------------------------"

" The attorneys-general of the four Labor-governed states have condemned what they say is a winding back of Australia's commitment to international human rights law. Federal Cabinet says it will restrict UN committees' access to Australia and review the Refugees Convention. The Government also said it will not be joining a sexual discrimination complaints system. The attorneys-general of Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and Tasmania say human rights are a legitimate area for international treaties and Australia should be accountable. Their statement expresses concern that the Federal Government is undermining Australia's reputation and is trying to shelter itself from international criticism. -------------------------------------"

" Vigilantes in Britain have driven a doctor from her home after falsely labelling her a paedophile. Police believe they were confused by her title of paediatrician, or children's doctor. The Royal Gwent Hospital describes Yvette Cloette as a valued and respected member of its paediatric team. Dr Cloette had the walls of her home painted with anti-paedophile slogans. Similar incidents have proliferated since the <i>News of the World</i> newspaper's ""name and shame"" campaign against child molesters. Police believe it was the work of a vigilante group, which confused the words paedophile and paediatrician. Dr Cloette described the incident as extremely distressing and has moved out of her home as a result. -------------------------------------"

" Officials have kicked the father of Australian tennis player Jelena Dokic out of the United States tennis centre after an argument about the price of fish. Damir Dokic began yelling after complaining that fish sold in the players' lounge at the US Open was over-priced. Officials stepped in but tempers became even more frayed with Mr Dokic being told to leave the lounge. He threw away his accreditation, then pulled his daughter's photo ID from her neck and threw it at officials. Security guards then escorted him from the tennis centre. On court, Mark Philippoussis has won his first-round match in straight sets. Philippoussis beat Spain's Albert Portas in straight sets, 6-3, 6-2, 6-3. Tasmanian Richard Fromberg is also through to the second round, following his surprise victory over George Bastille of Switzerland. -------------------------------------"

" East Timor is likely to request that Australia's military forces maintain a presence in the territory for some time after it formally gains independence next year. As East Timor began its first anniversary celebrations late last night, the CNRT's national congress voted to ask the United Nations to keep a peacekeeping force on the West Timor border for years, even after East Timor becomes independent. Indepence leader Jose Ramos Horta said East Timor would certainly be asking Australia to contribute to such a force. Yesterday, near the western border town of Maliana, Australian blue helmet troops clashed with armed militiamen, but no-one was injured. Today, East Timor celebrates its vote last August to end Indonesia's occupation. A mass hosted by Bishop Carlos Belo will be followed by the laying of flowers at Santa Cruz cemetery. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The United Nations is not expected to make a formal reply to the Australian Government's threat to cut ties with the UN treaty committee system. Traditionally the UN does not formally respond to threats like those Australia is making against the international treaty system. The chief of the UN treaty section, Dr Palitha Kohona, says he is surprised at Australia's attitude. He says the UN will work to ensure all countries become better international citizens, rather than adopt an antagonistic attitude. ""I think Australia has been a prominent player in the international arena for many years now and most of the time Australia's activities in the international field has drawn positive comment, praise in fact,"" he said. ""A country like Australia I'm sure will not adopt an attitude that is essentially attracting criticism from the international community."" Dr Kohona says Australia is the only nation in the world refusing to ratify a new protocol on women's rights. Carolyn Lambert from Women's Action Network says the Government has weakened its commitment to the treaty opposing discrimination against women. ""It does send a concerning message to the international community because many countries can look to Australia now and say now here is a member who has been a long standing signatory of CEDAW and they're not prepared to put their name to saying these rights have meaning,"" she said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Telstra is set to report another record annual profit today. Earnings of just under $4 billion are expected for Australia's most profitable public company. The dominant player in the economy's fastest growing sector is set to post the largest profit in Australian corporate history. Mobile and data are again expected to have driven growth, as competitors eat into Telstra's traditional phone markets. BNP Equities analyst Chris Savage says unlike March's half-year results, announcing the loss of another 16,000 jobs, he is not expecting any unwelcome surprises for staff. ""There was a bit of a negative reaction over that so I don't think Telstra will be focusing so much on the number of job cuts, but I think Telstra will keep pushing the message that they continue to cut costs and that along with revenue growth will keep driving solid earnings growth,"" he said. Shareholders will be hoping the numbers come in even higher than forecast, with Telstra Two stock now trading 63 cents below its issue price. ----------------------------------------------------------------"

" A federal Shadow Cabinet meeting this morning will further consider Labor's position on legislation to give police-style powers to the Army. The Senate is expected to resume debate on the bill today. The bill sets out the process for deploying the Army during civil emergencies. The Opposition agrees with the legislation in-principle, but wants amendments, including requiring the Commonwealth to negotiate with state governments before sending in troops. The nature of the bill has prompted enormous public interest - putting Labor in particular under pressure, including from unions worried troops would be called in to break strikes. Further talks between the parties are expected. It is unclear if the Government will accept Labor's amendments, or insist the bill stay in the form it prefers. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" An international investment banking firm says there is a chance the price of crude oil may hit $87 Australian a barrel, forcing the price of unleaded fuel in cities to $1.20 a litre. Goldman Sachs says rapid world economic growth, the onset of winter in the northern hemisphere and sharply lower global oil reserves, will place further pressure on existing stocks. Dominic Wilson, an economist with the firm, says while the risk is there, Australia is less dependent on oil than it used to be and that is a positive sign. ""A further shock to oil prices would certainly be a negative to the Australian economy but given current strengths, the kind of downturn you're likely to see is going to be much much less serious than it has been in the past,"" he said. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" It was a peaceful arrival for a group of illegal immigrants being transferred to the Adelaide Remand Centre last night. The 25 men were involved in Monday's riot at the Woomera Detention Centre. The men, of Middle Eastern origin, arrived peacefully at the remand centre last night - quite a different story from the riotous scenes played out at the detention centre on Monday, where 13 guards were injured and six buildings destroyed. The Department of Immigration says the men now face serious charges. The group will be held indefinitely at the remand centre, separate from the other prisoners. Correctional Services says it is not expecting any problems, but has doubled staff numbers in the area where the men are being held as a precaution. There may be more arrests following the disturbance, with Australian Federal Police examining video footage of the incident. ----------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Southern Victoria has been hit by a strong earthquake which shook houses and caused beds to bounce across the room. It struck just after 11:00pm AEDT and lasted about six seconds. Seismologist Gary Gibson from the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology says the quake, centred under Boolarra in Gippsland, was the strongest to hit Melbourne, the Yarra Valley and Gippsland in a number of years. ""It was felt over 140 kilometres to the western suburbs of Melbourne and all direction and this makes it of a magnitude approach, five on the richter scale. ""The last time we had a five on the richter scale was back in 1986 under Mt Baw Baw,"" he said. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australian Wayne Arthurs has eliminated one of the top-rated players in the US Open tennis tournament in New York. Pitted on centre court against number two seed Gustavo Kuerten, Arthurs fought back from a set down to win the match 4-6, 6-3 7-6 7-6. He served an incredible 26 aces and won 90 per cent of his first serves. He hit 69 winners to defeat the leading player of 2000 in two-and-a-half hours. Earlier, Australian teenager Jelena Dokic lost just one game to advance to the next round. Also winning their first round matches were Lindsay Davenport and Mary Pierce. Australia's Rachel McQuillan was defeated in three sets in her first round match against Shinobu Asagoe of Japan. Asagoe won the match 6-2, 3-6, 6-3."

" The Prime Minister, John Howard, has rejected calls from National Party MPs to earmark part of the petrol excise for increased road funding. Concern over rising petrol prices has been aired in the Coalition party meeting, with 15 MPs speaking during the debate. Mr Howard told the party room oil producers bear the blame for rising petrol prices and says there is no alternative but to keep explaining that to the public. Previous proposals to freeze the indexation of the excise were not raised in the party room but three MPs asked whether in the future part of the excise could be dedicated to spending on rural roads. Mr Howard described earmarking taxes as undesirable. However, it is understood the National Party believes there is considerable support in the Coalition for more money from general revenue to be spent on improving the state of rural roads. National Party sources say the Prime Minister supports that extra spending if budgetary conditions allow it."

" The Immigration Department is continuing a clean-up at the Woomera Detention Centre after six buildings were destroyed during yesterday's disturbance. Holes were also made in the centre's perimeter fence by a group of 80 illegal immigrants. This morning, 27 illegal immigrants were taken to the Adelaide Remand Centre to face charges. Department spokesman, Roger Wheatley, says the centre is returning to normal. ""The centre is functioning as it needs to ... people have been fed and people have accommodation to sleep in,"" he said. ""We obvioously need to do some repairs and remove the damage to the buildings but the centre is functioning."""

" The Federal Government has condemned today's manufacturing industry strike in Victoria. More than 20,000 workers in about 1,000 companies have joined the strike, pushing for industry-wide wage increases of 15 per cent over three years. Federal Industry Minister Nick Minchin says the industrial action sends an alarming message to international investors contemplating an expansion of manufacturing in Australia. ""It's a particularly stupid action when we are all working very hard to attract investment in manufacturing in the automobile industry in this country,"" he said. ""There's potential for over $4 billion in auto investments in Australia over the next five years, (and they are) all threatened by this crazy indusrial action in Victoria."""

" The 24-hour strike has been described as a failure by the Australian Industry Group. Victorian director Paul Fennelly says workers at only one in four workplaces have taken part in the stoppage. However, Mr Fennelly says the campaign has backfired and unions have lost touch with their members. ""They called on some 40,000 workers and certainly this is still going to cause a lot of damage, millions and millions of dollars,"" he said. ""But I think they should hang their heads because what it really says is people have had enough. ""They want to get on and work with their employer and gauge and embrace enterprise bargaining."""

" Australia says it will be more robust in dealing with United Nations' human rights bodies. The Federal Government says it will only agree to visits to Australia by UN committees if there is a compelling reason. After a review of the UN system, Cabinet has announced it will reject unwarranted requests from human rights committees to delay removal of asylum seekers from Australia. Foreign Minister Alexander Downer says Australia will not sign a convention on the elimination of discrimination against women. ""We've decided we'll take strong measures to endeavour to improve the effectiveness of the UN human rights treaty bodies,"" he said. ""The treaty review found that United Nations' treaty bodies do need a complete overhaul, especially as regards to the treaty committee system. ""We want to ensure that adequate recognition of the primary role of democratically elected governments and the subordinate role of non-government organisations is recognised."""

" Broadcaster John Laws has apologised to the New South Wales Supreme Court if he made a mistake during his 1998 on-air interview with a former juror. Laws has pleaded not guilty to soliciting information from the ex-juror. Crown prosecutor Mark Tedeschi QC yesterday alleged Laws breached the Jury Act in 1998 by encouraging a former juror to discuss her position in the jury room. Today, the broadcaster repeatedly stated he was not interested in what went on in the jury room during the murder trial. He said he was giving the former juror, a family friend, an opportunity to say what she was feeling. While in the witness box, Laws apologised to Justice James Wood if he made a mistake. He said it was his belief he was talking to the former juror on a personal level. The prosecutor then stated, on a personal level in front of 18 million Australians. It prompted Laws' barrister Winston Terracini QC to add that while his client's audience was big, he did not think it stretched to 18 million people."

" A large group of CSIRO researchers have staged a peaceful protest outside Parliament House in Canberra, calling on the Federal Government to exempt the organisaton from information technology (IT) outsourcing. The scientists claim their research could be jeopardised or information lost if private sector groups are given control over the CSIRO's computers and networks. The Federal Government says outsourcing will not threaten the capacity of scientists to carry out research. The Shadow Minister responsible for IT, Kate Lundy, says the Government should acknowledge outsourcing has not delivered the savings it had hoped for. ""I've got piles of evidence from the departmental officials themselves saying it's costing us more money,"" she said. ""On the ground efficiencies have diminished, and we've lost effective strategic control of information management, and we cannot even fulfil some of the Government's policies."""

" The Federal Government will consider sanctions against national sporting federations to force them to keep track of athletes. It follows an admission by Australia's official drug testing agency that some athletes are able to avoid random testing. The Australian Sports Drug Agency says some athletes have evaded random drugs tests by not giving accurate contact details or travelling to areas too remote for testing officials. The agency says it relies on sporting federations for information about where an athlete is training. Sports Minister Jackie Kelly says sporting federations have a responsibility to provide accurate data to the agency to stop athletes avoiding drug tests. ""We've got to close that loophole and we will do so,"" she said. The Minister says her department is now considering ways to make sporting federations more accountable."

" The Federal Government has bought $850,000 worth of Olympic tickets in corporate boxes at Stadium Australia. The Prime Minister, John Howard, says the tickets were bought to advance Australia's interests. Mr Howard says the Games gives them an opportunity to meet corporate decision makers from around the world. ""For this Government and its senior members to pass up the opportunity of meeting those people ... and advancing the interests of this country would be absolutely ridiculous,"" Mr Howard said. Mr Howard says Government members have to declare anyOlympic packages which they accept from corporate groups and overnight accommodation should be refused."

" A boosted security presence continues to patrol the perimeter of the Woomera Detention Centre in northern South Australia and extra police are on standby in case the riot which broke out yesterday flares again. Last night, a busload of illegal immigrants was taken to the Woomera police holding cells for questioning. Eighty illegal immigrants, mostly young men who have had their refugee applications rejected, brought the detention centre to a standstill yesterday. They destroyed four buildings and threw rocks and makeshift spears at security guards in their attempts to escape. An Immigration Department spokesman defended the use of tear gas and a water cannon on the illegal immigrants and refused to rule out out using them again if rioting reoccurred. ""Our greatest concern is for staff and particularly for...detainees inside the centre who don't wish to participate in this situation, so obviously we're going to employ methods that will ensure the safety of these people,"" he said. He says the department does not consider the incident is over. ------------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Senior International Olympic Committee (IOC) executives meeting in Lausanne, Switzerland, have decided to approve a new drug test for the Sydney Games. The test was developed by Australian and french scientists. The EPO test was first approved by the IOC's medical commission at the beginning of the month, but needed the full approval of the juridicial commission and the IOC executive board before it could be introduced. The juridicial commission needed to weigh up the legal ramifications of the test and assess the ethical and religious objections that some athletes have to giving blood. It now say it is confident it can defend any challenge to the tests in the courts if necessary. More than 400 tests will be conducted over a wide range of sports. IOC executive board member Jaques Rogge said any athlete who refused the test would be considered guilty of doping. The Federal Sports Minister, Jackie Kelly, says the acceptance of EPO testing by the IOC means the Sydney Games will have the toughest ever drug testing program. Ms Kelly says the Government's commitment of $1.5 million to the research effort has now been vindicated. Meanwhile, Australia's official sports drug testing agency says Australian athletes have been evading random drug tests. The Australian Sports Drug Agency says athletes have been failing to answer phone calls and have been moving to remote locations when told a test is imminent. The agency wants tougher sanctions for athletes who repeatedly avoid testing. The agency says a major problem is the need to rely on sporting federations to tell them where an athlete is training. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Better road funding is the new focus for Coalition MPs concerned about the high price of petrol. The petrol price issue dominated a National Party meeting last night. MPs have put aside their push for a freeze on the excise since the Prime Minister labelled it irresponsible. Today, Liberal and National Party MPs will tell a joint party meeting that the Government should use more of the petrol excise on roads and infrastructure. Meanwhile, the Trade Minister, Mark Vaile, has won an assurance from Indonesian President Abdurrhaman Wahid that he will raise the high world oil price at the next meeting of the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting countries, or OPEC. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Firefighters have managed finally to put out flames that gutted Moscow's Ostankino media tower, but only after President Vladimir Putin admitted the fire had underlined Russia's economic problems. Rescuers have found four bodies and the 540-metre concrete and metal structure, twice the size of the Eiffel Tower and a once-proud landmark on the Moscow skyline, is listing visibly. In the wake of the emergency and following the <i>Kursk</i> submarine tragedy that killed 118 sailors earlier this month, the Russian President says it is no longer possible to conceal that the country is in a shambles and can only re-emerge by rebuilding its economy. Lack of money for maintenance of the Moscow tower appears to have been a contributing factor in the fire, which is currently being blamed on a short circuit in its 33-year-old electrical wiring. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" Tough new laws aimed at stamping out the trade in illegal tobacco, known as chop chop, have been passed by the Federal Parliament. The Government says it has been losing $300 million a year in excise from the illegal trade. Under the new laws, tax officers will have extended powers to search vehicles suspected of carrying illegal tobacco, producers will be licensed and tobacco bales will be tagged and monitored. Assistant Treasurer Rod Kemp says the regime, which includes fines of more than $50,000, has industry support. ""Producer cooperatives were consulted as I said in the development of the measures proposed by this bill and [they] strongly agree with them,"" he said. ""I think this was a very important part of developing this strategy...working with the industry who were concerned to cut down on this illegal trade."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The future of East Timor's pro-independence grouping, the CNRT, will be decided today by delegates attending its first national congress in Dili. The decision will come just one day before the territory celebrates the anniversary of last year's vote for independence. It is likely that delegates will agree to re-name the CRNT the CRNT National Congress - less focused on resistance against Indonesia's occupation and more focused on stability and a peaceful transition towards full independence. The CRNT was formed in April 1988 to unite all East Timorese political parties. Some in the First National Congress have argued that the resistance struggle is by definition over and political parties should be free to pursue their own policy platforms. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Eleven British soldiers and a Sierra Leonean officer taken hostage by a renegade militia are being well looked after, a British force commander said. Speaking at a press conference in Freetown, Brigadier Gordon Hughes said that contact had been established. ""All of them are well, unharmed, getting food, water and shelter and are generally well looked after,"" Brigadier Hughes said. ""I can't go into details of talks but believe that the people we are talking to are representatives of the Westside Boys,"" he added, referring to a militia that broke away from an ousted junta now allied with the government. Responding to questions about possible demands made by the militia, he said: ""These are early days to start speculating as to what their demands are. My top priority is to get the troops out safely and swiftly, we don't want anyone to be harmed."" Earlier in the day, there were unconfirmed reports said the militia was demanding the release of three of its leaders from Freetown's Pademba Road prison. The UN mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL), the Sierra Leone Government and the British are holding talks with the Westside Boys in an attempt to secure the release of the 12 captives. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Shane Woewodin is the sixth Melbourne player to win the AFL's highest individual honour, the Brownlow Medal. The 24-year-old midfielder from Western Australia polled 24 votes to win by two from Western Bulldogs centreman Scott West. Adelaide's Andrew McLeod was third on 20 votes, while pre-count favourite Anthony Koutoufides from Carlton polled 19 votes and Collingwood captain Nathan Buckley, 18. Woewodin, who will play in Saturday's grand final against Essendon, says winning the Brownlow is a dream come true. ""It's a great honour to win this and a huge privilege and commiserations to Westie and the rest of the players who have come in, such a great honour,"" he said."

" Members of Australian rock band, the Screaming Jets, have caused the inaugural Impulse flight from Brisbane to Sydney to stop before it had started. Impulse says the plane was taxiing toward the Brisbane Airport runway when the captain decided there was too much disruption to allow the take-off. Impulse Airlines spokesman, Simon Westaway, said it was a disappointing start to the Brisbane service. ""It's disrupted, you know, the hundred plus other passengers, which do everything, did everything right and you know the unruly few always upsets the majority,"" he said. ""Clearly we're disappointed and it's obviously a publicity seeking exercise. ""You know, just a couple of rock and rollers that have just kept the boofhead mentality when travelling by air."""

" A parliamentary committee has found there is significant potential for tax fraud because the Australian Tax Office (ATO) is failing to manage its records properly. The House of Representatives Economics Committee has found major shortcomings in the management of tax file numbers. Last year, the Auditor-General found the tax office was failing to collect $460 million because of weakness in the tax file number system. The committee chairman, David Hawker, says the committee's investigation has found that $460 million is a conservative figure. ""While the Tax Office has acknowledged these problems, we do not believe that they have taken sufficient action to address these ongoing concerns,"" he said. ""For example, the committee does not consider that the ATO has adequately explained the reasons for the large number of duplicate and excess tax file numbers including the extra 65,000 duplicates found during this inquiry."""

" The chief of the Australian Army has dismissed claims legislation before the Senate would expand the Army's powers during a civil emergency. Australian Greens Senator Bob Brown and civil liberties groups are concerned the defence amendment bill would give the army police-style powers, including the right to shoot to kill. The bill, being debated by the Senate today, defines the Federal Government's powers to deploy troops during a security emergency. Army chief Major General Peter Cosgrove says the Government is not using the Olympics as an opportunity to expand the Army's powers. ""It doesn't actually expand it at all, it really just clarifies the way in which it will be done,"" he said. ""The army is not anticipating that this will be any additional power, just a clearer way of doing it."""

" The Prime Minister, John Howard, has rejected claims the Federal Government will receive a windfall from its petrol excise because of higher fuel prices. Several groups, including the Federal Opposition and the National Farmers Federation, claim there will be a windfall because petrol prices are higher than they were at the time of the Budget. However, Mr Howard says that is not the case, with the Budget papers showing that as inflation increases, less revenue flows to Government, with a negative effect on the Budget. ""It is worse off as a result of the indexation arrangements, rather than being better off, so this argument you get a windfall through the excise collection if the price of petrol is higher than what was calculated at the time of the Budget... that is wrong, wrong, wrong,"" he said."

" Shares in BHP have fallen, following an initial $830 million takeover bid for a major Queensland coal miner. BHP is offering $1.20 a share, with its joint-venture partner, Mitsubishi Development, for the Bowen Basin assets of QCT Resources. However, the current stakeholder, Santos, has not yet decided to sell. QCT shares are now above the offer price, while BHP is down 29 cents to $19.57, suggesting a counter-bid is expected. BHP's managing director, Paul Anderson, says the acquisition is part of a strategy to reduce the group's exposure to steel. ""That's part of that strategy, is to share our exposure to steelmaking materials,"" he said. ""I think as we rationalize our portfolio, we'll be selling assets, and we'll be buying assets, and the real key is what step makes sense at a particular point in time."""

" Fires have broken out again at the Woomera Detention Centre, in South Australia's north, where 80 refugees are rioting. Around 300 security personnel are at the centre where smoke is billowing from two separate fires. Reports are filtering out that 80 rioters have so far destroyed four buildings including the recreation building, dining room, school and ablution block They are using slingshots and spears made from fence pickets in an attempts to repel guards. Detention centre guards have used a water cannon in an attempt to break up the group, but they are continuing to storm the perimeter fence, which has a number of holes. The elite police staff force are on stand-by in case of escape but no-one has breach the razor wire fence as yet."

" The director of the Australian Refugee Association, Kevin Liston, says the trouble at Woomera shows a review of Federal Government policy on the handling of illegal immigrants is warranted. ""We as a nation need to look again at whether we do need to detain in remote areas in spartan conditions all those people who come to us, albeit without our permission, but nevertheless as refugees,"" he said. South Australia's Opposition Leader, Mike Rann, agrees, saying while he makes no excuses for the violence at Woomera, the unrest raises questions about the way the detainees' applications for refugee status are being processed. ""There needs to be much more speedy processing,"" he said. ""We've also seen the Federal Government letting people out and dumping them on in communities without adequate back-up or support. ""Really that's a way of just shifting the costs of handling these people to the states and onto charities, so essentially the Federal Government's policies aren't working."""

" The Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock says he expects charges to be laid against those involved in rioting at the Woomera Detention Centre. Mr Ruddock says those involved in the current disturbance may mistakenly believe their behaviour will force the Government to speed up their refugee status applications. ""There is no way I, the Government nor I think the Australian people will be coerced by behaviour of this sort,"" he said. ""The Government will be looking at any further action it can take to ensure that in relation to those people who have been involved in rioting, civil disorder and destruction of property dealt with in accordance with the law and if the law is inadequate that the law is addressed."""

" A Sydney court has heard that a former juror interviewed by John Laws two years ago was a long-time friend of the radio broadcaster. The prosecution has completed its case against Laws, who has pleaded not guilty to soliciting information from a former juror in 1998. Mr Laws spent the day in the dock in the New South Wales Supreme Court. The former juror in a 1998 controversial murder trial told the court she received a telephone call from Laws's personal assistant after a sleepless night of anguish over the acquittal of two men. The ex-juror, identified as Mrs Hanson, said she was asked if she would speak to the broadcaster on his 2UE morning show. She said if she had have more sleep and been less stressed she would have declined to go on-air. Mrs Hanson said she largely spoke to Mr Laws because he was a friend, adding there was no pressure put on her."

" The Federal Opposition is unlikely to succeed in a bid this week to establish a Senate inquiry into petrol prices. The Labor Party has released its proposed terms of reference for the inquiry, which would look at the link between the new tax system and higher fuel prices. The Democrats have ruled out supporting the inquiry, describing it as a waste of time. But Shadow Treasurer Simon Crean says an inquiry is needed to hold the Government to account. ""It's not just a political stunt,"" he said. ""This is an exercise to get the Government to honour its promise and to expose the deceit that they're now saying that this would cost a lot of money to honour the promise. ""They've got a windfall that they never factored into the budget. They can afford to honour the promise and they should."" ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" East Timor's independence leaders, Xanana Gusmao and Jose Ramos Horta, have agreed to lead the territory's new pro-independence body. The decision came only hours after the two men declared they were resigning their leadership. It appears last night's resignations from the umbrella independence group, the CNRT, were a calculated bluff to scare East Timor's diverse political parties into focusing on consensus on the way to independence. In recent weeks, the 26-year-old Fretlin party had been flexing its muscles, claiming it would get 90 per cent of the vote in any East Timor election. Mr Ramos Horta warned of the implications of a return to the politics of the mid '70s when civil war precipitated Indonesia's invasion. Some members of Fretlin have become frustrated with the consensus approach that the CNRT represents, calling for the quick introduction of a competitive political process. To prevent that shift, Mr Gusmao and Mr Ramos Horta resigned, but overturned that decision once they felt there was a commitment to the creation of a new transitional body to lead East Timor towards elections and independence next year. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Government has dismissed criticism of proposed new laws which seek to clarify powers to send in troops in civil disturbances and security threats. The Australian branch of the International Commission of Jurists says the bill, to be debated in the Senate today, is vaguely worded and could create conflict between state police and soldiers working together on emergencies. The Attorney-General, Daryl Williams, says the legislation simply provides a greater degree of certainty to existing arrangements between the Federal Government and the states. ""We certainly take the views of the International Commission of Jurists seriously, but I think they must be misunderstanding the affect of the bill,"" he said. ""The bill is not expanding the circumstances under which the Defence Force can be called out in aid of civil authorities, it's remaining exactly as it has been effectively since Federation."" ----------------------------------------------------------------"

" Four people are trapped halfway up a huge, burning TV tower in the Russian capital, Moscow. The 520-metre tower, the tallest building in Europe, caught fire last night and is still burning. Firefighters are battling to contain the blaze which has been burning for 10 hours. It started at the top of the tower and is burning its way down. While the tower had been evacuated, three firemen using a lift to ferry supplies to the top became trapped there with the lift operator. Efforts to rescue the four of them continue. The blaze blacked out all television across the world's largest country and is believed to be due to wiring problems. Officials predict the tower, the second tallest in the world, should not fall. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" Negotiators hope another man may be released this morning in the southern Philippines, after the release of five hostages held by Muslim rebels. However, at present, seven hostages and at least 12 Filipinos remain in rebel hands. Libya's Kadhafi Foundation welcomed the release of the five hostages. All four remaining women have been released, along with the oldest of the men, after what was widely believed to have been a huge payment of ransom with funds from Libya. The Libyan Government is yet to confirm reports that it paid a multi-million ransom payment to the Abu Sayyaf rebels to obtain the release of five hostages. But it has issued a statement welcoming the release of the captives while pledging to work for the release of those still being held. The Philippines' Government has maintained throughout the four-month ordeal that it would not meet such demands, but could not prevent others doing so. The rebels have expressed fears their camp will be attacked once all hostages have been released. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak has vowed to continue the war against terrorism, despite the loss of three soldiers during an offensive against Islamic militants. Israeli leaders have indicated that the soldiers may have been accidentally killed by their own side. The raid on a northern West Bank village should have been a triumph for Israel's elite commando unit. Instead, it resulted in the death of three soldiers and the escape of one of Israel's most wanted men. Mahmoud Abu Hanoud, a prominent member of the Islamic resistance movement Hamas, is believed to have masterminded two 1997 suicide bombings that killed more than 20 Israelis. Abu Hanoud fled into Palestinian territory and is now in the custody of Palestinian police. Israeli Defence Force chief Shaul Mofaz has not ruled out that his men were killed by so called friendly fire. An inquiry is being established while Israel decides whether to push for Abu Hanoud's extradition. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Commonwealth secretary-general Don McKinnon has wound up two days of talks in Pakistan, promising the Commonwealth will do what it can to help restore democracy there. He says he received no commitment from Pakistan's military ruler, General Pervez Musharraf, for general elections. But Mr McKinnon says he accepts on face value the General's commitment to rebuild Pakistan's troubled democracy. ""One could look backwards forever,"" he said. ""I've said this country has had a very volatile political history. ""What I'm more concerned about is looking ahead, where are we going from here. People do worry if Pakistan becomes a very unstable state."" --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Finland's Mika Hakkinen has won the Belgian Formula One grand prix in his McLaren after a long duel with Germany's Michael Schumacher in a Ferrari. Hakkinen, on pole, was overtaken by Schumacher on the 13th lap, but then snatched the lead back after 41 laps. Ralf Schumacher finished third in a Williams. Hakkinen now leads Schumacher by six points in the drivers' world championship standings."

" The Federal Opposition has applauded former prime minister Malcolm Fraser's attempt to renew debate on a bill of rights. The Prime Minister has dismissed Mr Fraser's push for a bill of rights, saying it would lead to more litigation and is not the best way to protect people's rights and freedoms. The Shadow Attorney-General, Robert McClelland, says Labor supports a legislative, rather than a constitutional, bill of rights. He says Australia should join other Western democracies, including New Zealand, Canada and Great Britain, in developing a legal statement of people's rights. ""A bill of rights is more about changing the culture of the community and making the government more accountable and facilitative rather than intrusive in people's lives,"" he said. ""This is, in this day and age, something that Australians have to be, and are, becoming more concerned about."" Northern Territory Chief Minister Denis Burke says Mr Fraser's speech in Darwin last night was emotive, divisive and disloyal to the Prime Minister. Mr Burke says Mr Fraser is an ""old stodgy"" with an ""unimpressive record"" who should ""go back to the farm""."

" Meanwhile Federal Aboriginal Affairs Minister John Herron says although he disagrees with many of Malcolm Fraser's views on Aboriginal issues, he agrees with him on one point. Senator Herron has told a Press Club lunch in Darwin that he endorses Mr Fraser's support of self-government for Aboriginal people. Senator Herron has told a Press Club lunch in Darwin, he endorses Mr Fraser's support of self-government for Aboriginal people."

" The Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) chair, Geoff Clark, has welcomed Mr Fraser's comments. He says a bill of rights would help indigenous Australians. ""I think it would enshrine in the Constitution or in legislation however they attempt to do it,"" he said. ""It would enshrine Aboriginal people would have certain access responsibilities in tems of their land, you woudn't have this attack as the Minister said or review like the Reeves review constantly undermining any initial system that is put in place,"" he said."

" The managing director of St George Bank has described the decision to cut back the bank's workforce by more than 10 per cent as ""painful"". However, shares in the company have surged on the Australian Stock Exchange. At about 4:00pm AEST, St George shares were up 27 cents at $11.55. The bank has announced details of what it calls a ""major redesign of its operations"". By eliminating duplication and inefficiencies, it is looking to achieve a boost to pre-tax earnings of $120 million by its 2002 financial year. But the managing director, Ed O'Neal, says there was always going to be an impact on jobs. ""Although some roles will no longer exist, some staff will simply move to new or different roles, but no matter how hard you work at these things, there are always painful decisions to be made,"" he said."

" The Federal Treasury has delivered a positive outlook on the national economy, playing down the extent of inflationary pressure. Treasury's latest quarterly report on the economy says despite strong growth and employment throughout the last financial year, inflationary pressures are under control. Taking out the effect of petrol prices and other factors described as one-off influences, the report says ongoing inflation is significantly lower than the headline rate of 3 per cent. Its observations are based on data before the introduction of the goods and services tax. Treasury's overall outlook remains positive. It says easing growth in domestic demand will be partially offset by the benefits for exports from the falling Australian dollar."

" The man at the centre of an aerial prison break-out last year has pleaded guilty in a Sydney Court to escaping from lawful custody. John Reginald Killick, 58, today entered the plea when his committal hearing resumed in Sydney's Central Local Court. Allegedly aided by his girlfriend, Lucy Dudko, Killick escaped from the exercise yard of Silverwater jail in a helicopter. He has also pleaded guilty to armed robbery and interfering with a helicopter pilot. The office of the Director of Public Prosecutions withdrew a number of charges including kidnapping and armed robbery. Dudko has been committed to stand trial in the New South Wales District Court on charges including harbouring an escaped prisoner."

" Tablets belonging to a South African swimming coach were confiscated by customs officials at Perth airport this week. However, it is believed the 14 tablets, although containing ephedrine, were for dietary purposes. Ephedrine is banned if used in competition. Earlier this week the South African Olympic swimming team arrived in Australia for a training camp and to compete in this weekend's Grand Prix swim meet in Melbourne. Senior coach Dean Price says he ordered the swimmers and staff to declare all their medication to Perth customs officials to avoid any unwarranted suspicions about drug use in the team. He says another coach's dietary tablets were found to contain ephedrine and were confiscated. Mr Price says no further action was taken by customs and he resents the incident being leaked to the media. The senior coach says today's media attention is simply pre-Olympic sensationalism."

" The Federal Government has announced 54 Carelink centres to be set up around the nation as shop fronts, providing a central point for information on services for the aged. The centres, costing nearly $33 million over three years, will be run by community organisations. The Aged Care Minister, Bronwyn Bishop, says the centres will draw together information about the range of agencies and services available in individual areas. She says there will also be a 1-800 inquiry line. ""People will be able to ring and find out for instance how to get meals on wheels, how to get home nursing, how to get carer respite, whatever,"" she said."

" China's religious leaders are intensifying a crackdown on religious dissent amid claims the outlawed Falun Gong meditation is still being practised in China. The group is once again subject to a co-ordinated attack in the state-run media. The head of China's Religious Affairs Bureau and the leader of China's official Buddhist movement are the latest to attack Falun Gong. The Buddhist leader, Sheng Hui, said the group's followers were like drug traffickers and its product like narcotics. The latest official figures show 151 Falun Gong practitioners and organisers are now in jail in China; many for up to 10 years after convictions for leaking state secrets and causing social chaos. But outside China, the movement continues to lobby international governments to pressure China to ease its ban."

" The Federal Government is on the receiving end of some stinging criticism from the former Liberal prime minister Malcolm Fraser. Mr Fraser launched the attack in Darwin last night, when he delivered the 5th annual Vincent Lingiari Memorial lecture, in honour of the Gurindji man, who lead the 1966 Wave Hill walk-off. In his speech, Mr Fraser was critical of the Federal Government's handling of reconciliation, the Stolen Generations, the United Nations and mandatory sentencing. Mr Fraser said governments must act more vigorously and with greater conscience. ""And if governments will not act, then this is a matter on which people must act to secure a government that will. ""The dignity and self esteem of Australia at some point will demand it,"" he said. The Reconciliation Minister, Philip Ruddock, has defended the Federal Government's approach to reconciliation and rejected Mr Fraser's call for a national apology to the Stolen Generations. ""The Government has expressed its deep and sincere regret for what has occurred in the past,"" he said. ""We indicated that we've got no problem with any form of words that doesn't sugggest inter-generational liability and culpability."" The chair of the Reconciliation Council says last night's address by Mr Fraser encourages more action. Evelyn Scott says Mr Fraser's statements, including his call for a bill of rights, have support among indigenous people. ""I believe that now with our leaders we really need to get together in some sort of a national forum where we can talk about these issues, of a bill of rights, and really push it,"" she said. ""Because unless we don't start talking about it, governments won't start talking about it so we need to be a part of the solution to our problem."" The head of the Northern Territory Stolen Generations Corporation, Maurie Ryan Japarte, says he hopes the Federal Government listens to Mr Fraser's statements. ""Absolutely enthralled for what he said and I'm going to study this for the next couple of days, because I reckon it was one of the most fantastic speeches I've heard from a prime minister of this country. ""I admire him for it, it was beautiful,"" he said. ------------------------------------"

" The Federal Treasury has delivered a positive outlook on the national economy, playing down the extent of inflationary pressure. Treasury's latest quarterly report on the economy says despite strong growth and employment throughout the last financial year, inflationary pressures are under control. Taking out the effect of petrol prices and other factors described as one-off influences, the report says ongoing inflation is significantly lower than the headline rate of 3 per cent. Its observations are based on data before the introduction of the goods and services tax. Treasury's overall outlook remains positive. It says easing growth in domestic demand will be partially offset by the benefits for exports from the falling Australian dollar. -----------------------------------"

" The official investigation into yesterday's plane crash in the Persian Gulf has only just begun and pilot error is already being blamed. The 143 people on board a Gulf Air plane were killed, when it plunged into the Persian Gulf on its third attempt to land on the island state of Bahrain. State television in Abu Dhabi, which is a part-owner of Gulf Air, said the accident was not due to technical malfunction but human error. Quoting unidentified civil aviation experts, it said the pilot made a mistake during his first attempt to land and one of its wings was perhaps damaged by hitting the water during the second attempt. On the third attempt, the report said the plane ""lost balance and plunged into the sea"". However, Gulf Air spokesman, Abdullah Abdul Karim, says no-one can yet say what happened. Meanwhile, relatives of many of the 148 who died in the accident have arrived in Bahrain to identify the bodies and then take their loved ones home. The plane's two flight recorders have been found and are now being checked by aviation investigators. ---------------------------------"

" The Australian dollar is now trying to dig itself in after the tumult of the past couple of days. Movements in the local currency overnight have been confined to a narrow range of less than one-third of a cent. Around 7:00am, it was sitting at 57.29 US cents, up less than one-tenth of a cent on yesterday's local close. Volumes have been reasonable though. The calm has left some dealers uneasy and they say the currency could now break either up or down. On the cross-rates this morning, it is at 0.6356 euros; 61.20 Japanese yen; 38.67 pence Sterling; and against the New Zealand dollar, it is at 1.320. On Wall Street, the implications of higher oil prices for company earnings have continued to weigh on the market. But the Dow Jones industrial average has managed to climb 38 points to 11,183. There has again been greater enthusiasm for high-tech stocks. The Nasdaq composite index is up 42 points at 4,053. That is a rise of almost 1.1 per cent. The US bond market is a little firmer. The improved prices have pushed down the yield on 30 year Treasury paper to 5.65 per cent, a fall of not quite 1.5 points. On the British share market, banking and oil stocks surrendered ground, as telecommunications issues recovered. London's FT-100 index has closed 9 points lower at 6,557. Yesterday, Japanese share prices went against the generally lower trend across the rest of Asia. Tokyo's Nikkei index gained 234 points to 16,671, as investors chased high-tech stocks. In Australia, the market continued into record territory. The All Ordinaries index finished 8 points higher at 3,330. On the Sydney Futures exchange, around 7:00am, the Share Price Index contract was up five points on yesterday's day settlement at 3,392. The 10-year bond contract is up one point to 93.80 with the implied yield easing to 6.2 per cent. The gold price is at $US272.95 an ounce. Oil and West Texas crude is at $US31.71 a barrel. ---------------------------------"

" The Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) claims the international media is questioning what has happened to Australia's clean and green image. Executive director of the ACF, Don Henry, says many are asking what Australia is doing to combat the effects of global warming and green house gas emissions. Mr Henry says as the Olympic Games draw closer, there will only be more scrutiny. ""These rates of bulldozing the bush is something that's shocking countries that are used to Australia looking after its environment, are use to our clean and green image with agriculture,"" he said. ""Many of these countries are very concerned about green house gas emissions as well so I think it's really important that we get our act together as Australian's because the world is watching."" Mr Henry says there has been much negative international press about what Australia is doing in its own backyard. ""We've seen for example Swiss television, British newspapers carrying stories where they're wondering what's happening to Australia's clean and green image and why the heck are we the fifth worst landclearing nation in the world and also why are we doing this when it creates salinity and the problems one sees with that."" ----------------------------------"

" The maritime union is concerned a decision by Patrick Stevedores to close its operation in Newcastle is just the start of similar moves across the country. Patrick announced this week that the Newcastle office will close next month, affecting around 30 workers, but denies the closure signals a change in direction for the company. Maritime union members from across the country are offering support to the Newcastle workers, and union organiser, Len Cavell says meetings will be held soon to discuss the union's response. ""They're saying that this is basically confined to Newcastle, but I would say this is not confined to Newcastle,"" he said. ""I think Port Kembla, Adelaide, Fremantle, possibly even Sydney operations are under threat. ""The union nationally will be supporting their members in Newcastle...there are a number of faxes and letters of support coming in from all around Australia."" -----------------------------------"

" The International Olympic Committee (IOC) says it will consider on Monday any action over late nominations of the Australian team. The IOC says the Australian Olympic Committee has until the end of Friday, european time, to finalise Australia's Olympic team. The selection of some athletes is still uncertain because of appeals to the Court of Arbitration of Sport but the the deadline for track and field entries is still two weeks away. An IOC spokesman in Lausanne says any possible penalties or exclusions for Australia will be considered next week. Australian Olympic Committee president John Coates says there is no guarantee that athletes who successfully appeal against their exclusion from the team will be included. The AOC will submit two lists to the IOC. One will include all nominated athletes, the other the names of athletes lodging appeals. ----------------------------------"

" Veteran Mick Martyn and Shane Clayton have been named in the Kangaroos squad for tonight's preliminary final against Melbourne at the MCG. Shannon Motlop and Adam Lange are out. The Demons have named an unchanged line-up for the match. Roos ruckman Mathew Burton says consistency is the key. ""I think I'm a bit like the Kangaroos have been this year, hopefully tomorrow I can do it for four quarter and so can we,"" he said. Essendon has named the same side which thrashed the Kangaroos a fortnight ago for tomorrow's final against Carlton. The Blues however, have brought in Fraser Brown and Dean Rice for the injured Stephen Silvagni and Brett Backwell. Carlton coach David Parkin claims it will be a miracle if the Blues beat the Bombers. -----------------------------------"

" Sydney Roosters forward Luke Ricketson continues his bid to be fit for Sunday's NRL grand final when he is expected to train with the side today. Ricketson has struggled with a hamstring injury this week, but he is hopeful of playing. Favourites Brisbane continue their preparations today with another training session. Brisbane's only injury worry is Shane Webcke, who has a broken arm, but he says he will definitely play. The representative forward says he is not worried about being targeted by the Roosters. Roosters captain Brad Fittler says his team is happy to go in as underdogs. ""In a grand final you've got to get up and make your one on one tackles with these big fellas, it's not an easy job and no-one's been able to do it all year,"" he said. ""It's a tough ask, but we've shown that we can beat them and we only have to do it once more."" Broncos winger Wendell Sailor, who set himself a personal goal of scoring two tries, says he is also enjoying a rivalry with winger and teammate Lote Tuquiri. ""Lote's been really good for me. I think at the moment he's playing better than me so I think I need a big game. ""We've got a very good rivalry there and he's let me know he going alright and I'm letting him know, too. ""Hopefully I can have a big game Sunday because by the sounds of it the Roosters are going to target me, so I'll have to have a big one."""

" The Australian dollar has risen slightly today. The currency is now back to around 57.3 US cents, still well below the 59 cents of earlier this week. Coupled with high petrol prices, the low dollar is fuelling fears of rising inflation and interest rates, with the Reserve Bank saying sustained weakness will push up import prices. BNP Australia currency strategist Clifford Bennett says after yesterday's huge falls, today's rally has been muted. ""It certainly hasn't been exuberant buying, the buying has tended to be a little bit of exporter interest because they are good levels at which to buy the currency in terms of recent history,"" he said. ""But no-one is rushing in to buy a lot and it is more a case of people selling."" The local share market, meanwhile, is set to post yet another record close, with the All Ordinaries index up 10 points, to 3,333. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" At least 70 people have been killed and thousands made homeless by cyclonic rains in the southern Indian state of Andhra Pradesh. Heavy rains and winds from the Bay of Bengal have lashed Andhra Pradesh since Tuesday and there is no sign of them easing. Officials estimate that more than 2,000 homes in 300 villages have been flattened. The military has been deployed to help with emeregency relief, which has rescued more than 2,000 marooned people. Several roads, including the national highway which connects the state to the rest of India, have also been damaged and schools and colleges have been shut. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" An Australian man arrested during an investigation into the murder of a British woman in northern Thailand is to remain in custody for a further 12 days. A court in Thailand ordered Stuart Crichton to be held to allow a police investigation into possible drug offences to be carried out. Thai police say Stuart Crichton is no longer considered a suspect in the murder of 23-year-old British woman Kirsty Jones. But police asked that he continue to be held in custody to allow an investigation into possession of drugs to be completed. Police allegedly found a small quantity of heroin and marijuana when they searched his room at the Chiang Mai guest house in northern Thailand. Crichton faces a fine if guilty of possession of marijuana. There is confusion about whether police are seeking to lay charges in regards to the .01 grams of heroin allegedly found in his room. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Australia's peak motorists group says the Federal Government can afford to provide one-off relief from rising petrol prices. The Prime Minister has continued to defend the government's refusal to cut taxes on fuel, saying it would mean spending cuts elsewhere, or running down the surplus. Australian Automobile Association's Lachlan McIntosh says that is not the case, with the government receiving an unexpected windfall from rising world oil prices. Mr McIntosh has repeated the call for the government to freeze the excise, rather than increasing it with inflation, next February. ""The government didn't anticipate this large increase in the crude oil price in its own factoring, it expected world oil prices to fall,"" he said. ""So any increase in the petroleum resources rent tax that increase is significant, we believe the government probably has $500 million extra, which it could use to offset the index in excise next February."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Australian Medical Assocation (AMA) has launched a new program aimed at improving the health of young people. The AMA has appointed a youth health advocate to implement programs specifically targeting the health needs of young people. There will be a particular focus on rural areas, where young people experience more health problems but are less likely to visit a doctor. The advocate, Melanie Earl, says she wants to improve the relationship between young people and the medical profession. ""Part of my role is to find the middle ground and its really to look at skilling young people to be able to have the confidence and the ability to use their right to access medical services,"" she said. ""It's also about skilling up doctors to understand some of those unique health needs that young people have."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Western Australian Premier, Richard Court, has stepped up his call for the Federal Government to forego at least one CPI increase on the fuel excise. The Australian Automobile Association wants the Commonwealth to freeze the tax rather than the adjustment, which would have a similar effect. The Prime Minister says cutting taxes on fuel would mean spending cuts elsewhere or running down the surplus. But Mr Court says he will take the issue to the next premiers' conference in November. ""If this issue is not resolved by then, I've got no doubt it will be one of the main items on the table,"" he said. ""I believe there would be strong support for that CPI increase, particularly if it's going to be a large one associated with that one-off GST bounce, I think it would be appropriate that that one be foregone."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The widow of a Western Australian police officer killed in the 1994 bombing of the National Crime Authority office in Adelaide is considering launching civil proceedings in the matter. The South Australian Coroner found Dominic Perre was responsible for the death of Sergeant Geoffrey Bowen, although criminal charges were withdrawn due to a lack of evidence. In the Supreme Court in Adelaide today, Perre lost an appeal against the coroner's finding. Sergeant Bowen's widow, Jane Bowen-Sutton, says she will not give up, and now she is considering launching a civil action against Perre. ""I think that's the hardest part - that it's been six and a half years, but I've waited this long so it's just something I feel that I need to see through,"" she said. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The interim report from the King Commission into cricket corruption has been delivered to South Africa's United Cricket Board. The board will consider the report before making any response. The chief executive of the United Cricket Board, Ali Barker, says he will not comment on the report until Monday. But the South African Government is planning to reveal its contents tomorrow. The 66-page document was completed earlier this month by Cricket Corruption Commissioner Edwin King. The King Commission will resume its public hearing in October and a final report is now expected by mid-November. Despite the investigation, South Africa's Sports Minister N'Conde Bowser says the game of cricket is still healthy. Mr Bowser says only a few individuals are to blame for recent controversies and cricket's reputation has not been tarnished. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" It appears there are no survivors among the 143 people on board a passenger jet that crashed in the Persian Gulf this morning. Gulf Air flight 72, an Airbus A320 flying from Cairo crashed while preparing for its third attempt to land at Bahrain's Manamar Airport. Around 135 passengers and eight crew were on board. One Australian is on the passenger list, while the bulk of passengers were from Egypt and Bahrain. The wreckage is lying in about six metres of water and United States navy aircraft and ships are assisting the night time rescue attempt. Bahrain's Transport Undersecretary, Ibrahim Al Hammad, says so far there have been no signs of life at the crash scene. ""I cannot confirm whether there are any survivors or not, but all the attempts are there to try to recover whatever we could. So far we have recovered about 50 bodies,"" he said. The Foreign Affairs Department has confirmed an Australian man was on board the plane. A spokesman says the man has lived in the Middle East for a long time and his family, which is also based in the Middle East, has been notified. --------------------------------"

" Prominent forecaster Access Economics is warning the worst might not be over for the Australian dollar. The local currency has fallen to a new three-month low overnight but is showing signs of recovery. Potentially putting upward pressure on petrol prices and inflation, the Australian dollar had fallen almost two cents in a day by the close of trade yesterday. During the European trading session overnight, it has been even lower, bottoming at 56.68 US cents, its lowest level since May. Meanwhile, in its latest Economics Monitor released publicly overnight, Access Economics says activity in the United States continues to surprise with its strength and US interest rates might need to rise by more than financial markets are assuming. That, it says, would keep the Australian dollar under pressure. When Australia's Reserve Bank raised interest rates in April and May, it specifically mentioned the weakness of the dollar as a concern. ------------------------------"

" Indonesia's President, Abdurrahman Wahid, has unveiled a new and smaller cabinet to tackle the country's social unrest and economic woes. The lineup may have caused a rift with his deputy, Megawati Sukarnoputri. President Wahid says he jointly decided the new Cabinet with his deputy, Megawati Sukarnoputri, who it was announced two weeks ago would take over day-to-day running of Government affairs. But Megawati was conspicuously absent for the naming of the new Cabinet line-up. President Wahid told reporters his deputy was missing because she had to quickly return home to take a shower. But sources close to the President say Megawati disagreed over several of the new Cabinet appointments. Close Presidential ally, Alwi Shihab, has been retained as Foreign Minister and Attorney-General Mazuki Daroesman who brought corruption charges against former President Suharto, retains his position. -------------------------------"

" Mattel has recalled a children's swing sold in Australia since 1991, following injuries to five children. Mattel says it is voluntarily recalling the Fisher-Price ""Lift and Lock Swing"" and providing an extra safety restraint to owners to ensure it is safe. The recall follows concerns about a plastic ""T"" shaped restraint. Children can apparently manoeuvre out of the restraint and fall out of the swing. The company is aware of five reports of children falling out of the outdoor swing in Australia. Parents are advised to stop using the swings immediately until they receive an additional kit with a supplementary waist and crotch restraint belt. Around 180,000 of the swings have been sold in Australia since 1991. --------------------------------"

" Cathy Freeman will have to wait until the Sydney Olympics before she can race against her great 400 metre rival, Marie-Jose Perec. The French woman has withdrawn from Friday's Golden League athletics meet in Brussels, where she was to have raced Freeman. It is the fourth time this year that the reigning Olympic champion has pulled out of a major competition in Europe."

" The debate over petrol pricing has stepped up a gear with revelations two oil companies are being investigated over claims they are pocketing a Federal Government rebate for rural motorists. The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) is investigating Shell and another oil company, over a $500 million Government scheme aimed at reducing the gap between country and city prices under the GST. ACCC chairman Allan Fels is inviting evidence from service stations, that their suppliers are absorbing the grant, instead of allowing it to be passed on to motorists. ""We have not made up our mind as to whether either of these companies are breaking the law, but we are certainly investigating very seriously,"" he said. Shell has angrily denied any wrong doing and spokesman Ian McKenzie is demanding a quick resolution to the inquiry. ""The fuel rebate is paid to retailers, not to Shell,"" Mr McKenzie said. ""It's being passed on in full by retailers. There is no rorting of the system."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A federal politician from New South Wales who has strongly criticised Telstra says it would have compromised his stance had he accepted Olympic tickets from the corporation's Country-Wide arm. The offer was made to the Independent Member for Calare, Peter Andren. The rural based MP says he was offered a ticket package which he understands would have made him Telstra's guest at either the Olympics opening or closing ceremony. Mr Andren has called for any politician given the same offer to refuse it. While he will not say whether he considers the offer bribery, the MP says to accept it would certainly have compromised his stance on Telstra-related issues. ""How could I stand and be critical of Telstra's performance when I'm prepared to accept largesse,"" he said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Russian President Vladimir Putin has criticised the state of the Navy's rescue equipment during a meeting with bereaved relatives of the 118 crew members of the nuclear submarine <i>Kursk</i>. He made his comments during talks in Murmansk which lasted for more than three hours. Mr Putin had gone to see the relatives after meeting naval chiefs and after declaring a national day of mourning. President Putin arrived in the Arctic dressed in black, following emotional pleas for forgiveness from the Navy and the Defence Minister. But Russians do not seem to be in a forgiving mood following the loss of the Kursk and all her crew in a protracted and poorly handled rescue. The media is continuing its criticism, 'those who pretended to be a superpower will not be excused, said one newspaper. These attacks which have goaded the President into action. But for many Russians, Mr Putin has failed the first test of his presidency. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Tension is once again rising in Northern Ireland, with the arrest and imprisonment of the commander of a paramilitary group, the Ulster Defence Association (UDA). Johnny ""Mad Dog"" Adair was released from Maze Prison last September under the terms of the Good Friday peace agreement. In a dramatic move, provoked by the recent battles between rival Protestant paramilitaries in Belfast, Northern Ireland Secretary Peter Mandelson has revoked the UDA leader's licence for early release. Adair, one of Northern Ireland's most feared Protestant extremists, has been blamed for inflaming tension between the Protestant groups since his release from prison last September. In a statement, Mr Mandelson said he could not give freedom to an individual intent on abusing it and he has urged the people of Belfast to reject gangsters and thugs interested only in their own power and greed. It followed several days of bloody feuding in Belfast between Protestant extremist groups which has left two dead and many more wounded. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The United Nations has confirmed reports that as many as 100 pro-Jakarta militia are now operating inside East Timor. However, the militia appear more interested in returning to their homes than in fighting UN peacekeepers. The United Nations military has confirmed reports of armed militiamen operating in groups of up to 25 deep inside East Timor. A UN military spokesman says the groups are carrying automatic weapons, but rather than wanting to engage UN troops, they are seeking ways to resettle in their native East Timor. There is one unconfirmed report of a group asking the help of a priest to make contact with UN civilian police as a first step in returning from their stronghold in West Timor. The United Nations has suspended the repatriation of East Timorese across the border, fearing an escalation in violence. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" In an unusual move, the United States has joined Libya, a country it has often accused of sponsoring terrorism, in offering to help end the long running hostage crisis in the Philippines. A new proposal to deal with the Philippines four-month-old hostage crisis has been accepted by Libya. Some reports suggest the deal may include an increase in the ransom money on offer and/or a staggered release of the hostages. Tension on the island of Jolo has grown in recent days, with the Philippines military conducting weapons exercises. A United States embassy spokesman in Manila says the US would assist the Philippines Government in battling the Abu Sayyaf kidnappers if it was asked and the US considers the Abu Sayyaf a terrorist group. The United States has long accused Libya of sponsoring international terrorism and maintain sanctions against that country. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Wollongong sprint cyclist Ben Kersten has lost his appeal for inclusion in the Australian Olympic team. The world junior champion says he is completely devastated at not being part of the Sydney Games. Ben's father, Harry Kersten, says Cycling Australia did all it could to prevent Ben's appeal from succeeding. He says the appeal was based on a legal technicality that there was bias in the selection process. ""We went into it with reasonable hope, looking for some fairness,"" he said. ""There were some issues that were raised, that showed that everyone just doesn't play on the same playing field. ""I don't think the selectors had it in for Ben in any way,"" he said. ""The argument that we put up, and we think has merit, is that there was bias towards other athletes in that squad."""

" Russia's President has declared a national day of mourning, in honour of the crew of the submarine Kursk who died when their vessel sank in the Barents Sea more than a week ago. The announcement follows criticism of the government over its handling of the rescue operation. President Putin has a lot of ground to recover, accused of isolationism and incompetence over the rescue of the Kursk. International experts say that if they had been called in earlier they could have saved some of the crew. Instead all 118 perished in Russia's worst peacetime naval disaster. The chief of the northern fleet appealed to the families for forgiveness saying that everything possible had been done to save their sons. But in the light of the international rescue effort Russians remain dubious. Moscow is appealing for foreign aid to raise the Kursk, as it is too shallow for it to lie safely where it sank."

" It may be several more weeks before the competition watchdog rules on whether oil companies are profiteering on petrol, or have passed on cost savings from the new tax system. Oil companies are impatient to be cleared of profiteering, saying inadequate federal goods and services tax (GST) compensation has forced them to raise prices by one-and-a-half cents a litre. The Government continues to blame world oil prices, not state and federal taxes, for the high pump prices and has rejected the Senate inquiry demanded by state Labor premiers. The competition and consumer commission's chairman, Alan Fels, says oil companies will have to be patient for his ruling. ""We don't run this show for the benefit of the oil companies, it's just one of many issues that we're reporting on in our monitoring report, and they'll get their day then,"" he said. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Australian Olympic Committee (AOC) and Athletics Australia say there will be no problems naming our Olympic team by Friday's deadline. The team list is uncertain because the International Olympic Committee (IOC) says athletes who succesfully appeal their failure to make the team, may not be allowed to compete. The problem stems from the IOC's insistance that for team members to be added to the list after Friday, there needs to be a medical problem with the athletes already selected. But Athletics Australia says it will use that rule to include on Friday's list athletes who are appealing their non-inclusion in the team. The AOC says it is a simple administrative issue that has not been a problem at past games. Athletics Australia's Brian Roe claims everyone who eventually qualifies will compete in September. ""All the people who are in the ballpark for nomination, being appealed against, or appealing, are all in the entry system by the required date."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Democrats leader Meg Lees is calling for a trial of legalised heroin to be resurrected and reform of marijuana laws. She has told the Melbourne Media Club that the ACT heroin trial, which is currently on hold, should go ahead. The ACT trial would supply heroin to a limited number of addicts under medical supervision. Senator Lees has left open the possibility of more widespread trials, but says the community can only take one step at a time. ""If they can actually see that the number of people dying is reduced, then I think we can maybe take a look at where we go from then,"" she said. ""But just looking at the issue of marijuana, I think perhaps that's the first thing we need to come to terms with. ""Are we actually going to look at this on a more national basis and say well, kids are going to experiment with something, let's make a very clear line between what really is dangerous and what is dangerous but a lot less dangerous than heroin. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Two Australian men are still being considered suspects in a murder case in northern Thailand despite reports suggesting they had been cleared. Diplomatic sources in Thailand say that the final results of DNA tests will not be released until this evening. Wire agency reports from the northern Thai city of Chiang Mai yesterday reported that all foreign suspects in the investigation into the murder of British woman, Kirsty Jones had been cleared of suspicion. But diplomatic sources in Bangkok now say these reports have been incorrect. The sources say police have told them that DNA results will not be announced before this afternoon. At least until that time Australian Stuart Crichton and Nathan Foley are still considered suspects in the case. Crichton remains in police custody while Nathan Foley has been asked not to leave Chiang Mai. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" More and more Australians are eating out and fast food outlets are the most popular. The findings are in a BIS Shrapnel report which estimates Australians will eat more than $3 billion meals outside the home this year. The author of the report, Dr Sandro Mangosi, says fast food chain operators will maintain their strong market position. Dr Mangosi says Australia is adopting the American experience. ""In Australia we spend 30 cents out of a dollar on food which is not prepared at home,"" Dr Mangosi said. ""In America it's about fifty-fifty, we can put the two graphs of Australia and United States beside and we are lagging the US by about 10 years. ""So we are moving towards the fifty-fifty in due course, probably in 10 years time."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" After a nine day wait, the relatives of the 118 crew members of the Russian nuclear submarine <i>Kursk</i> have heard the news they have been dreading, all onboard the vessel are dead. The announcement came after the rear escape hatch of the vessel was opened by Norwegian divers. Russia is a nation in mourning following confirmation that none of the crew of the <i>Kursk</i> submarine survived. There is anger in the country at what is seen as a bungled rescue. Russia failed to dock on the submarine for three days, while the Norwegian divers had entered the vessel within 24 hours. Russia is negotiating with the Norwegian divers to recover the bodies of the submarine's crew, the shattered submarine and its two nuclear reactors. Meanwhile, it has been revealed that Russia did not have the capability to send divers down to the vessel because its diving units were decommissioned in 1997. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Prime Minister has lashed out against Queensland Premier Peter Beattie over the Premier's calls for an inquiry into petrol prices. Mr Howard says Mr Beattie is engaging in a cheap stunt by suggesting excise and the GST are responsible for the latest round of petrol price increases. He says if the Premier seriously wants fuel excises cut, he should name which state grants he would be prepared to have reduced by the Commonwealth. Mr Howard says world oil price movements are the key factor behind petrol price rises. ""It really is the most unmitigated stunt I have seen in years for Peter Beattie to carry on in this headline hunting superficial fashion,"" he said. ""Politicians who call for inquiries are either afflicted by one of two political disabilities: either they don't have a policy or they don't know how to solve the problem."" ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Opposition claims the Government has created another problem for itself in its approach to legislation regarding access to reproductive technology. The Government has confirmed its legislation will allow Western Australia and South Australia to continue to have lengthy waiting times before de facto couples can access IVF programs. The Shadow Attorney-General, Robert McClelland, says the five-year waiting times are a form of discrimination. Mr McClelland says the Federal Government is caught between its promise not to discriminate against de factos while giving the states a free-hand to run discriminatory laws. ""They seem to be allowing the states to define the concept of de facto,"" he said. ""Once they do that, they are permitting the states to discriminate against de factos, as they do in actual fact in Western Australia and South Australia."" ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" British troops are back on the streets in Belfast, following an outbreak of violence amongst Protestant paramilitary groups. Northern Ireland secretary Peter Mandelson has urged the residents of the Shankill Road area to work with the authorities to stop the violence, which he says has nothing to do with politics, but is the result of squalid murderous gang warfare. In the latest killings, two men were shot in a car by a lone gunman, a killing condemned by the Ulster Development Party, the political arm of the paramilitary group the Ulster Defence Association, or the Ulster Freedom Fighters. There is little doubt that it was payback by the rival protestant paramilitary group the Ulster Volunteer Force following weekend attacks on its supporters. Authorities now fear that the violence will now escalate, threatening an already fragile peace. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Foreign Minister Alexander Downer says it appears Fiji's new interim government has no intention of restoring the Chaudhry Government. This follows a meeting yesterday between Mr Downer and his Fijian counterpart Kalipate Tavola, the first since the May coup. Mr Downer says he re-affirmed his demand for the restoration of the 1997 constitution and the Chaudhry government and Australia's committment to sanctions. ""I said to him in the event of the 1997 constitution not being re-established with Mr Chaudhry as Prime Minister there needed from Australia's perspective a very rapid return to constitutional and democratic government in Fiji,"" he said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Thai police have defended their handling of the investigation into the death of British backpacker, Kirsty Jones. Two Australians are still being held as investigations into the murder continue. Sitting in a hotel room last week with a policeman by his side, Australian, Nathan Foley, was critical of the investigation into the murder of his friend, Kirsty Jones. Mr Foley said police had lied to him and tried to break him. He also said he could not understand why they had not taken his fingerprints if he was being treated as a suspect. A British embassy official has been reported calling the investigation a shambles. Thai police denied charges that their investigation has been delayed or confused, but the investigator running the case has been transferred to a neighbouring province. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The road transport industry has warned state and federal governments the sector is about to suffer a critical shortage of drivers. A quarterly survey of the industry by APS and Freight Business Australia found 62 per cent of respondents believe driver shortages will become the biggest issue for them. APS managing director Julian Barson says unless governments and the industry address the problem, Australia will be like the United States where trucks are idle and freight does not move because of the driver shortage. ""There seems to be some sort of stigma associated with being a driver or coming into the logistics industry and it's not something that is encouraged from schools or from parents,"" he said. ""Unless there is some sort of combined effort by government and private industry and unions to recruit in this industry the problem is only going to become worse."" --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The International Olympic Committee (IOC) is warning Australia, its complete Games team must be named by Friday, regardless of outstanding appeals. At the same time, Olympic organisers have clarified flag rules and indigenous athletes have been told they will not be able to run on the track with the Aboriginal flag. Spectators can carry the Australian, Aboriginal and boxing kangaroo flags, but athletes can only carry the Australian flag on the track. The ruling means Cathy Freeman will not be permitted a re-run of her 1994 victory lap. With 10 or more appeals and medical reports pending on the Australian athletes, it seems certain the team will not be named by Friday's IOC imposed deadline. IOC executive Jacque Rogge says only genuine medical problems will allow a selection change on the team. ""I would imagine that it is a problem,"" he said. ""All of this must be anticipated and it all depends on when you organise the last trials. ""If you organise them very close to the Games, then you're bound to have problems."""

" An international team has reached a stricken Russian submarine in arctic waters off northern Russia, and is set to begin a new rescue attempt. But Russian officials now say that after a week trapped under the sea, all the men aboard the submarine are likely to be dead. The announcement came just as the British rescue team was sailing into the Barents Sea. A Russian admiral confirmed there were now unlikely to be any survivors. He said the men in the nose of the submarine probably died instantly when it hit the sea bed. The men in the rear compartments had survived longer, but the messages they had tapped in code on the hull said that the water was rising around them. The admiral's address was televised nationally, but the sailor's relatives were not informed beforehand, learning the fate of their loved ones from television like the rest of Russia. --------------------------------------"

" Impulse Airlines is stepping up its airfare pricing war, this time offering discount fares between Canberra and Melbourne. The latest offer - a $120 one-way fare between Canberra and Melbourne via Sydney - is the second price cut Impulse has announced within a week. Last week, the airline announced a $132 fare between Canberra and Brisbane, while fare prices between some eastern capitals have fallen to as low as $33 one-way. Most of the discount fares must be booked over the Internet and have limited seats available. Impulse chief executive Gerry McGowan says the airline is remaining viable despite the two major carriers Qantas and Ansett matching the discount fares so far. --------------------------------------"

" Islamic guerillas in the Philippines are holding on to almost 30 western and local hostages, shattering hopes that the four-month old crisis would be resolved this weekend. The chief negotiator leading Libyan efforts to offer millions in development funds in exchange for the 28 remaining hostages, has returned from talks with the Abu Sayyaf saying the terms of agreement need to be re-negotiated. Libyan says the delay is the fault of the Philippines Government and military because they have not assured the kidnappers that there will be no attack if the hostages are set free. It now appears there is not even a guarantee that talks will resume in the near future. It is understood that Abu Sayyaf leaders are resisting a request from Phillipines President Joseph Estrada that all the hostages be released at once. --------------------------------------"

" Olympic organisers admit they may have to delay some Games events if the city's transport system breaks down. Olympics Minister Michael Knight has confirmed events could be held back if large number of spectators fail to arrive on time. Organisers have been warning spectators to ensure they leave enough time to get to Games venues, sometimes recommending people allow double the time a trip to Homebush might normally take. Mr Knight says the thousands of Olympic buses will be used if there is a rail breakdown. However, organisers have previously said buses can never replace the rail network so some events may be delayed until all spectators arrive. Organisers will also encourage spectators to walk from rail stations near Homebush Bay, if there is a major rail failure. Mr Knight says international sporting federations have been consulted and have approved venue contingency plans, which include the possibility of delays. --------------------------------------"

" The Federal Government will reaffirm its demand for a return of constitutional democracy in Fiji during Australia's first meeting with Fiji's new interim government since the coup. The Foreign Affairs Minister, Alexander Downer, will meet with his Fijian counterpart tomorrow. Australia has imposed some aid, sporting and defence sanctions on Fiji since the coup. Mr Downer says he will send a clear message to the new Fijian Government during tomorrow's discussions. ""Our message is that these sanctions that we have are going to remain in place until Fiji gets right back onto the path of constitutional government and democracy,"" he said. ""For that to take three years, as has been so far foreshadowed by the interim government, is for us frankly far too long."" --------------------------------------"

" The Federal Government is planning to launch its biggest vaccination campaign, offering Australians between 18 and 30 free vaccination against measles. The campaign aims to eradicate measles in Australia and is focusing on that age group because it is the only generation which has been overlooked in other campaigns. The Australian Medical Association's Dr Shane Sondergeld says the program, offered on a voluntary basis, is long overdue. ""Particularly we're concerned about effects on the brain and also effects on the lungs,"" he said. ""But more importantly in this age group, if measeles can be contracted, it can then be passed on to younger members of the community who may not be vaccinated."" --------------------------------------"

" Queensland Premier Peter Beattie is calling for a Senate inquiry into the rise in petrol prices since the introduction of the GST. Fuel prices in Brisbane reached 92.9 cents at most bowsers earlier this week and are now at about 89.9 cents. In other areas around the state, fuel has either hit the $1 per litre mark or is creeping close. Mr Beattie has attacked the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission for cracking down on supermarkets and toll roads but ignoring the massive fuel price rises. The Premier says he believes it is time for a Senate inquiry into the massive rise in petrol prices. --------------------------------------"

" Dairy farmers who provide shade and sprinklers for their herd are likely to record a higher milk yield, a study has found. CSIRO research in the New South Wales Hunter Valley shows heat stress is causing cows to produce about 3 per cent less milk than those kept under shelter. Research scientist Roger Jones says the introduction of cooling techniques will be even more benefical in years to come. ""We were able to show that that sort of on-farm adaptation would certainly be even more economic in a changed climate,"" Dr Jones said. Dr Jones says hot cows can cause dairy farmers to lose money. ""At the moment in our test area of Muswellbrook the cows are losing on average around about 130 litres per cow per year, which doesn't sound very much but it's almost $6,000 for every 100 cows,"" he said. --------------------------------------"

" Monday night's Four Corners traces the fierce political battle behind Australia's new digital TV laws and delves into what is arguably Australia's most protected industry. The program airs on ABC TV at 8:30pm. Discuss the issue in the 4C forum, starting at 9:30pm AEST. Put your questions to the special guests: \* Vicki Bourne, Democrats spokeswoman for communications; \* Peter Coroneos, head of the Internet Industry Association; \* Tony Branigan, head of the Federation of Australian Commercial Stations; and \* Alex Encel, TV importer and retailer."

" British rescuers onboard a Norwegian supply ship hope to start pulling out any survivors from the crippled Russian submarine in the Barents Sea tomorrow morning. The British contingent are to use the high-tech LR5 submersible, described as an ""underwater helicopter"", to dock with the ill-fated Kursk nuclear submarine. Following the failure of previous Russian rescue attempts, this is seen as the last real hope to free the 118 trapped Russian submariners. The organisers of the British contingent say the capsule will take about four hours to get down to the Kursk once it is launched from the parent ship, the Normand Pioneer. Meanwhile, United State Defence Secretary William Cohen has reaffirmed the Pentagon's willingness to help with the rescue of the Russian submarine. Mr Cohen says US concern for the crew of the Kursk transcends nationality and political differences. He says the Pentagon is assembling a team of divers, engineers and medical experts to be ready to leave in 24 hours, if Russia requests further help. ""The Defence Department remains ready, willing and able to provide whatever assistance to the Russian authorities that they would find helpful,"" he said. -----------------------------------------------"

" A grenade has been fired into a building used to house the offices of several political parties in Kosovo's capital, Pristina The head of the United Nations mission in Kosovo has blamed anti-democratic extremists for the attack. The blast ripped through the building at about 9.30am local time. Although glass and debris were sent flying into neighbouring buildings, no-one was seriously hurt. The building houses a political support centre run by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe. Several of the province's smaller political parties have their offices there. The worst-hit were the offices of an ethnic Turkish party and a Bosnian party. No-one has claimed reponsibility for the attack and it is unclear what or who was the target. Local elections are due to be held in Kosovo on October 28. The head of the UN mission, Bernard Kouchner, says the attack was an attempt by extremists to destroy the election system. In a separate incident, eight children were seriously injured when an explosive device was thrown near a checkpoint in a village in the north of the country. The device, thrown from a car, exploded 20 metres from the checkpoint manned by members of the NATO-led peacekeeping force. ---------------------------------"

" Polls suggest Democratic presidential candidate Al Gore has pulled slightly ahead of his Republican rival George W Bush, after his nominating convention. An NBC television opinion poll found 46 per cent of more than 500 respondents prefer Senator Gore, with 43 per cent preferring Mr Bush. The network says the poll shows Senator Gore has received the same kind of convention bounce that Mr Bush did in a similar poll taken immediately after the Republican convention. Senator Gore is now back on the campaign trail, appealing to working families. ""This election is to enable and to empower all of us to join together to say the people of America have had enough, we want these changes and ... we're going to stand up for our families,"" he said. However, Mr Bush gave Mr Gore low marks for his Democratic National Convention speech, dismissing it as a laundry list of promises to make up for past failures. At a campaign stop in Senator Gore's home ground of Tennessee, Mr Bush was cheered as he tore into his rival's nomination acceptance speech in Los Angeles. Reiterating comments that he made at the recent Republican National Convention, Mr Bush accused the Clinton administration of squandering opportunities and says Al Gore cannot escape the blame. ""We heard a laundry list of new promises, which I thought was an attempt to cover up old failures,"" he said. ""It is a long list of promises without priorities, a list of promises without purpose or vision."" -----------------------------------------------"

" Post-mortem results on a woman and man whose bodies were recovered from a Queanbeyan house fire have revealed they were murdered before the fire started. The post-mortem revealed 35-year-old David John McNally died as a result of gunshot wounds to the head and upper body, and his de facto wife 32-year-old Adelia Williams died after being stabbed a number of times in the upper body. Police have recovered accelerant from the crime scene. They believe it was used to light the fire. The couple's three children, aged eight, six and four, were in the house at the time of the attack but were rescued from the fire by police. The six-year-old boy had been shot in the head but was released from hospital yesterday after surgery to remove bullets from his skull. The eight-year-old girl dialled 000 when she was awoken by a smoke alarm in the house. The three childen are now in the care of relatives who are assisting police with their murder investigations. --------------------------------------"

" The decision about who will light the cauldron at the Olympic opening ceremony may not be made until the day before the event. Australian Olympic Committee President John Coates and the Olympics Minister Michael Knight will make the decision. Olympic circles are saying the person may be a gold-medal winning Australian Olympian and most likely female. Mr Knight says it has to be someone special and the decision must remain secret. ""The best way to keep the secret is not to make the decision until quite late,"" he said. ""I wouldn't expect us to make the decision until just a few days or even the day before the opening ceremony. ""It's a difficult decision. There are obviously a lot of people who would do a terrific job but only one person can light the cauldron"". --------------------------------------"

" The Western Australian Government has formally revealed the establishment of five new national parks in the Kimberley will thwart two native title claimants. The Premier, Richard Court, says the national parks in the Mitchell Plateau and the King Leopold Ranges will allow the land to be accessed by all Western Australians, not just a select few. But the Kimberley Land Council says neither of the native title claimants is seeking exclusive access. The Government has been condemned by Green groups and Aborigines for creating the new national parks without consulting local claimant groups. Mr Court says the formation of the additional 500,000 hectares of national park today will better protect the area. ""Here we've got a national park where all Western Australians will have the ability to go and enjoy that property,"" he said."

" The Kimberley Land Council says Mr Court knows that the traditional owners of the land covered by the new national parks have no intention of restricting access to others. A spokeswoman says letters to the Premier clearly state that tourists travel through the area all the time, and they are welcome. She says the traditional owners have also said in public statements that their concern is for the land to be looked after, and they believe it should be their responsibility to do this. The Aboriginal Legal Service (ALS) agrees, saying the people of Western Australia will recognise the Premier's action as mean-spirited and a cynical move to capture votes. ALS spokesperson Dennis Eggington says Mr Court knows that Aboriginal people have never sought to restrict access to the land. ""Aboriginal people will feel happy about ... land that's protected and preserved ... shared and looked after by everyone,"" he said. ""What I think he's doing is, not only trying to put Aboriginal people down again, but he's certainly out there trying to capture a vote."" The Anglican Primate of Australia and archbishop of Perth, Peter Carnley, has joined the chorus of disapproval, saying native title has never been about exclusive possession. ""I think it is very provocative to do such a thing when there's a native title claim pending... and to do it also without consultation with the Aboriginal people,"" he said. ""I think reconciliation in this country really means we've got to talk together and really just to walk over the top of people isn't on any more."" ---------------------------------"

" Cathy Freeman has continued on her winning way with victory in the 400-metres at the Golden League event in Monaco, setting the fastest time of the year. Freeman won easily in 49.48 seconds, more than a second ahead of her nearest rival. Freeman is now unbeaten in eight starts over 400-metres this year, and has won 40 out of 41 races since her silver medal in the Atlanta Olympics in 1996. She will have her last 400 hitout before the Olympics next weekend in Brussels, before winding up with a 200-metres run at Gateshead in Britain three days later. --------------------------------------"

" The Federal Government will move to fix a problem in the wording of its reproductive technology legislation, which could have left the way open for states to ban de facto couples from accessing IVF programs. The Government's legislation, tabled in Parliament this week, had been designed to ban lesbians and single women from IVF, but would also have allowed discrimination on the basis of a couple's marital status. The Attorney-General, Daryl Williams, says the Government will put forward an amendment to ensure women living in a de facto relationship with a man could not be denied access to reproductive technology services."

" Police say evidence collected from the Childers backpackers fire will be sent to America for analysis by an arson expert. In the Bundaberg Magistrate's Court today, 37-year-old Robert Paul Long was remanded in custody until November 7 on charges of murdering Western Australian twins, Stacey Louise Slarke and Kelly June Slarke on June 23. He was also charged with setting fire to the Palace backpackers hostel in the main street of the southern Queensland farming town. Fifteen backpackers died in the blaze. Speaking outside the court, north coast region Detective Inspector, Jeff Oliphant said it was expected the results of the US analysis would be known within three months. He said there would be no further charges relating to the fire until the current ones are dealt with. ""A significant number of witnesses will be called, but I don't expect that all those people who were at Childers will be called,"" he said. "" ""There's only the people we believe that will assist us in proving our case. ""Most statements have now been obtained from all the people we believe will assist us. ""Scientific statements and evidence have got to be finalised and hopefully in three months time, that will all be put together."""

" South Australian scientist and former Governor, Sir Mark Oliphant, has been remembered at a public memorial ceremony in Adelaide this morning. Sir Mark died last month at his Canberra home, aged 98. He was well known for his involvement in inventing the magnetron, a radar device used to track enemy planes and ships, and his work on the Manhattan Project to develop the atomic bomb. The Premier, John Olsen, says Sir Mark was a brilliant scientist, and it was a great irony that his efforts to understand how the universe was put together led to the creation of history's most destructive weapon. ""While he personally carried in part the shame of Hiroshima like an albatross for some of his life, while there will always be debate about how the bomb was used, history judges the actions of Oliphant and his colleagues well. ""They fulfilled a need to develop technology ahead of others,"""

" Leading general insurer and stockmarket newcomer, NRMA Insurance, has its much-prized credit rating under close scrutiny. The group is Australia's highest-rated insurer and the only one that carries the AA+ rating from Standard and Poor's. The ratings agency has affirmed the rating today, saying NRMA has an excellent business franchise, market leadership in general insurance and a very strong balance-sheet profile. But Standard and Poor's has revised the ratings outlook to negative. It expects the group's capitalisation to deteriorate in future, as NRMA Insurance funds ambitious growth targets. After early gains, NRMA's share price was early this afternoon down one cent at $3.01. After two successive record-high closes, the share market's All Ordinaries index is up a further five points at 3,302."

" The Australian Medical Association (AMA) believes people would be prepared to pay higher taxes to improve the public hospital system. The AMA has taken part in a day-long health round table in Canberra, as part of a Senate inquiry into public hospital funding. Government officials, pharmacists and other interest groups have also been involved. AMA president Kerryn Phelps says hospital funding needs to increase by about $780 million, or 6 per cent a year. ""I think Australians would be prepared to pay more for an improved healthcare system,"" she said. ""We know that our healthcare system is important to the Australian population, we know that Australians would be prepared to pay something more to make sure we have the security of access and equity of access that I think Australians value."""

" Australia's agriculture ministers have decided against phasing out battery hens. State and federal ministers discussed the issue in Brisbane today. They voted down a proposal to phase out battery hens, saying there was insufficient research to show a better alternative. Instead, they have agreed to an upgrade of standards. All pre-1995 cages will need to be modified or phased out. As of January 1, 2001, new cages will be larger, 550 square centimetres, up from 450. The cages will have a 20-year lifespan. Agriculture Minister Warren Truss says it was difficult for the ministers to reach a decision but says the compromise will bring some certainty to the industry."

" NSW legislation enacted yesterday has resulted in today's decision by a Supreme Court judge to reduce the sentences of three men over the death of a truck driver in Sydney's south-west in 1998. Ronan Sharkey reports the trio pleaded guilty to the manslaughter of 30-year-old Mark Evans after pushing concrete rocks from a pedestrian overpass onto his moving truck. Mr Evans died after a concrete rock crashed through his windscreen and struck him in the chest as he drove along the M5 motorway at Menangle. Sean Sutcliffe and brothers Sean and Liam McGoldrick, aged 22, 21 and 17 at the time, pleaded guilty to manslaughter. A 17-year-old also involved received a good behaviour bond last year. Yesterday the New South Wales court of criminal appeal recommended jugdes consider sentence discounts of between 10 and 25 per cent in the case of a guilty plea. In the Supreme Court today, Justice Adams implemented the guidelines by the full 25 per cent. Sean Sutcliffe, identified as the instigator, received a five year jail term; Sean McGoldrick received four years, and Liam McGoldrick received two-and-a-half years periodic detention."

" In Perth, four teenage members of the racing industry have been sentenced to detention for their involvement in the gang-rape of an 18-year-old stablehand. The apprentice jockeys were convicted of multiple sex offences in what the judge described as a prolonged, sordid and humiliating episode. The four, who were described as ringleaders, received sentences of between three and four years. All were given minimum terms of between 12 and 20 months. Two other youths who were convicted of detaining the woman against her will avoided a jail term, and received supervision orders."

" Nova Peris-Kneebone has secured an Olympics berth after winning the final of the women's 400 metres at the Australian athletics selection trials in Sydney. Peris-Kneebone won in 52.21 seconds, ahead of Susan Andrews and Lee Naylor. All three will run the relay event at the Olympics. Earlier, Australia and Commonwealth record holder Deborah Sosimenko struggled with a back injury to finish second in the women's hammer throw final behind Caryne Perkins. And Matt Shirvington has won the first semifinal of the men's 100 metres in 10.27 seconds beating Patrick Johnson."

" South Africa has lost two early wickets in the second one-day cricket international against Australia at Docklands Stadium in Melbourne. The Proteas were 2 for 71 after 19 overs, with Jacques Kallis on six and Darryl Cullinan yet to score. Andrew Hall made 37 runs, looking to loft Andrew Symonds through mid-wicket but only making it as far as Mark Waugh. Earlier, Gary Kirsten was trapped lbw to Ian Harvey for 22, although replays suggest the ball pitched outside leg stump. Brett and Shane Lee have been replaced in the Australian side by Andrew Symonds and Jason Gillespie. It is Gillespie's first match back in the Australian side since breaking his leg in a collision with captain Steve Waugh in Sri Lanka 11 months ago. Australia has a 1-0 lead in the best-of-three series after winning the opening match on Wednesday. The third match will be played on Sunday."

" There is growing uncertainty about the condition of 118 Russian crewmen who have been trapped in a submarine at the bottom of the Barents Sea for five days. Russian officials said sounds from the vessel have been sporadic, disappearing at one point for several hours. Norwegian deep sea divers have set out to join the rescue efforts and a British team with a special mini-sub is also due to head there aboard a Norwegian ship. The commander of the British team, Alan Hoskings, says his men should reach the accident scene on Saturday. ""It is a long journey, it's going to take us...over 50 hours,"" he said. ""We will do anything we can to reduce that time obviously because we don't know what conditions are like on board. ""As far as we are concerned we are here to assist the Russians and carry out the rescue mission for as long as they want us to, and hope that there are still survivors."" -------------------------------"

" The Reserve Bank has left open the prospect of further interest rate rises. The bank has issued its quarterly assessment of the economy and financial markets. The hawkish tone of the review has economists convinced that this month's rate rise will not be the last. The Reserve sees major risks to growth and inflation. Growth is not slowing as expected and there are broad-based price pressures, not just from oil prices, but also higher production costs, the low exchange rate and possibly from wage demand. Factoring out the goods and services tax, the Reserve sees inflation in the upper part of its 2 to 3 per cent target band for up to another year-and-a-half, and concludes that inflation is more likely to exceed the target than fall below it. Significantly, it notes the five rate rises since November have not unduly restricted economic growth. ---------------------------------"

" The Federal Government is playing down the significance of a Telstra memo which discusses political pressures on the independent inquiry into telecommunications. The Opposition says the memo, circulated to senior Telstra managers, calls into question the independence of the Besley inquiry - a report which will influence the Government's ongoing push to fully privatise Telstra. The assistant Communications Minister, Peter McGauran, says the memo has no bearing on Government policy or the direction of the Besley inquiry. ""I've looked at this red hot, top secret, protected eyes only inquiry,"" he said. ""It's from the head of the regulatory section, it's thinking aloud, it's reading the tea leaves on the Besley inquiry. ""You may as well open up a chicken and study the entrails for as much knowledge as this might provide."" ---------------------------------"

" The chairman of Fiji's Great Council of Chiefs, Sitiveni Rabuka, says sanctions against his country are aimed at the wrong target. Australia has withdrawn non-humanitarian aid, suspended defence and sporting ties. Major General Rabuka says the so called smart sanctions are aimed at the fire brigade rather than the arsonists. ""The arsonists are on Nukulu Island awaiting court, the fire brigade is the...Government that's trying to put things back together,"" he said. But Australia's Foreign Minister, Alexander Downer, is unapologetic, saying it is important to keep up international pressure to get the country back to democracy. Mr Downer has also warned a new World Trade Organisation consistent import credit scheme for the textile industry, being negotiated with Fiji, could be at risk if there is no progress towards a return to democracy. ""That will depend very much on the messages we get out of Fiji in the next few weeks,"" he said. ---------------------------------"

" NSW Health Minister Craig Knowles says using video link-ups to expand specialist diabetes services will not mean inferior medical advice for people in country areas. At Sydney's Royal Prince Alfred Hospital today, Mr Knowles announced that the video link-ups, called ""tele-medicine"" would be increased from four regional sites to 12. The Minister spoke to a diabetes patient from Dubbo who was in danger of losing her foot. Nationally, some 3,000 people have feet or lower limbs amputated annually, due to diabetic complications. Mr Knowles says the diabetes foot care program means patients can stay in their home towns and still get the best specialist advice available. ""To diagnose some of these illnesses you actually do need to be dealing with someone who is dealing with the illness on a very frequent basis so you don't misdiagnose, and so this is a clever way of linking high quality services to the entire State,"" he said. ---------------------------------"

" An Australian soldier killed while on duty in East Timor has been buried with full military honours on Victoria's Mornington Peninsula. Corporal Stuart Jones, 27, was accidentally shot when a rifle discharged while an armoured vehicle was travelling over rough terrain. Hundreds of mourners gathered for the service at HMAS Cerberus. The Corporal's Commanding Officer, Lieutenant Colonel Michael Krause, says Corporal Jones was due to be promoted to Sargeant on his return to Australia. ""He was horrified, he was horrified because he knew if he was a Sargeant he could no longer be a scout and he wanted to be a scout and lead his men, the way he was, the night he died,"" he said. -----------------------------------"

" The South Australian Government wants to create a ""virtual electorate"" to give people born in the State, but now living outside it, the right to vote for an Upper House seat via the Internet. The State Information Economy Minister, Michael Armitage, says the proposal is part of an information economy policy featuring 21 measures, which include giving all residents the chance to have free personal web pages and e-mail addresses. He says the Australian economy is generally regarded by outsiders as not being part of the new global economy, and the proposed measures could change this. ""We think actually it'll be an example to the rest of the world that at least a state in Australia gets it, and we think we might even be able to influence the Australian economy because of the implementation of this strategy,"" he said. The Federal Communications Minister, Richards Alston, has welcomed the move. Senator Alston says there are several imaginative and ground-breaking initiatives in the proposal that warrant consideration outside South Australia. ----------------------------------------"

" Matt Shirvington has won his first round heat of the 100 metres at the Australian Olympic athletics trials in Sydney. Shirvington had a comfortable win recording a time of 10.29 seconds wearing a full length body suit, while Patrick Johnson won his heat in 10.43 seconds. Natalie Harvey won a dramatic 10,000 metres women's final. Victorian runner Claire Fearnley suffered a major blow to her Olympic campaign, breaking down on the last lap with a hamstring injury. She will now have to wait to see whether selectors pick her in the Olympic team on Sunday. Stuart Rendell won the hammer throw and Paul Burgess the pole vault. Blair Young has qualified fastest for the men's 400 metres hurdles while Lauren Poetschka was in the women's 400 metres hurdles. Fifteen-year-old Georgie Clark looks set to make the Australian Olympic team after finishing third in the women's 1,500 metres. Marge Crowley won the 1,500 from Sarah Jamieson with Clark third. Benita Willis, who has previously posted an A-qualifying time, finished fourth. Only three runners will make it through."

" The latest attempt to rescue the stricken Russian nuclear submarine in the Barents Sea has run into problems. Navy officials say a mini-submarine sent to rescue 116 trapped sailors was unable to dock with the <i>Kursk</i> because of a sudden worsening in the weather. However, a second underwater vessel is continuing to search for <i>Kursk's</i> escape hatch. The nuclear submarine has been stranded on the seabed since Saturday and is lying at a difficult angle. It is estimated air in the vessel will run out on Friday. Concern is growing, with a Russian Navy spokesman saying they have not heard those inside the submarine tapping on the hull as they have on previous occasions. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Prime Minister has promised Australia's social security safety net will remain through any changes the Government makes to welfare reform. Mr Howard has endorsed the broad thrust of the McClure report into the welfare system, which recommends an expansion of mutual obligation requirements for people on benefits and a consolidation of different types of payments. The Government will deliver a detailed response to the recommendations this year. Mr Howard has ruled-out taking welfare payments away from those who need them. ""We are not in the business of cutting benefits for needy Australians, we never will,"" he said. ""Needy Australians will always be protected under this Government."""

" The Federal Opposition has welcomed the recommendations of the McClure report into welfare reform but says it holds reservations about how the Government will implement any changes. Opposition leader Kim Beazley says the report includes many good ideas similar to proposals Labor has advocated. He says the ALP will approach welfare reform in a positive light but fears the Government could use the McClure report's recommendations as a form of crude cost-cutting. ""What we are most concerned about, while we see the good that is here in this report, we are most concerned that with a bad-hearted government, as opposed to a good-hearted government, they will take opportunities here to do things,"" he said. ""For example, like depriving sole parents of benefits or reducing their benefits once the youngest child turns 13."""

" The Australian Democrats say the Government will be sorely disappointed if it thought the report would give it an excuse to slash welfare spending. Democrats leader Meg Lees said if the Government's legislation mirrored the positives of the report as well as the extension of mutual obligation, her party would support it. ""There's a package that we could support if the thrust of this report is adhered to in the Government's response,"" she said. ""If the major message that the Government gets from this reort is that they need to assist people right down to one to one assistance to get them into the workforce, and we see that in legislation, yes that is something we can support."" ""But it also says there should be better training programs and assistance with child care and transport to help people return to work."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" It is feared the reduction in the price of Woolworths own brand milk will mean lower incomes for farmers. The supermarket chain says a cut of 27 cents a litre in the price of its milk will be permanent and will apply in all mainland states and the ACT. The new national $1.19 price for a litre of milk has also been adopted by rival Coles. Between them, the two sell about a quarter of Australia's domestic milk consumption. The new price is the result of a competitive tender by processors such as National Foods and Dairy Farmers, following milk deregulation. But Woolworths says all its milk will be bought locally in each state and will not be trucked across state borders. Both the Queensland Dairy Organisation and the NSW Government say they will be checking whether the new prices will mean a further cut in payments to farmers. Woolworths says it will not be providing cheap milk in the Northern Territory yet. A spokeswoman says Woolworths is still negotiating with milk processors in the Territory. She says cheap milk will only be introduced in the Territory if tenders are competitive. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The chief of the Australian Army, Lieutenant General Peter Cosgrove, says allegations of violence and bullying in the Defence Force are being dealt with as quickly as possible. Six soldiers have been charged so far over alleged assaults on colleagues in the third battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment, after an investigation completed in April last year. General Cosgrove oversaw the unit at the time of the incidents. He says there has been a brief delay, but the allegations have been vigorously and openly pursued. ""The sorts of things you're talking about are reprehensibile, they are not condoned,"" he said. ""We are investigating them and we are moving as quickly as the legal system will permit to getting some resolution of them. ""We've got to be careful to make sure any victims see justice and that of course people accused get their share of justice as well."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Police in northern Thailand have charged a Thai suspect in a murder case with drug offences. None of the eight suspects police are considering have been charged in relation to the murder of British backpacker Kirsty Jones. Police claim DNA testing of semen samples will identify the killer of Kirsty Jones by the end of this week. The 23-year-old English backpacker was sexually assaulted and murdered in her room at Chiang Mai's Aree Guest house, one week ago. Two Australian suspects remain in police detention. One of them has been charged with drug offences. Last night, police arrested Surin Chanparnet, a Thai manager of the Aree Guest House. He has also been charged with drug-related offences. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" A skier who spent two nights on the slopes of Victoria's Mount Hotham in temperatures as low as -8 degrees celsius says he survived because of tips he picked up from the media. Police who conducted the search for 32-year-old novice skier Stuart Page, from Melbourne, say they were amazed by his high spirits after the ordeal. Mr Page is undergoing treatment at Hotham Medical Centre for mild hypothermia. Mr Page says because of information in reports of other rescues, he knew the essentials of how to survive. When he realised he was lost on Monday evening, he built a snow cave. He drank water from the headwaters of the Diamentina Creek and ate moss. Again from the media, he knew to stay where he was. Yesterday, he improved his icy abode by adding branches to provide more protection. He had crossed his skis in the snow and was waving when an ABC helicopter found him about 1:00pm today. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The first major survey of restaurants and caterers shows revenue is down since the goods and services tax (GST). A peak group, Restaurant and Catering Australia, has polled its 4,000 members nationwide. An early snapshot shows of 180 respondents, more than half had suffered a fall-off in demand since early July, involving fewer customers, less spending or both. One-third noticed tips were getting smaller. Most said average prices had risen by less than 10 per cent. The group says restaurants remain deeply concerned about the impact of fringe benefit tax on business dining. Invoking recommendations of the Ralph Review, it has again urged the Federal Government to consider removing the tax from business entertainment, to compensate for the loss of revenue caused by the GST. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" A second attempt is now being made to rescue the crew of the Russian nuclear submarine which sank on the weekend in the Barents Sea. The Russian Navy has waited for a break in the weather, aware that time is running out for the 116 men aboard the stricken submarine. Rescue attempts are continuing amid speculation that the disaster was caused by the explosion of a World War II mine. A rescue ship was positioned above the submarine, but the first attempt to reach the crew with a small manned rescue craft has failed. The angle at which the submarine is lying on the sea bed is part of the problem for the docking craft, and there are also fears that the hatch was damaged when the submarine sank. If the second attempt fails, the Russian Navy will try to refloat the crippled submarine with inflatable pontoons. The back-up plan involves strapping 400 tonne pontoons to both sides of the submarine and inflating them under water with highly pressurised air. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Labor Party's peak decision-making body will today meet in Canberra to decide whether Federal MPs should be granted a free vote on reproductive technology issues. There are warnings a conscience vote is the only way to ensure harmony prevails within the party. The 20-member National Executive will consider whether MPs should have a conscience vote on Government legislation, which seeks to give states the freedom to ban lesbians and single women from accessing IVF treatment. Executive member and union leader Joe De Bruyn says unless a conscience vote is granted, the issue will fester. Mr De Bruyn says the National Executive should not be daunted by Kim Beazley's opposition to a conscience vote. ""Mr Beazley is putting himself in a difficult position by having ruled out a conscience vote in the first place without due consideration, and having stuck to that position ever since,"" he said. Mr De Bruyn's supporters estimate they might get six to nine votes out of 20, but remain hopeful of a win. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" World oil prices have risen to their highest levels in a decade amid mixed signals from oil producing nations. The world's biggest oil producers, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, have signalled they want to force the market back down by increasing production, and the oil producers' cartel, OPEC, has increased production twice in recent months. But in the past few days Venezuela's president Hugo Chavez, who was visiting the Middle East, said he believed current price levels are fair. Venezuela currently holds the OPEC presidency and will host the organisation's next meeting in September. The comments, seen as reflecting the mood of smaller oil producing nations, combined with the continued drain on US oil reserves, sparked the latest price rise. At $US32 per barrel, brent crude is now at its highest mark since the Gulf War in 1990. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Government has confirmed assault charges have been laid against six members of the elite 3rd Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment based at Holsworthy in New South Wales. They were charged after a military investigation completed in April last year. <i>Time</i> magazine alleged that soldiers in the regiment have been bashed or tortured with the knowledge of senior officers in a system of regimental discipline. But procedings against those charged were stalled by the regiment's deployment to East Timor. A spokesman for the Minister Assisting the Minister on Defence, Bruce Scott, says a legal technicality had delayed the case. The spokesperson says the Government does not condone any action which circumvents the proper administration of the Defence Force Discipline Act. He says the Minister is expecting a briefing on progress in the case at the end of this month. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The future of the supersonic Concorde remains unclear today after a decision by British Airways to ground its fleet removing the last of the jets from service. British Airways had kept its fleet in the air despite last month's crash near Paris, which left 114 people dead. In the weeks after the Air France crash, British Airways has insisted, with the support of Britain's Civil Aviation Authority, that its Concordes were still safe to fly. But both the French and British accident investigators have now decided to recommend the withdrawal of the aircraft's airworthiness certificate. As a result, British Airways flights have been suspended, with its last Concorde flight literally recalled from the runway before take-off. The authorities have yet to reveal if there has been any new information gleaned from the French crash has led to their decision. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A 37-year-old man has been charged with three counts of threatening to kill, after an incident in north Queensland in which three children disappeared while on a supposed camping trip south of Mackay. The children were found unharmed at a house on the Sunshine Coast yesterday and reunited with their mother in Mackay last night. The man returned to Mackay with the children. He has been helping police with their inquiries and is currently being held in the Mackay watch-house. The man is expected to appear in the Mackay Magistrate's Court this morning. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Police in the northern Thailand say they will soon know who was responsible for the murder an English backpacker. DNA tests on semen samples are expected to reveal the identity of the killer of Kirsty Jones. Two Australians are among the eight suspects still being considered by police in Chiang Mai. Stuart Crichton is in a police cell while Nathan Foley is under police guard at a hotel. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The cricketing world will have its eyes on Melbourne this afternoon, when the historic, indoor, one-day international between Australia and South Africa gets underway. Australian captain, Steve Waugh says it is an ideal chance for players to put the recent off-field dramas behind them. And he has few worries about playing under a roof at Docklands Stadium. ""Conditions are really good,"" he said. ""I guess the lights are the only slight worry as to how much they're going to play a part in the game, whether you're fielding and whether they're going to be in the corner of your eye when you're batting. ""But we're hoping not and if that's okay it's just going to be a great place to play cricket."""

" Moscow has declined offers of international aid in the rescue effort to save more than 100 crew members on a Russian nuclear submarine trapped in Arctic waters. Raging storms are hampering the rescue of the submarine. The submarine remains stuck on the seabed where it sank during training exercises on Sunday. The generator is still not functioning and the crew of 107 is relying on a back-up battery for their air and power. Experts are divided as to how long the battery and air supply will last. It may be as long as a week or as little as 48 hours. In the difficult conditions in the Arctic, time for rescue is tight. Efforts to connect air and power have so far failed and there is no radio contact with the stricken submarine. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Australia says it will give considerable money and resouces to help Indonesia close refugee camps in West Timor. The Foreign Minister, Alexander Downer, says this will be in addition to the $7.5 million Australia has already given to maintain the camps. Mr Downer told Parliament that Australia was deeply concerned at recent militia attacks into East Timor. He says Indonesia accepts that closing the camps in West Timor is fundamental to solving the problem of militia activity. ""The Government of Indonesia must provide effective security to ensure that there is no militia intimidation, unimpeded access to camps for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and there is a credible registration process,"" he said. ""It is crucial that the refugees are able to exercise their choice on resettlement in Indonesia or repatriation to East Timor, free of any intimidation."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" A former ALP New South Wales MP, Keith Enderbury, has died in hospital after being attacked and set alight in his Sydney home last night. Police say Mr Enderbury died in the Concorde Hospital burns unit shortly after 3:00pm today. Mr Enderbury had received burns to 90 per cent of his body, after being doused with an accelerant and set on fire. His 22-year-old son, Christian Enderbury, appeared briefly in Burwood Local Court earlier this afternoon, charged with the attempted murder of his father. He has been remanded in custody, to appear in court again on October 12. Keith Enderbury was a Labor MLC from March 1984 to March 1995. Mr Enderbury was involved with Labor Party for more than 30 years and served the ALP for 11 years in the Upper House. Born in Bankstown, Mr Enderbury lived on the state's north coast, where he was an ALP organiser for many years. In the late 1980s, Mr Enderbury was among several people the Independent Commission Against Corruption investigated in relation to north coast land deals. He was Labor's Upper House whip for the six years to 1995 when he failed to be re-endorsed for a further term. NSW Premier Bob Carr told Parliament both sides of politics had fond memories of Mr Enderbury. ""In a speech he gave in his first year in Parliament, Keith reflected on his long journey from the days when he ran messages to Macquarie Street as a first year apprentice printer,"" he said. ""He recalled the great honour 30 years later of walking into Parliament House as a member of the Legislative Council."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Police are examining several charges they propose to lay against a Mackay man, who vanished with his three young children during an access visit last week. Police swooped on Mark McDonald in the yard of a Doonan house on the Sunshine Coast this afternoon. Central region crime coordinator, Detective Inspector Russell Janke, says Mr McDonald could face several charges, including over the cost of a massive sea, air and land search. Detective Jenke says the children, aged five, three and two, will be reunited with their mother, Debbie Wales, in Mackay today. ""They are quite fine, they have been well looked after apparently in the time they have been away,"" he said. Police have praised the support of the Mackay community in helping to locate the children. Detective Inspector Russell Janke says it is a wonderful result. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The WA Opposition wants investigations into two serious recent incidents at Joondalup Hospital to be tabled in State Parliament. Hospital staff told police a toddler was dead following a suspected drowning incident on Sunday, when in fact the boy was still alive. He is now at another hospital in a critical but stable condition. The incident comes three weeks after an 18-month-old girl died when she was given the wrong dose of a drug. Health Minister John Day has called for a report into Sunday's incident, but Labor's health spokeswoman Sheila McHale says his response is inadequate. ""It's not good enough for the hospital to conduct an internal inquiry,"" he said. ""The second case suggests very clearly there should be an independent inquiry, or at the very least an inquiry conducted by the Health Department so that it is removed from the hospital."" Mr Day says medical staff tried for one hour to resuscitate the boy before it was decided there was no life left in him. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" There is a new twist to the current airline price war. One of the country's biggest travel insurers is refusing to cover passengers travelling on Impulse Airlines, the airline that has challenged Ansett and Qantas with huge discount airfares. If Impulse Airlines goes bust, the insurer will not cover passengers left out of pocket. HIH Casualty and General Insurance has written to travel agents pointing out that its policy excludes the insolvency of an airline that is not a member of the International Air Transport Association unless the airline has been approved by HIH. The letter says Impulse Airlines is not a member and has not been approved by it in writing and has told agents that this be pointed out to customers and they should be given a copy of the notice. HIH also says that it is not in a position to and certainly does not make any adverse comment on the solvency of the airline. Impulse has recently slashed airfares between Melbourne Sydney and Brisbane to as low as $33. Those fares have been matched by Ansett and Qantas. Impulse Airlines presently sells most of its tickets directly to customers and not through travel agents. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Takeover activity has sparked big moves in several key Australian stocks today. Shares in Australia's third-largest telecommunications company, AAPT, have soared $1.22, or 20 per cent, to $7.12. That is as majority owner Telecom New Zealand announced a bid to buy up the 20 per cent of AAPT it does not already own. The positive fall-out continues from News Corporation's $9.2 billion deal to buy US television operator Chris-Craft Industries. News Corp is up up 77 cents, or 3 per cent, to $22.07. Weaker banking and resource stocks have reduced the overall market's gains: the All Ordinaries index is up 11 points to 3,287. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Russia's naval chief acknowledges that it may not be possible to rescue the sailors trapped in a nuclear submarine which sank in the Arctic. Naval vessels have arrived on the scene to begin the rescue effort. The submarine sank in the Barents Sea in the Arctic Circle during a Russian naval training exercise. The submarine is understood to have taken on water, trapping its crew of 107 men. The cause of the incident is not yet known, although the chief of the Russian Navy has speculated that it was the result of a collision. The Russian Navy insists that the submarine has no nuclear weapons aboard and that its two nuclear reactors have been switched off. As the nuclear reactors power the submarine's generator, the men are now relying on back-up batteries to purify their air. It is not clear how much battery time they have left and it is possible the men may suffocate. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Government has defended its right to again present rejected industrial relations legislation in the Senate, despite predictable defeat. The Government has begun taking steps towards creating a double-dissolution trigger for the next election, with the defeat of its small business unfair dismissal laws in the Senate last night. Democrats Senator Andrew Murray says the resurrection of the legislation was a stunt to give the Government a certain trigger for a double-dissolution election if it ever needs one. The Democrats have vowed to reject the legislation again when it is brought back to the Senate in three months. But the Workplace Relations Minister, Peter Reith, says the Coalition will not surrender in its attempt to deliver on its election promises. ""The fact of the matter is it's no political stunt. It's an election commitment that the Government made, particularly to the small business community and we don't walk away from the commitments we have made, particularly when up to 50,000 jobs could be created as a result,"" he said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Indonesian Foreign Minister Alwi Shihab says his country will need international assistance in closing down refugee camps in West Timor. The camps are home to more than 120,000 people, including many pro-Jakarta militia who have recently been attacking United Nationa forces inside East Timor. Several United Nations peacekeepers have died during the militia border attacks. Militias are also being blamed for intimidating and obstructing refugees returning to East Timor Mr Shihab says Indonesia is not willing to be accused of being the culprit of the violence. An Indonesia taskforce made up of government officials, police and the Indonesian military is to draw up a plan of action to end the refugee crisis once and for all. Those East Timorese still loyal to Jakarta will have to be relocated within Indonesia. They include more than 2,000 personnel who served with the Indonesian military and police. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" In the lead-up to the United States presidential election, the Democrats have opened their convention which will both endorse Vice-President Al Gore as party candidate and bid farewell to President Bill Clinton. Despite the scandals that have tainted President Clinton's time in the White House, delegates such as Sherman Brown from Ohio, are enthusiastic about his parting valedictory. ""It'll be very nostalgic. He's a man who's been in office for eight years, has had ups, almost certainly he's had downs,"" Mr Brown said. Prominent Democrats, such as California Senator Diane Feinstein, say the President will not take a triumphant tone. ""He should talk about some of the accomplishments, [but] I think he should talk about Al Gore's role in these accomplishments. I mean right after this convention it all changes,"" she said. Although the President's reception will be enthusiastic, convention organisers are anxious he does not overshadow Mr Gore. Mr Gore arrives on Friday to claim the presidential nomination. Mr Clinton has been in California for fundraisers since Saturday, and will leave the state with his wife, Hillary, today. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The parents of murdered British backpacker Kirsty Jones have criticised people at the guest house in Thailand where her body was found for not doing enough to prevent her death. Guests at the Chiang Mai hostel have defended their lack of action saying they had no idea someone's life was in danger. The parents of the murdered 23-year-old woman have appeared on British television saying they believe more could have been done to prevent the death of their daughter. People who were staying at the Aree guest house on the night of the murder, say they heard a woman's voice shouting ""get out, get out"". A manager of the guest house and some guests made cursory investigations, but say they assumed the shouts emanated from a harmless domestic quarrel and returned to their beds. The half-naked body of Kirsty Jones was found the following afternoon, when the hostel rooms were cleaned. Her body may be repatriated today from Chiang Mai. Eight suspects, including two Australians, are being questioned by police in relation to the murder. Australian Stuart Norman Crichton is being held at Chiang Mai's central police station on charges relating to the keeping of drugs in his room at the guest house. Another Australian and former guest at the hostel Nathan Foley has moved to another hotel, but has been told not to leave Chiang Mai. Scientific tests have been conducted on hair and blood samples of suspects, but no one has yet been charged in connection with the killing. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation could run into trouble with the Federal Communications Commission in the United States following moves to expand the Fox Television network. News Corp has paid $9 billion to add 10 television channels to its existing 23 stations. The deal would give the media magnate 13 stations in the top 10 US markets, with two stations in New York, Los Angeles and Dallas. Mr Murdoch's buy-up of Chris Craft Industries will take his Fox Television Network into 40 per cent of American homes. Federal Communications Commission rules limit a company owning television stations to 35 per cent of the market. News Corp is fighting the 35 per cent rule in court and analysts say the US election could help Mr Murdoch complete the $9 billion deal without having to divest himself himself of television stations. Mr Murdoch outbid other broadcasters for Chris Craft Industries, after saying 10 months ago it looked too expensive. Media analysts say the company is worth the high cost of its purchase, at about $145 a share. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" North and South Korea will set aside half a century of animosity today, when they allow the first reunions of families torn apart by the Korean war. Flights carrying 100 mostly elderly citizens will take off from the northern and southern capitals at the same time to meet family members they have not seen for 50 years. The heavily controlled events will be broadcast on television across the Korean peninsula, partly to appease the millions of others who have missed out this time. South Korean President Kim Dae-Jung will meet and speak with the northern group, which is led by a woman who defected to Pyongyang. His northern counterpart, Kim Jong-Il will tell the South Koreans that his country is dedicated to peace and unification, something many Koreans still disbelieve. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Kangaroos' hopes of beating Hawthorn in the AFL semi-final on Friday night have received a boost with mid-fielder David King cleared by the AFL tribunal last night. King, who kicked seven of his team's 11 goals in the 20-goal loss to Essendon last Saturday, was cleared of a charge of striking Essendon's Chris Heffernan during the third quarter. The tribunal found contact had been made, but with no videotape of the incident available, King was given the benefit of the doubt as to whether the contact was a punch or a push. Earlier, a striking charge against Geelong's Tim McGrath was withdrawn. Meanwhile, the Kangaroos have been fined $35,000 for the late lodgement of contracts. The Brisbane Lions have been fined $7,500 for the same offence."

" The Prime Minister has accused the Federal Opposition of wanting to invent its own legal mechanism to deliver compensation to members of the Aboriginal Stolen Generations. Labor has promised to establish a tribunal to adjudicate on compensation claims. It argues the tribunal would be less costly than the current option of proceeding through the Federal Court. But Mr Howard says a reparations tribunal would not reduce legal costs. ""What really the Labor Party is saying is the normal system didn't deliver the outcome we wanted so we want a new system,"" he said. ""What I say to the leader of the Opposition and what I say to the Shadow Attorney-General is why don't you be honest enough and say that, instead of hiding behind this argument that in some way a reparations tribunal would be cheaper. ""A reparations tribunal would not be cheaper."" Mr Howard has also called for the focus on Aboriginal Stolen Generations to turn to reuniting separated families. Mr Howard told Parliament that despite the outcome of the Stolen Generations compensation claim in the Federal Court, there was a clear acceptance that past practices would not be accepted by current generations of Australians. He says the Government is sensitive to the ongoing trauma felt by Aborigines, but attention should now turn to helping those affected to get on with their lives. ""It remains the view of the Government that the most appropriate thing to do now is to focus on the future,"" Mr Howard said. ""To focus on bringing those members of the indigenous community of Australia who were subject to these practices back in contact with their families. ""That is why the Government has strongly supported the $63 million programs recommended by the Wilson Committee."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" A Melbourne PhD student has achieved a world-first in the development of therapeutic cloning techniques to treat diseases such as Alzheimer's, Parkinson's and diabetes. The concept of therapeutic cloning involves growing healthy cells in a laboratory and then reintroducing them to the body as a way of treating diseases. Monash PhD student Megan Munsie has become the first scientist to prove the theory that cells could be grown using a patient's own genetic material. Professor Alan Trounson from the Monash Institute of Reproduction and Development says it is an important breakthrough. ""This is a very major development in our view and the one that a lot of scientists in the world have been looking for as a proof of concept - we've talked about it, but we've never been able to prove it,"" he said. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" It is believed three people are dead and 14 are injured following a collision between a mini-bus and a four-wheel-drive on the Bruce Highway south of Townsville, in north Queensland. The ambulance service says the accident occurred just before 5:00pm AEST, south of the Burdekin Bridge. John Rintoul from the service says all of the victims have now been taken from the scene. ""We've got about 14 patients out of it so far, they've all been taken to the Ayr Hospital from Townsville,"" he said. Staff from the local Inkerman sugar mill say all on the mini-bus were backpackers who had been collected after a day's fruit picking. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Federal Cabinet has approved the legislation aimed at allowing states to block access to in-vitro fertilisation treatment for single women and lesbian couples. The Opposition is yet to see the legislation and the timing of when the Federal Government gives it to Labor may determine whether it is debated in tomorrow's caucus meeting. Some Labor MPs want Labor leader Kim Beazley to reverse his opposition to a conscience vote on the matter. But Mr Beazley says it is not an issue about the termination of life and so does not qualify for a conscience vote. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Federal Government has rejected two out of five possible sites in South Australia's outback for Australia's first national low-level nuclear waste repository. The Federal Resources Minister, Nick Minchin, says the remaining three sites are in flat country on pastoral leases between Woomera and Roxby Downs, with one site being in the Woomera prohibited area. Senator Minchin says all stakeholders, including Aboriginal groups, pastoralists and soil conservationists, are being consulted and the final choice is expected to be made by the end of the year. ""All this land meets the criteria originally established back in 1992 by Simon Crean for the establishment of a low level waste repository,"" he said. ""The land in question is in flat, stony, desert country - it's all well away from the Great Artesian Basin, it's geologically stable, so it meets all the criteria that were originally set down by the former Labor government for establishing a national, low level waste respository."" A spokesman for the South Australian Premier, John Olsen, says while the State Government has given in-principle support for the esablishment of a low-level nuclear waste dump, ultimately the Federal Government will still have to convince the State Government that the safest and best site has been chosen. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Olympic torch is on New South Wales soil. The torch crossed the Union Bridge over the Murray River at Albury Wodonga this afternoon. A big crowd gathered along the Lincoln Causeway leading to Albury, including the New South Wales Tourism Minister Sandra Norrie, who was there to greet the torchbearer on behalf of the New South Wales Premier. The Victorian Sport and Recreation Minister, Justin Madden, was also there to say farewell. The torch was carried across the border by middle distance runner Damian Clark and handed to local triathlete Tony Serbs for the first full leg on New South Wales' soil. It was carried around the crowd lined streets by runners, including the chief executive of the Sydney Organising Committee for the Olympic Games, Sandy Hollway, before the official cauldron lighting ceremony. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" A Russian nuclear submarine on training exercises in Arctic waters has been forced to run itself aground on the seabed due to technical faults. The Russian Navy says the submarine has no nuclear weapons on board. The submarine was taking part in northern fleet training exercises when it was crippled by technical faults. It descended to the bed of the Barents Sea and ran itself aground there as a precautionary measure. The Russian Navy says the submarine's nuclear reactor was shut down so the fault was not there. Communication with the submarine has been re-established and a rescue mission is underway. Russian naval vessels are moving to the scene to assist the stricken submarine. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Federal Government is focusing on its next big reform target, with the final report on proposed welfare changes likely to be released this week. The Government is expected to face some problems in the Senate, as Parliament resumes after the winter break. The Government will respond to the final welfare report before the end of the year and is promising change will not be about cutting benefits, but getting welfare recipients back to work. The Democrats have warned if mutual obligation is a one-way street, the reforms may not easily pass the Senate. The Government's proposed changes to in-vitro fertilisation rules may also strike trouble in the Senate. They are expected to go through Cabinet and the Coalition party room early this week. The issue is set to cause problems for Labor, with some MPs calling for the Labor leader to reverse his oppositon to a conscience vote. The third issue which will almost certainly fail in the Senate is yet another attempt by the Government to make small business exempt from unfair dismissal laws. The Democrats and the ALP remain opposed to the changes and the Government has conceded it is not likely to win Upper House support. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Democrats Leader Meg Lees is calling for a premiers' conference to discuss how to spend what she says will be a goods and services tax (GST) bonus for the states. Senator Lees says given 30 per cent more businesses than expected have registered, the amount to be collected under the GST will be far higher than expected. She says if there is more money than has been predicted, the premiers should make plans about where it should be spent. ""Looking at what happened in other countries when there were additional business registrations and a GST was introduced, I would think we will be seeing considerable more revenue and we certainly should be planning for it,"" she said. The Western Australian Premier Richard Court says how extra funds from the GST should be spent is up to individual states. ""Western Australians are quite capable of making decisions on our own expenditure priorities,"" he said. ""We don't need a national meeting to be advised as to how to spend our revenues."" --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" An Australian national has been detained in Thailand as police crack down on guests staying at a hostel where a British backpacker was found murdered last week. Two Australians are among nine men being questioned by police about the incident. Police in the northern Thai city of Chiang Mai have widened their investigation into the death of British backpacker, Kirsty Jones. The 23-year-old woman was found raped and strangled at the Aree guesthouse last week. One Australian has been detained for the unrelated offence of illegal drugs possession and a British co-owner of the guesthouse has been arrested for residing in Thailand with an expired British passport. Thai police are awaiting the results of hair and blood samples taken from suspects. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" India is on full alert ahead of tomorrow's Independence Day. In the lead-up to the celebrations, the biggest Muslim militant group fighting in Kashmir has conducted two bomb attacks against the Indian Army. Kashmir's powerful Hizbul Mujahedeen militant group has claimed responsibility for two attacks in southern Kashmir. At least six Indian border guards have been killed and another 45 injured. The attacks followed the separatist group's cancellation of a 15-day cease-fire and a promise to step up attacks against India. Preparing for tomorrow's Independence Day celebrations, Indian security forces are placing the capital under tight security. But a spokesperson for Hizbul Mujahedeen would not comment on the group's plans. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" Malaysia's Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad has hit back at United States criticism of his 19 years in power. Protests in support of Dr Mahathir's jailed former deputy, Anwar Ibrahim, continue in Malaysia for the third day in a row. Yesterday, 2,000 Anwar supporters gathered outside the main gate of the prison where Anwar may spend the next 14 years following his conviction on political corruption and sodomy charges. United States Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, has said Malaysia deserved a better leader than Dr Mahathir. The Malaysian leader has hit back, suggesting the US had no right to criticise Malaysia's justice system, because the United States courts were the same. He referred to the policemen who were filmed beating Rodney King, but were allowed to go free. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Firefighters from Australia and New Zealand are heading to the American state of Montana this morning, where they will help crews battling 22-large wildfires. A 500-person battalion from the US Army is also arriving to help out. The wildfires have burnt more than 146,000 hectares in Montana and more than 2,400 homes are still threatened. About 600 homes have been evacuated near Montana's Bitterroot National Forest, where heavy smoke has stopped helicopters from checking on the situation. However, the number of large fires across 10 western US states is now put at 60, down from 65 fires 24 hours earlier. One US firefighter was confirmed to have died on Friday - the 11th victim of the wildfires since late March. A member of Australia's contingent, Tasmanian firefighter Tony Blanks, says it is shaping up to be the worst wildfire season in the United States since 1910. ""In my experience, Australia hasn't experienced such an extended period of hot, dry and windy weather,"" he said. ""Just overnight, there've been several hundred new lightning [strikes which have] caused fires across six states in the north-west of the United States and that's likely to continue until October."" --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" American Democrats are gathering in Los Angeles for a party convention which will officially nominate Al Gore as candidate for the November presidential elections in the United States. With George W Bush having received his party's endorsement in Philadelphia 10 days ago, it is now Vice-President Gore's turn to rally his party and become its candidate. Mr Gore's campaign was given a boost last week with the well- received announcement that his running mate would be Connecticut Senator Joseph Lieberman. But Mr Gore continues to trail Governor Bush in the national opinion polls, making this week's convention a crucial test for him. Outgoing President Bill Clinton will address delegates tomorrow, along with wife, Hillary. Both are using the lead-up to the convention to hold exclusive fundraisers in Hollywood, with money going towards the President's library in Arkansas and Mrs Clinton's New York Senate race. However, the Gore campaign has denied reports it is unhappy about the prominent role being played by the Clintons, who will leave Los Angeles before Mr Gore's arrival. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Mika Hakkinen has won the Hungarian Formula One Grand Prix after leading virtually from the start. Hakkinen, in a McLaren, passed Germany's Michael Schumacher, who started on pole, at the first corner and Hakkinen never lost his grip on the race. Schumacher, in a Ferrari, was second and the other McLaren driver, David Coulthard, came in third."

" Ansett has joined Qantas in matching new $33 airfares announced today by Impulse Airlines. Impulse announced the new Sydney-Brisbane one-way fare in an aggressive push for market share. It has also announced an $88 Melbourne-Brisbane fare. Qantas responded almost immediately with an identical offer. Ansett's chief spokesman, Peter Young, says the airline's monitoring unit has just finished meeting. ""Ansett is matching exactly what our two-competitors have done,"" he said. ""We've matched Qantas and Impulse detail for detail. ""We have to make this decision, we have to be competitive on price otherwise the bottom end of the market deserts us. ""However, we continue to compete on value not just on price."" --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Government has dismissed calls for a tribunal to be established to determine Stolen Generations compensation cases. The Australian of the Year and deputy chair of the Reconciliation Council, Sir Gustav Nossel, has suggested a tribunal be set up. Sir Gustav says it would be less costly than using the court system to decide compensation cases. But the Federal Immigration Minister, Phillip Ruddock, has told Channel Nine the suggestion will not work. ""Let's understand what happens in a tribunal environment,"" Mr Ruddock said. ""If people are legally represented, the same sorts of questions are going to be asked, the same sorts of issues are going to have to be addressed in terms of bringing out the factual situation and applying law and it doesn't mean you won't end up in the courts."" --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Malaysia has sent a formal protest note to Australia and several other western nations, rejecting international criticism of its justice system. The courts in Malaysia have been widely criticised for sentencing former deputy prime minister Anwar Ibrahim to a total of 15 years' jail, on charges he claims were fabricated by his political opponents. Malaysia's foreign minister says his country will not accept foreign interference over what he calls Mr Anwar's ""free and fair trial"". In response, Zama Coursen-Neff, from the United States based group, Human Rights Watch, says the Malaysian Government used selective laws against Anwar Ibrahim. ""There are very broad laws that allow for selective application against the opposition,"" he said. ""They give a great deal of descretion to the ruling party to apply those, only those, who criticise them. ""That means that the Opposition in Malaysia is constantly vulnerable to arrest and prosecution from making states that are critical of the Government and these very wide laws, such as the internal security act and the sedition act and the official secrets act."" --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australian army investigators have been scrutinising the scene of an explosion which put four soldiers in hospital in East Timor. The four members of the Brisbane-based 6th battalion are reported to be in a stable condition, recovering from burns and wounds. The army says the four were on duty at an observation post at Memo, near the border with West Timor, on Friday night. A fire in a rubbish dump appears to have triggered an accidental explosion. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The ALP has retained the federal seat of Isaacs in Victoria with an increased majority. A by-election for the seat was called after the death of Labor MP, Greg Wilton, in June. At the close of counting last night, Labor candidate Ann Corcoran had scored 66 per cent of the two-party-preferred vote to the Democrats 34 per cent. Democrats candidate, Haydn Fletcher, quadrupled the votes his party scored in the 1998 federal election. There was a higher than usual number of informal votes, which commentators are attributing to the absence of a Liberal candidate. Ms Corcoran believes the win is an endorsement of Kim Beazley's leadership. ""What has become clear to me over the campaign, and what has been brought out by today's results, (is that) people are concerned about health, education and the GST, and the policies that Kim Beazley has been promoting throughout his campaign are in fact on track,"" he said. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Floodwaters are receding but a severe risk of water-borne disease remains in north eastern India. The first cases of malaria have been reported and there is a growing threat of cholera in the region. Tens of thousands of people are in temporary shelter without enough food or drinking water. Doctors are in short supply and medicines are running low. More than 120 people have died and more than 5 million are homeless following the floods which have affected vast areas of India's north-east as well as neighbouring Nepal, Bangladesh and Bhutan. The Red Cross has begun an urgent appeal for nearly $6 million to help the flood victims. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Police have confirmed that a man who remains missing off the coast of Mackay along with his three children, had recently withdrawn a significant sum of money from his bank account. A massive search has failed to find any trace of the family. Police believe the children's father, 37-year-old Mark McDonald, may have staged their disappearance. He was soon to face criminal charges in a Mackay Court. Brian Swift from Police Media would not say how much money was withdrawn from Mr McDonald's account. ""We are aware that there has been money withdrawn in recent days but the exact amounts are known only by us and Mr McDonald and we'd like to keep it to ourselves at the moment,"" he said. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" There is no end in sight for a dispute involving Victoria's nurses which has closed hospital beds throughout the state. Hours of talks in the Industrial Relations Commission yesterday failed to resolve the dispute; negotiations will resume tomorrow. Nurses are seeking a 24 per cent pay rise over three years, a claim the Government considers excessive. Belinda Morrison from the Australian Nursing Federation says she is pleased discussions are continuing but says work bans will continue to affect public hospitals. ""I think that the nurses are continuing to admit the emergency patients and there's probably going to remain approximately 900 beds closed,"" Ms Morrison said. ""I think it will primarily be elective surgery which is hit with the bans, because all the emergencies will continue to be admitted."" --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A Federal Court judge has found the Commonwealth did not abuse its powers in removing two mixed-race Aboriginal children from their families more than four decades ago. Justice Maurice O'Loughlin has dismissed the landmark compensation case against the Commonwealth, brought by members of the Northern Territory Stolen Generations. Justice O'Loughlin accepted the evidence of Lorna Cubillo, who was removed to the Retta Dixon home in Darwin, that she was assaulted by staff and starved of affection. He also accepted that Peter Gunner, who was taken to Alice Springs, was the victim of sexual assault. But Justice O'Loughlin found that because there was a lack of evidence in Mrs Cubillo's case, he could not rule the Commonwealth had failed to carry out its duty. In Mr Gunner's case, the evidence showed the removal had been authorised as his mother's thumbprint was found on a form of request that asked that Peter be taken and given a Western education."

" Both Mrs Cubillo and Mr Gunner say they are prepared to put their case to a higher court if there are grounds for an appeal. The pair has expressed disappointment at today's judgement. The Stolen Generations Litigation Unit says Mr Gunner and Mrs Cubillo's case was lost on a technicality and it will review the judgement with a view to an appeal. An emotional Mr Gunner says he will fight on for the benefit of all members of the Stolen Generations. ""I can only say that I'm very disappointed with the decision that has been handed down,"" Mr Gunner said. Ms Cubillo says she half-expected today's decision. ""The world should be aware of our plight,"" Ms Cubillo said. ""We've suffered for so long and yet we've always been denied justice."""

" The Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, John Herron, says the decision was clear cut, refusing to be drawn on whether the ruling vindicates the Howard Government's stance on the issue. He acknowleged the decision would be disappointing for Aboriginal groups. ""It's a sorry chapter in the whole nation's history that we're still trying to grapple with,"" he said. ""But it was a different time with different people and different attitudes when those actions occurred, that will never happen again."""

" Federal Opposition leader Kim Beazley says the system has failed the two claimants seeking compensation. Mr Beazley says Aboriginal people who were taken from their families should not be forced to endure lengthy court cases; instead funds should be set aside for victims to access. ""Lawyers have walked away from this case with more money,"" he said. ""Two people, who a judge has found abused, have walked away with nothing but more trauma, [which is] not good enough,"" Mr Beazley said. Mr Beazley demanded a more sympathetic and humane system of dealing with Stolen Generations compensation cases. ""The situation cries out for a decent humane solution,"" he said. ""We've got to have a process where the $10 million plus spent so far doesn't simply end up in the legal system,"" he said."

" The Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission is calling for the Federal Government to set up a reparations scheme for the Stolen Generations. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social justice commissioner Bill Jonas says he is extremely disappointed with the decision. Dr Jonas says a reparations tribunal would be a fairer and less traumatic way of deciding compensation rather than divisive litigation. He says New Zealand has overcome some of its problems by setting up the Waitangi Tribunal. ""The fact that this court case has been brought down is not going to make this issue go away,"" Dr Jonas said. ""There will be more court cases, there will be more done on an individual-by-individual basis, this case alone cost $10 million. ""At least in New Zealand, where they now have a tribunal which can sort things out fairly and equitably, they're in a much better position than us."""

" The National Sorry Day committee has called for a mediation commission to help members of the Stolen Generations as an alternative to the courts. Co-chair Audrey Kinnear Ngingali says while today's Federal Court case was lost, the courts may still be an option for those seeking compensation. ""We're not going to stop here,"" she said. ""It gives a future direction that documentation and documented evidence is important to the case. ""I'm aware of one such case that exists where a child was taken from the hospital without the mother's consent and there's documentation from both sides, so justice will come."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Fiji's coup leader George Speight and 14 others have been charged with treason and conspiracy to commit treason. All have been remanded in custody till August 25. The charges relate to the military takeover of Fiji's Parliament on the May 19 and other events stretching into July. George Speight and his fellow accused were brought to the Suva Magistrates Court very late in the day. They had hopes of winning bail but that sentiment was quickly dashed with the prosecution introducing three new charges. Those of treason, conspiracy to commit treason and being accessories to treason. The treason charge in theory carries the death penalty and the other charges have a maximum penalty of life imprisonment. Bail for Speight and his colleagues was denied. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Employment Services Minister Tony Abbott says policies which force unemployed people in particular areas to apply for certain jobs could be extended. The Government has announced that jobless people in South Australia's Riverland will have to apply for at least five jobs a fortnight in the fruit picking industry or risk losing their dole. The same policy applies in Sydney with Olympic-related jobs. Mr Abbott says the policy could be used in more areas if it is a success. ""I'm optimistic that the measures that we've taken in Sydney, the measures that we've just announced in the Riverland, will help drive unemployment down further, faster,"" Mr Abbott said. ""But let's not rush into things, let's see how these initiatives go and then see what lessons there might be for other places at other times."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Immigration Minister, Philip Ruddock, has defended the Government's policy on refugees describing Australia as the most generous country in the world. Speaking in Broome today, Mr Ruddock said the Government was providing ample support through benefits for the refugees who had been released from Government detention camps. The minister was responding to claims that the Commonwealth is shifting the cost of supporting the refugees onto the state and territory governments. But Mr Ruddock said if the states want to offer additional support, that is up to them. ""If the state's want to do something more than that well I guess they're entitled to,"" Mr Ruddock said. ""But I don't think they should because it's sending a signal to those people who're contemplating being smuggled into Australia that we are relaxing our position in relation to the desirability of that. ""In other words, sending a message to the people smugglers that you can get back into business."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" A man who has had nine wives and 62 children will spend at least five years in jail, after being convicted of child sex offences. Alistah Laishkochav molested four girls on his property at Bells Beach on Victoria's south-west coast between 1987 and 1991. The County Court was told the 71-year-old Laishkochav was a cult leader who attracted a number of followers. Outside the court, Detective Sergeant Doug Smith said Laishkochav betrayed the trust of his wives and children. ""Obviously, at one stage he was very charismatic and I suppose that helped him to get into the position where he could commit those offences,"" Mr Smith said. ""But I think over the last couple of years and especially since the break-up he's been pretty much a broken man."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Law Council of Australia has renewed its calls for Malaysia to repeal the internal Security Act, after the jailing of former deputy prime minister Anwar Ibrahim. Law Council President Gordon Hughes says irregularities in the conduct of the case have raised questions about Government interference. He says the Law Council is concerned the separation of powers between the courts and government may be threatened. But Dr Hughes says the council is hopeful justice may yet be upheld ""The Law Council of Australia certainly hasn't given up hope that the appeal process will be conducted fairly and impartially,"" Dr Hughes said. ""Even though, there are reasons to believe that the trial at the first instance wasn't conducted fairly and impartially."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Sydney Olympic organising committee says the prices for food and drink items at Games venues have the approval of the competition and consumer commission. Organisers have given many reasons for the higher than normal prices announced today. Standard sandwiches will cost up to $5, hot dogs $4.50, and a 600 ml bottle of soft drink up to $3.80. The Games organisers say those prices are lower than what caterers wanted to charge. The committee's catering manager, Hugh Taylor, says the prices are often equivalent to prices at other events, including the football finals. He says catering during the Olympics brings extra costs, an increased wages bill, supply costs because of special delivery arrangements between midnight and 6:00am only and also the provision of marquees. Spectators have the option to bring in a small amount of food and drink to venues though. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" A Federal Court judge will deliver his decision in Darwin today on the Stolen Generations compensation test case against the Commonwealth. The decision will have implications for the Northern Territory's 700 members of the Stolen Generations and their families. Lorna Cubillo and Peter Gunner were separated from their families and placed in institutions under the Commonwealth's Aboriginal Ordinance put in place in 1918 and existing for almost 40 years. In a ruling last year against a Commonwealth application to have the case struck out, Justice Maurice O'Loughlin said the case was of such importance to the individuals, the larger Aboriginal community and the nation, that nothing short of a determination on the case's merits was warranted. The two applicants are seeking compensation for loss of family and culture. The Commonwealth argued no children were removed without good reason. The case took more than 100 days to hear, with Justice O'Loughlin taking submissions in the Northern Territory, Perth, Townsville, Adelaide and Melbourne. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A massive car bomb triggered by Muslim rebels killed 11 people and injured 27 in the Kashmir capital Srinagar, two days after a ceasefire offered by a guerrilla group collapsed. The police say nine policemen had been killed and a local shopkeeper died later of a heart attack. Many of the injured were hospitalised in a critical state. Ten journalists were injured and one press photographer was killed in the blast. The combined grenade and bomb attack outside a branch of the State Bank of India in central Srinagar. The Hizbul Mujahedeen, which had offered the unilateral ceasefire, and Lashker-e-Toeba, which opposed the truce, separately claimed responsibility for the blasts. Eyewitnesses say the militants began their attack by throwing a grenade at security guards near the entrance to the bank. Fifteen minutes later, after security reinforcements and journalists had rushed to the area, a white car packed with explosives, exploded, causing devastation. ""Our fighters have carried out the attack,"" Hizbul spokesman Salim Hashmi said. Hizbul supreme commander Syed Salahuddin says the group would carry out a ""much bigger operation"" soon if India continued its irreconcilable position over proposed peace talks. The blast destroyed half a dozen cars, damaged nearby shops and buildings and blew a hole in the wall surrounding the bank. Hospitalised local journalist Habibullha Naqash says he and other reporters had rushed to the spot after the initial grenade blast. ""Nobody was hurt, and the police were showing us where the grenade landed when there was this enormous explosion,"" he said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" French accident investigators say a 40-centimetre strip of metal found on a runway probably caused a tyre to burst on an Air France Concorde that crashed last month. Pieces of tyre were found on the runway at Charles de Gaulle airport near Paris following the Concorde accident. The plane crash killed 114 people when it smashed into a nearby hotel soon after take-off. Investigators believe shreds of the split tyre could have pierced a fuel tank on the aircraft, causing a large fuel leak or fire. However, questions as to why one of the two engines on the left wing failed and the other engine malfunctioned remained unanswered. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The two major political parties have been placed on notice by the head of the Reserve Bank that an election bidding-war that reduced the Budget surplus could lead to higher interest rates. Reserve Bank Governor Ian Macfarlane says fiscal policy will be watched closely by the Reserve. While acknowledging the introduction of the new tax system this year is unusual, Ian Macfarlane has expressed disappointment that governments have not run budget surpluses to match the large deficits run previously. Mr Macfarlane says fiscal policy will be important and he has delivered a warning to politicians about reducing the surplus. He says an election bidding war which frittered away budget surpluses would be viewed seriously by the Reserve. ""I think we would view with some trepidation any prospect of a bidding war as we approached next year's election,"" he said. Mr Macfarlane says such a war would have implications for monetary policy. The Shadow Treasurer, Simon Crean, says Mr Macfarlane's comments reflect the depth of concern about the Government's ability to manage a budget. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australia goes to South Pacific talks today with a warning that Solomon Islands is nearly bankrupt and that Fiji must be careful in re-writing its constitution. The message will be carried by Foreign Affairs Minister Alexander Downer to the talks, being held in Samoa. The special meeting of Foreign Ministers of the Pacific Forum will look at the breakdown in Solomon Islands and the continuing crisis in Fiji. Mr Downer says Fiji is promising a new constitution next year, says it must not discriminate against Indian Fijians. ""If they're going to build in significant bias over and above those that already exist toward indigenous Fijians at the expense of Indo Fijians, the trouble with that is quite apart from the moral question is it's not going to lead to a stable society,"" he said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Northern Territory's Coroner today will examine the body of a Darwin-based soldier, accidentally shot and killed in East Timor on Wednesday. The Defence Force will hold a memorial service for 27-year-old Corporal Stuart Jones in Darwin next week. The body of Corporal Jones arrived in Darwin last night, and was met by 400 defence personnel and his brother, who had flown in from Queensland. His regiment formed a guard of honour as his coffin was carried off a Hercules aircraft. An investigating officer has been appointed to head an inquiry into the death, which occurred after a rifle in the back of an armoured vehicle accidentally discharged, near the border with West Timor. Corporal Jones was originally from Victoria. His funeral will be held next week along with a military memorial service. -------------------------------------------------------------------- -"

" A sea search is resuming off the coast south of Mackay in north Queensland for a man and his three children, who are thought to have disappeared while on a camping trip. Mark Joseph McDonald, 37, and his children, Brett, 5, Brian 3, and Jade 2, were last seen hiring a fishing boat in Mackay on Wednesday. The boat was found drifting off Mackay yesterday morning with clothes, a baby's bottle and camping gear aboard. A hired utility truck and boat trailer were located at Campwin Beach near Sarina. Inspector Tony Wright says police hold grave fears for the family, but have not ruled out that Mr McDonald may have abandoned the boat and left the area. ""There are a number of avenues of inquiry that we are following up we are conducting a search,"" he said. ""We have had the CQ rescue helicopter out there, air sea rescue vessel and police vessels, searching the area. ""We are also conducting inquiries with public transport, the buses, trains and rent-a-cars as well in case he may have left the area."" Central Queensland crime co-ordinator, Inspector Russell Jenke, says a massive land, air and sea search has resumed. ""SES [State Emergency Service] members will be assisting with the search down at Sarina doing the shoreline where the vehicle and boat trailer were located,"" he said. ""That's propbably the main focus area for the search, that area around there and directly out to sea."" --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Shane Warne says he still hopes to play a leadership role within the Australian cricket team, despite being dumped from the vice-captaincy for his off-field antics. The champion leg spinner says he has learned from the incident and hopes to be judged for his on-field performance. Warne has told Channel Nine's <i>The Footy Show</i> that public scrutiny can be tough, but he remains positive. ""Just being the life you live sometimes does get you down, but I look at the positive side of things and I think I'm a pretty positive person,"" he said. ""I think all the good things that have happened in my life over the last 10 years and longer, and the things I've achieved as a person and a cricketer, I think outweigh the bad things."""

" An Australian soldier in the UN peacekeeping force in East Timor has died as a result of the accidental discharge of a weapon, a UN spokesman said. No further details were available about the incident, which took place near the south-eastern town of Maliana, UN deputy spokesman Manoel de Almeida e Silva said. The soldier was not identified. Defence spokesman Colin Blair says the man's family have been notified and a full official statement will be made later this morning. ""It is a soldier serving with the Australian contingent in the border area,"" he said. ""The accident happened last night at about 8:00pm AEST, but other details will be released as they come to hand...we're working on a statement at the moment."" --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A Malaysian Government Minister says Prime Minister John Howard should mind his own business and stop commenting on the sentencing of Anwar Ibrahim. Mr Howard says the nine-year jail term given to the former deputy prime minister after being convicted of sodomy, raises serious concerns about the independence of Malaysia's judiciary. However, Malaysia's Legal Affairs Minister, Rais Yatim, says Mr Howard's comments on the affairs of another country are unwelcome and misguided. ""The judicial system in Malaysia has decided that way and...there is no need on the part of a Prime Minister of Australia to express whether it is political or not,"" he said. Meanwhile, the Foreign Affairs Minister, Alexander Downer, says many people have expressed misgivings about the treatment of Anwar Ibrahim. ""There has been a great deal of criticism, not just from the international community, but within Malaysia itself, of the whole of the court processes and that's something that concerns us,"" he said. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" An army officer has been shot dead in Spain in what is thought to be the latest incident in an escalating campaign of violence by the Basque separatist group ETA. In the past week, six people have died and 11 have been injured in what is believed to be an attempt by ETA to force the Spanish Government back to the negotiating table. Talks between the two sides broke down late last year. The shooting of the Spanish army officer follows three separate car bombings the previous day which killed five people - including four suspected ETA members - and injured 11 others. More than 800 people have died in what has been a 30-year campaign of violence by the separatist group. However, the Government is showing no signs of backing down. The Spanish Prime Minister, Jose Maria Aznar, says it is important to maintain resistance and not bow before terror. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Solomon Islands cease-fire monitoring council is due to meet today hoping to keep peace initiatives alive. The cease-fire in the country's ethnic conflict has been breached twice in the past 48 hours. The Malaita Eagle Force launched an offensive into rival Isatabu Freedom Movement territory west of Honiara yesterday. It used a stolen bulldozer, which has been converted into a tank, and Eagle Force troops set fire to houses in the area. This is a clear breach of the six-day-old cease-fire. But the Eagle Force says it is in retaliation for an earlier breach, the killing of one of its members by sniper fire on Tuesday. The cease-fire monitoring council will meet Isatabu leaders today, hoping to get a renewed commitment to the agreement. Council chairman Sir Peter Kenilorea has appealed to both sides to exercise restraint in the coming days. Sir Peter says both sides should allow time for the breaches to be investigated. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Analysts will watch the latest employment figures, out today, for any signs of GST spin-offs. Employment is expected to have grown moderately last month, with the jobless rate steady at 6.6 per cent. But analysts are mindful of a likely post-GST retail slow-down in July and the emerging slowdown in the building sector, as shown by yesterday's 14 per cent slump in housing financing for June. Macquarie Bank senior economist Richard Gibbs says, after raising interest rates again last week, the Reserve Bank will be watching the numbers closely, as it treads the line between holding back inflation and maintaining growth and employment. ""To the extent to which we see fallout in a sector of the economy, be it the building sector or retail trade or whatever, and that then reverberates through into the employment environment for the economy, well then that is a concern in that balancing of those objectives,"" he said. The Reserve Bank Governor, Ian McFarlane, will make a public speech in Brisbane later today. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A new study from the United States show when it comes to using the Internet, women now outnumber men. The World Wide Web is no longer a male-dominated domain, after a study showed that for the first time in its history, there are more women using the Internet than men. A study released by two US communications companies shows in the first quarter of this year 50.4 per cent of the total American Web audience was female, with that figure set to rise. While the total number of Web users grew by 22 per cent in the past year, the number of female users grew by 35 per cent. There has been a massive 125 per cent jump in the number of girls aged between 12 and 17 using the Web in the past year. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australian cricket captain Steve Waugh has urged fans to rally behind Shane Warne, despite his dumping as national vice-captain. Waugh says Warne has endured a ""tough time"" since his off-field image was tarnished by recent confessions that he indulged in ""dirty phone talk"" with a British woman. The scandal cost Warne the vice-captaincy last week but Waugh says his former deputy deserves the support of Melbourne fans in next week's one-day series against South Africa at Colonial Stadium. ""That's really important because he's had a tough time of it and as a fellow human being I feel sorry that he's been under such intense scrutiny,"" Waugh said. ""You put yourself in his position, you make a mistake and you really do cop it for a long time. ""He's in a high-profile position so he expects that kind of scrutiny but it doesn't make it any easier. ""It's something I can't even comprehend. I guess I'm under pressure and media scrutiny but Warnie probably gets 10 times what I'm under."" Waugh says he will still call on Warne for advice after the pair forged an impressive partnership, which included last year's World Cup triumph."

" Russian police say they have found a bag containing explosives in a major Moscow train station. The Interfax news agency reports the bag was discovered in a luggage storage office in the Kazanskaya station. Explosives experts have rushed to the scene. The discovery came a day after at least seven people were killed in a rush-hour blast in a central Moscow pedestrian underpass. More than 90 people were injured in the explosion. Police say they have arrested two suspects in the case, both from the North Caucasus region, where Russia is waging a 10 month campaign in Chechnya. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Immigration Minister, Phillip Ruddock, has come under attack for claiming refugees released from detention centres are double-dipping from welfare services. Mr Ruddock's comments follow an appeal for assistance from 40 Iraqi and Afghan refugees, released in Melbourne. Mr Ruddock says it appears many are doing the rounds of welfare agencies, but he admits to having no real proof of double-dipping. ""I've seen lists who are being serviced by welfare agencies well beyond the number of people being released,"" Mr Ruddock said. The Shadow Immigration Minister, Con Sciacca, says on the one hand the Federal Government is dumping refugees around Australia and on the other is painting them in a bad light. ""He likes to demonise refugees whether they come here legally or illegally and he feels there are some votes in it for him,"" Mr Sciacca said. Welfare groups claim they are under pressure because the refugees have been left to fend for themselves. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The ceasefire in Solomon Islands appears to have collapsed, following a limited offensive by the Malaita Eagle Force (MEF) today. The offensive was apparently in retaliation for an attack on MEF troops yesterday. The Eagle Force used a stolen, armour-plated bulldozer to advance through the Kakabona area, west of the capital, Honiara. They set fire to houses in villages and there were several exchanges of gunfire and one Eagle Force member was wounded. Today's offensive follows an attack on a Malaitan patrol in the area yesterday, in which one man was shot dead. Yesterday's attack and today's offensive are both flagrant breaches of a ceasefire which came into force on Saturday. The Solomon Islands ceasefire monitoring council is due to meet tomorrow to try to resolve the situation. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Prime Minister has strongly supported the involvement of one of his senior staff member's with a nursing home in Canberra. Mr Howard's chief of staff, Arthur Sinodinos, is a voluntary board member for the St Nicholas Home for the Aged in Canberra, although he intends to step down when his term ends next month. The Opposition claims Mr Sinodinos has a conflict of interest and is in breach of the code of conduct for the Prime Minister's staff. A recent audit criticised the home for not meeting standards in all 35 categories. But Mr Howard has defended his staff member, saying the matter was disclosed when Mr Sinodinos was appointed to his office. ""I applaud him for doing it and I encourage my staff to do good works,"" Mr Howard said. ""I want more people on my staff to engage themselves in charitable activities and I just think it's incredible a person who's prepared to give of his time to help the elderly, to do charity work, is attacked."" Shadow Aged Care Minister Chris Evans says Mr Sinodinos must resign from Mr Howard's office. ""He's been directly involved in a group that receives Commonwealth funds, that lobbies the Commonwealth, that is affected by decisions with which he is involved,"" he said. ""It's a clear breach of those [prime ministerial] guidelines. ""It seems the Prime Minister is unwilling to enforce the standards that he himself has set."" Mr Sinodinos says he has never used his position to advantage the home. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Bridgestone Australia says it is yet to receive any confirmation that its Firestone tyres will be recalled, following claims they have been responsible for a number of fatal vehicle accidents. But Bridgestone says it is aware of speculation there may be a recall. Bridgestone-Firestone USA is scheduled to hold a news conference tonight or early tomorrow morning Australian time. Bridgestone Australia corporate affairs manager John White says the situation may affect tyres on Australian vehicles. ""The tyre was imported on the Ford Explorer up until late 1997 when the tyre specification for Australia was changed to a different tyre size and a different tyre construction,"" Mr White said. ""If there are still some tyres out there, then they will be involved."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander elders have accepted an official apology from a number of Brisbane magistrates for past injustices. A ceremony was held in the Brisbane Magistrates Court this afternoon. Queensland's chief magistrate, Di Fingleton, and senior stipendiary magistrate, Brian Hyne, presented Aboriginal elder Herb Bligh and Torres Strait elder Steven Mann a deed of apology and commitment. Eight Brisbane magistrates took part in the ceremony with about 20 elders and a number of other dignitaries, including Supreme Court judge Ros Atkinson. The courtroom overflowed and the crowd broke into spontaneous applause when the magistrates asked the elders to join them on the bench. Mr Mann said: ""All that is said today and what you have handed to us will always be remembered from generation to generation"". -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Latest arrival figures confirm the Olympic-led boost to Australia's inbound tourism industry has begun. The Bureau of Statistics figures show international visitor arrivals for June up almost 10 per cent on the same month last year. The preliminary figures for the month of June are backed up by strong growth in visitor arrivals of more than 9 per cent for the first five months of 2000. A return to growth in tourism from Japan and double-digit growth in other key Asian markets and from the US has led the trend. Increases in visits from the UK, Europe and New Zealand were also significant. While pleased, the Australian Tourist Commission says it does not expect the growth for the second half of the year to be as strong. Meanwhile, Olympic organisers have announced John Farnham and Olivia Newton-John will head the line-up of performers in the opening ceremony next month. The pair will perform one of the theme songs to welcome the 12,000 athletes. Other performers in the Australian line-up include Julie Anthony, who will sing the national anthem, John Williamson, who will sing Waltzing Matilda, and Human Nature. Nineteen-year-old Vanessa Amorosi will take centre stage during the raising of the Olympic flag while Tina Arena will sing during the lighting of the cauldron. She flew in from London to take part in today's announcement. ""Quite honestly, I think, it'll probably be one of the greatest emotional and professional highlights of my career and I'm just really thrilled to be a part,"" Arena said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The death toll has risen following a bomb attack in Moscow. President Vladimir Putin has sent his condolences to the families of the eight dead and 53 wounded. Mr Putin convened an emergency meeting of his top security and defence ministers. Later, in a statement issued by the Kremlin, he described the explosion as a ""terrible tragedy"", saying it has ""deeply shaken"" Russia. But he avoided linking the blast directly to rebels in breakaway Chechnya. The office of Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov also denied any separatist link to the bomb blast, which ripped through the centre of Moscow during the evening rush hour. The bomb was set in a crowded pedestrian underpass not far from the Kremlin. As smoke billowed out of the underpass, victims struggled to the surface to be treated at the scene. Even emergency workers required treatment and hospitals have put out a call for blood donors. No-one has taken responsibility for the bomb yet, although the attack does come the day after Chechen Independence Day when police were expecting terrorist activity. This is the first bombing in Moscow since the apartment bombings almost a year ago that prompted the invasion of Chechnya. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A group of Muslim parties say President Abdurrahman Wahid is the cause of his country's woes. The group delivered a scathing assessment of Mr Wahid's first nine months in office. ""The problems lie at the level of the president himself. The president is the cause of almost all the problems engulfing the nation,"" said Murdiati Akmal of the Muslim-based Reform faction. The criticism came as the 700 member assembly's eleven factions were one by one delivering their assessments of a progress report delivered by Wahid, himself a respected Muslim scholar, to the assembly on Monday. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" The president of the Australian section of the International Commission of Jurists, Justice John Dowd, has attacked the sentence given to former Malaysian deputy prime minister Anwar Ibrahim. The Malaysian High Court handed out a nine year sentence for a sodomy conviction which is to be added to an earlier six year term he received for political corruption. Justice Dowd has expressed his surprise and dismay that any court could have convicted anyone on the evidence put forward during Anwar's trial. ""This was a very political decision and very difficult to see how any judge anywhere in the world could have come to this decision on the evidence,"" he said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Government is refusing to give ground to demands by the states and territories for extra funding to cover the cost of settling refugees. Australia's Community Services Ministers have expressed grave concerns about the stress being placed on welfare organisations having to deal with hundreds of refugees being released from immigration detention centres. They have accused the Commonwealth of shifting the cost of support services on to state and territory governments and are demanding an even distribution of refugees across the country. But the Federal Immigration Minister, Philip Ruddock, continues to reject the claims. ""In relation to the arrangements for release of people who've arrived in Australia unlawfully, whether they're found to be refugees or not, we honour our international obligations,"" he said. ""The states are getting themselves into a tither over these matters for little or no purpose. ""Now I'm certainly happy to talk to the states about arguments in relation to cost shifting that they make because there's been no cost shifting on our part."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Residents of nursing homes set to be closed down for failing to meet standards of care will be warned of any imminent closure, under new laws foreshadowed by the Federal Government. Existing laws prevent Federal regulators tipping-off nursing home residents and their relatives before a move is made to shut-down an operator, which happened in the Riverside case. Federal Cabinet has also approved a change to the Aged Care laws, which would give the Department the power to seek the removal of a company director or nursing home operator whose been convicted of a serious offence or been bankrupted. The Aged Care Minister, Bronwyn Bishop, says the changes are part of the Government's ongoing efforts to strengthen compliance with nursing home standards. ""With this new requirement for people to meet standards, you're obviously going to flush out the minority of providers who leave something to be desired,"" she said. ----------------------------------------------------------------"

" Chile's highest court has cleared the way for former military dictator, General Augusto Pinochet, to be prosecuted for crimes committed during his 17 years in power. In a decision announced in Santiago today, Chile's Supreme Court upheld a lower court ruling stripping General Pinochet of the immunity granted to him when he yielded power 10 years ago. The decison could see General Pinochet prosecuted on more than 150 charges arising from political violence during his rule. However, lawyers for the former leader are expected to challenge his fitness to stand trial. The 70-year-old General avoided extradition from Britain to Spain on the grounds of diminished mental capacity. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Police in the English town of Portsmouth have again appealed for calm after a fifth night of vigilante attacks against alleged paedophiles. Several cars have been burnt and a number of people have moved from the area since the attacks began. Police say they have already assisted one known sex offender to move from the area after an angry mob rioted outside his house several days ago. His photo and name featured in the <i>News of the World</i> newspaper campaign. The campaign was halted last week following a meeting between police, civil authorities, the newspaper and the parents of murdered 11-year-old, Sarah Payne. However, the rioting has continued on the housing estate every night since then with cars burnt and houses of other alleged paedophiles stoned. Police are appealing for calm, saying that a hooligan element has been fanning the violence. ----------------------------------------------------------------"

" The clean-up continues this morning after a severe storm swept across regional Victoria and parts of Melbourne. Sunbury, north-west of Melbourne, was worst hit. The storm struck just after dark last night, cutting power to thousands of homes, damaging buildings and causing flash flooding on roads. It was a busy night for State Emergency Service volunteers, particularly in Sunbury, where what is described as a mini tornado tore the roof from a basketball stadium. Linda, who lives close by, says the damage is extensive. ""The back wall has just been peeled away and the roof's missing as well,"" she said. Ambulance officer Michael Donnard was on the highway when the storm struck. ""[It]looked just like a cyclone, a mini tornado. There was a dark cloud over Sunbury, a little funnel coming down from underneath it,"" he said. ""It really did look like something out of the movies."" The storm also brought down power lines, while a block of flats in South Yarra was damaged by lightning. No injuries have been reported."

" Malaysia's one time deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim has been found guilty of sodomy. The court has been considering what sentence it will apply and Anwar was given a chance today to make a mitigating statement. The judge called a further adjournment after he came under attack by the former minister. Anwar told the court his case had long ago ceased to be a legal matter, but a political issue. He told the judge the verdict was sick and he too was a sick judge. Anwar who was sentenced to six years in jail last year after being found guilty of abuse of power, is facing a further 20 years in jail. Police have maintained a strong presence outside the court. Earlier, they arrested an opposition leader who had come to the court to show his support for Anwar. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The ceasefire in the Solomon Islands ethnic conflict has been breached. A militia member has been shot dead by a sniper west of the capital, Honiara. A Malaita Eagle Force patrol came under fire this morning as it moved into an area the Eagles say was being taken over by the rival Isatabu Freedom Movement, in breach of ceasefire conditions. The Eagles patrol wanted to remove explosive charges it says the Isatabu had placed in the area. Sniper fire killed one Eagle Force member. Eagle Force spokesman Andrew Nori says the ceasefire agreement is terminated, but he also left open the possibility that the Ceasefire Monitoring Council could mediate a solution. The ceasefire was signed last week, and came into effect on Saturday. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Australians visiting Fiji are being warned that Australian sanctions might lead to hostile reactions. The overnight shooting of a policeman and a soldier in an ambush outside Suva has reinforced Australian consular advice against travel to Fiji. But Department of Foreign Affairs spokesman Matt Francis says people who do travel there should be aware they may be targeted by local reaction to Australian policy ""We've announced a range of measures intended to register Australia's deep concern to events in Fiji,"" he said. ""It is possible there might be some reaction to those measures which could cause difficulties for Australian travellers. ""We're highlighting the importance of staying aware of what's happening in the area you're visiting and maintaining a high level of security awareness."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Australian Democrats say it is about time the Federal Government moved to address the privacy and discrimination issues surrounding genetic testing. The Competition and Consumer Commission has cleared the way for insurance companies to force clients to take genetic tests and to allow cheaper premiums for people with no genetic pre-disposition to disease. Democrats deputy leader, Natasha Stott Despoja, says today's meeting between the Attorney-General and Health Minister to discuss biotechnology laws is long overdue. ""I cannot begin to tell you how the democrats have tried in vain for more than two-and-a-half, almost three years to get these ministers together,"" Senator Stott Despoja said. ""And to get the privacy commissioner involved, to ensure that we have some draft legislation or at minimum a working party to debate some of these issues."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" One of the first readings of business conditions in a post-goods and services tax (GST) Australia has been released. The National Australia Bank's July survey shows business faring reasonably well under the new tax system. The Bank conducts a broad-based study of both trading conditions and business confidence. Senior economist David Lansley says strong pre-GST activity in June has been generally unwound in July. ""Which is to be expected because a lot of that was distorted by a sharp surge in retail spending. ""It's suggesting that an underlining economy is reasonably firm,"" he sid. While the volatility has been most pronounced in the retail sector, the construction industry is now showing a sharp decline, contributing to a falling index measure of employment. However, business confidence overall appears to be returning. ""Companies were clearly a bit cautious about the way they saw things panning out but now that the GST is in, they're a little bit more optimistic about how that's working,"" Mr Lansley said. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" One Nation leader Pauline Hanson says she is half-way towards paying her $500,000 debt to the Queensland Electoral Commission. Miss Hanson yesterday handed over a cheque for $250,000, part of the money she has to repay, after the commission found One Nation fraudulently registered for the 1998 State election. Miss Hanson says she is confident of raising the rest, before the December 31 deadline. ""We've got a few months now to actually try to raise the balance of the money, that's been about $252,000, plus I've got legal costs of about $150,000 to raise to pay the balance by the end of the year,"" Miss Hanson said. ""It's been a big effort to do that but I'm just so appreciative of the Australian people who've got behind me, to support me, with this."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The proprietors of The Daily Telegraph newspaper and the ABC have been ordered to pay $250,000 in damages after repeating allegations of corruption within the kangaroo meat industry. A judgment late last year found both media organisations defamed Sydney-based meat processing company Vacik Distributors and its owner Victor Bates when reporting on attempts to ban the book, Smuggled Two. The book by Melbourne author, Raymond Hosier, contained allegations that Mr Vacik and Mr Bates were corruptly involved in a wildlife trafficking trade with National Parks and Wildlife officers. Justice Sperling, in awarding the damages, says both the newspaper and ABC television news failed to make inquiries about the accuracy of the allegations and it was not a fair report of court proceedings to publish them. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The New South Wales Government is being urged to immediately implement an International Paralympic Committee decision to scrap entry fees for the Paralympic Games. The committee decided last week to waive the entry fee for athletes participating in the 2004 Athens Paralympic Games. Shadow Community Services Minister Brad Hazzard say it is a policy which should also apply in Sydney. He wants the State Government to provide the $5 million for the entry fees of Paralympic athletes from around the world. ""Australians are very fair people and I think they're outraged that our Government has actually discriminated between Paralympians and Olympians,"" he said. ""Two billion dollars went to the Olympics, we're talking about just another $5 million to even up a bit of it for Paralympians."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Tension has escalated in Fiji, following the deaths this morning of a soldier and a police officer, and the wounding of three other soldiers, in what the military says was an ambush by nationalist rebels. A search is underway in thick bush about 20 kilometres outside of Suva for the gunman or gunmen who fired on a military patrol. Heavy rain overnight and showers this morning is making the search more difficult. The Army and police have established checkpoints around the area and they are searching for a white double cab vehicle with a green top. The military has a very high reputation in Fiji and is generally well regarded. There has, however, been considerable criticism of soldiers for individual acts of brutality against people involved in the May coup. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australia's newest airline, Virgin Blue, is reviewing its cost structure in the wake of the latest airfare price war. The review comes as Australia's competition watchdog says it is not too concerned about the sudden drop in the price of air travel. The latest price war has been triggered by Impulse Airlines offering $66 one-way fares between Sydney and Melbourne and Sydney and Canberra. Virgin Blue is still awaiting its license to fly but it had said it would be offering $99 Sydney-Brisbane tickets. Chief executive Brett Godfrey has signalled cheaper prices are on the way. ""I think we're going to have to be lower than $99 now,"" he said. Chairman of the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC), Allan Fels, has told Channel Nine he is not too concerned by the current price competition. ""It's normal competition in so far as the major airlines seem to be just matching the prices of a new entrant,"" he said. The ACCC is making sure that Qantas and Ansett are living up to its new cheap offers. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A promise by Indonesia's embattled President Abdurrahman Wahid to lie low and revamp his Cabinet appears to have won him a temporary reprieve from hostile legislators. But no-one, including President Wahid and the Jakarta Stock Exchange, which reacted by slipping slightly, seems to be sure how long it will last. The country's first democratically-elected leader, in the words of political analyst Kastorius Sinaga, was ""cornered"" when he faced the 700 members of People's Consultative Assembly (MPR). President Wahid, who turned 60 on Saturday, is accused by the MPs who elected him to a five-year term in October, of lagging far behind public expectations in his first nine months in power. The MPs say his inexperienced cabinet is letting the country drift into anarchy, that he spends too much time overseas, that the economy has failed to take off and that unrest in the outer regions of the huge archipelago was tearing the country apart. Unusually contrite, President Wahid apologised and said a cabinet reshuffle would come soon after the assembly session, which is scheduled to close on August 18. From then on he would leave the day to day running of the government to others and concentrate on diplomacy, he said. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" US Vice-President Al Gore has selected Senator Joseph Lieberman to be his running mate for the Presidential elections. The move rounds out the Democratic ticket with the first Jewish vice presidential candidate in US history. The choice of the moderate Democrat and self-styled moral crusader is seen as an effort to win over independent voters and distance Gore from the moral controversy which surrounds President Bill Clinton. Senator Lieberman was the first prominent Democrat to openly criticise the President's conduct with former White House intern Monica Lewinsky. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Malaysia's human rights body says it will monitor any public gathering outside the High Court in Kuala Lumpur today for the handing down of the verdict in the sodomy trial of Anwar Ibrahim The Malaysian Human Rights Commission says it will observe the actions of both the public and the police. The commission says people have the right of peaceful assembly outside the court, while the Government says even peaceful protests will be banned. The judge in former deputy premier Anwar's year-long sodomy trial will deliver his verdict this morning. He faces up to 20-years in jail if convicted. Anwar is already serving a six-year jail term after being convicted of corruption. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Yugoslav Government says it intends to charge four foreigners with terrorism. The two British men and two Canadians were arrested in Montenegro last week. The four western men were arrested as they were returning to Kosovo, from neighbouring Montenegro, after a few days holiday. The Yugoslav Army alleges they were spies and Serb television has shown evidence to back up the army's case, including maps and foreign currency that it says the men were carrying with them. An army spokesman said initial investigations had confirmed that the men had committed the criminal act of terrorism. Two of the men are British police trainers working in Kosovo, the other two are a Canadian aid worker and his nephew. The British Government says the detention is a breach of international law and says it has yet to be told what the men have been charged with. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A young woodchopping champion has been turned away from competition at the Royal National Association's (RNA) annual Queensland show because he has only one arm and is deemed a safety risk. Nick Fredriksen, who is 15 today, was approved to chop by the RNA, but four weeks later received a letter from Ekka organisers saying he was a safety risk because the axe could slip from his one hand. The teenager lost his left arm in an accident on the family farm at Kilcoy, in the upper Brisbane Valley, when he was eight. His father has been chopping on the National Show circuit for years and Nick followed in his footsteps in competitions up and down the Queensland coast. The pair had planned to compete in father and son events at the Brisbane Exhibition, and Nick in the boys' solo championship chops. Nick says when he told his mates about the ban they could not believe it. ""Well I told 'em about it and they said we reckon its because you've only got one arm and we know now that it is,"" he said. He says RNA president Colin Meagher should be aware of the dangers the chopping ring already pose. ""I would just ask him if it was alright if I could chop and if I can't, well I'd tell him that the woodchop arena is a safety risk already because it hasn't got a fence around it, chips can fly out and so there might not be any chopping."" Nick and his mother have contacted the Anti-Discrimination Commission. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" World champion sprinter Cathy Freeman is back on track today after pulling out of Saturday's Grand Prix in London with an injury to her upper leg, the world athletics governing body reported. The 27-year-old Australian ran a light workout near London and is expected to compete on August 18, in the Golden League Herculis meeting in Monte Carlo, her coach Peter Fortune confirmed. ""Cathy had a modified training run today and she should be back to normal training later in the week,"" Fortune said. ""She ran at a slower pace than normal today because she doesn't want to take any risks, but she's looking OK, really."" Freeman was a last-minute withdrawal on Saturday in the Grand Prix meet in London's Crystal Palace when she complained of pain in her thigh and hamstring. Australian team trainer Kay Crossley described it as a ""twinge"" in a muscle in the groin area. Ms Crossley said Freeman had suffered a few minor strains in the hamstring region this season, but said her Olympic preparation was on track. In Monaco, the Australian is likely to race France's Marie-Jose Perec, who beat Freeman out of Olympic gold four years ago. Perec, 32, pulled out of the French national championships over the weekend with a minor tendon injury."

" The Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) has called for the reintroduction of wage subsidies and traineeships to help get the long-term unemployed into work. The welfare group believes the Job Network is failing the most disadvantaged jobseekers. ACOSS analysis of the first 16 months of the Job Network has found that the number of long term unemployed remains stubbornly high, despite a buoyant job market. ACOSS president Michael Raper blames the billion dollar a year Government cuts to employment assistance. ""The incentive scheme is not encouraging job network providers to provide those sorts of programs that have proven in the past to be exactly what's necessary,"" Mr Raper said. He says successful past programs, like Jobstart and Jobskills, offered wage subsidies and traineeships, giving people work experience and skills. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The head of the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC), Professor Alan Fels, says he will be monitoring the airfare price war that has broken out. Over the weekend, Impulse Airlines announced fares as low as $66 for the one way trips Sydney to Melbourne and Sydney to Canberra. Those fares are now being matched by major airlines. Professor Fels says the ACCC will be keeping a close eye on the way other airlines respond to the Impulse move. ""If there was misleading or deceptive conduct in the marketing, if they were making offers that were not real ones, if they were trying to divert customers away from Impulse with false advertising or misleading [advertising] that would of course raise issues under the Trade Practices Act,"" he said. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Indonesian police and soldiers have been issued with shoot-on-sight orders to ensure security for the annual meeting of the country's highest law makers which begins today. More than 30,000 troops and police have been deployed in the capital, Jakarta, to guard a parliamentary session that is expected to indicate the strength of President Abdurrahman Wahid's grip on power. Sharp shooters have been deployed to strategic locations around Jakarta and police and soldiers are geared up to stop rioting or street violence. President Wahid, the country's first democratically elected leader, will defend his record before 700 members of the People's Consultative Assembly. He is expected to face tough criticism on his performance during his first year in office for failing to end religious fighting in the Maluku Islands, for his handling of a weak coalition government and he will also be questioned about a number of financial scandals among his inner circle. It is unlikely there will be any moves to sack President Wahid. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australia's Defence Forces have been involved in another mishap in Darwin, this time involving the Navy. An investigation has been launched into how four people came to be injured while trying to board the Navy catamaran <i>Jervis Bay</i> at Darwin wharf. The four were trying to cross a gangway, which was not properly secured, when three of them fell into the water and the other hit the deck. The commander of <i>HMAS Jervis Bay</i>, Vaughan Rixon, says all four are in a serious condition in Royal Darwin Hospital. ""The duty watch reacted appropriately, they recovered the people from the water, recovered or assisted the man who was injured on the deck and got them off to hospital as quickly as we could,"" Commander Rixon said. ""We'll investigate exactly how it did happen."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" One of Israel's most eminent rabbis has labelled the victims of the Holocaust ""reincarnated sinners"" who were killed by the Nazis to make amends for their past wrongs. The comment by the Shas movement's spiritual leader, Rabbi Ovidia Yossef, has triggered a wave of criticism in Israel, from the Prime Minister's office down. The spiritual head of the ultra-Orthodox Shas movement, Rabbi Yossef, spoke in a sermon later replayed on Israeli radio. He said the six million Jews who died at the hands of the Nazis were sinners in past lives who had been reincarnated to make atonement. The remarks sparked shock and anger among holocaust survivors and their relatives. Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak says the sermon would hurt the memory of holocaust victims. In the same sermon, the rabbi, whose Shas Party recently quit Ehud Barak's coalition, called the Prime Minister ""senseless"" and described Palestinians as ""snakes despised by God"". -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Sydney's Olympic Games Committee has confirmed they have a deal with the operators of an Aboriginal cultural centre not to stage protests at the venue during the games. The centre, at the main games precinct at Homebush Bay, is funded by both the New South Wales Government and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission. A spokesman for the Games organisers says there are ""special conditions"" attached to the contract to run the centre that it only be used as a showcase of arts and crafts. The centre might be closed down if organisers or the Government deem it is being used for purposes outside of the agreement. The chairwoman of SOCOG's Indigenous Advisory Committee, Dr Lowitja O'Donoghue, says Aboriginal protesters would be removed from the Indigenous Arts Centre at Sydney's Olympic Park. Dr O'Donoghue says anyone using the centre to protest would be acting against the centre's purpose and in breach of its contract. ""Well they'd be removed, I'm pretty sure of that,"" she said. ""This is a site for showcasing Aboriginal arts and crafts, there are other venues for people to do that [protest], obviously the contract...would indicate that."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Life imitated Hollywood in the United States on the weekend when the passenger of a light plane was forced to land it himself after the pilot passed out at the controls. Henry Anhalt, who had never flown a plane in his life, was returning to Florida from the Bahamas, with his wife and three children, when the pilot of the single engine Piper aircraft collapsed. After sending out a mayday, Mr Anhalt was contacted by a nearby flight instructor, who gave some quick lessons on handling the plane and then, half an hour later, helped talk him through the landing. Despite a bumpy landing, which saw the plane veer across a grassy median strip before coming to a halt on an adjacent runway, little damage was sustained and the passengers emerged unhurt. The pilot was later pronounced dead, with cause unknown. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australians have filled three of the top five placings in the $5.99 million PGA International golf tournament in Colorado. South Africa's Ernie Els took out hte tournament on 48 points under the modified stableford scoring system, winning by four points from Phil Mickelson. Stuart Appleby led in a trio of Australians with 41 points in third place, followed by Greg Norman, who was fourth on 38 points, and Craig Spence, who was fifth on 32 points. Greg Chalmers completed a good day for the Australians, sharing 11th. The modified systems awards two points for a birdie, none for a par and takes away points for shots over-par."

" The Royal Australian Air Force says its major training exercise Pitch Black is continuing normally, despite a mishap with a dummy-missile falling off an FA-18 Hornet in Darwin last night. An incident investigation team has arrived from Canberra to examine the crash scene and aircraft, which has been grounded. Air Commodore Dave Dunlop says he is not sure how long the investigation will take. ""At this stage, that's up to the investigation team and we will continue the investigation until we get to the bottom of this,"" Commodore Dunlop said. Defence Minister John Moore says the Air Force will remove missile cannisters from all its FA-18 fighters until it is determined how a dummy missile was accidentally dropped last night. Mr Moore, who is in East Timor visiting Australian troops, says the hornet involved in the incident has been isolated for investigation. ""I've spoken with the chief of air force and the cannisters will be taken off the FA-18s until they're further investigated,"" Mr Moore said. ""As to what really happened, in a mechanical sense, it's unfortunate but these things can happen. ""The good thing about it is that it didn't really cause any great damage except to a couple of material matters."" ---------------------------------------"

" Australia says United Nations troops in East Timor are at a high state of readiness because of increased militia activity. Australia's Defence Minister John Moore, visiting East Timor today, says the militia coming across the border are now better trained. Mr Moore says the militia from West Timor have equipment from the Indonesian military, the TNI. ""I don't know whether they're being provided by the TNI, but they (the militia) certainly have been picked up with Indonesian ammunition and elements of equipment,"" Mr Moore said. ""I can't say that they are directly coming from the Indonesian Army however."" Mr Moore says refugee camps in West Timor and the inability to have control in those areas added to the dangers peacekeepers faced. ""So we are looking to the Indonesians to tone down, or wind up or get rid of the refugee camps,"" he said. The body of a United Nations peacekeeper killed in East Timor will be flown to Australia today on its way back to Bangladesh. The soldier died in a bomb explosion on a beach near Dili while 15 Bangladeshi engineer-soldiers were clearing unexploded ordinance. There will be a public ceremony at Comoro Airport at Dili before the soldier's body is flown out. A board of inquiry will be established to investigate the incident. ---------------------------------------"

" Poor visibility has forced Navy divers to abandon a search for the wreckage of a light plane which crashed off Cairns last night. Divers spent the last few hours searching waters off Machan's Beach where witnesses report seeing the Cessna 206 plunge into the sea last night. However, visibility is down to less than a metre, making the job almost impossible. Authorities will attempt another underwater search using special metal-detection equipment tomorrow. The body of Dean Raymond Irons, 53, of Cairns was pulled from the water last night while there is still no sign of the plane's pilot Stewart Arthur Smith, 52, from Innisfail. Police do not expect to find him alive. An air search of the area will conclude at dusk. ------------------------------------"

" The military in Fiji has detained the leader of a rebel group it suspects has been burning down houses in the rural area of Tailevu, north of the capital, Suva. His detention coincides with the arrest on another island of scores of supporters of the coup leader, George Speight. According to the military spokesman, Lieutenant Semi Koroi, the military arrested three rebels in a sweep through the Tailevu area this morning. He said two were indigenous Fijians and the other was an Indo-Fijian, Saresh Prasard. Lieutenant Koroi said Prasard was believed to be leading the group allegedly responsible for a spate of house burnings. The houses burnt down have all belonged to Indian families. Further north, on the island of Vanua Levu, the number of rebel arrests is approaching 80. ------------------------------------"

" The Australian Cricket Board has dropped Shane Warne as vice-captain and replaced him with Adam Gilchrist. ACB chairman Dennis Rogers says while Warne's on-field performances were outstanding, his off-field indiscretions were unacceptable and therefore he had to be stripped of the vice-captaincy. Rogers says the door is not closed on Warne for the future and says when the leg spinner was told of the decision he said he hoped to get the job back. Australian selectors had endorsed Warne for the vice-captaincy. Tasmanian Ricky Ponting was the other candidate. Rogers says his nightclub indiscretions were not used against him, rather that Gilchrist was the better man for the job. Gilchrist takes up the role when Australia plays South Africa in Melbourne in a fortnight. ------------------------------------"

" The makers of Children's Panadol baby drops have issued a voluntary recall of the product. Smith Klein Beecham says it is recalling the baby drops because of a defective dropper device, which has been found not to be tamper-proof. Spokesman Greg Husband says it is possible for a child to open the bottle after the dropper has been installed. The baby drops are not a prescription item but are only available from chemists. ------------------------------------"

" Darwin police say a dummy missile has fallen off a Royal Australian Air Force jet, crushing a car in a Darwin suburb. The jet was involved in the Pitch Black joint military exercises between Australian, Singaporean and British troops. The missile landed on a four-wheel-drive parked in a panel beaters in the industrial suburb of Berrima, destroying the front of the vehicle and damaging two others. No-one was injured in the incident. A police spokesman says it was a ""captive missile"", not explosive but instead carrying recording equipment. He says the RAAF has been to the scene to remove the missile. ----------------------------------"

" Four helicopters will this morning search an area off Cairns in far north Queensland for the second victim of a light plane crash. The Cessna 206, with two people on board, crashed into the sea off Machan's Beach just before 7.00pm AEST last night. An air search recovered one body and parts of the wreckage. Emergency crews combed the city's northern beaches late into the night, without success. A police spokesman at the scene, Rolf Mettmeyer, says the plane went down in bad weather. ""There appeared to be an increase in power and the plane possibly turned and broke into the sea,"" he said. Sophia Wood, who witnessed the crash from Machan's Beach, says it was obvious something was wrong. ""The conditions looked really bad, like when it actually came over the first time I saw it and said wow that looks really low, it didn't look very safe it looked like something was wrong with it,"" she said. She says says there is little chance anyone could have survived it. ""It would have had to be a split second for them to bail,"" she said. ""I mean they gave themselves no chance - it was almost like it must have just tipped sideways and crashed straight in as though it was a wrong turn or something like that."" ---------------------------------"

" The Youth Legal Service in Western Australia says the Australian Labor Party has failed to show leadership on the issue of mandatory sentencing. Yesterday at the ALP's national conference, Labor agreed to recognise the differences between Western Australia's and the Northern Territory's mandatory sentencing regimes. Western Australian Labor leader Geoff Gallop says his federal counterparts will no longer push to have the state's mandatory sentencing laws overturned. Cheryl Vernon from the Youth Legal Service says the federal ALP has not taken into consideration the failure of Western Australia's laws. ""The home burglary rate has not decreased and despite this supposedly being a rehabilitative option for those kids, 80 per cent of them on release have reoffended within two years,"" she said. The Greens Senator, Bob Brown, has joined the criticism of the ALP for limiting its opposition to mandatory sentencing. Senator Brown says the new platform reflects the Prime Minister's deal with the Northern Territory Government on mandatory sentencing. He says the federal ALP has buckled to Western Australia's Labor Party. Senator Brown says the next test for the Federal Opposition will be when he introduces a new bill to overide mandatory sentencing for all property crimes. ---------------------------------"

" Fijian troops have killed a supporter of rebel leader George Speight in a new sweep of trouble spots. The man was killed in an exchange of fire with soldiers who had gone to Fiji's second largest island, Vanua Levu, where ethnic Indians have been attacked by Fijian nationalists. Almost 40 of the nationalist rebels have been arrested. Army spokesman Major Howard Politini says the troops swept into the Dreketi area where earlier this week rebels had erected road blocks and terrorised Indo Fijian families. A delegation of chiefs from Vanua Levu met in Suva with the vice president and their spokesman said they gave the military all rights to use the full force of the law against those creating trouble. --------------------------------"

" The militia group controlling the Solomons Islands capital Honiara says it will begin standing down its troops following a cease-fire agreement. The cease-fire takes effect tomorrow morning, with peace talks also due to start this weekend. Malaita Eagle Force spokesman Andrew Nori has told Solomon Islands radio militia members will begin standing down in the coming days. But he says the militia is not disbanding, and troops are just on leave while the cease-fire lasts. Foreign Minister Alexander Downer says Australia will offer to host the talks, most likely in Cairns. Mr Downer welcomed the cease-fire agreement, saying Australia will do all it can to assist peace efforts. He says Australia may contribute to an international peace monitoring operation. ------------------------------"

" Big early losses have been transformed into solid gains among high tech stocks listed on the Nasdaq exchange in New York. The Nasdaq composite index has closed 101 points higher at 3,760, which is an overall improvement of 2.8 per cent. Initially the high tech indicator plunged around 3.75 per cent on profit worries, before climbing back. Activity has been more muted on the New York Stock Exchange. The Dow Jones industrial average has also made up lost ground to close up just 19 points at 10,707. Factory orders for US manufactured goods has jumped 5.5 per cent in June. Although expected, it is the biggest monthly rise in more than nine years. Durable goods orders are up 9.7 per cent, underpinned by demand for aircraft. The all-important non-farm payroll figures will be released today with the strength of employment seen as possibly dictating the Federal Reserve's next move on interest rates. The US bond market is a little weaker. The softer prices have pushed up the yield on 30-year Treasury paper to 5.74 per cent, which is a rise of almost two points. In Britain, investors were rattled by the early losses in New York, with the London's FT-100 index falling 74 points to 6,317. Yesterday in Australia, there was very limited headway. The All Ordinaries index ended 3.5 points higher at 3,236. At 7.00am AEST, the Share Price Index contract was up five points on yesterday's day settlement at 3,303. The 10-year bond contract is up 3.5 points at 93.84, with the implied yield easing to 6.16 per cent. The dollar is unchanged on yesterday's local close, sitting at 58.60 US cents. On the cross-rates, it is at 0.6462 euros, 63.50 Japanese yen, 39.13 pence sterling, and against the New Zealand dollar, it is at 1.283. Gold price is at $US274.00 an ounce and West Texas crude oil is $US28.83 a barrel. -------------------------------"

" George W. Bush, the Republican hoping to be the next president of the United States, will today put his case to the American people. Mr Bush is to accept his party's nomination for president in a speech aired on prime time television. Today he takes the stage at the Republican national convention with the aim of proving to Americans he has what it takes to be president of the United States. Mr Bush is expected to follow the lead of his running mate, Dick Chaney, who says it is time to evict the Clintons from the White House. ""Let us go forth from the hall in confidence and courage, committed to restoring decency and honour to our republic,"" he said. ""Let us go forth knowing that our cause is just."" Until now most Americans have paid little attention to the race for the presidency, and the Republicans hope Mr Bush's speech will change that. ----------------------------------"

" Scientists at the South Australian Research and Development Institute (SARDI) say Australia's first cloned sheep, Matilda, is doing well, and will probably be mated in about a year. Unlike Victorian scientists who cloned a twin calf to follow the birth of their first clone Suzi, SARDI scientists say they have no intention of cloning other versions of Matilda at this stage. Matilda is now 16-weeks-old and weighs 32 kilograms. SARDI's principal research scientist, Simon Walker, says they need to iron out problems with cloning technology first before they consider expanding the program. ""I guess until we do and make progress in that area, there is little point in trying to produce too many more Matildas,"" he said. ""It really is a matter of being, I think, wise about the way in which we go about our efforts and those efforts will be spent very much on researching some of those basic problems."" ------------------------------------"

" The Australian Cricket Board will decide today whether Shane Warne retains the Australian vice-captaincy. Warne's leadership role in the Australian team is under review after several off-field indiscretions, including a phone sex scandal in England. Adam Gilchrist and Ricky Ponting are the leading contenders for the job if Warne loses it. Gilchrist says any player in the Australian team would be a worthy deputy leader to Steve Waugh. ""At the moment in the team there's probably any number of candidates that could do the job if given the chance,"" he said. ""It's a pretty strong team and Stephen runs a tight ship but the other 10 players will contribute."""

" A search is continuing in East Timor for a suspected band of pro- Indonesian militia fighters after a gun battle with Australian United Nations peacekeepers. No Australians were hurt, but two militiamen were killed and another injured. The search is being carried out near the town of Maliana, about 20 kilometres from the border with West Timor, and involves 100 troops, mainly Australians. A UN military spokesman says they are following a blood trail, which he says is evidence that one militiaman is injured. The man killed in the attack was dressed in Indonesian-style camouflage and armed with an automatic rifle. Militias loyal to Indonesia have been using refugee camps inside West Timor to launch attacks into neighbouring East Timor. ---------------------------------"

" Australia's latest increase in official interest rates has been followed by a quiet night's trading in the local dollar. The Reserve Bank yesterday raised the cash rate a month earlier than many in the market had been expecting. The rate was raised 0.25 of a percentage point to 6.25 per cent. In both currency and credit markets, the feeling is that there is more to come. However, overnight the dollar has failed to surpass the highs of yesterday, being capped at just under 58.5 US cents. At 7.00am AEST, it was sitting at 58.42 US cents, 0.125 cents above yesterday's local close. On the cross-rates, it is at 0.6393 euros, 63.63 Japanese yen, 39.09 pence sterling, and against the New Zealand dollar, it is at 1.285. In the United States, investors are breathing easier on the interest rate front. Sales of new homes in America have dropped to their lowest level in over two years. The outcome is attributed to the past year of tightening monetary policy in the US, and is seen as bolstering the case for the Fed to hold off any further rate rise at its August 22 meeting. On the markets, high tech stocks have been unable to recover after yesterday's 2.2 per cent slide. New York's Nasdaq composite index has finished a further 27 points behind at 3,658, but the blue chip Dow Jones industrial average is up 81 points at 10,688. The US bond market is weaker. The softer prices have pushed up the yield on 30-year Treasury paper to 5.76 per cent, which is a rise of almost four points. In Britain, investors have also been watching interest rates. The sharemarket has managed another modest advance, with London's FT-100 index rising 12 points to 6,391. Yesterday in Asia, markets were mostly heading higher. Japanese stock prices clawed their way back after early losses, with Tokyo's Nikkei index rising 107 points to 16,206. In Australia, investors appeared happy to shrug off the further move on interest rates. The All Ordinaries index ended 14.5 points higher at 3,232. At 7.00am AEST, the Share Price Index contract was up five points on yesterday's day settlement at 3,308. The 10-year bond contract is up two points at 93.78, with the implied yield easing to 6.22 per cent. The gold price is at $US277.55 an ounce, and West Texas crude oil is at $US28.25 a barrel. ----------------------------------"

" The chairman of the Australian Broadcasting Authority (ABA) says he is not planning to subject commercial television stations to the same scrutiny as the radio industry. The ABA's final report on the inquiry into the ""Cash for Comment"" scandal recommends new standards of disclosure of sponsorship and advertising on radio stations. After a $1 million inquiry spanning four states, the ABA concluded there was a systemic failure of self-regulation in the radio industry. It is proposing to impose new standards on stations and has called for increased powers to sanction breaches. In light of the problems revealed in the radio industry, the Communication Law Centre in Sydney, which participated in the inquiry, says it would be prudent for the ABA to turn its eyes to commercial television broadcasters. But chairman David Flint says he has no such plans. ""I think there are lessons to be learned from this inquiry for the whole media, but at the present time there's no intention to commence an investigation into television,"" he said. ---------------------------------"

" Federal Opposition leader Kim Beazley will today outline his vision for the health system under a Labor government, on the final day of the ALP's national conference in Hobart. Health is a central theme of the conference, which has also focused on jobs and education. Mr Beazley has already announced Labor would change the way Commonwealth and state health money is spent, and today he will make further announcements on the plan, including Labor's initiatives for rural areas. The conference will also debate defence, diplomatic and foreign aid policy platforms, emphasising the need for self-reliance in Australia's security. Before closing, the ALP will move to implement new national membership rules for the ALP to end branch-stacking. ---------------------------------"

" A cease-fire is to take effect in Solomon Islands by the weekend. Leaders of militias that have fought a 20-month war finally signed a cease-fire agreement yesterday. The agreement was signed after two weeks of negotiations, which came close to collapse several times. The Malaitan and Isatabu militias will lay down their weapons by Friday night, and peace talks will begin within seven days. The Solomons Government and the two militias will cooperate in forming a monitoring council to supervise the agreement, which will last for 90 days. The agreement requires control of law enforcement to be returned to the Solomon Islands police force. However, that could be difficult to implement, as both militias have become the law in the areas they control, and some elements may be reluctant to give up that power. The Government is expected to ask for foreign assistance to implement the agreement and deal with peace negotiations. ---------------------------------"

" Pakistan and India are blaming each other for the latest attacks against pilgrims and other civilians in Indian-administered Kashmir. More than 90 people, mostly minority Hindus in a Muslim-dominated area, have died in the attacks. Those killed include pilgrims, construction workers and villagers. Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee says these attacks were carried out by Muslim extremists aiming to derail the truce, who are supported by Pakistan. However, Pakistan rejects accusations of assisting insurgence and claims it is providing only political support to militants in Kashmir. It blames the attacks on renegade elements of Indian armed forces. The renewed violence in Kashmir comes after the militant group, Hizbul Mujahadeen, announced a cease-fire more than a week ago. -------------------------------"

" Dairy Farmers has issued a voluntary recall of its Shred Heads cheese stick. There are concerns the sticks may contain small pieces of rigid plastic that could be a risk to young children. Sticks with use-by dates from the September 19 to December 6 have been withdrawn from supermarket shelves. There have been no reports of injury so far. -----------------------------------"

" The strong cold front which caused havoc along Western Australia's south coast today is now heading into the southern goldfields and Great Australian Bight. The storms left behind a trail of property damage, uprooted trees and downed powerlines. Officers from the State Emergency Service and Western Power have been kept busy making temporary repairs to buildings and restoring electricity supplies. The Albany region took the brunt of the storms, with winds gusting to 130 kilometres an hour. --------------------------------"

" The AFL career of Fremantle veteran Dale Kickett is in doubt after he received a nine-match suspension last night at the tribunal. Kickett was found guilty of three striking charges while other charges against him - attempting to strike, wrestling and melee - were withdrawn. Kickett accused the media of persecution last night before receiving his suspension from the tribunal. In other cases, the Dockers' Brad Dodd and West Coast pair Michael Gardiner and Phil Read were banned for two matches following Sunday's spiteful game at Subiaco Oval. Also, three Eagles' and seven Dockers' players were fined a total of $28,500 for their involvement in a melee, while $20,000 in fines was handed out from the Melbourne versus Geelong clash. So far, the AFL tribunal has imposed more than $84,000 in fines from last weekend's matches, with more charges to be heard today. ----------------------------------"

" Australians will soon be able to take their pets to Britain without having to place them in quarantine for six months. The British Government has announced that it will extend its ""pet passport"" scheme to Australia and New Zealand. The pet passport trial was launched in February this year, with 22 western European countries being certified as rabies-free. Under the scheme, pets are vaccinated against the disease, and a tiny microchip is placed under their skin. The pets then avoid an expensive and often traumatic six months in quarantine on their arrival in Britain. The British Government has now decided to extend the program to Australia and New Zealand as of next year, despite the British Vetinary Association expressing concern that the scheme has yet to be properly evaluated. --------------------------------"

" An Australian patrol in East Timor has killed an armed militiaman near the town of Maliana near the border of East and West Timor. A Defence Department spokesman says it is believed another militiaman may have been injured in an exchange of gunfire with Australian troops. A spokesperson says between three and five militia, armed with single shot and automatic weapons and grenades, were involved in the the incident at about three o'clock this afternoon. There were no Australian casualties. Todays incident follows last weeks clash, which claimed the life of a soldier from New Zealand. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The housing industry has attacked the latest rise in interest rates. For the fifth time since last November, the Reserve Bank has lifted the cash-rate by a quarter of 1 per cent, citing stronger than expected economic growth and inflation. Banks and other major lenders are still considering whether to lift their mortgage and deposit rates in line with the official rate rise. Industry groups have warned of slowing investment and job losses, especially among smaller firms struggling to cope with the goods and services tax. John Murray, of Master Builders Australia, says the rate rise will put off new homebuyers and worsen the housing slump expected later this year. ""That's why we describe today's decision as part of a serial killing,"" Mr Murray said. ""I recognize it's colourful language but in the context of an industry that only yesterday had to digest the biggest slump in building approvals on record, this is savage news."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" A string of attacks has taken to death toll in Indian Kashmir to at least 84. In the fifth attack in less than 24 hours at least eight people were gunned down by suspected Muslim militants south of the summer capital Srinagar. The victims were members of a village defence force, civilians who had taken up arms against separatist fighters. The spate of attacks follows last week's announcement by the main militant group in Kashmir, Hizbul Mujahideen, that it will halt its armed struggle for three months. The Indian Government says it will talk with Hizbul Mujahideen while other militant organisations have condemned the truce. Addressing the parliament, Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee said his government would not be swayed from the path to peace. The Prime Minister also accused Pakistan of being behind the violence. But Muslim groups in Pakistan have rejected allegations that they were behind the killings in Kashmir. The Hizbul Mujahideen says India's allegations are jeopardising the ceasefire which the group declared last week. Another Pakistan-based group has accused Indian security forces of plotting the attacks to stir up communal violence and discredit the separatist movement. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Fiji Trades Union Congress says it is pleased with today's response to the national day of protest in support of a return to democracy. But the unions are accusing Fiji's employer groups of betrayal. The national secretary of the Fiji Trades Union Congress, Felix Anthony, says the congress was impressed by the courage shown by people who defied threats by the public services commission and some employers and stayed home. However, he has accused the Fiji Chamber of Commerce and the Employers' Federation of bad faith for backing out of an agreement that today would be a ""no work, no business day"". Mr Anthony claims to have been threatened by four members of the extremist Taukei movement, who he says invaded his office in Lautoka and threatened to kill him. Police in Fiji's western province say they are not aware of an incident in which Mr Anthony says he was intimidated by nationalist thugs. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak has suffered another blow with the resignation of his foreign minister, David Levy. Mr Barak's Government will now go to a parliamentary recess barely clinging to power. Mr Levy's resignation had been anticipated since the eve of the Camp David summit when he told the Prime Minister he would not join the peace talks. The foreign minister's departure makes it even more likely that the Israeli Parliament will vote for early elections. But Prime Minister Ehud Barak's Government will tonight have stumbled to a parliamentary recess delaying the effect of an early election spill and giving him three months breathing space in which to assemble a new coalition or seal a peace deal with the Palestinians. Many in the Government believe that it is their best chance of winning an election, which they see as imminent regardless of today's vote. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" A psychiatrist who shot a male prostitute in the chest after an argument over sex has been struck off the medical register. Dr Roderick Doyle Motum was convicted in January of malicious wounding. In 1997, Mr Motum picked up a male prostitute in Darlinghurst and after sex got into an argument with him over payment. He then shot the man after he got out of his car in Marrickville, hitting him in the chest but only causing minor injuries. The psychiatrist was then seen in the process of disposing of his revolver by his next door neighbour in Concord, whom he later harrassed by telephone. On the basis of the conviction and evidence Dr Motum suffers from anxiety, depression and paranoid personality traits, the medical tribunal of New South Wales has struck his name from the register of practitioners for at least three years. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Australian Cricket Board (ACB) has attacked the International Cricket Council's (ICC) investigation into the bowling action of Brett Lee. A 12-member ICC panel cleared Lee's action, after holding a telephone hook up last night and viewing footage of his bowling. ACB chief executive Malcolm Speed says that process should be changed and the ICC should not have waited three months to deal with the allegation. ""It's somewhat an unreal environment to be on a telephone hook-up with 10 people in different places around the world, each on a different telephone line talking about a video tape that they've viewed some time in the past week,"" he said. ""I think the realisation now is that there is a better way of doing it and we will work with the ICC to make sure that that process is put in place as soon as possible."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Prime Minister John Howard says the Senate must cop the consequences if it rejects the Federal Government's push to amend legislation and change IVF laws. The Federal Government wants to change the current Sex Discrimination Act to allow state legislation banning lesbian and single women from using IVF. Both Labor and the Democrats have voiced opposition to the plan and it is unlikely to get through the Senate. Mr Howard has told Channel Nine the Senate must answer to the Australian people if it opposes the amendment. ""We have to do what we think is right, not do what we think might muster the numbers in the Senate and that's what we're elected to do,"" he said. ""If the Senate decides to vote against our legislation, we'll let the members of the Labor Party and the Australian Democrats explain that to the Australian people."" --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Labor premiers will today come under pressure from unions to contribute to a national entitlement scheme for workers. Day three of the national ALP conference in Hobart is also expected to provide further details on Labor leader Kim Beazley's Knowledge Nation plan. All state premiers have refused to fund the Federal Government's national entitlement scheme for sacked workers. Without matching payments from the states the scheme is not fully funded. According to one delegate, the refusals of state Labor governments to be involved so far has angered some unions. The conference is today expected to debate at least one motion calling on Labor premiers to help fund the scheme. Both the left and right factions will meet this morning to discuss how the issue will be dealt with. The conference will also focus on aged care, families and Labor's plan to revamp education. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The International Olympic Committee's medical commission has decided two tests for the performance-enhancing drug EPO can be used at the Sydney Games. An IOC statement says the panel ""critically reviewed"" the Australian and French tests. ""As a result, the review group agreed unanimously that the EPO tests should be implemented,"" the statement said. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Fiji Trade Union Movement is organising a nationwide strike today as it and a coalition of non-government organisations demand a quick return to democracy. The Fijian Government has warned public servants they will lose a day's pay if they do not turn up for work. In what they are calling a national day of protest, union leaders in both the public and private sectors are hoping to bring Fiji to a standstill. Other groups, including the Employers Federation, say they are recognising today as a national day for law and order, peace and democracy. The Fiji National Council of Women has organised a vigil for reconciliation and peace in the capital, but the new unelected civilian administration is ignoring the protests. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" Security forces are on alert across Zimbabwe as thousands of workers strike today to protest against the political situation in the country. Zimbabwe's Congress of Trade Unions says the national stoppage is a warning. The union movement claims workers will walk off the job again if the Zimbabwean Government does not take notice. But the Government and business groups say the strike will harm the nation's fragile economy. Some Government departments are threatening to record the names of public servants who do not report for work today. But the unions, the Zimbabwean Opposition and the Commercial Farmers Union are continuing to endorse the strike. The leader of the main opposition party, Morgan Tsvangirai, says the stoppage is justified. Mr Tsvangirai says it is a protest against ongoing political violence and intimidation. The union movement now says the strike will only last for one day instead of three days as originally planned. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" Israel's new President, Moshe Katsav, has been sworn into office amid controversy over his political views. The right wing MP won the presidency yesterday in a shock parliamentary defeat for the favourite, Shimon Peres. As he was sworn into the presidency, Moshe Katsav claimed he would be above politics - a clear reference to the position of the outgoing president, Ezer Weizman, who supported peace approaches to Syria and the Palestinians. But a few hours before the swearing in, Mr Katsav declared that Jerusalem should remain united under Israeli sovereignty, which is the position of Israel's right and at odds with the negotiations conducted with the Palestinians by Prime Minister Ehud Barak. President Katsav gained office after orthodox religious MPs joined the Opposition to defeat Shimon Peres. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The director of the Civil Aviation Safety Authority [CASA], Mick Toller, has put small regional airlines on notice that they will be driven out of business unless they properly comply with safety regulations. Mr Toller's comments follow the decision this week by Whyalla Airlines to abandon a legal challenge against its grounding by CASA last month, and close down. The airline's demise came two months after one of its planes crashed into the Spencer Gulf, killing all eight on board. Mr Toller concedes many of the allegations made about Whyalla Airlines' safety record remain unsubstantiated, but he has defended CASA's handing of the issue. He says he will not hesitate to take tough action against other airlines accused of breaching safety rules. ""We are going to take every step we can to drive the marginal operators out of this industry,"" Mr Toller said. ""The charter operators are going to have to lift their game and some of them won't be able to. ""It's going to be beyond them, but that's a necessary part of maintaining or assuring the standards of safety for the Australian flying public."" Mr Toller also rejects suggestions Whyalla Airlines was denied natural justice following its grounding. Whyalla Airline's managing director Chris Brougham accused CASA of being determined to run the airline out of business, by deliberately drawing out the legal case to the point where he could not continue the appeal. Mr Toller questioned the amount of money the airline spent on lawyers and says the airline could still have presented its case. He says he is pleased at how the case has turned out. ""The public are interested in safety...we've ended up with the right result,"" he said. ----------------------------------------------------------------------"

" AFL players have been told to control themselves on-field or face heavy fines at the tribunal. Five Essendon players and nine from the Western Bulldogs were fined $35,000 for their part in Friday night's half-time melee. Essendon's Gary Moorcroft and the Bulldogs Steven Kretiuk were given the biggest fines of $3,500. Charges against Essendon's Blake Caracella and Sean Wellman were withdrawn and all other players pleaded guilty. The tribunal warned the players they had an obligation to play fairly and to set a good example to young players. Essendon's John Barnes was suspended for one match for charging and the Bulldogs Bret Johnson has a match off for striking Barnes. Tribunal hearings continue this afternoon with players from West Coat, Fremantle, Geelong and Melbourne facing melee charges. Fremantle's Dale Kickett will face five charges."

" The Prime Minister has announced the Federal Government will attempt to amend the Sex Discrimination Act to allow states the right to deny in-vitro fertilisation treatment to single women and lesbians. The Federal Court ruled earlier this week that Victorian laws which barred single women from fertility treatment breached the federal sex discrimination laws. John Howard says the legislation was never intended to deny states the right to pass laws like those in Victoria. He says it is Cabinet's overwhelming opinion that children should have the expectation of being cared for by both a mother and father."

" However the Victorian Premier, Steve Bracks, has urged Mr Howard to consult him over the Commonwealth's decision to give states a free hand in legislating to deny IVF treatment to single women and lesbians. Mr Bracks says the Federal Government did not talk to him or Victorian officials before the announcement, which he claims was deliberately timed to coincide with the ALP National Conference. He says the Victorian Government will wait to see whether the federal legislation passes through Parliament, before determining what he would have to do to fix the State laws. ""As a responsible State Government, I'll wait and look at that legislation before making a judgment,"" Mr Bracks said. ""But I stress that in Victoria we want the Act upheld. ""That has been our position. ""The court case has changed that, I'll live with the court case, and live with the spirit of it, and that is that IVF will be available under guidelines for infertile women, not for those who choose it as a lifestyle."""

" The Gay and Lesbian movement in Western Australia has urged single and lesbian women to challenge the Federal Government's move. WA spokeswoman for Gay and Lesbian Equality, Louise Pratt, says she is outraged, and says the Federal Government's legislation is archaic and discriminatory. She is encouraging single and gay women to challenge the existing laws and fight for equal rights to have children. ""I would think that we would have to have a challenge come from women in Western Australia, whether it's a single woman or a lesbian,"" Ms Pratt said. ""But there are certainly people who have been refused access to these services in WA that are considering such a challenge."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" In Indonesia three people have died after a bomb exploded in central Jakarta. More than a dozen people were injured including the Philippine ambassador. According to eyewitnesses the ambassador was in the car that was entering his residence when a bomb went off. A huge cloud of black smoke rising from the car suggests the bomb was planted in the vehicle. The blast threw metal and debris up to 60 metres away in front of the building injuring 17 people. It is understood the car driver and a security guard were among those who died. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Australian Labor Party is sticking to its policy of free trade, after a push to abandon the stance was lost at the party's national conference. In the most passionate debate yet at the conference the Manufacturing Workers Union leader, Doug Cameron, has argued the party should abandon the free trade rhetoric of the 1980s. But the move was lost by 23 votes. The Federal Labor leader, Kim Beazley, warned delegates if they supported the move the ALP would be seen to be walking backwards to an era of protectionism, leaving Australia with no gains. ""On the one hand, we would have taken the hard steps to bust open those markets which had turned against us,"" Mr Beazley said. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" A class action is being taken against the manufacturer and distributor of nearly 1,000 implanted heart pacemakers. About 90 Australians with pacemakers manufactured by St Jude Medical are having the machines replaced and the other recipients are being monitored. The class action is being taken by law firm Maurice Blackburn Cashman, and lawyer Rebecca Gilsenan says the firm has so far been contacted by more than 40 people with the pacemakers. Ms Gilsenan says the class action seeks financial compensation. ""They are claiming that the conduct engaged in [by] the company in marketing this device was misleading and that the device itself is defective and unsuitable for the purpose for which it was marketed,"" she said. ""These claims are being made under the Trade Practices Act."" Sandra McCulloch, who is involved in the class action, said it was very worrying to have her potentially faulty pacemaker replaced. She says surgery is always traumatic and that she should be compensated. ""I've had to pull all my sickleave out and the three weeks leading up to the operation was absolutely traumatic for me, not knowing,"" Ms McCulloch said. ""From the time I found out to the time I was actually operated on was three weeks, and then there was another two weeks of being off work."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The only African-American man to led the United States armed forces, General Colin Powell, has told the Republican convention in Philadelphia the party should reach out to minority groups every day not just in an election year He says the party must also drop its opposition to affirmative action for minorities and work to bridge the racial divide in the United States. In a keynote speech to the convention, General Powell targeted the problem of the large number of blacks being held in American jails. He told delegates education was the nation's highest priority and warned Americans had the choice of building children or building more jails. ""Two million convicts, not consumers,"" General Powell said. ""Two million Americans who are paying for their crimes are not paying taxes, are not there for their children and are not raising families. ""Most of them are men and the majority of those men are minorities."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" X-rays of five sharks taken at the Royal Darwin Hospital today will be sent to an expert in Hobart, to determine whether the sharks belong to previously unidentified species. The sharks, caught by Northern Territory Museum scientists in Kakadu National Park, are thought to represent two species of the rare spear-tooth shark The Museum's Barry Russell says initial indications from the x-rays are that they are two new species to Australia. ""We've still got some more examination of the specimans to undertake,"" Mr Russell said. ""We will then send off the results of our preliminary examination to Dr Peter Last in Hobart at CSIRO and work with him in preparing some descriptions of the species."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Federal Transport Minister, John Anderson, has called officers from Airservices Australia and his department to Canberra for a meeting on the blackout at Sydney airport. Mr Anderson says he is seeking a full explanation on this morning's events at the 5:00pm meeting and they will be doing what is necessary to get things right at the airport. The Minister says back-up generators swung into action as they should have, but were unable to deliver the power needed to run all of the consoles properly. ""Particularly with the Olympics coming up, I just seek to reassure people that I'll be talking with Airservices and to my department,"" he said. ""I expect them to be able to offer me very solid reassurances indeed on the mechanisms they're putting in place to ensure that we do not continue to suffer from these sorts of glitches."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Five Australian Football League veterans have announced their retirements. Western Bulldogs captain and Brownlow Medallist Scott Wynd and team mate Steven Kolyniuk will retire at the end of the season. West Coast captain Guy McKenna says a chronic back problem has forced him from the game. Joining them will be Brisbane defender Richard Champion and former Geelong captain Barry Stoneham. Stoneham says it is the right time for him to step aside. ""It takes me a week to get over each game and little niggling injuries where I miss one or two games,"" he said. ""I just really, I suppose, weighed it all up and thought, well, it's time for some younger guys to take the opportunity and I shouldn't be in the way of their progress."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Federal Opposition leader, Kim Beazley, is confident Australians want extra spending in areas like health and education more than they want tax cuts. He says if the ALP wins Government, funding of national investment programs, such as money for public health, will take first place in the queue for spending. Mr Beazley has included rolling back the goods and services tax in his early priorities. Mr Beazley says there is no sense in getting a tax cut if education and health costs more. ""Look, where did the last set of tax cuts come from? They came from national investment, they came from universities, they came from the health care system, they came from childcare...that is where they came from,"" he said. ""What we say now is that there is a yawning gulf there between performance in this country and where we need to be. ""We think now that the people believe national investment issues are more important than ephemeral tax cuts."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Fijian military has taken back control of an army base in the northern town of Labasa. Last night, soldiers who rebelled three weeks ago handed back the weapons they had stolen, some of which had been used to terrorise Indo-Fijians throughout the district. Major Tuiwainunu, who negotiated the return of the barracks to the Fiji military, says he can not be sure that all arms and ammunition had been returned. He says an accord which was signed with the rebels would give them an amnesty against prosecution. He says the amnesty was subject to the approval of the interim non-elected government in Suva, which had initially threatened to take harsh measures against the rebels. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Indonesia has ordered the immediate closure of refugee camps in West Timor in a bid to halt militia crossing into East Timor. An estimated 120,000 people have been in the camps since fleeing East Timor almost a year ago. The order to close all West Timor's refugees camps has come from President Abdurrahman Wahid. Pro-Indonesian militia groups have largely controlled the camps, stopping thousands of East Timorese from returning home, as well as intimidating international aid workers and carrying out raids across the border. Militia men are being held responsible for the shooting of New Zealand United Nations peacekeeper inside East Timor last week. The UN administration in East Timor has issued arrest warrants for a gang accused of killing the peacekeeper, believed to be hiding inside West Timor. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Reserve Bank board meets today amid heightened speculation about Australian interest rates. Wage and inflation figures last week are seen as putting pressure on monetary policy. Average weekly earnings have hit the central bank's danger level, rising 4.5 per cent in the year to May, while inflation is nominally above the bank's 2 per cent to 3 per cent target band. Economists also see pressure coming from a tightening labour market, a weak dollar, recovering consumer confidence and the economic shots in the arm from tax cuts, the Olympics and the sharemarket float of the NRMA. Although still generally regarded as unlikely, any decision today to raise interest rates would not be known until tomorrow morning at the earliest. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Petrol prices will rise by 0.6 of a cent a litre today in line with the half-yearly increase in federal excise linked to inflation. Motoring groups are calling on the Federal Government to scrap the indexation of petrol tax, which takes effect effect in accordance with legislation that was passed almost 17 years ago by the then Labor Government. The motoring groups say the adjustments are a con and should be abolished following the introduction of the goods and services tax. David Cumming from the Royal Automobile Club of Victoria, says motorists are paying much more in petrol tax. ""Basically, under the guise of a GST, the Federal Government has increased its tax base by 2.9 cents since the July 1, and on top of that GST occurs,"" he said. ""So June 30 this year you were paying 44 cents per litre tax, today when you wake up you'll be paying 46.8 cents a litre tax, and the indexation of petrol should cease. ""I think once this con is exposed the motoring public will be very annoyed."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak has survived a series of no-confidence votes as his Government was rocked by a shock result in the ballot for the country's new president. The clear favourite for the presidency had been former prime minister Shimon Peres. Mr Peres, a Nobel Prize winner for his efforts towards Middle East peace, bore the brunt of the collapse of Prime Minister Ehud Barak's Coalition over recent weeks because of his approach to Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations. In the presidential race, Mr Peres had the backing of the Prime Minister and of the public, according to opinion polls. However, underdog Moshe Katzav from the Likud Party won a tight parliamentary vote to become Israel's eighth President. The vote is seen as a clear indicator of just how far Mr Barak's influence on the floor of Parliament has waned. While he survived a series of no-confidence motions in the hours that followed, the Israeli Prime Minister has indicated he is looking for a breakthrough in Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations to resurrect his political standing. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Rival militias in Solomon Islands are finally expected to sign a cease-fire later today. The agreement is due to take effect later this week. Speaking on Solomon Islands radio, the chairman of cease-fire negotiations, Sir Peter Keniloria said an agreement is now close to being finalised. Leaders of the Isatabu and Malaitan forces met for several hours yesterday, and their lawyers have been studying a draft agreement overnight. It provides for laying down of arms, and the establishment of a cease-fire monitoring council. There are several obstacles still to be overcome before the agreement can be signed, but Sir Peter says he expects it to be signed later today. Three Isatabu leaders who have stayed away from negotiations will also be given the chance to sign, with the document being taken to their camp west of Honiara during the day. The cease-fire will take effect 48 hours after it is signed. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The International Olympic Committee [IOC] Medical Commission will decide later today whether to approve a test for the performance enhancing drug EPO. Australian and French scientists have presented IOC officials in Lausanne with two different testing programs for the previously undetectable drug. Many believe this is the last chance to have such a test introduced in time for the Sydney Games. However, IOC medical director Dr Patrick Schamasch says a test can be approved at any time, even up to the last race. He says any test needs to be scientifically and legally watertight and says he must be convinced there is no chance of false positive tests. The Australian team says it is confident it can give that guarantee. If a test is approved by this meeting, the procedure then needs to go before the IOC's executive board for final clearance before testing can begin."

" A better than expected trade deficit for June has failed to lift the Australian dollar. The figure came in at $1.32 billion, significantly below market expectations of $1.5 billion. The fall was due to a 4 per cent rise in exports to $11.71 billion, while imports remained virtually unchanged at $13.03 billion. The National Australia Bank's chief economist, Alan Oster, says the fact that the dollar failed to rally is not necessarily bad news. ""You have to be careful because boosting the Aussie dollar at present is code, in financial market terms, for more [than] likely...increases in interest rates,"" Mr Oster said. ""It depends on which way you look at it. I would say that we still believe fundamentally that the Australian dollar's oversold and it will come back."""

" Federal Cabinet will review Australia's sanctions against Fiji tomorrow. The Prime Minister, John Howard, has not ruled out tougher action against the military regime in Suva. Mr Howard this morning held talks with the deposed Fijian Prime Minister, Mahendra Chaudhry. ""He remains in Australia for a number of days as a very welcome guest of the Australian Government,"" Mr Howard said. Mr Howard defended Australia's sanctions against Fiji, describing them as ""right"". They will be reviewed at a Cabinet meeting in Canberra tomorrow. ""They will not be rolled back, but they'll be kept very much in place and we think they are right,"" Mr Howard said. Mahendra Chaudhry is due to undergo a thorough medical examination before he returns to Fiji, he says he is still feeling weak. ""I've been advised to undergo a very thorough medical examination and that's what I intend to do,"" Mr Chaudhry said."

" Meanwhile, Mr Chaudhry has suggested the United Nations be called in to help restore law and order in the country. Mr Chaudhry described today's discussions as fruitful. ""I am thankful for the measures that the Australian Government has taken against the regime in Fiji,"" Mr Chaudhry said. ""If the regime there is unable to do so then it should itself seek assistance. ""Maybe the United Nations would be the right body to approach in this regard and they can work the details out."" He says the number one priority at the moment is the restoration of law and order."

" The Federal Opposition leader, Kim Beazley, has indicated a Labor government might have to stretch the implementation of its election promises over a longer time if it inherits a tight budget position. On the opening day of the ALP's National Conference in Hobart, Mr Beazley has outlined two major new spending commitments, a restructure and increase in Medicare funding, and extra education spending in disadvantaged areas. He is refusing to cost the initiatives, preferring to wait until Treasury reveals the official budget position early in the election campaign. Mr Beazley says Labor will deliver on its promises, but the timeframe will depend on the size of the surplus. ""In relation to the level of commitment related to what we will discover 10 days into the campaign about what the actual state of the budget is, it will not in any way shape or form alter our priorities or direction,"" Mr Beazley said. ""It may alter the pace of their achievement."""

" Authorities are investigating reports of a helicopter crash south of Rockhampton in central Queensland. Police say an aircraft reported hearing a distress signal from a helicopter near Dululu just after 1.00pm. Air rescue authorities in Canberra are coordinating the investigation. It is believed a helicopter from Rockhampton has been dispatched as part of the operation."

" Whyalla Airlines has given up its legal appeal to get back into business following the crash of one of its planes in May which claimed eight lives. The shock announcement was made in the Adminstrative Appeals Tribunal this morning. Just as the airline's appeal against its grounding by the Civil Aviation Safety Authority last month was to enter its third week, airline lawyer Gary Hevey told the tribunal that Whyalla Airlines simply was not in a position to continue the legal action. Outside the tribunal, Mr Hevey explained that cost was the main factor behind the decision, which means the airline has effectively surrendered its operating licence. The airline's managing director, Chris Brougham, and his brother, Chief pilot Kim Brougham, were absent from the tribunal this morning. During its appeal to resume flying, the airline faced countless accusations of breaches of air safety regulations. This afternoon, Chris Brougham will detail the airline's future. Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA) spokesman Peter Gibson says the suddenness of the Whyalla Airlines announcement caught CASA by surprise. ""It's been long and drawn out because it's been a complex process - we've had to get as many facts about the history and the operation of Whyalla Airlines out there as possible, and it hasn't been easy, and that's meant it has taken a long time,"" he said. ""But I think the reality has been recognised by Whyalla that they did have a lot of problems, that they were going to have to address those problems if they were going to operate safely again."" The former chairman of CASA, Dick Smith, says Whyalla Airlines was always battling to win its appeal because of the resources marshalled against it."

" The community of Wudinna on the Upper Eyre Peninsula, which two weeks ago blockaded the Eyre Highway in support of Whyalla Airlines, says it is sad to hear the airline is out of business. But representative, Marylin Scholz, says the Wudinna community is relieved to have found another permanent air service in Airlines of South Australia. ""We were asking, however many weeks ago it was, for them to make a decision, so that we could either continue our lives with Whyalla Airlines or attract a new airline, which we've been able to do,"" she said. ""It's always going to be sad for this community to think that Whyalla Airlines won't be back here."""

" An Iraqi detainee has told of poor conditions, hunger strikes and suicide attempts at the Curtin Detention Centre in the Kimberley. The man is on trial in Broome Magistrates Court charged with inciting the break-out of more than 300 detainees from Curtin in June. Munjed Al Muderis, a 28-year-old surgeon from Baghdad, arrived at Curtin in October last year. He said it was five months before he was able to contact a lawyer, and the only contact with his family was through a fax prepared by immigration authorities. He says the isolation led to growing frustration in the camp. The court was told so far there had been more than 30 suicide attempts. Muderis says for weeks detainees were fed only minced meat and macaroni, and had limited access to cold water. He says the food was only changed after a hunger strike in February, which involved about 800 people. Two public telephones were also installed at the centre after the hunger strike."

" Sydney radio broadcaster Alan Jones has been ordered to apologise to the Aboriginal people of New South Wales for comments he made on his breakfast program in November 1995. The 2UE announcer was accused of showing serious contempt for Aboriginal people. The complaint to the Equal Opportunity Tribunal followed on-air comments by Mr Jones on an anti-discrimination decision concerning an Aboriginal woman who had been attempting to rent a house in Dubbo, in the State's west. Mr Jones said if he owned the only rental property on an estate agent's list and a person came in smelling and looking like a skunk, with a sardine can on one foot, and half a bottle of beer under the arm wanting to rent it, he would expect the agent to say no, without giving reasons. Mr Jones has been ordered to apologise on his radio program and via letter to the Western Aboriginal Legal Service within 28 days."

" A lesbian woman, who three years ago won a court battle to receive in-vitro fertilisation, is back in court appealing against a Supreme court ruling which overturned the decision. Jennifer Morgan, 29, also asked for the lifting of a suppression order identifying herself and her children. The Court of Appeal agreed with the Supreme Court ruling to overturn the decision made by the Queensland Anti-Discrimination Commission, which found Ms Morgan was directly and indirectly discriminated against. But it ordered the matter of indirect discrimination go back to the commission. In today's hearing, Ms Morgan's counsel argued that she was unable to respond to the clinic's requirement that her male partner or husband sign a form of consent for the procedure. The hearing is continuing."

" The town of Broome in Western Australia's north-west has been invaded by a herd of cattle. The animals escaped while en route to the town's port, where they were to be loaded onto a ship. ABC cameraman David Battie says the cattle, which he estimates at 100 in number, have created havoc in the town. He says they are on the main street, on parks and ovals, at the local Telstra building, and also on the beach. He has likened the scene to the wild west. ""We've got police, we've got council, and we've got anybody in town whose got a horse out there trying to muster cattle,"" Mr Battie said. The owner of the Broome cattle-yard, Jetty Dipyards, says stray dogs jumped into their yard, alarming the cattle which then broke through a fence. He says they are having difficulty trying to round up the cattle because there are so many."

" The ALP's national conference gets underway today with the Labor Party seeking to regain some political momentum. Federal leader Kim Beazley will open the conference and is expected to unveil some policy details. Until now, Labor's primary focus has been on the goods and services tax (GST) and its plans to roll back the tax. But Labor acknowledges it has to broaden its public agenda and will use the conference to direct attention to its other priorities, particularly in health and education. After recent problems created by outspokenness from New South Wales powerbroker, John Della Bosca, Labor says it does not want any further division and Mr Beazley was playing up unity as the national executive met yesterday. ""We're one big happy family - how could you possibly think otherwise?"" he said. Mr Beazley, in talks to the three faction meetings yesterday, has acknowledged the conference is important for him and to set up the party's strategy for the next election. After Labor's recent woes over its GST strategy, it wants to broaden its pitch to voters and move beyond the perception it is about opposing rather than putting forward positive ideas. It also wants to present a united front with sources saying concerns from some in the party about free trade and youth wages will not erupt into a policy changing battle. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" The first of coup leader George Speight's supporters will face court in the Fijian capital, Suva, this morning. The military and the police have been keeping 369 supporters of Mr Speight at a police academy in Suva. Amongst the charges expected to be laid is unlawful assembly, which is an offence under Fiji's emergency regulations. The Red Cross reports that Mr Speight and six of his supporters are being well cared for on their specially gazetted prison island off Suva. More serious charges against those seven are still being prepared. Meanwhile, rebels have given up the military barracks in the northern town of Labasa. The barriers that locked entry to the barracks have been removed, there is no longer heavily armed men at the gate and the small group of rebels have moved to an adjacent hilltop. The military command in Suva has extended the deadline for negotiations with the rebels by 24 hours. A local chief told the ABC that the rebellion was effectively over, but some negotiations about the conditions of the soldiers would continue. Meanwhile, there is good news this morning for Suva's residents. Landowners who took over a hydro-electric station have released their hostages and normal power supplies should be gradually restored. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" French experts investigating last week's Concorde air crash near Paris say they have found part of its fuel tank on the take-off runway. They also say the flames coming from the Air France plane were most likely from leaking fuel, and not from an engine. The investigators are now a step closer to working out why the Air France Concorde burst into flame so suddenly. Their preliminary investigations show the fire originated in the fuel tank, rather than in an engine as was originally thought. Fuel apparently poured out of a leak in the tank and appears to have been ignited by the massive amount of heat generated by the Concorde's engines during take-off. The findings support the theory that the fuel tank may have been punctured by a fragment of the Concorde's wheel after a tyre burst as the plane was hurtling along the runway. British Airways pulled a Concorde out of service last night due to what was described as a refuelling problem, although the airline said it was not related to the cause of the Paris crash. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Israeli and Palestinian negotiators say they will continue efforts to forge a peace deal following their first meeting since the breakdown last week of the US-brokered Middle East summit. But the resumption of negotiations, which focused on matters the two sides largely agree on, has been overshadowed by Israel's political crisis. Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak faces a no confidence vote in Parliament today, as well as another defection from his government. Prime Minister Barak has been in minority government since three parties quit his coalition on the eve of the camp David talks. Now Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy has announced he will resign on Wednesday unless Mr Barak moves towards a unity government that includes the opposition Likud party. Mr Barak faces a parliamentary no-confidence vote that is seen as a ballot on his approach to the peace negotiations. Meanwhile, after months of delays United Nations forces have deployed along the length of the Israel-Lebanon border. The multinational force only took position after a series of border disputes and local confrontations. More than two months after Israel ended its two decades of occupation of south Lebanon, United Nations soldiers from Ghana, Sweden, Ireland and Nepal have finally moved in to secure the border zone. Lebanon refused to authorise the movement of UN forces into the area for months after the withdrawal because of Israeli encroachments over the Lebanese frontier. This allowed a series of potentially dangerous incidents to develop between stone throwing demonstrators on the Lebanese side and Israeli soldiers, who responded with gunfire a number of times. But the final obstacle came today when Hezbollah militia blocked Nepalese soldiers, but after intervention by a Lebanese Government official, the UN officers were allowed to take up their positions. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Final preparations are being made for a nationwide strike in Zimbabwe. The stoppage is a protest against the worsening land dispute between farmers and war veterans. Meanwhile, the farmers say it is time for the Zimbabwean Government to restore law and order. The Commercial Farmers Union has joined with the Trade Union Movement and Zimbabwe's main opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change, to organise the nationwide strike. The three-day stoppage will start on Wednesday, and the trade unions say it will only be called off if the Government promises to clamp down on political violence and intimidation. Senior officials form the Farmers Union are expected to meet with President Robert Mugabe later today. Zimbabwe's last nationwide strike was staged in 1998, with six people dying during the protest, after President Mugabe deployed troops on the streets. Meanwhile, state television has announced that the government is to immediately acquire 3,000 white-owned commercial farms for redistribution to thousands of landless blacks. It says the decision was taken at a special emergency meeting of cabinet ministers and top government officials yesterday. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Japan's Prime Minister has apologised to the Japanese people after one of his ministers was forced to step down. The Minister for Banking Regulation, Kimitaka Kuze, has admitted receiving payments from a bank, after being appointed by Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori only four weeks ago. He says he told Prime Minister Mori that in the past 16 years he had received payments and gifts from the Mitsubishi Trust Bank totalling $A3 million to $4 million. He says the payments were legal and took place some years ago, but he is stepping down so as not to damage Japan's finance industry. Prime Minister Mori has apologised to the Japanese people, saying that he has to take responsibility for what has happened. Mr Kuze is the first of the Ministers appointed by Japan's new Prime Minister to lose their job. In February, one of his predecessors as Reconstruction Minister stepped down after being caught on tape telling a group of banking executives that he could help if they thought their audits were too severe. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australian swimming legend Shane Gould has won the 400 metres freestyle title at World Masters championships in Munich. Twenty-eight years after her three gold medals at the Munich Olympics, Gould has now scored a double in the Masters after winning the 100 metres yesterday, in a comeback that has delighted swimming fans. Gould dominated the 400 metres race, just as she did in the Olympics in 1972. The double victories have rejuvenated her interest in competitive swimming. She says she now plans to go on competing in World Masters events around the world. It is a remarkable turnaround in attitude from somebody who retired from swimming at 16 and then dropped out of public life altogether. But she says that is what this trip to Munich was all about; an affirmation that she is indeed Shane Gould, Olympic champion. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" For the second time in three years, Australian golfer Stephen Leaney has won the Dutch Open. He shot a final round of 68, 4-under par, to finish 19-under, four ahead of Germany's Bernhard Langer. It was Leaney's third win on the European tour and earned him prize money of $357,000. Another Australian, Stephen Allan, was second going into the final round, but could do no better than par, finishing in a tie for seventh, seven strokes behind Leaney."

" The United Nations Human Rights Committee says the Australian Government has an obligation to force the states to re-assess their mandatory sentencing legislation. The UN's Human Rights Committee says it believes the mandatory sentencing legislation in place in Western Australia and the Northern Territory raises serious issues of compliance with various articles in the covenant of political and civil rights to which Australia is a signatory. The committee's chairwoman says the Federal Government has an obligation to ensure that the states comply. ""We reminded Australia that under Article 50, the obligation was for the Federal Government, or for the federal state to see to it that the covenant rights were respected in every place,"" she said. The committee also says it is concerned that the 1998 changes to the Native Title Act limits the rights of indigenous persons in communities and affects their interests in native title land, particularly pastoral lands. Meanwhile, Australian and international human rights groups have called for federal action to get rid of mandatory sentencing. Australian Human Rights commissioner Bill Jonas, who gave evidence before the committee, says that it is time the Federal Government fulfilled its treaty obligations and overrode the mandatory sentencing laws. It is a sentiment that was echoed by Amnesty International's Hein Sherman. Amnesty has also appealed to the Federal Government to reconsider its decision to review its cooperation with such UN committees. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Fiji's detained coup leader George Speight and his fellow conspirators have reportedly been moved to two small islands off the coast. Mr Speight, Ilisoni Ligairi, Joe Nata and several others had been held at Queen Elizabeth Barracks since their arrest on Wednesday night amid fears they were plotting civil war. A military spokesman says they have now been moved to Nukulau, a former quarantine station and popular picnic island, about 10 kilometres east of Suva. Supporters have also been shipped to the neighbouring island of Makuluva, with both islands being decreed prohibited areas. The spokesman has told the Fiji Broadcasting Commission, the dawn operation was carried out for the safety, security and comfort of the prisoners. He says it is too early to say when they will face court. Meanwhile, the only part-European Minister in Fiji's new Government says he has already been threatened by Mr Speight's supporters. The Minister for Public Sector Reform, Hector Hatch, says he has no illusions about the difficulties facing the new Government and is ready for a backlash from Mr Speight's supporters still at large. ""There is a threat and I'd be worried. I don't think it's a personal worry. It's a worry about our country and the things that are happening in it,"" Mr Hatch said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The National Farmers Federation (NFF) says it will investigate whether new genetically modified (GM) food labelling requirements breach World Trade Organisation (WTO) standards of fair trade. Australian and New Zealand Health Ministers agreed on a comprehensive labelling policy at a meeting in New Zealand yesterday. The policy, which requires labelling for foods with less than 1 per cent of genetically modified products, are among the most stringent regulations in the world. But Wendy Craik, from the NFF, says the decision may disadvantage Australian producers by creating an unfair trade system. ""You're in fact putting in place a barrier which says you have to describe the processes of production for one food that looks substantially looks the same as another so you're creating a non-tariff trade barrier,"" she said. ""We're very concerned to make sure that every other country in the world plays by the rules so we wouldn't want to see Australia setting up rules which in fact breach the WTO."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The last group of Northern Ireland paramilitary prisoners has been released from the notorious Maze prison. Only 15 inmates now remain in the jail, which has been emptied as part of the Good Friday peace agreement. At the same time, police in Croatia have seized a consignment of arms, including rocket grenades and plastic explosives, that was apparently on its way to a splinter Republican group in Northern Ireland. One by one the imprisoned paramilitaries, from both Loyalists and Republican camps, emerged from the prison that was made famous by the Irish Republican Army (IRA) hunger strikes of years gone by. The families of victims of bombing attacks expressed their bitterness over the mass release, which was conducted under the terms of the Good Friday Agreement. But spokesman for prisoners on both sides of the political divide, expressed hope that the violence of the past was at an end. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" United States President Bill Clinton has warned the Palestinian leadership against declaring statehood without a peace agreement. The President's warnings and suggestions of extended political support for Israel have brought an angry response from the Palestinian camp. In an interview with Israeli television, President Clinton urged the Palestinians not to take the course they have threatened to pursue if a treaty is not signed by the peace process deadline, just seven weeks away. ""It would be a big mistake to take a unilateral action and walk away from the peace process and if it happens there will inevitably be consequences,"" Mr Clinton said. Palestinian officials, already angered by President Clinton's praise for Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak at the break-up of the Camp David talks earlier this week, are now accusing the White House of taking sides. The Palestinian representative to the United States, Hassan Abdel Rahman, says the ramifications of Mr Clinton's comments will be felt across the Middle East. ""This is going to be considered a unilateral action and it's going to antagonise not only the Palestinians, but the Arab world,"" Mr Abdel Rahman said. In the same interview, Mr Clinton suggested he would decide whether or not to move the US Embassy in Israel to West Jerusalem by the end of the year. ----------------------------------------------------------------"

" Two federal appeals judges have granted Napster a stay, allowing the popular music trading service to stay online, at least temporarily. The service was facing a midnight Pacific Daylight Time deadline after a lower court judge sided with the recording industry which claimed Napster allowed users to violate copyright laws. Napster, founded last year by a Northeastern University student, contends that it is an Internet service provider and not responsible for the actions of its users. The appeals judges said ""substantial questions"" had been raised about ""the merits and form of the injuction"" and granted Napster the stay. Users worldwide have held Napster-download marathons and developers of alternatives to Napster's distribution system worked feverishly to provide their software to people hooked on Internet music trading. Napster says it has 20 million patrons. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The United States Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, has described the highest level talks so far between the US and North Korea as historic. But she has also admitted that North Korea's recent suggestion that it might give up its missile program has not been clarified. North Korea's offer to give up its missile program in return for access to space technology was the number one item on her agenda at the landmark talks. The offer was made during a meeting in Pyongyang with Russian President Vladimir Putin earlier this month. Dr Albright hailed the landmark talks with her North Korean counterpart, Paek Nam-sun but said they provided no new details on the offer. The first talks between the two nations in 50 years had been labelled as a further sign that the isolationist state is continuing to reach out to the rest of the world. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australia's two-time 400 metres world champion Cathy Freeman has won the event at the Golden League meeting in Oslo. Freeman won in a time of 50.74sec to beat Suziann Reid and Monique Hennagan of the United States. Freeman, 27, has been in Europe for the past six weeks training for the September Olympics. Double Olympic bronze medallist Ato Boldon, of Trinidad, showed he is aiming for gold at the Games with easy wins in the 100 and 200m sprints. Boldon, who sat out last year's world championships with a leg injury, showed he is back on track by winning the 100m in 10 seconds flat and the 200m in 20.26sec. Australia's Matt Shirvington finished .56sec behind Boldon in the 200m. Norway's Trine Solberg-Hattestad was the star of the night breaking her world women's javelin record for the second time in a month. The 1993 and 1997 world champion, and 1994 European champion threw 69.48m. The 34-year-old Atlanta bronze medallist is now a strong favourite to win the gold medal at the Sydney Games. Gail Devers, denied a chance to defend her Olympic 100m title after finishing out of the top three places in the US trials, won the 100m hurdles."

" As Fiji awaits the naming of a new government, unrest continues across the country. Supporters of coup leader George Speight have reportedly rounded up more than 200-ethnic Indian males in retaliation for his arrest. The army has warned that it will act unless the men are released. It also says it is considering whether or not to charge Speight with treason."

" Fiji's president, Josefa Iloilo, has announced that interim prime minister, Laisenia Qarase, will retain his post for the next three years. An interim cabinet is also expected to be named by the President later this afternoon. The country's caretaker government has introduced severe expenditure cuts in an attempt to ease the nation's economic problems. Mr Qarase, has praised Pacific Island nations for their low key reaction to the coup, while warning Australia and New Zealand that their tough stance will not help the country return to democracy. ""Their understanding and sympathetic response will do more to help and encourage us to return to parliamentary democracy than aid reduction and trade sanctions... we do respond to the Pacific way,"" he said. ""In contrast, the agressive and threating Western way only happens out of our resolve to do things our own way."""

" French authorities have confirmed that the Concorde jet that crashed near Paris this week, killing 113 people, suffered from a failure of two engines. The aircraft also experienced problems with its undercarriage shortly after take-off. French authorities revealed that a tyre blew out at a crucial time during take-off, and the Concorde crew informed ground control that the undercarriage would not retract. Seconds before the supersonic jet crashed, the pilot signalled that he was experiencing problems with both of the left-hand side engines. The French Accident Investigation Bureau has confirmed that the engine nearest the fuselage had broken down, and the other port-side engine twice lost power before the jet lost all power, swerved to the left and crashed. Seconds before the plane crashed, the pilot said ""Problem in Engine Number Two""."

" Federal Liberal backbenchers, concerned about mandatory sentencing in the Northern Territory, say they are happy with an $20 million agreement finalised yesterday. Police will send young offenders to diversionary programs if their offence involves property worth less than $100 and if there is no unlawful entry. Liberal MP Dana Vale was one of a handful of moderates who threatened to cross the floor to overturn the Territory's laws for juveniles earlier this year. She says she is happy with the agreement signed by the Commonwealth. ""I think it's a good agreement, a practical agreement,"" she said. Another Liberal, Brendan Nelson, who recently raised concerns about how much of the package was to be spent on police, also says he is satisfied. ""Those resources being committed in that particular way is something that I strongly support and is embodied in this agreement,"" he said. Dr Nelson says the diversionary programs are groundbreaking. ""If this program is working, if it is successful, if it is providing better outcomes for juveniles who might go another way other than a lifetime of recidivism, then I'd like to see these sort of programs extended beyond the Northern Territory,"" he said. However, the Shadow Attorney-General, Robert McClelland, is not impressed with the agreement. ""The underlying injustice of mandatory sentencing will remain,"" he said. Labor will decide on a policy of overturning the laws for adults, as well as juveniles at its national conference next week."

" A final decision is expected today on labelling rules for genetically modified foods. Health Ministers from Australia and New Zealand are meeting in Wellington. State and territory ministers agreed last year to a strict labelling system that would identify food with a GM content of more than 0.1 per cent. But the Federal Government is pushing for labels only if there is more than 1 per cent in the product. Most of the states appear to still favour of the tougher rules. Despite the differing views, the Federal Parliamentary Secretary for Health, Grant Tambling, says he is confident of a final resolution today. ""I would hope that we can talk the issue through and reach a position that is acceptable to all governments in Australia and New Zealand,"" he said. ""I think all ministers are certainly aware that... a very high standard information is probably the most important issue to be addressed, but at the same time there are also very imprtant impliations for health for assessment, scientific matters and trade issues."""

" A militia group in Solomon Islands has denied responsibility for yesterday's hijacking of a Japanese fishing boat. The boat was hijacked in Western Province and the crew was forced to take three armed men to Honiara. The men claimed to be members of the Malaita Eagle Force and said their lives were in danger, but the Malaita Eagle Force denies its members were involved. Solomon Islands police are investigating the incident, which could be linked to a series of robberies in Western Province in recent days. Meanwhile, there has been no announcement yet on whether cease-fire negotiations between the militias will resume today as planned."

" The managing director of the online CrimeNet service says a move by Australia's Attorneys-General to set up a working party to investigate Internet databases could threaten all publishers. At a meeting in Brisbane, the Standing Committee of Attorneys-General agreed to investigate ways to restrict the use of such databases, but CrimeNet's Ken Schultz says the inquiry may not stop there. Earlier this year a Victorian Judge aborted a murder trial because CrimeNet provided public access to the criminal record of the accused. Mr Schultz says the records of convicted criminals on its site are independently cross-checked for accuracy and fairness before they're made available to the public. ""We check if convictions have been overturned and if they are we remove or amend those conviction details,"" he said. ""We're constantly working to keep our site up to date and accurate as we possibly can."""

" Fears of inflation have been stirred again in the United States. But on share markets, it has been high-tech stocks that have taken another caning in the latest session. Traditional sectors of the market and the bond market look to have provided a ""safe haven"" for the funds coming out of technology issues. US durable goods orders have surged by 10 per cent in the month of June - the biggest monthly jump since 1991. The US Commerce Department in Washington says the rise reflects demand for aircraft and parts. Meanwhile, the US employment cost index has risen 1 per cent in the June quarter, to be up 4.4 per cent over the year, and in line with expectations. On New York's Nasdaq exchange, technology shares have tumbled almost 3.7 per cent in value overall. The Nasdaq composite index is down 145 points to 3,842. But on the New York Stock Exhange, the Dow Jones industrial average has recovered 70 points, after yesterday slumping 183, and has finished at 10,586. The US bond market is also firmer. The better prices have pushed down the yield on 30-year Treasury paper to 5.77 per cent, which is ll of around three points. In Britain, investors have been unsettled by the strength of the US durable goods orders, as well as a profit warning from Nokia. London's FT-100 index has fallen 35 points to 6,352. Yesterday in Asia, share prices in the region's main centres moved lower. On the Japanese market, investors continue to worry about the country's economic prospects. Tokyo's Nikkei index fell 321 points to 16,182. In Australia, record profits from BHP and the National Australia Bank failed to set the market alight. The All Ordinaries index dropped 23 points to 3,224. Overnight trade on the Sydney Futures exchange is into the final moments now. Around 7:00am AEST, the Share Price Index contract was unchanged on yesterday's day settlement at 3,280. The 10-year bond contract is up 1.5 points at 93.85, with the implied yield easing to 6.15 per cent. The Australian dollar has settled back from yesterday's two-week high in the wake of strong wage growth figures. Around 7:00am AEST, the currency was being quoted for about 58.78 US cents, down more than 0.4 of a cent on yesterday's local close. On the cross-rates, the dollar is at 0.6306 euros, 64.20 Japanese yen, 38.82 pence sterling, and against the New Zealand dollar it is at 0.284. The gold price is at $US278.75 an ounce, and West Texas crude oil is at $US28.21."

" The president of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), Juan Antonio Samaranch, says his greatest worry about the Sydney Games is the weather. In an interview with <i>The New York Times</i>, Mr Samaranch says the weather during the Games could be cold and rainy and that would be a problem for him. Mr Samaranch said he had tea with Olympics Minister Michael Knight earlier this week, and that Mr Knight was happy with Games' preparations. Mr Samaranch also commented on the relationship he had with the two men indicted over the Salt Lake City scandal. Following the formal charging of Salt Lake City's Tom Welch and Dave Johnson, Mr Samaranch says he always had a very friendly and very cooperative relationship with the two men. He says the city's bidding scandal was a mistake caused by some people within the IOC, as well as the bid committee."

" Australian boxer Kostya Tszyu is considered such an overwhelming favourite for his fight at the weekend against Mexico's former world champion, Julio Cesar Chavez, that Las Vegas bookmakers are refusing to bet. The fight was moved to Phoenix, Arizona, after authorities in Nevada questioned whether Chavez was fit enough or still good enough to challenge Tszyu. The Las Vegas bookies who are refusing to bet have even suggested Chavez might be injured. While Tszyu is the World Boxing Council's super lightweight champion, Chavez has not fought in that division for two years, has not met a top-10 contender in the past 14 months, and lost his most recent fight to an unranked boxer last October."

" The military in Fiji has killed at least one supporter of coup leader George Speight in a crackdown that has resulted in the arrest of Speight and some of his key supporters. The military is warning that it will hold Mr Speight responsible for any violence that is linked to his detention. This morning, the military shot one man dead and wounded about 30 others when it raided a school just outside Suva where George Speight's supporters have set up their headquarters. Among those reportedly detained in this morning's operation is the ex-British SAS colonel, Illisoni Ligairi, who provided Speight with military expertise and advice during the coup. One radio report from Suva says one soldier was wounded in this morning's exchanges. The operation began last night with the arrest at a military roadblock of Mr Speight, his bodyguards and media advisor, Jo Nata. The military claims threats had been made against the President Josefa Iloilo's life, and the army says it is prepared for a backlash. Australian Foreign Minister Alexander has congratulated the Fijian military on its arrest of Mr Speight. ""George Speight committed an act of terror in seizing the prime minister and the cabinet of Fiji,"" he said. ""He's a man who we would regard by any standards as a criminal, and he should be detained...I hope he's not released."" ---------------------------------"

" Air France has revealed that one of the engines on the Concorde jet which crashed yesterday, was repaired just before the fatal flight. The same engine was seen burning during take-off. Air France says that seconds before the Concorde crashed, the pilot had reported failure in an engine that had been repaired just before take-off. The plane came down just minutes after leaving the runway, killing 113 people. According to the first transcripts of the black box flight recorders, the pilot was no longer able to brake given the force of the take-off thrust. Air France spokesman Francois Brousse says the plane's captain had ordered engineers to repair a fault in the airliner's second engine shortly before take-off, something that he said was not unusual. ""If the crew has any doubts or any even hint of an eventual problem, this kind of technical intervention is practically automatic,"" he said. As the investigations continue, relatives of those killed in the crash have been arriving in Paris to identify the bodies of family members. Emergency crews are still clearing the debris at the scene and the charred remains of the bodies of 55 of the victims have now been transferred to a makeshift mortuary at a medical-legal institute in Paris. British Airways suspended its flights after the crash, but normal Concorde services across the Atlantic have now resumed. ------------------------------------"

" Senior members of the Israeli Government are saying peace negotiations with the Palestinians have not been exhausted. The comments came as the leaders of both sides returned from the Camp David summit in the United States. Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat was cheered and carried shoulder high on his arrival in Gaza. In his only public comments, he insisted on the Palestinian and Arab claims to Jerusalem. Israel's Prime Minister, Ehud Barak, arrived to a state ceremony in Tel Aviv, later addressing a noisy group of supporters in Jerusalem. At least two of Mr Barak's Cabinet are already attempting to beat off the pessimism that surrounds the collapse of the Camp David talks yesterday. Justice Minister Yossi Beilin is insisting negotiation resume with United States mediation. ""We have to go on, we have to negotiate,"" Mr Beilin said. ""We have to have informal and formal contacts with the Palestinians. ""We have to involve the Americans again in order to find a solution in the coming months."" -----------------------------------"

" Cease-fire negotiations between rival militias are due to resume in Solomon Islands today. However, the signs are not promising that the pre-conditions for the negotiations will be met. The Malaita Eagle Force has insisted that all leaders of the Isatabu Freedom Movement attend the talks. But three key Isatabu leaders have stayed away from all sessions so far, and the signs are that they will not attend today. If they do not attend the meeting, the Malaitans could abandon the talks, but the Solomon Islands Government hopes they will agree to go ahead anyway, as a show of good faith by the Malaitans. However, there is a risk that the absent Isatabu leaders will not consider themselves bound by any agreement produced at the negotiations. The leaders will meet today on HMAS Tobruk, off Honiara. ------------------------------------"

" Mitsubishi has revealed cars manufactured at its Adelaide plants were affected by the same problems that recently prompted a recall in Japan. Mitsubishi's Australian managing director, Tom Phillips, says the reported Pajero brake hose problem has already been the subject of a recall in Australia, beginning in 1996. A Lancer/Mirage crankshaft pulley problem has also resulted in a recall from 1997. It has also come to light that about 2,000 imported Mitsubishi Gallants will be subject to a recall because of a possible suspension problem. The company had earlier said no Australian-made vehicles had been affected and that it was checking imported vehicles. --------------------------------------"

" There has been a sudden bout of nerves on Wall Street. Share prices have tumbled in the latest session, closing on their lows. On the New York Stock Exchange, the Dow Jones industrial average has slumped 183 points to 10,516, a slide of 1.7 per cent. While financial stocks have struggled, there is said to be further concern about the future profit performance of high-tech stocks, although current earnings reports appear to be matching expectations. The high-tech Nasdaq composite index is down 42 points, or 1 per cent, finishing at 3,988. The overall mood of caution also comes ahead of US cost of employment figures, as well as other data, due out of Washington tonight. The US bond market is a touch firmer. The better prices have pushed down the yield on 30-year Treasury paper to 5.80 per cent, a fall of about 0.5 points. Once more there has been little overall movement on the British share market. London's FT-100 index has slipped 400 to 6,387. Yesterday in Asia, results were mixed across the region's key centres. On the Japanese market, the country's second biggest convenience store chain, Lawson Inc, had a disappointing listing, with retailers still suffering from the collapse of the department store operator Sogo. Tokyo's Nikkei index fell 71 points to 16,503. In Australia, further weakness in News Corporation shares offset buying in the resources sector. The All Ordinaries index remained steady at 3,247. At 7:00 am AEST, the Share Price Index contract was down 24 points on yesterday's day settlement at 3,287. The 10-year bond contract is up 2.5 points at 93.87, with the implied yield easing to 6.13 per cent. The Australian dollar has been pushed even higher, following yesterday's latest measure of inflation. The CPI is up 3.2 per cent in the 12 months to June, and markets are now allowing for a greater possibility of further interest rate increases before the end of the year. Just before 7:00am AEST, the dollar was being quoted for about 59.15 US cents, up 0.4 of a cent on yesterday's local close. On the cross-rates, it is at 0.6272 euros, 64.60 Japanese yen, 39.03 pence sterling, and against the New Zealand dollar it is at 1.279. The gold price is at $US279.75 an ounce and West Texas crude oil is at $US27.86 a barrel. -------------------------------"

" More than 250 people are expected at a memorial service in Switzerland later today, to mark the anniversary of the canyoning disaster that killed 14 young Australians. In July last year 21 people died after a flash flood burst through the Saxeten River near the Swiss Alpine resort of Interlaken. Australia's consul in Geneva says the families of Perth victim Glynn Harries, RAAF officer John Flynn and New South Wales man Bradley Dewar are among those who will be at the ceremony. Kelly Swanson-Roe, a New Zealand woman who survived the disaster but lost her husband had also returned as had the fiancee of Australian victim Warwick Tout. After last year's disaster Swiss authorities set aside a park near the site as a permanent memorial to those who died. ---------------------------------"

" The world's number one female tennis player, Martina Hingis, says she will not be playing at the Sydney Olympics. The Swiss champion says she does not want to risk injury after the tough hardcourt season. The Olympic tennis tournament begins just a week after the finish of the US Open. ----------------------------------"

" Australia's oldest man says the chance to carry the Olympic torch in his hometown of Bendigo today ranks among the biggest thrills of his life. The star attraction for day 50 of the relay, the halfway mark of the relay in the lead-up to the Sydney Olympics in September, is 109-year-old Jack Lockett. Mr Lockett will carry the torch along Bendigo's Pall Mall before lighting the cauldron this afternoon, watched by thousands of locals and big international television audience. Mr Lockett, who lives semi-independently at a home for the elderly in Bendigo, has three sons, a daughter, 15 grandchildren, and 23 great-grandchildren. The sprightly war veteran says he is not worried by all the fuss, and will stick to his regular routine for what he says is possibly the biggest day of his life. ""It's a real thrill, it is a terrific thrill, one of the biggest thrills I think I could have,"" he said. ""I can do it...I can nearly run once I get up on my feet...I'll walk down there without my stick as good as gold."""

" On Australian Story tonight at 8.00pm, the unheralded contribution of the families of Australian troops in East Timor. Join an internet forum after the program at 8.30pm. Go to ""http://www.abc.net.au/austory/""."

" Investigators are searching under the glare of floodlights for vital clues into this morning's crash of a Concorde plane near Paris that killed 113 people. So far, they have recovered both black boxes - the flight recorder and the cockpit voice recorder. Eyewitnesses say the Concorde failed to reach more than 50 metres in altitude before it came down. The plane slammed into the 45-room Hotelissimo Hotel in a village just a few kilometres from Charles de Gaulle Airport. Hundreds of firefighters have spent hours trying to put out the fire which engulfed the hotel. Police have cordoned off the area, but smoke can still clearly be seen coming from the crash site. Rescue workers say the plane has almost completely disintegrated and the ground is littered with wreckage, bodies and burnt luggage."

" The French Government has grounded all future Concorde flights pending the outcome of a technical inquiry. A judicial inquiry will also be conducted. At a news conference the president of Air France said the Concorde that crashed had undergone a routine inspection only four days ago. He added the plane had no problem with cracks in the wings that had been reported in other Concorde aircraft. He confirmed there had been a problem in at least one engine as the plane took off. French President Jacques Chirac has spoken of his deep shock at the crash. This is the first Concorde to crash in the 30 year history of the plane. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Movements in world oil prices have helped push Australia's official inflation measure to its highest level since 1996. In the year to June, the consumer price index (CPI) has risen 3.2 per cent. That is nominally outside the Reserve Bank's target band of 2-3 per cent inflation. Car insurance, overseas holidays and fresh vegetables have been among the key contributors in the latest three months. But Federal Treasurer Peter Costello says the most telling factor has been petrol prices. ""Principally, the increase in the consumer price index was as a result of increased world oil prices, which have increased more than 60 per cent in US dollar terms over the year to June,"" he said. In Australia the increase in petrol price through the year to June of 2000 was around 22 per cent."" The Australian dollar has moved higher in the wake of the figures. Just before 2:00pm AEST, it was being quoted at around 58.70 US cents, up three-tenths of a cent. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Northern Territory's uranium miner, Energy Resources of the Australia (ERA), expects to increase production next year. ERA's parent company, North Limited, has released a target statement to the stock exchange in response to the takeover bid from Rio Tinto. The statement shows ERA is the world's third largest uranium producer, supplying about 9 per cent of the western world's uranium requirements. It also shows ERA expects to sell more than $200 million worth of uranium next year - up by $30 million on this year and last. The company says the rise will be because of increased production. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Federal Labor backbencher Mark Latham is urging the party to adopt radical ideas he has put forward for a complete overhaul of Australia's education system. He is proposing broadening the funding base to include business, community groups and individual savings plans. He says people should be encouraged to continue learning through business funded schemes, parenting centres and community organisations such as clubs. The backbencher also believes universities should be completely changed to have some as centres of international excellence, some as research or corporate institutions and some free public universities. Mr Latham says Labor has nominated education as its priority issue, and he has urged the party to take up his approach. ""The key thing for Labor is to recognise that we'll never become the Knowledge Nation unless we're the radical party, unless we're the party that's able to make creative use of knowledge and turn it into new policy,"" he said. ""This is not a time for being conservative or timid about policy making, it's about striking out a new agenda."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The New South Wales Government has settled the state's oldest native title claim. It is the first land rights claim of its kind under the 1993 Aboriginal Land Rights Act. The Wiradjuri community at Wellington in the state's central-west lodged its land rights claim for the Wellington Common and surrounding land six years ago. In 1868, the Common was set aside as the Wellington Aboriginal Mission, but the final Wiradjuri families left seven years ago. The transfer of ownership has been described as the final step in a lengthy negotiation process. The Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and Deputy Premier, Andrew Refshauge, says agreement has been reached between all parties. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" In the Snowy Mountains, it is expected that the Alpine Way will be reopened tomorrow, after being closed since Sunday by a rock collapse. Rock fell down, blocking the Alpine Way on Sunday, near Scammel's Lookout, south of Khancoban, where the road runs through deep cuttings in the range. The National Parks and Wildlife Service says more rock will have to be brought down to make the area safe and geo-technical experts have been brought in. The service had to call in special rock handling equipment from Leeton. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Australian Government is urging Indonesia to do more to prevent militia activity in West Timor following the death of a New Zealand soldier. The Prime Minister, John Howard, has expressed sadness at the death, which he says is a reminder of the dangers still faced by troops in East Timor. Mr Howard says there is an obligation on Indonesia to do all it can to curb militia activity. The Foreign Affairs Minister, Alexander Downer, says he is conscious of efforts made at the most senior levels of the Indonesian Government to deal with the militia problem, but has urged Indonesia to redouble its efforts."

" Federal Opposition Leader Kim Beazley says he has no problem with a proposal to locate a United States missile testing range off Western Australia's north-west coast. Mr Beazley says there have been discussions between the US and Australian navies on tactical missile defence for warships at sea and the proposal is one part of those plans. He says it is still early days but the plan is part of an ongoing co-operative program between America and Australia. Western Australian Premier Richard Court says he had no knowledge of a proposal to locate a United States missile testing range in the north west of the state. Mr Court unsuccessfully tried to obtain details of the project from the Federal Government this morning. The State is the favoured location to develop a joint US/Australian facility to launch missiles for warships to use as practice targets. The Premier believes Australia needs to escalate its defence presence in the region but not in conjunction with the United States. Mr Court says Australia should not be relying on foreign powers to meet its defence needs."

" Police are continuing to question two men in relation to the shooting murders of two police officers in Moorabbin in Melbourne's south-east. The major breakthrough in the investigation comes nearly two years after Sergeant Gary Silk and Senior Constable Rod Miller were killed. Members of the Special Operations group carried out raids across Melbourne this morning, arresting two men, aged 47 and 19. They are now being questioned at the St Kilda Road police complex. Detective Inspector Paul Sheridan, who heads the Lorimer Taskforce investigating the murders, says the raids will continue until at least the end of the day."" ""The taskforce is also carrying out searches in some suburban residences in the areas of Cranbourne and Narre Warren,"" he said. Sergeant Gary Silk and Senior Constable Rodney Miller were shot in August 1998 while taking part in an undercover armed robbery operation. The Chief Commissioner, Neil Comrie, will not give anymore details of the arrests, but says today is a defining moment in the history of Victoria Police. ""This is the day we've been waiting for for two years,"" he said. The Silk and Miller families have released a joint statement, thanking detectives for their commitment to the case over the past two years."

" Retailers have accused the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) of overreacting to mistakes made in the implementation of the GST. The Australian Retailers Association says in its discussions with the ACCC and the Federal Government, it was assured retailers would not be publicly pilloried if errors occurred. But the association's Phil Naylor says the treatment of Franklins supermarkets is giving rise to concern. ""The company has accepted it has made an error and it has remedied its error, but we don't think it's necessary to have the company's name waved from the rooftops across Australia and sort of humiliated in the way that it has been,"" he said. ""We're just concerned for the future of smaller retailers, or larger retailers, if they make very minor mistakes, that they're not going to be similarly treated."""

" The Commander of Fiji's military forces has held talks today with senior members of the cabinet announced last week by the President, in an apparent effort to sort out yet another government line-up. The military seems to have lost patience - not for the first time - with the coup leader, George Speight. Fiji Radio is reporting the meeting between Commodore Frank Bainimarama and the interim Prime Minister, Laisenia Qarase, and other members of his aborted government would finalise a new cabinet which the President, Josefa Iloilo, may announce tomorrow. George Speight rejected the last line-up, forcing the President to abandon last week's proposed swearing-in. Speight's group is still saying Mr Qarase is unacceptable and that the new Prime Minister should be the current High Commissioner to Malaysia, Adi Samanunu Cakobau."

" A former member of Japan's Aum Supreme Truth cult has been sentenced to death for his role in a poison gas attack. Satoru Hashimoto was found guilty of an attack on a central Japanese city ahead of the cult's mass poisoning of the Tokyo subway system in 1995. Satoru Hashimoto was found to have helped build the cult's poison gas factory near the base of Mount Fuji. He was found to have released the deadly sarin gas from a van outside the homes of some judges in the city of Matsumoto in 1994. The judges were hearing a case against the Aum cult. Seven people died in the attack. He is also found to have murdered the lawyer who was conducting the case against Aum as well as the man's wife and baby. The 33-year-old is the fifth member of the Aum cult to be sentenced to death by hanging. The cult's leader Shoko Asahara has yet to be sentenced."

" A New Zealand peacekeeper has been shot dead in East Timor following a confrontation with suspected militia in rugged jungle close to the border with West Timor. United Nations administrator Sergio Viera De Mello, speaking in Bangkok, has reacted angrily to the first combat casualty in East Timor. He says initial reports indicate militiamen who crossed over the border from West Timor were responsible. The body of 24-year-old Leonard Manning was found yesterday with two bullets in the head. A tracking team sent to investigate reports of armed men operating in the area had come under close range fire and retreated because they were outnumbered. They returned with additional forces to find the body of their colleague. In the past two months there have been three attacks on UN peacekeepers. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A senior Indian tax official has accused Indian cricket officials of taking part in match fixing. Vishwa Gupta has told Four Corners that an Indian cricketer is suspected of earning $US50 million from fixing matches. He is one of five Indian players under suspicion. Mr Gupta says entrenched corruption in Indian cricket could only have flourished if officials allowed it to happen. ""I think they are as corrupt and as criminal as those who are involved in match fixing,"" he said. ""I'm firmly of the view that no match fixing can take place without the connivance of the board officials, they're quite aware."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The names of the five people killed in yesterday's rescue helicopter crash in central Queensland have been released. The pilot who died in yesterday's crash has been identified as 59- year-old Vietnam veteran, Lieutenant Colonel Paul ""Paddy"" O'Brien, from the Darling Downs. Also on board were Anthony Sherry, aged 5 and his 30-year-old mother Susan from Yaraando Station, and paramedics Billy Birch and Craig Staines, both of Rockhampton. It has also been confirmed that the pilot has reported fuel problems just before the accident. Emergency Services Minister, Stephen Robertson, says he cannot comment on whether the helicopter may have been low on fuel, but can confirm the pilot made a radio distress call saying the helicopter was experiencing problems with fuel consumption. It had taken off from Rockhampton late on Sunday night and landed at Yaraando Station, almost 200 kilometres away to pick up Anthony Sherry, who was having breathing problems. On the return flight it became clear that Rockhampton was fogbound and arrangements were made to meet an ambulance vehicle at Marlborough, 100 kilometres north-west of the city. After having aborted a planned landing at the Marlborough school the helicopter crash landed in a paddock beside the Bruce Highway. The crash is now the subject of two inquiries, one involving police the other involving the Civil Aviation Safety Authority. The bodies of those killed in the crash have been taken to Rockhampton. The helicopter, a Bell 206L-3, was leased to the Capricorn rescue service by a company owned by Sunshine Coast businessman Grant Kenny. It is one of many throughout Australia owned by the company."

" Army Aviation officers have paid tributes to one their top ranking officers. The former head of the Army's School of Aviation at Oakey retired in 1985, but never ended his love of flying. He had survived a helicopter crash during the Vietnam war in which his plane was shot down. Close friend, Rowan Monteith says the accomplished pilot will be remembered for generations. ""You know, he was one of those real characters in Army aviation who was larger than life really,"" he said. ""The sort of person who personified the image of Army aviation. ""I think as he grew older in aviation he became a sort of father figure I guess to many of the young officers and soldiers within the corps."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Health Minister, Michael Wooldridge, says the Federal Government can wear the extra cost created by the success of private health insurance initiatives. Industry figures show insurance coverage has reached a 10 year high, with the 30 per cent rebate and lifetime health cover scheme pushing membership up to cover 40 per cent of the population. Dr Wooldridge says he is thrilled four years of hard work has paid off, and says the Government has made plans in the budget to cover the costs. ""If you look in the forward estimates, we allowed for 7 per cent growth in the expenditure, because we've got so many extra people in that will keep real downward pressure on premiums, they won't go up 5 to 8 per cent a year as they did under Labor,"" he said. ""So we've got a bit of fat built into those forward estimates and I'm not concerned about that at all."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The New South Wales Premier, Bob Carr, has described a newspaper report, which states he is considering a switch to federal politics, as ""false"" and ""silly"". A report in <i>The Australian</i> says Mr Carr was in talks with senior Labor figures about whether he was interested in a shift to Canberra. But the Premier says he plans to remain leader in New South Wales for the next election and beyond. ""This report in <i>The Australian</i> is wrong in every respect,"" he said. ""I'm not going to Canberra, it hasn't been raised with me, it most certainly wasn't discussed with me on the weekend as the report asserts, and if they'd paid me the courtesy of asking me about it before they'd printed it, they would not have been in a position to print a totally fabricated, entirely false report."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The ATSIC Commissioner on Social Justice issues, Brian Butler, says he hopes the Lutheran church's apology to indigenous people will lead to the rewriting of history. The National Synod of the Lutheran Church, meeting in the Barossa Valley, has acknowledged the role the church played in developing harmful policies. At a ceremony of reconciliation, the church asked for forgiveness from indigenous people and apologised for past hurt and injustices. Mr Butler says in South Australia, the Lutheran church and other denominations played a major role, in partnership with the Government, in the forced removal of children from their parents, which sometimes amounted to genocide. He says the apology will help build a strong foundation for the future. Mr Butler says he hopes the churches will help to correct the errors of history. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park has been increased by more than 1,000 square kilometres, with 12 new areas added. The additions are scattered across the length of the reef, from the tip of Cape York to the coast off Bundaberg. Federal Environment Minister, Robert Hill, says the new areas include dugong and turtle habitats, seabird nesting colonies, and large coastal reef systems. He says six more areas are soon expected to be included in the marine park, and another 10 are being assessed for inclusion. Conservationists have praised the Federal Government move. Great Barrier Reef campaign manager for the World Wide Fund for Nature, Imogen Zethoven, says there is more to come. ""Well, we are very pleased that this has happened, it has been a long time coming, but we are very pleased that it has finally been put in place,"" she said. ""It's the first round, if you like, of new areas to be added to the marine park so we are eagerly awaiting the next round of areas to be included. ""There are 28 all up and this is the announcement of the first 12. ""The commitments from both State and the Commonwealth Governments was to include all 28 areas, so we hope that that is done in the next six to 12 months."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The New South Wales Opposition has accused Treasurer Michael Egan of misleading Parliament over Olympic financing. An Upper House inquiry into a government contingency grant of $140 million to SOCOG has criticised the Games organising committee, saying its financial planning was inadequate. Opposition Treasurer Stephen O'Doherty says Mr Egan misled Parliament when he made his pledge that the Games were fully paid for, yet the contingency money was granted one month later. ""Well, we've now got the proof, there was a failure of Government accountability,"" he said. ""The Treasurer should have been vigourously asking questions, finding out how much the blowout was, and providing for it in the state budget."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Investigators have started searching the scene of this morning's fatal helicopter crash north of Rockhampton to try to piece together clues about the cause of the tragedy. All five people on board the Capricorn community rescue helicopter died in the crash. The Capricorn rescue helicopter was called to a property 100 kilometres west of Marlborough last night to pick up a 5-year-old boy for medical treatment. As the aircraft was returning to Rockhampton in the early hours of this morning the crew decided to put down at Marlborough because the fog was thickening quickly. The pilot tried to land at the Marlborough School but aborted the landing then tried to land close to the highway. However, the helicopter crashed into a paddock killing all five people on board, the pilot, two ambulance paramedics, the 5-year- old patient and his mother. RACQ agent, Viv Jenkinson, was one of the first people on the scene. ""I rushed over to see if I could be of some assistance - it was a pretty horrific thing,"" he said. ""I could do nothing, police arrived shortly afterwards."" Investigators from the Australian Transport Safety Bureau will look at the airworthiness of the helicopter and weather conditions during the accident. Deputy director of air safety at the bureau, Barry Sargeant, says four investigators will remain at the scene for up to two days. ""We'll be looking at the air worthiness of the helicopter prior to it crashing,"" he said. ""Whether it was capable of normal operation or not and that's obviously a fairly detailed thing to determine. ""We'll be looking at aspects of how the helicopter was being operated, clearly weather may have been a factor so again that's taken into consideration, so a whole range of things need to be looked at. ""It may be that further aspects need to be followed up in our labrartory. ""We may need to look at metallurgical matters, who knows. ""So it may take some months before the final report comes out so it doesn't stop us from making safety recommendations to improve safety if we find something sooner than that."""

" The State Member for Rockhampton, Robert Schwarten, says the Capricorn Rescue Helicopter Service plays a vital role in the central Queensland community. He says the community will be devastated. ""This is a very close-knit operation of the people who voluntarily work with the people who work there,"" he said. ""They have a strong bond. ""We all feel for those concerned. ""It really is a member of the family in their case and is felt that way by all concerned here. ""It's shock and disbelief and agony and all of those sorts of emotions."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" One of Australia's largest corporate damages claims has started in the Supreme Court in Sydney. Australia's largest bank, the National Australia Bank, is being sued by the developers of a trading systems platform, AUSMAQ, which it purchased in 1996. The bank paid approximately $7 million for AUSMAQ - a partly automated system for investing managed funds and debentures created by two companies owned by Mr John Maconochie. However, those companies now allege the product was not developed to its full potential and are claiming up to a $51 billion share of the profits they say it could have generated. The counsel for Mr Maconochie, John Garnsey QC, says the case is unique for a number of reasons, including the fact that it is the first time a court has been called upon to value a lost e-commerce opportunity. The case is expected to last up to two years. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Attorney-General, Daryl Williams, says discussions with the Northern Territory over a mandatory sentencing deal have not concluded. The Territory Chief Minister, Denis Burke, says the territory's detailed plan on implementing the $20 million deal has been finalised. It is being considered by the Prime Minister over the next few days, and Mr Burke says he expects agreement at the end to three months of negotiations. But Mr Williams says although there have been fruitful discussions it is not the end. ""What needs to be understood is that once an agreement sets out some details in what was agreed between the Prime Minister and the Chief Minister, there's a lot of work to be done to implement it,"" he said. ""The Commonwealth's position is, as it always has been, that it will not be handing over any money until it's satisfied implementation is underway."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Franklins supermarket chain has admitted to wrongfully charging a 10 per cent GST on some of its products. The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) says Franklins charged GST on items which are GST free. ACCC chairman Allan Fels says Franklins, which operates in all mainland states, has agreed to compensate customers by discounting normal prices for the relevant product of 11 per cent, for three weeks from next Wednesday. The products involved are No Frills Weetbix, orange juice, and apple juice and Peats Rich Natural Water. Those who have receipts will also be able to get refunds. Professor Fels says it is a victory for consumers. ""The case shows that price-conscious vigilant consumers can detect and did detect over-charging, and will now get speedy compensation,"" he said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Conservationists claim world heritage listed Daintree rainforest could be auctioned to make way for housing developments and shopping centres. The Daintree futures study was commissioned by the Wet Tropics Managerial Council to look at development and conservation options for the area. Cairns and Far North Environment Centre coordinator, Henry Boer, says the study suggests the area's population may treble, leading to a development boom in the region. ""This document was meant to set the future of the Daintree, however it's going to put the Daintree into long-term decline in terms of its world class ecological values and in terms of its world class tourism values,"" he said. ""The Daintree is an international icon in terms of lowland tropical rainforest conservation, natural habitat of the endangered cassowary and it's an historical treasure trove in terms of the bidiversity values that are contained there."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A senior bank official says welfare agencies are turning into big corporations while business is being pressured for more donations. Ron Burke, of the National Australia Bank, says the corporate sector is being pushed into a chequebook mentality of giving more. He says the call for more philanthropy coincides with the growth of big agencies like Mission Australia with sizeable assets and turnover. ""We are in the ironical situation of having corporations in Australia donating to organisations that are often larger in terms of assets and annual turnovers than their funders,"" Mr Burke said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Supporters of labelling for genetically modified (GM) foods have stepped up pressure on state and territory health ministers not to water down the labelling proposals they agreed to last year. The Ministers will meet in New Zealand on Friday to make a final decision on what foods should be labelled. The Prime Minister has lobbied for labelling only if foods contain more than 1 per cent GM content, and for GM additives, processing aids and oils not to be included. Scott Kinnear from the Organic Federation says consumers have a right to know about all GM content. ""Consumers who wish to reject GM foods and choose alternatives for very real reasons such as ethical reasons or moral reasons...want to know how those foods were produced,"" Mr Kinnear said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Retired Olympic swimmer Nicole Stevenson predicts there will be more drug cheats at the Sydney Olympics than at previous Games. Stevenson was in Melbourne today speaking to teachers about a drugs in sport program, which the Australian Olympic Committee will introduce to schools from next year. She says the temptation to do well means there will always be drug cheats at the Olympics. ""I think at this Olympic Games there will probably be more, I know there will be athletes that go positive at the Olympics Games this year because there are always going to be athletes that cheat to be as good as our natural athletes,"" she said. ""The temptation is as great as it's ever been."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" In central Queensland, five people are dead after an horrific helicopter crash on heavy fog at Marlborough, north of Rockhampton. The helicopter pilot and two ambulance officers had picked up the mother and five-year-old child from a property north of the small town, on the Bruce Highway 100 kilometres from the city. Around 3:00am AEST, they encountered heavy fog and the helicopter crash landed, killing all those on board. Reports from the scene say the crash site is just off the highway in a paddock about one kilometre north of Marlborough and authorities are blaming the thick fog. Wreckage is spread over a wide area. Trevor Kidd, from Queensland Fire and Rescue says the area has been cordoned off. ""At approximately 3:00am the rescue helicopter from Rockhampton had picked up some people north of Marlborough and were attempting to put down in the Marlborough area and what's happened from there is that the pilot has crash landed and we have five people who are deceased,"" he said. ""At the moment we're just standing by, we have a perimeter set up it's just basic fire protection at this stage."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" President Bill Clinton is back in the United States, ready to assess whether it is worth continuing with the Middle East peace talks at Camp David. Mr Clinton arrived back in the US this morning after an early departure from the G8 summit in Japan and headed for the presidential retreat in Maryland. Israeli and Palestinian negotiators have continued talks in the President's absence and Mr Clinton says systematic efforts have been made on many of the issues facing Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat. But US officials say the talks are not open-ended and the parties appear to remain split on the crucial issue of Jerusalem. A spokesman for Mr Barak says the delegation will decide soon after Mr Clinton's return whether there is any point in staying on. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The mandatory sentencing deal between the Northern Territory and the Federal Government looks set to be finalised within days. The Territory's Chief Minister, Denis Burke, has signed off on the deal after months of negotiations. In April, the Federal Government pledged $5 million towards diversionary programs and it was agreed 17-year-olds would be sentenced as juveniles, not adults. However, the deal has yet to be been ratified, with the Federal Attorney-General expressing concern about plans to allocate the bulk of funds to police. Mr Burke says he has met with Federal Government representatives who have returned to Canberra, satisfied with that allocation. ""I've had a look at it and am happy it will be put before the Prime Minister in the next few days,"" he said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Opposition has accused the Government of creating a diversion by encouraging job-seekers to undertake part-time military service. The Federal Opposition's family and community care spokesman, Wayne Swan, said the scheme was designed to distract attention away from problems with the goods and services tax (GST). ""He [John Howard] is seeking to erect a smokescreen to disguise the impact of the GST on interest rates and the fact that his Government will not engage in constructive welfare reform,"" he said. However, the Prime Minister says involvement in the Reserve will go a long way towards preparing people for the workforce. ""People can benefit from training, they can benefit from the comradeship that's involved - the sense of discipline,"" he said. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A highly-concentrated batch of heroin is currently being sold in Sydney, and is said to be responsible for four deaths and 78 overdoses. The Special Minister of State, John Della Bosca, says the overdoses have occurred over the past 72 hours, added to a further three deaths in Canberra last week. Mr Della Bosca says it is sad the same lesson has to be repeated over and over again. ""There is no such thing as safe injecting drug use and people need to be aware both individually and as a part of the community that the best course of action is to seek treatment for their habits,"" he said. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Cease-fire negotiations are due to resume in Solomon Islands this morning between leaders of militias fighting a 19 month ethnic conflict. The talks were suspended on Friday after three Guadalcanal leaders failed to show up. While there is some doubt that the three leaders will turn up today and there is a high risk of the negotiations collapsing. The Malaita Eagle Force has continually said it will only negotiate if all leaders of the Guadalcanal side are present. The Eagle Force has given a guarantee of safe passage for the three Guadalcanal leaders to travel to today's talks, to be held on board the Australian navy ship, HMAS Tobruk. Most of Honiara remains without water today, following the bombing of the town's main water supply facility. Water authority staff will try again today to reach the site after fighting in the area on Saturday forced them to cancel a planned inspection. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" One of the most ruthless guerrillas of Northern Ireland's years of conflict will be freed early from jail today under a scheme to cement the British province's uneasy peace. Michael Stone has served 11 years of a 30-year term for crimes that include the Milltown Cemetery murders, where three people were killed at an Irish Republican Army funeral. As part of the 1998 Good Friday peace accord, 340 Catholic republicans and rival Protestant loyalist prisoners have already walked out of Northern Ireland's top-security Maze prison. Prison authorities say the Maze, which in the mid-1980s was western Europe's biggest guerrilla jail with 800 prisoners, will soon be mothballed. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Tiger Woods of the United States has shot a closing 69 to win the British Open this morning, with a record-breaking 19-under-par total of 269. In so doing, Woods became only the fifth and youngest player in history to win all four Grand Slam events. The others were Gene Sarazen, Ben Hogan, Gary Player and Jack Nicklaus. Second place, eight strokes back, went to South African Ernie Els and Thomas Bjorn of Denmark. Meanwhile, Australia's Karrie Webb has won the US Women's Open Golf tournament at Illinois, the richest ever women's golf tournament. Webb finished at 6-under par, five strokes ahead of her nearest rivals Meg Mallon and Christie Kerr. It is Webb's third Major title and comes shortly before her induction into the Hall of Fame."

" The Australian Democrats are seeking an urgent briefing from the Federal Government on Australia's security agencies. On Friday, Federal Police charged two people, one an employee of the Defence Intelligence Organisation in Canberra, over the theft of classified documents. The charges have prompted calls for a review of the organisation's staffing policies. The Prime Minister, John Howard, has expressed total confidence in Australia's security agencies. But the Australian Democrats leader Meg Lees has told Channel Seven that she is not so sure, although it is too early to be calling for a full Senate inquiry into the matter. ""One of the first steps we can take is a confidential briefing with Government to have put on the table for us exactly what is happening and what they are doing about it,"" she said. ""Now down the road, yes there is always the potential for a Senate hearing, but at this point in time I'm not prepared to commit to that."" --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Government has threatened wider sanctions against Fiji if George Speight becomes a member of cabinet. Last Wednesday, the rebel leader claimed to have stopped the swearing-in ceremony of a new government. His supporters are now demanding that the country's leaders sack the military-backed interim prime minister Laisenia Qarase and replace him with their nominee, Adi Samanunu Cakobau, a diplomat who ranks highly among Fiji's hereditary chiefs. Australia's Foreign Minister, Alexander Downer, speaking on Channel Nine, warned Fiji against appointing Mr Speight to cabinet. ""If Mr Speight became a member of a new cabinet I think frankly Australia, New Zealand, Britain, the United States, Japan and others would have to review the measures we've already taken towards Fiji,"" he said. ""Frankly it would be completely unacceptable for a terrorist to form part of a government. ""We couldn't have any part of dealing with a country that included terrorists in its government."" ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The secretary-general of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, has criticised the world's richest nations, for failing to deliver on their promise of debt relief to the poorest countries. Mr Annan has made the comment as the Group of Eight summit in Japan prepares to issue its final communique. Mr Annan says the delay in debt relief is having a negative impact on the lives of poor people. Last year, the leaders of the richest nations agreed to cancel $100 billion of debt owed by the world's poorest countries by the end of 2000. But Mr Annan says so far, less than half of the world's 40 most heavily indebted countries have qualified for the relief, which has amounted to only $15 billion. The debt relief has been slow in coming because the G7 countries require the poor nations to introduce wide-ranging economic reforms and to promise not to use their relief to fund wars. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Palestinians have demonstrated in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank urging Yasser Arafat to hold out for the return of Palestinian refugees and for a Palestinian capital in Jerusalem while taking part in the Camp David summit. Members of the Islamic Hamas group, which is opposed to the peace process with Israel, as well as Mr Arafat's supporters, all urged him not to make concessions with the Israelis. The United States peace talks are reportedly stuck over the Jerusalem issue. Mr Arafat wants sovereignty for the Palestinians in the Arab neighbourhoods in east Jerusalem, while Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak is apparently prepared to offer only autonomy. Mr Barak also wants to see most Palestinian refugees rehabilitated in Jordan, Syria and Lebanon, where they now live, rather than have them return to Israel. Speculation is rife that the United States is pushing a pact that would leave some issues undecided, but Mr Arafat's top aide says there will be no partial peace deal with Israel and that it is ""either a full agreement or no agreement"". But he says they are still optimistic that an agreement will be reached, even if it is not at the current peace talks. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) is being urged to review the latest increase in bank interest rates. The Commonwealth Bank and the National Australia Bank have announced higher home mortgage rates, blaming the introduction of the goods and services tax (GST). Westpac wrote to its customers last month telling them that it was being forced to raise bank charges because of the GST. The leader of the Australian Democrats, Meg Lees, has told Channel Seven the ACCC must review the price hikes. ""Certainly the banks don't have any direct input on any of the charges,"" she said. ""They are largely outside the system and I think it's most disappointing that yet again the banks go looking for excuses to put up costs. ""I think on the other side of the ledger you need to look at what their profits are and they are enormous, so I do not believe there is any real case for increased costs due to the GST."" ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Pakistan's deposed prime minister, Nawaz Sharif, has been convicted of corruption. He has been sentenced to 14 years in prison with hard labour and banned from public office for 21 years. Sharif was sentenced in the high security Attock fort near Islamabad. He was convicted of concealment of assets and tax evasion. In addition to his prison sentence and ban from public life, Sharif was also fined more than $US370,000. The ousted prime minister is already serving two life sentences for terrorism and hijacking, but he is appealing these convictions. The latest verdict against Mr Sharif further undercuts any prospects for a resuscitation of his political career after he was ousted by a coup in October. Pakistan's military rulers have launched two other corruption cases against Sharif and his wealthy family. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A man is due to appear in court tomorrow, charged over Thursday's double murder in Maryborough, in southern Queensland. A 32-year-old man was charged with two counts of murder late last night. The charges follow an intensive police investigation into the deaths of 32-year-old John Karami and his wife, 35-year-old Julie Karami. They were gunned down in their Maryborough home on Thursday night in front of their seven children, all aged under 11. Police executed a search warrant on a house at Bribie Island, north of Brisbane, early yesterday morning. A man was taken away for questioning and property was seized. The suspect remains in police custody in the Maryborough watch house and is expected to appear in court tomorrow. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Tiger Woods has strengthened his grip on the British Open golf title with another brilliant round overnight. Woods now leads the field by six strokes going into the final day. Starting the day with a three-shot lead, Woods managed to carve two bogeys. He now has a comfortable lead with his nearest rivals, American David Duval and Denmark's Thomas Bjorn, at 10-under. The big question is now whether Woods will pass the record of 18- under set by Nick Faldo a decade ago and never passed as the best score at the St Andrews course. But a win by any margin would make him the youngest player to complete a career grand slam and further cement his place as the greatest player of the modern game. Stuart Appleby and Jarrod Moseley are the best-placed Australians after the third round, but sit a distant 11 shots off the pace. Appleby shot a 4-under 68 to take him to 5-under for the tournament, while Moseley shot a 2-under 70 to join him. Western Australian Nick O'Hern and Lucas Parsons from New South Wales are two shots behind them at 3-under. Craig Parry picked up a stroke with a 71, which has left him at 1-under par for the tournament while Robert Allenby is also at 1-under after a 72. His playing partner, Queenslander Peter Senior, shot a 2-over 74 to drop back to even par for the tournament, level with Steve Elkington, who shot a 2-over 74. Meanwhile, Australia's Karrie Webb has a four-shot lead in the third round of the US Women's Open Golf Championship near Chicago. Webb is 7-under after 14 holes, while American Meg Mallon is outright second on 3-under par after 11 holes."

" The head of the United Nations Committee of Human Rights has urged the Federal Government to take measures beyond the ordinary to address the inequalities still endured by indigenous Australians. The committee is examining 21 questions relating to human rights issues in Australia, ranging from women's rights to the treatment of asylum seekers. However, the issue of mandatory sentencing dominated the final day of hearings in Geneva. Almost every member found some difficulty with the Australian delegation's assertion that the laws were not discriminatory. In her concluding statements, the chairwoman said that while Australia had made progress on human rights, she detected a violation of the principle of equality. She said measures beyond the ordinary should be taken to address the past injustices suffered by indigenous Australians. The committee will issue its concluding report next week, but the tenure of the questions and concern over mandatory sentencing suggests the report will include some strongly critical findings. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Concerns have been raised about systematic security breaches at Australia's Defence Intelligence Organisation (DIO) in Canberra. Yesterday's court appearances of a man and a woman over the alleged theft and attempted sale of three classified documents is the latest in a string of security lapses at the DIO. In May last year, former DIO officer Jean Wispelaere was arrested in the United States for stealing hundreds of classified intelligence documents from the organisation. The Federal Government has ruled out the need for a full-scale inquiry into the security of Australia's defence secrets. But intelligence commentator David McKnight says at the very least there needs to be a review of staff security checks at the DIO. ""It's very hard to have to have a foolproof system of vetting,"" he said. ""One thing that's been suggested is lie detector tests at various times and another thing that has been suggested is to have more probing psychological tests."" ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" With the Middle East peace talks in their 11th day, Palestinian sources have dismissed what is being reported as an Israeli-backed formula to devolve power over parts of Jerusalem, calling it inadequate. As the summit continues under US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, an Israeli Cabinet Minister has reported that Prime Minister Ehud Barak offered extended self-rule over parts of Arab east Jerusalem and possibly symbols of joint sovereignty as a solution to the impasse over the city's future. Jerusalem has been identified as the most intractable issue within the talks, despite a news blackout over the summitt. However, a spokeman for the PLO in Washington has dismissed the reported offer as falling well short of the full sovereignty being claimed by the Palestinians. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Civil Aviation Safety Authority says it could soon begin test flights with Virgin Blue as part of the process of giving it approval to operate in Australia. CASA spokesman Peter Gibson is rejecting suggestions by Queensland Premier Peter Beattie that unnecessary bureaucracy has again delayed the airline's start-up date. Mr Gibson says CASA is working through the process with the airline and ultimately, the timing is up to them. ""Virgin Blue are completing the documentation stage of their application...putting together all their operational, engineering, training, checking manuals, the manuals that underpin the whole operation,"" he said. ""The next stage after that is actually doing some test flights where the Civil Aviation Safety Authority make sure they can put into practice all the steps and stages and procedures and processes that are in their manuals."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A South African farmer has died after a land ownership disagreement. The property owner was found beaten to death at his farm after having been warned that his property could be invaded. Earlier this week, more than 300 local tribal families rallied at a nearby magistrates court and promised to take over the land. The families say they were forced off the farm during the apartheid era and want to move back onto the land. They say they lost valuable livestock and farming equipment when they were evicted. The incident has increased tensions in the surrounding district in the east of South Africa's Kwazulu-Natal province. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Efforts will continue in Solomon Islands today to ensure that stalled cease-fire negotiations can resume on Monday. The talks were halted because one of the preconditions set by the Malaita Eagle Force was not met. The Malaita Eagle Force has said it will only negotiate if all leaders of the rival Isatabu Freedom Movement are involved. Three Isatabu leaders failed to attend the talks and they were called off. Today, the Papua New Guinea Government will repatriate about 140 people from Bougainville living in Solomon Islands. With the ethnic conflict there still unresolved, PNG wants its citizens out of the country. Meanwhile, much of Honiara remains without tap water following an attempt to blow up a key water supply facility west of town. So far, repair crews have been prevented from reaching the site by militants. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A special investigation into the 1993 siege of the Branch Davidian compound at Waco in Texas has exonerated the United States Government of responsibility for the deaths of 80 sect members. Independent counsel John Danforth has issued his report a week after a Texas jury in a damages lawsuit found that federal agents were not to blame for the deaths in a siege and fire. The former Republican senator was appointed 10 months ago to make the investigation, under pressure from members of Congress who alleged there had been a cover-up of Government wrongdoing. Senator Danforth has concluded that the leaders of the religious cult set the fatal fire and shot at their own people. ""There is no evidence of any wrongdoing on the part of Attorney-General Reno, the President, former director of the FBI, other high officials of the United States, or members of the FBI hostage rescue team, who fired pyrotechnic tear gas on April 19, 1993,"" he said. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" Tiger Woods cast a massive shadow over his struggling rivals when he shot a second round 6-under 66 to go into the third round of the British Open with a three shot lead. It was a stunning performance that stretched his bogey free golf in majors to 62 straight holes. ""They spoil the scorecard,"" he smiled. Later, Woods delivered a chilling message to his rivals - ""I'm playing very similar to how I did at Pebble Beach."" It will not be lost on them. Five weeks ago on the northern California course Woods won the US Open in a record 15 strokes ahead of the rest of the field. Woods' nearest rival is David Toms on 8-under. One shot further back was the trio of Sergio Garcia, left-hander Steve Flesch and Loren Roberts."

" A 25-year-old man has appeared in the ACT Magistrates Court charged with misuse of classified documents. It is alleged Simon Lappas earlier this month passed documents prejudicial to the defence of the Commonwealth to an unauthorised person in the ACT. Lappas did not enter a plea and has been released on $5,000 bail to reside with his parents in Menai in New South Wales. He has been ordered not to talk about the case with anyone but his lawyers, and will reappear on August 11. Meanwhile, a 25-year-old woman has appeared in a Sydney court charged with the removal of classified documents from the Defence Intelligence Organisation. The woman has been extradited to the ACT where she is expected to appear in court this afternoon. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australia's Labor-governed states and the Federal Government are at odds over how to tackle rising petrol prices. New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland have proposed a 10-point plan to bring prices down at a meeting of Fair Trading and Consumer Affairs Ministers in Perth today. The plan, drawn up by NSW Fair Trading Minister John Watkins, includes proposals to allow franchise owners to purchase fuel from any wholesaler and calls for a Commonwealth inquiry into petrol prices. But Federal Minister for Financial Services and Regulation, Joe Hockey says he is more concerned with misleading price boards at petrol stations. ""There's been extensive debate about oil codes and petrol distribution,"" he said. ""Mr Watkins has tried various petrol stunts before, but I am particularly concerned about the level of misleading information displayed on price boards and how it differs to the price charged at the petrol pump."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" It is believed that ambulance crews and other police could not get to a shot policeman for some hours outside Rockhampton last night because they were in danger of being shot themselves. Eventually an armoured security vehicle from Rockhampton prison, on the north eastern side the City, was called in to get help to the policeman. The officer was dead when it arrived. Senior Constable Norman Watts aged 33 was shot, just after 9:00pm when he arrived at a domestic dispute on the city's north western outskirts. A seven hour stand off with a male occupant of the house continued throughout the night, until police talked him out of the house at around 5:00am. A man is in custody and is now being questioned by police."

" Police Minister Tom Barton and Police Commissioner Jim O'Sullivan are in Rockhampton and have spoken with the family of the officer. They will also be offering support to the dead Constable's workmates."

" Merv Bainbridge from the Queensland Police Union says it will be closely monitoring investigations. ""Most certainly we will, to see if the correct procedures and everything was followed correctly with respect to the safety of our members,"" he said. ""Initially our information is, you know, everything was done according to how it should be. ""It was just an unfortunate incident. ""I believe the farm house is like a type of grove or orange grove or citrus orchard and it took a little time to find him, yes. ""The union will be offering moral and financial support to our member's family and we'll be supporting them, as I said, morally, financially and any which way we can."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The National Farmers Federation has welcomed the Federal Opposition's plan to establish a new office to combat salinity as part of its environment policies announced yesterday. Federal Labor Leader Kim Beazley says he plans to establish a national strategy to combat salinity and has accused the Federal Government of not making it a high priority. But the Government says the issue will be discussed at the next meeting of a ministerial taskforce on salinty. The Farmers Federation says it is in their interest to see a long term bi-partisan approach to the problem which it describes as one of the nation's most serious environmental issues. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Stolen credit card numbers are being used to trap computer hardware suppliers in Australia. The international scam involves the use of fraudulently-obtained credit card details to buy computers over the phone. Police are asking suppliers to report any orders they get from MicroTouch Systems Limited. It is alleged the company orders hardware using the stolen credit card details. Telephone calls and deliveries to the company's virtual office in Sydney are being re-directed to an address in Britain, where police are also investigating the matter. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" North Queensland Aboriginal activist Murrandoo Yanner has had another setback in his bid to get his job as an Aboriginal and Tores Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) Commissioner back. The Federal Court today ruled it did not have the jurisdiction to make a judgement in the matter. Mr Yanner was removed from the ATSIC Board after being convicted and sentenced to 18 months in jail on assault charges. The jail term was suspended. Outside the court, Mr Yanner's counsel, Angelo Vasta, said he will now take the matter to the High Court. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Fiji's deposed government is setting up office in the west of the main island. A meeting of coalition MPs in the west of the main island has vowed that the Chaudhry Government still exists, despite the George Speight coup and the abrogation of the constitution by the military regime. The coalition is to set up office in the Labour Party headquarters in Lautoka, Fiji's second largest city. It was the first official meeting since the hostages were released and focused on the breakdown of order in Fiji, creating a series of working committees to address the crisis. -----------------------------------"

" The United States Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, has taken charge of the Middle East peace talks at Camp David near Washington. She met separately with the Israelis and the Palestinians in a bid to bridge wide gaps still unresolved in the 10th day of the talks. Mrs Albright took over mediation when President Bill Clinton had to fly to Okinawa in Japan for a summit of industrialised nations. A State Department spokesman says Doctor Albright will try to bring both sides closer, so President Clinton would have something better to work on when he returns. --------------------------------"

" Japan says it is confident that today's meeting of the world's eight most powerful leaders will not be disrupted by protesters. Japan's Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori says he is determined to prevent a repeat of what he calls the ""confusion"" caused by demonstrations at last year's meeting of the World Trade Organisation in Seattle. The 20,000 police who have arrived on the island of Okinawa from all over Japan are stopping traffic at 30 sites and are ensuring that journalists stay in their compound, eight kilometres away from the leaders' meeting. Yesterday police watched on as 27,000 Okinawans held hands to create a human chain around a US airbase, staging what might be the first demonstration of the three-day summit. --------------------------------"

" A police officer has been shot dead in the central Queensland city of Rockhampton overnight. The officer was attending a domestic dispute at a home in the city when the incident occured. Rockhampton police headquarters says the policeman, aged 33, had responded to a disturbance at a house at Alton Downs, on the city's north-western outskirts at around 9:20pm. When the senior constable neared the house, he was shot and killed. A stand-off with a male occupant of the house continued throughout the night until police talked the man out of the house at around 5.00am. Police spokesman Eric Meyer says the officer was shot when he tried to approach the house. ""As police actually apporoached the home he was killed,"" he said. ""He was a 33-year-old married Senior Constable and at the moment his next of kin are being notified of his death. ""A man came out of that house and his currently speaking with police in Rockhampton."" -----------------------------------"

" Recommendations to reduce Australia's personal debt levels will be the subject of a conference in Perth today. The measures include a ban on unsolicited mail offering credit cards and stricter standards for credit advertising. The New South Wales Fair Trading Minister, John Watkins, is asking his counterparts around Australia to support the plan. He says Australians presently owe about $69 billion in personal household debt, including $13 billion on credit cards. The issue will be discussed at today's annual conference of the Ministerial Council on Consumer Affairs in Perth. ---------------------------------"

" The Federal Government says it wants to hear from the private sector about increasing private investment in major infrastructure projects. The Transport Minister, John Anderson, and the Industry Minister, Nick Minchin, are convening a round table meeting in Melbourne today with builders and financiers. The Government has flagged major infrastructure announcements in the lead-up to the next federal election. Mr Anderson says private groups are involved in building roads, airports and railways, and private involvement needs to be maximised. ""It's time that we heard from them as to where they think the opportunities are in the future and what they think we can do to more effectively drive infrastructure expenditure,"" he said. ""We live in an age where with all the demands on the public purse, taxpayers...can't meet all of the expectations that the community now has in terms of infrastructure and future needs, particularly in the area of transport."" -------------------------------"

" Former South African cricket captain Hansie Cronje has cancelled a planned trip to London because of fears he would be arrested. Cronje was concerned he may be detained and forced to face match fixing charges in India. The former Proteas captain was advised by his lawyer not to travel to London. Cronje had planned to go to London to meet with publicity agent Max Clifford. Mr Clifford says any legal confusion must be clarified, because he says the world's media wants to talk to Hansie Cronje. Cronje was sacked from the South African cricket team in April, when he admitted being dishonest about his dealings with bookmakers. -----------------------------"

" Stock and bond prices have jumped ahead in the United States, following a keenly awaited testimony from the head of the Federal Reserve head, Alan Greenspan. Dr Greenspan has told a Senate Banking Committee that moderating spending suggests demand might be moving back into line with the US economy's potential. And the reason given is what Dr Greenspan is describing as America's ""impressive productivity growth"". The comments have been tempered to some degree by the warning that it is ""much too soon to conclude that [inflationary] concerns are behind [the US]"", he said. But on the markets, investors see a reduced risk of greatly higher official interest rates. At the same, computer giant IBM has issued an upbeat forecast on its second quarter earnings. On the New York Stock Exchange, the Dow Jones industrial average has climbed 148 points in the latest session to 10,844, a gain of 1.4 per cent. The high-tech Nasdaq composite index is up 3.2 per cent, jumping 129 points to 4,185. The US bond market has rallied strongly after the Greenspan comments. The firmer prices have pushed down the yield on 30-year Treasury paper to 5.81 per cent, which is a drop of more than 10 points. On the British sharemarket, summer trading patterns have prevailed with a muted rise overall, despite a strong banking sector and the early gains on Wall Street. London's FT-100 index has edged up less than four points to 6,469. Yesterday in Asia, prices were generally lower on the main regional equity markets as investors awaited the Greenspan address in Washington. The Japanese market was closed for a public holiday. Trade on the Australian market saw gains by banking stocks and News Corporation nullified by losses for Telstra and Rio Tinto. The All Ordinaries index was up less than one point to 3,259. This morning, the Share Price Index contract was up 19 points on yesterday's day settlement at 3,345. The 10-year bond contract is up 14 points at 93.87, with the implied yield easing to 6.13 per cent. The Australian dollar has popped back above 58 US cents, and was trading at around 58.28 this morning, up more than 0.5 cent on yesterday's local close. On the cross-rates, it is at 0.6276 euros, 62.76 Japanese yen, 38.57 pence sterling, and against the New Zealand dollar, it is at 1.261. The gold price is at $US280.25 an ounce, and West Texas crude oil is at $US30 a barrel. ----------------------------------"

" Ernie Els is leading the British Open after the opening round at St Andrews in Scotland overnight. He is six-under-par, one stroke ahead of Americans Tiger Woods and Steve Flesch. Els finished with two bogeys against eight birdies, while Woods completed a bogey-free round. Last week, Els won the Loch Lomond tournament with a six-under-66. ""I feel like my game's coming round,"" Els said. He covered both outward and homeward nines in three-under-33. ""I've worked pretty hard, I've worked on my mental attitude almost more than my swing,"" he said. ""I needed to believe in my own abilities."" Woods started the game by parring his first eight holes, before unleashing a burst of five birdies on the back nine, which led to his 67. ""I knew if I could drive the ball well I would give myself some chances,"" Woods said. Left-handed Coollum Classic champion Nick O'Hern was the best- placed of the 10 Australians in the field. He says he is happy with his three-under-69, despite injuring his right wrist on Monday. Jarrod Moseley and Lucas Parsons had a bogey-free two-under-70, followed two shots behind by compatriots Robert Allenby and Craig Parry. Australian youth Adam Scott, playing in his first major after turning professional only four weeks ago, had an undulating round of even par 70, spoiled by a double bogey six at the 17th hole."

" Federal Attorney-General Daryl Williams has warned countries attending the Sydney Olympics that they will seriously breach Australian law if their security personnel bring in their own weapons. Mr Williams says no foreign personnel will be permitted to carry their own weapons or acquire firearms once they are in Australia. He says Australians want to accept responsibility for the protection of athletes and officials and the New South Wales police have the main task of doing so. Mr Williams says there is a role for foreign security personnel at the Games, but it is not to protect VIPs and athletes. ""It would be a serious breach for any government to smuggle weapons in and Israel would be in no different situation to any other country,"" he said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Foreign Minister Alexander Downer says Australia has nothing to fear when the United Nations today examines Australia's human rights record at a special session in Geneva. The UN Human Rights Committee has asked the Australian Government to address concerns about the treatment of indigenous Australians, including issues like deaths in custody, the Stolen Generations and mandatory sentencing. But Mr Downer says the hearing is unlikely to change international opinion of Australia. ""I think the international community knows only too well that in this country that we have a government that is working very hard to try and improve opportunities for indigenous people,"" he said. ""We don't have institutionalised apartheid, we don't have a government that is ignoring the needs to improve education, and health opportunities for indigenous people."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Taxation Office (ATO) is warning businesses it is in a better position to identify tax dodging now the new tax system is in force. New products and an ATO media campaign will soon be introduced to try to help firms cope with the first quarterly business activity statement, due in November. On the compliance side, Tax Commissioner Michael Carmody says the statement and the register of Australian business numbers provide a rich new source of intelligence on potential tax fraud. He says over time the ATO's goods and services tax focus will shift from helping business to a concerted crackdown on non-compliance and the black economy. ""We'll get a range of information from the business activities statement about current trading activity, industry norms, factors that we'll be able to compare, to ensure that people are disclosing the right amount of their income,"" he said. ""Plus we will have very extensive field operations that will progressively move from assisting business into broader compliance activities right around the country."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" People out of work for a year or longer have benefitted from the fall in the national unemployment rate. The number of long-term unemployed people fell by more than 11,000 in June. Just under 28 per cent of the total number of unemployed now belong to the long-term unemployed category. The figures prove the long-term unemployed have been picked up in the strong employment growth which helped reduce the unemployment rate for June to a 10-year low of 6.6 per cent. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Northern Territory's Labor Member for Nhulunbuy, Syd Stirling, says the former Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) chair, Gatjil Djerrkura, would have to overcome widespread mistrust of the Country Liberal Party (CLP) to win the seat. Chief Minister Denis Burke has asked Mr Djerrkura to seek CLP preselection for the seat and Mr Djerrkura says it is an option. Mr Stirling said he was disappointed Mr Djerrkura would consider standing for the CLP, with its support for mandatory sentencing and changing the Land Rights Act. ""These are things that Labor stands to protect Aboriginal people on and I think those issues are very close to Aboriginal people,"" he said. ""They respect the efforts I've made for them over the years and I would expect to retain that level of support."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Retail chain Harvey Norman's sales figures have shown a pre-goods and services tax spending surge by Australian consumers. While the past year has been strong as a whole, there was a stunning jump in sales for the month of June. Harvey Norman trades nationally and in New Zealand, specialising in electrical goods, computers and furniture. Over the year to June 30, it had a turnover of a just under $2.5 billion, up 27 per cent on the previous financial year. Even allowing for new stores, and comparing on a ""like for like"" basis, sales are up 22 per cent. The most impressive figure was registered in the final month, with sales in June leaping by more than 74 per cent. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Australian Olympic Committee is lodging an appeal in the Federal Court against a Tax Office ruling which classifies grants to Olympic athletes as taxable income. The committee has highlighted the case of Joanna Stone, a javelin thrower, who says the ruling will affect the majority of Australian athletes at the Sydney Games. From this month, grants received on a regular basis become taxable. Stone says the majority of grants are small, she receives $10,000a year. ""It looks like we'll be appealing the ruling and taking it to the appeals tribunal and, using me as a bit of a test case, I think for the ATO and for all athletes where this ruling really stands with us all,"" she said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A central Queensland man is planning to cross three states in a homemade wagon to raise money for the Royal Flying Doctor Service. Charles Rayner, from Gracemere, will leave central Queensland in early September, and hopes to arrive in Ceduna in South Australia about 12 months later. Mr Rayner says he will be travelling with his two Clydesdale horses and his dog Minnie, and hopes he may get some other travelling companions as well. ""At this stage, I think my nephew Joel Parsons will be travelling most of the way with me and there's two or three people that are interested in doing it for a couple of weeks and that sort of thing, both ends of the trip,"" he said. ""You've sort of got to have someone with you in case you trip and break a leg or something. ""I've always wanted to do the trip. Clydesdales have been in our family for a lot of years and I always wanted to do a trip like this. ""And I had 20 odd years on the Nullabor in South Australia and had a fair bit to do with the Royal Flying Doctor Service over there and I thought it was a good way to, seeing as I was doing the trip anyway, raise some money for the doctors."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Middle East peace talks in the United States have continued past yesterday's original deadline, but there is no sign of a breakthrough in sight. Since US President Bill Clinton decided to postpone his trip to Japan for a G8 meeting, he has held bilateral talks with Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat. However, representatives of both sides are now accusing one another of negotiating in bad faith. Mr Barak has written a letter to President Clinton in which he reportedly predicts a missed opportunity for peace that could have tragic consequences unless the Palestinians change their position at the last minute. A key stumbling block is the status of Jerusalem, which both sides claim as a national capital. The White House is not ruling out a futher extension of time, but Mr Clinton's spokesman says he expects to leave Camp David this afternoon. --------------------------------"

" Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee has joined Prime Minister John Howard in calling for strong measures to calm the crisis in Fiji. An Indian Foreign Ministry spokesman says Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, in a telephone call to Mr Howard, relayed his deep concern over the possibility of civil war in Fiji. Mr Vajpayee says strong action must be taken to ensure effective progress in restoring democracy. The crisis in Fiji emerged as a key point of concern in talks between the two leaders during Mr Howard's two-day visit to Delhi last week. They had agreed to stay in touch over developments in Fiji, where more than 40 per cent of the population are ethnic Indians. ------------------------------"

" Australia's human rights record will be examined again when the United Nations Human Rights Committee meets in Geneva later today. The committee will be asking the Australian Government to answer questions about the treatment of indigenous Australians. Aboriginal groups and other non-governmental organisations have given the committee submissions questioning Australia's adherence to the conditions of the covenant. The Australian Government will be asked to address concerns about the treatment of indigenous Australians, including issues such as deaths in custody, the Stolen Generations and mandatory sentencing. The committee is believed to be particularly concerned about the recent mandatory sentencing deal between the Federal Government and the Northern Territory. A number of Aboriginal leaders are in Geneva for the hearing, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission chairman Geoff Clark and the Aboriginal Social Justice Commissioner Bill Jones. The appearance is part of the periodic reporting required by all signatories to the covenant on political and civil rights. ---------------------------------"

" Britain has blamed Irish republicans opposed to the peace process, for a rash of bomb alerts that gridlocked parts of London and cast a shadow over a birthday pageant for the Queen Mother. Anonymous callers who alerted the police to the bomb threat, used the same code that was used in another tip-off earlier this month, relating to a bomb planted on a railway line in Northern Ireland. On that occasion, police suspected the Irish Republican Army (IRA) splinter group, the Real IRA, of planting the device. Police destroyed one bomb planted near a railway line in west London, and scrambled to check into alerts relating to other tip-offs. ------------------------------"

" There is a suggestion that Saudi Arabia is quietly ramping up its crude oil output, despite the Organisation for Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) now scrapping plans to boost production by an extra 500,000 barrels. However, confusion remains with the OPEC president saying he has received assurances from Saudi Arabia they will not act unilaterally. Nonetheless, world prices for crude have eased back overnight, with West Texas crude easing to $US31.15 a barrel. On New York equity markets, it has been another wobbly night for high-tech stocks. Investors seem to be locking in profits after the recent strong run by the sector. The Nasdaq composite index has dropped 122 points, or 2.9 per cent, following yesterday's 2.3 per cent slide. Meanwhile, on Wall Street investors are awaiting a speech tonight by the head of the Federal Reserve, Alan Greenspan, on the economy and monetary policy. The Dow Jones industrial average has ended the latest session 44 points down at 10,696, and the US bond market is fractionally weaker. The softer prices have pushed up the yield on 30-year Treasury paper to 5.91 per cent. On the British sharemarket, it has been mildly positive night overall. London's FT-100 index has risen 15 points to close at 6,465. Yesterday in Japan, there was a pause in the recent market slide, as Tokyo's Nikkei index inched back up 39 points to 16,084. However, the Australian market put in another lacklustre performance, with the All Ordinaries index falling 1.5 points to finish at 3,259. At 7.00am (AEST), the Share Price Index contract was down 13 points on yesterday's day settlement at 3,328. The 10-year bond contract is down two points at 93.71, with the implied yield rising to 6.29 per cent. On world currency markets, the Australian dollar has slumped to a seven-week low, bottoming at 27.50 US cents. Early this morning it was trading slightly above that at around 57.68 US cents, down 0.6 cents on yesterday's local close. On the cross-rates, it is at 0.6234 euros, 62.47 Japanese yen, 38.50 pence sterling, and 1.266 against the New Zealand dollar. The gold price is at $US 279.15 an ounce. ------------------------------"

" A leading pay television provider has confirmed it is charging residents in rural Queensland more than $27,000 to connect the service to their homes. Residents in the northern inland Queensland town of Richmond have condemned the fee as a social injustice, claiming people in Townsville can get pay TV installed for about $10. But Austar's Head of Corporate Affairs, Bruce Mayor, says service delivery costs more in the bush because of a lack of satellite dishes, and he is asking residents to be patient while the company expands its technology. ""There'll be a high performance beam that covers pretty much all of the country and everybody will be able to receive the service at a price that is reasonable, like $100 for connection or if there's a special on less than that,"" he said. ""So unfortunately on that view if you're patient then these costs will come down. ""You can improve communication services not just the service we provide...by banding together and buying the base infrastructure,"" he said. ""So if through Government grants, if you as a community could actually buy the very expensive satellite dish, it's then possible to distribute pay TV and Internet services locally once you've got that key infrastructure in place."" --------------------------------"

" The New South Wales Chamber of Commerce says its latest quarterly survey shows business confidence in New South Wales has essentially collapsed. It says the June quarter result is the lowest level of business confidence recorded since the survey was first conducted four years ago. Chamber of Commerce spokesperson Katey Lahey says the results reflect a drop in sales and revenue growth. Ms Lahey says the next test for the sector will be in October. ""The next quarter's figures are going to be very important,"" she said. ""Those first GST returns are due then and businesses will have to hand over all that GST they've collected. ""We just hope that they've got that already put aside in the bank."" --------------------------------"

" World number one Tiger Woods will go into tonight's opening round of the British Open at St Andrews as the shortest priced favourite in the history of the tournament. Victory by Woods would make him the youngest player at the age of 24, to win golf's four major tournaments. The American says he is going into the Open with confidence. ""When you go out there and you play, you have an opportunity to win,"" he said. ""Now I don't think anyone ever takes the attitude you're determined to win or lose. You're going to give it everything you have."""

" Fiji says it faces potential disaster and has called for Australian patience and understanding. Fiji's nominated Foreign Minister says Fiji needs Australia's help, not sanctions. Foreign Minister Kalapate Tavolo wants to stress to Australia the magnitude of Fiji's problems and argues against sanctions. ""It will be disastrous for Fiji and we know the sanctions always impact on the innocent people, the wrong people, the people who are not involved in the politics of the game,"" he said."

" Foreign Affairs Minister Alexander Downer has appealed to the Fijian President not to cave into pressure from coup leader George Speight. Fiji has moved towards another Government crisis with the swearing in of the new Cabinet put on indefinite hold. The Prime Minister says it is because President Ratu Josefa Iloilo is unwell. But coup leader George Speight says it is because the President accepts his complaint that the cabinet does not have enough Speight supporters. Mr Downer says the current leaders should not be frightened to stand up to Mr Speight. ""At the very least, the President, the Great Council of Chiefs and the military must not cave in to the squealings today of Mr Speight. ""If the interim Government is changed in order to accomodate the demands of a gunman, Mr Speight, then still greater a tragedy will fall upon Fiji,"" he said."

" The Australian Government is being urged to reconsider its aid program to Cambodia. Three backpackers, including Australian David Wilson, were murdered by the Khmer Rouge in 1994 and former commander Chhouk Rin was acquitted of involvement, stunning the Wilson family. Their lawyer, Bill Wodrow, speaking from the Phnom Penh, says the entire court proceedings were a joke. But he claims that even more alarmingly, Australian aid money has been used by Chhouk Rin in his defence. ""Australian taxpayers money was given by our Government, $1 million, to a Cambodian Aid Action centre, here, in the same province and the beneficiary of the money, most of the money, is this man, Chhuok Rin. ""I'd be recommending that they don't proceed any further with it,"" he said."

" More tax cuts could be possible with one of Australia's leading economists saying today that tax relief is a critical part of continued economic growth. Speaking at a business seminar in Brisbane, Macquarie bank chief economist Bill Shields says recent personal and capital gains tax cuts could lift consumer spending and keep gross domestic product (GDP) growth at 4 per cent. Mr Shields says further tax cuts may well be on the Federal Government's agenda leading up to the next election. ""We think the forecasts in the past budget are fairly robust, if you like, to changing economic circumstances and we think those surpluses will come true. ""Therefore, the Government leading up to the next election has some leeway to deliver additional tax cuts. ""Either, if they wish, for political reasons or if, as we said before, they want to maintain or stimulate growth further,"" he said."

" Australian oil and gas company Petroz has secured its participation in the massive Bayu-Undan gas project in the Timor Sea. Fletcher Challenge Energy has acquired a substantial shareholding in Petroz enabling the company to not only invest in Bayu-Undan but also ongoing exploration programs in the Timor Sea and elsewhere over the next few years. Petroz's managing director Rod Brown says it is good news for shareholders. ""Now that our funding has been secured ... [it] will lend itself to securing the debt funding for the project. ""That means that we are fully participating in the Bayu-Undan project and that we would expect to see value being added progressively through the development phase. ""Once production starts in Bayu-Undan, knowing that it will have a 20-plus year life, it will generate a lot of cash and should have the impact of increasing shareholder value,"" he said."

" The Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) plans to devote more resources to studying cyberspace corruption. Commissioner Irene Moss has told the National Press Club not enough attention has been given to issues such as information security. She says traditional corruption investigation methods, such as following paper trails, are becoming redundant. ""Paper is the investigator's life blood,"" Ms Moss said. ""You can actually tell a whole lot of things from paper, I mean sometimes when paper comes in we even say things like well let's dust for fingerprints, you can't do that anymore with computers."""

" Olympic officials have been embarrassed by today's premature revealing of the Olympic cauldron at Stadium Australia. The cauldron could be seen standing more than three metres above the northern grandstand today, as workmen continued preparations for the torch's arrival in September. More than 100 people saw the black structure on display for more than an hour before the mistake was picked up. Workmen then covered the torch, before lowering it mechanically. Among those who saw the structure were members of the media who had gathered for a National Rugby League media conference, two junior rugby league teams, and people on a guided tour of the stadium."

" Australian welterweight boxing champion, Julian Holland, from Queensland's Gold Coast, says he would fight newcomer Anthony Mundine anytime, despite conceding 10 kilograms in weight. Holland believes Mundine's switch to professional boxing without serving an apprenticeship has devalued the efforts of professional boxers struggling to gain recognition. Holland says the former St George Illawarra footballer's recent debut fight was overrated. ""It's not a matter of not being impressed,"" he said. ""I thought he did a great job for his first fight but for the publicity and the actual payday that he did get for that I feel that it's all over the top. ""I think that we're the sort of pros that have been working hard at our sport to try and get there and he just comes straight in and goes straight to the top shelf basically."""

" The Federal Opposition leader, Kim Beazley, says the battle lines on which the next election will be fought are emerging as the ""Knowledge Nation"", Medicare, the goods and services tax (GST), and industrial relations. Addressing the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) national conference in Newcastle, Mr Beazley said he was promising reform on all four issues. Mr Beazley began his address by promising not to budge an inch on his policy of rolling back the GST, despite recent opinion polls showing stronger support for the new tax. He told union delegates his ""Knowledge Nation"" policy was not just about universities and people in lab coats, but would embrace all workers and encourage innovation in the manufacturing sector. Earlier in the week the AMWU conference called on the ALP to make a commitment on fair trade to fix tariffs at current levels of around 5 per cent. However, Mr Beazley refused to make the commitment, saying instead Australia needed to look at increasing its access into overseas markets, ensuring more investment in business research and development. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Rebel leader George Speight says no new government will be sworn in until he endorses the line-up. Mr Speight says he forced the President to cancel this morning's ceremony because he was not in favour of the ministerial line-up announced yesterday. He told Sky News he plans to meet the Prime Minister, Laisenia Qarase, soon. ""We are looking for a solution that's good for our country but more particularly that's good for our Fijian people,"" he said. ""On the back of the events of May 19, he agreed, and we were supposed to have begun those discussions yesterday afternoon."" Mr Speight says the swearing-in will go ahead when they have had those discussions, which should take place sometime this week. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A key pointer to the future health of the Australian economy remains subdued. The leading index compiled by Westpac and the Melbourne Institute is signalling an economic slowdown at the end of the year. The leading index for May is showing an annualised growth rate of 3.2 per cent, down from the April measure and well below the trend rate of 3.8 per cent. Westpac's general manager of economics, Bill Evans, says it is a good indicator of how the economy might be travelling six to nine months out. He says the result suggests official interest rates should remain on hold. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Government has accused the Labor Party of releasing misleading figures from a survey of post-goods and services tax prices. The Opposition has conducted its own survey of prices, based on items monitored in 20 electorates. Its press release highlighted goods whose prices rose by significantly more than the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) had forecast. But the Government says Labor failed to release an even greater number of goods whose prices have risen by less than the ACCC predictions. The Shadow Finance Minister, Lindsay Tanner, acknowledges prices have come in on both sides of the ACCC forecast range. ""The survey also shows that there are areas where the prices have undershot as well,"" he said. ""But we're not saying there's any average conclusion you can draw from it, because it's only 20 electorates and it's a limited basket of goods. ""What we're saying is that this shows there are some problems out there that they really need to crack down on and stop patting themselves on the back, that it's all been plain sailing."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The National Crime Authority (NCA) and state police say their ability to deal with organised crime is being hampered by differing laws across the country. Law enforcement agencies from all states have gathered in Melbourne for a two-day seminar to exchange ideas and methods for tackling the problem. The NCA's regional director, Nigel Hadgkiss, says uniform legislation to deal with organised crime would improve the arrest and conviction rate. ""Every time criminals cross borders, be it state or international borders, there are jurisdictional problems,"" he said. ""Each jurisdiction...they have different laws, they have different powers entrusted to police organisations. ""Therefore the movement of criminals across those borders is a huge impediment."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australia is to protest to Cambodia over the release of a former Khmer Rouge commander charged with the murder of three Western backpackers amid outrage over the court verdict. Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer said he had also sought clarification of the decision to acquit Chhouk Rin of the kidnap and murder of Australian David Wilson, 29, Briton Mark Slater, 26, and Frenchman Jean-Michel Braquet, 27. Chhouk Rin was accused of leading a gang that seized the three young men from a coastal-bound train after halting it with a bomb attack that killed 10 Cambodians in July, 1994. The backpackers were held hostage for four months then brutally beaten to death when an attempt to pay a ransom for them was botched. Families of the men said they were shocked and angered by the verdict, handed down by a court in Phnom Penh on Tuesday, and will appeal against it. Mr Downer said he was deeply concerned about the verdit, adding: ""I have instructed our embassy in Phnom Penh to make the highest-level representations to the Cambodian authorities about the matter."

" ""I have consistently stressed to the Cambodian Government the importance of bringing to justice all of those implicated in the abduction and murder of David Wilson and his British and French colleagues. ""We will look closely at the details of the judgment as it contains a number of technical legal issues which need careful consideration,"" Mr Downer said. The verdict was based on legislation outlawing the brutal Marxist movement but indemnifying cadres who turned themselves in during an amnesty period of all crimes committed while members of it. The judge acquitted him after refusing to rule on his guilt or innocence, arguing he had immunity from prosecution. Chhouk Rin, who was rewarded for turning himself in by being appointed a general in the Cambodian army, smiled and bowed to the court officials in a traditional gesture of thanks after the decision was read out. The Wilson family's lawyer, Bill Woodrow, said an appeal will be lodged against the court proceedings which he decribed as a sham. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Sydney to Hobart race inquest has heard that the race director refused a request from rescue authorities in Canberra to call off the disastrous 1998 race. The race director decided it was too late to call off the event because the worst of the conditions were over. The inquest into the six deaths during the 1998 race is hearing evidence from Anthony Hughes, a senior officer with the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA) in Canberra, based during the race at the Tasmanian Yacht Club's operations centre. He told the inquest the centre was not geared up to handle the flood of distress calls that were heard at the height of the Bass Strait storm at 1:00am AEST on December 28. He says AMSA's rescue coordination centre in Canberra recommended calling off the race as resources were stretched to breaking point. Mr Hughes discussed the point with race director Phil Thompson but he decided since the storm was abaiting there was no point in calling off the race. Mr Hughes said no thought was given earlier that evening to abandoning the race. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Moves are underway to establish one of the largest wildlife corridors in Australia. The Federal Government is providing $100,000 to help buy 31 hectares of land near Mission Beach in far north Queensland as part of a wildlife corridor to protect the cassowary. Plans are to eventually set aside a 250 kilometre stretch of land along the coast to protect the endangered bird. Chairman of the Cassowary Advisory Group, George Mansford, says it is time for action. ""We talk about the cassowary and other wildlife and up 'til now a lot of this has just been bandaid,"" he said. ""Well, we're getting a bit weary of the bandaid, we're getting a bit weary of asking the Government continually for funds and we believe through the Foundation which has just been launched with a group of dedicated businessmen that we intend to lead the way."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" All of Fiji's new Cabinet may not take office today because rebel leader George Speight's group says the line-up is unrepresentative. Mr Speight has attacked the new Cabinet saying it is a betrayal of his cause. He says the announced Cabinet list is devious and his supporters did not agree to join. ""Some smart alec in government is trying to pull a fast one, but that list is definitely not acceptable to us,"" he said. Mr Speight says only four people aligned to his movement have been named in the 32 member ministry. The Cabinet is to be sworn in later this morning, but some of those named are threatening not to attend. Among those saying they will boycott the meeting are those named as assistant ministers for health and for regional development. Radio Fiji reports that only 90 per cent of the Cabinet line-up may be sworn in. Diplomatically, a withdrawal of ambassadors in underway. Britain is following the lead of Australia and New Zealand and is recalling its High Commissioner. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Palestinian officials say the Middle East peace summit near Washington has reached a crisis point. They say Israel's insistence on undivided sovereignty of Jerusalem is the key stumbling block in the eight-day-old meeting. Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat had been preparing to report the summit's failure to United Nations secretary-general Kofi Annan when American President Bill Clinton asked to see him. President Clinton's meeting with Mr Arafat had earlier been reported by a White House spokesman. Meanwhile, Uzi Landau, a leading member of the opposition Likud Party in Israel, is in the United States protesting against the negotiations. He says he is at Camp David to remind Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak of the commitments he made to the Israeli public before the elections. ""I feel the moral imperative to remind him that Jerusalem is not for negotiation,"" Mr Landau said. Mr Barak said during the election campaign that brought him to power last year, Jerusalem was a red line and the city must remain Israel's capital forever, undivided under Israeli sovereignty. ""Barak, I urge you to build a consensus before you make territorial concessions that endanger the security of Israel and Jerusalem, our eternal capital,"" Mr Landau said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The father of murdered Australian backpacker David Wilson will appeal against the Cambodian court's decision to acquit the former Khmer Rouge commander accused of involvement in his son's death. Family members of the three slain backpackers reacted with shock and anger to the release of the former commander on technical grounds. Former rebel commander Chhouk Rin faced court charged with leading the ambush on the train in which the three backpackers were seized in 1994. But the judge acquitted him after refusing to rule on his guilt or innocence, arguing he had immunity from prosecution. His decision was based on automatic amnesty offered to all Khmer Rouge rebels who defected to the Cambodian Government in a six month time zone laid down in the year the backpackers were murdered. The court's decision produced an angry response from the lawyers for the Wilson family. Barrister William Rodway described the decision as a travesty of justice and says the Wilson family will lodge an appeal. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Indonesian military has admitted that some of its troops have taken sides in the long-running fight between Christians and Muslims in the eastern Maluku islands. Television footage released on Monday clearly showed Indonesian troops fighting alongside Muslim militants. Indonesian armed forces spokesman Rear Air Marshall Gracio Orcodo says some soldiers have become emotionally involved in the ongoing religious war in the Malukus. He says it is not military policy to favour one side or the other in the fighting, which has dragged on for 18 months. In footage shot over the weekend by Associated Press television news, Indonesian soliders were seen providing covering fire for Muslim fighters attacking a Christian neighbourhood. Many of the militants were armed with homemade weapons and army issue assault rifles, which in Indonesia are only available to members of the security forces. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" Farmers in Zimbabwe have staged a demonstration, following renewed farm invasions by war veterans. The farmers say they have had enough and are now demanding police protection. Farm owners and their workers in one district north of Harare have gone on strike. Spokesman Dave Jenkins says the protest follows police inaction. He claims police have stood still while farmers and their families have been threatened and intimidated by war veterans, saying the situation has now become untenable. The tension is increasing between farmers, war veterans and the Government. Yesterday, new members of Zimbabwe's Parliament were sworn in. Despite the election of a record number of opposition candidates, the Parliament remains under the control of President Robert Mugabe. Mr Mugabe is promising to speed up the official seizure of white- owned farms. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Solomon Islands Government is due to announce a draft ceasefire proposal today. The Government hopes the ceasefire agreement will be accepted by rival militias fighting a 19-month ethnic conflict. The Solomon Islands Cabinet has been working on the draft agreement for several days. It is to be the basis of negotiations between the Isatabu and Malaitan forces, which the Government is hoping can begin this week. If a ceasefire can be implemented, the Government will have a chance to restore its police force, which was effectively neutralised when the Malaita Eagle Force took over the capital, Honiara, six weeks ago. Crime has risen dramatically in Honiara over the past week and much it is allegedly being committed by members of the Malaita Eagle Force. Meanwhile, the Government has expressed sorrow to the Papua New Guinean Government over the death of a PNG citizen in Honiara. The man was killed in fighting between rival militias involved in the conflict. Peter Tani, from Goroka in the PNG eastern highlands, was shot at the weekend in fighting between Isatabu and Malaitan Forces west of Honiara. The Malaita Eagle Force says Mr Tani was shooting at their troops before he was killed. But the PNG High Commission says he was an innocent victim of the war. And a group of Solomon Islanders studying in PNG have been evacuated to Port Moresby amid fears of reprisals. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Petrol supplies could be affected as oil industry workers begin industrial action as part of enterprise bargaining talks. Esso workers in Victoria say they will not repair faulty equipment after Saturday. Gas supplies are not involved, and Esso says refineries have considerable oil reserves. It is offering 400 oil workers a 3.5 per cent pay rise in each of the next three years, but Australian Manufacturers and Workers Union Victorian organiser Terry Lee says Esso can afford to pay more. ""There have been a number of outcomes recently in manufacturing of a 15 per cent package,"" he said. ""Tradition has it that the oil industry has the capacity to pay, so therefore 15 per cent is not over the top in terms of a wages claim. Esso spokesman Ron Webb says the company's offer is generous, and there is little chance of a further pay offer. The company also wants guarantees against disruptive industrial action. ""As different changes occur that allow us to improve, we want to be able to do that progressively rather than having to wait until every time there's an enterprise bargaining agreement,"" Mr Webb said. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Two former top East German sporting officials have been found guilty of the secret doping of young Olympic athletes. Manfred Ewald was head of the East German Sports Confederation from 1963 until 1988 and Manfred Hoeppner was deputy director of the East German Sports Medicine Service. Both men have been found guilty of harming the health of young athletes with performance enhancing drugs. The drugs were administered under the communist regime without the athletes' knowledge, resulting in serious long-term damage to their health. Many girls stopped menstruating, developing deep voices and thick body hair. Some of them went on to suffer serious disorders of the liver, kidney and heart, and others developed cancer. Ewald denied the charges and refused to testify, but was given a 22-month suspended sentence. Hoeppner admitted his part in the doping program from the start of the trial and was given an 18-month suspended sentence."

" The Federal Government has unveiled a range of sanctions to be imposed immediately against Fiji. Australia's High Commissioner to Suva Susan Boyd will be temporarily recalled. Several defence ties will be cut, including the suspension of ship visits and the withdrawal of some officers. Australia will also review favourable garment import arrangements with Fiji when the current scheme expires. Fijian sporting teams will be banned and Australia will encourage Britain not to allow the Fijian rugby league team to play in the world cup. The Foreign Affairs Minister, Alexander Downer, says a range of aid projects will also be cancelled."

" ""This represents a cut in the bilateral aid program of around 30 per cent and almost halves the number of our aid activities in Fiji from 19 to 10,"" he said. ""Aid personnel will be reduced from more than 40 to about 25. ""The emphasis henceforth will be humanitarian rather than non-humanitarian projects."" The ban on Fijian sporting teams does not affect the Sydney Olympic Games. Mr Downer says the Government will honour its general obligation to SOCOG to allow the entry of Fijian athletes and officials for the Games."

" Fiji has a new Government with only a handful of George Speight nominees in the Cabinet. Mr Speight's nomination for Prime Minister has been overlooked. Instead, the new President, Ratu Josefa Iloilo, has retained Laisenia Qarase, who was installed as Prime Minister by the military. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Labor Party's national president, Barry Jones, has ruled himself out of contention as a candidate for re-election to the position. Mr Jones' decision follows a deal between the ALP's left and right factions over the make-up of the national executive. Under the deal, Mr Jones and the left faction had agreed not to contest the presidency in return for the right agreeing not to pursue an outright majority on the executive committee. Mr Jones says he feels the power-sharing arrangement is an achievement and his candidacy is no longer required. His withdrawal means the right faction's candidate, Greg Sword, is likely to take the presidency unopposed at the ALP's Hobart conference later this month. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Telstra is about to lose its grip on one of the biggest non-government telecommunications accounts in Australia. The Commonwealth Bank is on the verge of appointing Telecom New Zealand as its telecommunications gatekeeper. The Commonwealth Bank is in final negotiations with Telecom New Zealand on what the bank's technology head, Russell Scrimshaw, describes as a ""very significant"" deal. ""It's a contract that we expect to be in excess of $500 million over the next five years,"" he said. ""We are one of the largest telecommunications users in Australia."" Mr Scrimshaw says the decision reflects the current maturity of the local telecommunications market. ""Australia has now deregulated sufficiently that there is more than one provider who can guarantee to deliver all of the services that a big corporation requires,"" he said. The bank will still have relationships with other service providers, but they will be managed by Telecom New Zealand in a move the bank hopes will reduce its telecommunications costs by around 20 per cent. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Human Rights Commissioner, Chris Sidoti, has accused the Federal Government of condoning child abuse through its policies on refugees. Mr Sidoti said the long-term detention of children in remote detention camps was inexcuseable. He says the Government faces stern criticism when a United Nations body meets to consider refugee issues this week. ""The long-term detention of children has to be considered a form of child abuse, it's as simple as that,"" he said. ""There was a family at Port Hedland who were released in May after five-and-a-half years in detention. ""Now the older child was four when he arrived in Australia, the younger child was born about a year or 18 months later. There's nothing that justifies the detention of a four-year-old boy for five-and-a-half years."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A former Khmer Rouge commander accused of the kidnap and murder of three Western backpackers, including Australian David Wilson, has denied all the charges against him today as his trial opened in the Cambodian capital. Chhouk Rin smiled nervously as he was led into the Phnom Penh Municipal Court nearly six years after the deaths of Frenchman Jean-Michel Braquet, 27, Briton Mark Slater, 26, and 29-year-old Wilson. The court heard that he led a gang that bombed a coastal-bound train which the three Westerners were travelling on, killing 10 Cambodians aboard. The three young men were seized and held hostage for several weeks before they were killed and buried in shallow graves after a ransom payment was botched. Chhouk Rin, who defected from the murderous Khmer Rouge rebel group a year ago, addressed the tightly guarded court which was packed with the victims' families, diplomats and human rights observers."

" ""I did not participate because at that time I was very sick and under treatment. I absolutely deny it,"" he told the court. ""If I was there I would have to have been carried."" Security was extremely tight around the courtroom for the trial, which is expected to be wrapped up by the end of the day. Dozens of military police armed with automatic weapons stood on guard around the building. Prosecutor Yeth Chakriya said the charges against Chhouk Rin included murder, kidnapping, creation of an armed force, terrorism, robbery and damage to public property. ""After reviewing the case, we charge that on 26 July, 1994, Chhouk Rin led an armed force to ambush a train in Kampot province under the orders of Nuon Paet and caused 10 people to die and three to be injured,"" he said."

" ""He destroyed the locomotive, robbed the passengers and took three Western hostages. In August and September, the three hostages were killed."" Nuon Paet was last year jailed for life, becoming the most senior Khmer Rouge figure to have stood trial in Cambodia since the movement was ousted from power in 1979. Yeth Chakriya also said investigations were ongoing into a third figure linked with the murders, Sam Bith, who was the Khmer Rouge army chief for south-western Cambodia during the hostage drama. The most senior of the three accused, diplomats fear Sam Bith's status as an army general, which he won after his defecting from the Khmer Rouge, will protect him from charges. Outside the courtroom before the trial opened, the families of the Westerners who died said they hoped the hearing would shed some light on their sons' ordeal."

" ""What happened was awful, disgusting. We hope that we will get the truth,"" Jean-Claude Braquet said. He lamented the fact that it had taken six years to bring Chhouk Rin before the court, and the Government's kid-gloves treatment of him after his defection. ""I don't understand how Chhouk Rin could become a colonel in the army. Everyone knows he was the one responsible for the attack and the hostage-taking,"" he said. David Wilson's father Peter said one issue that had never been explained was the botched ransom demand. When the payment failed to come off, Cambodian forces bombarded Nuon Paet's Phnom Vour (Vine Mountain) base where the hostages were held, sealing the fate of the three young men. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Australian Medical Association (AMA) is urging people to be careful when using the Internet for medical purposes. The AMA has highlighted potential risks associated with self-diagnosis from health-related websites, without consulting a general practitioner. The problems include wrong self-diagnosis and incorrect administration of drugs. The AMA says the growth of the Internet has led to a surge in the number of websites offering diagnosis, drugs and alternative remedies, which are difficult to monitor. The association's Tasmanian branch is encouraging patients to discuss health concerns and any information obtained online with their doctor. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A former employee of the Sydney Organising Committee for the Olympic Games (SOCOG) claims she was paid less than her male colleagues and was promised a pay rise that was never delivered. Marketing manager Karen Webb is suing SOCOG in the New South Wales Industrial Commission after she was sacked in June. Ms Webb alleges other SOCOG employees heard of her dismissal via internal e-mail before she was called to the office of SOCOG'S deputy chief executive officer Michael Airs. She claimed Mr Airs warned her against going to the media, quoting Mr Airs in court documents saying ""this is unpleasant, but my best advice is for you to go into a hole. First reactions are not always in your interest"". Ms Webb claims that as well as being paid less than male staff at her level she was promised a $20,000 pay rise in late 1998 that never materialised. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Fiji will get a new president today as it prepares to face sanctions from Australia and New Zealand. Meanwhile, the rebel leader George Speight will lead mourners at a funeral in the parliament complex where he held political hostages for 56 days. Mr Speight faces an arrest warrant for failing to appear in court to answer a dangerous driving charge. The case is not covered by the immunity granted Mr Speight for seizing the parliament. The lack of a government means there has been no response from Suva to looming sanctions from Australia and New Zealand. The line-up of the new Cabinet is expected quickly after the Ratu Josefa Iloilo is sworn in as president by the chairman of the Great Council of Chiefs, Sitiveni Rabuka. The number of George Speight nominees in the Cabinet will be a key determinate of future sanctions. The rebels still occupying parliament will today conduct a funeral in the grounds of the complex for a 24-year-old supporter killed in a clash with the military two weeks ago. The grave is only a few metres from the parliament chamber. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The ATSIC commissioner for sport, Charles Perkins, has again promised large Aboriginal protests during the Olympics, following comments by athlete Cathy Freeman over the stolen generations. The Aboriginal sprinter told a London newspaper the Federal Government has been insensitive and she was angry about its denial there was a generation of stolen children. Mr Perkins says he is disappointed Freeman's comments did not move the Government into saying sorry. ""We've got a few big surprises now because of Howard's attitude towards Cathy Freeman and towards his attitude towards the stolen generations,"" he said. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Human Rights Commissioner, Chris Sidoti, has criticised the Federal Government for not providing social or financial support for a group of refugees released from the Woomera detention centre. Mr Sidoti says refugees should be given, at the very least, English language training, housing and employment assistance. He says there has been a progressive hardening of Government attitude towards refugees over the past 11 years. ""That applied under the former Labor government, it applies now under the Coalition Government and the withdrawal of support has to be seen in that context,"" he said. ""It started eleven years ago - a hardline government approach that gets harsher and harsher as the years go on. ""This is simply the latest step in a decade long process of hardening our hearts."" ------------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A fund to compensate people forced into slave labour under the Nazis has been formally signed in Berlin. A total of 10 billion marks ($A8 billion) has been set aside, financed equally by the German Government and more than 3,000 German companies. More than 12 million Jews and other people from countries in eastern Europe were forced to work for nothing in the mines and factories of German industry by the Nazis. The fund, established after considerable negotiation between the United States, German Government and German industry, will compensate those who are still alive. The German Foreign Minister, Josker Fischer, declared that the signing was an historic moment for Germany and, above all, a gesture of moral responsibility for the Nazi crimes. But the agreement has come too late for many, as it is estimated one in seven survivors have died in the past 13 months of negotiations. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Rwanda Government is conducting a census to determine how many people were killed during the central African nation's 1994 genocide. Investigators will interview family members of those who were murdered to determine just how many people died. Until now, the real death toll has been unknown, but unofficial estimates have ranged from 500,000 to one million victims. The killings occurred during just three months in 1994, with most of those murdered being members of Rwanda's minority Tutsi population, who were targeted by ethnic Hutu extremists. A 1,600 member team will travel across the country interviewing survivors and gathering information about those who lost their lives. A final report will be completed by October. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A new report has highlighted the high survival rate among premature babies born in Australia and New Zealand. The report by the Institute of Health and Welfare shows high risk newborn babies admitted to top-level intensive care units in the two countries have survival rate of more than 90 per cent. But Professor Graham Reynolds from the Canberra Hospital, says experts in neo-natal care are concerned at the higher rates of premature births among male babies. ""They have a higher rate of prematurity, they have a higher rate of problems arising out of prematurity, so in all respects across this group of individuals, they are very much the weaker sex,"" he said. ""(However) there's no real explanation as to why that is at the moment."" --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A memorial service for Sir Mark Oliphant will be held in Adelaide in the middle of next month. Sir Mark died in Canberra on Friday after a short illness at the age of 98. A world renowned nuclear physicist, Sir Mark was born in Adelaide in 1901 and studied at Adelaide and Cambridge Universities before working on the top-secret American ""Manhattan Project"" in a race against the Nazis to develop the atomic bomb. His post-war achievements included helping to create the Australian National University in Canberra, being granted a knighthood for his contribution to science in 1959 and his appointment as Governor of South Australia during the Dunstan era. The South Australian Protocol Office has confirmed that a memorial service will be held on August 18 at Bonython Hall. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The captain of the German swim team, Chris Carol-Bremer, has apologised for suggesting Australian swimmer Ian Thorpe used illegal drugs. Carol-Bremer sent a letter to Thorpe yesterday apologising for implying Thorpe's large hands and feet were the result of illegal use of a human growth hormone. Star swimmer Susie O'Neill has also apologised to Dutch swimmer Inge De Bruijn, for implying the European swimmer's seven world record swims this year were tainted by drug taking. O'Neill sent an email to De Bruijn, saying she should have known better when she remarked the Dutch swimmer's times were ""pretty suss""."

" New South Wales Premier Bob Carr has backed comments by athlete Cathy Freeman criticising the Federal Government over the Stolen Generations. In an interview with a London newspaper, Freeman referred to her own loss of extended family ties, and described the Government as insensitive. Mr Carr says she is entitled to say there should have been a Government apology to Aborigines. ""Cathy Freeman has been an inspirational figure for young Australians, especially young Australians of Aboriginal descent and she's entitled to say that, absolutely entitled to say that,"" he said. ""She's right, there should've been an apology from the Government, an eloquent, and given the nature of the Government, a conservative apology."""

" The Shadow Foreign Affairs Minister, Laurie Brereton, has called on the Howard Government to come clean on whether it would support US plans to create a missile defence shield. Mr Brereton says US Defence Secretary William Cohen has been open about what role he could see for Australia if the National Missile Defence system is given the go-ahead. But he says the Federal Government has been less forthcoming and Australians need to be told what the implications would be. ""Labor has great concerns about the whole concept of national missile defence development,"" he said. ""We, like many countries in the world, believe that it will undermine and abrogate the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABN) Treaty of 1972. ""It's the ABN Treaty that has been a keystone of nuclear non-proliferation for almost three decades."""

" In Fiji, George Speight supporters are digging a grave next to the country's Parliament chamber. The rebels say they will hold a funeral tomorrow for the 24-year-old supporter who was killed by army gunfire two weeks ago. Suva authorities have denied permission for the burial, but rebel spokesmen say the grave beside the Parliament will be a monument to the Fijian indigenous struggle. Mr Speight's rebels have handed back their weapons, but still retain control of the Parliament compound."

" Sydney police allegedly found videos on prison breakouts when they raided the home of a women who is charged with helping an inmate escape by helicopter from Silverwater Jail. A committal hearing for alleged prison escapee John Killick and his girfriend Lucy Dudko has begun in Sydney's Central Local Court. Killick and his Russian-born de facto face more than 12 charges each in relation to the alleged escape from Silverwater Jail in March last year. A statement of facts tendered to the court says Dudko pulled a gun on helicopter pilot Tim Joyce, while they were supposedly on a joy ride over the Homebush Olympic site. After Killick was picked up and the helicopter was abandoned at North Ryde, they allegedly hijacked a car and its driver during their getaway. The pair was eventually arrested at a Sydney caravan park six weeks later. The statement says that while searching Ms Dudko's flat, police found three videos with the titles ""Fled"", ""Hostage"" and ""Breakout"". The latter apparently features an escape from a prison by helicopter."

" The Australian Taxation Office (ATO) has denied that the practice of mixing methanol with petrol is a substitution scam. The Victorian Automobile Chamber of Commerce has called for the Federal Government to take action to stamp out the practice. But an ATO spokesman says mixing methanol and ethanol with petrol is legal, and the two additives were exempt from excise in 1994 under the Commonwealth's alternative fuels strategy. However, the spokesman says the ATO is consulting with the petroleum industry to see if the rules should be changed."

" Human rights group, Amnesty International, is calling for a more compassionate approach to the issue of illegal immigrants. Two men appeared in a Cairns court this morning charged with bringing illegal immigrants into Australia, after raids in the far North last week. 22 other Chinese immigrants detected in Cairns have already been transferred to the Port Headland Detention Centre. Paul Tavatgis from Amnesty International said Australia must uphold the human rights of people fleeing persecution. ""I mean obviously a country has to protect it's borders,"" he said. ""We can't have a lot of people coming here just because they think they're going to improve their economic circumstances. ""We're very keen to make sure that anyone who comes here fleeing persecution gets all the rights that they're allowed to under international law. ""Without that we're not meeting out international obligations and we have to keep a close eye on that. ""If people are claiming asylum the Government only needs to detain them long enough to establish their identity and whether they're at any risk to the Australian population. ""They shouldn't be detained at all. ""Obviously if people are claiming asylum the Government needs to make sure that they're kept secure but yeah conditions in port headland aren't fantastic especially for people who are claiming asylum and have got no reason to be jailed at all."""

" One Nation founder Pauline Hanson says she is pleased the party has been formally re-registered in New South Wales. Last year, the New South Wales Electoral Commissioner de-registered One Nation after finding it had been registered by misrepresentation. Miss Hanson says today's announcement that One Nation is again an official political party in New South Wales, is a relief. ""I believe that One Nation has had to jump more hurdles and through more hoops than any other political party,"" she said. ""It is fantastic to see the support we've had from people in New South Wales who have actually rallied behind us, and now the party's re-registered again...we believe it will be ready in the future for another state election in New South Wales."""

" A private memorial service was held today for the great Australian scientist Sir Mark Oliphant, who died after a short illness at the age of 98. Sir Mark, a physicist, worked with the team that succeeded in splitting the atom in 1932, and became a lifelong campaigner for the peaceful use of atomic energy. He was the founding director of the Research School of Physical Sciences at the Australian National University, and a governor of South Australia. Sir Mark died in Canberra last Friday."

" Thousands of Australians have stayed up late to watch a total eclipse of the moon, a rare event that saw the moon completely blocked by the earth's shadow. The eclipse, which last for more than 90 minutes, was seen across much of the Asia-Pacific region. Australia was one of just a handful of points on the globe in the path of the rare event. In India, tens of millions of Hindus observed the phenomenon with religious rites and holy dips in rivers. The eclipse was the longest in 141 years and a similar event will not occur again until 2007. Starting just before 10.00pm AEST last night, the moon began drifting into the earth's shadow. It eventually disappeared from view to be replaced by a dark disc with a rusty glow. The red tinge was caused by sunlight passing through the earth's atmosphere reflecting on the lunar surface. The director of the Perth Observatory, Jamie Biggs, says scientists noted the exact time the moon went into full eclipse and the time it came out. ""That actually tells you something about the size of the Earth's atmosphere,"" she said. ""It's sort of interesting that the earth's atmosphere isn't exactly the same shape as the Earth, it should just be like an envelope around the Earth and it's not."""

" Athlete Cathy Freeman has lashed out at what she calls government insensitivity over the issue of the stolen generations. She was speaking after a training session in England.. It is the first time Freeman has weighed in so publicly to the political issue of the stolen generations. She told London's <i>Daily Telegraph<i> her grandmother was taken away from her mother because she had fair skin. Freeman says when a government is so insensitive to the issues close to people's hearts, people are going to be angry. ""I was so angry, because they were denying that they had done anything wrong, denying that whole generation was stolen,"" she told the newspaper. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Indonesia's Defence Minister Juwono Sudarsono is blaming rogue army officers for inflaming sectarian violence in the Maluku province, where another 11 Christians and Muslims were killed in fighting yesterday. Mr Sudarsono says some soldiers have been uncontrollable factors in the bloodshed between Christians and Muslims which has raged for 18 months. As fighting intensifies, he is urging that rogue military officers be sacked, despite a state of civil emergency being announced. But under Indonesian law, the Defence Minister has no direct power over the army and ranks equally with military chiefs under the country's President. The Indonesian Government is under increasing pressure to end bloodshed in the Malukus. An appeal last week by the World Council of Churches called on the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mary Robinson, to intervene because of what is claimed to be a design to annihilate Christians. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak has phoned his senior ministers from the Middle East peace talks near Washington to report that wide gaps remain in negotiations with the Palestinians. However, in Tel Aviv, tens of thousands of right-wing demonstrators have gathered in the huge Rabin Square to protest against concessions that might be made to the Palestinians. The organisers of the demonstration, a coalition of right-wing and Jewish settler groups, hailed it as a success and proof of their belief that most Israelis do not support the Prime Minister. Ariel Sharon, at the head of the opposition Likud Party and the keynote speaker at the demonstration, said that Mr Barak was attempting to make what he called a peace of the moment and that the Prime Minister's policies would lead to war. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" A prominent forecaster sees Australia's economic fortunes more closely linked than ever to events in the United States. Access Economics believes that means the hands of Australia's Reserve Bank might be tied on interest rates. In its latest <i>Five-Year Business Outlook</i> publication, Access Economics says the world economy is growing at a pace not seen for a decade. It says with pressure on wages and prices in the United States, interest rates might rise further. The forecaster says that brings the risk that Australia's Reserve Bank might also be forced to tighten its monetary belt later this year. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock begins two days of official talks in New Delhi today as part of a five-nation tour aimed at stamping out people-smuggling and illegal immigration. Mr Ruddock will meet with India's influential Home Minister, L K Advani, as well as India's Aviation Minister. Mr Ruddock has already visited Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand, as part of the Federal Government's drive to stamp out illegal immigration and people-trafficking. Also on the agenda with officials in New Delhi will be Indian students visiting Australia. The lucrative $100 million market for education services has been tarnished by recent police investigations into concerns that some students are using false documents to obtain visas to study in Australia. Last year about 9,500 Indian students came to Australia for education. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Fiji's schools are reopening today after eight weeks of disruption because of the political crisis. Twice during the siege of Parliament, Fiji's Education Ministry tried to reopen schools, but had to close them again because of incidents of violence. With schools around Fiji resuming today, the next test will be how many parents think it is safe enough to send children back to school. Suva's night curfew has also been relaxed, now starting two hours later at 10:00pm. But Fiji's main island is still suffering power cuts because of a landowner occupation of the key hydroelectric station. Rebel unrest still plagues the northern town of Labasa and a standoff continues at Fiji's maximum security prison. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" McLaren's Mika Hakkinen has won the Austrian Formula One grand prix. McLaren team-mate David Coulthard finished second, with Rubens Barrichello coming third in a Ferrari. Michael Schumacher crashed out of the race in the first lap. The result has thrown the driver's championship wide open once more, with Schumacher on 58 points, Coulthard 50 and Hakkinen 48. A disappointed Schumacher was philosophical about his early exit from round 10 of the Formula One world championship. ""That's racing. I think he (Zonta) just overestimated his corner. This has happened to me in the past,"" said Schumacher. ""I'll have to have a word with him."" His Ferrari was sent spinning 180 degrees to face oncoming cars and collided with the Jordan of Jarno Trulli. But Hakkinen's victory is under some doubt, with Formula One's ruling body announcing it will investigate an electronic box on his McLaren. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Davis Cup captain John Newcombe and team members are pushing for the retention of Australia's current winning combination, which will exclude Mark Philippoussis. After Australia's semi-final win against Brazil in Brisbane, Newcombe suggested the team that won the tie should contest the final against either the United States or Spain. Philippoussis's team loyalty is being questioned after he withdrew from the semi-final with an injury. Pat Rafter says selectors should keep the winning team. ""We feel very comfortable with the guys we've got... very, very happy out there,"" Rafter said. ""There's always good vibes and good positive energy...and I think that's very, very important if you want to win. ""We've had our negative energy around the Davis Cup before and you've seen how it's affected us."" But Tennis Australia president Geoff Pollard says he does not believe a mediator should be called in to resolve the rift between Philippoussis and his Davis Cup team-mates, saying it is simply a matter of communication. ""The message really is we need to improve communication and the best way of communication is directly to Mark, rather than through a whole range of intermediaries,"" Mr Pollard said."

" Fiji's ousted government has blamed ethnic Indian business leaders for secretly funding the coup against it. The Labour-led coalition is determined to return to power. The deposed Prime Minister, Mahendra Chaudhry, claims key Indo-Fijian businessmen are on a list of 135 people who plotted the coup. The ousted Agriculture Minister, Poseci Bune, says George Speight was just a vessel for the real leaders behind him. ""This is a power struggle, a Fijian power struggle that has been simmering since the last elections,"" Mr Bune said. Mr Chaudhry and his colleagues are already examining ways to secure their reinstatement, but the rebel group has warned of more unrest if they try to return to power. The military has extended the state of emergency another two weeks because of continuing violence. Prisoners are still holding guards hostage in Suva and villagers still control a police station at Lambasa. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Rival militias have clashed again in Solomon Islands, despite continuing efforts to broker a ceasefire in the 19-month ethnic conflict. Three people were killed in the latest fighting. The Isatabu and Malaitan militias clashed yesterday at Kakabone, west of the capital, Honiara. Three Isatabu militants were killed. One of them is reported to be a local commander. This was an isolated incident, but it is the third fatal attack in less than a week. Militia leaders appear to be receptive to the Government's peace initiatives, but elements of both forces continue to fight. The Government remains hopeful ceasefire negotiations can begin by Tuesday. The talks are likely to be held on the Australian navy supply ship, <i>HMAS Tobruk</i>, which remains on station off the Guadalcanal coast. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Twenty-two illegal immigrants, detained in Cairns and Brisbane over the past three days, have been taken to the Port Hedland detention centre in Western Australia. Customs officials have also intercepted a fishing vessel believed used to smuggle the Chinese nationals into Australia. Three men were taken into custody in Cairns on Thursday and raids on Friday netted another 15 Chinese nationals also in Cairns. Three other suspected illegal immigrants were arrested in Brisbane on Friday night and a fourth in Cairns also on Friday. Immigration officials say all have now been taken to the Port Hedland detention centre and unless claims are made for refugee status all will be removed from Australia as soon as possible. Customs authorities have now intercepted a fishing boat believed repsonsible for smuggling the people into Australia. It is being escorted back by Cairns customs vessel Hervey Bay. Eleven Indonesian crew are being interview by federal police. Another two men have appeared in the Cairns Magistrates Court yesterday charged with people smuggling and will reappear tomorrow."

" Meanwhile, Immigration Minister Phillip Ruddock has arrived in Delhi ahead of two days of talks with Indian officials and non-government organisations. The visit is part of a five nation tour. The Immigration Minister's tour, which includes Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand and France, is part of the Government's drive to stamp out illegal immigration and people trafficking. Mr Ruddock will meet with a range of Indian ministers and officials as well as representatives from the United Nations High Commission for Refugees. But the business end of the visit does not kick off until tomorrow. Today, Mr and Mrs Ruddock will look at the Taj Mahal. The Immigration Minister's visit to India comes less than a week after Prime Minister John Howard held two days of officials talks in Delhi aimed at restoring bilateral ties in the wake of India's nuclear test in May 1998. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) says new federal environment laws which come into effect today are inadequate. The Environment Protection and Biodiversity Act is the biggest overhaul of national environmental laws in 25 years. The laws are designed to protect Australia's World Heritage listed areas from extensive land clearing and toxic spills but the ACF says they are a shadow of what is needed. Campaign director John Connor says Australia has the highest tree clearing rate in the developed world, as well as the world's highest greenhouse pollution rates, with the laws not giving the Commonwealth any power to veto projects. He says where they do give the Commonwealth responsibility for an issue, they are also able to hand over power to the states. He says the Federal Government needs to come up with money to help provide incentives for farmers to stop land clearing, particularly in Queensland. ""These laws don't actually address land clearing head on, which is how the Commonwealth should be doing that rather than through back door provisions."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A Canberra barrister says he hopes to clear some discrepencies in the upcoming trial for a second member of a Khmer Rouge group alleged to have helped kidnap and murder Melbourne man David Wilson. Chouk Rin was a senior member of the Khmer Rouge group responsible for the killing of Mr Wilson and two other men in October 1994. Rin admitted his involvement after defecting to the Cambodian Army but has since retracted the admission. Canberra barrister William Woodrow, who will represent the family of David Wilson at the trial on Tuesday, says there is a lot of interest in the case. ""I think the Cambodian people would like to see the whole thing put to bed,"" Mr Woodrow said. ""I think if justice was seen to be done and people who had been involved were brought to justice they'd like to move on. So there is interest in the sense that they'd like the people who perpetrated these wrongs dealt with."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" People all over Australia will have a chance to see a lunar eclipse tonight, an event that will not happen again until 2007. The moon will begin to drift into the shadow of the Earth around 10:00pm AEST and an hour later will fall into almost complete darkness. Astronomers say sunlight passing through dust in the Earth's atmosphere may give the moon an unusual reddish tinge. Ross Gould, from the Mount Stromlo Observatory in Canberra, says the eclipse should be easily visible with the naked eye. ""If you go outside in the evening, after about 9.30 at night, you may notice that the moon is starting to look a little shaded,"" he said. ""Around ten o'clock it will start moving into the darkest part of the Earth's shadow, and so we'll see that gradually pass across the face of the moon, until by shortly after eleven o'clock we have the moon fully within the Earth's shadow."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The United States tobacco industry says it is ready to fight this morning's massive class action award in Florida. The Florida jury took only five hours of deliberations before announcing a record-shattering punitive award against the biggest US tobacco companies, ordering them to pay more than $240 billion to ill smokers in that state. But the companies claimed during the trial that that sort of figure would destory them and they are attacking the trial itself as fundamentally flawed and unjust. ""All along we said this plan was unworkable. This law suit demonstrates why,"" Philip Morris lawyer, Greg Little said. During the trial tobacco industry executives argued their companies should not be punished, as they had reformed their marketing practices and were already paying out billions of dollars to the states in legal settlements. The Tobacco Control Coalition's Simon Chapman says the US legal judgement could lead to similar actions in Australia. ""Australian companies engaged in the same sort of conduct that American and British [companies] engaged in,"" Mr Chapman said. ""I would believe that there is a very, very good case, a very good parallel case, for the same sort of action to be run here and to succeed in this country as it has happened in the United States."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Cairns police are searching for a further three suspected illegal immigrants who fled from a raid on a house in the city's north yesterday. Twenty suspected illegal immigrants were arrested in the raid. Acting on a tip-off from the public police, Customs and Immigration Department officials swooped on the house at Holloway's Beach about 1:00pm AEST yesterday. Three other suspected illegal immigrants were arrested in Cairns on Thursday night. Leon Beddington, from Customs says the group, thought to have arrived from the Philippines on board a merchant vessel, were interviewed late into last night. He says Customs will decide this morning what to do with them. Acting Immigration Minister Amanda Vanstone has praised the swift action of federal and state authorities in arresting the suspected illegal immigrants. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The industry responsible for the construction and maintenance of Australia's infrastructure has accused the Federal Government of discriminating against it. The Civil Contractors Federation says the recent changes to the diesel fuel excise will translate into a loss of $65 million for the industry. The federation's Doug Huett says other industries, such as farming, will also suffer losses of up to $25 million. But Mr Huett says with the amount of diesel his industry uses, it will be hit the worst. ""So really the Government is pocketing quite a large amount of money which is costing our members, some of whom are paying up to $5,000 a month because of fixed price contracts, all because the Government hasn't kept its promise to not make fuel more expensive."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Greenpeace says further delays in securing an international agreement to save the albatross could result in its extinction. An international meeting which ended yesterday in Hobart failed to formalise a draft agreement and joint action plan to protect the endangered seabirds. It is estimated up to 1,000 albatrosses and petrels a day die as a result of long-line fishing. No time frame has been given by delegates on when further discussions will take place. Denise Boyd, from Greenpeace, has criticised what she says is the lack of political will to address the problem. ""This is not a new problem. This has been known for many years,"" Ms Boyd said. ""There's an increasing level of talk around the problem, but there's still no action to really prevent albatross deaths from... the long line fishing industry."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A key Western Australian horse racing figure has rejected claims that incidents of group sex are commonplace in the industry. Yesterday, six teenage industry members, including three apprentice jockeys, were convicted on charges arising from the sexual assault of a female stablehand. During the trial the court heard claims the standards and culture in the State's racing industry appear to condone group sex among apprentice jockeys. But chairman of the Kalgoorlie-Boulder Racing Club Rob Scavarci says that is untrue. Mr Scavarci also says the convictions have worsened the shortage of jockeys in WA, with two horses being scratched in one of the Kalgoorlie-Boulder races today because of a lack of riders. Mr Scavarci says country race courses like Kalgoorlie-Boulder are training grounds for young riders and will be hit hard by the shortage. However, he rejects concerns that the court case has damaged the industry's reputation to the extent that young people will be detered from entering the industry. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" People prepared to wear a smile for hours on end are being sought by Sydney Olympic organisers. The spectator hosts will ""welcome the world"" to Olympic Park, where thousands of people are expected to congregate during the event. Offers have already been made to some 46,000 people, but SOCOG needs another 1,500 volunteers and will open a call centre on Monday as part of the recruitment drive. Project manager Lucy Regan says the volunteers will be the faces of Australia. ""We're really looking for enthusiastic and energetic people because it's really a challenging role,"" Ms Regan said. ""You know, being that sort of welcoming and happy face.... It may be for six or seven hours at a time. ""So we're really looking for people who have that energy and enthusiasm and they're really representing the face of Australia and we need that, to be a very smiley and happy face."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Fiji's Great Council of Chiefs has elected a president and a vice-president who are acceptable to rebel leader George Speight. The new president is Josefa Iloilo, and the vice-president is Jope Seniloli. The chairman of the meeting, former prime minister Sitiveni Rabuka, says the chiefs did not give in to Mr Speight, although both men had been endorsed by him. ""I would not say that the nation or the Council of Chiefs capitulated to George Speight,"" Mr Rabuka said. After the meeting, the chiefs went to Parliament House to see the rebels surrender their weapons, most of which were stolen from the Fijian military. Meanwhile, New Zealand Foreign Affairs Minister Phil Goff has condemned the change in the administration. ""These people are self-serving... they don't like democracy because democracy didn't serve their own ends,"" Mr Goff said. ""They used the rhetoric of indigenous rights, [but] what they're really doing is promoting their own political and financial ambitions. ""Mr Speight, after all, is a failed businessman who was due to appear in a court case on extortion on the day that he launched the coup,"" he said."

" Northern Territory Chief Minister Denis Burke claims there is a Labor Party agenda behind the British Prime Minister's wife, Cherie Booth, leading a case against mandatory sentencing. Ms Booth, a human rights lawyer, will lead a case at the United Nations, arguing on behalf of Aboriginal clients that the Territory's laws breach the UN Covenant on Human Rights. Mr Burke has raised doubts about who the unnamed Aboriginal clients are, and claims Ms Booth's husband, Tony Blair, is part of a Labor lobby led by the ALP and Opposition leader Kim Beazley."

" The Victorian National Party has severed its ties with the state Liberal Party. The split is effective immediately. National Party leader Peter Ryan says a joint meeting of parliamentary members and the state council has accepted the recommendation of a review committee that it end its nine-month partnership with the Liberals. Mr Ryan says it is time for the Nationals to stand alone and give country Victoria its own voice in the Parliament. He insists the decision does not represent a war between the National and Liberal parties."

" A two-year study of cancer patients has found they get physical benefits from being involved in a support group. The Newcastle University study compared the physical symptoms of cancer patients who attended weekly support group meetings, where they learnt stress management and relaxation techniques, to the symptoms of patients who receive no emotional support. Psychology researcher John Shea says the support group patients had less chest pain, could breathe more easily, slept better and had more energy. Dr Shea says the reason most people abandon cancer treatments is because of the pain they suffer, and developing support groups in all hospitals may reduce the rate of drop-outs. ""If more people complete treatments, maybe there'll be more effective healing that goes on as a result of that,"" he said."

" Breakaway dairy farmers are confident about the viability of a planned High Court challenge seeking compensation for losses incurred by deregulation. The Australian Milk Producers Association (AMPA) is meeting at Toogoolawah in the Brisbane Valley today to update its members on the latest legal advice. Chairman, John Cartwright, says it is uncertain who the case will target at this stage, but indicated the Federal Government and even organisations which supported deregulation will be involved. He says the farmers will want adequate compensation. ""Over and above the national package for property rights that we consider we're losing,"" he said. ""That would probably be more than the quotas, to take something away that would be such a massive income facility to farmers, there would have to be loss of income and loss of property rights."""

" Residents of the capital of Solomon Islands, Honiara, say there has been an increase of car theft and harassment by armed men. Criminals appear to be taking advantage of the ethnic tension in Solomon Islands. Honiara has no effective police force at present, with law enforcement being provided by members of the ""joint operation"", which involves members of the Malaita Eagle Force and the police paramilitary unit. But armed men are continuing to confront Honiara residents, demanding money or vehicles. A number of business people have had their cars taken, and a member of the foreign diplomatic corps was also targeted but managed to escape. The criminals usually wear military clothing, and claim to be militia members, but the militias say their members are not involved. Cars stolen in this way are usually put aboard ferries and transported to Malaita Island."

" The Federal Transport Minister has warned Virgin Blue it may not be able to begin operations next month as planned. Australia's newest airline is planning to begin operating flights between Brisbane and Sydney on August 3. But Deputy Prime Minister John Anderson says Virgin Blue is yet to receive its air operator's certificate. He says the issuing of the certificate will not be rushed for Virgin Blue's planned take-off date. ""There can be no rushing or cutting of corners in relation to the issuing of an air operator's certificate,"" he said. ""We do not and will not compromise safety in any way in this country, and it will have to be done in strict accordance with proper procedure. ""While we're keen to see Virgin in the air, you know we've got to make certain it's all done properly."""

" Many eyes are expected to gaze skyward on Sunday night for what experts say will be one of the best lunar eclipses seen in Australia for decades. The total eclipse will take place around midnight and be visible throughout Australia, with forecasters predicting fine conditions. Astronomer Gordon Garrard says as well as the novelty value, the lunar eclipse will be useful for scientific purposes. ""The brightness of the moon's face is measured and that's helpful in determining how much aerosols and things are up in the atmosphere of the earth,"" he said. ""If there's a lot of material in the earth's atmosphere around from a big volcanic eruption, for example, then the moon is much dimmer."""

" Australia has taken a stranglehold on the Davis Cup semi-final in Brisbane, winning the opening day's singles rubbers in straight sets. Lleyton Hewitt downed Fernando Meligeni in the second rubber 6-4, 6-2, 6-3, to give the defending champions a commanding 2-0 lead in the tie. The first three games of the rubber saw three consecutive service breaks, before Hewitt was able to hold serve and take a 3-1 lead. Games continued on serve for Hewitt to close out the set. Hewitt then raced to a 4-0 lead in the second set, before Meligeni began to engineer a fightback. The Brazilian kept pace with Hewitt in the latter part of the set, before Hewitt prevailed on his second set point. The third set went with serve in the opening games, with Meligeni clearly mounting a challenge and threatening a likely comeback at certain stages. The third set was level at 3-3, before Hewitt was able to manufacture three break points. Meligeni saved two, but Hewitt was able to convert the third. Hewitt then held serve and broke again to take the rubber. Earlier, Gustavo Kuerten was beaten by Pat Rafter in straight sets, 6-3, 6-2, 6-3. Kuerten will not play in the doubles tomorrow after injuring a groin muscle in the loss and is a doubtful starter for the reverse singles on Sunday."

" Fiji's last 18 hostages have been freed after an emotional reconciliation ceremony with their captors. The 18 MPs have been taken to the Red Cross headquarters for a medical check-up. Just before he was freed Fiji's now deposed prime minister Mahendra Chaudhry hugged George Speight, the man who took him hostage eight weeks ago. The rebel group staged an emotional ceremony in which the MPs and George Speight shared a bowl of kava. The MPs were then escorted to the Red Cross headquarters and reunion with their families."

" The former prime minister's wife, Mrs Vimira Chaudhry, was among a crowd of about 300 friends, media and onlookers, many of whom cheered and clapped as the hostages arrived. Meanwhile, at the military barracks across town another former prime minister and now chairman of the Great Council of Chiefs Sitiveni Rabuka is expected to announce the chiefs' nomination for president later this evening. Earlier, Fiji's Great Council of Chiefs issued an ultimatum to the coup plotters over the release of the hostages. They told the Speight group that if they did not free the hostages soon, they would lose immunity from prosecution, promised in an agreement aimed at solving the crisis. On Sunday, the military agreed to scrap Fiji's multiracial constitution, depose Mr Chaudhry, and grant amnesty to Mr Speight and his supporters."

" Unemployment in Australia has reached a new 10-year low, with the latest monthly improvement coming on the back of solid jobs growth. As of June, the national jobless rate stands at 6.6 per cent, seasonally adjusted. The last time it was lower than that was in May 1990. During the latest month, a net 21,700 extra positions were created. An additional 47,000 full-time jobs have been offset by a drop in part-time places. The participation rate held steady, and around the states New South Wales was the only one to register a rise in unemployment, but it still has the lowest rate at 5.8 per cent. Federal Employment Minister Peter Reith is delighted with the figures. ""These are the best figures since May 1990, the best figures for a decade,"" he said. ""For young people the rate has dropped and there's an extra 21,700 jobs and there's a lot of full-time jobs as well, which is again an excellent part of the news."" He also says the figures are another blow to Opposition leader Kim Beazley's anti-goods and services tax (GST) campaign. ""The Labor Party for years said that the GST, including its implementation, would mean a loss of jobs,"" Mr Reith said. ""Well, in the month leading up to the official start off for the GST, we've had the best unemployment number in a decade and that shatters Kim Beazley's false claims."""

" At the same time, there has been a dramatic fall in the youth unemployment rate. In June this year the unemployment rate dropped to 20 per cent - its lowest level in almost a decade. The fall has been accompanied by a fall in the actual number of young people looking for work, which is down more than 3,000 to 63,000 people. Mr Reith has welcomed the figures, saying the past 12 months have brought particularly strong jobs growth for young people."

" Victorian Labor unionist, Greg Sword, has confirmed he will be standing as a candidate for the Labor national presidency. His candidacy is being supported by the Federal Labor leader, Kim Beazley, and he has also managed to secure the support of the Victorian right faction after negotiations. Mr Sword says he will seek the broad support of the right in other states and territories. However, the ALP's left wing is still looking for its own candidate, with one senior faction member urging them to find a woman who could win support for the job."

" The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) fears the high standing of doctors within the community is at risk because of the Federal Government's refusal to increase doctor training numbers. New research commissioned by the RACGP shows most Australians are happy with the level of care they receive from their doctor. A third of those surveyed gave their local GP 10 out of 10. But RACGP president Margaret Kilmartin says while she is pleased with the result, those high levels of satisfaction may be jeopardised if the Government does not increase the number of doctors being trained. She says times have changed and doctors coming through the system now want a life outside medicine as well. ""They no longer want to be tied to working 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and not having any time to look after their own health,"" she said. Dr Kilmartin says there needs to be a national coordinated approach to address the problem."

" The Victorian Government will introduce the nation's toughest controls for air conditioning cooling towers, to reduce the risk of legionnaire's disease. State Health Minister John Thwaites says the Government will adopt the recommendations of the Legionella Working Party, set up last December. In future, officials will carry out yearly audits of businesses with cooling towers, registration will be compulsory and random spot checks will be carried out. Mr Thwaites says those failing to comply will be fined. ""We want to have the best system in Australia, if not the world, to reduce the risk of legionnaire's disease,"" he said. The Government has ruled out mandatory monthly testing, but is considering other safety measures for Victoria's 10,000 cooling towers. Professor Graham Brown from the Victorian Infectious Disease Service has welcomed the new regulations. ""We will have a much better system based on risk management and a preventative strategy for this disease,"" he said."

" The Administrative Appeals Tribunal has refused an application by Whyalla Airlines to resume flying. The Civil Aviation Safety Authority grounded the company's planes 10 days after one of its Piper Chieftain aircraft crashed into South Australia's Spencer Gulf in May, killing all eight people on board. The airline had asked the tribunal to temporarily lift the suspension order, pending a full review of the decision. While making no judgment on allegations about the company's safety record, the tribunal's deputy president, Brendan Burns, says allegations about the airline's safety are serious and the public interest outweighs all other considerations. The matter will be heard again next Wednesday."

" The Australian Capital Territory Health Minister, Michael Moore, will offer advice to his Victorian and New South Wales counterparts on the establishment of safe injecting rooms, during a ministerial meeting in Perth today. Mr Moore is in Perth for a meeting of the ministerial council on drug strategy. He says he will express his disappointment that a trial has been postponed in Canberra. ""One of the levels of disappointment is that we had an opportiunity to have three separate scientific trials running at the same time, all of which would have been based on some different information. ""We could have drawn comparisons between the three, but that's water under the bridge. ""We now know that ours has been postponed until after the next election."""

" Champion Australian swimmer Ian Thorpe has asked for his drug test results to be put on display to the public. The results of the Australian Sports Drug Agency urine tests will be released next week, when Thorpe launches an anti-drugs in sport campaign on Thursday."

" The ALP is scrambling to undo the damage caused by the John Della Bosca affair. The New South Wales right faction power-broker has withdrawn from the contest for the presidency, after telling <i>The Bulletin</i> magazine the Opposition's roll-back policy would complicate the goods and services tax (GST) and suggesting the tax should be extended to include food. Senior party sources admit Mr Della Bosca's intervention has been dreadful and very damaging. Even Labor leader Kim Beazley says Mr Della Bosca has made a grave error. ""I don't agree with those reported comments and nor am I going to be deflected by them,"" he said. Mr Beazley's own position does not appear to be under question, but some in the party have noted the problems have come from within Mr Beazley's own faction and from someone Mr Beazley backed for the presidency. Victorian right wing unionist Greg Sword is now expected to run for president, with Mr Beazley's support. ""I made a commitment to Mr Sword at the last conference that if he was a candidate in the future that I would be offering him my support,"" Mr Beazley said. But others believe the party needs a senior well known candidate and have mentioned New South Wales Premier Bob Carr's name. And there is an outside chance current president, Barry Jones, may in the end, retain his position."

" The New South Wales Premier has emphatically ruled out standing for the ALP national presidency, following the withdrawal of his Special Minister of State, John Della Bosca. Mr Della Bosca was forced to quit following his reported criticisms of Labor Party policy on the goods and services tax (GST). The ALP has been canvassing other likely candidates for the post of federal president, and Mr Carr was named as a possibility. But a spokesman for Mr Carr, who is overseas, says he has firmly ruled that out. Mr Carr says all his energy and focus is on his responsibilities as Premier of New South Wales."

" An inquiry into the telecommunications industry has heard company profits will ultimately decide if access to new technologies will be equally available in metropolitan and regional areas. The inquiry, sponsored by the Federal Government, held its first meeting in Sydney today as part of nationwide meetings. A report is due to go to the Government at the end of September. Head of the inquiry, Tim Besley, says he is confident industry players will make new technology widely accessible. ""So there's always things happening at the moment which have got considerable potential if they're wisely used by the carriers... they've got to make profits and be efficient and economic,"" he said."

" The nine hostages are settling back into normal life following their unexpectedly early release. The group of Indo-Fijian MPs in the former government were released early this morning. The remaining 18 hostages were relocated in Suva's parliamentary compound to make way for today's meeting of regional chiefs. One of the freed hostages, former attorney-general Anand Singh, expressed relief at his freedom. ""Well, I'm very happy to be out and I'm enjoying my freedom and I'm spending time with my family,"" he said. ""That's my priority."""

" Post-goods and services tax (GST) relief has helped produce a record surge in consumer confidence. The latest Westpac/Melbourne Institute index of consumer sentiment will be another welcome sign for the Coalition Government. The monthly survey was conducted late last week and into the weekend, after Australians had received their first paypackets reflecting the lower income tax rates. And survey respondents had also had around a week to assess the price impact of the GST. The result: the July consumer sentiment index jumped from 100.3 to 110.6. Westpac's general manager of economics, Bill Evans, who says the fears of earlier in the year had been founded on underestimates of the tax cuts and overestimates of price rises under the GST. Mr Evans says another important element has been the more benign outlook for official interest rates."

" The Federal Government has rejected claims changes to private health insurance have failed to reduce the burden on the public health system. The claims appear in a Senate inquiry report into Commonwealth-State health funding arrangements. The report says there is no evidence federal funding for private health cover has reduced demand on the public system. But the Health Minister, Michael Wooldridge, says the new private health insurance arrangement has to be given time to work."

" A morning-before-sex contraceptive pill may be ready for testing on Australian women by the end of the year. Scientists from Monash University in Melbourne have designed the pill, which prevents fertilisation by stopping sperm reaching the egg for up to 24 hours. Consultant ethicist, Nicholas Tonti Filippini, says the new drug will have less side effects than the existing pill, but it will also still have shortcomings. ""[The] problem with taking something like this is that it would disturb the mucous pattern and you wouldn't know what to predict, what would happen afterwards, in terms of fertility for a woman who was following her mucus symptom,"" he said. But the pill has attracted criticism from church leaders and ethicists. The Catholic church is urging the scientists to abandon the trials. Father Christopher Prowse says the church has concerns about the health of women who would use the drug and is opposed to contraception in general. ""We see in the Catholic church that every act of sexual intercourse must be both a love sharing and life giving act, which is appropriate in the married state,"" he said. ""We find that this morning before pill suppresses that life giving dimension or at least suspends it for a short period of time."""

" The number of deaths in custody in Australia is continuing to decline. A new report from the Australian Institute of Criminology shows there were 85 deaths in custody last year, down from 95 the previous year, and 20 fewer than in 1997. Of the 85 deaths last year, 26 occurred in police custody. Aboriginal people accounted for almost 25 per cent of all deaths in custody. A third of all deaths were by hanging, 20 per cent were by illness and other natural causes. More indigenous prisoners and detainees died from natural causes than from hanging."

" Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock has told a Singapore newspaper that Australia expects a wave of illegal immigrants during the Olympics. In an interview with <i>The Straits Times</i>, Mr Ruddock asked Asian countries to heighten vigilance and to continue ""working smarter and faster"" to thwart the smuggling rackets. During his visit to Asian countries, Mr Ruddock will hand out information kits and video tapes showing footage of crocodiles in mangrove swamps and sharks in the sea to deter possible illegal immigrants. He says 350 illegal immigrants have died on the high seas while en route to Australia this year."

" Lawyers for Whyalla Airlines have told the Administrative Appeals Tribunal in Adelaide that it will have to sack its pilots immediately if the Civil Aviation Safety Authority's order grounding the airline is not lifted soon. The airline was grounded after eight people died when one of its planes crashed in the Spencer Gulf in May. Whyalla Airlines is appealing to have the order lifted. The matter is being heard Whyalla Airlines is hoping a decision will be made today."

" Wallabies coach Rod Macqueen has made two changes to his squad to meet New Zealand in the first tri-nations Test at Stadium Australia on Saturday night. Jason Little replaces Rod Kafer in the starting 15 at inside centre and Andrew Walker replaces Elton Flatley on the bench. Walker is hoping to become a duel international after leaving the Sydney City Roosters in the National Rugby League competition at the end of last season. Walker played one Test for the Kangaroos against Papua New Guinea in 1996. The match doubles as a Bledisloe Cup game and the first in the tri-nations series. Australia currently holds the Bledisloe Cup The Wallabies are coming off a record 44-23 win over the Springboks in Melbourne on Saturday night. The team is: Richard, Harry, Michael Foley, Fletcher dyson, David Giffin, John Eales, Mark Connors, David Wilson, Jim Williams, George Gregan, Stephen Larkham, Joe Roff, Jason Little, Daniel Herbert, Stirling Mortlock and Chris Latham. Reserves: Rod Kafer, Andrew Walker, Sam Cordingley, Toutai Kefu, Troy Jaques, Glenn Panoho, Jeremy Paul."

" The man at the centre of Labor's embarrassment over the goods and services tax (GST) has stopped short of expressing regret for his comments. New South Wales right faction power-broker, John Della Bosca, has withdrawn from the contest for the presidency, after telling <i>The Bulletin</i> magazine the Opposition's roll-back policy would complicate the GST and suggesting the tax should be extended to include food. He has since recanted and expressed regret for causing any embarrassment to Opposition leader Kim Beazley. ""I think it's very important that people understand that everyone in the Labor Party takes the view that Kim Beazley and the Labor Party's policy platform - positive policy platform - is emphasised,"" he said. ""But that includes a roll back of the GST. ""I should make my position on the GST very clear, I have always and continue to believe that the GST is an unfair tax."" --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Nine of Fiji's political hostages have been released in the early hours this morning. The nine hostages released from Parliament are the former attorney-general, the works minister, the trade minister, four Labour Party MPs and two General Voters Party MPs. They were taken to Red Cross headquarters for a medical check-up, before returning to their families. The release of the nine leaves 18 hostages remaining in the Parliament, including the deposed prime minister, Mahendra Chaudhry. While the hostage crisis maybe drawing to a close, unrest continues across Fiji. The island resort of Turtle Lodge has been taken over by villagers to support ownership claims. The resort owner, Richard Evanson, was detained and about 40 guests have been told to leave the island. In the north, the main police station at Labasa has been occupied by rebels. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Latvia has approved the terms of an extradition treaty with Australia. This could pave the way for Latvia to charge Konrad Kalejs and other Australian citizens with war crimes. Following months of negotiation, the treaty will be signed in the Latvian capital, Riga, this Friday. It will then be some weeks before it is in force, as further legal procedures are required in both countries. This extradition treaty has been negotiated specifically to remove any barriers to the charging of Mr Kalejs over crimes committed in Latvia during World War II, when he fought with the Nazis. The Latvian prosecutors office has indicated it may be ready to charge him as early as next month. Mr Kalejs, aged 86, has always denied any involvement in war crimes. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Critical Middle East diplomatic talks are underway in the US this morning, with President Clinton urging Israeli and Palestinian leaders to give their children the gift of peace. Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat held the first trilateral session of the summit at Camp David, in Maryland, with President Clinton, who says the risks involved in the talks can be surmounted. ""Of course, there is no guarantee of success, but not to try is to guarantee failure,"" he said. The summit was called against a looming deadline in September, when Mr Arafat says he will declare a Palestinian state if no peace deal has been reached. Key questions dividing the parties include the future status of Jerusalem and claims of a right of return to Israel by Palestinian refugees. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A group of international AIDS researchers says that a special vaccine to fight the disease in Africa could be ready within five years. The scientists have been given approval to trial the vaccine on humans. The research team says its goal is now in sight. It is confident it can produce an AIDS vaccine which is designed for Africa. Scientists believe that African nations are being hit by a specific strain of the HIV virus. Dr Seth Berkley, from the International AIDS Vaccine Initiative, says human trials will start within a month. ""If we get a strong immune response in our first human testing...we will turn around right away and set it into multiple trials,"" he said. The vaccine will be tested on small groups of volunteers before larger trials begin. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A prominent economic think-tank says labour market conditions in Australia are deteriorating, despite a continuing fall in the official jobless rate. New research has been published this morning by the Committee for Economic Development of Australia, (CEDA). CEDA has undertaken the study of employment conditions in conjunction with Sydney University's Centre for Industrial Relations Research and Training. Officially, Australia's jobless rate stands at 6.7 per cent, the lowest in a decade. But the new research concludes that full-time employment has dropped and underemployment has risen significantly. At the same time, long hours of work have increased, with the number of full-time employees working more than 49-hours a week jumping, while earnings inequality has grown since at least the mid-1990s. ----------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australian tennis player Pat Rafter has returned to Brisbane on a late night flight, ahead of the Davis Cup semi-final against Brazil, which starts on Friday. Fresh from his loss in the Wimbeldon final, Rafter refused to back away from his criticism of Mark Philippoussis, who has again pulled out of the Davis Cup team. Rafter says he stands by his comments, but will wait until after the Cup tie to discuss it further. He says he is happy to be back in Australia, but he cannot relax yet. ""I'd really like to let myself go, but I can't yet cause this weekend means a fair bit to me and all the boys and we all want to win this one, and I knew half way through Wimbeldon that I wasn't going to let my hair down because it was just getting too close to Davis Cup as well,"" Rafter said."

" Prime Minister John Howard has hit back at blistering Australian newspaper headlines about his trip to London, describing them as adolescent. Mr Howard argues that criticism of the week-long Centenary of Federation festivities is short-sighted, ignoring the foreign investment that could flow from promoting Australia. A comment piece in London's <i>Daily Telegraph</i> says the Prime Minister has been lampooned by Australia's left-leaning press for his love of Queen and mother-country. Mr Howard says the trip was worthwhile, but has been trivialised by the media. ""I think those headlines have been in many cases quite adolescent,"" he said. ""They've just set out to be negative without understanding the economic gain from such a focus as this."""

" Australia's Pat Rafter is through to his first Wimbledon singles final after beating Andre Agassi overnight. Twelfth seeded Rafter won his semi-final clash with Agassi 7-5, 4-6, 7-5, 4-6, 6-3 and will now play Pete Sampras in the final. Rafter says the result was beyond his expectations, after coming back from a shoulder injury. ""It's been a long road back, I think that's the most satisfying thing about it and now I'm back in the finals, so it has been a big shock, but I don't want to think about it right now, I want to go ahead with the job and put in my best efforts on Sunday,"" he said. Australia's Lleyton Hewitt and partner Kim Clijsters are through to the final of the mixed doubles, while Australia's Rene Stubbs and American Lisa Raymond lost their semi-final in the women's doubles."

" Air Services Australia says engineers at Sydney Airport have pinpointed the possible cause of Thursday's power shutdown, which blacked out the air traffic control centre. The power failure lasted 15 seconds, but it took another 10 minutes before computer and radar systems were back on. Twenty planes were airborne at the time. Air Services Australia will not elaborate on the possible cause of the shutdown, but says the investigation is looking at human error, computer software and linkages with the back-up power supply, which failed. The organisation has rejected union claims that staff cuts in the maintenance area have compromised safety. Air Services Australia spokesman, Richard Dudley, says back-up power has returned, but engineers are still working towards a ""total fix"" of the problem."

" The New South Wales branch of the Australian Medical Association (AMA) is calling for a national debate on the future of the public health system. It follows claims by the AMA that crucial surgery at public hospitals is being cancelled because of funding shortfalls. While New South Wales Health has denied the claim, the association's state president Dr Michael Ridley says more money is needed for hospitals around Australia. ""We have to spend more money, now we feel it's worthy not only of a state debate but also a national debate on: do we want to do that or do we want to have a second rate health service, and if we do want to spend more money, exactly how are we going to do that?"" he said."

" Shadow Treasurer, Simon Crean has rejected claims that the states and territories would be big losers in any proposed roll-back of the GST by Labor. Federal Treasurer, Peter Costello says Labor's draft policy platform, released yesterday, shows that the Opposition plans not to pay GST revenue to the states. But Mr Crean says the document actually commits Labor to maintaining the GST payments promised by the Government. ""What we're doing is pledging to roll-back the GST, but the states will not pay for it,"" he said. ""The states will not bear the cost. ""So, for Costello to be arguing that state funding is at risk, he's barking up the wrong tree,"" Mr Crean said."

" Whyalla Airlines will have to wait at least another five days to find out it can get back into the skies soon. The airline yesterday made an application before the Adminstrative Appeals Tribunal for a stay of its suspension by the Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA). It has been grounded after one of its planes crashed into Spencer Gulf on May 31, killing all eight people on board. A lawyer acting for the company told the tribunal that its aircraft have been given a ""clean bill of health"" by the Civil Aviation Safety Authority and if the CASA investigations continued to drag on, Whyalla Airlines would be ""killed off."" The company says it has lost $40,000 a week for the past five weeks. But a lawyer for the Civil Aviation Safety Authority has told the tribunal that a bid to lift the suspension was premature, as the investigations into the company's operations and the crash were complicated and some way from completion. He also alleged further safety issues had arisen, including a claim that the pilot killed in the crash had been chastised for not flying the same aircraft onto Adelaide, after making an emergency landing when one of its engines failed. Whyalla Airlines managing director Chris Brougham has signalled CASA's version of events will be disputed. The matter has been adjourned until next Wednesday."

" The Royal Australian Mint has released a new commemorative $1 coin honouring recipients of the Victorian Cross - the highest military award available to members of the Commonwealth. Today's release marks 100 years since the first Victoria Cross recipient, Captain Neville Howse, was awarded the medal for his bravery in saving a comrade under enemy fire during the Boer War. Ninety-five other Australians have been awarded the cross since then. Anton Porzig from the Royal Australian Mint says it is particularly proud of the latest edition to its commemorative collection. ""It's really a very, very elegant coin, it's terribly difficult to do justice to that sort of bravery but I think it has come out very beautifully,"" he said. ""The Howse family has seen it and I think they're equally thrilled with it."""

" The Shadow Transport Minister, Martin Ferguson, has blamed the power failure at Sydney Airport on recent staff cuts. A two minute power blackout last night caused the centre's computer system to crash. It took a further 10 minutes before radar communication with circling aircraft was fully restored. Mr Ferguson says up to 80 maintenance staff lost their positions last year. He says Air Services Australia is now operating with an underlying profit motive. ""We've got a proud and well-earned reputation as a safe aviation nation,"" he said. ""The incident of last night has got to send a warning bell to all of us. ""We must always be vigilant and we must not take risks with the system, and importantly [remember] that people are only human beings and there is a limit to the pressure and the stress that they can suffer in operating our system."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Labor Party has been blasted for not addressing the imbalances between public and private school funding in its draft education policy. The draft policies will go before the party's national conference next week for approval. The Australian Education Union says the document is grossly disappointing because it is high on sentiment about a ""knowledge nation"", but does not deliver better funding for public education. The union wants Labor to put funds allocated to private education back into public schools and TAFE colleges. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Motor Trades Association has condemned an order by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) for service stations to submit a monthly log on their petrol and diesel rates. The ACCC wants all fuel retailers registered for the Commonwealth Fuel Grants Scheme to keep a detailed record of petrol prices. The scheme provides a grant of one or two cents a litre to fuel retailers in regional and remote areas. But the association's executive director, Michael Delaney, says keeping a daily log of prices is a costly intrusion into the operation of service stations. ""The ACCC has announced it's hired 4,000 price inspectors to go around and collect prices,"" he said. ""Our prices are displayed on price boards everywhere in the country, those inspectors could simply consult the boards if they want."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Hotel workers across Sydney will be walking off the job later this month in support of a greater share of the Olympic dollar. The Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers Union says the city's hotels are fully booked out at premium rates for the whole Games' period. But it says while the companies will be making a major profit it is staff who will have to work extra hours and are not being recompensed. The union's Troy Burton says his members dislike having to take industrial action, but the hotels are refusing to discuss any compensation for the additional work. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Government shares Treasury concerns that further industrial relations reforms are needed if Australia's unemployment rate is to keep falling. Federal Treasury secretary Ted Evans yesterday said future unemployment falls would depend heavily on how the labour market is functioning. On the Gold Coast today, Workplace Relations Minister Peter Reith echoed Mr Evans' concerns. But he says plans for further industrial relations reforms are being hindered by the Opposition and Australian Democrats. ""The Labor Party and the Democrats have a freeze on any further workplace relations reform,"" he said. ""The Democrats have not supported any labour market reform since January 1997. ""Whilst unemployment numbers are some of the best we've seen in a decade, the Government is keen to see that number come down and we know it can come down if we get further reform."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A Federal Court judge has been asked to abort one of the highest profile class actions in Australia's recent history. The application was made by counsel for the more than 6,000 claimants in the McDonald's McMatch and Win trial. The Federal Court in Brisbane has heard the associate of trial judge John Dowsett had negotiated a job with the Sydney law firm representing McDonald's. Cedric Hampson QC, for the claimants, told the court there was the potential for the job to be perceived as a reward for ""services rendered"". The hearing is continuing. The long-running trial began in July last year and has held hearings across Australia. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Antarctic may soon be home to a telescope which could place Australian scientists at the leading edge of modern astronomy. The telescope's designers say it could be built for $9 million. Normally, optical telescopes cost between $100 million and $1 billion dollars to build. But Michael Burton, from the University of New South Wales, says it will be cheaper and smaller because of the unique characteristics of the Antarctic. ""An infra-red telescope on one of the highest parts of the Antarctic plateau where the air is incredibly cold and dry and it provides the clearest views of the distant stars and galaxies and universe,"" he said. ""It would allow Australia to build a world leading facility for a fraction of the price of other countries [and] to be leading the way in international astronomy."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australian Swimming is considering taking legal action against self-confessed drug cheat, former Australian discus champion Werner Reiterer. In his book released yesterday, Reiterer admitted taking steroids and human growth hormone, and also accused Australian athletes and swimmers of using banned substances. Australian Swimming president Terry Gathercole says the organisation's lawyers are investigating the allegations made in the book, with legal action a possibility. ""We have 110,000 swimmers around our country. When you say 'swimmers' that paints a pretty broad brush,"" he said. ""With 70 or 71 days to go before the Games we don't want our swimmers of any calibre being distracted and especially the 44 who have been selected to represent Australia at the Olympic Games."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Opposition Leader, Kim Beazley, says families will find this week's pay packets do not make up for losses they will face under the goods and services tax (GST). More than one million people receive their first pay today with reduced tax rates. Prime Minister John Howard, who is in London, had said that the public reaction to the GST was more positive than expected. But Mr Beazley says the view in Australia is much different from London and it is a particularly bitter day for pensioners. ""There has been an announcement by the Government that tax cuts will be backdated before July the first if there's a relevant pay period,"" he said. ""That didn't happen with the pensioners, that went down $10."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Local councils are warning of higher rates and charges if the Federal Government does not prevent them paying more for diesel fuel. Under the new tax system, councils are ineligible for the general diesel fuel rebate, while the Commonwealth will not fully cover the loss of former state subsidies. The Government says those affected, including building contractors and charter-boat operators, should make up the gap through cost savings. But the chief executive of the Australian Local Government Association, Rod Nettle, says the cost savings will not be achieved overnight. ""What we want the...Federal Government to do is to step in and knock off that one and-a-half cents additional [cost]...off the excise, and progressively put it back as those cost savings come through the petrol industry over five years,"" he said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Opposition says if it wins the next election, doctors and health professionals would be required to tell patients the charges they face, before treatment. Labor has prepared a draft health platform ahead of its national conference later this month. The Shadow Health Minister, Jenny Macklin, says there have been some changes in the area recently, but Labor would take them further. ""To make sure that doctors who are part of no gap or known-gap schemes that they be required to inform patients of any outstanding bills they might get,"" he said. ""But what we'd like to see is that extended to all doctors, that they be required to give patients information about how much they'd be out of pocket before they have any procedure."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Australian Government is supporting the creation of an exclusion zone around the Fijian Parliament. The Foreign Minister, Alexander Downer, says the military has been too lenient for too long. The exclusion zone was established around the compound last night. Those inside have been warned by the military they have until midnight Friday to leave. In a show of defiance, rebels have paraded some men in warrior dress and raised a hand-made flag in the Parliament grounds. The rebels, holed up in Fiji's Parliament, are having face-to-face talks with the military regime for the first time in a fortnight. A member of the military council is in the Parliamentary complex for a meeting with the rebels. The emissary is Ratu Epeli Ganilau, the previous head of Fiji's military, and a member of the council overseeing the martial law regime."

" Ratu Epeli is having talks with the commander of the renegade troops in the compound, former officer Ilisoni Ligairi, who has emerged as a key figure in the George Speight group. The rebels say the talks are exploratory and unofficial. They come as the army moves slowly to enforce the exclusion zone declared at midnight last night. Mr Downer has welcomed the tougher stance of the Fijian military. Despite the formation of a civilian Government two days ago, 27 hostages remain under the control of the rebels, 49 days after the coup began. Mr Downer says pressure is mounting on coup leader George Speight and he should end the stand-off immediately. ""There is very little community support for Mr Speight and Mr Speight has no further options,"" he said. ""He should take the opportunity of releasing the hostages, doing the one decent and honourable thing he can do."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Australian Democrats say the Federal Government is doing nothing to stop suspected Nazi war criminal Konrad Kalejs from leaving the country. Australia announced it would sign an extradition treaty with Latvia next week, which would allow an application for Mr Kalejs, who lives in Melbourne, to be extradited. Democrat Senator Brian Greig has urged Justice Minister Amanda Vanstone to have Mr Kalejs's passport seized if he attempts to leave the country. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australia's second largest retailer, Woolworths, has reported a strong increase in sales for the year to June. Turnover topped $20 billion, with sales growth at 8 per cent during the year. This came despite the sale of the Rockmans Fashion chain in February. Chief executive Roger Corbett says there do not appear to have been significant pre-goods and services tax distortions in sales trends from March to June. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Government says it has rectified an anomaly in the new tax system which would have left one group of pensioners worse off. Garry Newman, who receives a service pension, says his family payments were going to be reduced and his wife would lose her health care card because of the taxation changes. Mr Newman's family benefits would have been cut because of income testing for the pension. But the Family and Community Services Minister, Jocelyn Newman, says the Government has already taken decisions to protect the small number of people affected. She says the decision was taken in the week before the tax changes were introduced and people are now being notified. The Opposition has accused the Government of trying to hide the change and of engaging in a roll-back of the goods and services tax (GST) on the run. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Fiji's military has declared an exclusion zone around the Parliament, where 27 hostages are being held. The zone decree, to apply from midnight, gives 48 hours for people living around the Parliament to vacate the zone. Announcing the exclusion zone, Fiji's military President Frank Bainimarama says it is not the start of a military operation to free the hostages. Food will be allowed into the Parliament compound but no people will be allowed to enter. A military spokesman in Suva says the hostage seige cannot go on forever and the restrictions on movement are designed to make the hostage-takers focus on a resolution. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Two Aboriginal men who admitted taking Aboriginal remains from a sacred keeping place south of Hobart, say they have no intention of giving them back. Douglas Maynard and Cranston Mansell have been jointly charged with trespassing and destroying property at Oyster Cove in November last year. The pair did not enter pleas in the Hobart Magistrates Court today, but said the charges should be decided by the Aboriginal community and NOT the courts. The Aboriginal bones are contained in twenty-one boxes, and the pair has refused to give them back despite requests from the Aborignal Land Council and the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Australian Medical Association (AMA) has criticised plans by a major private health insurance group to limit the treatment patients can receive for a chronic condition. A report today says the insurance company MBF [Medical Benefits Fund] is planning to allow patients with the chronic condition lymphoedema to be covered for only 10 treatments in their lifetime. The AMA president, Karyn Phelps, says it is an attempt to shift the burden back onto the public hospital system and it is not fair to patients. ""If a patient has gone to the expense of private health insurance, in good faith, and they develop a condition, acute, chronic or otherwise, they should be covered for that condition. ""To put a lifetime cap on treatment for a chronic condition is another form of cost shifting back to the public sector,"" she said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The parents of a young northern Victorian boy mauled to death by the family's dog say they are devastated by the loss of their son. The two-year-old Mooroopna toddler was found dead yesterday afternoon in his bedroom. Police say he had sustained injuries to most of his body. The family dog, a 12-month-old cross breed bought from a neighbour several months earlier, was also in the room near an open window. In a prepared statement read by the boy's aunt, the parent's, identified only as Amish and Peter, said they are still unsure how their son Patrick came to be mauled to death by the family pet. The parents described their son as a happy, loving and active child ""and he was our little angel and will be forever missed"". A post mortem will be carried out tomorrow. The dog was put down earlier today at the request of the parents. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Paralympic organisers say the entry fee for athletes will not be waived, despite a $20 million funding boost from the New South Wales and Federal Governments. Organisers say the money, announced in the State and Federal Budgets, is to enhance the delivery of the Games, not to cover the $6 million in entry fees from competing countries. The Australian Paralympic Committee has raised concerns about the fee but no other country has asked about it. Sydney Paralympic Organising Committee chief executive Lois Appleby says there is no room to move on the issue. ""They believe that we have the discretion to waive the entry fee and that we have the budget to do that. ""I've pointed out to their president that we do not have the resources. We do not have the money to waive the $6 million entry fee,"" she said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Prime Minister, John Howard, has made another ""never-ever"" goods and services tax (GST) promise, saying he will not allow the tax rate to rise. Mr Howard has outlined his new tax system to his British counterpart, Tony Blair. The Prime Minister may have left behind his 10 per cent GST but in London he is paying the UK equivalent, a 17.5 per cent VAT. Mr Howard would not criticise the British tax but the Prime Minister emerged from talks with Mr Blair saying when you look around the world Australia has a more balanced and fair system. Mr Howard says the Australian rate will absolutely stay at 10 per cent. ""You can quote me as long as you live, no government that I've got anything to do with will ever do anything about increasing that rate,"" he said. ""I don't believe a Coalition government led by anyone else, sometime into the future, will do anything about it either."" ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A mutiny on Fiji's second island has apparently stalled. The effort to overthrow the commander of the Labasa camp has exposed tensions in Fiji's military over dealing with the rebellion led by George Speight. Two lieutenants seized control of the weapons in the Labasa camp and announced the captain in charge of the post had been deposed. The would-be mutiny has pledged support to the Fiji nationalist aims of Mr Speight and those who have seized Fiji's Parliament. But other troops in Labasa did not join the mutiny. A team of officers from headquarters in Suva flew to Labasa and after several hours of talks were given the keys to the armoury to regain control of the weapons. The military will continue talks today with traditional northern chiefs gathering in Labasa. The mutiny is an embarrassment for the military regime which yesterday saw its civilian Cabinet sworn into office. ----------------------------------------------------------------"

" International flights to Solomon Islands have again been suspended following fighting around the capital, Honiara. The only airline still flying to Honiara has cancelled today's flight. Air Nuigini was due to fly in from Port Moresby at lunch time, but says its insurance under-writers would not cover the flight. This follows heavy fighting between the rival militias at Alligator Creek about one kilometre from the airport. The scene of the fighting is close to the end of the runway, but as has been the case throughout this conflict, aircraft have not been targeted and international flights have operated safely. Air Nuigini was the only international airline still flying to Honiara. Qantas suspended its code share service with Solomon Islands one month ago. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Villagers in the north of Sierra Leone have reported that rebel soldiers have raped a group of young girls. The rebels are accused of sexually assaulting up to 25 girls during the attack. Witnesses say the soldiers were laughing as they raped the girls, aged between seven and 10. The alleged incident has taken place in a town in the north of Sierra Leone. Amnesty International has already expressed its concern about the increasing incidence of sexual assault. The United Nations has also acknowledged the problem saying civilians remain vulnerable as fighting continues. The UN is investigating reports that rebel soldiers have now taken control of a strategic junction east of Freetown. Residents fleeing from the area, 40 kilometres outside the capital, say that the rebels used heavy mortar fire to secure the position on Monday night. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The United Nations refugee agency has resumed aid work in West Timor after a two week suspension following assaults on staff and refugees. United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) spokesman Kris Janowski says the move came after Indonesian authorities agreed to measures to protect workers and refugees against pro-Indonesian elements. Measures include police taking charge of security in the camps and maintaining a 24-hour presence. The UNHCR suspended its activities in three major refugee camps near the West Timor capital, Kupang, two weeks ago after an escalation in violence and intimidation by pro-Jakarta militias. The camps house 24,000 people who sought refuge from unrest in East Timor following the territory's vote last year in favour of independence. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australia's Jelena Dokic has beaten Magui Serna of Spain 6-3, 6-2, to reach her first Wimbledon semi-final. Dokic will meet defending champion Lindsay Davenport who earlier beat Monica Seles in their quarter-final, 6-7, 6-4, 6-0. The 17-year-old is yet to drop a set in this tournament. After her match, Dokic told a news conference that while her sights are set on the Wimbledon crown, the hard work is yet to come. ""You know I probably haven't gotten tested yet because I've just kept pressuring the opponent and I know the next one will be tougher but you deal with that when you get to it,"" she said. Meanwhile, fifth seed Venus Williams of the United States has defeated the top seed, Martina Hingis of Switzerland 6-3, 4-6, 6-4, to reach the other semi-final. She will now face her younger sister and eighth seed Serena, who beat unseeded fellow American Lisa Raymond 6-2, 6-0, in their quarter-final match."

" A battle has broken out around Fiji's Parliament with at least four people wounded by gunfire. The battle follows a mini mutiny on Fiji's second island. The battle on the perimeter of the parliamentary compound in Suva saw volleys of shots exchanged by the rebels inside and soldiers stationed around the compound. An army spokesman says one grenade also exploded during the fight. The military says four civilians were taken to hospital with leg wounds. It has also reported from inside the compound that one of the rebel guards was wounded in the arm. Each side said the other started the battle and the army says it has been contacted by the rebel leader George Speight to arrange an immediate cease-fire. Earlier, some soldiers at the army base at Lambasa, on Fiji's second island, mutineered in support of Mr Speight's Fiji nationalist demands. A military spokesman says two soldiers had seized the weapons held by the garrison in Lambasa."

" The Federal Government says long-term unemployed people would gain vital new job skills, if they carry out military service as part of the work for the dole scheme. The Government is considering a proposal to add defence reserve service to the list of activities recognised as meeting mutual obligation requirements. The Acting Defence Minister Bruce Scott says service would be voluntary and would only apply to people who meet the usual requirements for entry into the Army, Navy or Airforce Reserves. Mr Scott says there could be a positive spin-off for the defence force if work for the dole reservists later decided to apply for permanent military jobs. ""If people were given an opportunity to meet that obligation and include as part of that some reserve force training and if that led to them being interested in a career in the ADF (Army Defence Force), well that is a positive step forward,"" he said."

" The farm lobby has complained to the Federal Government about a glitch in diesel excise arrangements which will leave farmers paying nearly two cents a litre excise for on-farm diesel use. Diesel for tractors, pumps and generators on farms is traditionally free of excise, via a rebate scheme. But the National Farmers Federation (NFF) says the Government's failure to reduce excise by a full 8.2 cents per litre means there will be a gap of 1.8 cents a litre between the excise paid for diesel and the amount rebated. NFF president Ian Donges says the problem will have to be fixed and backdated to July 1. ""There's no doubt if you're talking about a time period of six months and even 12 months, you're talking about millions of dollars of extra cost to agriculture because diesel fuel is an important component of many farm businesses, and you're talking nearly a two cents per litre tax,"" he said. A spokesman for the Transport Minister, John Anderson, says the Government is prepared to look at the NFF's case."

" The Federal Government says a slump in investment on research and development reflects the level of abuse of tax concessions offered by the former Labor government. The latest figures on research and development show spending has fallen to just under 0.7 of 1 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), well down on levels when the Coalition formed government in 1996, and towards the bottom of the ladder of industrialised nations. The Industry Minister, Nick Minchin, says comparisons with the Keating government's years are invalid because research and development spending was artificially inflated by systematic abuse of tax concessions."

" A proposal to establish a South Pacific whale sanctuary has failed. Members of the International Whaling Commission (IWC), meeting in Adelaide, voted 18 in favour and 11 against the proposal while four countries abstained. However, it did not achieve the three-quarters majority needed. Opposition to the proposal focused on a lack of scientific evidence to support it. Australia's Environment Minister Robert Hill has vowed to pursue the proposal at next year's meeting."

" Meanwhile, the RSPCA says it is strongly opposed to commercial whaling, regardless of whether it can be justified or not. Japan has used the IWC meeting to argue for the lifting of a commercial whaling ban, claiming an increase in the number of whales is threatening the world's fishing stocks. But the RSPCA's national president, Hugh Wirth, says for a whale to be killed humanely, it must be rendered instantly unconscious and remain unconcious until it dies. Dr Wirth says there is no method which can kill a whale humanely and they currently die a cruel death. ""It's killed in agony. Very painful wounding occurs to the animal, regardless of what the Japanese, the principle nation, says and that animal takes a long time to die and is conscious of its wounds,"" Dr Wirth said."

" The Victorian Government has ruled out changing the State's abortion laws, despite two inquiries into a late term abortion at the Royal Women's Hospital. Three senior medical staff have been suspended over the termination of a 32-week-old foetus. It is believed the mother was suicidal and requested the abortion because her unborn child had a serious abnormality. Abortion in Victoria is legal only if pregnancy poses a health risk to the mother. Mr Thwaites told Southern Cross Radio he was satisfied the current laws are working. ""This is one of those dreadfully difficult community issues where there are passionately different positions and where the law has been working reasonably well as it has,"" he said. ""I don't think it's necessarily in anyone's interest to reopen it and simply change the law. ""You'll excite all that passion and it's been tried elsewhere and it's led to bad outcomes, not good outcomes."""

" Former rugby league player turned boxer Anthony Mundine is in good spirits despite his house being robbed overnight. Mundine was in the boxing ring fighting his first bout, after he quit rugby league, when the house at Earlwood was robbed. Thieves stole jewellery, clothes, trophies and other items from his bedroom. Mundine, who is recovering from his fight against Gerard Zohs, says he will now increase household security. ""Just for the family's sake [to] make sure that they are all secure. So I'll probably increase it, put in an alarm system or something like that,"" he said."

" Thousands of people in Western Australia's south-west have missed seeing the Olympic torch. The flame arrived last night in the timber town of Manjimup, where up to 7,000 people turned out, many of them to watch it on a giant television screen. However, a major sponsor decided not to set up the screen, claiming the ground was not level, even though SOCOG officials had approved it. Event organiser Tracey Crombie-Wilson says the superscreen would have allowed the crowd to see everything but they missed out. ""Because of the way the streets are lined a lot of people didn't actually get to see the torch until it got up onto the stage to light the cauldron. ""It was very exciting, and we're not taking away from that, but they didn't get to see it along the leg because they chose to wait for the cauldron and so they saw the last 30 seconds,"" she said."

" Australia has named a predictable team for the Davis Cup semi-final against Brazil, beginning in Brisbane on July 14. Cup captain John Newcombe has named Mark Philippoussis, Lleyton Hewitt, Pat Rafter and Mark Woodforde. It is expected Philippoussis and Hewitt will play singles, while Rafter will combine with Woodforde in the doubles."

" The Federal Treasurer, Peter Costello, has repeated his call for the Federal Opposition leader, Kim Beazley, to detail his plans to roll back the goods and services tax (GST). In his televised reply to the Prime Minister's address to the nation last week, Mr Beazley pledged to roll back the GST in health and education, to simplify it for small business and lift the burden on the most needy. But Mr Costello has dismissed the address, saying the only thing Mr Beazley was definite about was that he would keep the GST. Mr Costello says the Labor leader did not rule out increasing income tax or petrol excise to fund the roll back, and did not say say what would be GST exempt. He says Labor thinks the GST can be made fair, but it cannot say how, when or by how much. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Fiji's coup leader George Speight has threatened retaliation in response to the military's announcement of a new interim cabinet. The military commander, Frank Bainimarama, has announced a new Prime Minister, senior banking executive Laisenia Qarase, and another 18 ministers to guide Fiji to new elections in two years. The new Government will be officially sworn in on Tuesday. Commodore Bainimarama says he will remain the effective head of state until the 27 hostages are released and a new president can be appointed. Mr Speight vented his anger at the military's decision, after they selected the Cabinet without any input from the coup leader after he refused to agree to the military's terms for appointing a president. ""The army, in so doing and completely ignoring this group down here, has the very real possibility of making a lot of people very, very upset,"" Mr Speight said. ""All I can say is if the army is wishing to test the extent of the support that we have, then this one example of them doing it and only time will tell, as to what might take place, inside and outside of Parliament."" Mr Speight also questioned the commitment and motives of those accepting the military's appointment. ""We view them as being opportunists, political opportunists, the whole lot of them, with due respect to the professionals who are there, in the interim government, who have a love for Fiji and who wish to participate, but these are abnormal times, this is not a normal situation,"" he said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The new Prime Minister of Solomon Islands has appealed to rival militias to begin peace talks, following renewed outbreaks of fighting. One of the militia groups has refused to recognise the new Government. Prime Minister Mannaseh Sogavare is urging talks for a ceasefire, following renewed outbreaks of shooting outside Honiara. The shooting was said to be intense at times, but there is no word on casualties. In the past, even intense firefights have caused few casualties. The Isatabu Freedom Movement says it will not recognise the new Government or cooperate with it. The Isatabu says the Government was formed under circumstances of duress and has appealed to the Australian Government to withhold recognition and cooperation. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australia has ruled out backing down on its opposition to lifting the ban on commercial whaling, in exchange for support for its proposal to establish a South Pacific whale sanctuary. Japan is opposed to the sanctuary and has been gathering support for its stance. The joint Australian-New Zealand proposal has the support of Britain, the United States, France and the South Pacific forum, but needs three quarters of the vote for it to succeed. Six countries have indicated they will abstain from today's vote at the International Whaling Commission (IWC) meeting in Adelaide. The Federal Environment Minister, Senator Robert Hill, says the time is right for the vote, particularly with the IWC meeting in the region. The IWC says a management plan for the reintroduction of limited commercial whaling is the only way to control countries who continue to hunt for whales. Japan and Norway are the main countries that continue to defy a 14-year international moratorium. IWC secretary Ray Gambell says the plan is the only way of putting controls on those countries. ""I think it probably is because what Japan and Norway are doing is perfectly legal - they are catching whales in a way which is totally in conformity with the international convention under which we operate,"" he said. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The South African Government says it will not back away from the pursuit of alternative treatments for AIDS. The Government has invited several controversial scientists to attend a special two-day meeting. The forum, which finishes today, will deliver advice to the Government on how to deal with the worsening AIDS crisis. Several of the scientists attending the meeting believe that HIV does not cause AIDS. It is a view which is in contrast to mainstream research, but the South African Government says it has a right to explore a range of opinions. It is estimated that one in 10 South Africans are now HIV positive. This weekend, South Africa will host the world's largest forum on AIDS. Up to 10,000 international delegates are expected to attend the conference in Durban. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Chechen rebels say the latest suicide attacks that have killed about 60 people are the first phase of a major operation for the liberation of Chechnya. The heaviest attack was in the city of Argun, where a suicide bomber in a truck packed with explosives blew up a police hostel. The Chechen political spokesman, Aslan Bakadiaf, says suicide is strictly forbidden in Chechen society. ""But the situation of [the] Chechen civilian population is so desperate at this moment and their situation is so severe that some Chechen soldiers, fighters, decided to take this extreme method of resistance,"" he said. ""But actually, [it] is more dedicated to bringing attention to this forgotten war."" --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Former World War II nurse and prisoner of war Vivian Bullwinkel has died in Perth at the age of 84. Sister Bullwinkel, whose married name was Statham, suffered a heart attack today, following leg surgery at a Perth hospital. She was the sole survivor of the Banka Island massacre, following the sinking of the Vyner Brooke as it evacuated civilians and Australian nurses from Singapore in 1942. More than 20 nurses struggled ashore at Radji Beach, where Japanese soldiers ordered them into the sea and shot them. Sister Bullwinkel, who was shot above the hip, was the only survivor. She feigned death, then hid in the jungle for 12 days before surrendering to the Japanese and spending three and-a-half years as a prisoner of war. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australia has three players in the Wimbledon quarter-finals, after Mark Philippoussis beat England's Tim Henman this morning. Philippoussis won in five sets, 6-1, 5-7, 6-7, 6-3, 6-4 and will face Andre Agassi in the next round. The style of the win, coming after Saturday's five-hour marathon against Sjeng Schalken, would have won Philippoussis many backers for Wednesday's quarter-final against second seed Agassi, who had a three-set romp over German qualifier David Prinosil. The doubters came out for Philippoussis as he dropped the third set, many believing his stamina would be his undoing after the exhausting match against Schalken. But instead he responded in admirable style and ultimately underlined his win with four aces in the final game, after which a stunned and bitterly disappointed Henman smashed his racquet on his foot. Meanwhile, Australian 12th seed Pat Rafter is also through to the quarter-finals defeating Thomas Johansson of Sweden 6-3, 6-4, 6-7 (4/7), 6-1. ""At this stage I'm very happy with the way things are going,"" he said. ""I had a pretty tough draw."" Rafter had not expected to come close to matching last year's semi-final finish following a serious shoulder injury. Rafter will next play Alexander Popp of Germany and Jelena Dokic, Australia's only women's quarter-finalist, will play Magui Serna of Spain."

" Retail figures confirm Australian shoppers left their pre-goods and services tax (GST) spending till the last minute. Sales turnover rose only slightly in May and the surge is seen as having happened last month, boosted by earlier than usual mid-year sales. Economists believe overall consumer spending will rise in coming weeks, when people digest the income tax cuts, and as the Sydney Olympics and the NRMA float draw nearer. The chief executive of the Australian Retailers Association, Phil Naylor, says a sales downturn for items such as clothing could last a couple of months."

" One of the major fuel companies, Shell Oil, says petrol prices will rise by about 2.5 cents a litre this week, partly because of the goods and services tax (GST). The Prime Minister, who promised the price of petrol would not go up as a result of the GST, says if there is a rise it will be due to other factors. But Ian McKenzie from Shell says 1.5 cents will be due to the GST with the rest from usual discounting cycles and international influences. ""The effect of higher crude oil prices and a lower exchange rate - the net effect of those may see a price increase of around one cent a litre but that has nothing to do with the GST. ""Let's make it absolutely clear, the impact of the GST is about 1.5 cents and I think we need to put the other factors into another category,"" he said."

" Two teenagers will be sentenced later this month after pleading guilty in the Perth Children's Court to raping a 75-year-old woman. The boys, aged 14 and 15, admitted breaking into the woman's unit in suburban Wilson two months ago and raping her. They pleaded guilty to several charges including sexual penetration, deprivation of liberty and stealing."

" The Federal Government has outlined details of its $30 million national biotechnology strategy. The funding is an addition to the $250 million the Government spends annually on biotechnology research and development. Science Minister Nick Minchin took the opportunity to launch the new strategy at the opening of Australia's premier biotechnology conference ABA 2000, in Brisbane. A key priority of the strategy is to establish a $20 million fund to encourage business to invest in biotechnology growth. He says the Government will source funding from the science community, private sector and state governments, to provide a pool of finance for potential biotechnology projects. Other priorities in the strategy include identifying the requirements and costs of gene technology, promoting public awareness, establishing an environmental risk research program, developing biotechnology networks and ensuring market access for agriculture and food biotechnology products."

" Indonesia's President Abdurrahman Wahid is reportedly determined to come to Australia, despite opposition to the visit in Jakarta. President Wahid says he agreed to postpone the visit by a month on the advice of his Foreign Minister but he will not agree to any further delays. The President, known as Gus Dur, made the comment at a national forum in Bali at the weekend. The forum was hosted by Indonesian television journalist Wimar Witoelar, who is currently visiting Australia. ""He's resolved to come here [Australia] but then he meets this opposition from members in the Parliament who are seeking to get political mileage out of an ultra-nationalistic stance. ""So he said he's been advised by his Foreign Minister to delay the visit to Australia for a month. ""But Gus Dur said to me, in public, that when that month is over, he will go to Australia no matter what the political opposition says,"" Mr Witoelar said."

" The new Solomon Islands Government is working to secure a clear majority, after Mannaseh Sogavare's narrow win in Friday's vote for a new prime minister. The new Government claims to have won over at least one member of the former government. Mr Sogavare was elected by 23 votes to 21, but six MPs did not attend and it is unclear whether they support the Government or the Opposition. Mr Sogavare says a former minister will join his Government and others have indicated an interest. Mr Sogavare has moved in to the Prime Minister's office, which he says was stripped of faxes and computer equipment by the outgoing government. Meanwhile, there have been reports of sporadic gunfire east and west of Honiara, where local residents say there has been an escalation of activities by the rival militias. One report says the Malaita Eagle Force has mounted automatic weapons on a bulldozer, which is now being used as a tank."

" Fiji's military commander Frank Bainimarama has announced a new Prime Minister and Cabinet to rule Fiji for the next 18 months. The merchant banker, Liesinia Qarase, will replace the deposed prime minister, Mahendra Chaudhry, and will lead a Cabinet of 18 other ministers, who are prominent citizens in the Fijian community. Commodore Bainimarama says two Indian Fijians were offered a post on the Cabinet but both declined the offer. The new Cabinet will be officially sworn in tomorrow and will take over from the military council. Commodore Bainimarama says the interim Cabinet will have a wide ranging mandate, including the rehabilitation of Fiji's economy, affirmative action programs for indigenous Fijians and the contentious issue of land ownership. He says the Cabinet team was chosen because of their high standing in the community, their professionalism and their qualifications."

" Mexican voters have re-written political history and elected a new Prime Minister. Vincente Fox, from the National Action Party, won the top posting, breaking the ruling party's 71-year grip on power. President Ernesto Zedillo has gone on television to acknowledge Vincente Fox's victory. Sufficient votes have been counted to guarantee his triumph. The Institutional Revolutionary Party, known as the PRI, had not lost a presidential election since its foundation way back in 1929. Mr Fox is celebrating at Mexico City's angel of independence with tens of thousands of his jubilant supporters."

" A proposal to introduce secret ballots for the International Whaling Commission has not made it onto the agenda of the meeting being held in Adelaide this week. The Japanese proposal was submitted late and the committee chairman ruled it would not be discussed this year. Japan says it wants secret ballots introduced because of concerns that some smaller countries feel intimidated. A spokesman for the Japanese Government says the proposal will be re-introduced next year."

" Thousands more Australian businesses will today experience trading under the goods and services tax (GST) for the first time. The start of the week for Monday-to-Friday traders follows a relatively smooth introduction of the GST at the weekend. Early monitoring by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) has shown 97 per cent of goods and services surveyed rose by less than 10 per cent. Nappies, vitamin pills, paint, hamburgers and clothes recorded some of the biggest price rises. ACCC chairman Alan Fels says the initial results are indicative only, and should become more accurate as price monitoring activities increase. Professor Fels says further price changes are expected as smaller stores complete their GST preparations. ""It's pretty clear what's happening in the major supermarkets, but in some of the smaller businesses it's less clear,"" he said. ""Big business has been well prepared. At the other end, with very very small businesses, there's been quite a few of them still making the change, or have been slow to do so and I think I understand that."" In a further sign the introduction of the GST has run smoothly, the ACCC says it received 5,000 calls over the weekend with only a small percentage complaints. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The make-up of Fiji's next government could be announced as early as today. The interim cabinet will have a wide ranging mandate. Military commander Frank Bainimarama is expected to swear in the government this week to rule Fiji for up to two years. It is understood merchant banker Laisenia Qarase will be prime minister. Mr Qarase has already held talks with foreign missions, including Australia's high commissioner, to secure international recognition. But military leaders are keeping the final line-up a closely guarded secret. The interim cabinet will have powers to govern on economic and social issues such as land ownership. The military says Indo-Fijians will be included in the government, but admits it will have to offer ongoing protection for new ministers because many candidates fear for their safety. Local media say some Indo-Fijian candidates have been pressured by their own community not to stand. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The new Solomon Islands Government has begun swearing in its Ministers and will today appoint a member of the previous government to its ranks. But despite the apparent return of stability, residents of one area of Honiara have moved out, fearing an escalation of militia activities. Mannaseh Sogavare's Government has won over an as yet unnamed MP who had been a minister in the previous government, who will be sworn in today. There are unconfirmed reports that man is former prime minister Bartholomew Ulufa'alu. The switch will strengthen the new Government's narrow majority of two. Meanwhile, residents of Tasahe, west of Honiara, are moving away. They say they fear an escalation of the conflict between the Malaita Eagle Force and the Isatabu Freedom Fighters following the disappearance of two Malaita Eagle members from the area last week. Residents believe they were captured by the rival Isatabu force and fear there may be reprisals. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Government has provided $100,000 for projects related to its South Pacific Whale Sanctuary proposal, which will be voted on during the International Whaling Commission (IWC) meeting in Adelaide this week. The funding is part of a $387,000 package under the coasts and clean seas component of the Natural Heritage Trust. Environment Minister Robert Hill has announced the funding to coincide with the IWC meeting. The funds will be used to help protect humpback, southern right, blue and pigmy blue whales and for increased data collection on whales in Australian waters. Japan says it is voting against the proposed sanctuary on principle. The Australian/New Zealand proposal has the support of the South Pacific Forum, the United Kingdom, the United States and France. Some conservationists have claimed Japan is buying the votes of smaller countries to defeat the proposal, a claim Japan has denied. Japan is also calling for the moratorium on commercial whaling to be lifted. A spokeswoman for the Japanese Whaling Association, Shigeko Misaki, says even though Japan can still kill whales in sanctuaries for scientific purposes, a proposed sanctuary is against their principles. ""Because it is against the principle of the sustainable use of wildlife, so we take it as a symbolic issue of the utilisation of wildlife, including fish and whales,"" she said. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Residents of the southern Queensland farming town of Childers are trying to put their lives back together after the backpacker fire tragedy and the ensuing international attention. A visit by Princess Anne yesterday, again saw the media converge on the town, between the cities of Maryborough and Bundaberg. The residents of Childers were pleased the Princess Royal took the time to pay a visit during a hectic Australian tour schedule. However, it again focused international cameras on the small rural community. One woman voiced her concern about what she describes as pure bedlam in the town since the fire that claimed 15 lives. But the visit by Princess Anne did raise the spirits in Childers at least for a short time and in particular for the remaining British backpackers. The Princess Royal inspected the charred shell of the hostel, spending some time speaking with survivors and those emergency service personel who were first on the scene. British backpacker, 20-year-old James Whitehurst, says he and the other British survivors appreciated the Princess's visit. ""It's a comfort to know that they're actually concerned and they've come along and taken time out from their plans, she had a pretty tight schedule and she popped in for the morning,"" he said. British fire survivor, Emma Waldek, says she holds no grudge against the town or its residents. ""It's like a second home you just walk down to the shop and everyone says hello, good morning how are you, even before the tragedy...it's a wonderful little town to be in,"" she said. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Melbourne's Royal Women's Hospital has suspended three senior medical staff over the abortion of a 32-week-old foetus. The incident has also been referred to the coroner for further investigation. The hospital's medical director, Glenn Bowes, says the full details of the incident are not fully known, with the hospital also conducting an internal investigation. Professor Bowes says the hospital does know the woman was referred to the hospital to terminate the pregnancy due to a foetal abnormality. ""A woman arrived here in an extremely distressed state with her husband and they both came here for the first time at that gestation of pregnancy and requested a termination of pregnancy,"" he said. He says details are still sketchy over the incident, but medical practices exist to terminate pregnancies at such a late stage in extreme cases. ""We know that there was a stillbirth, we know there was an abnormality,"" he said. ""We know that there was a request for termination of pregnancy. We also know that there are various treatment modalities procedures that are used in such circumstances."" --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Voting continues in Mexico, where there is a real chance the ruling PRI could lose power after more than 70 years in office. Polling booths close in a few hours, but results are not expected for some time. The leader of one of the observer missions, former US president Jimmy Carter, says Mexico has made great strides in stamping out election fraud. ""I think this is probably one of the best organised processes legally, that I've ever seen,"" he said. ""It's very clear, the Central Election Commission has complete authority. All the members of it have been agreed upon by all three major parties, so there's no prejudice there."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" In a thrilling finish, reigning world champion France has beaten Italy to win Euro 2000 with a goal in extra time. France first equalised in the fourth minute of injury time and David Trezeguet scored the ""golden goal"" in a 2-1 victory which gave Les Bleus a European football championship on top of its world title. After French substitute Sylvain Wiltord equalised with the seconds ticking away in regulation time, another substitute, David Trezeguet, volleyed the winner home in the 103rd minute. Italy, in its most offensive formation in the tournament, went ahead in the 55th minute when Gianluca Pessotto curled a low cross into the area and Delvecchio stabbed it home with the inside of his left foot high into the net and outside Fabien Barthez's reach. When all seemed lost Wiltord finally found a hole in the ironclad Italian defence and beat Francesco Toldo with a low angled shot. With France pushing ever harder, Robert Pires broke on the left and passed low into the path of Trezeguet, who volleyed high into the net from 10 metres out. France thus became the first nation to win a European championship title as a world champion and established a soccer dynasty in the process. Italian coach Dino Zoff had been a minute away from becoming the first man to win the European championship both as coach and player. The 1996 European Championship was also decided on a golden goal when Germany beat the Czech Republic 2-1."

" The Prime Minister is keeping his exact whereabouts on the first day of the goods and services tax (GST) under tight wraps, for fear of political protesters. On the eve of the new 10 per cent tax, which comes into force at midnight, Mr Howard has inspected a Sydney department store and has done at least half a dozen media interviews throughout the morning. Mr Howard says he will also be attending public events tomorrow to gauge reaction to the GST, but he is not saying where. ""I will be out and about tomorrow. I'm not saying exactly when, because whenever I say in advance where I'm going a funny thing happens - branch members of the local ALP branch turn up posing as outraged citizens,"" he said."

" The Federal Treasurer, Peter Costello, says it is unlikely consumer spending in Australia will contract significantly under the GST. Some small businesses fear the pre-GST rush to spend will drop off after many prices rise tomorrow. But Mr Costello says that is unlikely. ""You haven't seen a frenzy of buying in the lead-up to these particular taxation changes. And I think consequently you won't see the drop off to the same extent that you've seen in some of the other countries,"" he said."

" With just hours before the introduction of the GST, the Federal Opposition leader, Kim Beazley, is visiting the Snowy Mountains in New South Wales. Mr Beazley has gone bush to the small town of Jindabyne. He is focusing on inconsistencies between city and country pricing, specifically an expected rise in petrol prices. He has spoken of the rolling back of the GST if Labor is elected at the next election and has reaffirmed his party has not and does not support the new tax system. As for Mr Beazley's pre-GST shopping, he bought a few books and clothes for the family."

" The Australian Taxation Office (ATO) is expecting around 15,000 GST inquiries this weekend, as business and consumers adjust to the new tax system. Telephone hotlines will be open from 8:00am to 8:00pm tomorrow, and 10:00am to 3:00pm on Sunday. The Tax Commissioner, Michael Carmody, says the ATO will not be looking to penalise businesses that encounter problems. ""Overall, I think we will see that businesses are pretty well prepared,"" he said. ""Now look, there's going to be some teething problems and some businesses won't be all the way there. ""And that's why we've made it clear that when we go out and visit businesses afterwards, we're going to take account of the fact that this is the biggest change in our system, and we don't want to penalise people - we just want to help them out into the future."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" In Indonesia, rescuers have located some survivors of a ship which sank while carrying about 400 passengers, all refugees fleeing sectarian violence. A radio message from one of the rescue vessels indicates some passengers are alive, but there is no confirmation of how many. The ship, the Cahaya Bahari, sank yesterday afternoon on a voyage from Halmahera island on the strife torn Maluku Islands to the city of Manado. It was licenced to carry 270 passengers but those who witnessed the departure said there were as many as 400 people on board, refugees, mainly women and children fleeing fighting in the village of Duma. Last week about 100 people were killed in the village after an attack by Muslim fighters. This is the second tragedy involving a vessel carrying refugees from the Malukus. In May, another ship capsized in a storm, killing 40 passengers who were fleeing Ambon. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The ACT Government has warned major projects are at risk because of the Budget impasse. The Government's Budget was voted down last night because of opposition from key Independents to funding for a trial of a drug injecting room. The Budget provided funding for programs such as the First Home Buyers' scheme, an expansion of the police force and a multi-million dollar deal to locate Impulse Airlines at Canberra airport. Treasurer Gary Humphries says the Government has funds to operate for another six months, but is unclear whether new programs can be paid for. ""Certainly a range of initiatives are at risk. In fact, in theory all the things that were new in this Budget have to be in serious doubt at the moment,"" he said. ""We're getting advice on the status of those things but, frankly, it's very hard to see how we can legitimately fund those things which were in the Appropriation Bill which the Assembly has just rejected."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" In Fiji, an Air New Zealand aircraft carrying 10 Maori activists has made an emergency landing at Nadi international airport after a bomb threat. Fiji's immigration authorities had earlier detained the activists, who tried to enter Fiji to show their support for coup leader George Speight. They were detained overnight and ordered to board an Air New Zealand flight this afternoon. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Families of the victims of the Thredbo landslide are not expecting massive compensation payouts, according to their lawyer. Lend Lease is so far the only party named in the class action to agree to contribute to compensation. Lawyer Bernard Colleary says the eight families involved will not be receiving millions of dollars. ""But in this country awards for nervous shock are not what our people, our viewers and listeners believe from American TV. They're very paltry, you rarely see a nervous shock claim above $50,000,"" he said."

" New South Wales Emergency Services Minister Bob Debus says all claims by families involved in the Thredbo disaster will be settled as quickly as possible. All 10 recommendations handed down yesterday by the Thredbo coroner, Derrick Hand, have already been accepted by the state Government. Mr Debus says the families should be spared from further litigation. ""Wherever possible the Government approach will be to settle the common law cases brought by families through negotiation, not through litigation,"" he said. ""We will not be seeking to fight these or other claims in court. I'm hopeful that through this approach we will move to end the legal aspects of the legal strategy as quickly as possible."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A former chairperson of Amnesty International says indigenous Australians have every right to protest during the Sydney Olympics. Ross Daniels was the international chairperson of the human rights group from 1992 to 1996. Speaking in Cairns as part of the region's Peace Week activities, Mr Daniels says the Olympics are an opportunity to highlight issues such as mandatory sentencing. ""These are really profound issues and everyone is more than aware of the issues relating to indigenous peoples. ""Now, if people cannot get a fair go and a just deal by using internal processes then they are perfectly entitled to use whatever external events come their way to promote their particular grievances and their causes. If that's done around the Olympic Games, then so be it,"" he said."

" There are still 2.6 million tickets available to the Sydney Olympics. The International Olympic Committee board member overseeing Sydney's preparations, Jacques Rogge, says overall he is happy with how sales are going but he would like sales to pick up further. ""1.9 [million] for the Sydney-based sports and 0.7 [million] for the football interstate venues [Adelaide, Brisbane, Canberra and Melbourne]. That's million. Yes 2.6 million. ""I'd love to be able to tell you that there is just two tickets available but that's not going to be the case,"" he said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" An Australian Federal Police investigation has begun after a computer hacker gained access to the goods and services tax (GST) Start-Up Assistance Internet site. The hacker sent warnings about the security breach to people listed with the site. The site contains information on registered suppliers for goods and services available for GST certificates issues with Australian Business Number registrations. Those whose files were breached received an e-mail message containing the warning, with their bank and telephone details. The GST Start-Up office, which administers the site, says it has now been shut down and a security review has begun. A prepared statement from the office also points out it has no connection with the Tax Office, which has been unaffected by the incident. Suppliers have also been reassured that their payments are unaffected, and no Commonwealth funds are at risk. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" In the WA goldfields, rescue crews believe they still have 30 metres of water and rock to clear in their search for three miners missing in a mine near Leinster. Three men aged 21, 26 and 45 remain buried beneath the massive pile of debris following a cave-in at the Bronzewing mine on Monday afternoon. The accident has prompted Mines Minister Norman Moore to call an emergency meeting with industry bodies and he has foreshadowed a review of safety guidelines. ""I'm happy to have as many reviews as necessary to reach that fatality free regime,"" he said. Mr Moore says he is frustrated by the continuing rate of mine deaths given the efforts of unions, companies and the Mines Occupational Safety and Health Advisory Board to protect workers. There have been two official deaths at WA mines so far this year with a third death under investigation. Mr Moore has called the mining summit for early next week. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" There has been another cyanide spill involving a Papua New Guinea gold mine. A tailings spill at the Lihir gold mine in New Ireland province has released cyanide into sea water, resulting in a small fish kill. A spokesman for the mine says a fault in a tailings containment area allowed five tonnes of solids to escape into a boat harbour. The spokesman says the material included a substance containing low levels of cyanide. The company has conducted a clean-up, and says its tests found no significant environmental damage. Earlier this year, one tonne of cyanide pellets was accidentally dropped from a helicopter carrying the load to the Tolokuma gold mine near Port Moresby. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Brisbane police have charged 33 people with more than 230 serious drug offences, including trafficking heroin, during a two day drug operation codenamed ""Stack"". Detective Inspector Gordon Thompson says 190 grams of heroin was seized, along with a substantial amount of money and property during raids on houses at Goodna, Carole Park and Inala. Inspector Thompson says the bust will make a big dent in the heroin trade in Brisbane. ""It's a significant seizure of heroin and it will have an impact which we believe will be very substantial on the drug trade in the Brisbane area,"" he said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Another hitch has appeared in plans to elect a new prime minister in Solomon Islands. The Governor-General had announced that the Parliament would meet on board an Australian Navy ship anchored off Honiara tomorrow morning to make its decision. The announcement followed the Parliament's failure to meet yesterday, after more than half its members, mostly Government MPs, boycotted the vote because of fears over their safety. Now, the Opposition says its members will boycott tomorrow's meeting because it is being held on what they describe as ""foreign soil"". The rebels who took over the capital and forced the prime minister to resign, have warned they may escalate the crisis after the failure of Parliament to convene. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A small but noisy protest by Burmese pro-democracy supporters has ended with calls for the Australian Government not to conduct human rights training in Rangoon. The protest, organised by the Free Burma Action Group, occupied NSW Liberal Party headquarters in Sydney for a short period this afternoon, until police ejected them. Protester Peter Murphy said Australian taxpayers would be outraged to learn $500,000 is to be spent teaching human rights to military intelligence officers. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A Melbourne man who was struck in the eye by a gladioli thrown by Dame Edna Everage has settled a legal case against the star. Singing teacher Gary May suffered impaired vision as a result of the incident, at the Princess Theatre last year. He was seeking around $40,000 compensation to cover medical costs, pain and suffering and loss of income. The case has been settled out of court at a hearing in Melbourne. Mr May's lawyer, Eugene Arocca, says his client has made a full recovery, but would like Dame Edna to stop throwing gladis. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Queensland town of Childers is preparing for Sunday's arrival of Princess Anne, who will visit the survivors of last Friday's tragic fire, in which 15 young people died. Eleven of the victims were from overseas. Isis shire mayor Bill Trevor says arrangements have been made for her to inspect the gutted backpacker's hostel. ""She will be touring the site of the hostel, and having a look through the rooms from outside, of course,"" he said. ""She'll then be returning for morning tea at the cultural centre where she'll be mixing and being introduced to the survivors, some of the parents and also the emergency services workers and volunteers who have formed an integral part of this rescue operation."""

" As the parents of some of the 15 backpackers killed in last week's hostel fire arrive in Childers, messages of support are arriving from people who have been through their own tragedies. Mr Trevor says the town is being offered emotional support from people around Australia. ""People from those horror places of Port Arthur, Whyalla, parents of the Interlaken disaster in Switzerland have been in contact. ""The whole Australian community's been very supportive and at this stage I am very proud to be an Australian,"" he said."

" Childers' Multicultural Festival will go ahead next month in spite of the fire. Mr Trevor says staging the festival will be an important part of the town's recovery. ""Part of getting on with life and putting this horror behind us, even though we'll carry a scar into the future for ever, part of that is getting the community back together. ""And I think multicultural day offers us a huge opportunity to reinforce what I've known for a long time, and that is the strength of will of this community,"" he said."

" The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) has released its latest figures on crime, showing a rise in murder rates. Assault cases rose but the number of robbery victims has dropped. The ABS reports the number of murder victims for 1998/99 rose by 20 per cent. However, the increase is largely attributed to the multiple bodies discovered in the Snowtown murder case in South Australia and two family murder-suicides in Western Australia. The number of assault victims rose by two per cent, with the Northern Territory recording the highest rate. Queensland recorded the highest rate of sexual assaults although, across Australia, there was a marginal drop in cases. The number of robbery victims around the country dropped by just over five per cent. New South Wales Bureau of Crime Statistics head Don Weatherburn says: ""There's no 'one safest state'; New South Wales has the worst robbery problem; Western Australia has the worst break and enter problem."" ""So each state has different kinds of crime problems - there's no one state that's got the worst of everything,"" he said."

" Excavation teams working in a goldfields mine where three men are trapped have removed nearly all the fill from the level directly above the site of the accident. The rescue operation is continuing at the Bronzewing gold mine, 400 kilometres north of Kalgoorlie-Boulder, despite there being little chance the men are still alive. Ninety-five percent of the rock, mud and other debris which flowed into a section of the central underground orebody on Monday has now been removed in an attempt to locate the men. Normandy, the owner of the Bronzewing, mine says the cause of the incident has not yet been determined and operations have been suspended while the search and recovery continues."

" An Australian consortium of universities and community groups has won a major contract from the United States to develop a vaccine for HIV/AIDS. The $27 million contract from the United States National Institutes of Health is one of four to be granted, as part of a promise from the US President Bill Clinton to fast track a vaccine. Professor David Cooper from the University of New South Wales says the Australian team will work on a double vaccine technique which boosts the body's immunity. He says HIV is a global emergency and there are high hopes for the Australian project. ""Three are in the United States and it's to our great credit that the only foreign one is from us,"" he said. ""It is a very large sum of money, $27 million, probably one of the largest single grants given by a foreign institution for scientific research in this country."""

" Meanwhile, AIDS researchers are emphasising that an Australian human trial of an AIDS vaccine does not mean a cure has been found. Robyn Gorner, from the Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations, says even if the trial is a success, a vaccine is at least 10 years away. ""We need to get the message out to people that the vaccine is not yet ready,"" she said. ""It's at a very exciting and critical stage, but there is one clear message that the Australian population need to remember, which is behavioural. ""Prevention works, clean needles and safe sex using condoms is the only mechanism we have available for the next 10 years."""

" The Senate has passed an amendment to the digital broadcasting legislation which would allow multi-channelling for the ABC and SBS. The Senate resumed debate this morning on the legislation which lays down the rules for the introduction of digital television to Australia. The amendment passed with the support of the Democrats and the Labor Party in a 34-31 vote. During debate on the issue, Federal Communications Minister Richard Alston argued against singling out the two public broadcasters for multi-channel services. But the Democrats and Labor combined to support the move. Other key amendments to the proposed digital regime including plans to broaden the definition of datacasting, defining it by its attributes rather than the programs carried, have failed. The bill will now have to return to the House of Representatives."

" Meanwhile, the ABC board has urged the Federal Government to allow multi-channelling for the broadcaster when the digital broadcasting bill is reconsidered in the House of Representatives. The Communications Minister, Richard Alston, told the Senate to give the public broadcasters multi-channel services would threaten the quality of their output. ""You are moving it more into the realm of being a second class commercial network rather than a first class quality alternative,"" he said. However shadow Communications Minister Stephen Smith says multi-channelling would be a big win for regional Australia. But he says the failure to amend the datacasting provisions will hold Australia back. ""We won't now be able to embrace new information services and new technology in a way in which we ought,"" he said. After the Senate vote today, the ABC chairman and board released a statement calling on the Government to support the amendment allowing multi-channelling in the House of Representatives. The board is meeting in Sydney today."

" The Federal Government is to refer an increase in bank fees, announced by Westpac today, to the Australian Consumer and Competition Commission (ACCC). The banking industry is expected to reap millions of dollars in savings from the new tax system. But Westpac has announced increases in its transaction fees, saying the new tax system will cost it $66 million a year on top of a one-off compliance charge of $25 million. The Assistant Federal Treasurer, Rod Kemp, has told Senate Question Time the Government is very concerned about the development. ""Mr Hockey, the responsible Minister, is concerned about this matter and my understanding is that he will refer the matter about Westpac fees to the ACCC,"" he said."

" The Federal Employment Services Minister, Tony Abbott, says he is unaware of a document urging Centrelink staff to take a hard line with jobseekers in Sydney during the Olympic year. The briefing note advises staff to tell jobseekers if they cannot get a job in Sydney this year they never will and they are not really trying. Mr Abbott says he believes the Olympic Games in Sydney do offer a great opportunity for jobseekers, but he has not seen the note to Centrelink staff. ""I'm not aware of it and I don't imagine that it would be something that had been run by Ministers,"" he said. ""What I'm saying is that economic conditions in Sydney have never been more buoyant and jobseekers ought to make the most of them while they last. ""Certainly now is the chance to go out and drive unemployment in Sydney back down to levels that were last seen in the 1950s and 1960s."""

" A deadline imposed by Fiji's military law authorities for the coup plotters to agree on a new interim government has expired. The ultimatum was issued yesterday in an effort to get supporters of George Speight to sign an accord on the make up of an interim civilian government and the release of hostages. A military spokesman in Suva says the military would now run the country for the next two years. It will also review the constitution and prepare for general elections. The spokesman says the military is prepared to include ethnic Indians in the interim administration."

" The ethnic militia that is controlling Honiara in Solomon Islands, the Malaita Eagle Force (MEF), has withdrawn its men from the streets of the capital in the run-up to this afternoon's parliamentary vote on who will become prime minister. But for what is left of business in the capital, it is just another day, with most shops and banks remaining open and plenty of people on the streets. The MPs are to meet this afternoon to elect a prime minister to replace Bartholomew Ulufa'alu, who was forced to resign two weeks ago. All is calm in the Parliament as a women's group plans to lead a religious service before the MPs gather to vote for the new prime minister in a few hours time."

" Queensland's Golden Casket Lottery Corporation remains tightlipped about what a moratorium on new interactive gaming will mean for its own Internet ambitions. The Federal Government will introduce legislation in the spring session of Parliament to impose a 12 month moratorium on the introduction of new interactive gambling services. The moratorium also covers new services offered by existing providers. Golden Casket plans to establish an Internet presence through its wholly owned subsidiary, Interactive Gold. The corporation says it is considering the implications of the moratorium but is not in a position to comment further. Meanwhile, existing online gaming house, Gocorp, says it will announce over the coming months how it intends to utilise a license already issued by the Tasmanian Government. Gocorp has expressed dissatisfaction about the rate of gaming taxes in Queensland and has indicated moving to Tasmania is an option."

" Bank fees are set to rise again, with Westpac announcing fee increases due to the goods and services tax (GST). Westpac has begun informing its customers that some fees will rise by the full 10 per cent. Westpac spokesman Noel Purcell says the bank will be out of pocket because of the GST. ""In net terms, the GST impact on an annualised basis is $66 million a year and it's costing us $25 million in terms of the upfront compliance costs,"" he said. As a result, it is passing on those costs to customers claiming it has the support of the Government and the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC). But the ACCC chairman Professor Alan Fels has told Channel Nine the fee increases are yet to be approved. ""We have had some talks with Westpac,"" Professor Fels said. ""We do know that some items they are interested in charging 10 [per cent] and have apparently announced it to some people but a lot of items are far less then 10 [per cent]."" Westpac says some of the fees would have risen even without the GST. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Rescue teams at a mine in the West Australian goldfields say it could be weeks before three men trapped in an underground shaft are located. The workers aged 21, 26 and 45 were buried by mud, water and rocks when a retaining wall collapsed at the Bronzewing Goldmine 400 kilometres north of Kalgoorlie. It took 24 hours for the area to be stabilised after 18,000 cubic metres of earth and water gushed into the shaft about half a kilometre below ground on Monday afternoon. The company which owns Bronzewing, Normandy Mining, has conceded it is unlikely the men have survived the accident. But rescue crews have worked throughout the night clearing the debris whcih the company says would have filled the shaft in seconds. Three inspectors from the Department of Minerals and Energy are contining their investigation into the accident. ----------------------------------------------------------------"

" Queensland police say they will keep searching today for a man they want to question over the Childers backpacker fire. The bodies of the 15 backpackers who died in the fire are now in Brisbane for identification. The police and fire service have wound up their investigation in Childers and the burnt out hostel remains quiet and empty this morning. The investigation is in the hands of the coroner, who has ordered that the identities of the dead not be released until they have been confirmed. Relatives of the victims are reported to be arriving in Childers over the next few days. This Sunday, Princess Anne will also visit the scene of what's become an international tragedy. Police Inspector Phil Wardrope says the investigation is now focusing on the search for Robert Long, a 37-year-old man police descibe as a witness, seen in the building just before the fire. ""If he sees or hears or reads any of these media releases, I ask him to come forward and contact the police and we will certainly go to wherever he wishes and speak to him,"" Inspector Wardrope said. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Government has developed a plan to spread the influx of new refugees into the Australian community, as they are released from detention centres in the next few weeks. The 1,700 illegal immigrants who have been assessed as having a legitimate claim to refugee status will be directed to all states and territories, except New South Wales. They will be released on a phased programme over six weeks, starting next week. The Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock says the illegal immigrants are deliberately being deterred from settling in Sydney. ""We'll be arranging for around about 25 per cent to go to Western Australia, 25 per cent to South Australia, 25 per cent to Queensland, 15 per cent to Victoria, with 3 per cent to the ACT, the Northern Territory and Tasmania,"" he said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Zimbabwe's opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), says it may challenge the results in at least 20 of the seats decided at this week's national elections. Despite their loss, the MDC has removed President Robert Mugabe's two-thirds parliamentary majority, ending the ruling Zanu-PF party's 20 year domination of of the country's political scene. The MDC won 57 of the 120 seats contested. But the MDC says because of intimidation and rigging of votes, confirmed by the reports of independent observers, it was denied victory in many seats. MDC leader, Morgan Tsvangarai, who failed in his bid to win a parliamentary seat, says the result sends a clear signal to President Mugabe. ""What he has to understand, the message out there is very clear, that the people aren't going to stop at anything short of change and the target of that change is instant... the game is up,"" he said. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" Fiji's coup leader George Speight claims he is the man in charge of the rebel group and has rejected a threat by the military to bypass him and set up an interim government. Military authorities have questioned Mr Speight's power because he continually changes demands each time an agreement is near. The military believes the former SAS officer, Ilisoni Ligairi, is one of the masterminds behind the coup and that maybe it should negotiate with someone else. But Mr Speight says Mr Ligairi is only in charge of security at the Parliament compound where he has 27 hostages. ""He is not the man at top, I am the man at the top... I don't answer to anybody in this camp,"" he said. Last night, the military gave Mr Speight a 24-hour ultimatum to accept its terms for appointing a president, or it would bypass him altogether and set up its own interim government, but Mr Speight has rejected the demand. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Religious leaders in Solomon Islands are offering to help protect politicians who are going to the capital Honiara today to decide on a new prime minister. Many MPs fear for their safety in Honiara, which is under the control of the Malaita Eagle Force militia group. Many MPs are nervous and some have threatened to boycott the meeting, claiming they will not vote under threatening conditions. However, the Solomon Islands Christian Association, which is made up of all the major church groups in the Solomons, has even chartered aircraft to fly to the western province to pick up members to bring them to Honiara. They say they will accompany the MPs wherever they travel in Honiara to ensure their safety. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australia's Lleyton Hewitt has suffered a shock defeat in round one at Wimbledon. Hewitt's defeat was the biggest upset. The seventh seed, touted as a big threat to reigning champion Pete Sampras, went out in straight sets to American Jan-Michael Gambill, ranked 49th in the world. Hewitt lost his match 6-3, 6-2, 7-5. Last week Hewitt won the warm-up event at Queen's Club. Meanwhile, more Australian tennis players have been losing than winning so far in first round matches at Wimbledon. Others to go out are Andrew Ilie, Mark Woodforde, Richard Fromberg, Paul Kilderry, Dejan Petrovic and Nicole Pratt. The Australian winners were Pat Rafter, Mark Philippoussis, Todd Woodbridge, Alicia Molik and Jelena Dokic. Philippoussis defeated Austria's Jurgen Melzer in four sets. Another Australian to win in the first round was teenager Jelena Dokic, who beat Germany's Greta Arn in straight sets. Meanwhile, Andre Agassi won his opening match but refused to look ahead to the looming battle with Spain on clay in the Davis Cup semi-finals. The second-seeded American advanced when teenaged compatriot Taylor Dent quit with an injury in the fourth set after winning the first. Agassi advanced with a 2-6, 6-3, 6-0, 4-0 result."

" Police, fire and forensic crews have finished searching the burnt shell of the Childers backpackers hostel. Investigators are now contentrating on the search for a man they think can help them find the cause of the disaster. Police have removed the bodies of 15 young backpackers who perished in the fire last Friday. They now want to question Robert Long, a 37-year-old man who they believe was near the scene when the fire first started. There has been one postive sighting of Mr Long in farmland near Childers but a search today failed to find him. Floral tributes continue to arrive in the town, with a memorial being built at a bench across the road from the Palace Backpackers Hostel. Princess Anne will visit the scene on Sunday to meet survivors and relatives. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Emergency workers in Western Australia's goldfields believe it could be days before three trapped underground miners are found. The men were working 460 metres below ground at the Yandell Bronzewing gold mine at Leinster, 400 kilometres north of Kalgoorlie, when there was a cave-in. Some 18,000 cubic metres of rock, mud and water gushed into the mine. Normandy, which owns the mine, says efforts are underway to secure a section of the structure so workers can begin looking for the men. Normandy spokesman Paul Dowd says eight others working in the mine at the time were able to escape. While the company is hopeful of finding the men, Mr Dowd admits it is a race against time. The men - aged 21, 26 and 45 - have been trapped for more than 20 hours. The emergency has forced the closure of Normandy's entire Bronzewing operation. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Immigration Minister, Philip Ruddock, says up to 1,700 people detained as illegal immigrants will be released as refugees over six weeks after July 3. Mr Ruddock has told a joint party room meeting the bulk will go to Western Australia, South Australia and Queensland and will not necessarily be taken to capital city centres. The announcement comes after 500 detainees escaped from the Woomera Detention Centre, in South Australia's north. The group will be released on temporary protection visas. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Fiji's military rulers have given what they say is a final ultimatum to the coup leader, George Speight. The rebels have been given 24 hours to sign an accord for a new interim government but a spokesman for the rebels immediately rejected the ultimatum."

" The Motor Trades Association of Australia has described the surveillance of its members by price inspectors during the introduction of the goods and service tax (GST) as a Rambo assault. The Federal Government has threatened to impose fines of up to $10 million if service stations do not reduce fuel by 1.5 cents a litre after midnight on July 1. But the association's Michael Delaney says that is half of the margin allocated to petrol stations for wages and running costs. He says the association has delivered a bill of rights to thousands of its members outlining their responsibilities and rights under the new system. ""It [the bill of rights] may not be sufficient to ensure that they are not harassed and threatened with prosecution but at least it goes some way to equipping them to assert their rights and to ensure that proper processes are followed,"" he said. ""[It may also ensure] that they are not put on a shame file in relation to their prices, post-GST."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Australian Democrats say it is now more important than ever that Australia passes laws to protect against discrimination based on genetic tests. Researchers from more than 18 countries have announced they have unravelled 97 per cent of the human genetic code and they believe the discoveries will lead to advances in fighting disease. But the Democrats' biotechnology spokeswoman, Natasha Stott-Despoja, says the information could also be used against people applying for jobs or health insurance. She says the Government has so far ignored her genetic privacy bill but it must now support the legislation. ""The excuse from the Government then was it's a future issue, we don't have to deal with it, but now it's a here and now issue,"" she said. ""President Clinton's announcement last night should provide the impetus I think for the Australian Government to act. ""If it doesn't, we're going to be not only luddites in the eyes of the world, but we could have some real problems with people's personal genetic information."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Olympic torch has made a successful trip underwater. The flame burned brightly throughout the 60-second trip on the Great Barrier Reef. The cauldron-lighting ceremony at Palm Cove, north of Carins, took place on the front deck of a catamaran. The boat then sailed to Aegaean Court Reef, where marine biologist Wendy Craig-Duncan was waiting with a specially made torch to take the flame underwater. It went off without a hitch: the bright orange flame could be seen from the surface and the bubbles from Ms Craig-Duncan's scuba gear were accompanied by smoke as the environmentally friendly gases made their way to the surface. The torch is now on its way to Port Douglas. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Trial flights from Hobart to Australia's Antarctic territory are expected to begin this summer. A study into the feasibility of an air link has recommended two runways be built on the Antarctic continent. The main runway would be at Casey Station and the second in the Bunger Hills, 440 kilometres further west. Smaller feeder aircraft would be used for transport to Davis and Mawson Stations and to remote research areas. At present, planes are not capable of aborting flights to Antarctica past a certain point should the weather deteriorate. The director of the Australian Antarctic Division, Tony Press, says forecasting techniques will need to be upgraded. ""The refinement of weather forecasting predictions is going to be an important part of this and of course there has been a lot of history of weather observations in Antarctica,"" Mr Press said. ""We would hope we would be able to refine weather forecasting to suit this kind of operation,"" he said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Scientists have completed a working draft of the instructions to make a human being, launching an era of dazzling medical rewards and sombre moral concerns. An international group of public-sector scientists said it had unravelled 97 per cent of the human genetic code, and 85 per cent of the data had been assembled in the right sequence. Hailing what it called a landmark in knowledge, the consortium, the Human Genome Project (HGP) said it had ""assembled a working draft of the human genome - the genetic blueprint for a human being."" Announcements were made by HGP participants in Japan, Britain and France. Other countries participating are the United States, which has shouldered the lion's share of the work and $US300 million cost, as well as Germany and China. An American firm, Celera Genomics, has raced with the HGP to the finishing line. It was scheduled to make a joint announcement in Washington with the public-sector group later. ""The decoding of the human genome, the deciphering of the book of life, is a milestone in science,"" said French Research Minister Roger-Gerard Schwartzenberg. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) says it is considering several submissions from oil companies on price rises after the goods and services tax (GST). The ACCC has so far raised no objections to the arguments put forward by the companies, although discussions have not been held with all four oil companies. The Prime Minister, John Howard, has attacked the oil companies recently over their refusal to pass on what the Federal Government says is a one-and-a-half-cent a litre saving from the new tax system. But the companies say the real savings are much less and will take years to realise. ACCC chairman Professor Alan Fels says he is yet to decide if a petrol price rise is justified. He says the industry will be carefully scrutinised before any decision is made. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Police in the southern Queensland farming town of Childers today hope to remove the temporary morgue from the main street. This morning they expect to recover the final two bodies from the top floor of the gutted Palace Backpackers Hostel. It has been four days since the disasterous fire that killed 15 young travellers,in the area to work in the local fruit and small crop fields. Police say they still do not know if their deaths were the result of an acident or murder, but they are hoping further probes of the old building today. Amateur video fottage of the blaze turned in yesterday may shed more light. The nationwide hunt for 37 year old Robert Long, believed to be staying at the hostel at the time of the fire, continues. The Police Disaster Identification unit is about to re-enter the building and the temporary morgue that's been a constant reminder of the tragedy may be moved to Brisbane this afternoon. Meanwhile, the 70 survivors of the backpacker hostel fire are starting to disperse and life goes on in Childers. It may be some time though before the names of the victims are released. The official death toll in last Friday's Childers backpacker hostel fire has been revised back to 15. Police had believed another backpacker, unaccounted for, may have been the 16th victim. However, the missing woman approached police in Childers yesterday after she read her name in a list of missing backpackers compiled by a British newspaper. Police spokesman, Eric Meyer, says the woman was concerned for her family when she realised she was believed to have been a victim. ""The concern she expressed to us is that she had done that to her mother and father and she was concerned about all her other relatives and friends that she had met and that she knew in Australia that she now had to try and contact,"" he said. ""And that sort of emotional pressure, as she expressed it, she could do without."" --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Three men are trapped 460 metres below ground in Western Australia's goldfields region after a mine caved in. The men, aged between 21 and 46, were working at Yandell's Bronzewing mine near Leinster, about 400 kilometres north of Kalgoorlie. Inspector Bill Todd says mud and water flowed into the mine about 5:00pm AWST yesterday. ""Mine fill has been stored up and barricaded against the side of the mine in one of the cabins there,"" he said. ""It appears that water has come through the side of the mine and washed all the mud and the fill down into the 13th and 14th levels of the mine."" Emergency workers are pumping the material out of the mine. Families of the missing men are receiving counselling. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The future of Australia's defence force will come under the spotlight today with the Prime Minister to release a defence discussion paper. The paper will increase Australia's strategic focus on South-east Asia and the South Pacific. The emphasis on defence of the Australian continent, in place since the end of the Vietnam war, will be broadened to look at military roles in South-east Asia and the South Pacific. That may mean the Australian Army may be less able to operate further afield with the United States. But the paper rejects the New Zealand option, saying that to structure for peacekeeping would only make for a third-rate military. The chief of the defence force, Admiral Chris Barrie, has already rejected the view of his predecessors that 50,000 people in uniform is the minimum needed for a credible force. ""That figure lies a couple of thousand under 50,000 if I was to be ruthless about it,"" he said. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Halfway through the vote counting in Zimbabwe's parliamentary election, the ruling Zanu-PF Party has taken the lead. With 62 seats declared in the lone house of Parliament, Zanu-PF has won 32. The other 30 seats have gone to the opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). There are 150 members of Parliament, of which 120 are elected and 30 are appointed by the President, Robert Mugabe. The MDC must win 76 seats to get an absolute majority. However, the ruling Zanu-PF only needs to win 46 because President Mugabe can appoint the other 30 he needs to win the election. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Fiji's rebel leaders have sought a guarantee that the former president, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara will not return to the position once the present political crisis is resolved. The demand is the latest impediment to resolving the 40-day hostage crisis. The former president stepped aside when military leaders declared martial law late last month. The military commander, Frank Bainimarama, announced at the time that Ratu Mara did not want to return. But the military has confirmed he did not resign and there was never a deal that he would step aside forever. Ratu Mara still has strong grassroots support, but the rebel group wants his formal resignation and a military decree installing its own candidate, Josefo Iloilo to prevent the former president's return. It is the key issue preventing an accord to end the hostage crisis. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Men's defending champion Pete Sampras and women's top seed Martina Hingis both progressed smoothly to the second round at the Wimbledon Championships on a gloomy day in south London. Six-time winner Sampras of the United States hurtled through on Centre Court by hammering Jiri Vanek of the Czech Republic 6-4, 6-4, 6-2 in just 1:23hrs. Sampras, 28, is seeking to set an all-time record of 13 Grand Slam singles titles here after he equalled Roy Emerson's haul of 12 here last year. He next faces Karol Kucera of Slovakia, who beat Wayne Black of Zimbabwe 6-2, 6-2, 6-4. Hingis, looking to land her second singles crown at the All England Club after 1997, needed only 53min to see off 42nd-ranked Angeles Montolio of Spain 6-1, 6-2 and ensure there was no repeat of last year's nightmare when she crashed out at the first hurdle to Aussie teen Jelena Dokic. Joining Hingis in the second round was US eighth seed Serena Williams, who breezed through against Sweden's Asa Carlsson 6-3, 6-2. Meanwhile, two Australians have been eliminated on day one of the event. Wayne Arthurs lost in four sets in the opening round to South Africa's Wayne Ferreira. Jason Stoltenberg lost his match against Israeli qualifier Harel Levy in five sets. Other Australians Lleyton Hewitt, Andrew Ilie, Richard Fromberg, Mark Woodforde and Alicia Molik did not get on court."

" The Queensland Government believes this morning's fatal fire at a Childers backpackers hostel is the worst fire in the state's history. Queensland Premier Peter Beattie says he is shocked by the tragedy and has promised a full investigation. Mr Beattie also says he will consider declaring a state day of mourning when all the victims have been identified. He has promised a thorough investigation and says there will be no coverups. Mr Beattie also gave an undertaking that changes will be made to state laws, if necessary. ""If there need to be any changes made to legislation, and this is the last thing I really want to say on that today, then clearly those changes will be made. ""All I can simply say is this is a terrible tragedy and we will provide every piece of support we can for those surviving and those families who unfortunately tragically lost somebody in this fire,"" he said."

" Mr Beattie also moved to reassure international and domestic visitors who are considering travelling to Queensland. ""We would clearly want to provide that assurance to the international and national community that this is not only a safe place to visit, and a friendly place to visit, but people are safe here. ""And the only way you retain that international reputation is to ensure that there is a full investigation and that appropriate action is taken to ensure this doesn't happen again,"" he said."

" Queensland Emergency Services Minister Steven Robertson says he will set up a task force to further investigate the cause of the fire and to provide him with advice. Speaking from Childers, Mr Robertson says not since the 1973 fire at the Whiskey-A-Go-Go nightclub in Brisbane has such a tragedy been seen. ""You don't want to make comparisons but obviously 1973 is the last incident that most Queenslanders would remember, where 13 people died. ""More people have died in this incident so I don't think we've probably seen anything like this before in Queensland,"" he said."

" A telephone hotline has been set up for those needing information about the fire. It is 1800 451 399. Police have requested only people who require information regarding the survivors or victims of the fire ring the number."

" ABC managing director Jonathan Shier has addressed staff around the country, saying he wants to improve the corporation's ratings. Mr Shier says while he does not want to spell out by how much, he does want a ""bit more of the cake"". Mr Shier said he has spent the first 100 days in office talking to people and getting a feel for the organisation. He talked about his background in broadcasting, his desire for more ratings, funding, the structure of the ABC, content and distribution. Mr Shier announced there would be a new structure, with six new director positions, bringing it to a total of 14. There would be new directors dealing with content, in specialist units with some 20 subject areas such as arts, science, news and current affairs. The managing director says public broadcasting in Norway, Sweden, Holland, France and Germany, attracts 39 to 69 per cent audience ratings. Mr Shier says that the ABC TV ratings of 16 per cent are not good enough. He described his job as a plumber to unlock the creative juices and let them flow."

" Fiji's coup leader George Speight appears to have struck a deal with the military to end the five-week hostage crisis. An agreement is scheduled to be signed tomorrow morning. Mr Speight has held another full day of talks with military leaders and representatives of the great council of chiefs. Last night, he indicated there were still substantial points of difference on the establishment of a new interim government. But Jo Brown, the secretary of the former president, Sir Ratu Kamisese Mara, has emerged from the talks this afternoon to say only that what began with the coup on May 19 will come to an end at 11:00am tomorrow. It is expected that is when the long awaited accord between both sides will be formally signed. That would pave the way for the release of the 31 hostages."

" A group representing 8,000 service station operators around the country has warned of financial ruin if they are forced to find savings of 1.5 cents per litre of petrol. The Federal Government says the fuel industry will make savings under the new tax system, which are to be passed on to motorists at the petrol pump. But Geoff Gardener from the Motor Trades Association of Australia says margins are already tight and the tax savings simply do not exist. ""We aren't aware of any particular savings that arise out of the new tax system, out of our businesses. ""Certainly not of the order of 1.5 cents a litre. ""Our view is in fact borne out by the Australian competition and consumer commission in the everyday shopping guide that said savings on a litre of unleaded petrol are zero per cent,"" he said."

" The Employment Services Minister, Tony Abbott, has admitted he is pushing Centrelink to ensure fewer appeals by job seekers succeed in overturning punishments for breaches. The agency has a system of punishment for job seekers who do not comply with their obligations to look for work. Mr Abbott has rejected claims a quota has been imposed on Centrelink after a contract emerged showing the agency is required to ensure no more than 15 per cent of breaches are overturned. But he does admit to figures designed as a method of quality control to make sure Centrelink is imposing the penalties. ""We would expect that in at least 60 per cent of those cases Centrelink would impose a breach and in 75 per cent of cases where Centrelink does impose a breach that breach is sustained, it's not overturned on appeal,"" he said."

" A section of the Workplace Relations Act prohibiting third party interference in enterprise bargaining negotiations could soon be tested in the courts. The National Tertiary Education Union has filed a statement of claim in the Federal Court in Melbourne, accusing the Education Minister, David Kemp, of such interference. The union's Grahame McCulloch says the Government's offer to fund a 2 per cent salary increase for staff at those universities which implement workplace reform, including non-union agreements, is coercive. ""We've already seen the courts act in a number of other instances to limit the extent to which the Commonwealth and employers can attempt to coerce and or discriminate against trade unionists. ""We've decided the time's come for us to test that section of the law as well,"" he said."

" Rock climbing and abseiling on the Three Sisters in the Blue Mountains National Park is to be banned. The cliff face and vegetation of the Three Sisters has been badly damaged over the past three years as the site became increasing popular amongst rock climbers. Jeff Luscombe, from the National Parks and Wildlife Service, says eco-tourism groups have agreed to the ban, which will take effect next month. ""Once you get on to the Three Sisters themselves you can see quite a number of walking pads and tracks where the vegetation has of course been completely destroyed by trampling and the effects of ropes and things leading to soil loss and so on,"" he said."

" The Aboriginal people have offered Kosovo Albanians safe haven at their embassy in Canberra. The offer was made this morning as the Australian Kosovar Support Network continues its efforts to force the Australian Government to allow 330 Kosovo-Albanians the right to stay. Helen Gibbs is a member of the group which has established a caravan embassy in Canberra. She says the Aborigines saw a co-relation between the treatment of the Kosovo Albanians and themselves. ""The Aboriginal people have recognised that these people are in desperate need of asylum and they've offered that to them. ""They've offered them safe haven here at the embassy with no strings attached should they need it,"" she said."

" The Real Estate Institute of Australia says says rents will not automatically rise under the GST. The Opposition has accused the Government of hiding economic modelling which says rents will rise by double the Government forecasts. Treasurer Peter Costello has disputed the modelling and says while rents will go up, people will be compensated. Daryl Smeaton, the institute's chief executive officer, says landlords will attempt to pass on GST costs but will be restricted by what the market will bear. ""If you've got a market with a vacancy rate of 7-8 per cent - and that's not uncommon in many parts of Australia - landlords will not be able to increase their rents because tenants will say 'I can get the same property down the road for less, goodbye',"" he said."

" The Federal Government says it will not shirk its responsibilities over the costs behind the breakout of hundreds of asylum seekers from the Woomera detention centre. About 33 South Australian police, including 17 members of the STAR Group, were sent to the northern township to control the breakout earlier this month. The SA Police Service has not completed full costings from the incident but says it cost about $22,000 to fund the special task group alone. Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock says the Government will meet its obligations in relation to the matter. ""They are issues that are addressed on a government-to-government basis and where traditional arrangements have provided for appropriate reimbursement, those arrangements will be followed,"" he said. ""I'm not privy to all of the details but we won't be churlish in relation to ensuring that if under normal arrangements the Commonwealth is required to reimburse that that occurs."""

" There have been calls to remove children held in Australia's immigration detention centres following allegations of sexual abuse. Two Iraqi men from the Curtin Detention Centre in Western Australia's Kimberley have been charged with sexual abuse of children. Marion Le, from the Independent Council for Refugee Advocacy, says at the very least children should be segregated and protected from the threat of abuse. Ms Le says legislation is in place to remove children that are at risk of abuse but it is not being used. ""We've basically called for a review of the situation in the detention centres where children are being held with adults in close confinement and asked the Minister to release families with children into the community at least while they are being processed,"" she said."

" New economic data out today shows Australia's economy is continuing to grow strongly. The figures have done little to assist a lazy Australian dollar. The Westpac Melbourne Institute leading index of economic activity, was 4.2 per cent in April, above its trend growth rate of 3.9 per cent. Bill Evans, Westpac's general manager of economics, says growth should continue at around the 4 per cent mark for the next six to nine months. But he says that should not put any pressure on raising interest rates. ""I think the interest rate policy is very much focused on what's going to be happening a year ahead and we believe next year the economy will be slowing,"" he said. But the strong growth figures have failed to inject life into the Aussie dollar which has been losing value since yesterday's local close. At noon it was trading around 59.95 US cents."

" Rupert Murdoch's satellite businesses are about to undergo a major restructuring. News Corporation has filed for an initial public offering by a new company holding its satellite television businesses. Analysts claim the float could raise more than $5 billion, making it one of the biggest in the United States. The new company, called Sky Global Networks, will own the Star System in Asia, News Corp's stake in BSkyB in Britain and TV Guide, and Sky Brazil and Sky Mexico. Sky Global Networks will be the world's biggest distributor of pay television services, beaming into 85 million homes. Sky Global use use half the proceeds to repay debate to News Corp, while the other half is earmarked to support growth."

" Figures released today show that spending on mineral exploration around Australia has slumped to a seven year low. The Australian Bureau of Statistics says the trend estimate for mineral exploration expenditure for the March quarter fell to $166 million. That is down $35 million on the same period last year. The biggest slump occurred in gold exploration, which fell 22 per cent to $77 million - the lowest level since the March quarter, 1993. Western Australia was the only state to report an increase in expenditure - up 25 per cent to $121 million. In Victoria, spending on exploration fell 44 per cent, and in the Northern Territory by 33 per cent."

" The Australian Government and trade unions are being encouraged by Fijian unions to toughen their position on trade sanctions against Fiji. Visiting Australia for talks with the ACTU, Mr Diwan Shankar, the assistant secretary of the Fijian Trade Union Congress, says Fijians want a return to democracy. He says they accept there will be sacrifices to achieve that aim. Mr Shankar has rejected Australian Government arguments that tough economic sanctions will hurt ordinary Fijians. ""This is what Australia said in '87. That's what they are saying again and I think [the] Australian Government has to be reminded that they want to deal with people like that. ""Then they'll have to continue to face these kind of problems every now and then...and the pressure will be on the Australian Government to stand up and say 'look, don't be naughty Fiji, you can't be doing this all over again, and we can't be helping you all the time',"" he said."

" Police this morning hope to retrieve the remaining nine or 10 bodies from the gutted Palace Backpackers Hostel in the southern Queensland town of Childers, the scene of last Friday's tragic fire. Six bodies are in a temporary morgue outside the hostel. Just 100 metres down the road last night, about 2,000 people including the Governor-General, Sir William Deane, Prime Minister John Howard, Queensland Premier Peter Beattie and the survivors attended a moving memorial service. Close to the entire population of Childers turned out for the poignant service. The Governor-General, Sir William Deane, read a message from the Queen, Prime Minister John Howard's voice was choked with emotion and foreign diplomats shed tears with survivors. The Childers Cultural Hall is just 100 metres from the backpackers hostel where the bodies of the 15 people still lie. The generators of the temporary morgue housing six of the bodies could be heard during the quiet moments of the two-hour service. A further nine and possibly ten people remain in the charred building. Mr Howard was close to tears thanking the town. ""They have given such wonderful help, sustenance and support and demonstrated that great Australian mateship in a time of need and distress,"" he said. ""It's been a tragic event. ""I'm moved beyond words by the wonderful spirit of the people of the young people from different countries, the courage they've displayed, their comradeship to each other and the wonderful open hearted character of the people of Childers."" -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" Japan's ruling Liberal Democratic Party has lost its majority in Japan's House of Representatives. But it has won enough seats to continue to govern as part of a coalition. Japan's Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori has fallen seven seats short of his target of a bare majority. After an early-hours meeting with his two coalition partners, he announced he will not resign but will be governing in a coalition which will have a majority. Japan's Opposition Democratic Party gained some 30 seats, but not enough to unseat the coalition. Japan's Liberal Democratic Party has been in office in and out of coalition for all but 10 months of the last 46 years. It was aided this time by the second-lowest voter turnout on record. Only 63 per cent of the electorate voted. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Voting has finished in Zimbabwe's parliamentary elections. But President Mugabe's ruling party claims it will not step aside regardless of the result. Now begins the nervous wait. After a peaceful weekend of voting there are fears Zimbabwe could return to political violence. More than 30 people died in the lead-up to this poll which has been the most fiercely contested since independence. The main opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change, believes it has the momentum to win government. But the ruling ZANU-PF party is vowing to hang on to power. Its chairman John Nkomo says President Robert Mugabe has the right to appoint anyone he wishes to the government. He says Mr Mugabe will not be influenced by which side wins a majority. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Fiji's martial law authorities are increasing pressure on coup leader George Speight to sign an agreement to end the 38-day hostage crisis. The military is refusing to rule out the possibility of force to secure the hostages' release. Until now the military has been adamant no force would be used. The military says it cannot make any more concessions to Mr Speight and will not agree to his demand that the rebel group appoint its candidate as president. It insists the Great Council of Chiefs should decide who fills the position. Military leaders say it is now up to the rebels to initiate talks and they must accept the military's stance and sign the agreement as it stands. Yesterday, four female hostages were released. Meanwhile, Mr Speight says the remaining 27 hostages will not be released for up to two days after the military government and rebels agree on a new administration. Ilisoni Ligairi, a former British SAS officer who controls elite military troops at the parliamentary compound, says supporters of the attempted coup need to be fully briefed on the political agreement to avoid further bloodshed. Mr Ligairi is also demanding the inclusion of Mr Speight's group in the new interim government, a move that will trigger trade sanctions against Fiji by Australia and New Zealand. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Fighting between Christians and Muslims in the Indonesian city of Ambon has claimed dozens more lives amid calls for martial law and international intervention. A spokesman for the Muslims says 41 people have been killed in the last five days, but Indonesian aid workers in Ambon say the real figure is more than double that number. As street fighting between Christians and Muslims intensifies, hundreds of houses have been burned. Families are fleeing the city and both sides accuse the Indonesian military of siding with the other. Many Indonesian leaders have called for their President, Abdurrahman Wahid, to impose martial law immediately. Christian church leaders in Ambon have appealed to the international community to step in, claiming their people are not protected by Indonesia's security forces and as Christians flee their homes, they have nowhere to hide. Even so, about 5,000 people are taking refuge in a navy base close to Ambon. In the last 18 months of sectarian violence in the city and the surrounding islands, more than 3,000 people have died. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" One of Australia's most prominent poets and activists, Judith Wright, has died, aged 85. Ms Wright had a heart attack last night in a Canberra hospital, after being admitted on Saturday. During a career spanning more than 40 years, Ms Wright became known as an international ambassador for Australian poetry and was the first Australian to receive the Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry in 1992. She published her first book of poetry in 1946, but her involvement in fighting for Aboriginal rights and the environment became her passion later in life. Family friend Jeanette Condon says she was involved in the fight for reconciliation right up until she died and attended the walk over the Sydney Harbour Bridge last month. ""There were significant turning points in her life, for instance, the battle to save the Barrier Reef in the 60s and the creation of the Wildlife Preservation Society politicised her, made her into a public figure,"" she said. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Patrick Rafter has won the Heineken Trophy in Holland for the third consecutive year beating Nicolas Escude 6-1, 6-3, in a grass court prelude to Wimbledon next week. Both Rafter and Escude completed semi-final matches earlier on Sunday, after rain interrupted play on Saturday with each match still in the first set. Rafter's victory follows a recovery from a shoulder injury, but he has a one-day rest before his first match at Wimbledon against Jamie Delgado of Britain. Rafter, a grass court specialist, is seeded 12th, after his world ranking slipped to 23."

" Authorities are preparing to remove the bodies of the Childers fire victims from the charred shell of the Palace Backpackers Hostel. Police say they have revised the list of 15 people staying in the hostel who are missing and feared dead. Seven are from the United Kingdom, three from Australia, three from the Netherlands, one from Korea and one from Japan. It is feared there may be up to three others missing, who were staying at the hotel but were not registered. Emergency crews are still on stand-by with some small fires re-igniting in the building overnight. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" An inquest has begun into the deaths of the 58 Chinese immigrants found in the back of a truck at the port of Dover earlier this week. The hearing has been told how the immigrants frantically tried to raise the alarm as the air in the lorry's sealed container began to run out. The coroner's officer, Graham Perrin, told the inquest that no-one responded when the immigrants banged on the side of the container with their shoes after an air vent controlled from outside the lorry was closed off and they started running short of oxygen. Mr Perrin told the hearing that the air vent had been closed before the lorry went onto a ferry at Zeebrugge in Belgium, which meant that most of the immigrants would have died during the trip across the English Channel. Mr Perrin said it was amazing that there had been two survivors, which he put down to the fact that more air became available inside the container with the death of each of its occupants. Police are still trying to identify the victims, but they have now ruled out the possibility that those on the truck were from a similar size group of illegal Chinese immigrants who had been detained and filmed in Belgium in April. Meanwhile, the Dutch driver, Perry Wacker, who has been charged with the manslaughter of the 58 victims, has been remanded in custody for seven days. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The signing of an agreement to end Fiji's five-week-old hostage crisis has been delayed yet again. The military and coup leader George Speight were scheduled to sign an agreement this morning. Military spokesman, Colonel Filipo Tarakinikini, says this morning's meeting with the coup leaders will go ahead, but they will now only review the draft accord. He also says he cannot say when a definitive agreement will be signed. All that is known of the agreement is its name, the Muanikau Accord, and that the coup plotters have warned it will not result in the immediate release of the hostages. Mr Speight and his gunmen have held Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry and his Cabinet hostage since seizing Parliament on May 19. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The ALP's federal executive has refused to intervene in an internal preselection battle within the New South Wales branch of the party. But the decision not to get involved may only be temporary. At the ALP state conference two weeks ago the party machine announced it was going to recommend to its administrative committee that former ACTU boss Jennie George should be installed into the Illawarra-based federal seat of Throsby. Further, it decided that four sitting state and two federal MPs in Sydney's south-west be exempt from preselection ballots for upcoming elections. But the party's Left wing has been arguing all seven seats should go to a rank and file ballot. The federal executive has turned down an invitation to intervene and call for preselection ballots, arguing the matter is still to resolved by the state branch. But it did say it will review the matter if requested, should preselection ballots be offically thrown out."

" Meanwhile, the New South Wales Special Minister of State, John Della Bosca, has had his chances of becoming the next national president of the ALP firm dramatically. A concerted push will be made over the next two weeks to persuade the current president, Barry Jones, not to seek another term. State Labor leaders, except Western Australia's Geoff Gallup, Queensland's Peter Beattie and Tasmania's Jim Bacon, have expressed support for Mr Della Bosca. Mr Jones has publicly stated his intention to seek another term, but if Mr Jones contests a ballot against Mr Della Bosca he could be defeated badly. At the final scheduled meeting of the party's national executive before next month's federal conference yesterday it was agreed cross-factional talks would decide how to ease Mr Jones out from any contest and get Mr Della Bosca elected unopposed. The talks will link the transition to an agreed rotation of presidents from the Left and Right in the future. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Iran and China have signalled they will move towards closer relations that do not rely on Europe or the United States. The two countries have signed agreements following bilateral talks in the Chinese capital. Iran's president Mohammad Khatami is in Beijing for talks with his Chinese counterpart on a range of military, trade and cultural issues. But it has been a speech to hundreds of students at China's prestigious Beijing University that is attracting most attention. President Khatami spoke of the need for an Asian convergence, one that stood up to western dominance, and the focus by western media on what he called a ""uni-polar world"", a phrase China regularly uses to refer to the Euro-American relationship. He says the world's economic, cultural and political development could not be left to the wishes of the so-called dominant powers. China and Iran have long supported the notion of a multi-polar world where the voices of developing nations and religious diversity are recorded with similar weight to those in groups like NATO and the G8. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Australian Government is being warned of the risk from an overseas outbreak of the highly infectious foot and mouth livestock disease. There is no cure for foot and mouth, and the only way of eradicating it is to destroy the herd and animals on surrounding properties. A new strain from the Middle East has hit Taiwan, Korea and Japan, which have been free of the disease for many years. Australia's livestock industry has been free of foot and mouth for more than a century, but animal health authorities are warning the Federal Government that they must be vigilant as the risk of it entering Australia is rising. Dr Harvey Westbury, from the CSIRO's Animal Health Laboratory at Geelong, says the growth of backpacker tourism in Asia, particularly Laos, is a key concern. ""Foot and mouth occurs all over the place in that country and if backpackers just packed up their boots and came back home without taking the necessary precautions, like sterilising those boots, there is the potential of them bringing back the virus on those boots,"" he said. ""Foot and mouth disease is the most contagious disease in the human and veterinary medicine world, so it spreads like wildfire."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A wooden Indonesian fishing vessel carrying 112 suspected illegal immigrants has been detained overnight at Ashmore Reef, off the north coast of Western Australia. The Australian Customs Service detected the vessel yesterday and warned its crew not to cross into Australian waters. Customs service spokesman Leon Bedington says a customs patrol vessel, the Wauri, intercepted the boat later in the afternoon. ""When it crossed into Australian territorial waters and was detained at Ashmore Islands overnight...a decision was made on how best to transfer the people to Australia. ""It'll be some time, of course, depending if they are escorted in before they reach Australia and immigration officials can process them,"" he said. The people on board, including two infants, are believed to be from the Middle East."

" One of the groups angry at plans to impose the goods and services tax (GST) on permanent caravan park residents says government monitoring of the impact of the tax does not ease their concerns. The Affiliated Park Residents Association of New South Wales says National Party members should continue campaigning to have the GST on permanent van site rentals scrapped. In response to angry opposition to the tax, the Government says it will closely monitor its effect on permanent park residents. Association president Jim Clark says that does nothing to ease the pain for people who live in caravan parks. ""Why does a person renting a small unit not pay the GST. There's no justice in that whatsoever. It's completely unfair and it's discriminatory,"" he said."

" The New South Wales Government has set aside an additional $140 million to help bail SOCOG out of its financial problems. The Treasurer, Michael Egan, has confirmed the Sydney Games Committee has spent all of its previous contingency funding. This latest payment follows an extra $100 million in Olympic spending by the Government announced in last month's Budget. Mr Egan says a combination of extra expenditure and lower revenue is the reason for the payment."

" The Federal Government is playing down a decision not to send a minister to a social development summit in Geneva next week, despite a request from the United Nations. More than 100 countries are sending ministers to the summit, while Australia is one of several countries which will send diplomats instead. The Opposition says the decision shows Australia is taking another step away from embracing the world community. The Foreign Minister, Alexander Downer, says the request for political representation at the summit came from a UN staff member who was a former Labor Party MP. ""I would say there would be a fairly uncontroversial declaration produced at the end of this meeting and we don't think it's something that gets to the very heart of Australia's national interest,"" he said."

" The Federal Opposition says it does not know whether the Democrats will support its proposed amendments to the Government's digital broadcasting laws. Labor has released the changes it wants to make to the legislation, with debate due to begin in the Senate tomorrow. The Shadow Communications Minister, Stephen Smith, says the amendments would allow the ABC and SBS to run extra channels. Mr Smith says a more general definition of datacasting and broadcasting is needed, based on their characteristics rather than programming. ""More than enough guidance for datacasters, more than enough guidance for broadcasters and more than enough guidance for the ABA [Australian Broadcasting Authority] if there was a dispute. ""Much easier system to determine than the arcane distinction between what might be news or current affairs, or what might be informative, educative but not allowed to be lightly entertaining, which is the Government's content or program-based distinction,' he said."

" The District Court in Perth has heard a 43-year-old woman accused of causing burns to a baby girl sounded calm when she called the child's mother home from work. Former baby sitter Jillian Marie Lukin is on trial accused of causing life-threatening burns to seven month Nicolle Tormey by putting her in a bath that was too hot. Today, the baby's mother, Denise Ludwig, said she had received a phone call at the family's cafe in Kellerberin to say that Nicolle had a little burn on her foot. Ms Ludwig said during the phone call Ms Lukin seemed very calm and did not express any urgency or concern. The court has been told the baby suffered burns to 20 per cent of her body and requires ongoing medical treatment."

" The Los Angeles Lakers have won this year's National Basketball Association title, beating the Indiana Pacers 116-111 in game six of the finals series in Los Angeles. The Lakers won the best-of-seven series 4-2 to win their first title for 12 years. Shaquille O'Neal scored 41 points and pulled in 12 rebounds."

" Next month's rugby union test between Australia and South Africa will go ahead at the Docklands Stadium. Australian Rugby managing director John O'Neill gave the all clear only after reaching an agreement with the stadium's operators. Mr O'Neill says a deal has been reached to replace 50 per cent of the stadium's turf with new grass. He says if the new turf was not laid the game would have moved elsewhere. ""That would've been our last resort. I mean we're always talking about armageddon and armageddon would've been a pitch which was unsafe for the players. ""That old turf potentially could've been unsafe,"" he said."

" An independent report commissioned by the Federal Government has warned that residential rents under the GST could rise by more than twice the amount forecast by Government. Modelling by the firm Econtech shows the long-term effect of the GST on residential rents could reach 4.7 per cent, more than double the 2.3 per cent the Government predicted in its tax package. Econtech says much of the rent increase will be driven by higher construction costs and property prices. The Shadow Treasurer, Simon Crean, says the modelling provides further proof that the Government understated the effect of the GST on prices. ""What we're now finding is a pattern,"" he said. ""All prices are rising by significantly more than they said. ""Today it's rent. The other day it was clothing, gas, electricity, transport, food, beer. ""This is not a simple tax. It's not a fair tax. It's certainly a complex tax."" Australian Council of Social Service president, Michael Raper says if accurate, the Econtech figures would leave many renters worse off in the longer term. ""This would particularly affect single unemployed people, sole parents, and other people who spend a very high proportion of their income on rent,"" he said. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" British police are still trying to trace the families of 58 illegal Chinese immigrants, found dead in the back of a lorry in the port of Dover. Detectives trying to identify the organisers of the tragic people smuggling operation are hoping that members of Chinese communities around the world, particularly in China, will come forward with information about those who died. Meanwhile, BBC News has just broadcast some information which could provide a vital clue in the identity quest. It has been established that exactly the same number of Chinese illegal immigrants who were involved in the Dover tragedy were rounded up by Belgian authorities two months ago. It says the Belgian authorities found documents suggesting that each of them paid more than $25,000 to make the trip to Europe. Four ringleaders were arrested and held, but the 56 men and four women were ordered to leave the country. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The world's leading oil producing nations are preparing for a crucial meeting that will decide the future of petrol prices. There have been moves to raise oil production but it may not be enough to see a reduction in the cost of petrol. Petrol prices are again approaching the $1 mark in many parts of the country. A result of world crude oil prices at more $US33 a barrel. Later today, Energy Ministers from the Oil Producing and Exporting Countries (OPEC )countries will meet in Vienna to discuss raising production. Iran, a crucial member of the group, has reportedly reached agreement on raising production but is not giving any details. Analysts are predicting OPEC will agree to increase production by between 500,000 and one million barrels a day, which according to Commonwealth Bank economist Michael Workman will not have much of an effect on petrol prices in Australia. ""Those 90 cent and one dollar a litre petrol prices are likely to stay in place in Australia for the next three or four months,"" he said. Analysts say only an increase of more than one million barrels a day will drive petrol prices down. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Government is not ruling out an extention of the July 1 health fund deadline. Anyone over 30 who has not taken out private health insurance by the end of this month will pay higher premiums for every year they delay joining a fund. A vigorous campaign by health funds has drawn a huge response with thousands of people rushing to join by July 1. But last minute applications are so numerous the Government has not ruled out extending the deadline, to help the funds cope with the situation. Already the Government has indicated those who can demonstrate a commitment to private health insurance, but who are in short term financial difficulty, will be able to join a health fund without penalty premiums after July 1. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Fijian military and coup leader George Speight have appointed lawyers to draft an agreement for an interim government. Both sides appear to be close to finalising the composition of a civilian cabinet. Fiji's national broadcaster is reporting that lawyers are already on hand to draw up a legal accord setting out the interim government and the handover of rule. The martial law authorities say both sides are still to decide on a time frame for the military to relinquish power. The military government has also indicated Fiji's public servants may have to take a 20 per cent pay cut, or even redundancy if the economy continues to deteriorate. The International Confederacy of Free Trade Unions has set up a food fund to help feed workers made redundant because of the political crisis. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" In Solomon Islands, there is mounting hope that the ethnic crisis that led to the mass evacuation of foreign nationals may soon be resolved. This follows yesterday's face to face meeting between spokesman for both warring ethnic militias onboard an Australian Navy landing craft. One of the churchmen who mediated at yesterday's talks, Seventh Day Adventist Pastor the Reverend Lawrence Tanabose said there would be another meeting. He declined to give details on the discussions, saying all sides had agreed not to spoil what had been achieved by making premature statements. The two spokesmen, Andrew Nori for the Malaita Eagle Force and Henry Toboni for the Isatabu Freedom Movement, are reporting back to their respective groups and seeking consensus. The next meeting may be held on Friday. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The New South Wales Government is accused of ramming through a bill last night, providing for an extra $140 million in Olympic spending. An Opposition attempt to have the bill referred to a committee for further scrutiny, was lost along party lines. Shadow Treasurer Stephen O'Doherty says the Government provided no explanation or supporting documentation as to where the money's going. ""We proposed that the estimates committee look at this matter, bring it back to the Parliament by Friday so we could get a proper view of exactly what happening to the Olympics expenditure,"" he said. ""Sadly the Government didn't agree, regretfully we couldn't agree and voted against this additional expenditure."" ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Patrick Rafter has started his campaign for a third straight Heineken Trophy grass court tennis title in England with a straight sets victory over a Dutch qualifier. Rafter gave an assured performance, defeating Dennis Van Scheppingen 6-3, 6-4. However, top seed and fellow Australian Lleyton Hewitt, coming off a victory in the Queen's Club last week and seeded number seven at Wimbledon next week, pulled out with an ankle injury. The big attraction in the women's draw, top-ranked Martina Hingis, disposed of Canadian Jana Nejedly 6-0, 6-4 in just 44 minutes in their second-round match."

" Police have launched a major criminal investigation into the unprecedented discovery of the corpses of 58 other stowaways in a truck arriving in Britain. Two men found alive in the truck were taken to hospital with severe dehydration and almost unable to speak. The pair say they tried in vain to get out of the air-tight refrigerator compartment. Although the lorry's refrigeration unit was not switched on, the truck compartment was hermetically-sealed. Police say suffocation or intoxication from carbon-dioxide fumes were the likeliest causes of death. Meanwhile, the European Union has expressed shock at the deaths and French President Jacques Chirac is urging leaders attending an summit in Portugal to accelerate the setting up of a common European policy on immigration and asylum to avoid any replay of the drama. Police says customs officers in the southern English port of Dover found the bodies of 54 men and four women of ""oriental"" appearance in the lorry, which had arrived from the Belgian port of Zeebrugge on a freight ferry. In a statement to Parliament, British Home Secretary Jack Straw condemned the organised trafficking of illegal immigrants. ""This terrible tragedy must serve as a stark warning to others who might be tempted to place their fate in the hands of organised traffickers,"" Mr Straw said. ""Those who tragically died are without doubt the victim of these traffickers."" He damned the smuggling of human beings as ""a profoundly evil trade whose perpetrators have no regard for human life whatsoever"". --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A key consumer group suggests people avoid non-essential shopping on June 30 or July 1, to avoid confusion arising from a range of ticketing in the move to the goods and services tax (GST). While prices will change at midnight on June 30, retailers have another 10 days to change shelf labels and till the end of July to show all GST-inclusive prices. Some stores opt for dual-ticketing of pre and post-GST prices, while others may even do the complete switch on June 30. Food retailing giants Woolworths and Coles are both changing over late on Friday, June 30, with Woolworths closing early for the purpose. Norm Carruthers of the Australian Consumers Association says major retailers have prepared extra staff, signs and brochures, but he still expects considerable confusion. ""Many consumers will probably find it quite confusing when they go into stores on the 30th, when many of the supermarkets in particular start to make their changeover to shelf prices,"" he said. ""And still on Saturday the first, it's likely to be some changeover going on throughout that day, so might be wise for a lot of the consumers who do not really have to shop on the Friday, or the Saturday to avoid those couple of days, shop earlier, shop later."" --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A federal parliamentary inquiry has backed the continued expansion of the genetic engineering industry in Australia. The House of Representatives committee has made 37 recommendations for improving the regulation and safety of the industry, attracting investment and building public understanding of the issues involved. But Independent MP Peter Andren has lodged a dissenting report. Mr Andren says a five-year moratorium is needed to assess whether Australia would be better-off without genetically-engineered agriculture. ""The AMA [Australian Medical Association] and other bodies say that the jury is well and truly out on the benefits and the consequences, so I'm suggesting that we'd be very wise to place a moratorium on this until we get it right,"" he said. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Fiji's military government and coup leader George Speight are believed to have agreed on at least six people to join a new interim civilian administration. The news has raised hopes for the release of Fiji's hostages, now in their second month of captivity. Fiji's public broadcaster says 14 people have agreed to a military invitation to help lead the country for up to two years under defence force supervision. None are considered Mr Speight supporters. The military is also reported to want bank executive and former senator Laisenia Quarase as Fiji's next prime minister. Both sides are tight-lipped about their discussions, but say progress has been made. The military says only professional, competent and apolitical individuals will be appointed to the new interim civilian government, with Australia and New Zealand threatening trade sanctions if Mr Speight and his supporters are included. Talks are set to continue today. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare has released its first ever national report on surgery waiting times. The 1997/98 study reveals 20 per cent of all Australians seeking elective surgery experienced extensive waiting times. The report also shows 19 per cent of category one patients, or those who require surgery within 30 days, had also waited for longer than the desirable period. In 1998, over 37 per cent of patients awaiting surgery in Tasmania waited for longer than the desired time compared to 32 per cent in the ACT, 25 per cent in Queensland and 10 per cent in New South Wales. Institute spokeswoman Jenny Hargreaves says waiting times have more significance than waiting numbers. ""The hospital could have quite a long waiting list, but if they've got a lot of capacity to do elective surgery people might not actually be waiting very long, so it might not be a real problem,"" she said. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The United States Government is being accused of causing the wrongful death of 80 sect members of the Branch Davidians, who died in a siege of their Waco compound in central Texas in 1993. Survivors and relatives of the people killed when the FBI stormed the compound have accused the Government of negligence. The 100 plaintiffs are claiming damages of more than $US1 billion, alleging federal agents triggered the stand-off by using excessive force in the attempted arrest of cult leader David Koresh and his followers. They claim FBI actions caused fires that destroyed the compound and kept firefighters away. The trial, seen as an important part in restoring public faith in law enforcement, is to be heard by a judge assisted by a six-member advisory panel. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The British Government is introducing urgent measures to try to stop English soccer fans causing further disturbances at their side's next Euro 2000 match against Romania later this week. Convicted soccer hooligans are to be banned for life from attending football games in England. Britain's Home Secretary Jack Straw has announced that extra police will be on duty at UK ports and aerodromes in a bid to identify known and suspected hooligans, and to stop them from travelling abroad. The British Government is especially keen to ensure that the hundreds of fans who have been deported by the Belgian authorities are prevented from returning to the tournament. Cross-channel ferry companies and the Eurostar train service between England and continental Europe are being asked to refuse to carry suspected hooligans. The British Government is also asking Belgium to follow the successful lead of the Dutch, who were able to prevent trouble at earlier matches, partly by serving weaker beer to football fans. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australia's Lleyton Hewitt has firmed to second favourite for the Wimbledon tennis championships starting next week. Hewitt is 6-1 after his victory over Pete Sampras in the final of the Queen's tournament in London. However, Sampras is the 11-8 favourite to win his seventh Wimbledon title in eight years. Of the other leading Australians, Mark Philippoussis has been listed at 14-1, while Pat Rafter is rated an outside chance at 20-1."

" The Federal Opposition has accused the Government of breaking a promise not to impose the goods and services tax (GST) on residential rents, in its application of the levy on caravan park sites. The issue dominated the National Party conference at the weekend with some members concerned they may suffer at the next election if the Government does not remove the charge. Government leader in the Senate, Robert Hill, says Labor is mistaken in its claim of a broken promise. He told the Senate the situation for long term renters stays the same, but a compromise was developed for caravan parks. ""In relation to caravan parks which include a mixture of short term and long term residents a different formula applies but equity has remained,"" he said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Fiji's coup leader George Speight says he will accept the inclusion of Indo-Fijians in an interim civilian government. Mr Speight has been engaged in talks with military leaders over the make-up of an interim government to take effect as soon as he releases his hostages. Mr Speight has proposed about 30 nominees, all indigenous Fijians, some of whom the military has accepted. But he is prepared to allow one or two Indo-Fijians into the government. ""Our recommendations that the interim military government, or rather the interim civilian government, make-up be a combination of selections from us, selections from the army, and selections from the great council of chiefs, as well as some appointees by the president to be appointed,"" Mr Speight said. ""It is possible that the President will appoint some of our brothers and sisters from the other ethnic communities. ""If that be the case we'll accept it,"" he said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" In the Solomon Islands, a number of hard-core criminals who were freed from the country's main prison overnight are understood to have fled into the Guadalcanal hinterland. It appears that no major effort is being made to round up those who were let out of the Rove prison. An exact figure is hard to get but more than 80 prisoners, some of whom were life-termers are on the loose. A prison officer from neither of the ethnic groups engaged in the current conflict apparently felt sorry for the prisoners from Guadalcanal who were being given a hard time and let them go. The Malaita Eagle Force, which controls Honiara security, responded by letting all the rest out. Sources within the police force say some of the hard-core criminals were seen making their way inland, which is Isatabu Freedom Fighter territory. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Government has denied there is a need to examine the gap between rich and poor in Australia. Independent Senator Brian Harradine has asked if the Government would consider a report to the Parliament on the issue. Senator Harradine says he believes the gap is getting wider despite increasing employment rates. But Assistant Treasurer Rod Kemp says the Government takes issues of poverty very seriously. ""We are addressing these issues across a wide range of areas and I believe that this Government is showing results on this score,"" he said. ""When you reduce unemployment from the 11 per cent peak under the Labor Party to the 6.7 per cent today you are doing a great deal to help people who are the most deprived in this community."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The campaign against the Federal Government's increase in the beer excise has reached Melbourne, with a convoy of six beer trucks travelling around city streets. The convoy has so far covered 10,000 kilometres and gathered 250,000 signatures from concerned beer drinkers. Fosters Brewing Group chief executive Ted Kunkel says the campaign is focussed on a doubling of the beer excise - not the imposition of the goods and services tax (GST). He says the impact of the new hidden tax could affect his company's bottom line, but will devastate smaller operators. ""We'd expect a small impact but a much, much greater impact on the industry rather than the brewers,"" he said. ""What happens in businesses such as our size is if one thing costs you a bit more then you spend a little bit less somewhere else. ""It's the small outlets such as this that don't have that opportunity that are, in fact, going to feel the brunt."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) says a breakfast cereal with genetically engineered ingredients would not need to be labelled as such, under the Prime Minister's proposal for labelling. The proposal would allow foods with small amounts of genetically modified ingredients not to be labelled. The ACF's Gene Ethics Network says Kellogg's All-Bran Soy 'n Fibre Cereal, already on the market, is one product that would escape being labelled. The Network's Bob Phelps says most Australians want labelling, and he is calling on Kellogg's to do it voluntarily: ""We've written to the company today. We've asked them to acknowledge that their product may be contaminated. It may have happened somewhere in the process, even by accident,"" he said. ""In good faith now we think that industry should begin now to label its genetically engineered products without the Government requiring them. ""There should be voluntary labelling of genetically engineered foods now."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Prime Minister John Howard is showing no signs of backing away from a goods and services tax (GST) on caravan park rents. Under the new tax system, site fees for permanent caravan park residents will increase by about 5.5 per cent. The issue dominated this weekend's National Party conference, with leader John Anderson expected to take the matter to a parliamentary party meeting. Mr Howard says the tax will stay and has played down the fears of National Party MPs in marginal seats who fear they will lose the next election over the issue. ""In marginal seats, as in other seats, people make up their mind on a whole range of issues,"" he said. ""And one of the things they ask themselves, more frequently than anything else in the end, is `which government will be better for Australia?',"" he said. ""If we can persuade Australia at the end of next year that we'll be better for the country than the alternative, then they'll vote for us."" Meanwhile, the Shadow Minister for Community Services, Wayne Swan, will not say if Labor would remove the goods and services tax (GST) from caravan site rents if elected. Mr Swan says it is discriminatory to charge the GST on caravan rent, but says it would be silly for Labor to announce the details of its roll back on the tax in a piecemeal fashion. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Fiji's Chamber of Commerce has called on the military regime to set up a task force to examine how to rebuild the country's economy. Fiji's Trade Union Congress has campaigned for bans at both international and domestic level, but the Chamber of Commerce says they believe the bans are achieving nothing. Boycotts by the ACTU and by farmers in Fiji's sugar industry have helped to bring the economy to its knees. Already more than 4,000 people have lost their jobs and key sectors have been paralysed by the economic crisis. But the Chamber of Commerce has condemned the bans, saying they are ineffective. Head of the Chamber of Commercce, Joe Singh, says if there is mass unemployment, Fijian families will be out hunting for food and businesses will be devastated. He is calling on the military to set up a task force to examine how to keep Fiji from economic collapse. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The main prison in Solomon Islands capital of Honiara has been emptied of inmates. It appears a number of Guadalcanal prisoners escaped and the under-staffed prison service let the rest go. Up until last night, there were 98 prisoners in the main jail at Rove, a Honiara suburb, but now none remain. The International Committee of the Red Cross had yesterday complained that the Red Cross has been denied access to the prison. Last week it had taken over responsibility for feeding the prisoners because the prison service had run out of money due to the current ethnic crisis. It is understood the prisoners from Guadalcanal made the first break, after which the remaining prison guards left the others, including hard core criminals, out on to the streets. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The body which governs European soccer, UEFA, is threatening to throw the English team out of the current Euro 2000 competition if there are further outbreaks of violence among its supporters. UEFA is annoyed at the behaviour by a substantial minority of English fans, hundreds of whom are being deported by Belgium. The chief executive of UEFA, Gerhard Aigner, has criticised the British Government for not doing enough to prevent soccer hooligans from travelling to the Euro 2000 venues. He is calling on British ministers to take steps to prevent hooligans from causing trouble again. For its part, the United Kingdom Government has promised to consider strengthening the law to stop known football thugs from travelling abroad. However, Home Office Minister Lord Bassam says it is difficult to target people without previous football-related convictions. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Australian Democrats say they will not be badgered into supporting the Federal Government's plans to change unfair dismissal laws. The Federal Government will introduce a bill into the Senate this week, which seeks to exempt small business from the laws. A similar bill was rejected by the Democrats last year and the Government still is not confident of obtaining their support Democrats leader Meg Lees says there is a chance the Government is using the bill to bring on an early election. ""They may be looking for a double dissolution trigger, but also it may simply be that the Minister believes that if he wears us down that eventually we'll get to the point of passing it,"" she said. ""We won't be worn down, we will treat each issue, each piece of legislation on its merits."" ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Health Insurance Association says people with private health cover can look forward to a long period without premium rises. The statement was made after figures released at the weekend showed a big jump in member numbers. The Health Insurance Association says while constant price increases for private health cover had led to a decline in membership, Federal Government initiatives have seen almost a 250,000 people sign up for insurance in April and May. The record jump in membership has taken the number to 6.4 million people. The association's executive director, Russell Schneider, says now that a third of the population has cover, it should be able to keep a lid on premium rises. ""As prices have gone up and people dropped out, that increased the cost more and more and more in a vicious cycle,"" he said. ""That vicious cycle has been broken, and I think we can look forward to a long period of relatively stable prices."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" After a weekend of lengthy debate, the United Nations has endorsed secretary-general Kofi Annan's declaration that Israel has completed its withdrawal from Lebanon. The UN Security Council declaration was due earlier, but was held up by Russia, which was insisting that Lebanon had to be satisfied the withdrawal was complete. Beirut has disputed the UN recognised borderline between itself and Israel, and claims Israeli troops remain on its soil. In a gesture towards Russia, the council read a statement saying some violations may have occurred. The endorsement clears the way for Mr Annan to fly to Lebanon for discussions on the UN peacekeeping force, now due for deployment in southern Lebanon. The area was under Israeli control for more than 20 years, until a unilateral pullout of Israeli forces last month. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australian teenager Lleyton Hewitt has defeated American Pete Sampras in straight sets to win the Queen's grass court tennis title in London. Sampras says Hewitt will be a contender at Wimbledon, but Hewitt disagrees, saying he will consider it if he gets to the final. Hewitt recovered from 0-2 to beat Sampras 6-4, 6-4 to win his fourth title of the year, which is more than any other player on the ATP tour so far this year. Sampras commented that Hewitt's serve is becoming a weapon. Hewitt says the win give him even more belief in himself and says it is an unbelievable dream."

" Queensland National Party leader Rob Borbidge is urging his colleagues to take seriously the concerns of groups which have been protesting outside the party's federal convention. Anti-deregulation dairy farmers, brewers opposed to a proposed rise in beer excise and permanent caravan park dwellers against a goods and services tax on their site fees have all demonstrated at the Tweed Heads meeting. Mr Borbidge told convention delegates their concerns are the same concerns that gave rise to One Nation and have to be addressed by the Nationals. ""The National Party with all our warts, and all our faults, and all our problems, is the best political vehicle that those people who feel disillusioned and disconnected from the political process have in terms of responsibly addressing their concerns within the mainstream of Australian politics,"" he said. The National Party convention ends today with a speech by the Deputy Prime Minister and National Party federal leader John Anderson. Mr Anderson is expected to unveil a funding package to further help regional communities and map out a future increased emphasis on social issues by his party."

" The Federal Government is planning to introduce a new unfair dismissal bill into the Senate this week. The Workplace Relations Minister Peter Reith says the legislation will seek to provide a complete exemption for small business from the unfair dismissal law. Mr Reith has told Channel Seven he doubts whether the Senate will approve the bill. But he has revealed that he is considering ""technical"" changes to unfair dismissal laws. ""Some of the cost issues for example which even the commissioner says need reform and other technical changes which the Democrats in the past have publicly supported,"" he said. ""We intend to have a better system in the future. ""If the Democrats and the Labor Party vote against them, then let it be known publicly that people in the Senate are opposed to reforms for the benefit of small business, and therefore to job creation."""

" The National Party has proposed a controlled rise in immigration as part of a review of the party's new population policy. A working group at the party's federal convention at Tweed Heads, in northern New South Wales, expressed a preference for a natural increase in Australia's numbers. Riverina MP, Kay Hull, says priority would be given to migrants with good English speaking skills and there would also be efforts made to attract them to regional Australia. But she says there is a downside to that idea. ""Perhaps there's a danger of ethnic concentration as you've seen in some of our major cities, whereby we have established ghetto areas because we have had ethnic concentration in some of those areas,"" she said."

" The Queensland Premier says he will meet with industry leaders on Monday to rethink the state's fuel subsidy scheme. Premier Peter Beattie has backed down on plans to replace the fuel subsidy scheme with cheaper car registration fees, following a barrage of public complaints. He says he is now considering a new scheme, which would see the Government pass on the fuel subsidy directly to petrol station owners. Mr Beattie says under the proposal, the 8.3-cents-a-litre scheme would be passed on directly to motorists at the bowser. He says the motorist's watchdog, the Price Watch Task Force, would play a key role in ensuring motorists receive the full benefit of the subsidy. The four-point petrol plan was scrapped after a Government telephone poll showed clear opposition to the proposal. ""I mean I will make mistakes and clearly this is one of them, but I am prepared to learn from what people have said to me and go back and get it right, and that's what I will do,"" he said. But Queensland Opposition leader Rob Borbidge believes Mr Beattie is not sincere and the backdown is only temporary. ""That only has weight that only carries water this side of the next state election,"" Mr Borbidge said. ""It's very clear Mr Beattie wanted to scrap the scheme, but for political considerations he decided that he would not proceed."""

" RACQ external relations manager Gary Fites has commended Mr Beattie for listening to the concerns of the public and industry groups. ""We have known for the past week in fact that people have been very concerned at the very least about the Government's proposal to scrap the subsidy scheme,"" he said. ""Full marks to the Premier for getting out there and listening to people who have told him the same thing."""

" The Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) claims the jobs of over 1,000 Email employees in Adelaide are under severe threat by a planned takeover of the company. It says Smorgans and BHP are bidding aggressively for Email's steel operations, leaving the whitegoods manufacturing sector likely to be taken over by American companies Whirlpool or Electrolux. AMWU assistant national secretary Dave Oliver says the union fears a foreign company may buy only Email's brand names and cease manufacturing in Australia. He says the union has demanded Email guarantee to protect employees in the event of takeover. ""We don't want to see any job losses, we don't want to see any reduction of wages and conditions,"" he said. ""We want to see an adherence to all the existing agreements and arrangements in place. ""Also we want to see the protection of employees entitlements by being secured at the point of transmission in the event a company takes over and collapses within a short period of time."" They say their position is not negotiable and are threatening industrial action to protect jobs. AMWU has met with Email management and mass meetings of employees will take place in around 10 days to discuss the company's position."

" A quick resolution of the political impasse in the Solomon Islands looks unlikely. The crucial parliamentary meeting to elect a new prime minister has been set down for Wednesday week. According to the governor of the Solomon Islands' Central Bank the country is already on its knees. But there is to be no speedy resolution to the crisis. The Malaita Eagle Force (MEF) which took over the capital almost two weeks ago, has achieved its first objective, the prime minister Bartholomew Ulufa'alu has resigned. But the parliamentary meeting to choose his replacement has been set down for June 28. In the meantime, the country is rudderless and one of the two rival ethnic militias, the MEF is effectively the law enforcer in the capital Honiara. The most positive news however is that international flights should resume today with an Air Nuigini flight from Port Moresby."

" The owner of Charlie the buffalo, an icon from Adelaide River, south of Darwin, is spending almost $30,000 dollars to preserve the bovine. The 26-year-old buffalo featured in the movie <1>Crocodile Dundee</i>. He had been at the Adelaide Hotel, until he had to be put down five weeks ago because of pneumonia. The hotel's John Robinson says apart from the taxidermist's costs, renovations will need to be done to accommodate Charlie, but he says he is worth it. ""We're going to stuff him and we're going to bring him back in a pantec, and we're going to stand in him in the bar at the Adelaide River pub, half in the bar and half out on the verandah,"" he said. ""We've got the spot where we're going to put him. We've got to take a bit of the wall out we've got to lower one of the windows but he'll fit. ""Charlie's the Phar Lap of Adelaide River,"" he said."

" Beer trucks, dairy farmers and angry caravan park residents will gather in Tweed Heads today to protest outside the National Party's federal convention. The two-day convention will also hear a keynote address from Deputy Prime Minister John Anderson who has been landed with a goods and services tax (GST) by New South Wales Nationals. The NSW National Party's state conference yesterday passed a unanimous motion urging the Federal Government not to levy the GST on the rents paid by permanent caravan park residents. One delegate, John Fulton, urged the federal convention to consider the caravan park issue because it has national repercussions for the Coalition. ""This is National votes. Could I suggest to you, madam chairman, that the National Party leaders in all states take on board this motion?"" he said. Caravan park residents are due to protest outside the venue today, along with anti-dairy deregulation farmers. A convoy of semi-trailers carrying beer, organised by brewers, will highlight their dissatisfaction with the Government's proposal to double the beer excise. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Fiji's military government has set a timetable to restore democracy and hold fresh elections within two years. The military ruler, Frank Bainimarama, has briefed the Commonwealth on the planned return to constitutional rule. A Commonwealth delegation left Fiji last night with assurances that the military regime is committed to reinstating democratic government under a multiracial constitution that upholds the rights of both Indian and indigenous Fijians. The Commodore has also pledged to establish a civilian government as soon as the coup leader, George Speight, releases his 31 hostages. He has again ruled out any role for Mr Speight in the interim government. But Australia's Foreign Minister, Alexander Downer, who was part of the delegation, says two years is still too long and the military leaders should aim for a much faster return to democracy. ""It is very important that Fiji returns to democracy as quickly as possible,"" he said. ""As quickly as possible means precisely that. If it could happen much more quickly than two years we'd be pleased and we urge that on Commodore Bainimarama and I hope he takes note of that."" The 31 hostages are now into their fifth week in captivity. Fiji's Labour Ministry says more than 4,000 workers in Fiji have lost their jobs since the crisis began, with most in tourism, manufacturing and textiles. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Authorities in Montenegro say they have arrested several people responsible for an assassination attempt on Serbian Opposition leader Vuk Draskovic. Mr Draskovic says the regime of Slobodan Milosevic was behind yesterday's assassination attempt. Officials in the Government claim the shooting could have been a publicity stunt. Mr Draskovic is now back at his seaside home with bandages covering the two superficial wounds to his head received when two gunman fired at him through his window late on Thurday night. Mr Draskovic says he has no doubt that the Yugoslav secret police were behind the attack and that they were acting on orders from the Yugoslav President, Slobodan Milosevic. Mr Draskovic says it is the regime's second attempt on his life in less than a year. Last October he claimed the regime was responsible for a car accident that left him wounded and killed four others. He says only a miracle saved him from death this time but government officials say the whole incident could have been designed to win Mr Draskovic some much needed publicity. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A ceremony has taken place in Scotland to mark the repatriation of the largest known collection of Aboriginal remains in Britain. The ceremony took place in Edinburgh, where the remains were entrusted to the representatives of two groups of South Australian Aborigines, the Ngarringeri and Kaurna communities. The handover involved the remains of 330 Aborigines, which had been collected and stored at the University of Edinburgh's Department of Anatomy some 90 to 100 years ago. A statement released by the Australian High Commission says the majority of the bodies had been supplied to the university by the then Adelaide City Coroner, Dr Ramsay Smith. The handover ceremony was conducted in private in accordance with the wishes of the Aboriginal representatives. Australian High Commissioner Philip Flood, who was also at the ceremony, says the Australian Government welcomes the return as part of its broader endorsement of the repatriation of indigenous remains from public and private collections wherever possible. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The United Nations has announced that Israel has completed its withdrawal from Lebanon. But the Lebanese Government disagrees with the UN assessment. More than three weeks after Israel pulled its military forces out to end a 22-year occupation of South Lebanon, the United Nations has made it official. UN secretary-general Kofi Annan announced that UN forces in Lebanon had completed verification of Israel's withdrawal, saying Israel had now complied with UN Resolution 425, opening the way for UN forces to patrol the border. But Lebanon's President, Emile Lahoud, and Prime Minister Salim Al-Hoss have disputed the UN assessment. Both say Israel has not withdrawn behind international borders deliniated in the 1920s. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A group of 21 hostages being held by Muslim rebels in the southern Philippines has been divided into two groups and taken to different locations. A Malaysian negotiating team has opened separate talks aimed at winning the freedom of the captives, taken hostage almost two months ago. The Malaysian Government has been critical of the time it has taken to resolve the crisis. The hostages have been held on the southern Philippines island of Jolo since April, when they were seized from a Malaysian resort. Police intelligence sources in the southern Philippines have been reported as saying the separation of the hostages into two groups coincided with the arrival of a 15 member Malaysian delegation. Muslim rebels are demanding payment of $US1 million for each hostage. Malaysia has already intimated that money may have to be paid to secure the release of the hostages. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Olympic flame is set to pass through the Aboriginal community of Cherbourg, in Queensland's south-east, today. Cherbourg torch relay coordinator Matthew Malone says traditional dancing and street entertainment will be part of the town's celebrations. He says the excitement for the event is building for the six local runners. ""The build-up to it has been really quiet and the people running with it have been very relaxed, but in the last couple of days you can feel people getting a bit more electrified about it,"" he said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Zimbabwe's President, Robert Mugabe, has denied reports that he is planning to seize foreign-owned mines. Mr Mugabe says he simply wants blacks to share in the wealth of the mining sector. He says the Zimbabwean Government has been working with mining companies to open up to black entreprenuers. Mr Mugabe was quoted in a British newspaper on Thursday as saying that the mining sector could be targeted for what he described as ""Africanisation"". However, he now says his remarks have been distorted. The controversy comes only a week before Zimbabwe is scheduled to stage parliamentary elections. The lead-up to the vote has seen violence and the takeover of white-owned farms. The Government has now earmarked more than 800 farms for seizure. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" India's Sports Minister says high-profile Indian cricket figures should step aside until they are cleared of match-fixing allegations. Disgraced South African captain Hansie Cronje has named Mohammed Azharuddin as the man who introduced him to a bookie during a South African tour of India in 1996. Sports Minister Sukhdev Singh Dhinsa is calling for Azharuddin to stop playing Test cricket until his name is cleared. He adds that current coach, Kapil Dev, should also step down until proven innocent of separate match-fixing claims, saying that it is for the good of the game. ""I'm very much concerned as the Sports Minister... even the whole nation is very much concerned, because that's a bad name for the country,"" he said. He says it is up to the law to deal with any cricketers found guilty of match-fixing, and that if need be, the Indian Parliament should pass new legislation to deal with the problem. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Fiji's military ruler Frank Bainimarama has promised he will install an interim civilian government as soon as the 31 hostages are released. Commodore Bainimarama has told a Commonwealth delegation in Suva he remains committed to restoring Fiji to democracy and a multi-racial constitution. He also promised that the coup leader, George Speight, and his supporters would not be part of any interim government. But the commodore has said it could take two years before a new constitution is drawn up and fresh elections held. One of the delegates, Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer, says the Commonwealth wants democracy restored much sooner. ""He made it clear that it would take a maximum of two years and I pointed out that two years was a very long time for Fiji to go on without a democratic government, and there was a need to get back to a democratic situation much more quickly than that,"" he said."

" The South Korean leader Kim Dae-Jung is holding a special cabinet meeting to build on the results of the three day summit between the two Koreas. It was his first ever meeting with his North Korean counterpart Kim Jong Il. On his return to Seoul last night, President Kim declared reunification between the Cold War enemies is now possible. The United States has decribed the summit as being high on good feeling, but cautioned that exuberance should be tempered with wariness."

" The National Party New South Wales conference in Tweed Heads has voted against splitting from the Liberals in Opposition. They have also voted down a proposal to change the organisation's name to the National Country Party. During debate on the separation from the Liberals the Coffs Harbour MP, Andrew Fraser, savaged the coalition partners. ""The state Liberal Party is in total disarray. They've had no direction for the past two years,"" he said. ""They are driven by popularity polls rather than policy. They're in the hands of an administrator Tony Staley."""

" The Federal Government has received a clear message from deep in its heartland - drop the goods and services tax (GST) on rents paid by permanent residents of caravan parks and relocatable homes. The NSW National Party state conference in Tweeds Heads unanimously passed a motion urging the Howard Government to remove an anomaly in the new tax system. Delegates made it clear permanent caravan park residents were being treated differently to other residential renters when it came to the GST. As the Deputy Prime Minister, John Anderson, looked on many MP's, state and federal, warned the caravan issue could lead to many of their colleagues around Australia, including Tweed-based Minister Larry Anthony, losing their seats. One sitting federal backbencher Garry Nehl summed up the mood: ""It is wrong. It is bad politics. We should change it as quickly as possible,"" he said."

" Mr Anderson has indicated he might talk to the Prime Minister about the GST to be paid by permanent caravan park residents. Mr Anderson says the Government has already considered the issue, but he will discuss the conference's decision with his colleagues and, possibly, John Howard. ""I will consult with my colleagues, of course, and depending on the outcome talk to perhaps the Prime Minister as I've done in times past. ""It becomes my responsibility to respond back to the NSW branch of the party with any final determination."" The Community Services Minister, Larry Anthony, says he has no intention of resigning over the levying of the GST on rents paid by caravan park residents. Mr Anthony, whose electorate includes many caravan park residents, says he will stay in the Government to help bring in tax reform. ""I have never said that I would resign. Indeed that's an interpretation by the media,"" he said. ""The best value I can serve the Government is in the current portfolio that I have of Community Services and also putting through the enormous positive reforms that we're doing for the Australian people which will particularly come into play after July 1."""

" The Australian dollar has hit a new two-month high, as overseas investors continue to reverse their negative perceptions of our currency. The dollar peaked at 60.91 US cents earlier this afternoon, on broad-based buying. It is now back to 60.7 US, still more than half a cent up on this morning. On the cross rates, the dollar is at 40.06 sterling, 64.53 yen and 1.247 German marks. It is at $NZ1.271 and 0.637 euros. The dollar is at 53.4 on the trade weighted index. The local share market has closed a touch higher in lacklustre trade, but was buoyed by good rises in BHP and Rio Tinto. The All Ordinaries index closed up seven points, to 3,097, after the Dow Jones added 27 points, to 10,715 and the Nasdaq rose 48 to 3,846. Locally, BHP rose 43 cents, or 2 per cent, to $18.89, thanks to recent strength in the oil price and general earnings optimism. Managing director Paul Anderson today said he was talking to the Competition and Consumer Commission about a range of options for its stake, currently at 14 per cent in Email. Rio Tinto surged $1.00 to $25.90, after a jump in the aluminium price in London trade, but Delta Gold fell another nine cents to $1.15. Other key blue-chips finished lower with Telstra, down four cents to $6.66, Telstra Two down five cents to $3.66, moving closer to its all-time low of $3.53. News Corp shed seven cents to $22.38, the National Australia Bank rose 27 cents to $25.85 and the Commonwealth Bank continued its choppy ride, up 20 cents to $26.80. The price of gold is $US289.45, down 40 cents on this morning."

" The jury in the trial of National Party MLC Doug Moppett has retired to consider its verdict. Mr Moppett is charged with dangerous driving occasioning death after driving through a give way sign at an intersection near Coonamble in New South Wales north-west three years ago. Sydney woman Beth Flemming, 38, was killed when the vehicle in which she was a passenger collided with Mr Moppett's on 27 August 1997. Mr Moppett told Coonamble District Court he suffered a mind blank about 20 kilometres before reaching the intersection. Mr Moppett said he could not recall reaching the intersection or seeing the give way sign. Crown Prosecution is arguing Mr Moppett was voluntarily conscious before the accident because he waved to a passing bus driver moments before reaching the intersection."

" Former Australian Test cricket captain Kim Hughes says the International Cricket Council (ICC) should take some of the responsibility for the cricket betting scandal. Former South African cricket captain Hansie Cronje has admitted to a Government inquiry that he had accepted $167,000 from bookmakers since 1996. Other international players have also been implicated in match-fixing incidents. Hughes has labelled the ICC a joke. ""Where the heat should really start to come on is that the ICC have known of this for four or five years and have done absolutely nothing about it, and have tried to sweep it under the carpet, hopeful that it might just go away,"" he said. ""Well it hasn't gone away, and now the whole game has been thrown into an absolute abyss."""

" Shareholders in the busline Greyhound-Pioneer have rejected a takeover bid offer by New South Wales company Nowra Coaches. Today's meeting follows yesterday's announcement of a takeover bid by Toowoomba-based busline, McCaffertys. McCaffertys yesterday lodged a takeover bid for Greyhound-Pioneer with the Australian Securities and Investments Commission. McCaffertys says today's decision by Greyhound-Pioneer shareholders gives them the opportunity to properly consider the McCaffertys offer, which it says is a better deal. No-one from Greyhound-Pioneer was available for comment."

" The Olympic torch relay has become a family affair on the Sunshine Coast. Olympians Lisa Curry-Kenny and Grant Kenny both carried the torch through Mooloolaba on the Sunshine Coast this morning, with Lisa passing the flame to husband Grant. The torch will stop at Nambour at lunchtime, before heading to Tewantin where it will stop for the evening. Lisa Curry-Kenny says carrying the torch was a special moment. ""Well I've got to hold back the tears,"" she said. ""I must admit it's been so great to see so many Australians out with their flags and waving, and it's just fantastic it really is. ""I didn't think it would affect me this much, but it's fantastic."""

" The Solomon Islands' Governor-General, Sir John Eni Lapli, has announced that the national Parliament will not be sitting tomorrow as previously expected. In a short address to the nation, Sir John also said he has received the resignation of Prime Minister Bartholemew Ulafa'alu, which will become effective from this afternoon. Sir John thanked Prime Minister Ulufa'alu for his service to the country and, in a reference to the Malaita Eagle Force, he appealed to those who, he says, are in charge of the security of Honiara to allow for a peaceful atmosphere to prevail. He says Parliament should be able to sit to elect a new Prime Minister without MPs feeling under duress. He says the Parliament session set down for tomorrow to debate a motion of no confidence in Mr Ulufa'alu would not go ahead. He says he will announce at a later date when the Parliament will sit next, and it is understood he will consult with the Speaker to decide when that should be."

" Victorian police have discovered the body of a Federal Labor MP in a car in Gippsland in the state's east this morning. The body of Greg Wilton, 45, was discovered at 9:30am AEST at Labertouche. Police say there are no suspicous circumstances. Mr Wilton has been in Parliament since 1996. He was arrested in May after police feared for the safety of his two children, both aged under five. Following his arrest, Mr Wilton had himself admitted to hospital. It is not clear at this stage when Mr Wilton left the hospital."

" The Australian economy continues to defy the doom-sayers. The annual economic growth rate remains above 4 per cent. The March quarter national accounts come as a surprise. Economists across the board expected the economy to drop back from the growth rates being recorded last year. Instead, they have been maintained, with gross domestic product (GDP) expanding by 1.1 per cent in the first three months of the year, almost triple the median forecast. That has produced an annual growth rate of almost 4.3 per cent. Despite a fear that slowing retail spending might even produce a negative number for the quarter, household consumption has actually made a solid contribution to growth, as has business investment and housing activity, as home buyers move to beat the goods and services tax. New oil wells coming on stream in the Timor Sea have also been a significant factor. Australia's economic growth rate has now been a 4 per cent or above for three consecutive years. Meanwhile, the Australian dollar has moved significantly higher on the figures, but has been unable to breach 60 US cents. It initially jumped three tenths of a cent before falling back a touch. Just before 12:00pm AEST, it was at 59.90 US cents, still up more than one fifth of a cent."

" A steady hand on interest rates this month by the Reserve Bank has enabled a recovery in consumer confidence. This month, the Westpac Melbourne Institute Index of Consumer Sentiment is up 7 per cent. The improvement comes after Australian households had become increasingly pessimistic over the preceding four months. Westpac's general manager of economics Bill Evans says consumers are breathing easier about the outlook for interest rates after the central bank decided against tightening policy again this month. ""I think it's pretty well all down to the fact that the interest rate outlook has improved,"" he said. ""The other big factor driving the falling confidence has been concern about the goods and services tax and indeed part of a survey indicates whilst consumers remain quite negative about the tax, they are less negative than they were three-months ago."""

" One of Fiji's major international hotels shut its doors today, the latest victim of the country's political crisis. With tourists shunning the island nation in what is the peak holiday season, hotel occupancy rates are as low as 8 per cent. The Sheraton Royal Denarau is based outside Nadi International Airport on the west of Fiji's main island. While violence has been concentrated around the capital, the Fiji tourists rates overall have plummeted. The Sheraton is the first of the major hotels to shut up shop, moving what guests it has to nearby sister hotels on the Denarau Tourist Development. It says the closure is temporary and the decision will allow the hotel to avoid staff lay-offs. But that will depend on how long the crisis drags on and when tourists decide to return to Fiji. As one hotel manager said, there is no shortage of sun and nice beaches in the Pacific."

" Extortion threats to two of Australia's most prominent manufacturers of painkillers have sparked moves to develop new crisis management protocols. Members of the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA), state and territory health authorities, peak industry bodies and consumer groups met in Sydney today to discuss the Panadol recall. The TGA's Rita MacLachlan says while individual companies have long had in place procedures for dealing with crises, there is a need for a whole-of-industry approach. Ms MacLachlan says it may also be necessary to enshrine in law standards for tamper-proof packaging. ""I don't think it can be standardised, it's got to be appropriate for the type of product,"" she said. ""But certainly what we'll be looking at is ensuring that there are appropriate standards in place that have legislative underpinning for tamper-evident packaging."""

" New research estimates that every day in Australia 133 women over the age of 60 suffer a fracture resulting from osteoporosis. The discovery, by Sydney's Garvan Institute of Medical Research, has prompted the launch of a new nationwide campaign urging those at risk to seek medical advice before the first fracture. Former Olympian and campaign spokeswoman Marjorie Jackson says she only became aware of the problem when a test revealed her bone density was bordering on the danger zone. ""I think it sort of shocked me to think that all the sport I had done [and I] could develop osteoporosis,"" she said. ""I really didn't know much about it, other than it was broken bones, so then I got to reading about what it could do and I've decided every two years to have a bone density test."""

" Personalised cancer vaccines are being trialled by scientists at the Queensland Institute of Medical Research. The treatment works by using a patient's own cells to create an immune response. Chief scientist Dr Andrew Nicol says while the approach has been tried before, the vaccines had to be manufactured overseas. He says the vaccines can now be developed in Australia, making it easier to see if the treatment is effective against the spread of cancer. The vaccines are currently being tested on patients with a range of cancers, including melanoma and leukaemia."

" The highest court in New South Wales has concluded the ""career criminal"", Arthur ""Neddy"" Smith, must serve out his life sentence. The Court of Criminal Appeal has dismissed Smith's 10 grounds of appeal against his murder conviction and the life sentence imposed two years ago for the shooting of brothel keeper Harvey Jones. Smith, 55, shot Jones on a beach at Botany in 1983, with the victims remains found buried in the southern Sydney sand hills in 1995. Smith, who suffers from Parkinson's disease, was given the green light in the 1980s to commit any crime short of murder as long as he shared the proceeds with corrupt NSW police."

" The Prime Minister of Solomon Islands, Bartholomew Ulufa'alu, has submitted his resignation. He told the Governor-General it was in the interests of long-term peace. Prime Minister Ulufa'alu was not expected to resign until the Parliament meets tomorrow. However, last night he submitted a letter of resignation to the Governor-General, Sir John Eni Lapli, with a proposal that he be made caretaker prime minister until the Parliament votes for a new leader of this deeply troubled nation. An announcement of whether the Governor-General has accepted this course of action is expected today. The Government caucus, which has endorsed Mr Ulafa'alu's resignation, is putting several demands to the Malaita Eagle Force, which now controls Honiara, to try to ensure that whatever decision Parliament does make tomorrow, is not made under duress. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Fiji's coup leader George Speight has cut food supplies to his 31 hostages in retaliation for the military shooting at his car on Monday. Mr Speight's rebels are stopping the Red Cross delivering food and medicines. The coup leader has cut food for the hostages to one meal a day in retaliation for the incident in which soldiers at a military checkpoint fired on the car he was in. The military has since apologised, but Mr Speight has accused forces within the Army of plotting to kill him. The rebel camp has also criticised plans by the military commander, Frank Bainimarama, to announce a civilian government later this week. Commodore Bainimarama has ruled out any role in the government for Mr Speight, or his supporters, saying the civilian cabinet will be independent of both the coup leaders and the military. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" In North Korea, South Korea's President Kim Dae Jung has spelled out a program for reuniting the two nations. The President last night delivered his first speech on North Korean soil at a state banquet. Kim Dae Jung says he wants to open up the road between the communist North and the US affiliated South which has been blocked off for half a century. He wants to relink the broken railway and open sea and air communications as well. He told the state banquet that all Koreans need to be able to travel freely in order for both sides to move toward reconciliation and eventual reunification. The South Korean President begins his first full day of talks with North Korean officials this morning. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Late Syrian president Hafez al-Assad has been laid to rest in his home village in the country's north after a day-long state funeral. The funeral provided the first opportunity for the United States to raise the issue of peace with Israel with the man expected to assume the Syrian presidency. Hafez al-Assad, for 30-years a figure towering over Syrian life, was laid to rest in Al Quedahar after a procession that saw demonstrations of political support and at times hysterical grief among hundreds of thousands of mourners. Most Arab heads of state paid respect as the president's coffin lay in state at the presidential palace in Damascus, shile the majority of Western heads of state chose not to attend the funeral. United States Secretary of State Madeleine Albright met the late president's son, Bashar, who is certain to be the next president, raising with him the legacy of his father's peace negotiations. Doctor Bashar said that he would continue on that same road. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" Air Services Australia has confirmed that two air-traffic controllers have been stood down pending investigations into two near misses over Brisbane and Alice Springs. Air Services spokesman Richard Dudley says passenger jets were involved in both incidents and internal navigation equipment inside the planes alerted pilots to possible collisions. ""I can confirm that there were two separate incidents - one in air space to the south of Brisbane and one over central Australia where a breakdown of separation of those aircraft occurred on both occasions,"" he said. ""On both occasions the air traffic controllers have been stood down as part of normal procedure pending an internal Air Services Australia investigation and an external independent investigation by the Australian Transport Safety Bureau."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A lawyer for Perth-based company Esmeralda Exploration says its mine in Romania is safe and ready to open again. The mine overflowed in January and is feared to have significantly polluted a tributary of the Danube River. Lawyer Michael Hardy says the mine's equipment has been altered to ensure there is now capacity to handle future overflow. He says the Romanian Government set an exhaustive list of requirements to be met before it gave approval for the reopening. Mr Hardy says there is widespread local support in Romania for the mine to be reopened. ""All of the factors were properly taken into account and we've now satisfied all of the requirements that have been placed on us by the Government,"" he said. ""We believe it's appropriate, having regard to all the circumstances, that we get going again."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" An insecticide that is widely used in Australia is to be phased out in the United States because of concerns about its effects on human health. The use of chlorphyrifos is also under review in Australia. Chlorphyrifos is an organophosphate insecticide. In Australia, it is used mostly for termite control, but is also found in some household insect sprays and in the farm product Dursban. The US Government will gradually ban the insecticide after studies found it posed an unacceptable health risk, particularly to children. Australia's National Registration Authority is reviewing the insecticide's use. The authority's Ron Eichner says it is considering improved warning labels on products containing chlorphyrifos and possible restrictions on the manufacture of household products. Mariann Lloyd-Smith from National Toxics Network says Australia should quickly follow the US to introduce bans. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" South Africa's cricket corruption inquiry has adjourned. The break comes as former South African captain Hansie Cronje prepares to give evidence. Cronje has already been implicated in alleged match-fixing by his former team-mates, but he is yet to deliver his side of the story. The disgraced captain will be granted indemnity if he delivers a full confession. The cricket corruption inquiry has been told that Cronje offered money to several South African players to throw matches. The inquiry adjourned late yesterday to consider the evidence tendered so far and will resume tomorrow. Inquiry officials say it has not been decided if Cronje will be the next witness. If Cronje does testify, he will have only one day on the stand before a public holiday disrupts proceedings on Friday. Meanwhile, the Australian Cricket Board (ACB) says everyone should be prepared for more allegations of corruption involving Australian players. The board is investigating claims made at the South African inquiry that Australian cricketers have generated income from match-fixing. The ACB's chief executive Malcolm Speed says the board has been checking whether Pakistani fast bowler Shoaib Akhtar is the source of the unsubstantiated and anonymous allegations. He does not expect them to be the last. ""I'm not expecting any more [allegations] but if you look at the way this has developed, there are a number of suggestions that are floating around about different players from different countries,"" he said. ""What I'm saying is don't be surprised if someone pops up and gives evidence of involvement of an Australian player."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" It appears there is still no clear way forward in Solomon Islands for the caucus to find a resolution to the country's crisis. The Prime Minister, Bartholomew Ulufa 'Alu, attended today's caucus meeting, but was non-committal in the brief comments he made afterwards. Mr Ulufa 'Alu is no longer under armed guard by the Malaita Eagles force, but they are still adamant that he must resign when Parliament meets on Thursday. Journalists in Honiara were allowed a brief photo opportunity of his government caucus meeting as it wound up a lengthy discussion on how it would approach Thursday's session. ""Well you can see we are still intact,"" he said. Eighteen of the 30 members of the government caucus were present and more are expected to arrive in the capital tomorrow."

" Large crowds have massed in the main square of the Syrian capital Damascus for the start of the State Funeral of the late President, Hasaf al-Assad, who died on Saturday. The elaborate funeral will last a full day. Artillery rounds have already rung out through the Syrian capital as the President's body was brought to the Ummayyad Square, from where it will be flown to a city near his home town, where there will be a lengthy procession. Foreign heads of state and other dignatories have travelled to Syria for the funeral. Large groups including bare-chested men slashed by razors have lined the procession route in Damascus, chanting prayers for the President, and for the man prepared for succession, his son Bashar al-Assad."

" It has been suggested business confidence in Australia has now dropped to below the levels recorded during the Asian economic crisis. A survey by the National Australia Bank is among a flurry of research indicating increased business pessimism. The bank's May business survey shows a significant deterioration in business conditions. Trading and profitability are showing the greatest downturn, while employment is flat. As measured by the bank's index, conditions are the worst since September 1998. But the slide in confidence is even greater, now below the levels registered at the height of the Asian crisis. The impending goods and services tax, higher interest rates and lower profits are given as the reasons. The bank says pressure on the Reserve Bank to raise interest rates again has clearly diminished."

" The Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock has defended delays in releasing genuine refugees from immigration detention centres, saying the Government has to be satisfied they are not criminals. Mr Ruddock says the 1700 people assessed as having refugee status will not be released until all security, criminal, and health checks have been carried out. He says the task is difficult because most of the illegal migrants do not have documentation, and it is difficult to checkwith overseas governments. ""I am not about releasing into the Australian community people who may have substantial criminal records, who could be murderers, could be terrorists, and have it said later if you made inquiries, if these inquiries had been carried out fully this information would have been available to you,"" he said. Mr Ruddock today visited the Woomera detention centre, the scene of a mass break-out by illegal migrants last week. Following the break-out, Mr Ruddock has announced a review of security arrangements at detention centres, which will examine whether security and supervision needs to upgraded at the major facilities in Woomera, Port Hedland and Curtin. He says he decided to travel to Woomera as a show of good faith after the troubles died down. ""I indicated I would not visit Woomera under any duress, but when people were back in detention and there were issues that they wanted to raise, I'd be happy to hear them,"" Mr Ruddock said."

" The Prime Minister has been given a demand for compensation and reparation for the Aboriginal people of Northern New South Wales at the start of a two-day visit to Moree. Mr Howard was accompanied by Industrial Relations Minister Peter Reith and Deputy Prime Minister John Anderson, and will be joined by Philip Ruddock in his capacity as Minister assisting the Prime Minister on reconciliation. A member of the local Aboriginal community, Ray Swan, told the Prime Minister, the State and Federal Government should agree to the decolonisation of tradition Aboriginal lands. ""The community has to realise there's an universal jurisprudence that plays a part here, and Australia is part of the family of mankind,"" he said. ""They're obligated under international law to adhere to international principles because that's the decolonisation process."" But Mr Howard says he is committed to practical reconciliation, so that all Aboriginal people can share in the general life of the Australian community. ""If we can provide over the years genuine equality of opportunity for all Australians, whether they're Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders or other Australians, then you will achieve genuine reconciliation."""

" The Australian Cricket Board is taking seriously allegations that Australian cricketers have profited from match-fixing. The anonymous and unsubstantiated remarks have been made at the South African cricket inquiry. The Australian Cricket Board (ACB) is investigating whether Pakistani fast bowler Shoab Akhtar is the source of the allegations. Meantime, ACB Chief Executive Malcolm Speed will speak to Australian vice-captain Shane Warne tonight. He will primarily be talking to Warne about his ACB contract, but will also raise reports in the English press that Warne has harassed a woman."

" Two Australian sporting greats have joined nearly 180 Olympic torchbearers in today's flame relay around south-east Queensland. While all torchbearers were given a rousing welcome, Samantha Riley and John Eales drew extra applause. The flame set off early this morning from Cleveland, at Redland Bay, before making its way to QE2 stadium at Nathan. Former Olmpic silver and bronze medallist Samantha Riley carried the flame into the stadium where thousands of supporters had gathered to cheer her on. Riley failed to make the Australian swimming team for Sydney, but says that disappointment did not temper her excitement at being a torchbearer. ""Today's just about more the Olympic spirit having a lot of people involved and feeling part of the Olympics in our own countries,"" she said. And Wallabies Captain John Eales was hoping his participation could be a prelude to rugby union again becoming an Olympic sport. ""It has been before, and Australia has done very well in it, winning gold medals so maybe it's a way forward for rubgy,"" he said. The flame is now headed to Ipswich, which will host a huge community celebration, including an F1-11 flyover, to welcome the flame."

" Police are investigating the deaths of two students in the Blue Mountains on the weekend. The two were among a group of nine from the University of Newcastle who had set out on Saturday for a canyoning expedition in the Kanangra Boyd National Park. Newcastle University has confirmed the two dead men, both in their 20s, were members of the Mountaineering Club who had been planning a weekend of abseiling and caving in the rugged area. The University says all members of the group were experienced, well-prepared and the trip was carefully planned. A spokesperson for the police, Alan Small, says the alarm was raised when they failed to return on time yesterday and a search was mounted this morning. ""It's a very attractive area, very scenic and very popular with bushwalkers, sheer sandstone cliffs, quite rugged country,"" he said. While police will not confirm the circumstances surrounding the incident, it is believed the two men died while abseiling on Saturday night. The seven other members of the group, also in their 20s, remained in the area until they were reached by rescue teams this afternoon and they have since been airlifted out. Police say there will be no attempt to remove the bodies until Wednesday. The accident follows two other deaths in the Blue Mountains during the long weekend. A 20-year-old abseiler slipped and fell from a cliff in Stones National Park near Lithgow on Sunday, and a teenage bushwalker died on Saturday after falling down a steep rock incline near a waterfall at Capertee, also in the Blue Mountains."

" Talks today between the Queensland Government and the Teachers Union have failed to resolve a dispute over pay and conditions, ahead of tomorrow's planned 24-hour strike. The parties were ordered back to the negotiating table during an Industrial Relations Commission hearing in Brisbane last night. However, they still have not agreed on a number of issues and the union says it is pushing ahead with plans for a statewide strike tomorrow."

" Shots fired at Fiji's coup leader George Speight have compounded tensions between Mr Speight and military leaders. The coup leader has accused the military of ordering his assassination. The military has apologised to Mr Speight after soldiers at a checkpoint shot at the car he was in when it failed to stop. A military spokesman says it was a major misunderstanding, but Mr Speight has accused the military of issuing orders to kill him. Earlier in the day, Mr Speight had held talks with the military Commodore Frank Bainimarama and two of Fiji's traditional chiefs. The latest incident has set back efforts to resolve Fiji's 25-day hostage crisis. Mr Speight is refusing to release his 31 hostages until the military restores civilian rule. He claims he has growing support within Fiji's Great Council of Chiefs to end martial law. Military rulers have lifted a curfew in Fiji's north and western regions, but it remains in force in the capital. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The evacuation of foreign nationals from Solomon Islands is continuing. The New Zealand Air Force will undertake another two flights today, as the country's political crisis continues. As of yesterday, the Australian High Commission estimated there were about 550 Australians left in the Solomons, 400 of those in Honiara. Every citizen has been advised to leave. There have been no clashes between the rival ethnic militias since last week and the High Commission in the Solomons admits Australians are under no direct threat. However, the advice to get out remains firm and the navy's <i>HMAS Minora</i> is now in Solomon Islands' waters to assist in a final evacuation of Australians if that becomes necessary. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A Qantas jumbo jet is undergoing repairs in London after an outer windscreen cracked just after take-off. Passengers arrived home this morning exhausted, but satisfied with the airline's handling of the situation. Qantas flight two had left London on Sunday bound for Sydney. One female passenger says just after take-off, the captain told passengers they would be turning back to London because a flying object had hit the windscreen. ""When we questioned the stewardess she said it was probably a bird, and to be at that height it would probably have been a pelican,"" she said. ""There's pelican bits all over Europe somewhere."" Fuel was dumped before the 747-400 landed and passengers were put on to another plane bound for Sydney via Bangkok. The flight ended up arriving in Sydney about 12 hours late. Qantas said at no stage was passenger safety compromised. The damaged plane is now undergoing repairs in London. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Labor party members in the federal seat of Throsby are threatening a revolt over the preselection of Jennie George as the Labor candidate for the safe Illawarra seat, south of Sydney. The former ACTU president was endorsed for the seat at the ALP state conference in Sydney at the weekend, despite maintaining that she would have preferred a rank-and-file ballot. Paul Stobbie from the Throsby Rank and File Defence Committee says they are sick and tired of being overlooked by head office when it comes to preselection. ""All we're asking for is ALP members in this area get a say in who their representative is, whether that representative is Jennie George, Sharon Bird, Noren Hey, whoever that is,"" he said. ""That we as the rank and file, the people that work on the booths, the people that pay our membership every year, and the people who are told when we join the party that that is one of the rights we do have is to choose our representative - that we get that right back."" Rival candidate Sharon Bird who was going to seek preselection for the seat says she is too upset to make a rational decision about her future. Sitting Member Colin Hollis has been unavailable for comment. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A survey of business expectations shows confidence has again slumped in the lead up to next month's introduction of the goods and services tax. More than 1,000 executives took part in the Dun and Bradstreet survey for May - showing downward trends in sales, profits, employment and capital investment since falls were recorded in April. Dun and Bradstreet's managing director Christine Christian says the uncertainty over the tax changes means Australia is heading for a period of much slower economic growth. ""We've seen a slowdown in spending and that has overall affected companies in terms of keeping up their inventory levels,"" she said. ""A lot of businesses hesitate right now as far as creating new jobs, I mean there's a real wait and see feeling within the business community."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright has urged Syria to open itself up to the outside world as it moves beyond the rule of president Hafez al-Assad. The Secretary of State will represent US President Clinton at president al-Assad's funeral in Syria. Dr Albright, who is leading the US delegation to Damascus, says Washington welcomes the apparent smoothness of the transition of power to the late president's son. Dr Albright says she will be looking to meet with Bashar al-Assad and urging him to embrace the cause of regional peace. In March, President Clinton met president Assad, but failed to revive stalled talks between Syria and Israel. Meanwhile, the brother of president al-Assad says he will lead a new ""revolution for democray"" in Syria, accusing Damascus of violating the constitution in propelling Bashar to succeed his father. Rifaat Assad was vice-president of Syria until he had a falling-out with his brother and he now lives in Europe. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The pharmaceutical company at the centre of an extortion bid says its Panadol and Panadeine painkillers could be off the shelves for up to three months. The company may re-start production of its children's line for pharmacy-only distribution, or introduce a new over the counter version with tamper proof seals, in the next two weeks. But managing director Alan Schaefer says like Herron Pharmaceuticals, who experienced a similar extortion threat, it will take 10 to 12 weeks to return all products with improved, tamper-evident packaging. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australian cricketers have been accused of being involved in international match-fixing. The allegation has been made during South Africa's cricket corruption inquiry. The inquiry has been told that Australian cricketers are very active in engineering the outcome of matches. The chief executive of South Africa's United Cricket Board, Dr Ali Bacher, has detailed the claim during his testimony to the inquiry. Dr Bacher says he received a letter from a South African business executive. The executive claims to have had a conversation with a man he later identified as Pakistani fast bowler Shoaib Akhtar. The inquiry was told was that during the conversation, the man believed to be Akhtar said that Australians were fixing games and that Australian cricket authorities were well aware of the practice."

" Meanwhile, Sri Lanka has become the latest country to announce a formal investigation into match-fixing. News of the inquiry was released by the new president of the country's cricket board. The independent panel has been established to investigate and prevent match-fixing in Sri Lankan cricket. The cricket board president says no specific measures are so far being taken against match-fixing, even as Sri Lanka prepares to play Pakistan in Colombo tomorrow in the first of three Test matches. Five members of the visiting team have been recommended for fines after being named in the Pakistani match-fixing inquiry announced last month."

" A Brisbane couple, who became ill after taking Panadol capsules, are recovering. An nationwide recall of Panadol capsules has been extended to all Panadol and Panadeine products, after the pair came down with symptoms of strychnine poisoning. The Royal Darwin Hospital spokesperson says the woman, 54, and her husband, 61, are in a stable condition. Meanwhile, Northern Territory police say the cause of the illness will not be confirmed until toxicology results are received. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" In a dramatic new development in the Solomon Islands crisis, an armed group has taken control of the capital of the country's western province, Gizo. It appears a new ethnic militia that may have the support of factions of the Bougainville Revolutiony Army, this morning raided the Gizo police station and telecommunications facilities. Regular telecommunications to Gizo, Munda and other parts of the western province which borders Bougainville, have been severed. Shortly before the phone links went down, the Solomon Islands provincial police commander for the western province, Aloysius Ora, said 45 heavily armed men, some of them apparently from Bougainville, had taken control of Gizo. He says some of the men were armed with M-16s and declared that they were going to protect the western province against the Malaita Eagles Force. The Malaita Eagles Force is the ethnic militia which took control of Honiara last Monday."

" Meanwhile, evacuations of foreign nationals continue at Honiara's Henderson Airport. A New Zealand air force 727 has flown out with about 90 people on board, including New Zealand Foreign Minister Phil Goff, bound for Auckland. Australian Foreign Affairs Minister Alexander Downer has arrived back in Australia on an RAAF jet. Another 40 Australians are still in the airport terminal waiting for a New Zealand Hercules that is to take them to Townsville. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Fiji's rebel leader, George Speight, says traditional chiefs are preparing to move against the military regime. Last night, Mr Speight's supporters again clashed with the police and army. Mr Speight claims that regional meetings of provincial chiefs across Fiji are preparing the way for the Great Council of Chiefs to be convened. He says the chiefs will meet in spite of the opposition of the military president, Commodore Frank Bainimarama. ""You've got high-ranking chiefs from all around Fiji knocking on his door, asking him to see reason, to return executive authority to the Great Council of Chiefs and let them make the decision,"" Mr Speight said. ""But he continues to be adament that it will be exclusively his to decide what is the structure for the next three to five years for Fiji, and I question that. ""The solution to this is, you know, let all the chiefs sort him out."""

" Last night about 100 of Mr Speight's supporters broke curfew and tried to occupy a police post about two kilometres from the parliament complex. The armed mob was turned back by the army but later set fire to a nearby restaurant. The clash is the latest in a series around the parliament complex, where the Prime Minister, Mahendra Chaudhry, and 30 other MPs are being held hostage. Negotiations between the rebels and the military regime are suspended. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Labor Party has promised to make the goods and services tax (GST) fairer if elected to government at the next election. The new tax system comes into force on July 1. The Federal Opposition says the Government has not provided enough compensation for those adversely affected by the GST, and it says prices will rise more than initially expected. The Shadow Family and Community Services Minister, Wayne Swan, has told Channel Seven there will be a full review of the tax. ""We are going to roll back the GST, we are going to make it more fair, we're going to lift its impact on the weakest and most vulnerable, we're going to look at its impact in areas of health and education,"" he said. ""You simply cannot dismantle a $30 billion tax overnight. ""We have said we are determined to make this tax fairer by lifting its impact on the weakest and most vulnerable in the community, and by lifting its impact on areas of health and education which were supposed to be GST-free."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Authorities have not given up efforts to find the body of the last missing victim of the Whyalla Airlines crash. The accident, which happened more than a week ago, claimed the lives of all eight people on board. An exhaustive search has so far failed to find the body of Whyalla man Chris Schuppan. Emergency service crews have been stood down this weekend for rest, but fishing boats on both sides of the upper Spencer Gulf are on alert to report any new discoveries. Whyalla mayor John Smith says the official search will be re-activated on Monday."

" Meanwhile, thousands of Whyalla residents are expected to flock to the foreshore today to mourn the loss of the eight lives. An ecumenical service, including the lighting of eight candles, will be held, before the family of those killed visit the crash site to lay wreaths. The Reverend Michael Hillier, who will oversee the proceedings, says the service will last about 45 minutes. ""We've tried to capture the sense that despite the pain that everyone is experiencing and that darkness that is there nonetheless God is with us and walks with us in our pain and our pain is His pain and the choice of footprints picks that up us well that God walks with us in our grief."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Four National Parks and Wildlife Service officers, injured in a fire at Ku-ring-gai last week, remain in hospital. Natalie Saville, 25, is in intensive care at Concord Hospital but her condition is improving. Luke McSweeney, 26, is in a stable condition in intensive care at Westmead Hospital, while Jamie Shaw, 34, and Mark Cupitt, 32, are listed as critical in Royal North Shore Hospital. The fire, which was set as a routine back-burn, claimed the lives of three of the officers' workmates. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Prime Minister John Howard's call to the state's to water down labelling laws for genetically modified (GM) food is receiving some resistance. Mr Howard wrote to the state governments recommending that products with less than 1 per cent of GM food should be exempt from labelling laws. New South Wales Health Minister Craig Knowles says the Prime Minister's involvement is unhelpful. ""Health ministers are trying to get a clear sense of the true cost to both industry, retailers and the community as a labelling regime may be introduced,"" he said. ""But those things need to be discussed openly and widely, not just trying to close down health ministers because they may disagree with John Howard's lobby groups."" He says the decision will be made by all states and the community, not Mr Howard. ""The Prime Minister is naive to think the community is just going to accept a sectional view,"" he said. ""What we have to do as a community is to get a strong and structured response to what is happening around the world with modified foods."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The path of a meteor late yesterday could be seen over much of Victoria and northern Tasmania. Witnesses spotted a red tip on a vapour trail last night, as the meteor came through the atmosphere. Sightings have been reported from Mansfield, Tocumwal and Boort in Victoria. Judy Blunden, from Wycheproof, is convinced the meteor may even have fallen to earth near the town. She says many locals heard a huge thud which they initially thought was a gas explosion. ""I mean, for someone to hear it at Charlton, well it's about 25 miles away...so I mean, it must have hit with a hell of a bang, because it shook everything. ""We couldn't see any plumes or any smoke or anything coming up."" James Carter was driving near Mansfield, in Victoria's north-east, when he saw the vapour trail. ""It broke up into a couple of little bits of different directions...it just wasn't there any more,"" he said. ""I would imagine from the vapour trails that I saw, that some of the pilots coming out of Tullamarine [airport] would have seen it too. ""It sort of drifted and fell apart, left a path very much zig-zaggy as the sun set over it."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A Commonwealth delegation will arrive in Solomon Islands today in an attempt to arrange a permanent resolution to fighting between islander groups. The delegation is led by Australia's Foreign Affairs Minister Alexander Downer and includes the New Zealand Foreign Minister Phil Goff and other Commonwealth representatives. The group plans to fly out of Townsville this morning and to return this afternoon. Mr Downer says they will offer international support for a peaceful resolution to the Solomons conflict during talks with factional leaders and Prime Minister Bartholomew Ulufa'alu. ""What we hope is that a ceasefire can be arranged, first and foremost, and then that some peace conference, a new peace conference, there was one not all that long ago, but a further peace conference can be put together yet again,"" he said, ""And that some progress...can be made towards a resolution of some of these inter-ethnic problems."""

" Australia is sending a second Navy ship to Solomon Islands with troops, helicopters and medical support on board. The Navy's amphibious ship, <i>HMAS Manoora</i>, is heading to Honiara as the transport ship, <i>HMAS Tobruk</i> prepares to return. The <i>Tobruk</i> will leave for Cairns this morning with 480 evacuees on board. It was moored off Honiara harbour overnight awaiting the arrival of the New Zealand frigate, the <i>Te Mana</i>. The Tobruk may take on a small number of extra evacuees before leaving. The <i>Manoora</i> was sent from Townsville yesterday with troops from the 1st Battallion, Black Hawk helicopters, vehicles and medical support personnel on board. It is due to arrive in the Solomon Islands in the next few days. Despite its potential for troop landings, Defence Minister John Moore says the <i>Manoora</i> has only been dispatched to provide contingency options. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Engineers will check a military plane which developed a mid-air fault on its way to Brisbane last night while carrying Prime Minister John Howard and Opposition Leader Kim Beazley. The VIP plane landed at Brisbane Airport after the pilot reported an engine fire warning light. Airforce spokesman Paul Lynham says no-one was hurt and the military 707 plane touched down safely. ""As luck would have it, Brisbane was the termination for the VIP flight with the PM, so it landed where it was due to land anyway, although there was a bit more pomp [and] ceremony with the fire engines,"" he said. ""The fault was just the faulty indicator light. There was no fire on the PM's aircraft."" The plane was returning from Japan. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Immigration Minister Phillip Ruddock is denying claims that the processing of illegal arrivals takes too long. His comments follow three mass break-outs of inmates at Australian detention centres in South Australia and Western Australia. Speaking on Channel Nine, Mr Ruddock said it is an involved process that simply cannot be rushed. ""Each case is looked at case by case, and they have to be assessed against the lawful criteria and the decisions have to be clearly sustainable,"" he said. ""Those decisions which have been developed, and the decision-making process, which has been developed over a long period of time with the active involvement of the courts, are highly technical, very difficult, involve highly-qualified officers who have to be able to make those decisions. ""We do not have the numbers of people available to process something like 400 people in a matter of weeks."""

" Meanwhile, a senior official from the Immigration Department is blaming people smugglers for the recent unrest. At Woomera in South Australia's north, escapees protested in the town for almost two days before the stand-off ended late on Friday after drawn-out negotiations with immigration officials. The Immigration Department's Roger Wheatley says the migrants arrive in Australia with unrealistic expectations."

" All escaped illegal immigrants from the Woomera detention centre in South Australia have returned to the facility. Their move late last night ended a tense two day stand-off. Meanwhile, the Federal Government is the target of growing criticism over its response to security and other issues at the detention centres. The Immigration Department says it was in the process of improving security when the break-outs happened at Woomera, and Derby and Port Hedland in Western Australia. Pilbara Independent MP Larry Graham says the Federal Government needs to examine shifting the location of the Port Hedland facility, from its present residential setting. But Marion Le from th Indo-Chinese Refugee Association says Immigration Minister Phillip Ruddock should have expected the break-outs, given the long period the detainees have been held in the centres. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Fiji's military government and the rebel group holding Parliament have both dismissed mediation efforts by other Fijian groups. The terrorist group holding 31 hostages in the parliament complex have rejected efforts by the Methodist Church to negotiate the immediate release of MPs. The rebel leader, George Speight, says the church can have a spiritual, not a practical role in dealing with the crisis. The military President, Frank Bainimarama, received a delegation of chiefs from the western part of the main island. The chiefs called on the military leader to make way for a civilian president. Commodore Bainimarama says he heard the group's proposal for a solution, but no decision was reached, nor was one expected. As the hostage deadlock enters its fourth week, martial law is still in place and night curfews are being maintained. Schools were due to re-open next Tuesday, but the military government has ordered them to remain closed until at least June 20. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The New South Wales Opposition leader, Kerry Chikarovski, has sacked her shadow Treasurer, Peter Debnam. Liberal Party sources say Mr Debnam has been demoted because of his disatisfaction with Mrs Chikarovski's leadership. Mr Debnam's replacement will be Hornsby MP Stephen O'Doherty, who formerly held the Shadow Community Services portfolio. Mr Debnam says he will not say what is behind his sudden departure. ""As leader of the Liberal Party Kerry has the right to hire and fire her front bench and as of today I'm no longer on that front bench,"" he said. ""But I'll continue to work very hard for my electorate, the Liberal Party, and for the party."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The AFL is considering whether to move matches away from Docklands Stadium because of continuing concerns about the surface. They are not happy with the condition of the outer wing, which some players have dubbed ""death valley"". The AFL says it is too late to move tonight's clash between St Kilda and Hawthorn, but next week's scheduled matches may be played elsewhere. Former North Melbourne player, John Longmire, shares the concerns about the outer wing, and suspects it could be a long-term problem. ""I think it's a concern. They all, everyone's saying 'OK after this season when the turf settles down, it'll be a lot better'. ""Sure enough most of the ground will, but will that area of the ground be a lot better? ""I mean, that is, after all, always going to be in shade"" The AFL will meet with Docklands management this morning to discuss their worries about the state of the ground. Former Collingwood player and ABC commentator, Michael Christian, says the patch is not the only area of the surface causing problems for players. ""We haven't touched on the strip down the middle from goal to goal, but you've almost got to take a six-inch step down off that strip,"" he said. ""That's been laid from goalpost to goalpost, down the middle of the ground, like putting off against the fringe on a putting green."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Further evacuations of foreign nationals are planned from Solomon Islands capital, Honiara, today. The New Zealand Air Force and a Malaysian military plane are expected to fly into Honiara's Henderson Airfield to take them out. The New Zealanders are planning a repeat of yesterday's exercise. A New Zealand Air Force 727 will fly people back to Auckland and a Hercules will take others to Queensland. Malaysia has arranged for one of its military aircraft to fly in to evacuate about 150 Malaysian citizens, many of whom work in the timber industry. Amongst those heading for New Zealand will be several Bougainvilleans married to New Zealanders. They are going following yesterday's incident in the Western Province provincial capital of Gizo where an armed group led by a Bougainvillean killed a part Malaysian man. The Western Province police commander, Aloysius Ora, is quoted on Solomons radio this morning as saying his police station has not been taken over and that he could not take any action against the group because they were so heavily armed. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Fiji's military has given assurances about the health of the hostages in the siege at Parliament which is entering its 25th day. At the same time, the son of one of the hostages plans to lead a protest march around the main island. Ben Padarath's mother is one of the MPs being held in the Parliament complex. Mr Padarath says he wants thousands of Fijians to join him in a four-day march over the 220 kilometres from Lotoka in the west to Suva in the east. He is calling it the ""Enough is enough"" march, saying the rebel leader, George Speight, should release the 31 hostages and accept an amnesty. The military government is discouraging the march, saying no permit has been issued for the gathering. The military spokesman, Lieutenant Colonel Tarakinekine, says he has been allowed to visit the hostages. The Colonel says they appear in good health with no signs of having been abused. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The pharmaceutical company, SmithKline Beecham, says it is uncertain how long it will take to complete a nationwide recall of all its Panadol products. The recall was extended after the apparent poisoning of a Brisbane couple. The 61-year-old man and his 54-year-old wife were released from intensive care at Royal Darwin Hospital yesterday after being treated for strychnine poisoning. Both became ill after taking Panadol Capsules, prompting SmithKline Beecham to widen a nationwide recall to all Panadol and Panadeine products. The company's managing director, Alan Schaefer, says it will take some time for all of the 10 million bottles and packages of the painkiller to be returned to the company in Sydney and has called in the Environment Protection Authority to assist. ""There are certain legislative procedures that must occur and you have to have allowance to bring it across state lines,"" he said. ""If not it must be sequestered in each state and destroyed there."" Meanwhile, the company says it wants to work with the Pharmacy Guild of Australia to continue supply of childrens' Panadol to consumers. It says around 10,000 people, including many parents, are calling the consumer hotline each day. Mr Schaefer says despite the recall, the painkiller is still being supplied to hospitals and it is hoped the same can be done with childrens' Panadol. ""We're hoping that we can work through the Therapeutic Goods Administration and find a way back through hospitals - ultimately on a short term basis on those necessity items and then ultimately we'd like to have some discussion with the Pharmacy Guild of Australia to begin supply back through pharmacy on a behind the counter basis."" ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Government has dismissed as hypocritical the Labor Party's proposal for tougher legislation to stop the use of taxpayers' money for Government advertising. In response to the Government's GST chains advertisements, the Opposition leader Kim Beazley has announced he will introduce a bill to make government advertising comply with guidelines written by the auditor-general. Breaches of the guidelines by public servants or ministers would result in prison terms of up to seven years, or an order to repay taxpayers' money. The Special Minister of State, Chris Ellison says Mr Beazley's proposal is unnecessary, ill-considered, and possibly illegal. It is something dreamt up by Labor on the run at a Labor Party conference,"" he said. ""I mean who's going to decide whether something's political or not, who's going to be the thought policeman who controls this?"" --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" More than 400 Australians who have made significant contributions to society have been recognised in the Queen's Birthday honours list. But the Council for the Order of Australia says there still are not enough women being nominated. Four people have been appointed Companions in the Order of Australia, the highest honour. They are the head of the Federal Government's business taxation review, John Ralph, Queensland Chief Justice Paul de Jersey, New South Wales Chief Justice James Spigelman and Adelaide business and arts identity, John Uhrig. One hundred and twenty people have been made Officers or Members in the Order of Australia, while 293 have been awarded the Order of Australia Medal. Council chairman Rear Admiral Peter Sinclair says while he is pleased with the quality of nominations, he would like more female candidates, particularly from the business sector. ""It's happening but it's happening a little too slowly for my liking,"" he said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" One of the United States' top foreign policy experts believes there will be a smooth transition of power in Syria following the death of President Hafez al-Assad. White House envoy to the Middle East Dennis Ross says the key thing for the US is to ensure the door remains open with Damascus. Mr Ross says the Middle East is at a turning point with the death of the Syrian leader, the Israeli withdrawal from south Lebanon and the resumption of Israeli-Palestinian talks in Washington. ""I think there's no question that when you take a look at a region and see that it's changing and you see that there are moments and if the moments aren't seized they get lost,"" he said. ""I suspect that that will add to a sense of urgency on everbody's part."" Palestian leader Yasser Arafat will travel to Washington for talks with President Bill Clinton later this week. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The managing director of Whyalla Airlines has vowed the company will fly again after being grounded by the Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA) yesterday. The CASA audit was brought forward after eight people were killed when a Whyalla Airlines plane crashed into the Spencer Gulf in South Australia almost two weeks ago. CASA has suspended the airline's operating licence after an in depth audit found the company's pilots had too high a workload and that flight and duty records may have been inaccurate. Whyalla Airlines managing director Chris Brougham has accused CASA of bowing to political pressure to discipline the airline following the recent crash. ""We are not uncomfortable with their decision,"" he said. ""We'd already told CASA we weren't going to fly until they were satisfied with our airline and so the decision they've made hasn't changed that at all."" CASA says its findings should not be seen as a possible cause of the crash. Meanwhile, Whyalla's mayor and police officer, Senior Sergeant John Smith, has condemned CASA for the timing of the announcement which coincided with yesterday's memorial service for the eight victims of the crash. ------------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Former South African cricket captain Hansie Cronje has struck a deal to avoid criminal charges over his role in alleged match-fixing. Prosecutors have agreed to grant Cronje indemnity if he tells the truth about his involvement when he appears before the cricket corruption inquiry in Cape Town this week. Three of his former team-mates have already testified that they were offered money by the disgraced captain to throw games. The evidence contradicts Cronje's earlier confessions, but his agreement with prosecutors means he is now likely to escape any criminal charges. The deal will be extended to batsman Hershell Gibbs and bowler Henry Williams who agreed to take bribes from Cronje during South Africa's tour of India earlier this year."

" Four Members of the Parliament, including a Cabinet Minister, have resigned from the Solomons Islands Government. The group has not declared who they will be supporting when the Parliament meets on Thursday to decide who will lead the country. Prime Minister Ulufa'alu has offered to resign to try to solve the political and constitutional crisis in the Solomons. The situation was brought to a head by the Malaita Eagles Force's assumption of control of the captial city of Honaira's security last Monday. His coalition government did have 35 of the 50 seats in parliament, but the resignations of four MPs, including the Minister for Indigenous Business Affairs could signal the beginning of a new round of political alignments. Some members of the Ulafa'alu Cabinet do not want the Prime Minister to step down voluntarily, because of the precedent it might set."

" Accommodation will be offered to more than 150 evacuees from Solomon Islands, due to arrive in Townsville this evening. The expatriates from Australia and New Zealand will be flown in by New Zealand aircraft. Paul Macalonin, from Counter Disaster and Rescue, says he expects most of the evacuees will be able to fend for themselves, but help will be there for those who need it. ""I would expect that having to leave the country under those circumstances some of them will be distressed,"" he said. ""We have people here to help them sort out any of those issues that they may have. ""We're actually anticipating that most of these people will be self-sufficient and should be able to look after themselves but we'll help them with accommodation. ""Those people that are in need, don't have finances and that, we'll be able to provide them with some sort of accommodation and meals."" The Australian Navy assault ship, HMAS Manoora, is due to arrive in Solomon Islands today, in case it is needed for further evacuations. The Manoora has accommodation for 200 people, but could take more in an emergency."

" The son of a hostage in Fiji's capital, Suva, claims threats have been made to his mother by George Speight's rebels. Ben Padarath, whose mother Lavinia has been held for 25 days, had organised a protest march from Lautoka in Fiji's west to Suva, to confront Mr Speight and demand he release all 31 hostages. But the military has banned the march, saying it could not guarantee the protesters safety. Mr Padarath says he is aware of threats to his mother if the march goes ahead. ""Somebody from the <i>Daily Post</i> called me up and said that ... (it had been) said in a press conference yesterday that if I went ahead with this march today he could no longer guarantee the safety of my mum,"" he said."

" The head of Herron Pharmaceuticals says a taskforce needs to be set up to examine responses to extortion attempts and to look at gagging the media where appropriate. Euan Murdoch, whose company was the target of an extortion bid earlier this year, says systems need to be in place to reduce the leverage of extortionists. The call comes after a nationwide recall of Panadol products following a similiar extortion attempt. He says while the media is needed to alert the public about product recalls, a taskforce could plan and manage the issue in the public arena. ""To give an example, New South Wales is looking at present whether it's appropriate to gag the media on certain issues. ""It's not appropriate for a corporate entity to make that recommendation, but if a taskforce who was given the authority to review what's an appropriate response came up with that determination, I'm sure most consumers and the public generally would support it,"" he said. Herron Pharmaceutical boss, Euan Murdoch, says the media should be gagged in some cases of extortion. Mr Murdoch also wants a taskforce set up to examine responses to extortion attempts. His comments follow an extortion bid against his company earlier this year and the current recall of Panadol products. Mr Murdoch says the media should adopt a policy on extortion attempts, similar to its approach to suicides. ""The media doesn't cover suicide because they're trying to stop copycats and they have a responsible role to play in the management and the reduction of suicide within Australia. ""It's [a] similiar situation with respect to extortion. There are some extortion attempts where it's not appropriate to cover them and there are some extortion attempts where it is,"" Mr Murdoch said."

" The Olympic torch is making its way to Logan City, south of Brisbane, after travelling through the Gold Coast earlier today. The torch relay passed through Beenleigh a short time ago. The relay resumed around 7:30am today at Point Danger, near the Queensland-New South Wales border. The torch was carried north along Gold Coast streets before a special detour onto the beach at Surfers Paradise, where champion ironwoman Karla Gilbert, and Surfers Paradise club mates Trevor Hendy and Nathan Meyer took part. The torch continued to Southport where Olympian Andrew Baildon and his father Gold Coast Mayor Gary Baildon lit the special Olympic cauldron. Andrew Baildon says in his mind, carrying the torch has at least equalled actually competing in the Games. He says it has been a special day for everyone. ""I mean the most precious thing is that the kids are here to see it and I just hope they can remember this day,"" he said."

" The managing director of Whyalla Airlines has vowed the company will fly again, after being grounded by the Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA) yesterday. The CASA audit was brought forward after eight people were killed when a Whyalla Airlines plane crashed into the Spencer Gulf almost two weeks ago. CASA has suspended the airline's operating licence after an in depth audit found the comapny's pilots had too high a workload, and that flight and duty records may have been inaccurate. Whyalla Airlines Managing Director Chris Brougham is accusing CASA of bowing to political pressure to discipline the airline following the recent crash. ""We are not uncomfortable with their decision,"" he said. ""We'd already told CASA we weren't going to fly until they were satisfied with our airline and so the decision they've made hasn't changed that at all."" CASA says its findings should not be seen as a possible cause of the crash. Meanwhile, Whyalla's Mayor and police officer Senior Sergeant John Smith have condemned CASA for the timing of the announcement, which coincided with yesterday's memorial service for the eight victims of the crash."

" Meanwhile, the search for the eighth victim of the Whyalla airlines crash resumed this morning. 39-year old Whyalla man Chris Schuppan is still missing. State Emergency Service (SES) and Surf Lifesaving Club volunteers will focus their search on the eastern and western coastlines of the gulf. Senior Sergeant, John Smith, says there are no immediate plans to abandon the search. ""There's just so much that we can ask our volunteers to do and they've done a magnificent job for the last 10 days. ""We certainly won't give up, we'll always be looking. ""Even if we scale the search right down, we'll always have that in the back of our mind that he's out there somewhere,"" he said."

" An estimated 55,000 people have marched across Adelaide's King William Road bridge during the city's Walk for Reconciliation this morning. It took the procession over half an hour to complete the 200 metre walk. It was a relatively short walk across King William Street bridge, but organisers are proclaiming a major step forward in race relations. A larger than expected crowd made the march, including the State Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Dorothy Kotz, and the Opposition leader, Mike Rann. The procession crossed the bridge into Elder Park, where hundreds planted a symbolic sea of hands. Participants were then invited to place a handprint on a banner or sign as a pledge of commitment to the reconciliation process. Scott Wilson of the South Australian Council for Reconciliation, says the turnout increases public pressure for a Federal Government apology to indigenous Australians. ""It basically brings people together, regardless of what John Howard and people like that might think about an apology. ""South Australian people and people around Australia are obviously showing their support for reconciliation by turning up to these sort of rallies,"" he said."

" The Federal Government has dismissed as hypocritical the Labor Party's proposal for tougher legislation to stop the use of taxpayers' money for Government advertising. In response to the Government's GST chains advertisements, the Opposition leader Kim Beazley has announced he will introduce a bill to make government advertising comply with guidelines written by the auditor-general. Breaches of the guidelines by public servants or ministers would result in prison terms of up to seven years, or an order to repay taxpayers' money. The Special Minister of State, Chris Ellison says Mr Beazley's proposal is unnecessary, ill-considered, and possibly illegal. It is something dreamt up by Labor on the run at a Labor Party conference,"" he said. ""I mean who's going to decide whether something's political or not, who's going to be the thought policeman who controls this?"""

" The Queensland Government has rejected calls for a Royal Commission into hostels and boarding houses which accommodate disabled people. Community groups claim people are being abused and that conditions are run-down and over crowded. The Minister for Fair Trading, Judy Spence, says a unit within her Department is developing a set of standards for the industry, as well as training operators in the care of the disabled. ""I've been out there visiting these hostels and boarding houses in the last year myself and I'm very pleased at the work of that unit,"" she said. ""But no-one wants to see these boarding houses closed down overnight and these people turned out onto the street. ""So we've got to work with them in a cooperative way. ""I don't think we need a Commission of Inquiry to tell us what the problems are out there. ""We know what the problems are out there. ""What we need to do now is work with that industry to develop standards that are acceptable to them so that they can keep their doors open. ""I mean these are people who are running these boarding houses with fairly low profit margins and if we regulate too fast for them they will simply close down and these people will be on the streets."""

" New Zealand's Foreign Minister Phil Goff, who is part of the Commonwealth delegation visiting Solomon Islands, says the group will not try to interfere in the country's internal affairs. However, Mr Goff says there is a clear-cut choice for the warring parties. ""One is the path through violence, which will lead to a situation that they've seen already happen in their near neighbour Bougainville,"" he said. ""That is the path of devastation, of thousands dying, of the infrastructure being destroyed, of the economy collapsing. ""The other alternative is the path through the negotiating table to try to resolve the causes of the conflict to settle matters like compensation."""

" Meanwhile, the Defence Department expects the Navy ship HMAS Tobruk to sail from the Solomon Islands capital Honiara by Saturday afternoon. Around 400 people are on board the Tobruk, and the Navy believes the total might stand at about 450 by the time the ship leaves Honiara harbour. The Navy's deputy Maritime Commander, Commodore Brian Robertson, says the evacuees appear to be in good spirits as they wait to leave the Solomons. ""It's stretching the ship's facilities quite considerably, but things seem to be going particularly well,"" he said. ""One of biggest challenges at the moment is to keep the children occupied, and they're down in the tank deck. There's no tanks on board so they've turned that into a playground. ""They're playing soccer on the flight deck and they're watching movies, so things seem to be going fairly smoothly at the moment."" The Tobruk is likely to head to Cairns or Townsville, but the Defence Department still has not made a final decision."

" Following the Woomera break-out, 150 illegal immigrants have escaped from the Curtin Detention Centre in the far north of Western Australia. The detainees, including women and children, are believed to be heading to the town of Derby, 50 kilometres away. The illegal immigrants escaped from the facility by tearing down a cyclone fence. The Immigration Department says 150 inmates of a population of just under 1000 are taking part in the break-out. A department spokesman says the remaining detainees are calm."

" The break-out comes a day after 500 illegal immigrants escaped from the Woomera detention centre in South Australia. The spokesman says moves are underway to recapture the Curtin escapees. The department is threatening the escapees with prosecution unless they return to the facility. And Derby Shire president Peter McCumstie says the break-out will not help their cause. ""People of Derby have accepted having the people out at Curtin, but if they're going to start breaking out and entering the town of Derby, I would suggest they're going to start getting a pretty cold reception in the future,"" Mr McCumstie said."

" Woomera residents are buckling down as hundreds of illegal immigrants continue to protest in the centre of the town. Linda Schultz says she is keeping her children home from school today because of the number of police and demonstrators in the town centre. She says other families have followed suit and the stand-off is making life very difficult for Woomera residents. ""I think the biggest concern to the townspeople now is that our shops are cordoned off and we can't get in unless we go in the back way, and that's a risk,"" she said. ""This is our big tourist season. Normally we have buses coming through, plenty of tourists coming through all day, and now they can't."" Meanwhile, it appears progress is being made in negotiations to end the stand-off. A delegation of five escapees has travelled back to the detention centre, where they are set to hold talks with Peter Vardoss, a senior-ranking official of the Immigration Department."

" The wreckage of the Whyalla Airlines plane which crashed into South Australia's Spencer Gulf last week has been brought to the surface. Whyalla Airlines' chief pilot Kym Brougham has been aboard a salvage vessel to oversee the operation. The wreckage will be taken to Adelaide to try to determine the cause of the crash in which eight people died. Whyalla Airlines hopes to be in the air again by the middle of next week, pending final clearance from the Civil Aviation Safety Authority."

" The ABC's Managing Director, Jonathan Sheir, says a deal to supply online content to Telstra fell through because of cost and Telstra's insufficient recognition of the value of ABC content. The $67 million deal was eight months in the making, but was called off on Thursday night just two nights before the final sign-off. Telstra spokesman Stuart Gray says the ABC changed the deal. He says the ABC was wanting to provide less content for the same amount of money and it was not viable to Telstra to persist with the deal. Mr Shier says critical issues in the deal include the obligations that would have been imposed by Telstra, the cost of servicing the deal, and the fact it did not sufficiently recognise the value of the ABC's breadth of content. He says Telstra is dealing with dozens of other content providers and neither party is ruling out future cooperation."

" The Olympic torch has arrived in Queensland, being greeted by sunshine in the north-west mining city of Mount Isa. About 200 residents were on hand as the Olympic flame touched down at the Mt Isa airport on schedule at 3:09pm AEST today. The rain had ceased and the smiles in the city had returned as thousands of people vied for the best position on the relay route. Frank Davey lit the flame on the second day of the its Olympic journey."

" Potential buyers are now circling the wounded Internet service provider, eisa Limited. Eisa's annual general meeting has been told the company's future now lies in a successful merger. Eisa provides Internet access for around 85,000 subscribers. In February, it announced plans to step into the big league by buying the residential business of Ozemail. But it has been unable to pull together funding and Ozemail's owners terminated the sale agreement last week. During a 20-minute annual general meeting, eisa chairman Evan Rees acknowledged the company was struggling. ""I know the share price isn't too good,"" he said. Mr Rees says eisa is now talking to interested parties about a merger."

" A leading Queen's Counsel in Sydney has gone home to recover after he was struck in the face by a doctor he cross-examined during a medical negligence trial in the New South Wales Supreme Court. General practitioner Dr Andrew Katelaris hit barrister Ken Horler QC with a rolled up copy of a judgement moments after Justice Peter Hidden dismissed a negligence claim against the doctor. The lawyer then struck his head on the bar table as he doubled over in front of about 10 lawyers, journalists and the judge's associate. While Mr Horler was too unwell to continue in a murder trial in another courtroom, Dr Katelaris spoke of his frustration with the lengthy medical case. ""I know what costs I've incurred. How do you quantify costs that have gone over 10 years of anxiety, the sort of thing that tears families apart. ""You can't quantify these in dollar terms but I'll certainly look for some redress. ""But I fear that there is very little justice in our legal system,"" he said."

" Perth's Underwater World says it will not consider re-introducing dolphins into its enclosures until a police investigation into the death of three dolphins is complete. The decision comes after it was revealed the dolphins were poisoned. Investigators from the department of conservation and land management found the dolphins, Mila, Raja and Echo, all died from heart attacks induced by poison, in December. The type of poison has not been revealed but Police are investigating if someone has deliberately poisoned them. The charge would be criminal damage which carries a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison. Underwater World's Dean Lee, says he is confident his staff are not involved. He says captive dolphins in Western Australia may now be a thing of the past. ""This time, given the results of the investigation, there's no way we would pursue placing dolphins in that harbour enclosure again unless we were in some way able to mitigate any risk to those animals,"" he said."

" Three national parks and wildlife service personnel have been killed in a bush burn-off that went wrong on Sydney's northern outskirts this afternoon. Two others remain missing, and emergency services are combing the Kuringain national park. Two other officers are in hospital in a critical condition and a third has been listed as serious. Environment Minister Bob Debus informed the New South Wales Parliament of the tragic events. ""Out thoughts, Mr Speaker, the thoughts of all the house, I'm sure, are now with all of the officers and their families and their friends at this terrible time,"" he said. ""A New South Wales rural fire services investigation team is now is on the site already along with emergency services personnel."""

" Reports from Solomon Islands say the rival militias have agreed to a ceasefire. The Commonwealth peace negotiator, Professor Ade Adifuye, who has been liaising with both Andrew Nori from the Malaita Eagle Force, and the Isatabu Freedom Fighters, says there are good signs of a truce. ""There is an expressed commitment on both sides to work towards peace. ""There are several procedures. First of all, there are a truce, want ceasefires, want peace talks. ""These are procedures we have to go through, but the prospects are much brighter now,"" he said. Although fighting outside Honiara has died down today the capital remains tense. New Zealand's Foreign Minister Phil Goff says there is doubt over whether a Commonwealth team due to fly into the country tomorrow will be able to enter because the airport remains closed."

" Meanwhile, the heavy landing craft HMAS Tobruk has arrived in Honiara, the capital of Solomon Islands, to evacuate Australians and other foreign nationals from the country tonight. The evacuation has been ordered because of the worsening security situation. The Tobruk, which has been on standby for two days, can take over 800 Australians and other foreign nationals who want to leave the Solomons. The High Commission in Honiara is organising the evacuation, and has won agreement from the Solomon Islands Government as constituted and one of the warring factions for the operation and has been seeking the cooperation of the second faction. The Defence Force Chief, Admiral Chris Barrie, does not believe the troops on board the Tobruk will be needed for security, and they will not take part in any other operation while in Honiara. While Admiral Barrie says the Defence Force has a range of other evacuation options, he says the Tobruk plan is a good one. He says security at the airport is not assured."

" The Deputy Opposition Leader, Simon Crean, says Labor supports the Government's decision to order the evacuation. ""The safety of Australians is paramount to all of us and (we) sincerely hope the operation is successful and that whatever steps necessary are taken to ensure the safety of all of those involved, those being evacuated and those undertaking it,"" he said. Shadow Foreign Affairs Minister Laurie Brereton says the evacuation is appropriate. ""We believe there's every chance that this will be a very successful operation. It has our absolute support,"" Mr Brereton said."

" The Prime Minister, John Howard, is moving to reassure Indonesia that he will not be supporting secessionist moves in the province of Papua. The Prime Minister has made the commitment ahead of talks in Tokyo tonight with the Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid. Mr Howard says he will tell the Indonesian President he respects Indonesia's present borders. ""I will be assuring him of our support for the territorial integrity of the republic of Indonesia, which is under some challenge from various areas within, but they are matters for the Indonesian authorities,"" he said. Tonight's meeting in Tokyo, after the memorial service for Japan's late prime minister Keizo Obuchi, will be the first between the Australian Prime Minister and the Indonesian leader since President Wahid took office in October last year."

" The Immigration Department says it is working to return around 200 escapees to the Woomera Detention Centre in South Australia's north. Immigration Minister Phillip Ruddock says there will be a review of security at the complex. In the early hours of this morning the detainees, mostly from Iraq and Afghanistan, confronted security officers at the Woomera Detention Centre. The escapees then ran through the town demanding political asylum. Local residents were evacuated during the incident and only one police officer was on hand to control the situation. Mr Ruddock says he believes there were violent acts committed before the outbreak. ""I understand that people did have rocks and there were incidents during the night when they were thrown,"" he said. The escapees have now been cordoned off from the public and are staging a noisy but peaceful protest. Most of the detainees have been in detention since January. It is the second escape from the centre. In April two men absconded, but were caught shortly after at Port Augusta."

" Meanwhile, the Sydney Olympics has been blamed for causing huge delays in the processing of thousands of illegal immigrants. Former Migration Review Tribunal member Mary Lindsay claims she has been told the delays are because Australian Intelligience Security Organisation (ASIO) staff are busy with the Olympics. She is concerned about the further impacts on detainees if the delays continue. ""I'm very worried that this Government is actually keeping them in there because they know that the average person out there is not very sympathetic to the refugees,"" she said. ""I know Australians and I know that if they knew what was going on there they would...(know that) this is the problem."" She says the breakout at Woomera is a sign of the increasing frustration and desperation felt by hundreds of immigrants held in detention centres across the country. She is concerned about the further impact on detainees if the delays continue."

" The Federal Government has stopped the Tax Office from using the electoral roll to mail out a booklet explaining the goods and services tax (GST). The Commonwealth Solicitor-General has advised the government that the Electoral Office is entitled to supply the Tax Office with a tape or disk of the electoral roll. But the Tax Office can use such copies only in relation to medical research and public health screening programs. The opinion differs from earlier advice to the Tax Office from the Australian Government Solicitor. The Attorney-General, Daryl Williams, says the electoral roll now will not be used. ""Instead, Mr Speaker, the Treasurer has advised me that the Australian Taxation Office will distribute information on the new taxation system on a household distribution basis, not using the electoral roll,"" he told Parliament."

" Alice Springs will be the centre of Olympic celebrations tonight after the first day of the Australian leg of the Olympic torch relay. At a ceremony at Uluru this morning, Governor-General Sir William Deane passed the flame to the area's traditional owners at the start of the relay. The first runner to carry it was Olympic gold medallist Nova Peris-Kneebone, who was accompanied by her daughter Jessica. There were a number of minor hiccups this morning, with windy conditions seeing the torch blown out a number of times. Other runners included actor Ernie Dingo and tennis champion Evonne Cawley. Ms Cawley says the Uluru setting would help get people behind the spirit of the Games. ""It's really sort of a blessing really, starting from here for the Olympics,"" she said. ""That blessing I'm sure will pass right down and right up to the Olympics, because I know that they (the traditional owners) very much appreciate starting off here."" The torch will be held in Alice Springs overnight before heading to Mount Isa tomorrow."

" Up to two million packets of headache capsules are expected to be incinerated at a plant in Sydney's south on Friday. They are at the centre of extortion threats made against the pharmaceutical company SmithKline Beecham, which manufactures Panadol capsules. The company says there is still no evidence of tampering and the recall is voluntary. It is expected to cost the firm in excess of $10 million. The managing director of SmithKline Beecham, Alan Schaefer, says the recall should be completed in a day or so. ""Consumers have done their job, in fact we had over 12,000 calls in the last two days alone in terms of the 1800 line that we announced earlier in the week,"" he said. ""We don't really know exactly how much of any product that is still on the shelves, but we believe the vast majority of the product has already been removed or will be removed in the next 24 hours."""

" More than 1,000 Commonwealth Bank branches throughout Australia will be closed tomorrowdue to a 24-hour strike. Workers say the bank must hire more staff. More than 20,000 Commonwealth bank workers are demanding a 6.5 per cent pay increase over two years to bring them into line with higher wages paid by other banks. Finance Union organiser Norm Bristow says workers are fed up with abuse from customers waiting in long queues. ""The feedback from our members at the moment is that there is daily abuse - customers are obviously experiencing extreme frustration,"" he said. ""Our members are directed to try and cross-sell different products, and that obviously delays the servicing of customers as well."""

" Victoria's magistrates court is offering an unprecedented apology to Aborigines.. The Chief Magistrate, Michael Adams, convened a ceremonial sitting of the court in Melbourne about 2:00pm AEST, to say sorry for the injustices of the past. Similar sittings are being held in Bendigo, Mildura and Wangaratta. Aboriginal culture will also be honoured in the courts in future."

" The Federal Government has denied a senior Liberal election campaign advisor, is to work on a public relations campaign to soften up the bush to the full sale of Telstra. Labor Senator John Faulkner has quizzed the Government in Senate question time today, over the appointment of Jonathan Gaul by an advertising company retained by Telstra. Senator Richard Alston has confirmed Mr Gaul is helping Telstra. ""I'm not aware of the precise details but I am aware that Mr Gaul has been assisting Telstra on some matters. ""But I can be absolutely certain it is not in any way, shape or form an exercise in softening up the bush for privatisation,"" Senator Alston said."

" Police officers from Fiji and Vanuatu, who have been trying to help the peace process in Solomon Islands, are giving up and going home. The commander of the Police Assistance Group says it no longer has a role because the Solomon Islands Police Force has been taken over by the Malaita Eagles militia. The mandate of the peacekeepers was recently extended for another three months and 50 additional police from Fiji were to have joined the force but for the problems in Suva. The peace force commander, Fijian policeman Savenaca Tuivaga, says the force members have begun packing up to head home. ""We're waiting until there is a flight back to Fiji and Vanuatu because our mandate here automatically ceased when this guy took over the police force,"" he said. ""We are here to assist the police. Now that it has been taken over by an illegal organisation, we have no mandate here any more."""

" Forensic police are examining two letters sent to the manufacturers of Panadol capsules, which have been recalled nationwide following an extortion bid. Police will not reveal the nature of the threats contained in the letters, which were sent to SmithKline Beecham's Sydney headquarters last Wednesday and on Monday. The company was also contacted yesterday through its consumer hotline by someone with information about the extortion bid. Detective Superintendent Peter Dein, who heads investigation, has appealed for the caller to come forward. He is also defending a police sting, which led to two teenagers accidently picking up a $70,000 money drop at Sydney's Circular Quay on Monday night. ""I must say it was not foiled due to third party intervention,"" he said. ""It was an operation which gave us intelligence and information, and we were very happy with the result. It did confirm certain issues."""

" Police divers have located the remaining engine and starboard wing of the Whyalla Airlines plane which crashed into South Australia's Spencer Gulf a week ago, with the loss of eight lives. Five bodies were found in the main wreckage yesterday, after two bodies were recovered last week. But an extensive air, ground and sea search for the remaining victim has so far proved unsuccessful. Chief Inspector Terry Harbour says the engine and wing were found 50 metres from the main wreckage of the twin-engined plane. ""I don't want to be jumping to conclusions, but one would assume this came off as a result of the impact when it ditched at sea,"" he said."

" Meanwhile, the South Australian Government says certain air safety regulations concerning light aircraft are inadequate. South Australia's Emergency Services Minister Robert Brokenshire has written to Federal Transport Minister John Anderson expressing his concerns. Mr Brokenshire says it is ridiculous that light aircraft are not required to carry life jackets or life rafts."

" A 19-year-old West Australian woman is recovering well after a ground-breaking liver transplant operation. In April, the woman required an urgent transplant because her liver failed. There was no donor organ available, so surgeons at Perth's Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital removed a piece of her sister's liver and transplanted it. Dr Garry Jeffrey says it was a difficult decision for the sister to make because there was a chance she would die. ""That death rate is in the order of 1 per cent, maybe 2 per cent. People vary about what the risks are involved with that operation,"" he said. ""It's a very difficult decision to make in a very short time period and they made it, and it came out very well."""

" The two-day Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) trade ministers meeting in Darwin has wound up, with delegates confident they will be able to move towards a new round of trade liberalisation negotiations. The 21 Asia-Pacific member countries generate more than half the world's economic activity. Their trade ministers this afternoon gathered in the great hall of the Northern Territory Parliament to present their joint communique. The Australian Trade Minister, Mark Vaile, interrupted his presentation when an official delivered a note to say Darwin's Aboriginal traditional owners were waiting to welcome the delegates to the hall with a dance. The performance over, Mr Vaile said progress had been made in talks on e-commerce, paperless trade, and regional trade agreements. But he said the most significant outcome was the reaffirmation of support for a new round of World Trade Organisation (WTO) talks. However, he warned the agenda will have to ensure success. ""We don't want a repeat of missed opportunities as came out of Seattle,"" he said."

" The Federal Government and the Opposition are again at odds over the advertisements for the introduction of the goods and services tax (GST). The Opposition is maintaining pressure on the Government to reveal details of the block booking of ""GST chains"" advertisements during a prime time Sunday night movie on Channel Nine. Labor claims the Tax Office gained sponsorship of the movie at premium prices to block out brewing industry advertisements critical of the Government. It claims the brewing industry advertisements had already been booked, but the Government gazumped them by paying more. The Special Minister of State, Chris Ellison, says the Government's media booking agency did not seek or enter into any exclusivity deal with Channel Nine. ""That was not sought by the Government, that was not sought by the agency and what the channel does is its own concern,"" he said. ""It was not communicated to us what it did or what it was going to do, and that is a decision made by Channel Nine on its own. ""It was not part of any purchasing arrangement."""

" Meanwhile, Labor claims the prices of some rental goods and clothing will rise by the full 10 per cent, contrary to the Government's claims. It says the cover price of <i>Home Ideas</i> magazine will rise by more than 10 per cent to $5.95 after July 1. But the Financial Services Minister, Joe Hockey, says the price of <i>Home Ideas</i> is $5.95 now, and the publisher is not changing it. ""The management of Express Lifestyle publications have taken the decision to absorb the impact of the GST, to absorb the GST on <i>Beautiful Home Ideas =2</i>,"" he said. ""What does that say? It says you can't trust what the Labor Party says in this House."""

" Potential home buyers continue to wait until after the introduction of the goods and services tax (GST). The number of new home loans being written is at a 14-month low. Around Australia just 41,651 borrowers secured finance from a home-lender during April. That seasonally-adjusted total is down 4.6 per cent from March and it is 17.6 per cent below the record high of October last year. Most affected by the pre-GST paralysis are loans for the construction of new homes. They are down almost 15 per cent in the latest month, to their lowest level since May, 1996. Meanwhile, the average amount borrowed under a new mortgage has risen to $139,000."

" Senior Queensland Liberal Member of Parliament, Santo Santoro, has quit the Opposition frontbench, after party leader David Watson labelled him a ""prima donna"". Mr Santoro will now sit on the backbench. For the past 11 years Mr Santoro has been on the Coalition frontbench, both in Government and Opposition. But leader David Watson's failure to express confidence in him this week has prompted him to quit. However Mr Santoro denies he will now mount a leadership challenge. ""I will not in any way participate in a destabilisation campaign of him. ""I said to him that I would not ever participate in a leadership spill,"" Mr Santoro said. Meanwhile Dr Watson is unapologetic. ""No-one should put their own ambition ahead of the team. ""Our job is to hold Labor to account. Politics is no place for prima donnas,"" he said. Dr Watson will decide on a replacement for Mr Santoro in the next few weeks."

" An inquiry into cricket match-fixing will begin soon in Cape Town, with former South African captain Hansie Cronje a crucial witness in the investigation. He was accused of match-fixing after Indian police released a tape of a conversation between the former captain and an Indian businessman. It is now being reported that Cronje has admitted it is his voice on the tape, but is claiming he was only playing a joke and had no intention of throwing a game for money. Hansie Cronje is one of more than 40 players and officials who will give evidence at the commission of inquiry. The man in charge of the commission, retired judge Edwin King, is promising to get to the bottom of what he says is the worst sporting scandal to hit South Africa."

" New Zealand's Foreign Affairs Minister, Phil Goff, says there has been a breakthrough in the Solomon Islands crisis which will allow democracy to be restored. He says it follows pressure being brought to bear by New Zealand and other countries. Mr Goff said an agreement has been reached for withdrawing the demand for the Prime Minister, Bart Ulufa'alu, to resign. He would resume his normal duties with normal security and Parliament would be called together on June 16. Mr Goff said the Parliament would decide the leadership question, rather than it being imposed at the barrel of a gun. He said the deal had been agreed last night and its announcement is expected this morning. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Commonwealth Foreign Ministers have agreed to the partial suspension of Fiji from the organisation until democracy is restored. An emergency meeting of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group in London has also decided to dispatch a high-level mission immediately to Fiji. The emergency meeting of Commonwealth Ministers stopped short of a full suspension of Fiji, instead suspending the country from its councils. It will send a delegation, including Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer, to the island this weekend. But Mr Downer says they will make it clear, in particular to the military and the Great Council of Chiefs, that the Commonwealth wants a rapid return to democracy. Describing rebel leader George Speight as a terrorist, Mr Downer was critical of the easy access Mr Speight has had to promote his views in the media, and said no Commonwealth Minister should have dealings with him. Mr Downer did, however, express a cautious optimism that the latest information from Solomon Islands indicated a peaceful resolution there may be imminent. Meanwhile, Mr Speight says the Commonwealth's action is not important and predicts the group will eventually change its view. He dismissed the criticisms of Alexander Downer and his fellow foreign ministers. ""Who's Alexander Downer, who's Alexander Downer?"" he said. ""With due respect to his view, it's really not at the top of our agenda at the moment and it's quite a typical reaction, much akin to what happened after '87. ""They'll soon change that stance again,"" Mr Speight said. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Herron Pharmaceuticals has offered to assist SmithKline Beecham, the makers of Panadol Capsules, after its product was removed from sale because of an extortion threat. Herron chief executive officer Euan Murdoch says following his own company's recent contamination scare, he was gravely concerned to hear of the withdrawal of Panadol Capsules. He says Herron will offer any help it can provide. Meanwhile, Queensland Police have confirmed that they are already helping their colleagues in New South Wales investigate the latest contamination threat and will respond to any further requests for help. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Frightened residents, whose homes survived Sunday night's earthquake on the Indonesian island of Sumatra, are still too frightened to go back inside as aftershocks continue to be felt. Homeless families are huddling under plastic sheeting at roadsides, waiting for help to arrive. The BBC reports from the provincial capital, Bengkulu, it is still unclear how many people have been killed and injured. Estimates vary from 60 to more than 100 dead, but it is known that hundreds of people are now being treated for serious injuries. The local hospitals are becoming overwhelmed with the number of patients and are appealing for special medical tents. The main airport has been closed for several days now and some roads have been badly damaged, although temporary repairs have already been carried out in some places, making access easier. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat will go to Washington next week for Middle East peace talks with President Bill Clinton. US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright says at this stage, there is no plan for tripartite peace talks involving Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak. Dr Albright would hope that a three-way summit could be held to sort out a final status peace deal involving the enormously difficult issues of Jerusalem, the status of Palestinian refugees and the future of Jewish settlers in the West Bank and Gaza. A peace deal is due to be signed in September and Yasser Arafat has signalled he will declare Palestinian statehood after the deadline with, or without, a treaty. Even more urgency is added by the impending end of the Clinton administration. The Palestinian leader will meet President Clinton next week, but there is no indication his Israeli counterpart will join a summit soon. Meanwhile, Mr Barak faces another domestic political crisis tomorrow with renegade coalition party, the religious Sash group, planning to support a vote for an early general election. ----------------------------------------------------------------"

" Doctors and private health insurers will be required to be more open about the likely costs to be faced by patients under legislation passed by the Senate. The Government's legislation to cater for the growth of no-gap and known-gap health insurance products has been amended to include extra financial transparency measures. Patients with gap cover insurance will now be entitled to a written quote from their doctor about the amount of extra money they would be likely to pay for treatment. Federal Health Minister Michael Wooldridge says the amendments improve a patient's right to informed financial consent. ""I've been pushing the medical profession for a long time now to be up front about disclosure,"" he said. ""People have a right to have informed financial consent. ""This amendment to the Gap Cover scheme is a good one, we're happy to back it and I think now when a patient is sitting down with their doctor discussing treatement, the doctor will give them a piece of paper telling them what to expect their out of pocket expenses to be,"" Dr Wooldridge said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The president of Sydney's Olympic Committee, Michael Knight, says with 100 days to the Games it is now just the little things that need to be managed. Mr Knight is proud that all the permanent venues are completed. Mr Knight is not signalling complacency and is aware that attention to detail is still needed. ""And we're down to things at the margin, things that you've got to be careful that you don't muck up or you can undermine everything else you've done,"" he said. ""There are many expensive racing cars that have failed to finish because a $10 part's broken. ""I don't want to underestimate or minimise the importance of the small things...but it's now down to lots of little things,"" Mr Knight said. Olympic organisers are hoping a mistake-free first day will help reignite interest in the Games. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australia's Lleyton Hewitt is out of the French Open. The number nine seed has lost to Albert Costa of Spain 6-3, 4-6, 6-2, 6-3. Hewitt says the conditions on court when they started the match two nights ago were absolutely atrocious. ""Obviously the conditions were better for me out there today than yesterday,"" he said. ""It was the worst conditions I think I've ever gone onto a tennis court in yesterday - it was raining right from the start. ""Very heavy conditions today, it was easier to hit winners and move the guy around on the court and use your serve as well. That's why I felt I started pretty well and the turning point was 2-1 in the third set."" In other matches at the french Open tonight, Spain's Arantxa Sannchez Vicario has defeated number four seed Venus Williams in three sets. Sanchez-Vicario won 6-0, 1-6, 6-2. Number one seed Martina Hingis also won her match against American Chanda Rubin 6-1, 6-3."

" A day-long meeting of the Solomon Islands' caucus has ended with the Prime Minister Bartholomew Ulufa'alu apparently indicating he would be prepared to step down. His resignation has been one of the key demands made by the militia which yesterday put the Prime Minister under house arrest and seized weapons and key installations in the capital, Honiara. The Solomon Islands Minister of State, Alfred Sasako, says the resignation is expected to take effect from tomorrow. ""If that is the price, if his resignation is the price of peace and the return to normalcy in the country then, yes, he is prepared to do that,"" he said. Australia's Foreign Affairs Minister, Alexander Downer, has described the development as profoundly disturbing. Mr Downer was responding shortly before he entered a meeting of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group in London. ""My initial reaction is that he was put into a position at the end of a barrel of a gun to resign, and that, of course, is what is profoundly disturbing and regrettable,"" he said. ""Whether the Prime Minister resigned as a result of a vote of a caucus meeting or a vote in the Parliament, of course, is a domestic matter for another country but the circumstances which led to his resignation are obviously profoundly disturbing."""

" Meanwhile, the New Zealand ANZAC frigate Te Mana is under new orders tonight in case New Zealanders trapped in the Solomons have to be evacuated. But the country's Foreign Minister, Phillip Goff, has ruled out military intervention to solve the crisis. ""What we're saying to the parties of the conflict is 'we will facilitate your meeting, we will provide venues inside or outside the Solomons for you to talk the problems through',"" he said. ""But in the end the solution must be their solution, they must own it because if we try to impose a solution, then it won't be a solution at all."""

" Police divers have recovered two more bodies from the Whyalla Airlines plane which crashed in South Australia's Upper Spencer Gulf last Wednesday night. Three other bodies were retrieved from the plane earlier today. Police says the search for the sixth and final body will start tomorrow morning. The missing aircraft was located this morning by police divers using sonar equipment brought from New South Wales. A New South Wales police officer says the fuselage of the plane was missing its right wing and appeared crumpled at the nose, possibly as a result of the impact."

" An extortion threat to pharmaceutical company SmithKline Beecham late last week has prompted a voluntary nationwide recall of Panadol capsules. Police are releasing few details about investigations into the threat, but the company says the threat is not from an internal source. SmithKline Beecham managing director Alan Schaefer says the product affected is Panadol capsules, with an orange marker on the front of the packet. ""We have no evidence to believe that anything has been tampered with - again this is an ongoing investigation,"" he said. ""We're dealing with the extortion threat and today, quite frankly, we don't believe there's any consumer risk. ""Given all that's happened at Herron, I think this is a good precautionary, voluntary measure to keep consumers safe, and it's that simple."""

" The company will follow the lead of Queensland competitor, Herron, by improving its packaging. Herron was forced to recall products and review its packaging after an extortion threat was made against the company. Kevin Dark, from SmithKline Beecham, says it is also reviewing its product line, following the nationwide recall. ""Clearly there will be a review of our product line and we will be obviously withdrawing our capsules as part of this recall,"" he said. ""Any introduction of capsules will be with improved tamper-evident measures."""

" Former Indonesian president, Suharto, has suffered a devasting blow in his efforts to fight allegations of involvement in large scale corruption. An Indonesian court today rejected a multi-billion dollar criminal defamation claim he brought against <b>Time</b> magazine. <b>Time</b> magazine claimed last year that the Suharto family was sitting on a fortune of $15 billion and that shortly after he fell from power in May 1998, he transferred $9 billion of this from a bank in Switzerland to one in Austria. He sued <b>Time</b> magazine for libel seeking $27 billion in compensation. But today the central Jakarta court struck out the defamation suit because of lack of evidence. A lawyer for <b>Time</b> magazine hailed the result as a victory for the Indonesian press. The former president's lawyer says the judge made a mistake."

" With the introduction of the goods and services tax (GST) under a month away, the Federal Government and Opposition are stepping up the battle over the changes. The Prime Minister's belief people are no longer listening to the political debate about the tax changes has not stopped that debate continuing. With the Opposition attacking Government GST advertising, the Prime Minister has highlighted a Queensland Government pamphlet about help for first home owners which is part of the Commonwealth's tax package. ""The difference between this document and our material is that our material is truthful and accurate and this is misleading,"" Mr Howard said. The Opposition has raised examples of where the full 10 per cent of the GST is being passed on, including on a girl's cardigan, on rental items and on magazines. ""Isn't this another breach of your Government's unequivocal guarantee that the price increase is never 10 per cent,"" Mr Beazley said. The Government is referring the issues to the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission."

" A hazard alert has been issued for various models of the St Jude Medical Tempo Pacemakers, following the discovery of an internal problem which could lead to sudden failure. The Therapeutic Goods Administration says the pacemakers, which are manufactured in the United States, have been implanted in 992 Australians. Clinical advisor Dr Graham Maynard says there have been four incidents of failures in Australia, but none has been fatal. ""A hazard alert has been distributed to the clinicians who implanted these pacemakers advising them of the problem and they've been asked to assess their patients in the light of the clinical situation to see which is the best course of action for individual patients. ""This may be that in some cases where patients are pacemaker-dependent, the pacemaker should be removed,"" he said."

" The Federal Government has failed to win support for its bill to ban industry-wide strikes by unions. The Democrats have ruled out amending the Government's pattern bargaining bill, which sought to end protected action when workers across an industry combine in support of common pay and conditions. The Democrats say if unions switch to industry-wide strike tactics, the Industrial Relations Commission has the power to deal with the situation. Leader Meg Lees says the Democrats would be prepared to support legislation of some kind, if a pattern bargaining campaign by Victorian metalworkers proves unmanageable. ""We will revisit this issue if necessary, but we will now be watching with interest to see what eventuates in Campaign 2000,"" Senator Lees said."

" The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry's Mark Patterson says the Democrats decision is a disappointing one. Mr Patterson says any pattern bargaining remains a significant risk to the economy. ""We must have an industrial relations system that's focused on meeting the needs of individual enterprise and those working within it,"" he said. ""To have campaigns, or potential campaigns, of industrial action in pursuit of pattern bargaining outcomes is not an enterprise-focused system."""

" Sydney broadcaster Alan Jones and Radio 2UE are being sued by a group of Aborigines over comments he made about a native title application in northern New South Wales three years ago. The woman who lodged the claim, the NSW Aboriginal Land Council and two others have taken the case to the Supreme Court. Mary Lou Buck claims she was defamed by Alan Jones during an radio interview in 1997. In a tape of the broadcast, played to four jurors, Mr Jones claimed Ms Buck's application for native title at Crescent Head near Kempsey was fraudulent and deceitfully pursued. A cousin, Anthony Carter, is also being sued after alleging on-air that Ms Buck was not even remotely related to the Dunghutti people, and had lodged her native title claim in Perth so as not to alert her community. Mr Jones also said the NSW Government agreed to pay the Dunghutti people $738,000 compensation for the land which had been subdivided into residential blocks. The case is continuing."

" Researchers at the Monash Institute of Reproduction and Development are claiming a breakthrough for the meat industry. They have cloned a second calf from the same group of developed cells. Mayzi the calf has joined her genetically identical older sister, Suzi, in the same process used to create the world's first cloned animal, Dolly the sheep. Deputy director of the Institute Alan Trounson says the process could give the dairy and beef industries a huge genetic advantage. ""That would be a tremendous boon to the beef industry to be able to have very, very good bulls out there being cloned and used across the beef industry,"" he said. However, Professor Trounson says ethical issues also need to be examined, and such a process would have to use a large pool of different animals to ensure disease would not wipe out the cattle population."

" Efforts to resolve the crisis in the Solomon Islands will continue today, following yesterday's attempted coup by a militia force. The militia have demanded the Prime Minister resign. In a short-wave broadcast monitored in Port Moresby, Solomon Islands radio said the tension has eased in Honiara following yesterday's takeover. However, it is not yet known how Prime Minister Bartholomew Ulufa'alu will respond to demands by the Malaita Eagles for his resignation. He appears to still be under house arrest, but did meet the Governor-General following a caucus meeting late yesterday, although no details have been announced. The man who appears to lead the takeover is lawyer Andrew Nori. He claims it is not a coup, but an attempt to begin constitutional processes that would allow Parliament to choose a new leader. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Fiji's rebel leader says he will seek an independent arbiter to resume failed talks with the military regime. The Army says it wiil no longer deal with George Speight's demands. Mr Speight says he can remain indefinitely in the Parliament compound holding the 31 MPs hostage. He says resumed talks with the Army will need an independent arbiter, probably from the Great Council of Chiefs. In breaking off negotiations, military president Frank Bainimarama says his regime can outlast Mr Speight. ""We just hope that with the support of the public of Fiji, with the support of...[the] community we will be able to break their resolve and ask them to leave and bring us back peace,"" he said. The military commander repeated his statement that the Army will never attack the Parliament compound. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Indonesian Government is moving more food and medical supplies in to Sumatra, after the island was struck by an earthquake measuring 7.9 on the Richter scale. The first medical relief is slowly arriving in the most affected regions around the town of Bengkulu. The tremor claimed at least 58 lives, with more than 500 people injured. Newly arrived doctors are now moving to assist the over worked local medical teams. Hospitals are running out of blood and medicine to help the ever growing casualty list. The 15 doctors arrived late last night from nearby regions. They will be kept busy as the search resumes for survivors in the rubble, with reports filtering through of casualties in outlying villages and islands. It is estimated that on the island of Engano, which was closer to the epicentre, 90 per cent of the structures were damaged. In Bengkulu, thousands of local residents slept outside last night, spooked by the estimated 200 aftershocks. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A reprieve on interest rates is in prospect for Australian businesses and home buyers. Most analysts believe the Reserve Bank's monthly board meeting today will decide to put rate rises on hold. There have been four increases in the official cash rate since November last year, taking it to 6 per cent. Economists now generally believe that is where it will stay for the moment. Business and consumer confidence is crumbling under the impact of the earlier rate rises, slowing economic growth and the impending goods and services tax. The housing sector is also clearly in decline. Australia's Reserve Bank might now have more breathing space, with the latest measure of US employment much weaker than expected, reducing speculation about further near-term rises in American interest rates and providing some support for the Australian dollar. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Government is about to announce a broad inquiry into competition in the telecommunications industry. Treasurer Peter Costello and Communications Minister Richard Alston will announce, possibly today, a wide ranging brief for the Productivity Commission. The inquiry would examine the state of competition in telecommunications and the prescriptive rules that constrain Telstra and other carriers. The commission's brief would be separate from the level of service standards in the industry now under examination by a government appointed panel. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" An oil slick found in the search area for the Whyalla Airlines plane that crashed on Wednesday night in South Australia has indicated another dive point to be investigated today. However, police Inspector Terry Harbour stresses the discovery is one of many which have been investigated during the past six days. He says police divers will fully analyse the site from first light, but do not want to build up false hopes of finding the wreckage. Meanwhile, the Civil Aviation Safety Authority has expressed concern about media coverage of the air tragedy. Eight people were on board the twin-engine Piper Chieftan on a flight from Adelaide to Whyalla when it went into the Upper Spencer Gulf after a mayday call from the pilot. Two bodies have been recovered. Dr Paul Scully Power, the chairman of the Civil Aviation Safety Authority, says there are all sorts of people from all sorts of media making presumptions about how the crash of Whyalla Airlines flight 904 occurred. But he says nobody can know for certain what occurred to make the Piper Chieftan's engines fail, forcing it to ditch into the Spencer Gulf. He wants the speculation to stop, at least for the sake of the victims and their families, until the Australian Transport Safety Bureau has investigated the cause of the crash. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" International cricket administrators are being urged to allow sacked South African captain Hansie Cronje back into the game. Cronje was fired two months ago following allegations of match-fixing. But a former coach of the South African side says Cronje should be allowed to return to international cricket. Bob Woolmer, who coached the team from 1994 to 1999, says the fact that Cronje admitted to acting dishonestly should be taken into account. Earlier this month, Woolmer was critical of the disgraced captain and the South African team. Woolmer said he nearly hit the roof when he discovered that team members had seriously considered an offer to throw a game in return for cash in 1996. A South African commission of inquiry into match-fixing begins tomorrow. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australia's Lleyton Hewitt will be back on court at the French Open later today to continue a fourth round match that was halted by bad light. The Adelaide teenager is a set down. Hewitt will return to complete the match he started against Albert Costa - Costa was leading 6-3, 4-4, when bad light stopped play. Yevgeny Kafelnikov, the champion in '96, plays Gustavo Kuerten who beat him in this very round en route to the title in '97. The other men's match guarantees a Spaniard in the semis, with Alex Corretja playing Juan Carlos Ferrero. Women's quarters action sees Martina Hingis playing Chanda Rubin, Monica Seles faces Mary Pierce, Arantxa Sanchez-Vicario meets Venus Williams and Conchita Martinez takes on Marta Marrero."

" Members of the Solomon Islands' paramilitary police appear to have been involved in this morning's coup in Honiara. A statement quoting the lawyer representing the militia group, the Malaita Eagle Force, has been released claiming the coup was a joint operation. Andrew Nori, who has been legal spokesman for the Malaita Eagle Force, says in the statement that in a one hour joint operation members of the police paramilitary and the Eagle force took arms and ammunition from various police stations in Honiara and from the country's Australian-supplied patrol boats in the harbour. The statement, released through the Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation, which was also taken over in the operation says the Prime Minister, Bart Ulufa'alu, has been handed a letter demanding that he resign. Mr Nori is quoted as saying the action has been taken because of ""the Government's failure to positively address the country's current ethnic crisis"". That crisis, which has pitted the Malaita Eagle Force against another militia group from the main island of Guadalcanal, has been going on for 18 months."

" The Foreign Affairs Minister, Alexander Downer, says the coup in Fiji has not helped the deterioration of the situation in the Solomon Islands. Mr Downer says Australia made a substantial effort to stabilise the conflict in the Solomon Islands before today's coup. He says this includes peace talks and an international police force. But Mr Downer says conditions in the region have contributed to the latest development. ""The coup in Fiji was certainly in terms of the situation in the Solomon Islands a very considerable setback. ""Not that there was any umbilical link between the two but there was an atmospheric link between the two,"" he said."

" The Prime Minister, John Howard, has condemned the coup in Solomon Islands. ""We do utterly condemn the kidnapping of the Prime Minister and the Governor-General by armed militants with assistance from elements of the police. ""The Government...is as concerned about that situation as it is about the events in Fiji,"" Mr Howard told Parliament."

" Meanwhile, passengers booked on a flight from Brisbane to Honiara this afternoon will not be making the trip. The Solomon Airlines' flight, which was due to leave Brisbane at 4:30pm AEST, has been cancelled. Qantas says there were 40 passengers booked on the flight. All international and domestic operations have been suspended in Honiaro, due to the coup."

" The death toll from two massive earthquakes in Indonesia has reached at least 50, with hundreds of people injured. The first quake off the island of Sumatra measured 7.9 on the Richter scale, followed by another reaching 6.7. The massive earthquakes in the Indian Ocean were felt as far away as Singapore, while in Jakarta, high-rise buildings swayed and groaned. Worst affected is the city of Bengkulu. Electricity has been cut to the city and doctors have moved the hospital outside because of fear of aftershocks. Seismologists say because the earthquake was in shallow water there was a significant risk of a tsunami, but there have been no reports yet of any tidal waves in the region."

" Fiji's military regime has delivered an ultimatum to rebel leader George Speight. The self-appointed military president, Frank Bainimarama, says he will no longer entertain any more demands from the rebels. In a national radio address, President Bainimarama acknowledged that talks with Mr Speight were deadlocked. He told Fijians that the army has a mandate to bring back normalcy to the country, warning the military will no longer tolerate the rebel leader's demands. President Bainimarama says if Mr Speight wants an amnesty he should immediately release his 31 hostages and return all arms and amunition. In a sign that international pressure is having some effect, the military says it would be impossible to include the failed businessman or any of his gang in a new government because of a possible backlash from Fiji's trading partners."

" Meanwhile, nearly 20 per cent of the Olympic staff uniforms manufactured in Fiji cannot be brought to Australia because of the coup in Suva. The Sydney Olympics organising committee (SOCOG) has confirmed the garments remain in a warehouse in the Fijian capital. The Australian Textile and Footwear Union says SOCOG is reaping the consequences of using cheap overseas labor. SOCOG says Games workers will not be left without uniforms and Games sponsor Bonds is working to retrieve the remaining uniforms."

" The outlook for employment growth looks to have brightened. There has been a recovery in the latest monthly measure of job advertising. Carried out by the ANZ Bank, the job advertisement survey has seen the number of newspaper positions vacant notices rise 3.9 per cent during May. In any one week during May, an average 30,625 employment ads were published - the highest figure since December 1989. However, the ANZ's chief economist, Saul Eslake, says actual employment growth should still be more subdued than earlier in the year. ""Over the past six months we've seen nearly 24,000 new jobs a month on average,"" he said. ""We think over the next three we should see around 16,000 a month on average, that should still be enough, however, to maintain the recent decline in the unemployment rate."""

" After more than two years of investigation, a federal parliamentary committee has handed down a unanimous report on how to improve the health of indigenous people. The 35 recommendations include the establishment of an independent Council for Indigenous Health, investigating the cost of providing clean water to indigenous communities, and a national system for training Aboriginal health workers. It also recommends the Federal Government take major responsibility for the health care of Aboriginal Australians. Committee chair, Liberal backbencher Barry Wakelin, says international experience shows it is possible to improve indigenous health outcomes. ""We don't expect dramatic change in the immediate future. This is a long-term proposition, decades before you can start to see the sorts of results, it's inter-generational. ""So we need to measure our progress millimetre by millimetre, but we can do it,"" he said."

" Telstra workers have put their own complaints to the Federal Government's inquiry into Telstra's service levels. The Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) says their stories put the lie to the Government's and Telstra's claims that job cuts have, in fact, led to an improvement in service delivery. In its submission the union cites numerous cases where staff have detailed management practices which have prevented them from delivering customer service. The CPSU's Stephen Jones says stress among Telstra staff is high, and morale is low. ""In their last staff survey 67 per cent of staff said they didn't have faith in senior management, a massive 67 per cent of staff,"" he said. ""So if the customers are saying it, if the staff are saying it to the union and the staff are saying it to management, there is an endemic problem that needs to be addressed. ""We think that's the story that should be taken to the services inquiry."""

" Rescue crews could be forgiven for laughing their way through a salvage attempt off the far north Queensland coast today. A seaplane overturned in Princess Charlotte Bay, about half way between Cairns and the tip of Cape York, after a large saltwater crocodile tried to mate with it. Coastguard Bob Harvey says the plane was moored on Friday night when people onboard a nearby trawler heard strange noises. He says they shone their torches and found a love struck crocodile trying to mate with the plane's float. ""The plan is to try and salvage the aircraft but I wouldn't like to be the diver going down to hook the ropes onto it,"" he said. ""I understand it's not in very deep water and the damage to it would be mainly water damage. ""Maybe this crocodile mightn't be that happy at seeing the love of his life depart the area, I don't know, it sounds pretty weird to me. ""Obviously it was very big, it would need to be to have enough weight to tip this aircraft over but I mean they grow in excess of 20 feet up here. ""We've not been involved in anything quite so bizarre. Obviously this guy needed glasses."""

" Two massive earthquakes measuring up to 7.9 and 6.7 on the Richter scale have hit the Indonesian island of Sumatra, killing at least 10 people and injuring dozens more. The initial colossal shock in the Indian Ocean off the south-west coast of the island hit land around the city of Bengkulu. It was followed minutes later by a huge aftershock. According to witnesses, the first quake shook the ground and buildings for several minutes. Reports of severe structural damage, including to a public housing block, are beginning to filter through. The US Geological Survey's John Bellini say aftershocks could last for months. ""So far we've had one significant size aftershock 11 minutes after the main event and that was a magnitude of 6.7,"" he said. ""We can expect aftershocks that are able to be felt for up to several months after this earthquake."" The earthquake has also been monitored by scientists at the Australian Geological Survey Organisation. Seismologist Mark Leonard says there is unlikely to be a tsunami associated with the quake, but significant loss of life and property damage is expected. Dr Leonard says the region has a history of large earthquakes. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The hostages in Fiji are no closer to release as negotiations continue between the military government and the rebels holding them. The two sides are attempting to draw up an accord on Fiji's government. The release of the 30 hostages is linked to negotiations about who will serve as Fiji's president, the length of time the military government will remain in office and the extent of amnesty for the seizure of Parliament. Rebel leader George Speight wants legal immunity for all actions directly or indirectly connected with the assault on Parliament and detention of MPs. The Fijian Army says amnesty will be limited to Mr Speight and six of his men. Mr Speight says the hostages are his trump card and will not be released until an agreement is signed with the Army. He says the hostages are well cared for. The terrorist leader says the four women MPs held captive have been offered their freedom but have opted to stay with their colleagues. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal National Party has warned Telstra it has to deliver on promises for better services under a new regional business unit. Telstra is putting more offices in regional areas and pledging not to cut jobs outside the cities. The National Party warns the new unit will have to prove itself quickly with demonstrable improvements in services. National Party leader John Anderson says Telstra is acknowledging mistakes in past practices and is responding to massive pressure, but he says Telstra has a lot of work to do. ""We're looking to turn around a situation that is at best patchy,"" he said. Mr Anderson is hopeful the new move by Telstra will get close to delivering services rural Australians have to have - a condition for the party supporting the full privatisation of Telstra. However, Shadow Communications Minister Stephen Smith says it will not provide the Government with any cover for full privatisation. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" US President Bill Clinton's first meeting with Russia's leader Vladimir Putin has ended without a hoped for foreign policy breakthrough. The US and Russia disagree about how to manage the threat from emerging nuclear powers. America and Russia have signed agreements to reduce their stockpiles of plutonium and to establish a joint centre to monitor early warnings of missile attacks. But the agreement Mr Clinton most wished to secure on his last visit to Moscow eluded him. Russia failed to agree that in order to meet the threat from non-aligned nuclear powers, the US needs to build a new anti-missile defence system. President Clinton said he had not decided whether America should unilaterally build the new system, in breach of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty - the cornerstone of global arms control since the 1970s. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Newcastle-based Impulse Airlines today begins flying in direct competition with Qantas and Ansett on Australia's main domestic routes. The first flight, from Sydney to Melbourne, left this morning with 111 passengers booked, just six short of a full load. Impulse spokesman Simon Westaway says bookings have also been strong for other flights today. ""Our load factors during the whole course of the day from both Melbourne and Sydney sectors has also been quite positive,"" he said. ""We've got over 50 per cent loads on most services, it's really right on line with what we thought we'd carry on [the] first day. ""Impulse has always budgeted on having low to medium load factors on these major routes in the short to medium term."" -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" Downturns of up to 20 per cent are being predicted for the top ends of the Sydney and Melbourne property markets during the next two years. Industry forecaster BIS Shrapnel has just released its annual study of residential property prospects. The firm is predicting price declines in all states during the next two years, with the exceptions of static prices in Western Australia and slight rises in Queensland. The boom cities of Melbourne and Sydney are now close to their peaks and for Sydney homes valued at more than $750,000, BIS Shrapnel is expecting price declines of 15 to 20 per cent during the next two financial years. Rising interest rates, a weakening economy and the satisfaction of pent-up demand will be the key factors in Sydney and Melbourne. Elsewhere, the forecaster says there has been a continuing over-supply of housing. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The New Zealand leg of the Olympic torch relay officially begins at Coronet Peak near Queenstown later today. A triple Olympic gold medallist in the 800 and 1,500 metre events, Peter Snell, will light the torch. The three-day stop in New Zealand concludes in the early hours of Thursday morning when the Olympic flame is flown to Uluru for the start of the Australian relay. The flame has already made an unscheduled stop in Australia. Yesterday, it touched down in Norfolk Island, but was not put on display for locals. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" Top seed Martina Hingis has moved through to the quarter-finals of the French Tennis Open. But Hingis had a hard time getting through Romania's Ruxandra Dragomir. Hingis survived a bit of a scare for a player she says has great hands. The Romanian levelled their match by winning the second set 6-0, but Hingis then won the last six games for 6-3, 0-6, 6-1. Monica Seles beat Amelie Mauresmo, Mary Pierce and Venus Williams advanced and Yevgeny Kafelnikov rallied from 2-5 in the fifth to beat Fernando Vicente 8-6. Alex Corretja is into the quarters to play Juan Carlos Ferrero, who beat Mark Philippoussis."

" Security forces in Fiji have clashed with a gang of rebel supporters outside the Parliament where MPs are being held hostage. One man was shot during the incident. The army has warned that any civilian government formed by the rebels will cause conflict in Fiji. Top level negotiations resume today to try to resolve the hostage crisis as it enters its 16th day. A clash took place near the parliament compound at a house belonging to the son of the detained prime minister, Mahendra Chaudhry. A mob was throwing rocks at the house, which has already been attacked and robbed. One of the gang was shot in the leg while trying to escape and is under police guard in hospital. Fiji's Military President Frank Bainimarama is entering a third day of personal negotaitions with the rebel leader, George Speight, on release of the 30 hostages. An army spokesman says the military will warn the Great Council of Chiefs that any civilian government formed by Mr Speight will cause bloodshed. ""We feel that [if] he forms a government, then it'll just lead to bloodshed because the majority of the people do not think [they] will accept him,"" he said."

" Federal Opposition leader, Kim Beazley, has used an address to the Victorian Labor Party conference to slam the Howard Government's industrial relations policies. Mr Beazley has told the conference, which is the first since the Victorian Labor Party's election victory, the Federal Government's record of industrial relations has been one of confrontation and union bashing. He said the Government had nobbled the Industrial Relations Commission, robbing Australia of an effective, independent industrial umpire. The Opposition leader has also promoted Labor's recently announced plan to scrap Australian workplace agreements. Mr Beazley said the agreements were both ineffective and unfair. ""You have all these workers trying to get a fairly bargained agreement, but they're told the by the AWA, you'll take it or we'll take back the job,"" he said. ""For working people trying to get a fair deal under Peter Reith, it's like a crowd trying to get through the turnstyles at Colonial Stadium."""

" A plane with specialised in depth sounding technology, spent the night searching parts of Spencer Gulf for wreckage of the twin engine Piper Chieftan, which crashed with eight people on board on Wednesday. The search concentrated on the Yarraville Shoal area, south-east of Whyalla, where the plane is believed to have ditched. The results of the search have been flown to Sydney where they can be downloaded and analysed. A plane equipped with laser depth sounding technology did overnight sweeps of Spencer Gulf where the plane, flown by Whyalla Airlines, is believed to have crashed on Wednesday. A scaled-down search by boats is also underway, their efforts assisted by the first fine weather since the plane crashed. The bodies of two victims have been recovered, the other five passengers and the pilot are presumed dead. The Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA) is conducting a safety audit of Whyalla Airlines this weekend. The airline has suspended its flight services since the crash."

" The Australian Education Union has criticised plans to apply the goods and services tax (GST) to professional development courses. Union president Mary Bluett says the GST will have a big impact on teachers who try to improve their skills. Ms Bluett says it is a tax on teaching and learning. ""Every time a teacher undertakes a course they will have to pay 10 per cent on top of the costs of the course simply on the basis of the GST,"" he said. ""That is not free education and certainly not GST free education as the Minister promised."""

" New South Wales Attorney-General Jeff Shaw has left the way open for the Government to be prosecuted over the 1996 Gretley mine disaster, near Newcastle in which four miners died. Mr Shaw has agreed to refer documents on the disaster to the Director of Public Prosecutions, to determine if charges should be laid against the Department of Mineral Resources. The Opposition has successfully moved that a third opinion be sought into the likely success of legal action and Shadow Mines Minister Duncan Gay says it is only fair for the families of the four men. ""Certainly I am not hunting for the head of the department, what I'm looking for is due process,"" he said. ""I have indicated to the cross benches as I have indicated to the Attorney-General, that whatever the result of this third opinion, the Opposition and myself are willing to accept that as a fair degree of due process."""

" Small businesses have welcomed a new service to help them deal with retail theft. The Federal Government is providing more than $800,000 to the Australian Institute of Criminology to establish a Crime Prevention Extension Service for small business. New South Wales Retail Traders Association executive director Bill Healy says retail theft costs small businesses $700 million each year in New South Wales. ""One of the problems in small business is that it's extremely competitive, the margins are very tight,"" he said. ""Retailers can't afford two or three cents in every dollar to thieves. ""It does put people at risk and on top of that of course, the preventative strategies adds additional costs,"" Mr Healy said. ""So if the problems aren't curtailed well then retailers are at risk of going out of business."""

" Australia's Mark Philippoussis has beaten Morocco's Hicham Arazi to advance to the last 16 at the French Open in Paris. Philipoussis says he was happy with his game, and got the benefit of his opponent's unforced errors. The Scud cruised into the fourth round on Friday with a 6-2, 6-1, 3-6, 6-3 win over experienced Moroccan player Hicham Arazi. He will now play 16th seed Juan Carlos Ferrero tomorrow. Philippoussis says triumphing in a battle with his own instincts has helped him become a better player. ""It's a Grand Slam and you have to give it your all. That's what I'm prepared to do,"" he said. ""I came into this tournament to concentrate, and not get upset on court. ""I'm thinking to just go out there, play hard, enjoy myself, but not get upset."" Fellow Australian Lleyton Hewitt faces Hungarian qualifier Attila Savolt today for a place in the last 16, while Jason Stoltenberg meets 15th-seeded Moroccan Younes."

" The Australian men's hockey team has failed to qualify for the final of the Champions Trophy in Amsterdam. Germany will play the Netherlands in the decider on Sunday after beating the Kookabuuras 4-2. Australia was always battling after the Germans scored the first 3 goals of the match. Jay Stacy and James Elmer were the scorers for Australia. The result means the Netherlands and Germany will play each other in the men's and women's finals of the Champions Trophy."

" Fiji's rebel leader George Speight says he wants to release his hostages this weekend. Mr Speight says he will end the siege to clear the way for a meeting on Monday of the Great Council of Chiefs. He says he has a deal with the military under which he will hand over all weapons and release the 30 MPs being held hostage in Parliament. In turn, he says, the army will order its troops back to barracks. Mr Speight says this will clear away the crisis, so the council of chiefs can meet on Monday. ""Between now and Monday are the issues to do with what we do with the hostages, and what we do with the army and its presence in the streets,"" he said. ""The commander [Commodore Frank Bainimarama] and I have pledged our commitment to resolving those issues before Monday because we'd like the Great Council of Chief's meeting and decision-making process to be uninhibited or untainted by those issues being unresolved. ""I personally would like the Great Council of Chiefs meeting to go ahead and proceed with all of these issues resolved,"" he said. Divisions in the Great Council of Chiefs mean it is not yet clear that the 50 traditional leaders will gather on Monday. Mr Speight wants to present his plans for Fiji's future government, with himself as prime minister, while the army will present its own blueprint. The rebel leader says both sides have pledged to accept as binding the judgement of the chiefs."

" The Federal Transport Minister John Anderson has rejected accusations about his overseeing of the Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA), after the Whyalla Airline disaster. The former CASA deputy chair Dick Smith claims Mr Anderson has failed to overhaul the organisation. Mr Smith has released details of a letter warning about problems at Whyalla Airlines in 1997, drawing a parallel with Monarch and Seaview airlines. He claims Mr Anderson's failure to address problems within CASA have meant that such warnings have not been heeded. But Mr Anderson has released two letters from Mr Smith, including one which says CASA has a clear plan for Whyalla Airlines to ensure the unsatisfactory situation involving the attitude of the chief pilot towards CASA is resolved."

" A delegation of 12 farmers from Zimbabwe, who have escaped recent atrocities in their homeland, has arrived in Perth. The group will assess the possibility of moving permanently to Western Australia. The farmers are on a two week tour of the state. On the agenda are visits to the south-west wine growing region and Kununurra's Ord River irrigation project. The farmers are the victims of recent violence in their homeland and are among dozens of similar land holders looking to migrate permanently. Another white Zimbabwean farmer was killed yesterday taking the number of deaths to five since squatters began occupying commercial farms in February."

" There has been a big blowout in Australia's foreign debt. However, the current account deficit for the latest quarter has been better behaved. For the March quarter, the overall current account deficit is a fraction over $8 billion. That is a deterioration of 2 per cent from the December quarter. While the deficit on trade in goods has improved by $400 million, the deficit on services is $320 million bigger. Meanwhile, the slide in the value of the Australian dollar has contributed to a significant jump in the net foreign debt. It has ballooned to $256 billion, $11.5 billion up in the latest three months."

" The chairperson of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation has accused the major political parties of failing to encourage indigenous candidates. Evelyn Scott does not support the idea of reserving seats in Federal Parliament for indigenous people which was one of the proposals raised following the successful Corroboree 2000 celebrations. Instead, she wants the major political parties to identify seats that indigenous candidates could win and preselect appropriate people. ""They know where the black seats are in this country and if they were genuine about indigenous people going into politics perhaps they should start thinking on those lines and act on it,"" she said. Ms Scott believes there will eventually be a treaty or settlement with indigenous people. Some Aboriginal leaders have been promoting the idea, following Corroborree 2000. But Evelyn Scott says it is premature to have that debate now. ""In the end we will have some sort of agreement, be it a settlement or a treaty, but that's a long slow educative process,"" she said. ""It's too early a time to start talking about that. We have to warm the people to reconcilliation first."""

" Former assistant tax commissioner, Nick Petroulias, will face three new charges, and a charge of conspiracy to defraud the Commonwealth against him has been withdrawn. Mr Petroulias, who appeared in the Melbourne Magistrates Court this afternoon, has been charged with corruption of a Commonwealth officer, seizing goods in Commonwealth custody, and disclosure of information by a tax officer. Prosecutor Peter Hastings QC, told the court it is alleged Mr Petroulias marketed a tax avoidance scheme and received one-third of the profit. Magistrate Duncan Reynolds is considering an application to have the case heard in a Sydney court next week."

" Melbourne researchers believe snoring contributes to heart disease by increasing wear and tear on the body. Severe snorers have a high rate of sleep apnoea, a condition in which breathing stops during the night. The head of the Alfred Hospital's Sleep Disorders Unit, Dr Matthew Naughton, says some people stop breathing several hundred times a night. ""It's the low oxygen level and the arousals from sleep which we believe cause problems with blood pressure and may go on to develop heart disease,"" he said. The research team has found 20 per cent of people who die from a heart condition have sleep apnoea. They are trialling a special pump which increases air flow to the lungs to try and reduce the extent of the condition."

" The long-running coronial inquest into the 1997 Thredbo landslide has finally drawn to a close in Sydney. The National Parks and Wildlife Service was the last party to make final submissions to acting New South Wales coroner Derek Hand. The inquest began in 1998 to investigate the circumstances surrounding the deaths of 18 people in the Carinya and Bimbadeen Lodges at the Thredbo ski resort the previous year. Coroner Hand is expected to hand down his findings on June 29, a month short of three years since the tragedy."

" Fiji's military government and the rebel group holding 30 MPs hostage in parliament appear to have reached a deal to end the country's political crisis. Both sides have agreed to allow the Great Council of Chiefs to arbitrate. The breakthrough came in talks at military headquarters involving the military President Frank Bainimarama, rebel leader George Speight, and the Great Council of Chiefs. The army says the emerging agreement means there should be significant moves on the hostage situation in the next 24 to 36 hours. Mr Speight and the military have agreed that the Great Council of Chiefs will rule on their differences over the future government of Fiji. The chairman of the chiefs' council, Sitiveni Rabuka, says it will be called together as soon as the two sides finalise their positions. The coalition government of Mahendra Chaudhry, captured by Mr Speight a fortnight ago, has released a statement saying Fiji's military has succumbed to terrorists. The coalition statement says the military cannot abrogate the constitution because that can be done only by majorities of both houses of parliament. --------------------------------"

" The search for six people missing after a plane crashed into the Upper Spencer Gulf in South Australia on Wednesday night will resume at first light this morning, despite the probability noone will be found alive. Emergency crews suspended the operation just before 6:00pm ACST last night, after almost 24-hours of air and sea searching over 100 square nautical miles. The search was called off last night, for reasons including crew fatigue and worsening weather. Two bodies have been recovered, and six people are still missing. The search and rescue mission will now be scaled back, with searchers today focusing their attention underwater. The Maritime Safety Authority says given the water temperature and the time elapsed since the crash, it is almost certain there will be no survivors. --------------------------------"

" Two senior members of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation have criticised the campaign for a formal treaty with indigenous Australians. Aboriginal leaders disillusioned with the reconciliation process have been pushing the idea as a new way of moving forward. But council chair Evelyn Scott says the campaign will only allow the enemies of reconciliation to confuse the issues. Deputy chair Sir Gustav Nossal says the success of Corroboree 2000 indicates support only for the council's goals, not for ideas being advanced by others. ""Now we are finding that certain people want to jump some stages in what is going to be a long and tortuous journey towards full reconciliation,"" he said. ""That's why we would much sooner have a framework agreement for cool and rational discussion, and not try to jump the...hurdles too quickly."" ---------------------------------"

" The Olympic Coordination Authority says more than one million Olympic tickets will remain unsold when the latest round of sales ends on Monday. Almost every high profile event, including the ceremonies, swimming and athletics, have sold out. However, tickets remain for less popular sports such as volleyball, handball and equestrian events. The Sydney Organising Committee for the Olympic Games said it always expected a large number of tickets to be available in the lead up to and during the Games. --------------------------------"

" US financial markets are breathing a little easier on the inflation front this morning, resulting in solid rallies on bond and equity markets. The American Commerce Department has published new figures on construction activity. Across the US, spending on construction has dropped a sharper than expected 0.6 per cent in April - the first fall in seven months. At the same time, the National Association of Purchasing Management says that while manufacturing has grown in May for a 16th consecutive month, the pace of expansion is less robust. Although the more important figures on US employment are not released until tonight, investors have been prepared to push up prices on the markets. High-tech stocks have led the way, surging 5.3 per cent on the Nasdaq exchange. The Nasdaq composite index has finished 182 points ahead at 3,583. On the New York Stock Exchange, prices have closed a little off their highs. But the Dow Jones industrial average is still up 130 points to 10,652. That is an advance of 1.2 per cent. The US bond market has again registered healthy gains. The firmer prices have pushed down the yield on 30-year Treasury paper to 5.95 per cent, a fall of five points. In Britain, share market trade has taken a lead from Wall Street, with telecommunications and technology the key sectors once again. Overall, London's FT-100 index has jumped ahead 111 points to reach 6,471, the percentage gain being 1.75 per cent. Yesterday in Asia, there were signs of bargain hunting on the major exchanges of the region. Japanese investors appear to have been encouraged by stronger corporate profits. Tokyo's Nikkei index rose 362 points to 16,694. In Australia, market players were more uncertain, but Telstra and retail stocks gained some attention. The All Ordinaries index gained seven points to reach 3,048. In overnight trade on the Sydney Futures exchange, just before the 7:00am AEST close, the Share Price Index contract was up 16 points on yesterday's day settlement at 3,122. The 10-year bond contract is up six points at 93.93, with the implied yield easing to 6.07 per cent. The Australian dollar is a little weaker on the night. Just before 7:00am AEST, it was was being quoted for about 57.20 US cents, down one-tenth of a cent on yesterday's local close. On the cross-rates it is at 0.6141 euros, 62.09 Japanese yen, 38.28 pence sterling and against the New Zealand dollar it is at 1.251. The gold price is at $US272.80 an ounce, and West Texas crude is back up to $US30.24 a barrel. ----------------------------------"

" Northern Ireland's peace process is back on track today with the first meeting of the Northern Ireland Assembly since it was suspended three months ago by the British Government. Side by side, the Ulster Unionists' David Trimble and Sinn Fein's Martin McGuinness were back in their jobs today as Ministers in the semi-autonomous assembly, in business for the first time in three months. However, Ian Paisley's hardline Protestant Democratic Unionists boycotted the session and have vowed to bring the Assembly down from within. Already a row is brewing over what flag should be flown on government buildings this week on the anniversary of the Queen's coronation. But the bigger battle will be over proposed changes to the Royal Ulster Constabulary, presently the overwehlingly Protestant police force. ---------------------------------"

" The sounds of horses panting in the crisp early air have been heard in Grenfell, west of the New South Wales town of Cowra, this morning. The animals are up and running in the inaugural Henry Lawson Grenfell to Gulgong pilgrimage. The 10-day event joins the two towns, both with links to the poet, Henry Lawson and both with Lawson festivals on the June long weekend. While visiting towns along the way, the 50 or so riders and passengers will be joined by parties including the Cudal pony club and the Manildra school P&C. Tonight's camp is at Gooloogong."

" Rescue searchers have discovered oil slicks in the vicinity of where a passenger plane went down last night with eight people, in South Australia's upper Spencer Gulf. Eighteen hours into the search and there is still no sign of any survivors with wet, foggy conditions continuing to hamper their efforts. Two bodies were found early this morining, and it has been confirmed two of the missing are cousins of Premier John Olsen. Meanwhile, searchers say they have sighted two oil slicks near where the plane went down. Search coordinator Chief Inspector Brian Fahey says it is uncertain if the oil is an indication of the crash sight. ""I'm just really not in a position to say at this point in time. ""All we know is that a couple of oil slicks have been found, they could have come from anything, even some of the boats that may be out there,"" he said. The Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA) says it is investigating Whyalla Airlines' fuel records, following the failure of both engines on the airline's Piper Chieftain. Some pilots and safety experts are speculating that the plane ran out of fuel, but CASA is refusing to comment on the cause of the crash. CASA spokesman Peter Gibson says Whyalla Airlines has been under routine surveillance recently and investigators found nothing of concern in the way the company operates or in its maintenance procedures. ""The particular aircraft, I don't have any details on at this early stage but I can say that the Civil Aviation Safety Authority audited the maintenance organisation that Whyalla Airlines uses this year and found them carrying out their work to an acceptable standard, no great problems there. ""So the maintenance of Whyalla Airlines' aircraft in general hasn't given us any problems currently,"" he said. However, CASA has suggested it may review the rules regarding safety equipment on airplanes following the crash. The twin-engine Piper Chieftain was not required to carry life jackets, or a life raft, because it flew within 50 miles of land. Some rescuers say if anyone survived the crash they may have had a better chance of being rescued if such equipment was on board. ------------------------------------"

" Prime Minister John Howard has accused the Opposition leader of a pathetic and insipid capitulation to the unions over Labor's industrial relations policy. Kim Beazley has promised a Labor government would abolish Australian workplace agreements, with individual agreements only available under common law. Mr Howard said the ALP would destroy the choice available under the present system, and Mr Beazley has sold out to Labor's union masters. ""It's a reminder that a Beazley Labor government would be union Labor,"" he said. ""It wouldn't be new Labor or better Labor or true Labor, it would be union Labor."" ---------------------------------"

" An audacious attempt to become one of Australia's leading Internet service providers looks to have failed for the beleaguered company eisa. Plans by eisa to buy Ozemail have now been scuttled with current owners, UUNet, saying the sale agreement has been terminated. Eisa had offered more than $300 million for Ozemail back in February and a successful completion would have seen it rivalling Telstra's Big Pond. But the funding depended on a series of equity deals with other players, one of which was the John Fairfax subsidiary, f2, which earlier this week pulled the plug on its $40 million participation. UUNet says it is clear that eisa is not in a position to meet financing requirements. Eisa says it is now examining the legality of the deal's termination as well as the retention by Ozemail of a $20 million deposit paid to it by eisa. ---------------------------------"

" Thousands of elderly arthritis sufferers are about to get access to a new drug at heavily subsidised prices. The drug, Celebrex, has been added to the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) at a cost of $217 million during the next four years. Health Minister Michael Wooldridge says it is the biggest new addition to the PBS in its 52-year history. About 35,000 people presently use the drug, paying about $60 a month - the price will fall to just over $3 for health card holders and $20 for general patients. Dr Wooldridge says it is expected 500,000 people will benefit from the subsidy, which becomes available from August. ""It is going to be an additional cost to the budget,"" he said. ""It's a very good cost to the budget. It will save a lot of illness, it will save a lot of people ending up in hospital with bleeds because [of] the non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs they use now. ""It will prevent a lot of side-effects that older people currently get from their medication."" ---------------------------------"

" There has been another disappointing monthly measure of retail activity in Australia. Latest official figures show no growth at all for April. The relevant column in the Australian Bureau of Statistics retail trade publication reads zero change. But in fact the seasonally adjusted total of national retail turnover is fractionally negative, and in raw terms the amount of money parted with by shoppers has dropped by almost $400 million in April to $11.5 billion. What might concern an already puzzled Reserve Bank even more is the fact that in trend terms retail activity has now declined for five months in a row. ---------------------------------"

" The Queensland Museum wants to study the sex drive of male funnelweb spiders to try to predict the weather. Senior curator of spiders, Robert Raven, says he tipped this year's big wet after finding an active male funnelweb on Mount Tamborine, near the Gold Coast in August. The last time that happened so early was just before the big Queensland floods of 1974. Dr Raven says spiders are weather sensitive and he wants to see if it happens again. ""The big thing to do is to be watching in August at Mount Tamborine and similar locations to see whether males start moving again that early,"" he said. ""Whatever stimulated moulting so early in the season may be a complex of air pressure, of humidity and of temperature something about that combination seems to have been very good for the spider. ""Whether it was a coincidence or not we're not sure but in science when this happens we make a prediction and if the prediction is true then we say okay there might be some fact and reason behind this."" -------------------------------"

" Essendon coach Kevin Sheedy has added one more to his list of memorable statements by claiming the Bombers will go into Saturday night's game against the Kangaroos as underdogs. Despite being unbeaten in the first 12 rounds of the season, Sheedy insists his side should not be the favourite. ""I'd have to say that in all honesty the reigning premier will only have one player out,"" he said. ""That's all they've got out, and that's if Stephens plays then he plays. ""That means the premiership side at the present time, and if it's in rain [it] should be favourite. I've got no doubt about that - we haven't even played each other once yet."""

" Fiji's new military President says his regime will face major repercussions from the international community. But Commodore Frank Bainimarama says he will remain President for up to three years to re-write the constitution before an election. Meanwhile, talks between the military and rebel leader George Speight have stalled. Commodore Bainimarama says he wanted to have a personal meeting with George Speight today, but it had been refused. Mr Speight's spokesman accused the military leader of acting in bad faith by appointing a new Prime Minister who is the son-in-law of the deposed president Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara. Commodore Bainimarama says the international community will punish Fiji's military regime. ""I know there'll be a lot of international repercussions that will go along with what we have done,"" he said. Tensions have risen in Suva with a rash of car-jackings by supporters of the rebel leader George Speight. They have seized nine cars from around the parliament area. The military responded by putting extra cordons around the parliament and restricting movement from the city to the parliament area. Meanwhile, Fijian organisations in Australia have called for the Australian Government to immediately impose sanctions against Fiji. Several hundred members of the organisations rallied outside federal parliament in support of democracy in Fiji. Delegates from the organisations are meeting the Foreign Affairs Minister, Alexander Downer, this afternoon. Anil Singh from the Movement for Democracy, says they will explain the need for the Australian Government to take action now. ""Impose the sanctions now so that they will realise that what they are doing is wrong, and this is not the way to overthrow governments. ""You do it through the ballot box, not through the barrel of the gun,"" he said. ----------------------------------"

" The Prime Minister, John Howard, has been making the pitch for the full sale of Telstra, backed by $65 million worth of new communications projects for rural Australia. The projects announced today include an expansion of rural low cost Internet access. Mr Howard says it is spending made possible by the Telstra sale. ""This is a good news story for the people of rural and regional Australia. ""And it's a demonstration to them that we're serious in our commitment, that there are great benefits from the sale of Telstra,"" he said. The Government is waiting for the outcome of an inquiry into Telstra service levels to see if it can win support for the full privatisation. Mr Howard says the inquiry is independent, but he believes Telstra is doing a better job and deserves praise. He would not comment on Telstra's falling share price, but he has expressed full confidence in the Telstra board and management. --------------------------------"

" Shareholders in Colonial Limited have overwhelmingly approved the $8 billion takeover by the Commonwealth Bank. The vote comes despite concerns about widespread branch closures and staff cuts raised at meetings in Melbourne today. The deal, the biggest in Australia's corporate history, now only needs Supreme Court approval after it was cleared by the Federal Government and competition authorities yesterday. -----------------------------------"

" The Prime Minister, John Howard, has rejected a call to remove singer Joe Cocker's name from the Government's current goods and services tax (GST) television advertisements. Mr Howard has also given his support to the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) following complaints about its GST pricing powers. Some businesses believe the ACCC is too heavy-handed in pursuing business which allegedly breach pricing guidelines. But Mr Howard does not believe ACCC chairman, Alan Fels, is being overzealous, and says he is protecting consumer interests. ""You do need somebody who is in there punching for the consumer. ""And I think the Australian public rather likes the idea that there's somebody in there punching for the Australian consumer,"" he said. -----------------------------------"

" The Australian Retailers Association has condemned the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) for raising consumer expectations prior to the introduction of the goods and services tax (GST). The issue was raised during the launch of a new training program in Canberra. The retail association has launched an interactive CD-ROM to train more than one million retail staff Australia-wide. It aims to assist the front-line staff who will experience the brunt of consumer confusion. Association chief executive Phil Naylor says the ACCC's latest price guide is misleading. ""Headlines of their publications, they all give the impression that there is going to be a lot of things happening from day one when in fact changes will take place over a six month period,"" he said. Mr Naylor says come July 1, retailers should be prepared for chaos, but based on the New Zealand experience that should not last longer than a couple of months. ----------------------------------"

" The Federal Government has introduced legislation to ban all tobacco advertising at sporting and cultural events by October 2006. Federal Health Minister Michael Wooldridge says the proposed laws will remove the existing exemptions for some international events, like the Melbourne Grand Prix. Dr Wooldridge says he has been assured by motor sport organisations that the laws will not disadvantage Australia's chances of hosting future events. ""It does seem a long lead time, but that is the lead time that I'm told is required for current contracts to expire, for new sponors to be found,"" he said. ""It does give the now absolute watertight deadline that we can see the end of all tobacco advertsing at sporting events as something that is going to happen."" ----------------------------------"

" There is a call for local councils to stop genetically modified (GM) canola being planted in the south-west of New South Wales. The call by the Gene Ethics Network follows the revelation that GM canola seed was accidentally mixed with non-GM seed in the UK and Europe. Most of the New South Wales trials of GM canola are in the south west, with an estimated 2,300 hectares being planted nationally this winter. The director of the Gene Ethics Network, Bob Phelps, says Western Australia has already said no, and he has called for a five-year freeze on the trials. ""NSW should say no as well. And it certainly comes down to the local level. Under NSW planning laws, local government can say no to GM crop trials,"" he said. ""The locations are secret. Neighbours are not being told that their neighbours are doing these experiments. Local government should stick up for its constituents and say no to genetic engineering."" ------------------------------------"

" Aboriginal leader Charles Perkins has confirmed he is interested in having another voluntary role associated with the Sydney Olympics. Mr Perkins, who is already a member of Olympic organisers' (SOCOG's) Indigenous Advisory Committee, is nominated as an assistant mayor for a day of the Games village. Mr Perkins' appointment needs the approval of the committee's board next month. He says the honourary position will not stop him from criticising the Federal Government's handling of indigenous issues during the Games."

" Fiji's military chief Commodore Frank Bainimarama has named Ratu Epeli Nailatikau as the country's new Prime Minister. Fiji Radio says Mr Nailatikau is the husband of Adi Koila Mara, who was the tourism minister in the ousted government of former prime minister Mahendra Chaudhry. She is currently one of 30 hostages being held in Parliament by coup leader George Speight, who stormed Parliament on May 19 in the name of Fiji's indigenous population. Mara is also the daughter of President Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, who resigned on Monday after the military declared martial law. Radio Fiji says the full line-up of the military's interim government will be announced soon and will consist of professionals not affiliated to any political parties. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Treasurer, Peter Costello, has been accused of failing to consider the national interest by approving the Commonwealth Bank's $8 billion takeover of Colonial. The Government and Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) will allow the biggest corporate takeover in Australia. The regulator concedes its approval was ""line ball"", given the two groups' overlap in retail banking in Tasmania and regional New South Wales. There are promises that prices, service standards and the product range there will be protected, but the sale of Tasmania's Colonial Trust Bank was not required. Mr Costello says the takeover is in the national interest, with likely cheaper services and more diverse products. But Tony Beck of the Finance Sector Union says Mr Costello should consider the 250 branches and 2,500 jobs set to be lost. ""Public interest issues relate to banks' obligations to maintain service standards, maintain diversity and choice within a financial services market, and for us, the employment consequences,"" he said. Colonial shareholders vote on the plan today. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Australian Competition and Consumer Commisson (ACCC) says it cannot guarantee the Federal Government's new fuel subsidies will be passed on in full to consumers. The government announced last month it would pay $500 million over four years to country petrol retailers, to ensure the price of fuel in rural and regional areas does not rise under the goods and services tax (GST). But the ACCC's Alan Asher has told a late night Senate hearing that despite vigorous monitoring, there can be no guarantee. ""By having somebody to check actual prices at one in two service stations is something that's never been achieved, or even contemplated in Australia before,"" he said. ""Can I guarantee that that will lead to the full flow on of all of those rebates? No."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Democrats will try to have doctors disclose the benefits they receive from other services, when referring some patients to them. The party plans to amend health cover legislation before the Senate next week to include the requirement. Democrats leader Meg Lees says the amendments would apply to patients being treated under a gap-cover scheme. She says they are based on an Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) finding, that relevant financial interests could compromise a referral made by a doctor. ""There is always the risk and we want just to make sure it is absolutely never going to be a problem,"" Ms Lees said. ""We are not suggesting for a moment that many doctors would in any way do anything that wasn't in the best interests of their patient, however the ACCC has pointed out this particular issue and we believe after investigation it is a very good idea to move these amendments."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Swiss authorities say they are lifting a ban on sporting activities in a valley where 21 people were killed in a canyoning accident last July. Most of the victims were Australians. The accident happened when flash-storms caused the river level to rise rapidly, trapping a group of canyoners and their guides. Eleven employees of the holiday company that ran the excursion, Adventure World, are under investigation for causing death by negligence. Adventure World has announced it is ceasing operations after a man taking part in a bungee jump it organised, this month plunged to his death because the elastic cord was too long. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" School children have fired shots at police during a riot near Johannesburg in South Africa. A student was killed in the clash and four police officers were wounded. High school students from the township of Alexandra, north of Johannesburg, attacked police and burned down a house. They had gathered to confront a local shop owner who had been accused of killing a student during the week. When police arrived more than 500 students were rallying outside the store. The shop owner's house was then set alight before several shots were fired. Police say rocks and petrol bombs were also thrown by the students. The police eventually dispersed the crowd and arrested several youths, but the students regrouped and are demanding the release of their schoolmates who are now in custody. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Hundreds of marines and police reinforcements are being sent into two provinces of Indonesia, in the wake of sectarian violence over the past week, which has left more than 90 people dead. Most of the victims are Christians, killed in bomb and gun attacks at the hands of Muslim extremists. The most savage attack took place on Halmahera island in the northern Malukus. At least 50 people were killed in a dawn raid as Muslim extremists raided villages by sea and mountain, setting alight hundreds of houses. Violence has also flared in central Salawesi, where seven have died in several clashes and more than 40 were injured, when a bomb was detonated in church during a service on Sunday. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A total of 21 courts will be used later today to get French Open matches back on track after all of day two's play was washed out due to heavy rain. Australians Lleyton Hewitt, Pat Rafter, Andrew Ilie, Jason Stoltenberg, Alicia Molik and Nicole Pratt should all have played but not a ball was hit. Their games have been rescheduled. Mark Philippoussis' game against American Paul Goldstein will also be played tonight. Some of the big name seeds in action will be Andre Agassi, Lindsay Davenport, Venus Williams and Anna Kournikova."

" Australian diplomats in Fiji have met the country's new military ruler Frank Bainimarama and stressed the need for a swift return to democratic rule. The Foreign Minister Alexander Downer says Commodore Bainimarama has pledged to appoint a new civilian interim government in Fiji to work towards a new or amended constitution, and possibly fresh elections. Mr Downer says the Commodore has said he is not interested in taking part in any future government. He says Commodore Bainimarama also appears to be taking a strong line with the coup leader George Speight. ""Commodore Bainimarama has initiated contact, I understand, with the Speight group and would appear to be taking a firm line with them,"" he said. ""He's demanding the surrender of weapons and accepting no conditions in return, although there is a possibility that he may be prepared to grant amnesty to Speight and to the six original colleagues. ""We do take some, albeit very limited, encouragement from reports that the military's assumed control solely for the purpose of restoring law and order and that it does plan to return the country to civilian rule as soon as possible."" Mr Downer said. ---------------------------------"

" There has been a collapse in confidence in the Australian small business sector. The Yellow Pages' Small Business Index has slumped to the lowest level in its seven-year history. Conducted across more than 1,200 small business owners and operators, the survey results for May indicate the sector is rattled by both the impending new tax system and the general economic outlook. ""We have the lowest level of confidence in the small business sector for seven years,"" the survey's economic adviser Dr John Marsden said. ""The Yellow Pages index has been running since May 1993 - this is the worst result we've seen nationally and it's not only the lowest result, it's also the sharpest fall."" Along with the overall slide in sentiment, expectations for sales, profits and employment are also the lowest in the survey's history. ""But it doesn't appear to be only GST [the goods and services tax], it's got to do with their perception of the economy itself, and it's certainly got to do we believe with interest rates,"" Dr Marsden said. Share market declines and the weak dollar also appear to have contributed."

" The number of people with diabetes in Australia has doubled in the past 20 years. The first national diabetes, obesity and lifestyle study shows Australia has one of the highest diabetes rates among developed countries, with one in five people over the age of 65 affected. The study, which also identified risk factors for heart disease, found 60 per cent of Australian adults were either obese or overweight. Researchers claim the results of the study indicate a major heart disease and diabetes epidemic. -------------------------------"

" The X classification for erotic video is set to remain in place. The Federal Government has abandoned a plan to re-name the X classification non-violent erotica (NVE). Members of the Government, particularly National Party MPs, became concerned that NVE was too mild a description of the sorts of pornographic acts performed on the videos. The Government has reviewed the proposed switch to NVE and decided to stick with the X classification, although there will be a tightening of the restrictions on what can be shown on X-videos. Fiona Patten, of the Eros Foundation, says it is the first step towards a total ban. ""Unfortunately the Coaltion Government has a policy to ban X-rated videos and the X classification, this was why they decided to introduce NVE,"" she said. ""Now we are faced with a ban on all sexually explicit material in Australia. ""We will see the end of the legal industry in the ACT. The ACT has had a very good, regulated industry and we will now just hand it over to the blackmarket in the States. ""I think NVE was a far more prescriptive classification. It only allowed non-violent erotica. It was much more restrictive in cutting out aggressive language and demeaning behaviour,"" she said. Meanwhile, National Party MP De-Anne Kelly says she is happy to cooperate with any police investigation into the screening of sexually explicit videos at Parliament House in Canberra. De-Anne Kelly says she organised the private screening last March for herself and other colleagues who were considering a proposed new video classification. The sex industry lobby group Eros Foundation has raised questions about the legality of the screening and Federal Police have confirmed a complaint has been referred to them. Mrs Kelly says she has written to the ACT chief police officer offering to answer any questions. ""I think it's a matter of privilege that parliamentarians be able to properly inform themselves,"" she said. ""The Eros Foundation, I'm afaid, doesn't frighten me at all. I haven't had the Federal Police knocking on my door, and don't expect to."" ------------------------------------"

" The Federal Treasurer, Peter Costello, has indicated he is prepared to take on the brewing industry over its campaign against the changes to beer excise. The changes have come as a result of the introduction of the goods and services tax (GST), and brewers have launched an advertising campaign warning prices of beer sold over the bar could rise by more than 8 per cent. The Treasurer has drawn International Olympic Committee vice president, Kevan Gosper, into the issue. He has told Coalition MPs that one of companies involved in the campaign, Lion Nathan, is foreign owned with Mr Gosper as its Australian director. He has also urged MPs to tell him of cases where hotel chains are taking licences from country hotels in order to reissue them in cities and suburbs. -----------------------------------"

" The biscuit manufacturer Westons has been fined $900,000 in the Federal Court for an attempt at price-fixing in Tasmania. In a case brought by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, Westons was fined for trying to induce retailers to lift the price of its ""Lots O' Cookies"" product in 1997. The court said that following a small-scale price war between Chickenfeed and Woolworths, trading as Purity and Roelf Vos, Westons formulated a plan to induce the retailers to raise the price of the cookies. Justice Goldberg said there was a deliberate and conscious attempt to eliminate competition in the relevant market. It is not the first time George Weston has been fined over price- fixing. In 1997, only days before this offence, the company was fined $1.25 million for another incident in Victoria. ---------------------------------"

" Former NSW Law Society president John Marsden has denied taking drugs and having sex with a teenage boy from Kings Cross 30 years ago. The 58-year-old lawyer has returned to the witness box for a second day as he pursues Channel 7 over its child sex allegations. A subdued Mr Marsden denied each of the allegations made by 44-year-old Ron Kinchella during the solicitor's defamation action against Channel 7. Mr Kinchella alleged he was picked up by Mr Marsden on five different Friday nights in 1970 or 1971 near the El Alamein fountain at Kings Cross. He claimed at Mr Marsden's house, he belted the lawyer with a strap had sex with him and sniffed amyl nitrate. Mr Marsden said he has never picked up anyone near the fountain, and in the early 1970s he did not smoke marijuana or sniff amyl nitrate, which he recalled was not available in a bottle until 1976. ----------------------------------"

" New South Wales' selectors have made three changes to the side for the third State of Origin rugby league match next week. Matthew Gidley comes into the centres for the injured Shaun Timmins, Jason Stephens will start at prop for the suspended Rodney Howe, with Michael Vella coming on to the bench. Howe today pleaded guilty to a careless high tackle charge and will miss two weeks. His club is considering contesting the severity of the charge."

" Fiji is again under military rule with the chief of the armed forces assuming control of the Government. Commodore Frank Bainimarama is Fiji's new military leader, after President Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara willingly agreed to step aside for 21 days Announcing the takeover, Commodore Bainimarama refused to answer question about rebel leader George Speight or his hostages, which includes democratically-elected former prime minister Mahendra Chaundhry. The new military ruler moved to impose a strict curfew but that has since been lifted. ""The members have the right to use force in enforcing this curfew,"" Commodore Bainimarama said. ""All movement to the parliamentary complex will be limited to central services only."" --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Prime Minister John Howard's decision to send out a letter about the new tax system is being labelled ""massive overkill"" by the Federal Opposition. The signed covering letter will be included with a booklet outlining the tax changes, to be mailed out by the Tax Office next month. The booklet will go to eight million families at a cost of $10.2 million. Labor's Senate leader John Faulkner says Mr Howard's letter is a waste of taxpayers' time and money. ""It's just $10 million of taxpayers' money being used to flog the GST,"" he said. ""It's massive overkill and it's totally unprecedented."" --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" In Jakarta, state prosecutors have placed disgraced ex-president Suharto under house arrest, after promising that the former strongman will be charged within the next two months for embezzling millions of dollars. A spokesman for the prosecutor's office says Mr Suharto will not be allowed to leave his house in downtown Jakarta from today. His confinement was prompted by escalating public pressure, including violent protests by students demanding swift action against the former strongman. Mr Suharto was ousted from office in 1998 amid massive pro-democracy protests, leaving behind a legacy of endemic corruption and nepotism. The former autocrat is a leading suspect in a corruption investigation involving the misuse of millions of dollars during his 32-year reign. Suharto is denying any wrongdoing. Reformist President Abdurrahman Wahid has promised to pardon him if he is found guilty and returns the millions of dollars he is alleged to have stolen. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Another round of negotiations between the Papua New Guinea Government and Bougainville leaders begins today. The leaders will be encouraged by comments from Commonwealth secretary-general Don McKinnon. Frustration has been creeping in lately at the egdes of the process of determining Bougainville's political future. The process is of necessity, very slow, perhaps too slow for some. There have been claims of a plan to overthrow the island's interim provincial government, claims strongly denied by members of that government. After visiting Bougainville on the weekend, Mr McKinnon said he was confident the peace process would succeed. ""Bougainville has certainly broken away from its past,"" he said. ""There is a real determination by the people to make the most of the freedom they are getting."" ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Sierra Leone's hostage crisis appears to be over after the release of the last of some 500 United Nations workers who had been held hostage by rebels for more than three weeks. A UN spokesman says 85 captives have arrived in the capital of Freetown, from neighboring Liberia, where President Charles Taylor had been negotiating their release. Meanwhile, the Sierra Leone army has recaptured the rebel-held town of Lunsar, some 80 kilometres north-east of Freetown. Lunsar is on a main road to the strategic, rebel-held town of Makeni, 140 kilometres north-east of Freetown. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Members of Sydney's Jewish community have given emotional testimony at a special committee into the Maccabiah Bridge accident almost three years ago. The hearing has been established to investigate the tragedy and consider issues of compensation. Three Sydney competitors died as a result of the bridge accident and 70 people were injured. Suzanne Small lost her husband Greg in the accident. Now left with two children, she told the inquiry her life was a living hell. ""My husband and my life was dead, his body was lifeless, his face blue and swollen,"" she said. ""Men were pumping his chest and shoving things down his throat, these are visuals I live with everyday of my life."" The chairman of the special committee, Eliezer Sandberg, told the survivors to be patient. ""There is a need to emphasise again how deep is the sorrow of people in Israel towards your tragedy,"" he said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Indian police conducting match-fixing investigations have asked Interpol to speed up efforts to obtain voice samples from former South African cricket captain Hansie Cronje. Cronje was charged last month with match-fixing. The team investigating the match-fixing case has sent two urgent reminders to Interpol, asking for the voice samples of Cronje and other evidence needed to take the case to court. The crime branch in Delhi charged Cronje and three other South African players on April 7 with match-fixing. At the time, police said they had access to tapes which contained damning conversations between the former South African captain and a London-based Indian bookmaker. India's Central Bureau of Investigation claims to be making significant progress in its enquiries relating to five one-day internationals between India and South Africa in March. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Mark Philippoussis ousted second seed Pete Sampras in a not-too-unexpected upset at the French Open today. It was only the second time in his career that Sampras had been ejected from Roland Garros in the first round and he did not go out without a fight. It took Philippoussis more than three and a half hours to wear down the second seed and take the match 4-6, 7-5, 7-6, (4-7), 6-4, 8-6. Philippoussis will play American Paul Goldstein in his second round match. In other results, Australia's Jelena Dokic says her superior fitness and mental strength helped her through a difficult opening round match at the Open. But another Australian, Richard Fromberg, lost in four sets to Frenchman Sebastian Grosjean. Women's top seed Martina Hingis cruised through to the second round with a straight sets win against Belgium's Sabine Appelmans. Dokic lost her opening set 3-6 to Slovakia's Tina Pisnik, but fought back to win the next two sets 7-6, 6-4."

" Diplomatic sources say the Fijian Army chief Frank Bainimarama will take over as ruler of Fiji, and his appointment will be announced shortly. The sources were speaking to reporters shortly after the army seized control of Suva and ordered troops to ""shoot-to-kill,"" to enforce a new 48-hour curfew. The move followed an overnight rampage by supporters of a coup against the country's elected government. The Government has been held hostage in parliament since May 19."

" Fiji's coup leader George Speight has threatened to execute the President's daughter first, if there is any military attempt to free his hostages. The Foreign Minister Alexander Downer has revealed the threat at a press conference in Canberra. Fiji's President Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara's daughter, who is a minister in Mahendra Chaudhry's Government, is one of about 30 hostages being held in the Parliament compound. Mr Downer says he is appalled at Mr Speight's threat. ""This is a measure of the man. Speight has said to Ratu Mara that if there is any attempt militarily to release the hostages the first person he, Speight, will shoot will be the President's daughter,"" he said.""So that's the type of person we're dealing with here. This is simply appalling, an appalling thing to say."""

" Federal Cabinet has decided on a raft of sanctions it is prepared to impose against Fiji if it does not return to constitutional rule. Australia will suspend its trade and economic relations agreement with Fiji, downgrade its foreign aid program, cancel joint defence exercises and any naval visits to Australia. There will also be a review of Australia's sporting contacts with Fiji, and a possible ban on all visits to Australia by Fiji's rugby union team. Australia has already decided to cancel the Fiji leg of the Olympic torch relay. But Mr Downer is giving no ultimatum for the sanctions to take effect. ""We will see how the proposals that Ratu Mara has put forward evolve,"" he said. ""Both we and the New Zealanders are of the view that today is not the day to impose the sanctions. ""Today is the day to flag what sorts of sanctions we'll be taking and these are sanctions obviously that would very much damage Fiji."""

" The Federal Government has cancelled Mr Speight's visa for Australia. Mr Speight has residency status in Australia, and therefore a visa for re-entry to the country. But immigration authorities have now cancelled the visa on the grounds that Mr Speight's presence in Australia could be a risk to the health and safety of the local community."

" The total cost of the Federal Government's goods and services tax (GST) information and implementation campaign has blown out to at least $400 million. The spending covers advertising and promotion, information kits, seminars for business and costs such as registrations for the Australian business number. The Opposition has described it as a scandal, and predicted the costs will rise. The Taxation Commissioner, Michael Carmody, has defended the amount being spent. ""That $400 million, given that it's such a massive change to our tax system, includes registration kits, information booklets, information to get over two million businesses registered in a very short time and so it goes on,"" he said. ""In my view that is money that is absolutely essential."" Meanwhile, the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) claims its new GST kit will help small businesses correctly price their goods following cost savings as a result of the new tax system. The kits aim to provide a tool for small businesses to adjust their pricing systems to the new tax system. The chairman of the ACCC, Professor Alan Fels, says the kits will ensure the new tax benefits are passed on to consumers. ""It's very important that small business doesn't add any tax increases to prices and pocket, for bottom line benefit, cost savings from the new tax system,"" he said."

" The Prime Minister, John Howard, will include a personalised letter in a mail-out by the Tax Office about the goods and services tax (GST). The Tax Office will send a GST information booklet to eight million families next month, at a cost of $10.2 million. The mail-out is already under fire from the Opposition, because the Tax Office is using an electronic copy of the electoral roll to carry it out. But Mr Howard has defended his decision to include the letter. ""I'll be signing the covering letter yes, there's nothing new about this,"" he said. ""The Keating and Hawke governments did household deliveries explaining changes in other areas. ""The letter that I'll send is completely factual."""

" The Peruvian president Alberto Fujimori is headed toward a third consecutive five-year term after winning a widely boycotted vote. Mr Fujimori, 61, won the run-off election with a landslide majority. But it is a weak mandate since millions of Peruvians protested over alleged irregularities by staying away from the polls or cancelling their ballots by writing ""no to fraud"" across them. The incumbent essentially ran against himself since his only rival, Alejandro Toledo, boycotted what he said was a fraudulent process. Legally Mr Fujimori won a massive majority, since only valid votes are recognized. But the huge support for Mr Toledo's boycott showed a deep polarization of the electorate."

" Sydney lawyer John Marsden has finished his first day of evidence at his defamation trial against Channel 7 by denying he had a preference for whipping during sex. The 58-year-old former Law Society president and Police Board member also testified about his drug-taking. Before Channel 7 completed its case last week, Justice David Levine heard allegations that Mr Marsden was involved in half-hour whipping sessions with a boy prostitute and took drugs during his under-age sexual encounters. In the witness box today, in his pursuit of damages from Channel 7 for two defamatory broadcasts, Mr Marsden said he regularly smoked marijuana from the mid 1970's. He said from 1992 he did not keep the drug in his home because he had given the then Police Minister Ted Pickering an undertaking he would not have it at home when he was on the Police Board. He denied ever using cocaine but said he sniffed amyl nitrate during sex. As the day drew to a close, Mr Marsden said he had never engaged in whippings, stating it is not his scene."

" Australian swimmer Michael Klim has spoken publicly for the first time about his decision to withdraw from the 200 metres freestyle at the Olympic Games. Klim qualified behind world record holder Ian Thorpe for the event, but says he wrote to head coach Don Talbot last week to tell him he no longer wants to swim the 200 metres. ""It will be in my best interests if I want to win gold in an individual event to focus on the ones that I have been performing well in over the past,"" he said. ""The 100 fly and the 100 free are my two individual events from now on."" Australian Swimming head coach Don Talbot says he understands that and expects Grant Hackett to swim in Klim's place. ""The next swimmer on the list in order is Grant Hackett and I havent talked to him since I've received that letter or to his coach Dennis Cotterall,"" Talbot said. ""We've got an orientation camp beginning on Sunday in Caloundra and I'll get with them then."""

" Unseasonally cold and wintery weather is still causing major problems in northern victoria, southern New South Wales and the ACT. But the weather is prooving a boon for ski operaters. For the first time in years, Victoria's Mount Hotham ski fields will open early following heavy snow falls on the weekend and more forecast for the rest of this week. The mountain had more than a metre of powder snow over the weekend. Marcus Lovett from the Mount Hotham Ski Company says after three lean seasons the current conditions are a godsend. ""It's starting off amazing. ""The temperatures have dropped off beautifully through Autumn and now it's really cold, it's staying cold, it's minus six degrees. ""With this big snow fall it's not like an early season snowfall that disappears after the first sunny day, this is around to stay and we're going to be opening the lifts this weekend at Mt Hotham for free skiing,"" he said."

" The RACV is urging motorists to be careful responding to about 6,000 calls for help, mainly from motorists stranded because of battery and ignition problems. The cold weather has already resulted in tragedy. A six-year-old girl died yesterday when a snow laden tree fell on a utility. The weather bureau's Ken Dickson says the cold snap will continue until mid week. ""There's another burst of cold wintery weather coming up towards us from down south,"" he said. ""There's further showers, the possibility of hail and thunder and snowfalls down to low levels."" One of the major routes from Sydney to western New South Wales has been closed, due to ice and snow. The Bell's Line of Road is closed but the Great Western Highway through the Blue Mountains is open."

" Queensland selectors made four changes for the third State of Origin match against New south Wales on Wednesday. Into the side come Ben Ikin, Wendell Sailor, Chris McKenna and Craig Greenhill. Making way are Jason Smith, who is injured, with Paul Green, Russell Bowden and Steve Price omitted. Queensland coach Mark Murray says it is important to retain the three match state of origin series. While Murray acknowledges he faces a challenge in preparing the team for what is effectively a dead rubber against New South Wales, he says comments by the Maroons Gordon Tallis to scrap the match are wrong. ""The media have seized on that which are fairly substantial comments I suppose for a person in his position,"" he said. ""I know that Gordon has a great love of playing for the state. ""I'm sure his comment was out of disappointment at being down 2-nil in the series and certainly not aimed at the opportunity of playing for Queensland the third time this year."""

" In a sign of the tension generated by mob violence overnight in Fiji's capital, Suva, the military has called up all reservists under the age of 55. The call went out on national radio, Radio Fiji, after a meeting between the army chief, Commander Frank Bainimarama, and the President, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara. Some time later, men started trickling into Queen Elizabeth Barracks, the military headquarters. In another development, the United States embassy has issued a statement advising all American citizens to leave Suva. At Parliament, rebel leader George Speight is still holding the Prime Minister, Mahendra Chaudhry, and a number of other hostages. ---------------------------------"

" The Fiji leg of the Olympic Torch Relay has been cancelled. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Sydney's Olympic Games Committee are blaming the decision on what they call Fiji's deteriorating political situation. The torch relay was due to visit Fiji this Saturday. ---------------------------------"

" New South Wales Democrats Senator Aden Ridgeway says the Prime Minister must realise the push for a formal treaty between white and Aboriginal Australians will continue. Mr Howard said despite the big turnout for yesterday's walk for reconciliation in Sydney, he believed a treaty would be divisive. But Senator Ridgeway says Mr Howard's stance helped to swell the numbers that walked across the Harbour Bridge and pressure for a treaty will not let up. ""People need to understand that division already exists,"" he said. ""Any formal agreement is about bringing unity and bringing about the co-existence and harmony that's completely absent. ""I think the Prime Minister's kidding himself if he thinks that a treaty's going to be divisive if you've already got division."" ---------------------------------"

" The Bureau of Meteorology says a new cold front moving north from Victoria is likely to bring more snow across New South Wales. Duty forecaster Phillip King says the southern and central tablelands in the State are expected to be hit, as is the northern tablelands later tonight. ""Definitely by tonight, we would expect that snow to spread right through New South Wales, if it is not there already,"" he said. ""I just have not had any reports early this morning, but temperatures are down about one to zero around [the] northern tablelands. ""We have been getting widespread snow in the southern tablelands and with this next system coming, I think it is again [going to] have another burst."" -------------------------------"

" Australia has recorded its best monthly trade outcome in more than two years. A drop in imports during April has been the key. International trade in goods and services during April has resulted in a seasonally adjusted deficit of just $556 million, that is down from $828 million in March and is the smallest shortfall since February, 1998. While exports have dropped 1 per cent in April, the improved trade outcome has been achieved with a 3 per cent decline in the value of imports into Australia. Imports of capital goods are down 13 per cent - less industrial transport equipment has been brought in and machinery and telecommunications imports are also down. --------------------------------"

" Australia's big brewing companies have launched an advertising and lobbying campaign against the Federal Government's proposed increase in beer excise. The campaign has the backing of Lion Nathan, Carlton and United, Coopers and Boags breweries. The beer industry claims the excise increase on tap beer is a tax grab that will net the government an extra $500 million a year. The brewers estimate beer sold over the bar will rise by more than 8 per cent or 17 cents a glass. Believing the issue is ""dynamite"", the brewers are running television and print advertisements, a phone hotline and placing posters and coasters in pubs and clubs. The industry has not revealed the budget for the campaign, but says it will be open-ended until the excise rate is changed by the government or overturned in the Senate. ---------------------------------"

" Tonight at 8.30pm on ABC TV, After the Corroboree, a special event hosted by George Negus. It's a forum for Australians to discuss the way forward after the Corroboree 2000 celebrations and the historic handover of the final draft of the reconciliation document. Join an internet forum after the program at 9.30pm. Go to ""http://www.abc.net.au/4corners/""."

" Fiji's coup has claimed its first life. A policeman has died after being shot during a riot in Suva last night. The policeman was shot as the mob surged into central Suva from the Parliament compound to attack the headquarters of Fiji TV. The policeman died in hospital in the early hours of this morning. During the rampage, the mob took control of Fiji TV, putting it off air and destroying its offices and studios. Coup leader George Speight's supporters attacked the TV station after it broadcast a program carrying criticisms of Mr Speight. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation says while the weekend's Corroboree 2000 was an outstanding success, Australia still has a long way to go. With estimates of the human carpet that yesterday made its way across Sydney Harbour Bridge ranging from 150,000 to 250,000, the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation says the event will be cause for celebration for a long time to come. But deputy chairman Sir Gustav Nossal says their work is far from over. With the council set to cease to exist on December 31, Sir Gustav says they will now concentrate on the formation of Reconciliation Australia - a foundation designed to take over the people's movement. However, he says not all the responsibility will lie with the new organisation. ""Don't forget, after the council goes out of existence, there's also ATSIC [the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission], ATSIC goes on forever and ATSIC is going to carry on a lot of the unfinished business too,"" he said. Meanwhile, Prime Minister John Howard is standing by his refusal to offer a formal national apology to indigenous people. Mr Howard told Sydney radio 2UE the Federal Government's position was held for genuine reasons. ""What I am expressing about this whole issue are views that I sincerely hold,"" he said. ""I know people say `why don't you say sorry?',"" he said. ""Well, I've said sorry personally on numerous occasions. ""What they want is a formal national apology. The government...I speak for the entire government on this and it's a matter that's been discussed at great length, we don't think it's appropriate for the current generation of Australians to apologise for the injustices committed by past generations."" --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Opposition has taken bolt cutters to the Government's good and services tax (GST) campaign - with newspaper advertisements attacking the cost. Labor has launched its own national advertising to expose what it says is a waste of $360 million - the government's spending on the ""unchain my heart"" campaign. Labor's own ad shows a set of bolt or chain cutters and appeals to taxpayers to start a chain reaction by telling the government to stop wasting their money. Shadow Treasurer Simon Crean says the $360 million ads do not achieve a thing. ""These ads do not inform, they don't give any message that clears up the ignorance,"" he said. ""The government still can't explain how its new tax system is going to apply and the ads also claim that everyone will be worse off when in fact they will not be."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A United Nations' special envoy has asked the Lebanese Government to halt spiralling tension on the Israel-Lebanon border. The appeal came as Israeli soldiers opened fire on stone-throwing Lebanese civilians, injuring several of them. This was the most serious border incident since Israel's withdrawal from south Lebanon. Israeli troops used percussion grenades, then opened fire on a crowd that had been throwing stones and attempting to break through the frontier fence at the Fatima Gate. Hezbollah officials and United Nations personnel have attmepted to stop the provocation, Lebanese President Emile Lahoud told UN envoy Terje Larsen, who will look at solving the problem. Elsewhere on the border, two children died and seven people were injured when their car drove over a landmine and a Christian man in south Lebanon has been shot dead, reportedly by a supporter of the victorious Islamic resistance. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Police in London have charged a man with the murder of BBC television presenter Jill Dando, who was shot in the head outside her home last year. He is a 40-year-old unemployed musician named Barry Michael George, alias Barry Bulsara. He is reported to have been living only a few hundred metres from Dando in west London. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Federal Labor MP Greg Wilton will appear in court this morning on charges arising from an incident in bushland on Friday. Police say the 44-year-old from Malvern, in Melbourne, was arrested in the You Yangs National Park near Geelong. Police took two children from him, fearing they were at risk. Mr Wilton has admitted himself to hospital for psychiatric treatment. He is to appear in the Geelong Magistrates Court today charged with breaching an intervention order. A spokesman for the Federal Opposition leader says any decision on Mr Wilton's political future is up to the MP. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The blast of wintry weather is still gripping areas of Australia from Tasmania to southern Queensland. It has caused four deaths directly and two more in one of many road accidents associated with the poor driving conditions. In Victoria, snowfalls have led to tree falls, killing two people. The weather bureau is forecasting snow to low levels and motorists heading into the high country are being warned to carry chains. Northern Tasmania has had significant snowfalls, particularly on Ben Lomond, near Launceston. The weather bureau in South Australia says strong winds around the state will ease off as a new high pressure system moves in from the west. Two men died yesterday when a house they were assembling collapsed in the high winds. Strong gusts have extended across South Australia and into New South Wales where at Broken Hill wind speeds reached up to 63 kilometres per hour. Heavy snow has caused problems on New South Wales' roads west of the Blue Mountains, with major highway closures and a spate of car accidents. The snow is forecast to move towards the northern tablelands. Temperatures plummeted again across Queensland overnight as a pool of cold air pushes north. The weather bureau says it is freezing this morning at Charleville and Oakey in southern Queensland, and many parts of the state are 10 degrees below average. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" It is the first day of the French tennis Open today, the season's second grand slam championship, with Mark Philippoussis and Pete Sampras set to meet on centre court. Not too many matches are expected to come close to the intensity of Philippoussis and Sampras. It is meeting 10 and Sampras is 1-7, the only clay court match went to Philippoussis three years ago when Sampras retired in the third set. Martina Hingis, last year's runner-up, starts on the centre court, where elsewhere men's favourite Gustavo Kuerten, Monica Seles, Yevgeny Kafelnikov and Jennifer Capriati have also been scheduled to play. It is now up to the unpredictable weather to allow that."

" Families, church groups and indigenous people from across Australia walked across the Sydney Harbour Bridge this morning to show support for Aboriginal reconciliatioln. While walking, Federal Opposition leader, Kim Beazley, said a future Labor Government would consider a formal treaty with indigenous Australia. Organisers are expecting close to 100,000 people to walk over the bridge by this afternoon."

" The Minister for Reconciliation, Philip Ruddock, says the Prime Minister's absence from the bridge walk has not marred the event. Mr Ruddock told Channel Nine John Howard supports the reconciliation process. ""You need to look at the nature of the program that the Prime Minister has and the commitments that he has,"" he said. ""He was at the conference yesterday and he spoke to the conference and he outlined the Government's support for the reconciliation process. ""He made it clear that we believe that it's a people's movement and today is about unity,"" Mr Ruddock said."

" The Roman Catholic Church in Fiji has strongly condemned the overthrow of Fiji's elected government. The messsage from the Archbishop of Suva has been read out in services today. The Archbishop of Suva, Petera Mataca, says Fiji has been shocked, shaken and frightened. The archbishop says the Roman Catholic Church strongly condemns the overthrow at gunpoint of the democratically-elected Government and the holding of hostages of the Prime Minister and MPs. The archbishop's message also attacks the destruction, burning and looting of Indian property. In the message read out in Suva's cathedral, Archbishop Mataca expressed shame at the looting by Fijian families. ""I am ashamed to be known as a Fiji islander,"" he said."

" Fiji's rebel leader George Speight will resume talks with the Great Council of Chiefs today in an effort to end the country's political hostage crisis. A spokesman for Mr Speight has rejected a compromise plan put forward by the president. President Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara yesterday sacked the Chaudhry Government and has taken control of the country. The president is considering granting immunity to Mr Speight and six of his rebels. Tomorrow, an interim council of ministers is expected to be appointed. The Labour Party, led by captive and now deposed prime minister, Mahendra Chaudhry, has rejected Ratu Mara's actions as unacceptable. The plan has also failed to sway Mr Speight, a spokesman for the rebel leader saying it did not go far enough."

" The world's largest trade union body has set in motion a campaign of action over Fiji, that may include boycotts, sanctions and strikes. Tim Noonan, from the Brussels-based International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, says the union movement will do all it can to press for the restoration of democracy in Fiji. He says the action will involve Australian unions, and is likely to involve disruption of mail, shipping, and airlines. ""We've had discussions today with the International Transport Workers Federation,"" he said. ""They're in contact with their affiliates in countries that have important transport connections with Fiji, so that's certainly one of the areas that'll be looked at."""

" Also, the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) has announced it will begin a series of bans against Fiji. The ACTU says the bans will go into place from midday today. The bans involve a range of boycotts on transport and communication services to and from Fiji. The most critical involve interruptions to the loading and unloading of freight. Flights to and from Fiji and postal services will also be affected. ACTU president Sharan Burrow says the union movement has taken the action because it does not support terrorism. ""We watched our trade union colleagues in Fiji develop a democracy movement and they built a democratic system...12 months ago,"" she said. ""And if that can be brought to nothing, the civilised world can't sit back and ignore that."""

" The Australian Greens have called for a clarification over whether political parties will pay the goods and services tax (GST). Greens Senator Bob Brown says there are conflicting opinions, with the Australia Institute suggesting the tax will not apply. Prime Minister John Howard has argued political parties will be treated in a similar way to charities. Senator Brown claims the Assistant Treasurer and the Deputy Commissioner for Tax say political parties will not be exempt. The Senator says the confusion needs to be sorted out. ""I don't see why political parties should have the same status as charities and indeed I don't see why we politicians should be voting to give political parties that status, when important fund-raising activities for charity will be under the GST,"" he said. ""The air needs to be cleared and Peter Costello, the Treasurer, must make it clear to the public political parties are not getting a special deal and will not be GST-exempt."""

" High profile television doctor, Kerryn Phelps, has been elected federal president of the Australian Medical Association (AMA), making her the first woman president in the association's 38 year history. Dr Phelps beat current vice president, Melbourne psychatrist Sandra Hacker for the position. Outgoing president Dr David Brand decided to stand down after two one year terms."

" The Northern Territory's Environment Centre has supported a Federal Opposition call for an independent inquiry into a leak at the Ranger uranium mine in April. The leak was reported to authorities a month after it was detected and it was revealed last week that contaminated water reached the wetlands in the Kakadu National Park. The Federal Labor Party says the Office of the Supervising Scientist, responsible for monitoring the mine, is too close to it, and its procedures should also be scrutinised. The environment centre's Mark Wakeham agrees. ""The supervising scientist is deeply embedded in the regulatory and monitoring regime for Ranger, and we believe that this inquiry needs to look at the causes of the incident, [mining company] ERA's failure to report the incident and why the regulatory authorities didn't detect the leak,"" he said."

" Tickets to one of the most internationally popular Olympic Games sports are being made available today. More than 30,000 tickets to the weightlifting, to be held at Darling Harbour's Sydney Convention Centre, will go on sale. Australian Olympic weightlifter Damian Brown says history will be made this year when women's events are included for the first time. ""It'll be the first time that women's weightlifting is contested and there'll be four categories for women and eight for men,"" he said. ""So it's very exciting. We've got a lot of females training at the moment and it gives them a fantastic incentive over the last couple of years, to really get stuck into some training."""

" A television cameraman has been shot just outside Fiji's Parliament House during a confrontation between George Speight's gunmen and soldiers manning a road block. The incident forced many media outlets to withdraw from the compound. The incident occurred during a confrontation between Mr Speight's supporters and the military unit, stationed just outside the parliamentary compound. Automatic weapons were discharged into the air as the two groups jostled and a wire service cameraman was hit in the forearm. The wounded man has been taken to hospital by colleagues and his condition is not known. The man has been identified as Gerry Harmer, an Associated Press cameraman from Bangkok. Several media outlets have pulled out of the compound following the clash. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A group of 12 people representing displaced farmers in Zimbabwe arrives in Perth next week to assess the possibility of a future in a new country. The group is funding its own passage on invitation from the Pastoralists and Graziers Association (PGA) of Western Australia. The 14-day visit follows weeks of preparation and meetings involving the PGA, the Western Australian Department of Trade, and Agriculture WA. It is understood the group has been issued short stay business visas and will be housed with Zimbabwean friends and Rotary Club members. They will also visit agricultural regions in south-west WA, the Ord River scheme near Kununnurra, and Queensland. PGA president Barry Court says while he does not know whether any group member wants to settle in Australia, he is sure they will be wanting to talk with immigration officials. ""I think there's discussions between the government of Australia as to whether we can help them or not, but we're certainly doing our bit to show them round the state and try to help their plight a little,"" he said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The small central Queensland town of Tieri is reeling this morning, after the death of a man in a mining accident at the nearby Oaky Creek coal mine. A roof at Mount Isa Mine's Oaky Creek coal mine, near Tieri, in central Queensland, collapsed yesterday morning, trapping two men. A 36-year-old father of two, Michael Morris, was found dead by rescuers, who were unable to revive him. Another man, Stewart Euston, lay next to his dead mate for hours until rescuers were able to bring him to the surface. He was taken to the Emerald Hospital with minor injuries, and has since been released. Mining company, MIM, has expressed sorrow at the accident, and says it should never have happened. Investigations into the tragedy are continuing, and family and co-workers are receiving counselling. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Western Australia's Director of Public Prosecutions has applied to the Supreme Court for leave to appeal against the magistrate's finding in the case of art critic Robert Hughes. At a hearing in Broome earlier this month, Magistrate Antoine Bloeman dismissed two charges of dangerous driving against Mr Hughes. The appeal announcement was made by the Crown Prosecutor, Stephen Pallaras. ""We have, after careful consideration, decided that we will institute appeal proceedings in relation to the magistrate's decision to dismiss the case against Mr Hughes,"" he said. ""We will be alleging that the magistrate made errors both in law and in fact."" Mr Hughes was involved in a near fatal road crash near Broome last year. The driver and front seat passenger in the other car were not called to give evidence. They have been charged with attempting to extort $30,000 in return for giving favourable testimony. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The military regime in Burma has warned against attempts to commemorate the 10th anniversary of elections won by the National League for Democracy, led by Nobel Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi. Heightened security is in place in both the capital, Rangoon, and Burma's second largest city, Mandalay. Ten years ago today, the people of Burma went to the polls and voted to end military rule. It was a landslide election victory to the National League for Democracy. The party won 82 per cent of the vote, but the military regime has maintained power by creating a culture of fear. They have warned against any attempts to mark the anniversary. A special warning has been issued to the Buddhist clergy, after reports emerged of a planned march on the capital by monks from the northern city of Mandalay. Diplomatic sources say despite the reports, they believe the anniversary will pass without major incident. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Victoria's sudden plunge into winter has resulted in snow on many of the State's ranges. Temperatures dropped dramatically overnight, reaching -1 in the state's west and -4 in alpine areas. The weather bureau's Scott Williams says the coldest air is heading for Melbourne. ""It is a pretty nasty cold outbreak for this early in the season,"" he said. ""We did have one like this back in 1977, where we had a day of just eight degrees in Melbourne at the end of the month, but it's certainly not common. ""It's more common not to get this severity of weather until later June or early July,"" Mr Williams said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Six o'clock closing would return to South Australian hotels under a proposal from the state's National Party. The president of the party's women's state council, Loma Silsbury, says the move would help curb binge drinking in young children. Mrs Silsbury says alcohol could still be bought after 6:00pm, but only if accompanied by a meal. While accepting the idea is unlikely to be adopted, she says something has to be done. ""What can we do between ourselves, the hospitality industry, the hotels, parents, the community at large, to formulate some kind of workable option to replace the chaos that we've got now?"" she said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Coup leaders in Fiji say they are prepared to compromise over a key demand - that of the future of Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, as President. A spokesman for the coup leader, George Speight, says at some point there will need to be a compromise and the status of President Mara is likely to be that point. Meanwhile, in a dramatic hour at the Parliamentary gates, George Speight and his supporters have torn down military barricades. As he was preparing for the second round of talks with a delegation from the Great Council of Chiefs, Mr Speight, followed by about 100 supporters, left the Parliamentary complex. They went to three military barricades to tear them down, encouraging the armed officers to join them. They then returned triumphantly back inside the Parliamentary gates. Earlier, 15 unarmed soldiers marched through the gates of Parliament, lead by Major Savua, the younger brother of Police Commissioner, Isikea Savua. Coup spokesman Simone Kaitani said he was sad at the apparent split in the ranks of the military."

" Fiji's Trade and Investment Bureau has warned that the country's export agreements will be jeopardised until the crisis is resolved constitutionally. Nearly 40 per cent of Fiji's national income is derived from exports, the majority from preferential access to markets in Australia, New Zealand and Europe."

" The Foreign Affairs Minister, Alexander Downer, says he will meet the Olympics Minister, Michael Knight, within 24 hours to discuss cancelling the Fiji leg of the Olympic torch relay. Mr Downer says Fiji coup leader George Speight is a terrorist whose actions have killed democracy in Fiji. Mr Downer says Federal Cabinet will meet next week to consider cutting political aid, as well as defence and sporting ties with Fiji. But Mr Downer says it is too early to discuss banning Fiji from taking part in the Sydney Olympics. ""I don't know about being banned from the Olympic Games but in any case the whole concept of the Olympic torch, which is a symbol of harmony and peace amongst human kind, passing through Fiji at a time like this needs to be considered pretty carefully,"" he said. Sydney's Olympic organisers say they will be guided by the Department of Foreign Affairs on whether the Fiji leg of the torch relay goes ahead. Mr Knight is yet to return to Australia from Rio De Janerio where the International Olympic Committee executive is meeting. A torch relay spokesperson says organisers will not put people in danger and will act upon advice from Foreign Affairs. The torch is scheduled to arrive in Fiji at the end of next week."

" Australia's third national Sorry Day has been marked by new calls for the Prime Minister to apologise to indigenous people. Thousands of people around the country have marched to commemorate the occasion. Australians from all walks of life have joined Sorry Day activities to show their regret for the past treatment of indigenous people. In Melbourne, about 3,000 people assembled at State Parliament. In Sydney, hundreds gathered at Maroubra beach. In Brisbane, a big crowd marched through the city. Sorry Day supporters around the country were united in their condemnation of John Howard for refusing to apologise for past wrongs. In Adelaide, the co-chairman of the Stolen Generations report, Mike Brown, said Mr Howard now owes a new apology - not just for the past but also the present. ""He's appealed to parts of our society and divided it very strongly in the process,"" he said. But Mr Howard says Australians are starting to realise his decision not to apologise does not lessen his commitment to reconciliation."

" The Queensland Premier described Mr Howard's refusal to apologise to the Stolen Generations as ""un-Australian"". However, Peter Beattie has also been criticised by indigenous people at a ceremony to mark the start of Reconciliation Week. Aboriginal performer Adrian McEvoy claims Queensland police are targeting indigenous people with their new move-on powers. ""I myself have been pulled up on occasion, on several occasions by police for no apparent reason, only because of what I look like,"" he said. Queensland Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy, Judy Spence, was sympathetic. ""I think what we're seeing today is that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, indigenous people in this country, are still hurting and they need to express that hurt,"" she said. Meanwhile, Queensland Government ads, running in newspapers tomorrow, call on business to invest more in the indigenous communities of Cape York."

" Queensland miners have walked off the job for 24 hours to highlight safety concerns in their industry. The move follows the death of 36-year-old father of two, Michael Morris, who was crushed to death in an accident at the Oakey Creek Coal mine in Central Queensland early this morning. Another miner is recovering in the Emerald Hospital with leg injuries. CFMEU [miners' union] spokesman Greg Betts says the reason for today's accident may not be known for some time. ""We have made the decision this afternoon that to raise awareness of our concerns for the serious number of injuries in [mining], the industry has decided to shut down for a period of 24 hours and will return to work tomorrow afternoon,"" he said. ""It's showing the family of that person concerned our deep sorrow for what happened."""

" Bands of Indonesian students have rampaged through the streets of central Jakarta, stoning and burning police and military vehicles. The trouble started yesterday during a protest outside the home of former Indonesian president Suharto, calling for him to be charged for alleged corruption and other abuses. About 13 students were injured last night after being beaten by police and shot at with tear gas. This afternoon the unrest spread as a bus tried to pass the former president's street and the driver was taken out and the vehicle was turned over and set on fire. Since then at least eight vehicles have been set on fire. Military reinforcements have arrived to quell the violence."

" Hundreds of truck drivers are taking part in a blockade at Aratula, west of Brisbane. It is part of a nationwide truckies' dispute over pay and conditions. Already, up to 150 trucks are lined along the Cunningham Highway, at Aratula, and the Transport Workers Union expects that number to grow. It also expects the blockade to continue through the weekend. Police at the scene are monitoring the situation. The union has urged the owner-drivers to conduct their protest peacefully. Police say some vehicles are getting through the blockade, but it is believed there are significant traffic delays in the area. A blockade is also underway at Wodonga, on the New South Wales-Victorian border. Drivers want the Federal Government to listen to their appeal, for guaranteed minimum cartage rates. The Federal Transport Minister, John Anderson, says he would be prepared to meet the transport workers over the next few days."

" ALP president Barry Jones has been asked not to stand again for the position. Mr Jones says he wants another term in the role, saying his main opponent, New South Wales Minister John Della Bosca is too busy to do the role justice. But Federal Parliamentary Leader Kim Beazley says he has had talks with Mr Jones and told him there are other roles for him within the party. ""As far as the presidency is concerned Barry has had a good innings, eight years is a long period of time for a Labor Party president,"" he said. ""We usually have a much higher turnover than that. ""Barry and I are discussing these matters amicably but I do think we do need to have some fressh blood in that position."""

" The Tax Office (ATO) and Australia's richest man, Kerry Packer, are to go head-to-head in the High Court. The ATO alleges Mr Packer's companies owe over $100 million in tax from a series of overseas transactions. The claim relates to a four year period between 1988 and 1992. One of the main issues is the 1990 transfer of Consolidated Press companies from Britain to the Bahamas. The ATO claims the companies were moved after announcements in Britain and Australia about changes to tax laws, in an asset-stripping exercise, to move profits beyond Australia's jurisdiction. In earlier legal action, the Federal court ruled the companies did not indulge in asset-stripping in the Bahamas transaction. But the court did rule the Packer companies entered into a scheme to avoid tax in a 1989 failed takeover bid. The High Court has agreed to consider both issues, with Consolidated Press calling for the tax avoidance ruling to be overturned, and the ATO wanting a ruling the group is guilty of asset stripping."

" The Victorian Division of the Australian Funeral Directors Association has celebrated its 110th anniversary with a parade of classic hearses through the streets of Melbourne. The celebrations culminated in the burial of a time capsule at the Melbourne General Cemetery. Australian Funeral Directors Association spokesman Graeme Bird says the capsule will be opened in 40 years when the group celebrates its 150th anniversary. ""It contains some copies of publications the Funeral Directors Association has produced here in Victoria and also some of the price lists and brochures that we actually currently produce,"" Mr Bird said."

" The Federal Government has embarked on a national round of consultation to develop new programs and policies to tackle homelessnes. The Community Services Minister Jocelyn Newman has released a National Homelessness Strategy - a discussion paper which canvasses prevention, early intervention and emergency support services. It is estimated more than 100,000 people are homeless in Australia on any night. Although the strategy contains no new funding announcements, Senator Newman says it will focus the attention of community groups and governments on what needs to be done. ""If we were going to be doing meaningful things for people who are homeless we've got to work together,"" she said. ""I'm delighted with the way the states and the Commonwealth are working together on the SAP agreement. ""We do recognise that better linkages between the SAP arrangements and the other services that are already there would make a great difference to people who are homeless. ""There are a lot of practical things you can do regardless of the dollars."""

" The Great Council of Chiefs in Fiji has bowed to the demands of kidnappers and agreed to a new government. However, the hostages have yet to be released. The Great Council has agreed with the kidnappers demands for the Indian led Chaudhry Government to be replaced with an indigenous led government. An interim council will be established led inititally by president Mara. The consistution will be changed to address the concerns of the nationalist Taukei movement. The Chiefs decisions are currently being conveyed to coup leader George Speight. Council Chair General Rabuka said he had hoped the hostages would be released during the day but, for security reasons, says they may have to spend another night in captivity. A clearly unhappy Council Chairman agreed with reporters the Council had given into blackmail and said there would be repercussions. ""We should expect international backlash on this,"" he said. ""Although the immediate solution, or immediate arrangment is within the constitution, with his excellency the President taking executive control as far as section 85 of our constitution, the extension of that after the release of the members of Parliament will have be with the concurrence of the elected members. ""The chiefs agree that his excellency the President has the sole authority to appoint the council of advisors and that some of his advisors maybe selected from the group led by George Speight. ""The chiefs agree that his excellency the President be requested to exercise his powers to pardon all those who participated in the possible takeover of Parliament and the kidnapping of the people's coalition government."""

" Aboriginal leaders, who today met the Prime Minister in Sydney, say an ideological split remains one of the key stumbling blocks in the reconciliation process. The meeting comes ahead of this weekend's Corroboree 2000 Walk for Reconciliation in Sydney. The delegation spent close to an hour-and-a-half with the Prime Minister in his Sydney office. Afterwards, chairman of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission Geoff Clark said Mr Howard appeared interested in discussing the differences between an agreement and a treaty. But he says the Prime Minister is driven by popular mandate. ""He finds comfort in believing the mandate is necessary and at this particular stage he doesn't believe the mandate exists,"" Mr Clark said. However, Mr Howard says the meeting was positive. ""I think we should focus on the things that unite us in this area rather than the things that divide us,"" he said."

" The Prime Minister, John Howard, denies he pressured the Treasurer into not walking across the Sydney Harbour Bridge during Corroboree 2000. Mr Costello will not take part in the walk, despite earlier indicating he might. Corroboree 2000, to be held this weekend, marks the handover of the declaration prepared by the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation. Mr Costello says while he will not walk on Sunday, he will attend the main event on Saturday. He says he supports the Government's decision to have two ministers officially represent the Government in the walk. ""I've discussed this with the Prime Minister and I'm comfortable with the decision of the government, which is that [Aborginal Affairs Minister] Senator Herron and [Reconciliation Minister] Mr Ruddock will represent the Government, and I'm entirely comfortable with that,"" he said. Mr Howard says he is not stopping any coalition MP's, including Mr Costello, walking across the bridge. ""There's no ban on anyone, on anybody walking. He's his own man and he takes his own decisions,"" he said."

" Mr Howard says the future for reconciliation in Australia lies at the grassroots community level rather than with political leaders. Mr Howard held talks in Sydney today with key Aboriginal leaders to discuss the reconciliation process, ahead of Corroboree 2000. He says the talks were positive, and he is hoping the weekend events will mark another step towards reconciliation. But he says reconciliation needs the ongoing involvement of the community. ""We all recognise that reconciliation is essentially a people's movement, it's essentially something that has to happen in local communities between individual Australians,"" he said. ""It's not something that can be mandated from some kind of political heaven, it's something that has got to actually occur in the ground amongst people in their hearts and minds."""

" Meanwhile, singer with the Aboriginal band Yothu Yindi, Mandawuy Yunupingu, says the best result to come out of this weekend's national reconciliation event would be a treaty between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians. Mr Yunupingu will be staging a concert in the remote Northern Territory community of Nhulunbuy this weekend, as part of reconciliation events. He says Corroboree 2000 in Sydney will go some way towards reconciliation. ""Even if there's no result, I will think that the struggle will continue and I will be involved in that struggle,"" he said. ""I think that the end result, I would think, is a treaty that will be independently pushed or endorsed by independent groups of people from Australia. I think that's my opinion of the whole thing."""

" The company which operates an internet site, blamed for a murder trial being aborted in Victoria, says it has launched a new version of the site. Governments in three states have expressed concern about the contents of the website, which contains a database on Australian criminals. Yesterday a Supreme Court judge discharged a jury after the defence counsel expressed concern at outdated information about the accused. However managing director of Crimenet, Ken Shultz, has rejected calls to close the website, saying it uses information from media archives. He says visitors to the updated site must state if they are jurors on a trial before they can access information. He says new ways of updating information from courts are being investigated. Mr Shultz says the site is being used as a scapegoat in the trial. ""I've looked up the record of that particular person and there were no visits to that site, to that record, from the time the trial began so I'm convinced that no juror did in fact look up the record,"" he said."

" The Australian Cricket Board has named a Sydney-based barrister as its special investigator into claims of match-fixing. Greg Melick, 50, comes to the job after 25 years in the legal profession, including a recent four year stint with the National Crime Authority. Meanwhile, one of the cricketers who blew the whistle on Pakistani match-fixing has spoken for the first time about the life ban given to former Pakistan captain Salim Malik. Former Australian spin bowler Tim May, along with Shane Warne, was the first to claim publicly that match-fixing was a problem on the sub-continent. But he says now that the findings of a judicial inquiry have been released his emotions are mixed. ""The overall emotion is probably one of sadness that a cricketer has been banned for life for his association with match-fixing,"" he said. ""We're talking about a bloke, Salim Malik, who was captain of his country and a wonderful cricketer."" And, Indian cricket faces a major crisis after Manoj Prabhakar finally went public overnight with a claim that Kapil Dev offered him a bribe to throw a match in 1994. Prabhakar told a website it was Kapil who asked him to play badly in a one-dayer against Pakistan in Sri Lanka. The admission is in line with Indian cricket chief Inderjit Bindra's revelation to CNN this month that Prabhakar told him it was Dev who had attempted to bribe him."

" The shelving of a float of the telecommunications company, Vodafone, has cast further doubt on the fund-raising ability of Australian new technology companies. Vodafone says volatility in world markets has forced the postponement. Vodafone is the second telco in two days to delay its float with ComVergent taking the same decision due to the volatility, especially in telecommunications and media stocks. In another sign of the market's new cautiousness, Peter Morgan of Perpetual Funds Management, says the big investors are opting strongly for firms with existing cash flows and a good track record. ""A lot of these newer companies, high flying companies, haven't yet shown the ability to generate profit so they've got no retained earnings and they can't really go to a bank,"" he said. ""When uncertainty comes into the marketplace they're going to find it difficult in what is now going to become a competitive environment to raise capital to keep them going."" Today, the money earmarked for Vodafone has instead flowed into rivals, Telstra and Cable and Wireless Optus, both substantially higher. Overall, the All Ordinaries index added nearly 8 points, to just under 2,980, in cautious trade. Meanwhile, a stronger-than-expected recovery in business investment during the March quarter gave the Australian dollar an initial boost. Capital spending rose by a seasonally-adjusted 9.4 per cent, while projections for the next financial year are now 6 per cent higher than at this time last year. Heavy selling this afternoon has pushed the currency back again, to around 56.6 US cents, down 0.25 cents since this morning."

" Lebanon's border remains peaceful despite new tensions as Hezbollah guerillas and Israeli soldiers face each other across a narrow 'no man's land'. The United Nations is now racing against time to deploy a new peace keeping force in areas now controlled by Hezbollah guerillas. The past day has seen none of the artillery exchanges or Israeli air strikes that have been part of daily life until now. But the stability of that peace is strained by the proximity of Israel's enemies, with the Hezbollah and Amal militia at the border. Today has been declared a national holiday in Lebanon to celebrate the end of Israeli occupation with thousands expected to stream to the border fences. Left behind by the speed of the shift in military balance, and with south Lebanon now already heavily occupied by Hezbollah forces, the United Nations is faced with the problem of how and where to deploy the expanded peacekeeping force it is now organising."

" Fiji's Great Council of Chiefs will meet for a third day today to continue discussions on a proposal by the President, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, to end the hostage crisis. They are reported to be deeply divided. At one stage their chairman, Sitiveni Rabuka, told the media the chiefs had given unanimous support to Ratu Mara. But other sources at the meeting have revealed that is far from true. Overnight, offices of a company formerly headed by rebel leader George Speight were burnt down in a a suspected arson attack. The offices belonged to Fiji Hardwood Corporation, which last year sacked Mr Speight for alleged misappropriation of funds. An official of a security firm said a guard saw a person throw a firebomb at the offices then run away. -------------------------------"

" The Middle East has a new flashpoint with Israeli and Hezbollah soldiers face to face across the Israel-Lebanon border. Israel today learnt at close range just what its military withdrawal from Lebanon means. Armed Hezbollah guerillas and Lebanese civilians faced Israeli soldiers just metres across Israel's northern border. Following Israel's pull-out its ally, the South Lebanon army, has ceased to exist in the space of two days. Its headquarters in Marjoyoun were looted today. The Hezbollah flag flies from most cars, buildings and the former Israeli stronghold, Beaufort Castle. With its enemies in Lebanon at such close quarters Israel's Prime Minister, Ehud Barak, has warned Syria and Lebanon that any attacks on Israel will be seen as an act of war. ------------------------------"

" A judge in the United States has ordered the Justice Department to submit an alternative plan for breaking up the software company, Microsoft. Judge Thomas Jackson told the department's lawyers to immediately revise their plans for changing the company's anti-competitive conduct. Observers say a new break-up plan might mean splitting Microsoft into three parts instead of two, one being strictly for its Web browser. The Justice Department and 17 of the 19 states that filed the initial complaint against Microsoft had proposed splitting the company in two. One part would sell operating systems and the other that would develop and market Microsoft's popular Office software and Internet properties. ------------------------------"

" New consumer research indicates the Federal government has so far failed to hit home with its messages on goods and service tax (GST) compensation through tax cuts. The latest reading of consumer attitudes has been undertaken by the Melbourne Institute. The Melbourne Institute's survey findings have been released this morning and show most consumers have not so far been influenced in their spending patterns by the new tax system. Any that have are most likely to have cut back on spending. On average, households are under-estimating the extent to which they will be compensated for the GST by income tax cuts and higher social security benefits. The survey indicates the bulk of consumers believe the GST will increase prices and they are over-estimating those rises. ----------------------------------"

" A late and sizeable rally has rescued United States technology shares from further falls overnight. The catalyst for the late-session turnaround appears to have been an announcement from Intel Corporation that it will be stepping up production. After yesterday's 6 per cent slump, the Nasdaq composite index has recovered from being a further 3 per cent behind to close 3.4 per cent in front. In points terms, the index has finished 106 higher at 3,271. Broader Wall Street market measures have also climbed back after early losses. The Dow Jones industrial average has risen 113 points to 10,535. That is a rebound of just under 1.1 per cent. The US bond market has lost ground. The weaker prices have pushed up the yield on 30-year Treasury paper to 6.20 per cent, a rise of four points. In Britain, sharemarket trade has featured strong demand for banking stocks. But UK technology stocks have failed to recover falling a further two-percent with trade closing before the late rally in New York. London's FT-100 index has ended 32-points higher at 6,119. Yesterday in Asia, there was widespread weakness on the region's main exchanges. The Japanese market dipped to a 12-month low, with investors wary about the signals coming from Wall Street. Tokyo's Nikkei index lost 274 points to 16,044. In Australia, News Corporation and technology stocks dragged the overall market modestly lower. The All Ordinaries index closed 14 points down at 2,972. Overnight trade on the Sydney Futures exchange is into the final few moments. Just before 7:00am AEST, the Share Price Index contract was up 24 points on yesterday's day settlement at 3,025. The 10-year bond contract is down two points at 93.55, with the implied yield rising to 6.45 per cent. The Australian dollar is little changed on the night. Just before 7:00am AEST, it was was being quoted at around 57.05 US cents, down less than one-tenth of a cent on yesterday's local close. On the cross-rates it was at 0.6305 euros, 61.55 Japanese yen, 38.66 pence Sterling and against the New Zealand dollar it was at 1.258. The gold price is at $US273.55 an ounce. Oil and West Texas crude is at $US29.89 a barrel. -----------------------------------"

" Pakistan's long awaited judicial investigation into match-fixing in cricket has recommended former capitain, Salim Malik, be banned from the game for life. Six other players have also been fined, including all-rounder, Wasim Akram. Justice Malik Mahommed Qayyum cleared the Pakistani team as a whole of planned match-fixing and betting but says doubts hang over the integrity of some individual members. The 149-page report says evidence supports allegations by Shane Warne and Mark Waugh that Salim Malik tried to fix matches. Justice Kyung calls for a life ban on the former Pakistani captain from any cricketing activity. Chair of the Pakistani Cricket Board, General Taquir Zia, says Pakistan's military rulers are leading the world in cleaning up cricket. It is recommended that four other players be fined more than $3,000 each for not cooperating with the judicial commission. And two players, including former captain Wasim Akram, are due to pay fines of $10,000. ---------------------------------"

" The bitterly divided US House of Representatives has voted to grant China permanent trade privileges. The decision has handed President Bill Clinton a major victory in his final year in office. Giving Beijing permanent normal trade relations (PNTR) cuts US tariffs on Chinese goods to the level enjoyed by all but a handful of nations and is a key component of a landmark Sino-US trade accord signed last November as part of China's accession to the World Trade Organisation (WTO). One Republican representative did not vote in the 435-member House, which voted 237-197 in favour of the measure. ---------------------------------"

" The Northern Territory's Stolen Generations Aboriginal Corporation says it is sticking with its decision not to take part in National Reconciliation events in Sydney this weekend. Corroborree 2000 is being hailed as a major step towards reconciliation and will mark the launch of the National Document for Reconciliation. The Stolen Generations Corporation announced earlier this month it would not go to the event, saying it could not stand beside a government which has undermined the concerns of Aboriginal people. The Federal Government has ruled-out supporting key elements of the national reconciliation document, to be presented at Corroboree 2000. The document refers to an apology, but the government says it would prefer to make an expression of sorrow and sincere regret. The group's Maurie Ryan Japarte says reconciliation cannot be achieved until there is a formal apology to the Stolen Generations. ""I will not be going down to Sydney because it does not say an apology from Mr Howard,"" Mr Japarte said. --------------------------------"

" New South Wales turned on the razzle-dazzle with five second-half tries to inflict Queensland's heaviest defeat and win the State of Origin rugby league series at Lang Park in Brisbane last night. Trailing 4-0 at halftime, the Blues were irrepressible with skipper Brad Fittler, scrumhalf Brett Kimmorley and replacement Andrew Johns in superb form. The victory gave the Wayne Pearce-coached NSW their ninth series win to level Queensland with one series drawn of the 19 played. The Blues had the better of play in the first half, but impatience cost them tries as Mat Rogers kicked Queensland into the lead with two penalty goals. But it was all NSW in the second half before 39,000 fans. Fittler surged through to plant the ball down one-handed five minutes after the interval to give the Blues the lead for the first time at 6-4. Queensland's hopes of levelling the series after losing the opening match in Sydney a fortnight ago rose when backrower Gorden Tallis rampaged through to score and retrieve the lead at 10-6 in the 50th minute. But the intervention of Johns off the interchange bench proved decisive for NSW. In the space of five minutes from the 60th to the 65th minutes, the Blues stormed on three converted tries. Centre Shaun Timmins had some good fortune when a kick ahead rebounded back into his arms to score and three minutes later a bullet Johns' pass put Scott Hill over. A wonderful interchange of passing mesmerised the Queensland defence with Johns and forward Ben Kennedy handling twice before David Furner scored wide out for Ryan Girdler to convert for 24-10. Queensland huffed and puffed in the final 15 minutes but could not breach the NSW defence, and the Blues were rewarded with their fifth try in the final minute off an intercept by Girdler, who interchanged passes over 70 metres with winger Adam MacDougall. It was Queensland's heaviest defeat in the 20-year series. The final match of the series will be played in Sydney in a fortnight with Queensland bidding to prevent a series clean sweep. ----------------------------------"

" Fiji's Great Council of Chiefs is continuing deliberations on how to resolve the six-day-old political crisis. Despite calm in the capital, police have moved in to prevent violence in other parts of the country. Eight men have been arrested and will appear in court in the northern town of Lambassa for allegedly attacking families in two nearby villages. An elderly man is currently recovering from knife wounds he received in the attacks. Meanwhile, the Fiji Canegrowers Association will be asking the Australian and British governments to consider repatriating Indo-Fijian canefarmers. The association says racial tension in Fiji is partly due to Indo-Fijian farmers being unable to have their leases renewed by land owners. The association says the farmers were orginally brought to the country to work for the Australian company CSR and says both governments should now take some responsiblity for the situation. Australia's Immigration Minister Phillip Ruddock says the Government is watching the situation in Fiji very closely. But he says there is no suggestion that the crisis ought to be dealt with by way of evacuation or resettlement of people from Fiji. ""There are a number of people here in Australia on a temporary basis,"" he said. ""We will continue to manage their presence against the backdrop of what has happened in Fiji but my expectation is that given it is a dynamic issue, one that we are likely to see a resolution [of] fairly shortly, that one ought not to be rushing to judgement about what needs to be done."""

" There is mounting business criticism of a goods and services tax (GST) price-guide from the Competition and Consumer Commission. It is claimed the booklet raises unrealistic expectations among consumers. The National Tax and Accountants' Association says the commission has not considered that rents will rise, not minimally, but by up to 9 per cent, in line with higher new house prices. It says the current buyers' strike and discounting, mean new cars will not fall by nearly 8 per cent after July 1. Similarly, it says the commission is wrong in tipping significantly cheaper TV's and videos as price-cutting is already occurring. Paul Drum, of the accounting group, CPA Australia, which has released its own price planner aimed at small business, says if viewed in isolation, the commission's guidelines could be misleading. ""Self-assess, make sure you're not going to take a profit margin loss as a result of following industry averages which are very generic,"" he said."

" Meanwhile, the Federal Opposition has attacked the government for hiring a former campaign advertising guru to oversee its commercials on the GST. It has been revealed at a Senate estimates hearing that Mark Pearson's company has been paid $195,000 to run its GST ads. The Government's communications director, Greg Williams, has confirmed Mr Pearson ran the Liberal Party's 1996 and 1998 election campaigns. Labor Senators on the committee, including Robert Ray, say the Government is guilty of a political rort. ""There's two points, of how Mark Pearson happens always to get on these lists, and the second thing is even if he does, how such a politically biased bunch can actually select him having worked hand in glove with him in the two previous election campaigns and pay him $195,000,"" Mr Pearson said. ""We can see the results on our screens right now, it's a political advertising campaign."""

" But the Government's Senate leader, Robert Hill, rejects allegations of a conflict of interest. ""The fact that he has worked previously for a political party which they were involved [with] doesn't amount to a conflict of interest,"" he said. ""You can say it amounts to an association, professional association, and that was apparently reported."""

" The Immigration Minister, Phillip Ruddock, has rejected claims of a possible mass suicide by illegal immigrants. There have been reports 100 people of Middle Eastern origin at Curtin Detention Centre are planning to take their own lives. They are reportedly demanding their applications for asylum be processed more quickly. But Mr Ruddock says he is unaware of any mass suicide pact. ""I know nothing which would substantiate a view that we are likely to experience a mass effort on the part of some people to take their own lives,"" he said."

" The Premier of Western Ausrtalia, Richard Court, says illegal immigrants will not improve their chances of staying in Australia by threatening suicide in detention camps. Immigration officials have confirmed there has been tension among Middle Eastern boat people at the Curtin Dentention Centre near Derby. Mr Court says he has no sympathy with those complaining as they are here illegally, but it would be a tragedy if something happened. ""No one should committ suicide. If they don't like the place get out,"" he said. ""I mean they have made a conscious decision to illegally come into this country and they are not in a very strong position to be calling the shots."""

" More than 1,000 long-distance truck drivers have voted to strike nationally, until their concerns about wages and safety are addressed. The Transport Workers' Union national president, Hughie Williams, says members have voted against taking blockade action, but have agreed to set up roadside protests around the country. ""We have had a national telephone hookup and we are setting up rendezvous areas in various centres around Australia,"" he said. ""In Brisbane here, we have got probably up to 100 trucks parked in a rendezvous area at the Gailes weigh bridge and our drivers are digging in for the week. ""Its creating quite a spectacle bringing it to the public attention and the dispute is escalating right around Australia."""

" The Israeli Army has announced it has withdrawn its last soldiers from Lebanon. Israeli attack helicopters are now flying over South Lebanon destroying their military infrastructure there. So hurried was the Israeli withdrawal that their new planned border fence is not near completion and there are reports that large quantities of weapons and equipment have been left behind at outposts. Israeli helicopters have returned to the battlefield to blow up outposts, also firing missiles into their former command post, the Crusader. More than 1,000 Israeli allied South Lebanon Army (SLA) soldiers and their families are still waiting to cross into refuge in Israel to join 2,500 already there. Israel's Prime Minister Ehud Barak has written to UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan warning that Syria has been preparing the ground for further violence in South Lebanon."

" Scientists who witnessed the birth of a volcanic island in the Bismark Sea near the Solomon Islands have described the sight as a once in a lifetime experience. CSIRO geologist Dr Brent McInnes says the research vessel Franklin sailed to the area expecting to explore an undersea volcano, only to find the island of Kavachi in full eruption. Dr McInnes says the volcano was exploding every five minutes, shooting a fountain of ash and molten magma up to 75 metres in the air, with a 500 metre plume of smoke. He says it presented world scientists with a unique opportunity. ""We got together a science team, an international science team, from New Zealand, from Canada, from the United States, from the Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea and we all got together and we decided how can we maximise our time here,"" he said. ""We deployed all of the instruments at our disposal and we did the first all round study of a submarine volcano in eruption."""

" The Australian Cricket Board (ACB) will ask South Africa's cricket chief tonight whether he will take action over new allegations of match-fixing. Former South African team advisor, Ashley Mallett, has gone public with claims of suspicious South African tactics and player selections during the Sydney Test against Australia in 1998. ACB chief executive Malcolm Speed says he will consider referring the allegations to Australian police. ""The people who the Australian police would want to interview I suspect would be the South Africans and they're in South Africa,"" Mr Speed said. ""It may be at this stage we're better to leave it with the South African inquiry and see what comes out of that, but it's a good point and I'll have a look at that."""

" Fiji's political hostages remain locked up in the parliamentary complex as the Great Council of Chiefs prepares for a second day of talks aimed at resolving the crisis. Coup leader George Speight says he is disappointed the council has thrown its weight behind the country's President Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara. The council affirmed what chairman Sitiveni Rabuka described as unanimous support for Ratu Mara, although he said there was considerable sympathy for ordinary Fijians' complaints reflected in three recent protest marches and a petition to Ratu Mara. An admittedly tired coup leader, George Speight says he is now waiting to hear what the council decides about his proposals to end the crisis. But the council will also discuss Ratu Mara's own plan of action. The council meeting resumes as the secretary-general of the Commonwealth, Don McKinnon, and special UN representative Sergio De Mello arrive in Suva to meet Ratu Mara later this morning. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" United Nations peacekeepers in south Lebanon say it is unlikely that there will be an explosion of violence as the 22-year Israeli occupation nears its conclusion. Close to 4,500 troops from nine countries are starting to patrol areas freed by the ongoing Israeli withdrawal Israel is warning Syria that it will target its military inside Lebanon in the event of attacks on its territory by Hezbollah guerrillas. Meanwhile, the United Nations Security Council has endorsed a plan to verify the Israeli withdrawal. The UN Security Council has endorsed tough conditions for maintaining its forces in Lebanon following the withdrawal of Israeli troops. Above all UN secretary-general Kofi Annan has called for explicit commitments for the safety of UN personnel. Mr Annan told the council, the UN would not confirm the Israeli withdrawal demanded by the UN since 1978, until the Israeli-backed South Lebanese Army had been dismantled and its weapons removed. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The number of complaints and inquiries about price exploitation under the goods and services tax (GST) has surged in the months leading up to the introduction of the new tax. The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) received more than 3000 complaints in the first quarter of the year. In January, February and March the ACCC was receiving calls on its GST hotline at an average rate of 230 a day. There were 3300 complaints and just over 6000 inquiries. The application of the GST to insurance policies was the biggest single cause of complaints, followed by general retailing. A large number of complaints were also lodged against the government, supermarkets and the building industry. Meanwhile, the ACCC has reported that cuts in the wholesale sales tax on TVs, videos, watches and hi-fi equipment last July have produced average price falls of 7.7 per cent, which is higher than the forecast range of 5 to 7 per cent. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The head of the Indonesian armed forces at the time of last year's Timor violence, retired General Wiranto, says the scale of militia violence has been exaggerated. He was speaking after spending several hours at the Attorney- General's office in Jakarta. Prosecutors were questioning the former general over the unchecked rampage of pro-Indonesian militia units in East Timor, before and after the independence vote. Mr Wiranto says apportioning blame would be easy, especially since the violence has been greatly exaggerated. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" As investors once again dump technology names, the Nasdaq composite index has fallen nearly 200 points, sinking to its lowest close since last November and erasing nearly all its spectacular gains. ""All the risks are on the table now,"" said Richard Cripps, chief market strategist at Legg Mason in Baltimore. ""We have rising interest rates, an effort to slow the economy and high valuations. Other than than lower stock prices, there's nothing to bring investors back."" According to preliminary calculations, the Nasdaq fell 199.52 to 3,164.29. The Nasdaq had not closed that low since November 10, 1999, when the index was in the earliest stages of its dramatic ascent. With today's losses, the Nasdaq is a stunning 37 per cent below its March 10 closing record of 5,048.62. According to preliminary calculations, the Standard and Poor's 500 fell 26.90 to 1,373.82. Declining issues outnumbered advancers by a six-to-five margin on the New York Stock Exchange, with 1,596 down, 1,346 up and 482 unchanged. NYSE volume totalled 862.23 million shares as of 4:00pm local time, versus 863.21 million in the previous session. Once again, the weakness in technology stocks undermined the broader market. The Dow Jones industrial average, which flirted with positive territory at several points, finished down 120.28 at 10,422.27. Broader stock indicators were also lower. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Thousands of workers at Toyota's Victorian plants have been ordered to stay home, with an industrial dispute shutting down the car manufacturer. Toyota says it will lose $11 million a day, despite being an innocent bystander in the dispute between parts manufacturer, Socobell and the Manufacturing Workers Union. The dispute, over a picket line outside Socobell's Spotswood premises, will be heard in the Federal Court this morning. Toyota's Ross Morten says the company was forced to stand down its workers. ""It's obviously not a decision we take lightly,"" Mr Morten said. ""We delayed making that decision until the last possible moment so we would urge people to get back talking to each other and get back to work so that we can start building cars again and our workforce can be back and gainfully employed."" --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The 26-year-old daughter of Japan's former prime minister Keizo Obuchi is to run for Parliament. The former prime minister died of a stroke last week after six weeks in a coma. Yuko Obuchi says she decided to succeed her father in Parliament when she saw his body returned to her family home. At 26 years of age, she is as old as Keizo Obuchi himself was when he stood for his father's seat. Politics runs in families in Japan. The country's Finance Minister had a father, uncle and brother in Parliament. Japan's Foreign Minister had a father, an uncle and now has a son in Parliament and the leader of Japan's Opposition had a grand-father, a great grand-father and now a son in Parliament. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Both Queensland and New South Wales go into tonight's second State of Origin match at Lang Park confident of victory. New South Wales is one up in the best of three series, winning the first match 20-16. Queensland coach Mark Murray says there has been enormous pressure on the Blues' halves, Brett Kimmorley and Andrew Johns, which could be used to the Maroons' advantage. ""There's been a lot of media about them in recent weeks, who should be the half, the starting half, how the coach is going to use them and they're obviously both desperate to be their number one half back for their state and their country,"" Murray said. ""So I think there'll be a bit of nerves and bit of pressure on both the sevens."""

" There has been a security alert at Nandi airport in Fiji following the discovery of ammunition in a package. Fiji TV is reporting one dozen rounds of ammunition was found in a package left at the airport, to be delivered to the western town of Lambasa. No arrests have been made. Meanwhile, the Great Council of Chiefs meeting is about to resume its discussions aimed at resolving the impasse over the hostage situation at Parliament. President Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara is still at the meeting, but no details have emerged about the proposals being debated. The proposals were presented in a traditional manner accompanied by whale's teeth. The atmosphere inside the meeting is believed to be cordial. The Papua New Guinea Government says the international community should exercise restraint in its response to the attempted coup in Fiji. Foreign Minister John Kaputin told the PNG Parliament there are complex factors that have led to the crisis in Fiji and any response must carefully take them into account. Sir Kaputin says there is no place for violent acts in the process of bringing about political change and the events in Suva cannot be condoned. But the PNG Foreign Minister says the nations of the Pacific should respond carefully to the crisis. ""A sustainable outcome must be just and respect human rights, while taking account of the legitimate interests of all sections of the community,"" he said. ""Those of us on the outside view the current situation with concern, should be sensitive to the complex variety of issues involved and exercise self restraint."" -------------------------------"

" Australia's Internet industry has spoken out against the Federal Government's planned 12-months moratorium on Internet gambling. At a public forum held in Canberra today, the Internet Industry Association claimed Australia is already leading the world in regulatory initiatives. The association claims Internet gambling in Australia has been met with a serious lack of understanding. Members say a year-long moratorium will cost Australians millions of dollars and drive all potential online companies off-shore. They are also concerned a freeze will see a loss in employment and a significant fall in state and territory taxation revenue. The government's announcement of an attempt to stop the issuing of new licences intensified after two permits were issued in the ACT last week. Since then five more companies have pre-empted a moratorium and have been granted licences in Tasmania. Members of an Internet association taskforce today said a number of harm minimisation measures, including player exclusion, betting limits and gambling warnings have already been extensively reviewed. --------------------------------"

" The profit performance of Australian companies remains healthier than expected. Corporate earnings have reached new highs in the latest quarter. The latest snapshot of Australian companies' profitability is for the March quarter. Australian Bureau of Statistics figures show that before tax, interest and appreciation, company profits totalled $16.7 billion. The seasonally adjusted outcome represents a rise of 3.4 per cent, and compared with a year ago profits are 21.5 per cent. The mining, construction and wholesale industries have registered some of the biggest increases in the latest period. The improvement comes despite higher fuel costs, rising interest rates, a pick-up in wage costs and a moderation in economic activity generally. -------------------------------"

" The Olympic torch is continuing its journey across the Pacific today with a stopover in Palau. Palau is the second of 13 Pacific stops for the torch, ahead of its arrival in Australia on June 8. The torch arrives in the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) tomorrow, where Jim Tobin from the FSM Olympic Committee says the emphasis will be on youth. ""Most of our torch bearers, around 90 of them, are under 21 and they are athletes,"" he said. ""We decided since we were one of the newest countries in the Olympic Federation [that] we'd let our future elite athletes...[carry] the torch."" ----------------------------------"

" Three men walked away uninjured when a pilot made an emergency landing on a Gold Coast beach this morning. The pilot guided his light plane onto sand at Tugun, after the aircraft lost power. Witnesses praised the skill the pilot showed. Andrew Pappas, who was jogging on the beach at the time, watched the plane's silent descent from 600 metres and says the pilot made a perfect landing. ""Within a split second, the pilot turned the plane towards the beach, he was very low and there was no way he was going to make it to the airport,"" he said. ""So I think that split second decision he made, it's fantastic and the landing was absolutely perfect. ""He only touched the sand three times. The only worrying thing - there was a guy fishing here and the plane was headed straight for him, and the guy did not know that the plane was there,"" Mr Pappas said. ""He just continued on fishing and not even hearing the plane at all."" ------------------------------"

" The Melbourne Aquarium will replace large sections of its airconditioning system, blamed for Australia's worst outbreak of legionnaire's disease. The company in charge of the operation, Norman Disney and Young, says the water cooled unit will be replaced by an air cooled system. Company director Stuart Fowler says work on the new system will start at the end of the month. He says air cooled systems are not susceptible to the legionella bacterium. ""Given what occurred at the Aquarium, the Aquarium wanted to make a very positive statement to the public, in relation to future legionella threat, and has decided to take the step of completely replacing the water cooled system of the plant with air cooled plant,"" Mr Fowler said. ----------------------------------"

" Australian swimmer Grant Hackett says he does not think he can beat world record holder Ian Thorpe in the 200 metres freestyle if he is chosen for the event at the Olympics. Hackett is expected to replace Michael Klim who has indicated he wants to pull out of the 200 metres to concentrate on other events. He says although he will always try to win, his real goal is gold in the 1,500 metres freestyle. ""I don't think over 200, I mean realistically I'm a 1,500 metres swimmer,"" he said. ""I train for the distance, I haven't got the physique or [I'm] not able to get to the gym or build up my muscles to have that sort of strength and speed going out. ""To be honest, I don't want that sort of speed going out because it will sacrifice my 1,500 a bit."""

" The fate of Fiji's Government may rest in the hands of more than 50 native chiefs from 14 provinces, who meet this morning outside the capital, Suva. They will consider whether or not to support the coup led by businessman George Speight, which has been condemned by President Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara. Mr Speight believes native Fijians support his actions and has threatened to kill the hostages he is holding in the national Parliament, including Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry. He still claims to have massive support to have control of the country returned to indigenous Fijians. ""I've made it very clear that I have a clear objective in mind, I'm not going to sway from it,"" he said. Meanwhile, the Papua New Guinea Trade Union Congress has backed opposition to the coup by unions in Fiji. Congress president Reg McAllister says trade unions around the region are opposed to the coup."

" A split has emerged in Federal Cabinet over plans to give the Commonwealth power to veto projects which emit high levels of greenhouse gases. The Federal Government has developed a plan which would require it to approve any project that would increase carbon dioxide levels by 500,000 tonnes a year, such as power stations. It is part of the government's commitment to reducing greenhouse emissions under the Kyoto Protocol, and was a promise made last year in return for the Democrats' support for the goods and services tax. The Environment Minister, Robert Hill, whose department drew up the proposal, says he supports the emission threshold. Senator Hill says the 500,000 tonne threshold is equivalent to 10 per cent of the average annual increase in Australia's greenhouse emissions, and therefore of national environmental significance. But at least one other Cabinet Minister, Deputy Prime Minister John Anderson, is opposed to the plan. He says federal involvement will only add to the complexity and delays for new development projects and could deter business investment in Australia. Mr Anderson says there are better ways to cut greenhouse emissions which would have less impact on rural Australia. ===================================================================="

" The Federal Treasurer Peter Costello has announced a new tax deduction for small to medium-sized businesses to help them cope with the goods and service tax (GST). Mr Costello revealed the new tax break while attempting to answer industry concerns over the GST. Treasurer Peter Costello announced a new tax deduction for small and medium sized business while addressing around 1,000 industry representatives in Sydney Monday night. Businesses which order plant or computer equipment to help administer the GST by June 30 and have it installed within one year can claim the cost of it as an immediate tax deduction. Mr Costello says there will be no need to depreciate the equipment. ""You don't have to depreciate it over three years, four years, seven years - whatever the life of it is, it will be immediately tax deductable over the 1999/2000 year."" The Federal Government says the tax deduction applies to business with a turnover of up to $10 million. ===================================================================="

" Hundreds of frightened Israeli-allied militiamen have streamed across the Lebanese border seeking asylum from Israel after Hezbollah guerrillas over-run their abandoned outposts in occupied south Lebanon. ""Hundreds of South Lebanon Army (SLA) men and their families are crossing the border in Tormus some 10 kilometres west of Kiryat Shmona and in two other border crossings,"" a military spokesman said. ""They are flocking into Israeli army posts on the border and their fate remains unknown,"" he added. Among the asylum seekers are five SLA officers and their families, who fear reprisals after Israel ends its 22-year occupation of Lebanon. ""The army is extremely concerned about the fate of the South Lebanon Army and it is reassessing the situation in light of Hezbollah provocations,"" another military official said. Zvi Rish, an Israeli lawyer representing SLA asylum seekers, says has received many calls from fleeing Lebanese who ""fear for their lives"" and has petitioned the Israeli supreme court seeking a ruling as soon as possible. Mr Rish said the court ordered the government to respond to the petition early Tuesday and to explain how it plans to resolve the problem of the asylum seekers. A date for a hearing had not been set. ===================================================================="

" At least half a dozen bodies wearing uniforms of United Nations peacekeepers have been discovered in Sierra Leone. The discovery raises fear thatthe dead may have been among 500 hostages orginally taken hostage in May by rebels after a dispute about disarmament. The position of the remains at the site and the nature of some of the injuries suggest that the possibility of summary executions cannot be ruled out. Government forces found the bodies just north of Rogberi Junction, about 87 kilometres north-east of the capital, Freetown. David Wimhurst, spokesman for the UN mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL), has viewed film footage of the bodies and acknowledges that circumstantial evidence indicates they might be peacekeepers, but advises caution. ""What we need to do is investigate more thoroughly before we can confirm anything as to the identity of these men who have been killed,"" he said. ""There are UN emblems on the uniforms attached to the bodies and there are blue helmets on the scene, but we also know that our uniforms were taken by the RUF (Revolutionary United Front) when they captured the Zambians (peacekeepers) so it makes identification at this point very difficult,"" he said. ""What seems clear is that these men, whoever they are, were deliberately killed."" Several distinctive UN blue battle helmets were found at the scene, one with a bullet hole in it. Some of the uniforms had clearly identifiable UN patches on them as well as Zambian national badges and badges of rank, and at least one Zambian military ID card was found at the site. UN officials say it may not be known for sure whether the bodies are those of missing peacekeepers until all the hostages are released and it is determined who, if anyone, is missing. ===================================================================="

" Doctors for former Indonesian president Suharto have stopped the latest round of inquiries into his 32 years in power because of problems with his blood pressure. Mr Suharto's chief lawyer says the former president's blood pressure began to rise when he was asked about the issuing of presidential decrees requiring civil servants to donate a portion of their wages to charities he once controlled. The lawyer says Mr Suharto became confused and could not comprehend the question. However, the inquiries will resume later this week. Indonesia's Attorney-General says the former president will be charged some time before August 10 for either corruption or abuse of power. The Attorney-General says if the Suharto family does not start cooperating with authorities soon, he will downgrade security around the former president."

" Sir John Gielgud, one of the most towering stage presences of the past century for his portrayal of Shakespearean characters, has died at the age of 96. Tributes flooded in for an actor whose performances in classical theatre, film and television entranced audiences around the world and whose blunt speaking off stage startled even devoted friends. The British actor, whose voice was described by Sir Alec Guiness as ""a silver trumpet muffled in silk"", died peacefully at his country home near Aylesbury, north-west of London on Sunday. Sir John's lawyer, Ian Bradshaw, said he had been working until very recently and he was in relatively good health. His agent, Paul Lyon-Maris, said he was still hard at work a month ago, filming a Samuel Beckett play called Catastrophe in London. It was ""incredibly impressive"" that he had continued working until the age of 96, he said. ""He never suggested stopping."" Most recently, Sir John appeared in a production of Merlin about the legendary wizard, for a British television channel. In 1998 he starred in the film The Titchbourne Claimant. Sir John once told friends he would like to die on stage in the middle of a good performance and also said he dreamed of playing Methuselah on his 100th birthday. ""What appeals is a good part with a couple of good lines, a good entrance and a good exit. I like a bit of limelight on me,"" he told Reuters at the 1994 opening of the West End Theatre renamed in his honour. Sir John's biographer Sheridan Morley said he was the last of a classic generation of actors with Laurence Olivier, Ralph Richardson and Peggy Ashcroft. British theatre writer Ned Sherrin said Sir John would always be considered the definitive Hamlet. ""He was the greatest actor and his life was exactly the history of the British theatre in the last century,"" he said. Despite acclaim as the finest speaker of Shakespearean verse in British theatre, Mr Gielgud never rated himself very highly. ""I managed to graduate from being a kind of romantic juvenile into an adequate character actor which was a great joy and gave me enormous scope,"" he said. He moved easily from stage to screen, winning acclaim for many character roles including a 1981 Oscar for best supporting actor as Dudley Moore's butler in the comedy Arthur. His other films included Julius Caesar, Oh, What a Lovely War, The Elephant Man, Chariots of Fire, Gandhi and The Charge of the Light Brigade. Sir John's lawyer said a private funeral was planned for family and friends. ===================================================================="

" Australian swimming head coach Don Talbot says he expects to get confirmation from Michael Klim today that he wants to pull out of the 200 metres freestyle at the Olympics. Talbot says Klim wants to concentrate on individual 100 metre events and he supports the move. ""All his events will be 100s now which he feels he can do better [in] and I understand,"" he said. ""He's going to be in the 4x100 metres freestyle relay, the medley relay, and I said to him `what about the 4x200 relay?', `do you want to be considered for that?', and of course he does [he said] `yes, yes, yes'."" Grant Hackett wil replace Klim in the individual event when Klim confirms his withdrawal."

" Fiji's President has hinted that Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry may not continue in the role, as major talks get under way in Suva tomorrow to resolve the hostage crisis. The President has also called on the coup leaders to release the hostages and surrender. President Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara will take to tomorrow's crucial Great Council of Chiefs meeting a proposal to end the four-day crisis. He would not reveal any details but said no one should assume that Mr Chaudhry would continue as Prime Minister. ""I cannot give you that assurance. What I intend to do is to talk to them and say that you've seen what has happened, what is your possible solution for it?"" he said. He said whatever action follows tomorrow's talks would have to be in line with the constitution and he was not inviting Mr Chaudhry to resign. He told a media conference he expects the full support of the Great Council of Chiefs when it meets tomorrow. Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara reiterated he was in charge of the country, under the terms of the State of Emergency as executive president, and not who he called the ""militant terrorist group"" in parliament. He said he was surprised to hear coup leader George Speight had been driven around Suva in a police car in the early hours of the morning and said it was a matter he was looking into."

" Meanwhile, Fiji's Deputy Prime Minister has called on the Great Council of Chiefs to oppose the attempted coup. Adi Kuini Bavadra Speed was speaking from her hospital bed in Canberra, where she is receiving treatment. Adi Kuini say the chiefs must distance themselves from a shameful act of violence by criminal thugs. ""This attempted coup must not succeed. The Fijians have already suffered from the effects of the 1987 coups, that is why they elected the Chaudhry Government,"" she said. ""Fiji's economy relies on cooperation between Indo-Fijians and the indigenous Fijians. ""The chiefs must show leadership and wisdom at this critical time,"" Ms Speed said."

" Fiji's Police Commissioner, Isikea Savua, has warned that the leader of the political hostage takers in Fiji, George Speight, will be arrested if he again steps outside the parliament compound. Meanwhile, details are emerging of reports that the gunmen this morning pointed a gun at the head of Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudry. Journalists inside the parliamentary complex say the incident happened mid-morning, when Mr Chaudry was escorted outside. Armed security guards heard scuffles nearby and fearing an attack, threw the prime minister to the ground, pointing a gun at his head. He was later taken inside. His condition is unknown. Journalists say the report is being confirmed by two politicians inside the complex including the deputy prime minister. The incident indicates the coup leaders' resolve to carry out an earlier threat that they will shoot their captives if attacked."

" As the stand off continues police and security forces have tightened the net around the hostage takers and their captives. The police have imposed a one kilometre cordon around parliament house, restricting Mr Speight's access to publicity and his supporters outside of the parliamentary complex."

" Fiji's High Commissioner to Australia, Isoa Gavidi, says he may stand down in protest if Fiji's Council of Chiefs supports Mr Speight. The council is due to meet tomorrow to discuss their response to Mr Speight's actions. The Great Council of Chiefs is reportedly split between chiefs from the west, who have condemned Mr Speight's actions and some from the east, who have expressed varying degrees of support. Mr Gavidi says he is unsure how many chiefs support Mr Speight, but if a majority stands by him, he will consider standing down. ""It will depend on the government that comes into power, whether they want me to remain and in the end, it will be a personal decision on my part,"" he said. ""I think I'll make the decision when it comes but really in the end, it is a personal decision that one has to make. ""I'll consider, but I think like I said earlier, I'll cross that bridge when I come to it,"" Mr Gavidi said."

" Air Pacific has cancelled one of its flights from Sydney to Fiji today because the flight would have landed after the curfew imposed on Suva. Passengers on the flight, which would have landed in the capital, have been transferred to an earlier flight which will land in Nadi later this afternoon. Air Pacific says 500 people flew from Australia to Fiji yesterday, although almost 100 decided to cancel their flights."

" Taxpayers are to fork out around $30,000 to install new curtains in the Prime Minister's office at Parliament House. The Labor members of a Senate Estimates Committee have questioned the Secretary of the Joint House Department, Mike Bolton, about the cost of new furnishings in the Prime Ministerial suite. Mr Bolton has told the Committee that new, longer curtains are needed to replace built-in furniture which was removed some time ago. He has acknowledged the curtains will be expensive. ""The job was made up of round about $7,000 in consultancy fees because there was air-conditioning issues to be addressed and some lighting and issues to be addressed in the office as well, to allow us to hang these curtains appropriately,"" he said. ""The supply and fabrication of the silk and the scrim curtains was $7,300, and then the actual building works needed to do it all was in the order of $15,000."""

" About 500 hundred workers have gathered outside the Federal Court in Melbourne to protest against the Federal Government's third wave of industrial law changes. The rally was called in response to the Federal Government's proposal to amend the Workplace Relations Act to restrict industry-wide agreements. Earlier, the Federal Court heard directions on penalties for three Metal Trades Federation of unions officials, found guilty of contempt of court after a series of stopwork meetings last November. Dean Mighell is one of those officials. ""This is about the Workplace Relations Act, it's about bad law, it's not about the courts,"" Mr Mighell said. ""It's about bad law and defending basic trade union rights of workers to be able to meet."" The labor movement has interpreted the proposed amendments as a direct response to Campaign 2000, the push for an industry-wide agreement in the manufacturing industry."

" A Nepalese Sherpa has slashed the record time to climb Mount Everest by more than four hours. Sherpa Babu Cheri reached the summit of Mount Everest after an overnight climb, lasting 15 hours and 56 minutes. It was his 10th successful ascent without bottled oxygen. The previous record of 20 hours and 24 minutes was set by another Nepalese Sherpa two years ago. Babu Cheri's record breaking climb was an attempt to raise funds to set up a school in the Everest region, where there are very few basic health and education services. Before setting out, Babu Cheri said that because he had never had the opportunity to learn to read and write, he wanted to establish as many schools as possible for children in the area."

" Parents from both state and independent schools have hit out at the level of government funding for schools. An 11-year-old is dead and a mother of three is fighting for her life after a fireworks display accident at a school fete north of Brisbane on Saturday night. Both the Parents and Friends and Parents and Citizens (P and C) Associations say they are being forced to raise more and more money to equip schools with the basics. P and C Association president Chris Jones says it is not through choice that parents raise funds. ""It is unfair...it is unequitable and we're constantly saying the state system needs to be realistically funded, so P and Cs can concentrate on adding the little extras,"" she said. ""So we can enhance students' opportunities to education and to be involved in what the education is being offered at the school...to focus on other things apart from fundraising."""

" Reserve Bank Governor Ian Mcfarlane has dismissed concerns about the bank's political independence. The governor is being scrutinised by a federal parliamentary committee in Melbourne about interest rates and the economy. The Reserve Bank recently said that political comments about interest rates, may have contributed to the plunging Australian dollar in January. The criticisms were widely seen as targeting John Howard. But today Mr Mcfarlane said he had no problems with either the Prime Minister or Treasurer commenting on interest rates. He rejected suggestions the board's independence is compromised as it includes a government appointee, Treasury Secretary Ted Evans. Labor MP Mark Latham asked why, in its four rate rises since November, the Reserve Bank had never mentioned the goods and services tax (GST). In reply, Mr Mcfarlane said the GST is not going to lead to higher inflation. ""We're saying it's going to lead to a lift in the price level and that that has gone into this particular measure of inflationary expection,"" he said."

" A wayward bachelor seal in search of food and a partner wound up in a suburban Launceston backyard this morning. The 200-kilogram seal was spotted yesterday in a paddock near the lower reaches of the North Esk River. Wildlife officers had hoped he would leave on high tide last night. But this morning some Waverley residents woke to find the big male in their yard. Parks and Wildlife Officer Luke Bonde says the seal had crossed the Tasman Highway via a culvert overnight. Mr Bonde says under veterinary supervision the disoriented mammal was tranquilised and returned to the sea at George Town."

" In Fiji, doctors have returned to parliament to check on the health of Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry, who remains a hostage for a third day in an attempted coup. Some of the captive politicians were released this morning after they signed documents of resignation, apparently under duress. Mr Chaudhry is reported to have suffered leg injuries during a fall as gunmen were taking him to a separate room in the parliamentary complex. His injuries prompted calls for an ambulance and hospitalisation. But the self-appointed Prime Minister, George Speight, refused access to outside doctors. Mr Chaudhry was then treated on the spot by assistant Health Minister, Dr Chand. Another 10 Indo-Fijian politicians have been released after signing a resignation document, leaving more than 12 hostages in the parliament. Rajendra Chaudhry, the son of the Prime Minister, this morning agreed to sign his resignation document, paving the way for his release. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Israel's Prime Minister, Ehud Barak, has cancelled a trip to the United States following a week of violent clashes between Israeli troops and Palestinians and increased violence in Lebanon. Mr Barak was to meet US President Bill Clinton to try to advance Israeli-Palestinian peace talks. The past weeks have seen a surge of violence in the territories, with four Palestinians killed and hundreds injured, including some 20 Israelis. In towns around the Palestinian areas, thousands of demonstrators have thrown stones at police, who returned fire with rubber-coated steel bullets. More than 100 injuries were reported in all. In the West Bank town of Ramallah, clashes escalated after it was announced that a Palestinian man who was shot in the head by Israeli troops on Friday had died. The Israel-Lebanon peace process has also stumbled, with Israeli warplanes raiding the base of a radical Palestinian group north of Israel. Four members of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command were killed in the raid on the organisation's base. Lebanese military sources say the attack on the base also destroyed an arms dump and a number of military vehicles. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" China appears to be making small but significant peace overtures to the new pro-democracy administration in Taiwan. The moves come a day after the inauguration of President Chen Shui-bian in Taiwan. In his inaugural address, Chen Shui-bian promised that unless there were a renewed prospect of war, Taiwan would not become independent. Nor would it advocate the contentious two states policy that sparked the latest round of cross-straits tension, he said. While an English-language response from China maintained a hard line, the Chinese language version appeared far more conciliatory, even hinting that President Chen's concessions were enough to resume a cross-straits dialogue. No timetable was suggested but China observers are saying it is the most positive development on Taiwanese tensions in more than two years. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A fireworks explosion at a school fete in Brisbane has claimed the life of an 11-year-old girl and left seven people with serious injuries. It is believed a wayward firework triggered an explosion at the Holy Spirit School in the Brisbane suburb of Bray Park. Police spokesman Brian Swift says police will continue their investigation of the blast today. ""It was somewhat chaotic for the officers who first arrived,"" he said. ""Fortunately there were a couple of off-duty police officers in the crowd and also, I understand, a couple of off-duty ambulance officers who immediately rendered assistance, as did other qualified people in the crowd, and calm did decend fairly quickly."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Tamil Tiger guerrillas claim they have captured a key town in northern Sri Lanka, amid reports of heavy losses on both sides. The rebels say thay have taken Chavakachcheri on the Jaffna peninsula after a 12-hour battle and have also reported the heavy bombing of a crucial government air base at Palali. Government reinforcements are being sent in to defend the town. The Tamil Tigers are reporting an intense bombardment campaign of the crucial Palali Airbase but the government says there have only been a few mortar rounds fired into the harbour on the northern edge of the Jaffna peninsula. The Sri Lankan forces rely heavily on the Polali airbase for supplies of troops and equipment. The military says it is determined to hold on to Jaffna and has sent in new weapons systems to try to shore up its defences. Even though there is no fighting in central Jaffna, residents are continuing to flee the town. Humanitarian groups are urging both sides to steer clear of 500,000 civilians living in and around the battle zone. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" After an 11-day relay around Greece, the Olympic flame has been officially handed over to the Sydney Organising Committee for the Olympic Games and it is now on its journey to Sydney. The Olympic flame began its epic journey to Australia in a ceremony that was high on both fanfare and emotion, despite being brief. Before girls dressed in traditional ancient Greek togas and hundreds of school children carrying the flags of the countries that will participate in the Olympics, the flame was handed over to Sydney representative, Chris Harchner. Mr Harchner thanked Greece for giving the world the Olympic flame and the 1 million Greeks who had chosen to make Australia their home. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" New research shows immediate treatment of needle-stick injuries can reduce the chance of developing HIV infection by nearly 80 per cent. The research by the Australian College of Dermatologists shows early treatment of diseases such as HIV and hepatitis B can significantly reduce the rate of infection after injury. The best results are obtained if treatment - usually a course of medication - begins within an hour or two. The chances of acquiring HIV can be reduced by as much as 79 per cent if treatment begins within 48 hours of the injury. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The political hostage crisis in Fiji is now into its fourth day, after the country's self-proclaimed prime minister George Speight refused a chance to give up gracefully. Armed gunmen are still holding Fiji's top parliamentarians prisoner. At a late night media conference, Mr Speight produced a letter containing the amnesty offer from President Ratu Sri Kamisese Mara. He said the conditions were that he accept the 1997 constitution and Mahendra Chaudry as Prime Minister. ""If I were to do that I would actually be going against the very will of the indigenous people of Fiji on whose behalf I executed the coup,"" Mr Speight said. Security has been tightened around Parliament and television cameras have been banned from within one kilometre of the complex. However, in an extraordinary move, the coup leader was seen taking a tour of Suva during the night. He also claims he will take over government offices today. Meanwhile, a minister in the Fijian Government will ask the Australian Government to play a bigger role in the crisis. Fiji's Education Minister, Pratap Chand, who is in Canberra, wants to meet Prime Minister John Howard and other ministers. Mr Chand, who flew here from Vanuatu when the coup occurred, says Australia could strengthen its condemnation of the coup. He said he would like an Australian representative to assess first-hand, the health of the hostages. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Israel has suspended peace talks with Palestinian negotiators in Sweden because of continued violence in the Palestinian territories. While Israel has halted the talks, US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright insists final status peace talks have not been abandoned. Dr Albright said the ongoing violence was hurting the talks, but that progress towards a final peace deal was still being made. But the second channel of talks in Stockholm was effectively closed by the Israeli Government just hours after a two-year-old girl was seriously injured in a petrol bomb attack in the West Bank. During 10 days of clashes, six Palestinians have died and about 600 have been injured. But US National Security Advisor Sandy Berger, who is in Israel, warned that calls for the peace process to be abandoned were misguided and could lead to worse violence. ""For those who believe the situation can endure more or less as it is, I say this, the alternative to a peaceful compromise is not the status quo, it is something very different and I am convinced far worse,"" he said. Meanwhile, reports say Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat has closed an independent Palestinian television station in the West Bank for alleged incitement to violence. The Palestinian Prisoners' Club says the Watan television station in Ramallah was closed and its director arrested over allegations that it had incited violence against Israelis. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Rebels in Sierra Leone have freed 54 more UN peacekeepers, leaving about 270 still being held captive. The release comes as United Nations secretary-general Kofi Annan recommended widening sanctions against the rebels and strengthening the UN peacekeeping force in Sierra Leone. The BBC's Mark Devenport the security council has already raised the strength of the beleaguered Sierra Leone peacekeeping force from 11,000 to 13,000. Now, Mr Annan proposes the addition of two infantry battalions, a logistics battalion, a light artillery unit, helicopter gunships and armed patrol boats. The reinforcements would expand the UN force to 16,500 military personnel. The secretary-general believes this will be sufficient to enable the UN to gradually deploy forward, but not to take over the strongholds of the rebel Revolutionary United Front (RUF). He says if the mandate of the UN soldiers is changed to authorise them to impose peace throughout the country, then the number of peacekeepers would need to increase yet again. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Queensland Government is considering a total ban on all fireworks until a coroner's report is released on a tragic incident which claimed the life of an 11-year-old girl. A fireworks display at a school fete north of Brisbane malfunctioned on Saturday night, sending shrapnel into a crowd of people. Mines Minister Tony McGrady has ordered a ban on the use of metal equipment in displays until the report is finished, but he says he can go further. ""I must say that yesterday we contemplated a total ban until the coroner's inquiry came down with the finding and we declined to take that action,"" he said. ""However, it is still an option which myself and the government could consider."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Intense fighting has continued in northern Sri Lanka as Tamil Tiger rebels have attacked government forces ahead of a Norwegian peace mission. A Norwegian envoy is due in Sri Lanka later today for talks with the Sri Lankan President as the rebels claim to have captured a key town in the Jaffna Peninsula. The government says extra troops and arms are being rushed to defend the town. In a statement issued from their London office, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam said they had captured Chavakachcheri on the weekend, 15 kilometres east of Jaffna town. The statement came as a senior army figure insisted his men will not leave Jaffna and will push back the Tigers' recent offensive. Observers say the army is struggling to hold back the rebels. The Tamil Tigers have demanded government troops withdraw by the end of the week to avoid the continuing bloodbath. Thousands of residents have already fled Jaffna and the International Red Cross is visiting refugees sheltering in school buildings outside the town. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Olympic torch arrived in Guam early this morning at the start of its journey across Oceania. Guam is the first of 13 Pacific countries that will host the torch before its reaches Australia on June 8. Shaun Gumataotao of KUAM TV says Guam is right behind the event. ""Everyone is well aware of it,"" he said. ""Roads, they're not going to be closed believe it or not for the relay, they are still going to have traffic going through, one lane will be dedicated to the relay, but all the motorists have been warned. ""Of course everyone is expected to be at Adelupe Park for the community celebration...about 20,000 people are expected to be on hand to attend the event."" The Olympic torch will be in Guam for a day, before it is flown on to Palau for the second leg of its Pacific journey. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The romantic novelist Barbara Cartland has died at her home after a brief illness, her son Ian McCorquodale has announced. Cartland, 98, was a prolific author of more than 650 books, most of them formulaic romantic stories, and a staunch defender of old-fashioned values. Towards the end of her life, Cartland's celebrity was enhanced by virtue of her becoming the step-grandmother of Diana Princess of Wales, whose father Earl Spencer married Cartland's daughter Raine. In 1991, Cartland was made a Dame Commander of the British Empire. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australia's most successful doubles pair, Todd Woodbridge and Mark Woodforde, have added another string to their bow by equalling the record 57 titles held by Bob Hewitt and Frew McMillan, and Peter Fleming and John McEnroe. In the final of the Tennis Masters Series Tournament in Hamburg, Woodforde and Woodbridge beat fellow Australians, Wayne Arthurs and Sandon Stolley, 6-7, 6-4, 6-3. Woodbridge and Woodforde, who helped Australia to last year's Davis Cup triumph over France, can now go in search of the win they need to bag the record for themselves at the French Open later this month. They reached the final at Roland Garros in 1997 but have yet to win the event. Woodforde, from Adelaide but now based in California, and Woodbridge, from Sydney, have clocked up a host of grand slam doubles triumphs - nine in all, including a record five straight Wimbledons between 1993 and 1997. They were also gold medallists at the 1996 Atlanta Olympics."

" The Fijian President, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, speaking on Fijian radio has declared a state of emergency. He says today's actions are not in accordance with the constitution and they are therefore unlawful. Following the address, Fijian Radio broadcast a message from the military command, calling for all troops to attend the Queen Elizabeth barracks. Meanwhile, Professor Brij Lal, the head of the School of Pacific and Asian Studies at the Australian National University, says the coup leaders are hiding behind claims that Fijian people are dissatisfied with the Government. ""What is important is to find out precisely what these people want, what is their agenda, what kind of government, what kind of constitution do they want,"" he said. ""I think it's important to find out and important to realise that this group does not really speak on behalf of anybody."""

" The Department of Foreign Affairs has urged Australians in Fiji to remain indoors and to contact the Australian High Commission. The Department of Foreign Affairs has warned Australians in Suva to stay indoors, or if they must travel, to avoid the Parliament building and any large public gatherings. Meanwhile, new reports from the Fijian Parliament indicate that Mr Chaudhry's ministers have been divided into ethnic Indians and others, and locked up in two rooms. Coup leader George Speight has declared that everyone inside the Parliament building is safe and no one has been harmed."

" The Federal Government is seeking to introduce legislation to ban Internet gambling sites in Australia for at least 12 months. All states bar Western Australia and New South Wales have agreed to suspend any development of online gaming for 12 months. Acting Communications Minister Peter McGauran says it is an issue which demands careful consideration. ""During that moratorium period we would look at the possibility, feasibility and desirability of a permanent moratorium,"" he said. But the Federal Government's ban comes on the heels of the ACT approving two licences worth about $200,000 dollars each. Community Services Minister Jocelyn Newman has accused the capital territory of wanting the the double mantle of pornography and gaming capital of the nation."

" The Northern Territory's Gaming Minister says he is seeking legal advice about the Federal Government decision today on Internet gaming licences, and what it means for the sale of the TAB. The federal government will legislate to put a moratorium on any new Internet gaming licences, effective from today. Tim Baldwin says it is a 'head in the sand' approach, and he believes bringing in player protection regulation is the way to go. He says the exisiting licence for Lasseters in Alice Springs will not be affected, but it is not clear what the decision means for other licences the government was planning to issue. ""That puts us in a very invidious situation because we have contractual commitments,"" he said. ""Let's look at the sale of the TAB for instance, what does that mean for that? And we'll be seeking legal advice on the extent of what this announcement is today."""

" Australia and South Korea will upgrade their political ties in an effort to boost trade relations The Prime Minister John Howard and the Korean President, Kim Dae Jung, have struck an agreement in Seoul for annual meetings to be held between their foreign and trade ministers. A free trade association between the two countries will be explored as part of the dialogue. Mr Howard says he recognises that Korea's restrictions on agricultural imports have been a long-term irritant in the relationship. ""As leader of the Cairns Group, Australia is still very committed to agricultural trade liberalisation, a point I made to the President,"" Mr Howard said. ""But we must nonetheless take what bilateral opportunities there might be and certainly explore them to expand trade and investment links between our two countries."""

" Earlier, the Prime Minister of South Korea resigned. Park Tae Joon had been found guilty of evading tax. Park Tae Joon was found to have hidden his ownership of property and shares worth $8 million when he was chairman of South Korea's governing party in the late 1980s and early 1990s. A member of the Opposition since the election of dissident Kim Dae Jung as president in 1997, Kim invited him to join the Government as Prime Minister in February this year. President Kim has accepted his Prime Minister's resignation."

" The New South Wales Electoral Commissioner has cancelled the registration of Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party in the state. Commissioner John Wasson has issued a three paragraph statement, saying he is satisfied on reasonable grounds that the 1998 registration of the party had been obtained by misrepresentation. Mr Wasson says the requirement of a party having 200 members was misrepresented at the time, as there was no admittance of the members in accordance with the party's 1998 constitution. He says the recovery of monies paid to the party by the Election Funding Authority is a matter for that body. The ABC's state political reporter in Sydney says the ruling does not constitute grounds for disqualifying One Nation's David Oldfield from sitting in the New South Wales Upper House."

" The New South Wales One Nation MLC, David Oldfield, has attacked the State's Electoral Commissioner who today cancelled the party's New South Wales registration. Mr Oldfield says he is not personally liable for the almost $880,000 that may have to be repaid in electoral funding following the Wasson ruling, which will be fought. ""Well, John Wasson is someone who makes a decision himself out of hand under the Act,"" he said. ""He hasn't done it to anyone else nor has his predecessor done it to anybody else despite the various and clear evidence that perhaps it should've been done. ""I think John Wasson is just doing his job and like a lot of people when they do their job they get it wrong sometimes - and today John Wasson is wrong."""

" US computer virus experts are warning of a new, more destructive variant of the 'Love Bug' computer virus which has started spreading. Dave Perry from anti-virus company Trend Micro says computers at several large US companies have been infected. Like the 'Love Bug', the new virus arrives in an attachment to an email. But it cannot be detected by a particular subject line because the virus mutates and the line changes to a random word or phrase every time a computer is infected."

" Veteran Australian breaststroke swimmer Samantha Riley will not make a decision about her future in swimming for at least another fortnight. Riley has told a news conference she is disappointed she has not made the Australian team for her third Olympics. Riley missed selection in the 100 and 200 metre events for the Sydney Games, and now says she wants time to think about her future."

" Newcastle-based disabled swimmer Gemma Dashwood has lashed out at organisers of Sydney's Olympic Swimming trials, saying they have treated Paralympic trialists with contempt. Dashwood was one of six disabled medalists who had their medals taken from them, after it was discovered there was a shortage of medals. Gemma Dashwood says she felt humiliated by the process, and the entire event has been poorly run. ""The whole meet has just been disgusting,"" she said. ""I've been near to tears a couple times the way we've been treated by the media, and the cameras. We've been told we can't go anywhere near the cameras. ""I get told to step back if I'm anywhere in shot and it's just an insult when we go out for our finals which are just as important as Olympic selection trials because they're our selection trials as well."""

" A 27-year-old Carina man has been fined in Brisbane's Magistrate Court after sending threatening e-mails to a woman who rejected his cyberspace advances. Jevon Antony Ingram, who called himself ""Sam Lush"" in the e-mails, pleaded guilty to offensive use of a telephone line. The court heard Ingram sent a suggestive e-mail to a woman calling herself ""The Mistress of the Green Dungeon"". The woman, Brisbane journalist Jennifer Dudley, sent a reply saying she was not interested, but she continued receiving his e-mails until reporting him to his Internet Sevice Provider who shut down his account. The court heard Ingram then threatened to bash her up, have her pack-raped, and kill her. When interviewed by police Ingram denied sending the e-mails, but later confessed after a search of his house. He denied having any intention to carry out the threats, and was fined $400 with no conviction recorded."

" The Fijian Parliament has been taken over by a group of armed men. Radio Fiji reports that around 8:00am (AEST), seven armed men burst into the parliament in Suva, locking prime minister Mahendra Chaudhry, other cabinet ministers and members of parliament, in the upstairs chambers. The men were dressed in plain clothes and armed with rifles. Shots were fired in the parliament and the gates to parliament have been closed. The drama comes as the Indian-dominated government of Mahendra Chaudhry celebrates one year in office. Also today, opposition parties had planned their third anti-government march in a bid to try and force Mr Chaudhry from office. Last night, police foiled an attempt to burn down the Girmit Centre, a memorial to the first indentured labourers brought to Fiji, in the western city of Lautoka. --------------------------------"

" The ACT Government is defying the Commonwealth and has granted two Internet gambling licences. Canberra based ACTTAB and national company Tattersalls are the first recipients of ACT interactive gambling licences which come at a cost of $200,000 each. Treasurer Gary Humphries says he expects a number of other company's will now lodge licence applications. He says the Federal Government's moratorium was not supported by the majority of jurisdiction and does not comply with ACT law. ""The ACT Gambling legislation was passed back in 1998,"" Mr Humphries said. ""We've been working since then towards the licensing of the online providers and that's now occurred. ""And we see no reason why that should change because the Federal Government is talking about a moratorium,"" he said. ---------------------------------"

" Ansett says it will conduct a full inquiry into a nose-wheel collapse on a jet at Sydney Airport this morning. The airline says no passengers were on the Boeing 747, which tipped onto its nose in a parking bay while engineers were working on it. No-one was injured. Ansett's Rita Buccheri says a minor hydraulic leak was being attended to when the undercarriage locking device was accidentally removed. ""Our safety record has been excellent, this has been a minor incident that has occurred during routine maitenance work,"" she said. ""Ansett is treating it extremely seriously and we'll be conducting a full inquiry."" ----------------------------------"

" An Albanian refugee forced to return to Kosovo from Australia last month, has described the situation there as being worse than it was during the war. The man, who wanted only to be known as Visar, said the day they returned to Kosovo, one woman was killed and since then, at least 10 of the refugees have been murdered. He says water and food is scarce, jobs are hard to find and many people have nowhere to live. He has implored the Australian Government to come good with a promise to send someone to Pristina to help them. ""So many people I know are still waiting. We have a form but we don't know how to fill it, they promised us a man to help come help us fill the forms,"" he said. But Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock says the government's hands are tied until the Albanian Association identifies who it actually wants to sponsor. ""And when we have those sponsorships from the organisation, we can then deal with the people and when we have a sufficient number of people for us to process matters, we will then arrange for one of our officials to go to Pristina from Athens to enable that to occur,"" he said. ---------------------------------"

" Long distance truck owner-drivers have launched a national campaign for better pay and conditions at a rally in Melbourne this morning. The Transport Workers Union says drivers who own their own trucks do not receive award wages, and are sometimes forced to wait months to get paid. They are seeking enforceable cartage rates, payment within 14 days and the licensing of transport and freight forwarding companies. Union state secretary, Bill Noonan, says the industry has operated this way for a long time, but the situation has got worse. ""Long distance owner-drivers are basically being ripped off,"" he said. ""They have no enforceable cartage rates, they're not being paid in a reasonable time period after the work is performed and they're dealing with people, who are not licensed in the industry and of course, there is no control over them relative to payment methods etcetera."" --------------------------------"

" The independent forecaster Access Economics says the Prime Minister's comments on interest rates have increased pressure on the Australian dollar. But its director Chris Richardson says he agrees with Mr Howard's analysis that Australia does not have to follow every interest rate move in the United States. Mr Richardson says he believes the dollar has further to fall, and will probably reach 54 US cents before the Reserve Bank intervenes. But he says the more the issue is batted around by the bank, the Treasury and politicians, the more the financial markets will bid the dollar down. ""It tends to be a red rag to the market bull when politicians say that there's no particular need for interest rates to rise here,"" he said. ""Certainly, with US rates likely to rise further, markets are looking for Australia to follow suit."""

" The Prime Minister and the Treasurer have defended their right to comment on interest rates, despite claims Mr Howard's remarks have helped drive down the value of the Australian dollar. The Opposition says loose talk has added to the likelihood of an interest rate rise. The Prime Minister yesterday supported the head of the Federal Treasury, who had suggested Australia did not have to follow every US interest rate move. This was interpreted by the markets as a sign of Government pressure against another rise. Mr Howard says he makes no apology for talking about monetary policy and will continue to do so."

" The Treasurer, Peter Costello, has told Perth radio 6PR the markets do not appreciate that Government comments have no bearing on interest rates. ""The bank is independent and once that is properly understood, that should give Prime Ministers and Treasurers greater freedom to speak on these particular issues,"" he said."

" The Prime Minister has been confronted by 200 angry staff and students at the opening of James Cook University's new library in Cairns. Staff were protesting against management's enterprise bargaining tactics. The Prime Minister's official vehicle was herded through the chanting crowd by a strong police presence, which then formed a barricade in front of the new library. As Mr Howard delivered his speech, the crowd continued to chant, asking for improved staff conditions and pay. The crowds' chants turned to cheers when senior lecturer Ian Jackson was escorted from the opening ceremony by police. Dressed in his academic robes, he was arrested for an outburst during Mr Howard's speech. The Prime Minister was whisked away from a rear entrance to the airport, where he boarded a plane for Korea."

" AMP's board has told shareholders it takes full responsibility for the events of last year. What is expected to be a fiery Annual General Meeting has begun in Melbourne. Stan Wallis, who has been AMP's acting chairman since last month's dramatic board overhaul, acknowledged shareholder concern over what he called a difficult and challenging year. He defended the $13 million payout to former chief executive George Trumble as having averted potential severe management disruption if the matter had gone to court. On the disastrous hostile takeover of GIO, which bequeathed AMP more than $1 billion in re-insurance losses, Mr Wallace conceded the anaylsis of that business was deficient and the board's judgement was wrong in pursuing an aggressive bid. But Mr Wallace says AMP has learned from its mistakes. ""The board of AMP, ladies and gentlemen, takes full responsibility and accountability to what happened in 1999,"" he said. ""In seeking to resolve the issues and problems of the past, we have taken strong and decisive action to put AMP back on track."""

" Federal Treasurer Peter Costello has described the republic issue as unfinished business, which Australia will return to. Mr Costello, who campaigned for a ""yes"" vote in last year's referendum, says he remains convinced the symbols of the constitutional monarchy need to be changed for the 21st century. He has told Perth radio 6PR, the push for a republic is similar to his campaign for tax reform. ""Change is a hard thing,"" he said. ""Gee, I know, I've been through this tax change; everybody's in favour of tax reform but the change, accomplishing the change is a hard thing. ""It's the same on the republic, you might have a view about where people would like to end up, but getting there and the mechanics of it is very, very difficult,"" Mr Costello said."

" Meanwhile, Mr Costello does not believe any business will fail as a consequence of the goods and services tax (GST). Mr Costello says if businesses go to the wall it will be for other reasons. ""There are businesses that get into difficulty for all sorts of reasons,"" he said. ""It may be that sales are down, that markets have changed and businesses will rise and fall as they always have, but I don't think that there'll be businesses that will founder because of the GST."""

" An elderly man died last night from legionnaire's disease. The 73-year-old was a patient at the Frankston hospital. A hospital spokeswoman says while the case is not yet officially linked to the outbreak at the Melbourne Aquarium, the man did walk past the building last month. His death is the fourth from legionnaire's disease in the last few weeks in Melbourne."

" The Queensland Children's Commission website has been shut down, after an Oppostion Parliamentarian revealed it has links to sites containing information about drug use and pornography. Alan Grice told Parliament today that the material includes a cartoon called 'The Crack Babies' and five recipes using cocaine. ""That depicts children in nappies, talking of oral sex, talking of prostitution, talking of brutal murder of a policeman by a child with a gun and a child with a knife and finally I table five recipes for using cocaine in Auntie Millie's breakfast crack,"" Mr Grice said. Families Minister Anna Bligh ordered the Commission to immediately close down the website, pending a review of all its links. ""It is regrettable, the material is offensive, the site has been removed this morning,"" she said. ""These things happen from time to time given the nature of the global web, most of the material on the web is in fact very, very useful for families and children and it will hopefully be restored as quickly as possible."""

" The US space shuttle Atlantis, with the Sydney Olympic torch on board, is preparing for launch tomorrow night on its long-delayed fourth mission to the future International Space Station (ISS). With a crew of seven, including a Russian cosmonaut, the shuttle is to begin a 10-day mission to carry out maintenance and other work on the ISS. Earlier, the launch was delayed for a fourth time when high winds swept the space centre at Cape Canaveral. The shuttle will carry the 2000 Olympic torch and flag to the space station, in recognition of the international nature of the Sydney event."

" Swimming coach Don Talbot says Susie O'Neill will have a clearer head going into the Olympics after last night's world record. The Olympic selection trials continue in Sydney tonight. Talbot says he got great satisfaction out of O'Neill's record last night. ""It's probably about time, but I think she can have a much freer time now, a clearer head for the Games. But it was very nice to see it happen,"" he said. Tonight, Sam Riley will swim for a spot on the Olympic team in the 200 metres breaststroke final, along with 14-year-old Leisel Jones and Rebecca Brown. Sarah Ryan is the fastest qualifier for the 100 metres freestyle final, which also features Lori Munz. Matt Dunn is the favourite for the men's 200 metres individual medley final, while Matt Welsh is the fastest qualifier for the 200 metres backstroke final. Scott Miller was quickest this morning in the heats of the 100 metres butterfly. Semi-finals tonight will feature Miller, Michael Klim and Geoff Huegill."

" Susie O'Neill has broken the world record in the 200 metres butterfly final at the Australian Olympic selection trials. O'Neill was always under world record pace and broke the previous mark by 0.15 of a second to finish the journey in 2:5.81 minutes. American Mary T Meagher had held the record for 19 years. O'Neill will thank Petria Thomas, who pushed O'Neill throughout the race and finished second. O'Neill told Fox Sports she tried not to put too much pressure on herself to break the record. ""Yeah, I was starting to wonder and tonight even coming into it I was expecting not to get it so I wouldn't be disappointed,"" she said. Earlier, South Australian Ryan Mitchell qualified for the Games with victory in the 200 metres breaststroke from Regan Harrison who also made the team. Simon Cowley and Phil Rogers were disappointing, finishing fourth and fifth. Sarah Ryan was the fastest qualifier in the women's 100 metres freestyle semi-finals while Gian Rooney was second fastest. Lori Munz, who is attempting to make the Olympics despite a car accident two months ago, finished fourth in her semi-final and just made the final. Samantha Riley qualified for the 200 breaststroke final. Matt Welsh was quickest in the 200 metres backstroke semi-finals. Michael Klim has set a Commonwealth record in winning the 100 freestyle final. Klim recorded a time of 48.56 seconds to win from Chris Fydler. --------------------------------"

" The Australian dollar has hit a new 20-month low, now sliding under its own momentum. Markets are focusing on the relative strength of the United States economy. The latest assault on the local dollar has seen it get down as low as 56.56 US cents in the New York trading session. Not since September 1998 has it been as weak. The level of the dollar has raised concerns about Australian interest rates. But an increase in New Zealand rates yesterday was only followed by a further slump in the dollar there. ---------------------------------"

" Deputy Prime Minister John Anderson has ordered an urgent inquiry into the National Party's Benalla by-election loss in Victoria. Three of the party's state directors, from Victoria, Queensland and New South Wales, will conduct the investigation and report back within a month. They will examine how and why the National Party lost such a safe seat to Labor, in an effort to ensure the loss is not repeated at future by-elections. The seat has been held by conservative parties for nearly a century, but went to Labor after an 8 per cent swing. It is part of a growing effort by the Coalition and the Labor Party to strengthen their hold on rural and regional electorates --------------------------------"

" A Federal Liberal Party backbencher has given the party until August to sort out a preselection row over his seat. The Member for Hume in southern New South Wales, Alby Schultz, fears he may lose his seat to the Finance Minister, John Fahey. Mr Fahey could lose his neighbouring seat at the next election because of an electoral distribution. Mr Schultz has threatened to stand as an independent against Mr Fahey, if the Minister obtains Liberal pre-selection for Hume. Mr Schultz says he has asked the Federal President, Shane Stone, to sort out the situation as soon as possible. ""He agrees with me that the situation is just not good enough, it has to be resolved not only in the best interests of the people of Hume but in the best interests of the Liberal Party and that means that some strong definitive decision has to be made very shortly,"" he said. ""If that hasn't occured in August I will then discuss the matter with the appropriate people and decide on what action I will take from that point on."" ---------------------------------"

" British troops have killed four gunmen in their first clash with rebel forces in Sierra Leone. In a separate incident, rebels killed a United Nations peackeeper and six government troops in a clash, 40 kilometres north-east of the capital, Freetown. Meanwhile, the rebels' leader, Foday Sankoh, has been captured and is being held in an undisclosed location near Freetown. Sankoh was captured by pro-government forces, stripped naked and paraded through the streets before being handed over to the Sierra Leone government, which called in a British helicopter to take the rebel leader to a secret location. The incarceration of the rebel leader provoked spontaneous celebrations on the streets of the capital. Thousands of war weary residents rushed outdoors to cheer and express their relief that the man who has destroyed last year's peace accords is back in government custody. ----------------------------------"

" The death toll from escalating violence in the Maluku Islands in Indonesia has risen to at least 22, after clashes in the provincial capital of Ambon. Many of those killed were thought to have been shot by security forces, trying to keep rival Christian and Muslim gangs apart. Most of the victims died from gunshot wounds. Security forces opened fire to disperse mobs fighting in the city. Among the dead were a 19-year-old policeman and an army soldier. The deaths follow years of bloody sectarian violence that have cost more than 2,500 lives. The governor and military commander of Ambon met with President Wahid to find a way of trying to calm the violence. --------------------------------"

" At least 17 people have been killed in a bomb blast in eastern Sri Lanka, which is thought to have been the work of Tamil Tiger rebels. The explosion occurred near a Buddhist temple in the town of Batticaloa during celebrations marking the holiest day in the Buddhist calendar. The blast came as heavy fighting continued around the northern town of Jaffna. The Sri Lankan military says it has turned back the latest attacks on Jaffna town by Tamil Tiger forces. Officials say at least 39 rebels were killed in their push to recapture the Tigers' former stronghold. Meanwhile, shellings been reported around the army's crucial military air base on the Jaffna peninsula. A ban on journalists entering the battlezone makes independent confirmation impossible and there has so far been no reaction from the Tamil Tigers to the government's statements. ----------------------------------"

" The last two Australians have been bundled out of the singles at the tennis masters series tournament in Hamburg. Lleyton Hewitt was beaten in three sets by Mariano Zabaleta and Richard Fromberg went out on a third set tie-breaker to Wayne Ferreira. For all his achievements this year, it seems Hewitt still has a lot to learn about playing on clay and this match showed it. The Hamburg courts are known to be slightly slower than those in Rome and Paris and following two hours of rain falling onto the uncovered surface, they were even slower, and the balls heavier. Hewitt managed to scrape through the first set, but he lost the first four games of the second and never recovered. When Zabaleta, who looked so much more comfortable on the clay than his opponenet, took the first five games of the decider, Hewitt looked almost out of his depth. Fromberg was always behind to Ferreira, but battled bravely. The South African moved ahead in the final set tie-break winning it 7-2. It was still a good tournament for Fromberg and in light of his current form, he is likely to do well at the French Open which begins on Monday week."

" The Reserve Bank is under further pressure for a fifth interest rate rise, following the latest tightening in the US. The Australian dollar has sunk to a new 20-month low, after US rates were raised to 6.5 per cent. That opens up a gap of 1.5 per cent between US and Australian rates. With investment funds likely to chase higher returns in the US, a falling dollar today is logical, but for dealer, Stephen Shuster it was still surprising. ""Normally the markets would start to factor in the fact that the 50 basis point hike by the US Federal Reserve was already priced into the market and on a day like today it's quite unusual for the market to actually trade to new lows,"" he said. The Australian currency has slumped below 57 US cents. One economist describes the Reserve Bank's next decision as a tortuous one, given Australia's economy is slowing and there's no pressing domestic need for higher rates. Meanwhile, the Prime Minister, John Howard, has said Australia will not necessarily follow the US when it comes to rate increases."

" Federal Treasurer Peter Costello says the 0.5 of a per cent increase in official United States interest rates overnight is an attempt to slow strong economic growth in that country. Mr Costello says the US dollar is obviously very strong, creating problems which impact on Australia and other economies. The Treasurer has refused to speculate on the effect of the US interest rate rise on Australian rates. However, he says it is an indication of a stronger world economy, which means benefits in terms of exports for Australia. ""The authorities in the United States are obviously trying to take some of the fizz out of the equity markets in America,"" he said. ""They're obviously trying to put an influence in relation to growth which will bring it off the boil a little bit, that's obviously what's moved their minds overnight."""

" Unconfirmed reports from Sierra Leone say the leader of the rebel Revolutionary United Front (RUF), Foday Sankoh, has been captured in the capital, Freetown. He is now reportedly being held at a Government military barracks in the city. News of Foday Sankoh's capture is yet to be independently verified, however, reports from Freetown say the RUF leader was snatched from a safe house in the capital by pro-Government forces and taken to a military compound. Witnesses are quoted as saying the rebel leader was stripped naked by his captors and may have been injured in a skirmish. Large crowds have gathered outside the barracks where the rebel leader is reportedly being detained. Over the past two weeks Foday Sankoh's fighters have been engaged in ongoing clashes with Government forces and United Nations peacekeepers deployed to Sierra Leone. However, the Sierra Leone Government says rebel forces have now been pushed back from the outskirts of the capital. In the last few hours 93 UN personnel held hostage by the rebels for more than two weeks arrived back in Freetown after being set free."

" Australia will provide more funding to Sierra Leone to support children separated from their parents during war. The Foreign Minister, Alexander Downer, says Australia will give an extra $750,000 to a program run by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). He says at least 10,000 children in Sierra Leone have been separated from their families, and 5,000 have been abducted and conscripted as child soldiers. Mr Downer says he is deeply concerned by the widespread loss of civilian life in the country, and the detention of UN personnel."

" The Prime Minister, John Howard, has dismissed the latest attack on Australia by his Malaysian counterpart. Dr Mahathir's comments continue a long history of prickly relations with Australian prime ministers. The Malaysian leader's last outburst was in September, calling Australian troops in East Timor ""belligerent"". This time he has accused Australia of being a regional bully, and he says Mr Howard is not welcome in Malaysia. The Opposition leader, Kim Beazley, says Mr Howard cozied up to Dr Mahathir when he first won office and did not direct foreign policy towards national security and opportunity. ""And his failure in that regard is manifest in the performance of the person that he was most obsequious to when he came to office,"" Mr Beazley said. Mr Howard says Dr Mahathir is wrong. Mr Howard is using a trip to South Korea beginning tomorrow as a sign Australia is deeply involved in Asia, and that he is welcome there. ""Korea is Australia's second biggest customer. Our best customer is Japan. The last time I checked they were both Asian countries,"" Mr Howard said."

" Police have ruled out terrorist activity following the discovery of gunpowder in tubes on a Qantas aircraft at Avalon Airport, near Melbourne. A package containing about 13 metal tubes was discovered in the cargo hold of the aircraft during a routine maintenance check last Sunday. Commander Rod Lambert, from the Crime Department, says the gunpowder posed no danger as there was no ignition point. He says forensic tests are underway. ""We don't know why they're there, because we don't know what they're used for,"" he said. ""If someone could tell us what they're used for and that's what we're trying to discover at the moment, really the first purpose of the investigation, we may be able to trace them back and find out whether they've been put there accidentally or deliberately."""

" Meanwhile, Qantas is talking up its safety record, despite a new audit to be conducted by the Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA). Qantas is also dealing with a security issue involving the discovery of gunpowder on one of its aircraft in Melbourne. CASA has widened its scheduled maintenance audit to investigate the company's quality assurance and technical publications divisions. An authority spokesman says the inquiry has been prompted by a CASA review of concerns raised by the US Federal Aviation Administration about Qantas' bearing and seals workshop at Sydney. Qantas deputy chief executive officer Geoff Dixon says the airline has an excellent safety record. ""I think we're in a very, very strong position to defend our safety record and indeed our record as an operating airline over a long period of time,"" he said."

" Staff at a Qantas call centre are angry they were not immediately informed about a suspected legionella infection in the building in Camberwell, in Melbourne's south-east. The Australian Services Union claims workers were not advised for 11 days after positive bacteria samples were taken from cooling towers at the building. Union branch president Martin Foley says the samples were taken after a staff member fell ill with suspected legionnaire's symptoms earlier this month. Qantas says the towers have been thoroughly cleaned and disinfected. It says the staff member concerned is being treated for pneumonia and is undergoing further tests as a precaution."

" Violence is spreading on the Indonesian island of Ambon, with 13 people killed and more than 50 injured, in fresh clashes between the warring Muslim and Christian communities. Among the dead are a 19-year-old policeman and an Army soldier The Indonesian state Antara newsagency reports that most of the victims died from gunshot wounds as security forces opened fire to disperse mobs fighting in the city late on Tuesday and early Wednesday. The 13 deaths follow years of bloody sectarian violence that have cost more than 2,500 lives. The governor and mililtary commander of Ambon are now meeting with President Wahid to try to find a way of calming the violence. Tensions have been heightened in recent weeks by the arrival of 2,000 self-declared ""Jihad Warriors"" who trained with swords and machetes in a camp near Jakarta in recent months."

" The man who was once Indonesia's most powerful military figure has resigned from the government after being interviewed over his role in last year's violence in East Timor. General Wiranto has denied the questioning had anything to do with his decision. He was effectively sacked in February, but he told the media last night his resignation will avoid any future disruption to the Cabinet. The announcement came after prosecutors from Indonesia's Attorney-General's office grilled General Wiranto for the first time yesterday. During the seven-hour interview, he denied any responsibility for the human rights abuses, arguing that the riots followed the pro-integrationists' disappointment at the unfair ballot process in East Timor. In a prepared statement, he maintained that the Indonesian military made a good effort to secure the territory. General Wiranto is among several former generals under investigation by Indonesian authorities."

" Prime Minister John Howard is refusing to buy into a possible preselection row between Finance Minister John Fahey and backbencher Alby Schultz. Mr Schultz is threatening to run as an Independent in the next election if Mr Fahey tries to move in to his seat of Hume in southern New South Wales. He has accused Mr Fahey's supporters of setting their sights on the Hume seat and trying to undermine him since Mr Fahey's own seat of McArthur had its boundaries redrawn. Mr Howard says he is hopeful the matter will resolve itself. ""I don't normally break forth on air about any role I might play in matters like that except to make the obvious comment that whenever you have a redistribution that alters boundaries like this you always get a little bit of tension,"" he said. ""I'm sure it will sort itself out."""

" The president of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), Juan Antonio Samaranch, has asked IOC vice-presdient Kevan Gopser to stay away from torch relay celebrations in Guam. Mr Gosper has also cancelled plans to return to Australia this weekend. Mr Samaranch says Mr Gosper's handling of the torch relay last week was a mistake. It is understood Mr Samaranch told Mr Gosper to keep a low public profile. After meeting each other, Mr Gosper said he was accepting advice given to him, he would be reassessing his busy schedule and now will not travel to Guam next week to welcome the torch into the Pacific. He is the senior Olympic office holder in the region and it is well known he had been determined to attend the function. Olympics Minister Michael Knight says he had nothing to do with Mr Gosper staying away."

" The Western Australian mining giant Anaconda Nickel says the purity of a massive underground water resource, discovered in the state's Goldfields, means it will require minimal processing to make it drinkable. Anaconda says exploration of the Officer Basin 400 kilometres north east of Kalgoorlie has indicated the presence of two-trillion kilolitres of water. Company chief executive Andrew Forrest says the water body, which measures 200,000 square kilometres, will secure the water needs of mining, agriculture and towns in the Goldfields. He says an additional benefit is the low salt content of the water. ""You would put in a simple reverse osmosis plant and I say that because removing salt from something with only 1,000, 2,000 parts per million, is a much simpler process than say from seas water which is 36,000 parts per million,"" he said."

" The Water Resource Minister, Kim Hames, says while the water is suitable for use by the mining and agricultural industries it would need to be desalinated before it could be used for drinking water. Dr Hames says it is unlikely the water would be used by Perth households as there is sufficient demand for the resource in the Goldfields. But he says the metropolitan region will still benefit from the find. ""We send water from Perth to Kalgoorlie and not just water from Mundaring Weir but underground water as well. ""We top it up so if we were able to find alternative water supplies for Kalgoorlie that would also be a significant benefit for the metropolitan region,"" he said."

" Former federal MP Pauline Hanson has officially signed up as a new member of the One Nation party, as part of moves to re-register the party in Queensland. Last year, the Queensland Supreme Court found that Pauline Hanson's One Nation had been fraudulently registered. The party's new constitution was launched at a meeting in Ipswich today. It needs 500 members to register and Miss Hanson says she has already got at least 70 new members on the books. ""This is the launch of it today so all these people in the room now have filled out new membership forms to the party,"" she said. ""Their names will be used as part of the 500 names that will be presented to the Electoral Commissioner. ""So as soon as the requirements are met there, we will be approaching Des O'shea to actually register the party as soon as possible,"" Miss Hanson said. ""If I could take in the 500 this afternoon, I would (laughs)."""

" Meanwhile, Miss Hanson says the ALP's registration of a new party name is a joke. Labor is registering the name Country Labor to capitalise on its growing support in rural and regional areas. Miss Hanson says a name change will not be enough to win over voters. ""I think it's a joke, the whole thing is an absolute joke,"" she said. ""Like I said, do they have to change the name of the party to get anywhere? ""Who are they trying to kid? Same horse, same old nag, the same rider, the same reins, nothing's changed,"" Miss Hanson said."

" Both Coalition parties have attacked the move as a con. National Party leader John Anderson says without proper policy,the ALP's use of Country Labor will only ever be a stunt. ""I think they've got a long way to go before they're seen as particularly relevant in rural and regional Australia,"" he said. But Mr Anderson admits his party cannot take rural voters for granted. And National Farmers Federation President Ian Donges acknowledges Labor has always had a place in the bush. ""The next election could well be decided in rural and regional Australia, and obviously the Labor Party have picked up on that,"" he said."

" A group of 600 Muslim militants, calling itself the Jihad Warriors, has arrived on the Indonesian island of Ambon, vowing to go on a holy war against the Christian community. Indonesian authorities vowed to stop the Warriors leaving Java but it is now estimated that up to 2,000 have arrived on Ambon, after training for several weeks with swords and machetes at a camp outside of Jakarta. Local military commander Brigidier General Max Tamaela has expressed his disgust that the latest group of 600 were allowed into the town's port on Sunday. He says the military is overburdened with other problems and will now have no option but to block the port. General Tamaela says the Jihad force have one month to leave or face a forced expulsion."

" Federal Treasury head, Ted Evans, says the weakness of the Australian dollar reflects developments offshore, rather than domestic factors. The currency has hit a new 20-month low today. In early local trade this morning, the dollar got down as low as 57.1 US cents - the weakest it has been since September 1998. A modest and unconvincing recovery sees it now awaiting the policy meeting tonight at the US Federal Reserve. The meeting is expected to raise American interest rates by possibly 0.5 of a percentage point. This afternoon Mr Evans suggested that one way or another the US economy would slow."

" The Australian Automobile Association (AAA) has issued a warning to oil companies after a survey found country fuel prices have not fallen in line with a recent drop in world oil prices. The AAA says during April, petrol prices fell between five and six cents a litre in capital cities, while country areas experienced a drop of two cents or less. Executive director Lauchlan McIntosh says in many cases the disparity cannot be justified. ""The lag occurs, I guess the distributors would say, because they bought fuel at one price and they've had to store it and hold it, and so they're selling you last month's petrol in effect,"" he said. ""That's all right, of course, as long as when the price goes up, they still continue to sell you last month's petrol at the lower price. Sometimes we don't see that happen."""

" The ACTU has attacked Federal Treasurer Peter Costello over his comments that forthcoming tax cuts are not goods and services tax (GST)-related. The union body says this contradicts the Government's previous position that GST-related wage claims will push up interest rates and inflation. ACTU secretary Greg Combet says unions will have no hesitation in making wage claims to include compensation for GST impact. ""Now the cat's out of the bag and there can be no legitimacy to the argument by the Government or Treasurer Costello that unions cannot pursue through wage increases compensation for the effects of the GST,"" he said."

" Lawyers for Alan Bond have suggested they may hand over a valuable painting to liquidators of the former Bond Corporation. The portrait of Captain Cook has been at the centre of a legal dispute,involving Alan Bond, his two sons, John and Craig, and the family's accountant. The portrait, by John Webber, was insured for $3.5 million in 1988. The liquidator of Bond Corporation, which is now called Southern Equities Corporation, Richard England, has made a civil claim for $13 million in relation to an alleged art scam involving 13 paintings, including the Captain Cook portrait. However in a surprise compromise, the painting, which is thought to be the most valuable of all the paintings in question, may soon be in the hands of the liquidators. None of the defendants is claiming ownership of the painting and the liquidator has asked the South Australian Supreme Court to make an order declaring the painting the property of the liquidators. The matter will resume on Friday."

" A special meeting of the International Olympic Committee's (IOC) ethics commission has cleared Kevan Gosper of all allegations of corrupt conduct over the Salt Lake City bid. The report from Martin Lipton, the independant New York lawyer, has cleared Mr Gosper of all allegations that he may have accepted inducements from the Salt Lake City bid team. The ethics commission has accepted his report. Mr Lipton says that after examining the evidence that there is no basis on which to conclude that either Mr Gosper or his wife knowingly or negligently violated the IOC rules with respect to visits to bidding cities. The head of the ethics committee has also accepted Mr Gosper's apology for last week's torch relay controversy. ----------------------------------"

" Ian Thorpe has continued to re-write the record books at the Australian Olympic selection trials in Sydney. Thorpe broke the world record in winning the 200 metres freestyle, taking 0.18 of a second off the mark he set in Sunday's semi-final. He covered the distance in a time of 1:45.51 to finish ahead of Michael Klim, who also qualifies for the Olympic team. Grant Hackett finished third. In other results, Dyana Calub won the 100 metres backstroke final, while Gian Rooney and Clemantine Stoney swam a dead heat. They will have a swim-off to decide who will qualify for the Olympic team. Susie O'Neill broke her own Commonwealth record to qualify fastest for tomorrow night's final of the 200 metres freestyle. ------------------------------------"

" Zimbabwe's President has announced the dates for the country's long awaited parliamentary elections. Zimbabwe will go to the polls on June 24 and 25. The election date announcement ends weeks of speculation about President Robert Mugabe's timetable for the polls. The political climate has in the past two weeks been dominated by a growing campaign of political violence by ruling party supporters and independence war veterans who have engaged in a concerted campaign of intimidation against supporters of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change. The announcement coincides with the arrival in Harare of Commonwealth secretary general Don McKinnon, who is to hold talks with President Mugabe about the deployment of Commonwealth election monitors and to voice concerns about the need for free and fair elections which the opposition says it believes are impossible. ---------------------------------"

" As global financial markets await tonight's policy meeting at the United States Federal Reserve, the Australian dollar has once more fallen out of favour. There is a widespread view the reserve's Open Market Committee could decide to raise interest rates in America by 0.5 of a percentage point. That would widen the gap with Australian rates, and ahead of such an eventuality, the local currency has again been sold off. The real damage was done in early European trade where the dollar was pushed down to 57.3 US cents. In New York it has gone a touch further to a low for the night of 57.20, the lowest it has been since September 1, 1998. Just before 7:00am AEST, it was being quoted for about 57.35 US cents, still down more than four-tenths of a cent on yesterday's local close. On the cross-rates it is at 0.6291 euros, 62.74 Japanese yen, 38.09 pence sterling and against the New Zealand dollar it is at 1.213. In New York, trade on the key stock exchanges has been very light ahead of the Federal Reserve's Open Market Committee meeting tonight. But amid the thin trading volumes, equity prices have headed higher. On the New York Stock Exchange, banks and tobacco companies have experienced some of the stronger gains. The Dow Jones industrial average has jumped 198 points to close at 10,808. That is a rise of 1.9 per cent. Looking at high-tech shares, and the Nasdaq composite index has closed 79 points ahead, a gain of 2.2 per cent. The US bond market is also stronger. The firmer prices have pushed down the yield on 30-year Treasury paper to 6.16 per cent, a fall of almost five points. In Britain, investors have been wary ahead of any shift in US interest rates. London's FT-100 index has fallen 36 points to 6,248. Yesterday in Asia, activity was subdued, with cautious eyes turned to the United States. Tokyo's Nikkei index fell just 44 points to 17,314. In Australia, the market managed mild gains. The All Ordinaries index closed 17 points up at 3,019. Overnight trade on the Sydney Futures exchange is into the final few moments. Just before 7:00am AEST, the Share Price Index contract was up 26 points on yesterday's day settlement at 3,079. The 10-year bond contract was up 2.5 points at 93.50, with the implied yield easing to 6.5 per cent. The gold price was at $US275.65 an ounce, and West Texas crude was at $US29.83 a barrel. ----------------------------------"

" Federal Liberal Party president Shane Stone has poured scorn on the Opposition's plan to register a new party name, Country Labor. Labor will register the name today Australia wide. The Country Labor Party is already registered in New South Wales, but from today it will be on the books nationally. Labor says the move reflects a surge of party branches springing up in country New South Wales and coincides with the strong swing to Labor in last Saturday's Benalla by-election in Victoria. However, Liberal Party president Shane Stone says it is all a con that Labor's solution to the problems of country Australia is to change its name. Mr Stone, who was previously the Country Liberal Party leader in the Northern Territory, says Labor is simply trying to hide the fact it has no policies and voters know this. ""If you are trying to draw the thread that because they won a state seat in Victoria that somehow Labor now speaks for the bush, well it's a long bow to draw,"" he said. --------------------------------"

" It has been a bloody and brutal day in Israel and the Palestinian territories, one of the worst in the past five years. At least four people are dead and hundreds have been injured in clashes across the West Bank and Gaza. One Palestinian policeman was killed near the West Bank town of Romallah, four more Palestinian police were shot in an exchange with Israeli troops near the town of Jennin. Four days of growing unrest peaked on the day Palestinians commemorate as Nakba or Catastrophe Day, marking the formation of Israel in 1948. A member of the Palestinian Legislative Council said the uprising was inevitable given the stalemate in peace talks and the policies of Israel's Barak Government. ""When you steal somebody's land, when you steal someboby's home, you expect a reaction,"" he said. ""Israel should stop behaving like an occupier and start behaving like a peace partner, otherwise it will be met with acts of resistance to occupation."" Meanwhile, in Washington, US Secretary of State Madelaine Albright said the US was concerned about the renewed violence and its threat to any chance of peace in the Middle East. ""We've learned over and over again that...violence is not the way to resolve this, nor does it help in moving the peace process forward,"" she said. ---------------------------------"

" The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority says there is no need for a crackdown on illegal navigation, after a ship's captain was fined for sailing through the park without a pilot. Dane, Anker Jacobsen, aged 56, was fined $8,000 yesterday for navigating the Trinity Opening, north of Cairns, without a pilot. The authority's chairman, Virginia Chadwick, says there is a very real threat of an oil spill if an accident occurred on the reef. But she says the authority's surveillance measures are strict enough to prevent further offences. ""I don't know that we need a further crackdown, we are pretty vigilent,"" she said. ""There have been two allegations in a very short period of time, and we've been able to follow-up on both of them. ""So I think it's to the credit of all authorities involved, including the maritime safety organisation, as well as our own officers."" --------------------------------"

" More than 48,000 Olympic water polo tickets will go on sale today. Women's water polo is being included in the Games for the first time. The Australian women's team goalkeeper, Liz Weekes, says with six women's and 12 men's teams competing, people should not have trouble finding a session to suit them. ""There's about 48,000 left and that's across every session, including finals and semi-finals, and the tickets start from as low as $43 for the preliminary games, which is pretty good value,"" she said."

" International Olympic Committee (IOC) vice-president Kevan Gosper will continue to have a ceremonial role in the Olympic torch relay. Mr Gosper's role has been confirmed in a statement released by the Olympics Minister, Michael Knight. Earlier today, Olympic organisers (SOCOG) were saying that Mr Gosper had been stripped of all ceremonial responsibilities, during the South Pacific leg of the relay. Mr Gosper, though, does not just represent SOCOG at these events, he is also an IOC vice-president and leader of the Oceania national Olympic committees. He will principally represent those groups when the relay reaches Guam. Mr Knight says he sees no ""reason to change any of those arrangements"". Later tonight, the IOC's Ethics Commission will release its report into Mr Gosper following his family visit to Salt Lake City in 1993."

" Yianna Souleles, the Greek Australian schoolgirl involved in the Olympic torch relay controversy, says she will not run the torch relay at the Melbourne Cricket Ground in place of International Olympic Committee (IOC) vice-president Kevan Gosper. A new runner will have to be found by the Sydney Organising Committee (SOCOG). Last week Mr Gosper announced he had chosen not to run a lap of the MCG with the torch, instead offering his place to Miss Souleles, after his daughter Sophie became the first Australian to carry the torch in Greece. Mr Gosper has been asked by Olympic organisers to have no role at any torch function, however, Miss Souleles says she would only run the torch if she could run with Mr Gosper. ""This honour that was given to our school to be part of the torch relay, was something extraordinary and totally unexpected,"" Miss Souleles said. ""We're all very proud to be Australian, proud of our Greek heritage, and proud of school."""

" The Federal Opposition will target the regions, young Australians and older workers who have been made redundant, as part of its new employment policy. Shadow Employment spokeswoman Cheryl Kernot says Labor will release the policy at its national conference in July. Speaking at a jobs conference in Brisbane today, she said the Federal Government's Jobs Network had failed to provide job-seekers with adequate training. Ms Kernot has confirmed that Labor's employment statement will boast a strong commitment to training initiatives. ""There has to be [a] guaranteed training component, in Labor's view, in work-for-the-dole and in the job network system itself,"" she said. ""This Government doesn't believe in that, it believes in handing over the responsibility and letting these people operate as they wish, according to the market."""

" There has further confirmation the pre-goods and services tax (GST) bubble has burst for the housing sector. Rising interest rates have also helped to produce a slump in the monthly number of new home loans. Around Australia during March, 43,700 homebuyers secured a new loan, that seasonally adjusted total is down 8.1 per cent on February. It is the second biggest monthly decline since April 1990 and in terms of the total value of lending there has been a drop of 12.1 per cent, the largest slump since April 1990 just ahead of the onset of Australia's last recession. Economists say March would have been to late for any further pre-GST pull-forward effect and the Bureau of Statistics itself notes there were widespread expectations of increases in interest rates."

" Australia's peak housing industry body is calling for a halt to the current round of interest rates hikes, warning they may cost around 60,000 jobs in the next two years. While a larger drop than expected, the March results only extend and accelerate the trend that began last November. The pre-GST (pre-goods and services tax) surge in construction is petering out, worsened by four interest rate rises. Senior economist with the Housing Industry Association (HIA), Simon Tennant says the industry is used to the boom-bust cycle, but this downturn may be more severe than previously thought. ""We'd expect between this financial year and next financial year, around about $6 billion less investment in building overall, which will certainly have a pressure on jobs as well, possibly around 60,000 jobs,"" he said."

" An ambitious plan has been unveiled to place land and water conservation as the top national environmental priority in the decade ahead. A bid has been made to spend more than $60 billion over the next 10 years. A study prepared for the National Farmers Federation (NFF) and the Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) has found salinity, erosion, acid soils and poor water quality is costing the economy nearly $2 billion a year. The two groups have called for $6.5 billion a year to address the problem with $3.7 billion to come from various governments. NFF president Ian Donges says up to 40 billion trees will be needed to control soil degradation. ""This report represents the thunderbolt, a major wake-up call for all Australians to address our environmental problems,"" he said. The strategy seeks 10-year bipartisan support, investment by the private sector and mass participation by Australians. The NFF and the ACF have not identified sources for the government funds they are seeking. They say governments will have to make long-term decisions on where to find the money. The Federal Opposition leader has offered to back the government if it comes up with a long term program on natural resources management, including tackling salinity. Kim Beazley congratulated the organisations for their report on the matter. Mr Beazley says if nothing is done to meet the challenge of salinity, regional communities will pay a heavy price. He says a long-term process is needed and if the Prime Minister provides a far-sighted response which is not funded from asset sales, Labor will back it."

" In the Philippines, both the Government and rebel Muslims holding 21 people hostage, have set new demands for the start of negotiations to free the captives. The Government has called on the rebels to put their demands in writing, while the rebels want all military operations in the area brought to a halt. The Government has so far rejected the rebels' key demand that the military pull out from the area on the southern island of Jolo, where the rebels are holding the hostages. The Government says it has pulled back, but it will not be pulling out. The rebels are also asking to hold talks with the Philippines' top military and police commanders. The hostages are now in their fourth week of captivity. The rebels are also calling for a safe conduct pass to be issued to their leader to travel to Jolo island, to join negotiations for the release of the hostages."

" The Australian share market has opened the week moderately higher, thanks to modest gains on Wall Street on Friday night. The All Ordinaries index rose nearly 15 points, to nearly 3,019, with most sectors trading in positive territory. The day's most dramatic business news was the departure of Chris Tyler, the controversial chief executive of business software group, Solution 6. Mr Tyler has been dogged by media criticism of his personal and business past. The share price has plunged from around $18.00 at the end of last year, partly due to the decisive high-tech correction last month, but shareholders appear to have given his departure a decisive thumbs-up, marking the stock up 82 cents, or 27 per cent, to $3.82. Telstra, with which Solution 6 says it continues to have dealings, is down nearly 13 cents to $6.79, hurt also by reports it has been forced to review plans for $4 billion of offshore borrowings. Another telco, Cable and Wireless Optus, rose 23 cents to $4.89 ahead of its next results, out this week. Westpac rose 30 cents to $11.80 after announcing on Friday a deal to acquire around $1 billion worth of assets from the Australian arm of the Standard Chartered Bank. Among the miners, BHP rose 22 cents to $17.10 but Rio Tinto fell 11 cents to $ 26.24. The miners have confirmed they are part of a global joint venture to buy more than $300 billion worth of supplies over the Internet. The Australian dollar has lost around 0.5 of a cent today, as pressure mounts ahead of another potential US interest rate rise tomorrow night, Australian time. The currency is at 57.65 US cents, weakened also by an eight per cent fall in local housing finance figures for March. The dollar is at just on 38 pence and 62.88 Japanese yen. Gold is fetching $US276.25 an ounce."

" The Federal Government has defended its latest goods and services tax (GST) advertisement against claims its purely political propaganda. The Opposition says the advertisement shows the Government is desperate. The latest television advertisement features people tied up in chains, with the message they are being shackled by the current taxation system, which needs the change, being implemented in July. According to Shadow Treasurer Simon Crean, the advertisements are nothing more than propaganda and should be withdrawn. ""They're an act of a desperate government, these ads are not providing information,"" he said. ""It's blatant political advertising at public expense."" But the government will not be pulling the advertisement. A spokesman says the community expects and is entitled to know about the biggest policy change in Australian history. The spokesman says people want to know what they are entitled to and in order for people to understand the changes, they must know the current system as well as the new one."

" Lori Munz has been given the all clear to swim at tonight's Olympic selection trials in Sydney. Munz collapsed after swimming in the heats of the 200 metres freestyle at the Sydney International Aquatic Centre this morning. Munz collapsed as she walked off the pool deck and had to be assisted from the arena. It is only eight weeks since the car accident that broke both her knee caps. The New South Wales Institute of Sport head swimming coach, Greg Hodge, says this is her first competitive hit out since then. He says she felt faint suffering from a lack of oxygen after pushing herself so hard in the heat. Doctors have cleared her of any knee problems and Hodge says she will be back in the pool for tonight's semi-finals. ""Lori is probably the toughest athlete I know and I don't think there will be any problem in her overcoming mentally the emotion of this morning,"" he said."

" Queensland State of Origin selectors have made one change in the team for the second match at Lang Park on Wednesday week. Selectors have shown faith in the team that almost pulled off victory last week. They have named Julian O'Neill at five-eighth, in place of the injured Ben Ikin. Wendell Sailor amd Gordon Tallis remain in the side pending fitness tests on Friday. New South Wales has made two changes to their squad. Andrew Johns has replaced the injured Terry Hill while Adam Muir also comes on to the bench for Michael Vella."

" International Olympic Committee (IOC) vice-president Kevan Gosper and the office of Olympics Minister Michael Knight are denying reports Mr Gosper has been stripped of his ceremonial duties on the torch relay. Mr Gosper maintains he will be travelling to Guam to accept the torch for its run through Oceania. Mr Gosper has been fighting controversy since his daughter Sophie became the first Australian to carry the torch in Greece. He says he will not perform his leg of the torch relay on the MCG, saying it should go to the Greek Australian schoolgirl who was originally promised his daughter's role in Greece. Mr Gosper says he is still on good terms with Mr Knight. ""I would be intending simply to go to Guam to pay the courtesy, as an IOC vice-president and Oceania president to be there, the same in the respect of Uluru,"" Mr Gosper said. ""If in the event, particularly in the case of Uluru, there was still a public outcry against me that could lead to any distraction, then of course I would discuss that with Michael [Knight] and say it's not a good idea for me to come. ""But I'll look at that when the time comes."" Meanwhile, the IOC's Ethics Commission will today deliver its findings into allegations of corrupt conduct levelled against Mr Gosper over the Salt Lake City bid. Mr Gosper arrived at Geneva airport looking tired and shaken after what has been a tumultuous week. He says he is still confident that today's judgment of the IOC's Ethics Commission will clear him of allegations that he and his family were among those who accepted inducements offered by the notorious Salt Lake City bid team. Some in the IOC are now reported to be concerned that Mr Gosper's refusal to back down over the torch relay matter may serve to undermine the reform process put in place after the Salt Lake City scandal. It is also thought the Ethics Commission may now be asked to widen its investigations to include the torch relay controversy. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" World champion swimmer Ian Thorpe says the world record he broke last night at the Australian Olympic selection trials in Sydney had little to do with his full-length swimsuit. Thorpe broke his own world mark in winning his semi-final of the 200 metres freestyle. Thorpe took 0.31 of a second off his previous best and believes there is still room for improvement. Thorpe says while sponsors claim the new long swimsuits improve times he is sure that is not why he broke the record. Thorpe will swim in the final tonight along with Grant Hackett and Michael Klim. Geoff Huegill started last night's program with a world record of his own in the 50 metres butterfly final, while Petria Thomas ended Susie O'Neill's dominance of the 100 metres butterfly, winning the final. Thorpe says he would love to take the Sydney pool every where he goes. ""I swam in a demountable pool once and that was in Hong Kong. They haven't moved that anywhere but if I could move this one I would be pretty happy with that,"" he said. Geoff Huegill also broke a world record in winning the 50 metres butterfly final. Petria Thomas broke through for a win against main rival Susie O'Neill in the 100 metres butterfly final. Phil Rogers made his third Olympic team by winning the 100 metres breast stroke final. Leisel Jones, 14, qualified fastest for the womens 100 metres breast stroke final. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A still unofficial death toll of 20 is expected to rise in the aftermath of the explosion of a fireworks factory at Enschede in the Netherlands. Dutch Prime Minister Wim Kok and Queen Beatrix have been visiting some of the more than 560 people injured in the blast. Explosives experts likened the force of the blast to a wartime rocket attack. The BBC's Angus Roxburgh reports 24 hours after the explosion, firefighters were still dowsing smouldering buildings around the fireworks warehouse and they were still hoping to find life in the rubble. Queen Beatrix visited the disaster zone together with the Prime Minister. They thanked the emergency teams for doing a professional job and said the burnt out landscape took their breath away. The Prime Minister later promised a thorough investigation into what had happened. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" At least 17 people are feared dead after a building collapsed in the Egyptian capital, Cairo. It is believed the building was under a demolition order but remained occupied because of Cairo's accommodation crisis. Witnesses say the building shuddered and then in a space of a few seconds was reduced to a pile of rubble. Emergency repairs had been made to the building only a few hours before the collapse, but residents had ignored an order to leave. It is not thought any survivors remain in the ruins. This is not the first such incident in Cairo which suffers from severe overcrowding and poor building regulation. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The National Party throughout Australia has been warned to take notice of the party's loss in the by-election for the once-safe Victorian state seat of Benalla. The Nationals suffered a swing of almost 8 per cent to lose the by-election, reducing their representation in the Victorian Legislative Assembly to just six. The warning has come from the party's federal president. Helen Dickie says the defeat in the Benalla by-election should sound alarm bells for the National Party in other states and federally. She says there were no federal issues involved, but the perception that the Nationals are too close to the Liberal Party was a factor. Ms Dickie says the Nationals have to sell their policies in different ways. ""We'll perhaps have to be a bit more radical in our response,"" she said. The Deputy Prime Minister, John Anderson, has also expressed concern about the party's performance in Victoria. The Opposition leader, Kim Beazley, says the Benalla result has no specific federal implications, but shows country people are prepared to recognise Labor has some solutions. ""There is an open mind in the bush about the Labor Party - a more open mind than there has been in my lifetime in politics,"" he said. Mr Beazley says the result speaks volumes about the way country people view the National Party. ""Not just in Victoria but elsewhere the Nationals, to the minds of many, have put their personal positions in power and their comfort in power ahead of the regional job they are sent out to do,"" he said. ""This is a perception that has been growing for some time now and I think it is now really set in the public mind."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Tens of thousands of Americans demanding tougher gun laws have spent Mother's Day in the National Mall in Washington as part of the ""Million Mom March"". President Bill Clinton told the demonstrators not to be deterred by the mountain they have to climb. Organisers of the march in the National Mall are demanding uniform handgun control laws, including licensing and registration. Mr Clinton, who has failed to convince Congress of the need for tougher gun legislation, says prevention is the key. ""It's not like we don't know prevention works, we know it does work,"" Mr Clinton said. ""One of the things mothers learn to do real early is not let their kids make excuses when they shouldn't."" The Centre for Disease Control says 12 children die each day in the US as a result of gun violence. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Japan's former Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi has died, six weeks after he suffered a stroke. Mr Obuchi had never regained consciousness. Although probably brain dead, the rest of his body kept functioning well until Friday when doctors warned that his blood pressure was falling dangerously low. The leader of the most powerful faction in Japanese politics, the one set up by former prime minister Tanaka and run by former prime minister Takeshita Obuchi, came to the prime ministership when Japan was in recession in 1998. He lived to see it come out of recession only briefly before slipping back in at the end of last year. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Philippines President Joseph Estrada will today confer with negotiators attempting to seek the release of a group of 21 people held hostage for more than three weeks. The Muslim rebel kidnappers have presented a list of demands including the withdrawal of troops from the area where they are holding the group hostage. The two negotiators flew to Manila after being presented with the rebels' list of demands. The conditions the rebels outlined include the complete withdrawal of troops from the area on Jolo Island where they are holding the hostages. While the negotiators say their main priority is the early release of one of the kidnapped victims, who is believed to have suffered a heart attack, the rebels maintain they want an agreement on further negotiations before they will consider releasing her. Violence has escalated in recent weeks in the southern provinces. It follows the cancellation of peace talks between the government and Muslim rebels who have been fighting a three decade long struggle for an independent state."

" Germany has sent emergency teams to the Netherlands in the aftermath of a massive explosion which ripped through a fireworks warehouse in the town of Enschede. The death toll in the eastern Netherlands town stands at 20, with 230 people injured, 40 of them still in hospital and emergency services are still grappling with the aftermath of the incident. A huge emergency operation is underway as firemen search for people buried in the rubble. Arson is suspected in the blaze which devastated entire streets and set a brewery alight. Witnesses spoke of seeing glass, concrete and limbs flying through the air. One witness was Gordon Coles. ""First we saw the fireworks coming over and thinking 'Oh God what's this now?' and then the secondary explosion, which was the big explosion, just flew everything into the air,"" he said. ""Then we had to run for cover, we were actually about half a mile away from the explosion itself."" --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The son of a victim of the Melbourne Aquarium's legionnaire's outbreak is calling on the Federal Government to provide interim compensation for medical costs. Rafael Gallardo, whose father contracted the disease, says the government has a duty of care to all the victims. Mr Gallardo and another victim Andrew Wayward have opted out of a class action. Mr Gallardo says the government needs to examine current legislation and hold a formal inquiry into the outbreak. ""We just want to understand what has occurred, how it occurred and I think the government has a moral responsibility to ensure that a tragedy such as this is preventable,"" he said, --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Health Minister Michael Wooldridge says there is absolutely no evidence that he behaved improperly in the magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) machines scandal. His comments follow the release of the Commonwealth auditor-general's report which found the Government's negotiations with radiologists may have prompted some to realise a Medicare subsidy would be made available to them in the 1998 federal Budget. That information prompted a rush of orders for the MRI machines ahead of that year's Budget. However, Dr Wooldridge has told Channel Nine's <i>Sunday</i> program that while errors have emerged in a statutory declaration given to the auditor-general about a pre-Budget meeting, he is still innocent of any wrongdoing. ""When you've had many meetings over a six month period and when you're trying to recollect 18 months later, recollections can be flawed and that's the whole point of this,"" he said. ""There was nothing untoward about this meeting at all, it was a perfectly normal part of government business. ""There is one piece of unanimity about that meeting, of course. Every single person at that meeting says that I did not disclose what was in the Budget."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" In Yugoslavia, a senior political figure has been shot dead, the latest in a series of assassinations of close associates of President Slobodan Milosevic. Bosco Perosevic, the head of the provincial government in the northern Yugoslav town of Novi Sad, was shot at close range by a lone gunman while attending an agricultural fair. The BBC reports Mr Perosevic was then taken unconscious from the scene to hospital where he was put on a life support machine, but he never recovered and was later declared dead. After a brief chase, the alleged assassin was apprehended. Local media say the man is a 50-year-old security guard at the fair. It is the fourth killing this year of prominent politicians, businessmen and public figures associated with President Milosevic. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The National Party's candidate, Bill Sykes, has conceded defeat in the Victorian Benalla by-election. His announcement confirms Labor's win in the seat that the Nationals have held for 96 years. The Premier, Steve Bracks, says Labor's victory shows the Australian Labor Party is indisputably the party of country Victoria. The Premier says Benalla voters recognise the Government's commitment to country Victoria. ""We've achieved more in seven months for country and regional Victoria, for the people of Benalla, than the National Party achieved in the last seven years and that's why they rejected the National Party,"" he said. The Labor win boosts the government's Lower House representation to 44 seats. It now needs the support of only one of the three independent MPs to have legislation passed. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Sydney schoolgirl Yianna Souleles, who has been caught up in the Olympic fiasco involving International Olympic Committee (IOC) vice-president Kevan Gosper, has come out in support of the Games chief. Yianna says she is concerned about the tough criticism Mr Gosper has been receiving over his decision to allow his daughter Sophie to take her place in the torch relay in Greece. ""I feel so bad, like I think everyone's been a bit hard on him,"" Yianna said. ""He's done so much for our country and he's an Olympian as well and I think everyone should just stay off, lay off him a bit, because it's a bit unfair."" Her family has also come out in support of Mr Gosper. Yianna's father Peter Souleles says he accepts Mr Gosper's apology and he has called on the public to remember Mr Gosper's good work. ""I think everyone should recognise Mr Gosper's incredible contribution, not only to sport as an Olympian, but his contribution towards the Olympics,"" he said. ""I think the man has been sufficiently drawn to his knees. I think he should be allowed to stand up again as a proud Australian. He should be allowed to run in Melbourne."" Yianna arrived back into Australia last night, facing a flock of media at Sydney International Airport. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Authorities in Sierra Leone have made public documents which they say show the rebel leader, Foday Sankoh, was preparing a coup this week. They say the documents were found in Mr Sankoh's house, which he fled during a gun battle on Monday. Pro-government forces in the west African country are meanwhile reported to have continued their advance east from the capital. The BBC reports government forces that entered the strategically important junction town of Masiaka appear to be a combination of the Sierra Leone government armed forces and pro-government militias. The militiamen have been fighting the rebels for many years. Trained originally as hunters, they entered Masiaka waving magic potions that they say protect them from bullets. Meanwhile, a British military spokesman said some 800 navy marines had now arrived by ship near to Sierra Leone to assist if necessary the 1,100 paratroopers already in the country. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Muslim rebels holding 21 people hostage in a Philippine jungle hideout have failed to release an ailing German woman, but offered the chance of talks over the coming days that would involve the fate of all of the captives. However, the Abu Sayyaf kidnapping has now been complicated by the disappearance in rebel-held territory of eight European journalists and their Filipino interpreter. Philippines police had warned foreign journalists about travelling on their own or attempting to contact the rebels. The hostages are being held in the mountains on the southern island of Jolo. There was an expectation that the kidnappers would release one of the hostages who suffers from high blood pressure and is believed to have had a stroke. But negotiators came back empty-handed saying they were not able to meet with the hostages. Police say they have found two vehicles used by the journalists. Until now, only journalists from the Philippines have been able to safely achieve access to the rebels' hideout. While the Abu Sayyaf held on to its hostages, members of another Muslim rebel group, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, burst into a remote southern village, demanded food and took hostages as they escaped from pursuing government troops."

" International Olympic Committee vice-president Kevan Gosper has apologised ""from the bottom of his heart"" for what he says was a lapse in judgment in allowing his daughter Sophie to be the first Australian torch bearer for this year's Olympics. And in London this morning, Mr Gosper offered his place as torch bearer in the pre-Olympic ceremonies at the Melbourne Cricket Ground to the girl his daughter displaced. His voice at times choking with emotion, Mr Gosper says fatherly pride clouded his judgment in allowing his daughter to accept the invitation. ""I concede now that it was a mistake,"" he said. ""My attachment to Sophie clearly got in the way of my normal judgment. ""Given that as vice-president of the IOC, people could perceive that there was a conflict and whilst I had no influence on the outcome, that was apparently the perception in some quarters."" Mr Gosper admitted both Olympic colleague John Coates and Minister Michael Knight had counselled him against involving his daughter, but he had ignored them. To make up to Yianna Souleles, whom Sophie Gosper displaced, Mr Gosper has offered his own, up until now undisclosed, role in carrying the torch on to the Melbourne Cricket Ground. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" Leaders of white farmers in Zimbabwe say they have agreed with President Robert Mugabe to set up a land commission to oversee the peaceful transfer of farmland to the state. The agreement came in talks in the capital, Harare, which also involved leaders of the squatters who have been occupying white-owned farms. Farmers' leaders say an outline agreement has been made, but talks on details, such as compensation, will continue next week. President Mugabe says his goal is peace. ""We are pledged to avoiding any incidents that disturb the life of a farmer that tend to interfere with the day-to-day operations on the farms, and where there's been this disturbance, it has got to corrected,"" he said. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Muslim extremists holding 21 mostly-foreign hostages in the southern Philippines are expected to release an ailing German hostage, officials said. Senior local official Nur Misuari told Philippine President Joseph Estrada's top aide Ronaldo Zamora by telephone that they are sending people there to formalise the turnover. Mr Misuari, governor of the Muslim autonomous region which includes Jolo island where the hostages are being held, says the rebels want to turn over 57-year-old teacher Renate Wallert, who is suffering from hypertension, on Saturday. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Legionella bacterium has been discovered during a routine check of airconditioning towers at the Arnott's biscuit factory at Marleston in Adelaide. South Australian Health Commission workers have been at the factory draining and cleaning the towers to eliminate the problem. Three people died recently in Victoria from legionnaire's disease, but the commission's Professor Brendan Kearney says it is unlikely such a situation will occur in Adelaide. ""The presence of the organisms is low and immediate steps were taken to eliminate the organisms from the cooling towers,"" he said. ""Because there were spray arresters on the towers, the likelihood of spray dispersal of the legionella is low."" Workers at the Arnott's biscuit factory who show flu-like symptoms are being asked to see their doctor immediately. No known cases of the disease have emerged in the area, but local residents showing symptoms of the disease are also being asked to see their doctor. The mayor of West Torrens, Dr Reece Jennings, does not blame the company. ""I would imagine if you cultured every cooling tower in Australia I am sure you would grow this wretched organism,"" he said. ""It is just one of those endemic things, it is virtually ineradicable I think."" The SA secretary of the National Union of Workers, Ron Docherty, says Arnott's has done the best it could in the circumstances to protect both its employees and the public. ""As soon as it has come to their attention they have acted swiftly and responsibly in informing the relevant government departments, in issuing a press release so that immediate residents around the area are informed and obviously informing their employees,"" he said. Arnott's Biscuits says the legionella risk from its Adelaide factory is low. Arnott's managing director John Doumani says any risk is confined to people who have been at the factory or in the immediate vicinity at Marleston. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" International aid agencies are warning of dire humanitarian consequences in northern Sri Lanka, where Tamil Tiger rebels are massing at the edge of their former stronghold of Jaffna. The BBC reports the Government acknowledges its troops have been forced to retreat from defensive lines south of the city. The Tamil Tigers are warning civilians to leave the area, but there is growing concern about the safety of the displaced. Humanitarian aid official Bo Schack says Tamil civilians fleeing the fighting are being restricted in their movements. ""Increasingly over the last months there has been a serious issue of freedom of movement problems,"" he said. ""A number of those that have come out are sitting and have been sitting for weeks in a transit centre in very crowded conditions. ""There have been discussions both with the military and with the authorities on trying to get them out."" -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Solomon Islands Government has agreed to suspend its ban on two warring militant groups, paving the way for their inclusion in peace talks. The breakthrough follows three more deaths near the Solomons capital, Honiara, during the week. The government is now expected to lift the ban on Monday and both the Malaitan and Guadalcanal provincial governments will try and persuade the two militant groups to a ceasefire seven days later. Malaitan lawyer Andrew Nori says he hopes the agreement will be the start of a lasting peace. ""We hope that they can see the sense in ensuring that no more fighting goes on around Honiara,"" he said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Australian swimming selection trials start in Sydney today with Ian Thorpe just one of the competitors looking to secure a berth in the Olympic team. Thorpe will contest the heats of the 400-metres freestyle today with the final being held tonight. Competitors who finish first or second in a final qualify for the Australian team provided they finish inside the Olympic qualifying time. Sam Riley says she will be competitive in the 100 and 200-metres breast stroke despite being hospitalised with a kidney infection recently. ""You know, I've got a lot of competition with a few of the young ones coming through and people coming back but I'm confident that I can do it,"" she said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australia's Lleyton Hewitt will meet Sweden's Magnus Norman in the semi-finals of the Italian Open in Rome. Hewitt beat Argentina's Mariano Puerta 6-3, 3-6, 6-1, while Norman, who defeated Hewitt at this year's Australian Open, defeated Spaniard Felix Mantilla, 6-4, 6-3. But Hewitt says avenging his loss in Melbourne is not part of his thinking leading into the match. ""I'm not going to take it like that though, it's a totally different surface,"" he said. ""It's not a grand slam but it is a big tournament for me and you know it's a semi-final. ""Trying to get into a final of a Masters series event and here sort of on a surface which I haven't really had too much success on at this young age, so it's a big opportunity for me and I'll be going out there and play my game and giving 100 per cent tomorrow."""

" The Federal Treasurer, Peter Costello, has attacked last night's Budget reply from the Opposition, saying there was not a single policy in it. The Opposition Leader, Kim Beazley promised a Labor Government would spend more on education, public hospitals and regional infra-structure, and would roll back the goods and services tax (GST). But Mr Costello says if less GST revenue goes to the states, the rollback and other spending would have to come from higher taxes.. He scoffed at Mr Beazley, for inviting Melbourne ABC broadcaster, John Faine, during an interview, to suggest some policies for Labor. ""You've now got the Opposition leader asking radio journalists to write his policies for him. ""He's just a blank sheet of paper wanting to be written and he's now asking John Faine to write his policies for him,"" Mr Costello said."

" The Federal Health Minister, Michael Wooldridge, has admitted there is an error in a statutory declaration given to the Auditor General in the magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scan inquiry. The investigation into a rush of orders for MRI machines ahead of the 1998 budget came after claims Dr Wooldridge had leaked budget information on a Medicare subsidy to radiologists. The Auditor General has found the Government's negotiations with radiologists created an environment in which some might have deduced or become aware of Medicare funding in the Budget. Dr Wooldridge says he only found out yesterday there was a discrepancy in the recollection of his officer, Penny Rogers, about who was at a meeting with radiologists before the Budget. But he says it makes no difference to the final outcome. ""The auditor was aware of this, the auditor didn't consider it changed the testimony of Ms Rogers,"" Dr Wooldridge said. ""There are other statutory declarations and really what did or didn't happen at a meeting the important thing is that every single person at that meeting said I didn't diclose budget details at that meeting."" But Opposition leader Kim Beazley says it is inevitable Dr Wooldridge will have to go. Mr Beazley says Dr Wooldridge is relying on a flawed memory for his defence, against claims by others including the incoming President of the College of Radiologists. ""Who stated that the control measure in the Budget, which is the one that is the critical financial information, the control measure in the Budget was in fact discussed with them,"" Mr Beazley said. ""As the Auditor General himself said on the balance of probabilities it was that meeting which produced a surge of orders."""

" A Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) report has expressed profound disappointment in the agreement between the Commonwealth and the Northern Territory on mandatory sentencing. The Federal Government has allocated $20 million for diversionary programs in the Territory in this week's Budget. The Budget allocation is in line with the agreement struck between the Northern Territory and the Federal Government on the mandatory sentencing regime. But the commission says it is disappointed because the laws are being retained. In its report tabled in the Senate, the commission says it welcomes the adjustment in the age of juveniles being lifted from 17 to 18 years, but says the laws are still inconsistent with Australia's international human rights obligations."

" In the southern Philippines, Muslim rebels holding a group of 21-people hostage have refused to release two ailing European captives. Ginny Stein reports the kidnappers have also rejected a government negotiating team. Rebel leader Abu Escobar has rejected a request for release of the two sick hostages. Negotiators had made the request in their first face to face meeting with the abductors on Wednesday. Any hope of an end to the crisis appears to have vanished with the rebels calling for a new negotiating team. The hostages have been moved once more, deeper into the mountains of the remote island where they have been held for almost three weeks. The Muslim rebels who have been fighting for an independent state have presented no formal demands. Abu Escobar says they will put forward demands only once their request for specific negotiators are met."

" Dual Olympic swimming gold medallist, Kieren Perkins, says the decision to allow the daughter of Australian IOC member Kevan Gosper to carry the torch in Olympia was insane. Mr Gosper's 11-year-old daughter Sophie was given the honour of being the first Australian to carry the torch by members of the Hellenic Olympic Committee. Mr Gosper ignored requests from Australian officials to refuse the offer and has since been criticised by politicians, athletes and sporting officials. Perkins says he was amazed by the decision."

" Prime Minister John Howard has made a plea for Australia to get over a controversy surrounding the first leg of the Olympic torch's journey to Australia. Disgraced International Olympic Committee (IOC) member Phil Coles and New South Wales Premier Bob Carr continue to criticise IOC vice-president Kevan Gosper. Mr Gosper's daughter Sophie was the first Australian to carry the Olympic torch, replacing a Sydney Greek-Australian schoolgirl. Mr Howard says Australia needs to get on with the business of the Olympics. ""I think there's been enough about that, it's been dealt with extensively,"" he said. ""I just think we ought to move on to the positive things about the Olympic Games. ""I think we run the danger in this country of becoming hooked on gaffes in relation to the Olympic Games,"" Mr Howard said."

" A founder of the reconciliation movement has accused Prime Minister John Howard of a cynical manipulation of the process. Pat Dodson is unhappy with the Government's handling of the declaration for reconciliation, which calls for a national apology. But he has given Mr Howard another chance to show he is serious about reconciliation, by setting up an independent treaty commission. Mr Dodson says a commission, half of which would be made up of indigenous members, would show Mr Howard's commitment to the process. ""Oh for sure, I think that's a substantial and significant thing to do,"" he said. ""And it would underpin, I think, the seriousness with which the Government and the country would take the question of indigenous peoples' position, as the first peoples in this country, can be recognised and how we might establish the basis for proper interaction between us."""

" A man is in custody following a stand-off with police which saw the evacuation of a Brisbane city office building. Police allege the man, 36, had a grenade, two molotov cocktails and a knife on him, when he entered the Queenslanders' Credit Union in Albert Street. Workers in the six-storey building were moved to safety while police negotiated with the man for almost three hours. Inspector Brian Nolan says a family tragedy may have sparked the incident. ""Negotiators spoke to him there and he's come out there with no injuries to himself,"" he said. ""He didn't make any threats against any person. ""The only threats he made was to harm himself. As I said, the negotiators bought him out and he's alright,"" Insp. Nolan said."

" A survey of surgeons has revealed more than 40 per cent are in favour of legalising euthanasia. The anonymous survey of more than 900 doctors shows 43 per cent supported the introduction of legislation on active voluntary euthanasia. The survey also found 44 per cent would support legislation for medically-assisted suicide. Royal Australasian College of Surgeons president Dr Bruce Barraclough says just like the community, the survey shows the medical profession is divided on the issue. ""It's a complex subject, it's a very delicate subject and it's a fine line to be walked,"" he said. ""Because often when people are striving very hard to relieve terrible suffering, they know that what they're doing may shorten lives."" ""They are acting within the law and they are acting ethically,"" Dr Barraclough said."

" Police are investigating the theft of an Arthur Boyd painting stolen from a Richmond house yesterday. The work, titled <i>Suzanna and the Elders</i>, is based on an Old Testament story and painted on a ceramic tile. Police say it is unlikely to be a professional theft, and the robber will have problems selling it. The painting's owner, Jim Yuncken, did not reveal the dollar value of the painting, but said it meant a lot to the art world and his family."

" The Federal Opposition leader, Kim Beazley, has promised a Labor Government would responsibly roll back the goods and services tax (GST) and not make promises it cannot afford. Mr Beazley has delivered his formal reply to the Federal Budget. Lost opportunities, a lack of vision, and a misreading of the economic times is how Mr Beazley characterised the Government's fifth Budget, one he says even the Treasurer is embarrassed about. ""On Tuesday night the smirk had gone and all that remained were the thin lips and a hushed backbench,"" Mr Beazley said. Democrats leader, Meg Lees, in her formal reply, went further. ""To paraphrase Graham Chapman in Monty Python's The Life of Brian, Mr Costello is not the economic messiah, he's just a very naughty boy,"" she said. But, in a strong speech, the Opposition leader spelled out some priorities for Labor. For the regions there would be more infrastructure, better education and measures to tackle salinity. In health, he promised quality public hospitals. And on Mr Beazley's pet area, education, he said: ""The role for Government is to provide an excellent education system, the best incentives for scientific and technological research, underpinned by a first class communications network."" And Mr Beazley is not abandoning a pledge to roll back the GST, something Labor believes is a vote winner but a promise fraught with danger - too much roll back will cost too much money and allow the government to paint Labor as bad economic managers. Mr Beazley has sought to deal with that in his reply. ""To roll it back we need to know how this tax operates over the next 12 to 18 months. And we need to know how much money is available to roll it back responsibly,"" he said. He says he will not make promises he cannot afford and will reveal details before the next election. That is not soon enough, says the Prime Minister, who wanted detail in the speech. ""It was just a spray of rhetorical pollie speak. It didn't offer any concrete alternative economic strategy,"" he said. ----------------------------------"

" Australian brewers claim excise increases in Tuesday's Budget will lift the price of light beer by up to 12 per cent. They have accused the Government of breaking another goods and services tax (GST) promise. The government increased the excise on beer in Tuesday's Budget to make up for the removal of the wholesale sales tax when the GST begins. The excise on light beer is lower to meet the government's promise that light beer prices will not rise under the GST. No such promise applies for draught beer. But Australian Associated Brewers says in fact the excise increase is such that the price of light beer will increase by up to 12 per cent. Its spokesman Gabriel McDowell says unless the government expects the states to subsidise beer sales, it is another broken promise which will net the Commonwealth $80 million in excise and leave light beer drinkers out of pocket. ""For a glass of beer it would go from $1.90 to about $2.10,"" she said. A government spokesman has been unavailable for comment. ---------------------------------"

" The Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) says the Federal Government's proposed amendments to the Workplace Relations Act will breach international standards. The government plans to end industry-wide enterprise agreements, giving the Industrial Relations Commission more power to intervene in disputes. But ACTU president Sharan Burrow says the changes will wind back the rights of Australia's workforce. ""The international standards, the ILO standards, provide for the right of unions to bargain across multiple employers,"" Ms Burrow said. ""Now why Peter Reith would see that as untenable in an Australian context is beyond me."" ----------------------------------"

" Oil has been poured over the troubled waters of United States equity markets overnight. And it has been smoother sailing thanks to a surprise result on monthly retail activity in America. For the first time since August 1998, sales have fallen. US Commerce Department figures are showing a drop of 0.2 per cent in April, compared with a consensus forecast of a 0.4 per cent rise. For the markets, the implication is that some of the pressure has been taken off interest rates, ahead of next week's policy meeting at the Federal Reserve. Sharemarket investors have waded back into equity markets, with both traditional and high-tech stocks well above water. After yesterday's 200-point plunge, New York's Nasdaq composite index has recouped 115 points, a rise of 3.4 per cent. On the New York Stock Exchange, financial issues have been among the front-runners. The Dow Jones industrial average has regained 178 points to close at 10,546. That is a recovery of 1.7 per cent. The US bond market, however, is barely changed. Slightly firmer prices have pushed down the yield on 30-year Treasury paper to 6.145 per cent, a fall of less than one point. In Britain, the weak retail data from the US has also soothed investor nerves. London's FT-100 index has surged 145 points higher to 6,246. That is a jump of 2.4 per cent. Yesterday in Asia, it was the Japanese market that suffered most from the earlier slump in US technology stock prices. Tokyo's Nikkei index dived 819 points, or 4.6 per cent, to 16,882. In Australia, the market registerd its fourth straight day of decline although Telstra managed a turnaround after a string of seven consecutive losses. The All Ordinaries index closed 45 points down at 2,967. Overnight trade on the Sydney Futures exchange is into the final few moments. Just before 7:00am, the Share Price Index contract was up 42 points on yesterday's day settlement at 3,033. The ten-year bond contract was down one point at 93.57 with the implied yield rising to 6.43 per cent. The Australian dollar has recovered after a new 20-month low in London overnight of 57.50 US cents. At 7:00am it was being quoted at around 58.15 US cents, up four tenths of a cent on yesterday's local close. On the cross-rates, it was at 0.6455 euros, 63.12 Japanese yen, 38.67 pence Sterling and against the New Zealand dollar it is at 1.213. The gold price has fallen to $US275.95 an ounce. Oil and West Texas crude has jumped to $US29.25 a barrel. ----------------------------------"

" The Australian Consumers Association (ACA) believes a Federal Government decision to deny the ABC multi-channelling will disadvantage regional and rural Australians. The government argued the decision, which affects both the ABC and SBS, was needed to protect the pay TV sector. ACA communications policy officer Charles Britton says the multi-channelling would have allowed the ABC to provide expanded services, such as rural and regional news. ""It's been an incubator for many of the innovations we've seen,"" Mr Britton said. ""It's a training ground for a lot of the staff who go on to commercial areas. ""It provides a service in regional areas above and beyond what commercials do and it's a unifying factor in Australian life. ""So I really think there was a very good case for giving the ABC the latitude to innovate in both multi-channelling and datacasting."" --------------------------------"

" Indonesia and rebels fighting for independence in Aceh province are to begin peace talks in Geneva today. It is the first time in almost 25 years of conflict that the government and independence fighters have held such talks. Indonesia's President Abdurrahman Wahid says a memorandum of understanding will be signed providing for a humanitarian pause in violence in Aceh. At lest 5,000 people have been killed in the past decade. Rebel leaders say they want peace and have ordered guerilla fighters to lay down weapons. But there appears to be little common ground about the future. Rebel leaders vow they will not abandon their push for independence. President Wahid has offered greater autonomy to the Acehnese but he says independence from Indonesia is out of the question. -------------------------------"

" Newcastle University's physics department is about to begin the final phase of testing on a piece of equipment for an Australian- built satellite. Physicist Brian Fraser says the project to build a magnetometer for Fedsat, involves the University of Newcastle and UCLA in California. The satellite will be assembled by Ausspace in Canberra and when it is in space, the magnetometer will measure magnetic fields from 800 kilometres above the earth and send data back to Adelaide. Final tests on the magnetometer begin next month and Professor Fraser says the experience the department is gaining from the project is invaluable. ""We've collaborated with UCLA and we're using their expertise to help us with this and of course as we go down the track hopefully there'll be future magnetometers that we will be building completely in our laboratory here,"" he said. ---------------------------------"

" The management of the Melbourne Football Club has admitted president Joseph Gutnick discussed the problems of drafting a Jewish player prior to last year's AFL national draft. Gutnick, an orthodox Jew, does not attend Saturday matches because it is the sabbath in his religion. Demons football manager Danny Corcoran says there was a minor discussion with Gutnick on the issue prior to the draft. AFL chief executive Wayne Jackson has told Channel Seven the league may investigate the matter, but admits it is a sensitive issue. ""I think we'd all have a high regard for Joseph and his approach to his faith and therefore I think it needs to be very sensitively considered,"" he said."

" The Federal Opposition has moved to censure Health Minister Michael Wooldridge in Federal Parliament today over the MRI scan investigation. The Commonwealth Auditor-General investigated a run of purchases of the machines in the lead-up to the 1998 Budget, after allegations Dr Wooldridge had leaked information about Medicare funding. The Auditor-General has found the Government's negotiations with radiologists created an environment in which some might have deduced or become aware of Medicare funding in the Budget. Dr Wooldridge told question time he has been cleared by the Auditor-General's report. ""Not a single person who gave evidence under oath has said there was a Budget leak and this confirms what I have been saying all along,"" he said. ""And if you wish to go to the specific paragraph in his report, [it] has come up with no leak at all."""

" The Federal Opposition has blamed what it dubs Treasurer Peter Costello's ""loose lips"" for yesterday's drop in Telstra's share price. Shadow Treasurer Simon Crean says Mr Costello's comments on Tuesday that he had had some bad news about Telstra's upcoming dividends, were responsible for wiping more than $1 billion off Telstra's share value. He has called on Mr Costello to apologise to hundreds of thousands of Telstra shareholders who have had their investment slashed because of his carelessness. But Mr Costello has defended his comments. ""The government accumulates all of its dividends as it always has,"" he said. ""It doesn't isolate them, and as we reported in the budget, a point that I made on Tuesday, they fall by 66 per cent and I think anybody who looked at that would say they would rather it didn't, and a 66 per cent fall in associated dividends was bad news."""

" There has been good news for Telstra shareholders today, with the stock rallying after seven days in decline. But it has been a different story for the overall market, while financial markets in Asia have tumbled. Telstra has today closed up 14 cents to $6.75, Telstra Two, also up 14 cents to $3.80. Analysts say it is a delayed response to yesterday's assurances, prompted by the Costello comments, about healthy profit growth and dividends this financial year."

" Prime Minister John Howard says today's drop in unemployment is a direct result of his Government's policies. The unemployment rate has fallen slightly to 6.8 per cent, and the number of employed people has risen to more than nine million, for the first time. Mr Howard has told question time in Parliament today employment, training and industrial relations reforms have all contributed to the good result. ""Seven hundred thousand more Australians now have jobs as a result of the policies of this Government, Mr Speaker,"" he said. ""And those 700,000 people will remember the leader of the Opposition for leaving us with an $80 billion debt in only five years, and also having opposed every measure of the Government designed to create those 700,000 jobs."""

" The Federal Government claims a crackdown on welfare fraud and overpayment has saved taxpayers $8 million per week. The results of the crackdown are detailed in Centrelink's half-year compliance activity report tabled in Federal Parliament. The report shows there were 1,300 convictions for welfare fraud, involving nearly $12 million. As well, nearly 115,000 people had welfare payments cancelled or reduced between July and December last year. Community Services Minister Larry Anthony says the majority of those people are honest, but failed to comply with requirements. ""For many people it may be because they failed to declare earnings or they may have started a new job and we recognise that,"" he said. ""But by the same token there is a requirement that if they've been receiving social security, receiving other taxpayers' money, then they should notify us."""

" A pioneering hand transplant surgeon says his patient, Clint Hallam, is in the United States for university tests and not because he is rejecting his new hand. The Perth-based Mr Hallam is reported to have told newspapers in the US he is there for urgent treatment because his body is rejecting his two-year-old transplanted hand. The surgeon, Professor Earl Owen, says Mr Hallam is in no danger of losing his hand, but part of the reason could be an arrest warrant, issued by New South Wales police, relating to fraud charges. ""He went over there because he's having cognitive tests in the North-Western University in Chicago, to check the brain function and the hand co-ordination,"" he said. ""He's lucky he got away on Friday of last week. He must have had a tip off because the New South Wales police are now looking for him on a fraud charge."""

" The federal Opposition leader, Kim Beazley, will take up a pet theme, making Australia a knowledge nation, in his formal reply to the federal Budget tonight. Mr Beazley will have the traditional right of reply in Parliament. Mr Beazley will use his half hour address to portray Tuesday's budget as a lost opportunity and focus as much on what it does not do as what it does. He believes the government could have spent far more on key priorities, especially education and research and development, to make Australia a knowledge nation rather than the only country in the developed world which has cut education spending. Mr Beazley will renew his attacks on the size of the government's surplus and the goods and services tax (GST), which he blames for eating up past savings, leaving few reserves for other programs. But he is unlikely to take up a challenge from Treasurer Peter Costello to expound on how Labor would roll back the new tax. ----------------------------------"

" Australian Olympic Committee (AOC) president John Coates says he feels a mistake was made in inviting the daughter of International Olympic Committee (IOC) vice-president Kevan Gosper to be the first Australian to carry the Olympic torch. Mr Coates has agreed that the move could be interpreted as another case of Olympic favours for IOC officials. Sophie Gosper's place in history is assured as the first Australian to carry the Olympic flame on its way to the Sydney Games. Despite the criticism the decision has attracted, the Hellenic Olympic Committee refused to withdraw the invitation and insisted that 11-year-old Sophie represented the perfect image of an ordinary Australian girl. Mr Coates says the Hellenic Olympic Committee did not understand the symbolism of the desire to have a Greek Australian schoolgirl as the first Australian runner and he says it could be interpreted as another favour for an IOC member. ""You can interpret it that way and I think it's fair to interpret it that way,"" Mr Coates said. Mr Coates says he is not surprised by the controversy the whole affair has created. --------------------------------"

" The Federal Health Minister, Michael Wooldridge, says Opposition allegations he leaked sensitive Budget information on Medicare funding to radiologists have been put to rest. Dr Wooldridge says he has been vindicated by the Auditor-General's report into the flood of orders for MRI scanning machines before the 1998 Budget. The report made no conclusions on whether Budget information was leaked, but says some radiologists may have deduced or become aware of what the Government was considering. Dr Wooldridge says there are no grounds for the Opposition's demands that he resign. ""I'm not sure really where the Opposition's got to go,"" he said. ""They have been making the most scurrilous and libelous accusation around the corridors of this place. The Auditor-General has shown that those accusations are completely untrue. ""I think the Opposition is just going to sound more and more shrill. It is a big department, it is a massive portfolio. The negotiation could have been handled better, I'm prepared to concede that."" ----------------------------------"

" Computer software company Microsoft has asked a United States court to throw out government plans to break up the company. Microsoft told the court the proposed penalty would far exceed anti-trust violations the company was found to have committed. Microsoft has proposed a range of remedies it says would correct what the United States District Court found to be illegal competitive behaviour. The software giant has offered to stop displaying the icon on its Windows operating system that takes users directly to the company's Internet browser. It says it will allow other computer makers to feature software on Windows. The US Justice Department has asked the District Court to split Microsoft into a personal computer operating systems business and a separate applications software firm, to stop Microsoft from dominating access to the Internet. Microsoft says the government's stand is extreme and wants the plans thrown out. The court has asked the Government to respond by May 17. ----------------------------------"

" Philippine negotiators say Muslim rebels will decide in the next 24 hours if they will free an ailing German woman, one of 21 foreign nationals held hostage on the island of Jolo. Pleas for the release of 57-year-old Renate Wallert have been made by both her fellow captives and diplomatic representatives. She has been held captive along with 20 others for more than two weeks after being seized at gunpoint from a Malaysian resort island. Kidnapped with her husband and son, it is believed she may have suffered a stroke. In the first face-to-face meeting between negotiators and the Muslim rebel captors, a deadline was set for making a decision on her release. Meanwhile Malaysia has announced it will send a team of medical volunteers to Jolo island, where the hostages are being held. -----------------------------------"

" Investors in the United States have bailed out of high-tech stocks again. Fear once more looks to be taking hold over valuations of companies in the sector. Some disappointing earnings reports have been thrown into the mix overnight and the selling has been much more vigorous than during the declines experienced over the previous two sessions. New York's Nasdaq composite index has crumbled, plunging 200 points. That is a rout of more than 5.5 per cent. The impact has also been felt on the New York Stock Exchange with Hewlett-Packard, IBM and Intel Corporation dumped. Interest-rate sensitive sectors have also been sold off again, ahead of next week's policy meeting at the US Federal Reserve. Although closing well off its lows, the Dow Jones industrial average is down 169 points at 10,368. That is a slide of 1.6 per cent. The US bond market looks to have benefited from a ""safe haven"" effect. Rising bond prices have pushed down the yield on 30-year Treasury paper to 6.15 per cent, a fall of around six points. In Britain, the sharemarket has suffered a third straight loss. Technology, media and telecommunications shares have again led the market lower. London's FT-100 index has dropped 23 points to 6,101. Yesterday in Australia, Telstra was again in the spotlight with its instalment receipts hitting an all-time low as the overall market headed sharply lower. The All Ordinaries index closed 43 points down at 3,012. In overnight trade on the Sydney Futures exchange, just after 7:00am AEST, the Share Price Index contract was down 27 points on yesterday's day settlement at 3,012. The 10-year bond contract is up seven points at 93.53 with the implied yield easing to 6.47 per cent. The Australian dollar has slipped slightly. At 7:00am it was being quoted at around 58.21 US cents, down less than one-tenth of a cent on yesterday's local close. On the cross-rates, it was at 0.6419 Euros, 63.75 Japanese yen, 38.49 pence Sterling and against the New Zealand dollar it was at 1.220. The gold price was at $US277.75 an ounce, oil and West Texas crude is at $US28.24 a barrel. ----------------------------------"

" New research has revealed that migraines, which affect up to two million Australians, may be hereditary. Melbourne neurologist, Doctor John Heywood, says the gene responsible for a severe form of migraine has been isolated. Dr Heywood says it appears that migraines, which are three times more likely to affect women than men, may be inherited through the female line. He says ongoing research means a simple blood test in the future could identify whether a person is likely to suffer from the debilitating headaches. ""That's been an enormous breakthrough,"" Dr Heywood said. ""Up until now, most doctors and many sufferers have suspected that they've got an inherited form of migraine because their mum or dad had migraine but it's been very hard to pin that down scientifically,"" Dr Heywood said. ----------------------------------"

" The Indonesian Government has rejected allegations of corruption and nepotism over its decision to offer a high paying job to the brother of President Abdurrahman Wahid. The announcement comes just days after Hussim Wahid was accused of accepting $6 million from a government agency. The Tempo magazine which was closed down by the Suharto regime alleged that Mr Wahid's brother accepted money from the State Logistics Agency. The President vehemently denied the claims and pressured another paper which republished the allegations to make a grovelling apology. Now Hussim Wahid has been appointed to the Government's bank restructuring agency. The agency has the job of accelerating the collection of bad performing loans. --------------------------------"

" Queensland forward Gorden Tallis has pleaded guilty to dissent in last night's State of Origin rugby league match but has escaped suspension. New South Wales won the match at Stadium Australia in Sydney 20-16, but Tallis was sent off by referee Bill Harrigan with nine minutes to go. Tallis had disputed a try scored by New South Wales to make the score 16-16, with the Queensland forward telling Harrigan he was a cheat and that there were two knock-ons in the movement that lead to the try. Tallis pleaded guilty to the charge but apologised for his actions saying he had cost his side the game and would apologise to Harrigan. The judiciary said it would normally consider a suspension but Tallis had paid a heavy price for the indiscretions."

" Regulators want to see whether there has been a breach of continuous disclosure rules in Telstra telling the Federal Government of its future financial performance. The Treasurer Peter Costello has said he heard ""very bad news"" about Telstra's dividends in the coming year. The Stock Exchange is not entirely satisfied with Telstra's explanation that it already publicly predicted earnings and hence dividends should improve for the current full-year. Telstra's finance director, John Stanhope, confirms dividends will fall next year, because this year all shareholders received a special dividend which is unlikely to recur. Also, that the Government will have only 51 per cent ownership, whereas it had two-thirds for part of this year. Mr Stanhope says Mr Costello had the right to seek information other shareholders are not privy to."

" The Olympic flame has been officially lit. The flame has been ignited in a special ceremony at Olympia in Greece, and is now on its way to Australia. Several thousand people, including a large contingent of Australian tourists were present in the ancient stadium in Olympia for the formal ceremony that signals the start of the last leg of the build-up to the Sydney Games. Olympics Minister Michael Knight pledged to deliver a quality Games that the athletes deserve and a Games that will truly uphold the Olympic ideals. The torch relay that began after the lighting of the flame will now weave its way across Greece for the next 10 days before travelling through the Pacific and on to Australia. In his address, the Governor-General Sir William Deane, said the flame would carry a message of inclusion and harmony when it arrived on Australian soil."

" The Defence Minister, John Moore, has acknowledged that money to upgrade two Collins submarines still will not be enough to make them ready for combat. The Federal Government has allocated $128 million in the Budget to repair two of the six Collins subs, which have been plagued with noise and software problems. Mr Moore says the other four will not be mothballed but it could be years before they are brought up to full standard. Mr Moore says the two undergoing repairs will be in the water by the end of the year but will be limited in their operations. ""At the end of the year these two submarines can carry out limited, limited capacity operations. ""They cannot enter into a total warfare scheme under their present, under what will be the augmented system, but for all intents and essential purposes they will be adequate for use at that point,"" Mr Moore said."

" The Federal Opposition says the Government's Budget commitment to the upgrade is short-sighted and threatens the future of the submarine project. Opposition Defence spokesman Stephen Martin says the Government is not prepared to make hard decisions about what is required for Australia's defence. ""The Government is not prepared to adequately resource the Australian sub corps to ensure those six submarines are brought up to full capability. ""This is a half-way house, in fact it's not even that. It's providing two submarines with the capability in particular circumstances to give us some protection, or some fire power or to fit into the broader defence of Australia, but the other four it seems will have to wait,"" he said."

" Staff at a Melbourne nursing home have rejected allegations they were directed to spray insecticide on elderly patients. The claims were made by a former employee at the Namara psycho-geriatric nursing home at Caulfield, who says she found ants in the mouth, nose and eyes of a resident. The Victorian Aged Care Minister has launched an investigation, and asked her federal counterpart to do the same. Belinda Morieson, of the Australian Nursing Federation, says nurses did not spray insecticide at residents, nor were they directed to do so by management. ""There has been a problem with an infestation of ants. The management has called in pest experts and has put the appropriate action in place. ""However, the nurses still are aware that they must constantly check for ants, because these are a lot of elderly and sometimes demented patients,"" she said."

" There has been another outbreak of legionnaire's disease in Victoria, this time in the state's north. Four cases have been reported at Cobram, west of Albury on the New South Wales border. Cooling towers on several buildings in Cobram including the hospital have been treated with biocides and an investigation has been launched to find the source of another four cases of legionnaire's disease. Three residents, two women aged 81 and 69 and a 61-year-old man have been treated in the Cobram Hospital and a 34-year-old woman has been discharged. All became ill between April 28 and 30. The head of disease control for the department of Human Services, Professor William Hart, says samples from the cooling towers are being tested for the legionella bacteria, and all towers have been treated and declared safe."

" The number of people confirmed with legionaire's disease from the outbreak linked to the Melbourne aquarium is now 87, making it one of largest outbreaks in the world. Two people have died, 25 remain in hospital and seven of those are critically ill. A further 17 people with symptoms are awaiting test results."

" The Federal Finance Minister John Fahey is being treated for legionella but expects to make a full recovery. It is yet to be determined if Mr Fahey's illness is linked to an outbreak of the disease at the Melbourne Aquarium. He is now on leave from Parliament, after working through Federal Budget preparations while suffering from legionella. While he did attend a Liberal Party function at the aquarium during the outbreak, Victorian health officials are unsure if it is the source of his illness. Members of Parliament, including the Prime Minister, John Howard, and the Opposition leader, Kim Beazley, have wished Mr Fahey a speedy recovery. Mr Fahey will recuperate at home over the next few days."

" Philippine and Libyan envoys are expected to open negotiations with Muslim rebels soon, and seek the release of an ailing German woman held captive with 20 other mostly foreign hostages. Government emissary Ghazali Ibrahim says a doctor with medicine, food and clothing is accompanying the Government negotiating team. The hostages were seized from a Malaysian diving resort by Abu Sayyaf rebels on April 23, and taken to the southern Philippine island of Jolo. Mr Ibrahim says he is initially hoping to secure the release of Renate Wallert, a 57-year-old German woman, who has high blood pressure and has weakened in the tropical heat. ""This we consider a priority to be discussed with them. We will try to talk to them regarding this matter,"" he said."

" Police in the Philippines are combing Manila for 10 more people suspected of helping launch the devastating Love Bug computer virus. The National Bureau of Investigation says the 10 are believed to be from a computer school, AMA Computer College, where the main suspect, Reonel Ramones, also studied. Meanwhile, Mr Ramones, who was questioned for several hours and freed yesterday, has been barred from leaving the country. Police said they did not have enough evidence to hold him. Further investigations are now being carried out by a special panel of prosecutors, the first of its kind in the Philippines which has no law specific for cybercrime."

" The worst fears of Swimming Australia appear set to come true with one of the competitors scheduled to swim at this weekend's Olympic trials threatening legal action unless he has access to a controversial new bodysuit. Atlanta medley relay bronze medallist Stephen Dewick, of New South Wales, says Speedo's fastskin bodysuit is only available to 160 members of the shadow Olympic team, while 300 others competing in the trials will miss out. Dewick says it is not fair that only some swimmers will have access to the suit, which is designed to improve times by cutting water resistance. ""I'm taking advice at the moment about where we stand and go to the arbitration of sport and all that. ""I just don't want to sound like the Anthony Mundines and all that where you're going about praising yourself [but] if you miss out by one 100th and they've had the opportunity to train in it for eight weeks, T think something should be done about it,"" he said."

" The Federal Treasurer, Peter Costello, says last night's budget lays a strong economic and social foundation for Australia's future. A surprise surplus and funding for rural Australia are the key elements. The Budget anticipates a bigger than expected surplus next financial year of $2.8 billion, largely because of the predicted bonanza from the upcoming sale of mobile phone spectrum. It is part of a generally rosy economic forecast with growth tipped to remain strong at 3.75 per cent next year, unemployment to fall to 6.25 per cent, a near 25 year low, and most of the Government's debt repaid. The surplus and debt savings have allowed the government to scrap its Timor Tax before it begins and gives it more to spend on social programs. The Budget's centrepiece is a $1.8 billion assistance package for rural and regional Australia. A total of $562 million will deliver better health services and more doctors to country areas. Half a billion dollars, already announced, will offset the impact of the GST on rural petrol prices. There is assistance for farmers, remote school children and the switch to digital television in the bush. Defence spending will rise by $300 million. Australia's commitment to East Timor will soak up $900 million next financial year. The foreign aid budget is going up 4 per cent in real terms and there is more money to stop people smuggling and build two new detention centres in Darwin and Brisbane. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Financial markets look to have already moved on, following last night's Budget. The Australian dollar has regained its poise after being initially dumped. The Treasurer's Budget delivery was followed soon after by a near 20-month low on the dollar of 57.66 US cents, down six-tenths of a cent on where it had been immediately prior to the speech. The Macquarie Bank's Jo Masters says main elements of the Budget were already known and the market has effectively put the Budget behind it. Just before 8:00am AEST, the dollar was at 58.56 US cents up three-tenths of a cent of the levels immediately prior to the Budget. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" British troops continue to evacuate foreign nationals from Sierra Leone today, as fighting between government and rebel forces escalates east of the capital, Freetown. At the same time, United Nations peacekeepers have been forced out of a town less than 60 kilometres from the capital and African leaders have ended a meeting in Nigeria, warning they will use military force to stop any attempt to grab power undemocratically in Sierra Leone. Hercules transport planes on shuttle runs to neighbouring Senegal have evacuated 180 British, Commonwealth and European Union citizens as the situation in Sierra Leone threatens to spiral out of control. The Sierra Leone Army is maintaining a heavy presence on the streets, but residents are unnerved by the reported disappearance of Revolutionary United Front (RUF) leader Foday Sankoh, whose whereabouts is unknown following a gunbattle outside his Freetown residence yesterday. Unconfirmed reports say he is being held by the national army, however those claims have not been independently verified. RUF rebels have also attacked the town of Masiaka, less than 60 kilometres from Freetown, driving UN peacekeepers out of the area and forcing thousands of rural villagers to flee for the capital fearing further attacks. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" International art critic Robert Hughes believes justice has been done in the dismissal by a Broome magistrate of a dangerous driving case against him. The magistrate ruled the prosecution had failed to satisfy him that Mr Hughes had driven dangerously. Mr Hughes was nearly killed in the head-on collision near Broome last May, two men in the other car were also badly injured. Mr Hughes was subsequently charged with dangerous driving. The prosecution alleged that he was travelling on the wrong side of the road. Last night, Broome magistrate Antoine Bloemen threw the case out. He described as a blunder the prosecution's decision not to call two of the men in the other car, who were charged with trying to extort $30,000 from Mr Hughes in return for changing their evidence. Mr Bloemen also ordered the prosecution to pay Mr Hughes' legal bills of $36,000. Mr Hughes says he was always confident of being cleared and able to get on with writing a book on his ordeal. Western Australia's Director of Public Prosecutions, Robert Cock QC, has defended his department's decision not to call the two occupants from the other car who were charged with extortion. ""The Crown is not only quite entitled to, but should have regard to the capacity of the magistrate to accept those witnesses as witnesses of truth,"" Mr Cock said. ""The prosecutor, as I understand it, made it quite clear to the magistrate that in his judgment the witnesses could not be relied upon as witnesses of truth."" --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The incubation period for contracting legionnaire's disease, linked to the Melbourne Aquarium, has passed. Victoria's Human Services Department says people who visited the aquarium before the cooling towers were disinfected are no longer in danger of developing the disease. The total number of confirmed cases now stands at 81, with seven critically ill. The department is awaiting test results on a further 19 people. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A United States computer intelligence analyst claims the man arrested in the Philippines on suspicion of launching the love bug computer virus was not its author. However, James Atkinson, of the Massachusetts-based Granite Island Group who has been investigating the release of the virus, says it definitely came from the Philippines. Police in Manila yesterday were forced to free their main suspect due to a lack of evidence. The love bug virus created global havoc, shutting down an estimated 10 million computers worldwide. It was traced to the Philippines, where Internet service providers have confirmed their systems were used to spread the virus. Within days of the virus taking hold, Philippines police announced they had a suspect. Reomel Ramones was detained, police are still waiting to speak to his wife. But the bank clerk has now been released after a preliminary hearing found there was insufficient evidence to hold him. A raid in the couple's home in a Manila suburb uncovered floppy discs, but no computer. Ramones says he is confident a full investigation will prove his innocence. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The first Australian to carry the Olympic torch on its way to Sydney later today will be International Olympic Committee (IOC) vice-president Kevan Gosper's daughter Sophie. Mr Gosper says he had nothing to do with the arrangement. Sophie Gosper, the 11-year-old daughter of Kevan Gosper, will be the second person to participate in the torch relay once the flame lighting ceremony is over in ancient Olympia later today. She will follow the Greek high jump champion Lambros Papacostas but more importantly she will be the first Australian to carry the flame. One of the Greek Australian schoolgirls who have travelled here for the occasion had been set down as the first but Mr Gosper says he was only informed of the change the day before the event. Sophie was invited to participate by the head of the Hellenic Olympic Committee and Mr Gosper says he has had nothing to do with the scheduling. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Queensland rugby league coach Mark Murray says limiting halfback Brett Kimmorley's opportunities is his simple game plan for tonight's opening State of Origin match against New South Wales. Kimmorley has been in great form for Melbourne and Australia but Murray says he relies on a strong forward pack so Queensland will have to match the Blues in that area. Queensland will field two players making their debut - reserve forward Russell Bawden and centre Paul Bowman. Fullback Darren Lockyer says he is confident Bowman will handle the pressure. ""Definitely, he's 24 so he's not lacking experience and he's... a solid player and I can't see any faults in his game at all."""

" The Federal Treasurer, Peter Costello, says this year's Budget lays the foundation to secure the future for Australia. It ushers in the major taxation change of the goods and services tax (GST), plus $12 billion of income tax cuts. By June next year the Government will have more than halved the debt it inherited from Labor. The Treasurer is also holding out the prospect of achieving the lowest unemployment rates in 25 years. Overall, the Budget in 2000-2001 is in surplus to the tune of $2.8 billion. It has been largely funded by the sale of new generation mobile phone spectrum licences worth a little over $2.6 billion. That has allowed the Treasurer to keep the Budget in the black and scrap the Timor tax before it has even begun. And according to the Treasury, the economic times ahead do not look so bad."

" Growth will be down from this year but still relatively strong at 3.75 per cent, with a slowing in domestic demand offset by predicted higher business investment and significantly stronger exports. Ongoing inflation is expected to remain well within the Reserve Bank's target range at 2.5 per cent, although the one-off effect of the GST will see inflation spike at 5.75 per cent for the next financial year. Unemployment is predicted to fall to 6.25 by per cent by the end of June 2001. The Treasurer has delivered the targeted spending he promised. There is more for health, defence, East Timor and, at the heart of it, $1.8 billion of new and already announced measures for the electorally all-important rural and regional voters."

" The rural package concentrates on improving health services. The Government has acknowledged the many problems facing country Australia, but says it is focusing on an area where it can make a difference - the lack of medical services. The Treasurer says there are 1,000 people for every doctor in city areas - compared to 1,500 outside the cities. A total of $562 million will be spent over four years on a regional health package designed to boost the number of doctors and health services. It includes $102 million to increase the number of training places for GP's and adds 225 more GP registrars outside the cities by 2003. There is $118 million to establish better training in rural health at all medical schools. There is funding for scholarships for medical students to practise in rural areas, and 100 more places for those who are prepared to practise in rural areas for at least six years after graduation. Nearly $100 million will be spent increasing the availability of medical specialists in the bush, and the provision of nurses, psychologists and pysiotherapists. There is also money for other regional health services, to make pharmacies more viable, and improve aged care services at small rural facilities."

" As well as the health package there are other measures for regional Australia. There is the already announced $500 million in grants to rural and regional fuel retailers to ensure petrol and diesel prices do not rise under the GST. There is $309 million to expand a package which gives farmers new training, encourages innovation and improves market access for their exports. The Government is also increasing the boarding allowance for isolated children who cannot get to school every day, and it is relaxing the Youth Allowance assets test on farm and business assets. There is $100 million to help regional broadcasters make the switch to digital television."

" In other general health measures, there is $240 million over three years to help non-private hospitals adjust to new fringe benefits tax arrangements. There is $32 million to improve the safety of blood supplies and $26 million to increase the safety of foods and medicines. There is also $31 million over four years to encourage the commercialisation of biotechnology research. There is also extra money to improve the standard of care for older Australians - in both nursing homes and for war veterans."

" The Government is also treating illegal immigration, East Timor, defence, and welfare reform as high priority funding issues A total of $117 million will be spent over four years to tackle people-smuggling and to expand detention facilities. Nearly $52 million will go towards a new detention centre in Darwin and a facility in Brisbane. The number of Australian officers monitoring and preventing illegal immigration in overseas posts is also up. Australia's commitment to East Timor will cost $900 million next financial year, hitting a five-year total of $3 billion in 2004. Defence costs account for most of that, but the Budget also includes money for civilian police and reconstruction works. Elsewhere in defence, there is a one-off $100 million to cover Reserves, information technology and logistics, and $128 million to bring two of the Collins submarines to operational standard. An extra $32 million dollars will help Vietnam Veterans and their families, after recent health studies confirmed they suffer high rates of illness and accidents. Benefits will also be extended to personnel who served in South-East Asian conflicts after World War II."

" In Welfare, childcare and family assistance schemes will cost an extra $240 million over four years. The Government hopes to raise an extra $100 million a year by including income from companies and trusts in the means test. Two hundred million will be saved by requiring all new dole applicants to sign mutual obligation agreements. The number of work-for-the-dole places will rise from 32,000 to 50,000 in the year ahead. Greenhouse gas reduction schemes are the main feature of the environment budget, attracting $400 million over four years. Elite sport will get an extra $5 million in the year ahead to retain coaches and other professionals after the Olympics. There is more money for film financing, the major performing arts and the development of circus skills. The Budget also confirms the Government's proposed new beer excise regime, aimed at keeping price rises for packaged beer at just under 2 per cent, but leaving the way open for higher increases on bar sales."

" A Broome Magistrate has ruled the dangerous driving case, against international art critic Robert Hughes, should not proceed. Mr Hughes has been on trial accused of driving on the wrong side of the road and causing a head-on collision between his car and another vehicle carrying three men. Mr Hughes nearly died in the crash and two men in the other car seriously injured. Late today, Mr Hughes' defence team submitted the case against their client should be thrown out because the prosecution had not proven he had driven dangerously."

" In the southern Philippines, there are reports that Muslim extremists have broken through a military cordon taking three of their 21 hostages with them. News of the break-out has coincided with plans for the first face-to-face meeting between the rebels and a new Philippines negotiator. A Philippines military report says muslim separatists broke through the military cordon surrounding their camp where they have been holding a group of foreign tourists. The reports says three hostages, a male and two females, identified solely as caucasian were spotted with their Muslim kidnappers. The report has emerged as high hopes for the hostages release were being placed on a planned meeting between the kidnappers and a newly installed Philippine negotiator. Ghazali Ibrahim departed for the southern island of Jolo, where the hostages are being held earlier today."

" The Senate is a step closer to holding a specific inquiry into airline safety standards in response to a series of incidents involving Qantas. The Rural and Regional Affairs Transport Committee will question the Civil Aviation Safety Authority about the incidents. But it says it is likely to have to initiate a separate inquiry to summon witnesses from the airlines. Committee chair Winston Crane says an inquiry will not single out Qantas, but will look at all airlines' maintenance. ""This must be a look at the total position as far as safety is concerned, as far as maintenance is concerned and the practices that have developed now that Qantas has been privatised,"" he said. ""This must be broad in...the way its done. It's about restoring confidence and keeping confidence in the people who have raised the issue with us."""

" Three of Australia's four major banks have now passed on in full last week's rise in official interest rates. The Commonwealth and Westpac today lifted rates on a range of home and business loans by 0.25 per cent. Westpac's new rates take effect from this Thursday, while Commonwealth customers will pay the higher rates from May 22."

" Australia's financial markets have weakened ahead of tonight's Federal Budget, weighed down further by yesterday's raft of negative economic news. The Australian dollar is testing the 20-month lows hit at the start of the month, bottoming at 57.9 US cents. Late in the afternoon it was at around 58.12 US, which was back at around this morning's levels. Investors are keenly awaiting news on the size of tonight's Budget surplus, the source of future surpluses and Treasury's forward estimates. On the share market, the All Ordinaries index is down 20 points to 3,054, on further weakness in Telstra and other ""new economy"" stocks. Telstra's woes are only worsening with the stock slipping to $6.70 - its lowest level since November 1998, before closing at $6.74, down 17 cents on the day. Other telcos were also depressed by a sizeable fall on the Nasdaq last night. Cable and Wireless Optus fell 26 cents or four per cent to $5.13 while AAPT fell 41 cents or five per cent, to $6.79. Davnet dropped 27 cents, or 14 per cent to $1.55. The embattled Solution 6 is down another 26 cents, or six per cent to $4.08. There are reports its chairman-elect and Telstra senior executive, Ted Pretty, has ended his direct involvement with the accountancy software group. Of the banks, St George rose five cents to $11.15 after a nine per cent rise in half-year profit to $169 million. The National fell 16 to $24.44, the ANZ is up 11 to $11.95 and the Commonwealth jumped 91 cents to $27.35. News Corp rose 35 to $21.15 but BHP fell 67 to $17.10. On the cross-rates, the Australian dollar is buying 37.9 sterling, 63.3 yen and 1.263 German marks. On the trade weighted index it is at 52.6. The price of gold is $US276.95 an ounce, up 30 cents since this morning."

" A judge of the South Australian Supreme Court is to reserve his decision over an application concerning a 13 million dollar civil claim against Alan Bond relating to an alleged fraudulent art deal. A court appointed liquidator for the former Bond Corporation, now known as Southern Equities Corporation, has applied for an injunction to freeze some assets of the Bond family. The liquidator, Mr England wants to stop Alan Bond or his sons, Craig and John from selling any assets of the Carindale Land Corporation, which is worth almost 5 million dollars. However today in the Supreme Court, Justice Debelle said he would reserve his decision on the application. The dispute centres around allegations by Mr England that Alan Bond, his sons and the family's accountant were involved in the fraudulent sale of 13 paintings, including a rare portrait of Captain Cook. It is alledged the paintings were sold in 1989 and sent overseas but that funds from the sale, and some of the paintings were returned to Australia through Carindale Land Corporation. The court is due to hear further submissions on the matter next week."

" The Federal Treasurer, Peter Costello, has dismissed a claim the Budget could be in a structural deficit of $5.6 billion. Access Economics has made the prediction, which it describes as ""worrying"", about the 2000-2001 Budget, in its latest Budget Monitor report. But Mr Costello says Access Economics is wrong. ""I noticed for example, one of the things it's premised on is NAIRU, the Non-Accelerating Inflation Rate of Unemployment is 6.7 per cent - so Access says structural unemployment in this country is 6.7 per cent - that's something I would never agree with,"" he said. ""I would never agree with the proposition that unemployment in this country can't go lower than 6.7 per cent."" Mr Costello says the Budget, to be brought down tomorrow, will continue the Government's good economic management. He says there will be targeted spending measures, expected to be in areas such as health and education, and the Budget will remain in surplus."

" Mr Costello has also defended proposed excise increases on beer, denying claims the Government has broken promises to the brewing industry. When the 37 per cent wholesale sales tax is taken off beer and replaced by the 10 per cent goods and services tax (GST), the Government will lift excise to ensure packaged beer prices rise by around 2 per cent. But the brewing and hotels industries are angry beer sold over the bar will rise by a higher amount. Mr Costello says industry lobbyists have no case to argue. ""Try as they might, as they thumb through the new tax system and all of the written policy, they cannot find there was ever a suggestion to the contrary,"" he said. ""What we said, it's there in black and white and the brewers know it and they've known it now for a very long period of time, is that we will move the price of packaged beer by 1.9 per cent and that's what we'll do."""

" Meanwhile, the Federal Government is to increase defence spending in tomorrow's budget. The Defence Minister, John Moore, told an air force conference the government's promise to lift military spending will be seen in the Budget. ""In terms of the Budget, the government is committed to spending more money on defence and that will be seen in the coming year,"" Mr Moore said. ""It is also committed very strongly to seeing an improvement in the management of defence because it certainly lacked and has been missing in the past."" Officials say defence will get what is described as a modest increase, above the rate of inflation. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Labor Party has celebrated the 99th anniversary of its first Federal caucus meeting. ALP members and senators today gathered in Canberra for their pre-Budget meeting, 99 years to the day since John Watson convened the party's first caucus meeting. The Opposition leader Kim Beazley read from minutes of a gathering on the May 7, 1901, which led to the inaugral caucus meeting the following day. A cake was cut and Mr Beazley led party members in a rendition of <i>Happy Birthday</i>. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" There have been mixed reactions from the passengers of the Qantas flight from Hong Kong that was twice forced to abort its journey to Australia. The group flew into Sydney this morning, 24 hours after they were scheduled to land. Some said they were happy with the way Qantas handled the situation while others claimed they will seek compensation for the inconvenience and trauma they suffered. Most passengers seemed unaware that the jet they were on had also skidded off a runway in Thailand last year but those who did said it did not really worry them. ""No, it doesn't concern me because if they fly the plane I know they can fly it. It's alright,"" one passenger said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australia says restoring diplomatic ties with North Korea gives it an opportunity to encourage Pyongyang to engage in regional dialogue. Australia and North Korea have announced separately they will resume full relations after a 25 year freeze. The two countries established diplomatic ties in 1974, but Pyongyang expelled Australian diplomats there the following year and closed its own embassy in Canberra without explanation. The Foreign Affairs Minister, Alexander Downer, says the Federal Government believes it can achieve more by dealing with North Korea than ignoring it. ""It is my view that in the main it makes much more sense to engage with a country rather than to ignore them or turn your back on them, in general that is likely to be a more constructive approach,"" he said. ""It's the view of the Australian Government that despite the concerns we have about North Korea, nevertheless we think it makes more sense to engage with them rather than ignore them."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The ANZ Bank is expecting employment growth to come further off the boil over the next three months. Its regular survey of newspaper job advertising shows a drop in April of 0.8 per cent. The average weekly number of ""positions vacant"" notices was a seasonally-adjusted 29,513. ANZ chief economist Saul Eslake says that points to actual employment growth of around 15,000 additional places per month over the next three months. ""That's down nearly 9,000 from the average of 23,600 new jobs per month that has been recorded over the six months to March,"" Mr Eslake said. ""If we get an average of 15,000 new jobs per month over the next three months then the unemployment rate would likely remain in the 6.75 to 7 per cent range that has been established since the end of last year."""

" Meanwhile, the latest measure of retail activity in Australia is showing a recovery, after three consecutive months of decline. But the rebound is weaker than generally expected. During the month of March, shoppers have spent, in raw terms, $11.7 billion nationally. Seasonally-adjusted, that is a rise of just 0.6 per cent. The latest outcome follows declines in the official measures for December, January and February, the first time on record there had been three consecutive falls. In its semi-annual report on Monetary Policy published last Friday, the Reserve Bank noted consumer spending had slowed after exceptional strength last year. But it said it would be surprising if it were to remain as weak as suggested by the recent retail trade data, given the continued gains in household income, high levels of wealth and the prospect of substantial tax cuts after July. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A Broome court has been told that art critic Robert Hughes was driving on the wrong side of the road when he collided head on with another vehicle in Western Australia's Kimberley region. Hughes is on trial on charges of dangerous driving. The head-on collision happened on a straight stretch of the Great Northern Highway south of Broome in May last year. Hughes, who had been fishing, received critical injuries while two men in the other car were also hurt. The back seat passenger suffered serious internal injuries. Today, the prosecution alleged that Hughes was travelling on the incorrect side of the road despite attempts by the approaching vehicle to get him to change lanes. The court was also told while the other car showed signs of slowing and braking before impact, there was no such evidence from Hughes' vehicle. The prosecution also confirmed today it would not be calling two of the men in the other car to give evidence because they have been charged with trying to extort money from Hughes in return for favourable testimony. Prosecutor Lloyd Rainey described the men as unreliable and untrustworthy because they had demonstrated they were prepared to give perjured evidence. Hughes' trial is continuing. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Australian Federal Police (AFP) says it is not currently investigating the source of the so-called Love Bug which has affected an estimated 300,000 computers worldwide. The AFP has dismissed claims by a Swedish computer expert that the creator is a German student currently living in Australia. Fredrik Bjoerk, who helped identify the maker of last year's Melissa virus, is convinced the student activated the virus in the Philippines through the Internet. But Steve Simpson, from the AFP's computer crime unit, says more credible information is being sought from organisations including the FBI."

" Small businesses relying on email are reported to be among the hardest hit by the ""I Love You"" computer virus. Industry analysts say at least eight variations of the virus are still attacking computer networks, with several mentioning a joke in the subject line of an infected email. The Insurance Council of Australia says few companies are insured against the impact of computer viruses, so they will not be covered for any financial losses. Rob Bastion, from the Small Business Council of Australia, says it is hard to estimate the actual cost of the virus on businesses. ""It's very hard no-one will ever know the impact of this specific incident, but the real issue is the vulnerability of our systems to such things when we are centralising them,"" he said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Britain has begun the first phase of the mass evacuation of citizens from Sierra Leone, where clashes between rival factions have spread to the capital. Britain says all of its citizens are being called in to a central hotel near the beach in Freetown, the usual departure point for previous evacuations from the city. More than 200 paratroopers have also arrived at the international airport to secure the facility and assist with the evacuation of foreign nationals if security continues to deteriorate. In the latest incident, opponents of Revolutionary United Front (RUF) leader Foday Sankoh were fired upon as they marched towards his house in protest over the capturing of UN peacekeepers by RUF fighters. As many as seven people were killed in the ensuing gun battle, which took place in the presence of UN peacekeepers. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" Health, education and rural Australia are expected to be among the focal points of today's federal Budget. But the initiatives will be specifically targeted, as the government plans to keep the Budget in surplus. The Treasurer, Peter Costello, says the 2000-2001 Budget will continue the government's commitment to good economic management. ""It's important that we make decisions that can secure Australia's future and that's what we intend to do,"" he said. Mr Costello says the Budget will, however, begin to address areas of priority, which include health and education. Regional and rural Australia are also expected to benefit from measures to improve health and other services. As well, there is likely to be a modest increase in spending on defence. Mr Costello expects the Opposition will try to have the Senate block some components of the budget, but says he is not expecting any major problems. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The run of technical problems for Qantas has continued with confirmation of problems on Sunday with Flight 63 from Sydney to Perth, travelling on to Africa. The airline says a faulty part in a system providing fuel readouts in the Boeing 747-400 had to be replaced, grounding the plane for 13 hours. The 329 passengers were accommodated in Perth hotels while the fault was fixed. The problem in Perth follows a Qantas flight from Hong Kong being forced to abort its journey twice because of technical problems. A Senate committee will be meeting this morning to consider whether to conduct an inquiry into Qantas' safety standards. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Police in the Philippines now believe three local people were responsible for the release of the love bug computer virus. The suspects are a man and his female partner, who both work in banks, and the woman's sister, all three lived in a flat in Manila. Meanwhile, the insurance agent Lloyd's of London has put a figure on the cost of the damage caused by the virus. Lloyd's says the cost of the love bug virus which swept across the world is being put at $25 billion and most of this bill is uninsured. Lloyd's says a new survey of insurance workers in America shows 70 per cent identified e-commerce as the major risk of the new century. The company's North America manager, Julian James, says the love bug has shown the vulnerability of new technology. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A Greek Australian man wanted for a Sydney murder appears to have successfully used military service to avoid standing trial in Greece. Steve Anas, 34, did not turn up to court yesterday in the northern Greek city of Ioannina to stand trial over the 1994 murder and robbery of Toula Soravia, a petrol station owner. The trial was postponed and a new date was not set. Two men were jailed in Sydney over the murder but Steve Anas avoided trial by moving to Greece. He joined the Greek army last year, after earlier successfully avoiding extradition to Australia. Under Greek law, civilian courts have no direct authority over people undertaking military service. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" British Northern Ireland Secretary Peter Mandelson says he will move to restore the suspended power-sharing Assembly within two weeks, following the Irish Republican Army's (IRA) offer to put its weapons beyond use. At the same time, two independent observers of IRA disarmament are to visit Northern Ireland early next week. Cyril Ramaphosa from the African National Congress and former Finnish president Martti Ahtisarri are to visit Belfast next week to start overseeing the IRA's offer to place its weapons dumps beyond use. Mr Mandelson says the ultimate prize of peace is within reach. He has announced he will restore the suspended Northern Ireland Assembly within a fortnight and even sceptical Ulster Unionists have indicated that the development is one of the most significant yet in the peace process. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Tax workers will start enforcing work bans this morning that could affect goods and services tax (GST) preparations. The industrial action is part of an ongoing wage dispute. Members of the Community and Public Sector Union voted on the work bans last week. The tax office is playing down the industrial action. Assistant tax commissioner Glenda Sullivan says she only expects 5 per cent of workers will participate in the bans. ""We'll be obviously treating each other professionally in the workplace and in accordance with the law, and we'll be making sure our managers are briefed on how to deal with any situations that emerge,"" Ms Sullivan said. The union, however, is expecting a much higher compliance rate. It has also threatened to step up its campaign if heavy-handed tactics are used against workers enforcing the bans. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The world's number one tennis player Andre Agassi and Australia's teenage sensation Lleyton Hewitt have had opening round wins at the Italian Open Masters tournament. Agassi easily defeated fellow United States entrant Todd Martin 6-2, 7-6. Hewitt, a winner of three titles already this season on hardcourt, beat the Austrian Stefan Koubek 6-4, 6-2."

" In a dramatic pledge that revived the Northern Ireland peace process at a stroke, the Irish Republican Army (IRA) has promised to put its weapons ""beyond use"" and permit international monitors to verify the process. It is a major breakthrough in a process many thought had become hopelessly deadlocked. Northern Ireland secretary Peter Mandelson described the IRA's move as more than just a step in the right direction, rather a jump. ""It creates the chance for people in Northern Ireland to have a future which is free from violence and the use of weapons,"" Mr Mandelson said. Even the leader of the Ulster Unionist Party, David Trimble, has acknowledged what he calls some quite positive elements in the IRA statement. But he says some areas, like how the weapons remain secure, need to be clarified. ""There are some quite possitive elements in it,"" Mr Trimble said. ""There are of course some questions that it raises and there are points that we'll want to tease out the meaning of. ""We'll also want to get clarification about some of the procedures, particularly on the ways of ensuring that weapons have remained secure."" Sinn Fein's Gerry Adams has hailed the breakthrough and praised the commitment of the IRA to the peace process. ""The IRA did not have to do this, the IRA doesn't have to do this. But it's only doing it to try and get some assurance to those who are nervous or are genuinely concerned,"" Mr Adams said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Two separate suspects have been identified as authorities attempt to trace the origins of the love bug computer virus. While United States and Philippines police close in on a suspect living in Manila, a Swedish computer expert has suggested the creator is a German exchange student living in Australia. Fredrik Bjoerck, a computer expert who helped the FBI track down the author of the Melissa virus, says just a few hours of research pointed to a 20-something German exchange student in Australia who he identified only as Michael. At the same time, US media reports suggest police in Manila - working in conjunction with the US Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) are set to arrest a 23-year-old man in the Philippines. NBC News reports that Philippine police are only waiting for a judge's warrant before they arrest the man, suspected of launching the virus. But Mr Bjoerck, a postgraduate student at Stockholm University's computer and information technology institute, says he believes the exchange student activated the virus from the Philippines, although he may not have been in the Philippines. Mr Bjoerck started his investigation after he received an infected email on Thursday. He did not open it but decided to track down the origins of the virus for an electronics security course he was teaching. ""Of course, we are working with probabilities,"" Mr Bjoerck said. ""But today we are even more sure this is the guy."" Estimates suggest the virus caused up to $16.99 billion, mostly in lost work time. Mr Bjoerck said he knew the full identity of the suspected virus writer but was not willing to disclose it to journalists and had no plans to contact the man himself. ""It's a person who has really good knowledge about [the Internet] and doesn't know what to do with it,"" he said. Mr Bjoerck said he had relayed some information to a colleague with contacts at the FBI but had not yet had formal contact with the US intelligence agency. David Perry, a virus expert at computer security company Trend Micro, said Mr Bjoerck's detective work was ""pretty good but I don't know if you can make a legal case of it"". Mr Bjoerck said he provided the FBI with information about the 1999 Melissa virus that eventually led them to the US author of the email bug that infected millions of computers. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Deputy Prime Minister John Anderson will launch Impulse Airlines' domestic services in Canberra today. Impulse is set to announce the details of ticketing costs, air routes and marketing strategies. Canberra Airport is set to become the main operation base for Impulse Airlines and will be up and running by next month. The no-frills airline will launch into the domestic market with the aim to create a price-cutting war. The cost of a flight from Canberra to Sydney is expected to be $50 below that charged by Qantas and Ansett. A new fleet of Boeing-717s will be unvieled today along with plans for flight route between Melbourne and Sydney. Marketing plans will also be released with the former captain of the Newcastle Knights Paul Harragon being named the face of Impulse. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A further 220 Zambian troops, serving as peacekeepers in the troubled West African state of Sierra Leone, are believed to have been taken hostage by rebel forces. If confirmed, it would bring the number of United Nations personnel being held by the rebels to nearly 500. A number of countries have announced they are willing to send troops to re-inforce the UN's peacekeeping effort in Sierra Leone, where the fragile peace process is under increasing strain. Three countries which had already promised to send extra peacekeepers to Sierra Leone, India, Bangladesh and Jordan are understood to have reconfirmed their intention to accelerate their troops' deployment. The UN is now working out how it will get the extra soldiers to the country. Russia is believed to have offered help with an airlift and discussions are underway with the Netherlands and the United States to see what logistical assistance they might be able to provide. Britain has sent a small team of military advisers to Sierra Leone's capital, Freetown, to assess what support should be provided for the UN force. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" People interested in buying tickets to popular Olympic athletic sessions can order over the telephone today and tomorrow. Five previously sold-out sessions of athletics including the men's and women's 100 metres finals are available by phone. Tickets to the remaining track and field sessions can be bought by using the order form published today in News Limited newspapers. The telephone number for the call centre and the codes to order particular seats are printed in those papers as well. Sydney Organising Committee for the Olympic Games (SOCOG) chief executive Sandy Hollway says the ticketing policy is as easy and fair as possible. ""Let's get real here, we're dealing with an extraordinary policy and operational challenge,"" Mr Hollway said. ""If this was easy we never would have stumbled. We're not fools."" Australian sprinter and Olympic hopeful Matt Shirvington says a strong home crowd would give athletes a tremendous boost. ""I would really love the Australian public to be there and to support the Australian athletes especially,"" Shirvington said. ""A lot of tickets are going overseas and a lot of tickets are going to officials and so on and I think for us to have a huge Australian contingency in the crowd would make things much easier for us."" Shirvington has called on the public to forget SOCOG's previous ticketing fiasco. ""I think those sorts of things, when the Olympics come round, are going to be forgotten,"" Shirvington said. ""If you're holding onto tickets, you're going to experience something that you're not going to possibly experience for the rest of your life."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Another two people have contracted legionnaire's disease. The total number of confirmed cases of legionnaire's disease rose to 69, after two Victorian men were diagnosed as having contracted the illness. The outbreak, sourced to the Melbourne Aquarium, has claimed the lives of two people and eight are still listed in a critical condition. The number of suspected cases stands at 23, with 12 in Victoria, three each in New South Wales and Tasmania, two in New Zealand and one each in Queensland, the United Kingdom and the United States. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Indonesian soldiers have reportedly shot and killed four members of a militant Muslim force in the strife-torn eastern Malukus, as thousands of the self-styled Jihad warriors prepare to leave for the islands today. The official Antara news agency says the troops shot the members of the Jihad, or Holy War, force during fighting between Muslims and Christians on one of the outer Maluku islands. The parent group of the Islamic organisation claims that 3,000 unarmed volunteers will sail today to the archipelago, which has been split by religious strife for the past 18 months. The group held a 10-day training course near the Indonesian capital Jakarta last month, causing an outcry when they paraded through the grounds of parliament with machetes and swords. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" East Timorese political leader Jose Ramos Horta wants the Timor Gap Treaty re-written to give it 90 per cent of the royalties from the rich oil and gas reserves in the region. The Timor Sea is expected to be producing more than $3 billion worth of oil and gas within five years. The original agreement, made between Australia and Indonesia in 1989, split royalties 50-50 in a shared zone of cooperation. After gaining independence, East Timor is now the beneficiary of the treaty. But East Timorese political leader, Jose Ramos Horta, has told ABC Radio National's ""Background Briefing"" he thinks the current agreement is unfair. ""I believe that Australia is an enormously rich country and I am confident it is prepared to take the intiative itself, so that the East Timorese can benefit much better from the treaty itself,"" Mr Ramos Horta said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Government has put the final touches on its fifth Budget, to be handed down in Parliament tomorrow night. Treasurer Peter Costello has hinted health, education and regional spending will be key priorities. It is Mr Costello's fifth Budget and the first with a goods and services tax (GST), meaning there will be big cuts in income tax and all GST revenue goes to the states. Mr Costello has confirmed the budget will maintain a surplus, but is putting no figure on it. He is also refusing to confirm or deny speculation that the government will scrap its Timor Tax. But the opposition parties and lobby groups are putting their last minute wish lists to the government. Mr Costello has confirmed the Budget will maintain a surplus but is putting no figure on it and says as the government continues to whittle away its debt it wants to channel more spending to other key targets, notably health and education. Mr Costello has also hinted at a spending boost for the bush, flagging funds for specific targeted projects. The opposition parties say rural infrastructure is the key priority, including water and sewerage, transport and communications. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A Qantas jet which last year skidded off a runway in Thailand has been grounded in Hong Kong, after two flights had to be abandoned due to technical problems. The problems were first detected when the aircraft left Hong Kong on Saturday night bound for Australia. With 259 passengers on board, Flight 128 left Hong Kong at around 11:30pm AEST on Saturday. Qantas says the journey was one-hour-old when the captain informed passengers the plane would have to turn back to Hong Kong because of a problem with one of the four electrical generators on board. Passengers spent the night in hotels while ground crews examined the aircraft. The next day, Sunday, the plane was declared fit to fly and passengers reboarded for a second attempt at the journey, only for that flight to be aborted as well. A Qantas spokeswoman says an indicator light alerted pilots to the same generator problem as the plane taxied on to the runway for take-off. Passengers were rebooked on other flights to Australia last night. Qantas says the Boeing 747-400 is the same aircraft that overshot a runway at Bangkok airport in Thailand last year. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Rebels in Sierra Leone have opened fire on a United Nations helicopter causing it to make a forced landing. The helicopter was forced down outside the rebel stronghold of Makeni where it had flown to evacuate peacekeepers wounded in fighting last week between UN troops and the rebels. UN spokesman Philip Winslow says the helicopter was one of two UN aircraft authorised by RUF leader Foday Sankoh to evacuate the wounded and deliver food and supplies to peacekeepers being detained by rebel soldiers in the strongholds of Makeni and Magburaka. Mr Winslow says as one helicopter was taking off rebel soldiers began running towards the airstrip and opened fire. The helicopter managed to fly 10 kilometres before being forced to put down. A second helicopter in the area rescued the crew and injured soldiers on board. The UN says the incident represents a serious violation of peace accords. A mission of UN officials and a rebel commander to the Makeni district have attempted to negotiate the release of more than 500 detained peacekeepers but have failed to achieve any breakthrough. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The number of confirmed cases of legionnaire's disease, sourced to the Melbourne Aquarium, has risen to 72. Three more Victorians have contracted the disease, with another 30 suspected cases. Victoria's Human Services Department says more than 5,000 tests have been done and more cases may be diagnosed. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Philippine President Joseph Estrada has travelled to the southern Philippines as international pressure for a resolution of the hostage crisis continues. Kidnaps by an Islamic radical group have been an unwelcomed blow to Mr Estrada's ailing presidency. Mr Estrada has experienced a stunning fall in popularity in the last year. His approval rating last June was 65 per cent but now it is hovering around 20 per cent. The Philippines' economy has been doing just well enough to keep him in power but Filipinos have tired of Mr Estrada's affection for cronyism and sudden executive decisions. Now he has bowed to international pressure and travelled to the southern Philippines in an attempt to solve the hostage crisis, particularly on the island of Jolo where 21 mostly foreign hostages are kept. Philippines' army casualties continue to mount on the island of Basilan where child hostages remain at large and on Mindanau where MILF guerrillas remain locked in a bitter conflict with the Philippines military. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" In Indonesia, 38 people are confirmed dead and dozens are still missing after a ferry sank off the eastern island of Ambon. There are suspicions the ferry was overloaded when it was hit by huge waves. The ferry set off from Ambon on Saturday night but returned to dock soon afterwards when sea water started to swamp its bows. The voyage resumed early yesterday after three cars were unloaded. But the ferry was reported to be still overloaded with four vehicles and 60 tonnes of cement and fertiliser. Ferries in Indonesia are often overcrowded. The worst accident happened last year when more than 300 died when a ferry sank. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" One of the most debonair stars of Hollywood's golden era, Douglas Fairbanks Junior, has died. The son and namesake of a silent era swashbuckler, Fairbanks became a lead actor himself in the romantic-adventure films of the 1930s, making appearances in <i>The Prisoner of Zenda</i>, <i>Gunga Din</i> and <i>Catherine the Great</i>. But he also won medals for his real life bravado as an American officer in Europe during World War II. His real life romances included a marriage to Joan Crawford and love affairs with Marlene Dietrich and Gertrude Lawrence. Fairbanks died in New York, aged 90. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Mika Hakkinen has taken advantage of Ferrari pit stop problems to win the Spanish Grand Prix for the third consecutive time, over team-mate David Coulthard. Hakkinen, the two-time world champion, was ahead of Coulthard by 16 seconds to notch his first win of the season, placing him second in the drivers' title race behind Michael Schumacher. Schumacher, in a Ferrari, had pole and led Hakkinen until the end of the 41st lap, when both came in together for fuel and tires. Hakkinen had been trailing by less than a second since the 28th lap. But while Hakkinen sped off back onto the track in less than seven seconds, Schumacher took more than 17 seconds, his stop being slowed by a faulty refuelling. Hakkinen moved easily away as Schumacher had problems, turning two seconds a lap slower than Hakkinen and dropping further behind. After that, Coulthard took advantage of Schumacher's slower laps and passed the German on the 48th lap to move into second. Schumacher had to come in again at the end of the 50th lap for his third stop and dropped to fifth, eventually finishing nearly 48 seconds behind Hakkinen. Schumacher's Ferrari team-mate Rubens Barrichello was third, 29 seconds behind Hakkinen. It was Hakkinen's 15th win in his career."

" The love bug computer virus that has crashed electronic mail around the world over the past 48 hours is still active, reaching as far as United States Defence Department computers at the Pentagon. The virus that originally came in a message headed ""I Love You"" also appears to have some other disguises. Pentagon spokesman Kenneth Bacon says a classified internal e-mail system was contaminated by the love bug and another classified system was infected. ""Despite these episodes, the Joint Task Force on Computer Network Defense says that it has received no reports that the virus had an impact on military operations,"" he said. While anti-virus companies have released electronic fixes to kill the malicious computer program that spreads by email and can damage computer files, there is a new menace from cyber vandals. New messages, possibly sent by copy-cats, are also carrying the virus program. They are headed ""Fwd:Joke"" or ""Very Funny"" and like the original message, appear to come from someone known to the recipient. The sneakiest new disguise for what is being called the world's most malicious computer virus is a message that falsely says your credit card has been charged several hundred dollars for a Mother's Day present. Outraged credit card owners are then asked to click an attachment for invoice details. If they do so, they open the virus program. Multimedia additions to this story are available at ""http://www.abc.net.au/news/2000/05/item20000506073553\_1.htm"". -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The United Nations mission in Sierra Leone is calling for the urgent deployment of 3,000 UN peacekeepers who are due to be sent to the troubled west African nation. The call came as the number of UN peacekeepers being held hostage by the rebels topped 300. United Nations spokesman Phillip Winslow says the move by rebels of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) effectively tears up peace accords signed last year. The UN says a contingent of 208 Zambian soldiers en route to reinforce UN positions in the east of the country have been rounded up by RUF soldiers and 13 armoured personel carriers have been stolen. RUF leader Foday Sankoh is facing increasing criticism from the UN and other world governments for allowing his fighters to threaten Sierra Leone's already shakey peace deal. The first contingent of nearly 100 peacekeepers were taken after fire fights broke out when they tried to fully disarm RUF fighters in the east of the country as they are mandated to do. The United States has joined the chorus of international condemnation of the RUF and Mr Sankoh, warning that unless the UN peacekeepers are immediately released the entire peace process may be jeopardised. An audio report on the situation in Sierra Leone is available at ""http://www.abc.net.au/news/2000/05/item20000506081906\_1.htm"". -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Victims of the legionella outbreak at the Melbourne Aquarium are being advised not to rush into accepting compensation offers. Lawyer Peter Redlich, who is representing eight of the victims of the latest legionnaire's disease outbreak at Melbourne's Aquarium, says it is too soon to know who is responsible. ""I certainly don't exclude the managers and the owners of the aquarium for responsibility but they're certainly not the only ones responsible for what occurred,"" he said. He says a class action launched yesterday by another legal firm should be delayed until an inquest is held. The number of people confirmed with the disease stands at 67; all visited or walked by the aquarium between April 11 and 25. Some 42 people are still awaiting results from tests for the disease. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Hundreds of hardline Indonesian Muslim fighters have boarded a ship bound for the strife-torn eastern province of Maluku, where there have been renewed clashes between Christians and Muslims. The men are planning a Jihad, or Holy War, on behalf of their fellow Muslims in Maluku. Indonesian police had promised to stop the Muslim radicals, members of the Alasuna Waljama Forum. But several hundred members were allowed to board a ship in the country's biggest port, Surabaya, when it was found they were not armed. Several thousand of the hardline Muslim fighters have been training for battle in a camp close to Jakarta. For weeks, police have known of their activities and fear a fresh outbreak of violence if they ever reach the Malukus, where Christians and Muslims have been fighting for almost a year-and-a-half. Police believe the Muslims will try to pick up weapons when their ship stops on the way. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Israel's Government says it will not launch further reprisal air raids against Lebanon for now, despite continued rocket attacks against Israeli towns. Hezbollah guerillas have fired dozens of Katyusha rockets at Israeli settlements in the past 36 hours, prompting Israeli air strikes against power stations and miltary targets in Lebanon. The first wave of Israeli retaliation left much of Lebanon without electricity. Since then, Hezbollah forces have fired more Katyushas into Israel. There were few casualties because residents along the border had already been ordered into shelters. But planning a military withdrawal from Lebanon within eight weeks, Israel's Government clearly does not want the situation to spiral further out of control. While issuing harsh warnings to Hezbollah, Israel's Deputy Defence Minister, Ephraim Sneh, ruled out further attacks against Lebaanese infrastructure for now. However, Cabinet Minister Yossi Beilin says future attacks will bring a strong response. ""Nobody who is trying to kill our citizens should feel that they can be exempted of any punishment,"" Mr Beilin said. ""That is the main message. The question of when and how is up to us and we will decide what is the right measure to take when things like that happen in the future."" Israelis living near the border now plan major protest action against what they say is the government's lack of response and its plans for the military withdrawal. About 30 Israeli civilians have been hurt, while 14 Lebanese have been injured and two killed in the past three days. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A local militia chief in the Philippines claims to have spotted some of the foreign hostages being held by Abu Sayyaf gunmen on the island of Jolo. Another group of Muslim separatists has offered a weekend ceasefire, which is being treated cautiously by Philippines President Joseph Estrada. Now hidden deep in the jungles of Jolo, the condition of 21 mostly foreign hostages cannot be good. There have been reports that the hostages, previously separated into five groups, have been regrouped by their Abu Sayyaf captors. South Africa has joined France and Germany in urging the Philippines authorities to avoid the use of force in any attempt to free the hostages. In a separate crisis on the major southern Philippines island of Mindanao, the 15,000-strong Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) has offered the Philippines Government a weekend ceasefire. President Joseph Estrada has been cautious about accepting the truce offer saying he would not compromise on territorial sovereignty. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" British Prime Minister Tony Blair has suffered a double loss in local government elections. Labour lost the race for Mayor of London to its former MP, Ken Livingstone, and also lost a swathe of seats throughout Britain to the Conservative Party, which won nearly 600 new positions. Labour's 'true believers' and pensioners deserted the party in some of its heartland, best illustrated in Labour's collapsed vote in London. The Conservative Party was expected to do well throughout the country from its earlier tiny base and the net gain of nearly 600 seats has restored it to a viable opposition in all tiers of government. But even the Tories had a disaster, as fickle voters combined with some tactical Labour voting to see them lose the blue ribbon seat of Romley to the Liberal Democrats. Overall, despite public eduction programs, the level of voluntary voting remained disappointingly low, below 40 per cent. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The New South Wales Council of Churches has called for fast food chain McDonalds to withdraw an advertisement they believe is promoting the occult. The advertisment shows a group of young people holding a seance and receiving a message from the dead. The council - representing the Anglican, Baptist and Presbyterian churches, the Salvation Army and other religious groups - says it has been overwhelmed by complaints. Council president Ray Hoekzema says the advertisement's promotion of seances is inappropriate for a family restaurant and could be harmful for young people. ""These things are dangerous especially for kids, being very impressive,"" he said. ""There is a strong oppressive power released in one of these seances, if they put their minds to it and has some detrimental effects and especially for kids, this is inappropriate."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Australian Computer Emergency Response Team (AusCERT) has warned computer users to expect a variety of versions of the devastating ""I love you"" e-mail virus over the coming weeks. The Queensland-based team tackles computer security emergencies in the Australian and New Zealand Internet domains. Senior security analyst with AusCERT Rob Macmillan says computer users should beef up their anti-virus efforts as soon as possible. ""We know from one site who spoke with us a little bit earlier on today that, in fact, they weren't affected by the 'I love you' virus but they were, in fact, affected by one of the variants so the variants have already started making their presence known. ""Certainly we're expecting to see a number of other variants over the next, say, few weeks and it's possible that some of those will have malicious payload, yes,"" he said."

" The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) in the United States has launched a criminal inquiry into the source of a new computer virus that attacks systems all over the world. United States government agencies, including the State Department, the CIA and the Defence Department, say their computer systems were hit, but that top security material was not affected. The virus is activated when computer users opened the file, prompting their machine to send the infected file to every contact in their address list. This created a huge volume of electronic mail that overwhelmed computer systems."

" A two hour failure of the main fibre optic line used by Optus on Australia's east coast is still being measured in financial terms. Optus says its main fibre optic line was cut by earthworks in northern Victoria and this, combined with the failure of a backup line, cut its services between Sydney and Melbourne for two hours. This not only affected telephone calls but played havoc with data transactions. Westpac lost half of its automatic teller machines for the period as well as banking at branches in three states. The outage also forced the Australian Stock Exchange to close, suspending trade for the morning."

" There are claims today of wide-spread corruption in the Western Australian police force. The chairman of the anti-corruption commission (ACC) has told a parliamentary inquiry that the corruption is occurring among police detectives. Terry O'Connor QC says police are carrying out actions similar to those exposed by the Wood Royal Commission in New South Wales and the Fitzgerald inquiry in Queensland. He alleges that many had improper relations with criminals, conducted criminal behaviour themselves, or refused to blow the whistle on fellow officers. He also says detectives spent a large part of their day in activities not related to police work, like long lunches. Mr O'Connor has called for a change to the ACC Act to allow open hearings so the public can get a true picture of the allegations of corruption against public servants and police. He said the public had been presented with a false representation of the allegations against police because of the campaign by the police union and sycophantic media."

" The Police Union in Western Australia has dismissed the claims of corruption. Union president Mike Dean says there is no evidence to support Mr O'Connor's claims and he has called into question the ACC chairman's state of mind. ""He's obviously stressed out, extremely stressed. It's fairly irresponsible to make blanket statements against any group of individuals at any time. ""I'd also like to say that the commissioner of police, most of the command group are long-serving detectives of 20 or 30 years experience within the criminal investigations branch. ""If what Mr O'Connor is saying is correct I'd certainly ask him to put up some evidence to that effect,"" he said."

" The community's response to the new tax system and the value of the Australian dollar appear to hold the key to future interest rate movements. Goods and services tax (GST) impacts and the currency are the issues of greatest uncertainty in the Reserve Bank's latest assessment of the economy. Hard on the heels of Wednesday's latest increase in official interest rates, the Reserve Bank today issued its semi-annual statement on monetary policy. The central bank says by putting aside the effects on the new tax system, the four rate increases since last November should keep inflation within its targeted range during the coming year to 18 months. That would tend to suggest that official rates are on hold for the time being. But the Reserve Bank is assuming there will be no second round effects on inflation from the GST, and it is worried about an increasing push to include GST-based renegotiation clauses in wage agreements. The weak Australian dollar is another area of uncertainty and concern, with the inflation rate also depending on how long the lower exchange rate is sustained."

" Meanwhile, the National Australia Bank has moved quickly to increase home loan lending rates. The bank has increased its variable home loan rate to 7.8 per cent from Monday. The move follows the Reserve Bank's decision to increase the official cash rate 0.25 per cent to 6 per cent on Wednesday."

" Tax Office staff are threatening to strike the day before the goods and services tax (GST) comes in, if a pay claim is not resolved to their satisfaction. Members of the Community and Public Sector Union have voted to impose work bans next week because of the enterprise bargaining dispute. The union says the bans could disrupt preparations for the new tax system, although the Tax Commissioner, Michael Carmody, believes the vast majority of staff are committed to putting the new system in place. But the union's Shane O'Connell is not ruling out further action in the lead-up to the GST. ""We're quite happy to look at the level of those bans, we have started off at a certain level, we have got room to move, and at the end of the day if it continues on and gets really serious then we'll be looking at, you know, potentially stoppage action on let's say the 30th of June, the last day before the new system's implemented,"" he said."

" Opposition leader Kim Beazley has lashed out at the Prime Minister over his claim the Opposition parties are responsible for the drop in Telstra's share price. Mr Howard singled out Mr Beazley and Democrats leader Meg Lees, saying their parties' opposition to the full privatisation of Telstra has brought down its credit rating. But Mr Beazley says that is a bit of a stretch, even for John Howard. ""The Prime Minister's a bit rich. When interest rates go down, it's the Prime Minister's responsibility, when they go up, it's the Reserve Bank or the Americans. ""When share prices go up, it's the Prtime Minister's responsibility, when they go down, it's the Leader of the Opposition's,"" he said."

" And the Australian Democrats are firmly rejecting the Prime Minister's latest call to support the sale of the remaining 50.1 per cent of Telstra. Mr Howard made the call on his return from overseas. The Democrats are also refusing to accept blame from Mr Howard for the downgrading of Telstra's credit rating and its falling share price. They claim the blame lies with a lack of direction by the Telstra board, which has seen the company's debt almost quadruple; the drop in the Nasdaq index and comments by the responsible minister. Senator Meg Lees says the Democrats will not be supporting a full sale, as long as she remains the party's leader. ""I can see at no stage on the horizon any sign of us changing our minds, certainly not within my time as leader, leading up now to the election, the answer is 'no'. ""So it is time for the minister and the Prime Minister to start positively selling this company and pointing out what a good investment it is, but it is always a risky investment,"" she said."

" The Australian Cricket Board (ACB) has revealed its response to the international fight against match-fixing, with plans to tackle the issue on five fronts. The board will appoint a special investigator to follow leads and liaise with the International Cricket Council's (ICC) new investigator when his focus turns to Australia. Australian cricket will also adopt the ICC's new penalties which cover players, umpires and officials. A conference will be held with representatives of all major Australian sporting bodies to develop wider strategies to combat corruption. The board's existing player education campaign will be expanded to cover all senior and junior contracted players as well as officials. And all players and officials will be asked to sign an undertaking before each series to play within the rules and the spirit of the game."

" Australian swimmer Samantha Riley has been admitted to a hospital in Cairns with a kidney infection. The setback comes just over a week from the Australian Olympic trials. Australian Swimming head coach Don Talbot says the news is a setback in the lead-up to the trials. ""I've talked to her coach this morning and he said that she was there and she's being treated, she's been in a couple of days. ""It didn't seem to be serious from what he was saying, but enough to put her in there and you know at this time she's resting anyway so I think we just have to wait and see,"" he said."

" Tasmanian triathlete Craig Walton has been selected for the Olympics. Walton won the bronze medal in the triathlon world championships in Perth at the weekend, after successfully appealing against his omission from the Australian team for the event. And Australian Phillip Dutton leads the field after the dressage stage of the US equestrian Olympic selection trial in Atlanta. Dutton, who was a member of the 1996 gold medal team, was riding eight-year-old gelding House Doctor."

" The Australian Democrats have called for any windfall profits from the sale of mobile phone spectrum to be spent on improving transport, hospitals and the environment. Reports suggest the Government will use proceeds from the spectrum sale to scrap the Timor tax, the one-year only increase in the Medicare levy to fund the Timor troops commitment. The Treasurer's office is not commenting on the report. The Communications Minister's office says the technology requires an auction of spectrum, but the government has not said when that will be. Democrats leader Meg Lees is not opposed to using the spectrum sale funds as an alternative to the Timor tax but says the proceeds should also be put into assets rather than debt repayments. ""I think there is a far greater need in our public health system, our public education system and, of course, in aged care. ""And the Murray Darling Basin, the CSIRO estimate that it will need, to get it back to a healthy river system, somewhere near 30 billion dollars,"" Senator Lees said."

" Fears of further interest rate rises have had a predictably adverse impact on the local share market today. The All Ordinaries index fell more than 50 points, or 1.6 per cent, to just under 3,026. The four leading stocks were sharply lower. Media heavyweight, News Corporation fell five per cent, or $1.20 to $20.70 after its US-listed stock fell, in two per cent slides by both the Dow Jones and Nasdaq last night. Major banks were down on the rate news. Westpac was down 17 cents to $10.43, the ANZ down four cents $11.36 and the Commonwealth, down 10 cents to $25.60. The National was not spared despite a 13 per cent rise in half-year profit to $1.57 billion, falling 28 cents to $23.63. BHP dropped 66 cents, or three per cent, to $17.63, stunning the market with a $1 billion write-down of the trouble-plagued HBI plant in Western Australia. Telstra continues to slide, as chief executive Ziggy Switkowski conceded the market's feeling of uncertainty over the deal with Pacific Century Cyberworks. Telstra fell another nine cents to $6.98 and Telstra Two was also down nine cents to $4.02. The Australian dollar is buying 58.7 US cents, 37.7 sterling and 64.1 Japanese yen. On the trade weighted index, it is at 52.7. The price of gold is $US277.25 an ounce."

" Australian Tax Office (ATO) staff across the country have voted in favour of commencing an industrial campaign. The action is set to disrupt the introduction of the goods and services tax (GST). Workers around the country have today rejected the Federal Government's latest pay offer of four per cent annually. Union members argue the Government's offer will not keep pace with anticipated inflation and does not take account of the extra workload associated with the implementation of the GST. The Community and Public Sector union's Shane O'Connell says workers are set to implement a range of bans including a delay on the release of Australian Business Numbers (ABNs). ""We are definitely aiming to slow it down so, therefore, what we need is a speedy resolution to the issues that are outstanding,"" he said. ""We seek from the commissioner a meeting to try and do that."""

" The ATO has played down the union's threat of industrial action, claiming it lacks support. Tax office management is not concerned, saying the campaign to recruit almost 5,000 staff to administer the GST is running smoothly and delays are unlikely. The ATO Assistant Commissioner, Glenda Sullivan, says the union's call for an eight per cent pay increase is unreasonable. ""The ATO has to consider what we're doing now but we also have to stay financially sustainable while providing the maximum resources for our staff,"" she said. Ms Sullivan claims today's stop work action was attended by no more than 10 per cent of the nation's taxation staff."

" The number of cases of legionnaire's disease linked to the Melbourne Aquarium has risen to 66. Test results show the aquarium's cooling towers were the source of the outbreak. The latest test results released by the Department of Human Services showed there are now 66 cases of legionnaire's disease in Victoria - 38 males and 28 females, ranging in age from 26 to 89. All but one visited the Melbourne Aquarium between April 11 and April 25. The number of deaths remains at two, and eight people are still in a critical condition. Twenty-eight people in Victoria are awaiting test results along with 13 people from interstate and overseas. Laboratory analysis also shows the level of legionella bacteria in the cooling towers was extremely high, confirming the cause of the outbreak."

" The Aged Care Minister, Bronwyn Bishop, says the Federal Government's accreditation system is working to raise standards in Australian nursing homes. The minister today released a discussion paper at a Sydney conference which she says will help shape aged care services for the next 50 years. She says the recent publicity surrounding the closure of the Riverside Nursing Home in Melbourne has obscured the progress that has already been made. ""But what received less attention is that we have already in Victoria alone seen 34 providers who could not or would not meet the standards leave the industry,"" she said. ""Those beds did not disappear, they went to good providers who will meet the standards. ""Across Australia as a whole we have seen the restructuring or leaving the industry of 147 providers."""

" The war being fought by Indonesia against separatist rebels in Aceh could soon end. The Government in Jakarta says rebels are ready to sign a truce agreement next week. It would end more than a decade of violence and killings. A breakthrough in resolving hostilities follows a series of meetings in Geneva. Indonesia's Human Rights Minister says an agreement to a truce and a commitment to open negotiations on the future of the troubled province will be signed by the government and a leader of the rebel Free Aceh movement on May 12. Aceh rebels have demanded an independent state. Indonesia's President Wahid has refused, but has vowed to end human rights abuses by the country's military, which has controlled Aceh for most of the last decade. In that time, fighting has claimed more than 5,000 lives."

" As Brisbane police continue the search for gunman Nigel Parodi one of the three officers he wounded in the ambush-style attack has been released from hospital. Sergeant Christopher Mulhall, 36, was shot while responding to a neighbourhood dispute in the northern Brisbane suburb of Chermside on Monday. Duty Sergeant Christopher Mulhall was shot twice as he sat in a police car discussing with two other officers how best to deal with the dispute in Hanbury Street. This afternoon doctors released him from hospital. However, two other officers who were also wounded in the attack remain in a stable condition in the Royal Brisbane Hospital. Constable Darryl Green, 27, and Constable Sharnelle Cole, 26, suffered gunshot wounds to the face, back and upper-body."

" Scientists at Sydney's Australian Museum hold great prospect of cloning a Tasmanian Tiger from the body of a tiger pup. Research has found high quality DNA in heart and liver samples which could bring the species back to life. The Tasmanian tiger pup died in 1866 and was preserved in alcohol, maintaining the DNA characteristics essential to cloning the animal. Today's announcement follows five months work and according to museum director, Professor Mike Archer, puts the museum well ahead of teams elsewhere seeking to clone extinct species. Professor Archer says with further research the tiger, which died out in 1936, can live again. ""I am absolutely committed to the view that within my lifetime I am going to see this happen,"" he said. ""There are estimates it could be 10 years. Some very optimistic geneticists have even suggested it could be just a few years."""

" Meanwhile, wildlife biologists have questioned claims the project would rehabilitate the species. Wildlife biologist Nick Mooney, from the Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service, says while an interesting academic exercise, the project is nothing more than a ""one-off freak show"" which will not necessarily help conservation. ""Considering their value, they would be worth millions of dollars each and I really cannot see them being put back in the wild, except for a one-off freak show. ""We're interested ultimately in having a functioning ecology, with animals doing their thing, being predators, evolving, being part of the whole system, and it's very hard to imagine how we get there from a cloned animal. ""So however extraordinary and interesting this is, it's a long way from having anything but a freak show,"" he said."

" Sierra Leone's rebel leader has reportedly agreed to free 49 United Nations hostages, after his home was surrounded by peacekeepers in the capital, Freetown. The UN has condemned the killing of seven peacekeepers by the rebels. Diplomats who attended a security council briefing in New York on the crisis say the seven killed were members of a Kenyan battalion supervising the disarmament of camps north-east of Freetown. Nearly 50 peacekeeping personnel, both military and civilian, are believed to be still held by the rebel army - the RUF - at two sites in the country. UN Secretary General Kofi Annan has condemend the killings and kidnappings as outrageous, and accused the RUF of breaching the terms of last year's peace accords, meant to end eight years of civil war in Sierra Leone. -------------------------------"

" Results of medical tests for suspected victims of Melbourne's outbreak of legionnaire's disease are expected this morning. Almost 2,000 people have been tested for legionnaire's in the past week, with 59 now confirmed as having the disease. A spokesman for Victoria's Human Services Department says about 35 people are still waiting for the outcome of tests, with some results expected this morning. The latest victim to have tested positive is a woman from Ballarat in northern Victoria. She says her doctor contacted her yesterday afternoon and told her she had tested positive. ""Well, I haven't looked into it any further at the moment because I didn't know it was positive [or] as to what impact it may have upon my health down the track, whether there are lasting effects on that,"" she said. --------------------------------"

" The Australian Medical Association (AMA) says an apparent breach of sterilisation standards at Royal Melbourne Hospital does not warrant a Medical Practitioners Board investigation sought by the Victorian Government. Instruments used on a man suspected after surgery of having the rare but deadly Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, were used on 10 other patients. The hospital says if he had been considered a candidate for the disease, before the surgery, the instruments would not have been re-used. AMA state president Michael Sedgely said public money would be wasted if patients were tested for every possibility before operations. ""When you make a diagnosis you look at the most likely things and come up with an answer, but once you get down to all the things [that] might be a one in a million chance, it becomes a very difficult exercise,"" he said. -------------------------------"

" The trial of two Libyans, charged with blowing up Pan Am Flight-103 over Lockerbie in Scotland in 1988, has been told the bomb was planted by radical Palestinian groups. From the very beginning of what is expected to be a long and exhaustive trial at Camp Ziest in Holland, counsel for the defence set out their plan of attack. After hearing a detailed indictment that took the clerk of the court 21 minutes to read, the lawyers defending the two accused Libyans claimed they would present evidence that the bombing of the Pan Am jet was in fact organised by two radical Palestinian terrorist groups. The prosecution then called a series of air traffic controllers as the first of an expected 1,000 witnesses who will take the stand over the course of the trial. -----------------------------------"

" Further value has been restored to the beleaguered Australian dollar in the wake of the latest increase in official interest rates. When the Reserve Bank yesterday morning moved rates up another one quarter of a percentage point, there was initial hesitation in currency markets. But the dollar then gained as much as half a cent in local trade, before being pushed up as much again in early European trade. The high for the night has been 59.45 US cents. Dealers say the local currency has shown resilience in the face of a further slide by the euro. The European single currency has been as low as 88.8 US cents following suggestions that Greece should be invited to join. Just before 7:00am AEST, the Australian dollar was being quoted for about 59.24 US cents, up four-tenths of a cent on yesterday's local close. On the cross-rates, it is at 0.6621 euros, 64.58 Japanese yen, 37.96 pence sterling and against the New Zealand dollar it is at 1.207. While the Reserve Bank has taken out a further insurance policy against inflation in Australia, inflation has also been on the minds of investors in the United States. Equity prices in New York have crumbled on renewed fears about price pressures. The latest ""Beige Book"" economic assessment of the US economy from the Federal Reserve has raised expectations of further rate rises in America to curb inflation. Wall Street's Dow Jones industrial average has slumped 251 points to 10,480. That is a slide of 2.3 per cent. The Nasdaq composite index has dropped 78 points, or 2.1 per cent. The US bond market has been sold off sharply. The weaker prices have pushed up the yield on 30-year Treasury paper to 6.12 per cent, a jump of 11 points. In Britain, the share market has shed almost 3 per cent of its value. London's FT-100 index has finished 189 points lower at 6,185. Yesterday in Australia, investors sold rate sensitive banking stocks. The All Ordinaries index closed at 3,076, losing 22 points. In overnight trade on the Sydney Futures exchange just before 7:00am AEST close, the Share Price Index contract was down 30 points on yesterday's day settlement at 3,087. The 10-year bond contract is down nine points at 93.37, with the implied yield jumping to 6.63 per cent. The gold price is at $US278.40 an ounce, and West Texas crude is at $US26.66 a barrel. -------------------------------"

" A group of Canberra researchers say they have found a way to reduce the spread of illnesses in childcare centres, partly through handwashing. The Australian National University study of 500 children in the ACT, found colds were cut by 17 per cent and diarrhoea by two thirds, with simple practices such as wiping toys. Dr Leslee Roberts says the children were also taught songs to sing while they washed their hands for the required 20 seconds. She says the findings have an economic benefit, reducing the time parents need to take off work with sick children. ""The hours they are away from work are...a cost in terms of their productivity...and [for] some people it becomes a threat to their continued employment,"" she said. --------------------------------"

" There have been unexpected developments in the forthcoming trial of prominent art critic and author Robert Hughes. Two key prosecution witnesses have been charged with conspiracy to pervert the course of justice. In May last year, Mr Hughes was involved in a traffic crash near Broome and was charged with two counts of dangerous driving causing grievous bodily harm. His trial is due to begin in Broome on Monday, but last night, police charged two key trial witnesses with conspiracy to pervert the course of justice. The men were the driver and passenger in the car that collided with Mr Hughes' vehicle. It is alleged they demanded $30,000 from Mr Hughes in exchange for altered testimony. The Director of Public Prosecutions Robert Cock QC says despite the latest charges, the trial will still proceed, adding that his office has a case against Mr Hughes without the testimony of the two witnesses. Mr Hughes' lawyer Mark Andrews says Mr Hughes will not comment on the matter until after his trial. ---------------------------------"

" A bus hijacking in south-western Japan is over 17 hours after it began. Police stormed the bus and subdued a 17-year-old youth armed with a knife. During the long ordeal, he had stabbed three women passengers, one of whom died in hospital. Three others had escaped by jumping out the windows of the bus, two of them as it was driving down a highway. One was admitted to hospital. Although the police had been negotiating with the teenager, his motives or demands were unknown. He had a history of mental illness. --------------------------------"

" The AFL Tribunal has concluded one of its strangest cases in recent times by throwing out the charge against West Coast Eagle, Fraser Gehrig. Gehrig was accused of recklessly or negligently making contact with an umpire at half-time on Saturday night game between the Eagles and the Bulldogs at the WACA, when umpire Brian Sheehan was knocked to the ground. The Tribunal found Gehrig could not be expected to have known umpire Sheehan was in the vicinity when he tried to break the grip of Bulldog player, Nathan Brown. In this evening's other cases, which were closed to the media, Bulldog pair Tony Liberatore and Nathan Brown were each fined $2,000 for using abusive language."

" On Australian Story tonight at 8.00pm, as floodwaters from north Queensland transform the normally desolate Lake Eyre, changes are afoot for the people of William Creek, the tiny settlement near the lake. One of those people is the local publican who is setting up for a big gymkhana at the end of the week, and also wrestling with some decisions about his own future. Join an internet forum after the program at 8.30pm. Go to ""http://www.abc.net.au/austory/""."

" Australian home-buyers can expect higher mortgage rates within days, after the latest increase in official interest rates. Business and housing groups say the fourth rates rise since November was unnecessary. If banks fully pass on their own higher costs, it is estimated the rises so far will have cost home-buyers a total of $145 a month extra on a loan of $145,000. Daryl Smeaton of the Real Estate Institute said: ""Why should home-buyers be penalised for an underperforming Australian dollar?"" The dollar was one reason quoted for the Reserve Bank (RBA) lifting the cash rate by 0.25 of one per cent. The dollar has rallied more than half-a-cent since the rates hike. The currency peaked at 59 US cents, before easing back. Other reasons quoted by the RBA were a higher Consumer Price Index, strong credit growth and a stronger world economy, all pointing to increased risks of inflation. But one business group complains of a ""trigger-happy"" approach, given the last move to slow the economy was less than a month ago. Colonial State Bank's chief economist Craig James expects two more increases, saying the Reserve cannot afford to let US rates rises outstrip Australia's. ""Australia has got a current account deficit,"" he said. ""It needs to fund that current account deficit and it needs to have interest rates which are attractive on the world scene,"" Mr James said."

" The Federal Treasurer, Peter Costello, has backed the Reserve Bank's actions in raising interest rates and rejected arguments the rise will eat up tax cuts to be delivered in July. Australia's ""big four"" banks say they have lending rates under review after the Reserve Bank this morning lifted rates by 0.25 of a percentage point. The Australian dollar has risen since the rate announcement and by about 1:00pm AEST was trading at about 59.01 US cents. Mr Costello says the government's task is to keep the economy growing, although he has expressed some caution about the prospect of the current growth being maintained. He says home owners should take into account more than just interest rates when assessing their position. ""I think the average person on average wages over the last year, as a result of a 3.5 per cent increase in wages after tax, will have $32 a week more,"" he said. ""If you want to bring everything into a person's position, mortgage, tax, Medicare, welfare, presumably you'd be bringing wages in as well."""

" Ten patients at the Royal Melbourne Hospital may have been exposed to the fatal brain disorder, Creutzfeld Jakob disease (CJD), after a breach in infection control procedures. Victorian Health Minister John Thwaites has revealed surgical equipment used on a patient who possibly has the disease was then used on the 10 other patients. Mr Thwaites says one of the patients has since died from an unrelated condition. The Minister says such a serious breach of infection control standards cannot be tolerated and he has ordered a full inquiry into the incident. The neurosurgeon involved will also face a separate investigation to see whether he is guilty of professional misconduct."

" Muslim rebels holding 21 mostly foreign hostages in the southern Philippines have abandoned their jungle camp with their captives. The news comes after a day of conflicting accounts about the fate of two of the hostages. Philippines police claim the rebel group known as Abu Sayyaf has now moved 21 mostly foreign hostages from the village where they have been held in recent days. An Abu Sayyaf spokesman had claimed that two of the hostages were dead, following a clash with soldiers yesterday. No blood was found in the hut when it was searched today. The move comes at the same time as escalating Muslim rebel activity across the entire area. Members of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) today took 70 civilians hostage, reportedly to use as human shields. Officials believe the MILF is also behind bomb blasts which killed at least 15 people and injured more than 30 in the port city of General Santos. The 15,000-strong MILF separatist guerilla army suspended peace talks with the Philippines government on Sunday."

" St George-Illawarra rugby league player Anthony Mundine has announced his retirement from the game. Mundine was due to appear before the board to explain why he went overseas without the club's permission. Instead, Mundine told them he wanted out. ""From today, I'll no longer be a part of rugby league,"" he told reporters outside the leagues club. Mundine apologised to close friends who he has not yet spoken to about his decision, and thanked the club for its support. Coach David Waite says he is disappointed to lose a player of such ability."

" The South Australian Research and Development Institute (SARDI) has today thrust Australia's first cloned sheep into the limelight. The lamb has been dubbed Matilda. It is a genetically identical copy of a host animal, using cloning and in-vitro fertilisation techniques. Matilda the marino was born on April 17 using the same technology that created Dolly the sheep in Scotland four years ago. Matilda has been shown to the public on the same day as Suzi, the cloned calf, was unveiled by Victorian scientists. SARDI's Rob Lewis says critics of Australia's involvement in the practice should remember much of the nation's wealth has been built on continuous improvement in the quality of the country's sheep and cattle. ""We have to be competitive in the marketplace,"" Mr Lewis said. ""We have to produce products which are required in the international market at the right quality and strength and other traits. ""If you put it in that context it really is an investment in our future."""

" Principal scientist Simon Walker says Matilda was created using the same technology as Scottish scientists employed to make Dolly. But Dr Walker says the process still needs fine tuning. He said that ""like cloning programs around the world"", Australia suffers from ""a number of problems, particularly foetal loss"". ""We have known for four or five months that of the pregnant animals we get, we lose a vast number of them,"" he said. ""But nonetheless we have produced lambs and Matilda is a fine example of a cloned healthy lamb."""

" Parodi has still has not made contact with his family, despite an appeal from his sister to give himself up. Mr Meyer says they are still hoping the wanted man will call his family or give himself up. ""I spoke to his sister...yesterday afternoon to see whether they had been able to get any response, whether he'd contacted the family, that hasn't occurred yet, nor has he contacted police,"" he said. ""Certainly she's very concerned for his welfare and of course for anybody else in the community. ""The family doesn't want to see anyone else get hurt and certainly that's paramount in the minds of the police that are responding here today as well."""

" The number of confirmed cases of legionnaire's disease linked to the Melbourne Aquarium has jumped to 58. The Victorian Human Services Department says there are also 35 suspected cases of the disease, including some overseas. Two people have already died as a result of Australia's biggest legionnella outbreak The Human Services Department has this afternoon released the latest list of cases. The department's John Carnie says one of the new patients visited the aquarium on April 25. All the rest were at or near the site between April 11 and 21. Nine are still in a critical condition. He says the department is awaiting test results on a further 35 people who visited the aquarium. They include two patients from New Zealand, one from the United Kingdom, two from New South Wales, four from Tasmania and one from Queensland. But Dr Carnie stresses more than 90 per cent of the people concerned about the disease have been given the all clear. He says test results on water samples from the aquarium's cooling towers have not been finalised."

" Organisers of the Sydney Olympics have finalised their ticket inventory and will make an extra 200,000 tickets available to the Australian public. There are now a total of 3.2 million tickets to the Games on sale. The additional 200,000 tickets are spread across almost all sports. They come from a range of sources, including unwanted tickets that had been allocated to sponsors and overseas Olympic committees plus the onsold component from the Olympic Opportunity Program. Finalising the number of seats set aside for the media has also resulted in more tickets available for sale than first planned. The next round of sales for the 3.2 million tickets begins this Sunday, with the publication of order forms in News Limited newspapers."

" Shares in Telstra could come under further pressure today, following downgrades by two key credit ratings agencies. Moody's and Standard and Poor's have made good their warnings to downgrade Telstra in the wake of its $5 billion investment plan for Hong Kong's Pacific Century Cyberworks. Among their concerns - the significant infrastructure investment required, the slim chances of stable cashflow in the short-term and differences in the two groups' corporate cultures. Moody's also says Telstra's 50 per cent Federal Government ownership significantly restricts its financial and operating flexibility. Telstra cannot raise money by issuing shares, as this would dilute the government's holding. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Prime Minister John Howard, who has now completed a visit to the Middle East, has described the Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat as a man searching for peace. Mr Howard said his visit to the Middle East was an opportunity to say how much Australians want the peace process to proceed. He says there is a new mood amongst Israelis and Palestinians. In 1997, Mr Howard withdrew an invitation his deputy Tim Fischer issued to Mr Arafat to visit Australia. However, now things have changed. He says the peace process is at a different stage. Mr Howard says while Australia is not a major player in Middle Eastern politics, it is respected. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The number of people confirmed with legionnaire's disease linked to the Melbourne Aquarium has risen, with a senior member of the Liberal Party in Western Austalia among the victims. Neil Patrucco was among Liberal Party members at a function at the aquarium last month. Mr Patrucco spent five days in hospital last week, after developing symptoms similar to pneumonia. He takes to 48 the number of people with the disease which has claimed two lives in this outbreak. An expert brought in by the aquarium to check its practices has found no problems with the cleaning of airconditioning cooling towers where legionella bacteria can breed. ""Legionella was not checked for, it was total bacterial count, but the fact that the total bacterial count was almost undetectable, it was considered in this indusdtry to be clean water - there was no reason to go the next step and test for legionella,"" Dr Vyt Garnys said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Police have again cordoned off streets in Brisbane's north where there has been another unconfirmed sighting of a man wanted in connection with Monday's shooting of three police officers. Police are searching for Nigel Parodi. Just before 5:30am AEST police rushed to Hanbury Street in Chermside West, the scene of Monday's triple shooting. Police at the scene apparently heard a disturbance and called for back-up. With guns drawn, police in bullet-proof vests are stopping and searching vehicles at road blocks around the area. Parodi is wanted for questioning over the shooting of three police officers, an incident that sparked a massive manhunt. Police say reports last night of shots being fired at a nearby hospital proved to be a false alarm. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Government has cut off childcare payments for thousands of parents who have failed to have their children immunised. The government repeatedly warned parents it would link childcare assistance to their children's immunisation status. About 9,000 parents have failed to comply, despite the warnings and an extension of time. Community Services Minister Larry Anthony says the government has done all it can to convince parents of the importance of immunisation. ""Look, we've given a lot of notice and even in the last month after our third letter we've also attempted to phone around 7,000 people to make that contact,"" he said. ""So every effort is being made by the government to contact these people, but we expect them to make a conscientious decision if they're not going to immunise their child."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Zimbabwe's President Robert Mugabe is poised to unveil his plans for the acquisition of white-owned farms, following his first cabinet meeting since the crisis over land reform erupted. Zimbabwe's Parliament has already rammed through a constitutional amendment allowing the government to confiscate white-owned farms without paying compensation. But before that can be enforced, President Mugabe must first use his special powers to repeal the Land Acquisition Act, signed in the early '90s which did allow for payments to farmers. The cabinet has been discussing the strategy for moving against the farmer owners, which is expected to begin within the next 10 days. Meanwhile, the Commonwealth secretary-general, Don McKinnon, is to visit Zimbabwe this month to convey international concerns over political violence and urge it to hold free and fair elections. The announcement was made in London following a meeting of the eight-member Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group. It issued a statement condemning Harare for failing to uphold the rule of law over the illegal occupations of hundreds of white-owned farms by black activists. The Commonwealth group also expressed concern over increasing political violence. But as expected, it failed to recommend sanctions against the southern African nation, where at least 12 people, including white farmers and black activists, have been killed in political violence since February. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A leading figure in Australia's Islamic Community has returned home to a rapturous reception from his followers, after spending several months in an Egyptian jail for smuggling antiquities. Sheikh Taj El-Din Hilaly, an Australian citizen, was convicted in Egypt in January but a subsequent appeal found the judgment invalid. Arriving last night at Sydney Airport, the Sheik proclaimed his innocence and said he was confident he would be cleared by a fresh court hearing set down for October. Speaking through an interpreter, he also thanked the Australian Government. ""He just would wish that actually he didn't want to cause so much trouble for so many people,"" the interpreter said. ""He thanked everyone here, he will never forget the stand the Australian government has taken in his support."" ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" British Formula One racing driver David Coulthard has escaped with minor injuries in a plane crash at Lyon Airport in which the pilot and co-pilot were killed. Coulthard's fiancee and personal trainer also escaped serious injury. The Lear jet 35 aircraft had taken off from Kent in southern England and was heading for Nice on the Mediterranean coast before it crashed. Firefighters said the plane's pilots had asked for an emergency landing at Lyon Airport after it developed engine trouble. ""At a very low altitude, the pilot lost control. He touched the runway with the wheels and left wing, and it bounced in the air violently,"" airport manager Bernard Chaffange said. There was a small fire which was quickly put out. Coulthard, 29, was taken to Edouard-Herriot Hospital in Lyon for tests, but was released later in the day, a statement from the hospital said. His fiancee, Heidi Wichlinski, and his personal trainer, Andy Matthews, were also allowed to leave hospital. In statement released by his McLaren-Mercedes Formula One team, Coulthard said: ""Obviously, I'm relieved that Heidi, Andy and myself are unhurt, but I would like to express my deepest sympathy for the families of the two pilots,"" Coulthard said in a statement. ""It is inappropriate for me to go into details of the accident, but we were very lucky to walk away."" The statement said Coulthard was expected to race for the McLaren-Mercedes team in the Spanish Grand Prix at the Catalunya track in Barcelona on Sunday. The crash comes nine days after Coulthard won the British Grand Prix at Silverstone, his seventh career Formula One victory, to place him second behind Michael Schumacher in the race for the 2000 drivers' World Championship."

" Prime Minister John Howard says he has invited Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat to Australia because he believes such visits are conducive to the Middle East peace process. Mr Howard says while Australia is not a major player in Middle East politics it is respected, and Australians want the peace process to succeed. Three years ago, Mr Howard withdrew an invitation issued to Mr Arafat by his then deputy, Tim Fischer. Mr Howard says things now are different. He believes Mr Arafat is a man searching for peace. ""There is an engaged dialogue between Israel and the Palestinians; there has been a quantum shift in the mood, the attitude of both sides,"" he said. ""It's clearly conducive to the peace process for Mr Arafat to visit other countries, including Australia."""

" A senior cricket official has suggested granting amnesties to some corrupt players to encourage them to give evidence about match-fixing. International Cricket Council chief executive David Richards will tonight outline the idea to a meeting of the game's leaders in London. Australian Cricket Board chairman Denis Rogers opposes the plan but Mr Richards believes it may be the only way to clean up cricket corruption. ""What we must do now is get everybody who has got the best interests of cricket in their heart to bring forward that evidence into the game, bring it out into the public domain,"" he said. ""We might have to do that in a discrete fashion. We might have to give an amnesty to people who bring forward that information. ""I don't have a personal problem with that but again the board has to make a decision on that."""

" Muslim rebels holding 21 people captive on the southern Philippines island of Jolo have threatened to behead two foreign hostages unless the military ceases its operations in the area. A spokesman for Abu Sayyaf said the rebel group would give the Philippines military a big surprise, threatening to send it the heads of two foreign hostages, maybe tomorrow, or in the days to come. The spokesman said Abu Sayyaf had seen Philippines troops edging towards rebel positions on the island of Jolo. Speaking to journalists who visited the rebel camp with a medical team, hostages pleaded with the military to cease operations, claiming its advance on the camp was stopping the kidnappers from obtaining food for hostages. One hostage said the crisis would end in a bloodbath if the Philippines military launched a rescue attempt."

" The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) says its guidelines on price exploitation are strong enough to stamp out over-pricing under the goods and services tax (GST). The Federal Opposition says there is no legislation to enforce the Government's pledge that prices will not rise by more than 10 per cent once the GST takes effect. But the commission's chairman, Alan Fels, says legislation giving the commission powers against consumer exploitation are fully enforceable. Professor Fels says the commission will investigate and take action against any business that raises its prices by more than 10 per cent. ""If someone puts up prices or tries to by more than 10 per cent due to the new tax system, the commission will take enforcement action against them, under the Trade Practices Act,"" he said. ""We think not only is there wide public and consumer support for that but it is a legally valid guideline."""

" But Labor's Treasury spokesman, Simon Crean, says there is no legislation to enforce the government's pledge that prices will not rise by more than 10 per cent. ""If the government can't get it right, if the government can't explain it, if the government is falling down on the detail, how can I expect the millions of small businesses around the country to cope? ""This is a government that said they were introducing a simple tax. ""It's not simple, it's certainly not fair and it's now being shown be be inflationary,"" Mr Crean said."

" Tests have confirmed that a senior member of the WA Liberal Party has contracted legionnaire's disease. Neil Patrucco was amongst a group of Liberal Party members who attended a function at the Melbourne Aquarium last month. He spent five days in hospital last week after developing symptoms similar to pneumonia. Some 60 members of the WA party are believed to have been at risk of getting the disease but Mr Patrucco says he appears to be the only one who has contracted it. ""I don't know whether it's a matter of bad luck or being in the wrong place at the wrong time but one would expect when you visit a facility like the aquarium that you're quite safe,"" he said."

" The number of people testing positive to an outbreak of legionnaire's disease linked to the Melbourne Aquarium has jumped by 10. The outbreak from the cooling towers at the aquarium has left two people dead and 47 with the disease. The number of victims still critical remains at eight. Victorian Health Minister John Thwaites says he is very concerned the disease is spreading and the full extent of the outbreak will not be known until more people are tested. ""Our priority is to ensure there is proper treatment for those people and that anyone who is at risk gets to a doctor and gets the treatment they need,"" he said. The Human Services Department says those at risk would have attended the aquarium between April 11 to 22. The aquarium has hired two experts on legionnaire's disease to identify the source of the outbreak. The aquarium is yet to concede its cooling towers are the source of Victoria's worst legionnaire's outbreak. One of the experts has launched an intensive investigation into how the bacterium came to be in the tourist attraction. He has described his mission as following a forensic trail and admits there is a remote possibility the source will never be identified. The aquarium has acknowledged it will go beyond national standards for testing legionnaire's - it will test its cooling towers for the bacterium every fortnight."

" Police are not releasing details of a note, believed to have been written by a man wanted over the shooting of three officers. A massive manhunt was launched yesterday morning following the shootings at Chermside, in Brisbane's north. Police want to question 32-year-old Nigel Parodi, who remains at large this afternoon, despite several unconfirmed sightings. Inspector John Hegarty says police are leaving no stone unturned in their search. ""I can confirm a note was found, but I'm not going to discuss the contents of it,"" he said. ""We can't confirm any sighting at the moment and that's somewhat frustrating from a police perspective that people come forward and say they've seen this person in a particular place, but it can't be confirmed."""

" Chermside residents still fear the gunman who shot three police officers yesterday, may be hiding nearby. They are taking no chances, with some people still staying at home behind locked doors. Escorting her seven-year-old daughter to nearby Craigslea State School, Wendy says many parents are still worried. ""Very very concerned,"" she said. ""I'd just checked with the school to see what they're doing about it and just to make sure that the kids aren't going off to the toilet by themselves and everything like that, so they're keeping the kids in today and [the] daycare centre's been locked up tight."""

" The Australian Olympic Committee (AOC) says the swim team selection for the Games will be delayed by at least two days following a ruling today by the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS). The court has upheld the rights of world governing body FINA to approve the use of neck-to-ankle swim suits favoured by Ian Thorpe and others. FINA allows the full-length suits to be worn but the AOC is worried that could be overturned following a protest. Olympic officials had hoped the Court of Arbitration for Sport's ruling would have been more comprehensive and ended the uncertainty. The Olympic swim trials will be run from May 13 but AOC president John Coates says the final team will not be announced until after May 20. He foreshadowed delays of at least 48 hours in the naming of the team, to allow swimmers who were not selected and did not wear the full-length suits time to appeal."

" Australian Swimmming has welcomed the court's decision. But Australian Swimming president Terry Gathercole says it is now time for everyone to focus on the Olympics. ""These 'from left-field' distractions have interfered with some people's focus,"" Mr Gathercole said. ""We want that to go away now that the CAS has ruled that FINA is well within their rights and we want our swimmers and coaches to keep their focus, with the trials only 12 days away, and get on with the job."" Mr Gathercole says he is confident Australian Swimming will be able to deal with any appeals that may follow the use of neck-to-ankle suits in the selection trials. He says he cannot foresee any problems, as it will be the choice of the swimmers as to what they wear for the trials. ""Australian Swimming will conduct its swimmimg trials under the FINA rules, which we are bound to do,"" he said. ""Those suits are legal and the swimmers will have the choice of wearing whatever suit they prefer, whether it's an ordinary Aussie cossie or an ankle-to-neck-to-wrist swim suit."""

" St George Illawarra five-eighth Anthony Mundine will face the Dragons' board tomorrow to explain why he left the country without permission. Mundine returned to Sydney this morning after flying to the US. He says a range of issues, ranging from racism in rugby league and out of the game, to not being picked in the Australian team, led him to flee. He has told Channel Seven he will accept any penalty handed down by the board. Mundine says he is having trouble coming to terms with hatred."

" Defence Minister John Moore says the high profile of former Interfet commander Peter Cosgrove was a factor in his promotion to head the Army. Mr Moore has completed the appointment of Defence Force high command, extending Admiral Chris Barrie's term as chief of the Defence Force and appointing Major-General Des Mueller vice-chief. Lieutenant-General Cosgrove is the new chief of Army, while Air-Marshall Errol McCormack and Vice-Admiral David Shackleton will continue as Air Force and Navy chiefs. Mr Moore says he does not see General Cosgrove's public profile as a threat. ""I can't see him turning himself into Napoleon yet,"" Mr Moore said. ""The undoubted high profile Peter's got really gives credibility to the Army. ""People can identify more easily with the Army through the success of one individual. Certainly Peter is high profile, but in that profile he does represent the Army."" General Cosgrove says he is confident he can make the switch from field command to Defence headquarters. ""I'll have a very good team around me,"" he said. ""Every job I've ever been into has carried a unique set of challenges. ""I've managed to meet all of those. I look forward to this one."""

" Prime Minister John Howard has joined Israelis in a special commemoration to the six million victims of the Nazi genocide. Mr Howard is in Jerusalem, where the Jewish community is observing Holocaust Remembrance Day. For more than 50 years, the Holocaust has been commemorated in a special ceremony. Victims re-light a flame in the Holocaust Memorial's Hall of Memory, where the names of 22 of the main Nazi concentration camps are inscribed. At sunset, the flags are lowered to half-mast, and in the most complete national holiday, cafes, restaurants and cinemas are closed for 24-hours until the end of mourning, which includes a minute's silence. Earlier in the day, Mr Howard visited Gaza and invited PLO chairman Yasser Arafat to visit Australia. He also expressed support for Palestinian self-determination. The Prime Minister urged Israel and the Palestinians to increase their efforts to achieve peace. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australian Opposition leader Kim Beazley today lambasted Prime Minister John Howard for failing to visit Indonesia to help repair bilateral ties. Mr Beazley said that despite the rift that opened between Indonesia and Australia over East Timor, Mr Howard should not have left it so long. The Opposition leader made the comments after a 30-minute meeting with Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid last night. Mr Beazley applauded Mr Wahid's proposal to establish a tripartite commission to quickly resolve problems in the region between Indonesia, Australia and East Timor, saying it dovetailed well with Labor's belief in being a good neighbour. But Mr Beazley said Mr Howard's two visits to Indonesia in recent years were not enough and he should have come to meet MrWahid before this. ""I regard visits to the neighbourhood by Australian prime ministers as routine,"" Mr Beazley told reporters. ""And I do believe Mr Howard should be here, yes, I believe he should have been here much earlier,"" he said. Mr Howard has not been to Indonesia since Mr Wahid became President in October. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Police fear a gunman who shot three police officers in Brisbane's north early yesterday, may have left the city and fled to regional Queensland or interstate. Police want to question 32-year-old Nigel Parodi, over the shooting in the Brisbane suburb of Chermside. Three officers have undergone surgery for gunshot wounds in Royal Brisbane Hospital and are reported to be in a stable condition. Police spokesman Eric Meyer says there have been several unconfirmed overnight sightings, but no new leads. ""Descriptions of the man who's wanted in relation to this have been issued statewide, in fact also to interstate authorities, so the net [has] broadened very widely and of course the things you start looking for also broaden in terms of cars and people seeing suspicious activity and people matching the description,"" he said. ""I mean Nigel Parodi's photo was distributed fairly well yesterday and we're...hoping he might stand out a little bit if he's trying to move about the state, and that could result in a call and a quick arrest."" ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The former Interfet commander in East Timor, Major General Peter Cosgrove, will be announced today as the new Chief of Army. He will be one of the Australian Defence Force's four most senior officers. Major-General Cosgrove, who takes over as army chief in July, will be promoted from land commander to the rank of Lieutenant General. At the same time, the Federal Government is extending the tenure of the Chief of Defence, Admiral Chris Barrie, for two more years. The appointments come ahead of the government's new defence white paper due out later this year - which will establish its new policy and funding priorities, and possibly be the biggest overhaul of defence in 13 years. Two other defence chiefs, the Navy's Vice-Admiral David Shackleton and the Air Force's Air-Marshall Errol McCormack, will remain in their jobs. General Cosgrove's promotion comes just days after winning the Anzac Day Peace Prize and after receiving the Companion in the Order of Australia from the Queen last month. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" External pressures on the Australian economy are seen as likely to produce a further rise in official interest rates this week. Most market analysts believe an increase of one quarter of a percentage point is in the offing. That would take the cash rate to 6 per cent, just 28 days after the last tightening of monetary policy was announced by the Reserve Bank. The bank holds its monthly board meeting today, with any decision most likely to be announced tomorrow morning. Some in the markets have described the case for a further rate rise as compelling. The National Australia Bank's chief economist, Alan Oster, sees it as ""reasonable"", while the managing director of the ANZ Bank, John McFarlane, says the Reserve Bank will have a difficult task trying to balance international and domestic pressures for a rate rise. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Gunshots have been fired at a medical mission taking food and medicine to 21 hostages, held by separatist Muslim guerrillas in the southern Philippines, but no one has been hurt. The shots rang out as the mission approached the Abu Sayyaf mountain base on the island of Jolo and their armed bodyguards radioed for military reinforcement. The rebels are holding nine Malaysians, three Germans, two French, two Finns, two South Africans, two Filipinos and a Lebanese, who they seized in an armed raid of a resort island off Malaysian Borneo on Easter Sunday. Philippine authorities dispatched a 100-member military unit to help the medical convoy, which includes a government doctor, three journalists and bodyguards for a government negotiator. A journalist who was allowed to visit the hostages on Saturday reported that the captives are suffering from diarrhoea, dehydration and emotional distress. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" May Day marches and rallies in at least three European cities turned violent overnight. In the German city of Hamburg, several hundred rioters threw stones, broke windows and set bonfires until they were dispersed by police using water cannons. Twenty-one police officers were injured and 134 people were arrested. Police in Berlin also used water cannons against some 5,000 left-wing demonstrators who set fire to a barricade and threw stones, bottles and fireworks. Several dozen people were arrested. In London, seven people were taken to hospital, including three police officers, after fighting broke out at an anti-capitalist rally in front of the Houses of Parliament. One policeman was seriously hurt when hit in the face by a brick. At least 22 people were arrested for drunkenness, public order offences or carrying weapons. ----------------------------------------------------------------"

" St George-Illawarra rugby league player Anthony Mundine has declined to answer questions on his return from overseas. Mundine returned to Sydney this morning from Honolulu. He has been overseas for more than a week and had left Sydney without the permission of his club. Mundine says he is not commenting, following a chat with coach David Waite this morning. The Dragons' club is set to look at the issue today, with Mundine likely to be called to explain his actions to club officials."

" Police are at the scene of a shooting in Brisbane's north, in which three officers have been shot. An ambulance spokesman says one female police officer was shot four times during an incident at Hanbury Street in the suburb of Chermside. She is being treated in Royal Brisbane Hospital with gunshot wounds to the neck and head. A second male officer has a gunshot wound to the shoulder and another police officer is also injured. Police say the incident happened when officers were called to an apparent domestic dispute, just before 4:00am AEST today. Police are warning Chermside residents to stay indoors. A search is underway in the area for a 32-year-old-man believed to be armed with a .22 calibre handgun, possibly fitted with a silencer. Police spokesman Brian Swift says one officer is in a reasonably satisfactory condition, the other two are very serious. ""The important message to the members of the public is to stay indoors, particularly in the area bounded roughly by Maundrell Tce, east to Webster Road, south to Hamilton Road and north to roughly in line with Gympie Road,"" he said. ""To stay in their homes as much as possible and not to investigate any suspicious noises or sightings at home, but to call police. ""It's very important that nobody does anything silly and that if people listen to their radios, we'll keep them informed as to the issues regarding safety later on in the morning."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Israeli government has announced it is about to pay a third of the agreed compensation cost to the Australian victims of the 1997 Maccabiah Games bridge disaster. Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak announced the payment after a meeting with Australian Prime Minister John Howard, and said he believed the contribution would help ease the suffering of the Australian victims. The bridge collapsed ahead of the opening ceremony of the 1997 games as the Australian team crossed a river to enter the stadium. Four Australians died and 70 were injured in the disaster. Meanwhile, Mr Howard has expressed his sorrow for the suffering of the Jewish people during the Holocaust after visiting the Yad Vashem Memorial in Jerusalem. It was built to commemorate the six million Jews killed by the Nazis during WWII. Mr Howard and his wife laid a wreath, then walked silently through a section in memory of the 1.5 million Jewish children who lost their lives. In the visitors' book at the end of the tour, Mr Howard expressed his sorrow and distress, on behalf of Australia, at what he called ""the appalling tragedy which overcame the Jewish people"". -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Indonesia's President Abdurrahman Wahid has set the mood for today's visit by Opposition leader Kim Beazley by saying he wants to establish a good neighbour policy with Australia. Mr Beazley is to meet President Wahid in Jakarta this evening. An Opposition spokesman also says Mr Beazley is keen to promote what he described as good neighbourly relations and open dialogue. Fresh in the minds of Australian diplomats is an incident in which Indonesian warplanes intercepted five Australian military aircraft in international air space. Relations between Australia and Indonesia have reached a low ebb. Last week, President Wahid for a second time postponed a planned trip to Canberra. Prime Minister John Howard says relations after events in East Timor last year will never be the same. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Eight people remain critically ill following the outbreak of legionnaire's disease linked to the Melbourne Aquarium. More cases are expected. Twenty-nine visitors to the aquarium have contracted legionnaire's disease, so far, with eight of those still in hospital in a critical condition. The outbreak has already caused the death of two elderly Victorian women. Another 27 people from Victoria, Western Australia, Queensland and Tasmania have developed pneumonia and are awaiting tests to find out if they have the disease. Victorian Health Minister John Thwaites is urging recent visitors to the centre with flu-like symptoms to be tested. Health authorities will conduct further tests for the legionella bacteria today, from samples taken from the cooling towers at the aquarium. Meanwhile, the number of suspected cases of legionnaire's disease in Tasmania has risen to three. A 59-year-old woman was admitted to the Mersey Community Hospital with symptoms of the disease on Friday. It is understood the woman recently walked around the aquarium, but did not go inside the building. The other suspected cases are a 73-year-old man at the Mersey Hospital and a 69-year-old woman at Launceston General Hospital. The two developed respiratory problems soon after they visited the aquarium. All three are in a stable condition. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" More than 190 people have been rescued from a luxury cruise ship that hit a rock and started sinking in the Solomon Islands, about half an hour from the capital, Honiara. Australian Maritime Safety officials say an SOS received from the World Discoverer was passed on to shipping in the region and the 112 passengers and 80 crew were taken on board another vessel, the Isabella, this morning. The World Discoverer was carrying passengers on a $12,000 a head ""Mysteries of Papua New Guinea"" cruise and was on its way from Fiji and Vanuatu to Papua New Guinea when the accident occurred. All passengers are reported to be safe. Tickets for the cruise were sold through travel companies in the United States and Germany. The ship is owned by Society Expeditions of the United States. A near civil war is underway in the Solomons and the US State Department has a travel advisory out against travel to the main island of Guadalcanal. ----------------------------------------------------------------"

" Security forces in the Philippines have sprayed tear gas into a tunnel complex where they believe Muslim extremists are holding at least 27 hostages they have held for six weeks in the south of the country. A military spokesman says soldiers reported hearing a child's voice as they began searching the extensive tunnel system. But they said Abu Sayyaf rebels had earlier been seen fleeing through a side exit from the tunnel. Inside the tunnel, troops found children's sandals, generators. weapons and sacks of rice. The hostages, mostly school children, were among about 50 people seized by the rebels, who have also taken captive a number of hostages from a Malaysian resort in a separate seizure. The rebels have listed a number of demands, including the granting of an autonomous region in the southern Philippines. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A prominent industry forecaster is predicting that housing starts in Australia will slump by more than 20 per cent next financial year. BIS Shrapnel believes downward pressures will be twofold. The firm says the downturn will follow four years of modest but consistent growth. It expects by the end of June, dwelling commencements across Australia will have risen almost 9 per cent for the financial year to just under 163,000. But BIS Shrapnel says the current year's increase can be attributed almost exclusively to people bringing forward buying decisions because of the goods and services tax (GST). It believes the GST will combine with rising interest rates to produce a decline of more than 20 per cent in 2000/2001. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Former Blue Heelers star Lisa McCune has won her fourth consecutive Gold Logie Award. McCune's award capped off a good night for the police drama which dominated the popularity section of the awards. Blue Heelers took Logies for the most popular male and female actors, the most popular female talent and the most popular program. Hey Hey It's Saturday was a sentimental winner of the award for the most popular comedy light entertainment program, despite being off the air. The ABC scooped the industry-based awards with Seachange stars William McInnes and Sigrid Thornton named most outstanding actors The most outstanding documentary went to the ABC's Facing the Demons, and the network's Micallef Program was awarded most outstanding comedy. Channel Nine's Hi 5 show won the most outstanding children's program."

" The Foreign Minister, Alexander Downer, says the Government will let pass an incident between Australian and Indonesian warplanes. Mr Downer has confirmed that an incident happened over international airspace as five unarmed airforce aircraft were on their way from Australia to Singapore. Mr Downer says they had approval to overfly Indonesia. They were intercepted by several F-5 Indonesian aircraft, one coming within 20-feet of one of the Australian aircraft. Speaking on Channel Nine, Mr Downer sought to play down the incident. ""I don't think they were threatened,"" he said. ""As I understand it what happened was that the two aircraft came up to meet with the five Australian aircraft and flew alongside them. ""The Indonesians say that they endeavoured to communicate by radio but were unable to do so, so there was some communications between the Australian F-18 pilots and the Indonesian F-5 pilots through hand signals then the F-5 aircraft left."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Treasurer, Peter Costello, has revealed the budget to be delivered on May 9 will be in surplus. He has rated continuing good economic management as the main focus of the budget and says the Government wants to keep the economy growing and keep bringing unemployment down. Speaking on Channel 10, Mr Costello says the government has to make sure it keeps the budget in surplus. ""We want in this budget to make it the fourth surplus in a row which will make sure that we're paying for our way,"" Mr Costello said. ""We're continuing to repay Labor debt, we keep the economy growing and we find new jobs. ""New jobs particularly for our young people, one of the best possible things you can do for Australian citizens."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Victorian health authorities have confirmed a further five people have developed legionnaire's disease linked to the Melbourne Aquarium. It takes the number of confirmed cases to 23. The Human Services Department received test results on the five people last night, confirming that the flu-like symptoms they had developed were in fact linked to legionnaire's disease. Seventeen others are still waiting to learn if they too have the disease, which has already killed an 83-year-old Melbourne woman and a 79-year-old Shepparton woman and hospitalised several others. It is the largest outbreak of legionnaire's disease in Victoria and health authorities believe it could get worse as more test results come through in the next few days. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Prime Minister John Howard will hold bilateral talks with his Israeli counterpart Ehud Barak today as he begins the third leg of his overseas trip. Mr Howard arrived in Israel late yesterday and spent the evening sightseeing, taking in the old city of Jerusalem, including the Western Wall and the el Aqsa mosque. Today, Mr Howard will receive an honorary doctorate from the Bar Ilan University in Tel Aviv for his support of the Middle East peace process. He will then address a business lunch, in a bid to drum up more interest in Australian exports to the region. Late today, Mr Howard will meet Mr Barak for bilateral talks. Mr Howard is expected to raise Australian concerns about the Middle East peace process as well as an Israeli court's decision on the Maccabiah Games disaster. The courts have found organisers responsible for the Maccabiah bridge collapse, but there has been little movement on compensation for the victims. Mr Howard has discussed the issue with the Australian Council of Jewry and he has promised to raise the issue in his talks with Mr Barak. The survivors of the disaster want the Israeli Government to commit to compensation up front. After the meeting, Mr Howard will lay a wreath at the Yad Veshem memorial to victims of the holocaust. On Monday, Mr Howard will meet Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and will urge both sides to find a lasting peace in the Middle East. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Communist party ceremonies have opened under tight security in the former capital of South Vietnam to mark the 25th anniversary of the fall of the city and the country's reunification. Interior ministry troops have reinforced riot police in a cordon around the ceremony venue: the old presidential palace in the centre of Saigon, now known as Ho Chi Minh City. The ceremony began with a speech by Vo Viet Thanh, chairman of the Ho Chi Minh People's Committee. He paid tribute to the millions who fought and lost their lives in the country's 30-year struggle for reunification and added the corruption plaguing the city now should make people ashamed. Heading the line-up of Vietnamese dignitaries is the retired General Vo Nguyen Giap, the architect of successive victories over the French, then the Americans. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Cambodian Government and the United Nations have agreed to a formula on setting up a Khmer Rouge war crimes trial, in a deal ending months of deadlock. The formula would see an ""international style"" court established in Phnom Penh, comprising both foreign and Cambodian participants with courtroom decisions requiring a ""super majority"" vote. It paves the way for surviving leaders of Pol Pot's ultra-Maoist rebels, blamed for the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Cambodians in the late 1970s, to face a court for the first time. United States Senator John Kerry, who has been mediating between the UN and the Cambodian government, says a final agreement could be struck by mid-June. ""This is really something that so many people feel is long overdue,"" Senator Kerry said. ""A million-and-a-half to two million people were killed during the period of the Khmer Rouge from 1975 to 1979 and the international community has long been seeking justice in this. ""The United Nations has done a terrific job of moving that process forward and now as a result of these discussions my hope is that the final agreement can be reached, permitting the process to actually be implemented."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A Perth resident who was the recipient of the world's first limb transplant is in danger of losing his new hand. Clint Hallam made history 19-months-ago when a team of French surgeons grafted a donor hand on to his forearm. However, authorities at Perth's Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital have confirmed Mr Hallam has been receiving treatment for rejection of the new hand. Mr Hallam, who lost his hand in an accident in prison, may also be thrown out of Australia, with his temporary visa due to expire in early June. Australian authorities have refused to give the former New Zealander permanent residency because of his criminal record in New Zealand. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Four Australians have filled the top 10 places in the Host City Marathon in Sydney, with Victoria's Rod de Highden winning the event. De Highden finished outside the Olympic ""A"" qualifying mark in a time of 2:16:36 hours. Fellow Victorian Magnus Michelsson led for most of the race but he was overtaken by de Highden approaching Stadium Australia, who went on to win by 28 seconds. Japan's Shinji Kawashima finished third, while Victorians Lee Troop and Julian Dwyer were fifth and seventh. Western Australia's Susan Hobson won the women's race in a time of 2:35:28 hours."

" The United States Justice Department has asked a Federal Court in Washington to split software giant Microsoft into two independent companies, one to develop operating systems and the other to focus on computer applications. Backed by a coalition of state attorneys-general, the department submitted the request to US District Court Judge Thomas Penfield Jackson, who on April 3 ruled that Microsoft was in violation of US antitrust laws. ""This is the right remedy at the right time,"" US Attorney-General Janet Reno said. ""Our proposal will stimulate competition, promote innovation and give consumers new and better choices in the marketplace."" Microsoft chairman Bill Gates blasted the proposal, warning that it would have a ""chilling effect"" on the future of the information industry. ""These proposals would have a chilling effect on innovation in the high-technology industry,"" Mr Gates said in a videotaped message aired minutes after Justice Department lawyers filed their break-up recommendation. Mr Gates said the company he had co-founded ""could never have developed Windows under these rules"". ""Looking forward, this kind of regulation would make it impossible for Microsoft to develop the next generation of great software."" Microsoft will now have until May 10 to file its preliminary response to the department's proposals, after which Judge Jackson will hold hearings, expected to begin May 24, on the remedies to be applied. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Opposition says the Immigration Minister, Philip Ruddock, has lost the plot over a plan to make refugees with temporary visas pay for the costs of their detention. Mr Ruddock says the user-pays scheme would apply to refugees granted temporary asylum who are able to find work and would require refugees to payback some of their detention costs. The scheme is designed to recoup some of the millions of dollars the government spends on housing and feeding refugees. But the Shadow Immigration Minister, Con Sciacca, says the plan defeats the purpose of humanitarian aid. ""What we should be doing is trying to include them into the broader community,"" he said. ""You're not going to be able to do that if you don't give them English language courses to help them to be able to speak the language and thus get a job. ""To saddle them with expenses that we don't even saddle our murderers and our rapists with that do time in our jail, I think is a loopy idea."" --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Indonesia's President Abdurrahman Wahid has proposed a meeting between himself, East Timorese leader Xanana Gusmao and Australian Prime Minister John Howard in a bid to strengthen ties between the three countries. President Wahid says the meeting could take place in Darwin, Dili, or in Kupang, in West Timor and he hopes a date can be set for it soon. ""I'm very glad that Xanana Gusmao has the same understanding about a meeting,"" President Wahid said. ""He even proposes that he will discuss that with John Howard on his next visit to Australia which will take place on the 6th and 7th of next month."" Meanwhile, the Foreign Minister, Alexander Downer, says the Australian Government is happy to participate in the three-way meeting. The suggestion came not long after Mr Wahid cancelled a visit to Australia. However, speaking in Washington, Mr Downer said Australia had an open and positive attitude to the Indonesian leader and to relations with Jakarta. ""The Prime Minister has the same view as I, that we have a very open approach to President Wahid and to relations with Indonesia,"" Mr Downer said. ""We obviously want to build up the relationship and we want to make it a relationship which is based on mutual respect and as the Prime Minister's made clear, of course it'll be a different relationship from the relationship of years gone by. ""But then you've got a very different political system in Indonesia from the system you had in years gone by."" --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Australian dollar has tumbled to new 19-month lows overnight, with the expectation of further interest rate rises in the United States. The dollar fell as low as 58.32 US cents, but has settled slightly higher and is currently at 58.40 cents. Serge Vartanian, from Citibank's foreign exchange desk, says anticipation of another rate rise in the US next week, the dollar's downward trend may continue. ""The US dollar continues to strengthen against most major currencies and unfortunately, the Australian dollar has been one of the currencies which has suffered because of that,"" Mr Vartanian said. ""Anticipation is growing on US interest rates being raised in the near future and that has added to the Australian weakness overnight."" Meanwhile, blue-chip stocks have fallen for a third straight session on the New York exchange as investors worried about rising interest rates but technology shares continued their recovery and drove the Nasdaq composite index higher. The Dow Jones industrial average fell 154 points, or 1.4 per cent, to close at 10,733 and end the week 110 points down. However, the Nasdaq composite rose 86 points, an overall gain for the week of 216 just under 6 per cent. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Five people have been killed and another critically wounded in the latest shooting incident in the United States. Police say a white man opened fire in two shopping centres in the city of Pittsburgh, in what they have described as a racially motivated attack. The man has since been taken into custody. Two of the dead were Asians who were shot at a Chinese restaurant, while a black man was killed at a martial arts school. Two other people, both Indian, were shot at an Indian grocery and a Jewish woman has been found dead in her home. Police say the gunman had also fired shots at two synagogues but no-one was injured. A swastika and the word Jew had been sprayed on one synagogue. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Several more people linked to the Melbourne Aquarium have developed the potentially fatal legionnaire's disease. The Human Services Department is is investigating the latest cases. The department has confirmed it became aware of several new cases of legionnaire's disease this morning. A spokesman says the exact numbers of new cases and more details about the victims will be released shortly. The spokesman says those affected have been hospitalised and all are from Victoria. He says the department is not including Western Australian Liberal MP Neil Patrucco, who has been released from hospital among the new cases, because it has not been confirmed that he has the disease. Before the discovery of the latest victims, seven people had been hospitalised with the potentially fatal disease. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The leader of Zimbabwe's independence war veterans says he will deal severely with any person committing acts of violence against the country's white farmers or their workers. The assurance has come during talks with farmers representatives to ease the tension on occupied properties across Zimbabwe. The agreement reached between the Commercial Farmers Union and the War Veterans Association does not address how the issue of land reform will be taken forward but may serve to defuse tension on occupied farms. Veterans will be allowed to remain on white-owned properties but on the proviso that any person responsible for violence against farmers or their workers will be severely dealt with. The farm owners will be allowed to return to their land unhindered. The leader of the war veterans association, Chenjerai Hunzvi, says violence must stop forthwith, while more formal negotiations on the issue of land redistribution are held. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Police in Indonesia's largest port city of Surabaya have tightened security to stop a Muslim jihad army sailing to the strife torn eastern Maluku Islands. Seven people have died in the island capital, Ambon, in two days of renewed fighting between Christians and Muslims. Residents in Ambon say many people are hiding in their homes, preparing to flee if violence on the streets escalates. Police in Surabaya, which is the main sea gateway to Indonesia's eastern islands, say they will not allow Muslim soldiers to board ships bound for Ambon to wage a holy war against Christians. Three-thousand jihad troops recently completed military-style training at a camp near Jakarta and their leaders have vowed they would soon leave by ship for Ambon. Indonesian security forces have not been able to control sectarian fighting, which has claimed thousands of lives in the Malukus during the last two years. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australia's inflation rate has jumped to its highest level in almost four years. The annual movement in the Consumer Price Index (CPI) is now at the top end of the Reserve Bank's targeted range. The CPI has risen 2.8 per cent in the 12 months to March, which is broadly in line with what had been forecast and is up from 1.8 per cent for the December quarter. It is the strongest annual rise in the cost of living since June 1996. In the latest three months, the CPI is up 0.9 per cent and, as expected, an almost 8 per cent jump in petrol prices has been a significant contributor. Costs for home purchases, tobacco, education, pharmeceuticals, car insurance and vegetables have also exerted upward pressure. They have been partially offset by cheaper overseas travel, furniture, fruit and pet supplies. All eyes will now be on the Reserve Bank as its board meets next Tuesday to consider official interest rates settings."

" There has been a significant jump this morning in financial market interest rates. Investors have a wary eye on inflation both locally and in the United States. Treasury director at Dresdner Bank, Chris Bell, says the move in market rates in Australia has been significant. Mr Bell says markets are factoring in a rise next week in Australia's official interest rates of 0.25 per cent. The heightened speculation follows surprisingly high wage cost and inflation measures in the United States overnight and yesterday's strong wage figures locally."

" The main political parties are at odds, over how seriously to take a dramatic jump in inflation. Inflation surged by 2.8 per cent in the year to March, its highest level in nearly four years. Sky-high petrol prices account for much of the 0.9 per cent rise in March-quarter inflation. Also up are housing costs, tobacco and vegetables, while fruit, furniture and overseas holidays were cheaper. The Treasurer, Peter Costello is playing down the figures. ""The Australian economy is still a high growth - low inflation economy and our inflation is well within our target of 2 to 3 per cent,"" he said. But his opposite number, Labor's Simon Crean says the goods and services tax (GST) is to blame. ""A year ago Peter Costello said the inflation dragon was slain,"" he said. ""The problem is his GST has breathed new life into the inflation dragon."" Employer groups also point to higher insurance costs, among others, as an early flow-through of the GST. The Australian dollar fell, and bond prices improved slightly, on relief the figures were not worse. But the National Australia Bank's chief economist, ALAN OSTER, says another rate rise is still in the offing. ""In some ways it's a mugs game trying to guess exactly when the Reserve Bank is going to go but you would have to think with the very strong GDP numbers coming out of the US overnight that the Federal Reserve is going to go at least 25 basis points and could well go 50 basis points and our central bank will be very aware of that,"" he said."

" The Victorian Department of Human Services has issued a national health alert over the outbreak of legionnaires disease at the Melbourne Aquarium. The number of confirmed cases has risen to seven, with all patients in hospital in intensive care. Five people are in a critical condition and two are recovering. Dr John Carnie, from the Department of Human Services, expects more cases of the disease to be detected. ""What we're suggesting is for people interstate who visited Victoria during the relevant period, again just as we've told people in Victoria, if they're concerned about it, if they've been to that vicinity and they are currently ill, to see a doctor and ask to get tested for this disease,"" he said."

" The Governor-General, Sir William Deane, has delivered an emotional speech at the fourth anniversary of the Port Arthur tragedy in Tasmania. Sir William joined hundreds of visitors at the site for the opening of a memorial garden to commemorate the 35 who died in the shootings. The native garden sits alongside the shell of the Broad Arrow Cafe which was the scene of the greatest number of deaths. Up to 800 people, many of them victims who survived the shootings, joined today's ceremony to reflect and mourn. Sir William dedicated the new memorial garden as a permanent shrine to those who died. ""This will be a permanent shrine to which all Australians, especially to those affected by the tragedy, may in the future come to reflect upon that day in our national life,"" he said. Opening the ceremony, local Reverend Henry Ivey indicated today's service will probably be the last of its kind, with future anniversaries commemorated by small private gatherings at the site."

" Three hundred jobs are expected to be lost in the dairy industry after an announcement by Bonlac Foods which will close four of its manufacturing plants. Factories in Drouin and Toora in Gippsland will be closed by the end of the year, as will a plant at Camperdown in western Victoria and Legerwood in Tasmania. Bonlac has also announced a merger with the New Zealand Dairy Board which both organisations say will make it stronger in a global economy. Dairy producers who supply Bonlac have met in Melbourne to discuss today's announcement. Many have walked away unhappy, claiming the company refused to nominate a competitive milk price. Bonlac Foods says the closure of four manufacturing plants will lead to a more competitive price for farmers. Bonlac chief executive Alex Sloan says the closures are necessary if the company is to get a competitive milk price for its suppliers. ""Certainly Bonlac Foods needs to be more efficient than it is today and that's the rationalisation program,"" he said. ""We recognise that we have been building very substantial value in this business over the few years but we are not currently paying a competitive milk price."""

" The Prime Minister, John Howard, is touring the Western Front battlefield where his father and grandfather fought. Mr Howard is carrying a copy of extracts of his father's war diary visiting Australia's war memorial at Villers-Bretonneux. Under steady rain a lone bugle sounded from the tower at the cemetery where Mr and Mrs Howard laid a wreath. Of the 400,000 Australians who served between 1914 and 1918 more than 300,000 served on the Western Front in France and Flanders. More than 45,000 died. In 1918, Australian soldiers helped liberate Villers-Bretonneux where a huge sign now stands reading ""never forget Australia""."

" Mr Howard's also conferred an Order of Australia on the local mayor and a private citizen for their work in caring for the memory of Australians who died there. The Prime Minister will visit a series of sites where his grandfather and father fought. He will also visit the grave of Harry Thorpe, the great-grandfather of Aboriginal reconciliation council member, Majorie Thorpe. The Prime Minister has used his trip to France to warn his French counterpart Lionel Jospin that Europe's agricultural subsidies penalise developing countries. Mr Howard is seeking to keep the pressure on France to reduce farm subsidies. He has strongly resisted Mr Jospin's cultural defence of the subsidies."

" A Perth judge has likened the people-smuggling trade from Indonesia to the beginning of what he calls Austalia's current drug crisis. The judge made his comments while sentencing an Indonesian fisherman to four years jail. Mohammed Saleh was one of two Indonesian crewmen discovered off Western Australia's north coast in October last year with 12 illegal immigrants on board. District Court Judge Robert Viol said Saleh had agreed to take part in the people smuggling trade in the full knowledge that what he was doing was illegal. Judge Viol said the poeple smuggling trade was now operating in a similar way to that of the beginnings of what he called the drug crisis, with those involved at the lower end of the operation claiming they were pawns in the hands of those at the top. He said people like Saleh who crew the ships that bring illegal immigrants to Australia should expect jail terms of around five years while he hoped those at the top of the people smuggling heirachy would one day be sentenced to the maximum 20 years."

" Scientists in the United States are claiming another step forward in the world of cloning. Researchers from Thomas Jefferson University in Philadelphia, who cloned six cows, claim the heifers appear to have cells younger than their chronological ages. One of the drawbacks of the most famous cloned animal, Dolly the sheep, was that she was born with six year-old cells and appeared to age prematurely. But by using a slightly different technique, these researchers appear to have frozen the ageing process. The findings could have important implications for organ transplants and treating diseases such as Alzheimers."

" State and territory immigration ministers have demanded the Federal Government suspend issuing temporary protection visas to illegal immigrants, claiming it is an unfair burden to them. However, Federal Immigration Minister, Philip Ruddock, has rejected the request, made at a ministerial immigration and multicultural affairs meeting in New Zealand. West Australian Multicultural Affairs Minister, Rob Johnson, has condemned the Federal Government for dismissing their concerns. He says since January more than 200 illegal immigrants detained in the far north of Western Australia have been issued temporary visas, with the state to bear the brunt of the costs. ""I don't believe Western Australian taxpayers should be forced to foot the bill for illegal immigrants which are basically the responsibility of the Commonwealth Government,"" he said. ""If the Commonwealth is not prepared to meet its obligations and the costs that it'll be imposing on the state's then these people should be sent home."""

" The latest inflation figures will be released this morning and they could seal another interest rate rise next Wednesday. Analysts are tipping Australia's annual inflation rate will jump to nearly 3 per cent in the March quarter, which would be at the top end of the Reserve Bank's target. Higher housing and petrol costs are expected to have driven the consumer price index up about 1 per cent in the first three months of the year. Yesterday, annual wages growth of 4 per cent surprised analysts, adding weight to the Reserve's worries about inflation. --------------------------------"

" Today's fourth anniversary Remembrance Service of the Port Arthur tragedy is being viewed as the close of a chapter and a new start. A memorial harden will be dedicated at what community leaders are saying will be the final public anniversary service. The remembrance service will begin with the lighting of the remembrance candle. There will be words of welcome and comfort, and the Memorial Garden will be dedicated by the Governor General of Australia, Sir William Deane. Sir William and the Tasmanian Governor Sir Guy Green will read scripture and there will be a reflection reading. Roman Catholic, Anglican and Church of Christ clergy will preside over the service. There has been an open invitation extended to the public by the local community. The chief executive of the Port Arthur Historic Site, Stephen Large says the Memorial Garden will be a comfort for those still affected by the tragedy. The Tasman Council Mayor, Neil Noye, says today will probably be the final public Port Arthur Remembrance Service, with people being left to make their own personal reflection over years to come. With today's anniversary there is a new direction for a foundation which supports child victims of crime and sudden family loss. The ""Alannah and Madeline Foundation"", named after Alannah and Madeline Mikac, who were among those killed at Port Arthur, will launch a new educational schools kit. The central character of the kit is ""Buddy Bear"", created by the renowned illustrator and author, Michael Salmon. The foundation's Robyn Peile says ""Buddy Bear"" will promote a caring attitude, and be a financial help for child beneficiaries. ""Buddy Bear will help us to raise funds for the beneficiaries that we have, and the other beneficiaries that we're not able to support at the moment,"" she said. ""Buddy Bear will also give the foundation a profile and help us to better support those beneficiaries. ""But at the same time, the whole program is about working with children to teach them to care about others, and in fact Buddy's theme is 'I'm special because I care about others'."" ------------------------------"

" The United States has expressed deep concern over the relationship between elements of the Indonesian military and the militia operating in refugee camps in West Timor. Washington says Jakarta must act to deal with problems that threaten East Timor's stability. The US ambassador to the United Nations, Richard Holbrook, acknowledged Indonesian President Wahid's commitment to stop militia operations in refugee camps in West Timor. But Mr Holbrook told the UN Security Council the Indonesian military must act to disarm and disband hard core militia in areas under its control. Mr Holbrook said it was a disgrace that up to 100,000 refugees still remain in the camps. ----------------------------------"

" Police in Zimbabwe have invoked sweeping colonial era powers to crack down on political activity. The announcement follows days of political unrest across the country. Zimbabwe's police commissioner, Augustine Chihuri, says effective immediately any gathering that threatens law and order is banned. Political parties are also forbidden from transporting their supporters to or from any political gathering, unless it is being addressed by a party president. The commissioner says he blames both the ruling ZANU-PF party and the opposition Movement for Democratic Changa (MDC) for the recent spasm of political violence, that has claimed at least 15 lives. The banning order will hurt the MDC which has been holding rallies in rural villages across the country, to raise the party's profile. Those meetings are now banned if the police consider them a threat to stability. --------------------------------"

" A new report on tobacco and alcohol consumption shows Australia is not the big drinking, heavy smoking nation it used to be. The Institute of Health and Welfare compares Australian consumption rates with those of the rest of the world. The statistics, comparing consumption rates from 1986 to 1996, shows Australia dropped from 10th place in the world for cigarette smoking to 17th. Greece was the world leader for heavy smoking, followed by Japan. For alcohol consumption, Australia was ranked 20th in the world, but when it comes to drinking beer we are in the top 10, with an average of 95 litres per person. The Czech Republic topped the list with an average beer drinking effort of 160 litres per person. The report also says in 1996, the average Australian spent more than $1,000 on alcohol and cigarettes. -------------------------------"

" New figures show international tourists are spending more time and money in Australia. According to the Bureau of Tourism Research, visitor spending for the year to September totalled just under $9 billion, an increase of 16 per cent on the previous 12 months. The number of nights spent by tourists in Australia was also up, rising by 14 per cent to 106 million. The Australian Tourist Commission says the softness of the Australian dollar against other major currencies has encouraged greater spending. According to the figures, the average tourist spends around $2,200 while in the country, with accommodation, shopping and organised tours the biggest outlays. --------------------------------"

" After revealing an after-tax loss of more than $130 million for last year, car maker Mitsubishi has announced a further 600 jobs are to go from its two Adelaide plants. The latest job cuts are part of a restructuring program and follow a warning from Mitsubishi in Japan that the plants could be wound back if they do not start making money. Mitsubishi Australia's Robert Gardener says the restructuring will not affect workers directly involved in vehicle production. Three hundred production jobs were lost late last year. At present, the company has about 4,000 employees in Adelaide. Mr Gardener says the $130 million loss can be put down to several factors, including the strengthening of the Japanese yen and a general slow-down in new car sales across Australia. He says speculation about Mitsubishi's future in Australia has also hurt sales. ""I hope the measures we are announcing today, along with our commitment to invest, will put such uncertainties to rest once and for all,"" he said."

" The South Australian Premier, John Olsen, says the loss of 600 positions at Mitsubishi is regrettable. ""The restructuring that will be put in place will give the opportunity for the continuation for manufacturing. That is the most important outcome. ""It is the securing of some 3,500 jobs in that manufacturing operation and, of course, the benefits it gives to automotive component companies supplying Mitsubishi."""

" The Federal Industry Minister, Nick Minchin, is confident Mitsubishi does have a long-term future in Australia. The Minister has welcomed Mitsubishi's commitment to achieve the cuts by voluntary redundancies and he has offered the company any help it needs in looking after its workers. Senator Minchin says the restructuring is a vital sign for the viability of the company. ""They are biting the bullet, they do understand the need to become a leaner, more efficient operation, their products are first class and I do believe very strongly they do have a long-term future in this country,"" he said."

" The Federal Opposition has blamed the goods and services tax (GST) in large part, for the hundreds of job cuts at Mitsubishi. Labor says the discounts that Mitsubishi has had to offer to counter the slump in car sales leading up to the GST are a major cause of the financial losses which have led to the cuts. Shadow Industry Minister Bob McMullan says Labor has been warning the Government for months to introduce measures to soften the GST's impact on the car industry. He says the Government is now to blame. ""Since June of last year Kim Beazley and I, and the Federal Opposition, have been warning the Howard Government that unless they took action to modify the impact of the GST and its transitional arrangements on the car industry, jobs would go in the car industry and sadly we've been proved correct,"" he said. The Australian Manufacturing Workers Union says while it is disappointed with Mitsubishi's announcement, it applauds a redundancy offer to staff. The Union's South Australian secretary, John Camillo, says the company has treated its workers fairly."

" Democrats leader Meg Lees has called on the Federal Government to delay the next round of tariff reductions, due to take effect in 2005. Senator Lees says Australia should not push ahead with further cuts until other countries lower their tariffs. ""For us to disarm well ahead of many of our competitors doesn't make any sense whatsoever,"" she said. ""So on behalf of Mitsubishi and the other car manufacturers remaining in this country, I ask the Government to think again about their further plans for reductions in support levels for this industry."""

" The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) expects cheaper long distance phone calls following a benchmark report today. The ACCC report shows Telstra has been overcharging companies which connect to Telstra's fixed network to sell their own long distance deals. Commission chairman Professor Allan Fels says Telstra had given an undertaking to charge 2.3 cents per minute but he says the commission's costings shows it should be 1.8 cents. He says he expects both Telstra and its competitors to lower their prices, so that consumers can get savings of around 5 per cent. ""Long distance we believe 5 per cent, remember there are millions of phone lines, there are 10 million phone lines in Australia and all of them will benefit or potentially benefit from this decision."""

" Meanwhile, Australia's third carrier, AAPT, has welcomed the ruling, as a victory for consumers and a boost to competition. AAPT says telecommunications companies will have greater flexibility to become more competitive, especially in pricing. It says being able to further drive down costs should benefit the company and its shareholders. However, the firm says Telstra's interconnection charges will still be too high, and it will continue to push for charges of around one cent per minute, in line with rates charged overseas."

" The Federal Government says the ACCC's decision shows there is now clearly competition in the telecommunications market. The office of Communications Minister Richard Alston says the ACCC's role is to ensure that market forces prevail and that is exactly what it has done in the case against Telstra. The Government says Australia has seen significant reductions in telecommunications charges since new entrants were allowed into the industry. Telstra shares have dropped on the prospect of reduced revenues from the charges. The stock has fallen 15 cents, or nearly 2 per cent, closing at $7.48."

" New wages figures could place further upward pressure on official interest rates. Annual wages growth is running at its highest level since 1998. In raw figures, the average weekly pay packet for Australian adults now contains $774.80 in ordinary-time earnings. Over the three months to February, that represents a seasonally-adjusted increase of 1.4 per cent. In annual terms, wages growth is running at 4 per cent which is its strongest growth since 1998. Salomon Smith Barney's bond and currency strategist, Stephen Halmarick, says the figures add weight to the case for further action by the Reserve Bank as early as next week. ""Today's wage numbers were important and I think the jump in the headline rate to 4 per cent is quite significant but tomorrow's inflation numbers are more important in terms of the near term monetary policy outlook,"" he said. ""We are of the view that the Reserve bank will tighten by 25-points next week."" The wages data have sparked modest rises in the Australian dollar and short-term market interest rates. In lunchtime trading the dollar was sitting at around 58.95 US cents which is up around 0.8 of a cent since the release of the figures. Market strategists say investors remain cautious ahead of economic growth figures tonight in the United States and Australian inflation measures tomorrow."

" The Federal Government has ruled out bringing in a national insurance scheme to protect workers entitlements when companies fold. Instead, Federal Workplace Relations Minister Peter Reith has told his state counterparts at a meeting in Sydney he will proceed with a taxpayer-funded scheme. While several conservative states have expressed in principle support for the Reith proposal, they have not signed up to it. The Labor states claim Mr Reith is blackmailing them by threatening to proceed with his scheme from as early as next month, and saying the states can take it or leave it. New South Wales Industrial Relations Minister Jeff Shaw says the states will stand their ground. ""I think we're being pressured in a political sense and we've got to argue this matter out as a matter of principle,"" he said. ""I think we've got to get the view through to the community, and I think they'll accept that view, that it's essentially a Federal Government responsibility to devise a reasonable national scheme whereby working people can be given their due entitlements."""

" The Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation is yet to decide who will be formally handed its final document, due to be made public in three days. In France today, the Prime Minister, John Howard, has said the Government remains firm on making no official national apology to the Stolen Generations. The document is expected to include some form of apology and may be accepted by the Governor-General, Sir William Deane, rather than Mr Howard. But the council's deputy chairman, Sir Gustav Nossal, has played down suggestions of a split with the Prime Minister. ""The council respects the Prime Minister and believes he has the right to hold whatever views he does hold,"" he said. ""We shall just have to see how the final wording pans out."""

" Meanwhile, a national alliance has been formed to push politicians and the public into improving the health of indigenous Australians. The Australian Medical Association (AMA) has announced in Canberra that it has joined forces with the National Aboriginal Community Control Health Organisation (NACCHO). The new alliance says it has two main objectives, firstly improve co-ordination among Aboriginal health groups and secondly lobby for more funding to tackle more serious health problems plaguing the Aboriginal community. The AMA says pushing for more funds could prove the most difficult of the two tasks. Federal AMA president Dr David Brand said at today's announcement that Aboriginal health is not a vote winner for politicians. He says persuading them to allocate more funds means educating the Australian public on the seriousness of the problem."

" The Federal Government has also conceded there is much work to be done to improve the standard of Aboriginal housing. A detailed study by the Bureau of Statistics has found almost one third of all properties are in need of major repair or replacement. The study also shows many indigenous communities have problems with their water and power supplies, and sewerage systems. The Aboriginal Affairs Minister, John Herron, says while the backlog of housing work has been reduced, it is still a serious issue. ""It'll take some time, I suppose, for us to all properly analyse the data but clearly there are enormous implications for governments at all levels in planning services for these communities in need,"" he said. ""The need's indisputable. What we must do now is simply be assured that we're all heading in the right direction."""

" The Federal Opposition has attacked the Government for spending what it claims is almost $250 million on goods and services (GST) advertising. Labor says this includes $16 million spent before the last election, around $90 million for TV ads, more than $100 million for education campaigns, and $11 million for promotion by the Competition and Consumer Commission. The Shadow Treasurer, Simon Crean says the money spent on advertising and education campaigns could have been used to boost the families package, or fund more schools and hospital beds. ""Labor will be ensuring that the detail of this expenditure is scrutinized in full. ""We want to establish the extent to which this has been genuine information in informing people, or misleading,"" he said."

" The Opposition has also seized on the closure of a 97-year-old family-run store in Western Victoria, to renew its attack on the GST. Owners of the Wheaton Family Store say they will be forced to close by June, because GST compliance costs are too high for a business their size. Mr Crean, says he feels very sad for the Wheatons, but this is not an isolated case. ""I think there will be a number that follow suit,"" he said. ""We are getting anecdotal evidence by the day, of people that can't get answers from the Tax Office, their compensation is inadequate, they're talking about packing up and getting out. ""This is the first real example of that happening, but there are many more being talked about."""

" The Australian Plaque Locust Commission says it has identified 48 locust targets to control following an inspection of Hillston and Ivanhoe in the far west of New South Wales earlier this week. It says the swarms already affecting the Broken Hill region and east of Wilcannia represent the biggest infestation in the region in about eight years. The commission's forecaster, Paul Walker, says spraying to control the area between Mossgiel and Hillston will start today. He says the swarms of locusts have been hatched in the region as well as outside areas. ""The hoppers have certainly hatched from eggs that were laid by adults in that local area, but the adults probably have flown in from other areas."" Mr Walker says the problem is spreading across the state. ""We have been doing quite a bit of control in the Tibboburra and White Cliffs areas as well. And there is basically locusts over a very, very wide area and wherever those adults were seen during the autumn, we can expect eggs to hatch in the next spring as well."""

" There are fears scientific research in Australia will suffer under a Federal Government plan to outsource Information Technology (IT) services. The government strategy involves outsourcing IT in six scientific agencies, including the CSIRO and the Antarctic Division. Unions say hundreds of jobs will be cut across the country. Paul Blount from the Commonwealth Public Sector Union says IT and research are closely linked, and outsourcing will badly effect Australian science. ""We use our computers for doing everything across all gamuts of science and to think of them as just something you can go along and touch once in a while is not true. We supply a high level of service,"" he said."

" The long-term future of car-maker Mitsubishi's operations in Adelaide may become clearer this afternoon when representatives from the Australian Manufacturing Worker's Union and some employees meet with company officials. The meeting follows news from Mitsubishi's management that Adelaide's operations would be wound back, if the company does not break even by the end of the year. Industrial and political officials say yesterday's comments on the future operations of Mitsubishi's Tonsley Park and Lonsdale plants are nothing new. Speculation has continued since DaimlerChrysler aquired over 33 per cent of Mitsubishi a little over one month ago. A spokesperson for the Premier said Mr Olsen was not willing to comment any further at this stage, except that the comments once again point to the need of restructuring. Union officials say the Mitsubishi president's comments might merely be a warning to hasten the restructure process. ---------------------------"

" It has been swings and roundabouts again on Wall Street. In the latest session, shares in both mainstream and new economy companies in the United States have dropped back to the ground after yesterday's substantial rise. It has been a dramatic reversal for the blue chips, with the Dow Jones industrial average plummeting more than 200 points in the closing minutes of trade. It has now finished 179 points behind at 10,946, which is a decline of 1.6 per cent. Worries about a further rise in US interest rates have outweighed a number of strong profit reports. The rate jitters come ahead of tonight's measure of US economic growth. High-tech stocks have lost around 2.2 per cent in value and the Nasdaq composite index is down 81 points. The US bond market has slipped a touch further. The weaker prices have pushed up the yield on 30-year Treasury paper to 5.95 per cent, which is a rise of 1.5 points. In Britain, a four-session rally has come to an end. Led lower by the pharmaceutical sector, London's FT-100 index has closed 27 points down at 6,257. Yesterday in Asia, investors remained wary on the key sharemarkets in the region. The Hong Kong market lost 1 per cent of its value, while profit-taking was the feature of trade in Japan. Tokyo's Nikkei index ended 138 points down at 18,134. In Australia, however, investors returning from the Easter and ANZAC Day break took heart from the earlier gains in New York. The All Ordinaries index closed 43 points higher at 3,085. In overnight trade on the Sydney Futures exchange just before the 7:00am AEST close, the Share Price Index contract was down 16 points on yesterday's day settlement at 3,092. The 10-year bond contract is down half a point at 93.60, with the implied yield rising to 6.4 per cent. The Australian dollar has been to a near 19-month low this morning. It has been down as far as 58.67 US cents, which is a level not seen since the beginning of October 1998. Just before 7:00am AEST, it was being quoted at around 59.83 US cents. On the cross-rates, it is at 0.6371 euros; 62.53 Japanese yen; 37.34 pence sterling; and $NZ1.209. The gold price is at $US275.65 an ounce and West Texas crude oil is at $US24.68 a barrel. ---------------------------------"

" One of East Timor's most notorious militia leaders has been caught and questioned by Indonesian police. Eurico Guterres is one of the pro-Jakarta militia men accused of committing atrocities, before and after last year's independence vote. Now in West Timor and still a militia leader, he has been repeatedly questioned, after being caught in possession of an automatic weapon. A police commander alleges Eurico Guterres has broken the law and will face firearms charges. Another militia leader appeared in court in West Timor yesterday on similar charges. Police say serious efforts are now being made by Indonesian security forces to crack down on milita activities and clear them from the border between West and East Timor. ---------------------------------"

" The leader of Zimbabwe's opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) party, says his members will be told to defend themselves from attacks by gangs of ruling party supporters. At least six members of the party have been killed in the past week. Morgan Tsvangarai says the campaign of intimidation being waged against MDC supporters is being organised at senior levels of the ruling ZANU-PF party, with the co-operation of the police. Mr Tsvangarai says the MDC knows who is orchestrating the violence and will take it to their own doorsteps. Until now the MDC has urged its members not to retaliate against attacks by supporters of the ruling party. While not specifying what instructions he will issue, Mr Tsvangarai says he will no longer stand by while innocent people are being murdered in cold blood. -------------------------------"

" The Australian Olympic Committee has called on the federal and state Governments to do more to tackle the problem of illegal sports drugs. The committee's secretary general, Craig McLatchey, says most users of sports drugs are not athletes, but people trying to enhance their appearance or strength for non-sporting reasons. Mr McLatchey says government officials including New South Wales Police Commissioner, Peter Ryan, need to understand this point. He says governments are the only ones who can track down the suppliers of the drugs. ""We're saying look if we are to attack the supply chain, then only you can help us,"" Mr McLatchey said. ""We...are powerless, we do not have the power to make law, therefore please enhance the law so it makes it less attractive for the criminals, who are now trafficking in these substances and some of these substances are finding their way into sport."" ----------------------------------"

" Prime Minister John Howard has repeated his refusal to make an official apology to the Stolen Generations. Mr Howard made the comment after arriving in Paris, where he will meet senior political and business leaders, before visiting the Somme battlefield. A few days ago in Turkey, Mr Howard paid tribute to Attaturk, who in 1934 uttered the famous words of reconciliation, to weeping mothers of all nations who had lost their sons in his country, in World War I. Mr Howard says he has never thought that words are not powerful. He says they can apply to both sides about a formal national apology. He says, as a political leader, he places great store on the meaning of words and how they are used, and sees no inconsistency between what he said in Ankara and his position on a formal national apology to indigenous Australians. -------------------------------"

" Despite protests from the United States, Russia has launched another mission to refuel and resupply the Mir Space Station. Moscow is resisting pressure to abandon the ageing and accident prone station. Mir was to be scrapped this year, but foreign funding has extended its life. Two cosmonauts are now there assessing if it can be turned into a space hotel and fixing a crack in its body, through which oxygen is escaping. Russia denies that focus on Mir is the cause for its delay on the new $60 billion international space station, presently being built. But an American newspaper is calling for Moscow to be removed as a contractor, claiming its delay has already cost $3 billion and the part it has built is in poor repair."

" Telstra unions say mass meetings of workers will be held this morning, in response to the company suspending 27 staff. Telstra management stood down the workers after discovering pornography on several computer hard drives in Telstra's Global Operations Centre, at Clayton in Melbourne. Another 35 staff have received official warnings from the company. The Communication Workers Union says the suspensions are an attempt to get rid of staff. --------------------------------"

" Sir Donald Bradman's secret may be about to be revealed, if scientists at Liverpool's John Moores University in Britain have their way. At the urging of a local cricket coach, they have been analysing the Don's famous unorthodox cricket action on computer. It began with a local cricket coach, Tony Shillinglaw, who has never really accepted that Sir Donald Bradman's cricket technique should be shunned as unorthodox. He studied photos of the Don in action and then persuaded scientists at John Moores to mimic his motions using a state-of-the-art, high speed, three dimensional motion analysis system. It is early days yet, but already Mr Shillinglaw believes the photos, which can capture movements in 10 times the detail of video, show the cricket great's backlift gave him a split second advantage in deciding which shot to play. --------------------------------"

" On Australian Story at 8pm...imagine his shock when Frank Hargrave, one of Australia's wealthiest men, found out he had a grown up daughter he had never been told about. Her sudden appearance in his life has had far reaching consequences. Join a live internet forum after the program at 8.30pm. Go to ""http://www.abc.net.au/austory/""."

" Mitsubishi has delivered a warning to its two Adelaide car production plants. Unless they start making money by the end of this year, they will be wound back. Unveiling the company's new corporate strategy, its president has told a press conference in Tokyo that the company's two plants based in Adelaide, are not breaking even. Katsuhiko Kawasoe has asked the Adelaide management of the plants to present him with a report on restructuring plans within the next few days. He says unless the Adelaide plants make money by the end of this year, they will be wound back and jobs will be lost. He says he hopes he will not need to close the plants altogether. Mitsubishi has announced plans to build a new car smaller than the Magna and the Colt. The company president says at the moment the Adelaide plants are not ready to build it."

" The Australian dollar has dipped back below 59 US cents in the first local trading session after the Easter and Anzac Day break. The currency's stumble comes ahead of a Reserve Bank board meeting next Tuesday. In raising interest rates again three weeks ago, the Reserve Bank said weakness in the currency could not be assumed to be as benign for inflation as it was in 1998. The dollar has been to a low this morning of 58.95 US cents and was only just above that at 59.03 US cents at 11:30am AEST. The Australian share market, meanwhile, has received a substantial boost from rallies in high-tech and blue-chip stocks in New York overnight. The local All Ordinaries index is up 43-points, or almost 1.5, at 3084. The rally has been underpinned by a 7 per cent surge in News Corporation shares. Other substantial movers in the top 20 companies include the ANZ Bank, BHP, Brambles, Rio Tinto and Woolworths."

" The Anglican Archbishop of Perth, Peter Carnley, has sent a clear signal to conservative elements in the church, that he will not allow them to bully its more liberal members. Dr Carnley has hit back at his detractors in Sydney who have questioned his theological interpretations. Critics claim in an article in the <i>Bulletin Magazine</i> written by Archbishop Carnley, that the primate questions the signifance of the resurrection and casts doubt on whether salvation can come only through Christ. But Dr Carnley has dismissed the claims, and says the conservative elements in Sydney, who have been at loggerheads with him before, are posturing before upcoming church elections. The Archbishop supports diversity of opinion in the church and says conservatives must also come to accept theological differences."

" The Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation has conceded it will not be able to convince the Prime Minister to issue a formal apology to indigenous people. The Deputy Chairman of the Reconciliation Council, Sir Gustav Nossal, is not revealling whether the Declaration for Reconciliation will include a reference to a national apology when it is unveiled in Syndey next month. But Sir Gustav has told the National Press Club in Canberra the issue of a formal Government apology will have to be put in the category of unfinished business. ""The Council has therefore regretfully accepted that an official apology on behalf of the Government will not be tendered in the near future,"" Sir Gustav said. ""That being said, it is absolutely vital that the reconciliation journey continues nevertheless. ""We can't afford for this one, what I call respectful,difference of opinion between the Council and the Prime Minister to be a showstopper,"" he said."

" Police in the United States have charged a 16-year-old boy in connection with the shooting at the National Zoo in Washington. An 11-year-old boy is brain dead after suffering head injuries while six other people were wounded. The police say they are not looking for any other suspects, but they are still searching for the weapon used in the shooting. Washington's Police Chief Charles Ramsey says he hopes the arrest will mark an end to the incident. ""It was something that was very traumatic for the young people that were involved and, whereas this doesn't change what happened,"" Mr Ramsey said. ""I hope it can bring some closure to what happened."""

" Malaysian military officials have confirmed that a group of 21 hostages abducted from a resort island are being held in a remote southern province of the Philippines. A military spokesman says the hostages are believed to be safe. The Philippines Defence Minister, Orlando Mecardo, has flown to the province with the Vice Commander of the Defence forces. They arrived on remote Jolo Island just before 7:00pm AEST. The Minister has so far ruled out ordering the use of force in attempting to free the hostages. He says he has flown to the island to assess the situation. The hostages were seized from a resort island off Malaysia's coast on Sunday. They were ordered onto a boat and then crossed into Philippines waters. Muslim rebels fighting for an independent state in the southern Philippines have claimed responsibility for the abduction, although government authorities are yet to independently confirm their claim. Meanwhile, police in Malaysia have arrested a further five people in connection with the kidnapping, which brings to 10 the number of suspects held in custody."

" The Federal Government has appealed to the states not to give any assistance to Iraqi or Afghan refugees released into the community. Up to 3,000 refugees could be released from detention. Nearly 500 Iraqi and Afghan refugees have already been granted three-year temporary visas this year and allowed to live and work in the community. Up to 2,500 more could also be released. Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock says the Commonwealth provides them with adequate income, health and rent assistance. ""Appropriate arrangements have, in fact, been made,"" he said. Some states say the measures are not enough and will only force them to cover the costs of other services such as language and education. But Mr Ruddock's office has appealed to the states not to offer anything because the Commonwealth wants to make Australia as unattractive a place as possible for refugees who arrive unlawfully. The Western Australian Premier Richard Court has gone further, saying the refugees should be deported. ""They're not welcome as far as we're concerned,"" he said."

" The Queensland Electoral Commission has given One Nation's Pauline Hanson an extension until Tuesday, in its bid to recover $500,000 in public funding, issued after the 1998 state election. The commission wants the money returned, after a Supreme Court ruling that the party was fraudulently registered in Queensland. Miss Hanson says she has raised more than $250,000, but the extension will give the party more time to put in a form of defence. ""It's very hard to say how much time I will be given,"" she said. ""Hopefully if we can work out something to pay back the electoral commission over a period of time, but we won't know this until next week."""

" Meanwhile, A One Nation MP says his integrity is not in question, despite a Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission finding that he made a racist statement about Australian ethnic communities. Two years ago the New South Wales politician, David Oldfield, was quoted in a West Australian newspaper as saying ""home invasion is an imported crime - Lebanese or Iranian - not Australian!"". The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commissioner found that on the balance of probabilities Mr Oldfield made the statment. Mr Oldfield says the Commissioner should have found that the case couldn't be proved: ""So essentially the commissioner might be saying I probably said it. ""But at the same time he's also saying that he believes that I believe I didn't say it...And I'm not aware of having said it. ""So in other words he's sort of saying well I think he probably said it. But,he obviously doesn't think he did...So the commissioner is not in anyway questioning my honesty or integrity in this matter"", he said."

" A study into obesity in schoolchildren has found some Year Three students are so large they need help to get out of their chairs. The University of Wollongong study has found almost 15 per cent of 431 students from the Illawarra region, south of Sydney, are obese. The research is believed to be the first in the world to examine how obesity restricts mobility in pre-pubescent children. Postgraduate research student Diane Harland, who conducted the study, says intervention is needed to prevent young people from carrying their obesity into adulthood. ""Once the children get to eight or nine years, my study showed that almost 15 per cent of them were obese,"" Ms Harland said. ""Before the age of eight or nine there needs to be some form of intervention, either dietry or exercise, prior to that age""."

" Up to 90 per cent of illegal immigrants currently detained at Woomera, in South Australia's north, could be granted temporary residential visas under a new Commonwealth proposal. Under the plan, the illegal immigrants would be allowed to stay in Australia for three years but would only be given $500 in support by the Federal Government. More than 1,000 of the illegal immigrants would be given the choice of living in either Adelaide, Perth or Brisbane and would be allowed to stay for three years. The South Australian Premier, John Olsen, says the idea is unfair on the states, who have to support the illegal immigrants. ""Our concern is there hasn't been adequate support or consultation from the Commonwealth government as to the provision of services to support them like public housing, emergency accommodation, health and other community services,"" he said. ""Now if the states are going to have to pick up the costs of that I think it's time the Commonwealth government, in a meaningful way, consulted and discussed with the states, those costs."" Mr Olsen says he will voice his concerns at an immigration meeting later this week. ""I would hope at that forum we will be able to make progress and get an understanding from the Commonwealth as to how they will assist the respective states and territories who take these illegal immigrants, to blend in with the community and how the Commonwealth government is going to support us financially to provide appropriate levels of support,"" he said. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A total of 29 people have been killed on the nation's roads during the extended Easter break. A collision between two motorcycles in north-western new South Wales late yesterday claimed the life of one of the two riders. The 18-year-old man was riding his bike on a stock-route outside Moree just before 5:00pm AEST when his bike collided head-on with another motorcycle. He was killed instantly while the rider of the other motorcycle suffered only minor injuries. The man's death takes the New South Wales holiday road toll to nine. Six people died in Queensland and five in Western Australia and Victoria. In South Australia, three people have been killed in car accidents with one dead in Tasmania. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Police in Zimbabwe have arrested five people in connection with the murders of at least two more members of the main opposition party, as violence continues across the country. Black farm workers and supporters of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) are now bearing the brunt of violent intimidation by members of the ruling Zanu-PF party. The MDC says one of its members was bludgeoned to death with an axe, while another was bashed after being caught wearing an MDC t-shirt. Late last week party organisers say one of their members was shot dead as he addressed an election rally. The tone of the violence has now clearly become an act of political intimidation as assaults against white farmers have diminished, now the target is any person who publicly backs the opposition. Hundreds of people have also attended a memorial service for slain farmer David Stephens who was killed in a farm attack 10 days ago. Mr Stephens was the first farmer to be killed in the current wave of unrest being unleashed by supporters of President Robert Mugabe's ruling party. Mr Stephens was a committed supporter of the opposition party and his widow Maria says she will continue the political struggle against President Mugabe's government. The ongoing attacks against black supporters of the MDC give further credence to claims that the spate of farm invasions was camouflage for a much wider campaign of political intimidation against government opponents. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" United States police are looking for the gunman who wounded seven children yesterday at the National Zoo in Washington. The children were shot as thousands of people gathered for an African American celebration at the popular tourist attraction. A running scuffle between two groups of teenagers ended with seven young people hospitalised with gunshot wounds. There had been clashes within the the zoo before rival groups moved outside the main gate and took up positions on opposite sides of a busy road. ""While standing on Connecticut Avenue one group on the west side of the street and one on the west side, they started throwing bottles back and forth and then someone pulled a gun and started firing into the crowd,"" said DC police chief Charles Ramsey. An 11-year-old boy was shot in the head and remains in a critical condition. The other victims are recovering. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Qantas says it has replaced an engine on a Boeing 767 which lost oil on a flight from Cairns to Sydney on Monday. The airline says the pilot of QF-567 reduced power in the affected engine during the flight after noticing a slight loss of oil, but was able to complete the flight safely. Qantas says at no stage was the aircraft or passengers in danger. The flight had earlier been delayed twice on take-off in Cairns by a faulty warning light - a problem a Qantas spokeswoman says was not connected to the oil problem. Meanwhile, Qantas engineers in Rome are still investigating the collapse of a landing strut on a 747 on Saturday. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" NATO's supreme commander, General Wesley Clark, has warned Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic to stop intimidating Montenegro. Speaking on a tour in Bosnia, General Clark issued the strongest warning yet to the Yugoslav leader over what it sees as aggressive actions against Montenegro. Montenegro is, apart from Serbia, the last remaining Yugoslav republic and its leader has been pursuing an increasingly independent line over the past few years. Many fear Montenegro could be the next Balkans flashpoint. General Clark said Milosevic had been strengthening the Yugoslav army in the region and deploying forces on the border. The NATO commander said the Yugoslav leader should know that NATO is watching and he should know what NATO's capabilities are. The forces in Kosovo, he said, are very capable, they are very well commanded and are very well prepared to do whatever is necessary. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" An Australian who squatted in a London house for over 12 years and won ownership from the council due to an oversight, has now sold it for more than $250,000. Ian Ames, an unemployed musician, is believed to have returned to Australia with the proceeds of the sale. The British law on squatters' rights grants ownership to a trespasser who squats on land for over 12 years without challenge. That is exactly what the unemployed Ames did in a council house in Brixton, thanks to a mix-up on the council books when the Greater London Council was dissolved under Margaret Thatcher's prime ministership. Last year, the council lost a bid to get the house back and before Christmas Ames sold the house to a developer reportedly for over $250,000. It is believed Ames has now returned to Australia with the proceeds, much to the indignation of local homeowners. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Retired tennis star Martina Navratilova will enter the women's doubles event at Wimbledon, her publicity firm has confirmed. The nine-time Wimbledon singles champion will be paired with South Africa's Mariaan de Swardt for the two-week grass court tournament that begins on June 26. ""She had come up with that decision a long time ago,"" said Kathy Mouton, a spokeswoman for Dozoretz Communication. The 43-year-old American has won seven Wimbledon women's doubles titles and her total of 19 Wimbledon crowns overall in singles, doubles and mixed doubles is one shy of Billie Jean King's all-time record. Navratilova, who retired in November 1994, announced last week she will come out of retirement to play doubles at Eastbourne, one week before Wimbledon. She and de Swardt received a wild card entry there."

" Qantas staff have been criticised for their handling of a plane emergency in Rome on Saturday. The plane's undercarriage collapsed onto the runway before it was scheduled to take off. Some passengers claim they were kept in the dark about the accident and that one flight attendant lost control, yelling at passengers. The executive general manager of aircraft operations, David Forsyth, says Qantas staff did the best they could in the circumstances but any complaints will be investigated. ""We always, in anything like this, have a full debrief with technical crew and our cabin crew,"" he said. ""That debrief will be occurring with our cabin crew to get some information as to exactly what happened. ""That report obviously will be thoroughly investigated and any action that needs to be taken will be done so."" -------------------------------"

" In the United States, relatives of six-year-old Elian Gonzales are pressing their claim to visit the child who was removed from their home by force at the weekend. The relatives are in Washington where the boy has been reunited with his Cuban father. Elian and his father Juan Migel Gonzales remain in seclusion at Andrews Air Force Base as distant relatives continue to condemn Justice Department tactics for removing the boy from the Miami house where he had lived for five months. They could soon be transferred to the Wye Plantation, a private property outside Washington, according to US press reports. US officials apparently hope to keep the family away from the media spotlight that made Elian's life in Miami a daily soap opera since his November rescue off the coast of Florida. On the weekend, six-year-old Elian was snatched at gunpoint by federal agents from the home of his Miami relatives and flown to an Air Force Base in Washington for a reunion with his father. Marisleysis Gonzales said there was no need for guns to be used against her family and she has made an emotional appeal to be allowed to see the boy. ""I demand to see Elian and I will not leave until I see this boy,"" she said. ""His father could have done this in a very peaceful way. We've always wanted to see him. My doors have always been open to everyboy."" Opinion polls show most Americans agree with the action to return Elian to his father. Politicians with strong links to the Cuban-American community are denouncing the raid. -----------------------------"

" The Federal Government believes the flow of illegal immigrants to Australia could be slowing. Immigration Minister, Phillip Ruddock, says action by authorities in the Middle East and Asia to stamp out people-smuggling appears to be having an impact. Indonesian police yesterday arrested 157 Iraqis at a remote fishing village in West Java as they prepared to board a boat for an illegal voyage to Australia. Mr Ruddock says he is aware of other groups from the Middle East on their way to Australia but arrivals seem to be slowing, with none coming to our shores this month. ""I don't think that we will see the trafficking come to an end immediately,"" he said. ""I just think that these have to be seen as positive signs of action by a number of countries to deal with what is a significant international problem. ""It's cooperation that is welcome and we will assist Indonesia as it's dealing with these issues."" ------------------------------"

" A group opposed to online censorship says Commonwealth legislation to restrict potentially offensive material on the Internet is unneccesary because it duplicates pre-exisiting state laws. Thirty-one locally-hosted websites have been issued with take-down notices since the Commonwealth laws came into effect on January 1. Electronic Frontiers Australia spokesperson Kimberley Heitman says a majority of those websites dealt with child pornography. ""It would be quite possible to close down those sites without having this heavy-handed law which effectively chills everything which is unsuitable for children."" The government regulator, the Australian Broadcasting Authority, says the Commonwealth laws were designed to complement existing state laws. --------------------------------"

" Prospects are good for NASA's scheduled launch of the refurbished space shuttle Atlantis on an 11 day mission the International Space Station (ISS), NASA official directing the launch, Jeff Pauling, says the countdown is proceeding extremely well with a 70 per cent chance of good weather. ""All of us are anticipating a very successful launch,"" Mr Pauling said. Atlantis will remained docked to the ISS for six days while astronauts transfer equipment to the space station. The mission will provide sustaining support for crews living in the station in the coming years, Atlantis' mission will feature a 6.5 hour space walk, during which two astronauts will repair the structure of the space station. The shuttle is scheduled to return to the Kennedy Space Center on May 4. --------------------------"

" Western Australian Premier Richard Court says Cyclone Rosita could not have come at a worse time for the Kimberley, especially for the tourist season. Rosita brought winds of up to 270 kph as it passed over the coast 40 kilometres south of Broome last Thursday morning. Two ministers are in Broome today assessing damage to the area. Mr Court says some government assistance has already been provided. ""We had a minister for family and children's services on the ground the day after the cyclone, and to make sure that people were properly addressed,"" Mr Court said. ""Our immediate priority in Broome were some elderly people that needed some assistance, so that emergency assistance is provided immediately."" ----------------------------------"

" Scotland's David Coulthard has won the British Formula One Grand Prix at Silverstone in England for the second successive year. Finland's reigning world champion, Mika Hakkinen, made it a one-two finish for McLaren-Mercedes, while Germany's Michael Schumacher finished third in his Ferrari. The Williams duo of Ralf Schumacher and 20-year-old Briton Jenson Button, in only his first season, finished fourth and fifth respectively. ----------------------------"

" Tonight on Four Corners at 8.30pm, a behind the scenes look at the gaming industry. Join a live Internet forum after the program at 9.30pm. Go to ""http://www.abc.net.au/4corners/""."

" Ten people have died on Australian roads during the Easter holiday period, which officially began at 12:00am Thursday. Three people have died in Victoria, three in New South Wales and three in Western Australia. One person died this morning in south-east Queensland. Three children are among those who have died on the roads, and police say they are disappointed with the start to the Easter break. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Independence war veterans in Zimbabwe have led another attack on a white-owned farm just outside the capital, Harare. The raid comes less than a day after the veterans' leadership promised to cease hostilities. A raiding party, numbering more than 100, stormed onto the Pied Piper farm, attacking the homestead. The owner had already fled, so the gang beat his farm dogs to death. The veterans then moved down to the compound, home to farm workers, smashing down doors and setting the buildings alight. The leader of the mob said they had attacked the farm because it was a local headquarters for the opposition Movement for Democratic Change Party. This provides further evidence that supporters of President Robert Mugabe's ruling party are now actively targeting government opponents. The raid comes ahead of a summit to be attended by six African heads of state, who are flying into Zimbabwe to discuss the growing crisis. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Church leaders throughout Australia are using Good Friday to voice their concerns over various social issues. The New South Wales Anglican Church leader has spoken of a crisis in the justice system because of mandatory sentencing. Archbishop Harry Goodhew, of Sydney, urged the country's law-makers to listen to criticism about mandatory sentencing and embrace change. In his Good Friday message, Archbishop Goodhew says Australians expect a system of justice that balances the strict application of the law, with a consideration of the circumstances of each case. He says the strict application of mandatory sentencing impacts disproportionately on ""our Aboriginal brothers and sisters"". ""How can we support a system that helps to imprison indigenous people, particularly juveniles, at a rate 21 times that of other Australians?"" he said. Archbishop Goodhew says this Easter Australians have a chance to re-examine themselves as a nation and as individuals. ""Let me encourage our law-makers to listen and to be prepared to listen to criticism,"" he said. ""Let me encourage each one of us to embrace the opportunity for personal change that God provides this Easter."""

" A Victorian Uniting Church leader has used her Easter message to criticise the Federal Government's handling of the Kosovo refugee crisis. More than 100 Kosovo Albanians were forced to return to their homeland this week, while those who refused to leave are now in detention. Uniting Church moderator, the Reverend Pam Kerr, says the Federal Government should allow the remaining refugees to apply for visas. ""Certainly when they arrived, all of us could be proud to be Australians because we did offer that generous hospitality,"" Rev Kerr said. ""It's unfortunate that the end of the story seems to have been handled with less sensitivity."""

" Meanwhile, the Catholic Archbishop of Sydney, Cardinal Edward Clancy, says the special message of Easter this year is hope. Cardinal Clancy says people associate Easter with many things but primarily, it is about the resurrection of Christ, which he says, is of particular relevance now. ""Disasters, both natural and man-made, take [a] terrible toll around the world,"" he said. ""And at home, in the lucky country, there are so many things that we can't seem to get right. ""Hundreds of thousands of Australians suffer extreme social disadvantage and they should not have to do so. ""Easter, however, bids us not be discouraged but invites us to look to our Saviour and put the needs of the world in his hands,"" Cardinal Clancy said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" New research has shown Family Court judges are feeling compromised by the need to help people who are representing themselves in cases before them. Professor John Dewar, of Queensland's Griffith University, says a growing number of people involved in Family Court proceedings are representing themselves because they cannot afford lawyers and cannot get legal aid. He says this makes cases more difficult for judges to preside over, and takes up more of the courts' time. ""It's very hard for a judge in an adversarial system, where the roll of the judge is simply to sit there and be impartial and listen to the arguments and evidence presented by each side,"" he said. ""It's very difficult then to intervene and to assist one side, but to retain that impartial role, and a lot of the judges thought that that really put them in an impossible position."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A Queensland Senator says new laws allowing the donation of land for conservation to be made tax deductable, should provide better incentive for landholders to curb tree clearing. The new laws allow for gifts of land to a conservation organisation or trust to be tax deductable and for bequests to be deductable through capital gains tax. Senator Andrew Bartlett says it is a major step forward for conservation, especially in states like Queensland. ""[It] undoubtedly will save enormous amounts down the track in terms of fixing up the environment and that sort of cost,"" he said. ""I mean, all the talk at the moment about the need to stop land clearing in Queensland because of the massive damage that is causing and that's a massive economic cost to us all down the track. ""A little bit of incentive at the start of the process can save a hell of a lot,"" Senator Bartlett said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Threatened Species Network says a recent rock wallaby symposium in Alice Springs heard numbers of the black-footed group found in central Australia are declining. The network's Colleen O'Malley says the symposium brought together land managers, scientists, researches and community groups to share information about problems and new strategies Ms O'Malley says rock wallabies were common across Australia but predation by foxes and cats and competition from goats and rabbits have left only remnant populations. She says in-breeding in these isolated desert populations is one of the biggest threats. ""Outside of the main range system some of these problems are really starting to be experienced by rock wallabies,"" she said. ""So in minor ranges at the top of the Simpson desert in the Northern Territory as well as the southern populations that used to occur around Uluru Kata Juta, there's been no records of black-footed rock wallabies there for the last 10 years or so. ""They are declining in some areas,"" Ms O'Malley said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A run of injuries to the New Zealand side has left Australia as clear favourites to win tonight's rugby league Test at Stadium Australia in Sydney. The visitors come into the match without centre Willie Talau and two former captains, Jarrod McCracken and Quentin Pongia, due to injury. Melbourne five-eighth Tassessa Lavea, 20, will make his Test debut from the bench, while David Kidwell and Tony Puletua will also start from the bench. They were called into the team earlier this week for Pongia and McCracken. There are no such problems for Australia, but winger Matt Rogers says the New Zealand injury problems could work against his side. ""The adversity will bring them probably more so together you know, we've really got to be on our game,"" he said. ""They put that black jersey on [and] they become a different team."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" An ex-patriot family of Australians was among 131 people killed in an airliner crash in the Philippines. They were formerly from country Victoria. Two of the family members were children. One of the flight recorders has been recovered from the crash site in the southern Philippines. More than 40 bodies have been recovered at the crash site on the hillside of Samal Island in the southern Philippines. The early morning flight from Manila to the southern city of Davao was packed with holiday-makers leaving the capital for the Easter break. Defence Minister Orlando Mercado who is at the site told the ABC one of the two flight recorders on board the Boeing-737 has been recovered. He said the second one is yet to be retrieved from the smouldering wreckage. He says the cause of the crash is not yet known but a preliminary report may be released later today."

" The Federal Government is threatening to go down the path of Internet censorship again, this time to block online gaming. The Government has failed to convince a majority of states and territories to support its proposal for a 12-month moratorium on the issuing of new Internet gambling licences. It is now threatening to over-ride the states and territories with its own legislation for a moratorium and possibly a ban on Internet gambling. The Communications Minister Richard Alston says a ban would be technically possible, as it has been with some pornographic Internet sites. ""Controlling pornography on the Internet world wide is a much more challenging task because you are talking about millions of websites. ""In gambling to date we are talking about less than a thousand and the technical presentation we had today suggested it is certainly feasible to identify a list of black sites and then block those sites,"" Senator Alston said."

" Ansett and Qantas say industrial action by aircraft workers will not effect Easter flight schedules. Ansett, according to Julius Roe from the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union, has refused to guarantee it will not outsource maintenance jobs overseas. ""Our members are happy to have Ansett to fly planes but they are not happy to have Ansett fly jobs out of Australia,"" Mr Roe said. About 500 of Ansett's ground staff have imposed work bans in aircraft, which the airline is hopeful will end tomorrow. In another dispute, a strike on Good Friday by 30 aircraft refuelers at Mobil in Melbourne has been dimissed by the airlines who say they can still get fuel interstate or from other companies."

" The Australian sharemarket has improved for a second day, since dropping 5 per cent on Monday after a major slump on Wall Street. With US stocks charging again overnight, the All Ordinaries index today rose nearly 56 points, or 1.9 per cent, to 3,042. News Corporation improved on yesterday's rally, while Telstra, the major banks and a number of high-tech stocks saw good gains. Grant Williams of Reynolds Stockbrokers says world markets will be driven by further profit results, out in the US, through the week. ""It looks like there has been some solid results so far to date this week and that really helps to bring the market back up out of the doldrums. ""I think the volatility has been saved a litle by the fact there has been some good results coming through. ""So if they continue with the major companies having beating forecasts then it might help stablisie the markets before Easter,"" Mr Williams said."

" Tropical Cyclone Rosita is intensifying as it heads towards Western Australia's Kimberley coast. The category four cyclone is 130 kilometres west of Broome and moving east southeast at 15 kilometres per hour towards Broome. Tropical Cyclone Rosita is expected to cross the Kimberley coast just south of Broome, in the early hours of tomorrow morning. Kimberley manager of the State Emergency Service Gordon Tiddums says Broome residents have spent most of the day battening down the hatches. He says residents have been warned of a storm surge associated with the normal eight-metre high tide tonight. The Broome region is expected to go on red alert this evening. Rosita is the eighth tropical cyclone to form off the Kimberley coast this year."

" A leaked budget document says Australia will provide East Timor with $150 million over four years. The Government briefing paper says this will make Australia one of the main donors to East Timor. The Federal Opposition has released a copy of the document prepared to brief government MPs after the release of the budget on May 9. The Opposition says $40 million will be provided to East Timor in the coming financial year, which falls short of recommendations from the Australian Council for Overseas Aid. The document says Australia's aid is consistent with what East Timor can absorb. It says Indonesia will receive $120 million in aid, about the same level as this financial year."

" Former Indonesian armed forces chief General Wiranto has been banned from returning to Cabinet. General Wiranto, who was suspended from his Cabinet post two months ago, has now been pushed out permanently. General Wiranto has been sent a letter from the government outlining the arrangements for his forced retirement from the government. He has been offered a pension, but little prospect of a return to Cabinet. Indonesia' Defence Minister Jwono Sudosono has confirmed General Wiranto's dismissal following a Cabinet meeting at the Presidential Palace. Earlier this year President Abdurrahman Wahid demanded General Wiranto's resignation. The General refused to step down but eventually agreed to step aside. The former armed forces chief has already been named as a suspect during inquiries into the bloodshed in East Timor. He was accused of being guilty by omission for not stopping the violence. General Wiranto faces further questioning as part of new government investigation later this year."

" There has been a second day of recovery on US equity markets. With the latest profit-reporting season underway, the rally has been broad-based across all the key measures of American stock prices. Following yesterday's 277-point jump, the Dow Jones industrial average has now added a further 185 points. That is an advance in the latest session of 1.8 per cent. Solid profit results have been announced by companies such as Coca-Cola, Caterpillar and Johnson & Johnson. But again, the price gains have been more spectacular among high-tech stocks. The Nasdaq composite index is up 254 points, or almost 7.2 per cent, which is its biggest ever points gain. Intel Corporation again featured, ahead of its earnings report. The US bond market has staged a modest recovery after yesterday's big sell-off. The firmer prices have pushed down the yield on 30-year Treasury paper to 5.91 per cent, a drop of two points. In Britain, investors remain wary, but the market has still managed a reasonable rise. London's FT-100 index has closed 79 points higher at 6,074. That is a gain of 1.3 per cent. Yesterday in Asia, there was relief across the key share markets in the region. The Hong Kong market regained 3.5 per cent of its value. The Japanese market, though, failed to build on an early rally and finished a touch lower, ahead of the revamping of Nikkei Index. The Nikkei ended 39 points down at 18,970. In Australia, investors jumped back into the market, but still had half an eye to future movements on Wall Street. Telecommunications, media, retail and high-tech stocks performed strongly. After Monday's 176 point slump, the All Ordinaries index closed 66.5 points higher at 2,987. On the Sydney Futures exchange at about 7:00am AEST, the Share Price Index contract was up sharply again, 48 points above yesterday's settlement at 3,069. The 10-year bond contract is down 4.5 points at 93.78, with the implied yield rising to 6.22 per cent. The Australian dollar is little changed on the night. At 7:00am AEST, it was being quoted at around 59.47 US cents. On the cross-rates, it is at 0.6289 euros; 62.28 Japanese yen; 37.71 pence sterling and $NZ1.202. The gold price is at $US281.15 an ounce and West Texas crude oil is at $US25.91 a barrel. --------------------------------"

" The Federal Government will today ask the states and territories to to support it in a one-year moratorium on Internet gaming. It is aimed at imposing long-term limits on expansion of the new technology gambling. The federal government wants to use the one-year moratorium to allow time to see whether it is technically possible to ban online gambling through Internet filters and blocking. Community Services Minister Jocelyn Newman, who will chair today's meeting of Gaming Ministers, says it is time for the states to prove they are serious about controlling harmful gambling, before online betting takes off. ""I would think we would have a mutual interest in trying to see that there's less pain and social problems inflicted on Australians,"" she said. It is believed most states and territories will oppose the moratorium. They argue it would give the only existing licensed operator, Lassiters, a 12-month monopoly, and that the ill-defined Commonwealth proposal could affect legitimate online activities of state lotteries. -------------------------------"

" Aid agencies in Kosovo are warning they will be unable to cope with the 250,000 extra refugees expected to arrive in the next few months. Before the war, Pristina was home to just over 300,000 people. There are now twice that number and the infra-structure that has been put in place so far is already stretched to the limit. Aid agencies like World Vision, have warned that they will be simply unable to cope with the expected new influx. Most of the accommodation in Pristina is already seriously overcrowded, with as many as 20 people living in some two-room apartments. Many aid agencies here believe Australia and those other countries now returning refugees should have allowed them to stay at least another six to 12 months. ----------------------------------"

" Sydney's Olympic Organisers (SOCOG) have changed their mind and will now allow some of the world's biggest television networks to film within the main Homebush Bay Games site. The announcement has been made in Lausanne, Switzerland, where SOCOG is meeting the International Olympic Committee's (IOC's) board. Sydney's Games Committee wanted to have television access to the site limited to Australian networks and America's NBC which paid $1 billion to cover the Olympics. Under a compromise approved by the IOC, Olympic officials will issue eight permits per day for international stations that are non-rights holders. That means CNN, Fox, Reuters Television and others can film outside of venues but will not be allowed to interview athletes or stage live broadcasts. Concerns over crowd control and protection of NBC's large investment in the Games are the reasons for the restrictions. Olympics Minister Michael Knight says it is a fair compromise, but acknowledges ""when you make a compromise you usually don't make everybody happy"". ---------------------------------"

" Japan's Department of Trade has given approval for the export of Sony's PlayStation2 games console, despite fears of its potential military applications. Japan's Minister for Trade says Sony will be allowed to sell PlayStation2 in Europe and North America from September, although he says he reserves the right to say no to sales in other countries. Sony has been told privately that the Ministry is likely to have a problem with exports to only four countries: North Korea, Libya, Iran, and Iraq. At issue is Sony's 128-bit encryption system, which is hard for security authorities to break, and its graphics processing unit, which can handle 3 million vector units a second, making it, a potential missile guidance system, according to the Ministry. Sony says it expects no problem with exports to Australia for which it will be supplied via Europe. -------------------------------"

" More than 2,000 Interfet personnel will march through the streets of Sydney this afternoon to be officially welcomed home from East Timor. The parade will start from Circular Quay at 12.30pm and make its way to the Town Hall where the peacekeepers will be met by the Prime Minister and the Governor-General. The former commander of the international force in East Timor, Major General Peter Cosgrove says the event will have a crucial effect on morale. ""Well I think it's tremendous to act as a closure on what we did in East Timor,"" he said. ""And I know that all the young men and women will be profoundly grateful if people wish them well as they march down the street and it'll encourage them to continue that form of service when and if it's needed by the country."" Sydney Lord Mayor Frank Sartor says he will be presenting the keys of the city to Major General Cosgrove and the Australian service personnel. He says he is expecting a big crowd. ""I think it's fantastic and we should be very proud of them, they showed a lot of initiative and restraint and I think handled the situation extremely well,"" he said. ""And I think it strengthens our image in the region and I think, reinforces the kind of egalitarian and democratic values that Australians treasure so much."" -------------------------------"

" Australia's women's hockey team has firmed as favourite to retain its Olympic gold medal after a clean sweep of its series against Korea in Perth. The Hockeyroos beat the Atlanta Olympics finalists convincingly in all four matches, including a 3-1 victory last night. Australian coach, Ric Charlesworth, says he is looking forward to the challenge of playing the strong Dutch side in next month's Champions Trophy tournament in the Netherlands. ""There will be a big crowd and lots of people there and not many friends for us, so it will be a sort of environment which is important,"" he said."

" There has been a tentative recovery on the local sharemarket, after US stocks bounced back overnight from their oversold positions. The omen was good this morning, with the Dow Jones recovering 276 points, or 2.7 per cent and the Nasdaq up 217 points, or 6.5 per cent. Locally, strong buying early pushed the All Ordinaries index to a peak of 3,011 before selling resumed and gained momentum through the afternoon. The index has closed 66 points up, or nearly 2.3 per cent, at 2,986, after its 5.7 per cent slump yesterday. It was generally good news for the stocks that took a caning yesterday. The media and telecommunications sectors rose an average 3 per cent. After its 13 per cent slide yesterday, News Corporation saw a partial recovery, up 2.6 per cent, or 46 cents to $18.21. That is still down on Friday's close of $20.60, as investors continue to worry about the state of the ""new economy"" and Rupert Murdoch's health. Telstra rose 23 cents to $7.35. The instalment receipts regained 16 cents to $4.31, still below the $4.50 issue price for October's float. PBL gained 88 cents or 7 per cent to $12.55 and John Fairfax Holdings is up 26 cents or 5 per cent to $5.21. It was a mixed picture for the high-tech sectors which were decimated yesterday. Solution 6 bounced back 4 per cent, Sausage Software, 9 per cent and Open Telecommunications 19 per cent. Eisa jumped 32 per cent, Reckon and BMC Media, both 20 per cent and New Tel 22 per cent. But high-tech issues such as Ecorp and Looksmart remained out of favour. Major banks did well with the National, up 52 cents to $23.40 and the Commonwealth, up 97 to $25.87. Brewer, Boag and Son, has leapt 45 cents, or 40 per cent to $1.57, after San Miguel of the Philippines launched a $92 million takeover bid late yesterday at $1.65 a share. The Australian dollar is buying 59.25 US cents, after falling to new 18-month lows overnight. The currency is at 37.55 British pence and 61.9 yen. On the trade weighted index, it is at 52.7. The price of gold is $US281.05 an ounce."

" The Federal Opposition leader Kim Beazley says he expects former ALP backbencher Andrew Theophanous to vote with Labor as a cross bench member. Dr Theophanous has resigned from the Labor Party, angry over its immigration policies and the Victorian branch's refusal to delay preselection in his seat of Calwell. He had asked for the delay to avoid having to contest preselection while he faced court proceedings on immigration charges. Mr Beazley says he hopes Dr Theophanous will continue to support the Opposition as an independent. ""Generally speaking I would be of the view that if you resign, as opposed to being expelled, you resign a party endorsement that you sought, had successfully contested an election with, that you would exit from the Parliament,"" he said. ""But if you choose not to then what I would say that you have an obligation to keep voting with the party on whose ticket you were originally elected."""

" A second white Zimbabwean farmer has been shot by veterans of the country's liberation war as the crisis-struck nation prepared to celebrate 20 years of independence and black rule. Farmer Robin Greeves told Reuters he had received two calls from his neighbour Martin Olbs, the first saying his farm house had been surrounded by 30 to 40 veterans and it ""looked pretty serious"". ""He (Olbs) phoned later to say he had been shot and could we call an ambulance,"" Greeves said. There was no further word on his condition. Greeves' and Olbs' farms are in Nyamandhlovu, about 500 kilometres south of the capital Harare. A white farmer and two members of Zimbabwe's fledgling Movement for Democratic Change were killed at the weekend amid a growing political crisis which has seen hundreds of white-owned farms invaded by war veterans and other pro-government supporters."

" A man charged over the sexual assault of a 91-year-old woman has appeared briefly in the Moree Local Court, in the north-west of New South Wales, this morning. Forty-four-year-old Stephen James Boney turned up at Wee Waa police station last night and was charged six hours later. Wearing handcuffs and surrounded by four prison guards, Boney, a labourer from Wee Waa, spent just three minutes before Moree Magistrate Mal McPherson. He was charged with aggravated sexual assault, aggravated break and enter and committing a felony involving violence. Boney's lawyer told the court no plea would be entered and he did not apply for bail. The arrest followed a mass DNA testing program on the entire male population of Wee Waa. Police prosecutor Brian Willis told the court a further DNA test was conducted on the defendant last night. The case was adjourned until next month."

" A British newspaper has reported what it calls a link between a Ugandan doomsday cult and a Catholic sect in Australia. The sect is said to have inspired Joseph Kibwetere, now wanted on murder charges after the death of 900 of his cult members in Uganda. However the head of the Order of St Charbel in New South Wales has rejected suggestions of a direct link between the groups. Mr William Kamm, who calls himself the Little Pebble, says he never knew Mr Kibwetere but did visit Uganda on a speaking tour in 1989. ""Our teaching is nothing like what they proceeded to do because they took their lives,"" he said. ""Our teaching is to preserve life so therefore what eventuated there as far as I am concerned is very very sad."""

" The former commander of the international force in East Timor, Major-General Peter Cosgrove has sought to play down an alleged spying incident in that country. An Australian intelligence sergeant has been ordered to return home after he allegedly paid a local man $20 for information about the militia. Major-General Cosgrove says while the soldier's method was questionable his intentions certainly were not. ""I think it was correctly characterised as being an innocent, if perhaps misguided act, by a quite junior soldier,"" he said. ""The motivation for it of course is only to ensure protection of our own forces and the East Timorese - you can not see it in any other light,"" Major-General Cosgrove said."

" Australian women will get the chance to trial a new gel which works in a similar way to the contraceptive pill. The gel, which is rubbed on the stomach each morning, is made of progesterone, one of the hormones which make up the pill. The women will use the gel for three months and have their blood tested regularly to monitor hormone levels. The Sydney Centre for Reproductive Health Research is currently recruiting women to take part in the three-month trial."

" Western Australia's Department of Minerals and Energy has confirmed the discovery of the largest asteroid crater in Australia, which is also the fourth largest in the world. Minerals and Energy scientists say the crater, measuring 120 kilometres in diameter, has been discovered in red sand country, east of Shark Bay, about 800 kilometres north of Perth. A drilling program on Woodleigh Station uncovered conclusive evidence of the asteroid's impact, which is believed to have ocurred more than 200-million years ago. Further work is said to be necessary to more accurately date the time of impact. Only the Vredfort crater in South Africa, the Sudbury carter in Canada, and the Chicxulub crater in the Gulf of Mexico are bigger."

" Bargain hunters cleared the way for stocks to rise in the United States overnight, but analysts warn markets are still unsteady. Both blue chips and high-tech stocks have picked up following Friday's freefall on Wall Street. The Nasdaq index of high-tech stocks jumped 218 points, or 6 per cent, to close at at 3,539, which is 29 per cent below its mid-March high. It is now sitting in what Wall Street defines as bear territory. The Dow Jones Industrial Average jumped 276 points or 2.5 per cent to 10,582. The trading session was marked by some volatile swings between positive and negative territory, an indication investors were still trying to work out which way the market was headed in the near future. Many analysts believe selling on Wall Street has not finished. Meanwhile, Australian shares are also poised for recovery, but the local dollar is now languishing after being hammered overnight. With a partial rebound being registered by stock prices in New York, institutional investors have positioned themselves for a similar outcome locally. Yesterday, $36 billion was stripped off the value of local stocks. But overnight the Share Price Index futures contract rallied 83-points, which is a jump of 2.8 per cent. No such bounce for the Australian dollar, which sank to its lowest level since October 1998 overnight, hitting 58.94 US cents. At 7:00am AEST it was being quoted at 59.12 US cents, still down 1.2 cents on the night and leaving some dealers scratching their heads in puzzlement. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" One of the five men convicted in Israel for recklessly causing the deaths of four Australians in the Maccabiah Games bridge collapse, has apologised to the victims families. The men are facing possible jail sentences after criminal proceedings that lasted more than two years. The five, an engineer, building company representatives and contractors and Yoram Eyal, the former chairman of the 1997 Games organising committee, could face cumulative sentences of three years in jail, for each of the four dead Australian competitors and one year for each of more than 60 injured. The judges found that the bridge collapse was inevitable because its design and construction were ruled by a lack of time and money. As he left court, Yoram Eyal accepted moral reponsibility for the tragedy. ""I just have to say that I'm sorry, I'm sorry for the families, I'm sorry for everybody that was involved in the Maccabiah,"" he said. ""I was the chairman of the organising committee, I hold the moral reponsibility for what happened in the Maccabiah and I hope that everything will be soon solved."" --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A large contingent of Kosovo Albanians, who left Australia this week at the request of the Federal Government, are now back in Kosovo after a journey which lasted more than 41 hours. The refugees arrived in Skopje, Macedonia, tired and confused after a flight of more than 30 hours. They were then packed on to buses and taken across the border back to Kosovo for the first time since they were forced to leave last year. Many were glad to be home. Some were still angry over the Australian government's ultimatum that forced them to leave, but most now say they are resigned to their fate. At the Pristina station, they were greeted by relatives and friends and many then disappeared to begin the reconstruction of their lives. Some though still have nowhere to go and they have been taken to transit camps where they have been told they can stay for no more than a week. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A man is to appear in court in Moree in New South Wales' north today on charges relating to the sexual assault of a 91-year-old woman. The assault took place at Wee Waa 16 months ago. Police say the 44-year-old man walked into the Wee Waa police station late yesterday and was interviewed by officers, before being charged in relation to the sexual assault which occurred on New Year's Day last year. Police inquiries led to the first ever mass DNA testing in Australia earlier this month, where hundreds of men in Wee Waa were asked to supply a saliva sample to eliminate them from the investigation. Police have not revealed whether the man, who comes from Wee Waa, was among those tested. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Leaders of the white Commercial Farmers Union (CFU) say Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe has expressed regret over the death of a white farmer. The CFU has held an emergency meeting with him and its leaders emerged saying President Mugabe had undertaken to bring the situation under control. CFU president Tim Henwood said: ""The President has given an undertaking to get things back to normality."" Mr Henwood says that although Mr Mugabe did not explicitly say he would order the war veterans off the farms, he did say he would make an announcement in the next few days. The President said he was due to meet leaders of the war veterans. Mr Mugabe's meeting with the three CFU leaders s lasted an hour and 40 minutes. Increasing tension in white-owned farms occupied by veterans of the independence war culminated in the murder late on Saturday of 50-year-old white farmer David Stevens in the central Marondera farming district. Five farmers who tried to help him were themselves badly beaten. Stevens, who was shot dead, was the first white farmer to die in a crisis that has pitted white farmers against the war veterans, whom President Robert Mugabe has backed in their land claims despite two court rulings against their occupations. Also on Saturday, two members of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), were torched to death in a petrol bomb attack in neighbouring eastern Manicaland province. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Fiji is worried that its economic progress means Australia will start reducing foreign aid. Fiji's Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry is to discuss future aid levels at a meeting in Canberra this afternoon with the Prime Minister, John Howard. Mr Chaudhry will push for an extension to Australia's export credit scheme which, he says, is vital to Fiji's clothing and textiles industry. Fiji's Prime Minister will ask Mr Howard to keep the concession going beyond June, when it expires. More broadly, he will ask that Australia not start cutting its foreign aid to Fiji, worth $21 million a year. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Mark Philippoussis has bowed out in the first round of the $4.5 million Monte Carlo Open, beaten by Wayne Ferreira, of South Africa. Ferreira beat the 14th seed in straight sets, 6-4, 7-5. In other results, France's Cedric Pioline is through to the second round, beating Magnus Larsson of Sweden 6-2, 6-2; Frenchman Nicolas Escude beat fellow countryman Stephane Huet and Britain's Greg Rusedski went down to Slava Dosedel of the Czech Republic."

" Wall Street's record weekend slump has produced major shudders on world financial markets today. Unexpectedly, strong US inflation figures renewed interest rate fears with the Dow Jones suffering its biggest ever points fall of 5.6 per cent while the Nasdaq collapsed more than 9 per cent. In Australia, the All Ordinaries Index has suffered its third biggest points fall ever of 176 points only slightly exceeded by the crash of October 1997, at the height of the Asian crisis. The All Ords ended 5.7 per cent down, at 2,920, its lowest close since last November. Around $36 billion was wiped off the Australian share market's value. No sector was spared, but the trio of media, telecommunications and technology stocks were again the worst hit. News Corp led the falls, dropping $2.85, or 13 per cent to $17.75, weighed down also by revelations about Rupert Murdoch's cancer. Telstra fell 37 cents, or nearly five per cent, to $7.12. Cable and Wireless Optus down was 10 per cent, John Fairfax Holdings down nearly nine per cent and PBL down 10 per cent. Of the high-tech issues, Eisa dropped a massive 55 per cent, down $1.18 to 93 cents. Liberty One, Sausage Software, Davnet, Ecorp and Looksmart also fell more than 30 per cent today. Major banks also took a drubbing. The National was down 70 cents to $22.88, the Commonwealth down 70 cents to $24.89 and Westpac down 25 cents to $10.65. BHP fell 25 cents to 17.30 and AMP fell $1.01 to $14.99. The Australian dollar was buying $US60.18 cents. It is at 37.86 sterling and 62.36 Japanese yen. On the trade-weighted index, it is at 52.5. Broker Grant Williams says the pure Internet players took the worst drubbing. ""If you talk about the technology stocks, yes, there was a bit of carnage, in certain stocks,"" Mr Williams said."

" Asian markets have taken a tumble, with the greatest falls coming in South Korea, Hong Kong and Singapore. Market analysts say the falls were to be expected with markets following last week's nosedive on Wall Street. South Korea's share market closed 11.7 per cent lower, Tokyo was down 7 per cent and Hong Kong's Hang Sen Index finished the day 7 per cent lower. In Singapore shares ended the morning session almost 8 per cent lower. Market analysts say the falls are a knee-jerk reaction to last week's losses on Wall Street. In Malaysia, the sell-off continued across the board. The Finance Minister Daim Zainuddin blamed speculation in Internet and technology stocks for the volatility. The market ended the morning session down 5.3 per cent. Stock markets in Thailand and the Philippines also closed lower in morning trade."

" Meanwhile, it has been standing room only at the Australian Stock Exchange in Sydney with investors rubbing shoulders with the curious. It has been a long day for those camped out at the exchange but, surprisingly, investors clutching mobile phones have been sitting on the ground with the majority of onlookers admitting they had gone simply for the spectacle or to bargain-hunt. ""I just look on shake-ups like this as a buying opportunity so I am not worried about the market going down, it just gives me a chance to dive in,"" one relaxed investor said. More than 300 people gathered to see the start of trade this morning but by the time the indicator board showed the last of the bad news, that number had dwindled to less than 70. But the day was certainly kind to one man. Chancey Hammond had been doing a roaring trade at his coffee stand in the foyer of the exchange and he says there has been one order which has proved particularly popular. ""I think the long, long black - probably to match some of the moods,"" he said."

" An Israeli court has found five men guilty of recklessly causing death in connection with the Maccabiah Games bridge disaster in 1997. Four Australian atheletes died and more than 60 were injured when the bridge carrying them to their tel Aviv opening ceremony collapsed. It is nearly three years since that tragedy and this court case has been running for two years. The five defendants - an engineer, builders, contractors and the former chairman of the games organising committee - were found guilty of recklessly causing death and could now face a sentence of up to three years. Australia's Jewish community has been outraged by delays in compensation to the victims of the bridge collapse. The civil case in Israeli courts still appears some way from completion."

" A new report has highlighted the vast contrast in life expectancy between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians. More than half of Aboriginal men die before the age of 50. The findings come from an Australian Bureau of Statistics report on deaths between 1995 and 1997. It found 53 per cent of indigenous men and 41 per cent of women die before the age of 50, compared to 13 and 7 per cent for non-indigenous people. The higher death rate is most pronounced between the ages of 35 and 54, when indigenous people are seven times more likely to die than non-indigenous people. The most common causes of death for Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders are circulatory disease, injury, respiratory disease, cancer and diabetes."

" The International Cricket Council (ICC) has announced it will hold an emergency meeting at Lord's on May 2 and 3 to discuss the match-fixing crisis. In a statement, ICC president Jagmohan Dalmiya said the council was extremely concerned at the damage to the image of the game. South Africa captain Hansie Cronje and team-mates Herschelle Gibbs, Pieter Strydom and Nicky Boje have been charged by Indian police with match-fixing during a one-day series between India and South Africa in March. They have denied the accusations. Meanwhile, in Johannesburg, officials say South Africa's judicial inquiry into the Hansie Cronje scandal could be heard in public. The inquiry is set to be launched later tonight with the naming of the judge and the terms of reference."

" The United Nations peacekeeping force in East Timor says an Australian soldier accused of spying made an error of judgement. The UN says the soldier, who was attempting to gather intelligence information, acted without the knowledge of his superior officers. The Australian sergeant was based near the town Maliana, and allegedly offered money to an East Timorese man. The man was asked if he could provide information about the movement of nearby militia groups but he was arrested and interrogated by Indonesian authorities in West Timor. A spokesman for the United Nations peacekeeping force says the incident, which occurred last week, is being investigated. The UN says the sergeant involved is very young and acted alone. A decision has not been made on whether the sergeant will be sent home, although the <i>Jakarta Post</i> newspaper says Indonesian military leaders have been assured the soldier will be deported."

" Human rights group Amnesty International is reserving the right to end the membership of the Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock, in a row over Mr Ruddock's use of its badge. Amnesty's national president Kathy Kingston will hold a meeting with Mr Ruddock to again ask that he not wear the membership badge while on official business. The organisation is concerned its political independence could be tainted if people are given the impression that Amnesty endorses the Minister's actions. Ms Kingston says legal options for discontinuing Mr Ruddock's membership will be examined as a last resort. ""It is a very serious step, but as I said before, I am very hopeful that when this matter is explained personally to Mr Ruddock, he will decide that we are acting in the best interests of the movement and that he will comply with our policy on this,"" Ms Kingston said. A spokesman for Mr Ruddock says as long as the Minister remains a member of Amnesty International, he will wear the badge with pride. He says Mr Ruddock has not used his membership or the badge to promote government policy."

" An Independent Tribunal has dismissed the appeals of three softballers over their non-selection in the Australian Olympic team. The three players, Kellie Allasi from New South Wales, and Queenslanders Frankie McCrae and Hayley Petrie, were informed of the decision late this afternoon. A fourth player withdrew her appeal prior to the Tribunal convening last Thursday. Softball Australia national executive director, Neil Dalrymple, says the players have a further avenue of appeal available. ""They've obviously been notified of the case and the fact that they've been dismissed and they will have 48 hours from tomorrow morning basically to appeal to the Court of Arbitration,"" he said."

" The Canberra Raiders have fined champion fullback Brett Mullins $25,000 following his altercation with team-mate Mark McLinden yesterday. Mullins has also been dropped to first division. Mullins appeared to push McLinden following an argument in the in-goal in yesterday's 14-2 loss to Parramatta. He was then booed off the field by Raiders fans.. The issue was discussed at length by the Raiders board today with several options considered before it was decided to issue a hefty fine and drop him for up to 4 games. Chief executive Kevin Neill concedes the club has taken a tough stance. Mullins has also issued a public apology to Raiders fans. Kevin Neill says Brett Mullins could force his way back into first grade after the game against Sydney City on Monday but it depends on his attitude."

" The Australian Stock Exchange is expected to open weaker this morning in reaction to large fall-outs in share prices on the Dow Jones and NASDAQ on Friday. Local economists say more than a couple of percentage points could be knocked off the Australian All Ordinaries index when the market opens. While losses are expected to be felt across the board, it is the technology stocks which are likely to be hardest hit. Rothschild's international portfolio manager Nicky Hutley says some technology stocks may not recover from the latest correction. ""People were prepared to buy them irrespective of what the company profile and earnings outlook was,"" he said. There are mixed thoughts as to whether the fall will provide bargains for punters today. The Commonwealth Bank's chief economist Bruce Freeland says he expects the market to be volatile for some time. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Protesters in Washington have regrouped, just as police thought a day of occasionally violent action aimed at a conference of world economic leaders was coming to an end. Protesters are again converging on the headquarters of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in Washington hoping to confront officials leaving today's meeting. The demonstrators have been out in force all day but failed to halt the spring meetings of the international financial institutions. Seven hundred people have been arrested in the past 24 hours in protest at the policies of the World Bank and the IMF. Protesters say the institutions impose unfair conditions on developing countries, increasing poverty and damaging the environment. A line of demonstrators is now standing in front of police on horse back near the world Bank and IMF building. Earlier in the day, a few blocks away, police used pepper spray and batons to turn back protesters. The crowds vow to return tomorrow and say they will be successful in shutting down the meeting as they were in Seattle last November with the World Trade Organisation. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The International Migration Organisation (IMO) says that if past experience is anything to go by, the refugees returning to Kosovo from Australia today should resettle easily. More than 800,000 refugees have gone back to Kosovo since the end of the crisis last year. The Albanian refugees from Australia will be the latest to return in what has been a remarkable resettlement program. When they left almost 12 months ago, none of them knew when they would ever make it back and while some may still be reluctant, the IMO, which is overseeing their return, says almost everyone will be able to rebuild their lives quickly. Many homes are still in ruins in Kosovo but a lot has been done in the last few months and the rebuilding is well underway. The IMO says it will not return anyone to areas that are still considered dangerous. Those refugees without homes or families to return to will be given emergency shelter and placed in rehabilitation and reintegration programs now underway in Kosovo. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Zimbabwe's President Robert Mugabe says he will not order war veterans to stop occupying white-owned farms. He made his position clear, despite the murder of a farmer. President Mugabe says the issue of land redistribution must be settled by the government and the people of Zimbabwe, not the courts - a direct reference to a High Court ruling that police be sent in to evict squatters from white-owned farms. Despite comments from Zimbabwe's vice-president and senior ministers that the farm invasions should stop, the war veterans say they take their orders only from President Mugabe, who has reiterated that he will not demand that the protest stop. His comments follow the murder of farmer, David Stevens and the bashing of five others, who were abducted by supporters of President Mugabe and his ruling party. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Federal Environment Minister Robert Hill will attend a high level meeting on greenhouse gas emissions in Perth today along with government officials from 30 countries. Australia is hosting the three-day conference, which will tackle details on cutting carbon emissions and the role of carbon sinks and emission trading schemes. Sinks are the practice of growing plantations or different farm crops to absorb carbon. Senator Hill says carbon sinks are necessary to offset emissions. ""It's a work in progress meeting designed to make a significant contribution towards achieving a settlement on the issues and details of sinks, for a meeting to be held in the Hague in November of this year,"" he said. ""It's very important for Australia that sinks are firmly on the agenda because they are so important in our carbon profile."" The Minister says the meeting is a step by Australia towards ratifying the Kyoto Protocol. ----------------------------------------------------------------"

" Japan's newest games machine, famed for its computer processing ability, may be too sophisticated for Japanese authorities. The Play Station 2 is said to be facing export controls because Japanese authorities fear it could be used for military purposes. The black Play Station 2 console and its eight megabyte memory card have, according to a news agency report, been designated 'general purpose products related to conventional weapons'. The Kyodo news agency quotes industry sources as saying the components could be used in missile guidance systems. Under Japan's foreign exchange control laws, the export of sophisticated devices worth more than 50,000 yen requires special government approval. But Play Station 2 is priced at less than that and so any ban might apply to the export of only two or more of the games machines at a time. ----------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Mark Boucher and Lance Klusener made half centuries in an unbroken stand of 87 to carry South Africa to a four-wicket victory over Australia in Johannesburg. The South Africans won the three-match series one day series between the two countries 2-1. Klusener, who joined Boucher when South Africa had slumped to 6-122 in pursuit of 206 for victory, smashed nine fours as he raced to his half century off just 49 balls, finishing unbeaten on 52 as South Africa won with 13 balls to spare. Earlier, Australia had done well to get to 205, Pollock taking two wickets in his final over to finish with four for 37."

" The federal director of the Liberal Party, Lynton Crosby, has warned party members the next election will be tough for the Howard Government to win. Mr Crosby told the party's national convention in Melbourne that the ALP would spend big to win the election, making it the most expensive poll in Australia's history. He said the Liberal Party must highlight the policy differences between the Government and a Labor Party he claims is lacking in energy and ideas. Mr Crosby attacked Labor leader Kim Beazley, accusing him of lacking the ability to effectively run Australia."

" Meanwhile, senior federal Liberal Party figures are at odds over mandatory sentencing laws. The Prime Minister and the Treasurer have criticised the laws operating in the Northern Territory and Western Australia as ""silly"" and ""bad"". However, the federal president of the Liberal Party, Shane Stone, has defended the laws. He has told Channel Seven, mandatory sentencing is good. ""Law and order is an important issue in the minds of many Australians,"" he said. ""Now whether you apply grid sentencing in NSW or you look to other remedies and other strategies in other states, that's entirely a matter for them."" Mr Stone said the Prime Minister was entitled to his view. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Immigration Department officials will oversee the departure of Kosovo Albanians being held at Bandiana, near Wodonga, in north-eastern Victoria this morning. The remaining 137 Kosovo Albanians begin their journey home today, taking a flight back to Kosovo from Sydney at 9:00pm AEST tonight. Yesterday, nine people who refused to leave were taken to a detention centre in Port Hedland in northern Western Australia, maintaining detention is preferrable to the dangers they would face back in Kosovo. The Federal Government has again declared the way open for the Kosovo Albanians to apply for refugee status once they have arrived home. However, those in detention will be barred from doing so for three years. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Government has handed its report on the proposed Jabiluka uranium mine in the Northern Territory to the United Nations World Heritage Committee. The Government had to explain what progress it had made in addressing the committee's concerns about the project and about the protection of Kakadu National Park. The committee wanted information about the Government's efforts to protect sites of cultural significance, and on its dialogue with the traditional owners on potential benefits for communities in the region. A spokesman for Environment Minister Robert Hill said the Government told the committee it would deliver on the undertakings it had given to protect Kakadu National Park. The committee will consider the report before its next meeting in Paris in June. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Navy's fast catamaran, The Jervis Bay, left for Dili this morning with 40 Darwin troops on board. The soldiers are from the First Combat Engineering Regiment and will provide engineering support for the Sixth battalion. Their tasks will include ensuring the supply of good drinking water, and keeping roads open. Sergeant Brent Doyle says the troops will be away for six months. ""Initially the troops from the first combat engineering regiment will be based out of Maliana which is located on the Western border of East Timor,"" he said. ""The primary role of those troops is to provide support to the battalion group whose ultimate role is to provide security to the people of East Timor."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Japan has appointed its first Deputy Prime Minister, a move seen as bringing greater stability to the government in Tokyo. Until now, Japan has never seen the need to appoint a full-time deputy prime minister. The thinking was that if the Prime Minister was going away or was ill he could appoint someone to deputise for him for that specific period just before leaving. However, this month's sudden collapse of the Prime Minister into a coma pointed to a weakness in that theory. The new Prime Minister has appointed not one, but three deputy prime ministers. The chief cabinet secretary is deputy number one. He will normally act when the Prime Minister is away. Should he be away as well, the Construction Minister is deputy number two, with the third in line being Japan's Minister for International Trade and Industry. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Victorian National Party has been warned its viability as a political force rests on its ability to attract support in provincial cities and towns. Ardele Shansullah, a lecturer in politics at LaTrobe University, told the party's annual conference that it has genuine obstacles to overcome if it is to win votes in the bush. He says the party must change its attitude to workers who are union members, re-evaluate its relationship with the Liberal Party and address its social conservatism. Nationals' leader Peter Ryan agrees the party needs to attract more support in country cities and towns. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Indonesia is preparing to grant greater autonomy to Bali, in a move that could help the popular holiday island recover business lost due to political unrest and communal violence across Indonesia. Bali is one of Indonesia's provinces pushing for greater control of its own affairs, and the democratic government of President Abdurrahman Wahid has responded. He is promising Bali's own legislators will not only get most of the revenue from tourism, but will also have a greater say about development, the environment and social and cultural affairs. The transfer of control could be made as early as next year. Bali has suffered a slump in tourist numbers, especially from Australia, after violence across Indonesia. The island's tourism officials now hope that greater control of affairs and having its own identity will win back overseas visitors. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Share prices on Wall Street have taken a pummelling in the wake of bad inflation figures in the United States. The two most closely watched barometers of the market, the Dow Jones industrial average and the Nasdaq index, suffered their biggest points drops in history. The across-the-board sell-off hit market values of companies in every industry. The Dow had its worst one day points loss ever, tumbling 617 points to close at 10,307 - a drop of 5.5 per cent. The high-tech Nasdaq index dropped almost 10 per cent to 3,321 points, shedding 355 points. The index has lost 1,100 points this week, a 25 per cent plunge, putting it in a bear market. Art Hogan from Jeffries and Company says investors are heading for the exit. ""Unfortunately it happened on a Friday, and unfortunately it happened and there was no way to stop it because once this body started in motion it was very, very difficult to put the brakes on,"" he said. ""By one o'clock everyone threw in the towel and said `this is a foregone conclusion, these things are going down, we'll wait till Monday to get back in the game', and buyers completely evaporated."" The Wall Street plunge followed bad inflation figures, with a big jump in the consumer price index. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Prime Minister John Howard is to announce more than $200 million in family funding, to help parents return to work or study. Mr Howard will make the announcement tomorrow at the Liberal Party's national convention in Melbourne. At least $200 million will be included in next month's federal Budget to help cover the child care needs of parents who want to return to the workforce or undertake study. The funds are expected to be a key plank of the Federal Government's family policy at the next election. It is understood the money would cover the costs of childcare workers needed to free up parents to go back to work. The government says the lack of child care is a major barrier for many Australians wanting to participate in the workforce. Delegates at the Liberal Party convention will today address other issues such as welfare and aged care, which will help determine the Coalition's social policy at the next election. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Sydney Organising Committee for the Olympic Games (SOCOG) has told a New South Wales Government advisory committee on the Games of a plan to heavily discount tickets for community groups. SOCOG's deputy chief executive Michael Eyers revealed the proposal when he addressed the Olympics Social Impacts Advisory Committee yesterday. The committees are working together on the details of the package, ahead of an announcement after the Easter break. Reverend Harry Herbert, who chairs the advisory committee, says SOCOG needs to offer discounts in the order of 50 per cent if the plan is to work. ""It's no good SOCOG coming back with [a] 5 or 10 or 15 per cent discount,"" he said. ""This has got to be a substantial program after working on this for years and pretty much making a mess of the whole thing. ""This is their last chance to redeem themselves, and I hope they will take that into account and do something really worthwhile here."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A Melbourne-based Internet and communications company is considering legal action over forged documents used by visiting Chinese officials. Six officials who arrived in far north Queensland this week have told Australian Federal Police the forged letter on a medialaunch.com letterhead, came from a Melbourne tour operator. The company's managing director, Ron Smith, has called on the Department of Immigration to act. ""Our major concern here is for the Department of Immigration and Customs, for the minister to come out with a policy saying that the department will not accept photostat copies of letters as verification of anything, because with the Internet today it's far too easy for people to be able to take details and then just cobble together...a false letter and then use it,"" he said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Prime Minister says if Labor leader Kim Beazley became Prime Minister he would quickly find a reason to support the full sale of Telstra. Mr Howard has accused Mr Beazley of hypocrisy, because as a former finance minister he supported privatisation of the Commonwealth Bank. Mr Howard's latest swipe at Mr Beazley came in a breakfast speech at the Liberal Party's national convention in Melbourne. ""The other great irony of the debate is that everybody knows that if Mr Beazley were to become Prime Minister of Australia he would quickly find a reason to change his current opposition to the full sale of Telstra, and I think everybody knows that,"" he said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" An Albanian community spokesman has sought to clarify the stance of Kosovo Albanian refugees who are refusing to return home. A total of 146 Kosovo Albanian refugees still remain at the Bandiana safe haven in Victoria's north-east. Erik Lloga has told Channel Nine that while some of the refugees realise they must return, others feel they cannot go back. He says some of the refugees fear retribution if they return. ""A number of people still feel they cannnot go back, they are not just being defiant for the sake of being defiant, but they are still rethinking their position,"" he said. ""What they really fear is that this is a group that comes from what is now Serbia proper, so returning to Kosovo is not really returning home for them, so if they go to Serbia at some point they are being sought out by the police there for not having answered the call to arms by the government of Milosevic."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Assertive Lad is favourite to win the world's richest horse race for two-year-olds, the Golden Slipper at Rosehill Gardens today. Trainer Gai Waterhouse is hoping Assertive Lad can provide her with her first Golden Slipper winner. The horse will be ridden by Shane Dye, who has won the race four times. ""He's all class, there's no doubt about it, he's different to a horse like Tierce who could quicken,"" he said. ""This horse just keeps going the same pace, but going into the Slipper I'm as confident as I have been with any other runner."" Other chances today include Crowned Glory, French Braids, and the other Waterhouse runner, Phoenix Park. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Treasurer, Peter Costello, says the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) will closely monitor oil companies to ensure they have passed on the predicted reduction in petrol prices after the introduction of the goods and services tax (GST). Mr Costello is currently in Paris to chair a ministerial meeting of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Oil companies say they cannot deliver the one-and-half cent reduction in petrol costs estimated by treasury models. Mr Costello says the savings in transport and production costs that the oil companies will enjoy after the introduction of the GST, highlighted by his department's modelling, shows they can and he will ensure that the ACCC makes sure they do. ""We're not putting in place reductions in excise and wholesale sales taxes and grants schemes for the benefit of oil companies,"" he said. ""They're being put in place for the benefit of the consumers and they'll be passed on."" Mr Costello says the details of the treasury model, used to calculate the one and a half cent saving, are well known and were released as part of a government policy paper in 1998. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" Doctor Bill Dennison, of the University of Queensland's Botany Department, says there is light ahead. Field crews wroking late last night discovered a decline in the weed at Deception Bay. ""Well the we think it's a combination of the weather and the fact that maybe it's just spent its resources and has basically run out of fuel."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Liberal Party's Federal Director Lynton Crosby predicts a very tough fight for the Coalition to win the next Federal election. Mr Crosby says the Coalition needs to lose only six seats - or one in each state - to lose power to Labor. He also predicts the election will not necessarily be won or lost on the goods and services tax (GST), but on issues that are yet to be decided. The Liberal Party's national convention is on in Melbourne this weekend to discuss campaign tactics and a range of social issues. Mr Crosby predicts other factors will also play a part in the poll. ""At the last election, a million people voted for One Nation as it then was and had moved away from the major parties. ""Those people are yet to firm views about where they are going to you know vote, and we have gone through a period of significant change with the implementation of the tax reform system, so obviously it will be a tight, hard fought election,"" Mr Crosby said."

" Protesters against mandatory sentencing and uranium mining have tried to steal the limelight at the Liberal Party's Convention in Melbourne. They have distracted attention from other social issues on the agenda. About 60 demonstrators outside the Melbourne Convention Centre tried to storm proceedings where hundreds of Liberal party leaders and MPs including the Prime Minister are meeting for three days. But a strong police presence kept the protest under control. Inside Mr Howard opened the convention with a speech affirming his government's commitment to equal rights for women. The Liberals' Federal president Shane Stone turned to internal party matters, warning that factional brawling could undermine the party's campaign in the leadup to the next election. ""Our focus remains on winning government because quite clearly there is no second prize,"" Mr Stone said. Delegates will discuss a series of social policy issues, including the principle of mutual obligation and the fight against drugs."

" Australian basketballer Annie la Fleur says she has done nothing wrong, after a package containing banned steroids was sent to her Sydney home. Basketball Australia is supporting her, and she will remain in training for the Games. After the testosterone-based drug was sent in a package to her address, five customs officials raided her home. She says the drugs were ordered by a friend. ""I have never returned a positive test result. ""After missing selection for Atlanta, my dream and my goal has been to represent Australia in my home town. ""I cannot believe this is happening and I have done nothing wrong,"" Ms Le Fleur said. Team managment will ask customs to wind up their investigation as quickly as possible. Opals coach Tom Maher is backing his player. ""I am 100 per cent confident, 100 per cent positive, I stand by her absolutely. ""Because I think I know her after working with her for such a long time, and the other thing is drugs are not a part of basketball culture,"" Mr Maher said."

" The Prime Minister has rejected a final plea by former Kosovo Albanian refugees to stay in Australia. Representatives of the former refugees have met Mr Howard during a break at the national Liberal convention in Melbourne. Mr Howard together with the Immigration Minister heard a plea that those former refugees wanting to stay in the country be allowed to do so, so they can apply for refugee status through the proper channels. Mr Ruddock emerged to say there has been no change in the government's position. ""You either take the view that you essentially cave in on these questions or that you maintain a consistent line in relation to the way in which people all over the world who happen to be here and do become unlawful are dealt with,"" Mr Ruddock said. A representative of the Kosovo Albanians, Eric Lloga, says he is disappointed his pleas fell on deaf ears. ""The only option now that has been left is the one that existed before, where the Kosovars will have to return,"" Mr Lloga said."

" A Kosovo Albanian man who remains in hiding in Tasmania has passed on his thanks to the Premier Jim Bacon and to other Tasmanians. Nineteen-year-old Akif Lutfiu went into hiding earlier this week when his visa expired. The pressure is mounting for Akif to voluntarily give himself up to officials, with the Minister for Immigration Philip Ruddock saying if any of the Kosovo Albanians involved in the humanitarian evacuation program do not leave by Sunday, they will be barred from applying for residency in Australia for the next three years. Sources say despite this warning Akif will not come out of hiding to give himself up to immigration officials. Sources say the 19-year-old fears for his life if he is returned to Kosovo but wished to pass on his thanks to Premier Jim Bacon for offering to sponsor his application for residency."

" A family of four Kosovo Albanians held in federal custody in Hobart since Monday have agreed to leave the country voluntarily within the next few days. Lawyer Eugene Alexander who is representing the Sopjani family says a consent form was signed by the four late this morning. The arrangement allows for the family to apply for residency in Australia once they return to Kosovo with custody and legal costs waived by the Federal Government."

" A Kosovar refugee, Dritton Dula, who has been back in his home town near the Albanian border for three days, is regretting agreeing to return. He says the conditions in Kosovo are terrible and chaotic. ""[My] family was happy when they saw me but what I saw here ... it is just terrible... I have made the biggest mistake of my life.. I should not have come back here,"" Mr Dula said."

" Police have arrested a leading Malaysian Opposition Party member on the eve of a planned mass demonstration in Kuala Lumpur in support of jailed former Deputy Prime Minister, Anwar Ibrahim. Six other party members have been ordered to report to police or face arrest. The Government and police have declared the planned protest illegal. In the past week, threats of tough action have been made to organisers of the protest and anyone who attends the rally. Ruslan Kassim, Information Chief of the National Justice Party headed by the wife of the jailed former Deputy Prime Minister, was arrested at his home in the early hours of this morning. Party Vice President, Tian Chua, has been named as one of the six to report to police. He says the police will have to come and get him. ""This is a very important step to assert our rights to public assembly,"" Mr Chua said. Organisers say despite the threat of further arrests they plan to go ahead with the demonstration."

" The saga of six-year old Elian Gonzales has taken another twist in the United States, with a court issuing an order to keep him in Miami as a drawn out custody battle continues. In the latest chapter in the saga of the shipwreck survivor, his Miami relatives have sent a video of the boy to a Spanish language television network. In the video, Elian is sitting on his bed looking into the camera, shaking his finger and saying `Dad I am telling you, I am not going back to Cuba'. The boy's father, Juan Miguel Gonzalez, waiting in Washington to claim his son, says the boy has been brainwashed. ""Juan Miguel Gonzales asks only this, that the laws of this nation be enforced,"" lawyer Greg Craig said. ""That the exploitation of his son come to an end and that Elian be returned to his care and custody."" The case will return to the courts tomorrow."

" A Liberal backbencher has raised $70,000 to buy a manuscript from the State Government about Jeff Kennett's years in office. Eltham MP, Wayne Phillips, is putting together an offer made up of $1,000 shares to buy the manuscript, which the previous government paid for with $100,000 of taxpayers' money. Mr Kennett had planned to release the book as a history of his time in office. The Premier, Steve Bracks, says the Government will consider the discounted price to recoup some of the money. ""I am very pleased that he has raised some money for it. ""Whatever money we raise is money for the taxpayers of Victoria and we can use that for community facilities, for community projects in Victoria as it should have been,"" Mr Bracks said."

" A man who has admitted attempting to export Australian native lizards says he wanted to start a self-sustaining population of the reptiles in Germany. Ralph Deiter Zeiler, 43, of Frankfurt, has pleaded guilty to attempting to export 75 lizards. Zeiler was arrested at Adelaide International airport in December, with 75 lizards in his baggage. The prosecution is alleging the lizards were worth about $70,000 and included three shingle-backed lizards and two knob-tailed geckos, which are very rare. Zieler's lawyer told the court his client had not intended to sell the lizards, but had been collecting them to create a self- sustaining population of them in Germany, with other collectors. He said Zeiler had thought they might sell some of the off-spring of the group at a later date. The prosecution said the court should take these kinds of offences very seriously and that native animals were not a commodity to be bought and sold. Zeiler will be sentenced next week."

" Two English cricket captains have suggested there is more to emerge from the South African cricket scandal, which has already claimed the career of Hansie Cronje. The comments come as the disgraced former Proteas' captain spoke for the first time since his sacking. Cronje said he had been naive and foolish, and that he had not cheated to swing a result. ""All I will say is that I was not involved in fixing or manipulating results of cricket matches,"" he said. ""I always play to win."" But former England skipper Tony Greig, a commentator on the controversial series with India, says the issue is not whether Cronje fixed a whole game, but whether he manipulated events during it. Greg says he is certain an Indian player is about to be named in connection with the scandal. Meanwhile, current England captain Nassar Hussein says there is more to come out, but that a contrived Test result with South Africa months ago was not a fix. --------------------------------"

" The Federal Government is trying to convince the remaining Kosovo Albanians at Bandiana to return home by offering them more assistance to come back to Australia afterwards. The 146 remaining former refugees will receive increased access to a humanitarian resettlement program where they can apply to resettle in Australia as refugees. But the applications to return can only be made from Kosovo. A spokesman for the refugees says those who have agreed in principle to return have done so to avoid going to Australian detention centres. The Immigration Department says it is planning to move the group from Bandiana barracks tomorrow or Sunday. The multicultural resource centre is organising a candlelight vigil at Bandiana this evening in support of the Kosovar Albanians. --------------------------------"

" Members of the Northern Territory's Stolen Generations say they will give a personal account to Prime Minister John Howard about being separated from their families, at a meeting with him next week. The Territory's Stolen Generations Aboriginal Corporation has been in Canberra for the past two weeks lobbying federal politicians. Yesterday, members of the group turned their backs on the Prime Minister in Federal Parliament, to protest against his refusal to meet the group. But last night they were told the Prime Minister had agreed to meet them on Monday. Spokesman Maurie Ryan Japarte, who was taken from his family at the Wave Hill cattle station in the Territory, says he is pleased he will be able to talk to Mr Howard. ""There will be a lot of things, [but] we'll mainly talk about the Stolen Generations and how we can solve the problems working together,"" he said. ---------------------------------"

" The emerging online group Eisa is closer to realising its takeover plans for the Internet service provider OzEmail. Eisa has secured investments of $180 million as it seeks to become the region's leading Internet-based communications group. Eisa's bid of $300 million plus for OzEmail's consumer business would see the merger of Australia's number two and number four ranked Internet service providers. Yesterday, the Fairfax publishing group agreed to pay 40-million for 5 per cent of Eisa, and importantly, will supply content through the Fairfax online subsidiary f-2. Late last night, Eisa confirmed a $40 million investment by the ANZ Bank, and $100 million from leading investment group Hastings Funds Management. It is not clear how big a stake each would have in Eisa. Talks are continuing with the Internet arm of the Walt Disney Company, whose content would also be welcomed, but no deal has yet been reached. -------------------------------"

" Indonesia's leader Abdurrahman Wahid says former president Suharto should be placed under house arrest if he continues to refuse to cooperate with a corruption inquiry. Meanwhile, police have fired tear gas on students marching on Mr Suharto's home in Jakarta. Students scattered as riot police fired tear gas. There is mounting public pressure for action against former president Suharto, who is officially named as a suspect in a widening corruption inquiry. Yesterday, Indonesia's Attorney-General placed a travel ban on Mr Suharto. For the next month, the former leader is banned from leaving Jakarta and for the next year he will not be allowed to leave Indonesia. Prosecutors have tried twice to question Mr Suharto, but doctors have intervened, claiming the former leader has been too sick to give evidence. -----------------------------"

" It is claimed the increase in Australia's suicide rate during the past 20 years may because people are getting married later in life. Researchers at the Australian National University believe the higher marriage age could explain almost half the increase in suicides for people aged in their 20s. In all societies with available statistics, the suicide rate is higher among single people than those with long-term partners. The researchers have concluded marriage provides some protection against self-harm, by offering stability, greater access to support and less likelihood of loneliness. It is also thought that people most at risk of suicide, including those with mental illness and drug dependence, are less likely to be married because of their illnesses. The researchers say their findings for people in their 20s reflect a pattern in other western countries. ---------------------------------"

" Queensland's Department of Primary Industries (DPI) hopes to determine the state of barramundi stocks in Gulf river systems with a study set to get underway next week. DPI marine biologist Sue Helmke says the northern inland rivers survey is part of a long-term monitoring project to assess fish stocks. She says the survey is important to put rumours to rest and obtain solid information to find out whether or not barra stocks are declining. ""There's been a lot of speculation in the past with people saying fish stocks are declining and the size of the stock is changing,"" she said. ""I think by going in there and doing some research we'll get a better idea of what actually is happening rather than just speculation."" ----------------------------------"

" Racehorse trainer Gai Waterhouse says she has a big chance to grab first and second place in tomorrow's $2.5 million Golden Slipper at Rosehill. The Waterhouse-trained Assertive Lad is favourite for the event, while Phoenix Park has hardly received any interest and is rated a 14-to-one chance. But Waterhouse says both horses have a big chance of winning. ""I couldn't be more happy with either horse going in to the race, and that's all as a trainer you can ask for - [that] your team are fit and ready and my team are fit and ready, and I'm raring to go for Saturday,"" she said. ---------------------------------"

" The Federal Opposition claims a billion dollar hole will be punched in the Government's budgets over the next three years through the relaxation of a proposed tax crackdown on contractors. The Government will not proceed with plans to tax some contractors at high personal income tax rates. The original proposal recommended by the Ralph review of business taxation was targetted at contractors who do more than 80 per cent of their work for one organisation and are effectively employees. They were to be switched into the Pay As You Earn (PAYE) tax system, but subject to eligibility, the Government will allow them to continue being taxed as companies. The Treasurer Peter Costello says it is a transitional arrangement which will not affect the budget over the longer term. ""We have recognised the rights of independent contractors and we will go on recognising them,"" Mr Costello said. The Shadow Treasurer Simon Crean says the Government has abandoned a major tax avoidance loophole and contradicted its promise last year to implement business tax changes in full. ""Some ticker this wimp of a Treasurer has got. ""He is a sellout and he has been a serial offender when it comes to tax avoidance mechanisms,"" Mr Crean said."

" The cricket betting scandal has drawn in more names in South Africa and India. South Africa's win in a one-day match against Australia yesterday has figured little in local news. A Johannesburg businessman Hamid Banjo Cassim has been named in the press as the third man who introduced disgraced captain Hansie Cronje to London businessman Sanjiv Chawla. He is said to have strong links with senior South African cricket management. Indian police have announced they are investigating a Dubai-based organised crime figure in connection with the scandal. Meanwhile, South African player Lance Klusener has described as 'crazy' a report in a Dubai newspaper that he tipped off police about Hansie Cronje's activities after a falling out with his captain."

" Kosovo Albanian refugees at Bandiana will have unrestricted access to a humanitarian resettlement program in Australia if they return home voluntarily. The Federal Government made the offer as 54 people at the camp remain undecided about repatriation. Ninety people have agreed to the terms and two are against them. The former refugees have also thanked the Australian Government and public for the support they have been given. But their spokesman Naser Bega says they still do not want to go back to Kosovo. ""We just want to tell you that we do not want to go back and if they want to use force, they have the power, they can do anything to us,"" Mr Bega said."

" The Federal Government will offer Kosovo Albanian families in Australia 50 extra refugee places if they return home. The offer provides the refugees an opportunity to return in the future. The ongoing negotiations and condemnation by the United Nations (UN) at the prospect of the forced repatriation of the Kosovo Albanians from Victoria has prompted the Federal Government to offer 50 more refugee places to the people."

" At least 56 people are dead with fears the toll may rise higher following the sinking of an overloaded ferry in the southern Philippines. Up to 200 people were on board the ferry when it sank. More than 100 people are still missing after the ferry sank off the coast while en route to the Malyasian state of Sabah in Borneo. Up to 200 people were believed to have been on board the wooden- hulled ferry at the time. Local authorities say the bodies of 56 people have been recovered but the search is continuing for the missing passengers. It is suspected many may have been trapped inside the vessel. The cause of the accident is not yet known but overloading is believed responsible."

" The Sydney Olympic Games Committee (SOCOG) has given in to pressure from the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) and revised its ticket sale program to allow money orders and cheques to be payment methods. One proposal favoured by SOCOG had Visa credit cards as the exclusive payment option. SOCOG's deputy Chief Exeuctive Michael Eyers says the change will benefit consumers. ""Yes we have always wanted to have the widest possible and most consumer friendly structures that we could and what we are announcing, foreshadowing today will meet those requirements"". The next round of sales will begin in early May when order forms will be available in News Limited Newspapers. Extra tickets to previously sold out events will be offered via the call centres, over the Internet and at box offices in June."

" Chinese police have used force to break up a demonstration in the heart of Beijing by practitioners of a banned spiritual movement. The Falun Gong protest was to mark a key anniversary in the group's turbulent history. Eye witnesses say police punched and kicked 60 members of the banned group after they had unfurled several Falun Gong banners in the centre of Tiananmen Square. In all, more than 200 were arrested. Security across Beijing has been tightened in recent days because the authorities expect more protests. This time last year, thousands of Falun Gong members surrounded the communist party headquarters in Beijing to demand recognition. Instead, the group's activities were outlawed and hundreds of former members are currently in jail or detention camps. The government says it has wiped out the so-called evil cult, and any protests are only sporadic and small."

" The Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) has heard evidence that a greyhound racing Chief Steward destroyed a urine sample. The Commission is inquiring into corrupt relationships between the Chief Steward and some leading owners and trainers. Chief Steward Rodney Potter has now admitted to taking bribes from three prominent trainers and a greyhound owner. The usual arrangement was that Mr Potter received ten per cent of their prize money for ensuring their dogs were not swabbed or returned a negative swab. On covert video surveillance, Mr Potter is seen tipping a urine sample down the gutter while parked at a service station last November. The Commission has also heard that Mr Potter destroyed a urine sample from a dog called Reckless Abandon which won its race at Wentwood Park in March. However, Mr Potter told its trainer Kenneth Howe not to give it anything at its next start and it came either last or second last."

" The Federal Opposition has renewed its attack on the head of the independent inquiry into Telstra service standards, Tim Besley, claiming he has a conflict of interest over the Sydney-to-Canberra Speedrail project. Labor claims the Finance Minister John Fahey has told Mr Besley the Speedrail project would have a better chance of approval if Telstra is privatised. Mr Besley is on the board of construction company Leightons, which is a member of the Speedrail consortium. Mr Fahey has not commented on whether approval for the rail link is dependent on the sale of Telstra, but says the Government's policy on the project remains unchanged. ""All I can say is that the Government's rules are clear. ""I have certainly stuck by them with all my conversations. ""If there is to be a decision on Speedrail, and that is yet to be determined, that may or may not be favourable for all I know, the rules that are in place at the moment are that there is to be no cost to budget,"" Mr Fahey said."

" Police say firearms were used as a last resort in the death of a man at Sydenham in Melbourne's north-west last night. A man in his twenties died after being struck by a number of shots fired by police, when he allegedly ran at three officers with a knife. Assistant Commissioner Ray Shuey says criticism of the police response is unfair because a split second decision is made to stop a threat to public and police safety. ""The training is to shoot to the critical mass which is the centre body mass and it is to stop the threat. ""It is not a situation where we can be Tom Mix in these circumstances or Hopalong Cassidy and shoot anybody's knee cap or the knife out of their hand or anything of this nature,"" he said. ""You have to stop the threat at this critical time."""

" Telstra has signed its biggest ever deal, which will create one of Asia's largest telecommunications networks. The $5 billion deal between Telstra and a Hong Kong Internet firm, Pacific Century Cyberworks, is seen as a new era of Australasian alliances. The alliance would create two new companies - a regional mobile phone company, 40 per cent owned by Telstra, and another carrier of data, voice and Internet services. Telstra chief executive Ziggy Switkowski says the deal defines his firm's international strategy in the more lucrative new technologies field. ""It positions us with critical size and strength in the most important high-growth markets,"" he said. The alliance would create a new regional mobile phone company, and another carrier of data, voice and Internet services. Analyst Chris Savage of BNP Equities says more such deals are to come. ""Groups like Sing-Tel and NTT have made it clear that they want to embark on a similar strategy, so we can expect to see similar sorts of deals or expansion from those carriers,"" he said. He said Telstra would be joining one of Asia's best operators, Hong Kong Telecom, which could merge with Pacific Century. ----------------------------------"

" The head of the UN's mission in Kosovo has urged Australia not to force Albanian refugees to return home against their will. Bernard Kouchner says forced repatriation is not considered normal international procedure. Mr Kouchner says he is grateful to all the countries that have taken in refugees, but he says he wants them to be patient and humane when it comes to organising their return. The head of the UN's mission in Kosovo says Australia's plan to forcibly repatriate Albanian refugees is not normal procedure, but he says the UN has no legal means to prevent it. His criticism was not directed only at Australia. Concern is growing generally in Kosovo about a wave of recent forced repatriations, mostly from Germany. The UN fears a large influx of refugees could put severe strains on the territory's infrastructure and housing stock. Mr Kouchner says all countries who took in refugees should now calm down and slow down the process of sending them back. --------------------------------"

" The board of the Sydney Organising Committee for the Olympic Games (SOCOG) is expected to make major changes to its plan for the next round of ticket sales when it meets this morning. The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) deemed elements of the plan discriminatory. ACCC chairman Alan Fels says the plan that made VISA Card the only method of paying for the next round of tickets available by telephone or the Internet was the concern. He believes SOCOG can solve the problem easily by allowing cheques and money orders to be used as well. Olympic insiders say it is not that simple and say the ACCC had approved the plan before voicing concerns yesterday. A senior manager with the committee says there are major operational difficulties, including considerable delays in allowing forms of payment other than VISA. SOCOG is still intending to detail its plan for the sale of the remaining 2.3 million tickets at a briefing this afternoon. -------------------------------"

" Rail services across Queensland have come to a halt due to a wildcat strike by the Rail, Bus and Tram Union. Queensland Rail was only notified of the strike, which began at midnight, at 11:00pm AEST last night. Thousands of commuters are expected to be stranded this morning after the union called the snap strike. It follows an Industrial Relations Commission recommendation yesterday that the union take part in ""driver only"" operational trials on the Mount Isa rail line. The union says it is not opposed to driver-only trains, but has serious concerns about the system when adequate safety measures are not in place. All Citytrain, Traveltrain and freight services are affected by the strike. Queensland Rail's Kerry Heldon says about 150,000 commuters on the Citytrain network will have to find alternative transport. The union and Queensland Rail are expected to appear before the State Industrial Commission this morning. -------------------------------"

" The Indonesian Government has banned former president Suharto from leaving the country. Mr Suharto has been ordered to remain in Indonesia to face a corruption investigation. The former president is not allowed to travel overseas for at least six months. A letter outlining the ban has been sent from the Attorney-General's office to Mr Suharto's lawyers. It follows concerns that Mr Suharto was planning to leave Indonesia to seek medical treatment elsewhere. The 78-year-old is suffering from a series of health problems. Last week, his blood pressure increased and his heart beat became irregular when government prosecutors asked him about alleged corruption during his time in power. Mr Suharto remains a suspect in the government's corruption enquiry, but his lawyers maintain he is too ill to be investigated. -------------------------------"

" A Newcastle research team is improving outcomes for cancer patients using information from the Human Genome Project which maps DNA. Head of Medical Genetics at the University of Newcastle, Rodney Scott, says the information is being used to identify people with a genetic risk of bowel cancer, so treatment can start earlier. Professor Scott says once the genetic risk is found, the person's life-expectancy increases from about 40 years, to close to the average for the rest of the population. He says this type of research is at the cutting edge of medicine. ""It will not be too long before molecular pathology and the molecular diagnosis of disease outstrips the current methods of disease identification,"" he said. ""This will allow for a much more precise diagnosis in patients and will definitely lead to better outcomes for individuals afflicted with illness."" --------------------------------"

" South Africa has scored a comfortable victory over Australia in the first one-day international in Durban. Australia made 9 for 240 off its 50 overs with Damien Martyn making 74 and Adam Gilchrist 51. In reply, South Africa reached 4 for 241 with 12 balls to spare. Gary Kirsten made 97 and Jonty Rhodes 46 for the Proteas. --------------------------------"

" They taste like snapper and smell like snapper, but unfortunately the fish produced at a commericial fish farm off Port Stephens in New South Wales do not look like snapper. The farm was established last year and the first batch, being sold this week, is not the usual pink colour. General manager Dan Liska says although chefs who have tested the fish say it tastes just as good, it seems the fish are getting sunburnt in the farm, and their skin has turned brown. ""They have a very dark colour with a slight tinge of pink, so they're not a light pink colour like most of the wild snapper,"" he said. ""This is due mainly to the fact that our growing environment is close to the surface of the sea not down deep where snapper normally occur. ""Given the fact that they taste great, we've decided to start going to the marketplace even though they're not quite red yet."""

" The South African cricket team is preparing to take the field for its first appearance since the sacking of skipper Hansie Cronje. South Africans are facing Australia is the first of three one day matches. Stand-in captain Sean Pollack has been left to pick up the pieces in the wake of the Cronje sacking. He has appealed to all South Africans to support the team despite the disgraced exit of the former skipper, who has admitted taking money on behalf of a bookmaker. Pollack says the team is trying to refocus on tonight's game against the Australians, but admits team members have been shattered by Cronje's confession. The newly installed skipper says he faces an uphill job to have his team in top form when the match begins."

" The president-in-waiting of the International Cricket Council (ICC), Australian Malcolm Grey, believes the international body is adequately equipped to deal with match fixing. Mr Grey's optimism comes as the fall-out continues from the Hansie Cronje affair. Cronje was sacked as South African captain last night after admitting accepting $US10,000 to $US15,000 from an Indian bookmaker. The South African Government has established its own inquiry, but there is also pressure on the ICC to step in. Malcolm Grey, who takes over as president in June, is happy to leave it to the South Africans, but says the ICC will be watching. ""We must be ever vigilant, we must be do everything possibly within our powers to stamp out anything of this nature of any cheating in the sport,"" he said. He believes the ICC is equipped to act if required. ""I believe it is and I think the procedures currently in place are adequate or as adequate as they can be,"" he said."

" Droves of cricket fans in South Africa are reportedly demanding refunds, ahead of tonight's first one-dayer between South Africa and Australia in Durban. Observers say it appears Cronje's fall from grace, and allegations that South African players may have been involved in match-fixing, have hit home with the supporters. Australia will field a full-strength team tonight, depending on how quickly Glenn McGrath can overcome jet-lag. Victorian Ian Harvey is the only other player in the 13-man squad likely to miss out. The full squad is: Steve Waugh (captain), Mark Waugh, Adam Gilchrist, Matthew Hayden, Michael Bevan, Damien Martyn, Andrew Symonds, Shane Lee, Shane Warne, Brett Lee, Damien Fleming, McGrath and Harvey."

" All but two of the Kosovo Albanians at Bandiana in north-eastern Victoria, have accepted the Federal Government's offer for volunatry repatriation. With only two people now refusing to move, the Immigration Department says it expects the matter to be finalised this evening and all of the 146 people to agree to the Federal Government's terms. Immigration Department spokesman Phillip Mayne says the Kosovo Albanians will leave by the end of this week. ""Whatever the circumstances if there are people who insist on not travelling they will be taken to a detention centre"". But Albanian spokesman Eric Lloga says many people have reason to fear returning to Kosovo and many of the refugees inside Bandiana have already received threats from their old country."

" In the Philippines, 41 Muslim insurgents have been killed in an assault on their base in the southern island of Mindanao. A defence force spokesman says at least 41 rebels have been killed since the Philippines security forces began the air and ground assault. Government forces have so far over-run six rebel command posts since Tuesday. Muslim insurgents, who have been fighting a 21-year battle to set up a separate state, have recently escalated their conflict. Insurgent activity has increased in recent months. In a separate incident, on a nearby island, scores of hostages continue to be held. Threats have been made to behead male hostages, including a priest."

" Australia's Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock says up to 220 people may have drowned trying to enter Australia illegally from Indonesia. Mr Ruddock says a boat involved in people-smuggling has disappeared on the way from Java to the Australian territory of Christmas Island. He says boat people from the Middle East already in detention in Australia knew of the disappearance of the vessel. Mr Ruddock says the insidious and dangerous trade of people smuggling may have caused a tragic loss of life. ""Suggestions are that a boat with something of the order of 170 to 220 people may have foundered en route to Australia,"" he said. ""Amongst many of the people in the detention centres there have been calls made to overseas destinations to assure family members they had in fact arrived safely given the reports that so many people had lost their lives in this incident."" Australian officials say the people-smuggling boat was reported to have sailed from Java late last month but had been hit by rough weather."

" Telstra has unveiled plans for its first major move into the lucrative Asian telecommunications market. The company is to invest a total of $US3 billion into a joint venture partnership with Hong Kong's Pacific Century Cyberworks. Half of this would be in cash and assets, with the rest in Pacific Century convertible notes. The deal also includes a new mobile phone company, and arrangements over content use. Pacific Century Cyberworks is run by the son of Hong Kong's richest man, Li Ka-Shing. Shares in Telstra were suspended ahead of the announcement at $7.64."

" The Federal Government says a $350 million investment by Telstra in rural Australia should have a bearing on the inquiry into its services. Telstra has announced the funds to upgrade its customer access network in rural areas - by replacing ageing equipment and lines. The Communications Minister Richard Alston has welcomed the announcement, saying it will significantly reduce fault rates and improve services. Senator Alston says the investment will be of interest to the inquiry. ""It ought to be apparent I think, that the older the network the more problems it will have, and if you replace that with world's best technology then you are likely to very substantially reduce the level of problems, and I think that ought to be a factor for the inquiry to take into account,"" Senator Alston said."

" A Senate committee has recommended that the ABC board consider improving a proposed deal to sell online content to Telstra. The report is divided along party lines. The Democrats have expressed serious reservations that the agreement could contravene the spirit of the ABC Act and constrain the ABC's flexibility in the future. They have also called for the removal of references to advertising revenues in the Telstra deal. Committee Chair, Democrats Senator Lynne Allison, says a new agreement should provide better protection of the ABC's independence. ""This agreement could deal merely with the sale and re-purposing of ABC Online content. ""It should include strong provisions to ensure ABC content is not altered by Telstra and that ABC editorial policies and guidelines will apply to all content supplied by the ABC to Telstra,"" Senator Allison said. Government members of the Committee have rejected the Democrats recommendations. They say the ABC should be allowed freedom to make commercial arrangements to take advantage of the booming online environment. Labor Senators have expressed similar concerns to the Democrats, calling on the ABC board to give consideraton to improving protection of its editorial control and independence."

" The Federal Government is hoping to get its digital broadcasting laws passed in the next session of Parliament. The legislation will set out the regulatory framework for digital television and datacasting which is due to begin next January. But the Democrats will be pushing for a Senate inquiry as soon as the bill is introduced, which could delay its passage. The Communications Minister Richard Alston says the legislation will be introduced soon. ""It is a very complex area and there are discussions occurring and once we have finalised those discussions then that will be reflected in a draft legislation,"" Mr Alston said."

" The call for a national apology to indigenous people is on the agenda for talks tonight between John Howard and the Reconciliation Council. Mr Howard is now meeting four Council members about the wording of a reconciliation document to be presented to him next month. The document is expected to renew calls for Mr Howard to apologise to indigenous Australians, despite his repeated refusal to do so. Council members say they are still confident of reaching agreement, but Gatjil Djerrkura is not predicting the outcome of tonight's talks. ""We have keep trying and that is the main thing, we're talking to the Prime Minister and that is a good sign, and I think a dinner at the Lodge will help. ""I think it is a step in the right direction,"" Mr Djerrkura said."

" Federal Parliament has been told a person received better care as a prisoner-of-war in Changi prison than at a Queensland nursing home. The Alchera home in Gladstone has already been investigated for the deaths of at least three elderly residents. The daughter of one of those residents has told the Opposition her father received better treatment when he was a prisoner-of-war. Labor says complaints made about the home last November still have not been dealt with. The Minister representing the Aged Care Minister in the Senate, John Herron, says a spot check was undertaken at the home last month. ""The agency has found that while there is room for improvement by the nursing home, residents are not at serious risk. ""They are continuing to supervise improvements being implemented by the home. ""Her department and the agency will continue to closely monitor the progress of this facility,"" Senator Herron said."

" Disgraced former South African cricket captain Hansie Cronje is continuing to insist he was not involved in match fixing, despite an admission that he accepted money from a bookmaker. Cronje has been sacked as South African captain and cricket officials say it is unlikely his contract will be renewed. United Cricket Board managing director Ali Bacher says Cronje accepted between $US10,000 and $US15,000 from an Indian bookmaker in London. The money was in exchange for providing information and forecasts during a three way series between South Africa, England and Zimbabwe earlier this year. His contract has been suspended and the South African Government has announced a judicial inquiry into the matter. However, Cronje continues to insist that even though he spoke to bookmakers by phone on the side's recent tour of India, he has never been involved in match fixing. Having not banked the money he accepted, he also maintains he has received no financial benefit from his actions. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Kosovo Albanians who are refusing to leave Australia have until 9:00am (AEST) this morning to cooperate with the Immigration Department. The Federal Government wants them to sign departure consent forms or they will be transferred to immigration detention centres. The deadline was given by the Minister, Philip Ruddock, yesterday. The remaining Kosovo Albanians at Bandiana near Wodonga, in north-east Victoria, have presented the government with a list of demands. There are more than 100 Kosovo Albanians behind wires at Bandiana. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) has warned country service station operators it will closely monitor their operations to ensure new federal subsidies are passed on to motorists. The Federal Government is pay half a billion dollars to regional fuel retailers over the next four years. The direct grants are the government's mechanism to ensure country fuel prices do not rise when the goods and services tax (GST) is introduced. Service stations will receive one or two cents a litre from the government, depending whether they are deemed to be in a regional or remote location. ACCC chairman Alan Fels says heavy fines will be imposed if retailers are caught profiteering. ""If petrol prices rise under the GST they'll likely be in breach of the Trade Practices Act,"" Mr Fels said. Opposition spokesman Joel Fitzgibbon says the grants will create divisions. ""Any scheme based on boundaries is going to create anomalies."" National Farmers Federation president Ian Donges is confident country motorists will be protected from the GST. ""We expect that'll address the real concerns we've had for some time about the changeover."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Prime Minister appears to have eased some of the tensions in his relations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commissioners (ATSIC) after a dinner with them at The Lodge. Eighteen commissioners went to the dinner, along with the Aboriginal Affairs Minister John Herron and the Reconciliation Minister Philip Ruddock. Reconciliation, mandatory sentencing, Stolen Generations and indigenous housing issues were discussed. New South Wales ATSIC Commissioner Charles Perkins says the meeting was worthwhile. ""We spoke as we saw it and the cards were laid on the table,"" he said. ""Certain principles were expressed which we think are important and he accepted that. ""Nothing was taken personally. Our position was very clear as ATSIC Commissioners. I was quite pleased with the meeting to tell you the truth."" --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The state of Israel and prominent British Jewish interests have called on Australia to keep its doors barred to historian David Irving in the wake of the collapse of his libel trial in Britain's High Court. Mr Justice Gray found that Irving was an ""active Holocaust denier, that he is anti-Semitic and racist, and that he associates with right-wing extremists who promote neo-Nazism"". Irving had brought the libel suit against American author Deborah Lipstadt and publisher Penguin Books to defend his academic reputation but now faces financial ruin. He said Ms Lipstadt's book Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory, branded him a ""Holocaust denier"" and accused him of distorting the truth of what happened in Adolf Hitler's Nazi Germany. But Justice Gray found that Irving has ""for his own ideological reasons persistently and deliberately misrepresented and manipulated historical evidence"". ""He has portrayed Hitler in an unwarrantedly favourable light, principally in relation to his attitude towards and responsibility for the treatment of the Jews,"" he said. Irving has been banned from Australia since 1993. He is also banned from Canada and from using state archives in Germany. Earlier this year he said he was still hoping to go to Australia to visit his daughter who has recently acquired Australian citizenship. Although he has been denied entry on four previous occasions he said he had strong legal advice the government could not bar him from visiting a family member who was an Australian citizen. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The national video chain under fire for allegedly charging the goods and services tax (GST) too early says it wants to meet with the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC). The chairman of the ACCC, Alan Fels, says Video Ezy customers claim staff have attributed a recent $1 overnight rental price rise to the GST. But Video Ezy spokesman Mark Patterson says the company wants the chance to refute Professor Fels' allegations. ""We've been wanting for some time to make our case and to explain ourselves,"" he said. ""His investigators have been interviewing our staff for quite some time now. ""It's clear to us that they had at issue something that we had done. ""We're happy to talk to him about it and he's suggesting that we refund our customers or give some free videos away or something of the sort - we'd like the opportunity to talk to him about that."" ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A radical Indonesian Muslim group is planning to send 3,000 militia to the strife torn island of Ambon. Militia have been training in a camp in West Java and say they are now prepared to wage a holy war against Christians. The young Muslim radicals are ready for action, armed with swords and claiming to have God on their side, they expect to complete training in the next few days. They plan to leave for Ambon, capital of the Malucu province, soon after. Sectarian violence in the province has claimed more than 3,000 lives in the last year. The radical group, Allah-Suna-WhalJama, claims the Indonesian Government and the military have failed to stop the fighting and it is now time for its members to step in. Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid, a moderate Muslim, has called for the group to back down, but its leaders say they will not, promising to defy any attempts to stop them. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australians without a Visa credit card may be unable to purchase the next round of Olympic tickets. Under a proposal to be discussed by the Sydney Olympics Organising Committee (SOCOG) board, tickets to events such as the opening ceremony and swimming finals will go on sale this month initially by Visa credit card only, over the phone and Internet. The tickets will sell on a first come first served basis. Those without a Visa card will have to wait until box office sales commence some weeks later. Visa is a major sponsor of the Sydney Games."

" The Immigration Department is searching for 22 Kosovo Albanians missing from the Bandiana compound in north-east Victoria. Their escape was revealed after a roll call at the former safe haven was completed. Immigration officers are now looking for 33 missing detainees in three states. The department says the total missing was confirmed by a head count at Bandiana conducted over the past 24 hours. It says it is not known when the 22 left Bandiana, saying it could have been before the safe haven became a detention centre at midnight on Sunday. It now says there are 10 Kosovo Albanians, not nine, missing from Sydney and one missing from Tasmania."

" The lawyer who defended CARE Australia worker Peter Wallace against spying charges in a Belgrade court, says there are no humanitarian grounds for the Kosovo Albanians to resist returning home. Ivan Jankovich concedes Kosovo is a dangerous place for everyone because the international community is failing to establish law and order. But he told the ABC's <i>Law Report</i> there is no longer any danger from Serb authorities. ""It is up to the Australian Government to decide but legally I see absolutely no grounds for them to stay here, absolutely none, except probably in individual cases - sickness etc,"" he said."

" The Federal Government has delivered an ultimatum to the Kosovo Albanians who are refusing to leave Australia. The former refugees have been given until 9:00 tomorrow morning to agree to fly home. The Immigration Minister, Philip Ruddock has set the deadline in a letter to the former refugees at the Bandiana compound. They have until 9:00am tomorrow to sign departure consent forms or they will be sent to permanent detention centres. The Immigration department spokesman Phil Mayne says the minister has made an offer to waive costs being incurred by the group. ""The high court costs, the costs that they are incurring while they are in detention,"" Mr Mayne said."

" The Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock has moved to reassure Kosovo refugees worried about being returned to the Serb controlled area of Presevo. Mr Ruddock says no one will be forced to go to the area against their will. ""I can guarantee they will not be returned to Presevo. ""I am not returning people to Presevo but that does not mean people will not go to Presevo. ""Albanians live in that region in fact I understand they are a majority in that region,"" Mr Ruddock said."

" A group of Wodonga people is gathered outside their local MPs office, to protest against the government's decision to deport the Kosovo Albanian refugees. Rutherglen resident, Jill Briggs, says the group plans to rally there overnight. ""Many of us have come to know some of them personally and so we know that their stories are much more complex than the forms that they were asked to fill in allowed them to reveal,"" Ms Briggs said."

" The South African cricket captain, Hansie Cronje has been sacked in the wake of match fixing allegations. Cronje has admitted being ""dishonest"" with the United Cricket Board of South Africa over the allegations. Vice-captain Shaun Pollock will take over the captaincy, while Dave Callaghan will replace Cronje in the squad. Last Friday, Indian police announced they were filing charges against Cronje and his teammates for allegedly fixing last month's one-day series."

" The Federal Government will pay half a billion dollars in grants to service station operators in regional and remote Australia to ensure country motorists are not worse off when the GST is applied to fuel. The Government has been working on the scheme for several months to honour its commitment that fuel prices need not rise under the new tax system. The $500 million to be spent over four years will be paid to fuel retailers at different rates, depending on their location. The Treasurer, Peter Costello says the grants will protect regional and remote Australians in full from the switch to the GST. ""If you happen to be a consumer in regional or remote Australia, a grants system will ensure that no petrol price need rise to the consumer with another $500 million of benefit over a four year period to regional and remote Australia,"" Mr Costello said."

" The Prime Minister has given an assurance that the impact of the goods and services tax (GST) will be considered when assessing whether anyone is worse off under the new tax system. The government has announced it will set up a review mechanism to decide whether taxpayers are financially disadvantaged and should receive special compensation. Anyone who is worse off, will be eligible for top-up payments until the end of September. Mr Howard has told Parliament, families in particular will be winners not losers under the new tax system. ""In making application under that mechanism, people will be able to take into account the impact of the GST. ""That is to be the arrangement and it remains the government's belief that families will be as we have always said much better off under the tax reform,"" Mr Howard said."

" Legal action is being threatened by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) against national video rental chain Video Ezy for introducing goods and services tax (GST) price rises too early. The ACCC says it has evidence that Video Ezy raised its video hire prices from $6 to $7 in preparation for the GST. Retailers are not allowed to implement GST price rises until July 1. ACCC Chairman Allan Fels says Video Ezy may be able to avoid court action by offering its patrons compensation, but warns the evidence against the company is solid. ""It is not just a question of whether or not they told the public this, it is whether they did in some way relate their prices to GST in advance, and we have concluded that they did,"" Mr Fels said."

" Papua New Guinea landowners have launched new legal action against BHP, claiming the company has failed to meet the environmental obligations contained in a settlement reached four years ago. The writ lodged in the Victorian Supreme Court seeks to enforce the terms of a 1996 settlement, which not only involved $150 million in compensation but a commitment to put an end to tailings from the mine polluting the Ok Tedi and Fly river systems. Lawyers representing the Papua New Guinea landowners affected by the environmental disaster say BHP has failed to honor its agreement, and claim the company is still dumping up to 90,000 tonnes of waste in the river each day. Lawyers say while the case at this stage is an environemental one, it could develop into a situation where the landowners will be demanding more monetary compensation."

" BHP says it will defend the court action. Mandy Frostick, from BHP, says the company has met a requirement to investigate the management of tailings at the mine. ""We believe we have complied with the terms of the 1996 out-of- court settlement agreement relating to mitigation of environmental damage at Ok Tedi copper mine so we will be defending the action,"" Ms Frostick said. Protesters Protesters have dumped dirt and dead fish on the steps of BHP in central Melbourne to protest against the company's mining operation in Papua New Guinea's western province. Environmental groups, including Friends of the Earth, and PNG landowners, claim waste from the Ok Tedi copper mine has destroyed much of the Ok Tedi-Fly River system. Protestor Simon Divecha says they want the company to compensate landowners who have lost their livelhood as a result of the degradation. ""The mine is a social and environmental disaster. ""The damage will last probably for the next 100 years,"" he said. ""BHP needs to commit to these people, commit to the environment and help right the damage that it has created,"" Mr Divecha said. Exaggerated claims BHP says it wants to pull out of the operation, but this may take years. Manager of Media Relations Mandy Frostick says the company is taking its environmental responsibilities seriously. ""A lot of the claims that they have made are exaggerated. ""There is quite clearly environmental impacts with the Ok Tedi river. BHP and OTML [Ok Tedi Mining Limited] have acknowledged that over many months, many years in fact,"" she said."

" Sydney criminal, Arthur ""Neddy"" Smith is appealing to the state's highest court against his conviction for the 1983 murder of Sydney brothel-keeper Harvey Jones. Smith was sentenced to life for the murder. The murder of Harvey Jones was found to have been cold-blooded and deliberate, undertaken for significant gain. In September 1998, Justice Carolyn Simpson sentenced Smith to life imprisonment after finding the 53-year-old was not entitled to the prospect of liberty. Smith maintains his innocence. Today he sat quietly in the dock of the New South Wales Court of Appeal listening to his barrister, Winstone Teraccini go through the 12-grounds against the conviction and sentence. Part of the case is based on inconsistencies between crown witnesses and the failure to call a lawyer, given the pseudonym, Mr White. The appeal is likely to continue until tomorrow."

" Three people, including a baby boy, have died after a chaotic day on Sydney's roads. The 11-month old boy died in hospital at 4:00pm after suffering serious burns in an eight car accident at Dee Why on the northern beaches. The car the baby was travelling in was one of three that exploded in this morning's accident. The police officer who grabbed the baby from the burning wreckage has been commended in State parliament. Senior Constable Don McKinnon represented Australia as a rugby league front-rower in the early 1980's. Police Minister Paul Whelan said ""I thank Senior Constable McKinnon for his superhuman heroism."" Three other people were also taken to hospital. At Warwick Farm, one person believed to be a cyclist, has died while still trapped in the wreckage of a four vehicle accident on Governor Macquarie Drive. Another person has died at Doonside in western Sydney, after a truck ran over a van on Knox. A 30-year old woman lost her leg in the accident and was taken to hospital in a critical condition."

" The chief steward of greyhound racing in New South Wales has been accused of betraying dog owners, trainers and the betting public by his alleged corrupt and illegal activities. A public inquiry has heard allegations that Rodney Potter was paid substantial sums of money for those activities by some owners and trainers. The Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) today began public hearings on the allegations, attracting the largest public gallery seen at the commission for years. It heard that Mr Potter has had a corrupt relationship with various owners and trainers for many, many years, by among other things, interfering with the drug testing process. He has also issued racing certificates for ghost dogs to run, reminiscent of horse racing's ""Fine Cotton Affair"". Outside the commission, Woy Woy dog owner and trainer Barry Waters said the inquiry had been a long time coming. ""I think there is going to be a lot of people frightened over this, I am certainly not one of them, I just think this sort of thing out in the open is the best thing that has happened in the greyhound industry for 20 years,"" Mr Waters said."

" Northern Territory Chief Minister Denis Burke has returned to Darwin and says the issue of mandatory sentencing has now been resolved. The Commonwealth has pledged $5 million, which the Territory government will use to expand diversionary programs for juveniles and an Aboriginal interpreter service. Mr Burke says he has always been a big supporter of diversionary programs. ""I believe they are a very real part of the answer, some of these family conferencing things, particularly on Aboriginal communities I think will be very good, but time will tell,"" he said. ""We'll review how it's going in 12 months time and there's resources provided for that. ""In the face of alot of criticism I said I would deliver on an Aboriginal interpreter service, I said the Commonwealth should contribute to that service and I come back with the assurance that the Commonwealth will assist the Territory to set one up."" ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Up to 182 Kosovar Albanians, now illegal immigrants, will be sent to remote detention centres if they do not return home voluntarily. Most are expected to be deported within two weeks. Immigration authorities have begun plans to remove Kosovar Albanians who have lost their legal fight to stay in Australia. Most are at Bandiana in north-eastern Victoria, but if they do not agree to leave within days they will be flown to higher security detention centres at Woomera in South Australia or Port Hedland in Western Australia. They have already lost their daily living allowances and free phone access. Authorities expect those who are prepared to cooperate could be on a plane by Thursday and even those who refuse will be forced home within two weeks. Eric Lloga from Australia's Albanian community has begged the government for clemency. ""The events these past few days have been really quite wrenching and it's because of them that I ask that they consider, it's a personal plea on behalf of fellow human beings,"" he said. ""I would like to in fact place a personal plea on the Minister and the government to I guess make an act of clemency and allow these Kosovars to put their case under the normal refugee or asylum seeker processes, so their cases can be tested. ""That is all that I would like to ask."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Zimbabwe's government has again ruled out the use of police to evict black squatters from hundreds of white owned farms. The High Court has been asked to overturn an earlier ruling that police had to act against the squatters. Zimbabwe's white farmers have already won one court ruling ordering police to evict squatters from their farms, which has been ignored by the government. Their lawyers returned to the High Court today to seek another similar order. Opposing the application, Zimbabwe's Attorney-General Patrick Chinamasa told the court that the use of force to evict squatters would ignite a bloody conflagration, describing the political atmosphere in Zimbabwe as a powderkeg. Counsel for the farmers told the court that white Zimbabweans are entitled to the same protection of the law as all other citizens. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" With less than three months to go before the goods and services tax (GST) takes effect, it is feared many small businesses will be left out in the cold unless they prepare now. A Dun and Bradstreet survey of 800 companies has found nearly 70 per cent polled are not fully prepared for the new tax system. Dun and Bradstreet managing director Christine Christian says many smaller companies do not have the necessary ABN number and do not realise the impact of not being GST-registered. She says others do not have the proper accounting systems in place, believing the Tax Office's public awareness campaign has come too late. ""I think in the early stages, small to medium business was fairly complacent,"" she said. ""I don't think they realized the extent of GST and I think it's only really happened, as I said, in the last 60 days, and for some it's just going to be too little, too late."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Eight people have been charged in Turkey over last week's violence in which two British football fans were murdered. Turkish police relied on television footage of the riots to identify the suspects. Five youths have been charged with murder, three others for offences in connection with the violence that erupted in Istanbul on the eve of last Thursday's match between Leeds United and Galatasaray. There has been criticism in Turkey and England over the police handling of the clashes, although the Turkish press has largely blamed the visiting Leeds fans for provoking the violence. European football authorities will decide on Wednesday whether to allow Turkish fans to travel to Leeds for the return match. Leeds officials have requested a ban on visiting fans. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Lawyers representing former Indonesian president Suharto say government efforts to question their client should be called off. Mr Suharto's legal team says an inquiry is now impossible. The lawyers say that the former president's health has worsened. Mr Suharto is suffering from speech problems and high blood pressure. Yesterday he was visited at home by government prosecutors. After three hours, the prosecutors left without asking any questions because of Mr Suharto's poor health. They have promised to try again but lawyers for the former president say the questioning should be called off. The leader of Mr Suharto's legal team, Juan Felix Tampubolon, says at the very least the inquiry should be suspended. He says doctors have confirmed that Mr Suharto cannot endure interrogation. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Re-elected Greek Prime Minister Costas Simitis has promised to forge ahead with new reforms, following a narrow election victory. Several prominent old guard socialists failed to retain their seats in the Greek Parliament. The Greek Prime Minister, Costas Simitis, said implementing a package of reforms would be his new government's single biggest challenge. The leader who has been widely credited for his reformist policies said his new goal was to bring Greece up to the standards of its European Union partners by streamlining the economy in civil service. Under Mr Simitis the socialists are the only party in the history of Greece to have ever won three successive terms in office. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Collingwood is considering an appeal against a two game suspension handed down to key forward Anthony Rocca at the AFL Tribunal last night. Rocca was charged with striking Bulldog Craig Ellis at Docklands Stadium on Friday night. He pleaded not guilty, arguing the lights at the new stadium blinded him while he was trying to knock the ball on. Ellis backed him up saying the contact was minor and within the rules of the game. But the tribunal sided with the umpires case, concluding the contact to the head was reckless. The Magpies tried to reduce the penalty to one week but that was overturned. Bulldog Steve Kretiuk is free to play this weekend after being cleared of striking Chris Tarrant of the Magpies. The case against Kangaroo Winston Abraham did not get to the tribunal after umpire Mark Nash withdrew his manhandling the umpire charge. It will be another busy night at the AFL Tribunal tonight, with eight players to answer charges. Carlton midfielder Fraser Brown will appear first on three separate charges of striking and wrestling. Of the remaining seven players to face the tribunal, six are charged with wrestling."

" The Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock is hoping to avoid the use of force to deport 182 Kosovo Albanians now in Australia illegally. One hundred and eighty-two Kosovo Albanians have been ordered to leave. Most are in detention at Bandiana near Albury, four are in detention in Tasmania, and about 14 are unaccounted for. Mr Ruddock says he is hoping all 182 abide by a court decision supporting their removal from Australia, and leave voluntarily. ""I would rather people leave if we put in place arrangements for a further flight, without any difficulty but if it is necessary for people to be removed otherwise, that will occur,"" Mr Ruddock said. One hundred and twenty-one Kosovo Albanians have been granted the opportunity to lodge formal claims for refugee status, two are applying for spouse visas, and 147 have had their visas extended on medical grounds."

" It has been confirmed the National Australia Bank will buy MLC for more than $4.5 billion. The National is buying the investment fund and insurer from Lend Lease. The cashed-up National was rebuffed in its takeover offer to AMP late last year, but today Managing Director, Frank Cicutto, is not regretting the past. ""I have no doubt that this is the best option available to the National Australia Bank. ""It is unique in terms of the quality of the asset and its strategic and cultural fit,"" Mr Cicutto said. The National would gain most from MLC's contribution to funds management, a weak spot in its own business profile. Ratings agency Moody's says the National has sufficient financial flexibility to support the purchase. But the sale's potential impact on Lend Lease's diversity have put it at risk of a downgrade. The firms' share-prices reflect these views, with the National up 52 cents to $23.17, but Lend Lease closing down 50 cents to $19.79."

" The Senate has passed a censure motion against the Aboriginal Affairs Minister John Herron. Labor, the Democrats and Greens Senator Bob Brown all supported the motion condemning Senator Herron's handling of indigenous affairs. In particular they attacked his statements in a government submission to a Senate inquiry, denying there was ever a generation of stolen children. The Democrats Senator Aden Ridgeway says Senator Herron has done nothing to address the pain he has caused in the past week. ""Minister Herron in fact has done nothing to ease the hurt and the trauma that indigenous people continue to feel as a consequence of past policies of separation, but more precisely to the comments recently by Senator Herron. ""I think that many indigenous and non-indigenous Australians have told me that what he has done is exactly the opposite,"" Senator Ridgeway said. But the government's Senate Leader Robert Hill has praised Senator Herron's leadership and achievements in Aboriginal affairs. Senator Hill says few ministers he has known have been more decent or genuinely committed to their portfolio responsibilities. ""He has in place a program that is providing a new direction, the leadership that can give all Australians greater confidence that indigenous Australians are going to get a fair go in the future. ""He matches that with a plan for the future that demonstrates exactly where he wants to take these programs in the future as I have just said,"" Senator Hill said."

" Australian doctors say a new anti-smoking pill about to be trialled in Australia could be a valuable tool in helping smokers quit. The drug which has been approved for use in the United States, works by stopping the smoker's desire for nicotine. Unlike other anti-smoking aids, the drug known as zyban does not contain any nicotine. Respiratory physician Dr Peter Frith from Adelaide's Repatriation General hospital says the drug simply blocks the chemicals in the brain which cause nicotine cravings. ""The single pill cure is not available but there is no doubt it would be attractive to have a pill to help people get through what represents a major addiction,"" he said."

" Pauline Hanson has lodged an application for leave to appeal to the High Court against the deregistration of the One Nation Party in Queensland. Ms Hanson is facing bankruptcy after a court ruling that the party was fraudulently registered during the 1998 state election. The Queensland Electoral Commission is suing Ms Hanson for the return of more than $500,000 in election funding. Ms Hanson says she has instructed lawyers to lodge the application but she does not know when the hearing might take place."

" Commonwealth Games marathon gold medallist Heather Turland has announced she will not be competing at this year's Olympics. An emotional Turland says she has been battling a virus and knew during an 18 kilometre fitness trial last week she was too far behind schedule to make the Olympic team. ""I knew at the end of that 18 kilometres I was struggling and I was hurting, and that there was no way that I could have continued at that pace for 42 kilometres,"" she said. ""Towards the end of it I was actually in tears trying to run and breathe at the same time which is very difficult because I knew that I had to make a decision to pull out."""

" About 170 Kosovars who have defied government orders to leave Australia have officialy lost their visas and are now classified as illegal immigrants. The temporary safe haven visas for the refugees at Bandiana, near Wodonga in northern Victoria, expired at midnight eastern time, and the Federal Government has refused to extend their visas. More than 100 refugees have held a candlelight vigil outside the Bandiana safe haven. Some claim they will be persecuted if they are forced to return home. The safe haven has become a temporary detention centre until alternative accomodation can be found. A spokesman for the immigration department, Phil Mayne, says the refugees have now ended a hunger strike, but have given no assurances they will co-operate with the restrictions now in place. He says they have now lost their privileges and have started incurring a financial debt to the Commonwealth. In Kosovo, international KFOR troops have clashed with around 100 Serbs in the divided town on Mitrovica in an incident sparked by ethnic tensions. KFOR officers say the violence occurred after Serbs chased three ethnic Albanian employees of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) who had earlier entered the Serb-dominated north of the town. Three soldiers in the NATO-led peacekeeping force suffered minor injuries when the Serbs peppered them with stones. The peacekeepers responded with teargas grenades and the crowd dispersed after about half an hour. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" Prime Minister John Howard and the Northern Territory's Chief Minister, Denis Burke, have discussed the Territory's mandatory sentencing laws for juveniles. A spokesman for the Prime Minister says the two met at Kirribilli House in Sydney last night for several hours. The spokesman says progress was made, but talks are expected to continue. Mr Howard wants the Northern Territory to introduce diversionary programs as an alternative to mandatory sentencing. Meanwhile, a federal Independent MP will introduce legislation in the House of Representatives today to override mandatory sentencing laws in the Northern Territory. The Member for the New South Wales seat of Calare, Peter Andren, says he is pessimistic about the bill's fate, believing the government will gag debate. Mr Andren says today's introduction of the bill will keep pressure on the Federal Government. ""I believe after talks with the Chief Minister, if there is no satisfactory outcome, then either my bill will continue or they will re-introduce their own legislation by the Attorney-General,"" he said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Adventure travel company that ran the canyoning tour in Switzerland last year that ended in disaster says it now has the best early warning system anywhere in the world. The company plans to start canyoning again on May 1. The head of Adventure World Travel, George Hodler, says his company has done everything possible to prevent a repeat of last year's canyoning disaster. However, he says he still cannot rule out such a possibility. ""I have to make clear like any other outdoor activity such as river rafting or sailing or paragliding or mountaineering - there will always remain a risk,"" he said. Twenty-one people, including 14 Australians, died when a flash flood swept them down the gorges during an expedition led by Adventure World. An official investigation into the disaster has still not been completed. Mr Hodler says it is too early to tell how badly last year's accident will affect his business, but he says he has already taken several bookings for the new season. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat has condemned the Israeli Government of Ehud Barak, saying hopes in the peace process have evaporated. His comment came as the Israeli Prime Minister left for Washington for a summit on Israeli-Palestinian negotiations with US President Bill Clinton. Mr Arafat predicted that the Barak Government would fall if in his words Mr Barak continued to refuse peace. He said negotiations had not moved at all, labelling the Israeli Prime Minister as a leader of hardliners and Jewish settlers. Israel's press has suggested the talks with President Clinton may focus again on the apparently terminal Syrian peace negotiations, rather than the Israel-Palestinian issue. But as he departed, Mr Barak said there was little cause for optimism on the Syrian front, a fact he said was underlined by a missile strike on a northern Israel village and an upsurge in fighting in south Lebanon. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Japan has passed a milestone in the communications revolution. It now has more mobile telephones in use than it has fixed phone lines. Japan now has 56 million, 800,000 paid-up mobile phone users, more than its 55 million, 500,000 fixed phone lines. It is gaining new mobile users at the rate of 26,000 each day, most of them for Japan's new I-mode service, which allows them to surf the Internet from their mobile phones, as well as talk. Japan is the biggest, but not the first country to pass the milestone. Finland, Cambodia and South Korea all have more mobile phones in use than fixed lines. It is expected to happen worldwide by 2006. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" South African cricket captain Hansie Cronje has again protested his innocence over match fixing allegations levelled by Indian police. The South African skipper has faced the media, insisting he has done nothing wrong. Cronje says he is willing to turn over his banking records to investigators to help clear his name of the match fixing allegations which have rocked the cricketing world. He has also denied ever having spoken to other players about rigging the outcome of the team's recent one day series against India. At the centre of the controversy are tape recordings of telephone conversations which Indian police say directly implicate Cronje with one of the ring leaders of the match fixing scam. The South African Government is demanding access to the tapes which Indian authorities say will be turned over to Interpol for voice analysis."

" Up to 100 Kosovo refugees have begun a hunger strike at the Bandiana safe haven near Wodonga on the Victoria-New South Wales border after refusing to board a bus for Sydney and a flight home. Twenty-one people from five families agreed to leave the centre earlier this morning. Those involved in the hunger strike say young children will be fed but the rest have voted to refuse all food and drink. They are appealing to the Immigration Minister, Philip Ruddock, to allow them to stay in Australia until it is safe for them to return to Kosovo. The time has passed for the 100 remaining residents of Bandiana to board buses for and meet the flight home. However, the Immigration Department is now saying it will attempt to arrange a flight to Sydney for any who change their minds. The department cancelled a second bus when no more people came forward. The department's Phil Main says the residents are aware of the implications of their decision to stay. ""We held a residents' meeting last night clearly outlining the consequences of their actions if they didn't get on the buses,"" he said. ""As at midnight tonight the Kosovars remaining in Australia become unlawful and we have no option but to take them into immigration detention."" The only Kosovar Albanian in Tasmania to agree to return to his homeland is reportedly reconsidering his decision. Immigration Minister Phillip Ruddock has apologised for the changes to plans. ""But with only a small number agreeing to leave, the Immigration Department says the remaining refugees are aware that they'll become illegal immigrants at midnight tonight,"" Mr Ruddock said. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Queensland National Party has emphatically ruled out supporting any further sale of Telstra. However, the party's federal MPs are split on the issue. The Queensland National Party has insisted that its federal MPs oppose any plans by the Howard Government to further privatise Telstra. The revolt has come at a central council meeting of 100 party delegates in the central western Queensland town of Longreach. During almost two hours of debate, federal MPs including Senator Ron Boswell, Warren Truss and Paul Neville attempted to head-off the attack on Telstra but it did not work. Dozens of party members including Federal MP Bob Katter and Queensland leader Rob Borbidge vented their anger at Telstra's inability to deliver adequate services to rural and regional areas. Senator Ron Boswell has acknowledged that the Queensland party's stance will cause tension in the Coalition. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Opposition's spokesman on Aboriginal Affairs, Daryl Melham, has vowed that a Labor Government would apologise to indigenous people for the past practice of removing children from their families. Mr Melham was speaking on Channel Nine in response to the government's denial this week that the practice amounted to a stolen generation. He said that the hurt and trauma of any individual removal would have spread throughout the community, and an apology would cost nothing and express empathy. ""We need to send signals, symbols are important,"" Mr Melham said. ""This Prime Minister who adores the flag and adores the Queen knows the importance of symbols. ""There are good people on all sides, there was a revolt in the government party room this week, morality doesn't reside on one side of politics."" Despite being pressed on the issue of mandatory sentencing, Mr Melham refused to specify what action a future Labor government would take to repeal laws the ALP has described as discriminatory. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Police at Wee Waa in the north-west of New South Wales will continue the mass DNA testing of the town's male population today. The tests, which are expected to take until Wednesday to complete, are part of a police investigation into a sexual assault last year. Those aged between 18 and 45 are taking the tests after police psychologists built a possible profile of a man who raped a 93-year-old woman on New Year's day last year. Detective Inspector Paul Mayger says the tests will not be used in wider police investigations into other unsolved crimes and says only those officers linked to the case will access the results. ""The sample will be destroyed once it is eliminated from this inquiry, it will only be used on this inquiry,"" Insp Mayger said. ""The finger print and the photograph have been used purely to maintain the integrity of that DNA sample to ensure there's no mix up, they also will be detroyed at the completion of the inquiry."" ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" An Australian who lost his son and daughter-in-law in last year's Swiss canyoning disaster at Interlaken says he is appalled the company behind the excursions is being allowed to start canyoning trips again. Fourteen Australians were among 21 people who died when they were swept away in a flash flood. Gary Redmond lost his son, Scott Redmond. A search for the body of his daughter-in-law, Alisa Redmond, was called off recently. Mr Redmond says Swiss authorities are still investigating the accident and he is appalled the Adventure World company is being allowed to start up again before the findings are in. ""I'm flabbergasted. I would have thought that, you know, activities of this sort would be suspended,"" he said. ""And whether it's canyoning or whitewater rafting, or any other extreme sport, I just find it immoral."" --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" There have been clashes between demonstrators and police in central Bolivia after the government declared a state of emergency to quash a wave of protests in the city of Cochabamba. The BBC's Jeremy McDermott reports President Hugo Banzer of Bolivia has imposed a state of emergency to protect law and order as protests across the country, the most violent against the hike in water rates, have led to violent confrontation. Cochabamba, the third largest city in this Andean nation of eight million, was the focus of the riots against water work projects that will raise the price of water by up to 35 per cent in one of the poorest countries in South America. Thousands of protesters clashed with riot police hurling rocks and petrol bombs at the security forces, who replied with tear gas and rubber bullets. So far two people have been killed in separate incidents and an unspecified number injured. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Indonesian military claims that United Nations helicopters have illegally crossed the border into West Timor. The chief of the Indonesian Air Force is warning that foreign aircraft will be shot down. Air Marshall Hanaffi Asnan says there is not time to merely protest. The Airforce Commander claims that UN forces have strayed into West Timor on 16 separate occasions. The Indonesian military has now released details of the latest incident, it will not say when the violation occurred but claims that United Nations helicopters were detected on the wrong side of the border near Atambua. Military officials say the helicopters travelled at least one kilometre into Indonesian air space. Indonesia's official government newsagency, Antara, says two UN military liaison officers observed the intrusion. It says the United Nations officers have delivered a formal report to their headquarters in the town of Maliana. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Play has been suspended late in the third round of the US Masters golf tournament at Augusta National, with Fiji's Vijay Singh at 7-under par - the outright leader by three shots. When play was stopped, Singh was on the 15th fairway, along with David Duval who is in outright second at 4-under par. Loren Roberts and Ernie Els are a shot back at 3-under. Tiger Woods and Davis Love both took advantage of the more favourable conditions earlier in the day to post the best scores of the day, each shooting 4-under par 68s to move to 1-under par. Greg Norman fired a 2-under 70 to be 2-over, Craig Parry also finished at 2-over, but Steve Elkington had a 78 for 10 over."

" The Federal Government is considering last minute visa applications this morning which could allow some of the Kosovar Albanian refugees expected to return home this afternoon to remain. The refugees, numbering around 180, have been housed at safe havens in New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania. It is expected they will travel to Melbourne, then catch a flight home this afternoon. The Minister for Immigration, Philip Ruddock, says he will review cases based on new information given to his office. But he says the UNHCR has advised that it is safe for the refugees to go home, so it is appropriate for most of them to return. ""The international community is there [in Kosovo] and an enormous amount of resources are being committed,"" Mr Ruddock said. ""Simply to allow those people who have had generalised assertions that they don't particularly wish to go back to remain would, I think, be totally unreasonable in relation to others - who would be accommodated under our refugee program, who have far greater needs and who have no place to return to and no place to stay."" The Shadow Immigration Minister, Con Sciacca, has accused the federal government of lacking compassion over its decision to send Kosovar Albanian refugees home. ""Technically of course these people did make the contract that they would come here on temporary safe haven that they would return when things were supposed to be better,"" Mr Sciacca said. ""Sometimes I think that the law should be tempered with a bit of compassion. ""Sometimes I wonder if this government has any compassion, whether it be indigenous people, whether it be people receiving some sort of welfare, disabled, refugees, it doesn't matter, they just seem to be very meanspirited. And this is just another example of it."" --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The most senior Bosnian Serb official yet to appear before the War Crimes Tribunal in the Hague has pleaded not guilty to charges of genocide. Momcilo Krajisnik, the former speaker of the Bosnian Serb Parliament, is considered to have been one of the masterminds of the policies of ethnic cleansing. Krajisnik was captured by NATO troops in Bosnia earlier this week. His first appearance before the court was predictably defiant. He pleaded not guilty to charges of genocide, crimes against humanity and breaches of the Geneva convention. Throughout the Bosnian War, Krajisnik was the right-hand man to the Bosnian Serb leader, Radovan Karadzic. Prosecutors consider these tow men to be the masterminds of some of the worst atrocities seen in Europe since the World War II. The case against Krajisnik is said to be something of a dry run for the case that would be made against Karadzic if he is ever caught. Krajisnik is the most senior person yet to appear before the court and the tribunal says his arrest shows that the noose is tightening around those who remain at large. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Indonesia has signed an agreement with the United Nations which could lead to some top military officers and militia leaders standing trial in East Timor. The agreement will allow for the extradition of Indonesians suspected of committing atrocities in East Timor last year, before and after the country's independence vote. UN officials have described the agreement as a genuine joint effort to investigate and prosecute those responsible for last year's violence. Indonesia has pledged to make suspects available to give evidence or assist in investigations carried out by the UN administration in East Timor. The agreement will also allow East Timorese witnesses to be taken under protection to testify against Indonesians facing criminal charges in Indonesian courts. United Nations secretary-general Kofi Annan says Indonesia has taken important steps in meeting its obligations to bring about justice. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Three smokers in the United States have been awarded record compensation totalling almost $22 million. A jury in Florida found that tobacco firms were responsible for causing cancer and other illnesses in the smokers, one of whom has died since the legal action began. The BBC's Rob Watson reports the jury awarded the damages as compensation for the pain and suffering of the smokers and to cover their medical expenses and lost earnings. The awards follow the jury's verdict six months ago, finding the tobacco companies had fraudulently conspired to produce a dangerous and addictive product. But there may well be much worse ahead for the tobacco industry. In the next few weeks, the jury will consider whether similar damages should be awarded to half a million other Florida smokers, which could cost the tobacco companies some $300 billion and the prospect of bankruptcy. But courts around the country have made similar awards before and as yet the tobacco industry has not paid out a cent to individual smokers appealing and winning previous cases. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Police have begun the mass DNA screening of men from Wee Waa in north-western New South Wales. The first tests are taking place at the local police station as part of investigations into the bashing and sexual assault of a 93-year-old local woman. Local MP, Ian Slack Smith, said earlier this week he be the first to submit to the DNA tests and has brought a contingent of local men to kick it off. Thirty police from as far away as Sydney are going door-to-door to ask the town's 600 men to be voluntarily swabbed. The volunteers will be photographed and thumb printed as part of the exercise. Once the man has been eliminated as a suspect, he will be notified his sample has been destroyed. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The United States Attorney-General, Janet Reno, says the Government will move next week to reunite Elian Gonzalez with his Cuban father. A day after Juan Migel Gonzalez arrived in Washington from Havana to reclaim his child, he met with Ms Reno who has told Elian's Miami relatives to be ready to relinquish custody next week. ""The law is very clear,"" Ms Reno said. ""A child who has lost his mother belongs with his sole surviving parent, especially with one who has shared such a close and a continuing relationship with his son."" The Attorney-General says a team of child pyschologists and psychiatrists will meet with the Florida family on Tuesday to determine the smoothest means of transferring custody. Yesterday, lawyers for Elian's Miami relatives announced the end of talks with the government, over their insistence the handover is not negotiable. Six-year-old Elian Gonzalez was rescued from the Florida Straits last November, after his mother drowned during an illegal crossing from Cuba to the United States. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The South African cricket board has reacted angrily to charges of match fixing levelled against the national captain Hansie Cronje and three team-mates. Police in New Delhi have accused the players of fixing the recent one day series against India. Both the South African skipper and the head of the United Cricket Board (UCB) have emphatically rejected the allegations levelled against the four players, describing them as rubbish. ""We are absolutely certain that none of our players have ever been party to this practice,"" UCB chairman Dr Ali Bacher said. Dr Bacher says Hansie Cronje is a man of enormous honesty and integrity but Indian police say the match fixing represents a huge international crime and have also laid charges against two Indians, one living in London. New Dehli police chief KK Paul says authorities are in possession of a tape recording of a conversation between Cronje and one of the Indians allegedly involved in the match fixing. He says those involved allegedly amassed huge sums of money. The South African players have been instructed to make no further comments. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" World number two David Duval is the outright leader at 6-under par after two rounds of the United States Masters golf at Augusta National. Duval shot 65 today to hold a one-stroke lead over Vijay Singh, Ernie Els and Phil Mickelson. Tiger Woods finished at 3-over par. Craig Parry is the best of the Australians at 2-over par, while Greg Norman and Steve Elkington both finished at 4-over par to survive the cut. But Aaron Baddeley finished at 5-over and Stuart Appleby 6-over to both miss the cut. Parry told Channel Nine he played better golf today. ""For me I probably didn't hit it in the right spots yesterday, as much as I did today, and I had a couple of lucky breaks, that was really what it boiled down to,"" Parry said. ""I had three putts yesterday as well, so that made it a bit harder."""

" The historian who coined the term Stolen Generation says the government's claim that only 10 per cent of indigenous children were removed from their families, is based on suspect data. The Australian National University's Dr Peter Read says the figure comes from a study in the Northern Territory seven years ago, which only included people of full Aboriginal descent. He says it is well known that the removal policies targeted children of part-indigenous descent and those with fair complexions. Dr Read says other research indicates about a third of Aboriginal children were forcibly removed. ""We know there [were] 9,000 people in New South Wales that were removed,"" he said. ""It is not difficult to calculate on a pro-rata basis, knowing how many identifying Aboriginal people there were. ""It's not hard to work out how many children, at a very rough level, were removed and so we're looking at something like, according to that extrapolation, maybe 45 to 55 thousand children were removed."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Federal Government has given an undertaking to the High Court that up to 81 Kosovar Albanians will not be forced to leave Australia tomorrow. The High Court is still hearing an application by lawyers for the Kosovar Albanians for an interim injunction to halt their departure. The Kosovar Albanians claim the Minister for Immigration, Philip Ruddock, has not taken into consideration a United Nations report recommending against the repatriation of those who meet certain criteria. The Commonwealth has given an undertaking that 81 of the 259 safe haven refugees will not be forced to leave tomorrow. The court has also been told that a handful of the 81 people have had their safe haven visas extended today on medical grounds. But Chief Justice of the High Court, Murray Gleeson, has said he will need the weekend to consider his decision, which is expected on Monday morning. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Australia's biggest bank has raised its variable home loan rates. The National Australia Bank has now decided how it will pass on this week's 0.25 per cent increase in official rates. The National Australia Bank's pricing committee has met this morning, following Wednesday's adjustment by the Reserve Bank to the cash rate. The National has decided to raise its standard variable home loan rate by 0.25 per cent to 7.55 per cent. However, it is also announced a drop in rates for a number of its fixed rate home loans. The National is the second of the major banks to detail its new rate structure, following an early move on Wednesday by the ANZ. St George Bank announced its changes yesterday. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" A man from Wagga Wagga has begun his lengthy prison sentencing for the murder of three people. Matthew James Harris, 31, has been imprisoned for a total of 40 years including a non-parole period of 25 years. Harris' first victim was Peter Wennerbom, 62, whom he strangled during a robbery in October 1998. Harris then killed Yvonne Ford, 33, a mildly intellectually disabled who was a passenger on the community bus Harris drove. Harris later told police he had no particular reason for strangling Miss Ford, stating ""it could have been her, it could have been anyone, she was just unlucky"". The killer then turned his attention to his neighbour - Ron Galvin, 53, and again strangled him from behind. In sentencing Harris to a non-parole period of 25 years with an additional terms of 15 years, Justice Virginia Bell found Harris became overwhelmingly depressed on his 30th birthday because he had achieved nothing in his life. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Indonesian prosecutors investigating corruption during the Suharto era, plan to make another attempt today to interrogate the former leader. The prosecutors are set to return to the Suharto residence this afternoon. Earlier this week, they attempted to question the former president, but the interrogation was stopped when Mr Suharto suffered heart problems. The 78-year-old is a suspect in the government's corruption inquiry. His lawyers have maintained for several months that he is too ill to be investigated and that he is currently being treated by a team of 24 doctors. The medical specialists say Suharto has difficulty communicating and struggles to remember detail. The former president is accused of misusing millions of dollars in public funds during more than 30 years in power. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" One of the country's oldest pastoral families will have to pay the ANZ Bank $40 million and surrender their nine properties, in the New England district of New South Wales. The Wright family group, headed by Phillip David Wright, has lost an appeal against an earlier ruling favouring the financial institution. As the New South Wales Court of Appeal noted, the 150-year relationship between the ANZ Bank and the Wrights survived droughts, floods, depressions and world wars. However, in 1996 after several years of drought and after the group had borrowed massive amounts to expand its cattle breeding operations, the bank sued the Wrights to recover a $34 million debt and nine mortgaged properties. When the Wrights lost in the New South Wales Supreme Court, the pastoralists continued their fight. The Court of Appeal has today upheld the earlier judgement that the family pay the ANZ $40 million. The judges unanimously rejected the Wrights' claim that the bank gave the family certain assurances to underwrite their expansion plans during a meeting in 1988. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Federal Court in Melbourne has made a significant ruling on the use of email in the workplace. Ansett dismissed union delegate Maria Gencarelli after she sent a strongly worded update on Ansett's handling of enterprise bargaining arrangements, alleging she had breached the company's email guidelines. However, the Australian Services Union argued in the Federal Court that Ansett had contravened freedom of association provisions in section 298k of the Workplace Relations Act of 1996. The Federal Court agreed and ruled Ms Gencarelli was illegally dismissed. Ms Gencarelli is relieved the court has found she was not breaching any workplace conditions. ""I obviously did not do anything wrong. I was merely communicating some enterprise bargain discussions to our fellow members."" The union says the ruling vindicates the use of new technology, such as email, for workers to communicate with each other. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Australian Olympic Committee has criticised swimsuit maker, Speedo, for not releasing all necessary technical information about the company's full-length bodysuits. The legality of the suits during the Olympic trials next month and the Games themselves, has been questioned by committee president John Coates. A decision by the Court of Arbitration for Sport on the issue has been delayed because the technical information has not been forthcoming. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

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" The Prime Minister has denied the Government has manipulated Aboriginal issues as a distraction from other issues such as the Goods and Services Tax (GST) and Telstra privatisation. The Opposition leader Kim Beazley has levelled the accusation at John Howard in the wake of the Government's submission to a Senate Inquiry, which asserted there never was a generation of stolen Aboriginal children. Mr Howard says Mr Beazley's claims are absurd. ""That is about the most ridiculous accusation that has been made against me in months, that we actually set out to generate some of the personal criticism and so forth that's been directed at me and the Government over the last week,"" he said. ""I mean you'd have to be crazy to do that, and we certainly haven't set out to do that."""

" Members of the Stolen Generations have accused the Federal Government of setting up its $63 million reparation program to fail. Revelations that most the money is still unspent have caused bitter recriminations. Aboriginal Affairs Minister John Herron has accused ATSIC - the peak indigenous organisation - of delays in spending the money set aside for the Stolen Generations. ATSIC received $11 million for family reunions, although the largest share, worth $39 million, went to the Federal Health Department for mental health services. But Maurie Ryan from the Northern Territory Stolen Generations Corporation says it is hard to find any services on the ground. He says part of the problem has been the lack of a proper monitoring system, for which he blames the Federal Government. \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*"

" Japan's new Prime Minister says he will be asking his Cabinet members to give back some of their salaries to the Government. Yoshiro Mori says he wants his Cabinet to be as selfless as the one that was led by his predecessor, Keizo Obuchi, who is on life support and in a coma. Mr Mori concluded his first news conference as Japan's Prime Minister with the advice he says his father gave to him: to put other people first, himself second. Presiding over his first Cabinet meeting last night, he asked each member to give 10 per cent of his salary back to the Japanese Treasury. He will be giving back 50 per cent of his own annual bonus as well. He dismissed suggestions that he was about to call an early election, saying that with Japan's economy at a delicate stage it was important to keep the Parliament open. \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*"

" Australia's peak welfare lobby group wants the Federal Government to increase unemployment benefits by $20 a week. The Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) will call for the increase when it responds to the Federal Government's welfare review, in Melbourne today. ACOSS estimates about 20 per cent of unemployed adults in Australia are living below the poverty line. ACOSS president, Michael Raper, says the Federal Government should not force sole parents and people with disabilities to work for the dole, until payments are increased. ""We have very low payments and a very tight system, in fact we actually have it too tight, we keep people in poverty that can't participate and that's our first and foremost problem we have to address,"" he said. \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*"

" Police in the northern New South Wales town of Wee Waa will ask all the town's men to undergo DNA testing this weekend in an attempt to solve a rape case. The mass-testing is an Australian first. On New Year's Day last year, a 93-year-old woman was savagely bashed and sexually assaulted, prompting a widespread police investigation. Officers from Sydney and from the Barwon local area command, based in Moree, will descend on the town this weekend to help take voluntary saliva tests from 600 adult men. Officers will also conduct a doorknock as part of their ongoing investigation. The testing this weekend will be on a voluntary basis. But the New South Wales Government has signalled it will introduce legislation to compel suspects and those convicted of serious crimes to undergo DNA testing. Those samples would go into a databank along with samples collected from crime scenes. \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*"

" Cyclone Vaughan has been upgraded to a severe system. The category three cyclone is moving towards the far north Queensland coast. A cyclone warning has been issued for communities between Cape Melville and Lucinda. It is located 250 kilometres east of Cooktown and 260 kilometres north-east of Cairns. It is expected to move west-south-west with destructive winds developing along the coast this afternoon. Winds are reaching 170 kilometres an hour at the centre of the cyclone, which is expected to cross between Cooktown and Cairns this evening. The cyclone could bring destructive storm surges between Cooktown and Innisfail, with seas likely to rise up to two metres above the normal tide level. A yellow maritime cyclone alert has been issued for Cape Flattery, Cooktown, Port Douglas, Cairns and Innisfail. State Emergency Service groups within the warning area are on standby and the Cairns disaster coordination centre is getting ready to open."

" In Townsville, emergency crews believe a 150-tonne boulder at the top of this week's landslide site has been temporarily secured. The landslide was sparked by strong winds and heavy rain in the aftermath of Cyclone Tessi, which crossed the north Queensland coast on Monday morning. Government and fire crews worked through the night to cement the rock, which is above homes at the base of Castle Hill. There was a danger it could roll if Cyclone Vaughan brings more heavy rain. City engineer Dawson Wilkie says the bulk of the immediate work has been done. \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*"

" The Federal Government is to decide the future of the troubled Collins Class submarine project. The government owns just over 48 per cent of the Australian Submarine Corporation. The rest is in private hands, including a 49 per cent stake owned by overseas interests which have been negotiating a sale with a German submarine company. Industry Minister Nick Minchin says the Commonwealth has called in its option to take control of the corporation, ahead of the foreign partners. Cabinet made the decision this week but the move falls short of a push from South Australia for the Commonwealth to buy out foreign ownership in the company. Senator Minchin says the Federal Government has not ruled out a purchase but is also interested in pursuing a deal already discussed with the German company. ""We're not at all excluding the possibility of the German company, HDW, being a part of the future ownership structure,"" Mr Minchin said. ""It is the biggest conventional submarine manufacturer in the world and they bring a lot of skills and technology and experience to it and would bring future work to the company. ""We want to get into negotiations with them with regard to future ownership structures."" Industry Minister Nick Minchin says the government plans to take its time. ""We might want to acquire that 49 per cent ourselves so we give ourselves now a period of time to decide what we believe is in the best interests of the country and of the company and its operations in Adelaide,"" he said. The South Australian Premier, John Olsen, has welcomed the Commonwealth's decision. Mr Olsen says the move is a win for the submarine corporation's workforce. Federal Shadow Defence Minister Stephen Martin says the decision was inevitable, as the work of the current organisation was due to run out by the end of the year. \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*"

" A taskforce responding to what could be the world's worst outbreak of blue-green algae, in southern Queensland, has been told there is no way to stop the current bloom. It is now covering nearly 40 square kilometres in Moreton Bay, prompting the taskforce to issue a public health warning. Bill Dennison from the University of Queensland's Botany Department says the problem will get worse. ""During this bloom, I don't see a whole lot of potential for stopping the existing spread,"" Dr Dennison said. ""It's happened so fast and it's a real difficult problem logistically to deal with the hundred to thousands of tonnes of lyngbya we have in the bay currently."" Queensland Department of Primary Industries fisheries manager Mike Dredge says the bloom is stopping some commercial fishermen from earning their living. ""We've got pretty clear evidence that in localised areas, the presence of lynbya is severely affecting commercial fishing operations, both by fish avoiding in some areas and also by the physical inability of fishermen to actually work their nets in the areas where it occurs,"" he said. ""This is not just in Moreton Bay, it also occurs in Hervey Bay."" \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*"

" A crocodile has been found in the main street of Katherine. Sergeant Barry Smith says the small reptile is back in the Katherine River after police removed it from Katherine Terrace overnight. ""At about 10 o'clock last night, a freshwater crocodile about a metre long was discovered by one of our local security firms,"" he said. ""A patrol attended and captured the beast near the pedestrian crossing in the main street of Katherine. ""From there, they transported it down under the high-level bridge and released it."" \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*"

" Australian men's hockey coach Terry Walsh has warned his side Olympic places are on the line in the four-nations tournament starting in Sydney today. Australia, South Africa, India and Germany will play in the tournament, which moves from Sydney to Perth next week. Australia plays India tonight at the Olympic Stadium. Walsh says even players like captain Michael Yorke and Jay Stacey - who have played almost 600 games between them - are not safe if they do not perform. ""Jay's just about on the verge of 300 games, which is an incredible feat at international level and Yorkey's been our captaan and played 280 or something or other,"" he said. ""They're right up there but I'll tell you what, if they slip sideways there's a lot of young hungry people who will take their spot."" \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*"

" The Reserve Bank has tightened the screws again. In a move to ward off inflation, it has announced another increase in official interest rates. No major home-lender has yet announced how it will pass on the rise but industry is expressing its disappointment. ""Lending rates now under review"" is the position of the big four banks. The Reserve Bank has nudged up official rates 0.25 percentage points to 5.75 per cent. It sees incipient inflationary pressures and cites factors such as expanding credit, increased speculative activity in asset markets, and a possible push for higher wages. The recent weakness of the Australian dollar is also seen as posing an inflationary risk. Industry has been left apprehensive in the wake of the rate rise. The chief executive of the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Mark Paterson, says more companies are likely to lower output, employment and investment. At the Australian Retailers' Association, Phil Naylor, says the Australian economy is precariously balanced. New South Wales director of the Housing Industry Association, Elizabeth Crouch, says the building industry is already feeling the impact of the previous two rate increases. ------------------------------"

" The Federal Opposition leader, Kim Beazley, has promised Labor support if the Prime Minister moves to overturn mandatory sentencing laws in the Northern Territory. Faced with a threat to cross the floor by three Liberal MPs, Mr Howard has agreed to step up pressure on the Northern Territory Chief Minister to change the laws. Mr Howard has delivered a veiled warning to the Northern Territory to heed Commonwealth concerns over its laws for juveniles, ahead of a planned meeting with NT Chief Minister Denis Burke. Mr Burke has already signalled he is unlikely to repeal the laws but says he is happy to explore better diversionary programs to keep young offenders out of jail. Mr Beazley says Mr Howard has his support if he tackles the difficult path. ""We will be providing him every opportunity to do so. We can assure him of that. He needs to exercise some leadership here,"" Mr Beazley said. Federal Coalition MPs have rallied behind the Prime Minister after a threatened revolt by members concerned about the government's refusal to overturn the Northern Territory laws. Mr Howard allowed limited debate on the bill in Parliament after the threats. North Queensland Liberal Warren Entsch says Mr Howard's leadership has been enhanced by the way he handled the matter in the partyroom. ""[The] Prime Minister put forward a position, as did many of our colleagues and then finally a decision was made by those who had a different view,"" he said. ""There was certainly absolutely no compulsion for them to do it one way or the other. ""I think what it has done in fact from our government point of view, it has enhanced his leadership."" Sydney Liberal MP Bruce Baird says Mr Howard should make the Chief Minister aware the Commonwealth can override the laws. ""He needs to be reminded that his people in the Northern Territory voted to remain a territory, they're not a state, and with that comes certain downsides,"" he said. ""The downside is that people in this place [Federal Parliament] are saying they're not happy in terms of the arrangements they've put in place there in regard to mandatory sentencing, especially for juveniles. ""He needs to recognise that."" ------------------------------"

" Japan's main Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) has elected Yoshiro Mori as its new President, making it almost certain he will be Japan's new Prime Minister. Elected by acclamation in a nationally televised meeting of Liberal Democratic Party MPs, Yoshio Mori will shortly be elected by Japan's Parliament its next Prime Minister. Under Japan's constitution the Emperor is required to appoint as Prime Minister whoever the Parliament selects. The 62-year-old LDP power broker is likely to call a snap election soon. Meanwhile a newsagency report quotes a friend of the present Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi as saying his condition is improving. Although still in hospital in a coma as a result of a stroke, his brain waves are reportedly fine and his hands are moving. ---------------------------------"

" A 31-year-old Perth man is believed to be the first Australian to be jailed for an incident of so-called air rage on an interstate flight. Roy Vincent Santamaria has been sentenced to three years jail after pleading guilty to endangering the safety of an aircraft during a flight from Melbourne to Perth last year. It was the second time Santamaria had caused havoc on a flight, with the District Court hearing he had committed strikingly similar offences for which he received a suspended jail term in 1998. Santamaria had threatened to open the plane door, refused to put his seatbelt on during turbulence and stood up and opened overhead lockers while the aircraft was landing. Civil Aviation Safety Authority officer Peter Boys says the incidence of air rage is on the increase around the world. ""It's been a five fold increase over the past four years,"" he said. ""This incident here in Australia is the tip of the iceberg and has far been the most serious over the past four years. That is the tip of the iceberg and has been increasing,"" Mr Boys said. ------------------------------"

" An American agricultural consultant has painted a grim picture for Australia, if its farmers adopt genetically modified organisms (GMOs). The director of Georgia's Union Agricultural Institute, Hugh Lovel, has written to Prime Minister John Howard calling for a moratorium on the use of genetic manipulation. The Opposition wants an urgent rethink on the environmental impact of GMOs, saying they could cause irreversible damage. Mr Lovel, who will visit Australia in July, says Nobel Prize-winning research indicates some life-forms mutate with each generation and if GMOs are involved, it could be a disaster. ""You may be damaging your ability to survive on the Australian continent by letting genetically modified organisms loose there,"" he said. ""We don't know what the fallout will be with this and it's more like playing with nuclear weapons that have sex and reproduce."" --------------------------------"

" New Australian laser technology being developed in Canberra, could eventually allow households to download feature-length movies within a minute. The Australian National University today officially opened the first laser technology production lab of its kind in Australia. Professor Jim Williams is co-leader of a team that has produced a type of semiconductor laser to speed the rate information can be transferred along optic fibres. Professor Williams says the technology has the potential to bring advanced communications such as videophones into the home. ""The lasers actually help pump the light down that fibre, you need many different colours in order to get a lot of information down and then you need to decode it but this is a crucial step in all of that process that we hope will lead to this information revolution,"" Prof Williams said. ------------------------------"

" Australian amateur golfer Aaron Baddeley has received the hardest draw possible for Thursday's opening round of the US Masters. Baddeley, 19, will play alongside world number one Tiger Woods and in front of what is expected to be the biggest crowd following on day one. Stewart Cink is the other player in the trio. Of the other Australians, Craig Parry is in the early group with Scott Gump and Brandt Jobe, and Stuart Appleby with Loren Roberts and Carlos Franco. Greg Norman and Steve Elkington are in two of the last three groups. Norman will play with Davis Love and Hal Sutton, while Elkington is grouped with David Duval and Jean Van de Velde. -------------------------------"

" Far north Queensland's famous banana man has struck again: Billy Singh has grown what could be Australia's largest bunch of bananas. The bunch was 1.89 metres high and 2.1 metres in circumference. It is been offically weighed, coming in at 127 kilograms after the stalk was trimmed to regulation. It comes from the same paddock where a previous record bunch grew."

" On Lateline at 10.30pm, has political debate in Australia been dumbed down? Go to ""http://www.abc.net.au/lateline/""."

" The Federal Government has begun searching for a compromise to deal with mandatory sentencing and prevent a backbench revolt. The Prime Minister is preparing to meet the Northern Territory Chief Minister, Denis Burke. The two leaders will meet soon to discuss alternatives to mandatory sentencing, such as better diversionary programs to keep young offenders out of jail and measures to tackle the many social and economic forces behind crime. Mr Burke has ruled out repealing mandatory sentencing laws for juveniles. But any compromise measures will have to be tough enough to satisfy Coalition backbenchers who had threatened to cross the floor to override the laws. A federal government committee met for the first time last night to examine what else the government can do to lessen the impact of mandatory sentencing. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The United States' major stock indices have recovered from a dizzying sell-off on Wall Street, ending the day with moderate losses. The Nasdaq plunged as much as 500 points during the session but then rebounded to 4,149 at the closing bell, a loss of 75 points. The nosedive came a day after a record plunge in the Nasdaq linked to a federal judge's ruling in the Microsoft anti-trust case, which sparked a huge sell-off in the tech sector. The Dow Jones Industrial Average - which had held up during yesterday's nosedive - tumbled some 4 per cent before moving off its lows to 11,175 at the bell, a decline of 47 points. Meanwhile, the White House has cautioned against predictions of an economic plunge based on the stock market's freefall. Top US economic advisor Gene Sperling says a close look at the fundamentals shows the US economy is running very strong. ""I think that almost all readings of the economy right now suggest that the basic fundamentals in terms of low unemployment, high percentage of people working, incomes rising above inflation, strong investment, strong projections for growth with low unemployment, almost all major forecasters have if anything improved their forecast over the last couple of months,"" he said."

" The former commander of the International Force in East Timor (Interfet) is on a high-level visit to Washington for briefings on his experiences. Major-General Peter Cosgrove's three-day visit includes meetings with officials from the Pentagon, the State Department and members of Congress. General Cosgrove says while there is still concern about the ongoing situation in East Timor, there is a strong view in the United States that the mission has been a success. ""I think we've made our own judgements,"" he said. ""We were able to do the job we were sent for at a relatively low human cost. ""That's also the judgement here and we're eager to draw out of that any lessons that are pertinent to future operations involving peacekeeping forces."" --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Member for Caldwell, Andrew Theophanous, has asked Parliament's Privileges Committee to examine evidence presented against him in a court case in Victoria. Dr Theophanous has been committed to stand trial on more than 20 charges of immigration fraud. He has pleaded not guilty to the charges. In Parliament, he asked the speaker to consider referring to the privileges committee issues raised in the committal procedings, which he says constitute an unjustified interference in his operation as a Member of Parliament. Dr Theophanous told the house the issues of concern include telephone tapping. ""The question of whether on the basis merely of suspicion and subjective analysis of evidence, bodies such as the NCA [National Crime Authority] are able to comprehensively intercept and record the telephones of Members of Parliament and use that information in whatever way they wish,"" he said. ""In so doing I maintain that they have massively invaded the privacy of people with whom I've been associated."" Speaker Neil Andrew says he is considering the matter. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Medical researchers are reporting increasing rates of a disease closely associated with breast cancer. A study in New South Wales from 1995 to 1997 is the first in the nation to examine ductal carcinoma in situ, known as DCIS. Anne Kricker from the National Breast Cancer Centre says in 1995, DCIS was diagnosed in 140 women aged 50 to 69, with the number rising to 221 two years later. ""We're saying that DCIS is a disease that's becoming more common,"" Dr Kricker said. ""It hasn't been something that many women had in the past and so a general awareness of the need for knowing more about it, knowing more about its pathology features, knowing more about what might be the best treatment is what we're talking about."" Dr Kricker says the range of treatment for DCIS - including breast conservation or removal - needs more debate. ""We would say that we would need greater certainty that masectomy in all cases is the most appropriate surgical treatment,"" she said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Protesters in Miama have broken through police barriers and have formed a human chain outside the house where Cuban shipwreck boy Elian Gonzalez is staying. Some 50 people demonstrating against moves to send the six-year-old back to Cuba are chanting slogans against his forced repatriation. It is the second time in 24 hours that demonstrators have broken through the metal barriers erected to keep them away from the home. Elian has been living there since being rescued from the sea four months ago, when a boat carrying him and his mother sank. The boy is at the centre of a custody battle between his Miami relatives and his Cuban father, whose request to take him home to Cuba is backed by the US Justice Department. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Sydney's Olympic Games organisers (SOCOG) have confirmed that the first batch of Olympic tickets are too large to fit into the turnstiles. The souvenir tickets also do not have bar codes, meaning they will have to be individually checked. The ABC has been told the problem affects three venues, including the main stadium. Opposition leader Kerry Chikarovski does not believe SOCOG will be able to cope with the problem at the time of the Games. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australian Open champion Aaron Baddeley has impressed some of the big names of golf in Augusta. The 19-year-old amateur has played seven practice rounds at the famous course in the lead-up to the US Masters. One of those rounds was alongside three-time Masters champion Nick Faldo, who gave his seal of approval to Baddelely. ""He's pretty impressive for a young lad isn't he,"" Faldo said. Baddeley will play a practice round with raging Masters favourite Tiger Woods later in the week. Baddeley has also earned praise from Australian Stuart Appleby, who says the 19-year-old amateur can only get better. ""He's got a great game,"" he said. ""I don't know a lot about his game, I've seen it but you can't go on first impressions. ""I think there's a lot more potential there in the next 10 years as he gets a little bit more mature definitely."""

" The Federal Opposition has moved to suspend standing orders in the Senate, in an effort to get the lower house to examine its bill on mandatory sentencing. The government has gagged debate of the bill, which supports federal intervention to overturn mandatory sentencing laws in the Northern Territory and Western Australia. Opposition Senate leader John Faulkner says the Senate will continue to stifle government business until the issue is addressed. ""We consider that this is a matter of such importance that if the House [of Representatives] doesn't respond to this message, then I think the Senate needs to look at re-inforcing that message in the days and weeks ahead,"" he said. The government's Senate leader, Robert Hill, says the suspension is nothing more than a political stunt. ""It wasn't long ago the Australian Labor Party was referring to the Senate as `unrepresentative swill', in the terms of the then prime minister, Mr Keating,"" Senator Hill said. ""Of course, as the numbers have changed, Senator Faulkner comes in here and says this unrepresentative swill should be sending messages to the House of Representatives that they should treat matters as urgent."" --------------------------------"

" The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commissioner is accusing the Federal Government of setting up a race-based general election. Geoff Clarke says the denial of any existence of the Stolen Generation by Aboriginal Affairs Minister John Herron is part of a bigger Government agenda. ""If you remember back to the last election, it was conveniently race issues were wheeled out and there is no doubt that there is also, I think, a possibility that that could be the case again at this coming election"". Mr Clarke accuses the Government of not being serious about addressing Aboriginal disadvantage, warning of a varying degree of anger among Aboriginal people. The ATSIC Commissioner has refused to distance himself from forecasts of civil unrest in Australia come the Olympics. He also says it is not inappropriate to liken the removal of Aboriginal children from their families to the Holocaust. Mr Clarke wants the Government to invite to Australia, a United Nations Committee which has criticised the reconciliation process so it can see what is happening here first hand. -----------------------------"

" There has been a small rise in the monthly level of job advertising. The ANZ Bank, which compiles the statistics, is pointing to the subdued underlying trend in its March series. The bank's chief economist, Saul Eslake, says the number of job advertisements in major newspapers was up 0.5 per cent in March. ""That follows a 5 per cent increase in February but it still leaves the number of newspaper job ads 2.8 per cent below the most recent peak in October last year,"" he said. ""The underlying trend is still declining as well."" Mr Eslake says the figures imply actual employment growth of about 18,000 extra positions a month during the next three months. ""That probably will be enough to reduce the unemployment rate to about 6.5 per cent by June,"" he said. -----------------------------------"

" The Australian outback is mourning the passing of one of its most colourful and dedicated characters. One of the founding figures of the Royal Flying Doctor Service, the Reverend Fred McKay, will be sadly missed. Reverend McKay passed away on Friday after a short illness, just two weeks short of his 93rd birthday. The Mackay-born clergyman began his association with the bush as an outback padre, before succeeding the Reverend John Flynn, who founded the Royal Flying Doctor Service in 1928. Described by colleagues as the man who could never say no to someone in need, Fred McKay remained active in the service until his final days, and maintained his long association with the John Flynn Centre in Cloncurry, which he visited annually, and maintained a strong affiliation with Emmanuel College at the University of Queensland, where he studied. A private cremation will be held in Sydney tomorrow, with a thanksgiving service set down for later in the week. --------------------------------"

" Australian cricket captain Steve Waugh has described Justin Langer as the world's leading batsman, after Langer scored a century to help Australia win the third Test against New Zealand. Langer's 122 not out guided Australia to victory by six wickets, giving them a three-nil series win against New Zealand and ten straight Test wins Waugh says Langer was under fire earlier in the summer due to a couple of low scores but has fought back well. ""You look at Langer, he was down and out coming into the Hobart Test and he's come away with four Test centuries, and at the moment he's the best batsman in the world right now, today,"" Waugh said. ""So look, you can achieve anything you want, it's just a matter of whether you want to do the hard work and believe it."" Meanwhile, New Zealand captain Stephen Fleming says his side needs to handle pressure situations better to win close Test matches. Fleming says New Zealand had opportunities to win matches during the series but need to make more of them. ""I dont think fighting hard is the question, we fight to the death but I think there's a period where you must push on, get to the advantage line, [but] then we take a step back,"" he said. ""To win a game you've gotta be able to take it to the advantage line and push on a little bit more."" ---------------------------------"

" On Four Corners at 8.30pm, the human impact of the Northern Territory's mandatory sentencing laws. Join reporter Liz Jackson and producer Lin Buckfield for a live internet discussion at 9.30. Go to ""http://www.abc.net.au/4corners/""."

" Emergency workers in north Queensland are starting to assess the damage from Tropical Cyclone Tessi. The category one cyclone is weakening and remains on the coast between Ingham and Townsville. Power is still out in about half of Townsville and it is expected to remain out for most of the morning. Many powerlines are down over the roads and heavy rain and wind gusts are continuing. Police say it is just too dangerous to venture out. The region's disaster coordination centre has been activated. Early reports of damage include two yachts washed up on the Strand Beach, a building overturned and a large pane of glass which has fallen from one of the city's high-rise buildings. Townsville Hospital is operating on emergency power, with only a skeleton staff and no surgery will take place today. All schools in Townsville, Ingham and the Burdekin have been closed and people are being asked not to travel. ------------------------------"

" There is declining business confidence in the strength of the Australian economy. The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry says its April survey shows a drop of almost two points in the index measuring business expectations of the economy. The survey also reveals businesses are expecting a rise in unemployment and further interest rate increases. The chamber's chief executive, Mark Paterson, says the results are a strong argument against any further interest rate rises. ""As business investment falls as the level of confidence declines, then the expections in relation to unemployment are going to decline as well,"" he said. ""This is not saying that the economy has gone flat or the like, it's certainly continuing to perform well, but it's come off the highs that were there and we don't believe that there's any case for a further movement in relation to interest rates."" ---------------------------------"

" Japanese Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi has been admitted to hospital. The 62-year-old, who has a pacemaker for a heart condition, admited himself yesterday. Chief Cabinet Secretary Mikio Aoki broke the news just before midnight last night that the Prime Minister had spent the previous night in hospital and was about to spend another one. Mr Obuchi admitted himself at 1:00am local time on Sunday, shortly after meeting his political rival, Ichiro Ozawa, who told him he was withdrawing from the three-party governing coalition. The two parties remaining in the coalition still have enough seats to govern in their own right, but the withdrawal was thought likely to harm Mr Obuchi's chances of being relected Prime Minister. When he took on the job 20 months ago with a history of heart trouble and a pacemaker, questions were asked about his health. For the moment, no acting prime minister will be appointed. --------------------------------"

" United Nations officials estimate that more than 100,000 East Timorese refugees still camped in Indonesian West Timor are unlikely to return to their homeland. More than seven months after they fled militia violence after an independence vote, the refugees claim East Timor is unsafe and there is not enough food. More than 150,000 refugees have returned to East Timor but now only a few hundred cross the border from West to East each day. Those who remain behind complain that East Timor is still too dangerous. Pro-Jakarta militia groups are still active in the refugee camps and clearly they and their families could be targets of revenge attacks if they return. But they continue to spread stories of killings and starvation in the East so others will stay. International organisations have tried to counter the claims with evidence of refugees returning safely to their homeland. But officials working for the UN's High Commissioner for Refugees say 70 per cent of those still in camps will remain in West Timor or be resettled elsewhere in Indonesia. -------------------------------"

" Australian Democrats Senator Aden Ridgeway says he has come up with a plan to keep the price of petrol down in regional areas after the goods and services tax (GST) is introduced. He says under the plan, petrol station operators would be reimbursed for transport costs depending on their distance from major cities. Senator Ridgeway says the rebate would be in addition to any cuts in excises in regional areas and may cost up to $200 million. He says he does not believe, as things stand, that prices in regional areas will go down significantly. ""What we need to be focusing on is that disparity,"" he said. ""I think first and foremost that has to be the target, but the second thing is looking at if there's going to be a 10 per cent increase because of [the] GST. ""Somehow you need to contain that and somehow you need to make sure that the government's commitment is met. We think we've got something that's workable and...we're happy to sit down and talk to the government, but obviously the party room still needs to discuss it."" --------------------------------"

" It is in with the ""new"" and out with the ""old"" at the Australian Stock Exchange today. The exchange is changing the way the share market is measured. The All Ordinaries index as it has been measured since 1980 is being scrapped. From today, a range of new benchmarks are in place. The stock exchange's index manager, John Elfverson, says there has been a fairly heated debate to get to this point. ""The outcome of it all was that there's general recognition that a single index can't meet all market requirements,"" he said. The main market price indicator will now be the ASX 500, which will take on the title of All Ordinaries and contain 500 stocks. That is compared to the 249 in the old All Ordinaries as of last Friday. For the professional investment community, there will also be an ASX 300 and an ASX 200 added to the range of indices. --------------------------------"

" The Queensland organisation, Drug Arm, says some parents want to hire sniffer dogs to go through their children's bedrooms to find out what drugs they are using. Executive director Denis Young says some parents feel the problem is so complex, they are getting advice on how to conduct blood or urine tests on their children. He says there is no evidence to suggest random drug testing in either the home or school is effective. ""It may change it or relocate, but it certainly won't address the issue as to why the young person feels the need to use a substance,"" Mr Young said. -------------------------------"

" Australia is on track for a perfect summer with victory likely today in the third test against New Zealand in Hamilton. The tourists resume at 3 for 137, needing just another 73 runs, with Justin Langer on 71 and Steve Waugh, 1. A win will mean a series whitewash against the Kiwis and a 10th straight test victory. Australian keeper Adam Gilchrist says he is thrilled to be part of the record-breaking side. ""I guess the thing that stands out in my mind is that it's just so enjoyable being in this environment,"" he said. ""The team and obviously the success makes it more and more enjoyable to be around."""

" The National Australia Bank has again hit back at critics, saying industry reform may slow if rural access to services dominates political policy. The National's managing director, Frank Cicutto, says branch closures and increased fees are necessary as banks adapt to changes in competition and consumer preferences. He told the Australia-Israel Chamber of Commerce in Melbourne, he would be pleased to work with the Federal Government, other service providers and rural communities, to decide exactly what is required to be socially responsible. ""I'm not disregarding the genuine concerns of those in rural communities,"" Mr Cicutto said. ""What I am suggesting is that the current critisism of service suppliers and threats of re-regulation will simply serve to diminish rather than increase access. ""It may be good politics but it's not a good long-term strategy."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Criminal Lawyers Association has expressed concern about the latest figures showing the Northern Territory still has the highest rate of imprisonment in the country. The Bureau of Statistics figures show 429 people out of every 100,000 adults were sent to jail in the December quarter. The figures also show nearly 70 per cent of inmates in territory jails are Aboriginal. The territory government says the rate of imprisonment is declining and opponents who claim mandatory sentencing is leading to an increase in prisoner numbers are wrong. But the Criminal Lawyers Association's John Lawrence says mandatory sentencing will inevitably lead to more Aboriginal people going to jail for trivial offences. ""What we do know is that 10 years after the recommendations from the deaths in custody commission our prison population is still extraordinarily high, the proportion of that population is 70 per cent Aboriginal which is the same as what it was ten years ago."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Police in Switzerland have called off the search for the body of an Australian woman killed in last year's canyoning disaster. Of the 21 people killed in the canyoning tragedy at Interlaken in Switzerland last year the body of 24-year-old Alisa Redmond is the only one never found. The search for her body was first suspended 10 days after the accident, but another intensive effort was resumed this week. A team of police specialists conducted a search for the body in Lake Brienz, using an underwater camera to a depth of 90 metres. The judge leading the inquiry into the disaster says the search has yielded nothing and has now been called off. Swiss authorities are still investigating 11 people who worked for the Interlarken travel company, Adventure World, on suspicion of negligent homicide. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A new report shows rural women seeking work are seriously disadvantaged in comparison with their urban counterparts. Research undertaken by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission has revealed women in regional cities, towns and rural areas experience higher unemployment rates than those in cities. The Sex Discrimination Commissioner, Susan Halliday, says patterns are similar across regional Australia. ""The stereotypes about women and their roles are still impacting quite significantly on what people are in a position to do, and that there's fewer full time jobs around and that there are higher unemployment rates and higher proportion of women looking for full time work and generally lower average personal incomes."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A man described as instrumental in the Royal Flying Doctor Service, the Very Reverend Dr Fred McKay has died in Sydney, aged 92. Regarded as a successor to the service's founder, John Flynn, Fred McKay took over Mr Flynn's duties heading the Australian Inland Mission and was actively involved in the flying doctor service until his death. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Former premier Jeff Kennett will open a three day national suicide prevention conference in Melbourne this morning. The conference will be addressed by a number of international experts and will examine the growing rate of suicide among young Australians. Figures show that 450 young people in Australia aged between 15 and 24 take their own lives each year. The conference will also consider government strategies to deal with the problem. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Indonesian Government is set to continue delivering aid to refugees in West Timor today after extending its assistance for a further three months. Up to 100,000 people are still living in refugee camps in West Timor. Indonesia had warned it would cut off aid to the camps on March 31 but it now says the deadline will be extended. The decision means refugees will have three more months to decide whether to return to East Timor. They will also be guaranteed the provision of basic services. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has welcomed the announcement. The UNHCR is offering international assistance to ease the burdon on Indonesia. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Queen will spend the last day of her two week tour of Australia visiting the University of Western Australia (UWA) and a bell tower. At UWA she will unveil a commemorative plaque at the opening of the Centre for Medical and Surgical Skills. The Queen will then visit Perth's Barrack Square development, where she will be given a tour of a bell tower, which is under construction. The Duke of Edinburgh's itinerary includes a visit to Fremantle before joining the Queen in a dedication ceremony at the Flame of Remembrance at Kings Park. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A judge is considering the evidence in a Stolen Generations test case before the Federal Court. Justice O'Loughlin today heard final submissions in the case, which began in the Northern Territory. It has cost more than $20 million and involved more than 100 days of evidence. Two Aborigines, Lorna Cubillo and Peter Gunner, are pursuing a claim against the Commonwealth for their forced removal from their families in the 1940's and 50's. They say that their forced removal cost them their language, their cultural identity, their traditions and caused them psychiatric damage. They charge that the Commonwealth failed in its duty of care during the time they were institutionalised at children's homes in the Northern Territory and that they were falsely imprisoned in these homes. The Commonwealth argued that Lorna Cubillo was voluntarily given up by her mother in 1947 and that Peter Gunner was ordered to be kept in another home in 1956 at the request of his mother. The Commonwealth further contended that they did not take the children without due consideration for their circumstances, nor did they abuse their power to remove Aboriginal Children. A decision is not expected for some months. ------------------------------"

" Smokers suffering from tobacco-related diseases have turned to the High Court to seek permission to sue Australia's tobacco industry under a class action. The Federal Court had upheld the tobacco companies' appeal against the claim proceeding as a class action. Six applicants are seeking special leave to appeal against that decision in the High Court. Alex Talay, 49, who is in remission from lung cancer, says he wants to continue the fight for the thousands of Australians who cannot afford to sue tobacco companies on their own. He says no amount of intimidation by the companies will make him back down. ""It has made me much more determined. I mean, six months ago I was still pretty sick and now I have recovered a lot of strength, and it has made me more determined because of what they do,"" Mr Talay said. -------------------------------"

" About 1,000 people have greeted the Queen at Busselton airport in Western Australia's south-west. The Queen arrived to the cheers of over 100 schoolchildren who waited patiently for most of the morning. They sang songs, waved flags and tried to catch the attention of the royal couple. The Queen chatted briefly with wellwishers before being whisked away to a waiting car. After the welcome the royal couple toured the local Aboriginal heritage centre. --------------------------------"

" Australia has dismissed New Zealand for 232 close to stumps on the first day of the third cricket Test in Hamilton. Brett Lee was the main destroyer finishing with 5 for 77, the second five-wicket haul of his career. Glenn McGrath finished with four wickets, while Adam Gilchrist also took five catches behind the stumps. For the Kiwis, Craig McMillan made 79 and Chris Cairns 37."

" Fraud allegations against a Melbourne based army reserve regiment have been the subject of an army investigation. A defence force whistleblower prompted the inquiry. Major Mary Ann Martinek, who left the force earlier this year has alleged the reserve regiment kept the names of 100 former soldiers on the books to maintain funding. Army Chief, Lieutenant General Frank Hickling, ordered an investigation into the allegations about the so-called phantom troops. A defence force spokesman has confirmed that Major Martinek raised a list of grievances. The spokesman says there are checks and balances in place to guard against the practice. It is not clear whether the inquiry has been completed. Meanwhile, Major Martinek says her lawyers have advised her not to make any further comment. ---------------------------------"

" Herron Pharmaceuticals says it will decide next week, when its products will be back on the shelves. The Brisbane company recalled 18 products earlier this month, after an extortionist laced some paracetamol tablets with strychnine, poisoning two people. Herron's chief executive Euan Murdoch says a task force will decide next week when to resume production, after the Therapeutic Goods Administration gave Herron's Brisbane factory the all-clear. ""But that's only one component, you know we have to satisfy Herron's own requirments,"" he said. ""Also we have to satisfy the police and the state department of of health requirements."" ---------------------------------"

" Australia has recorded its second best monthly trade result in more than a year. The February trade deficit has dipped back below $1 billion. The value of imports being shipped into the country has exceeded Australia's exports of goods and services by just $908 million. That is an improvement in the balance of goods and services on the seasonally adjusted $454 million. While imports have risen 2 percent, export receipts have risen 6 percent. Contributing strongly to the resurgence have been cereals, meats, metals (excluding gold), metal ores, machinery and other manufactures. The weak Australian dollar may have helped, as well as better volumes and prices. Raw figures show a jump of 16 percent in exports to Asia last month, notably to Hong Kong, China, South Korea, Indonesia and Japan. The Australian dollar has responded positively to the trade result. It initially jumped one fifth of a cent. Just before midday it was still up one-tenth of a cent at 61.26 US cents. ------------------------------"

" There is a new issue being raised in the debate over the pending deregulation of the dairy industry - suicide. It has been revealed that at least two dairy farmers in New South Wales and others in Tasmania and Victoria have taken their lives in recent months because of their fears about deregulation. The Concerned Dairy Farmers of Australia group says coronial inquests have pointed to the farmers being depressed about how they would repay loans under a reduced income structure being offered through deregulation. Group spokesman Tony Allen of Cobargo says that unless a better compensation offer can be made for the loss of whole milk quota rights, more farmers could also be driven to desperation. ""This is not the type of news that needs to be broadcast I suppose, but there is a reality to what is occurring and it's a situation that the politicians and the industry leaders don't want to see exposed,"" he said. ""But it's there and it's real and it's happening and unfortunately I believe it's only going to get worse."" --------------------------------"

" The southern Queensland city of Maryborough is in shock following a double murder-suicide in a hotel last night. Police believe the gunman knew one of the women he killed. Police are investigating the relationship between the 26-year-old gunman and a female victim. It is believed he entered the Shamrock Hotel armed with two guns following an argument with a 29-year-old woman in the hotel minutes earlier. He shot dead a bar attendant trying to protect the woman and then chased the woman outside, killing her before turning the gun on himself. Police spokesman Eric Meyer says they are in the process of reinterviewing the 15 patrons who witnessed the shooting. ""Any possible witnesses will be spoken to, to put together the circumstances surrounding the shooting. The three bodies will be identified and names will be released later today,"" Mr Meyer said. -------------------------------"

" In cricket, Greg Blewett has been dropped from the Australian side for the third Test against New Zealand which starts tomorrow in Hamilton. Captain Steve Waugh has just named the 12 with Blewett and Michael Kasprowicz the players to miss out. Matthew Hayden has been named in the squad alongside Damien Fleming. ---------------------------------"

" On Australian Story at 8pm, the remarkable story of World War II airman Chris Jarrett, the only survivor of a Lancaster bomber crash. Fifty-five years later he is unexpectedly reunited with the girl he loved and lost in the aftermath of that crash. Join Chris and producer Claire Forster for an internet forum at 8.30pm. Go to ""http://www.abc.net.au/austory/"". And on Lateline at 10.30pm, the Pope, his health and the health of the church he leads. Go to ""http://www.abc.net.au/lateline/""."

" Australian customers officers have upgraded their inspections of goods and tourists from Japan following a suspected outbreak of foot and mounth disease in cattle. The service says given a general lack of understanding amongst the Japanese of Australia's quarantine laws, a high level of surveillance already exists. But Customs spokesman Carson Creagh says it is more than 120 years since foot and mouth disease was in Australia and the service is doing its best to ensure it doesn't return through Japan. ""Passengers and mail items arriving are subjected to an extra level of inspection to ensure that there are no goods that could potentially introduce foot and mouth virus,"" Mr Creagh said. ""It's a very, very small risk but we don't want to take that risk at all, we inspect to make sure that no goods could bring the virus into Australia."" -------------------------------"

" The Federal Government will introduce legislation to crack down on the abuse of privacy on the Internet. Amendments to privacy laws will force website operators who collect personal information online to disclose who is collecting the information and how it will be used and stored. The Attorney-General, Daryl Williams, says some people are still reluctant to do business online because of legitimate concerns about security and privacy. He says the laws will strike a balance between encouraging IT development and protecting the right to privacy. ""You would be obliged to tell people when you collect information the purpose for which you're colecting it,"" Mr Williams said. ""You'd then be obliged to store it so access was denied to people who shouldn't have access, you would not be free to disclose it to anybody else, you couldn't trade that information unless that was a purpose for which the customer had provided it."" --------------------------------"

" Police in the southern Queensland city of Maryborough are continuing their investigations the fatal shooting of three people in a local hotel last night. At about 8.30pm, a 26-year-old man entered the Shamrock Hotel with two guns after an argument with two women. Police say he produced one gun, jumped the counter and shot dead the bar attendant who tried to protect the other woman after a fight. He chased the other woman outside and shot her as she reached steps at the corner of the hotel. He then killed himself. Police have so far not released the name of any of the dead. ---------------------------------"

" The major shareholder in Air New Zealand says it would prefer Singapore Airlines over Qantas, as a strategic partner for the carrier. Qantas and Singapore are competing to buy Brierley Investment's stake in Air New Zealand, with Qantas saying it wants to create a major new regional airline. But Brierley's chief executive Greg Terry has told Asian television, his group believes Singapore is the world's best airline and an excellent partner for Air New Zealand. A Qantas spokesman refused to comment on the report. --------------------------------"

" The Indonesian Government says it may be able to force former president Suharto to face questioning over corruption allegations. Mr Suharto has refused to answer a summons to appear before an inquiry into the allegations. Former president Suharto is scheduled to be questioned today but his lawyers say he will not appear due to poor health. They maintain the 78-year-old requires help to communicate and struggles to remember detail. It is the second time Mr Suharto has failed to comply with the summons. His legal team says prosecutors are welcome to hold discussions with him only at his home. The government says for the time being it will let the issue be. But Attorney-General Mazuki Darusman says theoretically and legally, the former president could be forced to appear. --------------------------------"

" The New South Wales Attorney-General says he does not intend to get involved in the row over the prospective release of the man convicted of conspiring to murder Donald Mackay. Mr Mackay, who was an anti-drugs campaigner in the Griffith area, was killed in 1977. His body has never been found. James Bazley is currently serving time in a Victorian jail for the crime and the murder of two other people. He is scheduled to be paroled in February next year. Christian Democratic Party leader, the Reverend Fred Nile says Attorney-General, Jeff Shaw, must intervene to stop his release. But Mr Shaw says it is a matter for Victoria's corrections and justice system. -------------------------------"

" A group of five Aboriginal traditional owners will greet the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh at Alice Springs airport this afternoon. It will be the second time senior Arrendte woman Rosie Furber has met the Queen, but this time it is as a recognised native title holder of Alice Springs, following last year's historic Federal Court ruling in favour of Arrendte claimants. Ms Furber says the visit is an opportunity to show how Aboriginal people are taking responsibility for issues like bilingual education. ""I speak good English but I'm going to greet the Queen in my own language to get the message across to the whole world that we too need funding and we too need two-way schools in Alice Springs."" -------------------------------"

" Swimming great Dawn Fraser has supported the use of the neck to ankle suits now popular among some Olympic hopefuls. Ian Thorpe, Susie O'Neill and Grant Hackett are backing the suits but others including Kieran Perkins oppose them and are concerned that the suits are not available to everyone. The Australian Olympic Committee (AOC) has asked the Court of Arbitration for Sport to decide if the suits are legal. Dawn Fraser sees nothing wrong in the full length suits. ""I do believe from talking to Klim and Thorpe that the swim suit is an advantage it makes them mentally feel good,"" Fraser said. ""Physically it doesn't help them but mentally it makes them feel good and whatever you can do in a 100 metres race to mentally be prepared to win the race of your life you have to take that - that's what it is."""

" Relief from high petrol prices is finally in sight for motorists. At a meeting today in the Austrian capital, Vienna, nine of the 11 members of the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) decided to lift production levels starting this weekend. With the cost of oil at its highest level in almost a decade, the pressure on these OPEC ministers to cut prices was intense. The current situation stems from their decision last year to cut petroleum production, a move which had a dramatic effect. The cost of oil went from around $10 to $30 a barrel. It sparked fears in Western countries of inflation. As a result, those countries led by the United States have campaigned vigorously in recent weeks to persuade OPEC to increase production and ease pressure on consumers. These calls appear to have been heard. OPEC ministers have announced a plan to boost output by around seven percent. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Australian Nursing Federation in Western Australia says deregulation of the nursing home industry in Australia has been ""a disaster"". The claim coincides with the release of a survey of registered nurses in WA's 130 nursing homes. The survey report tells of incident in which a body was left in a room while residents ate meals there, inadequate attention to medication, and bed linen being changed only when it looks dirty. The Nursing Federation's Mark Olsen says deregulation of the industry has resulted in an unhealthy focus on documentation to maximise profits. ""If your resident is classified as RCS1, as opposed to RCS5, you get a higher subsidy from the government, which is why the documentation, the focus, has become on documentation, because the government does audits. ""I find it fascinating. They do regular audits of the documentation, and yet the department is hard pressed to do actual audits of the care that is, or is not being provided,"" Mr Olsen said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A new report has found that the suicide rate for young Australians has risen markedly over the past three decades. The Australian Bureau of Statistics has released long-range data on suicide from the year 1921 to 1998. The biggest increase was in the 15 to 24 age group, where it is now found that 27 per cent of young men who die have taken their own lives. Married people are less likely to die from suicide, with unmarried and divorced people more likely. People from rural areas have the highest rate of suicide, with up to 17 people per 100,000 taking their own lives. Meanwhile, suicide rates in South Australia are among the highest in the country. In 1998, the Northern Territory recorded the highest suicide rate of 21 per 100,000 people, this was followed by South Australia and Queensland which recorded 16 per 100,000 people. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Fifteen people have been taken to hospital at Orange in New South Wales' central west, following a fire at the Cadia gold mine, near the city. The cause of the blaze, which occured sometime before 9:00am AEST is not known. About half a dozen people were treated at the scene for shortness of breath due to inhalation of a foreign substance. It is believed there was a gas leak. The mine operator, Newcrest is so far refusing to comment on the incident, except to say it was ""minor"". -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A senior Aboriginal woman, who will meet the Queen tomorrow on her visit to Alice Springs, says Australia is not ready to become a republic. Margaret Mary Turner is among eight Arrendte women selected to welcome the Queen at an official reception at the Desert Park, during the Royal couple's three-hour visit to the centre. Ms Turner says many Aboriginal people favour retaining Australia's status as a constitutional monarchy because it has not resolved its indigenous issues sufficiently to stand alone. ""For Aboriginal people to stand alone for them in their own culture is very strong because we can control our culture, but our culture and another culture standing, it does not make it strong,"" Ms Turner said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Swimming champion Susie O'Neill says she is on course to break a world butterfly record, with or without the new ""Fastskin"" swimsuit. The controversial suits are being distributed to swim teams around the world, and will be available to all Australian swimmers at the Olympic trials. Susie O'Neill says her main aim is to break the world 200 metres butterfly record, but there is a dilemma with wearing the new suit. ""That is my biggest problem should I wear it or should not I wear it? I have been training really well so if I put the suit on and break the world record everyone is probably going to think it is the suit. ""So that is another thing I have got to do is determine whether I will wear it or not, but if everyone is wearing them I might get beaten if I don't,"" O'Neill said."

" World 1500 metres freestyle champion Grant Hackett says he will not wear the controversial neck-to-ankle swimsuit if there is any chance that it will be challenged at the Olympics. Hackett wore the suit for the first time on the Gold Coast last weekend, winning the 400 metres freestyle. The Court of Arbitration for Sport is yet to rule whether the suit is legal. Hackett says while there is doubt, he will not even wear it at the Olympic trials. ""I do not want to risk any chance of being disqualified at the Olympics or even at the Olympic trials. ""This year is definitely a big year and controversy's one of those things that comes along when such big things like this are happening and if there is any, if there is five, ten percent, you know, doubt in the suit and there is a chance of disqualification if one of your rivals does not wear the suit and they put a bit of a protest in it is not going to be worth it,"" Hackett said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Ministers from the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries OPEC (OPEC) have ended a meeting in Vienna without reaching an agreement on increasing oil output. Iranian opposition is said to be the main stumbling block. Despite a second day of frantic lobbying and intense negotiation OPEC ministers have failed once again to reach a consensus. Some member states, led by Saudi Arabia, are pushing for an increase in production of 1.7 million barrels a day - a move that may help stabilise the world oil price. Since OPEC curtailed production by the same amount last year the price of oil has almost tripled. Petrol prices have increased around the world as a result. The US has been pushing hard for a significant boost to production. But some countries, most notably Iran, resent the American pressure and also fear an increase in production will see the oil price tumble. Meanwhile, the United States Defence Secretary, William Cohen, will urge Gulf producers to push oil prices lower through increased oil production during a visit to the Middle East next week. ""The secretary will be expressing our national view, which is we want them to increase oil production, which should lead to a decrease in oil prices,"" Pentagon spokesman Kenneth Bacon said. Mr Cohen's message will be ""that it's time for OPEC to increase its production"", he said. Mr Bacon gave no details on Mr Cohen's trip to the Middle East except to say that he would be travelling to the region next week. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Government says there could be opportunities for Australian beef exporters because of a suspected outbreak of foot and mouth disease in Japan. Some Australian beef producers say the suspected outbreak will discourage Japanese consumers from importing any beef for fear it may also be contaminated. Samples from black wagyu cattle in Japan's Miyazaki prefecture, south-east of Nagasaki, have been sent to Britain for testing. But the Federal Agriculture Minister, Warren Truss, says it may still be a false alarm. ""There are often false alarms on these sorts of issues,"" Mr Truss said. ""But if it's confirmed then I'm sure that the Australian beef industry will be to the forefront in reassuring Japanese consumers that Australian beef is safe and would be a very attractive option."" Meanwhile, Australian beef producers are being told that they have an ideal opportunity to increase exports to Japan. Bob McLeod from the National Meat Association, which represents export abattoirs and retailers, says Australian beef producers should not be worried that Japanese consumers will turn away from their product. ""We'd be wrong if we go into our shell and say that we've got to put up all shutters and say 'oh this will be a disaster for Australian exports',"" Mr McLeod said. ""I think in the reverse it offers us an opportunity to show Japan and the rest of the world that we are free of foot and mouth that we are a clean, green supplier of a very good product."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Prime Minister, John Howard, has moved to reassure Australians that his government is not about to cut welfare spending. An interim report to the government has recommended a major overhaul of the $50 billion a year social security system. The report suggests expanding the principle of mutual obligation to other welfare recipients, including sole parents and people on disability pensions. It also examines the possibility of combining separate welfare payments into a new Participation Support Payment. Welfare groups have broadly welcomed the report although some have warned it could take up to 10 years to implement, as well as costing hundreds of millions of dollars. Mr Howard has told Channel Nine his government will not turn its back on the needy. ""We will continue to provide a strong social security safety net,"" Mr Howard said. ""All we have is an interim report, it's a recommendation to the government, it's not a government decision. ""We'll get the report, then we'll announce our responses but we have to be courageous enough as a community to make sure our welfare system is modern and contemporary. ""You're balancing two things, people want the needy looked after but they don't want an explosion in welfare."" Meanwhile, welfare groups have broadly accepted the thrust of the report although some warn it could be up to 10 years before the reforms can be implemented. The president of the Australian Council of Social Service, Michael Raper, says the government will need to spend money to reap the benefit of any big change to the system. ""There's a lot of money in it and of course a foundation point, a fundamental point is an adequate payment level in the first place which is going to require a couple of hundred million dollars,"" Mr Raper said. ""If you actually do invest in this way there is the chance that this will result in less people having to be on the social security system because they're able to gain social participation from the extra income and from the extra support."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The needs of regional Australia will be on the national agenda today with federal, state, territory and local government leaders meeting in Canberra. They will discuss the recommendations from last year's Regional Australia Summit which discussed all the major issues affecting regional development including infrastructure, investment and services. Delegates identified duplication and a lack of coordination between the three levels of government as a hindrance to greater prosperity in the country and service delivery as the most critical issue for government. The Federal Minister for Regional Services, John Anderson, says he wants to confront the problem, with cooperation at all levels to streamline the delivery of services. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A 40-year-old Australian woman has died in Thailand, the third Australian to die in the country in as many days. Thai police were called to an apartment block near the Australian Embassy in Bangkok where they found the body of Jennifer Maria Lipman. Police say syringes were found in the apartment, they believe she died from a suspected drug overdose. Earlier this week in southern Thailand, the body of a 32-year-old man was discovered on the beach at the popular resort island of Koh Phangan. Heroin was discovered in clothing on the body of Michael Turner. And an investigation into the cause of death of 26-year-old Andrew Duncan Noble from Sydney is continuing. His body was discovered in a guest house in a popular tourist district of Bangkok on Monday. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A fourth mass grave has been discovered in Uganda on a property linked to the religious cult, the Movement for the Restoration of the 10 Commandments of God. Police are searching other properties belonging to the sect. The latest discovery brings to more than 550 the number of cult members killed in their leader's apocalyptic final days. The bodies have been found at a house owned by one of the sect's spiritual leaders. At least 28 corpses have been exhumed. It follows yesterday's discovery of 70 bodies at another property and 153 found last Friday. Ugandan police are still searching for the cult leaders, there is no clear evidence that they perished in the fire that killed at least 300 of their followers in the town of Kunungu 10 days ago. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A report into NASA's failed missions to Mars has found significant flaws in the work of the space agencies Jet Propulsion Laboratory and American aerospace industries. The report studied three lost missions including last year's Mars Polar Lander. Investigators say inadequate funding and supervision played a key role in the loss of the Mars Polar Lander, the Mars Climate Orbitor and Deep Space Two. In a 60-page report the Mars program's independent assessment team found significant errors in the execution of the program were evident. Nasa's Ed Weiler says plans for a 2001 Mars Lander have been cancelled. The report found the Polar Lander most likely crashed into Mars' surface late last year after its engines prematurely shut down. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australia's Pat Rafter has been knocked out of the Masters tennis tournament in Florida after losing to world number one Andre Agassi in straight sets. Agassi won the match 6-4, 6-4. However, Lleyton Hewitt is through to the quarter-finals following his straight sets win against Russian Yevgeny Kafelnikov."

" The Federal Government has been told a major overhaul of Australia's welfare system is urgently needed. The principle of mutual obligation is likely to be extended. With at least one in seven adult Australians relying on welfare for most of their income the government has been told big changes are needed. A reference committee, set up by the government last year, says the social support system has not kept pace with significant economic and social changes. On mutual obligation the discussion paper says welfare recipients should be expected to make the most of opportunities provided by the government, business and the community. It says as a last resort sanctions should be applied if recipients do not participate. The committee says now is the time to start changing the welfare system but it warns extra funding may initially be needed. The chairman of the reference group, Patrick McClure, says changes to the system will take time. ""It's going to be a long journey,"" he said. ""It's not a quick fix and so it will take time but we believe this is a good time to start with the strong economic growth but I would stress that it will take a number of years to implement."" ---------------------------------"

" The Prime Minister is still refusing to outline how the government will ensure petrol prices do not rise under the goods and services tax (GST). It has been suggested the government is planning a fuel rebate scheme to ensure prices do not rise dramatically in regional areas. A recent survey found the rising cost of petrol is of great concern to many Australians. Mr Howard said a decision will not be made for several months. ""I can very confidently say that the aggregate price of fuel after the first of July will be lower than what it would otherwise have been,"" he said. ""We're very conscious of the commitment we made."" ---------------------------------"

" The former prime minister Paul Keating says the Queen would not have worried if John Howard touched her at a function yesterday. Mr Howard has brushed off questions about whether he breached protocol by touching the Queen during a special reception at Parliament House. Mr Howard was seen with his arm around the Queen's back, but will not reveal whether he touched her. Mr Keating was attacked by the British media for touching the Queen during her last visit to Australia in 1992, but he has told Sydney radio station 2UE, the Queen has a relaxed attitude about such matters. ""She said to me at the time 'don't take any notice of those papers', that's what she said to me, you know, when they had me as a sort of...'hands orf cobber', and 'lizard of oz' and all that stuff,"" he said. ""I rather liked the Queen, I think she liked me. ""She used to always sit me next to her on the Britannia, and we used to have a yarn about the silver on the table and I'd tell her a few jokes, and she said to Robert Fellowes her private secretary, 'I think the Prime Minister's trying to get off with my silver', and I said to her, 'the papers think I'm trying to get off with you.'"" --------------------------------"

" Australian carrier Qantas says it is not commenting on the withdrawal from sale of a significant stake in Air New Zealand. Confirmation that Qantas is interested in its trans-Tasman rival yesterday caught the imagination of markets and regulators. The focus of attention is a 47 per cent stake in Air New Zealand held by Brierley Investments. Qantas yesterday confirmed it had been talking to Brierly about a sale, but refused to clarify whether that included the 30 per cent portion that is subject to restrictions on foreign ownership. Today, Brierley said it was also talking to Singapore Airlines and has received other expressions of interest besides. But in order to let Air New Zealand bed down last month's purchase of the rest of Ansett, Brierley says it has withdrawn its stake from sale. Qantas will not comment on the latest twist, and its shares are currently up one cent on the Australian share market at $3.66. -----------------------------"

" Australian business tycoon Kerry Packer is bidding for inclusion in India's rapidly expanding information technology (IT) market. Mr Packer has announced the creation of a venture capital fund worth almost $400 million. His new venture capital fund KVP Ventures will be created with equal contributions from an Indian stockbroker, as well as the head of an Indian telecommunications firm. Mr Packer's contribution to the three-way fund will be in his personal capacity, to circumvent Indian regulations banning investments by foreign media companies. He says the venture will fund and promote start-ups in IT, adding that India will be the growth area of the future. ---------------------------------"

" Public health screening programs are being hailed a success, following a new report into cancer rates in Queensland. The report, which studied trends between 1982 and 1996, found a 30 per cent decrease in rates of cervical cancer and mortality rates for breast cancer have also fallen 2 per cent. Health Minister Wendy Edmond says early detection programs mean cancers are being caught early and treatment is more successful. But she says smoking continues to cause concern. ""The rate of men dying from lung cancer has dropped from 64 per 100,000 down in 1982 to 52, but at the same time the rate for women has climbed and that's a really worrying sign,"" she said. ----------------------------------"

" A Mount Isa girl has 18 stitches after what is described as a highly unusual attack by a metre-long freshwater crocodile on Sunday. Dominique Larkin, aged seven, was swimming in a rock pool below the spillway at Lake Moondarra, near Mount Isa on Sunday when the crocodile bit her arm. Mike Griinke of the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service says there has been another sighting of the crocodile, but his officers have not been able to find it yet. He says freshwater crocs are normally timid. ""At this time of year as the water holes start to dry out, there is less room for crocodiles to manoeuvre,"" Mr Griinke said. ""If people stand on them they may lash out and just with this one actually biting the young girl yesterday, it's completely unusual for them."" --------------------------------"

" New Zealand has made two changes to its team ahead of the third and final cricket Test against Australia in Hamilton, which starts on Friday. Spinner Daniel Vettori has been ruled out with a stress fracture of the back and Simon Doull has been dropped, replaced by Northern Districts pair Bruce Martin and Darryl Tuffey. Australia leads the series 2-0."

" OPEC oil ministers have been meeting in Vienna to decide whether or not to increase global oil production. The first day of talks has ended without any result. After a year of dramatic oil price rises brought about by a previous decision to restrict global oil supplies, OPEC countries are now under intense pressure to bring some relief to consumers and increase the supply. The US wants an increase of more than 2.5 billion barrels a day. But even after weeks of intense diplomatic pressure, friendly OPEC states like Saudi Arabia have only indicated support for a 1.7 million barrel increase. Others, like Iran and Libya, believe such a large increase will see oil prices slump again and are looking for a much smaller boost in production. Analysts expect the meeting will agree to an increase to somewhere between one to 1.5 million barrels a day. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Russia's newly-elected President Vladimir Putin has been basking in his outright victory in Sunday's elections. The world is now waiting to see where Mr Putin, who is yet to announce his Cabinet, intends to lead the country. Having secured the simple majority required to win the election outright, Mr Putin also delayed any decisions on a new government or policies until after his inauguration, scheduled for May 5. Russians are anxious to see how he will fulfil promises to alleviate poverty and restore national pride. The world is equally anxious to see the foreign policy implications of a Russian President with a clear authoritarian streak. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Israel's Prime Minister Ehud Barak says the door to further peace talks with Syria remains open despite the apparent failure of a US brokered push to resume negotiations. But Israel's government has now turned its attention to other diplomatic priorities. Despite Mr Barak's comments that the Syrian peace deal is not extinguished, his Cabinet ministers have made it clear that the failed Geneva summit between US President Bill Clinton and his Syrian counterpart Hafez al Assad means a switch in Israeli policy. The focus is now returning to negotiating a final treaty with Palestinian authorities and plans for withdrawing Israel's troops occupying south Lebanon. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A third mass grave, linked to a Ugandan doomsday cult and thought to contain as many as 70 bodies, has been found in the south-west of the country. The grave is located in a house thought to belong to one of the leaders of the Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments of God. Police have brought in prisoners from a nearby jail to exhume the bodies - which are being briefly examined and then reburied in another pit nearby. Police scientists say it appears that many of the victims have been either stabbed or suffocated. The latest find brings to more than 500 the number of cult members known to have been murdered or committed suicide. Last Friday, 153 bodies were found in a series of mass graves at a compound linked to the cult. That discovery came a week after a fire in a school room claimed the lives of as many as 300 cult members. Authorities are continuing the search of properties linked to the sect. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Ansett workers hope enterprise bargaining discussions will begin as soon as possible to avoid any further industrial action. Cargo and ticketing workers walked off the job yesterday, disrupting flights across the country. And it could be a sign of things to come, with union members across the country voting unanimously for further industrial action if management does not come to the table and agree to union members' latest proposal. The Australian Services Union spokesman Ted Tamplin says discussions along these lines must occur before March 31 or Australian passengers can expect more strike action. ""It's a two-way street and we want the company to sit down so we can reach some sort of agreement,"" he said. He says the union has not yet received an official response from Ansett management. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Adelaide's two Mitsubishi car plants have a new landlord today. The giant German-US firm DaimlerChrysler now owns just over one-third of Mitsubishi, enough to give it control over the company's decisions. The deal makes DaimlerChrysler the world's third biggest car-maker, behind only Ford and General Motors. DaimlerChrysler is to get one third of the seats at the Mitsubishi board table, plus the right to veto its major decisions. Daimler's chief executive Jurgen Schrempp says although the Mitsubishi brand name will continue, he will want the two firms to work closely together. ""Here we have a partner with tremendous expertise, we have a facility which is extremely good,"" he said. It will be a return to Adelaide for the Chrysler arm of DaimlerChrysler. It operated the plants at Tonsley Park and Lonsdale for more than 30 years before selling them to Mitsubishi at the end of the 1970s. Meanwhile, the new controlling shareholder in Mitsubishi says it can give no guarantees about the future of its existing plants and workforce. Mr Schrempp says he is particularly excited by Mitsubishi's presence in Asia. However, when pressed to give guarantees about the continued employment of existing Mitsubishi staff in the Asia-Pacific or the continued use of its existing plants, Mr Schrempp said he did not want to be specific. Mitsubishi is one of South Australia's most important companies, employing more than 4,000 car workers at its two plants. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Queen heads to Tasmania today as she enters the final stage of her Australian visit. The Royal couple is about to begin the most extensive leg of their Australian tour, a swing across the continent that will take them from Hobart to Perth via Alice Springs. The Queen arrives in Hobart this afternoon to begin a two-day Tasmanian visit, her first stop a public reception in historic Salamanca Place. Later, the monarch will visit one of Australia's biggest export success stories, the Incat Catamaran building company, before attending a state dinner at Government House. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australia's record winning streak may save out of form opening batsman Greg Blewett from being dropped for this week's third Test against New Zealand in Hamilton. Blewett has struggled in the first two Tests, but Australian captain Steve Waugh says he is reluctant to change a winning team. New Zealand captain Stephen Fleming says he has faith in his team's ability to match the Australians. ""We're close with what we have and obviously we need to up the ante a little bit, but there are some good signs there and the last Test is very important to us,"" he said. Meanwhile, Waugh says his team is now aiming to break the West Indies' world record of 11 consecutive Test wins. Waugh's team set a new Australian record yesterday of nine successive wins when it beat New Zealand by six wickets in Wellington. Waugh says if his side can win the third Test in Hamilton, next summer's home series against the West Indies will be interesting. ""I'd love to have a crack at the West Indies...and try and beat their record,"" he said. ""[We have] had many tough times against those guys over the years and it would be very pleasing to break the record against the West Indies."""

" Australia's peak motoring organisation has warned the government it risks a major backlash from the bush over the impact of the goods and services tax (GST). New research for the Australian Automobile Association has found that rising petrol prices are of major concern to people living in the outer suburbs and regional areas. The government is already looking at ways of ensuring that already high petrol prices do not rise further under the GST. The executive director of the Autombile Association, Lachlan McIntosh, says it is a sensitive issue for the government. ""Well I think petrol is such a very major issue for everyone because everyone has to buy it every week, every day of their life for the very basic things they do,"" he said. ""And so when the GST comes along, that's confusing anyway, but I guess it's an acceptable activity. ""What isn't known yet is how the government will meet its promise on making sure that petrol doesn't rise as a result of the GST."" ---------------------------------"

" Australia's maritime commander says the Navy is working hard to stamp out misconduct in the force. The Navy is to conduct a disciplinary hearing with a sailor aboard the frigate HMAS Newcastle. Six other sailors have already been found guilty over an incident last month, when a 27-year-old able seaman fell overboard as the ship was returning to Sydney from East Timor. An audit of management has since seen the second-in-charge of the ship reassigned to shore duties. Rear Admiral David Lord says he does not believe misconduct is widespread in the force. ""I'm always embarrassed when groups of our sailors act stupidly, and they don't just embarrass me they embarrass all of us in the navy,"" he said. ""I think we all feel that and we're trying to stamp out this type of behaviour as much as...[we] can in a big organisation."" ---------------------------------"

" A leading defence strategist has warned Australia could soon be propping up New Zealand's defence force. The director of the Centre for Strategic Studies in Wellington, Dr David Dickens, says his country is considering dismantling its combat air force. He says New Zealand will be reliant on Australia for security if defence spending is cut further. ""New Zealand has gone from having a plan for a first-class defence force with a modernised navy, army and airforce, not withstanding the fact that it was being a bit slow on the question of modernising the third frigate, to a state where we have ruled out having a third frigate,"" he said. ""We've ruled out modernising the strike wing of the airforce and we may even get rid of the strike wing of the airforce, so this will take New Zealand from having a world-class defence force to a Third World defence force."" ---------------------------------"

" The Packer family is looking to create a new investment company. It is planning to restructure the FXF Trust, which holds a 15 per cent stake in publishing group, John Fairfax. The new entity would be renamed CPH Investment Corporation and have a bigger capital base and a broader investment strategy. Approval for the scheme will be sought from unit holders at a general meeting in May. A capital raising of up to $760 million is planned, part of which would be invested in a new subsidiary jointly owned with the Packers' private company, Consolidated Press Holdings. The subsidiary would pursue business to business electronic commerce opportunities and would eventually be listed on the stock exchange. --------------------------------"

" Australia's Karrie Webb has won the first major of the LPGA season at Dinah Shores in California. Webb carded a 2-under 70 to win the second major of her career on 14-under, a massive 10 shots ahead of defending champion Dottie Pepper of the United States. It is the Queenslander's fifth tournament win in six starts. Meanwhile, play has been abandoned at the US Players Championship in Florida because of a thunderstorm. Play will resume tomorrow with American Hal Sutton on 10-under with eight holes to play, leading by three shots from Tiger Woods. -------------------------------"

" On Four Corners at 8.30pm, NATO at war. A special report from the BBC. Go to ""http://www.abc.net.au/4corners/""."

" Pope John Paul has left Israel ending his week-long pilgrimage to the Holy Land. The final day presented the trip's spiritual climax and more reminders of the political wrangling that has dogged the visit. During the Pope's visit to Haram ash Sharif, or the Temple Mount, Jerusalem's senior Muslim clerk, the Grand Mufti, demanded his support for an end to Israeli occupation of East Jerusalem. Later, Israeli security forces arrested several Jewish protesters as the Pope visited the most sacred site in Judaism, the Western Wall. There the Pope left a printed message, a prayer repeating the Vatican's call for forgiveness for Christian persecution of Jews. His final act, which he described as intensely emotional, included two visits to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, revered as the site of Jesus' death and entombment. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Talks between US President Bill Clinton and Syria's President Hafez Assad, the first in almost six-years, have ended in Geneva with no sign of a breakthrough. President Clinton had hoped to break the deadlock between Israel and Syria over the Golan Heights. The talks broke up with a US statement there was still much work to be done and no way of predicting how it would all end. Though both sides had played down the chances of a breakthrough before the meeting, the US was encouraged by the fact that the Syrian leader had travelled to Geneva at all because of his poor health. President Clinton is now on his way home to Washington with no positive outcome. Syria wants Israel to return all of the Golan Heights, but the two sides have been unable to agree on a formula. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The second-in-command of the Australian frigate HMAS Newcastle has been confined to shore duties. The order follows an inquiry into an incident as the ship was returning from East Timor earlier this year. The naval management audit of HMAS Newcastle was instigated after a 27-year-old female sailor, dressed in only her underwear and a T-shirt, fell into the sea. Her drunken colleagues had been dangling her over the ship's rails, but let go of her. She was rescued 12 minutes later. A naval spokesman has confirmed that the frigate's second-in-command, a lieutenant commander, has been reassigned to shore. The ship's commanding officer, Peter Naughton, will remain in control of the ship. Other command and control concerns were raised during the audit. The Navy's maritime commander, Rear Admiral John Lord, is said to be unhappy with some of the findings. A copy of the report has gone to the chief of the Navy and an overview is to be sent to Defence Minister John Moore. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" South-East Asian nations have agreed to adopt an early warning system to prevent a recurrence of 1997's economic crisis. The system would concentrate on monitoring the flow of capital in the region. It was the sudden and massive outflow of short-term capital from South-East Asian nations which was blamed for triggering 1997's economic crisis. A meeting of the Association of South-East Asian Nations' (ASEAN) finance ministers in Brunei on the weekend saw member states agree on the concept of a regional monitoring system to keep an eye on any sudden shifts in capital flows. There was also consensus for the idea of establishing a form of Asian monitoring fund, focused on regional support. A joint statement produced by the ASEAN meeting claimed that South-East Asia's economy had grown by 4.4 per cent last year and predicted regional growth of 4.5 per cent in 2000. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh will attend functions in Canberra today. The Royal couple yesterday attended a service at Canberra's oldest church. Today, the Queen will inspect the site of the National Museum of Australia and open the first temporary exhibition. Later, she will open the Hall of Memory at the Australian War Memorial and attend a reception hosted by the Prime Minister at Parliament House. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Two Australian-based actors are among the hopefuls as the annual Academy Awards are announced in Hollywood today. Fans, media and the film industry have converged on Hollywood for the awards, which are expected to be seen by about one billion viewers around the world. Favourite for Best Picture is <i>American Beauty</i>, its toughest competition coming from <i>The Cider House Rules</i>. New Zealand born Russell Crowe is in the running for Best Actor for <i>The Insider</i>, but most pundits are either tipping Denzel Washington for his performance in <i>The Hurricane</i> or <i>American Beauty's</i> Kevin Spacey. The other local hopeful is Toni Collette, up for Best Supporting Actress for <i>The Sixth Sense</i>. And while the Hollywood heavyweights prepared to honour their best products, the lousiest films were also recognised this weekend at the Golden Raspberry Awards. Special effects disaster <i>Wild Wild West</i> was named worst movie of 1999, beating out its strongest rival <i>Star Wars Episode One</i>. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Michael Schumacher's winning start to the Formula One season in Australia two weeks ago has continued, with a win in the Brazilian Grand Prix. Ferrari's number one driver had more than four seconds to spare ahead of McLaren's David Coulthard in second place, with Giancarlo Fisichella, driving a Benetton, in third. Reigning champion Mika Hakkinen, who started on pole, failed to finish for the second successive race."

" Federal and state environment and agriculture ministers have agreed to review water allocation from rivers in the Murray Darling Basin. The ministers, who are meeting in Canberra today, will also set targets for reducing salinity within 12 months. The meeting has given the green light to an audit of the current water cap, to determine whether it has been set at the right level. Queensland is so far the only state not to sign up although today it says work is being urgently done on the matter. Federal Environment Minister Robert Hill says the Commonwealth will withhold national competition payments if the states do not move to fix water quality in the Murray Darling Basin. ""If the advice to us from their independent assessment is that a state is failing to meet the commitments that that state made under COAG (Council of Australian Governments) then they get docked money, that's the whole purpose,"" he said. -----------------------------------"

" Northern Territory Chief Minister Denis Burke has been jeered by protestors, outside an Attorneys-General meeting in Melbourne. About two dozen people opposing mandatory sentencing beat drums and yelled as Mr Burke arrived at the meeting. Mr Burke was confronted by protestors on his way to the meeting, which will discuss mandatory sentencing laws in the territory and Western Australia. Victoria's Attorney-General Rob Hulls plans to move a motion calling on his counterparts to express deep concern and support the abolition of the laws. ""I think today is an opportunity for Attorneys-General to do the right thing in relation to mandatory sentencing and this is an issue of national importance,"" he said. Mr Hulls says the meeting will also give the Federal Attorney-General Daryl Williams, a clear view of how all the states and territories feel about mandatory sentencing. ------------------------------------"

" Telstra says it is sceptical about claims from other telecommunications carriers they can supply services to regional areas for a profit. Telstra's Rob Lomdahl says the corporation welcomes the government's plan to introduce competition to the delivery of the Universal Service Obligation. The move will effectively end Telstra's monopoly on service delivery in the bush. Mr Lomdahl says Telstra will bid for tenders in rural areas, but remains unconvinced by its competitors' claims that they can turn a profit. ""This is going to be a competitive and tough market like the cities we hope so we're a bit sceptical as you might expect at the moment,"" he said. ""But that's competition, that's the marketplace and we're happy to see it tested through tendering and these market based processes. ""As long as you get the investment because it's the investment that we've got to be looking for, to improve services and give confidence to remote and regional Australia,"" Mr Lomdahl said. --------------------------------"

" A meeting sponsored by Pope John Paul II to promote dialogue between religious leaders in the Holy Land has been used as a platform for competing claims to Jerusalem. Even before the inter-faith meeting got underway in Jerusalem, the most senior Palestinian Muslim cleric, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, rejected his invitation because of the political stance of the Jewish participants. Israeli chief Rabbi, Meir Lau, used the platform to thank the Pope for recognising the Jewish independent state with Israel as its eternal capital, prompting a member of the audience to call out that the Pope had not said that. In response, the Muslim cleric, Sheik Tutsi Timimi, claimed Jerusalem as capital of a Palestinian state to loud applause and called for Palestinian prisoners to be released and refugees to be allowed to return home. For his part, the Pope urged an end to discrimination, rivalry and conflict. -------------------------------"

" Eighty-five per cent of Australians flocked to mainstream cinemas last year, to make the art form our most popular cultural activity. Attendances at live theatre performances and musicals were all up on previous years, according to the annual survey by market research company, Sweeney. The survey of 1,500 people, conducted in Australia's six biggest capital cities, also found there had been a resurgence in the classic performing arts. The director of Sweeney Research, Martin Hirons, says ballet has become increasingly popular. ""What we did note this year was a substantial increase with ballet attendances - it went from 10 to 15 per cent, classical music recitals increased to 22 per cent, contemporary dance to 14 per cent and musicals went up from 40 to 43 per cent,"" he said. ""The interesting fact is that we noted some decreases in some of the younger focused activities - rock concerts, live bands, public exhibitions, theme parks, sporting halls of fame."" ---------------------------------"

" Australia has dismissed a resurgent New Zealand for 298 on the opening day of the second Test in Wellington. New Zealand recovered from 5 for 66 early in the day's play after winning the toss, thanks mainly to a fine century by Chris Cairns. Cairns and Nathan Astle first combined for a 72-run partnership, with Astle making 61, and then Cairns and Adam Parore put on another 109 runs before Parore was out for 46 with the score at 7 for 247. Cairns went on to make 109 before Shane Warne picked up the tailenders to finish with four wickets and wrap up the Kiwi innings. Brett Lee picked up three wickets for Australia and Colin Miller two. Australia are 0 for 4 in reply approaching stumps on day one. ---------------------------------"

" On Landline on Sunday at midday, a Queensland farmer diversifies into aquaculture, and in particular red claw crayfish. And a housing boom in Darwin leads to an expansion of the Northern Territory nursing industry. Go to ""http://www.abc.net.au/landline/"". And on Four Corners on Monday night at 8.30pm, NATO at war. A special report from the BBC. Go to ""http://www.abc.net.au/4corners/""."

" The Federal Government's attempt to introduce competition for telecommunications services in the bush, has received a mixed response from consumers' groups. The government will call for tenders for new carriers to take over the Universal Service Obligation, to provide basic phone services in rural and regional Australia. It is also offering $150 million worth of contracts to extend untimed local calls to the most disadvantaged households in Australia. Steve Horrocks from the Consumers Telecommunications Network says the policy needs to be thought through carefully. ""We need to make sure that the technical requirements of the companies that are tendering for these services, are very tightly defined,"" he said. ""We don't want to see a situation where companies are actually determining the technical parameters of what it is that they're going to provide. ""We want to make sure that the services themselves are dictated by the needs of consumers, not by the commercial interests of very wealthy large multi-national companies,"" Mr Horrocks said."

" Australia's top law makers will tackle the issue of mandatory sentencing, at today's meeting of Attorneys-General in Melbourne. The issue has already sparked a heated exchange between the Northern Territory and Victorian Governments. Victoria's Attorney-General Rob Hulls has put the issue of mandatory sentencing laws in the Northern Territory and Western Australia on the meeting agenda. He will move a motion asking his counterparts to express concern and support the abolition of the laws. But the Territory's Chief Minister and Attorney-General, Denis Burke, says it would be inappropriate for Mr Hulls to raise the issue. ""What's happening is he's grandstanding. He's a brand new attorney, the meeting is in Victoria and he's being very impolite to say the least,"" he said. Mr Hulls says he will not be bullied into removing an issue of national significance from the agenda. ""Mandatory sentencing is immoral, it's racist, it's unethical and indeed it takes away judicial discretion from judges,"" he said. The Attorneys-General will also be asked to consider taking part in a class action against tobacco companies. The action would be aimed at recovering the costs to the states and territories of smoking-related illnesses. The Queensland Attorney-General will raise the issue, and is likely to have the support of at least Victoria and New South Wales. --------------------------------"

" The Kremlin appears concerned that Acting President Vladimir Putin, the favourite for Sunday's presidential election, may not win without a second poll. Russian observers say the Kremlin is concerned that the main liberal democrat candidate in the 11 horse presidential race, could steal enough votes on Sunday, not to defeat Mr Putin, but to force him to a run-off. The concern is said to be behind claims by television channel ORT, that Mr Yavlinsky illegally used foreign funding in his campaign - a claim Mr Yavlinsky denies. Mr Putin remains the runaway favourite to win the presidency, possibly in one round. But there have been glimmers of a weakening of public support for him while Mr Yavlinsky is thought to be more popular than official polls show. ----------------------------------"

" The Queensland Electoral Commission says it could take months to re-claim money owed by Pauline Hanson. She is personally liable for $500,000 in electoral funds, paid to One Nation candidates after the 1998 State election. Deputy electoral commissioner, Trudy Aurisch, says efforts to re-claim the money could be delayed if Ms Hanson decides to further appeal the party's de-registration. ""If she decided to appeal further it would be fairly silly for us to proceed to enforce this claim against her, because it may be that One Nation would be successful on the appeal where they haven't been previously,"" she said. ""So we would probably wait until that appeal had been determined before we took any further action against her."" -----------------------------------"

" Federal Trade Minister Mark Vaile has criticised union plans to blockade Canadian products as part of the row over raw salmon imports. The Australian Workers Union has sought bans totalling $45 million - the equivalent of the trade penalties being sought by Canada over Tasmania's refusal to allow in Canadian salmon. Mr Vaile says the union call comes at a delicate time in negotiations with Canada and is therefore irresponsible. ""The Canadians following the adoption of the report in Geneva on Monday night, have not have not declared a retaliation list,"" he said. ""I mean the $45 million that the union is referring to was before the previous WTO (World Trade Organisation) hearing not this one."" ----------------------------------"

" New research shows that almost 50 per cent of people most at risk of falling seriously ill or dying from influenza do not plan to immunise against the disease. The finding has sparked renewed calls from Australian influenza experts for high-risk groups to be immunised now. It follows reports of severe influenza outbreaks in the US, the UK and Europe earlier this year. Doctor David Smith, from Perth's Queen Elizabeth II Medical Centre, says influenza can worsen heart disease, respiratory problems and diabetes, potentially leading to death. He says immunisation is a simple, safe and effective way of reducing the risk of serious complications. ---------------------------------"

" Precautionary evacuations are continuing in Mozambique, where the government fears new flooding along the Limpopo River. More than 600,000 people are still reliant on international aid following last month's disastrous flooding. A top level government team has flown into the town of Chokwe to reiterate the authority's warning that people should leave for high ground, fearing more rising water in the Limpoto Basin. So far, more than 10,000 people have heeded the warning, returning to camps for flood victims, in case the river bursts its banks again. Monitoring stations upstream are recording lower water flows into the Limpopo system. However, when the region flooded last month, water levels rose three-metres in less than 30 minutes and the government is taking no chances this time around. ----------------------------------"

" Northern Ireland's Ulster Unionist leader, David Trimble, is to face a leadership challenge this weekend. While Mr Trimble is expected to defeat MP Martin Smyth, the move signals growing dissatisfaction with his support for negotiations with Sinn Fein. Martin Smyth represents the old guard of the Ulster Unionists - a former Grand Master of the Orange Order, he has already been beaten once by David Trimble. But this time the vote will be a test for the Good Friday power sharing agreement with Sinn Fein, which Mr Smyth has bitterly opposed. If the vote shows a significant slump in support for Mr Trimble, it may represent a serious setback for the Irish peace processs, which is why already its supporters, like British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, have praised Mr Trimble's leaderhsip record. -----------------------------------"

" The Queen wants to visit as many rural and regional areas as she can over the course of her Australian tour. Today it is Ballarat's turn to be caught up in Royal fever. Local officials have spent months preparing for a visit that will see the Queen touring the Soverign Hill historical site, meeting workers at a local factory, and being treated to a disaster control exercise by emergency services. As was the case in the New South Wales town of Bourke on Wednesday, large and eager crowds, not used to such regal attention, are expected to greet the monarch when she arrives in Ballarat early this afternoon. The Queen got a sample of Australian multiculturalism last night when she visited Melbourne's immigration museum. It was the last engagement of the monarch's Melbourne visit. A small but vocal crowd that included a handful of banner wielding Republicans greeted the Royal couple as they arrived at the immigration museum. Inside the Queen inspected exhibits such as models of the assorted ships that have ferried migrants to Australia over the decades. --------------------------------"

" Australian cyclists could be wearing the controversial full length swimming custumes at the Sydney Olympic Games. The suits, worn by some of the country's best swimmers, are at the centre of an inquiry by the Australian Olympic Committee (AOC) which is seeking a ruling on the outfits. Cycling Australia's high performance manager, Michael Flynn says if they are legal and can assist Australia's cyclists then riders will be able to swap their lycra racing outfits for the swimwear. ""We've spoken to the AOC lawyers with regards to the legality of it first, they haven't responded but from Cycling Australia's point of view anything that would be legal and safe and give us an advantage we'd look into,"" he said. ""I think we need to to get an advantage which in regard to sunglasses, helmets, aerodynamic positions, bikes, shoes, we've looked into every possible way and why not in regard to clothing, I mean otherwise we'll be wearing shorts and long sleeve shirts instead of the lycra we have at the moment."""

" Three Coalition backbenchers from New South Wales, Victoria and Western Australia are to examine the Senate's report into mandatory sentencing laws. Brendan Nelson, Senator Sue Knowles, and John Forrest have been asked to advise the Government on how it can address some of the social justice issues behind mandatory sentencing. The Government has consistently ruled out federal legislation to override the laws in the Northern Territory and Western Australia. Meanwhile, the Government has been warned the issue is explosive for Australia. The Greens Senator, Bob Brown, says Australia's treatment of its indigenous people will be the focus of international media attention in the Olympics year. Senator Brown has also criticised the government's decision to set up a backbench committee on the issue. ""The Prime Minister's behaving in a way which speaks of failure of imagination, failure of response, failure of leadership,"" Senator Brown said. ""He's setting up backbench committees, he's appealing to attorneys-general, he's writing letters to Perth and the Northern Territory, he's got his head in the sand."" -------------------------------"

" The Australian mining company responsible for a cyanide spill in Papua New Guinea says the amount of chemical that has reached local waterways is unlikely to cause much damage. Michael Silver, from Dome Resources, the company operating the mine in PNG, says up to 150 kilos of cyanide pellets may have dissolved in nearby streams. Mr Silver says clean-up teams have recovered up to 70 per cent of the pellets, accidentally dropped from a helicopter yesterday. He says any cyanide that reaches the waterways will be heavily dilluted. But Igor O'Neil, from the Mineral Policy Institute, holds a much graver view, saying the cyanide was lost in its most concentrated form. ""So even when it's diluted, one teaspoon full of 2 per cent cyanide solution is enough to kill an adult human and much lower concentrations are all it takes to kill fish life and other animals,"" he said. ---------------------------------"

" Former Indonesian President Suharto is expected to be declared fit to face questioning over allegations of corruption during his term of office. An independent team of doctors has completed an assessment of Mr Suharto's health. The doctors examined the former leader last week. They have now delivered a report to Indonesia's Attorney-General, Mazuki Darusman. Mr Darusman is trying to mount an investigation into alleged corruption during the Suharto years. Mr Suharto has already failed to answer a summons to face an inquiry. His lawyers have claimed he is medically unfit to be questioned and has trouble communicating. But the Jakarta Post newspaper reports that the independent medical team has found the 78-year-old is healthy enough to take part. It has now been more than a month since the government first attempted to verify Mr Suharto's condition. ----------------------------------"

" The Queen has paid tribute to Victoria's rich multicultural heritage as she continues her visit to Melbourne. The royals have attended a state luncheon at Government House, where the Premier Steve Bracks spoke of the Victorian Parliament's 1997 apology to the Aboriginal Stolen Generation. In her formal address the Queen highlighted the State's cultural diversity. ""Victoria, and indeed all Australia, can be proud of the way in which it has given and continues to give a new life to thousands of immigrants from Asia, Europe, the Middle East and other parts of the world by accepting them as valued members of today's increasingly multicultural community,"" she said. -----------------------------------"

" The gas industry says it will not automatically be the ""white knight"", which will save Australia from high greenhouse gas emissions. Forecasts by the Australian Bureau of Agriculture and Resource Economics (ABARE), suggest natural gas will take more market share from coal in the future, helping to significantly cut emissions. But the Australian Gas Association has told a Senate inquiry into Global Warming, a range of government policies needs to be put in place for gas to replace coal in the market place. Association chief executive Bill Nagle says the ABARE forecasts of strong gas penetration are too optomistic. ""In fact we consider them to be slightly dangerous in that it looks like natural gas is going to come riding up wearing a white hat and solving all our Kyoto target problems,"" he said. ""And we're seeing a battle going on in Queensland now where the next tranche of power stations are up for grabs and it would appear that black coal will again be chosen over natural gas."" ---------------------------------"

" Viewers of more than 100 syndicated channels may soon be watching the story of locals in Lightning Ridge. Panorama International Programs is busy compiling the series for television stations in Great Britain and the United States. Manager Antony Luciano says subtitles may even be used to broaden the appeal of the series. Producer Ian Hill, says the program will be one of a series called Postcards from Australia, and will feature a variety of local characters. Mr Hill says Lightning Ridge has been a friendly community with a several colourful features. He says the program is not just an advertisement for tourists. ""I believe it's for air on a travel channel in the United Kingdom, however this isn't just saying `come and visit' it's also showing inner aspects of the people in the town itself,"" he said. ""So it's got a cross purpose there, I guess it's an interesting documentary as well as the fact that it could be aimed at tourists."" --------------------------------"

" Australia will be chasing its ninth straight Test cricket victory when it takes on New Zealand in Wellington in the second Test starting tomorrow. But Australia has not beaten New Zealand in Wellington for 55 years. Captain Steve Waugh says he will wait until an inspection of the pitch tomorrow before deciding whether to pick paceman Damien Fleming or spin bowler Colin Miller. ""It looks pretty hard and flat, it's pretty hard to tell,"" Waugh said. ""I think it might seam around the first day or so and be pretty good batting after that. But it's always difficult to tell. I haven't seen too many yellow wickets around."" -------------------------------"

" On Australian Story tonight at 8pm, meet Jason Li, the young Australian who broke the deadlock and drafted the blueprint for what became the 'yes' model in the lead-up to last year's referendum on the republic. Join Jason for an internet forum after the program. Go to ""htt[://www.abc.net.au/austory/"". And on Lateline at 10.30pm, state attorneys-general meet to discuss whether or not they should take on the tobacco companies. Go to ""http://www.abc.net.au/lateline/""."

" Immigration and Reconciliation Minister, Philip Ruddock,has conceded that a United Nations Committee may query Australia's compliance with international conventions, on eliminating racial discrimination. Last night in Geneva, the Minister was questioned by the committee, which is expected to issue a report on its investigation later this week. The committee last year raised concerns with the government that amendments to native title legislation may breach the convention. At this week's hearings there has also been critical attention paid to Aboriginal rates of imprisonment and mandatory sentencing laws. Mr Ruddock says he does not belive such laws are in breach of the convention, but in any case, the Federal Government is addressing that issue through talks with the state and territory involved. But the Minister says it will not surprise him if the committee does raise some matters with the government when it issues its report later this week. -----------------------------------"

" An Australian mining company has defended its safety standards, after losing a tonne of cyanide pellets in Papua New Guniea. The cargo fell from a helicopter into an uninhabited area about 85 kilometres north of Port Moresby on Tuesday morning, while en route to a gold mine in Tolukuma. Most of the cyanide has been recovered, and contamination tests and a clean-up operation will continue today. Dome Resources managing director Michael Silver says it was an horrific accident, but insists the company's safety standards are adequate. ""I think we would probably have stricter safety standards in Papua New Guinea, precisely because we are very concerned,"" he said. ""We have very, very stringent precautions and we closely monitor all the activities of all of our nationals."" ---------------------------------"

" The Federal Government is to set up an advisory committee to determine what action it can take against mandatory sentencing laws. It will examine the findings of a recent Senate Inquiry. The Prime Minister has ruled out federal legislation to override mandatory sentencing laws for juveniles in the Northern Territory and Western Australia. Last week the government gagged debate on two private members bills and scuttled a separate bill from one of its own backbenchers. But it is concerned at the findings of a Senate Committee which recommended such legislation pass. Attorney-General Daryl Williams who is personally opposed to mandatory sentencing, is setting up a backbench committee to determine what action the government can take. Mr Williams also last night received a formal reply from the Northern Territory to a request for it to review its laws. Both the Northern Territory and Western Australia have said no. ------------------------------"

" Federal Communications Minister Richard Alston has defended the Telstra inquiry chair as a man of ""immense integrity"". Senator Alston says there is no reason for Tim Besley to stand down. ""Tim Besley is a long-standing public and private servant of immense integrity,"" he said. ""No-one has ever questioned his capacity to do the job and what he's required to do here is to look at the quality of service and decide whether it's adequate."" Meanwhile, the Australian Democrats are strengthening calls for a Senate inquiry into Telstra if the government does not scrap its own inquiry. The Federal Opposition and some Coalition backbenchers have called for the resignation of Mr Besley, citing a conflict of interest. Labor says Mr Besley is inappropriate for the job because he also has an advisory role with an investment bank which benefitted from earlier Telstra share floats. Democrats Senator Lyn Allison says she is concerned about Mr Besley's background and the fact the government's inquiry may not allow public hearings. She says a Senate inquiry may be the best alternative. ""We could look at conducting that, it's not my first preference because I think an independent inquiry by the Communications Authority is preferable, however it may be a way of making that inquiry and those submissions public,"" Sen Allison said. -----------------------------------"

" One Nation founder, Pauline Hanson, could face bankruptcy after admitting she will not be able to meet tomorrow's deadline to repay more than $500,000 in electoral funds. She is personally liable for the money, paid to One Nation candidates following the 1998 state election, after the party lost an appeal against its de-registration in Queensland. The Queensland Electoral Commission has pledged to pursue the money through the courts. Miss Hanson says she cannot pay. ""Because the party doesn't have this sort of money in a bank account, it will reflect back onto me because it was all in my name and I went as personal guarantee,"" she said. ""So unles this money can be raised...I've either got to sell up my home to try and pay some of this debt, or I could even lose my home and everything. ""If I become a bankrupt I will not be able to stand for Parliament again,"" Miss Hanson said. -----------------------------------"

" The Pope has again expressed his support of Palestinian political objectives while speaking at a refugee camp in Bethlehem, as his Holy Land tour continues. The Dheisheh camp, just over half a square kilometre in size, is home to 10,000 refugees. The welcome for the Pope included banners spelling out the continued demand for a right to return to land occupied by Israel. While not addressing that claim directly, Pope John Paul II said international agreements on Palestinian refugees had to be honoured. ""You have been deprived of many things which represent basic needs of the human person, proper housing...location and love,"" he said. After the visit, violence broke out in the camp with Palestinian authorities cracking down on rock throwing youths. ----------------------------------"

" A Queensland house renovator is counting his luck this morning. A man on the Redcliffe Peninsula, north of Brisbane, found a horde of old Australian cash behind a kitchen sink. Police say he was removing the sink in an old house at Scarborough, when he found a pot. Inside, wrapped in newspaper, was a stash of old Australian money - in denominations adding up to tens of thousands of pounds. The newspaper was dated from March 1953. Brisbane's Criminal Investigation Branch is investigating. ------------------------------------"

" The Queen's Australian tour shifts to Victoria today with the Royal couple the guests of honour at a State Luncheon in Melbourne. The Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh will spend the next two days in Victoria. In Melbourne today the Queen will visit the Bionic Ear Institute and the Australian Children's Television Studio. Prince Philip will travel to the Sandringham Yacht Club to meet round the world yachtsman Jesse Martin. Also on the agenda is a State Luncheon hosted by the Premier, Steve Bracks. Last night the Royal Couple attended a State Dinner at Government House in Canberra. The Queen donned a sparkling tiara to mingle with dinner guests including former Interfet commander Major General Peter Cosgrove, actress Ruth Cracknell, businessman Dick Smith, horse trainer Bart Cummings and swimming champion Michael Klim. --------------------------------"

" A legal hearing into the use of full-length suits by swimmers, including Ian Thorpe and Susie O'Neill could begin next week, following moves by the Australian Olympic Committee (AOC). The AOC wants the Court of Arbitration for Sport to rule on the issue before the Olympic selection trials in May. The committee's legal advisor, Simon Rofe, says the issue must be cleared up as soon as possible. ""We are in there and fighting this issue to ensure that there is certainty and that everyone knows, but particularly the swimmers know, exactly what they have to do to achieve selection and then hopefully win gold medals,"" he said."

" Acting Federal Justice Minister Daryl Williams says a new advertising campaign by the American gun lobby is offensive. The latest ads by the US National Rifle Association claim home invasions and other crime is rife in Australia because of gun controls. The ads target South Australia and argue that crime figures in the state have jumped by 21 per cent. Mr Williams says the campaign is simply misleading. ""One gets somewhat outraged when an organisation based in the United States, where there are something like 11,000 firearms homicides in one year, is telling us our gun laws fail, when our statistics show that in 1998, there were only 54 firearms homicides, which was a significant reduction from the previous year,"" he said. -----------------------------"

" The chairman of the Federal Government's inquiry into Telstra has sold his shares in the company to avoid perceptions of a conflict of interest. But Labor is still calling for Tim Besley's resignation. The Opposition has pointed to Mr Besley's share ownership and his advisory role at an investment bank involved in the second Telstra float, as evidence of a conflict of interest. Labor says he should be removed from any inquiry which could strengthen the case for Telstra's privatisation. But Mr Besley has sold his shares since his appointment on Sunday. And the Federal Government says the bank, Credit Suisse First Boston, has completed its role in the float and the inquiry is about Telstra services not privatisation. But one other member of the inquiry panel, Ray Braithwaite, who previously opposed Telstra's full sale now has a more relaxed stance. ""If those service difficulties or inequities can be resolved satisfactorily then the government can make its determination,"" he said. ---------------------------------"

" A key indicator of the future state of the Australian economy is pointing to a gradual easing in growth towards the end of the year. The Westpac/Melbourne Institute leading index for January has registered a broadly unchanged growth rate of 4 per cent. Westpac chief economist Nigel Stapledon says that indicates an actual economic growth rate slightly above the trend in six to nine months time. ""It's suggesting now the economy might pull back to closer to trend by late this year early next year,"" he said. ""You'd be looking at a growth rate of somewhere around 3.5 per cent, if this is correct."" ---------------------------------"

" A Senate inquiry has heard evidence of power companies delivering more than 240 volts of electricity into Australian homes, in order to increase power bills to consumers. The claim was put by a consumer to the Senate inquiry into global warming, which is meeting in Sydney today, as part of its national hearings. Greens Senator Bob Brown, who is a member of the inquiry, says it appears there are some power companies who have increased the level of voltage going into homes. ""We need to be able to see if that's the case, because it's also adding unnecessarily to greenhouse gas production, because thermal power stations are providing that power,"" he said. ""If consumers are getting more than 240 volts and are paying for it and getting no benefit from it, then it's an infringement of consumers rights, it's a scam."" -------------------------------"

" The operators of Australia's first regulated online casino plan to develop new products and technology with funds raised by a public float. The manager of the Alice Springs-based Lasseters Casino, David Ohlsen, says the company hopes to raise $40 million. He says it will spend up to $5 million developing technology, so customers can use a mobile phone to play the slots and blackjack. Mr Ohlsen says the company also wants to develop new games. ""I think we're looking at more of a challenge game these days when people are growing up,"" he said. ""They're looking for more of a challenge than the traditional slot machines. ""And I see in the future, probably one to two years away, where the games might be played against a friend, or more of a challenge situation, and we just facilitate the gaming environment."" ---------------------------------"

" The Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh were welcomed by the people of Bourke in far western New South Wales today. Up to 2,000 people turned out to see the royal couple. The Queen was welcomed by the mayor and NSW Premier Bob Carr who spoke of Bourke being part of the mindset of Australia. The Queen spoke of the new mixing with the old at Bourke pointing to its history of agriculture and the technologies she has seen at work in schools. She also paid respect to regional Australia. ""It has been a great pleasure for us to come here today to meet many of you and to be able to give recognition to the way in which you and so many Australians like you, who live not in the cities but in Australia's wide open spaces, are contributing to the success of this great land of Australia,"" she said. ---------------------------------"

" An expert in road accident research has called for a restriction on the number of passengers P-plate drivers can carry. A US study has found young drivers are more likely to crash if they have passengers. The study published in an American medical journal found a 16-year-old at the wheel with three passengers, is almost three times more likely to die in a crash than one driving alone. Boys driving with other boys in the back seat or at night are even more likely to crash. Professor Jack McLean, from the Road Accident Reserach Unit at Adelaide University, says the findings support the case for a graduated licensing system. ""I'd certainly strongly recommend that consideration be given to including in that a restriction on the number of passengers carried."" ---------------------------------"

" Australian cyclist Lucy Tyler-Sharman says she plans to compete in the selection trials for the United States Olympic team next month, despite being refused a clearance to represent the US at the Olympics. Cycling Australia this week refused a request from American cycling officials to allow Tyler-Sharman to compete for the United States at the Olympics. Tyler-Sharman says she has not given up hope. ""I don't know, it's very frustrating for me, because of course I would like to say my side of things and challenge some of what they have said,"" she said. ""But the advice to me is, not to yet. I have to go ahead to compete at the US trials later and I'm training for it."" -----------------------------------"

" Tonight on Lateline at 10.30pm, on the eve of the anniversay of NATO's bombing of Serbia, we ask where did it get us and is another conflict looming? Go to ""http://www.abc.net.au/lateline/"". --------------------------------"

" Interest rates are again on the rise in the United States in a bid to slow the economy and head off inflation. The US Federal Reserve has repeated its warning that inflation pressures in the US are on the rise. The central bank has increased short-term interest rates by 0.25 per cent to 6 per cent. In a statement, the Federal Reserve says the record economic expansion in the US was at risk with increases in demand exceeding supply. The Federal Reserve has now increased interest rates four times since last June. Analysts believe the next increase will come at the Reserve's next meeting in May. Today's rate rise follows new figures showing the US trade gap grew by 14 per cent in January, as oil prices surged and imports rose. The Federal Reserve decision is now having a positive impact on Australian markets. Official interest rates in America are now 0.5 per cent higher than in Australia - a possible magnet for investment flows. And the possibility of an even wider gap had not been entirely ruled out - a situation that Colonial Group's chief economist, Craig James says could have put pressure on the Australian dollar. After no initial reaction, the local currency has now started moving higher and at 7:30am AEDT was at 61.13 US cents. With stock prices moving ahead on Wall Street, Australia's share price index futures contract has jumped 25 points, while bond futures have also rallied strongly. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Opposition has called for the removal of the new chair of an inquiry into Telstra, three days after his appointment. Labor alleges Tim Besley has a conflict of interest and if he will not resign, the inquiry should be scrapped. Labor has questioned Mr Besley's selection to chair the inquiry, because he has also been appointed in an advisory role to the investment bank which has played a key role in Telstra's earlier share sales. Credit Suisse First Boston was one of three joint global coordinators for the earlier Telstra floats. Shadow Communications Minister Stephen Smith says Mr Besley is the wrong person to inquire into Telstra's service standards. ""There's a clear perception here of an actual conflict of interest and the government should do the decent thing now and scrap this inquiry,"" he said. ""And if the government doesn't scrap the inquiry, then I think Mr Besley should do the sensible thing from his perspective and resign from the inquiry."" Meanwhile, National Party leader John Anderson has given an assurance that any member of the public can request a hearing at the inquiry into Telstra. Some National Party members are upset that the six-month inquiry does not include public hearings for ordinary citizens to give their horror stories about Telstra services. Mr Anderson says he is confident the three-person panel will still get an accurate picture on how Telstra's catering for people in the bush. He says there is no value in holding large community meetings in town halls, but anyone can request a hearing. ""I have no doubt at all that the inquiry chairman will allow people to appear personally before the panel,"" he said. ""He may choose to or they may choose as a panel to do that, involving groups of people at a time. ""But I understand that he feels that actually having if you like, open meetings where you tend not to get to the facts as quickly as you ought to, is not the way that he wants to proceed."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Qantas says it views seriously an incident on a flight between Sydney and Melbourne late last year. The captain of the Boeing 767 has described the incident as a potential catastrophe. Forty minutes into the flight, fumes began filtering through the cabin, the captain ordered oxygen masks to be worn but he became dizzy and light-headed when he removed his mask to land. Qantas chief of aircraft operations David Forsythe says the cause was cleaning fluid residue left in the airconditioning system. He says the matter has been dealt with. ""Obviously it's a serious incident, we take all of these incidents seriously and the captain's comments, in particular, we take seriously,"" he said. ""He's since been given a copy of the report and a briefing on it. ""He's since flown the aeroplane and been happy with it."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Queen and Prince Philip will tour the far west New South Wales town of Bourke today. Children at Bourke Primary have been putting the finishing touches on a school website they hope to show the Queen as she tours their classroom, which is situated in a renovated railway carriage. The school has been recognised nationally for its leadership in Aboriginal education. The Duke will spend time visiting farming operations. While most town's folk see the visit as something special for Bourke, some such as long-time resident Bart Roberts say they will not be putting in any extra effort to see the monarch. ""I'm not going to break a leg or an arm to go out there to see her or anything like that,"" he said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Pope John Paul II has arrived in Jerusalem, calling on God to make a gift of peace to the Holy Land. The Pope left Jordan after a visit to one of the sites which claims to be the place where Jesus was baptised. He arrived in Israel to be met by Prime Minister Ehud Barak and President Ezer Weizman. There, the Pope delivered a call for greater dialogue between the region's faiths and for peace in Israel and the wider region. Taken by helicopter to Jerusalem, he was met by the city's mayor, Ehud Olmert, who welcomed him by describing Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and the eternal capital. The Vatican does not recognise Israeli sovereignty over East Jerusalem and Palestinians have petitioned the Pope to make a statement supporting their claims in the city - a move condemned by Israel as politicising the tour. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" US President Bill Clinton and Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee have held talks in New Delhi, but failed to resolve their differences on India's nuclear arms program. In private talks with Mr Vajpayee, Mr Clinton urged India to sign the comprehensive test ban treaty. Mr Vajpayee reaffirmed India's voluntary moratorium on nuclear testing and its no first use policy. He also said that India does not want to go to war with Pakistan despite escalating tensions between the two counties. Both leaders also condemned yesterday's killing of 35 Sikh men in Indian Kashmir. It was the first attack on Kashmir's tiny Sikh community in more than a decade of insurgency. Mr Clinton says the massacre highlights the need for India and Pakistan to show restraint and to resume peace talks. ---------------------------------------------------------------"

" Businessman Kerry Packer is planning an expanded investment role for a controversial trust. The FXF Trust was set up to house Mr Packer's interests in the Fairfax publishing group, once he decided federal cross-media ownership restrictions would not allow him to control Fairfax. Now, CPH Management Limited, part of Mr Packer's family firm, Consolidated Press Holdings, has retained advisers to help with a possible expansion of the trust's investments and funds. The advising firm will consider plans for the trust to take large stakes in new investments by Consolidated Press, allowing the public to do so as well. However, in a statement, CPH Management says it has ""no current intention"" to sell any of the trust's holding in Fairfax. ----------------------------------------------------------------"

" The first wife of former Khmer Rouge leader Pol Pot has been found living quietly in the Cambodian capital, Phnom Penh. Local newspapers claim the 80-year-old woman is now incapable of remembering much of her past life. Khieu Ponnary was once named as a member of Cambodia's gang of four that presided over a regime accused of the deaths of up to two million people. The first Cambodian woman to get a high school diploma, Ponnary married Pol Pot in 1956. He died in the jungle near the Thai border two years ago. Khieu Ponnary's whereabouts have remained a mystery for years, but she has widely been reported to have suffered from psychiatric problems since 1975."

" Canada says it is not looking for a trade war with Australia to force market access in Tasmania for Canadian salmon. The Federal Government has agreed to accept a World Trade Organisation (WTO) order to relax its restrictions on raw salmon imports. But Tasmania is refusing to lift its own ban imposed last year to protect the state's salmon industry. If it does not, Canada will have the right to increase tariffs or impose other trade barriers against Australia as a whole. But the first secretary at Canada's High Commission in Canberra, Wayne Robson, has indicated that would be a last resort. ""Canada's objective is to regain access to the Australian market for uncooked salmon, not to limit trade with Australia and certainly if both sides can come to a mutually satisfactory agreement on implementation then Canada will withdraw its request to retaliate,"" Mr Robson said. ------------------------------"

" A task force comprising Queensland pharmaceutical company Herron, the Health Department, the Therapeutic Goods Administration and police is today looking at ways of getting the company's products back on the shelves. Eighteen products manufactured by Herron were recalled, after two men were admitted to hospital with strychnine poisoning last week. Herron chief Euan Murdoch says he will be going into the meeting with an open mind, but consumer safety is the key concern. ""The plan is we'll meet today and we'll discuss options and then there is a meeting on Thursday morning,"" he said. ""[It is] a briefing between police and Herron and we will be raising the items discussed today and the developments will be tabled at that meeting."" ---------------------------------"

" Another significant deal appears to be in the offing as players in the Australian Internet sector realign themselves. AAPT shares were briefly suspended from trade on the Stock Exchange this morning, before Australia's third biggest telecommunications company announced it was holding discussions with America Online about its now wholly-owned subsidiary, AOL Australia. But AAPT says the pricing and timing of any transaction have not been finalised. AOL Australia is an Internet online service provider with about 60,000 subscribers. Elsewhere in the Internet sector, yesterday's announcement that Solution 6 is to swallow Sausage Software continues to whet the appetite of sharemarket investors. Sausage shares are up a further 40 cents, or 5.4 per cent, while Solution 6 has jumped 81 cents, or 6.25 per cent. ---------------------------------"

" Latest figures show Australia's population growth rate was greater than in the United States, China or the United Kingdom during the last financial year. An Australian Bureau of Statistics report released today shows the national growth rate for the 12 months to last June was 1.3 per cent. Of Australia's 7.2 million households, a quarter contained a single person. Queensland and Western Australia experienced the biggest growth, increasing 1.6 percent, while Tasmania was the only jursidiction to experience negative growth. -----------------------------"

" The Queen has returned to Sydney from Canberra for a third day of official duties. She is visiting the Sydney Children's Hospital. The Queen arrived 12 minutes late to the cheers of the hundreds of onlookers who braved the wet weather. She was greeted by Premier Bob Carr. The visit to the hospital at Randwick is officially being described as low key, but it has not stopped the several hundred people from lining the entrance to the hospital. She has been inspecting the Australian Cord Bloodbank and talking to researchers involved in the use of blood from the umbilical cord to save lives. She is spending time chatting to the young patients, who for the moment are calling the hospital home. She will also inspect the Olympic facilities at Homebush today. ---------------------------------"

" The Australian Children's Television Foundation has expressed concerns about a drop in the quality of children's programs. A 20-year study into children's television has found Australia produces good quality shows but foundation director Patrica Edgar, is concerned at the lack of C-classified programs shown after school. Dr Edgar says the quality of children's television programs has declined and believes the Australian Broadcasting Authority is to blame. ""They are a little more slack about what goes through. There used to be a children's program committee with the responsibility for approving programs that were classified C,"" she said. ""That program was disbanded some years ago and it's now done internally and I think there's some complacency,"" Ms Edgar said. ---------------------------------"

" South Australia's Catholic community is mourning the death of one its most respected former leaders. Emeritus Archbishop of Adelaide James Gleeson died of a heart attack this morning, aged 79. A strong opponent of abortion and euthanasia, he was appointed archbishop in 1971 and was forced to retire 14 years later after undergoing major heart surgery. Matthew Abraham from the Catholic News Centre says Archbishop Gleeson died while preparing to celebrate mass for the Sisters of Mercy. ""He was a remarkable man and active really until the end; he died as he lived,"" Mr Abraham said. ""Archbishop Faulkner has informed us that Archbishop Gleeson spent an hour in his chapel this morning as he always did, in prayer."" --------------------------------"

" Queensland has won its third national domestic cricket title in six years after bad light stopped play on the last day of the final against Victoria in Brisbane. The match finished in a draw but as Queensland finished on top of the table after the regular season, the Bulls take the title. When bad light stopped play, Victoria was 1 for 31, still 415 runs behind Queensland. ------------------------------"

" Lateline at 10.30pm looks at dealing with depression. One in five Australians suffers from depression, but are drugs the answer or just a quick fix? Go to ""http://www.abc.net.au/lateline/""."

" The squeeze could soon ease on world oil supplies. Local industry players believe a further fall in prices can be sustained. A crucial meeting of OPEC oil ministers takes place next week in Vienna. Ahead of that gathering, there has been a flurry of lead-up negotiations, with public comments now indicating a consensus that oil production should increase from next month. In response, West Texas crude for April delivery has this morning fallen below $US30 a barrel and is now at $US29.50, compared with more than $US34 earlier this month. Australian Petroleum Production and Exploration Association executive director Barry Jones says the outlook for petrol prices is encouraging for motorists. Meanwhile, high-tech stocks are dropping sharply on Wall Street this morning ahead of a policy meeting at the US Federal Reserve. The Fed's decision on interest rates will be known early tomorrow morning, Australian time and is generally expected to be a raising of rates by 0.25 per cent, although markets are not ruling out a move of 0.5 per cent. In the meantime, the main barometer of high-tech companies, the Nasdaq composite index is currently down 165 points, or 3.4 per cent. The slump in the sector comes just a day after Australian computer systems supplier, Solution 6, launched a $1.6 billion takeover bid for Sausage Software. Telstra is selling assets into Solution 6 and will hold a 40 per cent stake in the combined entity. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Government is hoping to head off any retaliatory trade action from Canada by agreeing to a ruling on salmon imports. The World Trade Organisation last month found Australia's imports of raw salmon were too restrictive and an outright ban in Tasmania in breach of international trade rules. The government has decided not to appeal against the ruling and is negotiating with Canada to relax its trade restrictions. But Trade Minister Mark Vaile says if Tasmania fails to lift its ban in the next few weeks, Canada could still go ahead with retaliatory measures against a range of Australian producers. ""It is possible, it is a very grey area we haven't come across this circumstance before,"" he said. ""We believe that if the Tasmanian ban stays on there may be the possibility of retaliation directly towards Tasmania or more broadly across Australia. ""It's another one of the issues that we are working through with the Canadians."" -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" National Party members are angry that the Federal Government's inquiry into Telstra will not include public hearings. The inquiry into whether Telstra and other carriers are delivering adequate services will run until September. The party's deputy leader, Mark Vaile, says those wanting to make submissions can do so in writing. But others in the party, including Queensland backbencher Bob Katter, say much will be lost if people cannot give evidence in person. ""A lot of people in the Gulf country and the more outback areas of Australia, they've had very limited access to education,"" he said. ""They, in many cases, don't express themselves well in letters and sometimes they do too, but there is a hell of a difference with writing a letter and confronting a very, very angry face."" Meanwhile, the Federal Opposition has shed doubt on whether other telecommunications carriers could fill any gap left by Telstra. The National Party has left open the possibility that as long as services are provided in regional and rural areas, it is not important which carrier delivers them. But Shadow Communications Minister Stephen Smith says Telstra is the universal service provider and he cannot see it being replaced. Mr Smith says the most other carriers can do is fill a niche market. ""I do see the possibility of exploring the notion of other carriers perhaps using different technology, having access to part of the universal service obligation, by way of a niche market or a regional market, but none of that will replace Telstra,"" he said. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Queen will inspect Sydney's Olympic stadium today as she continues her Australian tour. The Queen will get a first hand look at a number of Olympic venues including the main stadium and the aquatic centre. She will also meet a number of Olympic athletes both past and present. The Queen is impressed by what she describes as Australia's sporting prowess. ""The Olympics and the Paralympics will be an opportunity for Australia's sportsmen and women again to demonstrate to the world their natural talent for sport,"" she said. Day four of the Royal tour will also see the Queen paying a visit to the Sydney Children's Hospital. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" Authorities in Uganda believe the death toll from last week's cult mass suicide will be no higher than 400. Senior Ugandan police officials say so far forensic experts have identified the remains of some 330 people crammed inside the tiny school room, which doubled as the cult's church. At least 78 of the bodies are those of children. A spokesman in the capital, Kampala, says police do not expect to find more than 70 additional victims, bringing the death toll to around 400. Investigations are now underway into the leadership of the cult and its followers. There are indications that Joseph Kibwetere, acknowledged as the driving force behind the sect, may have died in the blaze, along with several defrocked priests and nuns who were his main aides in the organisation. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Pope John Paul has arrived in Jordan at the start of a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. The Pontiff has called on Arabs and Israelis to continue working towards peace. Starting the first Papal tour of the Holy Land for 36 years, the Pope prayed at Mount Nebo, the place where according to tradition, Moses was shown the Promised Land. Later he will visit Jordanian sites linked to Jesus and John the Baptist. In his first comments of the tour, he referred to the Arab-Israeli conflict as the grave issue of justice that had to be resolved. Later today, the Pope will conduct a mass in the Jordanian capital, Amman, for some 70,000 people, including tens of thousands of Iraqi Christians who have sought his support for an end to sanctions. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" US President Bill Clinton has completed a one day visit to Bangladesh, promising aid to the flood prone nation. Mr Clinton also used the visit to announce plans to hold a meeting with Syria's President at the end of his south Asian tour. Mr Clinton is the first American President to visit Bangladesh, a country once dismissed as a basket case. Security concerns prevented him from visiting a village showcasing a successful small loans development scheme. Mr Clinton announced a food aid program and $130 million plan to promote clean energy. His visit is widely viewed as US support for a moderate democratic government. Today, Mr Clinton begins his official tour of India, where he and the Indian Prime Minister are expected to sign a vision statement of greater ties between the two countries. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Western Australian Institute of Sport has welcomed a decision by Cycling Australia to reject American born Lucy Tyler-Sharman's request to compete for the United States at the Olympics. Tyler-Sharman, who has received financial support from the WA Institute of Sport for several years, now looks likely to be an onlooker in Sydney. Institute director Wally Foreman says the decision has avoided what would have set a dangerous precedent. ""It would be fair to say that Australia has made a fairly strong investment in Lucy and I just am not surprised,"" he said. ""I think they would consider it inappropriate clearing her at this late stage, given that investment."" Meanwhile, the Australian Sports Commission says Tyler-Sharman has broken her word, and proved her critics right, by trying to ride with the American Olympic Team. The commission's Geoff Strang says Australia will not simply hand over the investment they have made. ""She still has some feeling that the cycling community isn't supportive of her and would make it difficult for her to make the Australian team,"" he said. ""There's blame on both sides but I think Lucy's antics left it very hard for Cycling Australia given the way she'd spoken about them and the officials that run cycling."""

" The Theraputic Goods Association (TGA) says its officers are assisting Queensland police in the criminal investigation sparked by the contamination of Herron Pharmacuticals products last week. Eighteen products manufactured by Herron have been recalled after two men were admitted to hospital with strychnine poisoning. The association's Rita McLaughlin says it is not unusual for their officers to work with police. ""We've got one officer from our recalls coordination unit and we've got two officers from our surveillance unit there,"" she said. ""Really they're dealing with the product safety issues, which are enabling the Queensland police to concentrate on their criminal investigations."" -------------------------------"

" The chairman of the Federal Government's inquiry into Telstra says it will not be making any recommendation for or against privatisation. The government has appointed a three person panel to assess whether Telstra is meeting its service obligations, how it is improving those services and whether it caters for all Australians. Its chairman, Tim Besley, says he has a personal view on privatisation that he will not reveal, but admits as the former Commonwealth Bank chairman, he argued then against the bank's privatisation. Mr Besley says the question of whether to sell all of Telstra is a matter for the government. ""Ultimately the privatisation of Telstra will be a political decision as I see it,"" he said. ""Our task is to give the government some objective views on the service levels we find and that will be one of the ingredients they take into account when they make what will be a political decision."" ---------------------------------"

" Forensic scientists in Uganda are trying to determine how many people died in the country's cult mass suicide - a process that could take a week, but even then might not be precise. At least 200 members of the Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments are believed to have died when they set fire to their church. One estimate goes to almost 500. Piles of human remains are still inside the charred shell of the school room, which doubled as a church used by the group. Members of the sect, which was anticipating the end of the world, crowded into the building last Friday. It was then set alight. With windows and doors boarded shut, no-one is known to have escaped the blaze. The Ugandan Government is confronting a marked increase in cult activity, particularly in rural areas. In the past six months, two organisations have been closed down by police, but it is unknown how many more are operating in the country. ---------------------------------"

" Scientists say Australia will experience more extreme weather over the next century because of global warming. The CSIRO says the country will also become warmer, while other parts of the world will become wetter or drier. The CSIRO has been submitting evidence to the Senate inquiry into Australia's response to global warming. Dr Chris Mitchell says warmer Australian summers can be expected. ""It's really come down to the number of days over 35 degrees, if you live in Melbourne, you're used to experiencing a few days each summer over 35 degrees,"" he said. ""[By the] middle of this century you could expect to see a few more [of] that sort of thing."" -----------------------------------"

" The Queen says she will always retain a deep affection for Australia, even if it eventually becomes a republic. The monarch has told a state luncheon in Sydney she has followed the republic debate with the closest interest and she accepts the outcome of November's referendum. The Queen says the future of the monarchy in this country is a matter for Australians and Australians alone to decide. ""Whatever the future may bring my lasting respect and deep affection for Australia and Australians everywhere will remain as strong as ever,"" she said. ""That is what I have come here to say, that is why I am pleased to be back."" The Australian Republican Movement (ARM) says it is encouraged by the Queen's admission she would retain a deep affection for Australia, even if it becomes a republic. ARM chairman Malcolm Turnbull says the Queen will in turn retain the respect of Australians but is looking to the future. ""I think the Queen has gone further than ... diplomacy would have required her to do so,"" Mr Turnbull said. ""I think she, in some respects, is expecting her speech to be interpreted as saying to Australians 'come on, get on with it'."" The Queen's visit has prompted republicans to regroup to force a plebiscite on the issue. The ARM is preparing for an identity change and elections for national and state leaders. The movement is likely to be renamed Republic Australia. Meanwhile, republic campaigner Reverend Tim Costello says while he is not a supporter of the monarchy, he does not want republicans to protest in front of the Queen. ""We should not at all try to embarrass her by, if you like, our own failure in the referendum last year to make real what's in our hearts, that is, a republican nation,"" he said. ---------------------------------"

" Doctors are urging mothers who experience depression after childbirth to seek help. Plenty of advice is available this week as part of a Post Natal Disorders Awareness program. Brisbane organiser Enno Taemets says the most common problem for new mothers is adjusting to changes after the baby is born, resulting in stress, frustration and depression. ""Depression is a broad term for many problems in the post-natal area,"" Dr Taemets said. ""Probably the most common is really the adjustments that need to be made, that's the adjustments with the relationship between the partners, adjustments like work changes, often homes have to be either sold and bought or renovations - it's a major change."" --------------------------------"

" The New South Wales Department of Agriculture says industrial hemp plantations will be legalised across the state when current trials produce high enough yields. Up to 30 industrial hemp research trials have so far been approved, including a number in the Goulburn area. A condition of the trials is that the THC content, the chemical which gets marijuana smokers high, is kept to a very low level. Weeds Agronomist with NSW Agriculture, Bob Trounce, says commercial crops would cover hundreds of hectares. ""Really this hasn't been studied too closely because at the moment the act, the Drug Misuse Act, only allows trials,"" he said. ""If and when the trials become, or look as if they're hopeful, and commercial yields are being harvested then there will be an amendment to that act and easily it can be allowed to grow legal fibre hemp crops,"" Mr Trounce said. ---------------------------------"

" In South Australia, Truro murderer James William Miller has been refused leave to appeal against a 35-year non-parole period imposed last month. Miller, 59, was convicted of the murders of six women, whose bodies were found near Truro, north-east of Adelaide, in the late 1970s. Miller was sentenced to six life terms in 1980 and the non-parole period means he will have to serve at least another 15 years in jail. He had applied to the South Australian Supreme Court for leave to appeal against the non-parole period, which his lawyer argued is excessive. But Justice Margaret Nyland refused his application. --------------------------------"

" Queensland is 5 for 239 in its second innings at tea on the fourth day of the interstate four-day final against Victoria in Brisbane. Queensland lost three wickets in the middle session: Martin Love for 100, Stuart Law 84 and Andrew Symonds 18. The Bulls have an overall lead of 342 runs. Meanwhile, Australia is 4 for 175 requiring another 99 runs off 11.3 overs on the final day of the match against Central Districts in Napier. Damien Martyn is on 52 and Adam Gilchrist 6. Matthew Hayden made 1, Greg Blewett 14, Steve Waugh 6 and Justin Langer 79. Central Districts declared its second innings closed at 9 for 320 this morning. ---------------------------------"

" On Four Corners at 8.30pm, the elaborate campaign to undermine native title in Western Australia. This bizarre tale from the outback features mining companies, an anthropologist, an ex-politician and Aboriginal communities being pitted against each other over rival land claims. Join reporter Stephen McDonell and producer Janine Cohen for an online forum at 10.30pm in the east and 7.30pm in WA. Go to ""http://www.abc.net.au/4corners/default.htm""."

" The Federal Opposition has accused the Government of breaking an election promise to let Parliament control an inquiry into Telstra. The government has announced the terms of reference for the inquiry, which it promised to do before agreeing to any further sale. It will look at several criteria, including whether Telstra is meeting its service obligations and whether it is meeting the needs of all Australians. The three-person panel will report in September. But the Shadow Communications Minister, Stephen Smith, has condemned the Prime Minister for not letting Parliament have the proper scrutiny. ""He said that he would not seek to fully privatise Telstra without first seeing the results of an independent inquiry established by the Parliament, with the criteria and the terms of reference established by the parliament. And he should meet that commitment,"" Mr Smith said. ""The fact that he is not doing that clearly means that he wants to slide through with a rigged inquiry to get the outcome that he wants."" The Australian Democrats say the inquiry is too narrow because it will not examine the crucial issue of Telstra's long-term services in the bush. Democrats Senator Lyn Allison also says the panel is not independent enough because it includes a former National Party MP. Senator Allison says regardless of the inquiry's findings, the party is unlikely to change its opposition to Telstra's full privatisation. ""I would be very, very surprised if this inquiry turns up a finding which says that everything's okay,"" she said. ""If it does that then I think we'd seriously have to question the way it reached that finding."" But Communications Minister Richard Alston has told Channel Nine, the government will not proceed with full privatisation if the inquiry finds Telstra's service levels are inadequate. ""Quite clearly the results of this inquiry will be critical to our future approach, but one can't pre-empt the outcome of the inquiry,"" he said. ""It may not be black and white so it won't simply be a matter of saying well did they give it a tick or didn't it. ""They may well make a number of recommendations which we'll have to act upon,"" Mr Alston said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Police in Uganda have doubled the predicted death toll from a millennium cult mass suicide in the south-west of the country. Authorities say as many as 470 people may have perished in a fire deliberately set by cult members. Police in Uganda have spent the weekend involved in the grizzly task of working through the charred ruins of a school room, which was also used as a church, where hundreds of people are believed to have died in the world's second worst mass suicide. Many of the bodies have been so badly burned that identification and a final death toll may be impossible to determine. However, one police officer says the original figure of 235 is too low. The members of the Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments of God, locked themselves into the school room before setting fire to their belongings on Friday. The leader of the cult had predicted the end of the world on the December 31, but had put the date back by a year when nothing happened on New Year's Eve. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Taiwanese authorities have announced emergency measures to defend share values when the stock market reopens today for the first session of trading since Saturday's presidential election. Overnight on the streets of the capital, Taipei, thousands of supporters of the defeated ruling party, the Kuomintang, continued to stage demonstrations. The BBC reports they were expressing anger and dismay at the election of pro-independence candidate Chen Shui-bian. Riot police used a water cannon as they struggled to control the crowd and several people were injured. Losing an election is a new experience for these people. The ruling party has been in control for more than 50 years and now faces a painful period of readjustment as it adapts to a new and more open political climate. Chinese leaders in Beijing had warned the Taiwanese people not to support Mr Chen. They regard him as a subversive who wants to separate Taiwan from the rest of China. Beijing views Taiwan as a province of China but Mr Chen's opposition party favours independence for the island. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" A 21-gun salute and a full ceremonial guard of honour will herald the official Australian welcome today to the visiting Queen Elizabeth. After two days largely spent resting at Government House in Canberra, the Queen today begins her 13th tour of Australia in earnest. She will be officially welcomed with the full red carpet treatment at the Sydney Opera House. The size of the crowd turning out to greet the monarch this morning will take on added importance, with many Australians continuing to question the relevance of the royal visit. After the ceremonial welcome, the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh will attend a state luncheon at nearby Darling Harbour hosted by Prime Minister John Howard and New South Wales Premier Bob Carr. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" Police say it appears five people died in a horrific traffic accident at Gatton, west of Brisbane, late last night. The police Coronial Support Unit has been called to help identify the victims, who were in a car which collided with a semi-trailer on the Warrego Highway about 11:30pm AEST. Police say the sedan travelling west on the four-lane highway, crossed the median strip, into the path of an oncoming semi-trailer. The car was wedged under the front of the truck and was then pushed into the back of another semi-trailer parked on the roadside. The accident happened outside the University of Queensland's Gatton campus. The first task for emergency crews was to prise the car clear of the trucks before the number dead could be confirmed and their identities determined. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" Israel's Cabinet has voted to approve the transfer of another 6 per cent of the West Bank to Palestinian control after months of delay and disagreement. The final approval of the redrawn map comes two days before Israeli and Palestinian negotiators are scheduled to recommence frozen peace talks with a summit in the United States. The handover of this latest parcel of land, two months behind schedule, will bring to 42 per cent the proportion of the West Bank under complete or partial Palestinian control. Israel's Deputy Defence Minister Efram Snai said the land to be returned included significant Palestinian towns if not those bordering Jerusalem. From this week on, 60 per cent of the Palestinians in the West Bank would live under full Palestinian authority. This is the real change. The actual transfer is likely to take place on Tuesday, coinciding with the return of Israeli and Palestinian negotiators to discussion of the outline of a final peace treaty. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" US President Bill Clinton begins his official tour of south Asia today with a visit to Bangladesh. It is the first visit by an American President to the country and the first tour of the region by a President in 22 years. Bill Clinton will spend the day in Bangladesh, visiting community development programs and promoting American business interests. He will fly to the capital Dacca for the day after spending the night in New Delhi. He arrived at Delhi's international airport, accompanied by his daughter, Chelsea and mother-in-law, Dorothy Rodham. Mr Clinton's visit to India is intended to strengthen ties with the United States after a frosty cold war relationship. He will also be pressing India and Pakistan to sign the comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty, which neither country has yet committed to signing. Mr Clinton will make a short stop over in Pakistan at the end of the week on his way home for talks with military ruler General Pervez Musharraf. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australia may have found a new star to replace the recently retired multiple title holder, Mick Doohan, in the world 500cc motorcycle championship. Garry McCoy has had a stunning victory in the South African Grand Prix. McCoy, who had previously won in the 125cc division, finished ahead of fellow Yamaha rider, Carlos Checa of Spain."

" Taiwan's pro-independence party candidate Chen Shui-bian has overturned more than 50 years of Nationalist Party rule in Taiwan to become the island's next President. Mr Chen, the charismatic former Taipei mayor from the Democratic Progressive Party, will be the first Opposition figure to run the nationalist island which China considers a breakaway province. While Taiwan's new president has rejected Beijing's ""One China, two systems"" offer for reunification, he was conciliatory as he claimed victory in the election. This is a translation of part of his speech: ""We will open cross direct straits exchange and also all kind of topic to open dialogue and negotiations. We're open for direct links with China."""

" China has replaced its threat of war with an offer to hold talks with the new leadership in Taiwan. The gesture is a significant concession from the government in Beijing. Three days ago, Premier Zhu Rongji warned Taiwanese voters that they would regret electing a pro-independence candidate like Chen Shui-bian. But the result has prompted a far more conciliatory response. A statement from the Central Committee of the ruling Communist Party said China would listen to what Mr Chen says and watch what he does on the issue of cross-strait relations. There was no mention of any military option. Importantly, the statement offered the option of talks on cross-strait relations with any one who favoured the policy of one China. Cross-strait talks stalled last year after talk in Taiwan of greater independence from the mainland. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The vice-president of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), Kevan Gosper, still believes he has a good chance of taking over the IOC presidency. Mr Gosper recently removed himself from the IOC's Ethics Committee after allegations were made that he had accepted free gifts from the Salt Lake City Winter bid committee - claims that he has rejected. He has told Channel Seven the allegations will not affect his campaign to take over the Olympic movement from Juan Antonio Samaranch. ""I have an ambition to make a pitch at it, I know there's strong competition, but the current incident is merely a bump in the road,"" he said. ""And you're pretty lucky in a life as long as I've had, not to get a bump in the road."""

" Mr Gosper has stopped short of naming those he believes are responsible for recent allegations against him. Mr Gosper voluntarily stood down from the IOC's Ethics Commission after claims were made that his family abused hospitality offered by the Salt Lake City bid committee. He says he knows who is behind the allegations but would not name them. He did, however, criticise fellow IOC member Phil Coles for his recent attacks on his family. ""I didn't make an enemy of Phil Coles, I stopped supporting Phil Coles,"" he said. When asked if he suspected Mr Coles of the allegations, Mr Gosper replied: ""I wouldn't say on your air whom I suspected, I would simply start a rabbit run on conspiracies."" ""People have seen Phil Coles' performance as an athlete and as an administrator and more recently understand the files on which he brought himself into disrepute,"" Mr Gosper said. ""Now I didn't attack Phil Coles, Phil Coles lost me when in the process he started to attack my family."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A new study into the effects of the goods and services tax (GST) shows farmers will be better off. The analysis was carried out by the Centre for Agricultural and Regional Economics, based in the northern New South Wales town of Armidale. The centre analysed five types of farms - small and large beef and wool producing enterprises, two cropping operations and a horticultural business. The centre says net disposable income increased for each of the five farm types, from between 16 and 60 per cent. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" US President Bill Clinton says he is hoping to rekindle relations between India and the United States during a visit this week to south Asia. It will be the first trip to India by an American President in more than 20 years, and the visit will also take Mr Clinton to Bangladesh and Pakistan. Mr Clinton arrives in New Delhi late this evening. He will be accompanied by US Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, among the phalanx of senior White House officials, as well as business leaders, on board Air Force One. Mr Clinton's daughter, Chelsea, will also be accompanying him during the tour. Washington is set to upgrade its ties with India after an often difficult cold war relationship. His visit is eagerly awaited by officials and business leaders in India. But some citizens groups and left-wing parties will be protesting against the president's tour and calling for an end to corporate imperialism. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Investigations are continuing into a brawl at Sydney's central railway station. The fight broke out between two groups of people on a CityRail train on platform 16 just after 11:00pm AEDT last night. Passengers fled the carriage as the brawl spread to include a large number of people travelling on the train. At least one person, a 21-year old man, was seriously injured and was taken to hospital unconscious. Those responsible for the attack escaped before police arrived, but officers say they are confident of finding the attackers. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Canberrans will get their first opportunity to see the Queen today when the monarch attends mass at a local Anglican church. The Queen has so far had a relatively low-key weekend since arriving in Australia on Friday night. Yesterday, she held private talks with both the Governor-General, Sir William Deane, and the Prime Minister, John Howard. Mr Howard says the Queen is very happy to be back in Australia and insists she is not feeling uncomfortable about coming here so soon after November's republic referendum. The Queen will spend the rest of the day at Government House in Canberra before flying to Sydney tomorrow morning. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A pharmaceutical company at the centre of an extortion bid in Brisbane has offered a big reward for information about the case. Herron Pharmaceuticals has posted a reward of $250,000 for information leading to the conviction of the person responsible for tampering with the company's paracetamol products. The company's chief executive, Euan Murdoch, says anyone with information regarding the extortionist should contact Brisbane police. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Attorney General, Daryl Williams, has criticised four judges of the New South Wales Court of Appeal for speaking out against mandatory sentencing. In a letter to the <i>Sydney Morning Herald</i>, Justices Fitzgerald, Stein, Beazley and Wood described mandatory sentencing as unjust, racist and cowardly. But Mr Williams says judges should refrain from commenting on politically contentious issues and that it is inappropriate for judges to use their office to criticise the political process. He says the judiciary should not only be free from interference from the executive but the judiciary should not interfere in matters that are the responsibility of Parliament."

" The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission's (ATSIC) southern zone commissioner for the Northern Territory, says the Federal Government's approach to mandatory sentencing is killing the reconciliation process. Alison Anderson's comments follow the government's gagging of debate on three bills, aimed at overriding the territory's mandatory sentencing laws. Ms Anderson, from central Australia, says the government has nothing to reconcile with if it continues to allow juveniles to be affected by the laws in the Northern Territory and Western Australia. She says the Federal Government should protect children and ensure justice is applied uniformly across all jurisdictions. Ms Anderson says there should be a move towards incorporating traditional Aboriginal law into the legislative framework so indigenous people can administer their own justice. She has also attacked members of the coalition who say they will not cross the floor on the issue, despite opposing mandatory sentencing. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Olympic Social Impacts Advisory Committee chair says the release of further tickets to this years Games is a chance for Olympic organisers (SOCOG) to improve its image with the public. SOCOG claims to have found 3.1 million extra seats which will go on sale from the middle of next month on a first-come, first-serve basis. Included in the figure are tickets under the opportunity programme which goes to school children and disadvantaged groups. Committee chair, the Reverend Harry Herbert, says organisers should look at making more tickets available for the opportunity scheme. ""This is now the opportunity for SOCOG to say we will put back the vast bulk of the Olympic opportunity tickets,"" he said. ""They continued to reduce the number of opportunity tickets from 1.5 million to 1.1 million, then to 735,000. ""They have no excuse now for not putting back tickets into that program,"" Rev Herbert said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Queen is preparing to begin her 16-day tour of Australia after arriving in Canberra last night. The monarch was met at Canberra airport by the Prime Minister, John Howard and the Governor-General, Sir William Deane. After the brief welcome, the Queen was driven to Government House where she was welcomed by a small group of flag-waving monarchists. The Duke of Edinburgh flew in separately, arriving in Canberra later in the evening. The Queen's only engagement today is a private audience with Mr Howard. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Health authorities have welcomed a push for state and territory governments to consider suing tobacco companies. The governments will be asked to take part in a class action to recover the costs of smoking-related illnesses at a meeting of Attorneys-General next week. Tobacco companies have described the move as hypocritical, saying tobacco taxes in Australia more than cover the cost of smoking related illnesses. But the director of the Australian Council on Smoking and Health, Ron Edwards, says smokers pay most of the tobacco revenue collected by governments, while the companies pay very little tax. ""It's time for the companies to pay for the bill they've created for the Australian health system and for the individual, that is to be sued for producing a product that has killed lots of people in Australia,"" he said. ""18,000 a year it kills and tobacco companies have spent years denying their product did any harm. So it's time for them to face up to reality."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australia's pharmacists will take a more proactive line in the battle against diabetes, under a new industry package. The Pharmaceutical Society of Australia initiative will see chemists invite customers with diabetes to register their medical details in a special database. The system will also provide pharmacists with advice from GPs and specialists. The society's Marcus Weidinger says the aim is to improve the health of those living with diabetes through practical information. ""For example, if someone's smoking we know that that has a lot of cardiovascular risks and it may have some impact on diabetes control as well,"" he said. ""We might help to facilitate smoke cessation there. The other thing is with the vast number of people in Australia who have type two diabetes, where being overweight is a significant risk factor, we can help to get the ball rolling on weight management program[s] there."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Germany's Upper House of Parliament has voted to lift a four-year-old ban on British beef, originally imposed after an outbreak of mad cow disease in Britain. The European Union (EU) has dropped its legal action against Germany in response. Both France and Germany had defied an EU directive to lift the ban on British beef. But now the German Upper House has voted by a slim majority to lift the embargo. The vote came despite last minute efforts by some rural German politicians, who said they were still not satisfied that British beef was now safe to eat. German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder had hinted that any fines imposed for defying the EU directive would be passed on to regional governments unless the ban was lifted. British beef could now be back on sale in Germany as early as next month. France is still defying the EU directive. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Queensland Government says Herron Pharmaceutical's decision not to immediately report an extortion attempt to police was wrong. Herron knew of an extortion threat to its paracetamol tablets a month ago but failed to inform police or the public. It has also been revealed that the company received threats against its products in 1993 and again in 1995. Police are investigating the latest threat, which has led to a nationwide recall of Herron Paracetamol tablets, after two people fell ill when they took contaminated tablets in Brisbane. Acting Queensland Police Minister Paul Braddy says police and Crown Law officers will investigate why the threat was not reported immediately. ""I want to make it clear to the public that I think it was an error of judgement that it wasn't reported,"" Mr Braddy said. ""It should have been. ""We don't approve of their failure ... to report. ""Officers of the police and Crown Law look to their duty under the law in relation to these matters and I won't comment on any failure to so report other than to criticise it."" The two Brisbane people who were poisoned have asked for their privacy to the respected. Ray Crompton, the spokesman for the hospital where the pair was taken, says the father and son were admitted through the emergency department on Saturday. He would not confirm reports the son was initially discharged and came back only after taking another tainted capsule. Mr Crompton said they were in a stable condition and appreciate the community's concern. He read a statement from the pair: ""However, as we are sure everyone will understand, we do not wish to make any further comment on this distressing situation. ""It's affecting the whole family, a wide range of people. ""We know the health authorities and police are investigating this very serious issue and everyone will be in a better position to keep the public informed once the situation's resolved."" ------------------------------"

" Labor premiers have called for an urgent Council of Australian Governments meeting to discuss health funding after today's meeting of state and territory treasurers in Canberra. The meeting was supposed to replace the annual Premiers' conferences as part of changes generated by the goods and services tax (GST) which will go directly to the states. The premiers of Victoria, Queensland and New South Wales also say they may consider legal action against the Commonwealth for breaching the health agreement. Victorian Premier Steve Bracks says the Commonwealth has shortchanged the states on health. ""What we're talking about is the Commonwealth walking away from an agreement,"" Mr Bracks said. ""This is an agreement in which there was arbitration struck, which the Commonwealth agreed to the arbiter, the ex-Commonwealth statistician, it was agreed to. ""The arbitrator said that it should be CPI [consumer price index] plus half a per cent. ""The Commonwealth, once they found that out, walked away from it, gave $750 million less to all the states and that's effectively a cut in the health budgets of every state in Australia."" At the same time, the nation's health ministers have warned of an exodus of doctors from public hospitals because of federal tax changes. Emerging from a three-hour meeting in Sydney, the ministers said the impact of the GST and fringe benefits tax changes could cause hardship, particularly in rural areas. They say there is also major confusion over the GST's impact on hospital food. They are calling for the Commonwealth to increase its funding for hospitals, in line with recommendations which have been made by an independent arbiter. -------------------------------"

" Police commissioners from throughout Australasia have agreed to cooperate on strategies to defeat electronic crime. Australian Federal Police Commissioner Mick Palmer says the Internet is expanding rapidly and poses a serious challenge to law enforcement agencies worldwide. Commissioner Palmer says an electronic crime strategy taskforce is being established to examine the resources and tactics required to tackle the problem. ""The thing that I think really needs to be recognised, which I guess alarms us most of all, is the implication, the potential for e-commerce to commit crime on a scale that hitherto has been very unlikely. ""The capacity of properly organised electronic-based crime to undermine the financial stability of small and medium-sized countries is very real."" The taskforce is due to report in June. ------------------------------------"

" On Four Corners on Monday night at 8.30pm, the elaborate campaign to undermine native title in Western Australia. This bizarre tale from the outback features mining companies, an anthropologist, an ex-politician and Aboriginal communities being pitted against each other over rival land claims. Join reporter Stephen McDonell and producer Janine Cohen for an online forum at 10.30pm in the east and 7.30pm in WA. Go to ""http://www.abc.net.au/4corners/default.htm""."

" Herron Pharmaceuticals expects its paracetamol products to be off store shelves by today. Two people have been hospitalised in Brisbane with possible strychnine poisoning, after taking Herron paracetamol capsules. Police say the tablets were from the same packet, purchased from a Kenmore supermarket in Brisbane's western suburbs. Herron management is meeting this morning, to consider offering a reward for information leading to the arrest of those responsible for the tampering. Marketing Manager, Garth MacDonald, says the company's tamper-protection measures on its packets are superior to similar products. ""The product concerned is ... inside a cellophane wrapped box. So it's a tamper evident box in that sense. I haven't seen the pack that has been tampered with so I'm not sure what has been done,"" he said. Meanwhile, Queensland Police are assembling a taskforce to carry out an investigation into the contamination of Herron paracetamol. Police Media Spokesman Brian Swift says the taskforce which investigated the Arnott's biscuit extortion case is being reconvened to deal with the matter. ""The product was purchased from a supermarket in the suburb of Kenmore south-west of Brisbane, about last Wednesday we think,"" he said. ""That's yet to be confirmed and we can do that with cross-checking of cash registers and sales and batch numbers and those sorts of things. ""But that'll come in time and it appears the first part of that product wasn't consumed until either late Friday or early Saturday."" ---------------------------------"

" The Prime Minister, John Howard, has dismissed concerns that today's meeting of state and territory treasurers has reduced the need for direct contact with the premiers. The goods and services tax (GST) will head the agenda at the Canberra meeting. Today's meeting replaces the annual gathering of state and territory leaders which used to discuss commonwealth funding. The discussion has changed because of the Federal Government's decision to give the states the revenue from the GST. The focus today will be on the administration of the tax and transitional assistance. Some state leaders are not happy with the new arrangements. West Australian Premier Richard Court says the government is downgrading opportunities for the premiers to meet. But the Prime Minister says there is still ample opportunity for heads of governments to discuss important issues, and says he is committed to working closely with states and territories for the good of the nation. ---------------------------------"

" Police in the Kimberley say hopes of finding a teenager who has been missing in the area for a week, are fading. Darryl Clancy left an Aboriginal community near Fitzroy Crossing last week for a 60-kilometre walk with three other boys, who have since been found. Superintendent Steve Roast of the Kimberley Police District says the area the teenager is believed to be in has been too wet for a ground search. However, the water is beginning to subside and it is hoped a ground search can begin this morning. Meanwhile, a search will continue today for 56-year-old Ivann Gepp, who was last seen in his boat on the Fitzroy River on Monday. ------------------------------------"

" Some of Australia's most renowned artists are up for this year's Archibald Prize. The winner of the $35,000 prize will be announced later today at the Art Gallery of New South Wales. Artists shortlisted for the prize include Ann Thomson, David Fairbairn, Keith Looby and Bill Leak, who has double-dipped this year as both painter and subject. His portrait of a spluttering Sir Les Patterson, which won the unofficial packing room prize voted on by gallery storemen, is up for the Archibald, as is a portrait of him by Esther Erlich. A portrait of The Sandman, the alter-ego of Triple J broadcaster Steve Abbott, is also in the running, as is a self-portrait by 1998 Archibald winner, Lewis Miller. In addition to the Sulman, Wynne and Dobell prizes, the winner of a special $20,000 prize for portraits of Australian sports people will also be announced. --------------------------------"

" The era of the British Rover motor car appears to have come to an end. A breakup of the Rover company announced today will mean no new sedan models will be manufactured. For the past five years, the loss-making Rover company has been described by its German owners BMW as ""the English patient"", and today BMW cut its losses. Amidst howls of British union protest, it has sold most of Rover to a British venture capital firm Alchemy Partners, who will rename it the MG Car Company. The company will continue to make new model MGs and old Minis, but plans to phase out new Rovers. BMW will continue to make the new Minis, and it is believed to be selling the profitable Land Rover brand to another as yet unnamed car manufacturer. -------------------------------"

" Pakistan's military rulers will appeal a bizarre death sentence handed down to a man convicted of killing 100 homeless boys. Javed Iqbal photographed his victims, killed them, carved them up and dissolved their bodies in vats of acid. In a Lahore court he was sentenced to face the same fate as the children he killed in front of the city's national monument. Judge Allah Baksh Ranja invoked Islamic law in his brief judgement, which has shocked human rights activists across the country. The director of Pakistan's Human Rights Commission says there is no precedent or justification for the sentence. ""I am horrified. What is the difference between the accused and the law enforcers?"" he said. Three other men were found guilty of involvement in the murders. One of them has also been sentenced to death. The other two have been jailed for 14 years. The defence has a week to appeal to the High Court. --------------------------------"

" The Prime Minister, John Howard, says the Commonwealth is unable to override state laws on mandatory sentencing because of a deal struck between former Labor governments. The government has twice gagged debate on separate bills to overturn the Western Australian and Northern Territory laws, prompting the Opposition to break convention and ask itself and Independent MP, Peter Andren, questions on the matter. Mr Howard says the former West Australian Labor government agreed in 1990 to speed up signing the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The agreement was made with the Federal Labor government and Mr Howard says the Opposition is now being hypocritical. ""It states and I read it again, 'the state government's understanding that there is no intention by the Commonwealth to use the external affairs power on the basis of the convention to enact Commonwealth legislation to override state laws in this area.' I table this letter."" -----------------------------"

" On Australian Story tonight at 8.30pm, Sydney Olympics chief Kevan Gosper is seeking the top job job in sport - presidency of the International Olympic Committee. But before he can claim the prize there are hurdles to overcome, not least an IOC ethics committee inquiry into his family's luxury holiday in Salt Lake City. Join Kevan Gosper and Helen Grasswill for an internet forum after the program. Go to ""http://www.abc.net.au/austory/"". And Lateline at 10.30pm looks at Taiwan's elections. Go to ""http://www.abc.net.au/lateline/""."

" The Prime Minister is set to advance the process for the full privatisation of Telstra. He has told Coalition MPs he will soon announce the terms of reference and the personnel for an independent assessment of Telstra's service. The inquiry is a condition for the further sale. Mr Howard has told MPs the sale will only go ahead when the government is satisfied Telstra is meeting its obligations. He says Telstra still has a considerable distance to go before it can assure the Government obligations are being met. ----------------------------------"

" The head of the Reserve Bank says financial markets have been reading too much into a recent spate of weak economic figures in Australia. Ian Macfarlane was responding to a conference question on the performance of the Australian dollar. The query was prompted by an interview <i>The Financial Times</i> had conducted with the central bank governor. Mr Macfarlane said regarding the dollar's recent dip, he replied: ""In the normal process of receiving economic statistics there is a lot of random noise and short-run movements this way and that. ""And really during the month of February there were about three monthly indicators that looked to be weak and I think people read too much into those."" Mr Macfarlane says there has been a tendency for people both in Australia and offshore to come up with an incorrect assessment of the economy as the basis for conclusions about future moves in official interest rates. --------------------------------"

" Australia says it is worried by an increase in armed incursions from West Timor into East Timor. While expressing concern about cross border action in Timor, Prime Minister John Howard paid tribute to the good intentions of the Wahid Government in Indonesia. ""We naturally are concerned about any evidence or any sign of an increase in incursions,"" he said. ""On the other hand we accept that there is still a considerable degree of instability. ""And we set that against the overwhelmingly positive attitude we take towards the Indonesian government's approach under President Wahid,"" Mr Howard said. The Prime Minister says President Wahid showed his good will by visiting East Timor. Mr Howard says the Wahid government has pledged to bring to justice those responsible for wrongs committed against East Timor. --------------------------------"

" Australian woolgrowers have voted to halve the size of the wool tax they pay for research, development and promotion. Preliminary results of a ballot held by the Federal Government show 61 per cent of woolgrowers favour a 2 per cent levy. A reduction in the levy will mean there will be insufficient funds to continue retail and consumer marketing. Federal Agriculture Minister Warren Truss says the $55 million that will be raised through a 2 per cent levy will help establish a new body to replace the Woolmark Company. ""Well, I'll be proceeding immediately to set up the interim board and to move towards the development of a new company,"" he said. ""They'll need to take into account their establishment costs and determine what their budget levels are to find how quickly they're able to move to that figure. ""But the growers have spoken on this issue and clearly we'll be moving to 2 per cent as quickly as we're able,"" Mr Truss said. ---------------------------------"

" Australian researchers have found fewer boys are being born because of a drop in the quality of sperm. Chief scientist Keith Harrison, from the Queensland Fertility Group in Brisbane, says farm workers and men working in occupations such as mechanics, are even less likely to father boys. The likely explanation is exposure to toxins and chemicals which can damage sperm. Mr Harrison studied 4,000 Australian children, born through in-vitro fertilisation (IVF), and found boys were less likely to be born to couples where men had infertility problems. The findings will be presented at the Perinatal Society meeting in Brisbane. ----------------------------------"

" Play has been abandoned on the fourth day of the first cricket Test at Eden Park between Australia and New Zealand. Heavy rain overnight and today prevented any play. New Zealand is 5 for 151, needing another 130 runs to win the match. Shane Warne still needs one wicket to break Dennis Lillee's Australian Test wicket-taking record. ---------------------------------"

" Tonight on Lateline at 10.30pm, new technology stocks are leading markets up around the world, but are they are a sure bet? Go to ""http://www.abc.net.au/lateline/"". -------------------------------"

" Owing to industrial action by members of the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance, ABC News Online will be unable to provide its regular services and features for the next 24 hours. The industrial action will also affect the delivery of this NewsMail service. The NewsMail service will resume on Thursday morning AEDT. ABC News Online regrets any inconvenience. --------------------------------"

" The Prime Minister is under new pressure to allow a conscience vote on mandatory sentencing. The Senate could vote today on whether to repeal the laws in the Northern Territory and Western Australia. The Senate will resume debate today on a Private Member's Bill to repeal the laws for minors. Speakers last night took diametrically different views. The opposition parties support repeal including Northern Territory Labor Senator Trish Crossin. ""It is about putting people above party politics,"" she said. But Territory Coalition Senator Grant Tambling has attacked even his own colleagues who want to repeal the laws. ""It particularly saddens me that a few of my Coalition colleagues have jumped on this bandwagon,"" he said. The bill is certain to pass the Senate by tomorrow and go to the Lower House next month. The Prime Minister has ruled out a conscience vote meaning it is likely to fail. But organisations like the Law Council are lobbying for him to change his stance. Its president, Gordon Hughes, says otherwise MPs should decide for themselves. ""I would like to see a conscience vote take place, failing that there may be no other option than for concerned members of the Government to cross the floor,"" he said. ""Whether or not enough would cross the floor to make a difference in the vote remains to be seen, I think it's a pity that it would have to come to that. ""I would have thought the reasons in the Senate report would have been compelling enough for the government to re-evaluate its whole position on mandatory sentencing."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Public Service could face another shake-up with a parliamentary inquiry recommending some jobs be shifted to the bush. The report has made 92 recommendations to try to stop the decline of services in rural and regional areas. They include that all or some parts of departments such as Agriculture be moved to rural areas in an effort to boost employment. Inquiry member and Member for Eden Monaro Gary Nairn says the relocation would put public servants into areas where policy decisions are taking effect. ""Well the committee believes that some of the Commonwealth departments, or parts of them, could be located in more of the regional areas,"" he said. ""I think it's an aspect that can be considered, it might only be sections of departments. ""The Commonwealth departments currently are not just all in Canberra, many of those people from those Commonwealth departments are located in Sydney, Melbourne and other major capitals."" -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" The trial has opened in The Hague of the most senior Serb General yet to face charges of war crimes from the Bosnian war. General Radislav Krstic is accused of committing the worst crimes of genocide in Europe since the second world war. The prosecution in The Hague has alleged that General Krstic was the man who gave the orders for the operation that virtually wiped out the entire Muslim population of Srebenica. In July 1995, General Krstic's Bosnian Serb troops entered what was then a UN safe haven and ordered the 150 Dutch troops to hand over control. What followed was described by the prosecutor as the worst war crime seen in Europe since the second world war. Around 7,500 local Muslims, mostly men, are thought to have been killed. More than 1,800 corpses have already been exhumed from mass graves in the area, another 2,500 bodies are still buried and the rest have never been found. General Krstic pleaded not guilty. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A search will resume today for four teenagers who have been missing for five days in Western Australia's north. Police are confident the four are still alive, but they say more fuel is needed to continue the aerial search. Aviation fuel at Fitzroy Crossing is running low because new supplies are being delayed due to roads cut by flooding. The teenagers were walking from the Bayulu Community to Yakanarra, and may have been cut off by floodwaters from former tropical cyclone Steve. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" Indonesian police are investigating a shooting incident at the nation's Parliament. A single shot was fired, shortly after the son of former President Suharto had entered the building. The scene was sealed off late yesterday following the attack. It is believed a 32 calibre bullet was fired. It left a window in the hallway of the Parliament broken, but no-one was injured. Tommy Suharto, the youngest son of the former President, had just arrived in the building. He was attending a Parliament hearing into the clove cigarette industry, of which he is a large stakeholder. Mr Suharto junior has overseen a range of business interests, including the failure of Indonesia's national car project. It is not known if there is any connection between his appearance and the shooting. Police investigations are continuing. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The German Government has offered financial and technical aid to help Romania improve its environmental standards. The offer has been made as heavy metals from a second mine accident continues to pollute rivers in neighbouring countries. Just six weeks after a cyanide spill from a partly Australian-owned mine in Romania killed almost all life in some of the region's major waterways, the Romanian Government is now forced to defend a second spill of heavy metals from a totally Romanian-owned mine. In neighbouring Hungary, the country most effected by the spills, the government has once again banned any use of the water from the Tisza River. Meanwhile, the German Environment Minister has offered financial and technical aid to Romania to help it avoid such incidents in the future. The German government says it believes such accidents are international problems and the international community should offer support. The European Union has already granted $640 million euros a year to Romania over the next six years to help limit the damage and to help improve safety overall. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Buckingham Palace has slammed the lid on claims Queen Elizabeth will take a customised toilet seat on her visit to Australia. Rupert Murdoch's tabloid newspaper <i>The Sun</i> reports the Queen is taking 20-tonnes of baggage to Australia including an ultra soft white leather toilet seat, which can be fitted wherever she tours. But it seems the Palace is not amused by claims about a Royal flush. Its press office says no special loo seat will be taken on the trip and denies any Australian taxpayers' money will be spent on such an item. It also says less than three-tonnes of baggage will accommodate the Queen and her 32-person entourage not the 20-tonnes that has been reported. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Sharks last night maintained their outstanding home ground record by beating the Bulldogs 14-4 in their National Rugby League game last night. It was the Sharks' 13th win at home from their past 15 games. Coach John Lang told Fox Sports he was happy with his team's defensive effort. ""Our defence on our own line, I thought that was the best part about our win tonight I think you know you've got to be able to defend on your own line,"" he said. Sharks centre Andrew Ettingshausen says his team had to work hard to beat the Bulldogs. ""Our forwards had to do an enormous amount of work, especially that first half took its toll, but as the game came on I tell you I was glad that interchange was there we kept on bringing on some fresh faces which helped us."""

" The Senate's bid to override the mandatory sentencing laws in Western Australia and the Northern Territory will take a step forward with the release of a report into the laws. But the report will be split, with Liberal members of a Senate inquiry into the laws at odds over the issue. A Senate inquiry into overturning the laws, sparked by legislation from the Greens, Democrats and Labor will report today. Liberal Committee member Helen Coonan says no-one on the committee agrees with the laws, but she thinks there are other ways of dealing with the problem. ""There are some options that ought to be explored before you would look at doing anything as drastic as seeking to intervene,"" she said. ""Merely because the Commonwealth doesn't agree is usually of itself not sufficient reason to intervene. ""What I think will come out of this is, perhaps, some constructive dialogue and perhaps some very good ways to look at doing things a little better,"" Senator Coonan said. But it is understood the other Liberal committee member Marise Payne does not fully agree with Senator Coonan and may back overturning the laws. The Senate is likely to pass the bill, but its future looks more troubled in the Lower House. While some Coalition MPs want the laws overturned, the Prime Minister is reluctant to take that step. The Foreign Affairs Minister, Alexander Downer, has released a reference paper from the United Nations on mandatory sentencing. The paper was written after a request from the Federal Opposition leader, Kim Beazley, to the UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, when he visited Australia. The UN expresses concern about the unjustified and disproportionately high percentage of Aboriginal children in the juvenile justice system. It also expresses concern about the enactment of the legislation in two jurisdictions where a high percentage of indigenous people live. --------------------------------"

" The Federal Opposition has called on the National Party to stand-up to the Government on Telstra services to the bush. The call coincides with growing support for a rural unit within Telstra dedicated to regional areas. Buried in last week's announcement of a $2 billion profit and the slashing of 10,000 jobs, was a line suggesting the unit for regional services. Coalition MPs have embraced the idea, saying it should form a whole new division of the organisation, although all concede the exercise would require a subsidy. But Labor's Stephen Smith has dismissed the suggestion. ""It's just a sop. It was an attempt at PR to pretend that something real and effective was being done for rural and regional Australia,"" he said. National Party Member for Hinkler Paul Neville says Telstra is now well aware of the anger of Coalition MPs about services to the bush. He says his colleagues will be watching closely to see that promises are kept. Queensland farmers are suspicious about the effectiveness of a new division of Telstra to deliver services to regional Australia. Agforce president Larry Acton says there is currently legislation governing Telstra's service obligations and the organisation should be made to conform under the existing rules. ""Those sorts of things need to be enforced and just by providing another vehicle doesn't necessarily mean that it's going to be delivered,"" he said. ""It may be the solution but I'm yet to be convinced that we're letting them off the hook under the current systems. ""If we haven't got the will to deliver it under a new system it won't work under that system either."" The opposition has also sought a guarantee that the government's promise on services to the bush will apply to a fully privatised Telstra. Mr Howard promised last month at Nyngan that any threat to Commonwealth services in regional Australia would set off a flashing red light in his office. Opposition leader Kim Beazley has challenged the Prime Minister to include Telstra within the guarantee, even after it is fully sold. Mr Howard has told Parliament the promise applies to a majority government-owned Telstra, but when it is fully privatised there are other guarantees. ""The obligation to provide levels of service, in other words the community service obligation, is enshrined in statute and that obtains irrespective of who owns Telstra,"" he said. ---------------------------------"

" A yachtsman in the 1998 Sydney to Hobart race says he would have withdrawn from the event if he had been warned about the storm the day before it engulfed his boat. The New South Wales coroner is examining the deaths of six yachtsmen in the race. Skipper Ian Moray recalled battling 60 foot waves and winds gusting up to 86 knots, on the afternoon of the second day of racing. He told the inquest it was no longer a yacht race, it was survival. The yachtsman, with 20 years experience, said if he had been told of a storm warning issued by the weather bureau, one hour into the race, he would have pulled out of the event. Mr Moray described how with the help of the ABC helicopter, his crew located another vessel which sent out the first mayday of the race. Mr Moray said he waited beside the stricken boat for one hour until one of his crew was seriously injured. --------------------------------"

" The world's second-biggest economy has plunged back into recession. In the final quarter of last year, Japan's economy shrunk by 1.4 per cent. The fall of 1.4 per cent in economic activity in the December quarter follows a fall of 1 per cent in the September quarter. Two quarters in a row of falling economic activity means a return to recession in Japan after six months of apparent economic recovery. The recession is worse than expected. On an annualised basis, the economy is contracting by more than 5 per cent a year. The good news is that spending by private firms was up in the December quarter, although they are likely to be firms benefiting from government contracts. The bad news is that spending by Japanese consumers is falling - it fell by 1.6 per cent in the three months to December. ----------------------------------"

" Shares in upmarket retailer David Jones have risen on the Australian Stock Exchange despite a small decline in half-yearly profits. For the six months to the end of January, David Jones has suffered a 3 per cent drop in profit after tax and abnormal items to $24.8 million. However, revenue in the period was up almost 10 per cent and the dividend pay-out to stockholders has been maintained at four cents per share. In lunchtime trading, David Jones shares were up six cents at $1.35. ---------------------------------"

" New research is showing that folate supplements, widely recommended for women planning pregnancy, may increase the chances of having twins. Folate has been proven to minimise the risk of birth defects such as spina bifida by up to 70 per cent. Professor Judith Lumley, from the Centre for the Study of Mothers' Health at Melbourne's La Trobe University, says the increased risk of twins and the greater health problems they face could make recommending folate a dilemma. She says the likelihood of having twins is increased by around 40 per cent when folate supplements are taken. ""Your likelihood of having twins is about 1.4 per cent, so a 40 per cent increase in that takes it up to about 1.9 per cent so from 14 per 1,000 to about 19 per 1,000,"" she said. -------------------------------"

" A federal parliamentary report has warned that Australia is in danger of being divided into two nations because of a lack of infrastructure. The government is being urged to show more leadership in regional areas. The year long inquiry examined the issues facing regional and rural Australia and came up with 92 recommendations on how to stop the decline. The report titled Time Running Out warns that action is desperately needed to ensure that many regional communities do not just survive but learn to thrive once again. It says the opportunity exists for the Federal Government to take the lead in reshaping the future of regional Australia, particularly on the issue of new infrastructure. On the current debate over telecommunications services, the report recommends the universal service obligation be extended to ensure Internet services are made available to all regional areas. --------------------------------"

" New Zealand is 5 for 151 at stumps on day three, needing another 130 to win the first cricket Test against Australia at Eden Park. Shane Warne has drawn level with Denis Lillee as Australia's leading Test wicket-taker. Warne bowled Nathan Astle around his legs for 35 to bring up the 355th wicket of his Test career. Craig McMillan is 57 not out and Chris Cairns has 20. Colin Miller took three wickets and Glenn McGrath one. Earlier today Australia was dismissed for 229 in the second innings. Adam Gilchrist made 59 and Daniel Vettori took seven wickets for New Zealand, to give him 12 for the match. ------------------------------"

" The New South Wales Government has launched a campaign to stop a southward expansion of cane toads along the east coast. The government says there are breeding colonies at Lake Innes near Port Macquarie on the mid-north coast, with Yamba and Grafton further north the most vulnerable areas in the state. Environment Minister Bob Debus, who is launching the campaign, said small numbers of toads have also been transported from Queensland and the north coast to Sydney and Wollongong. ""Residents should report any sightings to wildlife authorities to eradicate a potential threat,"" he said. ""Cane toads are a significant threat to both wildlife and to domestic pets and it's very important that people in NSW understand that they are migrating steadily down the coast. ""We want to make sure that the community will help organisations like the National Parks and Wildlife Service to contain that expansion."" --------------------------------"

" On tonight's 4 Corners, reporter Chris Masters examines whether Australia is abusing the human rights of refugees. Join Masters and the story's producer, Matt Brown, in a live Internet forum after the program, at 10:30pm AEDT. Go to ""http://www.abc.net.au/4corners/"". And Lateline looks at the Senate report on mandatory sentencing for juveniles. Go to ""http://www.abc.net.au/lateline/""."

" The Prime Minister, John Howard, has again been challenged to allow Coalition MPs a conscience vote on the issue of mandatory sentencing. A Senate committee will later today hand down its report into a bill which proposes to overturn mandatory sentencing laws for juveniles in the Northern Territory and Western Australia. Mr Howard has previously ruled out calls for a conscience vote and although he says the laws are ""silly"" he has indicated it is not a matter for federal intervention. Greens Senator Bob Brown, whose Private Member's Bill sparked the report, says he expects the Senate will support his bill. ""The bill will go to the House of Representatives and every member there is going to have to vote yes or no as to whether they want to keep locking up Aboriginal children under these mandatory sentencing laws in the Northern Territory and Western Australia,"" he said. ""I think the Prime Minister and many government members will be looking at the fact that 13 per cent of their voters deserted the Liberal Country Party in Saturday's by-election in the heartland of this issue in the Northern Territory."" Meanwhile, the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation says it has no further plans to raise the issue of mandatory sentencing with the Prime Minister. The council's deputy chairman, Sir Gustav Nossal, raised his concerns about the state and territory legislation with Mr Howard two weeks ago. Sir Gustav says Mr Howard has made it clear he is not willing to act on the issue. ""I think the council's position on this is, having made its position clear to the highest level of government in this land, and having been told that no further action is proposed, there doesn't seem an enormous amount of point in us expending a whole heap of energy on this particular issue,"" he said. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Coalition MPs have welcomed a commitment from Telstra to develop a special unit dedicated to regional services. The suggestion was part of a series of announcements last week, including a $2 billion profit and the axing of 10,000 jobs. Chairman of the Coalition's Communications Committee, Paul Neville, says the MPs would like to see the special unit proposal expanded into a whole new division for regional areas. Mr Neville says such a division may require a government subsidy. ""I think there's an acknowledgement of that in Telstra two [T-2],"" he said. ""There's a clear understanding that in Telstra two there's a requirement for additional funding already. I think that may have to be extended still further."" -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" Israel has generally welcomed Pope John Paul II's appeal for forgiveness for the sins of the Church. But the country's chief Rabbi says he is deeply disappointed the Pontiff did not deal directly with the Holocaust, which saw millions of Jews put to death in concentration camps during World War II. Rabbi Lau concedes Pope John Paul II has done more than his predecessors in recognising Jewish persecution. But he wants the head of the Roman Catholic Church to specifically address the Holocaust and the Church's poor record in standing up to the Nazis when he visits Israel next week. Greater praise, however, came from the head of the anti-defamation league, Rabbi David Rosen. He says the Pope's mea culpa is important in that it is a liturgical act, not just a simple statement. In his homily the Pope said he was deeply saddened by the behaviour of those who throughout history had made the Jews suffer. Rabbi Rosen said the Pope's visit to the Holy Land will only help to further reconcile Jews and Christians. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Irish Prime Minister Bertie Ahern has appealed to all para-military organisations involved in the Northern Ireland conflict to put their weapons beyond use. Mr Ahern said public confidence would be boosted if all groups accepted that a return to an armed campaign was not an option. The power-sharing administration in Northern Ireland was suspended last month following the IRA's failure to start dismantling its weapons. Mr Ahern, who presented the Australian - Ireland Fund's first peace lecture in Sydney last night, says it is accepted on all sides that dealing with the arms issue to everyone's satisfaction is essential. ""There is an ever present danger of the misappropriation of weapons by dissident of criminal elements,"" he said. ""More fundamentally, as long as the arsenals exist, they will be seen by many as representing an implicit threat or option that force could be resumed some time in the future."" Mr Ahern expressed cautious confidence the administation will be restored on what he called a lasting basis. He says he is convinced that the present delays need only be temporary. ""Public opinion north and south and elsewhere will continue to press on all concerned the need for political action now, not to let the moment slip, so that before too much longer we can see the final consolidation of peace and democracy and no more suspensions of institutions in Northern Ireland,"" he said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Defence lawyers for deposed Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, standing trial on charges including terrorism, say they will not attend today's session. The prosecution is due to begin summing up its case, but the defence team is demanding the trial be moved for security reasons following the murder of one of its lawyers. Ikbar Rad was shot dead in his Karachi office on Friday by three unidentified gunmen. He was a leading member of the defence team for Nawaz Sharif, who is on trial for his life in a Karachi anti-terrorism court. Fearing for their safety, Mr Sharif's defence team say they will only attend the proceedings if the case is moved to the capital, Islamabad. Meanwhile, Nawaz Sharif's wife, Kulsoon Nawaz, has also been charged. She and 16 other leaders of Mr Sharif's Muslim League Party have been charged with treason. Police say they tried to create hatred against Pakistan's military regime in speeches to a convention of party workers. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Police in Berlin have had to use water cannons on demonstrators opposed to a neo-Nazi march through the centre of the city. The neo-Nazis were marching in support of the leader of Austria's Freedom Party, Joerg Haider. More than 1,000 police officers were deployed on the streets of Berlin as the march of neo-Nazis began. Their expectations of confrontation were quickly met. As the neo-Nazi march reached the Brandenburg Gate, the chants of the far right, such as Germany for Germans and asylum seekers out, were met with the stones and bottles thrown by more than 1,000 demonstrators from the left who were holding their own ""Europe without racism"" rally. Before the march, a Berlin appeals court overruled concerns that it posed a threat to public safety. But the court did uphold a ban forbidding the marchers from going through the Brandenburg Gate, the most politically charged landmark of the Nazi era. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" In her Commonwealth Day message, the Queen has said nations must strive to ensure that the advantages of modern communications systems are available to all. She says new technology must be used to bring people closer together. The Queen will celebrate Commonwealth Day with the organisation's outgoing secretary general Chief Emeka Anyaoku, and UN secretary general Kofi Annan. There will be a special thanksgiving service at Westminister Abbey in London. The service will be broadcast on the Internet at www.Commonwealthday.com. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Michael Schumacher is confident Ferrari can continue its dominance at the Brazillian Formula One Grand Prix in a fortnight. Schumacher won his first Australian Grand Prix yesterday, with team-mate mate Rubens Barrichello finishing second. Williams' Ralf Schumacher finished third, 20 seconds behind his older brother. Michael Schumacher says there is no reason Ferrari will not have a good season. ""This car is a faster car than it has ever been, it has been competitive, it is reliable as we have seen, so I'm really looking forward now to all the season,"" he said. ""I believe we will be able to be competitive everywhere. ""Not only is the car fast, we have already very good ideas how to develop it, so everything looks to be a very good year for Ferrari."""

" The head of the Commonwealth Bank says its proposed merger with Colonial Limited is in the national interest. But, David Murray has confirmed there will be job losses and branch closures. The $8 billion marriage might have been made in financial industry heaven. ""We started the discussion by saying what can two stars do together,"" the Commonwealth's managing director David Murray said. Mr Murray has confirmed there will be more than 250 branch site amalgamations in New South Wales, and a reduction of 2,500 positions. ""We'll be able to keep, on current indications, keep involuntary redundancy to an absolute minimum,"" he said. ""I've already told all of the staff of the bank that."" Mr Murray says the deal is in the national interest, offering more choice to more customers more efficiently and allowing a part on the global stage. ""If we sit here and do nothing the Australian financial service industry will be a branch office of the rest of the world,"" he said. The merger is still subject to regulatory approval and vote by Colonial shareholders in mid-May. --------------------------------"

" Stop-work meetings are being held at Telstra call centres across the country over the next week to protest against staff cuts. Telstra wants to shed 16,000, a third of its workforce, within two years. About 50 people from three call centres at Springvale in Melbourne's south-east were the first to hold a stop-work meeting. The Community and Public Sector Union's Doug Lilly says more will follow. ""We're holding meetings in various workplaces over the coming week to talk these issues through but the first thing we've got to do is get some answers from Telstra,"" he said. ""They're not providing them either to the union or to the employees at this stage."" ---------------------------------"

" A pregnant woman from Central Australia may be jailed under the Northern Territory's mandatory sentencing laws for allegedly stealing food and a pram from her ex-husband's house. Theresa O'Sullivan, the lawyer representing the 25-year-old woman, says the case has been set down for hearing in June, when the woman will be nine-months pregnant. She says the woman is alleged to have stolen the food for her five children. ""If she is found guilty of these offences because they are property offences that means she will have to serve a mandatory minimum period of 14 days in prison,"" she said. ""The father hadn't left her with enough money for the five children so she was waiting for him to return her account. ""It's that at some point some of the kids went into the house and let her in and they started eating some food and then she, they gave her some food to take with them and also gave her the pram for the youngest child who is only 19 months who was falling asleep."" ----------------------------------"

" Qantas flights may be disrupted by industrial action over the airline's proposal to export a range of its jobs offshore. Around 300 Qantas maintenance staff held a stop-work meeting at Sydney Airport today and voted in favour of national strike action against the airline. The members of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union have stepped up their campaign, with Qantas considering taking some of its operations overseas to stay competitive. The union says such a move would see the outsourcing of Qantas' maintenance operations overseas, which it says would lead to mass redundancies in Australia. The union believes Qantas has discussed the proposal with the Prime Minister or his senior staff. The workers are now threatening to disrupt Qantas flights through strikes or stop-work meetings, unless the plan is abolished. -----------------------------------"

" The Western Australian town of Carnarvon, facing its worst flood in 40 years, is now threatened with losing its water supply and wastewater treatment plant. The Gascoyne River is expected to peak about midnight tonight as heavy rain produced by ex-tropical cyclone Steve flows down the usually dry riverbed. The Water Corporation's regional business manager, Murray Johnsen, says the town, with 9,500 residents, is bracing for the floods. Residents in low-lying areas have already been moved, plantations along the banks of the Gascoyne are under water and an extensive sand-bagging operation is continuing. Mr Johnsen says if the floods are as severe as expected, the town's wastewater treatment facility could fail, causing effluent to spill into the river and ocean. He says the essential service providers in the town are preparing for the worst. ""Our wastewater treatment plant in the low-lying areas near the levy banks in town is under threat if the levy banks from the river burst,"" Mr Johnsen said. Meanwhile a transport company says 14 of its trucks carrying food to the north-west of Western Australia and the Kimberley are stranded by flooding. The operations manager for Wesfarmers Transport, Sid Moore, says some trucks bound for Kununurra have been stuck for six days, while trucks destined for Darwin have been trapped for nine days. He says much of the fresh produce on the trucks would have perished. ""A lot of it would have gone off by now,"" he said. ""A lot of milk and chickens that are out of date. Freezer product is obviously alright, dry freight's alright, apples, oranges, that type of thing should be okay. ""Lettuces and that type of fruit and veg would be no good, I would presume."" A shortage of aviation fuel at Broome is forcing airlines to divert planes to Port Hedland and Newman to refuel. Aviation fuel is normally trucked to Broome from Port Hedland but road closures due to flooding are preventing the fuel from getting through. Broome Airport chief executive, Ron Buckey, says the airport could be short on fuel for a few days. ""The storage that we have at the airport is something like 200,000 litres, which could last us three to four days,"" he said. ""We do need fuel on a consistant basis and the road train is a key part of getting fuel through from further south."" -------------------------------"

" The Climate Action Network says the Kyoto protocol may enable Australia to increase greenhouse gas emissions by well above the level agreed to. Under the Kyoto agreement, Australia can increase emissions to 8 per cent above 1990 levels by 2012. The network's Anna Reynolds has appeared before a Senate committee looking into Australia's response to global warming. She says Australia could trade pollution credits with other countries to give the impression it is meeting its target, while actually increasing emissions. ""It's certainly our belief that the public has an expectation that pollution will be cut at source in line with the Kyoto targets, rather than there being an accounting act to actually see an increase in emissions while you say you're meeting your target on paper,"" Ms Reynolds said. A population health expert has told the committee he predicts global warming will cause up to 600 additional deaths a year in Australia by 2030. Charles Guest, from the Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health, says the greenhouse effect will exacerbate heatwaves in parts of Australia and increase the range of airborne diseases, such as malaria. Dr Guest says Australia needs to update its risk assessment of the health impact of global warming. He says a review and integration of Australia's research on global warming has not been carried out for 10 years and ""it's time for a national review of this question"". --------------------------------"

" Officials in the Pacific nation of Tuvalu believe a candle may have started a fire in a school dormitory that has left 19 people dead. The fire destroyed the residential hostel of the Motu Foua secondary school on the island of Vaitupu late last night. A government spokesman says the fire is believed to have started after one of the students lit a candle to help her study. Eighteen students managed to escape the building but another 18 students and a matron died after becoming trapped. It is believed most were asleep when the fire broke out. The government has set up a board of inquiry into the incident. --------------------------------"

" In what is being called the first case of ""genetic terrorism"" in the country a crop of experimental pineapples in Brisbane has been destroyed. The destruction was discovered today. A group calling itself Free Seed Liberation has claimed responsibility for breaking into a private testing facility and destroying more than 100 pineapples being used for genetic research. Professor Ken Reed, from the Queensland Agricultural Biotechnology Centre, says the attack is a further example of the misguided campaign of groups opposing genetic engineering testing. ""I find it extraordinary,"" he said. ""This is a direct attack on the acquisition of knowledge, it's got nothing to do with anything else. ""If you're concerned about the potential for genetic pollution, which is the term used, pineapples are the most benign plants possible. ""They can't interbreed with any other plants in Australia."" Professor Reed says he does not believe opposition to testing genetic engineering procedures is increasing. ""I don't think [there is] necessarily an escalation in the opposition but a change in the nature of it,"" he said. ""It shows you more clearly the basis of that opposition and that's the important point. It's based on ideology, not on any reasoned factual position."" ---------------------------------"

" McLaren and Ferrari have been the pace setters in today's first practice session at the Australian Grand Prix. McLaren's Mika Hakkinen has set the fastest time of the morning at just over 1:32min. Ferrari pair Michael Schumacher and Rubens Barrichello are second and third respectively. But the morning turned sour for Schumacher who suffered a mechanical problem towards the end of the session and had to be pushed back in to the pits. Hakkinen's team mate David Coulthard is in fourth place, 0.6 of a second behind the leader. British American Racing's Ricardo Zonta was first out of the pits for the session and set the earliest fastest time of just over 1.35min. Twenty-year-old Briton Jenson Button was out with Zonta and had the next fastest time at one stage, 0.3 of a second behind. It has not been a good morning for the Prost team, with both Jean Alesi and Nick Heidfeld both coming off the track. ---------------------------------"

" Snakes are on the move in central Australia after heavy rains in the region. Parks and Wildlife staff in Alice Springs have received 90 call outs in the past month in what has been their busiest year. However, the CSIRO's Craig James says the rains have not had any impact on the breeding cycle, but snakes are moving about more than they would usually. ""The weather's a bit cooler so the snakes are active throughout the middle of the day, whereas in a normal summer it would be too hot in the middle of the day and the snakes would only be active in the mornings and the afternoons,"" he said. ""But they're not breeding up as a result of the rains. The snakes breed once each year and so the rains this year won't lead to large numbers of snakes."" --------------------------------"

" Tune in to Lateline at 10.30pm for news analysis providing up to the minute coverage of local and international news and events. Take part in the program by visiting the Lateline web site, where you can put your questions to our guests. Go to ""http://www.abc.net.au/lateline/"". And on Sunday at noon, Landline has all the latest rural news and issues. Join the live internet forum after the program. Go to ""http://www.abc.net.au/landline/default.htm""."

" It has been confirmed the Commonwealth Bank and financial services group, Colonial, are planning a friendly merger. The deal puts a price tag of around $8 billion on Colonial. The Commonwealth Bank is offering seven of its shares, which closed on Monday at $25, for every 20 Colonial shares. That values Colonial shares at $8.75 compared with their last traded price of $6.75. The proposal has been announced to the Australian Stock Exchange this morning ahead of the market's opening. It is subject to regulatory approval. The scheme of arrangement will be voted on by Colonial shareholders in mid-May. The board of Colonial has recommended they accept the offer. ---------------------------------"

" The Communication Minister Richard Alston has warned Federal Coalition MPs he expects them to tell rural people the facts about Telstra in debate about privatisation and job cuts. Senator Alston yesterday lashed out at Queensland National Party MP Bob Katter, describing him as a ""national disgrace"" and a ""scaremongerer"" for his criticism of Telstra's performance in rural areas. The Minister says Coalition MPs engaging in the Telstra debate should fairly explain the controls the Government has imposed to ensure service standards improve. ""I certainly expect everyone on our side to make rural people aware of those facts of life,"" he said. ""That whether a company is publicly owned or privately owned we impose obligations on it. ""They're obligations imposed by law. They will not change irrespective of any change in ownership."" The Australian Shareholders' Association does not believe Telstra's record half-yearly profit and subsequent plans to cut at least 10,000 jobs, provides a moral dilemma for investors. Shareholders' Association chairman, Ted Rofe, has defended Telstra's decision, saying any sacked employees may not stay unemployed for long.. "" People that are no longer working for Telstra may be working for someone else,"" he said. ""For example, in the last fortnight, we've had a lot of people working on Telstra cables in our street. ""They haven't been employed by Telstra, they've been employed by outside contractors, but they've still got jobs. It's a question of running, running a business efficiently and of course, don't forget, it's not only the shareholders, it's the customers. ""We've seen a lot of telephone call charges come down recently and that's you know, that's the result of competition."" ----------------------------------"

" There have been further gains in the Australian dollar overnight following yesterday's strong employment figures. The national jobless rate has fallen to a nine-and-a-half year low of 6.7 per cent as a result of 59,000 extra positions being created in the month of February. During the night, the local currency has been as high as 61.60 US cents. In early morning trading it was sitting at around 61.48 still up 0.2 of a cent on yesterday's local close. ------------------------------------"

" Victorian building unions are prepared to negotiate throughout the long weekend in a bid to resolve the dispute over a 36-hour week, and avert an industry-wide lock-out. The Master Builders Association (MBA) says most employers are still willing to lock-out thousands of workers for three months, starting this Saturday, although it will be reviewed on a weekly basis. But the construction union, the CFMEU, says it spent most of yesterday in talks with several employer groups, who it claims are refusing to join the lock-out. The CFMEU's Martin Kingham says hundreds of sub-contractors have already signed interim agreements. He says talks with other companies will continue today. ""The negotiating parties have made themselves available to negotiate every day during the long weekend, that's Saturday, Sunday, Monday and Tuesday of next week, obviously with the hope that we can achieve and fly up the flagpole an industry settlement before the MBA lock-out really takes effect,"" he said. ----------------------------------"

" Nato has rejected allegations that its bombing operations were compromised by a spy in the first two weeks of the Kosovo conflict. The allegations will be aired in a BBC television program this weekend. A BBC documentary quotes a secret US Defence Department report that it says concludes that for the first two weeks of the Kosovo campaign the Serbs knew which targets would be hit, which planes would fly and what kinds of bombs they would be using. The report says the details of the air tasking orders were leaked to the Serbs from information that was placed on the internal NATO computer system known as Kronos. For the first two weeks of the campaign as many as 600 people had access to that information. The leak stopped once the access was restricted after 14-days to just 100 people. NATO says there is no proof that a leak occurred and that if there was such a secret report it would surely have seen it before the BBC did. ---------------------------------"

" US presidential challengers Bill Bradley and John McCain both ended their campaigns for their respective party presidential nominations this morning. Speaking in his home state of Arizona, Senator McCain announced he was ""suspending"" his campaign, which suffered a fatal blow in this week's Super Tuesday primaries across the nation. But while he wished Governor George Bush well in the coming election, Senator McCain stopped short of endorsing his candidacy and he says he will continue his push for the reform of political funding. ""And I will never walk away from a fight for what I know is right and just for our country,"" he said. Meanwhile, in New Jersey former Senator Bill Bradley announced he was abandoning his bid after failing to win a single primary against Al Gore - whom he now promises to support. ""It is the tradition of the Democratic Party to fight hard during primaries and then unifying closed ranks behind the nominee as soon as the people have spoken and now it is time for unity,"" he said. ----------------------------------"

" Heavy rain is falling across southern Mozambique, disrupting efforts to deliver aid to thousands of victims of recent flooding. The severe weather is a significant setback to the relief effort. The World Food Program says severe rain storms have forced all helicopters and fixed wing aircraft operating in the hardest hit flood zones to return to the capital Maputo. The arival of more bad weather forced aid agencies to shelve plans to deliver up to 90 tonnes of desparately needed food aid to camps housing tens of thousands of flood victims. Less than a quarter had been delivered when the relief operation was suspended. However, the heavy rain is not expected to cause more flooding in the short-term. Meteorologists are keeping a close watch on the weather, as heavy falls further inland in the Limpopo and Save River catchment systems could cause receding flood waters to rise again. ---------------------------------"

" Melbourne's $240-million Docklands Stadium opened last night, with a smaller than expected crowd there to see Essendon beat Port Adelaide by 94 points. More than 43,000 people attended the event, with around 9,000 empty seats in the new stadium. There was little on-ground fanfare ahead of the launch of the AFL's new base. A few football songs, a rendition of Advance Australia Fair and fireworks on the ground were part of the opening ceremonies. A predominantly pro-Essendon crowd witnessed the Bombers build up a substantial lead which grew to a 94 point win The AFL's chief executive, Wayne Jackson said the match ran as smoothly as possible, under the circumstances. ""I think the stadium worked as well as you could possibly expect it to work given the construction work was still taking place on and around the site,"" he said. ""I think very importantly there are a lot of seats left in the stadium that people could come in for $14, bring their kids for $2 or if they were AFL members they could have sat in the AFL members in the normal way. ""I think that's been something that we've been trying to demonstrate to people for quite some period of time,"" he said. ----------------------------------"

" Failed businessman Alan Bond is facing the prospect of spending another night behind bars despite having his extended jail term quashed by the High Court. The former tycoon was jailed in 1997 for four years for his part in defrauding Bell Resources of more than $1 billion. That term was extended to seven years after a Commonwealth appeal but the High Court today ruled that federal authorities lacked power to appeal in state offences. Bond's wife, Diana Bliss, has arrived at the Karnet Prison Farm, south-east of Perth, where Bond is being held. She has told waiting reporters there has been a delay in receiving the appropriate paperwork and her husband may not be released until late tonight or tomorrow. ----------------------------------"

" Telstra's chief executive officer Ziggy Switkowski has faced a barrage of criticism from Federal MPs angry at Telstra's service levels. Dr Switkowski this morning spent two-and-a-half hours briefing MPs at Parliament House about Telstra's future, service levels and plans to cut at least 10,000 jobs. MPs and senators from all main parties attacked Telstra over its performance and potential cost-cutting, especially in rural and regional areas. Dr Switkowski says job cuts and cost-cutting are a direct result of the intense competition in the market. ""As prices come down in the local call market - it's an inelastic market, people do not make any more local calls - a cent off our price, that's $100 million goes straight to the bottom line,"" he said. ""You take three cents, that's $300 million [and] $300 million is 6,000 jobs if we have no other alternative way of reducing costs."" National Party Senator Ron Boswell says the planned job cuts and latest criticisms of Telstra will make it harder to sell the merits of Telstra's privatisation to the bush. Senator Boswell says the job cuts will not stop the National Party from supporting full privatisation but he says it is a public relations disaster. ""How am I going to get this message out? My immediate thing, what a disaster as a public relations exercise, what a disaster."" But Dr Switkowski says privatisation is right for Telstra and its customers. ""Our commitment is to maintain the continuous improvement in our service levels throughout all of Australia,"" he said. ""I think as more and more Australians are reassured about Telstra's performance, then any reservations about continuing privatisation will fall away."" Prime Minister John Howard has told Telstra its services to regional Australia must continue to improve. Mr Howard has defended Telstra's plans to shed staff, pointing out that more than 17,000 Telstra workers lost jobs over a three-year period under the former Labor government. He says although there has been a measurable improvement in Telstra's services to rural areas, there is still considerable room for improvement. ""As I said to both Mr Mansfield and Dr Switkowski yesterday, we are determined that the obligations openly given by Telstra in relation to the Australian bush will be maintained,"" Mr Howard said. ""It is an obligation of Telstra to do that. ""There are legislative obligations imposed on that carrier and I have every reason to believe those obligations will be delivered on."" The communication's union, the CEPU, maintains Telstra's announced job cuts are part of a hidden plan to outsource the company's call centres to Asia. The CEPU says staff from the centres have told the union that Telstra has had long-term plans to relocate the operations to Asian countries, to then run the services back into Australia. Telstra has confirmed to the union the majority of cuts will be made in its call centres. CEPU New South Wales secretary Jim Metcher says the Communications Minister, Richard Alston, must give a full explanation. ""We believe this is a national disgrace, when we are talking about Australian services, Australian jobs that are obviously now going to be exported overseas,"" Mr Metcher said. ""We think that the Minister should come clean with the details of where those jobs impacts are, how they are going to be cut back and where operations will be relocated or outsourced to other companies overseas to provide services for this country."" ----------------------------------"

" Australia's unemployment rate has fallen to 6.7 per cent after a big jump in the number of people finding work in February. The figures are better than expected. The unemployment rate, seasonally adjusted, has fallen 0.2 per cent during February with an extra 59,100 jobs during the month. More than half of those were full time, with 25,000 part time. Unemployment fell by more than 11,000 with 17,000 fewer people looking for full-time work during the month. Unemployment in New South Wales has fallen below 6 per cent down to 5.8 which is the lowest in the country. South Australia has the highest jobless rate, jumping by 1 per cent during February to 8.7 per cent. The national figures are better than predicted with many not expecting the big jump in employment. There has been an immediate reaction on the markets to the strong employment data. With the jobless rate at a nine-and-a-half year low, and employment growth more than double most predictions, short-term market interest rates have moved higher. So has the Australian dollar which has now pushed through the 61 US cent level, up 0.25 of a cent a short time ago to 61.13 US cents. The local sharemarket meanwhile has been dragged lower amid falling oil and gold bullion prices. News Corporation is down around 5 per cent in value. But as the market still waits on a merger announcement from the Commonwealth Bank and Colonial, AMP shares have continued to rise in anticipation of other predatory moves by the big four banks. --------------------------------"

" The latest housing finance figures show a mixed picture with the number of dwellings financed falling, seasonally adjusted, for the third month in a row in January. However the number of commitments to buy new dwellings is up by more than 7 per cent after two months of decline. Finance for the purchase of existing housing fell, as did commitments for refinancing, although commitments for building dwellings remains unchanged. The Bureau of Statistics says the trend shows considerable downward momentum in the total number of dwellings financed, indicating the figures have peaked. -----------------------------------"

" Justice Minister Amanda Vanstone has told the Senate the death of a former resident of the Riverside Nursing Home is to be investigated by the Victorian coroner. The Aged Care Department had asked the Australian Federal Police to examine whether a death at Riverside was linked to the use of kerosene baths. But Senator Vanstone says the Australian Federal Police have advised they have no jurisdiction in the matter. ""The department has also been advised that the appropriate authority to which to refer alleged crimes against aged care facilities in the physical sense is the relevant state [or] territory police service,"" she said. ""I've also been informed by the Austrlaian Federal Police that the Victorian coroner has initiated inquiries into the death of the former resident of the Riverside Nursing Home."" ---------------------------------"

" Some 700 Ansett maintenance workers in Melbourne and Brisbane have walked off the job for 24 hours in an on-going dispute over pay and work conditions. The Australian Workers Union says members are not happy with Ansett's offer of a 6 per cent pay rise over two years. Victorian state sectretary Bill Shorten says the package also includes a number of trade-offs, which he claims will erode work conditions. ""If Ansett wants wage restraint, they've got to also be reasonable and not expect our members to fall on their sword and give away a whole lot of other conditions of employment,"" he said. A spokesperson for Ansett says no flights have been affected by the strike. ----------------------------------"

" New research in Victoria claims there is evidence that a growing number of smokers are regulating where they light up. The VicHealth Centre for Tobacco Control, which conducted the study, says four in every 10 smokers now go outside their homes to smoke, twice as many as four years ago. Dr Ron Borland, the director of the centre, says perceptions about smoking are changing. ""I think a social revolution is what it is,"" he said. ""People would not believe 10 or 15 years ago that we would treat smoking the way we do today as something basically individuals should do in private without exposing other people."" -----------------------------------"

" The winners of Australia's Athlete of the Year awards announced today are both field athletes: long jumper Peter Burge and discus thrower Lisa Marie Vizaniari. The awards were decided on the basis of votes based on performance at each of the Grand Prix meetings this season, which finished in Adelaide last night. Lisa Marie Vizaniari received 16 votes in the women's award, beating Melinda Gainsford-Taylor and Emma George, who each finished on 15 points. In the men's, long jumper Peter Burge scored 17 points, beating Patrick Johnson on 15 and Patrick Dwyer and Shane Hair both on 12. Burge says the men's and women's wins are a boost for the profile of field athletes. ""Sometimes it is a little bit hard when you've got the guys running quite well on the track but on the outfield or the infield even there's a lot of good field action going on,"" he said. ""Half of the time there's some world-class performances going on, which a lot of the public don't actually know about but hopefully now we are getting a little bit more of a name for ourselves, the long jumpers, the discus throwers, the javelin throwers etc."" ---------------------------------"

" Australian Story at 8.00pm provides a glimpse into a unique and dangerous area of police work - special operations. Join Judy Tierney, Commander Detective Inspector Glenn Lathey and one of the special operations recruits for an internet forum after the program. Go to ""http://www.abc.net.au/austory/"". And tune in to Lateline at 10.30pm for news analysis providing up to the minute coverage of local and international news and events."

" Industrial action could begin as early as today, as unions fight the loss of around one-third of Telstra's workforce in the next two years. Telstra will target around 16,000 positions, but claims the cuts are necessary to counter competitive pressure in its core telephone market. The Victorian branch of the Communications, Electrical and Plumbing Union hopes to be joined by community and consumer groups, in its industrial campaign. Victorian secretary, Len Cooper, says he will be pushing for industrial action nationwide against Telstra's plans. ""This is not to do with the need for more earnings growth. They're a hugely profitable company,"" he said. ""This is to do with preparing the company for privatisation. ""This is to cut service standards down to a bare minimum, and costs down to a bare minimum, in order to keep the profit bottom line up stupendously like they have, in order for the money market to be satisfied to get a good price, when they sell it."" A national councillor with the union, Jim Tudehope, says Telstra's chief executive, Ziggy Switkowski, does not make sense, in his comments about call centres and regional areas. ""He's saying that he's going to rationalise the 290-odd call centres, and he's also said that it's not necessarily the people in the bush who'll suffer,"" he said. ""Yet we know the majority of call centre staff are in the bush at the moment, so he can't reduce the number in the bush and increase the people in the bush. ""It's just a ludicrous statement."" The Communications Union fears there will be significant Telstra job losses in Tasmania. The Union's Barry Riseley says proposed cutbacks will not take place in the high-density, high-profit city areas, but in regional areas such as Tasmania. Mr Riseley says if the rumoured closures of Telstra call centres are true, there will be hundreds of job losses in Tasmania. ""We'll have no alternative other than to fight the changes with all our resources, and I suppose it'd be our intention to harness the political persuasion of the people that are directly affected by the changes, that is the rural and regional Australians,"" he said. ""Don't foget they kicked out the Kennett government in Victoria fairly recently and I'm busting for the opportunity to have a go at John Howard and his colleagues."" A Federal Government backbencher says Telstra's new jobcutting plan shows the need for it to remain under public ownership. Queensland National Party MP Bob Katter, says the job cuts will definitely affect service levels in regional areas. ""Well it's the most cogent argument against the sale of Telstra,"" he said. ""In the case of the Gulf country I was ale to put tremendous political pressure on Telstra and we were able to get those extra jobs. ""I will have no control once it's sold off and of course when that happens in the future they're a commercial operation and unless it makes money for them they will simply put the jobs there."" The Queensland Premier, Peter Beattie, says Telstra's job shedding goes against the guarantees the Federal Government made about the benefits of selling off one-third of the telecommunications giant. ""At the end of the day you've got to say to yourself, where does this leave Australia. It leaves Australia and a lot of Australians without a mobile phone service and a lot more Australians without a job,"" he said. -----------------------------------"

" The Uniting Church says hundreds of millions of dollars are needed to fix the problems in Australia's nursing homes. The church, which is one of the country's largest non-profit nursing home providers, says hundreds of homes are sub-standard and should be demolished. The claim comes as the Australian Federal Police prepare to examine whether an elderly resident died as a result of being given a kerosene bath at the Riverside Nursing Home in Melbourne. The National Chair of Uniting Care Australia, Reverend Harry Herbert, says the capital funding program is woefully inadequate. ""The government needs to establish a very large fund, $100-150 million a year for several years, for the next five or six years and to direct those capital funds into the most needy areas."" -----------------------------------"

" An announcement is expected today on the future of the Colonial Financial Group. Shares in the company and in the Commonwealth bank have been suspended from trading, amid growing speculation of an imminent takeover. The Federal Treasurer, Peter Costello, has met the chief executives of both banks and will have the final say on any merger. While the details are still under wraps, the Commonwealth's Victorian Manager, Eric Kinsala, was quick to joke about the takeover at the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra's season opener last night. ""The speech that was prepared here yesterday, unfortunately I won't be able to go on with,"" he said. ""It went into our strategic plans and a few of those things, and in the interests of time, and also because we're precluded from saying too much in the next couple of days, I'll just say we're very, very proud to be involved with tonight."" ------------------------------------"

" A major music retailer is to withdraw thousands of compact disks (CD's) from its shelves today because of a row over access to digital distribution. Festival-Mushroom has signed an exclusive deal with Sanity.com to provide online access to some of its artists. But retailer HMV says the deal sets a dangerous precedent and is anti-competitive. Managing director, John Hazell, says CD's by a wide range of Australian artists will be taken off its shelves. ""It does include artists such as 28 Days, Amiel, on the sort of more developing side, Sonic Animation, right through to hugely well established Australian arists such as Jimmy Little,"" he said. Mr Hazell, says he hopes the boycott will force Festival to rethink the deal. ""I also hope that its a clear indication to the artists that maybe this isn't the best deal for them and means they'll be losing the oppprtunity to be represented in retail stores,"" he said. ""My understanding is our action is being supported by other retailers in the country as well."" ----------------------------------"

" Tropical Cyclone Steve, hovering off Western Australia's coast near Carnarvon, is likely to head back across the coast within the next twelve hours. The category one cyclone is currently located 45 kilometres west south-west of Carnarvon, and 95 kilometres west north-west of Denham. The weather bureau says the cyclone has been moving in a south-south-easterly direction at 10 kilometres an hour. Carnarvon has experienced record rainfall, with 102 millimetres of rain falling since 9:00am yesterday. ----------------------------------"

" Alan Bond will know his fate today, when the High Court delivers its decision on whether an extension of his sentence was lawful. Bond was jailed in 1997 for his part in stripping Bell Resources of nearly $1 billion in the 1980's. Bond was originally sentenced to four years in prison but this was increased to seven years after an appeal by the Commonwealth. Bond's lawyers have told the High Court the Commonwealth lacked the power to challenge the sentence because he was charged with a state offence. But the Western Australian government says the power does exist through a 'scheme of cooperation' with the Commonwealth. If Bond wins the case he could be released as soon as parole is arranged, but if he loses he will not be elligible to apply for parole until April 2001. ---------------------------------"

" In the US presidential race, Democrat candidate, Bill Bradley, is expected to formally withdraw tomorrow while Republican candidate, John McCain, is also considering his future. The Super Tuesday primary contest across the country sealed the Democrat nomination for Vice President Al Gore while handing a commanding lead to Republican Governor, George W. Bush. This morning, Mr Gore paid tribute to rival Bill Bradley, who had been unable to win a single state contest. ""He called me, it was a very gracious and friendly call. I appreciated it very much and I told him of how much Tipper and I think of them and Ernestine,"" he said. Meanwhile, Senator McCain is in Arizona surveying the grim prospects for his campaign now. Yesterday saw Governor Bush decisively win the biggest states in contention, New York, Ohio and California and Governor Bush is also looking forward to next week's southern primaries in states where polls show him well ahead of Senator McCain. ---------------------------------"

" The International relief agency, Community Aid Abroad, has called on the Australian Government to provide long term aid to the flooded nation of Mozambique. The agency's director of African programs, Roger Ahern, says Mozambique should be assisted by rolling back foreign debt and providing long term financial and food relief. Mr Ahern has just returned from over a week in Mozambique helping restore water supplies and constructing temporary shelter. He says despite the devastation, people are in relatively high spirits. ""It was surprisingly a positive experience in many senses. People, although they are in camps most of them had lost absolutely everything and still had quite a positive atmosphere,"" he said. ""They still were very keen to go back to their villages to replant for next year."" He says international support must not dry up once the devastation is forgotten. ""There's firstly the need for direct grants provided to Mozambique but also there's a need for debt forgiveness,"" he said. ""At the moment about a third of the budget, the country's annual budget, goes in debt servicing which if you're trying to rebuild a country is clearly a huge burden."" -----------------------------------"

" Australia's top athletes have ended the domestic athletics season on a high note, at the finale of the Grand Prix in Adelaide. Sprint star Matt Shirvington had a slow start to win the 100-metres, with Patrick Johnson easily winning the 200. The pair are heading to South Africa next week to compete and Shirvington is particularly looking forward to the meet. ""There's so much pressure back home on home soil to run fast and to be number one all the time so going over there I'm just representing my country and you know I don't have to worry about it, I just go out and do my best,"" he said. ""I mean it's been great for me over there and usually conditions are pretty good and I'm only going for one meet so I'm putting all my eggs in one basket."" Melinda Gainsford-Taylor had a return to form, and took out the 100 and 200-metres sprint doubles. She says she could not have imagined she would have been running so well at this point in the season. ""Last year I was out in the middle here compering and I was in really bad shape so it's great you know to have that sort of form back again,"" she said. ""So my whole dream of going to the Olympics is looking a little bit brighter now so that's great."" While Australian athletes finished off their seasons and are now heading to compete in South Africa, the international athletes who have competed in the series will return home. Of those, Kenya's Albert Chepkurui won the 5,000-metres, Mexican Ana Guevara beat Nova Peris-Kneebone to win the 400-metres and countryman Juan Toledo took the men's 400-metres. Kenyan William Chichir broke the meet record to take the 800-metres in 1.45min. The season will be capped off this morning with the announcement of the Athletes of the Year."

" Telecommunications giant Telstra Corporation has rung up a $2 billion half-year profit. For the six-months to December, Telstra has reported a 16 per cent lift in profit after tax and abnormal items. It has come in at $2.09 billion. The company's directors have declared an increased interim dividend of eight cents a share but it will only be partially franked. The Telstra result looks to have disappointed share market investors. Its share price was down 34 cents ahead of the announcement and after midday trading was 51 cents lower at $8.20. Telstra Two stock is down 48 cents at $5.22. The Federal Government says Telstra's profit results demonstrate the benefits of privatisation. Communications Minister Richard Alston says the result shows privatisation will not affect service levels. ""It's further proof that the company is making very significant progress,"" he said. ""It's also particularly welcome that the company is committing itself to ongoing improvements in service levels. ""There's no doubt that over the last 12 months or so there's been a significant improvement already and that's a fact acknowledged both by the secretary of the CEPU [Communications, Electrical and Plumbing Union], Col Cooper, and the Shadow Minister for Communications, Stephen Smith,"" Mr Alston said. The Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU), which covers Telstra workers, says the planned job cuts will lead to a major downgrade in services. The union's Steven Jones says the announcement is insulting to those workers who helped Telstra achieve its profit results. ""Last year, each employee of Telstra delivered over $70,000 in profit to the company and the way the company is thanking those employees this year is to sack 10,000 of them,"" he said. ""Frankly, the CPSU doesn't believe that these cuts can be delivered, without a cut in service to the clients of Telstra."" The Queensland Premier, Peter Beattie, has described Telstra's decision to shed thousands of jobs as extraordinary. ""In many ways it's anti-Australian because there are many parts of this state, where you simply cannot get mobile phone services,"" he said. ""The one-third sale of Telstra in terms of the $1.5 billion has not been put back in my view, into rural and regional Queensland in the way it was promised."" ---------------------------------"

" An announcement is likely to be made tomorrow on the future of the Colonial Financial Group. Shares in the company were suspended from trading yesterday amid speculation of an imminent takeover by the Commonwealth Bank, whose stock was also suspended this morning. If it goes ahead, the estimated $9 billion takeover will be Australia's biggest, and make the Commonwealth the country's biggest bank. A spokesman for Colonial says no statements will be made today, leaving open the possibility of an announcement tomorrow. ---------------------------------"

" The Federal Government has devised new accounting methods to make it easier for small food retailers to deal with the goods and services tax (GST). Retailers with a limited turnover will be able to apply any of three formulae to calculate their GST, without having to assess every individual item. The methods involve taxing an average percentage of sales, or working out the GST on a snapshot of goods and services over a shorter period and applying it to the whole financial year. Tax Commissioner Michael Carmody says the methods will ease the compliance burden. ""What it means for small business is that your typical convenience store, local mixed business, milk bar, delicatessen, will now have much easier ways of distinguishing between, for example, their savoury-filled bread rolls and their bread rolls,"" he said. ---------------------------------"

" The Deputy Prime Minister, John Anderson, claims he and other politicians were misled by the pornographic video industry about the sorts of films which would fall under the new non-violent erotica (NVE) classification. Mr Anderson had been involved in a Cabinet discussion last year which approved legislation to replace the ""X"" classification with an NVE classification. But after viewing a sample of NVE films, Mr Anderson and National Party colleagues have convinced the Prime Minister the legislation should be reconsidered. He says the non-violent erotica description does not accurately convey the sorts of hardcore sexual acts on the videos. ""My partyroom is convinced and the case was put very articulately by Deanne Kelly that it is a softening,"" he said. ""It's warm and cuddly, it encourages people to say 'this stuff can't be too bad, it's got nice warm romantic overtones, film with a bit of a nice warm cuddly physical feel about it, let's go and watch this', whereas in reality it's much harder than that."" ----------------------------------"

" Australia's biggest retailer, Coles Myer, has turned rising sales volumes into a better half-year profit. For the six-months to January, it has reported a profit after tax and abnormal items of almost $295 million. That is up 7.2 per cent on the previous corresponding period. Coles Myer directors have declared an increased interim dividend of 13.5 cents per share. -----------------------------------"

" Two people have been killed and 30 injured in a peak hour train collision in Japan. One witness in the train, which came of the rails, says it felt like the brake had been hit suddenly. Another says it was panic, everyone tried to get out. There were 240 passengers on a subway train which jumped the rails just out of the Nakameguru station, on the Hibya line, and rammed against the side of another, carrying 1,300 peak hour commuters heading toward central Tokyo. One side of one carriage was ripped off. Authorities say they do not know why the train jumped off the rails. Railway accidents are rare in Tokyo, a city with one of the highest concentrations of trains in the world. Most of the accidents are caused by suicides. ---------------------------------"

" International art critic Robert Hughes will face a hearing in Broome, in Western Australia's north, in May, on charges arising from a car crash in which he and two other people were seriously injured last year. Mr Hughes today made his first court appearance on two charges of dangerous driving causing grievous bodily harm. His lawyer told the court his client would be pleading not guilty to the charges which date back to May last year when he was in Western Australia's north filming a documentary. The court was told he had flown from New York to make his appearance in the Perth Magistrates Court. He has been remanded on a personal undertaking until the hearing, which starts on May 8. ---------------------------------"

" The Australian Pagan Alliance has written to the Catholic Bishop of Wagga Wagga in New South Wales, Bishop William Brennan, complaining about an attack on witches. The alliance's letter expresses concern over the tone of recent comments made by Bishop Brennan and his misconceptions about modern witchcraft. The letter says it is highly likely there are witches in Wagga, but that modern withcraft and paganism have nothing to do with Satanism as the bishop spoke of it. The alliance says that while Bishop Brennan has a right to disagree with witchraft, his comments are discriminatory to other religious communities who should be treated with fairness and respect."

" Richmond and Melbourne will kick-off the Australian Football League (AFL) season tonight when the teams meet at the MCG. Both were disappointing last year and they are keen to make amends. Richmond full forward Matthew Richardson says the Tigers are hopeful of getting into the finals. ""We've done reasonably well over the pre-season,"" he said. ""Although we haven't had that many wins, I think we've been competitive and we're coming to terms with our new style of play. ""Obviously there's always presure at Richmond to make the finals. ""We haven't been there for a while so obviously they're demanding some success and we're doing our best and hopefully this year, we can get into the finals,"" Richardson said. Melbourne forward Jeff Farmer says the team has shown some good pre-season form. ""From a form point of view, we've been able to stick Essendon in our very last game,"" he said. ""A lot of people didn't think that we were going to play finals footy in the Ansett Cup and we were able to be in the last four teams out there playing. ""So we're obviously doing something very good,"" Farmer said."

" Tune in to Lateline at 10.30pm for news analysis providing up to the minute coverage of local and international news and events. Tonight, As the results of Super Tuesday come in, top US political commentators examine the race for the White House. Take part in the program by visiting the Lateline web site, where you can put your questions to our guests. Go to ""http://www.abc.net.au/lateline/""."

" Takeover speculation has engulfed the big financial services group, Colonial. The insurance and banking group is today expected to announce a merger deal, with speculation centred on a bid by the Commonwealth Bank. Colonial has also been touted as a potential bidder for BankWest in Western Australia. The conjecture caused Colonial shares to spike up 82 cents, or 13 per cent yesterday to $6.75, before a trading halt was applied. The company requested the suspension to allow the conclusion of what it called ""certain negotiations, which may be material to the share price"". The Finance Sector Union says if the Commonwealth Bank takes over Colonial more than 2,000 jobs would be lost. It says most of the cuts would be in New South Wales, where both banks have large branch networks. The union says Tasmania would also bear the brunt of such a merger, given Colonial has just aquired the state's Trust Bank. Meanwhile, The Australian Bankers Association has acknowledged the closure of a number of banks has caused concern for small communities in rural and regional Tasmania. However, the ABA's chief executive, Tony Aveling, says in some cases facilities have improved with the introduction of community-based instore tellers, supermarket branches and services linked with post offices. Mr Aveling says banks are concerned for their rural customers. ""I'm sure that banks are trying to come up with solutions but you cannot do it in every single case,"" he said. ""I'm sure most people realise that but as an industry we do need to listen to the concerns of people particularly in small communities which may not only have banking services but all of us need to listen to the variety of other services that have been withdrawn from many small centres. ""That's a problem for Australia as a whole."" ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Opposition says poor nursing home standards are not just contained to Victoria and Queensland. The Opposition yesterday alleged that two elderly residents had died in a Gladstone hospital, in central Queensland, after being badly treated at a nearby nursing home. The Minister for Aged Care, Bronwyn Bishop, last night confirmed that three deaths at the Alchera Park home had been investigated by her department. Management from the home has denied the allegations and claims the investigation found they were based on inaccurate information. The revelations follow this week's removal of residents from the Riverside nursing home in Victoria. The Shadow Minister for Aged Care, Chris Evans, says his office is receiving hundreds of complaints about the standard of nursing homes. ""The problems are Australia-wide. They're systemic and they haven't been investigated properly,"" he said. ""They are limited to a small number of providers and those providers are spread throughout Australia. ""The worst and the most of the cases are in Victoria but there are others in Queensland and others in other states as well."" ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" In the United States, voters across the country are turning out for the biggest primary day of the election year. A total of 16 states are involved in polls for the Republican and Democrat parties. With Vice-President Al Gore expected to easily win the Democrat contests, most attention is on the Republican battle. It is here the insurgency campaign of Senator John McCain is facing it hardest test against front runner Governor George W Bush. Senator McCain leads in most north-eastern states and polls show a tight race in New York. But Senator McCain is apparently lagging behind Governor Bush in Ohio and also in the critical California primary, which is a winner take all contest with a big swag of nominating convention delegates up for grabs. But Senator McCain says his position is improving. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The former High Court Chief Justice, Sir Harry Gibbs, has described mandatory sentencing laws as wrong. His opinion was sought as part of a push by some Federal Coalition MPs to have the laws changed. While some in the Coalition support the mandatory sentencing laws in Western Australia and the Northern Territory others want them changed. A Senate committee, which has been considering whether the laws as they relate to juvenile offenders should be overturned was due out tomorrow, but has been delayed until Monday. The Prime Minister is reluctant to overturn the laws, although he says they are silly. He says there is legal opinion in WA and the Territory that the laws do not breach international obligations. But Sir Harry's view, which was sought by backbencher Brendan Nelson and circulated to other coaliton MPs, is that the laws are in principle wrong. He says mandatory sentencing has particularly unfortunate consequences for juveniles, and common sense as well as international convention dictate imprisonment should only be imposed on a child as a last resort. ""The law in the Northern Territory seems to be particularly draconian. The law in Western Australia is less draconian."" Meanwhile Greens Senator, Bob Brown, who has proposed the bill which would overturn the laws, has welcomed Sir Harry's support. ""Sir Harry is a very eminent legal expert and his opinion will carry a great deal of weight."" -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" NATO-led peackeepers are searching for the group responsible for attacks in Kosovo which injured at least 24 people including 16 French paratroopers. The injuries, mostly from shrapnel, occured during grenade and sniper attacks in the Serb sector of Mitrovica. The attacks came as the commander for the NATO-led peacekeeping force in Mitrovica arrived with his soldiers to inspect the scene of previous incidents. Mitrovica has been the scene of an upsurge in ethnic violence in recent weeks that has left at least 12 people dead. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" Stocks on Wall Street tumbled almost 400 points today after a disappointing earnings forecast from a major manufacturer. The key index finished with a loss of 374 points at 9,796. Proctor and Gamble lost one-third of its value after warning it would not meet profit estimates. Losses at Proctor and Gamble, one of the 30 blue chips in the Dow Jones, helped drag down the entire industrial index. Proctor and Gamble, maker of detergents, pharmaceuticals and food, warned profits would drop by 10 per cent in the quarter to June. The warning made an already nervous market even more anxious about industrial and financial stocks. But high-tech stocks are flourishing. The Nasdaq index of technology and Internet stocks has reached an all time high, with investors favouring shares whose profits are not threatened by borrowing costs. This year the Nasdaq has risen by 21 per cent while the Dow has tumbled more than 14 per cent. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Catholic Church says its efforts to assist indigenous Australians have often been misguided and have led to unintended but harmful longterm consequences. The Catholic Archbishops of Australia have released a Statement of Repentance to mark the 2,000 anniversary of the birth of Jesus Christ. The chairman of the Bishops' committee for the Great Jubilee, Bishop Michael Putney, says the arrival of Europeans has had an incredible downside for Aboriginal Australians. ""Also through our missions, through our institutions. For all the good they've done which has to be acknowledged, for all the enormous good they've done at times Aboriginal people were treated as second class citizens,"" he said. ""We've patronised them to say the least at times, we didn't respect their culture. ""There's a whole lot of issues there in our history that we've got to face if we want to enter the next millennium with integrity."" Bishop Putney says it is not the first time the Catholic Church has said sorry. ""This is a very special statement of repentance because of the significance of this year,"" he said. ""It's as if as we approach the third millennium we want to look indigenous Australians in the eye and say in our past we failed you as well as served you. ""We wish you to forgive us for our failures and to enter the new millennium with you as partners. That's what we're trying to do, it's a very significant moment for us."" ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Injuries sustained by Australian swimmer Lori Munz in a head on car crash yesterday in New South Wales, may not end her Olympic dream. Last night the Commonwealth Games gold medallist had the first of several operations on compound fractures to both kneecaps. Australian Swimming's Ian Hanson says Munz's coach Rohan Taylor has not given up hope his swimmer will compete in the Olympic selection trials in mid May. ""He's going to put a plan in place once he gets any kind of clearance from the doctors, and if that's the case then if anyone can get it to the starting blocks on time then I'm sure Rohan Taylor can do that."""

" The Federal Opposition leader, Kim Beazley, is claiming support for the ALP's promise to roll back the goods and services tax (GST) if it wins office. But the Prime Minister, John Howard, has accused Mr Beazley of weak leadership. Mr Beazley has told the ALP party room the party's benchmark polling confirms the plans to roll back the GST is winning support."

" The Prime Minister, John Howard, has described the mandatory sentencing laws in Western Australia and the Northern Territory as silly. He has told the Coalition party room the laws rob the judiciary of discretion. National Party leader John Anderson told the meeting he has reservations about what the laws mean for juveniles. Despite his comments, Mr Howard remains reluctant to overturn the laws, saying the Territory and WA have legal opinions indicating the laws do not contradict Australia's international obligations. Mr Howard says the government is waiting for the Senate committee report on mandatory sentencing due out on Thursday. ----------------------------------"

" A new survey of business expectations suggests industry is pressing ahead with investment plans, despite a drop in the outlook for economic growth. The Westpac Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry survey of industrial trends shows a greater number of business operators expect the economy to deteriorate during the next six months. But the chamber's chief executive Mark Paterson says other findings in the survey show industry views the economy as fundamentally sound. ""Growth, whilst it's come back off the peaks that were demonstrated in December last year, still remains robust,"" he said. ""The export numbers are very, very strong. The investment numbers are particularly strong, the best investment expectations in relation to plant and equipment for five years. ""The best expectations in relation to buildings in the 42 year history of the survey."" Westpac economist Bill Evans says the survey confirms conditions are good for exporters. ""We've got an ideal environment for a real surge in exports,"" he said. ""We've got a strong world economy and we've got an extremely competitive Australian dollar, and manufacturers are going to benefit from that."" ---------------------------------"

" A Brisbane conference has heard that Australia is losing thousands of jobs by sending its biotechnology breakthroughs overseas. Professor of medical genetics at Melbourne University, Bob Williamson, was speaking at a conference at Brisbane's Centre for Biotechnology. He says biotechnology, particularly genetic medicine, could be a key employer this century, if Australia can develop its own discoveries. ""It's heartbreaking because you'll see the very best of our research and it'll be taken up by companies in the US, in Japan, in Europe and developed there,"" he said. ""Now of course if we're not part of developing the research into health care delivery, then Australians are going to lose out."" ----------------------------------"

" Australia has made a symbolic change in the way it views women in combat-related roles in the Defence Force. The government has moved to modify Australia's commitment to an international bill of rights for women. An initial reservation to the bill meant that women were not able to engage in armed combat or duties related to armed combat. But a spokesman for the Minister assisting the Prime Minister on the Status of Women says women have been performing such duties for several years. The spokesman says it still remains Defence Force policy that women are not able to fight directly in combat duties. ------------------------------------"

" A major blow for South Australian athletics officials on the eve of tomorrow's Athletics Grand Prix in Adelaide with Cathy Freeman unlikely to run. Event organiser Rick Carter says Freeman, the world 400 metre champion, has had an extremely busy schedule and needs a rest. ""Cathy Freeman is very doubtful,"" he said. ""You can't expect every athlete to do every meet and Cathy had a very big campaign at the nationals where she ran the 200 and the 400 and won both. ""Then she had a big run last week and she's just feeling the pinch."""

" Former residents of the Riverside Nursing Home at Patterson Lakes in Melbourne have spent their first night in the city's St Vincent's Hospital. Another 10 residents are due to move today. The government effectively closed the troubled Riverside Nursing Home yesterday by removing funding and deregistering it. The action was result of it not making satisfactory progress for reform after kerosene baths were given in January. Twenty former residents are in a new unit at St Vincent's, but they are only expected to stay there a month. Their future beyond that is not known. St Vincent's chief executive Kerrie Cross says the new residents will have more staff to care for them than they are used to. ""We know that when people will come to us they will have medical conditions and they will be disturbed and anxious and they will need a higher level of care,"" she said. ""Some of the rooms at Riverside are accommodating up to five residents at the moment and we believe that they will settle quite quickly."" The Australian Nursing Federation is demanding the Commonwealth honour the outstanding entitlements of staff at the Riverside nursing home. The union says most nurses and care-givers are now without jobs. Nursing federation secretary Hannah Sellers says Riverside staff are out in the cold and fear they will lose their entitlements. ""I just find it absolutely appalling at the whole way this matter has been handled,"" she said. ""It's quite obvious that the staff, if they don't have that commitment given by the Prime Minister or the Minister for Aged Care, that they are going to be subsidising this whole debacle to the tune of anything up to $500,000. And we believe that that's just totally unacceptable."" Ms Cross says ex-Riverside staff are welcome to join St Vincent's hospital's casual pool. ""Any Riverside nurse could join our casual bank and continue to care for the residents as long as those nurses are appropriately qualified and meet our standards of care,"" she said. Meanwhile, the lawyer representing the Riverside Nursing Home says despite many residents leaving, the company still wants to pursue an Administrative Appeals Tribunal hearing aimed at having the Commonwealth's decision reviewed. Graeme Ephron says with more than 20 people still at Riverside the government needs to ensure they are cared for. ""The issue is the paramount interest and welfare of the residents and they clearly want to stay and if they want to stay we want to be able to provide them with adequate care and to do that we need the government funding,"" he said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" International Olympic Committee (IOC) vice-president Kevan Gosper says he is disappointed not to be cleared immediately of corruption allegations by the IOC's ethics commission. The commission has called for an independent examination of the case. Mr Gosper is just the latest in a long list of IOC members to be tarnished by the Salt Lake City scandal. The IOC vice-president has continually denied allegations that he accepted thousands of dollars worth of hospitality from the bid team and had been hoping the ethics commission, that he was instrumental in establishing, would clear him at its meeting in Lausanne, Switzerland. Before the meeting began Mr Gosper resigned from his position on the commission. The ethics commission has had all documents relating to the case for the past three weeks. After deliberating for three hours his fellow commission members said that although they believed Mr Gosper was innocent they felt an outsider should study the dossier and report back. The independent report is expected to be completed in a matter of weeks. Mr Gosper has emphatically denied the allegations, but says he had to divorce himself from the commission to ensure the integrity of its deliberations. ""I believe right from the start that I wasn't guilty of any improper behaviour, nor my family, nor were there any rules broken,"" he said. ""On the other hand, I just feel that that commission has got to be absolutely clear of any doubt and I resigned because once you're accused of something no matter what your defence is there's that risk of some compromise or blemish."" He says the episode has damaged his reputation and he did not want the commission damaged by the episode as well. ""Having being wounded, even though the wound will heal, it's terribly important that commission moves forward absolutely unimpaired and above board in every respect,"" he said. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Tropical Cyclone Steve continues to buffet the Western Australian coastline with strong winds and heavy rains. Steve is expected to weaken and has so far passed by several communities without causing major damage. At 6:00pm AWST yesterday, Cyclone Steve was closest to the town of Karratha, but its effects continue to be felt in towns to the east. It has dumped around 70 millimetres of rain in the past 18 hours, increasing the flood threat to local communities and pastoral stations. State Emergency Service units have reported no greater incidents than trees and power lines down, but will keep several towns on high alert until a full assessment can be done this morning. Steve is currently heading west-south-west towards the towns of Onslow and Exmouth, which felt the brunt of Cyclone Vance last year. Vance was one of the largest cyclones to ever cross the Australian coast. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" A London coroner has ruled that a 28-year-old Australian man, who died after collapsing in a West End nightclub last November, was killed by the drug ecstasy. Christopher Paul Irwin was originally from Nyngan in New South Wales. A London coroner's court was told how Christopher Irwin, an accounts manager who lived in the British capital, was a tall well-built man who was full of life. Christopher Irwin and two friends reacted badly after taking one ecstacy tablet each at the Estorian nightclub. But the 28-year-old Australian later decided to take another pill. Shortly afterwards he collapsed. He later died in hospital. A forensic pathologist who carried out a post mortem examination said she had discovered that Mr Irwin had a chronic pre-existing heart condition. The coroner returned a verdict of death by misadventure, listing the cause of death as ecstacy poisoning. ----------------------------------------------------------------"

" North Korea is today moving closer to being rehabilitated in the eyes of the international community. Japan seems set to announce diplomatic recognition of the communist country. Japanese wire services quote government sources this morning as saying that the two nations have agreed in-principle to begin talks next month aimed at establishing full diplomatic relations. Today Japan will announce the resumption of food aid to North Korea with the distribution through the World Food Program of 100,000 tonnes of urgently needed rice. Last September the US lifted sanctions against the communist nation. In January Italy became the first major industrial country to recognise the North and in February Australia held its first talks with the North on North Korean soil in a generation. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Aid workers in Mozambique are increasingly confident that they are coming to terms with the humanitarian crisis. A fleet of helicopters and aircraft has been working to get supplies through to the areas of need. But the BBC reports there are still questions over the coordination and targeting of the aid. There are still pockets of people who have not received food or fresh water for over a week. Aid agencies are grappling with two competing priorities - the need to feed huge encampments of up to 40,000 people which already have some water and the far more complicated task of reaching scattered groups of people for whom clean water is desperately needed. It could well be that thousands of people are still falling through the gap between these often conflicting priorities. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Islamic militants fighting against Israel's occupation of southern Lebanon are declaring a victory in the wake of Israel's decision to pull out its soldiers before July. However, elsewhere in the Arab world the reaction has been more cautious. Newspapers in both Lebanon and Syria express doubt that Israel genuinely wants to withdraw from its self-declared security zone within the framework of a wider peace deal. Syria's official daily newspaper says Israel's talk of a unilateral withdrawal carries with it the seeds of war for the whole region. In Beirut, media reports claim Israel is trying to divide Arab nations before a meeting of their foreign ministers in the Lebanese capital this weekend. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Australian women's hockey championships begin in Sydney today, giving teams the chance to play at the Olympic venue at Homebush. New South Wales is the defending champion. One of its forwards, Hockeyroo Alyson Annan, says the tournament will be a good trial for the Olympics. ""The thing that will benefit most of the players here is that it will be in an Olympic format so we'll be playing in the times of the Olympics,"" she said. ""I think the space in between the Games is quite similar to what we'll face in September."""

" Melbourne's Riverside Nursing Home is taking legal action to stop the Federal Government from closing it down. An application for an injunction will be made in the Victorian Administrative Appeals Tribunal this afternoon. Lawyer Graeme Ephron says the home cannot stop residents from being moved, but wants its federal funding restored. ""The issue is the paramount interest and welfare of the residents and they clearly want to stay,"" he said. ""If they want to stay we want to be able to provide them with adequate care and to do that we need the government funding."" Only two residents have agreed to be moved from the home with 50 patients and families refusing to sign consent forms giving permission to be moved. The Federal Aged Care Minister, Bronwyn Bishop, says residents cannot be left at the home because of its appalling condition. After two audit reports, sparked by a complaint residents were bathed in a kerosene solution, the operators of the home have had licences and nearly $2 million of federal funding revoked. She says residents cannot stay at Riverside indefinitely because the real estate is deplorably run down in what she calls an appalling nursing home. ""The fact of the matter is that the agency report found that the facility's unsafe, that the practices being carried out by the people who have been staffing the residents have been unsafe and that it is unsafe to leave them in that facility."" ---------------------------------"

" Telstra chief, Ziggy Switkowski, has deferred answering claims the organisation is bullying opponents of full privatisation. Democrats leader Meg Lees has accused Telstra of using ploys to push for the full privatisation and limit Senate scrutiny. Dr Switkowski has also declined to comment on speculation Telstra is eyeing Channel Nine and Channel Seven. The speculation sent share prices rising last week. He told an Australian Industry Group meeting in Canberra he will address the questions later this week. ""You'll understand if I defer addressing them,"" Dr Switkowski said. ""You will know that we have the half-year results on Wednesday and we are back here on Thursday, for really the first time in having invited all parliamentarians to come by and hear the Telstra status report, and give them an opportunity to raise similar questions. ""So let me hold the answers to that for a couple of days,"" he said. ----------------------------------"

" One man has been killed and another wounded in a militia attack on a remote village in East Timor. Peacekeeping forces are attempting to hunt down the well-armed group of five men which attacked the village yesterday. Security forces say the killing took place in daylight in an isolated village, some 30 kilometres inside East Timor, near the regional centre of Maliana. A spokesman for the peacekeeping force said the group responsible was probably still in the area. According to a witness, who said he had escaped after being kidnapped by the militia, they were using automatic weapons and grenades. The latest incident is one of a number of incursions in the past week. Authorities in Dili say there could be a few groups operating in the mountainous territory near the border with West Timor. --------------------------------"

" The cyclone alert for residents in some communities in Western Australia's Pilbara region has been upgraded. Residents in Karratha, Dampier, Wickham, Roebourne and Samson are now on yellow alert as Tropical Cyclone Steve moves south towards the coast. The State Emergency Service (SES) is urging people to prepare for wind gusts up to 140 kilometres per hour and heavy rain. Steve is moving at 15 kilometres per hour and is expected to be close to Karratha this evening. The SES is concerned that over the long weekend, some people may have travelled to islands in the Dampier Archipelago, or to inland tourist spots. Steve Cable from the SES in Karratha says residents need to heed the alert. ""Of course one of the concerns with that is that we are now going to a yellow alert and those people probably need to think about trying to get home,"" he said. ""Although I think the people inland might be in a little trouble because there has been a lot of widespread rain and there's already a bit of flooding in there."" ---------------------------------"

" Unemployment looks set to continue to fall, but at a slower rate. New figures out today show an increase in the number of job advertisments. The ANZ Job Ad series for February shows major metropolitan newspapers carried an average of nearly 30,000 job advertisements a week - a 5 per cent increase, which partially reverses January's 6.7 per cent decline. It is the biggest increase since April 1997. But the ANZ's chief economist, Saul Eslake, says the underlying trend remains downward. ""It does seem reasonable to conclude that the pace of employment growth might be slipping back a notch from what we saw in the second half of 1999,"" he said. The downward trend eases the pressure on official interest rates. ""My guess at this stage would be that there's probably not much of a case for a further rate rise between now and say June,"" Mr Eslake said. ---------------------------------"

" The Heart Foundation is to pressure the film and fashion industries to agree to a voluntary code of conduct to stop smoking being glamourised. The foundation's New South Wales executive director, Maree Faulkner, told women in Sydney tobacco industry documents recently released on the Internet prove women are being manipulated. Ms Faulkner says since advertising has been banned, the tobacco industry has been getting its message to young women through film and fashion. ""I think we need to call on the fashion and film industry,"" she said. ""I think we need to say to them, you're responsible people, you have a role in society where lots of young people look at your industries and develop their self image based on what you present. ""There's a responsibility there to not encourage these young women to take up a deadly habit."" -------------------------------------"

" Clubs have responded favourably to the AFL's plans to revamp the scheduling of games for next season. The league is looking at ways to make the draw fairer and is considering breaking the 16 team competition into two divisions. Melbourne, Hawthorn and Collingwood support a change, but say the fairest system would be to play every team twice. The Magpies' president, Eddie McGuire, says the so-called blockbuster matches must be maintained. ""I mean these games have been kept football alive for 105 years,"" he said. ""People forget that they had the blockbusters interstate, the derbies they used to call them then so everybody gets their whack at it. ""So what we're saying is make sure we give the people what they want not what people think they want and what they want is the big teams playing each other twice a year."" Mr McGuire says a 30 game season would be the fairest system, but may not be practical. ""It means the season would be longer. Does that mean we get rid of the Ansett Cup? Well there's pros and cons there,"" he said. ""So this is what we have to go through. How will it affect the television rights? Would it affect the players having to have a longer season? Obviously it would. ""Would it mean we'd shorten the Ansett Cup? Coaches would still want to have practice matches so there's no real solution other than playing everyone twice or maybe playing everyone once."""

" On Four Corners at 8.30pm, the inside story of the republic referendum and how it was doomed to fail, followed by an online forum at 10.30 with Debbie Whitmont and Virginia Moncrieff. Go to ""www.abc.net.au/4corners/default.htm"". Tune in to Lateline at 10.30 for news analysis providing up to the minute coverage of local and international news and events. Tonight, Prime Minister John Howard outlines his vision for Australia. Take part in the program by visiting the Lateline web site, where you can put your questions to our guests. Go to ""www.abc.net.au/lateline/""."

" Flood relief efforts in Mozambique have been boosted by the deployment of foreign military forces to help deliver emergency supplies to flood victims. British, French, German and soon American forces will be on the ground. The four British Puma helicopters were tasked on to their first missions to deliver food to a camp for 35,000 flood victims at Chaqualene within hours of their arrival in Mozambique. The deployment of foreign forces significantly increases the capacity of the relief operation which has until now relied solely on the South African military and helicopters donated by private businesses. Six transports and six heavy lift choppers from the United States are also on the way into the flood zone. The focus of the emergency is now shifting further north to the town of Beira where more fierce weather is expected to cross the coast in the next 48 hours. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Lebanese Prime Minister Salim al-Hoss has cautiously welcomed a decision by Israel's Cabinet to withdraw Israeli soldiers from Southern Lebanon by July. Mr al-Hoss has, however, expressed doubt as to whether or not the move is genuine. After a two day debate, the Israeli Cabinet has unanimously endorsed its Prime Minister Ehud Barak's pledge to withdraw from Southern Lebanon within the next four months. Israel invaded Lebanon in 1982 and continues to occupy a self declared security zone in the south of the country. The Cabinet indicated Israel would pull out with or without an agreement with Lebanon and its power broker, Syria, but it prefers doing so under an accord. It is a position shared by Mr al-Hoss. ""We will welcome any withdrawal from Lebanese territory by Israel anytime but we would wish that this withdrawal would come about in accordance with an agreement,"" he said. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Aged Care Minister Bronwyn Bishop faces a barrage in the Federal Parliament today, with a decision on the fate of Melbourne's Riverside Nursing Home still to be revealed. Mrs Bishop has been under pressure since it emerged the home's residents were bathed in a kerosene solution to treat a common skin ailment: Mrs Bishop says the decision about the home is up to a departmental delegate who is still considering a report on the incident. She says she has had legal advice against pre-empting any action before a decision is made. ""It is imperative that legal process, due legal process be followed,"" she said. But Labor's Chris Evans says she is hiding behind the excuse and has called for her to resign. ""She blamed the department, she blamed the agency, she blamed the nurses, she blamed the State Government and now she's blaming the legal advice,"" he said. Even the Democrats leader Meg Lees has suggested the Minister may have to make the ultimate sacrifice. But Mrs Bishop is standing firm, insisting the systems were in place to prevent the situation, but the processes were not followed. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Greens Senator Bob Brown says he hopes Federal Coalition politicians have the courage to defy the Prime Minister and support an end to mandatory sentencing laws. Senator Brown has introduced a bill calling for the laws in Western Australia and the Northern Territory to be overturned by the Federal Government. The Prime Minister has rejected the calls and a Senate committee inquiring into mandatory sentencing will deliver its report this week. Senator Brown says he is confident the Lower House will support the bill calling for the laws to be overturned. ""I believe this is such a hugely important issue for Aboriginal Australian kids that there must be enough members of the Liberal Party who have the courage of their convictions to cross the floor and see this legislation come into law, even if the Prime Minister doesn't want that outcome,"" he said. The Australian Democrats' Brian Greig says he will put forward a motion this week calling on the Senate to defer debate about other matters until mandatory sentencing is dealt with. He says he is confident the committee, which is dominated by non-government members, will decide the laws must be repealed. ""Historically, Senate committees tend to produce relatively objective reports and tend not to be party political in their findings,"" he said. ""I'm hoping that that will be the case with this as well it seems to me that as I said all the people on the committee are I think good people. ""We've seen the evidence, we've read the reports, we've listened to the witnesses and I think that we can produce, I'm quite hopeful that we can produce a report on which we can all agree."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A suspected rebel leader has been shot dead by Indonesian security forces during further violence in the province of Aceh. Troops have killed two other men in separate incidents. Security forces opened fire during a raid on a house in South Aceh. Five suspected rebels escaped, but a man believed to be a local separatist commander was shot dead. In the west of the province two other rebels were killed and one soldier was injured when troops attempted to disperse a number of armed men conducting illegal security checks. It is estimated that so far this year more than 250 people have lost their lives in the fighting. On Friday a large cache of weapons on its way to the province was intercepted by police. Twelve men including two members of the military have been arrested and will face court on suspicion of gun running. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A leading economic forecaster believes the Reserve Bank will have to raise interest rates later this year to counter the flow-on effects of tax changes. The Reserve has warned it will watch for any second-round inflationary effects of the goods and services tax (GST) arising from excessive price rises, or compensatory wage increases. Peter Jones of BIS Shrapnel says the GST and the accompanying income tax cuts come at an ""unfortunate"" time. ""We think that higher wage demands will come at a particularly unfortunate time, just in conjunction with the tax cuts in the middle of the year,"" he said. ""That means that the economy will be stimulated just at the very time that the Reserve Bank is trying to dampen demand and dampen expectations associated with wages. ""It means there's a danger of flow-ons from these enterprise agreements being renegotiated in some of the key industry sectors. ""That means that, to the extent that wage inflation is higher, that'll flow through into underlying inflation and the Reserve Bank will feel the need to use interest rates to reduce demand and to ease a tight labour market."" ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Tropical Cyclone Steve has intensified and is moving south down the Western Australian coast. In the last 24 hours, Cyclone Steve travelled a vast distance and is now located 100 kilometres north of Port Hedland and 235 kilometres north-east of Karratha. The weather bureau's Tony Jennings says there is no indication yet the cyclone will turn inland. ""Everything is looking like it will hold the west-south-west track. That's sort of parallel to that Pilbara Coast,"" he said. Travelling at 15 kilometres an hour, Cyclone Steve brings with it gales with gusts up to 125 kilometres an hour. Those winds are expected to hit northern coastal communities first and extend westward later today moving towards Exmouth. Heavy rain is expected to cause widespread flooding of the low-lying areas in the west Kimberley, eastern and central Pilbara regions. Coastal areas between Bidyadanga and Exmouth are on blue alert. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" Leading economic forecaster BIS Shrapnel says the Olympic Games will not lead to a substantial boost to investment in Australia. Chief economist Frank Gelber says in the long term, the only real economic legacy will be the earlier use of some high quality sporting facilities and a little additional tourism. Dr Gelber says in many industries, the best has already occurred. ""We've reaped most of the benefits of the investment in facilities already and we're already into a downturn in the construction industry due not only to the Olympics but other sectors as well,"" he said. ""On the activities side of the equation, there will be a lot of visitors be they tourists or athletes or entourage or press but that still is only a period of three weeks plus a few weeks beforehand and a bit afterwards."" Dr Gelber says with the goods and services tax (GST) on the way and predictions of further interest rate rises, Australia is bound to experience a downturn early next year. ""We'll have a great party around the time of the Olympics but afterwards I have my doubts about the magnitude of the impacts that people are liking to expect,"" he said. ""I mean certainly people will regard us favourably for tourism but we're a popular destination anyway. ""As regards new industry, they'll be much more concerned with industrial conditions than the fact that we can run an Olympic Games and we've got pretty scenery around the Harbour."""

" Residents in the north of Western Australia are preparing for the onset of a tropical cyclone. A tropical low off the Kimberley coast is developing into a cyclone and should be named as one in a few hours. Gales with gusts up to 100 kilometres an hour are expected to hit areas between Cape Leveque and Wallal sometime today. The low is the remnants of tropical cyclone Steve which first hit Queensland last week and then reformed in the Gulf of Carpentaria to strike areas of the Northern Territory. It is predicted heavy rain in the north and west Kimberley will cause widespread flooding in the region's low lying areas. The cyclone warning extends between Cape Leveque and Port Hedland with residents in those areas on blue alert, while a cyclone watch extends west to Exmouth. The weather bureau's Len Vanburgel says the cyclone threat is a concern to coastal residents. ""It is a bit of a concern because while it stays relatively close to the coast it can, of course, wing in and it can start affecting the coastline and start producing gail force winds on the coastline,"" she said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Government is considering raising the level of immigration next year. Yesterday, the Prime Minister said he would be in favour of increasing the migrant intake if it could be shown to be in Australia's interests. The New South Wales Premier Bob Carr has warned against allowing more migrants into Sydney. The Immigration Minister, Phillip Ruddock, has told Channel Seven he will take a submission to Cabinet next month to increase the level of immigration next year. ""There is some capacity at the moment for additional skilled growth if the government determines that's the route it wishes to take,"" he said. ""If the government decides that, weighing up all the arguments, that we can produce such an outcome [increased immigration] beneficially for the Australian economy and produce a better standard of living for all Australians."""

" Mr Ruddock says Premier Carr's views of not favouring an increase in immigration are at odds with others in his party and he is not surprised by the Premier's comments. ""It's been part of the mantra of the NSW Premier that he wants less migrants in Sydney. He's got his own Labor council disagreeing with him and other people in the Labor Party,"" he said. ""But putting that aside, what I do agree with is that there are premiers around Australia who are arguing that they should get a better dispersal of the migration program. ""The Premier ought to look at what's happening in Queensland and Western Australia because the growth rates in Perth, the Sunshine and Gold Coasts far outstrip the growth rates of sydney."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Indonesian immigration officials have begun deporting a large number of illegal arrivals who are trying to make their way to Australia. So far almost 300 people have been apprehended. Indonesia is calling for international help to send the illegal immigrants back to their home countries. So far more than 100 have been deported, but 88 others have managed to escape. Most of those apprehended had arrived in Indonesia by air from the Middle East and were using forged visas. The Indonesian government says in the eight months to February a total of 291 illegal immigrants have been caught en route to Australia. It is only a fraction of the thousands who have been caught in Australian waters. The flow of illegal immigrants has triggered some tensions. In January, President Abdurrahman Wahid expressed shock at Australian claims that Indonesia was being used as a staging point. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Northern Land Council says it is disappointed with a ruling by the full bench of the Federal Court, in the Miriuwung Gajerrong native title case. The Northern Territory Government, which was a party to the appeal, is yet to comment on the decision. On Friday the full bench of the Federal Court wound back a ruling which awarded extensive rights to the Miriuwung Gajerrong people over 8,000 square kilometres in the East Kimberly. It found native title had been extinguished by the Ord River Scheme in Western Australia, but not in the Keep River National Park, in the Northern Territory. The territory government, which was concerned about the implications for the planned stage two of the Ord River scheme in the territory, contributed to the multi-million dollar appeal. But the Attorney-General, Denis Burke, has been unavailable for comment. The Northern Land Council says it is looking at the findings and considering an appeal to the High Court. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A Melbourne researcher claims a man hanged for the rape and murder of a schoolgirl 78 years ago was innocent. Colin Campbell Ross was hanged at the Old Melbourne Gaol in 1922 for the murder of 12-year-old Alma Tirtschke. Researcher Kevin Morgan says the conviction was based on forensic evidence, from an analysis of hair samples collected by police. Mr Morgan was given permission to study the samples, and Victorian specialists using modern DNA tests have found the analysis at the time was flawed. Mr Morgan has asked Victorian authorities to re-open the case of Colin Ross, and posthumously exonerate him of the crime. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Police say this year's Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras was relatively incident-free, with just seven arrests. While the weather looked ominous for the start of the parade, nothing could keep the crowds away. Police estimate more than 500,000 people flocked to central Sydney for the 23rd annual Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras parade. Religion played a significant role in this year's parade with a number of the more than 200 entrants representing or satirising most of the major denominations. Media magnate Rupert Murdoch, columnist Piers Ackerman and Western Australian Premier Richard Court all received their share of flak with the aid of effigies and face masks. Dusty Springfield and Princess Diana were also remembered for their legacies."

" But while the parade may have been criticised in the past for straying from its political roots, many topical issues made an appearance last night. Among them was a group of walking tampons, calling themselves the Bloody Marys, protesting the levying of the goods and services tax (GST) on sanitary products. The biggest cheer of the night, however, was saved for the NSW police officers who marched in the parade for the second year running. The parade also provided a more unusual kind of wedding reception for one gay couple who had earlier held a committment ceremony in Hyde Park."

" Democrats Senator Brian Grieg, the first gay activist elected to the federal parliament, says church leaders are wrong to condemn the parade as merely a show of promiscuity. ""There are still so many issues we need to address as a nation,"" he said. ""Human rights issues in terms of equal consent ages and partnership recognition and anti-discrimination laws. ""We've got a long way to go in this country in that regard and so just being out and visible is in itself an act of political defiance."" The Mardi Gras is believed to have generated at least $41 million in tourism spending throughout New South Wales. Mary Lynne Koloff, from the Tourism Council of Australia, says income is especially strong in the retail, hotel and theatre industries. ""Well, the daily spend of the international visitors and the interstate visitors who are coming for this event is estimated at four times the average, around about $348 a day,"" she said. ""Whereas the average international tourist daily spend is only about $80. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Up to a million people around the country are expected to participate in this year's annual Clean Up Australia Day. Executive chairman Ian Kiernan says those getting out and about in New South Wales should look at targeting the massive accumulation of rubbish in our waterways. Mr Kiernan says with thousands of visitors set to descend upon Sydney later this year, locals should make a particular effort. With this in mind, he says another Clean Up Day will be held on August 13. ""Our research definitely indicates that people are more prone to return to a tourist destination, providing it's an interesting destination, they are more prone to do that if it is in a cleaner state,"" he said. ""If people go to overseas destinations and they are degraded waterways, degraded beaches and that sort of thing they often elect to go and find somewhere that's more pristine. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Opposition has cautiously welcomed the Prime Minister's apparent change of stance on immigration. John Howard has called for a debate on Australia's immigration and population levels. He says he would be in favour of raising the level of migrants coming into Australia every year if he could be persuaded that there are immediate benefits. The Opposition's Immigration spokesman, Con Sciacca, says if the comments are true, he welcomes them. ""If, in effect, the Prime Minister is saying, let's stop what the government's been doing and that is, if you like, provoking the fears of those in society who are concerned about the level of immigration, then if he's saying they're going to stop that, then the Opposition welcomes it,"" he said. ""We're prepared to enter any dialogue with them because in the end the country, the future of this country is the most important part."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The focus of flooding in the wake of tropical cyclone Steve has moved to the community of Daly River, south of Darwin, where the river has risen to 13 metres. Police are assessing the situation but at this stage there are no plans for the community, which is isolated by water, to evacuate. In Katherine, emergency service volunteers are this afternoon providing a ferry service to residents cut off from the centre of the town by water."

" The officer in charge of the Katherine police station, Colin Smith, says the water level in the river is dropping, but slower than expected. He says people who are cut off from town can be ferried across at Florina Road, and at the rocks area, near the intersection of the Gorge Road and Morris Road. ""Florina Road way we're probably looking at 100 to 200 people and on the other side of town probably a similar number, 50 to 60 people on the Gorge Road side,"" he said. The waters have subsided at the community of Beswick, to the east of Katherine, where 250 people have been sheltering under tarpaulins on the high ground. Sergeant Aarron Larson from the Maranboy police station says 80 per cent of the houses were covered in water, so now a big clean up is beginning. ""The actual structures and the buildings haven't suffered a lot of damage, it's just possessions and what have you,"" he said. ""All that will have to be assessed as they go through, but there will be quite a bit of loss on furniture and articles."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Investigations are underway to determine why a prawn trawler sank overnight in far north Queensland waters. Two fishermen were rescued from a dinghy after their trawler, the Sea Mistress, sank about 2.5 nautical miles off Brampston Beach near Innisfail. Coastguard Commander Rob Bryant says it seems the nets of the trawler got caught underwater and it was all over before the men could do much about it. He says the men are shaken by the ordeal. ""Naturally, I mean, a bloke who's just lost his livelihood it's not easy for anybody but as I say they're glad they're alive and can work together towards a new life,"" he said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Religion and the concept of family are among the themes for this year's Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras. Hundreds of thousands of people are expected at tonight's parade. Amongst the array of floats and spectacular costumes, religious issues will again be tackled. President of the Mardi Gras, David McLachan, says some people will respond tonight to a debate which he says he thought was over. ""Much of the rest of the community in Sydney had thought that the churches had really let go of that intense advocacy of their position about homosexuality because it didn't play out in the world anymore"" he said. The parade includes costumes made out of plastic water bottles collected from dance parties, one hundred Asian marching boys and the Klueless Klutch Klan, with a message to accessorise. Parade director Graham Greenhouse says parents and friends of lesbian and gays will form a large contingent and one couple will make a personal statement about the family. ""We've got a young couple who are actually having a commitment ceremony in Hyde Park and then using the parade route as their reception,"" he said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The family of the 12-year-old girl killed during the implosion of the Royal Canberra Hospital in 1997 has begun legal proceedings. Katie Bender's family was standing by her side when she was hit in the head by a piece of steel from the explosion. Five members of the Bender family are suing a total of eight groups and individuals for their part in the bungled implosion. They are seeking damages for nervous shock caused by the death of Katie Bender in July 1997. The family's lawyer has officially filed a writ which identifies a number of defendants including Totalcare, the government-owned corporation which supervised the project, a senior Totalcare employee, and the demolition project directors. Demolition contractor Tony Fenwick along with shot firer Rod McCraken are also included in the Bender family's claim. Fender and McCracken have already been ordered to stand trial. The ACT Chief Minister Kate Carnell has escaped any court action, but a claim has been lodged against the ACT for failing to ensure a competent contractor. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australia's Pat Rafter has lost his quarter final match at the Delray Beach Tennis Open in Florida in three sets to American Paul Goldstein. Rafter won the first set 6-4, but Goldstein levelled the match 6-1 in the second, and then took out the decider 6-2. Earlier today Richard Fromberg reached his first semi-final since a clay event two years ago when he beat American Justin Gimelstob in three sets. Thirty year-old Fromberg will play Austrian Stefan Koubek tomorrow after beating Gimelstob 4-6, 7-6, 6-2. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The deregulation of the dairy industry is set to proceed around Australia, following a decision by all states to accept ""in principle"" the Federal Government's restructuring package. It follows a meeting of state and federal Agriculture Ministers in Melbourne today. The Commonwealth package will provide $1.7 billion to help hundreds of farmers to exit the industry. Queensland Primary Industries Minister, Henry Palaszczuk, says he reluctantly agreed to deregulation after Victoria made it clear that it would go ahead, with or without the Commonwealth package. It is understood that the Western Australian State Cabinet is yet to ratify its acceptance of the package. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Victoria is 5 for 382 in reply to New South Wales first innings of 148 on day two of their interstate match at Punt Road Oval. Darren Berry is on 102 with Matthew Elliott on 93 - the Blues have a first innings lead of 237. In Perth, Western Australia is 7 for 525 in the match against Queensland at the WACA. Michael Dighton is on 166 with Matthew Nicholson on 38. Tasmania is 3 for 144 after tea in reply to South Australia's first innings of 5 for 502 declared on the second day of their interstate match in Adelaide. The Tigers trail by 358 runs. And South Africa is one for 73 in reply to India's first innings total of 158 in the second Test in Bangalore. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The decision to set Augusto Pinochet free has been condemned by lawyers in Spain and the other three European countries which were seeking his extradition. The Spanish extradition request was supported by similar cases brought by victims families in France, Switzerland and Belgium. Lawyers in all four countries have reacted with regret and anger at the British Government's decision, but they say there is now no legal means to appeal. The Swiss Prosecutor says it confirms Britain's long tradition of being a refuge for criminals of all kinds. The Spanish Government says it will respect what it describes as a poltical matter. The French Prime Minister, Lionel Jospin, says his government views the decision with regret and shares the disappointment of the families of the victims. French President Jacques Chirac said he hoped Pinochet would now face justice in Chile and the Belgian Government announced that it would be sending the files relating to its case on to Santiago."

" Outgoing Chilean President Eduardo Frei has pledged full independence of the justice system in ruling whether ex-dictator Augusto Pinochet was responsible for the crimes against humanity attributed to him. Mr Frei has also stressed that no-one is above the law in Chile. ""It will be the Chilean courts that will decide whether Senator Pinochet is responsible for the crimes imputed to him,"" the President said in his nationally broadcast speech. ""I have full confidence that our judges will carry out their mission without any other consideration than the application of the rule of law,"" he said. As a senator for life, Pinochet enjoys immunity from prosecution, but human rights groups and lawyers for victims of the dictatorship are seeking to have this protection lifted. Some 60 lawsuits for torture and killings have been filed against the ex-dictator in Chile. Mr Frei says all candidates in the recent presidential election had agreed that the judicial branch of the government should be allowed full independence in dealing with Pinochet, who was expected in Santiago on tomorrow morning. Ironically, Pinochet, 84, will arrive just in time to see power handed over to Socialist Ricardo Lagos, who had played a key role in bringing about the end of the 17-year dictatorship in 1990. Mr Lagos will take office on March 11. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Preparations are being made for the deployment of up to 1,000 American servicemen to assist with flood relief efforts in Mozambique. The US military will also send desperately needed heavy lifting equipment and transport to help move arriving relief supplies out to the hardest hit areas. Earlier, the Mozambique President has appealed for greater international assistance after touring flood devastated areas of the country by helicopter. President Joaquim Chissano said there was an immediate need for more rescue transport, food, drinking water and medicine, but it is also time to plan the rebuilding of Mozambique. ""If you think about the overall reconstruction of the main infrastructure items, ... schools, roads, bridges, some powerlines and telephone facilities, [would cost] about $250 million and that is a minimum,"" he said. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Heavy rain resulting from the ex-cyclone has eased in Katherine but police are continuing to check the level of the town's river. The river has risen gradually overnight and at last report was just over 16.5 metres - 4 metres less than the peak reached during the January floods two years ago. Yesterday, people from low-lying areas around Beswick and Mataranka were moved to higher ground, but there have been no further evacuations overnight. The Stuart Highway, north of Katherine at the Cullen River, is still closed, with 3 metres of water over the road. The Victoria Highway to the west is also impassable at the Victoria River. Florina and Gorge roads are closed."

" Meanwhile, New South Wales Premier Bob Carr will tour flooded areas in the state's far west today. An SES spokesman says while the clean-up is underway around Broken Hill and White Cliffs, the surrounding Paroo Flood Plains are still underwater. Mr Carr says he is keen to see just how effective emergency measures have proved so far. ""I want to assess the way the assistance has been absorbed by these communities and by farmers in particular,"" he said. ""We suspect the ultimate cost to the state will be something like $10 million, mainly in the reconstruction of roads that have been damaged by these floods."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The International Cricket Council will draw up a proposal for a 10-year Test schedule to ensure a fairer share of fixtures. The ICC says the schedule would seek to benefit newer countries in the nine-nation Test arena, such as Zimbabwe and Sri Lanka. Each team will have to play at least two series against every other country in the 10 years, one at home and another away. However, series such as the Ashes, played every two years between Australia and England, will not be affected. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Federal Government is preparing to clamp down on petrol retailers illegally diluting fuel as a form of tax evasion. Fuel companies are claiming dilution using the paint thinner, toluene, is widespread. Petrol retailer, Liberty Fuel, wrote to the federal government blowing the whistle on petrol diluters last year, but claims nothing was done to stop a practise it estimates is robbing the government of $500 million in excise. The Prime Minister, John Howard, the Transport Minister, John Anderson, and the Assistant Treasurer, Rod Kemp, have all backed the idea to apply excise to toluene, removing the incentive to use it as a cheap petrol thinner. Mr Anderson says dilution will not be tolerated. ""If people are avoiding their excise responsibilities, plainly that's an untenable situation and the government will have to fix it,"" he said. Senator Kemp says he is in urgent talks with the Tax Office on methods to monitor petrol quality and how to tax toluene, without affecting the paint industry. ""Initial advice I have received is that we are doing what we can to deal effectively with the problem,"" he said."

" But Federal Treasurer, Peter Costello, says there are no plans to change the excise regime on chemicals, suspected of being added illegally to petrol. ""What we're going to make sure is that when people roll up to the bowser to buy petrol they get petrol,"" he said. ""That's what they're buying, petrol, and they're entitled to buy petrol and it's against the law to have anything else in that bowser. ""The enforcement authorities should act on all information to prevent any substitution going on at the bowser level,"" Mr Costello said."

" New South Wales Fair Trading Minister, John Watkins, has welcomed Mr Howard's announcement that he is backing the plan to levy excise on toluene. Mr Watkins says while the news is good, provisions must be made to ensure other additives are not substituted. ""We have to be on guard against other additives, that's why next week I'm calling together leaders in the petroleum industry,"" he said. ""They're meeting me in Sydney and we're going to work out once and for all, a definition of this product petrol, so that we can then enforce it in the future, have a standard that we can test petrol against and that means we can protect motorists into the future."""

" New South Wales Shadow Fair Trading Minister, Michael Gallagher, says he is hearing from country service station operators that fuel contamination is widespread. Mr Gallagher is in the south-west city of Wagga Wagga today. He says a local operator has explained how $30,000 in modifications is needed to tankers to carry the adulterated fuel. ""He also informed me through the industry they are aware of this being nationwide,"" Mr Gallagher said. ""And who better to tell him than the truck drivers themselves. ""It's become quite common knowledge from those who are involved in the freighting of this fuel that it is widespread,"" he said."

" Meanwhile, the Federal Government has denied allegations that it sold trucks or redeployed staff that were meant to police petrol substitution. Senatorn Kemp says the trucks are still the property of the Tax Office and available for use in any investigation into petrol dilution. He says staff were transferred from the Customs Department to the Tax Office only because they chose to move or were promoted. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australia says it recognises differences on defence policy with New Zealand over military spending and the United States alliance. The Prime Minister, John Howard, says he discussed future military approaches during talks in Sydney with the New Zealand Prime Minister, Helen Clark. ""We share a lot of interests in common, but there are going to be points at which we put an emphasis differently from New Zealand, and New Zealand differently from us,"" Mr Howard said. ""It's far better to recognise that from the very beginning and be candid about it and get on which the association."" Mr Howard announced that Australia will start to lift its defence budget from July next year. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Government has denied it is reviewing its policy on applying the goods and services tax (GST) to long-term caravan park rentals. The Deputy Prime Minister, John Anderson, created confusion about the policy when he told reporters the matter is being considered by the government. A spokesman for Mr Anderson says the Minister knows there will be no change in the policy, but was unsure whether this had been announced. The Government has offered caravan park operators the option of a 5 per cent GST on long-term tenants, or to go GST-free with no rebates for GST paid on business inputs. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" New South Wales Education Minister, John Aquilina, says the Teachers Federation has effectively sabotaged the proposed English literacy tests for years seven and eight students. Mr Aquilina says he has tried everything to convince the union to lift bans on the assessments, but his department has now been forced to cancel any further testing. The Minister says the federation has wasted $2 million in taxpayers' money and denied parents information on their child's reading, writing and language ability. ""Problems with literacy [that] would've been detected through these tests are not now going to be detected,"" Mr Aquilina said. ""Who knows how many of these young people will slip through the net? ""Who knows what problems they're going to continue to experience in terms of their literacy?"" he said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Auckland waterfront was a scene of wild celebration this afternoon as hundreds of thousands of well-wishers cheered on Team New Zealand - winner of the 2000 America's Cup contest 5-0. Boats from super yachts down to dinghies formed an escort for the black boat SZL Christie, New Zealand's winning weapon against the Italian syndicate Prada Luna Rosa. With horns blaring and the cheering of thousands, the Kiwi sailors saluted the crowd holding bottles of champagne and the team's symbol, red socks. The America's Cup has so far pumped $800 million dollars into the New Zealand economy and that figure is set to rise even more, with the America's Cup celebrations tonight. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australia's head swimming coach Don Talbot has warned not to overlook Kieren Perkins as a medal chance at the Sydney Olympics. The world record holder for the 1,500 metres freestyle has struggled in recent times, with his biggest challenge coming from fellow Australian, Grant Hackett. Several swimming observers have doubts that Perkins can make the team, but Talbot believes otherwise. ""So far he's on track and doing well,"" he said. ""If he can get through these Olympic trials in May and it appears like he's going to do that, then I would say that, as I said, you'll see a great swim [and] a great race in Sydney."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Relief agencies in Mozambique are slowly starting to deliver much-needed emergency aid to thousands of people stranded by rising floodwaters. At the same time, rescue efforts are concentrating on finding people still trapped in treetops across wide areas of the country. The decision to concentrate on rescuing thousands of people still clinging for their lives in treetops continues after a woman was rescued by a helicopter 40 minutes after giving birth. She had been trapped in the high branches with floodwaters swirling at her feet for three days. The World Food Program says it will start lowering food supplies to those stranded on rooftops, as they will not be able to be rescued for some time. Mozambique's President says the number of people affected by the flooding is now expected to pass the 1 million mark. Emergency supplies and helicopters donated by the United States, Italy and Britain have begun arriving. However, aid agencies say another appeal for funding and assistance is likely before the end of the week. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A departing senior manager at Telstra denies there's a ""brain drain"" of top staff, lured from traditional companies to new high-tech ventures. Peter Shore, a former group managing director with the carrier, is himself leaving to head My-Price, an Australasian offshoot of US e-commerce firm, Priceline.com. Former New South Wales premier Nick Greiner recently left the board of Coles Myer, after becoming chairman of online retailer Dstore. Despite his own departure, Mr Shore does not believe there is a trend emerging. ""Companies like Telstra are training hundreds and hundreds of Internet-savvy managers every year and the banks are doing it and the insurance companies are doing it and the airlines are doing it and the Telstras are doing it,"" he said. ""I'm not really convinced there's any brain drain from the old to the new economy. I think the old guys are working very hard to transform their businesses."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" One person is dead and four are in hospital following another shooting in the United States, this time in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The man suspected of shooting them has been taken into custody. The shootings took place in Wilkinsburg, near Pittsburg, where a man shot a maintenance worker he had called to his apartment. He then went to a nearby McDonald's and shot three people before apparently shooting another at a neighbouring Burger King. He then sealed himself in an office building but was eventually convinced to surrender by police. One person has reportedly died and four others are said to be in a critical condition. The shooting comes a day after an incident in Michigan, where a six-year-old boy shot a girl in his first grade class with a gun he had found at home. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Former Indonesian armed forces chief General Wiranto has told a parliamentary commission he was not responsible for the bloodshed in East Timor. General Wiranto claims that at first he made peaceful efforts in East Timor but he believes unrest was inevitable. He has told the parliamentary commission that when the East Timorese voted for independence, they chose something they did not completely understand. General Wiranto and his troops have already faced international condemnation for their actions. An Indonesian human rights investigation has found the General was guilty of omission for not halting the bloodshed. He was one of six high-ranking generals named in the report. As a result, he was suspended from his Cabinet post two weeks ago. His removal followed a drawn-out confrontation with President Abdurrahman Wahid. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Environment Minister, Robert Hill, says it is not helpful to speculate on whether Japan will use aid money to influence votes on the International Whaling Commission. Australia and New Zealand are pushing for a third whale sanctuary to be established in the South Pacific. Greenpeace has expressed concern that as the region's largest aid donor, Japan could use its assistance as leverage for votes. But Senator Hill says both countries are eager for the support of Solomon Islands, which is the region's only commission member. ""Japan strongly opposes our proposal and will work vigorously for its defeat, there's no secret about that,"" Senator Hill said. ""In the same way as we seek to influence the Solomons to support the proposal, they will seek to influence the Solomons to oppose it."""

" The Australian Medical Association (AMA) says Federal Aged Care Minister Bronwyn Bishop's handling of her portfolio has been amateurish. The comments follow a federal review which has identified potentially lethal practices at a Melbourne nursing home. The Aged Care Standards and Accreditation Agency has found the Cambrai Nursing home, in East St Kilda, placed residents at serious risk. The review states staff are unable to correctly indentify residents placing them at risk of receiving the wrong medication, it also notes a type of restraint used at the home, could strangle a resident. AMA aged care spokesman Gerald Segal says Bronwyn Bishop does not understand the importance of quality care. ""I am afraid that she has never understood that it is all about quality of care,"" he said. ""If she can't get that in her mind, if she can't understand that when you provide funding you have got to make sure that the quality follows the funding, then I am afraid she has failed."" The nursing home says it has not received any complaints from residents or relatives. A spokeswoman says the problems identified in the report were addressed before a second review which was held last month. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Australian currency continues to crumble, sliding to a 17-month low in the latest offshore trade. But the dollar's downfall has proved the share market's salvation. Sentiment has shifted decisively on Australian financial markets. The Reserve Bank is now seen as adopting a less agressive stance on official interest rates. Yesterday's release of weak retail turnover figures for January has been a telling factor, after a run of data hinting at a moderation in economic activity. It came as a relief valve for Australian share market investors yesterday, with the All Ordinaries index surging 57 points to a record high close. But the flipside of easing pressure on interest rates has been the exodus from the Australian dollar. Overnight, it has been down to 60.36 US cents, a level last traded in October 1998. The looming end of the Japanese financial year is also mentioned as an influence, with Japanese investors now starting to repatriate funds and selling US, Canadian and Australian dollars. At about 8:30am AEDT, the dollar had recovered to 60.57 US cents, just a fraction below yesterday's local close. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The National Herbarium at Sydney's Botanic Gardens is mothballing its mothballs, which have been used for decades to protect its dried plant specimens. Naphthalene, which can cause eye, nose and throat irritations, is being replaced with a system of freeze-dried specimens, room temperature control and insect traps. Tony Martin, from the Botanic Gardens, says the plant discoveries of botantist, Joseph Banks, are among the collection. ""Naphthalane's been used for many years, probably well over 100 years, as an insect deterrent to try to reduce the effect of insect damage on herbarium specimens or museum specimens for that matter,"" Mr Martin said. ""But we are trying to phase its use out because of the potential dangers of naphthalane to visitors and employees of the organisation."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" New Zealand-born and Australian-raised actor Russell Crowe has been shortlisted for the British Academy of Film and Television's best actor award for his role in <i>The Insider</i>. Crowe is up against Kevin Spacey for <i>American Beauty</i> and Ralph Fiennes for <i>The End of the Affair</i>. <i>American Beauty</i> swept the board with 14 nominations, including best film, best director and best cinematography."

" The union movement has used statements by the Prime Minister to support its claim for a $24 a week pay rise for low-paid workers. In its submission to the Industrial Relations Commission's safety net review, the ACTU says its claim is moderate and economically affordable at a time when the economy is in a historic expansion. The ACTU has submitted quotes of the Prime Minister talking up the strength of the economy, while admitting not all Australians have been sharing in the country's prosperity. The union movement said the commission has a chance to help low-paid workers in the city and the country who have been missing out. The union movement has also used evidence from the Reserve Bank showing a slowing of the economy in the year ahead is unlikely, while highlighting there is no evidence from the central bank of wages growth as a pressure on the economy. The ACTU also asked the commission to take into account the likely effects of the goods and services tax (GST), saying tax cuts for low-paid workers are insufficient. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" New Zealand and Australia are to have top-level talks on dole payments and defence. The New Zealand Prime Minister, Helen Clark, arrives in Sydney this afternoon ahead of talks tomorrow with the Prime Minister, John Howard. Helen Clark says her government will keep Australia advised of its review of New Zealand's defence policy but will take decisions to meet its own strategic objectives. Ms Clark says New Zealand, as a small country, has been too prone to listening to other security views. She will also be talking to John Howard about the payment of Australian social security benefits to New Zealand citizens, noting that there is a net flow each year of 35,000 New Zealanders to Australia. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Figures released today show that the number of households using computers and the Internet is booming. The Australian Bureau of Statistics says half of all Australian households, or 3.5 million homes, have a computer and more than half of that number are connected to the Internet. The figures also show more than 800,000 people used the Internet in the past 12 months to purchase goods or services. Other bureau figures out today show there has been another unexpectedly weak amount of retail activity in Australia. The official seasonally adjusted estimate of retail turnover has dropped for a second month in a row. The Reserve Bank and financial markets alike are expecting consumer spending to underpin economic activity in Australia through the first half of the year at least. So there was some surprise when December, the Christmas month, registered a decline in seasonally adjusted terms. That has now been revised to an even bigger drop of 0.8 per cent, while the month of January is showing a fall in national retail turnover of 0.4 per cent. In raw figures, Australian households spent $11.6 billion at retail outlets in January, down from $15.8 billion in December - subdued even before last month's second increase in official interest rates. Other figures showed a 6 per cent rise in building approvals during January. However, approvals for private sector stand-alone houses have fallen by a seasonally adjusted 7 per cent. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Police in the US state of Michigan are trying to find out why a seven-year-old boy shot dead a six-year-old girl in his primary school class. The boy apparently arrived at the elementary school with the handgun. It appears he shot the six-year-old girl in a classroom, in front of both his teacher and 22 other pupils. It is not clear whether the shooting was intentional or an accident: some reports suggest the boy was showing off when he accidently fired the gun while another witness said the two had been arguing about something. The girl was rushed to a nearby hospital where she died about half an hour later. The boy was taken into police custody and the rest of the school was evacuated to a nearby church hall, where parents were waiting. School was called off for the day although it remained open for anyone who wanted counselling. It is not yet clear how the boy got the gun. Authorities say that while the boy is too young to face criminal charges, those responsible for the gun could be charged. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Insurance company Zurich Australia says an unintentional data entry error is to blame for it issuing increased premiums to its Tasmanian and Western Australian customers. The company has agreed to refund a total of almost $50,000 to 348 businesses following a complaint to the goods and services (GST) hotline. The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, which is investigating the billing practices of another seven insurance companies, says the mistake shows a systemic failure in Zurich's methodology in calculating the GST. However, the company's chief executive, Malcolm Jones, says the mistake was not tax-related. ""People can draw their own conclusion,"" he said. ""From our point of view it was a data entry error so I suppose you could form the view that that was systemic but I suppose we, not just we, but everybody from time to time will have a data entry error."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Republican presidential candidate George W Bush has had a big win in the primary in Virginia. As counting began, exit polls pointed to a margin of around 15 per cent. Governor Bush claimed victory and lashed out at opponent John McCain over his attacks on leaders of the Christian Coalition who are supporting him. ""The voters of Virginia have rejected the politics of pitting one religion against another,"" Governor Bush said. According to preliminary figures, Governor Bush increased his already-strong support among Republican voters in the open primary, with 71 per cent backing the Texas Governor and just 25 per cent backing Senator McCain. Among Christian conservatives, the difference was even greater, with Governor Bush dominating by a margin of eight-to-one. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Tropical Cyclone Steve has crossed the western edge of the Gulf of Carpentaria at Bing Bong, near Borroloola, but there are no reports of any damage. The weather bureau says Cyclone Steve is a category one cyclone with gale force winds of up to 110 kilometres per hour. The officer-in-charge of Borroloola police, Sergeant Spence Compton, says the cyclone is not producing any destructive winds. ""In Borroloola itself we're getting gusty winds but they're fairly moderate, they're probably not exceeding 60 kilometres an hour,"" he said. ""Here we get gusty storms that have higher winds than these so it's really moderate weather conditions. We've been getting squally showers but nothing really heavy."" A cyclone warning is now current for coastal and island communities between Port McArthur and Numbulwar. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Prime Minister has told Olympics officials he will try to attend team training camps and other sporting events before the Sydney Games to get to know Australian athletes. Mr Howard has been invited by the Australian Olympic Committee to play a bigger role in the preparation of the team before and during the Games. The Federal Government's spokeswoman on the Olympics, Pru Goward, says Mr Howard is keen to show the Australian team it has the nation's support. ""He's very pleased to be involved with athletes at their training camps and other team preparations, meeting with them, all of course depending on his diary, to show Australian support for this,"" she said. ""Taxpayers have put in $140 million to athlete preparation and of course the Prime Minister wants to encourage and show the support people have for them. ""I think the Prime Minister shares that view that national spirit comes from the top and athletes must feel, and want to feel, that their country's behind them. ""That's why he wants to be with them, encourage them, go to their camps and team preparations and show not just his support but his support as the leader of the Australian people."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Pat Rafter has made a successful return to singles tennis, winning his first round match at the ATP tournament at Delray Beach in Florida. Rafter has been recovering since he underwent shoulder surgery in October. In his return match, he beat Hernan Gumy 6-2, 7-6. He now meets Austrian Markus Hipfl on Friday morning. One Australian is guaranteed a quarter-finals berth, with Richard Fromberg to face Andrew Ilie in the second round tomorrow morning. Fromberg today beat American Jonathon Stark 6-4, 6-2."

" The head of the Commonwealth Bank has criticised the Reserve Bank for reducing interest rates too far. Managing director David Murray also warned the Federal Government against regulating banks' social obligations. Mr Murray has told a Melbourne business gathering the Reserve must consider the stability of banks, households' increased sensitivity now to rate changes and competitive pressures that force banks to move beyond changes to the cash rate. Interest rates fell 2.75 per cent in the three-and-a-half years to November, but Mr Murray says mortgage rates fell even faster. ""Maybe we went too far down with our monetary policy settings and should not have gone down to the 4.75 per cent,"" he said. Mr Murray also warned that government attempts to dictate that banks retain branches, could deter them from investing in more cost-effective ATM and Eftpos infrastructure, a move he warned would ""turn out the lights at the Commonwealth Bank"". -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" New flood surges are continuing to swamp towns in Mozambique with one of the country's biggest cities now under water. Rescuers have been concentrating their efforts on the coastal town of Xai Xai. Raging flood waters surging down the Limpopo and Save Rivers have now struck the coast in Xai Xai, where more than 100,000 people were seeking shelter from the rising waters. UN officials say the town is without fuel to run boats to rescue people. The onus is falling again on the stretched resources of the South African military, which has supplied an additional five helicopters to the rescue effort. Relief workers say the rescue phase of the emergency is far from over with more flood surges expected to hit towns over the coming days. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Tropical Cyclone Steve is expected to cross the Northern Territory coast at about midday today. The category one cyclone is in the south-western Gulf of Carpentaria, about 80 kilometres north-east of Port McArthur. The Darwin weather bureau says it is moving west at about 13 kilometres an hour and is expected to cross the coast between Port McArthur and Port Roper, on the Gulf coast. A cyclone warning continues for coastal and island communities between the Territory-Queensland border and Alyangula, on Groote Eylandt. The warning between Cape Shield and Alyangula has been cancelled. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The union movement will argue for a $24 a week payrise and compensation for the goods and services tax (GST), when the living wage case begins in Melbourne this morning. The Industrial Relations Commission will be asked by the Federal Government to grant an $8 a week payrise. The Workplace Relations Minister, Peter Reith, says it is an appropriate increase for Australia's 1.7 million low paid workers. ""It's better to have a measured approach rather than the reckless economically irresponsible approach being favoured by the federal Labor Party,"" he said. ""If you had the ACTU's claim of $24 a week then by the time you'd finished at the supermarket you would have lost most of that through inflation. ""You'd lose the rest of it through income tax increases and interest rate rises."" The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry will ask for a probationary rate of pay to be introduced for all new workers. It aruges there is no need for an across-the-board payrise but any increase should be delayed 12 months to offset inflation. Chamber chief executive, Mark Paterson, says businesses will ask the commission to approve the probationary rate. ""That's a single rate of pay. Not the current legally enforced minimum rate for every classification,"" he said. ""So people who are out of work get the opportunity to gain the experience in work before they're required to be paid the full classification rate for the job they'll be undertaking."" Mr Paterson says the chamber will also oppose the union movement's attempts to link wage rises with the GST. ""There's no justification for trying to link general wage increases in with a change to the taxation structure,"" he said. The commission will sit for six days ending on March 22. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" In the US presidential campaign, three states hold Republican votes today with the candidates looking for boosts in the run-up to next week's Super Tuesday contests. The largest number of delegates are up for grabs in Virginia, where polls show George W Bush leading over challenger Senator John McCain. But Senator McCain, who launched his attack on the Christian Coalition leadership in the state yesterday, is hoping for an upset. More conducive to the Senator is Washington state, but with only a small delegate count decided today, any victory would primarily be a pyschological one. Governer Bush's strong lead among committed Republicans should see him comfortably win the third state, North Dakota, which holds Republican only caucuses today. Today's ballots are seen as a warm-up for next week, when 12 states, including New York and California hold primaries. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The last major rebel stronghold in Chechnya has reportedly fallen to Russian forces. Moscow now says it needs only to mop-up pockets of resistance to gain control of the entire republic. The town of Shatoi, on the road to the rebel infested Caucasus mountains, is now said by Russia to be under its control. Moscow says its now chasing up a few remaining groups of rebels. Analysts though anticipate the guerrillas can still nip at the Russians' heels especially if their supplies hold out until the spring thaw. At the same time, Russia's chief military prosecutor says he has found no evidence of alleged Russian torture of Chechens in a controversial video tape that came to light last week. Moscow though has reiterated that it will not allow independent investigation of what are persistent allegations. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Israel has for the first time released the memoirs of Nazi war criminal Adolph Eichmann almost 40 years after he was hanged in an Israeli prison. The writings show Eichmann did not believe he was in any way responsible for the holocaust. Eichmann's memoirs reveal something of the person who is known as the architect of the Nazi's so called final solution - the extermination of the Jewish people. Eichmann, who organised the transportation of millions of Jews to the death camps in eastern Europe during World War II, portrays himself as a simple and practical man of moderate intelligence and suggests he had served false gods. He calls the holocaust the most enormous crime in the history of mankind, but says he was not guilty as he was merely obeying orders. Most historians in Israel agree there is little new factually in Eichmann's writings, but say their release is long overdue and can only help counter the claims of holocaust deniers. The release of the papers, which are being used by lawyers fighting a holocaust related libel suit in London, has been generally welcomed across Israel. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australia will be aiming to extend its unbeaten one day world record when it plays New Zealand today in the fifth limited overs match in Napier. The Australians, who have not been beaten in 13 consecutive matches, are considering playing their three fastest bowlers, Brett Lee, Glenn McGrath and Damien Fleming. Australian captain Steve Waugh says the trio will all play if the wicket is green. Meanwhile, Australian batsman Ricky Ponting will undergo a final fitness test on an ankle injury today before the national selectors decide if he can play in the New Zealand test series. Ponting injured the ankle in a fielding mishap in Sydney during the one day finals against Pakistan. If Ponting is ruled out of the three test series, Andrew Symonds, Simon Katich and Damien Martyn would be in contention to replace him."

" In Australia's top end, Tropical Cyclone Steve is moving slowly away from Mornington Island towards the Northern Territory side of the Gulf of Carpentaria. The cyclone, which is the same system that struck Cairns on Sunday night, reformed this morning over Mornington Island. Sue Oates, from the Brisbane Cyclone Warning Centre, says the cyclone is moving west-north-west at 11 kilometres an hour and could threaten communities between Port Arthur and Groote Eylandt tomorrow morning. ""Steve's continuing to move westward although somewhat slower than it's been doing over the past 12 hours,"" she said. ""There is the possibility that it could intensify further, though at this stage it's not showing any signs of doing that."" The cyclone passed over Mornington Island earlier this morning and the island's state school principal Jay Mills says there was some minor damage. ""Metal louvres were ripping off. We have a huge covered play area and that was damaged quite severely,"" she said."

" Cyclone Steve is getting a new lease on life after it already caused havoc in Queensland's far north over the past two days. Water and power remains cut in parts of Cairns and Mareeba, sugar cane has been damaged and one person has drowned in a swollen creek. Authorities in north Queensland have re-issued warnings not to play in flood waters after a 17-year-old drowned in a creek near Tully. Rescue workers recovered his body from flooded Five Mile Creek south of Tully. He was reported missing yesterday afternoon by friends who told police they were tube riding in the creek when a wall of water hit them."

" Graziers in Queensland's Gulf country are hoping Cyclone Steve stays away. Many Gulf country graziers have been isolated for weeks by the prolonged monsoon. Stuck on her property south of Burketown for a month, Burke shire Mayor Annie White says it is the biggest wet season since 1974. ""You get to the point where you really understand the word isolation,"" she said. ""You're pretty basically locked into your own little space and the space has become a bit smaller and smaller because it's very unpleasant outside. ""I think you could just say we're a soggy bog at the moment."""

" Meanwhile in New South Wales, the State Minister for Agriculture, Richard Amery, will arrive in White Cliffs, in the north-west of the state, this afternoon, to tour flood affected areas. New South Wales Agriculture say while 12,000 sheep may have been killed in the record flooding, nearly twice that have already been saved. The department's Geoff Woods says 23,500 sheep have been herded to safety, but a further 9,000 remain stranded on islands throughout the area. He says half of those will need to be airlifted six at a time to safety to prevent fly-strike, while the rest will be ferried across floodwaters by punt. ""It's much cheaper to get them off by punt and it's the same amount of work involved virtually,"" he said. ""It might take a little longer but where there's a danger to the sheep we'll use the helicopter and get them off quickly, but where's there's not so much danger, well we've got that bit more time to use the punt."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" A record number of Australian-born people migrated overseas last year heading mainly for the United Kingdom, New Zealand and the United States. Two thirds of the 35,000 people who left Australia permanently were overseas-born residents, returning to their country of birth. The Bureau of Statistics figures showed 84,000 people arrived in Australia to settle last year, one in five were from New Zealand and one in 10 from Britain. The study also found a quarter of Australia's population was born overseas and that just over two-thirds of that number had taken up Australian citizenship. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Australian Olympic officials Kevan Gosper and John Coates will urge Prime Minister John Howard this afternoon to maintain current funding levels for elite sport. The officials are hoping the Federal Government's current policy of redirecting funding away from Olympic sports after the Sydney Games will be overturned. Mr Coates and Mr Gosper are worried that if funding is cut, top coaches will leave Australia for other countries including Italy and France. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" A second two-day audit is being completed at a Melbourne nursing home after nurses reported more problems about the standards of care at the home. The Aged Care Standards and Accreditation Agency inspected the Riverside Nursing Home in Patterson Lakes following revelations the residents had been bathed in kerosene to treat scabies. Aged Care Minister Bronwyn Bishop says agency nurses, who have since been working at the facility, say the sanctions placed on the home have not been met. Mrs Bishop says these include requirements about fly-screens, food storage, climate control and privacy matters. Mrs Bishop has rejected allegations that information about nursing homes ""of concern"" is being withheld from the public. She says all audit reports are available, on request, from the accreditation agency. ""Those reports are available now if you ring up and ask for them,"" she said. ""But I want them back on the Internet and I have asked them to do that as quickly as possible, because in this day and age that's the quickest way of disseminating information."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The National Farmers Federation (NFF) says it may campaign against the full sale of Telstra unless promised upgrades in regional telecommunications are delivered. The NFF has called on the Federal Government to get on with the $750 million worth of improvements promised from last year's sale of the second tranche of Telstra. The peak farming lobby group also wants the government to release details of the inquiry into Telstra service standards. NFF president Ian Donges says if the benefits of T-2 are not delivered to regional Australia, the NFF might play an active role against any further privatisation. ""That's a possibility, there's no doubt about that, because the feelings are running very strong in terms of the quality of services and delivery of those services right now,"" he said. ""There's no doubt that the $750 million that was legislated for last year is something that rural people are looking for."" A spokesman for the Communications Minister, Richard Alston, says the government has already enhanced high speed data services and strengthened the universal service obligation for regional customers. He says the government has made it clear it will not pursue full privatisation until the study of service standards is carrried out. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Scientists are preparing for a population crash in penguin colonies in parts of Antarctica more affected by global climate change. Researchers believe increases in air and sea temperatures have led to a significant reduction in sea ice. Eric Woehler, from the Australian Antarctic Division in Hobart, says the change has been most noticeable near the Antarctic Peninsula. ""The prediction is that this year will be a bad year for penguins in the Antarctic Peninsula because it is such a bad year for sea ice,"" he said. ""The sea ice is required for the krill to grow underneath the ice through the winter and spring months. ""That provides the food the following summer. ""So if you don't have the sea ice in the winter time you don't have the krill the following summer and you're seeing a population crash in penguins the following summer."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Queensland opening batsman Matthew Hayden has been voted player of the domestic one-day cricket competition. Hayden scored 532 in six matches this season, including three centuries and was rewarded with a call-up to the national one-day team. The award was based on the votes of this season's cricket umpires. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The leadership of the Indonesian armed forces has been overhauled in a move designed to curb the military's political influence. The casualties of the shake-up include supporters of former armed forces chief General Wiranto. The General was suspended two weeks ago pending an investigation into his leadership in East Timor. In total more than 70 senior officers face immediate reassignment. The most significant change is the appointment of a new outspoken commander of the Army Strategic Reserve. General Ogus Wirahadi Kusulmar is well known for publicly criticising his colleagues. His instalment and the removal of so-called hardliners is the latest step towards limiting the political roll of the military. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Flood waters in Mozambique are not expected to recede until the end of the week, with tens of thousands of people still waiting for evacuation from the hardest hit areas. The flood surge is now heading for a town currently sheltering more than 100,000 people. The two metre high flood surge is tearing its way towards the Mozambique coast and the city of Xai Xai where 130,000 people have taken shelter from the raging waters. The town is now cut off and is without fuel or power. Emergency teams say the situation in the town is critical. The Mozambique Government has made a desperate appeal for more helicopters to assist with the airlift of more than 80,000 people still stranded in trees and on roof tops further inland. Officials say the death toll is impossible to calculate until the flood waters recede. However, the government says it is certain to be high as most Mozambiquans cannot swim. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The weather bureau says Cyclone Steve which swept across Cape York yesterday is about to be reborn in the Gulf of Carpentaria. The tropical low is crossing Mornington Island and moving north-west towards the Northern Territory. The bureau's issued a tropical cyclone warning from Mornington Island in Queensland to Groote Eylandt in the Northern Territory. Geoff Callaghan, from Brisbane's Cyclone Warning Centre, says the system is intensifying. ""The pressure has been dropping fairly rapidly,"" he said. ""Our automatic weather station there is not producing gales at the moment but it's developing a very strong tropical cyclone structure when you look at either radar or satellite imagery."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" A group of Port Pirie residents is suing mining company Pasminco in what is expected to be one of Australia's largest class actions. The action alleges noxious fumes from the South Australian city's smelter caused residents to suffer serious health complaints. Another Pasminco smelter at Cockle Creek in New South Wales is also the subject of legal action. It is alleged Pasminco wrongfully caused and permitted emissions of noxious fumes, vapours, lead and sulpur dioxide into the air. Residents living near the smelters are now claiming they suffered a range of health problems including intellectual disability, tumours and cancer. A public appeal is now underway to determine how many people are affected. Legal firm Coleman and Grieg says anyone born in Port Pirie or Cockle Creek in the past 21 years or anyone living in a radius of five kilometres of the smelters over the past six years could file for action. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Austria's far-right leader Joerg Haider has announced his resignation as Freedom Party chief, in a move the opposition in Austria has already dismissed as a tactical trick. The Freedom Party's entry into power in a coalition government earlier this month sparked Austria's international isolation, notably due to Mr Haider's controversial comments in the past, including apparently pro-Nazi remarks. The newly-elected head of Austria's opposition Social Democratic party, Alfred Gusenbauer, says resigning would be merely ""one of Haider's many tactical tricks"" and would give the coalition a respite from criticism. Mr Haider has led the Freedom Party since 1986, but did not stand in the election that saw his party win its way into a governing coalition. He is governor of Austria's Carinthia province, a position that will not be affected by his resignation as Freedom Party leader. James Rubin, from the US State Department, has reacted with caution to the news. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Foreign exchange dealers are looking over their shoulders for signs of the Reserve Bank with the Australian dollar plumbing new 14-month lows overnight. Weak trade figures have been cited as one of the factors. Official data out yesterday showed Australia's trade account going into the red by a greater-than-expected $1.3 billion in January. In London trade overnight, the dollar as been as low as 61.05 US cents - the weakest it has been since December 1998. Last Friday, a top Reserve Bank official described the dollar as being at fundamentally very low levels. Commonwealth Bank currency strategist Michael Workman says traders will be mindful of possible central bank intervention. ""It is mainly because when they were last actively buying the Aussie in June to August 1998 it was when the currency was at the similar levels as it is now,"" he said. In early morning trade the dollar had recovered to be trading at 61.40 US cents which is a fraction above yesterday's local close. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Defence lawyers for deposed Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif say they cannot represent him fairly and have resigned in protest. All six are boycotting Mr Sharif's trial on charges of hijacking, attempted murder and terrorism. Mr Sharif's two senior lawyers withdrew from the trial on Sunday. Now the remaining four members of the legal team have also pulled out. They are protesting against the anti-terrorism court judge's ruling that he will decide what can be reported of Mr Sharif's testimony. Prosecution lawyers argue public testimony by Nawaz Sharif could breach national security. Mr Sharif is reported to be extremely confused by his lawyers boycott of the case and it is not clear who will represent him now. The case centres on events surrounding the October coup in which Nawaz Sharif was ousted from office. If convicted he and six senior officials could face the death penalty. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The increasing export of Australian technology is to be recognised at the annual Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics (ABARE) conference opening in Canberra today. The Outlook forum, which focuses on commodity forecasts, will include manufacturing and service industries for the first time. ABARE head Brian Fisher says discussion is likely to feature the positive direction of the economy and potential problems, including rising world oil prices. He says one issue to be discussed is the increasing opportunities for exporting services. ""We've seen much more interest now in all of the technology and software services Australia is becoming better and better at,"" he said. ""I expect to see quite a big emphasis at the conference this year on those issues."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The head of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation says he has no problem with Prime Minister John Howard leaving open the timetable for the reconciliation process. The formal part of the reconciliation process overseen by the council is due to conclude at the end of the year. But Mr Howard says a deadline can be counter-productive and reconciliation will continue for many years. Speaking from the United States, Reconciliation Council chair, Sir Gustav Nossal, says the council has always maintained that the process must continue beyond this year. ""We did discuss the issue of arbitrary deadlines and we agree with him that reconciliation is not an instant fix,"" he said. ""It is not like a clap of thunder, it's not like something that happens from one day to the next. ""What we believe, however, is that Corroboree 2000 will be a major step, a major stepping stone in the pathway to reconciliation,"" Sir Nossal said."

" Prominent Aboriginal leader Charlie Perkins wants Prime Minister John Howard to resign after removing a deadline for the reconciliation process. Mr Perkins, who is commissioner for the Sydney zone of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), says Mr Howard has broken his word and only a change of leadership can get the reconciliation process back on track. ""It is just unbelievable that the Prime Minister of this country should make a decision at this time ... who does he think he is?"" Mr Perkins said. ""Is it for himself? I mean, he is the Prime Minister of this country, he's not just John Howard the man. ""He's John Howard the Prime Minister. I think he should resign,"" he said."

" The Federal Opposition leader, Kim Beazley, says comments by Prime Minister John Howard have effectively killed off the process of Aboriginal reconciliation. Mr Beazley says Mr Howard could start the process of reconciliation by apologising, or by allowing the House of Representatives to show its sorrow to the stolen generations. Mr Beazley says it is a tragedy that Mr Howard does not have the heart to apologise for past injustices. ""What John Howard is doing is killing the reconciliation process by a thousand delays and cuts, by passing every single word that is there in that document to make sure it minimises offence to himself personally,"" he said. ""Well, frankly, if you're leading this country you lead with your head that's important, but you also lead with your heart."" --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Residents in Queensland's flooded far north remain without power in the wake of Cyclone Steve. Roads remain closed, water rations continue and the rain is still falling. It is expected to be more than a week before the far north returns to normal, after Cyclone Steve crossed the coast last night. Major problems are being experienced with water, power and roads in the aftermath of the storm, which is now threatening to move into the Gulf of Carpentaria. Water supplies are back on in Cairns and Mareeba, but they are being rationed and power is still cut."

" The Gulf country in north Queensland can expect a deluge today from the remains of Cyclone Steve. Concerns that Steve may have re-intensifed heading north-west into the Gulf of Carpentaria have been allayed, with the ex-cyclone now 150-kilometres east of Normanton, weakening significantly. The Weather Bureau's Bill Granger says there is now no threat of damaging wind gusts, just lots of rain. ""It could dump quite a bit of water on that area from Burketown up to Karumba and it possibly will stay in the area for a day or two as well until it becomes part of the weather pattern again,"" he said. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Opposition has ruled out further deregulation of Australia Post. Labor has promised it would put in place computer technologies to allow post offices to offer online services to regional areas. Opposition leader Kim Beazley says the Labor Government would stop further deregulation of postal services and ensure Australia Post remains in public hands. Mr Beazley says post offices would provide online public services such as health, social security and employment to regional areas. He has released the policy during his three day visit to northern Tasmania where the shadow ministry has been developing its regional strategy. Further details will be released closer to the next federal election. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The New South Wales Government is being urged to reject a report calling for no phasing out of battery hen farms until 2015. The report, by the Agriculture Resource Ministers' Council of Australia and New Zealand, has recommended no change to battery hen housing conditions for the next 15 years. The Independent MLC, Richard Jones, one of eight Upper House MPs calling for the report's rejection, says 15 years is too long to wait, and the Agriculture Minister, Richard Amery, needs to act. ""We're hoping then that Richard Amery will push for the rejection of the report, recommending this no change be made till 2015 and that he push for a working party report which will in fact recommend a phase out,"" he said. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Dual Olympic gold medallist, Kieren Perkins, says he is very happy with the Olympic team's formal and casual uniforms. The colour scheme is teal for the suit and beige for the casual trousers and jackets. Most of the clothing is made of wool. Perkins says the colours are better than a past Olympic uniform, which included yellow trousers. ""Well ... look it's really comfortable I think, you know, it's understated but still distinctive and it is the type of uniform that you'd be proud to wear at anytime,"" he said. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australian swimming will advertise for a new head coach in July if it can not re-sign current coach, Don Talbot, to another contract. Talbot has been head coach since 1989 and his current deal ends at the end of the year. Negotiations with Talbot are continuing. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Aboriginal Reconciliation Council has expressed disappointment the Prime Minister has abandoned his original timeline for completing the reconciliation process. Mr Howard says reconciliation will take many years. The Reconciliation Council, charged with the responsibility of guiding the reconciliation process, is due to disband at the end of the year, marking the completion of the formal process. The Prime Minister has told <i>The Australian</i> newspaper reconciliation will not be resolved by May when the council hands over its reconciliation document and strategies, or by December. He says putting a finite timeline on the process can encourage bad behaviour and expectations on both sides. Reconciliation Council Member Marj Thorpe says the council will be disappointed. ""I think it does make it a bit difficult in that it's been a very long process and at times it hasn't been easy,"" she said. ""I know that other council members have worked very hard at this and as I say at times it's been very difficult."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Cyclone Steve appears to have let Cairns off relatively lightly, after crossing the coast last night. Attention is shifting inland to Mareeba, where floods are forcing people from their homes. Dawn in Cairns revealed roads littered with fallen branches, some businesses and homes unroofed, and rising river levels. The cyclone hit the city's northern beaches about 7:00pm (AEST) last night, bringing gusts of up to 143 kilometres to the city. On Green Island, the winds peaked at 170 kilometres. But the damage in Cairns has been relatively light and although the power is still out, many businesses intend to open today. It is on the Atherton Tablelands where the real drama is unfolding. The Barron River is flooding Mareeba, where a caravan park and some homes have been evacuated. That water is heading to the coast, with the river peaking at Cairns later this afternoon. The weather bureau's Mike Marrinan says this will cause problems for coastal rivers and further inland. ""Levels are rising on the Tablelands at the moment. It looks like the rain is going to continue so it's not looking good at this stage,"" Mr Marrinan said. ""We've had about 130, 140 millimetres since about midday yesterday in the Cairns area itself and some regions in the catchment of the Barron and Johnstone rivers, we've had over 200 millimetres."""

" Mareeba is completely isolated with the highway cut to the south and north. The Barron River has reached 12.5 metres and heavy rain continues to fall. Darryl Camp from the Mareeba SES says he has never seen the river so high. He says the main water pumps to the town have failed, leaving residents without drinking supplies. ""The council is flat out trying to get water into the reservoirs and into the filtration system but everyone from Mareeba cannot use water until we advise them,"" he said. The Kuranda Range is closed. The Bruce Highway is cut to the south of Cairns and there is reports of a wash out on a section of the Gillies Highway, which provides access to the Atherton Tablelands. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Federal Opposition leader, Kim Beazley, says it is vital governments find solutions to the problems of regional areas such as Tasmania. The Shadow Ministry is meeting today in Launceston where it will discuss policies to address the needs of regional and rural Australia. M Beazley is expected to make a policy announcement on the issue later today. Mr Beazley says regional issues cannot be ignored. ""Regional Australia now includes an awful lot of people who you would regard as in suburban Australia because the problems in regional Australia are often the problems of suburban city dwellers as well,"" he said. 'This has got to be the focus of policy now and it is for us and we're developing it and starting here in Launceston."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" A lobby group for young people says the Federal Government must overturn mandatory sentencing laws in the Northern Territory and Western Australia to avoid international embarrassment. The comment follows the release of a legal opinion signed by 34 of Australia's leading international law specialists. The opinion says the laws violate Australia's obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, as well as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. Louis Schetzer, from The National Children's and Youth Law Centre, says it is an international embarrassment for Australia. ""Australia will continue to be held up to international embarrassment and international ridicule in this particularly significant year where the eyes of the world are on Australia,"" he said. The Northern Territory's Chief Minister and Attorney-General, Denis Burke, has already rejected a request from the Commonwealth to review the laws, saying that was done last year. He also does not believe they contravene international treaties. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Mozambique is facing further devastation from a flood surge heading down the Limpopo River. Thousands of people in the path of the rising waters are still stranded in trees or on rooftops. The massive flood surge is heading for an area just north of Mozambique's capital Maputo. Helicopters have been flying constant missions to pluck people from the path of the rising waters, but there are too few aircraft and too many people to save. Aid agencies say more helicopters are desperately needed to get people out. Relief workers say the death toll from the flooding, the worst in 50 years, is now certain to go higher. So far more than 300 people across Mozambique, South Africa and Botswana have been killed by flooding in the wake of Cyclone Eline. Further exacerbating the problem, in neighbouring Zimbabwe, authorities have been forced to open flood gates on the massive Kariba dam, pouring 25 billion litres of water a day into the Zambezi River, which is also expected to burst its banks sending yet another flood surge into Mozambique. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights is in Chechnya today, set to investigate allegations Russian troops are committing human rights abuses against civilians in the conflict. The commissioner, Alvaro Gil Robles, is visiting Chechnya in the company of Russian officials. Other human rights organisations, including the United Nations, have been refused access to the war-torn republic. The European commissioner's visit follows Western pressure for independent bodies to be allowed into Chechnya to investigate allegations of execution, rape and looting by Russian troops. It also follows the broadcast of a video showing Russian soldiers dumping bodies in a mass grave in southern Chechnya. Russia says the video is not evidence of war crimes - it shows the ordinary burial of bodies in a battle zone. However, some of the corpses appear to be mutilated and Russia is investigating further. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" A comedy about a senior citizen getting his driving licence took out best film last night at Australia's premier short film festival, Tropfest held in Sydney's Domain. Robin Fiener and Jesse Gibson directed the short, called <i>Old Man</i>, at a cost of $700. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" World champion Cathy Freeman has completed a successful trial-run for the Olympics, winning a second title in the National Athletics Championships at Stadium Australia yesterday. Freeman won the 200 metre final in 22.78 seconds, just 0.02 ahead of Melinda Gainsford Taylor. Darryl Wohlsen took advantage of the absence of Matt Shirvington and Patrick Johnson to win the mens 200 metre final. Tamsyn Lewis won the 800 metre final but missed the national record. Rohan Robinson and Lauren Poetschka won the 400 metre hurdles finals."

" The vice-president of the world athletics body says he is not concerned by strong winds that affected times of sprinters in the championships. Several athletes complained about the difficult conditions, with some predicting world records may not be broken at the Sydney Games because of the wind. But International Amateur Athletics Federation vice-president Depang Lou, who was at the championships, says weather conditions are part of the sport. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" New Zealand Prime Minister Helen Clark says she will not be bullied into changing the country's defence policy. Last week, Australian defence expert Paul Dibb told a parliamentary hearing in Canberra that New Zealand was becoming a security liability for Australia. He said the country was stripping away its military ability to do anything but peace-keeping. Mrs Clark is due to visit Australia for the first time as Prime Minister on Wednesday. She has told Channel Nine her country is increasing defence spending. ""We will look at what our defence needs are and it isn't helpful for chipping from the side from Australian academics which implies New Zealand isn't pulling its weight,"" Mrs Clark said. ""New Zealand always pulls its weight. But we will pull our weight according to our definition of pulling our weight."" Mrs Clark has also defended her Government's plans not to buy a third Australian-made frigate. New Zealand has already bought two Defence Force ships and had been expected to buy a third, but decided to buy a squadron of F-16 aircraft instead. She says a review of the country's naval needs is underway, but it is unlikely that it will buy the extra frigate. ""We think we need vessels that are more multi-purpose, multi-role than the Anzac frigate,"" she said. ""We've had a particular interest looking at the Danish multi-purpose vessel which can, if necessity requires, be kitted up to the full Anzac frigate level, but in more normal times be playing a useful role in patrol of the economic zone and could double as a transport ship as well."" \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*"

" The British Broadcasting Corporation plans to privatise its commercial arm, BBC Worldwide, and the beeb-dot-com Internet service to help solve a cash shortage and raise money for programs. Britain's <i>Sunday Times</i> newspaper is reporting the public broadcaster wants to sell minority stakes in the two ventures to help meet a funding gap. A number of potential US buyers have already expressed interest in beeb-dot-com, an entertainment information site which is valued at more than $3 billion and funded by advertisements. \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*"

" AMP's new chief executive has revealed details of an alleged $600,000 fraud against the company. Paul Batchelor has taken over from George Trumble as head of the insurance giant. AMP last week reported a bottom line loss of $424 million associated with its investment in GIO. Mr Batchelor has told Channel Nine the company has uncovered an alleged fraud involving a female client services manager. ""I don't know whether the fraud squad has been called in, but if the requirements are to call the police, then they will have been,"" he said. ""I think the exact amount's about $600,000 and we don't expect to incur any great loss from that and certainly our customers won't."" \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*"

" The Prime Minister has indicated a proposed United Nations inquiry will not influence mandatory sentencing laws in Australia. The UN is examining whether Northern Territory and Western Australian laws breach international treaties. John Howard says he personally doubts the value of mandatory sentencing laws, especially in light of their impact on minors. But on Perth radio 6PR, he effectively ruled out federal intervention to repeal the Western Australian laws. ""I don't favour using the foreign affairs power to overturn what a state's deciding to do,"" he said. Mr Howard reiterated his view that it is for the states and territories to decide their own criminal laws. ""We shouldn't sort of so lack confidence in our own judgment as a people and a nation that everytime somebody breathes the name of an international figure we have to automatically assume that what we're doing is wrong,"" he said."

" Meanwhile, Australia's Human Rights Commissioner says moves by his United Nations counterpart Mary Robinson to review mandatory sentencing laws will not get rid of them. Chris Sidoti says he is expecting Ms Robinson to add weight to the moral debate against the laws. But he says the UN is not a police force and it is incumbent on the Federal Government to overturn the laws. ""We have reached the end game and there is no alternative but intervention by the Federal Parliament,"" he said. ""The Federal Parliament has primary obligations under international law and under our Constitution in cases like this. ""Everyone is sick to death of trying to convince these recalcitrant governments that they simply have to get their law into line with what are the constitutional and moral requirements in Australia."""

" The Northern Territory's Labor Senator, Trish Crossin, says after the United Nations' intervention in East Timor, Australia cannot ignore any findings the UN makes on mandatory sentencing. Senator Crossin says the Federal Government has a responsibility to ensure all states and territories comply with conventions it has signed as a member of the international community. ""We sign up to international conventions, we accept the fact they should intervene in East Timor and we give that a big tick and if they hand down a decision that's a decision that someone like [Chief Minister] Denis Burke doesn't like in respect to his mandatory sentencing laws, this country will need to respond to it appropriately,"" she said. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Riot police armed with batons have scuffled with unionists in Perth who attempted to block the Prime Minister arriving at an official function. During a chaotic few minutes police charged the demonstrators to clear a path for John Howard's motorcade and jostled with the media. One television crew was caught between the two sides. ABC journalist Peter Kennedy was among the media present and described the scene as the Prime Minister arrived. ""Riot squad police are moving in with batons and also with helmets, they are surrounding the Prime Ministers car,"" he said. ""The Prime Minister's getting out now and you can hear the build-up. ""The plain clothes police are moving us on and the Prime Minister is going to the entrance to the building. ""The riot squad is moving in with batons and also with shields and everyone has been pushed aside and the Prime Minister is now in the building."""

" Hundreds of unionists gathered outside the new Chamber of Commerce and Industry building in in Hay Street, Perth, which Mr Howardwas officially opening. The unionists are protesting against several issues, including what they say is the government's anti-union stance. Builders Labourers Union secretary Kevin Reynolds says there is also anger at the government's refusal to give workers a decent pay rise. ""They say they can't afford to give the working class of this state an $8 pay rise, they can't afford to give people who are on $380 a week a miserable eight bucks, but they can build this bloody monstrosity,"" he said. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" A spokesman for the Melbourne nursing home that gave its residents baths containing kerosene says the home is co-operating fully with the health department. The Riverside Nursing Home in Patterson Lakes in Melbourne's south gave 57 residents kerosene baths last month as a treatment for scabies. The owners refuse to speak directly to the media but trustee John Irving handed out a written statement saying Riverside is committed to those in its care. Mr Irving says residents and their families are receiving counselling by nursing staff and the health department. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" There have been angry scenes outside the site of the nation's first legal injecting room in Sydney's Kings Cross. Within an hour of the site being unveiled, there were verbal clashes between supporters and critics over the suitability of its location on the main thoroughfare. The Uniting Church this morning revealed a vacant former pinball parlour on Darlinghurst Road has been secured as the injecting room site. During a tour of the building, directly opposite the railway station, Kings Cross Chamber of Commerce chair Malcolm Brown described the site as a tourism disaster. Mr Brown threatened possible legal action, claiming there had been a lack of consultation. Meanwhile, the NSW Special Minister of State, John Della Bosca, is confident of the Uniting Church's capacity to conduct the trial, but concedes the experiment will continue to divide community opinion. ""That's why the government decided on the notion of a trial, a trial that will last 18-months, a trial that will allow us to really assess and the community to assess the value or otherwise of a medically-supervised injecting facility,"" he said. ""I don't think the heat will go out of the argument until the community has the information that this trial will give them."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The driver of the Cityrail train involved in the Glenbrook train crash says he was never told about delays experienced by the Indian Pacific train directly ahead of him. Kevin Sinnett told the Glenbrook inquiry the information would certainly have influenced the manner in which he drove his train before the December accident. The Glenbrook inquiry has tapes of conversations Mr Sinnett had with the city-based west control and the Penrith signaller. He was informed by west control that the Indian Pacific had reported a failed signal at Glenbrook Station. However, Mr Sinnett told the inquiry he was never told about how long the Indian was delayed at signal 41.6. Mr Sinnett knew the Indian Pacific left Lithgow 20 minutes ahead of him that morning, and says he was under the belief the train was still well in front of him. Mr Sinnett's barrister Peter Capelin QC asked him had he been told that the Indian Pacific had been delayed by 15 mintues, would that be a significant matter for him to have in mind, in relation to the running of his train. Mr Sinnett replied: ""Yes."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Australian Medical Association (AMA) has urged the Federal Government to lift public hospital spending and create new public health programs in this year's Budget. The AMA's budget submission calls for the annual increase in hospital funding to double from 4 per cent to 8 per cent, but does not recommend specific figures. The submission also asks for a review of the Medicare benefits schedule and extra spending on tobacco control, Aboriginal health and rural doctor training. AMA president David Brand says apart from the hospital funding request, the association's submission calls for only minor spending increases. ""These are very modest proposals - we're looking at $20 million a year on the bonded scholarship scheme, we're looking at $20 million a year on indigenous health,"" he said. ""The biggest ticket item really we're asking for is an extra $60 million a year on anti-smoking which is an an investment in human capital."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" World champion swimmer Ian Thorpe says he is willing to try out Speedo's range of swim suit as a way of sorting out a dispute with the Australian Olympic Committee (AOC). The AOC wants Thorpe to use Speedo's rather than his preferred choice of Adidas. Speedo's marketing director Tim Lees says it is possible the swimmer will still opt for the rival brand and if that is the case his company will accept it. ""I don't think we'll go and have a picnic but really that is a question for the AOC,"" he said. ""It isn't Speedo's decision on this one but there is a long way to go between now and then. I expect it will take at least another month or so for Ian to test our suit."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mary Robinson, is to review Australia's controversial mandatory sentencing laws. The examination follows a request made to UN secretary general Kofi Annan during a meeting with Federal Opposition leader Kim Beazley earlier this week. A spokesman from the office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has confirmed that Mr Annan had made what was described as a highly unusual request. The High Commissioner's office has now begun assessing whether the mandatory sentencing laws in place in Western Australia and the Northern Territory measure up to Australia's obligations under three human rights conventions. Assessments of this kind are usually made at committee level. The request for such a high level examination was made in a letter sent by Mr Annan following his meeting with Mr Beazley. Mrs Robinson's office says the examination will be carried out quickly. No time limit has been set, but the spokesman said more information may be available next week. Communications Minister Richard Alston has urged the United Nations to consider both sides of the mandatory sentencing debate. Senator Alston says any sympathy for the suicide of people in custody must be balanced with concern about crime. ""If you focus particularly on that aspect you don't then take account of the real concerns that people have about repeat offenders who are actually causing a lot of concern and distress in the community,"" he said. ""The balance is the critical aspect, and I very much hope that if there has to be these sorts of outside inquiries that they do look at all sides of the question."" Meanwhile, hundreds of people are expected to attend today's funeral on Groote Eylandt for the 15-year-old who died in custody in Darwin two weeks ago, sparking the latest mandatory sentencing furore. He was serving a mandatory sentence for property offences. A memorial service will also be held in Darwin's Christ Church Anglican Cathedral. Bishop Phillip Freir says the political debate about mandatory sentencing is losing sight of the human cost of the laws. ""It's almost a matter of wondering what will be the next way that debate will develop,"" he said. ""But you know throughout it all we've been saying that when discussing this young man's death, that he's a person whose life was valuable and we are very saddened by his death, and he was a person who was special to his family and his community and we want to have the chance of honouring his life."" \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*"

" The Australian Medical Association (AMA) has expressed concern at the use of kerosene on elderly people in a Victorian nursing home. A two-day audit of the Riverside nursing home at Patterson Lakes last week found residents had been bathed in kerosene to treat a skin condition, and were at serious risk of dehydration. Federal Minister Bronwyn Bishop has revoked the aged care provider status of the proprietor and ordered there be no funding for new residents for six months. The Opposition says complaints were first made about the private nursing home last July and then again in January. The AMA's federal director David Brand says kerosene is a major irritant to the skin and eyes, which was replaced years ago as a treatment for scabies by more modern and effective medicines. Dr Brand says it should never be used in a nursing home. ""Clearly many elderly people aren't able to let people know if things are burning or are stinging, they're not able to...scratch and manage their problems in the same way as some other people might,"" he said. ""I think I'd certainly be concerned about it being used on anybody, but elderly people are clearly a little more prone to some problems than the rest of us."" Meanwhile, the Council on the Ageing has called for a full review of the Federal Government's nursing home complaints system. The council's executive director Denys Correll says he is horrified by the claims of poor treatment. ""Our worry is that the complaints system is not responding fast enough to situations where there would appear to have been some major breach of care, and people need to be given confidence that their relatives and friends and staff in these places are going to be looked after,"" he said. \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*"

" The Federal Government has placed a freeze on the issuing of further refugee or humanitarian visas. The ABC has learnt Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock issued instructions to his department two weeks ago to freeze the processing of off-shore refugee and humanitarian visas until further notice. A copy of a Department of Foreign Affairs document, obtained by the ABC, also states the government has frozen some family reunion visas until at least July. A spokesman for the Minister says the decision was made as a result of the high number of boat people entering Australia. He admitted some people, who were assessed as high priority for a visa on refugee or humanitarian grounds, would miss out as a result of the freeze. But the decision has been labelled ""self-defeating"" by the Opposition. Oppositon Parliamentary Secretary for Family and Community Services Anthony Albanese says it will entice even more people to ignore official procedures and jump on the first boat heading to Australia. ""What it means is that the government is punishing people who are going through the legal channels to apply to come to Australia,"" he said. ""On the one hand we have a lot of rhetoric from this Minister stirring up hysteria about the number of illegals coming to Australia, but on the other hand a big stop sign saying that if you go through the proper procedures then there's no places for you."" \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*"

" Floodwaters in the central western Queensland town of Longreach dropped slightly overnight, but further rises are not being ruled out. Towns downstream are bracing themselves. The latest information indicates the Thomson River had dropped from 5.62 metres to 5.60 metres overnight in Longreach, but police cannot say though if floodwaters have peaked because there is still a chance of another surge. Twenty-three homes have been evacuated, while a further 120 have water in their yards or lapping at their doorsteps. Longreach will not be the end of the flood crisis. But flood engineer Peter Baddiley says while more towns will be isolated, most homes will be spared. ""I suppose after Longreach we're looking at the Thomson River at Junda and Cooper Creek at Windorah during the early weeks of March, but generally [the water will be] right around the towns but not too much [will get] into the towns,"" he said. \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*"

" Russia has hit out at the UN for its focus on allegations that Russian troops are executing civilians in Chechnya. The Kremlin's attack has targeted UN Human Rights Commissioner Mary Robinson. Russia's Foreign Ministry denies that its forces committed atrocities against Chechen civilians or that there is any torture of prisoners at the Chernokozovo Detention Centre inside Chechnya. The UN Human Rights High Commissioner expressed particular concern about that prison and called for an urgent inquiry into the allegations that beatings there are routine and that men, as well as women, are raped there. The Kremlin has reiterated that under international law each nation is responsible for its own protection of human rights, and denies that any investigation carried out by a Russian agency would be insufficient. \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*"

" A survey on Internet privacy suggests many big Australian companies could be monitoring emails in secret. The poll also indicates that privacy concerns continue to hold back the development of e-commerce in Australia. Melbourne law-firm Freehill's found three-quarters of the firms polled periodically monitored customer and staff emails. Of these, nearly two-thirds did so without notification. Fewer than one in five companies offered their website visitors a choice about being contacted for marketing purposes. \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*"

" The Bishop of the Catholic diocese of Wagga Wagga has backed up claims there are witches operating in the area. Bishop William Brennan was responding to concern about a homily by Father Luke Joseph this month where cathedral churchgoers were warned against witches, aromatherapy and yoga. He says the context of Father Luke's preaching was a gospel about Jesus exorcising a woman possessed by the devil. The priest denies saying there are witches covens in local Catholic schools but did say there are some girls in our schools involved in witchcraft. And the bishop says this probably arose from the Satanic shop in Wagga Wagga, which is now closed. ""Part of the concern was that one of employees of that Satanic shop was a girl at a Catholic school and that may have prompted that comment if that comment was made,"" Bishop Brennan said. ""But I understand there are groups of witches around the place. And certainly the number of books on witchcraft that you'll find in bookshops these days is quite extraordinary,"" he said. \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*"

" Australian athletes have voiced their concerns about windy conditions that affected the opening day of the National Athletics Championships in Sydney yesterday. Some athletes believe international competitors will not be pleased with the conditions. Strong winds through Stadium Australia made posting fast times a challenge. Melinda Gainsford-Taylor said, after running in the 100 metres yesterday, it was a real concern, while 400 metres sprinter Patrick Dwyer believes sections of the stadium should be covered up."

" Meanwhile, the Tax Office (ATO) has denied the introduction of the new tax system will give tax cheats a break. Tax Commissioner Michael Carmody says the ATO's normal monitoring of business income tax will be targeted to high risk industries during the implementation of the GST. He says anyone who makes a genuine effort to comply with the new tax system will be treated fairly in audits, with the emphasis being on correcting mistakes rather than penalising. But Mr Carmody says his assurances do not apply to businesses not making an effort to meet their responsibilities. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Federal Opposition leader, Kim Beazley, has called on the Prime Minister to take on the banks over credit card interest rates. The Labor leader says the banks charge excessive interest on credit card interest. Mr Beazley has told Sydney Radio 2SM Mr Howard should call the banks in to talk to them about the issue. ""I would have thought at the least what the Prime Minister could do was to haul the banks in and say, 'what we've got is a situation where there's a GST coming in, we've got a situation where there's going to be substantial price rises around the place',"" he said. ""'There's pressure in debt on the ordinary consumer in this country, have a bit of care for your social responsbilities.'"" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Customs officers have detected more than 25,000 counterfeit Olympic items. Soccer balls, beer mugs, watches and rugs are among the items seized. Most of the goods on display at a news conference this morning are clearly fake. One T-shirt has Sydney 2000 on it, but Sydney is spelt with an 'i.' Other products have tags claiming the goods are official Olympic merchandise. The counterfeit items are from a range of countries including China, the United States, and Thailand. Customs officials say the seizures have been over the last year, and in recent months they have made discoveries at a rate of once a week, or fortnightly. The Customs Minister Amanda Vanstone says it is likely the number of fake Olympic goods seized will increase in the lead-up to the Games. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Adventurer Dick Smith has landed on a beach on the mid-north coast of New South Wales, completing the first balloon crossing of the Tasman. Smith and his co-pilot John Wallington took 55:12 hours to complete the flight from New Zealand. They landed at Ten Mile Beach, north of Iluka, where a support crew and well-wishers were waiting. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Australia's five major arts and cultural festivals have been recognised by Australia Post, with the launch today of a new stamp issue depicting the festivals. The stamps recognise the Adelaide, Perth, Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane festivals. They were launched by the artistic director of the Adelaide Festival, Robin Archer, in Adelaide this morning one week before the South Australian festival's opening night. Robin Archer says while cultural activities have been recognised by Australia Post previously, this is another step towards our national cultural awareness. ""I think it's the first time there's been such an emphasis on performing arts and in particular the role of festivals in our cultural life."" ""So in that sense since stamps in my opinion always reflect our priorities, whether they be social or political or cultural, I think it's a great step forward that we now have a festival issue."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Queensland Government has extended natural disaster relief arrangements with almost a third of the state affected by flooding. Queensland's record rainfalls have drenched large areas and the weather bureau says a cyclone could develop off the coast within a week. A mass of brown water is moving south through inland Queensland, flooding homes and businesses, isolating towns and properties and causing extensive damage to roads and infrastructure. In central-western Queensland, the flood is heading down the Thomson River towards Longreach, where residents are sandbagging to prepare for what the bureau expects will be the biggest flood on record. The Thomson is expected to hit six metres by tomorrow and peak at a higher level on Saturday. The worst floods on record for the town were in 1974, when waters reached 5.99 metres. Floodwaters have continued rising overnight and at the last reading were already more than three metres above the bridge in Longreach. Sergeant Trevor Girling said: ""What we're hearing from the older locals that were here in this area is it could be bigger than 1955."" ""It looks like a big ocean, a big brown ocean around the western and northern parts of the town,"" he said. Nearby Winton has been inundated since the weekend. The north Queensland coastal strip was hit by floods a fortnight ago in an area from Cooktown to Townsville. The region around Mackay on the central coast is beginning to recover after five days of flooding. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Federal Government says it is disappointed by protests against the return of East Timor refugees who have been sheltering in Australia. Scores of police were called to Sydney's East Hills Safe Haven Centre last night when protesters disrupted the operation to repatriate the refugees. The protesters tried to prevent several busloads of East Timorese from leaving the East Hills Centre. Police eventually took control of the situation and the East Timorese were able to leave. This morning another 70 left without incident. The protesters say the East Timorese want to stay in Australia until conditions improve in East Timor, a claim backed by Agio Pireira from East Timor's National Emergency Commission. ""We wish that they stayed here a bit longer because that will facilitate the reconstruction and reorganisation of our society,"" Mr Pireira said. But the Immigration Minister, Philip Ruddock, says after listening to independence leader Xanana Gusmao and speaking with UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, the government is satisfied now is the time for the refugees to return home. ""Obviously the situation is very difficult but there is an expectation that people ought to be able to return home and can do so in safety and security,"" Mr Ruddock said. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Northern Territory Opposition has called on the Chief Minister, Denis Burke, to resign as Attorney-General over comments the justice system is totally corrupt. The Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Brian Martin, is expected to announce this morning whether he will disqualify himself from a case in light of Mr Burke's comments. Mr Burke sent a statement to the court yesterday apologising unreservedly for using the word corrupt and he says what he meant is there is a lack of public faith in the system. But the Labor leader, Clare Martin, says Mr Burke is out of his depth. ""I think this is probably the first time in Australia that this has ever happened,"" she said. ""It's the most extraordinary thing, where you've got a chief justice saying 'I think I'll have to disqualify myself because our first law officer has questioned the credibility and integrity and the impartiality of our courts'. ""Denis Burke simply should resign as Attorney-General."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The introduction of safe injecting rooms, or shooting galleries, in Australia and a number of other countries has come under attack by United Nations drugs experts. The annual report on worldwide drug abuse by the UN international narcotics control board (INCB) has accused some governments of helping the Illicit drug trade by establishing and operating the injecting rooms. The board says the move is another step towards the legalisation of the non-medical use of drugs. The report singles out Australia, Germany, Switzerland, Luxembourg and Spain as the countries of most concern. In a statement, the INCB said it should be recalled that many decades ago, drugs conventions were established precisely to eliminate such places as opium dens where drugs could be abused with impunity. Instead of shooting galleries, the board encourages government to provide a wide range of treatment facilities in line with sound medical practice and international drug control conventions. The UN's criticism has not deterred the New South Wales Government. The Special Minister of State, John Della Bosca, says the government remains committed to going ahead with setting up a trial of safe injecting rooms. Mr Della Bosca says the government is confident the initiative does not breach any international drug treaty to which Australia is a signatory. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Doctors Reform Society has criticised the Federal Government and Opposition over the private health fund rebate scheme. The group's president, Dr Peter Davoren, says the government's $2 billion a year commitment to the rebate has been a waste of money, with private health scheme memberships barely rising. He has also criticised Labor's comments that it will not roll back the rebate if it wins government. Dr Davoren says the public health system would make better use of an extra $2 billion in annual funding. ""With another $2 billion per year they would make an enormous difference in public hospital spending,"" Dr Davoren said. ""They could open another 16,500 beds in hospitals in Australia with that money, that would make an enormous difference to the operation of public hospitals. ""Waiting lists would probably disappear and everyone would benefit from that spending on health,"" he said. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The New South Wales Community Services Department has been notified of a case where a child has been left locked inside a car in searing heat. The latest incident happened early yesterday afternoon at Dee Why, on Sydney's northern beaches. Earlier yesterday, a woman appeared in a Melbourne court charged with the manslaughter of her 19-month-old son, who died after being left locked in a car, which was parked in the sun, last week. Senior Constable Dave Rose says a 36-year-old man has been ordered to face court over yesterday's incident in Sydney. ""Police from the northern beaches local area command attended Howard Avenue in Dee Why following reports of a young child being left alone in a BMW station wagon,"" he said. ""It was reported that the child had been left alone for half an hour. ""As a result of their concerns for the child's welfare, police smashed two of the car's windows and ambulance officers removed a 14-month-old boy seated in the front passenger seat of the vehicle. ""The child was treated at the scene by ambulance officers and a man has been summonsed for the offense of leave a child unattended in vehicle."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Australia has beaten Hungary 3-0 in their friendly international in Budapest. For the Socceroos, Steve Laybutt scored in the 11th minute, Josip Skoko in the 72nd, and Craig Moore in injury time. It was Frank Farina's first victory as Socceroos coach. The match was marred by protests against the involvement of Australian company Esmeralda Explorations in a cyanide spill affecting Hungary's second biggest river, the Tisza. The spill has led to fish kills in the river, and three dead fish were thrown from the crowd in the second half, landing near the pitch. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" US presidential hopeful George W Bush has dismissed yesterday's loss to John McCain in the Michigan primary, renewing his claim that the vote was hijacked by the Republicans' political opponents. In California to campaign for the state's winner-take-all primary in a fortnight, Governer Bush said his continuing lead among committed Republicans would see him win the nomination. He says the Michigan primary - where a majority of voters were not Republicans - was distorted by a conscious effort from state Democrats to tilt the result. ""That's okay, that's going to stop here pretty soon because ... pretty soon we're going to start having these primaries where those who'd want to come into our primary to hijack are going to have that difficult decision to make,"" he said. ""They want us to stay and support Al Gore or Bill Bradley, or not."" Meanwhile, Senator McCain is appealing to Republicans to join his campaign, claiming he is the best-placed candidate to beat the Democrats in November. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Australian commander of the multi-national force in East Timor, Major General Peter Cosgrove, has left the territory. General Cosgrove departed Dili Harbor aboard the Australian troop carrier <i> HMAS Jervis Bay</i>. Black Hawk helicopters flew a salute overhead as Australian troops lined the docks waving farewell. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Opposition says it will extensively review the job network scheme if it gains power. The Opposition has raised concerns the current system and Government policy are not addressing the need to improve skills training into the next decade. Labor's Workforce 2010 report released today forecasts unemployment will stay around 8 per cent over the next 10 years, unless the training issue is improved. The shadow employment and training minister, Cheryl Kernot, says the deregulated job network market is not addressing longer term problems. ""The very long term unemployed, those who require the most intensive assistance are slipping through exactly as was predicted because they take more work,"" she said. ""They take greater investment and some job agencies are taking the money, taking the easy cases and moving on, so we need to have a thorough review."""

" But Workplace Relations Minister Peter Reith has derided Labor's new employment proposals as unoriginal, vague and uncosted. ""Mr Beazley doesn't have any plans, he certainly doesn't have any policies and this just identifies a severe weakness in his leadership,"" he said. ""He's been running the Labor Party now for four years, he's laboured very hard for nine months over this particular document, but when you actually read it the reality is there's nothing new."""

" Meanwhile the Australian Democrats have questioned Labor's commitment to put real money into education and training. Democrats' employment spokesperson, Natasha Stott Despoja, says years of penny-pinching by Labor and Coalition Governments have left Australia's education system in a parlous state. She has also questioned how Labor will be able to fund its commitments. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Emergency services are evacuating parts of a north Queensland coastal city as the State's flood emergency continues. Torrential overnight rain is combining with a high tide at Mackay, where the Pioneer River is expected to swamp some low-lying homes. In central western Queensland, graziers near Longreach are waiting for a wave of floodwater to sweep down the Thomson River. Upstream, cattle and sheep are drowning at Muttaburra, where the flood is peaking. Further west, flood waters are receding from Winton but police are warning motorists not to leave the town yet. All roads out remain cut. Meanwhile, two enviromental health officers have arrived in flood-ravaged central western Queensland, to assess the level of contamination and the possibility of disease. Jim Dodds from Queensland Health says they will first target potential disease hot-spots around the town of Winton. ""They'll work with the local disaster committee, they'll initially look at the water supply and the sewerage,"" he said. ""That'll probably be their first priorities and then they'll check the food supplies to make sure there's no problem there and make sure that anything that is a problem is disposed of or at least gotten out of the food chain."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Northern Territory Chief Minister Denis Burke claims the federal Labor leader, Kim Beazley, would overturn the Territory's mandatory sentencing laws if he took office. Territory Labor is opposed to federal intervention and says the laws should be overturned in the territory. Mr Burke said in Parliament this morning that Mr Beazley told Melbourne's Radio 3LO if the NT Government failed to act, he would. Mr Burke said that is at odds with territory Labor's position. He said while the Opposition leader Clare Martin claimed she would tell the Federal branch of the party and the United Nations to butt out, the bill to override the territory law was co-hosted by NT Labor Senator Trish Crossin. Mr Burke said while Ms Martin claimed Mr Beazley agreed with her on the issue of outside intervention, he had raised the issue with the UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Australian company at the centre of a European controversy about the granting of a patent which could involve human cloning says it has no interest in that field. The European Patent Office says it made a mistake in granting a patent to Edinburgh University for a process of altering stem-cells that could include the cloning of humans. The Australian company holding the licence and an Australian patent says it is not interested in cloning. The chief scientist of Stem Cells Sciences, Peter Mountford, says the patent is for isolating particular cells from a mass of stem cells. Stem cells are so young they can become anything, so they are potentially the basis for growing organs, or ultimately a human. But Dr Mountford says that is not the plan. ""There was an interpretation that could be read as a method for genetically engineering humans, it's in no respect our intention or our plan to proceed with any of that sort of technology or patenting,"" he said. ""We're just not interested in that field at all."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australian republicans are hoping to capitalise on the Queen's visit next month. The Queen and Prince Philip will visit Sydney, Melbourne, Canberra, Hobart and Perth, as well as a host of regional and outback towns. The Australian Republican Movement (ARM) says the Queen is welcome in Australia and it will not be seeking to disrupt her visit. But ARM campaigner Greg Barnes says the visit serves as a reminder of the need for an Australian head of state. ""The point that we would make is simply that our head of state does live 12,000 miles away, she comes here very rarely,"" he said. ""I think this is her first visit here since 1992 and it does bring home to Australians that we do have a head of state that lives in the UK and essentially represents Britain's interests."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Opposition leader Kim Beazley will today attempt to switch his focus from tax to jobs. Mr Beazley is releasing his long-awaited discussion paper on employment. The release of today's discussion paper has been a long time coming, partly due to the sickness last year of Labor's employment spokeswoman Cheryl Kernot. The paper, which was written for the Labor Party by Monash University, examines the likely shape of Australia's workforce in 10 years. Mr Beazley says it will help to formulate Labor's employment policy, with special emphasis to be placed on education, training and skills, areas the Opposition leader wants to use in his plan to make Australia the ""knowledge nation"". The Employment Minister, Peter Reith, says it is unlikely the discussion paper will lead to an any such policy for Labor. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The terrorist group ETA has been blamed for a car bomb which exploded in the Basque capital Vitoria in northern Spain killing the local Socialist Party leader and his bodyguard. The car bomb exploded on the university campus, just a few hundred metres from the Basque Parliament. The blast killed the local Socialist Party leader, Fernando Buesa, and his female bodyguard. As yet nobody has claimed responsibility for the attack, but it comes just over two months since the Basque terrorist group, ETA, announced an end to its 14-month ceasefire. ETA's campaign resumed in January, when one of two car bombs in Madrid killed a Spanish Army officer. This latest attack comes in the middle of a general election campaign in Spain and an attack such as this, in the centre of a high security zone in the Basque capital, is clearly designed to show that ETA is back in business. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Emergency workers in Mozambique say at least half a million people have been affected by the latest disaster to hit the east African state. A tropical cyclone has crossed the Mozambique coast and is heading for the country's second largest city. Tropical Cyclone Eline could not have come at a worse time for Mozambique, many parts of the country are still underwater from the worst flooding in 30 years which hit early last week. Fierce weather in the town of Beira has already damaged a United Nations relief warehouse containing desperately needed supplies. Forecasters say although the cyclone is weakening as it tracks up the coast, winds and rain are expected to cause significant damage to poorly built structures where many people live."

" Victorian Police will reveal later this morning if they intend to lay charges over the death of a 19-month-old baby boy. The boy suffered serious damage to his body when he was left alone in a car outside a gaming venue in Ferntree Gully in Melbourne's outer east, last Wednesday, during hot weather. He died last night in the Royal Children's Hospital without regaining consciousness. The Homicide Squad spoke with the boy's mother last week and at that stage had not rule out laying charges if the baby died. The situation also prompted the State Government to yesterday announce plans to have Victoria's Gaming Industry encourage responsible gambling. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" Cool and cloudy conditions have been forecast for Dunedin today for the third one-day cricket match between Australia and New Zealand. Australia is chasing a record-equalling 12th match undefeated and opener Mark Waugh says the side will be doing nothing differently. ""I think this will be like any other game we've played this summer, we'll be going in there with a positive attitude, to try and enjoy the game, and obviously trying to win the game,"" he said. ""That's the way we've been playing all year, so [there is] no need to change it now."" Australia will take a reinforced pace attack into the match, with Shane Lee replaced by Damien Fleming. And Fleming says the wicket should suit the pacemen. ""I was talking to the curator, he said there should be little bit of pace and bounce,"" he said. ""It's a pretty good batting wicket, but if there's pace and bounce and you put it in the right areas, you're always a chance as a quick bowler. ""And if there's a little bit of swing there that helps too, so ... there should be a bit more bounce than there was in Auckland."""

" The United Nations secretary general, Kofi Annan, says he is sure Australia is aware of the implications of mandatory sentencing laws on it international treaty obligations. Mr Annan has been questioned on his views on mandatory sentencing, during a speech to the National Press Club in Canberra. He says the laws are a domestic issue, which he does not intend to be drawn into. ""It is a matter that could be of concern for the United Nations, only to the extent that it may pertain to international conventions in the field of human rights or rights of children, to which Australia is a party,"" he said. ""I'm sure Australia is conscious of its commitments in this regard and since the Government is dealing with it, I don't think I should be drawn into this."" But Mr Annan took a diplomatic swipe at the Federal Opposition for revealing the details of a private meeting. Kofi Annan yesterday met the Opposition leader Kim Beazley and Shadow Foreign Affairs Minister Laurie Brereton, where the pair raised the issue of mandatory sentencing laws. Mr Beazley later told reporters the secretary general had indicated he would refer the matter to the UN Human Rights Commission. Mr Annan has refused to elaborate, saying he does not discuss private conversations. ""I was surprised to read something about that in the press,"" he said. ""I did have a private conversation with the leader of the Opposition and I usually don't discuss my private conversations. ""And if you don't mind I won't do it this time."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The grandfather of the young Aboriginal boy who died in custody in Darwin, sparking a nationwide debate on mandatory sentencing, has told a rally in Darwin the laws must be overturned. More than 600 people attended the rally calling on the Territory Government to repeal the laws. Representatives from community, legal, Aboriginal and church groups told the crowd the laws are unjust and in breach of international conventions. Father John Sibo Mabo from Nangalinya College told the rally it is time indigenous customary law was acknowleged. Murabuda Warramarba from Groote Eylandt where the young boy who died in custody was from says his community has had enough of mandatory sentencing. ""We are suffering, black woman suffering, white woman suffering for their sons and their daughter. Why can't we stand together in one world and overcome with this?"" he asked. Rally organisers have so far collected 4,000 signatures on a petition that will be presented to the Northern Territory Government. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Glenbrook Rail Accident Inquiry has heard of a two-way radio conversation between the driver of the Indian Pacific and someone on the Cityrail train that hit it. Indian Pacific driver Peter Marshall says he still does not know who he was talking to. Mr Marshall has been describing the chain of events leading up the collision on December 2 last year. Because of the length of the Indian Pacific and the rear of the train being out of sight, the crew did not immediately know what had occurred. Mr Marshall said that after the collision someone on the train behind made contact on the two-way radio open channel, saying the ""urban"" had run into the back of the Indian. He asked the other person if he knew where the driver of the Cityrail train was and he replied no. Mr Marshall said he presumed he might have been talking to the guard on the Cityrail train. Both Indian Pacific drivers have said they did not believe they could directly communicate on their two-way radio with the inter-urban trains. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) is urging professions to protect whistleblowers who draw attention to corruption. ACCC commissioner Sitesh Bhojani says professional organisations must undergo a radical behavioural change and put the public interest first. Speaking at an Australian Institute of Criminology conference in Melbourne, Mr Bhojani said the professions need policies to encourage and protect whistleblowers. He says many potential whistleblowers are deterred by fear of recrimination. ""Concerns and apprehensions are things that people have as to what may happen to them,"" he said. ""These can include what will happen to their actual professional practice, how will they be able to mix in professional circles, and with their colleagues at formal functions and even social functions."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Western Queensland's major landlocked river systems are rising this afternoon in the biggest wet for years. Flooding in parts of central western Queensland is likely to intensify as levels in the Diamantina, Georgina and Thomson rivers continue to rise. A Queensland Emergency Services helicopter spent the morning evacuating stranded residents in Winton. A total of 25 people have now been removed from low lying areas of the town. About 20 motorists are preparing to spend their second night under the stars, stranded by flooded creeks on the Landsborough Highway, just north of Winton. Meanwhile, in Muttaburra, several homes have already been flooded and power has been cut as the Landsborough Creek reaches the eight metre mark. In Longreach, police and emergency services are bracing for major flooding. The water level in the Thomson River is rising rapidly and has already reached the bridge level, cutting off the road. Inspector Gary Jamieson from Longreach police says motorists should exercise extreme caution. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Australian swimmer Ian Thorpe says he is delighted swimming's governing body, FINA, has ratified the world record he set at the short course world cup event in Berlin. The world record was in doubt after Thorpe raised concerns about the drug testing procedures at the Berlin event and an investigation was launched. FINA secretary general Gunnar Werner says the investigation should be completed this week but says the records set by Thorpe and American Lenny Krayzelburg have been ratified. Thorpe is currently battling illness but said through a spokesman he was relieved FINA had given him the all-clear. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" A kicking charge against Melbourne vice-captain, David Schwarz, has been dropped. The report was withdrawn after umpire, Gavin Dore, reviewed video of the incident. Meanwhile, David Neitz has been appointed captain of the Demons for the 2000 season. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Prime Minister John Howard has accused Opposition leader Kim Beazley of displaying monumental weakness by refusing to detail his tax policy. Mr Beazley has pledged to roll back the goods and services tax (GST) and guarantee funding to the states. But he has refused to say how he would pay for it and whether Labor in government would increase income taxes or eat into a budget surplus. Mr Howard says Mr Beazley cannot make promises to the states, yet keep the other detail hidden. ""He is cornered by his own weakness,"" he said. ""If he had not been bullied, then maybe the situation would have been different. ""But having said that the states will be no worse off as a result of the roll back, then he has no alternative but to go the extra distance and answer all of the questions that are now being raised."" Meanwhile, Democrats leader Meg Lees said her party would be prepared to look at some changes to the GST proposed by Labor However, she warned some alterations may create an administrative nightmare. Senator Lees has indicated she would consider changes if there was a budget surplus, but says Labor's proposals could cost more than $4 billion. ""Somewhere in there we reach a line that's simply unaffordable,"" she said. ""Either we're going to have to have income tax increases or we're going to have to see the tax base eroded for the states and the Commonwealth, so there will be less money for the states to spend on hospitals and schools."" -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" The United Nations secretary general Kofi Annan is set to meet one of the most high-profile critics of mandatory sentencing laws today. While Mr Annan avoided answering questions about the issue in Canberra yesterday, it is set to confront him again today. He is scheduled to meet former High Court Judge Sir Ronald Wilson, who led the inquiry into the Aboriginal Stolen Generations. Sir Ronald says mandatory sentencing breaches a host of international conventions and he will raise the issue with the UN chief. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" After more than four weeks of fighting for their entitlements, 300 former workers from the National Textiles plant will vote today on a plan to pay them in full. Despite some last minute hurdles, the workers are likely to be paid within 30 days. After weeks of political and financial wrangling, the sacked workers will meet with other creditors today to vote on a deed of company arrangement which will pay them their full $11 million in entitlements. The deal was under a cloud as the company's two major creditors, Scottish Pacific Business Finance and Oldtex, clashed over details, but the two parties reached agreement late yesterday. There were also fears some of the 500 unsecured creditors, who will get less than five cents in the dollar, would scuttle the deal. However, they are unlikely to have the voting power at today's meeting, meaning the workers will be paid almost immediately. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" KFOR peacekeeping troops have clashed with thousands of Albanians in Mitrovica in northern Kosovo. The clashes come after weeks of escalating ethnic violence in the divided town. During the weekend, US peacekeepers were forced to retreat from the northern half of Mitrovica under a hail of stones and bottles after launching a search for weapons in the Serb controlled areas of the city. Now the KFOR troops have been defending themselves from thousands of ethnic Albanians who tried to force their way across the bridge that divides the town. Before the war, Mitrovica was a largely Albanian town and the countryside was mostly populated by Serbs. Now, it is divided, with Albanians in the south and mostly Serbs in the north. KFOR responded to attempts to storm the bridge with volleys of tear gas. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Western countries have been quick to welcome the landslide victory by reformers in Iran's parliamentary elections. Supporters of moderate President Mohammed Khatami have won control of the Assembly for the first time since 1979. Although final results are not yet in, the reformers led by the President's brother, Mohammed Reza Khatami, look like winning with at least 80 per cent of the vote. The conservatives, who have opposed the easing of Iran's strict Islamic rule, have failed to win even a single seat in even some of their traditional regionial strongholds. In Teheran, reformers have so far had a clean sweep, dashing the hopes of former president Hashami Rafsanjani who had lined up with the conservatives. The United States, Britain, Germany and other European nations have welcomed what they see as an important step that Iranians want to restore relations with the west. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" At least six people have been killed and three others injured by avalanches that hit ski-slopes in Italy, Austria and Switzerland after mild weather and snowfalls loosened snow caps in the Alps. Deadly avalanches struck both the Alto Adige Mountains in northern Italy and a ski trail in the Swiss resort of Davos, while a 15-year-old German boy was reported missing after a snowslide in the Austrian Tyrol. Three women died and another two people were hurt, one seriously, in the Italian disaster, when they were caught by a 150-metre wide snowslide in the Val di Mazia region near the Austrian border, rescue officials said. The victims were identified as Germans Christine Elisabeth Steinbacher, 41, and Simone Gramalla, 37, and Italian Lieselotte Wenter, 63. Another German, Joachim Haase, 62, was in Trente Hospital in a serious condition. The identity of the other injured survivor was not revealed. Two guides leading the group raised the alarm after the avalanche struck at an altitude of 2,800 metres, rescue officials said. In the wealthy Swiss ski resort of Davos, two Swiss nationals and a German died after an avalanche cascaded down a slope one kilometre from the town, police said. A German skier and his son, who were skiiing at an altitude of 2,600 metres, may have triggered the slide, police said. One of them was later found slightly injured by the dozens of rescuers and specially trained dogs who took part in the rescue operation and was airlifted to a Davos hospital. Swiss police did not reveal the identities of those recovered, although by nightfall they called off the search effort believing everyone was accounted for. Austrian avalanche experts warned that the risk of further snowslides remained high. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Despite mounting allegations of human rights abuses by Russian forces in Chechnya, Moscow remains committed to its military campaign. Acting President Vladimir Putin has praised his generals conduct of the war. He says the war in Chechnya has raised morale within the army and within Russian society as a whole. He makes no mention of the allegations that Russian troops are executing and raping Chechen civilians, or of the mounting international calls for human rights observers to be allowed into Chechnya, including most recently from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Mary Robinson. Instead, the Acting President reaffrims Russia's commitment to the war, which he describes as an anti-terrorist operation. Mr Putin was relatively unknown when he took office on January 1 and has built his popularity on a hawkish stance on Chechnya. He faces the electorate in five weeks' time. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" World records set by Australia's Ian Thorpe and American Lenny Krayzelburg at this month's short course swimming meet in Berlin have been ratified. Swimming's governing body, FINA, has approved Thorpe's 200 metres freestyle record and Krayzelburg's new best time in the 200 backstroke. The new records had been in doubt after both swimmers complained about the drug testing procedure where officials wanted to put urine samples in containers that were not tamper proof. FINA secretary Gunnar Werner says it is a positive outcome for the swimmers. ""I am sure that they'll be very happy, but it was no real reason for any suspect of a mistake there, so we had absolutely no reason not to approve them,"" he said. FINA is still investigating the drug testing procedures used at the Berlin meet and will announce its findings later this week."

" Australia says the United Nations could leave East Timor by August next year. The Foreign Minister, Alexander Downer, says the UN exit strategy will meet benchmarks for East Timor's independence. After talks with the UN secretary general, Kofi Annan, Mr Downer said the UN could not make an open-ended commitment to East Timor. ""There's no point in withdrawing if the benchmarks haven't been met,"" he said. ""I mean there's no point in withdrawing and leaving East Timor in a state of instability otherwise we'll find ourselves back at square one. ""But there is a good point in trying to ensure that the East Timorese understand that independence is absolutely coming - the United Nations won't be there forever. ""These United Nations operations, particularly a successful one like this one, do need to have an exit strategy at some stage. ""I think it's important to all of us transmit to the East Timorese that we're all there to help. ""We want East Timor to be a successful independent country but it can't depend on the UN administering East Timor forever."""

" The Federal Opposition is under fire for raising the issue of mandatory sentencing with the United Nations secretary general Kofi Annan. Mr Annan held talks with Australia's political leaders in Canberra today. The Prime Minister's hour long meeting with Mr Annan focused on East Timor, and mandatory sentencing was not discussed. Mr Annan also deflected questions about the issue after the talks. The Opposition leader, Kim Beazley, did broach the subject during his meeting with the UN Chief. He says Mr Annan declined to discuss the issue, but did say he would refer it to the UN human rights commissioner. But the Foreign Affairs Minister, Alexander Downer, says the Australian public will not thank Mr Beazley for running to the United Nations with a domestic political problem. ""I don't think it does any credit to Australia for the Labor Party to try and politicise the visit of the secretary general,"" he said."

" The Federal Opposition leader, Kim Beazley, is maintaining his refusal to rule out income tax rises if Labor wins office, saying it would be irresponsible to do so. However, he has sought to play down the issue. The Government, which is fighting it own battles over tax, has leaped on Mr Beazley's refusal to rule out tax rises to fund a roll back of the goods and services tax (GST) and funding guarantees to the states. The Prime Minister has dubbed Mr Beazley a big dark cloud hanging over personal income tax cuts to be delivered in July. But Mr Beazley says it would be irresponsible to be making promises when the election is at least two Budgets away. ""I will not be bullied into a silly position,"" he said. However, he says Labor is about relieving, not increasing the burden on families, and it will keep the attitude which saw it give seven incomes tax cuts not rises while in government. Mr Beazley is not saying where the GST would be rolled back, but has kept open the option of phasing the roll back over several Budgets."

" Queensland's freehold tree-clearing laws will be changed to apply to only a fraction of the State, following the Premier's failure to secure a compensation package from the Commonwealth. The Prime Minister today refused Queensland's request for $103 million in compensation, offering instead to set up a taskforce. Peter Beattie says instead of applying to more than 3 million hectares of land, the laws will only cover a few hundred thousand hectares harbouring endangered species because Queensland cannot afford the $103 million compensation bill. ""We will proclaim that area of endangered species, it would be irresponsible of us not to do so, every other state in Australia has done so,"" he said. Opposition leader Rob Borbidge says Mr Beattie's decision to discriminate against a small percentage of land-owners will only cause further anger in the bush. ""It is a mess. He's failed miserably in terms of his dealings with the Commonwealth and in terms of his dealings with landholders. The issue now has to go back to Cabinet,"" he said. Imogen Zethoven, from the Queensland Conservation Council, says the Commonwealth's refusal to pay compensation is a tragedy for the environment. ""The result of the decision by the Prime Minister will drive many species to extinction, if it is not changed,"" she said. ""It will also lead to worsening salinity problems, it will probably make the year when water becomes undrinkable in Adelaide much closer than it otherwise would've been. ""It'll be very bad news for farmers downstream in South Australia and New South Wales. ""It'll lead to higher levels of greenhouse emissions which will put more pressure on other industries to lift their game."""

" Authorities are uncertain when floodwaters will peak in the western Queensland town of Winton. The town remains cut off by rapidly rising floodwaters, which may peak tonight. Winton Shire mayor Bruce Collins says it is difficult to predict how high and when the Western River and two feeder creeks will peak. Two motels at either end of the main street have already been evacuated, while business owners have been moving stock to levels above the 1955 record flood. A Queensland Emergency Services helicopter has today been dropping supplies to isolated property owners and to a group of 20 motorists stranded on the Landsborough Highway at Werners Creek north-west of Winton. Councillor Collins says a record or near record flood level is possible."

" The mother of the late rock star Michael Hutchence has lost her defamation action in the NSW Supreme Court against two weekend newspapers. Patricia Glassop alleged she was defamed when <i>The Sun Herald</i> and <i>The Sunday Age</i> implied she was greedy and clutching. Joining Mrs Glassop in her legal action over the March 1998 articles was Christina Hutchence, the singer's step-sister. Through their barrister John Sackar QC, the women alleged the newspapers suggested they were so greedy it was necessary for Michael Hutchence to take special steps with his will to protect the inheritance of his daughter Heavenly Hiraani Tiger Lily. Mr Sackar said the reports painted a picture of a small little defenseless child who had to be defended from the clutching, greedy relatives. Counsel for the newspapers, Bruce McClintock SC, said no reasonable reader would think like that and the clutching, greedy relatives are unnamed in the articles. The jury of four men took less than half an hour to reject the arguments of late rock star's relatives."

" Strong gains by resource stocks have prevented any major losses on the local sharemarket, despite Wall Street's nose-dive on Friday night. The market was expected to be bearish, after a 295-point, or nearly 3 per cent drop, on the Dow Jones, to 10,219. But after dropping as much as 37 points early, the All Ordinaries index finished just 3 points lower, at 3,117. Regional stocks felt the downdraft from Wall Street, the Nikkei in Tokyo dropping more than 1 per cent today. At home BHP jumped 45 cents, or 2 per cent, to $17.05 after its managing director, Paul Anderson, was quoted as saying he was targeting a share price of $40. Other energy issues to do well were Woodside, up nearly 17 cents to $10.23 and WMC, up 10 cents to $7.00. The National Australia Bank was the day's top trader, falling 15 cents to a 16-month low of $20.25. Investors appeared unimpressed by the bank's latest strategic shift of considering to spin off its Internet and e-commerce operations, in a unit that may be floated. Telstra fell nine cents to $7.44. The company says it wants a bigger share of the US communications market, expanding from servicing large corporates, to small and medium-sized businesses. Property group, Mirvac is up four cents to $3.12, after its first-half profit rose 28 per cent to $77 million. Wattyl Limited has suffered a 14 per cent fall in half-year profit, to just under $10 million with the stock dropping eight cents to $4.18. After the market closed, Smorgon reported a 36 per cent rise in interim profit, to $40 million. Earlier, the steelmaker closed five cents up, at $1.70. The Australian dollar is still struggling to break the 63 US cent barrier, trading now at 62.83 US - down slightly on this morning. It is at 39.28 British pence, 69.55 Japanese yen and 1.244 German marks. It is also worth 0.636 euros and on the trade weighted index, it is at 55.9. The price of gold is $US306.12 an ounce, up around 55 cents since this morning. The yield on 10-year bonds is 7.05 per cent."

" The Prime Minister has launched an attack on Opposition leader Kim Beazley over his promise to roll back the Government's goods and services tax (GST) while not cutting funds to the states. Mr Beazley, on the weekend, would not rule out tax increases to fund the promise. Mr Beazley's refusal to rule out tax rises has given the Prime Minister, under pressure over the GST, a political lifeline. ""Mr Beazley has got no policy and as a result there's a huge dark cloud with his name written all over it hanging over the Australian personal tax cuts,"" he said. And while his office says it was not his intention, Shadow Treasurer Simon Crean appears to have cast doubt on Mr Beazley's funding guarantee to the states. ""We will be leaving it all till later because we need to know what the fiscal position is,"" Mr Crean said. Mr Beazley has been trying to counter some of the negative publicity, saying he does not think tax rises are more than likely. However, he says details of the Labor plan will have to wait until closer to the next election. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The coroner investigating the deaths of two women in far north Queensland has found that one of the women caused all of the injuries to the other. The findings of a second inquest into the deaths of Vicki Arnold and Julie-Anne Leahy have been handed down by coroner Gary Casey. Mrs Leahy was found to have been shot, bashed, stabbed and strangled - the original inquest determining she was murdered by Ms Arnold before she killed herself. The coroner today said that the injuries were caused by Ms Arnold and has ruled out any involvement by Mrs Leahy's husband. But Mr Casey said it was outside his jurisdiction to say it was a murder-suicide. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Northern Territory Chief Minister says the Country Liberal Party's (CLP) central council has unanimously endorsed mandatory sentencing during a weekend meeting. Denis Burke says the party is not conducting any polling on the issue, but believes it still has the support of most voters. ""[There was an] overwhelming vote in favour at the CLP central council meeting,"" he said. ""I believe there is overwhelming support in the Northern Territory because Territorians understand the issues and understand why the sentencing regime has been brought in,"" he said. ""I believe there's majority or more support Australia-wide, that's being backed up by National Nine News' polls being conducted at the moment because essentially the chattering class are out of touch with the problems of average Australia."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Maritime Union of Australia says its industrial dispute with Adsteam Marine could escalate to include other unions. Striking tugboat workers have staged a small protest outside Adsteam's Fremantle office this morning. The company has threatened to start retrenching workers as early as this week to cut its tug crews from four to three people. Union spokesman Wally Pritchard says Adsteam should withdraw the threat of retrenchments. He says other unions have been informed of the situation and could act if the company does not back down. Maritime union spokesman Wally Pritchard says the company's action could spark conflicts among tugboat crew members which will last for years. He says police have told the union they are happy with its assurance that its actions will be peaceful, and suggestions by Adsteam that it would disrupt the training course are unwarranted. ""All we wanted to do was give our members, who are working alongside these engineers, an opportunity to tell them that Adsteam are just selling us all down the river with this proposal and not to fall for it,"" he said. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Rescue workers in Japan are using explosives as they search for three New Zealanders who were buried in an avalanche at the weekend. The three were snowboarding down a mountain when the avalanche struck. Craig Mowat, James Gordon, and Chris Coaster had moved away from the main skiing area to do some outback snowboarding when the avalanche struck at Hakuba, 179 kilometres north of Tokyo. Australian Matthew Skinner escaped unhurt to raise the alarm. It is now nearly 48 hours since the accident. First Secretary at the New Zealand Embassy in Tokyo, Kerry Davis says the rescuers fear triggering further avalances, but they will use explosives in the hope of triggering a controlled snowslide. Meanwhile, the family of one of the three, James Gordon, has flown to Tokyo to see the rescue effort first-hand. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Prime Minister has hosted a lunch at Parliament House to honour the United Nations secretary general Kofi Annan. Mr Annan has spent the morning in a series of meetings with Mr Howard, Cabinet ministers, and the Opposition leader, Kim Beazley. During his talks with Mr Howard, both leaders agreed on the need to establish rapid-response military units ready for crises such as that in East Timor. Mr Annan praised Mr Howard and the broader community for Australia's role in bringing peace to East Timor. ""It is hard to imagine how peace could have been achieved in East Timor without Australia,"" he said. ""Prime Minister your tireless diplomacy during the height of the crisis, your incisive instincts and decisive approach in bringing an end to the violence, and Australia's willingness to take the lead in the deployment of a multinational force was the key to establishing the beginnings of peace."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Sydney Kings centre Ben Melmeth faces fines and suspension, after being cited for misconduct over an incident in which he grabbed a fan who had offended him by the throat. The National Basketball League has also cited Kings trainer Dave Driscoll over the incident, which occurred after the team's loss to the Melbourne Tigers at the Sydney Superdome on Saturday night. Melmeth is already out of action, having suffered a stress fracture to his foot last week. The NBL tribunal will deal with the matter on Wednesday morning. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Federal Opposition says Labor is not planning any increase in taxes through its plans to wind back the goods and services tax (GST). Opposition leader Kim Beazley has promised to protect GST revenue to the states even if the GST is rolled back in many areas. The Democrats say Labor's plan will cost billions of dollars in revenue and Treasurer Peter Costello says Labor will have to raise income taxes or run the budget into deficit to fund its promise. But Shadow Treasurer Simon Crean says Labor's plan is affordable. ""Rollback is a tax cut, what Labor's proposing is a tax cut not a tax increase, the question of how we do it we'll announce at the time, we're not going to be doing it in a piecemeal way and whatever we announce will be fiscally responsible,"" he said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Opponents of mandatory sentencing are hoping the issue will be raised when the Prime Minister meets UN secretary general Kofi Annan in Canberra today. Mr Annan is in Canberra for two days and will also meet Opposition leader Kim Beazley. Australia's commitment in East Timor is expected to dominate talks, with Australia to urge the UN to pull out at least a year ahead of schedule. However, Australian Democrats leader Meg Lees says it is important the issue of mandatory sentencing is raised. ""Australia until very recently had prided itself on its record on human rights,"" she said. ""We had been only too happy to be part of the United Nations and to uphold all of those conventions that we've signed on to and I think it's very important that those issues are now discussed and that this government thinks again about its attitude to mandatory sentencing."" --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Buoyed by his big win in South Carolina, US Republican presidential hopeful George W Bush is in Michigan for a whirlwind campaign before that state's primary on Wednesday. Governor Bush says the double digit win in the southern state has re-energised his campaign, which stalled badly after his loss in New Hampshire to Senator John McCain. He says he is confident the campaign is on track to take him to the White House. ""People were excited about my message and were positive about my message, and the people of America as well,"" he said. ""They want somebody to go to Washington DC, not only to bring honour and dignity to the office, but somebody to reform our taxes, strengthen the military and make sure all children get educated in America."" Senator McCain has accused Mr Bush of resorting to an expensive, negative campaign in South Carolina and has downplayed the result. ""We won the majority of the vote except for the Christian right yesterday, which turned out in huge numbers and I'm very optimistic,"" he said. Senator McCain says he can continue his campaign even if he loses Michigan, where polls show him level with Governor Bush, but he concedes it is an important state. Also voting this week is Senator McCain's home state of Arizona, where he enjoys a comfortable lead. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Environmental experts say heavy rain in north-western Romania is threatening to cause another cyanide spill from a reservoir at a gold mine partly owned by Australian company Esmeralda. The experts have gathered at the mine, near the town of Baia Mare, to work out how to stop that happening. One of them said a way must be found to drain off some of the water and reinforce the dike. But he insisted it would be done with absolute safety. A cyanide spill from the reservoir on January 31 got into two rivers that feed the Danube. Two of Romania's neighbours, Hungary and Yugoslavia, say the spill is responsible for killing many tonnes of fish. But the mine's co-owner, the Perth-based Esmeralda, strongly denies responsibility for this. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The main reform Coalition in Iran says it has won up to three quarters of the vote in an election landslide that has ended 21 years of conservative dominance in Parliament. The reformist victory was marred by violence in the country's south. Eight people were killed and more hurt in clashes with police that followed the announcement of poll results in two south-western towns. Across Iran the first round result was emphatic - outside the capital, Tehran, reformists have won 126 of the seats counted to the conservative's 34. The pro-reform swing has been praised by Turkey and the United States and by Israel, which remains the target of Iranian-backed guerrilla and terror campaigns. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A new report has called for a national strategy to help solve economic and social problems common to both Australia's cities and regional areas. The report, ""The Capital Cities and Australia's Future"", says the nation's capitals are suffering from similar problems to those that exist in country towns. It says a more coordinated approach is needed to fix them. It says the Federal Government has neglected urban policies in recent years, despite evidence that city-based sectors such as information technology and communications have been largely responsible for Australia's economic growth. It wants an annual capital cities forum to be held to develop a national strategy on cities. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A search by the multinational force in Kosovo for weapons stored in the divided town of Kosovska Mitrovica has sparked a furious reaction from the town's Serb community. The north of the town is majority Serb while the south is majority ethnic Albanian, and there have been 10 deaths recently in communal violence. Serbs hurled stones and snowballs at US peacekeeping troops after they took part in a search of the Serb area that uncovered rifles, a machine-gun, ammunition and explosive devices. Earlier, Lieutenant Commander Philip Anido, from the international Kosovo force, said the soldiers were looking for evidnce of criminal activity linked to recent violence in the town. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Buckingham Palace has confirmed a cook in the royal household was sacked after allegedly telling colleagues that she could easily poison the Queen. Monica Traub, 46, who was employed as a trainee chef at the royal family's Sandringham Estate, allegedly told colleagues that she had the opportunity to poison the Queen's food without being detected. British newspapers claim her comments were reported to the head of the royal household when she later allegedly asked where she could get hold of a quantity of cyanide. Ms Traub was immediately dismissed. The sacked woman told a tabloid newspaper that she did not know what cyanide was or what it looked like. However, she did say she remembered having a conversation with another cook about how easy it would be to interfere with food for the royal table. Ms Traub said she could not believe she had been sacked for that."

" Australia's consumer watchdog has warned businesses to only pass on the net effect of the GST. Last week, the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) hit out at Woolworths and the country's largest hotel group, Accor, for their foreshadowing of post-GST prices. ACCC chief Alan Fels told Channel Nine business owners should be in no doubt about how to handle the new tax system. Professor Fels says business can pass on compliance costs on certain conditions. ""You can pass on the net additional, reasonably incurred compliance costs attributable to GST providing the total price rise of any one product does not exceed 10 per cent, but it must be the net amount, not the gross,"" he said. ""Business just can't pass on the gross new price and pocket the savings, that would be a breach of the law."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Australian-led Interfet force has criticised Indonesian troops involved in the clash. The head of the force, Major General Peter Cosgrove, says a large number of shots were fired by Indonesian soldiers at a family reunion day on the border. The shootings began after rocks were thrown at the soldiers. The clash comes three days before the Interfet troops are due to hand over their commission to the United Nations. General Cosgrove has told Channel Nine he is less than pleased with the actions by the Indonesians. ""On the one side, while I'm happy that they were there to at least intervene in some way, the number of shots seem to me to be somewhat of an overreaction, or at least not designed to defuse tensions but to frighten and it could have caused a stampede,"" he said."

" Also in East Timor, two men accused of rape have escaped from Dili's UN controlled detention centre. The men escaped after removing louvres from the window of their cell in the first escape bid made since the detention centre was established following the independence ballot. More than 40 people are currently held in the civilian detention centre, which is controlled by UN civilian police. Many are accused of violent crimes, including murder, which took place in both the lead-up to and following August's independence referendum. One of the two men has since been recaptured. Civilian police say the louvres have now been reinforced."

" Meanwhile, more than 300 Australian soldiers have arrived in Sydney this morning, after a six-month deployment in East Timor. A large crowd of family and friends greeted the members of the 3RAR when they touched down at Sydney Airport. The soldiers, who worked in Dili, Maliana and Oecussi as part of the Interfet force, are the first wave of returning personnel, with a second group expected to arrive back in Sydney next week. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Premier Peter Beattie says a pilot program similar to boot camps underway in Queensland is a viable alternative to mandatory sentencing. A $3 million joint state and federally-funded trial at Warwick on the Darling Downs has 22 volunteer boys attending a wilderness camp, a project that if successful could be extended to other states. Mr Beattie does not support mandatory sentencing in place in Western Australia and the Northern Territory, saying it fails to deal with the causes of youth crime. ""The point about mandatory sentencing is this: it's after the event,"" he said. ""What we have to do is stop the crime happening in the first place, we have to be tough on the causes of crime, that's what this is about. ""There's no point trying to close the gate after the horse has bolted, I mean the truth is once people get into the criminal justice system it's very hard to get them out."" Mr Beattie says the trial is part of the government's wider strategy to be tough on the causes of crime. ""The evidence suggests early intervention is the most significant way of stopping people committing crimes and that's what these are about,"" he said. ""So if these programs work, that's positive parenting, the drug courts, in particular this pilot program, then there won't need to be an issue of mandatory sentencing, which I don't support."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australian Olympic athletes who are to compete on the first and second days of competition at the Sydney games are being urged to not participate in the opening ceremony, in the interest of optimum performance. The Australian team's medical director, Brian Sando, says some athletes could tire-out their postural muscles from standing for long periods. However, advice from the team's head of psychology services suggests that some athletes gain an emotional and physical lift from the event. Mr Sando says team managers should discuss the issue with athletes as soon as possible. ""Standing for long periods is something that athletes are very unaccustomed to in the main, and so we're concerned about the stress and fatigue factor that this muscle loading will provide,"" he said. ""So that if you're going to be competing in the next couple of days, a bit of muscle stiffness and that excess fatigue is likely to make it just a bit more difficult for your performance at your optimum."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The hotel industry has welcomed the campaign, but says parents also need to be educated. The national executive director of the Australian Hotels Association, Richard Mulcahy, says hotels are very aware of their responsibilities. ""I think one of the main areas is within the home itself, that possibly people don't exercise the level of controls they ought to,"" he said. ""That presents problems not only with young people turning up at licensed premises already intoxicated, but also consuming alcohol at public facilities or at other people's homes."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Meanwhile, the president of the Chamber of Commerce on Christmas Island, Philip Oakley, says there is no way the island can cope with another large influx of boat people. In the past few months, Christmas Island has been a popular destination for boat people attempting to enter Australia. Mr Oakley says catering for 1,000 boat people, which could be heading for Australia in one group, is way beyond the island's resources. ""If we were to get anything like 1,000 people on this island at once we would have a major logistical problem,"" he said. ""In the past we've had up to about 300 illegal immigrants at any one point in time and that stretches resources to the absolute maximum."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A day before the crucial United States Republican primary in South Carolina, conflicting polls are adding to the uncertainty for Texas Governor, George Bush and his main rival, Senator John McCain. According to an NBC television poll taken over the past two days, Governor Bush holds a tight lead over Mr McCain, of 44 per cent to 38. More comforting to the Bush camp, a CNN gallop poll suggests a bigger advantage, 52 per cent to 40. Both men are holding rallies across the state this morning, the final day of campaigning. Governor Bush has also suggested his opponent's support seems to be coming from independents and Democrats. ""I welcome Democrats, what I'm concerned about is Democrats who are coming to vote one way in the primary and go back to the Democrat Party in the general election,"" he said. South Carolina is an open primary, allowing voters of all persuasions to register their preference in the Republican ballot. A big turnout of independents in New Hampshire was critical to Senator McCain's surprisingly strong victory there."

" Meanwhile, reformist candidates in Iran look set to end a 21-year conservative dominance of the country's parliament. Early results from today's election suggests a clear-cut victory for the left, in a rebuff of restrictions on personal and social liberties. The early trends suggest that Iran is heading for its first reformist majority parliament since the 1979 revolution. The Interior Ministry says 75 per cent of those eligible have voted and that the Reform ticket leader, Mohammed-Reza Khatami, brother of President Mohammed Khatami, is leading his contest. Polling booths stayed open hours beyond schedule to cater for the record turnout. Young voters have led the push to reform, voting for the lifting of harsh social restrictions in the Islamic republic."

" However, in Africa, Senegal, until now considered one of west Africa's more stable nations, is showing signs of unrest ahead of presidential elections. The main opposition leader has told his followers to rise up if the results of the elections are not what the people want. And he said the army should be ready to take over. Senegal is one of the few African countries to have never had a coup d'etat. Violence erupted earlier this week, though, in Senegal's second city, St Louis, during which the ruling party's headquarters were burnt down. The opposition distrusts the way the elections have been organised, headed as they were by a close friend of President Abdou Diouf, with massive discrepancies reported in the electoral lists. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A retired Air Marshall has endorsed yesterday's attack on the Defence Department by its new secretary Allan Hawke. Dr Hawke savaged his department, saying it lacked credibility, had senior management problems and was facing serious financial shortfalls. A parliamentary committee examining the Australian Army's role in peacekeeping and war has raised the issue at a hearing in Canberra. Retired Air Marshall David Evans told the committee there was a time when the department knocked back all requests for new equipment. ""In fact, they used to say `but you can't have that, that's enhancing the defence force, the policy is to maintain the defence force',"" he said. ""They saw no reason why we should have things like an F-111 with a range to get to Indonesia because it might be seen badly by the Indonesians as threatening them."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Immigration Minister Phillip Ruddock says large groups of illegal immigrants are being gathered together in Indonesia in readiness for travel to Australia. Reports indicate more than 1,000 illegal immigrants are expected to arrive in Australia over the weekend. But Mr Ruddock says intelligence information shows no departures have yet occurred. He says the federal government is negotiating with its Indonesian couterparts about how to solve this latest problem. ""And we are discussing with the Indonesians what steps might be taken to interdict and otherwise deal with these departures, before they occur."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Federal Opposition leader, Kim Beazley, believes banks should be pressured to finance alternative services if they move out of country communities. Mr Beazley says the Government should be providing assistance to those towns which have set up regional banks of their own. He believes regional banks have the potential to turn the decline of country Australia around. ""You know, we've got a couple going in WA now and a couple in Victoria which have restored the profitability of towns,"" he said. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Australian Government says it is prepared to help clean up cyanide contaminated rivers in Hungary. The poison came from a Romanian mine, part-owned by Australian company Esmeralda, where a dam overflow in late January poured into streams flowing west to countries, including Hungary. The Hungarian Ambassador Istvan Gyurk met Environment Minister Robert Hill in Canberra today. Senator Hill has denied claims Australia has a moral obligation to help but says assistance may be offered, if needed. ""There is some effort to put together an international team to assist,"" Senator Hill said. ""We have been contacted by the United Nations environment program from Nairobi that's seeking to put together such a group and what they are doing with my officials at the moment is trying to identify whether there is particular expertise that might be useful."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Australia is to argue that the United Nations should cut short its administration of East Timor. Australia will tell UN Secretary General Kofi Annan that the UN should leave East Timor by August next year. Prime Minister John Howard and Foreign Minister Alexander Downer will have talks with Mr Annan in Canberra on Monday. The shorter timetable would mean the UN leaving East Timor in less than two years, rather than the three years presently scheduled. Australian sources say Canberra wants to reinforce a view emerging within the UN itself that it should leave sooner rather than later. To leave by August next year, the UN would need to hold local elections this year, with a general election early next year. Such a timetable meets UN concerns about cost, and also means political responsibility will be handed quickly to the Timorese parties. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" A senior bureaucrat has been forced to defend a manual with advice for public service managers on negotiation tactics, after claims the suggestions are unethical. The handbook compiled by an agency in the Workplace Relations department, outlines methods from bluffing to stalling and diverting attention from the real goal. Labor Senator John Faulkner revealed the contents of the manual in a senate committee hearing today, claiming the advice promotes practices which are not ethical. Workplace Relations Department Secretary Peter Shergold admits the advice may be out of kilter with guidelines for senior public servants. ""Yes, but I think it would be wrong to presume that the other side may not employ such tactics,"" Mr Shergold said. ""We are not promoting the use of those tactics, what we are saying is in a negotiation situation you will see on occassions all sorts of tactics employed in order for you to negotiate successfully you should be aware of this."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" International Olympic Committee (IOC) President Juan Antonio Samaranch has tried to ease any political divisions over criticisms of Sydney's marketing of the Olympic Games. Mr Samaranch has trod a diplomatic path during his final news conference in Sydney. IOC vice-president Dick Pound set the hares running yesterday when he was critical of SOCOG's marketing. He claims sponsors were upset and that Sydney organisers were not trumpeting the success achieved so far in selling the Games. Mr Samaranch tried to take the heat out of the conflict by arguing Mr Pound and Michael Knight were both right. He says the marketing has to be the best and therefore he backed his vice-president. But he also straddled the fence saying Michael Knight had a job to do and that was protecting the taxpayer. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" In tennis, a knee injury that has forced Mark Philippoussis out of the St Jude tournament in Memphis has been described as minor by his father. Philippoussis withdrew from his third round match against Magnus Larsson after his knee felt stiff following a warm-up for the match. His manager John McCurdy says he spoke with Philippoussis' father this morning about the injury. ""The injury is nothing serious, there was just some inflamation on the knee but nothing to do with his operation and, you know, he's had a pretty hectic schedule of late,"" Mr McCurdy said. ""Davis Cup, winning San Jose last week so and following on from the summer, he was advised to withdraw and opted to sort of take that direction."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Prime Minister says Australia will not be told how to make its laws, especially when it comes to mandatory sentencing. Mr Howard will meet visiting UN Secretary General Kofi Annan on Monday, with the Northern Territory and Western Australian laws expected to be discussed. Opponents of mandatory sentencing claim the laws break at least three UN conventions. Mr Howard says Australia does not answer to the rest of the world. ""I mean I'm not going to have a situation where people are denegrating the human rights reputation of Australia,"" he said. ""Australia's human rights reputation compared with the rest of the world is quite magnificent. ""We've had our blemishes and we've made our errors, and I'm not saying we're perfect, but I'm not going to cop this country's human rights name being tarnished."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Federal Government has backed the head of the Defence Department for publicly tackling entrenched management problems within the organisation. Alan Hawke has also won praise from defence lobbyists. After 100 days as head of the Department, Alan Hawke has given full public exposure to its faults. He has identified severe budget problems, poor planning and management of major projects and acquisitions, problems with the department's structure, and a leadership culture which shuns responsibility. The Defence Minister John Moore has endorsed Dr Hawke's diagnosis, saying he has set the Department on a course to fix problems which have afflicted the organisation for years. ""I believe Dr Hawke will manage personnel much better than it has in the past,"" Mr Moore said. National Director of the Australian Defence Association, Michael O'Connor says there is hope Dr Hawke will lead Defence out of an inward culture of denial. ""I think it's constructive for the Department. It shows leadership,"" Mr O'Connor said. ""It may, or should, help what has become a quite demoralised Department."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Simon Wiesenthal Centre in Jerusalem claims to have new evidence against alleged Nazi war criminal Konrad Kalejs, who is hiding in Melbourne. The centre's Israel director, Efraim Zuroff, says the evidence relates to Mr Kalejs' service in a Jewish labour camp in Porfov, in Latvia, during World War Two. Dr Efraim has welcomed moves between Latvia and Australia to sign an extradition treaty. But he says he is yet to be convinced the treaty will result in Mr Kalejs and other suspected war criminals being extradited for trial. ""The more time that elapses till the treaty is signed, until the extradition requests are filed, until sufficient evidence is collected by the Latvians to convince them to take that step, who knows if it will ever take place,"" he said. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Hungary's ambassador to Canberra will register his protest at the recent cyanide spill in Romania in talks today with the Federal Government. Ambassador Istvan Gyurk will meet Environment Minister Robert Hill to discuss Australia's response to the crisis. Dr Gyurk has attacked the Australian mining company, Esmeralda Exploration, for what he describes as cynical and primitive comments to downplay the severity of the contamination. He says the Hungarian Government plans to sue the company but the Australian Government also has a moral responsibility to act. ""It is the biggest catastrophe of the past 20 years in Hungary so we have to discuss this with the Minister of Environment, because it is an environmental catastrophe and an Australian company is seriously involved in it,"" he said. Romania has now acknowledged that the cyanide spill at the mine was significant. The admission comes as calls grow for the company to be held responsible for the damage. For more than two weeks the Roamnian Government has been relucant to acknowledge the magnitude of the spill from the Aural gold mine. The spill that occurred on January 30 is thought responsible for the widescale cyanide poisoning of river systems downstream in neighbouring Hungary and Serbia. But the poison has now re-entered Romania via the Danube and the Romanian Environment Minister now describes it as an unfortunate accident. ""We didn't ever want to hide or play down the magnitude of the accident,"" he said, during a visit to Solnok, one of the worst affected towns in Hungary. The European Union's (EU) Environment Minister Margot Walstrom, who was also visiting Solnok, suggested the company may be ultimately held responsible. She has promised to start work on a plan to prevent such catastrophes ever happening again. Margot Wallstrom says the EU has to learn lessons from the incident, and has to cover gaps in legislation. Ms Wallstrom is the first high-ranking EU official to tour the scene of what's been called the worst ecological disaster to hit Eastern Europe since the Chernobyl nuclear accident in 1986. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Authorities will continue to monitor closely a toxic algal bloom affecting the Swan and Canning rivers in Perth. The Canning River and a section the Swan River were reopned to the public yesterday, but waters downstream of the Garratt Road Bridge remain closed to all but larger vessels. Health Minister John Day says most people heeded the warnings, but there were still up to 20 reported cases of illness due to exposure to the bloom. Darryl Miller from the Swan River Trust says it is unknown how long it will be before all parts of the Swan River are considered safe. ""We're monitoring the algae daily and we'll continue to do that throughout the life of the bloom to make sure the public has current information,"" he said. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Air New Zealand is preparing to make an announcement today clarifying the future ownership of Australia's Ansett Airlines. Air New Zealand and News Limited each hold 50 per cent of Ansett. Amid speculation that Air New Zealand would exercise an option to move to full ownership, News Limited earlier this week confirmed that discussions had been taking place. A news conference has now been scheduled for midday AEDT in Melbourne. Radio New Zealand is this morning reporting that Air New Zealand is expected to pay $625 million for the other half of Ansett. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" India has firmly rejected US President Bill Clinton's offer to mediate in the long-running dispute over Kashmir. Mr Clinton will visit India at the end of the month and he says he would be happy to try to resolve the dispute over Kashmir if both India and Pakistan agree. Foreign Minister Jazwan Singh has restated India's established rejection of any third party mediation in the struggle for control of Kashmir. He highlighted President Clinton's pre-condition that any American involvement in the dispute demanded the approval of both sides. The remarks come as separatist linked violence again flared in Indian controlled Kashmir, killing at least seven people and injuring four soldiers. President Clinton will visit India and Bangladesh next month, but he is undecided on whether to visit Pakistan, which has been under military rule since October. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The new Secretary of the Defence Department has delivered a scathing critique of the defence force. Allan Hawke has been in the position for four months and has told a defence gathering in Canberra the department lacks credibility, is poorly managed and is facing big budgetary pressures. Dr Hawke says in the next couple of years his department is facing a shortfall of up to 40 per cent of the budget needed to replace major equipment items. ""Either the government wishes to put more money into the defence organisation or secondly we do without some of the capabilities we've got now and we find different ways of looking at this in the past,"" he said. ""We haven't quite got to that point yet but we certainly face that point in the next couple of years."" Dr Hawke described Australia's defence forces as too inward looking, lacking both credibility and leadership. He says next to the budget problem his biggest task relates to leadership. ""Not to put too fine a point on it too many of our people lack confidence in many of defence's senior leaders,"" he said. ""Justified or not, defence's leadership is perceived as lacking coherence, as failing to accept responsibility and as being far too reactive."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Steelworkers at BHP's Whyalla steelworks have unanimously voted in favor of a new collective bargaining wages agreement to start in April. The 20-month agreement provides for a 4 per cent wage rise in April this year and a 3 per cent wage rise in April next year. There are also provisions to review the pay increase if the goods and services tax (GST) has a greater impact than expected. Australian Workers Union branch secretary for Whyalla and Woomera Geoff Buckland says workers can now concentrate on other important issues at the steelworks. ""The wages agreement takes us through that critical period of divestment and also opens up the opportunity for us to have more meaningful negotiations with BHP about such things as security of employment,"" he said. ""[Such as] how the process of employees will be transferred from the current operator being BHP across to the new operator whoever that may be."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The co-driver of the Indian Pacific train involved in a fatal collision last year says he did not think about the train following behind, after his train was delayed. David Willoughby was giving evidence at the Glenbrook Rail Accident Inquiry in Sydney. Mr Willoughby has already given evidence that on the morning of the accident his train was about five minutes late leaving Glenbrook Station because of a red stop signal. In line with procedure, the train moved slowly through the next section. He said today the journey through Glenbrook normally took about three minutes, but took 15 minutes that day because of the signal delays. Mr Willoughby was asked if, because of those delays, he turned his mind to the Cityrail train which normally follows the Indian Pacific. ""It didn't enter my mind at the time, no,"" he said. He said he understood his train would normally be protected by two red signals behind him. Meanwhile, the inquiry has taken an early adjournment, after the counsel representing the rail union, raised concerns about a possible conflict of interest. Harry Bauer told the inquiry he may have a conflict in representing several of the train drivers involved and the signallers who provided advice about proceeding through stop signals. Acting Justice Peter McInerney took an early lunch adjournment for Mr Bauer to take advice on the matter. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Perth-based gold mining company being blamed for massive environmental damage from a cyanide spill in central Europe says independent tests should be completed by the end of next week. Esmeralda Expoloration says three environmental specialists from Victoria are already in Romania and another is on the way. Esmeralda spokesman Chris Codrington says the company has sent the team to Romania because the reports of damage defy scientific logic. ""They've gone there to get to...the truth of the matter and they will study the chemistry and the hydrology and get to the truth,"" he said. ""Quite clearly there has been damage and our hearts go out to those who have suffered, but that's drawing a very long bow to suggest that the extent of that damage is directly linked to the dam overflow."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Indonesia's globetrotting President Abdurrahman Wahid is preparing for his fourth overseas trip since his election to office almost four months ago. But after strained relations, near-neighbour Australia remains off the agenda. President Wahid has visited 20 countries during his short time in office and is preparing to visit neighbouring Brunei, Papua New Guinea and East Timor. He is also planning a trip to Cuba. But when his Foreign Minister Alwi Shihab was asked if there is a planned visit to Australia the Foreign Minister said, ""that can wait - there's no schedule yet maybe May, June or July..."" Australian-Indonesian relations plunged to an all-time low last year after Australia led an international force into East Timor to stop a wave of killing and destruction by Indonesian Army-backed militia."

" Meanwhile, Indonesia's former armed forces chief General Wiranto has appeared on television defending himself against allegations that he let his troops go on a bloody rampage in East Timor last year. In a long interview with a private television network General Wiranto used video evidence and charts to support his case that the Indonesian military carried out a mission based on clear guidelines and procedures in East Timor. He said the military as an institution would never plan to violate human rights but he admitted some of his troops took part in an orgy of burning, looting, and killing unleashed by pro-Indonesia militia soon after East Timor's independence vote was announced last September. General Wiranto was suspended from his Cabinet post three days ago pending an Indonesian Attorney-General's investigation. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Government has presented a bill to Parliament to change the Timor Gap Treaty, to exclude all reference to Indonesia. The bill changes the arrangements retrospectively to October 26, when the United Nations created UNTAET to be the administrative and legal authority for East Timor. The first commercial production of petroleum began in the zone covered by the treaty in 1998, with other potential projects still being assessed. The bill also makes changes to a range of laws dealing with crimes at sea and taxation regimes for companies operating in the zone. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Heavy rain in Wellington has forced the first one-day cricket international between Australia and New Zealand in Wellington to be abandoned. The start of play was also delayed for 90 minutes by rain after yesterday's original alotted playing day was also washed out. Matthew Hayden's dominant innings was a highlight of the match after he crunched 64 from 68 balls before rain forced the players off 23 overs into Australia's innings. Hayden struck 11 boundaries sharing a 118 run partnership with Mark Waugh who finished unbeaten on 45. Adam Gilchrist was out for a duck in the opening over after New Zealand had sent Australia into bat. Australia finished at 1 for 119. The series resumes in Auckland on Saturday. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Environmentalists in Yugoslavia have warned that cyanide from a spill at a Romanian gold mine could soon poison crops and livestock. More than two weeks after the cyanide spilled from a tailings dam at a goldmine upstream in Romania, countries downstream are still reporting dead fish and plankton in the Tisza River and in the Danube. The mine, co-owned by Australian company Esmeralda Explorations, has denied any link between the spill and the pollution so far downstream, but Hungarian and Yugoslav officials say the cause of the disaster is cyanide. Ecologists in Yugoslavia are now warning that the poison may spread through the food chain in water used for irrigation and through contaminated groundwater. The cyanide was expected to dilute to safe levels when it hit the Danube - one of Europe's biggest rivers, but it is still said to be present at four times higher than levels accepted by the European Union. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The World Bank says there is no evidence its funds were misused by Indonesia as it fought to retain control of East Timor. SBS television has aired a report alleging $12 million, earmarked for welfare and development, was channelled by Jakarta from the World Bank to militia groups in East Timor. However, the World Bank has rejected the allegations. In a statement, the bank says documents alleging misuse of funds by the World Bank have been shown to be false. The bank says its acknowledges it must be concerned about how the government of Indonesia spends its money, and says it needs to work with Jakarta to improve accountability programs. The statement concludes by saying the bank is ready to review any new evidence that would show money has been misused in East Timor. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" An emergency summit of the Prime Ministers of Britain and the Irish Republic has ended without any breakthrough in the deadlocked Northern Ireland peace process. The meeting followed last week's suspension by London of the province's power-sharing government. Tony Blair and his Irish counterpart Bertie Ahern met several of the Northern Ireland parties, including the Irish Republican Army's (IRA) political wing Sinn Fein, at Downing Street in London. The two leaders admitted the crisis was serious, but could be overcome. They said the parties they had spoken to remained committed to 1998's Good Friday peace agreement. Earlier, Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams said he believed the peace deal was in the wastepaper bin because its institutions had been torn down. A Downing Street spokesman said Mr Blair told Sinn Fein the IRA must state when and how it would disarm before direct rule would be ended. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Reserve Bank appears to be getting edgy as the implementation date for the goods and services tax (GST) draws closer. The central bank has sent a message about ""opportunistic"" pricing by retailers. Until now, the bank has maintained a steadfast confidence that after an initial GST impact, inflation would return to its 2-3 per cent target band. However, in its latest quarterly assessment of the economy, it has only gone so far as to say the prospects for this ""are still reasonable"". It says this depends crucially on the assumption there will be no second-round effects on wages or on prices through opportunistic pricing decisions. The Reserve Bank said if the assumption proved unfounded, inflation would pick up more quickly, fuelling ongoing inflation expectations, and that, it says, was a risk which would require close monitoring. While the GST introduction has implications for official interest rates in the medium-term, a collapse in consumer confidence has changed views on the shorter-term outlook. The Westpac/Melbourne Institute index of consumer sentiment has dropped 9 per cent in February, its biggest fall in five years. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" An Australian Senator has called for a new approach to the disposal of rubbish at Australia's Antarctic stations. Under the Madrid Protocol, which protects Antarctica's environment, most waste must be removed. Senator Ross Lightfoot, who chairs a joint house committee on Australia's external territories, has called for the policy overhaul after inspecting Casey Station in Antarctica. Senator Lightfoot says Australia has its own waste problems and rubbish generated in Antarctica should be left there. ""Getting to the point where you have to bring a cigarette butt back or you have to put your apple core into a plastic bag for fear of polluting the atmosphere or the environment in the Antarctic is quite frankly unacceptable,"" he said. ""If that is offending or does offend the Madrid Protocol then I think the Madrid Protocol could be easily amended to ensure after discussions that we could find some acceptable way of disposing of waste on that vast, vast continent."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Two Spanish newspapers that claim they have seen a leaked copy of a secret medical report on General Augusto Pinochet say the former Chilean dictator has suffered brain damage. The Spanish newspapers, <i>ABC</i> and <i>El Mundo</i>, say General Pinochet is suffering from 16 separate ailments that have affected his memory and comprehension. They say the report says that while he is physically fit enough to attend trial, he would have difficulty understanding and answering questions. Britain's Home Secretary Jack Straw used the report, compiled by four medical experts, as the basis for his provisional decision that the former dictator is too ill to be sent to Spain to stand trial. On Tuesday, the High Court in London ordered Mr Straw to disclose the report to the governments of Spain, Belgium, France and Switzerland in the strictest confidence. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The board of the Sydney Organising Committee for the Olympic Games (SOCOG) will today finalise which divisions will be most affected by $36 million in spending cuts. Areas likely to be untouched include ceremonies, sport and the arts festivals. There is a sense of nervousness and dread in parts of the committee about the exact nature of the cuts. With an overall budget of $2.35 billion, this latest round of downsizing still leaves SOCOG with a large budget to do its job. However Shadow Olympics Minister Chris Hartcher who is also a committee director, remains confident about the outcome. ""The Olympic Games are going to be the world's best there's no doubt about that,"" he said. ""The cuts are clearly going to affect it at the edges, they probaly won't be as wonderful as we would have wanted. ""Clearly they will have an impact, but at the end of the day Sydney is still going to deliver to the people of Sydney and the world the greatest Olympic Games the world has ever seen."" Full details of the cuts will be outlined this afternoon and are expected to be approved by the International Olympic Committee's board tomorrow. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Australian golfer Karrie Webb says putting will decide the winner of the Australian Women's Open, starting today at Melbourne's Yarra Yarra course. Webb says the hot and dry conditions make it possible to reach the par-five greens in two shots. She says it will bring into contention those less powerful. ""If the greens are hard to putt as it is and if they get a little faster and we have a little bit of wind, even though you'll be hitting short irons into the greens, you're still going to have to make the putts, and people are going to make the putts, but I think the players that aren't putting well aren't going to be at the top, "" she said. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Federal Government has denied there is any contradiction in the application of the goods and services tax (GST) to different types of contraception. The Opposition says there appears to be no public health argument behind the Government's decision to make condoms GST-free, while spermicide gels will be subject to the new tax. The Minister responsible for Health in the Senate, John Herron, says income tax cuts will make spermicide products more affordable for anyone wanting to use them. ""This is a bonanza for the taxpayer, $12 billion in tax cuts, $12 billion. And if they wish to spend something on spermicidal jellies, which is their right, so be it,"" Senator Herron said. ""I'm happy for them to do so. But I must say, Senator Crowley, when we've got zero population growth and been through it for the last 25 years, it's hardly something I'd be advocating."""

" Meanwhile, the Federal Opposition has accused the Government of wrongly promising caravan residents they will not have to pay a goods and services tax (GST) for their on-site fees. Parliament has been told the promise is contained in pamphlets which are being distributed by the Trade Minister Mark Vaile on the New South Wales north coast. The Treasurer, Peter Costello, says Labor is struggling to understand the detail of the new tax. ""But the general principle, Mr Speaker, is that input taxation will apply. ""And, Mr Speaker, I hear one of the brains trust of the Labor frontbench say they're not GST-free."

" It is claimed an oil shortage will cause oil prices to soar to $40 a barrel by mid year, forcing Australians to pay up to $1 per litre for petrol. The forecast has been made by Professor Michael Economides, the director of US-based OTEK Australia, who accurately predicted last May that the price of oil would rise to about $30 by the end of 1999. He says oil stocks are down to their lowest levels in a decade and the shortage is likely to push up the price of oil for all countries, including Australia. ""I believe it's going to get significantly higher than $30. It could get to $40. It could get even higher, depending on how fast the stocks are depleted. ""Australia's going to have to import oil and there's an international price,"" he said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australia's biggest export earner, the tourism industry, is celebrating a record year in 1999. Bureau of Statistics figures show 4.5 million international visitors arrived last year, up by 7 per cent on 1998's arrivals. The Australian Tourist Commission says the increase is double its forecast growth rate, and almost double last year's average growth in global tourism. The managing director, John Morse, says the figures rose on the strength of a turnaround in the number of visitors from Asia since the region's economic crisis in 1997. ""We lost around 23 per cent of our business out of Asia because of the economic crisis in countries like Korea, Hong Kong, Thailand,"" he said. ""Those countries have rebounded very, very quickly and last year we had a 11 per cent increase. We expect that increase to continue."""

" And tourism industry representatives say a small rise in the number of Australians travelling overseas last year, is good news for the domestic tourism market. The Bureau of Statistics has released figures showing 2.9 million Australians went overseas in 1999, representing a slowdown in growth since 1998. This figure is in addition to the record 4.5 million international arrivals last year. Phil Young, from the Tourism Council, says the combined benefits of rapidly increasing arrivals and a slower increase in departures, is a healthy sign for domestic tourism. ""The domestic tourism industry, I think, is very energised at the moment,"" he said. ""The order books are looking strong. We've got the Olympics coming which will be a fantastic opportunity to showcase Australia. ""In addition to it being good news for the tourism industry, I think it's great for Australians to know more about their own country."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Soaring world oil prices have eaten into Ansett's latest profits. Improved revenues and passenger numbers have been eroded by higher fuel costs. The formerly cash-strapped airline saw its net profit rise 17 per cent, in the six months to December, to $72 million, but the higher fuel and foreign exchange charges led to a big drop in operating profit. The international arm moved into the black, thanks to better performances on the Japan and Hong Kong routes, offset by a downturn on the Bali route during the East Timor crisis. Ansett's executive chairman, Rod Eddington, says the uncertainty of the global economy and fluctuations in the oil price and currency will continue to pose a challenge. Meanwhile, Ansett's half-owner, Air New Zealand says it is confident a deal to buy the other 50 per cent will be sealed with News Corporation within days. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A dam built to contain diesel from a massive fuel spill near Richmond, in north Queensland, has burst. Heavy rains and a strong flow of water through the Namoi Creek meant the dam was unable to hold the water any longer. It is bad news for the environmental impact of the spill, which happened after a train derailed yesterday. Richmond resident Rob Ievers says Queensland Rail (QR) workers have hired a helicopter to assess how far the spill has travelled down the river system. ""The fuel and water have gone down the gully toward the Flinders River,"" he said. ""QR, I've just spoken to John Kehoe, general manager of operations, and he has informed me that they are hiring a helicopter and they're going to go out and have a look at the extent of the spread of the diesel."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The New South Wales Premier has called for a national plan to address the needs of children in their first three years. Bob Carr has told the National Press Club in Canberra prevention and early intervention will have long-term benefits for the whole community. He has asked the Prime Minister to support his request for a national plan to do more research on the best ways of supporting early childhood. The plan would also include development of national indicators on the wellbeing of the nation's young children and the effectiveness of different approaches to supporting them. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Government is waiting for a Senate report before deciding what further action to take against mandatory sentencing. The issue is one of many dogging the government this week in Parliament. The Federal Government is under increasing pressure - including from its own backbench - to support a private members bill to override mandatory sentencing laws in the Northern Territory and Western Australia. Both states have rejected calls by the Federal Attorney-General for them to review their legislation. All depends now on the findings of a Senate committee inquiring into the matter, with its last hearing day tomorrow. The committee's report is due in three weeks and could determine how far the government is prepared to go. Some Coalition backbenchers want a conscience vote on the issue but the Prime Minister has now ruled that out. Federal Parliament sits again today with Labor preparing to renew its attacks on the government's rescue package for National Textiles employees and calls for more assistance for other retrenched workers. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) has dismissed concerns that the price of goods and services will rise above 10 per cent. Yesterday, the Consumer Policy Centre claimed businesses would pass on the cost of implementing the new tax system to consumers resulting in prices rising above the 10 per cent cap. But ACCC chairman Alan Fels says that will not happen. ""We have been saying for many many months that where there are net additional reasonably incurred compliance costs they can be included in prices,"" he said. ""The only absolute limit is that prices can't go up by more than 10 per cent."" ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Irish Republican Army (IRA) is pulling out of negotiations with the independent body charged with disarming paramilitary groups in Northern Ireland. The decision is a serious blow to the peace process. In a statement, the IRA makes clear its anger at last week's decision by the British Government to suspend Northern Ireland's power-sharing administration - which included representatives of the IRA's political wing Sinn Fein. It also expresses anger that a last minute proposal it made to the independent disarmament body did not halt the reimposition of direct rule from London. The IRA says in the light of changed circumstances it has decided to end contacts with the disarmament body, which is headed by Canadian General John de Chastelain. Significantly though, the statement does not indicate that the IRA's two-and-a-half-year old ceasefire is at an end. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Romanian Government is refusing to pay compensation to its neighbours for the cyanide spill at a mine co-owned by an Australian company. At the same time, Hungary is intending to sue the company for damages through Australian courts. The Romanian government had initially played down the effects of the cyanide spill at the Aural gold mine, but with compensation demands flowing in from neighbouring Hungary and Yugoslavia, Romania now says it has suffered more than anyone else and is equally entitled to any restitution. In Budapest, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban told a press conference that Hungary expects to launch several legal actions against Aural gold in both international and Australian courts and was considering taking action against Romania as well. Mr Orban said preliminary studes showed at least 20 protected species had been killed in the Tisza River and that it would take 10 to 15 years for the river to recover. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The two train drivers involved in a fatal collision in the lower Blue Mountains, in New South Wales, last December are expected to be called to give evidence at a public inquiry in Sydney today. The inquiry has already heard from the driver of the City Rail train that preceded the one involved in the fatal accident. Ian Hook has given evidence that all the signals were working properly when he passed through Glenbrook about 10 minutes before the one struck by tragedy. The inquiry has also heard from the station master at Glenbrook for the past decade, William Higgins, who is back in the witness box this morning. Mr Higgins told the inquiry yesterday that if the old signal box at Glenbrook station had been in operation, he might have been able to prevent the accident. He said the indicator board, which has been removed, would have shown that the Indian Pacific train had stopped down the track and he would not have let the City Rail train leave the station. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Administrators of the Sportsgirl-Sportscraft fashion chain say investigations are continuing into the possibility of fraud, relating to ""abnormalities"" in the company's financial accounts. Creditors could receive as little as 12 cents in the dollar if the firm is liquidated. The company's owner, Truworths, will consider a so-called deed of arrangement, giving 800 or so creditors a better payout. Most parts of the chain have been sold, since administrators were called in last November. They are still investigating the reasons for the company's failure, including significant amounts of money missing from the accounts, contributing to $12 million in losses by the end of last year. Asked if any criminal fraud was involved, administrator John Spark was reluctant to reveal much detail. ""The report indicated it was poor accounting and poor management and our investigations are still continuing,"" he said. The corporate regulator is in touch with the administrators. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Actors Russell Crowe and Toni Collette are among the contenders for this year's Oscars, with the nominees announced in Hollywood this morning. Leading a diverse field of movies this morning is the suburban dark comedy American Beauty, up for eight Academy Awards, including best picture. Receiving seven nominations, including best film, were the adaptation of John Irving's Cider House Rules and the corperate media thriller The Insider. That film also gave Russell Crowe a nomination for his role as a tobacco industry whistleblower. Australian Toni Collette received a supporting actress nomination for The Sixth Sense, in which she played the mother of a haunted eight-year-old child. The film itself is in contention for best picture, rounding out that category is the death row drama, The Green Mile. The winners are announced on March 27. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Government and the International Olympic Committee (IOC) have announced this morning they have reached an in-principle agreement on transparent and accountable drug testing for the Sydney Games. The arrangement, based on federal government proposals, were reached last night between Customs and Justice Minister Amanda Vanstone and IOC board member Jacques Rogge. The deal clears the way for cooperation between the Australian Sports Drug Agency and the IOC for out of competition tests in the immediate lead-up to this September's Olympics."

" The Glenbrook rail accident inquiry in Sydney has called its first witness. Ian Hook was the driver of an Intercity train that preceded the one that collided with an Indian Pacific train just south of Glenbrook last December. Counsel assisting the inquiry Christopher Barry QC is calling witnesses in chronological order, in line with the sequence of events on December 2. Ian Hook has told the inquiry he did not encounter any signal failures on his journey between Mt Victoria and Blacktown earlier that morning. He has also told the inquiry the speed limit at the cutting where the collision occurred was 65 kilometres an hour. Mr Hook says if a train needed to stop suddenly, it would need about 100 metres of track in order to do so. The inquiry has also seen video evidence of the train wreckage and the section of track between Glenbrook and the collision site. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Prime Minister has denied he favoured a deed of arrangement to secure workers entitlements at the National Textiles factory in the Hunter Valley because it protected his brother. The Opposition leader Kim Beazley has asked Mr Howard in Parliament whether he was advised by his brother and National Textiles director Stan Howard to support a deed of arrangement. Mr Beazley says a deed of arrangement prevents a liquidator pursuing directors for debts. Mr Howard says he opted for a deed of arrangement as the quickest and most effective way to secure workers' full entitlements. ""It was not designed to protect my brother, it was not designed to protect any of the other directors,"" he said. ""I would remind the house that the Australian Securities and Investment Commission has very wide powers of investigation, including the imposition of civil penalties, including the recovery of compensation, including criminal prosecutions."""

" Earlier, the Federal Opposition was told it never lifted a finger to help workers when their companies went bankrupt. Labor has used the first question time of the year to attack the Prime Minister over his handling of the National Textiles case. Workplace Relations Minister Peter Reith told parliament Labor in government was opposed to helping workers in similar situations. ""When the history of this is written, people will remark on the fact that economic mismanagement led to a million people unemployed, the highest level of unemployment since the great depression, the worst economic circumstances that Australia had seen in 60 years, thousands of businesses going broke and this government [Labor] never lifted a finger,"" he said. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Meanwhile, a Queensland indigenous leader says the laws will be highlighed to the international media during the Sydney Olympics. ATSIC's former social justice commissioner and head of Queensland's Indigenous Working Group, Terry O'Shane, says he is sickened by John Howard's decision not to challenge the laws. Mr O'Shane says he will be carrying the protest to the international community during the Olympics. ""Four thousand journalists will be in Australia at the time of the Olympics and there will be three occasions they will all be together, [at the] Sydney Harbour Bridge, Uluru and Cairns,"" he said. ""In every instance we will be ensuring the 4,000 international media are aware of issues like this, [where the] the supression of the indigenous people in this country is going on while the rest of the world is enjoying the Olympics."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Federal Court in Perth has heard how the late Lang Hancock became fed-up with his wife Rose in the months leading up to his death. Mr Hancock's daughter Gina Reinhart made the comments during evidence as part of bankruptcy proceedings against her father's estate. Mrs Reinhart recounted phone calls to her father, who was in intensive care from his wife who allegedly demanded money and trips overseas for her and a male companion. She told the court her father said he was too old, too sick and too tired to cope with his wife anymore. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Finance Sector Union (FSU) has accused the Commonweath and Westpac banks of avoiding the Federal Government's four pillar banking policy by stealth. Westpac has told the FSU it is considering a joint venture with the Commonwealth which could see the loss of nearly 400 jobs. The FSU says Westpac has only today confirmed during a briefing that there are plans to begin a joint-venture with the Commonwealth Bank. The union said the venture would involve merging back office cheque processing operations. Westpac has told the union about 370 effective full-time positions could be affected by the plan. The Commonwealth has denied such a proposal, but has confirmed preliminary discussions have been held with several parties on a more streamlined cheque process. Paul Schroeder from the FSU says the banks' broader plans have now been revealed. ""We think this is an attempt by Westpac and...[the Commonwealth] Bank to get around the four pillars policy by the Federal Government and we don't think it's something the general public would want,"" he said."

" The Prime Minister will face more heat today over his support for National Textiles workers, when Parliament resumes for the year. The first sitting day coincides with a big drop in the polls for the Coalition. Labor plans to make full use of question time to drive home its criticism of the special treatment given to retrenched textile workers. It wants the government's new entitlements scheme backdated to cover other workers denied their redundancy payouts and may try to amend the relevant legislation. Also today, the government could face the prospect of new demands on the goods and services tax (GST), with the Democrats expected to reveal whether they will push for an exemption on tampons or other health products. The government is starting the parliamentary year on a bad footing, with new polls showing Labor six points ahead of the Coalition. The Opposition will today give notice of its plan to push for a Senate inquiry into the proposed commercial deal between the ABC and Telstra. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Indonesia's powerful military has pledged its backing of the country's President Abdurrahman Wahid after the sacking of former military chief and key Cabinet Minister General Wiranto. The General lost a long running stand-off with his President after being named in a human rights report as morally responsible for atrocities committed in East Timor last year. Yesterday, the President suspended General Wiranto from his powerful Cabinet position, pending the outcome of an Attorney-General's investigation based on the human rights report. The General could be named as a suspect and stand trial. But rather than defend General Wiranto, who was military commander before and after last year's independence referendum in East Timor, the leaders of Indonesia's armed forces have pledged their support for President Wahid, saying he removed General Wiranto in the national interest. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Northern Territory Chief Minister Denis Burke says he has already reviewed mandatory sentencing and will not do it again. Federal Attorney-General Daryl Williams says the Commonwealth is concerned about the sentencing regime and he wants the Territory Government to review it. But Mr Burke says the laws are sound, do not breach international treaties and they are staying. ""If people persist with these sorts of crimes, they will go to jail, so there's no need for a review,"" he said. ""I'll be writing extensively to Daryl Williams outlining the Government position."" -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Government is under pressure to hold a public inquiry into why a senior defence intelligence officer committed suicide. The family of Merv Jenkins, who took his own life while working in Washington, say they want answers. An investigation by the ABC's <i>Four Corners</i> program has revealed Mr Jenkins came under pressure from Australia's Foreign Affairs Department to stop sharing intelligence with his American colleagues during the East Timor crisis. Military intelligence specialist Professor Des Ball says such a request would have made his situation untenable. ""That would have placed him in a very, very uncomfortable position,"" he said. ""On the one hand the Americans would have detected immediately that there had been cuts in the flow, [of information] yet they were continuing to pass to him really valuable, high level and expensive intelligence. ""In return, he must have thought that he couldn't do anything but at least unofficially let them see material he had."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The ABC says it is maintaining absolute editorial control in its $67 million deal to sell online content to Telstra. Shadow Communications Minister Stephen Smith says he is alarmed at news that a quarter of the ABC's revenue from the deal will be spent on co-producing and repackaging content for Telstra. He is calling for a Parliamentary inquiry into the deal. The ABC's general manager corporate strategy, Julianne Schultz, says a draft clause that the ABC ""consider Telstra's reasonable suggestions in relation to the mix and variety of content"" only applies to co-productions. ""We will only make for Telstra product which we consider will be useful and valuable for our own networks,"" she said. ""Telstra does not have any exclusivity in relation to content that will be produced over this agreement and there never will be any news co-productions...news is not available for co-productions, the editorial policies eliminate that - we wold never even countenance that."" --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" ACTU secretary Bill Kelty officially steps down today. Mr Kelty, who announced his resignation last year, has been a union official for 30 years. Mr Kelty had been influential in industrial negotiations during the past two decades, particularly during last year's waterfront dispute. Greg Combet will take his place. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" As the Stuart Highway in the Northern Territory remains closed due to flooding, police say tourists are still travelling north despite warnings the area is inaccessible. Most of the traffic is banked up at Marla, in South Australia's far north, and is fast becoming a headache for police. The Regional Commander for South Australia's Far North Local Service Area, Kym Boxall, says significant numbers of tourists and truck drivers are not listening to warnings. The Stuart Highway has been cut since Friday and three people remain flood-bound in an area just south of the Northern Territory border. Superintendent Boxall says the increasing numbers of motorists stranded in the area is continuing to strain the resources of nearby towns. ""The problems we're facing in Marla as a result of that are not as a result of any of the weather conditions,"" he said. ""At the moment it's the fact that people are still travelling north in an expectation to be able to get through. Coober Pedy again likewise, no problems there except a build up of tourist traffic."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" New timber plantations are to be set up around New South Wales in a deal designed by Japan's biggest power company to gain greenhouse gas credits. Contracts have been signed with the TEPCO Forests company, a newly formed Australian subsidiary of Tokyo's Power Company, for up to 40,000 hectares of forests in NSW. The first plantings of soft and hardwoods will start soon on the north and south coasts. The Tokyo company will use the forests as a trade off when it is required to cut its net emissions of greenhouse gases. State forests will manage the forests and its manager of investment services Tony O'Hara says they will boost local economies as well as the environment. ""Certainly some dollars are coming into the sector because we'll be using dominantly contract personnel to establish the plantations,"" he said. ""There'll also be some revenue for farmers who lease us their land for the plantations. [It's] a pretty exciting first step, it's the first contract we've got of this kind and we're hoping that there'll be quite a few more."""

" The Glenbrook rail accident inquiry in New South Wales has heard that a third train was some 60 seconds away from the collision site when urgent warnings were issued. The inquiry is also hearing tape recordings of conversations between signallers and rail controllers in the minutes before the fatal collision last December. Only some of the relevant conversations were recorded and this is just one of the deficiencies emerging in the control and communications systems now under scrutiny. The inquiry is trying to learn the causes of the collision that killed seven passengers when an Intercity service hit the Indian Pacific on December 2 near Glenbrook in the Blue Mountains. So far, the inquiry has been told a signal failure started the chain of events and that the track where the collision occurred is not covered by a signal system that indicates the position of trains. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Prime Minister John Howard has accused Opposition leader Kim Beazley of hypocrisy over the issue of government help for the workers of failed clothing company National Textiles. Mr Beazley last week accused Mr Howard of creating the perception of a clear conflict of interest, saying he should have handled the issue at arms length because the company's chairman is his brother. The Prime Minister maintains he did that, saying he fully disclosed his brother's involvement at all times. Mr Howard told Sydney Radio 2SM that Labor was being hypocritical because it called for the government to give workers their full entitlements. ""They, in fact, used the family connection to try and embarrass me into providing help and help having been provided they now try and use the family connection retrospectively to try and suggest that I behaved in some way improperly,"" he said. ""I mean, that is rank hypocrisy and I don't think it washes."" Deputy Prime Minister John Anderson says opponents of the Prime Minister's handling of the National Textiles case are un-Australian. Labor intends to pursue Mr Howard's involvement in last week's Cabinet decision to give special compensation to workers from the failed clothing company when Parliament resumes tomorrow. But Mr Anderson says Mr Howard has acted with honour and concern for the workers. ""I think what's being overlooked here is that the Prime Minister of this country is a man with a real heart, I think that's a tragedy, I think that's being overlooked,"" he said. ""You've got a Prime Minister who does care and I repeat I don't believe it would have made a jot of difference if his brother had never known anything about this or had any involvement. ""Instead of him being commended for that, we're seeing all sorts of slurs being cast upon him, his real motivation - I think that is un-Australian."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" But the Northern Territory Country Liberal Party (CLP) says it believes there is still strong public support for mandatory sentencing. CLP president Suzanne Cavanagh says the party is not doing any polling to see what the electorate thinks, but she is confident it has not changed. ""People are very supportive of mandatory sentencing because they think that these criminals should pay,"" she said. ""They don't think that they should just receive a slap on the wrist and be allowed out to do it again."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Australian health authorities say the fight against melanoma must be made a priority of cancer research, with victims of the disease becoming younger. The National Health and Medical Research Council has presented new professional guidelines to better manage Australia's third most common cancer. The council's Professor William McCarthy says 850 Australians are dying annually from melanoma - with half of those between 20 and 50 years of age. He says it is the relatively young age of sufferers which makes the need for research more imperative. ""Other cancers happen in your 60s, 70s or 80s - well at least at that time although a personal tragedy it's not such a community and family tragedy - you're not losing the breadwinner or mother - with melanoma if it gets away from you [it] is killing somebody who's if you like the epicentre of that family or social situation,"" he said. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Retail chain Woolworths is celebrating a sharp increase in half-year profits. For the six-months to the beginning of January, the company has reported a profit after tax and abnormal items of $216.5 million. That is up almost 22 per cent on the previous corresponding period. It has been achieved on revenue growth of more than 9 per cent and Woolworths says sales have since continued their strong trend through January and into the first week of February. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Prime Minister John Howard is under growing pressure to intervene in the row over mandatory sentencing. Coalition MPs will discuss the issue at a party room meeting when Parliament resumes tomorrow. New South Wales Liberal backbencher Danna Vale says many in the party believe the mandatory sentencing laws in the Northern Territory and Western Australia are unjust. ""I think there's considerable support there,"" she said. ""I think on an individual basis there are other liberal members who have a real problem in-principle with mandatory sentencing and I must say it is the principle of mandatory sentencing that I have real concerns with because it does not allow the judges to exercise any discretion whatsoever. ""My goodness...why do we have judges if we don't want them to exercise any discretion?"" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Yugoslav Government says it will join Hungary in seeking compensation for damage caused by a cyanide spill from an Australian-owned gold mine in Romania. The poison is now flowing into one of Europe's greatest rivers - the Danube. The Australian company that holds a 50 per cent stake in the Romanian mine has admitted contaminated water spilled from a tailings dams more than two weeks ago, but has said the claims of the environmental damage have been exaggerated. The poison is still travelling through one of central Europe's major waterways and still killing almost everything as it does. Authorities in northern Serbia say almost 80 per cent of the life in the Tisza is now dead and all fish and water consumption from the river has been banned. The Yugoslav Government says it will seek compensation for what it has described as a catastrophe. Branislav Bramic, the Serbian Environment Minister, said it was astonishing that somebody let something like this happen. Had Yugoslavia done something like this, it probably would have been bombed, he said. The Yugoslav Government says it will take at least five years for life to return to the lower reaches of the Tisza River following the spill. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Northern Territory Department of Transport and Works says central Australia is experiencing its worst floods for more than a decade. Heavy rains have fallen since Thursday, blocking off the Stuart Highway, south of Alice Springs. About 125 people are stranded at the Erldunda Roadhouse, on the Stuart Highway, about 200 kilometres south of Alice Springs. Five vehicles have been isolated between the Finke and Palmer Rivers since Friday evening and hundreds of tourists are unable to move between Alice Springs, Uluru and King's Canyon while the heavy rain persists. The department's Geoff Hood says it will be Wednesday, at the earliest, before the Hugh, Finke and Palmer Rivers have subsided. ""It's probably the worst since '88 and it is got the potential for being worse than that depending on the rain coming in from the north-west,"" he said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Northern Victoria Fruitgrowers Association (NVFA) is hoping to turn around union opposition to the use of illegal immigrants as fruit pickers The Federal Government is considering a proposal from Goulburn Valley growers for illegal migrants from detention centres to be hired at peak demand times. The idea has been slammed by Bill Shorten from the Australian Workers Union, but NVFA chief executive Norm Mitchelmore says he hopes the misunderstanding can be resolved at a meeting later this week. ""As it happens we're talking with Bill Shorten this week, at the end of this week in Melbourne at his invitation, on several matters involving the fruit and vegetable industries and this matter will be raised,"" he said. ""I'm sure we can talk this matter over with Bill as we often do on any of these typical subjects, and I'm sure he'll understand what our problem is."" Queensland's fruit and vegetable growers are cautiously exploring the proposal. Federal Immigration Minister Phillip Ruddock says he will consider the request. Queensland Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association president Paul Zebarth says Queensland's growers suffer from chronic labor shortages at certain times of the year, but admits he has reservations about the proposal. ""I think we need to know exactly where these people are going, at what time of the year and to look at it possibly as a very specific thing rather than a general just spray them all over the place and let them pick fruit and vegetables,"" he said. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Today marks the 25th anniversary of the introduction of the Australian Bravery Decorations, awarded to members of the community who have placed themselves at risk to save others. The Group Citation for Bravery has been awarded to employees at Victoria's Longford Gas plant after the serious gas rupture in September 1998. Twelve staff at the Esso plant battled explosions, fires, intense heat and toxic fumes to activate fire fighting equipment and isolate fuel sources from the fire. At the same time they provided breathing apparatus to their injured and confused colleagues, and helped them to safety. The Star of Courage, for acts of conspicuous courage under great peril, has been awarded to four men this year. Constable Timothy Champion from Hobart was seriously injured when he pursued and caught an armed man in December 1998. Grant Cumming, Robert Miller and William Visser are mentioned for displaying conspicuous courage under the dangerous conditions caused by the Esso gas explosion. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Afghanistan's Taliban Foreign Minister has urged Britain not to grant political asylum to any of the passengers freed from the hijacked Afghan plane. Of the 160 passengers on board the Ariana 727 that was hijacked and flown to Britain, only 17 say they want to return to Afghanistan. According to the British Foreign Ministry, those passengers are expected to fly back to Afghanistan later today. The Taliban militia says granting asylum will only encourage hijackings. Taliban Foreign Minister Wakil Ahmad Mutawakel told reporters in the southern Afghan city of Kandahar that the freed hostages returned to Afghanistan would discourage terrorism. He said a distinction should be made between political and economic asylum seekers, and that Britain risks encouraging Afghans to leave the war torn country. Afghanistan has been plagued by 20 years of fighting and Afghan's make up the world's single largest refugee population. More than two million Afghans are taking shelter in neighbouring Pakistan and Iran alone. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The man who penned one of the world's most popular comic strips is dead. Charles Schulz, the creator of Peanuts, died in his sleep at his home in California. The Peanuts comic strip first appeared in October 1950 and eventually ran in 2,500 newspapers, reaching millions of readers in 75 countries. Charles Schulz's last Peanuts appears in newspapers today, showing Snoopy at his typewriter and a dear friends letter thanking readers for their support. Mr Schulz wrote: ""Charlie Brown, Snoopy, Linus, Lucy...how can I ever forget them"". It ended with his signature. Mr Schulz was suffering from colon cancer. He was 77. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Australian one-day cricket team is off to New Zealand today to play six one-dayers against the home side. Captain Steve Waugh says the team has an opportunity to break some records but he wants the side to stay focused on winning. ""There's a lot to play for over there, we've got the Test and one-day records in sight, Warney's got his record in sight, but we mustn't get too carried away with those great achievements,"" he said. ""We've just got to get the process in place and make sure we play well and they'll look after themselves."" Australia plays its first match against New Zealand on Wednesday. Meanwhile, Queensland opener Matthew Hayden has been cleared of injury and will join the one-day squad. Hayden underwent X-rays on his right wrist after being struck in Queensland's nine-wicket win in the one-day match against South Australia in Adelaide yesterday. Hayden scored an unbeaten 120 in the match and afterwards was given the all-clear to play."

" As Ansett services ground to a halt due to industrial action, Air New Zealand has confirmed it is about to take control of the airline. Air New Zealand already controls 50 per cent of Ansett, with Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation owning the other half. The deal will end 10 months of uncertainty over the future of Ansett. Air New Zealand has a pre-emptive right to buy the half it does not own and used that right last April to prevent News Corp selling out to Singapore Airlines. Analysts say the fall in share prices of both Qantas and Air New Zealand because Virgin Airlines is about to enter the Australian market, has prompted News Corp to strike the deal. Meanwhile, Ansett staff have walked off the job around Australia this afternoon, grounding the airline for up to three hours. Freight handlers, check-in staff and flight planners stopped work to attend meetings to discuss the breakdown of talks over a new enterprise agreement and company restructure. Ansett reservation staff from all major centres stopped work for up to three hours this morning. Talks between the Australian Services Union and Ansett are expected to resume next week. Ansett spokesman, Troy Hey, says the stoppage comes at the busiest time of the week and at least 30 flights have been cancelled. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The head of the Commonwealth Bank has questioned whether the Reserve Bank has an accurate grasp of what impact its interest rate increases will have. Last week, the central bank raised rates by 0.5 per cent, following a smaller increase in November last year. Commonwealth Bank managing director David Murray has told the Securities Institute in Sydney that official rates will move even higher unless a slowdown in business investment occurs to dissuade policy-makers. But Mr Murray says the central bank needs to understand the transmission effect of higher rates, a theme he elaborated on later with journalists. ""I'm saying that there's a transmission effect of monetary policy through the banking system which might, even in competitive circumstances, mean that the outcome for the user in the system will be different from the starting point on the official cash rate,"" he said. ""Therefore, the Reserve Bank should carefully study and understand what that might be if they're to get the monetary policy effect that they were looking to get in the first place."" Meanwhile, the Reserve Bank governor, Ian Macfarlane, has accused critics of last week's interest rate rise of being short sighted. Mr Macfarlane defended the increase at a business function in Melbourne. He said if the Reserve had done what may have been popular, keeping interest rates at a low, as long as possible, and only raising them when things went off track, it would have regretted it in a few year's time. He says this approach fails to realise just how expansionary monetary policy was last year, with borrowing rates very low. The governor has repeated that rates were not tightened because of the goods and services tax. He has again warned of wage demands to cover the new tax, saying lower income taxes will more than offset it and that double compensation could be disastrous for Australia's economy. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Opposition leader, Kim Beazley, has accused Cabinet Ministers of being too timid to make the Prime Minister distance himself from matters concerning the Hunter Valley-based National Textiles. Mr Howard says he disclosed his brother's role as chair of the company before Tuesday's Cabinet meeting, which agreed on a $4 million package to secure workers' entitlements. The Prime Minister says he offered not to take part in the discussion, but Cabinet Ministers felt he should. Mr Beazley says allegations of perceived conflict of interest could have been avoided if Cabinet had asked Mr Howard to leave during the discussion. ""When this matter was considered by Cabinet and he advised them that he had a conflict of interest, a less sycophantic Cabinet would have suggested his exit, and that's precisely what should have happened,"" he said. ""What I say now is this: to assist overcoming those impressions, it would be very wise for him to announce he is placing the entire matter in the hands of the Deputy Prime Minister."" ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The senior Taliban representative in Europe has confirmed that those responsible for the hijacking of an Afghan airliner to Britain will be executed if they return to Kabul. General Rahmatullah Safi says those involved must be punished, either in a British or an Afghan court. He says there is no question of the Taliban asking for the extradition of the hijackers. Prime Minister Tony Blair says a clear signal must be sent that hijacking is not the way to obtain asylum in Britain. At least 60 passengers on the plane have applied for political asylum but the Home Secretary wants to send them home. Opposition leader William Hague agrees: ""We must not allow this country to reinforce its growing image as a soft touch for asylum seekers."" ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Protestant leader of Northern Ireland's power-sharing government insists the coalition is not facing a terminal crisis, even though it could be suspended this weekend. Ulster Unionist Party leader David Trimble has made the comment after talks in Dublin with Ireland's Prime Minister, Bertie Ahern. The British Parliament has passed legislation to take back direct rule of the province, setting a deadline for tomorrow for the IRA to make a commitment to disarm. But Mr Trimble says he is still hopeful of a last-minute statement by the IRA that will save the peace process. ""It is still possible that things could develop positively so that there's quite a different aspect to things on Saturday morning. It might not be of terriby great hope in view of the time available,"" he said. Mr Ahern says he is reluctant to see suspension, but admits it could be the only option available. ""If we can find resolutions now, great. If not, we'll just have to keep at it and we'll keep on working together,"" he said. However, Sinn Fein Assemblyman Conor Murphy says the British are unfairly blaming the current crisis exclusively on the IRA. He says the IRA is not the only paramilitary group or military organisation with arms in northern Ireland. ""The British Government were one of the parties who negotiated the Good Friday Agreement, they have obligations to demilitarise. So far there's been no movement on this important issue,"" he said. ""In some cases, the British Army installations have been refortified. This is completely unacceptable and runs contrary to the Good Friday agreement."" According to an Irish Government source, Trimble and Ahern's talks centred on a possible plan to see Britain dismantling military bases in South Armagh, a republican bastion in Northern Ireland, in return for tangible progress from the IRA on disarmament. The British Government would also make commitments on troop reductions. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The mediator of Victoria's power dispute says there has been a significant breakthrough in negotiations to end the long-running dispute at Yallourn Energy. News of the breakthrough came only hours after the lifting of mandatory power restrictions across Victoria. Government-sponsored mediator Neil Pope has emerged from talks, saying the developments in discussions are a ""terrific breakthrough"". Union officials are emerging at the conclusion of mediation talks in the Industrial Relations Commission planning significant breakthroughs in the 10-month dispute. The Australian Manufacturing Workers Union and Electrical Trades Union have agreed to a nine-day fortnight, 36-hour week and a 10-year compensation package for those workers giving up shift work. They have also agreed to a pay rise of 12.5 per cent over three years. Union secretary Dean Mighell says the agreement is enough to avert strike action at Yallourn Energy this afternoon despite continuing negotiations on contract labour. Premier Steve Bracks called off today's electricity bans amid cooler weather in southern Victoria and more positive news in the Latrobe Valley. ""Effectively every generator is now operating in Victoria and Yallourn is continuing to come on stream and will come on stream further as we go into the weekend. That's very encouraging,"" he said. Mr Bracks says he does not envisage a need to reimpose restrictions in the immediate future. But the Premier was not all smiles this morning, when he announced the bans were being lifted. He criticised the National Electricity Marketing Management Company (NEMMCO) for failing to inform the government excess power in Victoria was sold to New South Wales during the bans. He wants a full briefing from NEMMCO about the sell-off. NEMMCO has admitted it did not tell the Victorian Government about the sale of excess power to New South Wales during bans earlier in the week. The company's spokesman, Paul Price, says the government should have been told. ""If the communication between us and the government needs to be improved then we are happy to look at that and work with them to make sure that that's better in the future,"" he said. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The retailing career of former New South Wales premier Nick Greiner is about to leap onto the Internet. Mr Greiner is leaving Coles Myer to join Internet start-up, d-store. Mr Greiner has been on the board of Coles Myer since 1993 and at one turbulent stage for the company, he assumed the role of deputy chairman. Coles Myer chairman, Stan Wallis, today announced Mr Greiner is stepping down as a director to concentrate on his various other business activities. Among them will be the Internet company, d-store. Mr Greiner is expected to be appointed to the company's board. Launched last November, d-store is a joint venture between Internet directory company, LookSmart, and Rebel Sport. It sells toys, sporting goods, health products, DVDs and videos over the Internet. It is viewed as a competitor to traditional shopfront retailers such as Coles Myer. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" More than 30 Ansett flights will be cancelled across the country today, following industrial action by the airline's airport and freight staff. The Australian Services Union ASU refused to call off the action, after negotiations with Ansett broke down in the Australian Industrial Relations Commission. The ASU says airport and freight staff will walk off the job from 4:00pm AEDT for up to three hours as part of planned national action. Spokesman Paul Burlinson says the dispute is over employment security. ""[It's] Ansett's insistance on having an unlimited use of temporary and part-time employees and an unfettered right to vary the agreement should their competitors introduce any competitive advantages,"" he said. Ansett spokeswoman Jenny Mina says the company cannot suspend the restructure of the business as the union wants. ""To do so would damage and affect staff ultimately,"" she said. Ansett says its main priority is minimising disruption to customers caused by the industrial action. ""It's looking like about 33 flights will be cancelled,"" Ms Mina said. ""It's important that customers where possible call 13-13-00. ""We are doing everything we can to look after our customers and ensure the impact on them is minimised and where possible and get them onto another flight."" \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*"

" The end of the London hijack crisis has been welcomed by Afghanistan's ruling Taliban regime. The supreme leader of the hardline Islamic militia has urged Britain to send the plane and its passengers home immediately. In a statement carried by the private Afghan Islamic Press news agency, supreme Taliban leader Mullah Mohammed Omar has urged an immediate return to Afghanistan of the Boeing 727, the passengers and crew. But Taliban Foreign Minister Wahid Ahmad Mukawahi told reporters in the Afghan capital, Kabul, the hijackers should be dealt with according to international laws, or in whichever way the British Government wants. \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*"

" Victorian Premier Steve Bracks will seek an urgent explanation about revelations excess power in Victoria was sold to New South Wales during the restrictions. The ABC's <i>7:30 Report</i> has revealed the National Electricity Marketing Management Company (NEMMCO) sold Victorian power to New South Wales while Victorians were asked to turn off air conditioners and non-essential appliances, despite heatwave conditions. NEMMCO spokesman Steven van der Mye says the bans meant supply exceeded demand in Victoria. ""The level of demand in Victoria drops dramatically, so within Victoria there is enough capacity to meet the demand,"" he said. But Mr Bracks is angry and says NEMMCO did not tell the government about the transfer. ""I think that's unacceptable. It's something clearly I'll take up with my department and with the regulator,"" he said. The Australian Manufacturing Workers Union and the Victorian Employers Chamber of Commerce and Industry say Victorians should be outraged. \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*"

" The Hungarian Government has rejected claims by Australian mining company Esmerelda that it has exaggerated the environmental damage caused by an accidental spill of cyanide-tainted water. Hungary says the damage bill resulting from the spill will run into many millions of dollars. Hungary's Deputy Foreign Minister Janos Hermans says last week's spill from the Australian-Romanian joint venture gold mine has killed the Tisza River and destroyed a way of life for more than 2 million people. Tonnes of fish have died, drinking water has been affected and scientists fear the cyanide and heavy metal residue from the spill could remain for decades. Mr Herman says his country will use whatever international treaties it can to win restitution for the damage. ""You cannot say that this happened and nobody, absolutely nobody is responsible. There should be somebody who is responsible,"" he said. The Hungarian Government says its initial assessment is that the damage could exceed $15 million. But it says it will be collating all the facts and building a strong scientific case before it takes legal action. \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*"

" Australians appear to be relatively slow in using the convenience of the internet to buy products online with concerns about security one of the biggest deterrents. Although more and more Australians are connecting to the internet, the uptake of electronic-commerce is limited. A treasury report says recent surveys have found that books and compact disks are much cheaper online because retailers do not have outlays such as shopfronts. It says many products can also be delivered online including financial services, software and travel. But Australians still do not trust the new technology partly because it is difficult to get an accurate indication of whether the retailer is reputable. Other concerns include privacy, and security for credit cards used to pay for purchases. \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*"

" United Nations officials in Indonesia are seeking the extradition to East Timor of a militia leader who has been accused of carrying out atrocities there. The man, Moko Soares, was detained by the Indonesian authorities at his home in West Timor. Soares has been charged with the illegal possession and sale of weapons, but is suspected by the UN of involvement in many killings in the Oecussi enclave. Militia members already in custody have accused Soares of ordering them to kill someone connected with the UN, to enhance the militia's standing with Indonesian soldiers. \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*"

" Australian champion swimmer Ian Thorpe has continued his winning style by taking the 200-metres freestyle in the shortcourse world cup leg in Italy. On the second and last night of the meet in Imperia, Thorpe added the 200 to his 400-metres victory, completing the journey in 1:45.87 minutes, well ahead of Igor Koleda of Belarus, who clocked 1:47.05. There were two other gold medals for the Australians overnight. Josh Watson added the 50-metres backstroke to his 100-metres backstroke title, while Dyana Calub easily took out the women's 100-metres backstroke. And breaststroke specialist Phil Rogers went one better than his third in the 50-metres by coming second in the 100-metres."

" About 85 hostages have been released from the hijacked Afghani jet at London's Stansted Airport following face-to-face negotiations with the hijackers. However, 66 people remain on board the jet. About 3:30am local time, passengers began to leave the plane by its rear stairs. Groups of women and children went first, followed by men. Many had their hands in the air. Then the stairs were suddenly retracted. Police later confirmed about 85 passengers had left the plane. Assistant Chief Constable Joe Edwards, of the local Essex police, said those released had been taken to a safe location for health checks and to determine that they were, in fact, hostages. Mr Edwards also confirmed that face-to-face negotiations were going on with two hijackers who left the aircraft about half an hour before the passengers were released. He said negotiations to end the crisis peacefully were at a critical stage. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The head of Telstra has played down speculation the company is about to float key divisions. Ziggy Switkowski says he brought up the issue in the media so it could be debated, but Telstra has no specific proposal to float its key divisions. ""I've come back after several weeks travelling overseas, attending conferences et cetera and talking to other CEOs (chief executive officers) and I think there are some perspectives there that as a management team, we should debate,"" he said. ""But that's well short of either making a decision or recommendation or even getting to the chairman of the board. ""We're nowhere near anything like that,"" Mr Switkowski said. The Federal Government says it has had no formal proposition from Telstra to allow it to sell some of its key assets. The Opposition has raised the matter at a Senate Estimates hearing in Canberra. Labor says it is clear the government is considering privatising Telstra through the back door, by allowing it to float individual arms, such as its online business and Yellow Pages. It has cited comments by Mr Switkowski as one way of getting around Parliament's refusal to allow Telstra's full privatisation. But Telstra executive John Stanthorpe denies there is any such plan. ""It would be detrimental to the shareholders, the whole 100 per cent of the shareholders of Telstra,"" he said. The Communications Minister Richard Alston has refused to rule out the possibility of such asset sales, but has expressed sympathy for Mr Switkowski's stance. ""His concern is that Telstra is in a straitjacket that applies to no other Telco around the world,"" he said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australia's unemployment rate has dropped below 7 per cent for only the second time in nine-and-a-half years. But holiday-making during January looks to have taken precedence over job seeking. In the latest month far fewer people have been looking for work, driving the participation rate down by 0.4 of 1 per cent. That has meant that even though total employment numbers have shrunk unexpectedly, the official jobless rate has also fallen. It now stands at a seasonally-adjusted 6.8 per cent. After last November's 6.7 per cent, it is the best outcome in more than nine-and-a-half years. However the number of people holding down a job during January has dropped by almost 28,000 - a slump of more than 40,000 in the number of full-time positions has been offset by 12,000 extra part-time jobs. Federal Employment Minister Peter Reith says the drop in unemployment is further evidence of the strength of the economy. Mr Reith says while monthly figures will vary, the steady decline in unemployment is continuing. ""The figures making up this month's figures have sort of bounced around a bit, they're pretty volatile,"" he said. ""But generally speaking the Government is on track to meets its forecast unemployment rate by June next year."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" There has been some progress today in negotiations over industrial disputes which have been effecting the coal, transport and electricity industries. In Queensland, there has been a breakthrough in the rail dispute which has stopped the state's trains for two days. Queensland Rail is offering to pay an increase of 3.5 per cent backdated to January and another 3 per cent from next year. It is also offering to talk to the unions again if the goods and services tax increases the cost of living. David Dawes from the Queensland Council of Unions says rail workers will begin returning to work but it will be tomorrow morning before trains are running normally again. Nearly 600 Illawarra BHP miners are also returning to work, ending a 48-hour stoppage over BHP's decision to cut the price of export coal and alleged harassment. However, strike action continues to put tomorrow afternoon's schedule of Ansett flights in doubt. Private talks between the parties are continuing at the Industrial Relations Commission, after failed negotiations last night. Ansett is trying to prevent stopwork meetings by reservation and check-in staff and a 24-hour strike by cargo workers. Talks are also continuing between unions and Yallourn Energy in Victoria, as power restrictions are again put in place. The parties have been locked in private talks since this morning and those talks are expected to continue this evening. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Credit rating agency Standard and Poor's has affirmed its AA rating on Australia's four major banks. The agency says the profitability of Westpac, National Australia Bank, ANZ and the Commonwealth will remain very strong, despite increasing interest rates. Standard and Poor's' Ken McLay says the main risks to the AA category are global trends and non-bank competition. ""What we're saying today is if you look at the Australian banks these trends offshore are making their way to the Australian market, and in some respects they already have,"" he said. ""How banks manage those challenges will determine whether banks remain in the AA category, if they progress up through the AA category, which would be difficult, or if they progress out of the AA category which has been an increasing trend globally."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A computer security organisation has described a recent series of high-profile hacks as mere growing pains for the Internet community. Online computer industry publisher ZD Net is the latest site to be attacked by a hacking action called ""Denial of Service"", in which a site is shut down after being overwhelmed by information. Some of the world's biggest web businesses, including Yahoo, eBay, ETrade and Amazon.com have also been affected. The FBI is investigating, while hacking experts have declared the attacks ""juvenile"". Martin Christmas from Nortel says the hacks are a wake-up call, with Internet users more and more embracing e-commerce. ""Within that we are experiencing growing pains and as such quality of service and security are starting to raise their head as becoming major obstacles, potentially for the deployment of these kinds of e-based services to the mass market,"" he said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" More than 1,000 people have attended the funeral of Melbourne Storm football manager Michael Moore in Brisbane. There were tears and laughter at St Stephens Cathedral. The funeral was attended by sporting identities, Melbourne Storm officials and players, as well as family and friends. Mr Moore, 34, had been with the Storm since its foundation, after time with the Brisbane Bullets and Brisbane Broncos. He was described as a man full of life and fun, who had a great attitude to life and was an inspiration to those who knew him, and a man whose family was all important. Melbourne Storm captain Robbie Kearns says Mr Moore meant a lot to the club. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Major industrial action in three states is affecting the transport, power and coal industries. In Queensland, rail workers have brought the network to a standstill over a pay claim while flights across the country could be disrupted by planned stoppages at Ansett. Victorian power supplies remain threatened by action at the Yallourn power station and in New South Wales BHP's Illawarra coal workers are the subject of a return to work order. Queensland Rail unions face $75,000 fines for defying an order from the Industrial Relations Commission to return to work. The Queensland Premier Peter Beattie has conceded the 48-hour rail strike, now in its second day, is a test for the Queensland Government's industrial relations laws. Mr Beattie says Queensland Rail (QR) will begin proceedings in the Industrial Relations Commission today seeking penalties against the unions for defying a return to work order. QR will also ask for the dispute over its 6.5 per cent pay rise offer over two years to move to the arbitration phase, giving the commission the power to make a ruling and ban any future industrial action. Air travel is also set to be disrupted by industrial action after Ansett failed in its attempt to thwart stoppages which are expected to affect flights across the country. At an Industrial Relations Commission (IRC) hearing in Melbourne, Ansett failed to agree with the Australian Services Union on any resolution. Ansett was trying to prevent stopwork meetings by reservation and check-in staff and a 24-hour strike by freight workers planned for tomorrow. The industrial action is being led by the ASU following a breakdown in negotiations for a new agreement on wages and conditions. The late sitting in the IRC considered three requests by Ansett: to stop Friday's proposed action, to terminate the bargaining period and to sue the union for damages. Meanwhile, the IRC has ordered BHP's Illawarra coal workers to return to work as soon as possible. The workers have continued their strike for another 24 hours after taking part in a wider union campaign against BHP's decision to cut its price of coal. Their union, the CFMEU, says the workers extended the action after alleging BHP officials harassed them for taking part in the strike. BHP has begun contempt proceedings against the coal unions in the Federal Court for staging the strike. While the coal workers have been ordered to return, in Victoria, power problems brought on through industrial action at the Yallourn power station are continuing as temperatures soar. Victorian Premier Steve Bracks is reviewing power restrictions this morning following a revised top temperature for Melbourne of 38 degrees. Mr Bracks says the forecast increased temperatures for Melbourne, Adelaide and Sydney will put an added load on the national power supply. Power unions want the Victorian Government to intervene in the IRC to oppose Yallourn Energy's application to terminate the enterprise agreement with its workers. The CFMEU said termination of the agreement would result in industrial turmoil. Union spokesman Luke Vandermeulin says the unions cannot negotiate with Yallourn Energy with the threat of termination hanging over their heads. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Authorities in the United States are struggling to find those responsible for three days of concerted attacks on some of the biggest sites on the Internet. The latest web business to find itself under siege was broking site ETrade, which says a hacker or hackers flooded its web page for around 90 minutes, slowing service, but not compromising any of its customer accounts. Already this week, popular search engine, Yahoo, news site CNN and Internet Auction Business eBay have found themselves targets for a hacker or hackers, who have tried to overwhelm their computer networks with massive amounts of data being pumped at the sites every second. Authorities have yet to identify the source of the attacks. The FBI has now begun an investigation. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Indonesian security forces in West Timor have arrested a notorious militia leader, who is accused of leading a campaign of terror against East Timorese refugees in the isolated enclave of Oecussi Moko Soares is accused of murdering at least 10 people. The leader of the Sokuna militia, he orchestrated a campaign of terror against the people of the enclave, both before the August indepedence ballot and in the months that followed. Both Interfet forces and UN civilian police in Oecussi believe he is behind the recent cross-border incursions. He is also accused of ordering militia to confiscate goods and money from refugees returning home. Their actions have all but closed border trade between Indonesian West Timor and the enclave for the first time in 25 years. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Refugees are slowly moving back into the Chechen capital Grozny, as civilians emerge from the cellars where they spent the war. They are finding that their city and their homes are in ruins. The people, mostly the old and the sick, are emerging from the cellars for the first time in months and many are grief stricken to find they have no homes left. Those who have returned from unsanitary refugee camps on the border are preparing to move on as there is nowhere habitable in Grozny. The Russian Government will be slow to rebuild the city, however the Chechen rebels have vowed to re-take the city, as they did twice during the last war. Though intense fighting continues in the mountains south of Grozny, to where the rebels have retreated, Russia says it will be withdrawing troops from Chechnya. This will be popular with voters ahead of the Presidential election next month. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Reverend Tim Costello has offered to correct up to 40 inaccuracies concerning his 1998 visit to Western Australia's Pilbara, contained in his recently-published book. Karratha residents have complained that the book <i>Tips from a Travelling Soul-Searcher</i>, misspells the town's name and they are unhappy about references to Karratha as ""the domestic violence capital of Australia"" and a ""slagheap of despair"". The Member for Burrup, Fred Reibling, has demanded a public apology. However, Mr Costello says he was unaware of the inaccuracies and is willing to correct them. ""You send me a list of all the things that are wrong because it's the first I've heard of it,"" he said. ""I'm not going to sort of admit or try and deface things I may clearly have wrong, however, if you send those to me I'm more than happy to correct."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Government says it will fight a World Trade Organisation (WTO) decision against an Australian company which exports to the United States. The WTO has ruled that a $30 million subsidy to the Howe Leather company breaches world trade rules and the decision is retrospective. But the company, which exports car leather to the United States, says it does not see why it should return the subsidy because it did not break any rules. The Trade Minister, Mark Vaile, says the government is very annoyed about the decision and will take further action to support the company. ""We are going to work through this difficult situation with Howe Leather and the Americans,"" Mr Vaile said. ""I've got officals flying to Washington next week to have some negotiations with the USTR (United States Trade Representative) on this issue. ""We will work through it for the sake of the 700 Australian jobs that are involved in this company."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Israel's Foreign Minister says Lebanon will be set ablaze if Hezbollah guerillas launch rocket attacks on Israeli towns. David Levi addressed diplomats in Jerusalem after a second night of Israeli air strikes on another three towns in Lebanon. ""If katyusha rockets fall on our towns the soil of Lebanon will burn, Lebanon's interests will be in flames,"" Mr Levi said. But as Israelis from the country's north have fled south, or taken to bomb shelters, Hezbollah is concentrating on attacks on Israeli soldiers in south Lebanon. France, which has sharply criticised Israel's air strikes and the United States, which has blamed Hezbolalh provocation, both want to move the conflicts to diplomatic channels, with a meeting of a truce monitoring committee. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australian swimming officials are calling for blood testing to be implemented in time to be used to expose drug cheats at the Sydney Olympics. Australian Swimming president Terry Gathercole says blood testing would avoid such problems as occurred last week at the World Cup meet in Berlin. Several swimmers, including Australia's Ian Thorpe, were angry with the testing procedures after being asked to provide urine samples in non-tamper proof containers. Gathercole says Australian scientists are working hard to devise a conclusive doping test. ""I just hope our researchers can you know, bring this to a 100 per cent conclusion so that there is no doubt then with the IOC [International Olympic Committee] or anybody else, saying it's not a conclusive test,"" he said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" There has been a major development in the hijack crisis at Britain's Stansted Airport with four hostages escaping from the plane. Essex police have confirmed that four men have jumped to safety from the cockpit window of the hijacked Afghan airliner which has been on an isolated runway at the airport for nearly two days. The men, who were all wearing dark clothing, immediately ran towards a hangar where police have a command post. They have been speaking to police about the conditions on the aircraft and are being given medical checks. The police have not disclosed whether the four men were passengers or crew members, but they are insisting that the situation on the plane appears to be calm. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Industrial Relations Commission has recommended BHP's Illawarra coal workers return to work as soon as possible. The workers have continued their strike for another 24 hours today after taking part in a wider union campaign against BHP's decision to cut its price of coal. The Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union says the workers extended their action after alleging BHP officials harassed them for taking part in the strike. Meanwhile, BHP has begun contempt proceedings against the coal unions in the Federal Court today for staging yesterday's strike. The matter has been set down for three days before the Federal Court on April 18. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Prime Minister has been accused of pampering his brother by contributing a $4 million payout to retrenched National Textile workers in the Hunter Valley. A former miner at the CSA copper mine at Cobar in western New South Wales hopes the Federal Government will set up a meeting with Cobar and Woodlawn workers, who have also lost entitlements. Miners from the defunct Woodlawn operation near Goulburn and CSA copper mine in Cobar are owed more than $7 million in entitlements. Former Cobar miner Tony Chaplain says the main reason these workers have missed out on full payouts is because their companies did not have the Prime Minister's brother as a chairman. He says he will try to rejuvenate the campaign for retrenched CSA and Woodlawn miners, but is pessimistic they will ever receive their complete entitlements. ""I don't think so and that's the great shame of it,"" he said. But the Prime Minister said yesterday he has kept at arms length from his brother on the issue of National Textiles and has gone out of his way to get others to deal with the company. Mr Howard said the fact his brother is involved has not made it more awkward for him. The Prime Minister also defended his brother, saying he is a person of total integrity and has conducted his business life with complete honesty and integrity. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Taxation commissioner Michael Carmody says the Federal Government's business tax changes will be seen, in years to come, as the most significant improvements to the tax system ever made. He has told a Senate committee the changes will make the system for small business much simpler. Mr Carmody says business has not begun to realise the scope of the change. ""That is something that I believe just hasn't sunk in in all the reform that's going on,"" he said. ""You know, for the bulk of business that is a phenomenal change, and from our perspective a great change because it makes our operations so much more straight forward."" Meanwhile, Mr Carmody says he would support moves to ban tax advisers who do not meet their personal tax responsibilities from giving advice. Mr Carmody told the Senate committee he has become so frustrated by people who attempt to manipulate the system by doing things such as repeatedly declaring themselves bankrupt, that he will name them in the Australian Tax Office annual report. He said he would welcome a recommendation by the committee that prohibits tax professionals who do not meet standards of probity from giving advice. ""I would be quite happy with a recommendation that says that professional advisers aren't meeting their tax responsibilities in some of the ways we've talked about that it would be inappropriate...[for them to be] giving tax advice,"" he said. ""I don't see how they can divorce themselves from their behaviour."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Australia's peak union body has given qualified support to the Federal Government's latest proposal to protect workers' entitlements. However, the ACTU is still calling on the government to go further. The ACTU regards the government's Employee Entitlements Support Scheme as an interim and immediate arrangement pending examnination of a compulsary insurance model to protect workers' entitlements. The government yesterday announced it was establishing a safety net fund which will give workers up to $20,000 towards lost wages and other dues. It is also planning tougher laws against employers who leave their staff without protection. The ACTU's secretary-elect, Greg Combet, says the overall and individual caps put forward mean that many workers will only be partially compensated and the funding of the scheme absolves employers from their legal obligations to pay entitlements. Mr Combet has called again for a national fund, paid for by a 0.1 per cent levy on employers. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" There has been a renewed call for the Federal Government to get tough on local companies that damage the environment overseas. A project half-owned by an Australian company has spilled cyanide into a Hungarian river, poisoning the drinking water of more than two million people. The Democrats and Greens say Australian companies should not be able to exploit overseas environments and not be held to account. Greens Senator Bob Brown said nothing was done after the Ok Tedi disaster in PNG, and this time the government must act. ""There is now precedents for this, child abuse in another country, a child abuser in another country can be brought to dock in Australia, an environmental abuser in another country should equally be able to be brought to dock in Australia,"" he said. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Power company, Yallourn Energy has questioned whether a Victorian Government-appointed mediator should be involved in a fresh round of talks between the company and Unions. Neil Pope oversaw three days of failed talks aimed at ending the State's power crisis. The State Government says Mr Pope will work with the Deputy President of the Industrial Relations Commission, Iain Ross, when a new round of mediation starts tomorrow. But Yallourn Energy chief executive Mike Johnston has criticised Mr Pope for comments he made to the media when the initial talks broke up. ""We believe that by making the comments Neil has publicly and to the extend that he has since the mediation process, that he effectively ruled himself out."" ""If the Government wants to continue to use Neil Pope we would have no problem with that,"" he said. Meanwhile, power restrictions will be lifted at 7:00pm AEDT. The Premier, Steve Bracks, says the Government is satisfied there is sufficient capacity for electricity supply to the State. However, he says the situation will be monitored in case of exceptional circumstances, such as high temperatures or equipment breakdown. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Australian sides competing in this year's Super 12 rugby union competition have the chance to share in $300,000 in bonuses if they make the finals. If New South Wales, Queensland or the ACT finish first or second after the regular season, they will get $75,000. A total of $50,000 will be available to domestic teams that finish third or fourth. There is a further $100,000 on offer if an Australian side wins the final. The money will come from an Australian Rugby Union sponsorship arrangement. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Sacked workers on the National Textiles picketline at Rutherford, in the Hunter Valley in New South Wales, have welcomed a $6 million assistance package from the State and Federal Governments, but say the fight is not over yet. The two governments will each contribute $2 million to help make-up the shortfall in entitlements owed to the 300 former National Textiles employees and the Federal Government has given a further $2 million for a retraining scheme. The deal still depends on the company meeting its commitment to cover the rest. Workers are worried about a move by major creditor Scottish Pacific Business Finance to block the sale of National Textiles assets to a rival clothing manufacturer. Meanwhile, Prime Minister John Howard says National Textile workers should support the deed of arrangement to ensure they receive the proposed $7 million in assistance promised by the government. However, he has told Sydney Radio 2UE, workers can expect to receive the government's funding shortly. ""Our $4 million will be made available straight away,"" he said. ""We'll be sending people up to the Hunter to start talking to people about their retraining. ""There will be no delay in government money but it is the whole thing is conditional on the deed of arrangement being approved,"" Mr Howard said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The union at the centre of the coal industry dispute says it is not concerned BHP is planning to take it to court. BHP says the coal miners union (CFMEU) is in contempt of a Federal Court order by going ahead with a snap 24-hour strike over BHP's coal contracts with its Japanese customers. But the union's Tony Maher says the company does not have a case and the action is nothing more than an anti-union strategy. ""I have got no doubt that if this company tries to push an anti-union strategy they will fail and I think in their hearts they know that,"" he said. ""The fact is that this company doesn't have the hearts and minds of its workforce. ""It is bad decision-making, it's bad for the company, it's bad for jobs, it's also bad in the long run for share holder returns,"" Mr Maher said. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Another hostage has been released from an Afghan airlines plane being held by hijackers at London's Stansted Airport. The release came as police negotiators warned the crisis could continue for some time. A man, who is said to have been feeling unwell with a respiratory disorder, was released by the hijackers. He is the ninth person to be freed since the Ariana Airlines Boeing 727 landed at Stansted on Monday. It is believed 156 people, including 21 children, 14 crew and an unknown number of hijackers remain on board the aircraft. Police say the hijackers are yet to make any political demands, although it has been speculated they may be trying to obtain the release of an Afghan opposition figure, jailed by the country's ruling Taliban militia. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" As fighting continues in the south of Chechnya, there are allegations that Russian troops are executing civilians in the capital, Grozny. The allegations have been documented by the international monitoring group, Human Rights Watch. Human Rights Watch claims it has evidence of eight incidents over the past month in which unarmed civilians were shot at point blank range. It says 22 people died and it is investigating further allegatinos from witnesses of other murders of civilians. Human Rights Watch has also documented allegations of rape and looting, and is calling on Russia not to let these crimes go unpunished. ---------------------------------------------------------------"

" Sinn Fein president Gerry Adams says the Northern Ireland peace process is in crisis. The comment came as the British Government prepared to suspend the power sharing Government in Belfast. Legislation to return Northern Ireland to direct rule from London is being rushed through the House of Commons by the British Government, in response to the failure of the Irish Republican Army (IRA) to begin surrendering its weapons. But Gerry Adams is adamant that the suspension of Northern Ireland's new democratic institutions will not resolve the arms issue. Speaking after talks with British Prime Minister Tony Blair, Mr Adams declared that taking power back from Northern Ireland to London would show that the Blair Government was following the agenda of the pro-British Ulster Unionists. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Hungarian Government is looking at taking action against a partly Australian-owned mining company for what it calls an environmental disaster. The government says two large cyanide spills have killed 10 tonnes of fish and poisoned a quarter of Hungary's drinking water. The Aural gold mine is a joint venture 50 per cent owned by the Australian mining company Esemerelda and 50 per cent owned by Romanian interests. On January 31 heavy rain and snow caused a tailings dam to burst and leak cyanide into tributaries of the Thiesse River, one of the biggest in Hungary. Since then, there has been a second spill and the Hungarian Government says it has measured cyanide at 700 times the normal level. Hungarian Government spokesman Gabor Horvath says it is an environmental catastrophe and Hungary will be looking for restitution. ""Ten tonnes of fish, no drinking water for a number of cities, an environment devastated and rare species terminated forever,"" he said. A source at the company has confirmed that what was described as a diluted spill has occurred and says the company is still assessing the damage. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Indonesia's President has begun a two day state visit to India, designed to strengthen political and economic ties between the two nations. Presidnet Wahid is trying to develop joint ventures between India and Indonesia in small to medium industries, as well as the tourism and energy sectors. But while strengthening ties with the world's largest democracy, President Wahid is also facing questions about political problems at home. Speaking to reporters on his arrival in Delhi, the Indonesian President repeated his demand that General Wiranto resign from his post as Security Minister, following the former Army chief's implication by two independent reports of human rights abuses during last year's violence in East Timor. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" University graduates are being told to improve their independent and critical thinking if they want a successful career. The Federal Government has released a survey of employer satisfaction with graduates. The AC Neilsen survey found that while most employers were happy with the performance of graduates, three quarters of those who applied for jobs were considered unsuitable. Employers say the main reason they take on graduates is because they believe they will bring fresh ideas and thinking into the organisation. But the report says graduates need to improve their creativity, oral communication and problem solving skills if they are to become more attractive in the job market. The Education Minister, David Kemp, says the study is a valuable tool for universities, to make courses more relevant to the labour market."

" The Prime Minister has announced a $4 million assistance package to ensure sacked textiles workers get their full entitlements. The government will provide $2 million and New South Wales another $2 million to cover outstanding payments for 300 workers retrenched from National Textiles in the Hunter Valley. The funds are conditional on a deed of arrangement to be signed by all relevant parties. Mr Howard says the government will also provide $2 million to help the retrenched workers retrain. He says the government is being more generous because of special circumstances. ""It is the obligation of governments to pursue agendas of economic change and reform because they are beneficial to the overall community,"" Mr Howard said. ""But it is also the obligation of governments where people are hurt through no fault of their own, as a consequence of that economic change and reform, it's necessary to give a bit of assistance to those people,"" he said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" British negotiators dealing with a hijacked Afghan airliner are putting their faith in patience as they try to orchestrate a non-violent end to the drama. The plane, which was originally on a domestic flight from Kabul, has been parked on a runway outside London for more than 24 hours with no end to the crisis in sight. Despite the fact that the airliner has been staked out by camouflaged troops, the British authorities are indicating that they would only resort to storming the plane if the hijackers start harming the hostages. However, police are saying that their patient tactics could mean the crisis will continue for days. The hijackers have allowed supplies of medicines, drinks and food to be brought onboard, including the 157 hostages' first hot meal which included roast chicken and grilled fish. Afghanistan's Taliban Government has said that while the British authorities are free to negotiate with the hostages, the Taliban itself will not give in to any demands. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The mining union says it will start a campaign of non-cooperation against BHP following its decision to drop the price of coal. BHP says its coal miners in Queensland have returned to work already, despite the continuation of the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union's (CFMEU) snap 24-hour strike announced yesterday. However, BHP's Illawarra coal workers have decided to continue their strike action for another day, claiming they were intimidated and harrassed by the company overnight. The union's Tony Maher says that action is not endorsed by the CFMEU but the company will still experience further disruptions. ""No more negotiations on agreements, no negotiations on their log of claims that they have served on us, and every opportunity we get to make life difficult for them then that is what we will do,"" he said. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Australian Democrats have renewed calls for the Federal Government to means test the private health insurance rebate, after a massive increase in the cost of the scheme. The 30 per cent rebate for holders of private insurance was predicted to cost $1.5 billion a year by 2003, but the government has increased the forecast by another $800 million. Health Minister Michael Wooldridge says he is delighted by the increase, which proves the rebate is working. Democrats leader Meg Lees says a means test would help direct more money into the public hospital system. ""I'm sure the government is delighted that more people are taking out private health insurance,"" she said. ""But hopefully they're not delighted at the drain on the budget and hopefully they're not delighted at the risk that this poses to the public health system, particularly to public hospitals."" ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Government has accused the Victorian Government of not being strong enough during the state's power dispute. The Federal Workplace Relations Minister, Peter Reith, says Victorian Premier Steve Bracks failed to use federal laws to end the dispute and prevent electricity disruptions. Yallourn Energy workers have ended their four-week strike but power restrictions are in place until 7:00pm tonight. While Mr Bracks admits he should have acted sooner, Mr Reith has further criticised his handling of the dispute. ""When it comes to the crunch, he's not actually seeking arbitration of the dispute,"" he said. ""When he's been criticising the system of not providing arbitration he himself has actually refused to take advantage of the arbitral powers of the decision under 170MX and the only reason that he's doing this is because as usual he is very influenced by what the unions want and don't want."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Indonesia's General Wiranto, under pressure to quit the government since he was implicated by an independent report in human rights violations in East Timor, has defended his role as commander of the military. But General Wiranto has left open the possibility of stepping aside. In an interview with the Singapore-based <i>Straits Times</i>, General Wiranto is quoted as saying he would not accept personal or legal responsibility for any crimes committed by his troops. He said that in Indonesia a decision to resign from the Ministry would be seen as an admission of guilt following his implication in a human rights investigation for violations in East Timor. But according to the <i>Straits Times</i>, he left open the possibility he would quit if President Wahid demanded it when he returns from overseas next week. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A study of the former Labor government's employment programs has found that wage subsidy programs were of more assistance to jobseekers. Researchers at Curtin University examined labour market assistance programs between 1994 and 1997. They found evidence to suggest the programs led to long-term work, and not just short-term or ""dead end"" jobs. Of the labour market programs considered wage subsidy programs were found to have the most favourable impact on participants, followed by brokered employment programs, job search assistance and training programs. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" In harness racing, Courage Under Fire has been installed as odds-on favourite for Saturday night's Interdom grand final, at Moonee Valley. The bookies are quoting five-to-four on for Courage Under Fire, after it drew barrier two in the million-dollar race. Second favourite is Slug of Jin at seven-to-two, starting from barrier four. The number one barrier went to Kyema Kid, which comes into the race with a win over the favourite to its name."

" Eight hostages have been released so far as a stand-off continues at London's Stansted airport where armed hijackers are in control of an Afghan Airlines jet. It is thought 21 children are among 150 passengers and crew who remain on the plane which was seized on a flight from Kabul on Sunday. Meanwhile, as British police attempt to negotiate an end to the drama, Afghanistan's ruling Taliban militia say they will put trained guards on all flights of the state-run airline. This is the first hijacking of an Ariana plane and Taliban officials are hoping to make it the last, with the deployment of trained guards on all flights. It is not clear what additional measures will be put in place to improve security on the state-run airliner. After more than 20-years of war in Afghanistan, there is no money for x-ray or other electronic security equipment. Airport security checks are done by hand, if at all. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Federal Cabinet will today wrestle with two big challenges facing the Government - country petrol prices and a safety net scheme for workers. Cabinet meets in Canberra today for the first time this year. Cabinet Ministers will be doing the sums on how the government can meet its promise that the goods and services tax (GST) will not increase petrol prices, especially in country areas. The government has acknowledged its plan to cut the petrol excise by seven cents a litre will not be enough to offset the GST as pump prices soar. The government may have to endorse a much bigger excise cut and accept a huge loss of revenue, to ensure nobody is worse off. Cabinet will also weigh up a proposed new compensation scheme funded by taxpayers for workers who lose their entitlements when companies go broke. But budget constraints or Cabinet opposition might curtail the scheme in favour of tougher laws on companies to meet their obligations to workers. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" NATO has rejected claims that it breached international humanitarian law during its 11-week bombing campaign of Kosovo. The allegation has come from the Human Rights Watch group. Throughout the Kosovo campaign, NATO said it was doing what it could to prevent civilian casualties, but a report released by the Washington-based Human Rights Watch says that if proper procedures were followed, the final civilian death toll could have been halved. After a six-month investigation, Human Rights Watch says NATO violated the Geneva convention both in the selection of targets and the use of cluster bombs and has estiamted that at least 500 civilians died. NATO secretary-general George Robertson rejected the claim. He insisted that all necessary precautions were taken at all times to limit civilian casualties and says there was no alternative but to use the cluster bombs. Lord Robertson says NATO acted to defend international law that was being breached at the time by Serb forces. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The final budget of the Clinton Presidency has been submitted to the United States Congress. In contention is what to do with the billions of dollars of projected extra revenue produced by the booming US economy. President Clinton's budget proposes using $550 billion for tax cuts and, among other programs, spending about $440 billion on expanding health insurance coverage and subsidising drug costs for the elderly. The President wants to accelerate repayment of public debt, aiming for its elimination by 2013. ""This budget in short makes really strong and significant steps toward achieving the great goals that I believe America should pursue in this new century,"" he said. But already the election year budget has been attacked by Republicans as a fantasy. Congressional leaders have criticised the expansion of government programs and called for more of the surplus to be used for tax cuts. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Victoria still faces power restrictions today despite Yallourn Energy workers going back to work last night ending a four-week shutdown. Unions have reluctantly voted to comply with a State Government order after mediation failed. A small crew worked through the night to ensure Yallourn Energy's return to full output at a date yet to be confirmed. Restrictions remain in place today and tomorrow between 1:00pm and 7:00pm AEDT. Union spokesman Dean Mighell says workers feel betrayed by the Bracks Government's order to return to work. ""I would call on this government to start looking at what pressure it can put on the instigators and the protagonists, not on the workers,"" he said. The Premier says he understands the union's position. ""They have not deserted Victoria and I will not desert them either,"" he said. The Industrial Relations Commission is awaiting a progress report from the parties on Thursday before it considers arbitration. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The head of what is to be Australia's biggest independent television production house says there will be no loss of Australian identity in making shows for international markets. The new firm combines the resources of Channel Seven and Artist Services, which is owned by the British media company, Granada. The deal allows Seven to outsource production, reducing costs while staying in the business. Executive chairman Kerry Stokes says crucially, Granada will pay the new group's overseas distribution allowance. ""This gets over the problem like the ABC recently had with <i>Seachange</i>, where the ABC could only pay for the Australian rights and it was in jeopardy until Granada agreed to subsidise the overseas rights,"" he said. The current head of Artist Services, Steve Vizard, who will chair the new group, says Granada will be involved in all phases of development with a view to maximising overseas sales. ""I think we're not going to see any loss of identity, in fact to the contrary, we're going to see better Australian production values, better Australian stories,"" Mr Vizard said. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Researchers at the Royal Melbourne Hospital believe they have developed new technology to combat the debilitating effects of strokes. A team of neurologists, physicists and radiologists has been studying a new process of resonance imaging to diagnose stroke patterns in the brain. The hospital's neurology department's Professor Steven Davis says the procedure provides information not available with traditional CT scans. He says it will enable doctors to measure the level of brain tissue damage to provide better treatment options. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" World swimming champion Ian Thorpe is considering flying to London from Berlin, to undergo an independent drug test, amid fears a test carried out in Germany could be declared invalid. Swimming Australia has called on the world ruling body to launch an investigation into drug testing procedures at the Berlin World Cup. Five swimmers, including Thorpe, were asked to supply urine in containers that were not tamper-proof. Thorpe clocked a world shortcourse 200-metres freestyle record in Berlin yesterday, amid the drug testing furore. For the record to be validated, Thorpe must supply a sample within 24-hours."

" BHP's entire coal operations will be hit by a 24-hour strike from this evening following the company's decision to drop its coal price. Australian coal producers, led by BHP, have accepted price cuts on hard coking coal to Japan of about 5 per cent this year. The Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) has announced the snap strike in retaliation. After much speculation, BHP settled the terms for its annual coking-coal contracts today, arguing the decline reflects price discounting by some suppliers, and an increased capacity from new mines. The CFMEU says the decision will cost hundreds and possibly thousands of jobs. The union's Tony Maher say BHP has betrayed the faith of its workers. Queensland coal producer MIM Holdings is not saying much about the outcome of the latest coal price negotiations other than that it is ""prepared to meet the market"". BHP says the decline reflects price discounting by some suppliers and an increased capacity from new mines. Japan's biggest coal buyer, Nippon Steel, earlier said it would buy 2 million tonnes less coal than last year, with preference given to producers who would agree to the price cuts. MIM says it is a cost efficient producer and will meet the market. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A hijacked aircraft with at least 140 hostages aboard has landed at Stansted airport, north of London. The plane, which belongs to Afghanistan's state airline, was seized yesterday during an internal flight. It is thought up to 10 hijackers armed with guns are demanding the release of Ismail Khan, the former governor of Afghanistan's western Herat provice, who has been imprisoned by the country's Taliban rulers. A specially trained police team is attempting to negotiate with the hijackers. The Boeing 727 arrived at London's Stansted airport just after 2:00am local time. Stansted - one of the five airports that serve the British capital - is specially equipped to deal with hostage situations. After landing, the aircraft taxied for several minutes before coming to a rest in a secluded area about 800 metres from the main terminal building. The plane had flown from Moscow, where it is believed about 10 passengers were released during a refuelling stop. Several passengers were also released by the hijackers during two earlier stops in central Asia. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Australian Broadcasting Authority (ABA) has found Sydney radio station 2UE guilty of close to 100 breaches of broadcasting law and codes of practice. The cash for comment affair has led to new licence conditions being imposed on 2UE. The ABA found that broadcasts by announcers John Laws and Alan Jones involved five breaches of the Broadcasting Services Act and another 95 breaches of the commercial radio code. The head of the inquiry, Michael Gordon Smith, said the breaches involved a failure to properly identify political material and separately, failures to disclose relevant facts and to ensure that ads are not presented as news. 2UE will now face new standards of disclosure of commercial arrangements. Mr Gordon Smith also referred to the broadcasters at the heart of the inquiry and their own submissions about disclosure of their commercial arrangements. The panel has not accepted the submissions of Mr Laws and Mr Jones on these issues. The ABA's recommendations follow a lengthy investigation into practices at 2UE. The ABA inquiry began last October, after the ABC's Media Watch program revealed a contract between Mr Laws and the Australian Bankers Association for favourable comment about the banking industry. The inquiry started with ABA chairman Professor David Flint, at the helm, but he later stood down after being interviewed on the Laws program. A panel, led by ABA member Michael Gordon Smith, replaced him. The inquiry sat for 17 days and heard from 27 witnesses. It concluded in early December with the authority's legal counsel urging conditions be placed on 2UE's licence. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A big national union is calling for a public inquiry into a proposed commercial deal between the ABC and Telstra. The two organisations have been negotiating over the sale of ABC material to a Telstra website. Graeme Thompson from the Commonwealth Public Sector Union says there should be parliamentary scrutiny of every aspect of the deal, so the public can judge the effect on the ABC's independence. ""If groups like Telstra can come in and stitch up deals with the ABC, the ABC is going to find it very, very difficult to turn the blowtorch on those organisations if they need to and maintain their editorial independence,"" he said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Opposition claims the Government is undermining its own health objective to promote breastfeeding, by applying the goods and services tax (GST) to breast pads and pumps, but not to infant formula. Labor Senators have questioned Health Department officials on the application of the new tax to health products, during a committee hearing in Canberra. A departmental policy officer has told the committee that breast pumps and pads are not eligible for GST exemption because they do not treat illness or disability. Labor Senator Sue West says many women would fiercely contest that view. ""So a poor woman suffering from mastitis and needing a breast pump, or cracked nipples and needing a breat pump to express, so that she can continue the child on breast milk, but give the nipples a bit of a rest, that's not a disease or a problem?"" she said. ""Ouch! I can see a whole lot of the audience behind you squirming."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" About 50 sacked workers from the National Textiles factory and other unionists have taken their protest to the Eastern Sydney waterfront home of the company's chairman, Stan Howard. The workers, who set up a barbeque on the beach outside Mr Howard's Point Piper house, are owed $11 million in entitlements after the Hunter Valley factory closed last month. Federal Cabinet will consider a rescue package for the workers and legislation to protect workers' entitlements tomorrow. Dave Evans, who had worked with National Textiles for eight years, told the crowd their struggle was for all workers. ""We are all struggling but what I want you all to know is that we are not just doing it for our entitlements, we are doing it for everybody's entitlements and if they give us 99 per cent of our entitlements at National Textitiles we are bloody staying there till we get 100 per cent,"" he said. ""We will get legislation for every person in Australia."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The head of one of Australia's leading defence systems companies has attacked the media over their negative coverage of the development of Collins class submarines. The managing director of Celsius Pacific, Tommy Hjorth, says people fail to understand the submarines involve groundbreaking technology that comes with its own set of problems. Speaking at the Undersea Defence Technology Conference in Sydney, Mr Hjorth says he has never seen anything like it. ""I've never before witnessed such a vitriolic, sustained and unjustified public attack on a defence project as has been the case with the Collins class,"" he said. ""That problems exist has long been documented and acknowledged, however the level of criticism sometimes borders to hysteria."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" An airliner hijacked inside Afghanistan has landed in Moscow after a flight that took it across the former soviet republics of central Asia. Trucks and buses loaded with commandos, police and rescue teams have converged on the airport. This is the second hijack linked to Afghanistan within six weeks. But while the Air India flight, hijacked on Christmas Day was directed into southern Afghanistan, this is the first hijack of a domestic Afghan flight There are more than 150 people on board and conflicting reports as to the number of hijackers. An Afghan news agency reports that there are six hijackers armed with knives, pistols and grenades, seeking the release from prison of an opposition leader detained by the ruling Taliban since 1997. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Marathon talks to resolve the dispute which is slashing Victoria's power supply have failed. The company at the centre of the dispute, Yallourn Energy, has rejected a resolution package put by independent mediator Neil Pope. That package included penalties for day shifts and ensured unions would be consulted on the use of contractors. But Yallourn Energy's chief executive Mike Johnston said it was not good enough. ""We were asked to operate a closed shop in terms of the use of contractors, which we are advised would leave us exposed to legal action,"" he said. He says the company can do nothing more to encourage striking workers to return to work. ""We have made it clear to them from day one of their industrial action, if they are prepared to work normally, they could come back to work immediately,"" Mr Johnston said. ""We have been shut down for four weeks without any revenue coming in, that has cost us many millions of dollars, we desperately want to get our power plant back and satisfy the needs of Victoria."" But the union spokesman, Dean Mighell, is outraged. ""We've got members that have been without pay now for 29 days and we've got a state that could be facing electricity shortages,"" he said. ""I hope everyone knows that this company has walked away from this agreement."" After 24 hours of discussions, the dispute is back to square one. The company wants to send the matter back to the Industrial Relations Commission (IRC) but the unions do not want to go. Yallourn Energy has withdrawn the lock-out notices and will apply to the IRC to have the bargaining period lifted, and to implement an arbitrated solution. The Premier, Steve Bracks, has been unavailable for comment. However, Cabinet is expected to consider the situation later this morning. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" Police say a passenger train in Germany was speeding at more than 100 kilometres an hour when it derailed south of Cologne, killing at least nine people. The express sleeper train had left the Dutch city of Amsterdam carrying people to ski resorts in Switzerland. The engine hurtled down an embankment with several of the front cars and hit a house. Dozens of passengers were injured when one car of the train flipped on its side and another was crushed against a steel post. Police have said that more bodies might be buried under wrecked coaches that are yet to be cleared. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The New South Wales State Government is being urged to close the border to southern poultry products following an outbreak of Newcastle disease in northern New South Wales. The Queensland Egg Farmers Association says the outbreak near Tamworth, is just 300 kilometres away from the border and poses a real threat to the state's $200 million poultry and egg industries. Secretary Ivy Inwood says there are legitimate claims for a border closure to all New South Wales poultry imports. ""Now there will be repercussions out of that from chicken meat and growers in New South Wales, but we've asked the government to kindly take into consideration, to protect the growers from Queensland from this disease, because it's coming north all the time,"" she said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Israel's Prime Minister Ehud Barak has promised retaliation against the Hezbollah group in south Lebanon after an upsurge in attacks there. In the latest fighting, an Israeli soldier was killed and six were wounded by a bomb blast. Five Israelis have been killed in south Lebanon in the past few weeks. Only 13 died there in the whole of last year. Mr Barak today said Israel was going to hit Hezbollah. Pressure within Israel for the government to retaliate has only grown after a weekend attempt to assassinate a Hezbollah leader failed. Mr Barak repeated his determination for Israel to withdraw from Lebanon by July and said he remained confident about reaching peace with Syria, despite the situation in Lebanon and the suspension of talks. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The football manager of the Melbourne Storm has drowned in an accident in Auckland Harbour. Michael Moore, aged 35, had been at a bar after the Storm's loss to the Auckland Warriors where celebrations were in full swing for the America's Cup yacht race. Reporter Barry Swift from Wellington's <i>The Dominion</i> newspaper says the death has been described by police as a tragic skylarking incident. ""Apparently according to police in the early hours of the morning, Mr Moore who'd been drinking at a bar at Princess Wharf, was seen to jump up from his table and simply leap over a barrier and into the water,"" he said. ""Unfortunately for him it appears that he hit his head on a pontoon or something similar and he just didn't resurface."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A ferret, who bit a Brisbane policeman's genitals, is recovering after being struck on the head with a baton. The Fortitude Valley officer is also on the mend after the unpleasant attack. Police confiscated the ferret yesterday afternoon, after charging its owner with possession of prohibited wildlife. An officer was asked to transport the pet to a wildlife refuge, but during the journey it escaped its confines and bit the officer on the penis. A police spokeswoman says the officer then hit the animal with his baton to subdue it. The ferret is recovering at the refuge while the bruised officer is now back on the job. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australia has won its first round Davis Cup tennis match against Switzerland in Zurich. In the second reverse singles match, Mark Philippoussis defeated George Bastl in five sets 6-7, 6-4, 3-6, 6-3, 6-4. Earlier this morning, Lleyton Hewitt defeated Roger Federer in four sets to square the tie at 2-2."

" Police in Thailand have detained up to 10 people suspected of being involved in the murder of a Victorian man and the serious wounding of his female companion last week. They have also posted a reward over the attack on Kelvin Bourke, 23, from Swan Hill and Sheri McFarlane, 26, who remains in hospital with stab wounds. A close friend of the couple, Martin Graham, says a letter to the families from the Australian embassy detailed the circumstances of the attack on the couple. He says they were camping in the Chaing Mai National Park when they were ambushed. Mr Bourke was shot in the head as he investigated a noise outside the couple's tent last Thursday. Close friend Martin Graham says the murder has shattered the Bourke family. He says Kelvin was a popular man. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Queensland Labor Government has survived a twin electoral test to hold onto its one-seat parliamentary majority. The ALP had resounding victories in two by-elections held in State seats yesterday. Labor needed to win both the seats of Bundamba and Woodridge to cling to its slim majority. And although both had been Labor strongholds for two decades, Premier Peter Beattie says it was a tough battle. ""There is still a disillusionment in the electorate to the major political parties,"" he said. ""We've overcome a significant part of it. The results show that tonight. But we've still got work to do."" Labor's biggest challenge came in Woodridge, where an Independent captured a third of the vote. Meanwhile, with One Nation still deregistered in Queensland and not contesting the polls, it was left to its political off-shoot, the City-Country Alliance, to test support. But it reached only 14 per cent of the primary vote in Bundamba and a meagre 2 per cent in Woodridge. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Government says it is prepared to be flexible with the implementation of the goods and services tax (GST). The Small Business Minister, Peter Reith, concedes the GST is creating confusion amongst many business owners, prompting the government to embark on its biggest-ever education campaign for a tax change. He has told Channel Nine he is expecting a sudden increase in the number of new business registrations in the coming months. ""Well, we are certainly monitoring it and are we flexible? Of course we are,"" he said. ""We have an objective and that is to provide a quality education all the way up until they fill out the first form - 21 days with a three-week grace period after the operation of the GST on the first of July. So that's three or four months in. ""If we need to do anything else, I'll be in Cabinet arguing for it I can assure you of that."""

" Meanwhile, the One Nation Party has called for a Senate inquiry into the GST. The party's leader, Pauline Hanson, says One Nation wants the GST abandoned because it believes it is unfair and inequitable. The party has also released a nationwide petition against the new tax regime. Miss Hanson, who is in Adelaide, says the party is seeking support from the business sector. ""I think business operators are very important because they employ a large percentage of the workforce. Business operators are the ones who are going to be targeted very heavily with this GST,"" she said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Talks to try to resolve a dispute at the Yallourn Power Station in the La Trobe Valley continue today with the Victorian Government ready to invoke emergency laws if there is no settlement by tonight. The dispute has disrupted power in Victoria and South Australia during the past week. Negotiator Neil Pope says there is goodwill on both sides, but unions and Yallourn Energy are deadlocked on the use of contract labor. ""This is still about some fundamental issues which we still have not resolved,"" he said. ""The discussions have been constructive, but we still have not resolved those fundamental issues and therefore I am not creating any expectations. Whilst they're sitting there I still hold out hope."" Yallourn energy chief executive Mike Johnston says the issue of contract labor threatens a $500 million plant upgrade and development of a new coal mine in the La Trobe Valley. ""These are tough negotiations, there's some very difficult issues that are being addressed, but I know all parties are putting a lot of work into it,"" he said. Union spokesman Dean Mighell says even if the company goes ahead with plans to lock out hundreds of workers this week, the dispute will not spread to other power stations. ""We will contain it to Yallourn enemy not Yallourn Energy because they are the enemy, not the people of Victoria,"" he said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Irish Republican Army (IRA) has warned it will not begin to disarm in response to demands from the British Government or from Protestant Unionists. But the paramilitary group has also said it remains committed to the ailing Northern Ireland peace process. In a statement released in Dublin, the IRA said it believed the current impasse over disarmament could be resolved, but this would not be on the terms demanded by Britain or Protestant Unionists. That appears to rule out even a token act of disarmament before the end of this week, when the British government has threatened to resume direct rule of Northern Ireland, if there is no movement on the arms issue. The IRA also rejected claims that it had given London and the unionists an undertaking that there would be some disarmament by the end of January. A crucial report, delivered last week by the independent body charged with removing paramilitary weapons from Northern Ireland reported there had been no disarmament by the IRA, leading to accusations of betrayal. But the IRA said it had not betrayed anyone. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A number of federal politicians representing regional areas in New South Wales have joined together to support the aviation industry in their electorates in the wake of the fuel contamination crisis. Several thousand light aircraft were grounded late last year after a batch of Mobil avgas was found to be contaminated. The MPs from Riverina, Farrer, New England and Parkes, have issued a joint statement saying they have full confidence in the charter aircraft cleared to fly again. The Member for Riverina in the State's south-west, Kay Hull, says it is time to remind people that many aircraft operators are back in business. ""It's a case of having enormous amounts of publicity whilst the aircraft were going through the difficult time,"" she said. ""But now that a lot of these aircraft have been cleared, there has been no publicity given to say 'look, we are cleared, we're back in the skies, and we are carrying passengers and freight again'."" Meanwhile, the largest aircraft to be grounded by the avgas scare takes to the skies today. The historical Lockheed Super Constellation leaves Sydney's Bankstown Airport for Hobart this morning. Special tests were needed to ensure the huge fuel tanks on the aircraft, built in 1955, were cleaned of the Mobil contaminated fuel. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The future of the financially-troubled Gloria Marshall chain of weightloss and fitness centres is expected to be known by early next week. In recent days, 16 of the company's 45 national outlets have closed. Four remain open in South Australia. Voluntary administrator John Irving says the benefits of an offer aimed at keeping the company afloat are still being assessed. Under the plan, clients would qualify for a half-price deal if they purchased new programs. Last month more than 11,000 customers paid an extra fee of $65 to keep the company running through January. Mr Irving says it will be up to parent company, the Banksia Group, to decide if the response to the latest offer is good enough to take further. ""If they do proceed, then the creditors meeting to be held in a week or so's time will have to consider that proposal and vote on it. If they don't proceed, then unfortunately the likelihood is that the business will close down,"" he said. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The ABC is finalising a $67 million deal with Telstra, which would see the national broadcaster provide news and other material for Telstra's Internet site. But the deal could open the way for the ABC to share in the profits of advertising. Confidential talks have been going on since August and are expected to continue for another three to four months. The proposed five-year deal means the ABC will provide repackaged news and programs for Telstra's main Internet site, with extra staff to be put on to deal with the increased workload. Managing director Brian Johns says while the basic $67 million fee is not dependent on advertising revenue, one proposal is that in two years time, the ABC Board may change the rules to allow advertising to run alongside ABC material other than news, with the ABC getting a cut of the revenue. ""We will be in complete and utter control of that material,"" Mr Johns said. ""The integrity of that material will not be affected and under no circumstances, there's no prospect whatsoever of advertising being sold around our news."""

" However, the ABC has been criticised over the alleged secrecy of the deal. Dr George Blair West from the Queensland Friends of the ABC says the negotiations should not have been kept secret as it is an issue that should be talked through with all stakeholders. ""It's our ABC, not Mr Johns',"" Dr West said. ""It's the Australian people's instrument and this sort of issue needs to be discussed openly. ""I think we'll get a better outcome. ""I understand that there are financial and business ramifications, but in the ABC you just can't cut corners and make decisions on things that can influence its whole future activities."""

" The staff-elected representative on the ABC Board, Kirsten Garrett, says the proposed deal raises important issues about public broadcasting. She says it is not appropriate that discussions have been secret. ""But, of course, once you start getting into any important deals with any commercial partner then everything becomes commercial in confidence,"" Ms Garrett said. ""I think that in itself has huge dangers for an organisation that is publicly accountable. ""The most important thing is editorial control of past, present and future content and I think that should be up for public discussion."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Opposition says the aged care sector has been privately informed that the goods and services tax (GST) will apply to nursing home accommodation, contrary to Government assurances. The Opposition says the Australian Tax Office (ATO) has told aged care organisations that under the legislation, accommodation bonds and charges will be slugged with the 10 per cent tax. The Shadow Minister for Family Services and the Aged, Senator Chris Evans, says people entering nursing homes may have to pay an extra $6,000 a year, despite assurances that the sector will remain GST-free. He says the Government must legislate to exempt the industry from the tax. ""The ATO is now advising that under their interpretation bonds and charges paid to nursing homes to maintain the capital needs of the industry are subject to the GST,"" Mr Evans said. ""Costs will become even more prohibitive - it's expensive and difficult to get a bed now - with a GST imposed on it some older people won't be able to access the medical care they need."""

" The Federal Government says it totally rejects Senator Evans' claim. A spokesman for the Minister for Health and Aged Care, Michael Wooldridge, says aged care accommodation payments, including bonds and charges, will be GST-free. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Immigration Minister, Phillip Ruddock, has warned potential refugees to ignore claims from people smugglers that they will be welcome in Australia. Mr Ruddock has played down reports that 1,200 detainees at the Curtin Detention Centre near Derby are on a hunger strike. The detainees claim they have not eaten since Wednesday and that immigration officials have been treating them poorly. Officials at the centre say the number of people on the hunger strike is fluctuating. However, Mr Ruddock says many of the people are still taking meals and the claims are exaggerated. He says people are being misled by people smugglers that they will be welcomed with open arms and be allowed into the community upon arrival. He says the detainees should be using the opportunity to warn friends and relatives not to attempt the dangerous ocean trip to Australia. ""This is not the honeypot that has been held out to you by the people smugglers. It's a pretty grim situation and one in which we don't yet know whether we're on our way back."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Queensland Labor Government could be forced back into minority status today, after facing twin by-elections in state seats. Labor needs to win both polls to retain its one seat majority in the Queensland Parliament. The seats of Bundamba and Woodridge have been Labor strongholds for decades and while the ALP appears set for an easy win in Bundamba, that may not be the case in Woodridge. Labor's former state secretary is running there, but he has been overshadowed by the seat's former Labor member who was committed to stand trial on child sex charges, midway through the campaign. Premier Peter Beattie admits it has been difficult. ""I haven't exactly been a happy little chappy as you know, I mean I haven't been my normal self."" Mr Beattie says Labor will need every one of its supporters to stick by the party to win the seats. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Two Olympic athletes will appear before a parliamentary committee next week, to express their concern over the delay in passing tougher drug importation laws. Nicole Stevenson and Mike McKay will appear before the Senate committee inquiring into the Customs, Criminal Sanctions Bill. The swimming and rowing stars represent the Australian Olympic Committee's (AOC) Athletes Commission. The AOC says they are concerned at the delay of the legislation, which deals with the importation of performance-enhancing drugs. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" There will be a new entry in this year's Chinese New Year parade in Sydney tomorrow. For the first time, a group calling themselves Asian Lesbian and Gay Pride, will march officially along with 1,000 other participants. Spokesman Yoichi Takayama says it is an important moment for some in the Asian-Australian communities. ""I think many Asian communities are still quite conservative, in particular in gay and lesbian issues,"" Mr Takayama said. ""I think they don't want to talk about it. ""In normal western society it's more like gay rights type of thing but gay rights, lesbian rights are very weak in Asian communities. We are telling the world we are here and we are normal, just like anyone else."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Teenager Roger Federer has beaten Mark Philippoussis to score a shock four-set victory and draw Switzerland level with defending champions Australia in the Davis Cup first-round tie in Zurich. Federer stunned Philippoussis 6-4, 7-6, 4-6, 6-4 to pull the Swiss level after Australian number one Lleyton Hewitt had earlier beaten George Bastl 4-6, 6-3, 6-2, 6-4. Tomorrow's doubles now pit Swiss pair Federer and Lorenzo Manta against Wayne Arthurs and Sandon Stolle. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Federal Cabinet next week will consider what help can be given to sacked workers from the National Textiles plant in the Hunter Valley. Prime Minister John Howard announced the move during talks with a delegation of workers in Newcastle. Mr Howard spent an hour with the workers and says he sympathises with them. ""I understand they are going through a lot of hardship and the Government is very sensitive to that,"" Mr Howard said. He says Cabinet will discuss the worker's entitlements and proposals to retrain them. The five workers who attended the meeting say they were pleased the Prime Minister listened to them and happy with the proposal he put forward."

" Meanwhile, the Federal Opposition leader Kim Beazley says Mr Howard's efforts to recover workers entitlements are too little too late. He says Mr Howard promised he would have a guarantee for workers entitlements in place by the beginning of this year. ""The guarantee is not there,"" Mr Beazley said. ""The proposition which shifts the burden from employers to taxpayers does not even scratch the surface of what workers entitlements are and what they've lost in cases like the National Textile Workers."""

" The receiver for the National Textiles plant says it is possible workers may not receive as much money as thought. Earlier this month, workers were told they would receive 60 per cent of their entitlements after the plant folded. In a statement released this afternoon, National Textiles Receiver and Manager, Vince Barilla, says the sale of the company to Scottish Pacific Business Finance may not go through. Scottish Pacific Business Finance is the largest creditor to National Textiles. Mr Barilla says Scottish Pacific has already subsidised the payment of employees' wages by releasing more than $200,000 from its security. He says it cannot continue, as releasing more money might prejudice its position. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" It has been confirmed that last year's Christmas rush boosted consumer spending to record levels. In raw figures, turnover registered by the nation's retail outlets during December, jumped to $15.9 billion. Although that is up 29 per cent from November, when seasonally adjusted it represents a decline of 0.4 per cent. And that is a weaker outcome than had been generally anticipated by financial markets. But inflation-adjusted figures for the entire December quarter, show a rise in turnover of 1.4 per cent, which implies a solid contribution to economic growth. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The South Australian Government is being asked to explain why power generated in that state was sent to Victoria yesterday, when many local areas were enduring forced blackouts. South Australia's Opposition leader, Mike Rann, says he wants the government to provide details about how much power was sold to Victoria, when, and the effect on local supplies. Mr Rann says South Australians should not have to endure load shedding if the savings are going interstate. ""Surely the priority of an electricity system in South Australia should be to serve the needs of local industry and local citizens, not serve the interests of customers interstate,"" he said. ""It appears that we have a situation where they were actually selling power interstate at the same time that there were blackouts here in South Australia. ""I think that someone in the government needs to explain why."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Pilbara unionists have voted unanimously to push ahead with their campaign to force BHP Iron Ore to negotiate a new collective bargaining agreement. Australian Council of Trade Unions secretary-elect Greg Combet addressed about 200 workers at a stop-work meeting in Port Hedland this morning. The resolution to come out of the meeting welcomed a decision by BHP to consider negotiating a new collective agreement. Mr Combet says the company indicated that decision at a meeting in Melbourne last week. BHP has maintained it will not consider a new enterprise bargaining agreement at this stage but will await the outcome of its appeal against an injunction preventing it from issuing further individual contracts. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The two Melbourne law firms whch have launched class actions against Mobil over the contaminated fuel crisis are joining forces to fight the company. This follows the questioning by Mobil of the validity of one of the Supreme Court rules under which the action has been brought. The law firms say Mobil is arguing the case on technical legal grounds, in a bid to delay proceedings. Lawyer Bernard Murphy says the firms have decided to unite to ensure a speedy conclusion."

" Reassurances have been given about the safety of aircraft cleaned of contaminated fuel, despite a manufacturer's recommendation to replace an engine component rather than rely on cleaning alone. Thousands of light aircraft have been grounded by contaminated Mobil avgas but many are returning to the air after being cleaned. Bill Hamilton, the president of the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association, says a major manufacturer of aircraft carburettors is recommending the part be replaced, before guaranteeing engine safety. Mr Hamilton says many operators will replace the part, despite the Civil Aviation Safety Authority clearing aircraft regardless. He says that does not mean aircraft with old carburettors are unsafe. ""I don't necessarily agree personally with some of these engineers,"" he said. ""I believe that aircraft that are flying are, in fact, serviceable. However, those who are responsible, perhaps I might say those who know far more about aircraft engineering than I do, have said 'no, the aeroplanes are back on the ground'."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Alan Bond faces an anxious wait for the High Court to rule on a legal technicality which could see him released from prison. The High Court has reserved its decision on whether his prison sentence should have been increased. Bond was jailed in 1997 for his role in the billion-dollar Bell Resources fraud, initially for four years. That was then increased to seven years after an appeal by the Commonwealth. But Bond argues he was charged with state offences and the Commonwealth had no power to appeal against his sentence. Solicitors for the Federal Government, Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions and the Western Australian Government have argued the powers do exist and Bond should not be able to raise what is a new issue in the High Court. In a last-minute move, the Commonwealth has announced plans for a motion calling on the court to revoke the special leave granted to allow the hearing to go ahead. If Bond wins the case he will be elligible for parole under his original sentence. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Adam Gilchrist has scored a quick-fire 51 to get Australia off to a good start in the second one-day cricket final against Pakistan at the Sydney Cricket Ground. Australia has moved to 1 for 161 after the 25th over. Mark Waugh is on 44 and Ricky Ponting 47 yet to score. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" \*More blackouts in store for central Vic\* \*Bond's prison term appeal continues in High Court\* \*China tells Australia to tighten illegal immigration laws\* \*Britain issues ultimatum over N Ireland home rule\* \*Senate may review Federation Trust projects\* \*Coalition accepted reluctantly by Austrian leader\* \*PM to meet sacked National Textile workers today\* \*Hewitt in opening singles for Davis Cup tie\* \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_Scroll down for more\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Central Victorians have been warned they face more blackouts as the heatwave conditions continue. More than 100,000 Powercor customers were without electricity for up to two hours yesterday afternoon as selected feeders were shutdown to save dwindling supplies. Powercor's corporate affairs manager Hugo Armstrong says people should minimise their use of power and prepare for more blackouts lasting up to two hours. He says with increasing demand and limited supplies, it is not possible to give people more warning. ""We simply had to switch feeders very quickly with virtually no notice,"" he said. ""We apologise for that but we had no choice in the matter. ""The other option was for far greater areas of Victoria to be turned off without notice which would have quite possibly jeopardised services like hospitals and things like that."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" A hearing into whether Alan Bond's prison term should have been increased continues in the High Court today. Bond's lawyers say the Commonwealth appeal which saw his sentence increased from four to seven years, was invalid because the charges were based on state laws. Bond was jailed in Western Australia for his part in the billion dollar Bell Resources fraud in the 1980s. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" China is urging Australia to tighten its laws that deal with the arrival of illegal immigrants. Australian immigration officials have visited the most popular departure spots on China's south-eastern coastline. In an interview in the state-run China Daily, a top-ranking official with the Public Security Bureau warned that lax laws in Australia and Canada were encouraging more Chinese people to risk the voyage to gain residency. Recently a Foreign Ministry spokesman said immigrants often told lies about conditions in China so they could stay. An immigration official attached to the Australian Embassy in Beijing is believed to have recently been in the southern Fujian province to assess the resettlement of hundreds of Chinese nationals, being returned home from Australia. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The British government has formally signalled its intention to resume direct rule of Northern Ireland if an impasse over disarmament is not solved soon. The move follows a key report which concluded that the Irish Republican Army (IRA) has not started disarming. Britain's Northern Ireland Secretary, Peter Mandelson, is to introduce legislation which will give him the ability to suspend the province's fledgling power-sharing government. Mr Mandelson said it was simply unacceptable that groups like the IRA had not begun to disarm yet, but he stressed there was still time to find a solution to the crisis. Mr Mandelson's move is aimed at heading off threats by Protestant Unionists to deliberately wreck the power-sharing government. Unionists are angry because they believed they had an understanding with Catholic Republicans, that the IRA would have started disarming by now. Meanwhile frantic talks are continuing between the British and Irish Prime Ministers and the Northern Ireland parties in an eleventh hour bid to defuse the crisis. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Australian Democrats are not ruling out a Senate Select inquiry into whether projects under the Federation Trust, were politically biased. The Auditor General has completed a report into 60 cultural and heritage projects, which Labor has alleged targeted Coalition held seats. The report has not upheld the allegation, but criticised the Government for announcing so many Coalition seat projects during the 1998 election campaign, and delays in documenting reasons for its decisions. Labor says there are still serious questions, although the government says it has been cleared. Democrats Senator Andrew Murray says the party will review the matter before deciding whether to support an inquiry. ""What was running prior to this report was quite strong but until we've seen the report, I couldn't tell you whether there will be an inquiry, neither could I tell you until we've seen the proposed terms of reference,"" he said. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Austrian President Thomas Klestil, has reluctantly agreed to approve a controversial new coalition government. The President had initially delayed approval because of concerns at the inclusion of the anti-immigration, anti-European Union, far-right Freedom Party. Its leader, Joerg Haider, angered the international community by applauding Adolf Hitler's employment policies and calling veterans of the murderous Waffen SS,""men of honor"". The European Union has threatened to isolate Austria diplomatically if the coalition is sworn into office. However, President Klestil has been forced to approve the coalition, despite having some misgivings. He has already expressed concern at the prospect of allowing the far-right Freedom Party to take part in a new goverment. In an attempt to ease his concerns and the concerns of the international community, the two new partners have signed a declaration acknowledging Austria's responsiblity for the horrendous crimes of the Nazi era. The declaration also commits the goverment to work for an Austria in which xenophobia, anti-semitism and racism have no place. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Prime Minister has bowed to pressure and agreed to fly to Newcastle today, to meet sacked workers from the National Textiles plant. Mr Howard is on a tour of regional Australia, and until now has refused to meet the workers. Three hundred workers are yet to be paid any of their entitlements and are expected to get only 60 per cent of what they're owed, over two years. After ignoring repeated requests to meet them, the Prime Minister last night agreed to a stopover at the Newcastle airport this afternoon to talk to a handful of workers. But, the Textiles, Clothing and Footwear Union says a busload of workers will still meet the Prime Minister on the New South Wales mid north coast this morning, as originally planned. Worker Brian Blakemore says they just want a fair hearing. ""All we want this guy to do is just talk to us, just have a yarn to us,"" Mr Blakemore said. ""We've tried every way to get him to come down to us, but if he won't come down to us, it looks like we're going to chase him around the globe."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Lleyton Hewitt will play the opening singles rubber for Australia in the weekend's Davis Cup tie against Switzerland in Zurich. Hewitt will meet George Bastl, while Mark Philippoussis and Roger Federer will clash in the second singles match. Wayne Arthurs and Sandon Stolle have been named as Australia's doubles combination. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Federal Health Minister, Michael Wooldridge, says patients will not miss out on magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), despite the removal of Medicare benefits for the procedure. The Medicare rebate has been removed until investigations into the 1998 MRI radiology scam are concluded. Dr Wooldridge has refused to comment on yesterday's claims by the Opposition that six radiologists involved in confidential pre-budget meetings in 1998, ordered 15 MRI machines before the budget introduced further rebates. The Minister says no one is missing out on the benefits of the diagnostic technology, despite the removal of rebates from around 50 machines, until the issue is settled. ""We have funded MRI and 100,000 people will be getting scans on Medicare this year,"" he said. ""It's absolutely available and there are still 70 machines around Australia, with a good access in regional Australia, I might say as well, where people can go and get their scans on Medicare. ""There's plenty of MRI machines around that people can access,"" Dr Wooldridge said. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Cheryl Kernot has returned to work at her electorate office in the seat of Dickson on Brisbane's northside. Ms Kernot says she is easing back into the job after a three-month absence due to illness. She will resume her work full-time next Wednesday but is planning to take things a little easier this year. ""[I'll] pace myself better, ask myself what's the most essential thing I have to do today and work on the balance between representing the electors of Dickson, which means electorate functions, and portfolio work,"" she said. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Virgin Airlines says it is prepared to accept a loss in its first three years of operations in Australia. The airline will spend $200 million over the next five years establishing its headquarters in Brisbane and setting up a maintenance and call centre base. It initially plans to service the Brisbane-Sydney-Melbourne route, offering cut-rate fares in competition with Qantas and Ansett. Virgin Australia's chief executive officer, Brett Godfrey, says the company may consider a public float once its operations are established. ""Virgin will look to share in its hopeful good future but we need to basically show you a good future first,"" Mr Godfrey said. ""I would say in two or three years, if we've turned the corner, we plan to lose most of our investment over that period, in two or three years time. ""When we see the corner come, we'd be very happy to take it to the markets and share some of that with the Australian Stock Exchange."" Mr Godfrey has also indicated Virgin will expand into other areas besides the aviation industry. The company has confirmed it will base its airline in Brisbane but says it also has interests in the entertainment and communication sectors. Mr Godfrey says Queensland has offered the company a competitive operating environment and it is planning a long-term business venture. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Lawyers representing the Commonwealth have told the High Court in Canberra the federal Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) was entitled to appeal against the sentence imposed on Alan Bond. Bond is challenging the increase in his sentence from four to seven years. Bond says the Commonwealth lacked the power to increase his sentence because he was indicted on state offences. But lawyers for the Commonwealth say some of the charges were also relevant to federal law. Counsel for the Commonwealth DPP has told the High Court the person who instituted the appeals for the Crown did have the authority by statute and the Commonwealth has also argued there is an absence of any legal provision saying otherwise. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Western Australia's Youth Affairs Council has criticised the WA Government's so-called ""three strikes"" burglary legislation during a Senate inquiry hearing in Perth today. The inquiry is looking at the impact of mandatory sentencing on indigenous communities and whether it breaches Australia's international human rights obligations. The Youth Affairs Council's justice spokesman, the Reverend George Davies, says the legislation does not allow judges to consider the circumstances that lead to offences. He says mandatory sentencing is not a solution to crime. ""It's, of course, counter-productive to be intimidating young people, threatening them and locking them up because they will, in fact, become more of a danger to the public,"" he said. ""The idea of deterent and protecting the public is very misleading and simplistic."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Australia's credit markets remain fearful of steeply rising interest rates a day after the Reserve Bank's pre-emptive strike against inflation. But there is a view the markets are jumping at shadows. Yesterday's 0.5 per cent rise in official interest rates was an innoculation against overheating in the economy and as such its pre-emptive delivery should reduce the need for much bigger adjustments had they been delayed. But pricing in the bank bill futures market indicates a belief rates will climb a further 1.7 per cent by year's end, 1 per cent of that by mid year. Macquarie Investment Management's chief investment officer Greg Matthews says that would represent a total rise of 1994 proportions. But Mr Matthews says Macquarie believes the market is getting ahead of itself. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Australian vice-captain Shane Warne says he is looking for another early bowl in tomorrow's second one-day final against Pakistan at the SCG. After Glenn McGrath claimed three early wickets, Warne was brought on in the first 15 overs against Pakistan in the first final, won by Australia by six wickets. ""[There are] a few batsmen there that we like to come on early to,"" he said. ""We don't think they play leg spin very well but when you get a couple of top wickets, under pressure, it's important for the next people to back up because they can easily get away. ""They're a good side. They've got batters all the way down to number nine."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Federal Government has foreshadowed major cuts to Australia's refugee and resettlement intake, because of the impact of people smugglers. The matter was raised by the Immigration Minister, Philip Ruddock, in Darwin last night Speaking at an Immigration forum, Mr Ruddock suggested Australian courts interpret refugee status criteria more generously than the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. He said people who arrived illegally and then applied for refugee status had a better chance of succeeding in the courts than those who lodged applications overseas. He says the high level of people smuggling is threatening many of the 12,000 places on Australia's refugee intake, at the expense of more needy applicants. ""When it's really going to matter is when the refugee program is halved,"" he said. ""That's when it's going to matter, that's when it's going to bite."" Mr Ruddock also failed to rule out the prospect of children being jailed for people smuggling. The maximum penalties for the offence were increased by Federal Parliament late last year, amid an influx of suspected illegal immigrants in northern Australia. Mr Ruddock asked whether children who offend could be imprisoned and stressed age is not the only factor sentencing judges need to consider. ""But it is equally important that in weighing up any of those factors, that the courts are aware that there are very significant penalties that are available to them and deterrent is a very important factor for them also to take into account,"" he said. Mr Ruddock has just returned from a visit to Indonesia and the Middle East to discuss people smuggling. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Two medical organisations have called for more post-mortem examinations to be performed in Australia, in the wake of the conviction of a British doctor for the murders of 15 patients. The Council of Procedural Specialists says if some of those patients had had post mortem examinations, alarm bells would have started ringing much earlier. Australian Medical Association (AMA) president Dr David Brand says he is concerned that there has been a marked decline in the number of post-mortem examinations being performed in Australia in recent years. ""I think it's a reflection of the underfunding of our public hospital system and the fact that it's very difficult to get many of these tests done,"" he said. ""[It's] even sometimes taking up to a year to get some of the toxicology tests back so that we can let people know what some of their loved ones died from."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Brisbane is to become the headquarters of Australia's newest domestic operator, an arm of international carrier, Virgin Airlines. Premier Peter Beattie last night secured the deal with Virgin, owned by high profile English businessman Richard Branson. The contract was signed after months of lobbying for the headquarters by Brisbane and other capital cities, most notably Sydney and Melbourne. Under the agreement, Virgin will establish its operations at Brisbane airport, a move the Premier says will create hundreds of jobs and put the state's tourism industry under the international spotlight. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The United States central bank, the Federal Reserve, has raised its benchmark short-term interest rate one-quarter of a point to 5.75 per cent. It also raised the less important discount rate by a quarter of a point to 5.25 per cent. Analysts say the increases are meant to curb economic momentum. In a statement, the Federal Reserve warned about the risks of inflation. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Australia's head swimming coach Don Talbot has called on administrators to introduce blood testing to determine the true drug cheats. Talbot was responding to an article in a German swimming magazine where German men's coach Manfred Thiesmann accuses Australia's Ian Thorpe of using performance enhancing drugs. Thorpe has strenuously denied Thiesmann's allegations, and Talbot says proper drug testing procedures need to be implemented so champions like Thorpe are not unfairly tainted. ""Everybody knows that fiddling around with saline, with urine samples and with saliva, hair and all this sort of nonsense, is not going to give us the answers,"" he said. ""It's too easily masked so until they do something about that I'm afraid innocent people are going to be accused."" Meanwhile, Ian Thorpe has hit back at the German coach's claims that many leading figures in international swimming, believe the 17-year-old is a drug cheat. He was speaking in the English city of Sheffield, after picking up three gold medals at a World Cup short course meet. ""Everything that I do do is within the guidelines that are set out by FINA (the world swimming governing body) and everyone else,"" he said. ""I've never taken drugs and I won't take drugs because it is purely cheating and it just brings up once again the need for blood testing in international competition, in swimming especially, to prove the innocent."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Australia's biggest home lender has become the first to pass on today's rise in official interest rates. The Commonwealth Bank will increase home and business lending rates and a range of deposit rates. The Commonwealth has raised its rates by the full 0.5 per cent the Reserve Bank imposed this morning. The new rates apply from February 28. No other major lender has yet moved. Some industry groups have condemned the size of the official rate increase as potentially damaging to businesses and jobs. Meanwhile, the Australian Securities and Investments Commission is looking into how news of the rate rise was mistakenly released a few minutes early, leaving some in the currency markets open to claims of insider trading. The Australian Central Credit Union says today's interest rate rise by the Reserve bank is a positive move for the economy. Managing director Sam Walters says the 0.5 per cent rise removes speculation that has been in the market for some time, and helps stabilise the economy. He says it will support continued growth, while preventing a blow-out in inflation. ""It's enough to stop the jitters, and really to make people say, 'well, the rate rise we're expecting is there, it's a little bit stronger than maybe we expected, but it gives us some clear room before we're likely to see another rate rise',"" he said. ""And so it will let the economy settle down and get used to it. ""It'll slow things down, dampen them just a bit, but it won't take away the terrific growth that we're getting."" -------------------------------"

" A demonstrator has been slightly injured in a lively confrontation between protestors and the Prime Minister at Murwillumbah, in northern New South Wales. About 350 people, protesting against logging and the pending goods and services tax (GST), gathered outside the Tweed Civic Centre where the Prime Minister spoke this morning. Mr Howard waved to booing protestors, including a woman dressed as a tampon, as he arrived for a civic reception. During his speech he reaffirmed his committment to the GST and touched on local issues including daylight saving, saying the country should be divided into time zones based on longitude, not state borders. As he left the civic centre the demonstrators pursued Mr Howard to his car. One of his staffers was hit in the head by a flying thong and a demonstrator who jumped in front of the Prime Minister's car was knocked to the ground, grazing his shoulder. Later, the Prime Minister encountered more protests at Ocean Shores, north of Ballina. The second demonstration concentrated on the GST and local development issues with several people having to be restrained by police. --------------------------------"

" The Shadow Federal Employment spokesperson, Cheryl Kernot, says her recent illness never prompted thoughts of quitting politics. Ms Kernot is recovering from glandular fever and has resumed work, attending a Labor policy seminar in Melbourne today. She says she was recovering slowly but has every intention of resuming work in Canberra next week. ""I'm feeling much recovered but not fully recovered, because if you've ever had glandular fever, like hundreds of thousands of Australians you'll know you don't recover all that quickly,"" she said. ""But my doctor says I'm making good progress and that's why I'm just easing myself back into work and it was great to be part of a stimulating meeting last night and I'm looking forward to today on policy."" The Prime Minister has wished Ms Kernot good health on her return to work. Ms Kernot has been criticised within the ALP for her attempts to avoid the media and the public since falling ill and being admitted to hospital last year. Mr Howard says it is not up to him to comment on whether Ms Kernot is a liability for the ALP. ""I wish her a full recovery in her health, I would wish that of anybody in Australia and beyond that I don't have any comment. --------------------------------"

" The Federal Government is being urged to change the way some research staff are funded, amid fears that the national research effort is being undermined. The deputy vice-chancellor of research at Melbourne University has criticised the funding of research staff salaries from the National Health and Medical Research Council. Professor Frank Larkins says unless the council is allowed to provide adequate funds to full-time researchers, current world-class research efforts will be lost. ""We see them as vital, not only for social reasons, for the health of Australia but also in the biotechnology area which is seen as one of the emerging internationally competitive areas of economic growth that Australia needs to continue to play a major role,"" he said. -------------------------------"

" Two men looking to pioneer a billion dollar hemp industry in Australia arrive in Tasmania today for talks with the Department of State Development. They are seeking help to get the fledgling export industry off the ground in Tasmania. Paul Benhaim, a director of a British hemp company, has formed Australian Hemp Foods to capitalise on what he says is an expected boom in the world market for hemp food. Mr Benhaim said trials revealed Tasmania was ideal for some strains of industrial hemp but said the State Government would be called on to amend laws to legalise its production. Mr Benhaim said that while Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland were interested they had failed to pledge financial support. ---------------------------------"

" International Olympic Committee (IOC) vice-president Kevan Gosper will not make public receipts that show his family paid for accommodation for a trip to Salt Lake City. That city's bid commmittee's record of events is different and the matter is now before the IOC's Ethics Commission. Mr Gosper says releasing the receipts would not advance the independent review into his conduct so he sees no need to make them available. ""I went public with the allegations immediately, I advised the Ethics Commission and commenced to send documents to them and I'm still in the process,"" he said. ""Once you've taken the decision to go to the Ethics Commission there's absolutely no case for making public those documents."" Mr Gosper, who has stood aside from the Ethics Commission, will continue to play an active role in Sydney's preparations by attending tomorrow's SOCOG board meeting. -------------------------------"

" That elusive creature, the ""Burrum bear"" is causing a stir in the town of Gayndah in Queensland's Burnett region after more sightings. Mayor Peter Huth says one theory suggests the bear could be the offspring of an escaped animal when a circus trailer overturned in the late 1950s. Cr Huth says while the mystery is being taken light heartedly, people should be on the lookout. ""Well, we spoke about it at the council meeting and as I said it was light hearted,"" he said. ""There was some talk about perhaps offering a reward for the capture of this thing alive. ""I can assume if there are people down the river, I can assume people will be very careful and see if there are any signs of a bear,"" Cr Huth said."

" The Reserve Bank of Australia has moved again on official interest rates. The rise is a bigger one than most analysts had been expecting. The Reserve Bank has this morning announced it is moving in the markets to raise the cash rate by one-half of a percentage point. It is the second upward move in official rates this cycle, following last November's first increase for nearly five years. The cash rate now stands at 5.5 per cent. In a statement announcing the decision this morning, the Reserve Bank says it would be unwise to continue with the expansionary monetary policy setting which has been in place until now. It says the Australian economy, like the rest of the world, has continued to record stronger than expected growth. Household spending in particular, it says, has remained exceptionally robust fuelled by strong employment growth and the wealth effect of rising house prices. The central bank also points to early reports of companies finding it difficult to find suitable staff. And it expects inflation to rise to the upper half of its 2 to 3 per cent target range by mid-year. Meanwhile, the managing director of Aussie Home Loans, John Symond, says the rate rise will be passed on to home buyers quickly. ""The average home loan of say a hundred thousand over 25 years it will cost the borrower about $32 a month extra,"" he said. ""Bear in mind that our interest rates have more than halved over the past four or five years. ""I think that we can afford it, it's not all bad news but I'm very confident that interest rates in Australia will remain low and stable for the next few years."" ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid has publicly urged his former armed forces chief, General Wiranto, to resign immediately from Cabinet. He told a news conference in London that the General should step-down, rather than cling to office for a few more days. Mr Wahid confirmed that he has asked his Defence Minister to seek the General's resignation today, rather than next week when the President returns to Jakarta. Answering questions from the international media at his hotel in central London, President Wahid said it would be better for General Wiranto to resign as soon as possible as it would be good for him and would simplify matters. But the President insisted that if no resignation were forthcoming the General would nonetheless be removed from office when the Presidential tour ended. President Wahid dismissed fears of a coup or any other Army backlash resulting from his move against the General, describing such suggestions as hogwash. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" As International Olympic Committee (IOC) member Kevan Gosper denies improperly accepting gifts from organisers of the Salt Lake City Olympics bid, he has received strong backing from IOC president Juan Antonio Samaranch. A spokesman for Mr Samaranch says the IOC president believes Mr Gosper to be a principled man, who has shown his credibility by referring the claims against him to the IOC's ethics committee. Franklin Servin-Schreiber says the emergence of these new charges after three investigations of the Salt Lake City bid is dubious. ""The president is very strongly behind Kevan Gosper and supports him very strongly at this difficult time,"" Mr Servin-Schreiber said. ""We're just going to have to go through it and I think he believes Kevan Gosper did the right thing by asking the Ethics Commission to review the situation."" Meanwhile, Juan Antonio Samaranch has been questioned by US authorities investigating the scandal-plagued Utah bid. He flew to New York yesterday to talk to FBI agents and Justice Department officials. His spokesman says the president was happy to cooperate and is not a target of the investigation. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The peace process in Northern Ireland has been plunged into deep uncertainty. It stems from reports that an independent inquiry has found that there has been no paramilitary disarmament so far. A power-sharing executive was set up in Northern Ireland two months ago on the basis that decommissioning of weapons would begin. The continuation of the executive is now under threat, according to as the BBC's John Devitt. Even though the disarmament report has not yet been made public, politicians in Northern Ireland have assumed that it will contain no news of disarmament. The Unionists had expected the IRA to start getting rid of their weapons by now. David Trimble leader of the main unionist party said that whatever the language used in the report, it could not change the simple fact that the decommissioning of weapons had not happened and he called on the British Government to take action. ""My expectation is that we will be moving fairly soon to the suspension of the agreement, I think that is fairly inevitable,"" he said. However, Sein Feinn's Gerry Adams says the process can still be made to work. ""But it cannot work if one party is intent on walking out of the process, it cannot work because one party is now trying to force two governments to act in default of this agreement."" ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Federal Labor frontbencher Lindsay Tanner says colleague Cheryl Kernot remains an electoral asset for Labor. Ms Kernot, who is the Shadow Employment Minister and member for the seat of Dickson in Queensland, has returned to work after recovering from an illness. She has been under pressure while she has been away with the Opposition leader accusing the media of stalking her and most recently she has been photographed wearing a red wig while attending the cinema. Ms Kernot is in Melbourne today for meetings with the Opposition leader and other frontbenchers. Mr Tanner, who has been acting in her job, has appealed to people to judge Ms Kernot on her merits. ""That's the key to all politics whether it be judging an issue or judging an individual,"" Mr Tanner said. ""Judge them on their merits, judge them on their contribution and let's move beyond the sort of stuff that's been happening recently. ""I think people are entitled to be judged on their performance, on what they contribute. I have no doubt that she'll contribute fantastically."" ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Australian Shareholders Association hopes new moves to tackle insider trading will boost confidence in the integrity of the market. The regulator will begin scrutinising companies experiencing volatile trading, to see if they are releasing all necessary information. Regulators are concerned that unexplained share price volatility often continues for some weeks, then important information is released to the market. In that time the company has responded briefly to Stock Exchange queries by saying it cannot explain the volatility. The Australian Securities and Investments Commission has now entered the process, warning of audits, surveillance, even court action, with the focus to be on small mining and high-tech companies. Welcoming the moves is the Shareholders Association chairman, Ted Rofe. ""I think there is a perception among at least some investors that there are people who have information that is not generally available, as a result of which they are able to make superior profits,"" he said. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Chechen rebel leaders say their forces have conducted a planned retreat from the capital, Grozny. After weeks bogged down against a strong rebel defence, Russia's forces appear to be breaking through in Grozny. At the same time, Chechen leaders announced a retreat of rebel fighters from the city. Chechen spokesman in The Hague, Aslambek Kadiev, said the retreat was for humanitarian reasons. ""The situation of civilians, which are Chechen citizens is so unbearable at this moment that it was also one of the main reasons that we decide that it's impossible that they suffer so long,"" he said. But Russia denies the Chechens have left saying attempted breakouts from the city have been foiled and that fierce fighting continues. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Beijing has dismissed concerns raised by the human rights group Amnesty International about the increasing number of executions in China. In its latest report, Amnesty documented more than 2,700 death sentences handed down by Chinese courts during 1998 and just under 1,800 confirmed executions. Amnesty says with more than 50 people being executed a week, China kills more people each year than the rest of the world combined. While the government considers execution numbers a state secret, there has been a flurry of reports in the state-run media in the past week. One front-page article marked the execution of 13 people at one time; another told of six gang members executed for their role in several murders. The gap between trial and execution can be as little as three weeks, but a Foreign Ministry spokesman says the government exercises the penalty with prudence and has been known to offer reprieves."

" The Federal Treasurer, Peter Costello, is suggesting that rural and regional Australians will be better off if the full sale of Telstra goes ahead. He was responding to warnings from the Queensland Farmers' Federation (QFF) that the Federal Government would face a backlash from regional voters if Telstra was completely sold-off. The QFF has labelled it ""political blackmail"", but the Treasurer says many rural residents bought shares in the first two Telstra sales, signalling their support for the sell-off, and would benefit from improved infrastructure if the rest was sold. ""Two million Australians have a share in Telstra and I'll warrant to you a lot of those people live in rural and regional Australia as well, and they love the opportunity to get an investment in Telstra,"" he said. ""Now, if the Government locks up taxpayers' money in Telstra that just means we've got less money for roads, and hospitals and schools."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Oil company, Esso, has been committed to stand trial on charges relating to the fatal explosion at its Longford plant in Victoria's east in 1998. The charges concern a failure to provide or maintain a safe workplace. Esso pleaded not guilty to 35 WorkCover charges in the Melbourne Magistrates Court which carries a maximum penalty of $250,000 each. They stem from an explosion at the Longford plant on September 25, 1998, in which two men died and eight were seriously injured. The explosion cut gas supplies to Victoria for almost two weeks and was the subject of a Royal Commission last year. Esso spokeswoman Alex Roberts says the company will strongly defend the charges. ""We remain disappointed at the charges being brought against us, but we certainly will be defending them,"" he said. The company will face the charges on April 4, in the County Court. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Nearly 500 kilograms of cocaine have been seized in a pre-dawn operation off the New South Wales coast near Broken Bay, north of Sydney. Federal Customs Minister Senator Amanda Vanstone says the estimated wholesale value of the cocaine is between $80 and $150 million. Six people including two Australians and a New Zealander have been arrested and two vessels have been seized by Federal Police and Customs agents. The Minister says the record haul follows an 18-month covert surveillance operation with the co-operation of overseas authorities. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Senate Legal and Constitutional Committee, meeting in Alice Springs today, will be asked whether suspected Nazi war criminal Konrad Kalejs should face the Senate's Anti-Genocide Inquiry. Australian Democrats Senator Brian Greig is hoping to secure support from Labor Senators Jim McKiernan, Joe Ludwig and Barney Cooney. It is the first meeting of the Senate committee for the year and the first chance to address the question of whether Mr Kalejs, who returned to Australia last month, should be subpoenaed to give evidence at hearings later this month. Senator Grieg says an appearance by Mr Kalejs before the committee, would allow him to table a letter he says he has received from the Prime Minister, under the protection of parliamentary privilege. He says there may also be a case for the committee to call evidence from government agencies including ASIO about its knowledge of the arrival and presence of suspected Nazi war criminals in Australia. Submissions to the Anti Genocide Inquiry close on February 10. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Coalition and Labor spent about $60 million each last financial year - much of it on the 1998 Federal election. The Electoral Commission has released annual returns on political funding. The major parties' total receipts rose last year because each received substantial public funding after the 1998 election. Labor's receipts totalled $61 million, which is slightly more than it spent. The Liberal Party received $49 million and the National Party $10 million and between them they spent $62 million. Labor's biggest donations were from unions but there was also substantial funding from the private sector. The Coalition's big donors included the banks and companies such as Santos, Inghams and Coca Cola Amatil. Labor's national secretary Gary Gray says more Australians are donating to political parties. ""We're seeing a larger number of individuals start to enter the field of giving to political parties and we're starting to see in the corporate culture the acceptance and the regularisation of contributions to the political process,"" he said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Some ANZ customers will get free Internet access under a deal forged between the bank and an emerging online company. The ANZ will acquire a 25 per cent stake in the firm, Free Net Corp, in return for moving selected Internet customers exclusively to its partner's website. As well as providing free online access to members Free Net Corp gives advertisers a marketing service to target information and products to users, based on certain demographic profiles. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australia has dismissed England for 106 in the third women's one-day cricket match at Bowral. Charmaine Mason took 4 for 27 for Australia. Australia leads the series 2-0. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid says he will sack powerful General Wiranto after an official inquiry linked the officer to last year's mass violence in East Timor. ""We have to uphold human rights in Indonesia, whatever the course,"" he told Reuters Television while attending the World Economic Forum's annual meeting in the Swiss Alps. Asked if this meant he would sack the General, he said: ""Oh yes, of course. I will ask him, to use a polite word, ask him to resign."" Asked when he would dismiss Wiranto, Wahid said: ""When I return (home)."" He dismissed concerns about how the Indonesian military might react to the sacking. ""They will listen to us,"" he said. The Indonesian inquiry recommended that six generals, including Wiranto, face possible prosecution over the violence that erupted after East Timor voted for independence last August. The panel found evidence of mass killings and torture as well as attempts to tamper with evidence by removing bodies from graves. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" Hezbollah guerrillas in south Lebanon have killed three Israeli soldiers, just a day after assassinating the second highest ranked officer in the Israeli-backed South Lebanon Army (SLA). Israel's Prime Minister Ehud Barak has warned the situation in Lebanon is becoming dangerous. In a significant setback to Israel's plan to withdraw from Lebanon within months, three soldiers were killed and another four injured by a Hezbollah attack on an Israeli outpost near the Army stronghold of Beaufort Castle. Only one week ago, Israeli defence figures were suggesting their revised strategy had greatly weakened Hezbollah's ability to mount successful attacks in south Lebanon, with just 13 Israeli deaths recorded last year. But since then four Israeli soldiers have died as well as Colonel Akal Hasham, the second in command of the Israeli Allied SLA, killed in a remote control bomb attack yesterday. In Israel, pressure is growing for Prime Minister Ehud Barak to end a period of relative restraint, with a significant military response, despite the threat that could pose to the already unstable peace dialogue with Syria. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Kenya Airways is unable to say what might have brought down one of its Airbuses off the Ivory Coast, with 169 people presumed killed, stressing the aircraft had been fit to fly. The carrier's technical director Steve Clarke told reporters the plane was ""fully servicable and fit for flight"" when it took off from Abidjan. Earlier Mr Clarke said the Airbus 310-300 had ""no technical problems of any significance."" While wreckage had been found, this did not include instruments that would provide details of the few moments between take-off and crash, such as the black box or cockpit voice recorder. ""The cause of the crash is not yet known but an investigation has begun and Kenya Airways are working closely with local authorities to give them every assistance,"" a Kenya Airways statement read. A technical team, headed by Kenya Airways managing director Richard Nyaga left Nairobi Monday evening for Abidjan to assist in the investigation. The statement listed the names of the 10 people known to survived the crash. All were hospitalised and one was in intensive care. It also listed the names of eight members of the crew, whose ages ranged from 24 to 44. Asked whether foul play had been ruled out, Mr Clarke said: ""We are not in a position to rule out or confirm anything"" and repeatedly refused to speculate over the cause of the crash. Although the airline had announced the jet was among four Airbuses due for replacement under a five-year investment plan, he said this had nothing to do with their age or condition. ""The life-span of a modern jet aircraft in terms of years can be anything up to 30 years and somewhat longer in many respects,"" he added. The plane had been scheduled to stop in Lagos before Abidjan, but the flight plan was changed when haze reduced visibility over Lagos making it unsafe to land. The accident is the carrier's first disaster since the airline was set up in 1977. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A family doctor in Britain has been sentenced to 15 life terms in jail after being found guilty of murdering 15 female patients. Police also believe Dr Harold Shipman, aged 54, may have killed 100 more of his former patients. After deliberating for six days, the jury at Preston Crown Court, in northern England, returned to find Harold Frederick Shipman guilty on all 15 counts of murder. The GP, who ran a one man family clinic in the Manchester suburb of Hyde, was also found guilty of forging the million dollar will of one of his victims. Between March 1995 and June 1998, Shipman killed the 15 women by injecting them with lethal doses of morphine or dia-morphine, the medical term for heroin. Dr Shipman stared impassively ahead as the jury delivered the verdicts. His wife Primrose and his sons in the public gallery also showed little emotion. During the trial, the prosecution told the court there was no question of euthanasia, Dr Shipman killed the women simply because he enjoyed taking their lives. He then wrote false causes of death on their death certificates. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Russia has claimed an important victory in Grozny but at the same time has been warned by the United States the war in Chechnya will increase its international isolation. The warning came from visiting US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. After more than a month bogged down in the battle for Grozny, Russian media claims Moscow's forces have taken a strategic square in the city's centre. But the war is a long way from over and Mrs Albright warned in Moscow that Russia was paying a heavy price in life and reputation. Russia's Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov dismissed any isolation as temporary and Washington is treading carefully, trying to win Moscow's support on delicate arms control matters. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australia's most senior Olympic official, Kevan Gosper, says he and his wife have been aware for some time that some individuals have been endeavouring to draw them into the Salt Lake City scandal. Mr Gosper has spoken to the ABC about the hospitality he and his family accepted from the American city's bid committee. Mr Gosper says the head of Salt Lake City's bid, Tom Welch, asked them to make a private visit, which his wife and their children took up in December 1993. Mr Gosper says the holiday was nothing more than a welcome break with good friends overseas. ""[I am] extremely disappointed that this has become an issue about what I consider, naively, was a simple en route break in the journey, with people at the time we considered friends,"" he said. Mr Gosper says he has nothing to hide and is astonished about inflated reimbursements now being attributed to Salt Lake City's bid committee. They total $50,000 but according to Mr Gosper what is recorded by the Olympic bid city does not reflect what was paid for by them. Fellow Australian International Olympic Committee (IOC) member Phil Coles received a most severe warning from the IOC after accepting lavish hospitality from Salt Lake City. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" At least 10 survivors have been found after a Kenya Airways plane carrying 179 passengers and crew plunged into the Atlantic Ocean off the Ivory Coast. Officials say rescuers have narrowed in on a crash zone where the aircraft is believed to have gone down, as an increasing number of survivors and several corpses are being brought to shore. The Airbus 3-10 crashed off the coast a few minutes after take-off from Abidjan's airport, mid-evening local time. It was headed toward Lagos in nearby Nigeria. The survivors are coming onto shore in boats and canoes, while one man, a French national, had earlier swum back to the beach. Hugo Baas is a spokesman for the Dutch airline KLM, which part-owns Kenyan Airways. ""The only thing I know at this very moment, it was flight KQ-11-31 from Abidjan to Lagos,"" he said. ""It was carrying approximately 169 passengers on board with ten crew members. ""Shortly after becoming airborne the aircraft disappeared from radar into the sea."" --------------------------------"

" The Federal Government has released a draft list of state and territory taxes and charges not subject to the goods and services tax (GST). It includes animal registration costs, local government rates, water and sewerage and adoption fees. Releasing the list in Melbourne, the Federal Treasurer, Peter Costello, said compulsory taxes and charges should not be subject to the tax. ""Where it is a fine you're not getting anything for a fine it's a law enforcement mechanism, and that is not subject to a GST,"" he said. ""Where it is a regulatory thing like the issue of a motor vehicle licence, like freedom of information or something of that nature then it's on this determination and it's not subject to GST."" The Treasurer has rejected reports motor vehicle licences and pet registration fees will be subject to the GST. He says some newspaper reports have got it wrong. ""So, local government rates are not subject to GST, drainage, water, pet registration, motor vehicle licences, any of those sorts of things,"" he said. Mr Costello has also denied that Government comments last week contributed to the weekend slide in the Australian dollar. The currency suffered one of its biggest one-day falls on Friday night, plunging three cents to 62.2 US cents. It has continued to rally today, to 63.95 US cents. Some analysts partly blame the Treasurer's comments that the economy is not overheating and the Prime Minister criticism of banks forecasting higher interest rates. But the Treasurer says the dollar's slide was due to overseas factors. ""I think most of the activity in relation to the dollar is international events, and the international event that obviously influenced sentiment on Friday was the US growth figure,"" he said. ""It was stronger than expected and, as I said, people started taking positions."" -------------------------------------"

" A new study into the effectiveness of the Job Network has found it is not working as well as previous programs to assist the long-term unemployed. The Melbourne Institute's Dr Elizabeth Webster says Bureau of Statistics figures suggest long-term unemployment is not falling as fast under Job Network, as it did under Labor's Working Nation. She says it is probably because not as much money is being spent per person on intensive assistance programs. But she says the finding is hard to confirm, because the Government will not release data on the Job Network's record. ""With most things in economics, you always want more than one data source to confirm what you think's going on, or give you greater confidence in what's going on,"" she said. ""So that's why it's very very important that Job Network data is actually out in the public arena for people to look at."" ----------------------------------"

" The National Farmers Federation (NFF) has cast doubt on the worth of the Prime Minister's promise, to end the drain of Commonwealth services from regional Australia. Mr Howard says complaints about the removal of basic services are not falling on deaf ears. But the NFF has warned country people not to pin their hopes for a rural revival on such promises. The federation says the Government still has not delivered on a 1996 election promise, to ease the rules for access to Austudy, or taken up federation proposals on improving services in the regions. ---------------------------------"

" Australia is proposing a global regulatory regime to crack down on ""cyber-squatting"", or naming websites after someone else. International Internet authorities are meeting in Sydney today. Communications Minister Richard Alston has written to delegates proposing international rules for website registration, which would require companies or other entities, to prove they are the registered company or organisation named in the website, before it is registered. Senator Alston has also proposed a new category of .id.au, in addition to .com or .org, to allow individuals to set up websites, but again only if they are that person. The move coincides with the registration of one website Richard Alston.com, by an anti-censorship activist, who plans to use the site, to protest against the government's tough new internet laws. But the proposed regime would require broad international application, so website users can not get around the rules by registering sites offshore. ---------------------------------"

" There is a ray of hope for a handful of the 300 workers sacked from the National Textiles plant in the Hunter Valley. The workers will only be paid around 60 per cent of their entitlements over two years, and the Federal Government's safety net scheme for retrenched workers still is not in place. But recruitment firm Opie and Gough says it can find work for up to 30 of the workers elsewhere in the industry, with many factories suffering a skills shortage. Spokesman Michael Cadlow says it will require them to move interstate or overseas, but it is a good opportunity. ""I've also mentioned New Zealand in the advertisement we placed, because we've got clients there that are very hungry for skilled people as well,"" he said. ""So if location's not a problem, I think we'll surprise ourselves and the people at national at just how many jobs are out there."" ----------------------------------"

" About 100 angry pro-Indonesian East Timorese have marched on Indonesia's Human Rights Commission in Jakarta, disrupting a media conference to announce the findings of a report on atrocities committed in the territory. The protesters have angrily objected to the independence of East Timor, and the possible trial of military officers and civilians. Wearing red and white headbands, the colours of the Indonesian flag, the protesters marched on the Commission and then took over the room where Commission members were about to announce the findings of a report into atrocities committed in East Timor. The report names 24 military officers and civilians who should be brought to trial. Among the names is General Wiranto, former Armed Forces commander, who one Commission member says knew of killings and violence going on in East Timor, but failed to stop a reign of terror. ---------------------------------"

" Former Deputy Prime Minister and National Party leader, Tim Fischer, has taken a role in a pilot television program on lifestyle and cooking Mr Fischer, last week announced he will retire from federal politics by relinquishing the seat of Farrer, at the next election. He has indicated he would be interested in a bigger involvement in eco-tourism. ""It's a pilot, we've put it down as a pilot program which James Ostler, Canaust and Cool Bananas Production promote tourism on a deeper broader scale, to a chunk of the Murray Valley,"" he said. ""It's called Pleasures of the Palate [and] I'd be one of the co-presenters."" -------------------------------"

" The St Louis Rams have beaten the Tennessee Titans 23-16 in the American Football Superbowl in Atlanta. The Rams scored a touchdown with less than two minutes remaining and then held the Titans one metre short on the final play of the game to win their first Superbowl. At 62 Dick Vermail becomes the oldest ever coach to win a Superbowl. ""I feel so good and so proud of this football team and this organisation, to be able to bring this home to the city of St Louis,"" he said. ""They're a wonderful city full of wonderful people. Our organisation appreciates them, I know they appreciate us a little bit more right now and this is coming home to St Louis."""

" A Kenya Airways plane with 180 people on board is reported to have crashed into the South Atlantic Ocean after taking off from Abidjan in Ivory Coast in Africa. The Ivorian Civil Aviation Authority says there were 170 passengers on the plane and 10 crew members. There are no reports of any survivors. The Airbus 310 was on a flight to the Kenyan capital, Nairobi, via Lagos in Nigeria. Witnesses say it dived into the ocean immediately after leaving Abidjan. Emergency workers from Ivory Coast were rushing by boat to the site."

" The Prime Minister John Howard has promised an end to the withdrawal of Commonwealth services from the bush. Mr Howard says he understands the frustration of country people and will ensure service levels are maintained. At a dinner in the outback New South Wales town of Bourke the Prime Minister has vowed the Government will face up to the long-standing demands for action. ""They are very legitimate complaints, and they are complaints that are not falling on deaf ears so far as I am concerned and they are complaints that we are endeavouring over time to address,"" he said. Mr Howard is also flagging additional spending in the regions if the remainder of Telstra is sold. But he says the public must get behind the proposal. ""What I am doing is putting the case to the Australian people, that's what the political process is about."" ---------------------------------"

" The Australian dollar is this morning picking itself up off the floor, as global financial markets are again wracked by volatility. Strong US economic growth figures have stoked interest rate fears. Numbers out of Washington on Friday night showed an annualised economic growth rate of 5.8 per cent. Westpac's chief foreign exchange dealer, Peter McGrath, says that has heightened speculation the US Federal Reserve will lift interest rates by half a percentage point this week, putting a number of currencies, including the Australian dollar, under pressure. The Friday night low for the Australian dollar was around 62.2 US cents, a plunge of three cents to its lowest level since last April. Despite some rumours of intervention on Saturday morning, dealers this morning say they have seen no sign of the Reserve Bank in the market. Exporters having been buying the currency at its lower levels, and this morning, it has recovered about half the ground lost. Just before 9:00am AEDT, the dollar was trading at around 63.73 US cents, up 1.5 cents from its weekend low, but still well down on Friday's local close of 65.13. Meanwhile, the Australian sharemarket faces heavy selling pressure this morning, with the renewed US interest rate fears driving down stock prices on Wall Street. The New York's Dow Jones index dropped 289-points, or 2.6 per cent. In Australia, the Share Price Index futures contract closed down 47-points on Saturday morning. --------------------------------"

" In Indonesia, a commission of inquiry on East Timor is today expected to deliver findings, showing the Indonesian military was responsible for a reign of terror, following last August's independence referendum. Indonesia's national commission on human rights has spent months on a report, aimed at bringing to justice the perpetrators of killings and violence. While the pro-Jakarta militias have been blamed for a reign of terror in East Timor, one commission member says former armed forces commander General Wiranto and the highest ranking regional leader Major General Adam D'miri will be held morally responsible. The names of up to 30 military officers and civilians will be submitted to Indonesia's Attorney-General to take legal action. But while Indonesia attempts to deal with the issue of East Timor and justice, a United Nations report on East Timor released on the weekend, has recommended trials be carried out by an international tribunal. Indonesia has rejected any possibility of this happening. --------------------------------"

" An Australian woman has been injured in a pirate attack on their yacht off the coast of Yemen in the gulf of Aden. It is the second such attack on Australians in the area in under three months. Jill Dawson of Adelaide says the catamaran being sailed by sister Gail and her partner Steve Philips was boarded and ransacked by pirates in the Gulf of Aden. She had been e-mailed to say they had survived the attack but that Gail had been wounded. In July last year, the Darwin couple received praise for standing by and rescuing five Sri Lankan nationals after their vessel sank with the loss of 14 lives in the Indian Ocean. It is the second pirate attack in less than three months on Australians in the Aden area. In November, a cruising yacht being sailed by a family of four from NSW, including two young children, was taken-in-tow by an oil tanker after a similar incident. ---------------------------------"

" The market forecaster, BIS Shrapnel, says the Northern Territory has the brightest economic future in Australia, for the next five years. A new BIS Shrapnel study predicts the Territory's economy will grow at more than twice the rate of any other Australian jurisdiction. The forecaster says the emerging economies of Western Australia, Queensland, and especially the Territory, will surge ahead in the next five years. These economies are being fueled by fast population growth, rapid development and plentiful minerals and land. The prime drivers of growth in the Territory will be oil, gas, minerals, the proposed Alice Springs to Darwin railway, defence and involvement in the rebuilding of East Timor. Senior economist Richard Robinson says the size of the Territory's economy should increase by almost 50 per cent. ""It's current size is about $6.3 billion, so it will go to just over $9 billion by 2004,"" he said. --------------------------------"

" Australia's national mapping agency AUSLIG and the Canberra Deep Space Communication complex, this week will help NASA compile a three dimensional map of the globe. The space shuttle Endeavour, to be launched next Tuesday, will orbit the Earth for 11 days collecting data from a specially modified radar system. AUSLIG's remote sensing facility is assigned the task of validating Australian data. Uses for the information to be collected during the mission include planning mobile telephone coverage, weather forecasting and more detailed topographical maps. --------------------------------"

" Melbourne Major Events company chair Ron Walker says he is disappointed at the international media focus, yesterday's publicity stunt at Melbourne Park, would have attracted. Peter Hore, aged 39, who has disrupted other events in the past, including the Melbourne Cup and an international soccer match at the Melbourne cricket ground, ran onto the court during the mens final match, stopping the game. He is expected to be charged on summons with trespassing. Mr Walker who was watching the match says he is reviewing security for the upcoming Melbourne Grand Prix. ""Well our team of security people are working on it now,"" he said. ""I just feel sorry for Geoff Pollard that it happened at his event. ""All of us who participate and run these major events throughout Australia, are always in fear of this sort of thing happening, but I'm sure there is a remedy to it,"" Mr Walker said."

" Seven general insurance companies are under investigation for suspected breaches of goods and services tax (GST) guidelines. The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) says the companies appear to have raised their insurance premiums by several per cent more than they are allowed. The first big test of GST compliance was on July 29 - there were tax reductions on televisions, videos, watches and cameras, the ACCC says those falls were passed on in full, more than the commission had been expecting. But the commission's chairman, Alan Fels, has told Channel Seven he is not happy with the insurance industry. ""We have actually not been entirely satisfied with the explanation we've had from the industry thus far,"" Professor Fels said. ""We will be issuing this week notices under the Trade Practices Act requiring further substantiation of the reasons for some of the price rises from seven insurance companies, we want further details under the Trade Practices Act now."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Australia's Foreign Affairs Minister Alexander Downer expects a second report to find the Indonesian military responsible for recent atrocities committed in East Timor. A United Nations commission has concluded that Indonesian police and the army were ultimately responsible for killings carried out by pro-Jakarta militias. Its report recommends an international human rights tribunal be set up to prosecute those responsible. Mr Downer says the international community should first wait to see the outcome of the Indonesian Government's own inquiry, due tomorrow, and the recommendations it proposes. ""The Indonesian inquiry, which is being conducted by the Indonesian Human Rights Commission, should be concluded and let's see what action the Indonesians take on the basis of that inquiry,"" Mr Downer said. ""And the international court will be considered, I think, by the international community in the light of the domestic Indonesian inquiry."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Federal Government has challenged the states to support its proposed safety net scheme for retrenched workers. Details of the $100 million scheme have been unveiled by the Workplace Relations Minister. In recent months hundreds of workers in New South Wales have been retrenched but the companies that employed them have refused to pay out their full entitlements. The latest is Hunter Valley-based, National Textiles. A safety-net package is to be put to Cabinet that will ensure retrenched workers receive a minimum of up to four weeks' wages, 12 weeks' long service leave and four weeks' redundancy pay with a $20,000 limit. The Workplace Relations Minister Peter Reith has told Channel Seven he wants the support of the states. ""We're saying the Commonwealth should pay half and the states should pay half,"" Mr Reith said. ""My challenge, particularly to the Labor premiers, is to come out in the next day or two and support me in the submission I'm taking to Cabinet."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Prime Minister, John Howard, has rejected claims that his regional tour is simply a pitch to win rural votes. The South Australian National Party said this morning that Mr Howard's vist was ""sanitised"" because it focused on large regional centres and successful businesses, instead of struggling small communities. But Mr Howard says he is touring to hear the voice of regional Australia and not just to meet the Liberal Party faithful. ""I heard the claim from the National Party here that I wasn't going to any small, struggling rural communities,"" Mr Howard said. ""I'm going to Quorn which is a very small community which has not had it easy because of the drought and the fall in commodity prices, so it's a ridiculous, inaccurate claim. ""I had a public meeting in Port Lincoln yesterday and I'll be talking to all-comers again and I'll be doing that at the whole stage, so that's a silly comment I suppose designed to get a headline."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) is predicting significant price reductions in imported goods from Tuesday. Current laws mean companies importing products like food, clothing and toys which have copyright labels are able to maintain an import monopoly. But from Tuesday that ends. The ACCC chairman, Professor Allan Fels, says the changes are significant. ""Retailers can go to other sources than the holder of the copyright of the package or label to bring in the goods,"" he said. ""I think there will be some significant price benefits to consumers from this change in the law. ""This will be looked back on as a big change in getting more competition in the branded-goods area especially over a wide range of products."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" At the Tamworth Country Music Festival, 23-year-old Kasey Chambers has won two Golden Guitars following the success of her first solo album <i>The Captain</i>. Chambers was named Female Vocalist of the Year and her album was judged the Album of the Year. Other winners included Troy Cassar-Daley who won Song of the Year and received a second Golden Guitar for being named Male Vocalist of the Year. John Williamson won three awards, including Heritage Song of the Year for <i>Campfire on the Road</i>. Chambers has thanked her brother Nash for helping to produce the album. ""Nash, you really should be up here - you really made this album everything that it is and I appreciate so much everything you've done for me, thank you so much,"" she said. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Australia's Rennae Stubbs and American partner Jared Palmer have won the mixed doubles final at the Australian Tennis Open in Melbourne. The pair beat Sydney's Todd Woodbridge and Spaniard Arantxa Sanchez Vicario in straight sets, 7-5, 7-6. It has been a successful Grand Slam for Stubbs, who also won the women's doubles crown with Lisa Raymond on Friday, over Martina Hingis and Mary Pierce. Stubbs was the first Australian to win the doubles title in 21 years. Stubbs has won more than $200,000 at the Open, despite not making it past qualifying in the women's singles. The men's singles final between world number one, Andre Agassi and the defending champion, Yevgeny Kafelnikov, will get underway early in the afternoon. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Former undisputed world heavyweight champion Mike Tyson has stopped British champion Julius Francis in the second round of their heavyweight bout in Manchester. Tyson, 33, and with just three defeats in 50 professional fights, won when referee Roy Francis stopped the bout after 58 seconds of round two after London-born Francis had hit the canvas five times. Tyson told Fox Sports that with a few more fights under his belt he can challenge Britain's world heavyweight champion Lennox Lewis. ""I wish I looked as good....I felt as good as everybody said I looked but I'd like to thank my staff, all my sparring partners,"" he said. ""I trained hard for this fight, I was in great shape I was prepared to go the whole 10, 15 rounds whatever it was."" \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Aboriginal reconciliation and the full sale of Telstra have been stressed in the Federal Government's outline of priorities. The Prime Minister, John Howard, has issued a 10-year outlook for Australia during his first major address of the year. Addressing business and community leaders in Melbourne, Mr Howard began with a plea for patience on the goods and services tax, attacking what he called the negative, obstructionist agenda being pursued by the enemeies of tax reform. He has renewed the Government's commitment to Aboriginal reconciliation, saying it will be best done through practical measures to address disadvantage. In discussing the need to renew infrastructure, Mr Howard stressed the case for the eventual full sale of Telstra, saying funding the carrier is diverting money from other areas of public investment. On social policy, he says he has asked the Workplace Relations Minister, Peter Reith, to identify obstacles employers face in trying to let staff better balance work and family. ------------------------------"

" Housing purchases, domestic travel and tobacco have been the main contributors to what has turned out to be a relatively subdued rise in inflation in the latest three months. The Consumer Price Index has risen just 0.6 per cent in the December quarter. That has produced a lower-than-expected annual rate of inflation of 1.8 per cent. Other prices going up in the latest three months include take-away and restaurant meals, car insurance and rents, while lower costs have been recorded for cars, women's clothes, drugs, fruit and computers. Westpac's general manager of economics, Bill Evans, says the inflation outcome will be an important element of next week's Reserve Bank deliberations on interest rates. ""Clearly this is one of the most difficult times we've ever seen for setting policy,"" he said. ""There are so many big factors. ""It's very difficult for both the authorities and the forecasters to really get a good feel as to exactly what's happening given the number of changes that are going on this year."" The Treasurer, Peter Costello, says the figure proves that in world terms, the Australian economy is under control. ""It does not show evidence of overheating in the Australian economy,"" Mr Costello said. ""In fact, if we can continue to grow the Australian economy at 4 per cent, with low inflation, you'll continue to get the kind of jobs growth which has produced, over the last nearly four years since the Government was elected, nearly 624,000 new jobs,"" he said. --------------------------------"

" The Australian competition watchdog is concerned Telstra's planned takeover of Ozemail's Internet service provider business would have a detrimental impact on online content and advertising. The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission has issued a preliminary view on the $300 million bid, advising Telstra it has serious objections. The deal would give Telstra control of more than 40 per cent of the residential Internet market. The commission's chairman, Professor Alan Fels, says if it went ahead, the takeover would give Telstra dominance over a developing industry. ""Ozemail is the only Internet service provider at the present time that has the scale to compete head-to-head with Telstra,"" he said. ""So its removal from the market has to be viewed with considerable caution."" --------------------------------"

" Three hundred workers sacked from a Hunter Valley factory last week will receive only half their redundancy pay. The textiles workers were given the news at a creditors meeting in Newcastle. The administrator of National Textiles today told workers they will receive all their sick pay, annual leave, superannuation and rostered days off pay, but only half the money they are owed in redundancy and notice pay. National Textiles chief executive officer Derek Hodge says it all hinges on the major creditors approving a deal which would see most of the company's equipment and customers going to Victorian firm Bruck. But even if that is approved, the workers will not get all their money for up to two years. Mr Hodge says once the deal is approved, within a few weeks, employees will get around $2.5 million in total. But he says the remaining $5 million will not be paid until all the company's assets are sold, which could take up to two years. The Textiles, Clothing and Footwear Union has vowed to continue to fight for the workers' entitlements. Union organiser Steve Davies says he is very disappointed in the outcome today. ""It is a disgrace that directors can stand up here today and say 'we've fulfilled statutory obligations',"" Mr Davies said. ""Obvioiusly the law needs changing and it needs changing quickly,"" he said. Opposition leader Kim Beazley has criticised the Prime Minister for not meeting with the sacked textiles workers. Mr Beazley says the sacked workers are entitled to an explanation why the government failed in its promise to implement a scheme to protect workers' entitlements. He says the Labor Party has two pieces of legislation in Parliament to help workers keep entitlements if they are made redundant. ""Our ideas are out there, our plans are out there,"" he said. ""We have yet to hear from Mr Reith and Mr Howard despite their promises. It's no accident that the one part of regional Australia Mr Howard will not turn up at next week is the Upper Hunter."" --------------------------------"

" The Australian Democrats say a bill already before Parliament could allow Australia to prosecute suspected Nazi war criminal Konrad Kalejs, without the need to extradite him. Australia is in negotiations with Latvia about the possibility of extraditing Mr Kalejs on charges relating to the massacre of Jews during World War II. Authorities in Australia and other countries have previously failed to produce enough evidence to bring charges against Mr Kalejs, who has maintained his innocence. But Democrats Senator Brian Greig says the party's own bill to outlaw genocide would give authorities stronger powers to produce evidence. ""The allegations against him were proved unfounded because of the lack of evidence,"" Senator Greig said. ""But subsequently we know that there is more evidence there which simply wasn't uncovered and that makes it very politically difficult for the Government,"" he said. ---------------------------------"

" A new national pollutant database will allow Australians to get a clearer picture of pollutants being discharged into their neighbourhoods. The Federal Environment Minister, Robert Hill, has launched Australia's first national pollutant inventory in Melbourne. Senator Hill says people can use the Internet to find out what is being put into the atmosphere by factories and other sources and what is being done to reduce emissions. Senator Hill says Australia has followed the lead of other industrialised countries. ""We did have an advantage in that Australia is not the first in having a national pollutant inventory and so we were able to learn from the experience of countries such as the United States and Canada,"" he said. ""We were able to refine the lists of substances from their experience so that we were not requiring reporting on unnecessary substances and we want to be obviously as industry-friendly as possible."" The national pollutant inventory can be found at www.environment.gov.au/epg/npi/. ----------------------------------"

" Australia's dive industry has been the all-clear at an international conference, despite two major incidents involving American tourists. Dive Queensland secretary-treasurer, Col McKenzie, has just returned from the dive conference in Las Vegas. He says the disappearance of Thomas and Eileen Lonergan two years ago is a closed issue and no one blames Quicksilver for the disappearance of 80-year-old Ursula Clutton last month. ""I went to several training seminars where they were talking about how to handle disaster situations and that was probably the only place I heard the Lonergans mentioned and it was mentioned in the vain of being a media disaster,"" he said. ""The unfortunate situation that happened earlier this year out of Port Douglas, I mean, that didn't even rate a mention. Not one person mentioned it to me."" --------------------------------"

" Adelaide's Festival Fringe 2000 has been officially launched, with the claim that it is the biggest program yet staged in the city. A total of 536 companies and artists will perform at nearly a hundred venues. The Fringe has become so large that there will be three so-called hubs - in the East End, the West End, and in the southern part of the city. Headline acts include comedienne Judith Lucy, and the unpredictable duo Lano and Woodley, while the always outrageous Tokyo Shock Boys are returning for what is likely to be a sell-out season. The Festival director, Barbara Wolke, says the top ticket prices are no higher than $40. ""But it's mostly in the cheaper price range, and that's really so that it's affordable for everybody to come and see lots of things,"" she said. ""We really want it to be a festival that everybody can participate in."" -------------------------------"

" A Senate committee has recommended that existing laws be changed to give equal superannuation rights to same sex couples. Under the current laws, surviving homosexual partners are prevented by law from inheriting their partner's superannuation. The committee received 1,300 submissions, of which only five opposed the change. Labor MP Anthony Albanese, who has tabled a Private Members Bill to reform the law, says it is no longer acceptable to discriminate against people on the basis of their sexuality. ""This parliament must seize the opportunity which has had the support not just of gay and lesbian groups, not just the trade union movement, but also, most importantly, organisations such as the Society of Chartered Accountants, such as the Industry Funds Superannuation of Australia, such as the Association of Super Funds of Australia,"" he said. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

" Australian cricket captain Steve Waugh is shocked to hear that Pakistan's Shoaib Akhtar has been sent home because of concerns over his bowling action. Akhtar, who is rated as the fastest bowler in the world, has been banned by the International Cricket Council (ICC). The ICC has ruled that Akhtar's bowling action is suspect, forcing him out of the upcoming one-day series against Australia and India. Steve Waugh says it is disappointing that Australian fans will miss out on seeing the fiery paceman in the one-dayers. ""It's disappointing for the player and probably a little bit disappointing for the game because he's such an exciting bowler,"" Waugh said. ""But there are rules there and if people think he's broken those rules then they have got to make a judgement on it."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Liberal party of New South Wales is the suprise new entry in this year's gay and lesbian Mardi Gras Parade. The organisers of the March event expect more than 600,000 spectators in the streets, along with thousands viewing it live on the Internet and pay-per-view television. The March 4 parade will also be replayed on free-to-air television. Parade Director Graham Greenhalgh, says the application for the Liberal Party entry says Opposition leader Kerry Chikarovski might help make the float but it is not known if any Liberal MPs will participate. ""There are a group of Liberal party members who want to raise the profile of gay and lesbian issues within the Liberal Party and they are putting in a parade entry,"" he said. --------------------------------"

" Australian Rennae Stubbs and American partner, Lisa Raymond, have defeated Martina Hingis and Mary Pierce to take out the women's doubles title at the Australian Open tennis. Stubbs and Raymond won the final 6-4, 5-7, 6-4. In other news from the Open, Pete Sampras has withdrawn from the US team for the United States' upcoming Davis Cup tie against Zimbabwe, after injuring his hip. Sampras says the injury happened during last night's semi-final defeat by Andre Agassi. Defending men's singles champion Yevgeny Kafelnikov this afternoon meets Swede Magnus Norman, with the winner to play Agassi in the final."

" Rising prices for tobacco, housing and petrol are seen as fuelling inflation in the latest three-months. Financial market economists are tipping an annual increase in the Consumer Price Index of 2 per cent ahead of the December quarter data being released later this morning. That would put it back up into the range that has been targeted by the Reserve Bank, after being below it for the past three-years. Macquarie Bank chief economist, Bill Shields, says that in the meantime there is no consensus among market economists about what the Reserve Bank might decide at its board meeting next Tuesday. ""I think they are divided,"" he said. ------------------------------------"

" Australia's competition watchdog is expecting a further approach from Telstra after signalling it is poised to block the carrier's purchase of a significant part of OzEmail. Telstra announced earlier this month it wanted to pay more than $300 million for OzEmail's residential Internet service provider business. Australia's third biggest telecommunications company, AAPT was one of the first to object to the proposed deal, calling it anti-competitive. The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission said at the time it would examine the proposal. Yesterday, it informally advised Telstra that it had serious objections to the plan. --------------------------------"

" An inquiry is underway into how a drug trafficker was able to be named as one of the torchbearers to carry the Olympic flame. Warren Richards is currently serving a 12-year sentence in a maximum security jail in Sydney. Richards is a former Olympian, who took part in the 1976 Montreal Games in judo. The Australian Olympic Committee (AOC) invited Richards to take part in the torch relay, forwarding his name along with 1,400 other former Olympians to the Torch Relay organisers. But they were unaware that he had been convicted for conspiracy to import drugs and was serving 12-years in maximum security at Long Bay Jail. A spokesman for the Australian Olympic Committee says the AOC had no idea about Richards criminal history until last night. The AOC's Secretary General Craig McLatchey says his name will now be withdrawn. ""Clearly not only is it inappropriate, it's also impossile for him to be a torchbearer in 2000 and we'll be recommending to SOCOG that the offer of his place be withdrawn this morning,"" he said. ""We made a decision some time ago as a broad policy decision that all living Olympians would be offered the opportunity to carry the torch in recognition of their special place in Australia's Olympic history. ""The majority of the people in that group of Olympians are wonderful role models for Australia. ""We didn't know of Warren Richards' current circumstance. We now do and we've moved quickly to correct it."" The Department of Corrective Services is now investigating how Richards was able to nominate for the torch relay. ----------------------------------"

" The second day of the trial of deposed Pakistani Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif, has centered on evidence that the ousted leader tried to stop a plane with the army chief on board from landing in Karachi. Mr Sharif and six-senior officials are accused of hijacking the plane as well as attempted murder, abduction and terrorism. Among the seven accused is Nawaz Sharif's brother Shabaz. One of those originally accused, the former chief of civil aviation, Aminullah Chaudhry, agreed to give evidence in exchange for immunity. The prosecution's star witness says Nawaz Sharif ordered him to stop army chief General Pervaiz Musharraf's plane from landing at Karachi on the night of the October coup. Nearly 200 passengers were on board and it is alleged the plane was dangerously low on fuel. The trial in the anti-terrorism court is supposed to be finished within seven-days. ---------------------------------"

" The political party of Israeli Prime Minister, Ehud Barak, One Israel, has been fined $5 million and is to be investigated over the illegal funding of its election campaign last year. The party is one of five to face criminal investigation after an audit report found serious breaches of electoral laws involving millions of dollars. The report says One Israel's breaches were the most widespread and serious, with large sums of money secretly channelled to the Barak campaign through non-profit organisations to avoid restrictions on the size and source of campaign funding. Mr Barak says he knew nothing of the schemes during the campaign, but Danny Naveou of the opposition Likud Party, which itself is cited in the report, says the police investigation must go to the top. ""No one, no one can ignore the responsibility of the Prime Minister,"" he said. The report also names Australian mining millionaire, Joe Gutnik, as having illegally contributed to the losing campaign of Likud's Benyamin Netanyahu, by paying for tens of thousands of dollars worth of advertising. A spokesman for the Attorney General said he expected police would investigate Mr Gutnik's involvement. ---------------------------------"

" Stock prices on Wall Street have finished just into negative territory after increasing volatility in the final two-hours of the latest session. The Dow Jones industrial average has moved in a range of almost 250-points. But it has closed just 5-points lower at 11,028. The US bond market has strengthened. The firmer prices have pushed down the yield on 30-year Treasury paper to 6.515 per cent which is a fall of more than 5-points. In Europe, share prices have moved ahead taking a lead from Wall Street's earlier gains, and underpinned by merger speculation in the telecommunications sector. Frankfurt has surged again, jumping 2.3 per cent and Paris is up 0.7 per cent. In London, British Telecom shares have benefited from speculation it is about to announce a merger with Spanish group, Telefonica. London's FT-100 index has gained 55-points to finish at 6,431. That is a rise of 0.9 per cent. Yesterday in Asia, the larger markets tended to be the stand-out performers. Hong Kong was up almost 3.2 per cent overall. Japanese investors were also buyers. Tokyo's Nikkei index rose 99 points to 19,210. In Australia, the market limped ahead in an uninspiring resumption of trade after the Australia Day holiday. The All Ordinaries index finished just 5-points higher at 3,083. Overnight trade on the Sydney Futures exchange has closed with the March Share Price Index contract down 6-points on yesterday's day settlement at 3,086. The 10-year bond contract is up 2-points at 92.80 with the implied yield easing to 7.2 per cent. The Australian dollar is a little firmer against its US counterpart ahead of today's December quarter inflation figures. The local currency is now trading at around 65.42 US cents, up 0.2 of a cent on yesterday's local close. On the cross-rates, it is at 0.6621 euros; 68.73 Japanese yen; 39.90 pence Sterling; and against the New Zealand dollar, it is at 1.295. The price of gold is at $US286.90 an ounce. West Texas crude oil is at $US27.22 a barrel. ---------------------------------"

" A Hunter research team says the blink of a person's eye may identify people at risk of becoming compulsive gamblers. The researchers say they will look at people's eye-blink responses and brain waves, to test their theory that compulsive gambling is linked to obsessive compulsive disorder. Doctor Ulrich Schall says the research will begin at the James Fletcher Hospital in Newcastle next month and take about a year. ""We see a link of compulsive gambling with obsessive gambling with obsessive compulsive disorder,"" he said. ""That's a mental condition where people can't stop their behaviour although they know that it's meaningless what they're doing like compulsive washing the hands and this sort of story."" ----------------------------------"

" A research team based in Queensland is looking at ways of combating the threat posed by species which are introduced by ballast water from ships. A consortium, which has the backing of port authorities and business groups around the country, will fund the research into on-board ship treatment of ballast water. Bob Brunner from Ports Corporation of Queensland says the technology to treat ballast water is already available. The aim of the research, we basically are trying to commercialise approved equipment,"" he said. ""We know the techonology that will treat this ballast water, which is filtration, plus ultraviolet light treatment. ""What we're trying to so know is build a pilot plan to actually trial it in ports using real-life situations."" ----------------------------------"

" Andre Agassi has become the first man since Rod Laver in 1969 to reach four consecutive Grand Slam finals. Agassi won through to Sunday's Australian Open final by beating fellow American Pete Sampras in five sets, 6-4, 3-6, 6-7, 7-6, 6-1. The top seed says he is very proud of his achievement. ""Any acomplishment that's not easy to do is meaningful,"" he said. ""I mean it's an amazing run that I've had in the Slams and certainly I don't take for granted the difficulty of it."" But it was bad news for Australia's Woodies, who lost their doubles semi-final in three sets to Ellis Ferreira and Rick Leach."

" The picket line is growing outside a Hunter Valley factory which last week sacked 300 workers when it went into administration. Workers from National Textiles received their final payslips today after their original pays were withdrawn by the company. But they are still owed more than $11 million in entitlements. The employees, their families and the community are growing angry and frustrated as the administrators remain tight-lipped and the Federal Government refuses to provide emergency funding. The Federal Member for Hunter, Joel Fitzgibbon, has urged Prime Minister John Howard to visit the picket line himself. ""I'm prepared to admit that I didn't quite understand the extent of the plight of some of these people until I got out here today,"" he said. ""I thought I did, but I realise now I didn't. ""Some of these people don't have $2 in their pocket and I suggest if the Prime Minister were to come here, he might have a better understanding of that plight and might be a little bit more sensitive to their needs."" Rachel Cronin, whose husband lost his job at National Textiles, says her family has to pay off a car and a house and is struggling. Mrs Cronin has three children: two who start school next week and a baby. ""[He] turns one on Sunday and we're supposed to be giving him a first birthday party,"" she said. ""We've sent out all the invitations but I don't know where we're going to get the money from to do that now."" ----------------------------------"

" Prime Minister John Howard has indicated he does not agree with predictions about interest rate rises, saying the economy while strong, is not overheating. He has criticised banks which have predicted rises, calling it loose talk, verging on the self serving. While Mr Howard says he will not make a prediction about rates, he has told Sydney Radio 2GB people should not be afraid of a strong economy. ""Low inflationary growth is the thing that we've craved in Australia for decades,"" he said. ""We now have it and some people seem to be taking fright from it and I think that would be a huge mistake if we did that. ""I don't think the economy's overheating, I think it's strong and it's strong because the fundamentals are right,"" Mr Howard said. ----------------------------------"

" Hundreds of angry tennis fans are considering legal action against Qantas Holidays, because they have been left without a seat for tonight's Sampras-Agassi semi-final at the Australian Open. The fans paid for centre court seats at Melbourne Park, but Qantas Holidays failed to reserve enough tickets for the match which has been sold out. Qantas customers paid for their Australian Open finals tickets at least three months ago. Some, from as far away as north Queensland, claim Qantas Holidays failed to inform them of any ticketing error before arriving at Melbourne Park. ""If I'd have known about this two days ago, I'd have cancelled,"" one angry fan said. ""I've taken long service leave to come on this trip, and we booked three months ago, we arrived here and yesterday, we were told that we didn't have seats for the best match in the whole tournament,"" another fan said. Sue, from Mackay in north Queensland, says everyone in her holiday group is considering class action against Qantas Holidays. ""We paid the for these tickets four months ago, they have re-sold our tickets and no matter who was playing tonight, we want our seats, that's all there is to it, we don't want anything else, we want our seats inside the centre court,"" she said. Qantas Holidays spokeswoman, Janet Collingwood, says the company has taken full responsibilty for the ticketing mess. ""There appears to have been some error, we're not sure where that error is at this stage,"" she said. ""We obviously thought we had the tickets stitched up otherwise we wouldn't have sold them the tickets."" Qantas is trying to make arrangments for its customers to watch the match on a big screen, either at Melbourne Park, or another venue. ----------------------------------"

" The Northern Territory coroner's court has released its report into the death of a Dutch journalist in East Timor, in September last year. In his findings, Coroner Greg Cavanagh concluded that Sander Robert Thoenes was killed by a gunshot wound to the chest at close range. After three separate examinations by an Indonesian Army doctor, an Australian Army doctor and Dr Michael Zillman of the Royal Darwin Hospital, it was Dr Zillman's autopsy report which the coroner accepted. Greg Cavanagh says, unlike the other two, Dr Zillman had specialist training in forensic pathology. The report states that on September 21 Sander Robert Thoenes was travelling as a pillion passenger on a motorcycle from Dili, to the village of Becora. Instead the bike did a u-turn just past the Becora church, when the driver saw three motorbikes approaching, with the riders dressed in TNI uniforms, armed with automatic weapons. Either the chase or the shooting caused the bike to fall onto its left side, with the driver fleeing the scene. The body of Mr Thoenes was found early the next morning by Interfet personnel. ----------------------------------"

" Former deputy Prime Minister and former National Party Leader, Tim Fischer, will tonight announce he will retire from politics at the next election. Mr Fischer was elected to Federal Parliament in 1984, after serving for 13 years in the New South Wales Parliament. He became National Party leader in 1990 and Deputy Prime Minister when the Coalition won office in 1996. He resigned from Cabinet last June to devote more time to his family. -----------------------------------"

" The winners of the Australian songwriters' finals have been announced at the Country Music Festival in Tamworth, Song of the year award went jointly to John Williamson and Graeme Connors. The new songwriter honour was awarded to Brendan Walmsley and the songmaker award went to to Keith Kelly and Marion Dixon. Brian Young received the Tex Morton award for his outstanding contribution to country music, generally. The 2000 Australian Bush Poets Laureate Awards have also been announced, the winners being Kelly Dixon, of central Australia, Murray Hartin, formerly of Tamworth, Dobe Newton and Slim Dusty. ----------------------------------"

" Guyra Shire Council, in the north of New South Wales, says it is getting a strong response from groups and individuals interested in trying to recover the meteorite which crashed into its water supply dam, late last year. The dramatic fall to earth caused a frenzy of interest at the time, when the meteorite, which may be no bigger than a golf ball, flattened a reed bed and buried itself in a tunnel of mud, five metres deep, in the side of the dam. Guyra deputy mayor Robyn Jackson says as many as five different groups have put up their hands for the right to search for the meteorite, which could become a major tourist attraction if it is recovered. ----------------------------------"

" The top two women's seeds have made it through to the Australian Tennis Open final at Melbourne Park. Defending champion Martina Hingis had a convincing win over Spaniard Conchita Martinez, 6-3, 6-2. In the other semi-final, Lindsay Davenport held off a late charge by fellow American Jennifer Capriati, who took the second set to a tiebreaker before losing the match. ------------------------------------"

" A local Timber Creek police officer is the new Donkey leg throwing champion, after yesterday's annual Australia Day competition. The men, women and children of Timber Creek were all vying for the title, each given three throws. Michael Whyatt tossed the leg 22.5 metres, breaking the previous record by nearly five metres. Michael received a trophy made out the skulls and legs of a dead horse, painted black, white and gold. ---------------------------------"

" Foreign Minister Alexander Downer has played down the prospect of an upsurge in violence in East Timor by pro-Indonesian milita, once the Australian-led force starts handing over to United Nations peacekeepers next month. Mr Downer, who has just visited Jakarta, made the comments in Britain, after a speech to students at the prestigious Oxford Union. He said the peacekeepers will have to be vigilant and determined to use force if there is renewed militia activity, but he is confident it can quickly be brought under control. ""It may be that the militias will try them out a bit to start with, and anyway there'll be plenty of people with experience, including quite a lot of Australians from Interfet,"" he said. ""And I'm sure that any resurgent militia activity will be dealt with summarily by the peacekeeping operation."" \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*"

" After a month long search and the rejection of 25 names, the United Nations Security Council has agreed on who should head the new Iraqi weapons inspection agency. Swedish Diplomat, Hans Blix, a former head of the International Atomic Energy Agency, was the sole candidate acceptable to council members, including France and Russia, which had objected to the UN Secretary General's move to re-appoint the former head of the old Iraqi Weapons Commission, Rolf Ekaus. Iraq's ambassador Sahid Hassan said his country retained its objection to the inspection program overall. ""Devil or angel, the new chairman will not change in the scheme,"" Mr Hassan said. ""This resolution is not implementable, is not working and it will not work."" No weapons inspectors have been in Iraq since 1998, when the US and Britain launched airstrikes against the country, in retaliation for non-compliance with the UN-required inspection program. \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*"

" Australian and Latvian officials have met to discuss the possible extradition of the suspected war criminal, Konrad Kalejs. The talks have taken place on the sidelines of a special holocaust conference in Stockholm. Representatives from more than 50 countries are meeting in Stockholm to discuss what can be learnt from the holocaust. Australia and Latvia are among them and the conference has presented an oportunity for some direct talks on how to deal with an embarrassing present day reminder of the Nazi era. Officials have been discussing an extradition deal that could pave the way for Konrad Kalejs to be sent back to Latvia to face justice. Kalejs is accused of being a leader of the Arajs Commando, a Latvian Nazi unit responsible for more than 30,000 deaths during World War II. Australia has made Latvia aware of recent changes to the War Crimes Act that means foreign governments no longer have to establish a prima facie case when seeking the extradition of war crimes suspects. Latvia has also invited representatives from Australia and five other countries to a special meeting in Riga next month to pool evidence against Konrad Kalejs. \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*"

" The latest group of suspected illegal immigrants to be detected in northern Australian waters, have been taken to the Woomera detention centre in South Australia. Coastwatch detected the 40 people, including three Indonesian crew, on a vessel off the Kimberley coast on Tuesday. They were taken to Darwin, before being transported to Woomera last night. The three crew have been detained in Darwin and will be charged with breaching immigration regulations. \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*"

" The chief executive of Olympic organiser SOGOG, Sandy Hollway, is confident of securing a financial deal to bail out the organising committee. Yesterday the Olympics Minister, Michael Knight, said he was unsure whether the International Olympic Committee (IOC) would agree to surrender the $11 million payment, it is entitled to receive from SOCOG. But Mr Hollway is confident the deal, worth a total of $52 million will end up being secured. ""I'd be surprised to be sitting here to find that it hasn't come off,"" he said. ""This of course arises from the welcome offer made by the Australian Olympic Committee to give up its $11 million. ""If the IOC gives up its $11 million profits, if the government were to not require the $30 million surplus it had wanted and I think it will come off,"" Mr Hollway said. \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*"

" Three-hundred workers retrenched from National Textiles at Rutherford, in the Hunter Valley, have suffered another blow, with claims their last pay cheque from the company may have bounced. The company announced last week it was closing down. The workers are into their third day of a picket line outside the factory demanding to be paid their full entitlements. Former machine operator at National Textiles, Greg Nolan, says he is one of many workers who have had their last pay from the company removed from their bank accounts. ""We had a week's extra pay put in our bank,"" he said. ""I checked it on Saturday and it was there, $380.30. ""I went down last night and the $380.30 has been taken out. ""It's not a lot of money but it would have kept us going for another week or so."" Textiles union delegate, Brian Blakemore, says workers are supposed to be paid for another four days work this week. Mr Blakemore says workers are confused and he hopes they will get an explanation at tomorrow's meeting with the administrators. ""Everybody from National Textiles is going down to that administrators meeting at Newcastle Workers club on Friday,"" he said. ""Now we're supposed to have another four day's pay in there on Thursday, if it's not there, there'll be probably a hell of a scene down at the Workers Club. ""The feeling of the people, they're not happy. ""There's no money in the bank for them, they've got to feed their children, they've got to pay their mortgages, they've got to do everything else like everyone else that is working,"" Mr Nolan said. \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*"

" New South Wales dairy farmers have begun a series of meetings on the Federal Government's $1.7 billion plan to deregulate the nation's dairy industry. The package will give farmers compensation if they choose to leave the dairy industry, but it will not go ahead unless all states agree to the proposal. Farmers in Victoria, who are responsible for around two-thirds of Australia's dairy production, have backed deregulation. New South Wales Dairy Association Hunter representative Arthur Burns, says that does not leave dairy farmers with much choice. ""They don't really stand to gain anything from deregulation,"" he said. ""The problem is though, if the biggest dairy state in Australia, the state that produces 63 per cent of the nation's milk, does deregulate, to compete with them we have to too."" \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*"

" The trial of Pakistan's deposed Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif, has begun with the prosecution presenting its star witness. The court was told the former Prime Minister tried to stop a plane with army chief, General Pervaiz Musharraf, on board from landing, even though it was dangerously low on fuel. Mr Sharif and six senior officials are charged with kidnapping, hijacking and abduction. The start of the trial has been held up for three months by legal and procedural delays. The case of Nawaz Sharif and his co-accused relates to the night of the October coup when army chief, Pervaiz Musharraf seized power. It is alleged they tried to stop the General's plane, with 200 other passengers on board, from landing in Pakistan. Star prosecution witness, former chief of the Civilian Aviation Authority, Aminullah Chaudhry, told the court Mr Sharif ordered the plane be prevented from landing in Pakistan. \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*"

" A 36-year-old man has been flown from a tuna boat, about 100 nautical miles east of the Gold Coast, and rushed to hospital with a serious eye injury. The man was working on the boat yesterday afternoon, when a fish hook penetrated his eye. The boat was beyond the range of rescue helicopters, so it raced through the night to get closer to shore. The Careflight rescue helicopter met the vessel at about 6:45am today and winched the injured man onboard. Careflight manager Ashley Van De Velde says the man's injury is serious. ""[It's] apparently embedded in his eye and the crew themselves had actually released it out from his eye and from that, there was obviously a fairly intense injury to his eye,"" he said. ""We winched our ambulance officer down and as soon as he came onboard, our doctor assessed him from there, but he was quite stable when they had him on board."" \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*"

" Tonight's semi-final at the Australian Open will make grand slam history. The semi-final between Andre Agassi and Pete Sampras will be the first under lights at a grand slam tournament. They first played against each other in 1989. From their 28 matches, Sampras has won 17 including last year's Wimbledon final. Tournament organisers have opted for a night match, knowing the immense public interest, and that of the players including Martina Hingis. ""I'm going to watch that, I mean it's going to be exciting to see. Both of them have been legendary players,"" she said. Hingis will first play her own semi-final against Conchita Martinez, while Lindsay Davenport and Jennifer Capriati meet in the other women's semi. Tomorrow, Yevgeny Kafelnikov and Swede, Magnus Norman will decide the other men's finalist. The defending champion saying his match deserves as much attention as Agassi and Sampras. ""I'm sure they also appreciate that I won two grand slams which obviously seperates myself from the other guys. I think I'm welcome in their club."" And Todd Woodbridge and Mark Woodforde play a doubles semi-final tonight. \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*"

" Some 430 Australians have been honoured for their contribution to the country in the Australia Day Honours List. Westfield Chairman and Reserve Bank board-member, Franky Lowy has received the highest honour, along with historian Geoffrey Blainey. Former New South Wales Premier Tom Lewis, astronaut Andy Thomas, the first man on Australian television, Bruce Gyngell, businessman Bob Mansfield, and International War Crimes Tribunal Judge David Hunt have been made Officers in the Order of Australia. Former politicians Ben Humphries and Bruce Goodluck, the founder of an orphanage in Cambodia, Geraldine Cox, former television personality Donnie Sutherland, ABC journalist Sean Dorney, and ice skaters Stephen and Danielle Carr are also on the Honours List."

" Around 6,000 people are set to become Australian citizens at ceremonies around the country today. The Immigration Minister, Philip Ruddock, says Australia Day this year marks the end of a 12-month campaign to raise interest in citizenship. The Special Minister of State, Chris Ellison, has urged all those who become citizens to enrol to vote. Senator Ellison says Australian Electoral Commission officers will attend a number of citizenship ceremonies to hand-out enrolment forms and information."

" Around 2,000 people are expected to invade Australia Day ceremonies around Melbourne today, to push the case of the indigenous population. The Invasion Day Rally 2000 is scheduled to start at 11:00am AEDT in the centre of the city. Activist Charmaine Clarke says the ralliers have a serious point to make. ""It's not Australia Day for indigenous people around the country,"" she said. ""It's not a day of celebration, it's actually a day of mourning. ""We're also going to be calling for the actual Australia Day celebrations to be moved to a more appropriate time, so that all Australians, including indigenous Australians can actually celebrate together."" Aboriginal groups in Adelaide will mark Australia Day by labelling it Invasion Day and by paying tribute to their elders. A line-up of events will be held outside the Tandanya Aboriginal Cultural Institute in the city, from midday. The program will include a concert and will be launched by Kaurna elder Georgina Williams."

" One of South Australia's 42 Australia Day recipients says she will use her award to promote and raise money for her orphanage in Cambodia. Geraldine Cox, who has been made a member in the General Division, established the orphanage in 1993 with 24 children. She says it now caters for 61 children but could handle many more if it had the funds to support them. ""I'm going to be back in Adelaide perhaps towards the end of February and I will be contacting the corporate sector in Adelaide,"" she said. ""But I need big help from larger sponsors as well so I'm hoping that people will listen to me a bit more. ""Those OAMs at the end of your name sort of mean something in the corporate world, and I hope I get a good response from them."""

" The Australian of the Year Sir Gustav Nossal is to be one of the torchbearers for the Australian Olympic torch relay. The chief executive of the Sydney Olympic Games Organising Committee Sandy Holway says the Young Australian of the Year, Ian Thorpe, will also run in the torch relay ""I think the Olympic movement as well as Australia is honouring them,"" he said. ""Quite rightly so and in giving them the opportunity to run the the torch in 2000. ""Gus Nossal says that he's going to go into training straight away, and he's very much looking forward to it and Ian Thorpe likewise."""

" Eminent scientist Sir Gustav Nossal has been named Australian of the year. Prime Minister John Howard made the announcement in Sydney. Sir Gustav is a leader in immunology research, working with the World Health Organisation in the global battle against disease. He has also been involved in national organisations of social significance, including his role as deputy chair of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation. Sir Gustav says the award is a symbolic recognition of how important science and technology is to Australia's future at the dawn of the new millennium. He also urged Australians to consider the issue of Aboriginal reconciliation, which will be formally put to the people later this year. ""On May 27 in the Sydney Opera House at Corroboree 2000, we shall be presenting to the Australian people a declaration of reconciliation and a series of national strategies or action plans to address the remaining outstanding issues in indigenous affairs,"" he said. ""Reconciliation is a people's movement: I commend it strongly to all Australians."" ----------------------------------"

" Aviation engineers are continuing to test light aicraft across Australia for contaminated fuel as operators wait for hardship payments from Mobil. Max Quartermain from the Moorabbin operators group says they are not included in a class action for compensation against the company and have been told their cheques are in the mail. ""There was a representative of Mobil down at the airport all day yesterday and processing claims for financial hardship,"" he said. ""We hope that with - we still haven't seen a cheque from that fund of $15 million but we're assured the cheques will start flowing if not today being a public holiday, certainly tomorrow and that will keep the operators going. ""I'm fearful the group doing the class action may well and truly be out of business before the courts release any findings in their favour."" Mr Quartermain says additional kits were delivered to Moorabbin overnight to continue the engine cleaning process. ""The aircraft that have originally been tested earlier this week and proved to be contaminated are now going through the what they call the air directive 81 which is cleansing the contamination out of the fuel systems,"" he said. ""We would expect aeroplanes to start flying either late this afternoon or tomorrow morning as long as the tests are cleared."" ----------------------------------"

" The Federal Government is to tighten the rules for jobseekers receiving Government benefits. There will be an increase in the number of jobs the unemployed have to apply for along with an expanded use of job search diaries. The Community Services Minister, Larry Anthony, says it is better to have some type of job than none at all because once people are in work they are in a better position to progress. ""What we are seeing particularly in some of those capital cities and particularly in Sydney is that many areas we're getting down to almost zero unemployment,"" he said. ""Of course in other suburbs it might not be the case. ""But we do want people to be more vigorous in looking for work but we also recognise that if people obtain part-time work then the current requirements for looking for full-time jobs will be halved."" ----------------------------------"

" The prospects for interest rates continue to preoccupy investors in the United States. Recent comments from Federal Reserve officials have been taken by the markets to signal a more aggressive stance this year. Ahead of next week's policy meeting at the Reserve, prices on the New York Stock Exchange have managed just a small recovery after yesterday's big fall. That has only been achieved late in the session. The Dow Jones industrial average has been as much as 125 points lower overnight. But it has now closed 22 points higher at 11,030. The US bond market may be benefitting from some ""safe haven"" flows, having already factored in a tough stance on monetary policy. At the same time, President Bill Clinton has said the US will fully repay its public debt by 2013 - two years ahead of schedule. The firmer bond prices have pushed down the yield on 30-year Treasury paper to 6.64 per cent - a fall of one point. In Europe, yesterday's big falls on Wall Street had investors rattled and share prices in Frankfurt dropped 1.8 per cent. In Britain, UK interest rates also remain a concern. The London Stock Exchange's FT-100 index has fallen 106 points to finish at 6,274. That is the lowest close in three-months and a slide of 1.7 per cent. Yesterday in Asia, the key regional centres were all down. Japanese investors sold off information and high-tech stocks. Tokyo's Nikkei index fell 161 points to 18,896. In Australia, the market recovered some of its early losses but still closed substantially lower on interest rate concerns. The All Ordinaries index fell 18 points to 3,079. Today, the sharemarket will be closed for the Australia Day holiday. Overnight trade on the Sydney Futures exchange has now closed. The March Share Price Index contract is down 7 points on yesterday's day settlement at 3,076. The 10-year bond contract is down half a point at 92.73 with the implied yield at 7.27 per cent. The Australian dollar is a fraction lower against its US counterpart. Just before 8:00am AEDT it was now trading at around 65.56 US cents, down less than 0.1 of a cent on yesterday's local close. On the cross-rates it was at 0.6549 euros, 69.50 Japanese yen, 39.85 pence Sterling and against the New Zealand dollar it was at 1.289. The price of gold was at $US285.85 an ounce. West Texas crude oil was at $US29.86 a barrel. ---------------------------------"

" India will be keen for victory against Australia in the one-day competition today to take it a step closer to the finals. It must win its next three matches to eliminate Pakistan from the play-offs. The Indians beat their arch-rivals in Adelaide overnight, bowling them out 28 runs short of the 267 target. Indian captain Sachin Tendulkar says it was an important win. ""It's a bit too late in the series, but we still have a chance so it's come at the right time and when it was required the most,"" he said. ---------------------------------"

" The President of Cycling Australia, Ray Godkin, wants drug cases involving Australian athletes to be handled with more haste. Yesterday, Olympic cyclist Tim Lyons was suspended from competition for two years after the Court of Arbitration for Sport found him guilty of breaching anti-doping policies. A test revealed the Commonwealth Games gold medallist had a high testosterone level Mr Godkin says it is unfair that it took authorities 10 months from the time of the test, until yesterday's verdict was handed down. ""It's a long drawn out thing and hopefully we can shorten this up because I'd like to, when this sort of thing goes on, if we can get them and have them dealt with,"" he said. ""Both for the riders, and of course if the riders are innocent we support them whole heartedly - but what we would like to see is for these to be determined and dealt with as quickly as possible and this has been a long, drawn out thing."""

" The Prime Minister, John Howard, has rejected suggestions the goods and service tax (GST) on tampons is discriminatory or offensive. He is refusing to give in to pressure to make women's sanitary products GST free. The pressure is coming from some female Coalition backbenchers, the Opposition and some women's groups. Democrats leader Meg Lees says her personal view is that tampons should not be taxed, but the issue is yet to be discussed in the party room. The Democrats deputy leader, Natasha Stott Despoja, also wants women's sanitary products GST exempt and has told Channel Nine she hopes her colleagues agree. ""It's not as if we're drawing a new line in the sand,"" she said. ""We have to acknowledge that this country has quite a legacy, a good legacy when it comes to tax-free sanitary products for 40, 50 years, I believe in this country we haven't had a tax on tampons, or pads or sanitary products for Australian women. ""I'd like to see that line in the sand continue."" ----------------------------------"

" Class actions launched over the aviation fuel crisis could impact on compensation offered by Mobil. The company has pledged to pay the costs of cleaning its customers' aircraft fuel systems and will this week release a compensation package to cover direct business losses. It has also hired three jet aircraft to deliver kits to test for contaminated fuel to airports across eastern Australia. Two legal firms representing aircraft owners and pilots yesterday launched class actions over the crisis. But Mobil's corporate manager, Alan Bailey, says that could have an impact on any payments to affected customers. ""The fact that legal action is being taken does complicate the process of establishing a program to reimburse our customers,"" he said. ""If some of our customers are actually taking legal action against us, it places some limits on how we can deal with them, in terms of reimbursing them for losses that they have incurred."" ----------------------------------"

" Mitsubishi has told its Adelaide workforce that it is in South Australia to stay. Management told unions, in a briefing this morning, that a new model Mitusbishi would be produced in Adelaide from 2005. Meanwhile, new versions of the Verada and Magna models will be produced locally. However, unions are still uncertain as to whether restructuring taking place in Mitusbishi worldwide will lead to any further job losses in Adelaide. And the company's managing director, Mike Quinn, has also announced he will retire, to be replaced by a Japanese executive. ----------------------------------"

" BHP's chief executive officer Paul Anderson says the company is repsonding to the global environment by introducing individual contracts to iron ore workers in the Pilbara in Western Australia. Unions are considering further industrial action at BHP sites, as the dispute over individual contracts heads to the Federal Court in Melbourne on Thursday. Mr Anderson says BHP is not going to wind the clock back for the iron workers, with the majority of its workforce now in enterprise bargaining agreements. ""We've got 10,000 other workers under enterprise bargaining agreements right now,"" he said. ""Our relationships in the steel industry have been very healthy, we've accomplished a lot, we've improved productivity there, we've done it without any industrial action. ""And I have to say everyone involved would claim it was very successful."" ---------------------------------"

" Thai security forces have stormed a hospital west of Bangkok where Burmese rebels have been holding hundreds of people hostage, capturing at least eight of the 10 hostage takers. However one or two of the rebels is believed to have escaped. Thai commandos raided a provincial hospital 120 kilometres west of Bangkok where gunmen had been holding staff and patients hostage since Monday. Reports say several explosions rocked the compound and automatic gunfire was heard as truckloads of commandos rushed into the building. A senior government spokesman told the ABC the raid went according to plan and at this stage he was not aware of any casualties. Nurses helped patients, some on stretchers or in wheelchairs, leave the building. Gunmen believed to be part of a group calling itself God's Army had stormed the building holding some 700 staff and patients hostage. Throughout the day some hostages were either released or managed to escape. This is Thailand's second hostage drama in less than four months. The last was at the Burmese Embassy and ended peacefully with no casualties and the gunmen being freed. This time the Thai authorities had vowed tough action. --------------------------------"

" The Governor-General has paid tribute to the third last Australian Gallipoli veteran whose funeral has been held in Melbourne. A large number of mourners were at Trinity Uniting Church in North Balwyn, Melbourne, for the funeral of 105-year-old Walter Parker. Sir William Deane described Mr Parker as a true symbol of the Australian spirit through his service at Gallipoli, saying that like the other veterans of that campaign their spirit lives forever. After Gallipoli Mr Parker served on the Somme, where he was wounded, and in 1998 he was awarded the French Legion of Honour. Soldiers from Watsonia Barracks were among ex-servicemen who laid rememberance poppies on Mr Parkers casket and formed a guard of honour as his casket left the church. ------------------------------------"

" The Olympic torch relay will be expanded to include an additional 1,000 community positions. Olympics Minister Michael Knight made the announcement at today's official launch of the Sydney 2000 torch relay. The Minister says the extra positions will take the total number of torch bearers to 11,000. ""I was always conscious that once you got down the details, street by street, actual torch change by torch change, you's get a different number to the 10,000,"" he said. ""I'd always hoped it would be bigger than the 10,000. ""The team's worked very hard, they've been audited by the ICA on the process and they're confident now that we have 11,000 spots and we want to give that other 1,000 to the community."" ----------------------------------"

" Bundaberg's mild summer is causing a longer incubation period for turtle hatchlings at the famous Mon Repos rookery. Turtle researcher Col Limpus of the Environment Department says hatchlings normally emerge eight weeks after laying, but this year it is up to nine and half weeks. He says this means it will be a week or two before there is predictable hatchling production at Mon Repos, and the longer incubation period raises a concern. ""I guess the one concern is that the longer the eggs are in the sand, the higher the risk that we could get a cyclone come along and cause some major erosion down the coast,"" he said. ""We always look for a rapid incubation so that we get the eggs hatched and the hatchlings gone before the cyclones are having an impact,"" Dr Limpus said. --------------------------------"

" Andre Agassi has won a semi-final berth at the Australian Open tennis in Melbourne. In his quarter-final against Morocco's Hicham Arazi, Agassi took the match in straight sets: 6-4, 6-4, 6-2. Earlier this afternoon, Australia's doubles combination of Mark Woodforde and Todd Woodbridge won through to the quarter-finals, defeating Wayne Ferreira and Yevgeny Kafelnikov two sets to one. America's Jennifer Capriati has won through to her first grand slam semi-final in nine years, defeating Ai Sugiyama in straight sets. Capriati overcame two injury breaks in the first set, to win in 55 minutes."

" The Cival Aviation Safety Authority (CASA) has released its approved proceedures for decontaminating aircraft affected by contaminated avgas fuel. CASA has warned aircraft owners the procedure has not been approved by aircraft manufacturers and could affect warranties and insurance. Spokesman Peter Gibson says water must be flushed through empty fuel tanks. Then a water scavenging mixture is used to remove moisture and a number of engine parts are removed and inspected. ""It's n procedure which CASA's engineers and leading engineers from the aviation industry have been working on now for a number of weeks,"" he said. ""We've also been consulting closely with the aircraft manufacturers to get their views on these proceedures. ""Everybody agrees it is safe to use water to get rid of the contamination out of the fuel system."" ----------------------------------"

" A Queensland small businessman has refused to implement the goods and services tax (GST) unless local Federel Member Warren Truss works in his shop for a day to show how to cope with the change. Bill Knight, of the Inconvenience Store in Maryborough, says Mr Truss would have to work a 15-hour day without the benefit of a cash register to cope. He says he supported the tax in its original form but with the changes it is unworkable. ""It's fine for these people in Canberra to come up with these great ideas, make it law, but they've obviously never been in a situation where they've had to cope with it,"" he said. ""I don't think any of them would be able to cope with it, that's why I've issued the challenge to Warren Truss. ""If it's this great, you come and show me how it works. Show me how simple it is and great, I'll publicly apologise. ""If not there's no way I can do it and I should not be expected to,"" Mr Knight said. -----------------------------------"

" The Northern Territory's Police Minister, Mike Reed, says he is sure future statistics will show that a national DNA database is beneficial. The Territory's legislation came into affect a year ago, after Police Ministers across the country decided to set up the national database. The Territory had already been operating its own DNA database since 1992. Queensland and New South Wales are now finalising their legislation. Mr Reed say it is too early to say what impact the database has had in the Territory, but he is sure in the future statistics will show they have been effective. ""It will have been shown I think to protect Territory women from potential rapists,"" he said. ""And I think it will also be able to be demonstrated that in many cases people who were thought to have been involved in a crime, were excluded by virtue of DNA testing, and were not harassed as they might otherwise have continued to be questioned in relation to an offence."" -----------------------------------"

" Indonesia's President Wahid is planning to visit Australia in March, in a sign that bi-lateral relations may be improving. The visit would be the first by an Indonesian leader in a quarter of a century. President Wahid revealed his travel plans during a meeting with Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer. The Indonesian leader has travelled widely since his election to power in October, but has so far snubbed invitations to visit Australia. Mr Downer says he believes relations with Indonesian are getting back on track, after sharp differences over East Timor. In another sign of warming relations, Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock is to be invited to Jakarta to discuss the problem of illegal boat people reaching Australia from Indonesian waters. ----------------------------------"

" News Corporation says it is yet to receive a formal approach from some Ansett staff, who want to buy the media group's half-share in the carrier. A small group of airline staff has unveiled an ambitious plan to take the holding, which News Corp has been wanting to offload. The plan, which the group expects to be worth around $500 million, would be funded through a staff ""salary sacrifice"" over seven years. The steering committee comprises officials from the pilots, engineers and other unions, and says it has the backing of a top investment bank, and a leading advisor on employee share plans. It says the re-vitalisation that would result from staff ownership would give Ansett added competitive strength, when challenging new entrants in the Australian market, such as Virgin. ------------------------------------"

" Six human rights groups are challenging an interim decision by the British Government to release former Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet. The 84-year-old General was arrested 15 months ago in London following a warrant issued by Spain, which wants to extradite him to face torture charges. The six groups, including Amnesty International, will seek a judicial review at the High Court in London. The joint action is based on claims that Britain's Home Secretary, Jack Straw, did not act properly before announcing that he believes General Pinochet should be released, because he is too ill to stand trial. The groups argue that Mr Straw should have released the medical report on which he based his decision. They are also critical of the doctors who wrote the report. It is expected the challenge will be heard late tomorrow. Belgium, which is also seeking General Pinochet's extradition, has said it will launch a separate challenge. The legal manoeuvering is likely to delay a final decision on the former dictator's fate. Pinochet remains under house arrest at a luxurious mansion on London's outskirts. ----------------------------------"

" Thai Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai has arrived in a border town to take charge of negotiations with dissident Burmese rebels who have taken hundreds of people hostage in a local hospital. It is believed a dozen masked gunmen are holding more than 600 patients and staff hostage. Thailand has agreed to some of the groups demands, allowing ethnic Karen refugees to enter the country for medical treatment. The rebels, believed to be from God's Army, a Burmese insurgent group led by 12-year-old twin boys, stormed the provincial hospital 120 kilometres west of Bangkok. A number of the hostages have been released and at one stage some 30 people managed to escape through the hospitals back door. Most were elderly or parents clutching babies as they fled to safety. This is Thailand's second hostage drama in less than four months, with gunmen seizing the Burmese Embassy last October. ------------------------------------"

" Sydney Olympic Games organisers (SOCOG) are bracing themselves for complaints this morning with the release of the names of Olympic torch bearers. With 43,000 nominations for only 5,000 community positions the list's release will spark complaints from those who did not make the cut. With last year's criticism of ticketing, SOCOG is hoping the torch relay will boost public interest in the Games. Nova Perris-Kneebone will be the first to carry the Olympic flame on its 100-day journey, designed to pass within an hour's drive of 85 per cent of the population. Greg Norman will carry the torch across the Sydney Harbour Bridge, women's world number one golfer Karrie Webb is also on the list, along with marathon runner Heather Turland and former Test cricketer Carl Rackemann. Cooma ambulance officer Phil Brown, one of the community torch bearers selected, says it will be great to be part of history. ""Very proud in respect of my two sons being able to say that my dad was a torch bearer in years to come,"" he said. Meanwhile, former Australian distance runner Ron Clarke has offered some advice to those selected to carry the torch - ""relax, enjoy the privilege and run as slow as you can"". Ron Clarke, who carried a special torch for the final leg of the 1956 Melbourne Games, will carry the Olympic flame again. But he says the 1956 torch came with some pain. He suffered minor burns on the arm from the magnesium fireworks designed to be extra bright for television. ""It became a bright spark rather than a gas flame and the white sparks dropped off some magnesium cinders as they virtually exploded and only went for five minutes,"" he said. ""If I hadn't of got round the track and up there in five minutes then we would have had to go back to Athens and start again."" ---------------------------------"

" Pat Rafter has been left out of Australia's Davis Cup squad for the tie against Switzerland, in Zurich, due to injury. The squad is Mark Philippoussis, Lleyton Hewitt, Sandon Stolle and Wayne Arthurs. Davis Cup captain John Newcombe says Philippoussis was never in doubt for the first round despite some media reports to the contrary. Rafter is still recovering from shoulder surgery and will not resume championship tennis until March. Newcombe hopes to include Rafter in the next round, should Australia defeat Switzerland. ""Ideally we would have Philippoussis, Hewitt and Rafter as three people in the team and then find a doubles player that fitted into that package,"" he said."

" The Federal Opposition and Democrats are promising to increase the pressure on the Government to exclude more items from the goods and services tax (GST). The Prime Minister, who has returned from holidays, has had to deal with confusion over the tax created by his Ministers. John Howard has begun the year on the back foot, with confusion over tax details and the Democrats and the Opposition pressing for more changes, including making tampons GST exempt. With the tax not beginning until July, Mr Howard is trying to head off months of potential pressure on the Government, telling Channel Nine he will not agree to more exemptions. ""If you start doing that you will have no GST in the end,"" he said. He promised no-one will be worse off under the tax and prices will not rise by more than 10 per cent. But he is trying to keep the focus on the big picture. ""The end game of all of this is to give this country a more competitive taxation system,"" he said. -----------------------------------"

" Unions involved in the BHP dispute have not ruled out further industrial action as they commence a period of consultatation with their members. Australian Council of Trade Unions secretary-elect Greg Combet says there may be further industrial action in a couple of weeks but he is refusing to reveal details of the union's strategy. Union officials met in Melbourne today to draft a strategy in the ongoing dispute over BHP's plan to introduce individual contracts for iron ore workers in Western Australia's Pilbara. Mr Combet says he will go to the Pilbara to speak with iron ore workers and their families and pursue legal action against BHP. ""We will do everything that we do with the full support of the rank and file membership of union's throughout BHP's operations,"" he said. ""It's that course that we're now embarking upon; to go back to them, consult with them, inform them [of] what the state of play is so we can make some decisions about the future conduct of this dispute."" ----------------------------------"

" Mobil says it will fight against legal action taken over the contaminated aviation fuel crisis. Writs were filed in the Federal Court and the Supreme Court in Melbourne today, seeking millions of dollars from the oil company on behalf of thousands of pilots, aircraft owners and aviation operators. Mobil's Samantha Potts says the action is disappointing. ""We're particularly disappointed given the announcements we made towards the end of last week, firstly in relation to a $15 million program to provide financial support in an immediate sense, but also but also we comitted to establish a further program to address the direct business losses,"" she said. ""The details of that haven't been announced yet, yet we are having legal action. If the action is launched against us then we have no choice but to fight it."" Meanwhile, Victorian aircraft operators are becoming increasingly disheartened as planes undergoing testing for contaminated fuel fail to pass. Testing is underway at Melbourne's Moorabbin and Essendon airports. Moorabbin operators group spokesman Max Quartermain says testing is a waste of time and the limited number of test kits is slowing the process. ""I think that even if we had 500 kits on the airport it would just mean that all 280 planes would have been tested by now and we probably still would have had a 100 per cent fail rate,"" he said. ""I think the tests are useless. The tests are telling us what we already know - that the aircraft are contaminated. It's not solving our problem."" -----------------------------------"

" Brisbane software developer Technology One has announced it will supply a multi-million-dollar student administration system to Sydney's Macquarie University. Macquarie will use Technology One's ""Student One"" software to manage about 20,000 students. Shares in Technology One were up three cents to $2.63 shorlty after 2:00pm AEDT. ----------------------------------"

" One of Australia's last three Gallipoli veterans has died in Melbourne. Walter Parker was 105-years-old and died at a Melbourne nursing home at the weekend. Mr Parker died the day after being immortalised as a living legend in an Australia Day 2000 stamp issue. The stamps show Mr Parker and the two remaining Gallipoli veterans, Roy Longmore and Alec Campbell as young soldiers in uniform. -----------------------------------"

" A 40-year-old man will be assessed in a hospital to see if he is mentally fit to be punished for a 1998 threat to bomb Parliament House in Sydney. A Sydney magistrate last year convicted Brian Collins of making menacing telephone calls to the office of Olympics Minister Michael Knight. He was convicted in his absence, while working in remote Aboriginal communities in Queensland and the Northern Territory. The plasterer told Mr Knight's staff in September 1998 that State Parliament would be bombed in Jesus' name if he did not get money to assist Aboriginal people with medical problems. Magistrate Pat O'Shane today heard Collins has been diagnosed as a paranoid schizophrenic which has been partially caused by 20 years of chronic cannabis use. --------------------------------"

" The 57th Golden Globe awards, regarded in the industry as a signpost to the Oscars, have been dominated by the film American Beauty. The film won best dramatic motion picture, best director and screenwriting honours and was nominated for best motion picture screenplay, best original score, best actor and best actress. The movie stars Kevin Spacey and Annette Bening as a frustrated husband and wife in a mid-life crisis. American Beauty also recently won the film-of-the-year honour from the National Board of Review of Motion Pictures. Veteran Denzel Washington won best actor in a drama for playing one-time boxing contender Rubin ""Hurricane"" Carter in The Hurricane, a film about Carter's struggle to get out of jail. Newcomer Hilary Swank won best actress in a drama for playing a crossdressing teenager in Boys Don't Cry. The Walt Disney computer animated movie Toy Story 2 walked away with a suprising victory in the category of best musical or comedy motion picture. The suprise winner defeated a cast of bigtime rivals, including Analyze This, starring Robert de Niro, Notting Hill, Man on the Moon, with Jim Carrey as the late, tortured comic Andy Kaufman, and the favorite, Being John Malkovich, starring Catherine Keener. Carrey was named best actor in a musical or comedy for his portrayal of Kaufman. British actress Janet McTeer won best actress in a musical or comedy film for her performance as a Southern mum in Tumbleweeds. ---------------------------------"

" The humble shearing shed is set to reap the benefits of a high-tech development. The CSIRO, in conjuction with the Woolmark Company, has developed a portable laser-based wool classing system, which provides determination of micron at the classing table. The Fleecescan System includes a corer-washer unit, which automatically cleans and dries the sample for measurement on a laser-based scanning machine. The measurement process takes less than a minute and the system can fit on the back of a ute. The CSIRO says the development means there is no need for growers to send wool samples away. ----------------------------------"

" The Prime Minister, John Howard, has signalled he will not be giving in to pressure to remove the goods and services tax (GST) on particular items. There have been calls to take the tax off tampons, but Mr Howard says there is no case for taking that step. He does not believe confusion over issues related to the tax, such as rounding up prices, will be damaging over the long run. Mr Howard, who is back at work today after holidays, has told Channel Nine he will be keeping his sights on the main story, which is to give the country a more competitive tax system. ""That is what I'm commited to and I want the Australian public to know from day one of my return that I'm absolutely irrevocably committed to this new tax system because I believe in it,"" he said. ""I believe it will be good for our country. That is why I'm committed to it."" -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" Another law firm has announced it will launch a class action against Mobil over the fuel contamination crisis. Action against the fuel company was discontinued in the Federal Court on Friday because it lacked numbers. Slater and Gordon has already said it will represent the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association on the matter. But law firm Maurice Blackburn Cashman has confirmed it will launch a $100 million action in the Federal Court in Melbourne today. It represents at least 50 operators, primarily from aerial agriculture, air charter and flying training industries, who claim to have suffered significant financial losses since the crisis began. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Foreign Minister, Alexander Downer, is to hold talks with Indonesian leaders in Jakarta today after months of icy relations. He will meet President Wahid and Foreign Minister Alwi Shihab for the highest level talks since Australia led foreign troops into Indonesian-held East Timor last year. Relations with Indonesia plummeted last year when the Australian Government led international criticism of Jakarta for failing to stop a rampage by militias in East Timor. Indonesia was also angered when Australia took command of the multinational force deployed to take control of the territory ahead of the United Nations administration being set up there. Australian officials have been seeking ministerial-level talks to begin patching up the bilateral relationship ever since President Wahid was elected leader last October. But until now the Indonesian leader has given Canberra the cold shoulder and two months ago lashed out at Australia for what he said was a childish attitude against Indonesia. ----------------------------------------------------------------"

" Union delegates representing BHP workers in Western Australia will meet national union officials in Melbourne today to discuss the next phase in the dispute over individual work contracts. The ACTU meeting will be attended by representatives from several unions including the Australian Workers Union (AWU) and the Trade Workers Union. Employees at BHP's Port Hedland iron ore operations in the Pilbara returned to work yesterday morning after a four-day stoppage. Workers at the Newman site were back on the job on Friday night. AWU branch secretary Tim Daly says the meeting will allow the unions to regroup and develop strategies for their ongoing campaign. And he says the unions involved are committed to finding a resolution to the dispute. ""Metal workers, TWU, CFMEU, and CEPU and obviously there will be national officials from all of those unions, I'm not sure how many, the state officials are going over for it but it is certainly an indication of how seriously all of the unions are taking this dispute,"" he said. BHP spokesman, John Crowley, says a minority of workers participated in the industrial action at Port Hedland and Newman. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Germany's former chancellor Helmut Kohl has been forced to deny more reports of undeclared party donations. The opposition Christian Democrats (CDU), Mr Kohl's party, held an emergency meeting this morning, trying to find a way out of the escalating political crisis. Mr Kohl has already admitted taking two million marks in undeclared party donations and the CDU has found another 11 million marks in undeclared funds. But the latest report alleges the scandal is even bigger than that. A German television report claims that the Government of Francois Mitterand had paid almost 30 million marks to Mr Kohl's re-election in 1994. It was allegedly part of a bigger bribe by the French state-owned oil company as payment for its earlier purchase of an East German refinery. Mr Kohl has denied the allegations and has also described a press release that had claimed he was now prepared to name his donors as a hoax. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The British-based music conglomerate EMI has confirmed that it is close to striking a merger deal with the American publishing and media giant Time Warner. If the tie-up goes ahead it would create the world's biggest record company. The merger would bring EMI stars like the Rolling Stones and the Spice Girls under the same roof as Warner artists like Madonna, Cher and Eric Clapton. Time Warner itself recently announced a merger with Internet giant America Online (AOL) and a deal with EMI would give the group control over a huge catalogue of popular music which could be marketed over the Internet. The confirmation of merger negotiations came as a surprise to market-watchers, who believed EMI was close to a deal with Germany's Bertlesmann media group. EMI dates back to 1897 when it originally traded as the Gramaphone Company. The firm's biggest coup was signing The Beatles in the early 1960s. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" There has been a call for Australians to find a new name for the nation's highest mountain. The mayor of Tumbarumba Shire Council, in southern New South Wales, Councillor George Martin, says a new more appropriate name is needed for Mount Kosciuszko. After trekking to the top of the mountain on Saturday in Tumbatrek 2000, Cr Martin said a new name could be an act of reconciliation to commemorate the Centenary of Federation. He says the new name could be either Aboriginal or in honour of a well-known local person like Jack Riley, the man from Snowy River. Mount Kosciuszko was named by the Polish explorer Strzelecki, in honour of one of his country's patriots, General Kosciuszko. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" One of the Australian cyclists in the Tour Down Under, which finished in Adelaide yesterday, has been charged with indecent behaviour and common assault. He is expected to appear in the Adelaide Magistrate's Court this morning. He was granted police bail after being charged. It is believed the charges arise from an incident at a city hotel on Saturday morning."

" The five unions at the centre of an industrial dispute with BHP have launched Federal Court action against the company, to prevent it from offering further individual contracts to its workers. In the statement of claim lodged in the Federal Court in Melbourne this morning, the five unions allege BHP breached the freedom of association conditions of the Workplace Relations Act. It is also alleged the company breached another section of the Act which prohibits penalising workers who take legally protected industrial action. The claim alleges BHP has breached its award and the contract of employment of its workers. The unions are seeking to get BHP to negotiate collectively and are claiming unspecified damages for the affected employees. BHP says it rejects the allegations and will fight the claim. -----------------------------------"

" A passenger on this morning's aborted flight from Darwin to Townsville, via Gove, says he was concerned when the cabin started filling with smoke. Major Wayne Bradbury of the Fifth Army Aviation Regiment was on his way home to Townsville after serving in East Timor. The Airlink plane with 77 passengers was forced back to Darwin 20 minutes into its flight when one of its four engines failed. It landed safely early this morning. Major Bradbury said while there was not too much panic on the plane there was obvious concern, although the crew handled it all professionally. ""The first instance that we realised something was wrong was when we smelt the burning oil and then there was the white smoke in the aircraft,"" he said. ""It didn't fill the aircraft completely up such that we couldn't see the rest of the passengers but it was enough that there was obviously a problem. ""But the main reaction was the smell of the burning oil which was quite intense."" ------------------------------------"

" The Sydney Olympics organising committee (SOCOG) chief executive, Sandy Hollway, says he will press on for budget savings in the organisation, despite a possible deal to ease Games budget problems. The organising committee has a $100 million shortfall because of a slowing of sponsorship deals. Mr Hollway says SOCOG will have to dip into contingency funding despite a possible bailout package involving the Australian and International Olympic Committees and the State Government. ""It is a big uncertain and complex project and it would be nice to have our contingency as high as possible,"" he said. ""Therefore if we can find savings and keep our contingency as high as possible that would be very good to do with eight and a half months remaining."" ---------------------------------"

" The Federal Government has denied reports it is planning to impose management and programming conditions on the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) as part of the next three-year funding agreement. A report in The Australian newspaper suggests the government wants to dictate to the ABC board how to manage programming changes, outsourcing and revenue-generating activities. A spokesman for the Communication Minister, Richard Alston, says says the Minister has responded to issues raised by the ABC chairman, Donald McDonald, during funding negotiations. The spokesman acknowledges Senator Alston has suggested state-based television current affairs programs be resurrected, but points out that was raised as a goal by the ABC in its last annual report. The managing director of the ABC, Brian Johns, says it is vital to the independence of the national broadcaster that spending is decided upon by the ABC. -------------------------------------"

" The video store chain Video Ezy is about to move into telephony and Internet services. Video Ezy Australasia has announced it has signed a joint venture agreement with POS Media Online. The plan is to deliver telephone and Internet services to the existing customer base of Video Ezy through a television set-top box. The services, including transmission of videos on demand, will be delivered over customers' existing telephone lines. ----------------------------------"

" Electronic commerce in Australia's $70 billion hospitality and liquor industries is about to take a significant step forward. Three of the nation's top liquor producers are forming a joint venture to service the liquor trade online. Lion Nathan, Southcorp Wines and United Distillers & Vintners will participate in pilot program under the banner Artesian Innovation. A trial with selected Sydney restaurants will start at the end of the month. There will be a 24-hour liquor purchasing facility, with product information such as tasting notes, prices and promotions. --------------------------------"

" New research has found that young people belonging to the so-called generation X prefer renting to buying property, because it allows them to keep their lifestyle options open. A firm of Queensland architects joined forces with an advertising company and a research company to predict future trends in the property market. They found that generation X prefers renting, especially in areas close to cafes and other meeting places. And it seems for many, kitchens are optional - the study finding that pre-packaged food is a popular choice for many of those born between 1964 and 1978. They have also been dubbed the ""options"" generation, because unlike their baby-boomer parents, they are more inclined to rent than buy property. And because many are choosing not to marry, they represent a potential bonanza for the property market, increasing the demand for houses. -----------------------------------"

" Australia's oldest man, Jack Lockett, of Bendigo, turns 109 tomorrow. Mr Lockett who was born in central Victoria in 1891, has three sons and one daughter, 15 grandchildren and 23 great-grandchildren. He lives semi-independently, at a home for the elderly in Golden Square, where he will celebrate his birthday with family and friends. Mr Lockett became a sergeant during the first world war, where he served in France, and he is the nation's oldest surviving soldier. His son, Kevin, says his father is in good condition, despite a hearing problem. ""His health's great, he still goes for a walk around Carshalton house most days, and with the aid of a walking stick because of his balance, he has a bit of a balance problem,"" he said. ""But considering his age he's going very well. ""We often discuss this and we sort of put it down to the underground mutton and the quandong jam that he ate in his younger days,"" Mr Lockett said. ------------------------------------"

" The Australian Coal Association says a national 24-hour coal strike by BHP workers could not have come at a worse time. The Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) says the action is in support of BHP's iron ore workers in the Pilbara, who are protesting against the company's push to use individual work contracts. The coal association's Michael Pinnock says the snap strike is illegal, because it breaches the secondary boycott provisions in the Workplace Relations Act. And he says it will damage Australia's reputation overseas. ""This has nothing to do with the coal sector and just when our negotiations are in Japan in the middle of quite intense coal price talks they give us yet another example of what bad industrial relations we have in this country,"" he said. ""The timing just couldn't be worse."" A 24-hour snap strike has been called to protest against brutality on picket-lines in Western Australia. Iron ore workers in the Pilbara region are in dispute with BHP over the company's push to use individual work contracts."

" The latest fighting in the capital of the breakaway Republic of Chechnya has seen a Russian General killed by snipers. The General was the deputy commander of the Russian forces attacking Grozny. Russian news agencies report that General Mikhail Malofeyev was shot by Chechen snipers after they had ambushed him and his unit. The General's death comes as the war in Chechnya, which is now entering its fifth month, is seeing its most bitter fighting yet. This week Russian air raids are at their peak, with 200 sorties in one day, and both sides reporting mounting casualties. The main victims are said to be among the tens thousands of the civillians remaining in Grozny. Chechen rebels claim they are unable to bury the bodies littering the streets of the capital."

" The Indonesian Government has experessed fears that provocateurs with links to the country's military and past regime of former President Suharto are behind sectarian violence in the country's eastern islands. Christians continue to flee the tourist island of Lombok after days of religious rioting. Hundreds of police and soldiers have re-established control of the streets in Lombok's capital Mataram, but ethnic Chinese residents, many who are are Christians, continue to flee. Religious violence on Lombok and on the eastern Maluku Islands, including Ambon, is viewed by the new government of Abdurrahman Wahid as being manufactured. They claims it is the work of provocateurs closely aligned to rogue elements in the military and the supporters of former President Suharto. But Indonesia's leading military officials have met President Wahid to assure him they have no intention of staging a coup."

" Justice Minister Senator Amanda Vandstone says the way is now clear for Australia to negotiate an international prisoner transfer treaty with Thailand. The Minister expects a treaty to be signed soon. Speaking in Bangkok, where she is been meeting with her Thai counterparts, Senator Vanstone says she was informed officially that the Northern Territory had dropped its objections prior to her visit. She says that hurdle has cleared the way for discussions with Thailand to proceed. Eleven Australians, two women and nine men, are currently serving lengthy sentences in Thai prisons, most for drug trafficking offences. Senator Vanstone says while all parties want to move quickly, legislation must be passed in the Northern Territory and the treaty must be brought before a parliamentary committee in Canberra before it can be finalised."

" Israel's President Ezer Weizman says he will not resign, despite an order from the country's Attorney-General for police to investigate his financial dealings. Mr Weizman is protected by Presidential immunity, despite the serious nature of the allegations. It may not be possible to prosecute Mr Weizman if criminal conduct is uncovered, but his position in that office looks increasingly untenable as he now becomes the first Israeli President to face criminal investigation. Throughout the scandal President Weizman has denied wrongdoing, saying money he took from French millionaire Edouard Saroussi was for his son's medical expenses. Today spokesman Arieh Shumer repeated the President's intention to stay on. ""He will not resign from his job,"" he said. ""He's waiting to questions to meeting with anybody from the judges and from the police, and he will not resign from his job."""

" Melbourne medical researchers are working on a measles vaccine which can be grown in genetically modified food. Researchers at the Alfred Hospital say it could easily by applied to vaccines for other viruses. Part of the measles virus gene is inserted into a plant which then triggers an immune reaction once it is eaten. At this stage it is being tested in mice, but trials on larger animals are to follow. The head of the Alfred Hospital's infectious diseases unit, Professor Steven Wesselingh, says rice or bananas could also be used for developing countries where mass vaccination is hard to achieve. ""Measles is well controlled in Australia, but when you look at it globally measles is still a large problem in poorer countries in the world,"" he said. ""Also if it can work for measles it could potentially work for other viral and bacterial illnesses, things like cholera and hepatitis B are being looked at at the moment."""

" Ratings agency Moody's says conglomerates that sell assets should think harder about the potential impact on their credit rating. More companies are seeking divestments to improve shareholder value and the share price. Moody's names Boral, CSR, Fletcher Challenge, Carter Holt Harvey, Mayne Nickless and Pacific Dunlop as diversified groups that have, or are, considering significant asset sales and restructuring. Of these, Boral is under review for a possible downgrade, leading to higher interest on its debt. Moody's senior analyst Charles MacGregor says the predictability of cash-flows, is a factor in assigning ratings. ""What they're probably not focussing on enough is offsetting this risk factor with the diversity of business,"" he said. ""The fact that they do have variance in their cashflows provided by these different lines of business."" He says to maintain their rating, firms that divest should improve returns from existing businesses, and have a lower proportion of debt."

" The standings of the top 11 cyclists in the Tour Down Under are almost unchanged, ahead of today's fourth stage of the 777 kilometre event in South Australia. Australian Institute of Sport rider Michael Rogers yesterday retained the overall lead in the first major race of the international cycling calendar. Michael Rogers has extended his lead from one second to three seconds over Danish King of the Mountain leader Rene Jorgensen. Stuart O'Grady is in fourth place, 25 seconds behind Rogers. In a remarkable performance, Frenchman Stephane Berges rode alone at front for all but 20 kilometres of the race and finished 1:43 minutes ahead of the main group, which was led in by German Sprint King Erik Zabel, with O'Grady and Rogers hot on his wheels. Today the 92-man field heads south from Adelaide on a 185 kilometre ride to McLaren Vale."

" Long-term unemployment has fallen to its lowest level in three years. Those out of work for more than a year represented 28.4 per cent of Australia's total number of unemployed in December, down 2.5 per cent on the previous month. The figure was the lowest since December 1996 and was mainly due to the rise in total unemployment last month. The Bureau of Statistics estimates around 190,000 people had been out of work for a year or more. ----------------------------------"

" The Federal Government has announced details of an environmental impact study on the corporatisation of the Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electric Scheme and the impact on the River Murray. The government says it is the first time the Commonwealth has called for this type of study on a corporatisation proposal. The government says a primary focus of the study will be the impact of corporatisation on the Murray-Darling Basin. In particular the investigation will consider plans to divert water from the Murray into the Snowy River. The Environment Minister, Robert Hill, says the assessment will also look at the possibility of compensation for down-stream communities affected by water flow changes. There will also be a focus on the impact on endangered species and wetlands. The study is expected to be completed within about six months. ---------------------------------"

" Australia's most senior Olympic official believes all the parties involved in a possible deal to ease the Game's budget problems are willing to make a financial contribution. The possible deal centres on the Game's organisers (SOCOG) being forced to cope with a $100 million shortfall because of a slowing in sponsorship deals. The bailout package would have the Australian Olympic Committee (AOC) and the International Olympic Committee (IOC) each kicking in $11 million. The New South Wales Government would then miss out on a $30 million bonus from SOCOG after the Games. IOC vice president Kevan Gosper says his boss, Juan Antonio Samaranch, has indicated support for a deal. ""We're all waiting for each other to lay it on the line,""he said. ""I think the government needs to see the IOC and AOC formally putting thier offer on the table."" The move also comes as the IOC launches a media campaign aimed at presenting itself in a more positive light. -----------------------------------"

" It has been a stinker of a day in Queensland and northern New South Wales with temperatures in both states well above normal. In Brisbane, temperatures soared to 37 degrees while the mercury jumped to 44 in Birdsville in the state's far west. Weather bureau duty forecaster David Bernard says it is the result of an extremely hot air mass covering the whole of the interior of the state. One television repair company in Moree in New South Wales stopped its employees going onto building roofs because of the extreme heat. Ambulance officers say they have experienced no major health problems so far. ----------------------------------"

" Hollywood has lost one of the great stars of its heyday. Hedy Lamarr, glamour queen of the 1930s and 1940s, has died in Florida at the age of 86. Her movie career included box-office hits like Experiment Perilous in 1944 and the Cecil B de Mille epic Samson and Delilah. She was married six times and combined a glamorous on-screen persona with formidable scientific talents. Born Hedwig Kiesler, the daughter of a Viennese banker, she achieved international fame as well as notoriety after appearing nude in a Czechoslovakian film Ecstasy. A few years later, she was signed by MGM and worked alongside leading men like Spencer Tracy and Clark Gable. At the height of her fame during the Second World War she devised a system called ""spread spectrum"", which has helped to maintain the security of military communications and cellular telephones using different radio frequencies. ------------------------------------"

" The Commonwealth Bank's retail stockbroking arm has joined the ranks of brokers offering Internet access to the United States sharemarkets. Commonwealth Securities had already been offering a US share trading service but has now taken it online. It says that initially the online service will cover stocks quoted on the New York Stock Exchange, the American Stock Exchange and the NASDAQ. Payments would be in Australian dollars, obviating any need for customers to set up US bank accounts. -----------------------------------"

" Investors are continuing to desert Australian reinsurance companies. Like GIO Australia, Reinsurance Australia Corporation has been exposed to a series of natural disasters over the past 12 months. Reinsurance Australia Corporation (ReAC) was established in 1993 and by the following year it was operating in 76 countries. In January 1997, its share price peaked at $4.94. Today, it has been as low as 11.5 cents, a further plunge from yesterday's close of 30 cents. This morning the company announced it had been downgraded by ratings agency AM Best which it says will have an adverse impact on its ability to carry on its reinsurance business. The downgrading follows yesterday's disclosure that December's severe storms in Europe capped a year of natural disasters which will result in a 12 month reinsurance loss of substantially more than $281 million. ----------------------------------"

" The National Farmers Federation (NFF) is outraged over the United State's Government's decision to give an additional $160 million in assistance to its lamb producers. The NFF's trade committee chairman, Brendan Stewart, says it has added insult to injury for Australian producers whose offer last year, to help fund a major US marketing campaign, was rejected by US producers. He says the funds will be provided in direct cash payments to farmers. Mr Steward says Australian lamb exports to the US have fallen by 10 per cent since the US imposed tariffs on Australian and New Zealand lamb exports last July. ------------------------------------"

" Executives from the Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA) will today be questioned on the fuel contamination crisis at a Senate inquiry. CASA director Mick Toller and two other managers will appear before the Senate Transport Committee to explain the handling of the crisis and the grounding of the 5,000 planes. Committee chairman, Liberal Senator Winston Crane says he wants to focus on the background to the fuel contamination, to discover whether monitoring of fuel refining standards is stringent enough. ""What we need to know is whether or not the changes that were made actually relaxed or made the process less vigilant in terms of the end product that was coming out,"" he said. ""That is the basic concern. ""My understanding, which once again we'll get a full explanation today, is the responsibility at that time was switched more back to the manufacturer and less to the regulator."" ----------------------------------"

" Storms that battered parts of New South Wales and Sydney last night unroofed houses, uprooted trees and damaged scores of buildings. Winds reached 110 kilometres an hour in the north-west of the State. Heavy rain and hail also hit New South Wales. State Emergency Service crews were kept working through the night clearing damage in southern Sydney, Singleton, the mid-north coast and Moree. In the town of Mirannie, north-east of Singleton, 20 sheds and farmhouses were damaged by strong winds. Near Gosford, on the central cost, powerlines were torn down and homes damaged by an uprooted trees. And in Sydney late afternoon storms caused the most damage in Cronulla, Woolware and Caringbah, with reports of trees falling across power lines and blocking roads. --------------------------------------"

" Incidents of mob violence are reportedly becoming daily occurrences on the streets of East Timor's capital, Dili. Late yesterday afternoon Kenyan Interfet troops fired shots into the air in an attempt to break up hundreds of people throwing stones at each other in a neighbourhood clash. The origins of the dispute are confused, ranging from allegations that Falantil guerillas were inciting the violence to suggestions that former militia members may have been in the crowd. What is known is that youths from east Dili moved into an area of west Dili before the fighting began. Xanana Gusmao and Falantil's deputy commander Taur Matan Ruak were forced to attend the scene to calm the mob. Late last night a mob of 100 people gathered around Dili's market when a taxi driver killed a pig on the road. United Nations civilian police intervened and violence was narrowly avoided. -------------------------------------"

" Russia has increased its air attacks in Chechnya as ferocious fighting continues on the ground for control of the capital, Grozny. More than 2,000 rebels are said to be continuing their defence of the city. Russian warplanes have carried out more than 180 sorties over Chechnya in the last day, at least double the usual number, and an indicator of new Russian determination to take Grozny and finish off rebels hiding in the mountains. Ferocious hand-to-hand combat is also said to be continuing in Grozny, as Russia tries to cap its advances of recent days. In the middle are large numbers of civilians trying to survive as the city is reduced to smouldering rubble. Moscow is again talking of the imminent end of the conflict, but that is far from certain. Unconfirmed reports say that several unnamed Chechen field commanders are in Moscow for talks with Russian officials. But thousands of rebels and the top rebel leaders are still fighting. ----------------------------------"

" Prices movements have been reasonably subdued on world financial markets overnight. Leading stocks in the United States have moved lower, with Microsoft providing a drag on the overall market. Although Microsoft's quarterly earnings report shows a 23 per cent jump in profits, its executives have given a more downbeat assessment of its likely prospects. Investors are also still wary about the potential for a tougher stance on official interest rates. The Dow Jones industrial average has closed 71 points lower at 11,489. High-tech stocks are a little firmer overall. The Nasdaq composite index is up 20 points, or 0.5 per cent. On the economic front the US Federal Reserve's regular assessment of the economy has been released. Its so-called Beige Book says that powered by consumer spending the American economy remains strong, with inflation in check and wage gains restrained despite tight labour markets. The US bond market has strengthened. The firmer prices have pushed down the yield on 30-year Treasury paper to 6.72 per cent, a fall of almost 3 points. In Britain Wall Street's weakness has again been cited as a factor, and the financial sector has been at the forefront of sharemarket selling. The London Stock Exchange's FT100 index has dropped almost 1 per cent, losing a further 59 points to close at 6,445. Yesterday in Asia, US interest rate jitters put the skids under most regional sharemarkets. Hong Kong was down 3.25 per cent. Jakarta was down 4.3 per cent as worries persist about continuing religion-based violence. Japanese investors also sold down on the day. Tokyo's Nikkei index dropped 299 points, to finish at 18,898. In Australia the falls were also pronounced. The All Ordinaries index finished 46 points lower at 3,105. Overnight trade on the Sydney Futures exchange has now closed. The March Share Price Index contract is unchanged on yesterday's day settlement at 3,097. And the 10 year bond contract is up 3.5 points at 92.70, with the implied yield easing to 7.3 per cent. The Australian dollar is a touch weaker against its US counterpart. Just before 8:00am AEDT it was trading at around 65.36 US cents, down 0.1 of a cent on yesterday's local close. On the cross-rates it was at 0.6551 euros, 69.92 Japanese yen, 40.36 pence Sterling and against the New Zealand dollar it is at 1.290. The price of gold is at $US289.80 an ounce. And in oil, West Texas crude is at $US29.11 a barrel. ----------------------------------"

" In another embarrassment for the United States military, the Pentagon says it will take a week to find out why a crucial test of a proposed missile defence system failed last night. In the test an intercept missile was launched from a the Marshall Islands some 20 minutes after a mock warhead was fired from a US airforce base in California. But despite apparently approaching the warhead, no hit was made by the so-called interceptor missile. The system being tested is central to plans for a national missile defence shield for the United States, a proposal which has heightened tensions with Russia and China. President Clinton has yet to commit to funding the program. ------------------------------------"

" Three Australians are through to the third round of the Australian Open. Last night Mark Philippoussis defeated little known Dutchman Raemon Sluiter in four sets, to set-up a showdown with Andrew Illie who also won yesterday. Number three seed Pete Sampras is still regarded as the man to beat though he rates court conditions as dangerous and faster than grass. The number one seed Andre Agassi says he is drawing on a wealth of knowledge from Steffi Graf. ""There's a lot you can learn from a champion and she's a champion,"" he said. ""I definitely do my best to learn from her because she goes through the competitions of many intense situations through her career and she shined through them all."" Today Lleyton Hewitt will be tring to win his 12th consecutive match when he meets Spaniard Alex Corretja. Nicole Pratt will play number three seed Serena Williams, who is battling a back injury. Also on court will be defending champions Martina Hingis and Yevgeny Kafelnikov. -----------------------------------"

" Cyclists in the Tour Down Under event in South Australia will today set out on the longest stage of the six-day race. Only 11 riders have any real chance of winning the first major tour of the year. Australian Institute of Sport rider Michael Rogers will wear the leader's yellow jersey in today's 185 kilometre third stage. He has a one second overall lead over Danish rider Rene Jorgensen, who also leads the King of the Mountain classification. Twenty-five seconds further back in the general classification is Stuart O'Grady in fourth place. Yesterday they were among 11 riders who stole a lead of almost 27 minutes over the main bunch. Today the cyclists will set out from Glenelg, ride to Victor Harbor and then onto McLaren Vale. Just before the finish they will face one of their toughest challenges - the 450 metre Willunga Hill."

" Airline operators with grounded planes have been warned not to try to clean contaminated fuel systems using their own methods. The head of the Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA), Mick Toller, has appealed to airline operators to remain patient and wait for an official industry-wide testing procedure to be developed. CASA's test for contaminated fuel has been delayed for at least another week, after an independent chemist raised concerns it may not detect all forms of contamination. Mr Toller says serious safety problems could arise if airline operators devise their own fuel cleaning methods using water. ""There's a great temptation out there, I think, and certainly a growing temptation to get the garden hose out and to wash the system out,"" he said. ""I think that's a dangerous process to go through at this stage. ""I think it could lead to significant problems later on and it would not be approved by the authority."" Acting Prime Minister John Anderson has ruled out any government help or compensation to aircraft operators affected by the Mobil fuel crisis. Mr Anderson says the government's only role is to fasttrack the return to normal flights. He says it is solely Mobil's responsibility to negotiate with flight operators, as the contamination resulted from a problem at Mobil in the first place. ""At this point in time that's effectively being covered by consultations between Mobil and the industry and I think that's appropriate and I welcome that,"" he said. ""Cash will start to flow quite quickly to some of the very badly affected operators and the people that they employ and I think that will be very welcome."" Meanwhile, a University of New South Wales academic says the test kit designed by Mobil to check for contaminated avgas in planes does work. Professor David Trimm says while he has been able to validate the test, the instructions for mechanics to use them need to be rewritten. Up to 5,000 small planes remain grounded due to the fuel contamination scare. Professor Trimm says he still has not been able to confirm that a second white contaminant is part of the current aviation fuel scare. --------------------------------"

" The Australian Workers Union (AWU) says BHP management should bear responsibility for the escalation of the dispute at the company's Pilbara iron ore operations in Western Australia. Seven union officials were arrested by police this morning at Port Hedland, after attempting to stop a busload of workers from entering BHP's operations. Overnight about a dozen picketers blocking the entry to BHP's iron ore operation at Newman were herded into paddy wagons by police wielding batons. The workers are on a four-day strike over the company's move towards individual contracts. AWU spokesperson Andrew Whiley says BHP should be condemned. ""They've mishandled this dispute from the beginning and now urging the Western Australian police to baton charge ordinary workers and their families engaging in a peaceful protest is unacceptable behaviour on part of management,"" he said. ""This is an industrial dispute, it's not a criminal matter and they should stop acting like little boys and thugs and sit down and negotiate with the union."" Federal Opposition leader Kim Beazley says he suspects the Western Australian Government has already intervened in the strike. He says it is obvious the attitude of police has changed drastically in the last couple of days and that has come from a higher authority. ""This is very ugly, where people are being beaten and people are experiencing violence and if the state government has actually been urging that this should happen or fuelling it by telling the police to get heavy then that is to be deplored."" ""I know that they've denied it, but there's a strong feeling amongst those involved that that has occurred,"" Mr Beazley said. A unionist has been knocked unconscious in an incident at the Newman picket line. Police have confirmed the man was hit by a vehicle at the Dump Road picket line about 9:30am AWST. They say unionists stopped two vehicles attempting to enter the mine site, with one of the vehicles turning around and leaving. However, the second vehicle attempted to drive through the picket line, hitting a unionist and knocking him unconscious. He has been taken to hospital with no apparent serious injury. An investigation is underway into the incident. BHP spokesman John Crowley says the incident is regrettable. ""I'm not sure of the extent of the injury, I hope [it's] not serious. We're obviously concerned for the wellbeing of that person,"" he said. ""What we did then is call our site ambulance straight away, he came out and treated that person. ""I haven't got any reports of the extent of the injuries, but we just hope of course that they're not serious."" Mr Crowley says the industrial action is having a minimal impact on BHP, with both Port Hedland and Newman operating, although at a reduced capacity. ""We're mining ore at Newman and we're loading ships at Port Hedland and that's the nature of our game; we mine it and we ship it and we are doing that."" ---------------------------------"

" A key forward indicator of the Australian economy is still showing no sign of any significant slowdown in activity. The Westpac/Melbourne Institute leading index has registered an annualised growth rate of 5.1 per cent for November. That is around 1.4 percentage points above its long-term trend rate of growth and points to above-trend economic growth six to nine months ahead. Westpac senior economist John Peters says the result bolsters the bank's prediction that official interest rates will be raised by 1.5 percentage points before the end of June. ""Consumer spending, which has underpinned recent strength in the economy, is likely to remain robust given the continuing high level of consumer confidence,"" he said. ""Moreover, in 2001 the export and manufacturing sectors are likely to contribute more to the overall economic growth, as the outlook for the global economy and commodity prices improves."" ----------------------------------"

" Cable and Wireless Optus has boosted its number of mobile phone customers to almost 2.5 million. Optus says that represents growth of more than 15 per cent between October and December last year, when it added 315,000 digital customers. The company has laid claim to being the fastest growing mobile network in Australia for the third successive quarter. It says it now has a market share of 32.5 per cent of the total mobile market. -----------------------------------"

" Tennis Australia will give Jelena Dokic advice about how to deal with the media, after she made controversial comments about tournament draws to Sydney's The Daily Telegraph. The 16-year-old, who lost in the first round of the Australian Open, suggested that tennis officials deliberately arranged draws to the detriment of her career. The Women's Tennis Association has rejected Dokic's claim and says there is no way draws can be manipulated. Tennis Australia president Geoff Pollard says officials from the organisation are looking forward to talking to her. ""We all like to help all our players, from the president to the national coaches, through the men's tennis director and women's tennis manager,"" he said. ""We would continue throughout the year, not just to her but to talk to all players, and advise them in all aspects of their game and program, through to talking to the media...through to anything else."" Meanwhile, a leading sports psychologist says those close to Dokic should be doing more to help her cope with the pressure of top level sport. Dokic, who criticised her opponent after losing her first round match at the Australian Open, and was fined for being late to a press conference believes there is a conspiracy to stall her career. South Australian Sports Institute psychologist Trevor Dodd says Dokic is yet to develop the skill of top players who have learned to control their emotions. ""Usually the days they are playing best they can control that emotion, but our overal performance is dependant on... emotions,"" he said. ""When we're upset we play differently than when we're angry. ""In order to play better she's got to feel better and certainly there's pressures happening there and she's not feeling good about things."" ----------------------------------"

" Argentinian footballer Gabriel Batistuta and ex-Olympic figure skating champion Katarina Witt of Germany have been voted the sexiest sporting stars of the 20th century. A survey by the Romanian sports daily ProSport, saw Witt receive 489 votes to edge out Argentine tennis star Gabriela Sabatini, with recently retired German tennis star Steffi Graf third. The men's poll had married father of three Batistuta taking top place ahead of Italian skier Alberto Tomba and Russian swimmer Alexander Popov."

" Around 5,000 light aircraft will remain grounded for up to another week because of the fuel contamination crisis. While a field test, devised by Mobil, has gained the approval of chemist David Trimm who last night released an interim report to the Civil Aviation Safety Authoirty, there are still problems with identifying contaminants. A CASA spokesman says the test was unable to identify a white gel-like substance in the fuel tanks. He says planes will remain grounded until further tests are conducted over the next week. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Indonesia's cycle of religious violence is threatening to spiral out of control, casting doubts on the future of the Government and affecting the nation's crucial tourist industry. Fighting has continued over the past two days on the resort island of Lombok, just 40 kilometres from Bali, with Muslim groups burning a dozen churches and wrecking businesses belonging to Christians. Unrest in Aceh Province and on the Spice Islands, and the loss of East Timor as a province, has put further pressure on the fledgling government of President Abdurrahman Wahid. Jakarta is now trying to re-establish order, while dealing with constant rumours of a possible coup by the military. President Wahid has warned the country's majority Muslim population to exercise restraint after more violence directed against Christians and calls for a holy war. But he has had to rely on the military once again to restore order during a crisis. One thousand troops were deployed to the Lombok after the rampage took place. Australians are among those to flee the island by ferry to nearby Bali. The violence followed a rally during which militant Muslims vowed to take revenge for the deaths of hundreds of Muslims in religious fighting in Indonesia's Muluku Province. Clashes there began exactly one year ago. More than 1,500 Christians and Muslims have died, and as the violence escalated, so too has religious tension across Indonesia. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Union members protesting outside BHP's iron ore plant at Newman in the Pilbara have vowed to have sufficient numbers this morning to prevent any move by the police against them. There were clashes outside the main gate to the plant last night when police with batons charged the picket lines to enable a bus load of contract workers to enter the plant. About a dozen unionists were locked in paddy wagons by police and later released, although they may be charged by summons. The Construction, Forestry and Mining Union's Ron Kielty says it was an empty victory for police and the company. ""There was one bus of people and I'd say there'd be lucky if there's not even 30 on that bus,"" he said. ""Half of them were goons, what we call goons here as they send up their private security mob, which they would have had about eight on the bus. And some of the people on the bus were staff people. So, they'd be lucky if they could run the mine tonight."" BHP spokesman John Crowley says the unionists who were targeted by police last night were breaking the law. He says people have a right to gain lawful access to the plant and the police were defending that right. ""We're seeing some people that want to protest and they have the right to do so,"" Mr Crowley said. ""What we don't want to see is the sort of action where people are stopping and preventing other people from coming to work and then forcing a situation where the police have to take action to clear the pathway."" ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The National Australia Bank (NAB) has shelved plans to raise fees and charges on transaction accounts, citing the looming introduction of the goods and services tax (GST). The bank says it has been considering changes to the way it charges fees for more than a year. But it says it believes that to make changes now would lead to confusion with the introduction of the GST. The NAB was still holding talks with regulators as late as yesterday, but then decided against any adjustments. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" In Cambodia, a former Khmer Rouge rebel commander has reportedly been arrested and charged with the 1994 kidnapping and murder of Australian David Wilson and his two travelling companions. Chhouk Rin has reportedly been arrested, although a claim that fellow rebel Sam Bith was also detained has now been retracted. The announcement of the arrest comes seven months after a fellow ex-rebel was given a life sentence for his involvement. Chhouk Rin and Sam Bith both attended the trial of Nuon Paet last year. During the trial, Nuon Paet denied any involvement and pointed the finger of blame at Chhouk Rin who he accused of ordering the murders of the three western tourists. Cambodian authorities gave notice at the time that the two would be arrested, although they were allowed to walk free. Both men have in the past denied any involvement in the brutal slaying of 29-year-old David Wilson, Frenchman Jean Michel-Braquet and Briton Mark Slater. A senior Cambodian Army official told journalists of the arrests. Embassy officials say while they have been notified, they cannot provide confirmation. ----------------------------------------------------------------"

" China has urged the international community to accept and work with the new military leadership in Pakistan. China's message came at the end of a visit to Beijing by Pakistan's new military ruler, General Pervez Musharraf. The two days of talks have focused on economic and political issues. China has also been keen to know the steps Pakistan and other border countries can take to limit Muslim incursions along its remote north-western border that Beijing fears is helping to feed the separatist campaign in Xingjiang province. The leaders of both countries want the visit to give credibility to the October military coup, with the Chinese side optimistic the military-backed government will be temporary. General Musharraf returns to the Pakistani capital later today. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Former German leader Helmut Kohl has been forced to resign as honorary chairman of the Christian Democrat party (CDU). Helmut Kohl has embroiled his party in its worst ever political scandal by admitting that he funnelled two million marks in party donations through secret bank accounts and by refusing to name the donors. Over the past few weeks the scandal has widened. A state office has also admitted to laundering tens of millions of marks through foreign bank accounts and Helmut Kohl's successor, Wolfgang Shueble, says he also took up to 50,000 marks. Now Helmut Kohl has agreed to resign his positon as honorary CDU chairman rather than concede to party demands to reveal the names of his secret donors. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australian tennis teenager Jelena Dokic believes there is a conspiracy in place to stall her career. In an amazing interview published today in Sydney's <i>Daily Telegraph</i> Dokic, with her father Damir by her side, made the bizarre claim that tennis officials were working against her following the arrest of her father at a tournament in England last year. Dokic and her father launched an attack on the Women's Tennis Association (WTA) yesterday after she was fined $US2,500 for a late appearance at a press conference on Monday night. <i>The Daily Telegraph</i> also stated that with Mr Dokic regularly prompting his daughter, Dokic said that much of the family's motivation came from the fact that they had been refugees from Serbia before coming to Australia in 1994. Jelena believes the draws for her matches are being deliberately changed to stall her career, but WTA spokesman James Fuhse told the paper there was no way the draw could be manipulated. Meanwhile, Australian wildcard Amanda Grahame came close to causing the biggest upset of the Australian Open tennis last night, taking Serena Williams to three sets. Third seed Serena Williams battled back pain and jet lag in her first match for three months. Grahame, ranked 261 in the world, pressured her opponent from the start, winning the second set before succumbing on match point number four. The reigning US Open champion, who has back-to-back grand slams on her mind, admits to closing the match unconvincingly. Defending men's champion Yevgeny Kafelnikov is also suffering back pain, now complicated by a strained groin. He hopes to be fine tomorrow. Also last night, Lleyton Hewitt made it through to the second round with a four sets win over American Paul Goldstein. Although taking three and a quarter hours to win, Hewitt says he was ready for a deciding set. ""I think to get an actual tough match under my belt first round is nice,"" he said. ""I was feeling fine out there on the court towards the end of the fourth and if it did go to five I was ready to do that."" Despite finishing at 2:00am AEDT, Hewitt will be back playing doubles today. Thirteen top seeded players will be in action today including Andre Agassi, Pete Sampras, Lindsay Davenport and Mary Pierce. The Australians in action include Mark Philippoussis, Todd Woodbridge and Mark Woodforde."

" Mobil has announced a $15 million compensation package for its customers affected by the fuel contamination crisis. The company says claims of up to $10,000 can be made under its financial hardship program, and some fuel-testing kits will also be distributed. Mobil says it is not an admission of liability, but a way of helping its customers who need immediate financial aid as a result of the crisis. The company says it is working on a further assistance program, with details to be released soon. It says the first payments should possibly be made as early as next week. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" There is still no resolution to the dispute between Ansett and the Transport Workers' Union (TWU) over ground staff at Hobart and Launceston airports. An Ansett representative says the airline and the union have agreed to continue talks tomorrow. The union had given Ansett until 3:00pm today to respond to its offer of assistance in the restructuring of the airline's workforce. Ansett is not commenting this afternoon on the offer. A TWU national phone hook-up to decide whether to take further industrial action has finished. Ansett flights into Tasmania were grounded for two-and-a-half days through a baggage handlers' strike, leaving thousands stranded. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Australian Medical Association (AMA) is calling on the Federal Government to regulate the sale of prescription medicines on the Internet. The AMA's Queensland president Beres Wenck says while the extent of the problem is unknown Australians are obtaining pharmaceutical drugs without medical advice. Dr Wenck says the practice is fraught with danger. ""There's a lot of controls that have to happen and rigorous testing on the quality of the medication,"" she said. ""Sometimes it takes five to 10 years before a drug that's even available overseas becomes available in Australia because of our rigorous controls. ""There'd be no controls on Internet prescriptions and certainly, patients would be unaware of the quality of the medications that they're getting, what other additives are in them,"" Dr Wenck said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Australian Workers Union (AWU) has rejected BHP's claim that its Pilbara workers have a choice whether to accept individual contracts over a new award. BHP is refusing to backdown on its plan to expand the use of contracts, despite strike action at two of the company's iron ore opertations in Western Australia. The AWU says BHP is telling its Pilbara iron ore workers the only future employment arrangments will be through individual contracts. Union spokesman Andrew Whiley says BHP must take the matter before the Western Australian Industrial Relations Commission to resolve the dispute fairly. ""They have steadfastly refused to do that,"" he said. ""They are refusing to do anything in the west while they threaten workers in the east, but the union is renewing the call, lets have the merits of the dispute discussed and if necessary arbitrated by the umpire. ""What are they afraid of? If their actions are correct then they shouldn't have any concern about following that process."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Internet retailing is being described as the ""new Silk Road"" for Australian companies. A survey of online retailing by accounting giant Ernst and Young concludes that 1999 was an explosive year of growth around the globe. In the United States, the proportion of households that shopped over the Internet jumped from 10 to 17 per cent. In Australia, the figure was 5 per cent, with overseas markets appearing to hold more potential. Ernst and Young's director of retail, Steve Ferguson, says that of the Australian companies selling online, 72 per cent supplied products or services offshore. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australian vice-captain Shane Warne says he is honoured to be the only current Test player named in the Australian Test cricket side of the century. Warne and Bill O'Reilly were named as the spin bowlers in the team. ""It really is a thrill to be named in this side,"" he said. ""You look at the names - there was some people there that we used to idolise, my brother and I, in the backyard we used to imitate [them]."" The full side is Arthur Morris, Bill Ponsford, Sir Donald Bradman (captain), Greg Chappell, Neil Harvey, Keith Miller, Ian Healy, Ray Lindwall, Warne, Dennis Lillee, O'Reilly and Allan Border as 12th man. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" It has been a testing day of first round matches for many of the seeded players at the Australian Tennis Open. Rain, injury and the faster courts are among the factors which have caused grief for some of the top players. Defending men's champion Yevgeny Kafelnikov had to overcome injury to win his match, while rain interrupted play for about an hour on the outside courts. Nicolas Kiefer is the only other men's seed to win his match so far, with Gustavo Kuerten, Albert Costa and Cedric Pioline bowing out. Pioline was not pleased about losing the fifth set 9-7 to Goran Ivanisevich. ""You know Goran, tomorrow he could lose to his mum,"" he said. The women found the going easier, reigning champion Martina Hingis, Arantxa Sanchez Vicario and Conchita Martinez winning easily. Of the Australians, Jason Stoltenberg has won the first set of his match against Jonas Bjorkman and Alicia Molik is through to the second round. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australian forces in East Timor have had their first fatality since troops were deployed to the territory in September. A 33-year-old Lance Corporal has died of a respiratory illness. Interfet lost its first soldier in East Timor when a 37-year-old Warrant Officer with the New Zealand Army died in a truck accident on November 30. Today's death is the second Interfet fatality but the first for Australian forces in East Timor. The soldier died in hospital after a sudden deterioration of a respiratory illness. He was first admitted to hospital on January 13. The soldier was based in Dili. His family does not want his name to be released. The commander of the Interfet force, Major-General Peter Cosgrove has expressed his condolences to the man's family. He said the deceased man was a very good soldier. ""We are very sad to lose one of our own so far into an arduous tour of duty,"" he said. Arrangements are being made to repatriate the soldier's body to Australia. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" It has emerged that the Prime Minister took time out from his summer holidays to try to resolve the controversy over price-rounding under the goods and services tax (GST). The decision to alter government policy on price rounding at the weekend was not made by the acting Treasurer Joe Hockey alone. Mr Hockey announced at the weekend that guidelines would be changed to cap price rises at 10 per cent. Companies will be able to round prices up or down, but the combined effect of the GST and rounding will not be allowed to increase prices by more than 10 per cent. The decision has created confusion in the business community and prompted claims by the Retailers Association that the system will reduce profits. Mr Hockey's policy announcement followed conversations with Mr Howard on Saturday. The Prime Minister had been concerned at the prospect of businesses being seen to profiteer through rounding up and developed the new 10 per cent cap during talks with Mr Hockey and the Treasurer, who is also on leave. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Thousands of light plane operators will know later today whether there is an effective procedure to test for fuel contamination. The Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA) will receive a preliminary report into the test which was developed by Mobil. The field test involves using a PH meter to check the alkalinity of aircraft fuel systems. It is a simple test which CASA hopes could be carried out on thousands of light planes as early as tomorrow. An interim report by chemistry expert Professor David Trimm will be handed over to the safety authority later today. A spokesman for CASA says if Professor Trimm gives the test the all clear, a new airworthiness directive will be issued tomorrow. But aircraft cleared to fly by the test will still have to be reinspected regularly to ensure contamination does not reoccur. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A group of 25 suspected illegal immigrants rescued off the Western Australian coast two days ago will arrive in Darwin today, en route to a detention centre in South Australia. Customs officers rescued the group, believed to be from the Middle East, after their boat struck trouble 600 kilometres north-west of Broome. The Immigration Department's Michael Dacks says the four Indonesian crew will be held in Darwin, to face charges relating to people trafficking. He says the rest of the group will be taken to the Woomera Detention Centre where they will interviewed. ""The department and its officers will then start the very laborious checking process that goes into verifying everything that these people say and checking everything with the countries of origin and with other people and with other places,"" he said. ""So its a very labour intensive process that the department now takes on to verify people's stories."" --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Despite growing unrest across Indonesia, President Abdurrahman Wahid has dismissed suggestions of the possible overthrow of the Government. Fears of a coup grew on the weekend amid rumours that the government was about to dismiss former military commander General Wiranto from his Cabinet post. The General has been criticised for his handling of security both during and after the referendum in East Timor last August. While saying he does not believe a coup is likely, President Wahid has warned the military that an attempt to topple the government would not be tolerated. President Wahid also welcomed the support of the United States, which has warned the Indonesian military against any attempted coup. ""My reaction to what Mr Holbrook [US Ambassador to the UN] said, he gives warning to the militia in Indonesia not to do anything against the government and we appreciate that...other governments feel that as well,"" President said. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Spanish judge who first secured the arrest of former Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet in London in 1998, has asked Britain to carry out new medical tests on the former General. Judge Baltazar Garzon says he wants new medical tests to be carried out on General Pinochet by doctors of his choice and he says he also wants to question him himself. The Spanish Foreign Ministry says it has forwarded the request on to the British authorities. Judges in France and Belgium have also forwarded submissions to the UK Home Office seeking to push ahead with attempts to extradite him. Meanwhile, an application to the European Court of Human Rights to prevent Pinochet's release has failed. The court rejected the application first requested last September by seven Spanish relatives of people killed under the Pinochet regime. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Iraq has rejected the United Nation's choice of a new chief arms inspector, with Iraq's Deputy Prime Minister calling the nomination of Rolf Ekeus ""dishonest"". The remarks were the first Iraqi reaction to the recommendation by UN secretary general Kofi Annan that the Swedish diplomat should head the body. The new inspection agency, the UN Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC), is to supervise disarming Iraq of its banned weapons. Iraq has not accepted any international inspection of its weapons programs since December 1998, when UN inspectors pulled out on the eve of a bombing campaign by the United States and British air forces. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australian Jelena Dokic could be fined for leaving the Australian Open without attending a media conference. It was the only blight on an otherwise impressive day for Australia. Jelena Dokic went to church to pray for her future after losing to little known Hungarian Rita Kuti Kis. Risking a fine up to $US10,000 for missing a media conference, Dokic returned to Melbourne Park three-and-a-half hours later and criticised her opponent for not being a good player, predicting she never will be. The International Tennis Federation is considering its response. Last night Pete Sampras began his campaign for a record 13th grand slam title, defeating Australian Wayne Arthurs in three sets. Sampras says the fast paced courts suit players with quick reflexes, like Andre Agassi. ""I mean there's no question it's going to be good for his game and help out his serve and he returns so well,"" Sampras said. ""He's very tough to beat here. ""So it doesn't necessarily help the serve and volleyer, it can help out the base liner."" Today 10 Australians will be playing singles, including Lleyton Hewitt, Jason Stoltenberg and Nicole Pratt. Top seeds in action include Martina Hingis, Yevgeny Kafelnikov, Gustavo Kuerten and Conchita Martinez. Pat Rafter last night withdrew from the doubles due to a shoulder injury."

" The chair of the Federal Government's tax advisory board says there should no longer be any confusion about the rounding up of prices under the goods and services tax (GST). The government has ruled that prices can be rounded up or down, but says it will move to prevent any GST inclusive increases of more than 10 per cent. Retailers argue the cap will interfere with existing rounding rules introduced after one and two cent coins were withdrawn. Chris Jordan, who heads the new tax system advisory board, says most businesses are planning to only marginally increase their prices. ""What the position is is that one can round up to a particular pricing point and provided that's less than an overall increase of 10 per cent that is acceptable, provided businesses do not profiteer overall from that rounding,"" he said. --------------------------------"

" A litter trap developed at Melbourne's Swinburne University may help solve the problem of syringes on beaches. Inventor of the Humegard Dr Don Phillips says the traps have already been installed effectively on Gold Coast beaches. The Humegard can be fitted to stormwater drains, where it traps floating litter and redirects it into a holding chamber for safe disposal. Dr Phillips says many syringes discarded in Melbourne are washed into stormwater drains which discharge either into the Yarra River or Port Phillip Bay. ""There's hundreds of outlets into the bay and it's a matter of really money, putting enough of these units along the beaches to intercept all the litter that's getting into the bay including these syringes,"" he said. ""If we can put enough of them, enough money is available to do this work, certainly we can put them in at every outlet into the bay and stop a lot of this problem from happening."" -------------------------------"

" Australian and German researchers have formed an alliance to help solve water contamination problems in Australia. The group will work in regions where contaminated lake sediments are causing environmental concern. The International Research Alliance will use a new and relatively simple technology to stop the disturbance of contaminated sediments in Lake Macquarie, in New South Wales, and in the Gippsland Lakes, in south-east Victoria. Project manager Doctor Neil Lavitt says Lake Macquarie is affected by heavy metals, whereas the Gippsland Lakes regularly experience algal blooms fed by nutrient rich sediments from nearby farms. The alliance will ""cap"" sections of the lake bed with an absorbent clay material that absorbs the contaminated sediments and prevents their release. Doctor Lavitt says the ""capping"" will stabilise the environment of the two lakes and will also be modified to neutralise acid-sulfate soils in northern New South Wales. ----------------------------------"

" The first cable Internet access in regional Australia is to be officially launched in the next few weeks in Mildura. Neighbourhood Cable says a trial among local businesses has proven its technology provides faster access to the Internet, reduces Internet access bills and frees up telephone lines. Technical manager Mark Schmidt says the company is ready to offer cable access to residents in central Mildura and is looking to expand into other regional centres like Ballarat. ""We chose Mildura as a testing ground for this product, mainly because of the layout of Mildura and the size of the town,"" he said. ""It was very well positioned to trial the product in. ""And also Mildura, because of its isolation, does miss out on a lot of the services which they already have in the capital cities, than the larger regional centres near Melbourne, so we just found it a very good testing place for the product,"" Mr Schmidt said. -----------------------------------"

" The CSIRO has devised a strategy whereby residents can store water during off-peak times to reduce costs. It is one of several options that has emerged from a national study into Australia's urban water use. CSIRO spokesman Andrew Speers says householders could buy their water during off-peak times at a lower price, and store it in a tank. The idea is part of a national campaign for more sustainable and efficient water use. ----------------------------------"

" The ACTU has called for a total ban on the use of asbestos in Australia by the end of this year. The call follows similar action in the European Union. ACTU assistant secretary Bill Mansfield says it is estimated between 60,000 and 70,000 Australians will have died from asbestos related disease by the year 2020. He says a total ban on asbestos is achievable. ""There is only a limited range of uses for asbestos in Australia these days, primarily in the use of brake pads for motor cars, but it would also be used in the construction industry to some extent and so we believe it's quite realistic to call for a ban by the end of the year 2000,"" he said. ---------------------------------"

" Australia's significance as a regional financial centre has been further recognised with the launch of a new barometer of the local sharemarket. The Dow Jones Australia Index covers 95 per cent of the total value of the Australian sharemarket and currently includes around 198 stocks. Editor of Dow Jones Indexes John Prestbo says the new index will compete against those offered by the Australian Stock Exchange (ASX) when it restructures its All Ordinaries index in April. ""We just think the ASX in going to fixed securities, fixed number indexes in taking a step backwards,"" he said. ""What we're offering here is a continuation of the All Ords as currently operating."" The ASX will expand the All Ordinaries index to 500 stocks, covering 99 per cent of the market's value. There will also be indices that include 300, 200, 100, 50 and 20 stocks. -------------------------------"

" Two federal Labor politicians are proposing a law to force television stations to lower the volume of commercials. Queensland's Craig Emerson and Tasmania's Michelle O'Byrne say there is no doubt that commercials are often aired louder than programs. Mr Emerson says he is surprised to learn there are no laws or regulations governing the volume of advertisements. ""If the TV stations maintain their view that the volume of ads is no greater than that of normal programs then they've got no concerns, no basis for concerns about a change of the law to just keep it that way,"" he said. ---------------------------------"

" A new study shows most Australians have a poor knowledge of sex and contraception. The five-year investigation by Queensland doctorate student Patricia Petersen found one in 30 people did not know how HIV AIDS is transmitted. The study also found most people, particularly young sexually-active women, did not fully understand the contraceptive pill. Ms Petersen says only one in 500 women knows that sickness can disrupt the effectiveness of the pill. ""But out of those who were taking the pill, the contraceptive pill, hardly any of them realised that if they became very unwell, if they experienced vomitting or diarrhoea, or they were prescribed antibiotics from their doctor, that they may not be covered,"" she said. ""That's very scary."" ----------------------------------"

" Tournament top seed Andre Agassi has earned himself a place in the second round of the Australian Tennis Open in Melbourne. Agassi easily defeated Mariano Puerta of Argentina in three sets 6-2, 6-2, 6-3. Also through is women's second seed Lindsay Davenport, but not the 15th seed Anke Huber, who made a surprise early exit. Jim Courier lost his match, while Jennifer Capriati defeated Austria's Barbara Schwartz in two sets. Of the Australians, Rachel McQuillan and Joseph Sirriani lost thier matches, but Michael Hill and Todd Woodbridge advanced. Woodbridge said he was pleased with his performance in his first match of the tournament. ----------------------------------"

" The commander of the Interfet force, Major-General Peter Cosgrove, says he is very angry and disappointed with soldiers involved in the alleged sexual harassment of East Timorese. Interfet has been searching for more than a month for soldiers who went to a family house in Dili and allegedly engaged in verbal harassment of young women who lived there. The women claim the soldiers were Australian but that has not been established because the men have not been caught. Two Australian soldiers found in the area were questioned and cleared of involvement. Major-General Cosgrove says the incidents last year were isolated and all Interfet troops have been reminded of their responsibilities. ""We've apologised to the young women involved by saying that we were aghast at this as 99.9 per cent of the people who are here are,"" he said. ""I dare say the other 0.1 per cent would be feeling very guilty and stupid. ""I'm pleased to say that the Timorese family at that time were comforted by our assurances that we're very sorry, it was not typical and we'd be looking after the culprits,"" he said. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Opposition says it will make another attempt to amend the goods and services tax (GST) legislation to allow separate recording of the GST component on receipts. Labor is trying to capitalise on the Federal Government's backflip on the issue of round-up of GST prices. The acting Federal Treasurer, Joe Hockey, had supported an Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) ruling that companies could round-up prices, as long as their profit margins were not increased. But Mr Hockey changed his position over the weekend, announcing the guidelines would be changed to prevent any price rise above 10 per cent. The Shadow Treasurer, Simon Crean, says the only way for consumers to be fully protected is for transparency of the GST on receipts. He says he does not expect support for the amendment from the Democrats or the Government. ""The reason they will not support this amendment is they want to hide their tax,"" he said. ""They know their tax is unpopular, they know it's unfair and now we're seeing more signs that this tax is going to add to inflationary pressure."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association says it has every confidence in the independent expert appointed to review the proposed test for planes affected by the fuel contamination crisis. Chemistry expert Professor David Trimm has been asked to produce a preliminary report for the Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA) by tomorrow afternoon. CASA says if the test proves to be effective it will issue a new airworthiness directive for thousands of light planes as early as Wednesday. Mike Hart from the Aircraft Owners And Pilots Association says that would be great news for the troubled industry. ""We have confidence and hope that that will be the case,"" he said. ""We believe that if there's any problems with the test procedure whatsoever, then we're sure Professor Trimm will either discover that or be able to fix that up. ""Whether that timetable can be adhered to, we're not sure. ""However, we'd certainly think that if that can be done and things got moving by that stage it would be a terrific help and great breakthrough."" ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid is reportedly planning to sack powerful cabinet minister General Wiranto. The former military commander is facing allegations that the armed forces were involved in atrocities committed in East timor following last August's independence referendum. General Wiranto is still an influential figure in the Indonesian military, which is also a major political force in the country. If he is dismissed, it could prompt a reaction from the military. President Wahid has told a visiting Japanese politician of his plans to sideline General Wiranto, who holds the key Cabinet portfolio of Coordinating Minister of Political Affairs and Security. He headed the Indonesian military for the past two years, as the brutal tactics of soldiers and police came under enormous scrutiny. General Wiranto is himself accused of involvement in the military's suspected sponsorship of the pro-Jakarta militias which went on a killing rampage after the independence vote in East Timor. He could face charges before an international court. --------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Customs officers have rescued 24 Middle Eastern boatpeople after their vessel struck trouble 600 kilometres north-west of Broome, in Western Australia. Leon Bedington, from the Customs Service, says a Coastwatch plane spotted the Indonesian fishing boat heading towards Ashmore Reef yesterday afternoon and alerted the Australian customs boat Botany Bay. ""The fishing boat started to take water, was in an unseaworthy condition so the Botany Bay decided to take the people off the boat,"" he said. Mr Bedington said the boat was subsequently sunk because it was a hazard to navigation. -----------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) has cited new evidence to bolster its opposition to another rise in official interest rates. Most economists are predicting the Reserve Bank will increase rates as early as next month, after the next board meeting is held. A new ACCI survey has found the November rates rise led some companies to reduce their production levels. Chamber chief executive Mark Paterson says the Reserve should take note of the survey. ""It's clear evidence that even a 25 basis point increase has seen businesses take decisions to lower output, to lower growth and to lower employment,"" he said. ""If we want to do the economy harm then we'll take measures which will lower growth and force the pain onto the unemployed and those looking for work."" ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Opponents of Yugoslavia's President Slobodan Milosevic are suggesting that authorities in the capital, Belgrade, authorised the killing of the Serbian paramilitary leader and indicted war criminal known as Arkan. Zelko Raznatovic, better known as Arkan, was shot dead in a classic Balkan-style mafia hit in a Belgrade hotel on Saturday. At the time of his death he was said to have controlled almost 90 per cent of the gangster activity in Serbia and many believe his assassination was underworld business. He seemed untouchable - protected by what amounted to a private army. This made his killing all the more shocking to many people in Serbia. Opposition leaders have made it clear that they blame the authorities. The controversial politican Vuk Draskovic said the death of Arkan was further proof that state terrorism existed in Serbia. Mr Draskovic has repeatedly demanded an investigation into unsolved killings - most recently a suspicious car accident in which four of his associates died. Other Opposition leaders say the spate of assassinations in Serbia adds urgency to their calls for a change of government. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" World tennis has a new number one. Australia's Lleyton Hewitt with two wins since January 1, has benefited from the new scoring system introduced this year by the ATP. Hewitt is excited by the news and is beginning to understand the new pressures that go with the position. He believes he is playing very good tennis going into the Australian Open."

" Indicted Serb war crimes suspect Zeljko Raznatovic, better known as ""Arkan"", has been assassinated in Belgrade. Sources in a city hospital emergency ward said Arkan died after being shot while at a hotel in Belgrade. He was hit in the head in the shooting, which took place at the entrance of the Intercontinental Hotel. At least two other people were killed, including one of his bodyguards, one of the medical sources said. Arkan was shot in the left eye and died at the hospital at 4:50am AEDT, one of the sources said. The bodyguard, known as Manda, died instantly. The other person, whose identity was not immediately known, died in hospital. Police sealed off the lobby of the hotel, located in the Novi Beograd district of the city. Arkan was indicted by the Hague-based International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in March last year. He was accused of ordering his ""Tigers"" paramilitaries to massacre thousands of Muslims during the Bosnian war. He had repeatedly denied those accusations, and others claiming that his forces were involved in killings of ethnic Albanians in the Serbian province of Kosovo. Kosovo's ethnic Albanians have greeted the news of the slaying with joy, although many expressed regret that he would never face justice. ""As a Kosovar I would like to see him in the flesh and rip his throat out,"" said Nebi Qena, a journalist at the Albanian-language daily <i>Koha Ditore</i>. ""Everyone thinks he got what he deserved. Our only regret is that it was not as painful as it could have been,"" he added. ""I can barely keep the smile off my face,"" said one colleague. ""It's great,"" said Fatos Statovci, a Pristina resident. ""He carried out too many massacres in Kosovo and Bosnia. It's not a person who is dead, but a criminal, a monster."" All three expected widespread celebrations in Pristina, the provincial capital of Kosovo, although political leaders were more guarded in their response. Edita Tahiri, head of foreign affairs for the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) - the organisation of veteran ethnic Albanian leader Ibrahim Rugova - said she would have preferred to see Arkan face justice. ""We want to see all the criminals before the court in The Hague."" \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*"

" Ansett and Kendell Airlines flights into and out of Tasmania will be disrupted for a second day today, as baggage handlers continue their industrial action. The Transport Workers Union says Ansett wants to replace the union members with contract employees and says the company is refusing to negotiate with the union. Ansett plans to hand over its Tasmanian operations to its wholly owned subsidiary, Kendell Airlines. Ansett spokeswoman Rita Buccheri says the disruption to flights is disappointing, adding that Ansett has been negotiating with the TWU about the changes since last year. ""Once again we expect the same number of flights to be cancelled that was as per Saturday: 19 Ansett flights and eight Kendall flights,"" she said. \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*"

" The first independent test results of contaminated Mobil aviation fuel are expected next week. The Australian Transport Safety Bureau is having samples tested at a Melbourne laboratory and results will be matched to in-house test results provided by Mobil. Up to 5,000 light planes have been grounded in the contamination crisis. The bureau's deputy director, Alan Stray, says test results should show whether there is a problem with Mobil's Altona Refinery in Melbourne, or whether the fuel is contaminated after it leaves the plant. Mr Stray says a Mobil avgas sample taken by a distributor 18 months ago is also being tested. ""We immediately contacted the distributor and got conformation and then asked for that fuel sample to be immediately sent to the laboratory for analysis and the purpose of that was to look at an 18 month old sample and compare it with the current sample,"" Mr Stray said. ""It's very hard to get samples from that long ago."" \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*"

" Russian forces in Chechnya have launched one of their fiercest attacks of the new year so far, flying repeated sorties against rebel positions and sending troops into many towns to make house-to-house searches. The Russians say they have regained control of most areas taken by the rebels in their recent counter-offensive. The heaviest Russian land and air assault for some weeks is now underway. In the latest 24-hour period, the Russian air force flew 180 missions against rebel targets in Grozny and the mountains of southern Chechnya. The rebel side has confirmed this is one of the heaviest bombardments of the war. Russian troops have also been sent into many lowland towns and villages to demonstrate that they have been recaptured and make house-to-house searches for the guerrillas and their weapons. But they have mostly taken over a wasteland. The rebels have melted away into the mountains. Latest television pictures from the war zone show town after town of destroyed houses and streets strewn with debris, in places like Charlee and Argun where the recent fighting was fiercest and the Russians suffered heavy casualties. Fighting has intensified in Grozny with reports of pitched street battles and intense Russian shelling. Russian troops emerging from the battle zone said Chechens were putting up fierce resistance. Russia claims to have regained the momentum after its offensive in Chechnya stalled last week in the face of rebel attacks on Russian-held towns and fierce resistance by fighters in Grozny. Meanwhile, heavily-armed guards at the main border post between Chechnya and the Russian republic of Ingushetia have allowed Chechen men to cross in and out of the republic for the first time since Tuesday. They had shocked refugees by splitting up families and separating Chechen men from women in response to two fierce rebel counter-attacks. Russia's Acting President Vladimir Putin has told Russian television that victory in Chechnya will require time and patience, apparently preparing the ground for an extended military campaign. He did not say how long he thought it would take Russian troops to win the war in the breakaway republic, stressing instead that care must be taken not to harm civilians. Mr Putin's tough handling of the Chechen campaign has seen his popularity rise in Russian polls, making him the frontrunner in the presidential elections due in March. \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*"

" India has asked Pakistan to arrest and hand over five hijackers of an Indian Airlines plane who Delhi says are likely to be in Pakistani territory. The hijackers seized the plane last month and held it in Afghanistan for eight days until India agreed to release three Kashmiri Muslim militants in exchange for more than 150 passengers aboard the plane. Ever since the hijacking ended and the five armed men who seized the plane disappeared from Kandahar, India has been insisting that they are in Pakistan. This demand from the Government in Delhi that Pakistan arrest and handover the hijackers is the most robust expression of India's feelings so far. It is not known where the hijackers are, but one of the freed Muslim extremists who travelled with them from Kandahar has been quoted in the press as saying they may have crossed the border into Pakistan. This is denied vehemently in Islamabad. Officials there say they will arrest and try the hijackers if they are caught on Pakistani soil. \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*"

" Yahoo!, the top website on the Internet, has no plans to enter a merger along the lines of AOL and Time Warner. The founder of the US-based company, Jerry Yang, told Germany's Sunday newspaper <i>Welt am Sonntag</i> Yahoo! will not weaken its position by joining with a big partner. ""Yahoo! has deals right now with hundreds of companies in the media sector. But, even in view of the AOL/Time Warner merger, we don't see any need to weaken our position by joining up with a big partner,"" Mr Yang said in the interview. ""Even in the future, we want to operate as an independent platform for communication, commerce and media with a lot of partners in order to give our users the biggest range of options possible,"" he said. He also denied rumours that Yahoo! was looking for a tie-up with the Walt Disney Company."

" The Council of Small Business Organisations is warning the goods and services tax (GST) is only part of massive changes to be faced by business in the coming year. The Federal Government has launched a $200 voucher system to help small businesses with GST compliance. But the council's Rob Bastian says other aspects of the Ralph review on business tax are still being discussed. He says the time ahead will be difficult for business with many small businesses still not even prepared for the GST. ""I don't believe that we are as prepared as everyone would like us to be, but there is going to be an intense effort between now and the 13th of June, but remember that we are focusing, swinging round there."" ----------------------------------"

" Australian manufacturers are feeling the heat from resurgent industries in Asia. The latest jump in the value of the Australian dollar will add to the pressure. At 11:53am AEDT, the local currency was at 66.63 US cents. It has settled back around one-quarter of a cent from its overnight peak, which represented the highest level it has been against the greenback since early July last year. An Australian Industry Group survey of manufacturing released today indicates a rising dollar and increased import competition have intensified the pressures on local industry. The group said the keenest competition was coming from a re-emerging Asia, and it said that in such an environment a major risk for local manufacturing would be any imposition of higher interest rates. ----------------------------------"

" A chafed anchor rope is being blamed for two divers enduring a 15-hour ordeal on the Great Barrier Reef overnight. The incident comes as police consider abondoning a search for missing American snorkeller Ursula Clutton. The two men, aged 31 and 37, were collecting crown of thorns star fish from Opal Reef, north-east of Port Douglas, late yesterday afternoon when their privately-owned six-metre boat was set adrift after the anchor rope became chafed. An overnight air search failed to locate the pair who were eventually rescued just after first light today by a commercial boat on the reef. After being treated by ambulance officers the men have returned to Cairns. Meanwhile, police will decide this afternoon whether to continue a search for 80-year-old Ursula Clutton, who disappeared while snorkelling on Agincourt Reefs, north-east of Port Douglas on Tuesday. --------------------------------"

" The World Anti-Doping Agency has held its first meeting in Lausanne with US anti-drugs campaigner Barry McCaffrey insisting the new body should be based away from Switzerland. Mr McCaffrey made the plea even though the new body's interim head Dick Pound - a member of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) - says the fledgling body has already made some progress. The meeting also discussed establishing a single list of banned substances, the adoption of an anti-doping code, the accreditation of anti-doping laboratories and the future location of the agency. The Australian Sports Drug Agency (ASDA) says it remains unclear whether it will have a role to play in drug-testing competitors at the Sydney Olympics. The agency's acting chief executive officer, John Mendoza, says the indications from the Lausanne meeting are that the IOC will surrender control of drug testing to the new world body. ""There has been a suggestion in some articles that ASDA's going to have a role,"" he said. ""We have nothing to verify that. I think our role will be simply to continue pressing for an open transparent and accountable process in which athletes' rights are protected along the lines of what we've put in the report to the IOC on the existing result management process and where it needs some improvement."" -----------------------------------"

" The founder of software giant Microsoft, Bill Gates, has announced he is standing down. He has told a press conference in Redmond, Washington that he is turning over the post of chief executive officer to the company's number two, Steve Ballmer. However Mr Gates says he will remain chairman of the board. He has told reporters that he would spend ""almost 100 per cent of my time as a chief software architect."" ---------------------------------"

" Scientists in the US have achieved a world first with the cloning of a rhesus monkey. According to the magazine Science, the monkey, called Tetra, was cloned using a method that splits the original cells in an embryo to create multiple identical animals. Scientist at the Oregon Regional Primate Research Centre, Gerald Shatten, describes it as artificial twinning. The centre says the birth of Tetra, a healthy female cloned from a quarter of an embryo, proves that this approach can result in live offspring. The technique used in Oregon is significantly different from that used in the famous cloning of a Dolly the sheep where adult genetic material was transfered into an empty cell. Researchers believe that being able to produce identical sets of animals will make for more reliable studies in disease treatment. ------------------------------------"

" Australia's army chief is warning the country's strategic outlook could remain unstable for several years. Lieutenant-General Frank Hickling says Australia should expect to send troops to countries further afield than South East Asia. He says troops are now more likely to be engaged in peacekeeping efforts as seen recently in East Timor. ""What we're seeing here is a series of friction points or tension points if you like between people of different ethnic backgrounds, people of different religious persuasions who aren't able to resolve their differences peacefully,"" he said. ""Some of these conflicts go back for many years of course and some of them are not going to be resolved quickly, so it's a question of how quickly they flare up and of course that's something you can't predict."" -----------------------------------"

" The shackles have come off the Australian dollar, with offshore investors pushing it to a six-month high overnight. The currency's rally started with yesterday's strong monthly employment data. With almost 56,000 extra jobs created in December, domestic currency players yesterday saw the latest employment figures as implying strong economic growth that would lead to further increases in interest rates. The dollar was immediately bought up to a three-month high. Overnight, the rally has been extended. The dollar's peak in New York of 66.87 US cents is the highest it has been since last July. Macquarie Bank corporate dealer Kevin Tuckey says for the past week or more an offshore options play had kept a lid on the dollar. Mr Tuckey says a post Y2K effect and stronger world economic growth could see the dollar rise above 70 US cents later in the year. A short time ago, the dollar was being quoted for around 66.71 US cents, still up almost four-tenths of a cent since yesterday's local close. ----------------------------------"

" Airport operators are seeking legal advice on whether they will be able to claim compensation from Mobil over the aviation fuel contamination crisis. The Airport Owners and Operators Association says its members are facing financial ruin if the problem continues to drag on. Association chairman Peter Byrne says it is not just pilots and aircraft owners who are being affected. ""There are a couple of airports in particular, which I can't name naturally, who are suffering daily losses that are quite significant as time goes on the problem is exacerbated,"" he said. ----------------------------------"

" Australian ocean researchers have discovered important new underwater petroleum deposits just off the coast of Tasmania. Scientist Peter Hill, who has just returned from mapping the seabed around Tasmania, says several new areas of petroleum have been identified, including the Port Davey Basin and the Coles Bay area. He says special sonar equipment allowed scientists to survey up to five kilometres under the seabed, where the petroleum deposits were found. The research was done by the Australian Geological Survey Office as part of the Federal Government's oceans policy. ----------------------------------"

" New research shows burglars are more likely to break into homes on a Friday than any other day. Sunday is the least popular day for robberies. The study was carried out by insurance company SGIC in conjunction with the NRMA. It found Friday was the highest risk day, accounting for 17 per cent of all burglaries. SGIC manager Bruce Sheldrick says most burglars prefer Friday because more people are socialising after work, giving intruders extra time to steal from a home. Monday and Saturday are also popular among robbers, with Sunday considered the least favourite day. -------------------------------"

" A petrol tanker carrying large quantities of fuel has rolled over in the Perth suburb of Cannington, rupturing a tank and causing a major fuel leakage. The tanker, which rolled over on the corner of Nicholson Roads and Albany Highway was carrying 24,000 litres of petrol and 8,000 litres of diesel. Police Inspector Phil Birch says the area has been cordoned off while the spill is cleaned-up. He says the spillage will cause major disruption to morning traffic, as the roads will be closed until at least 10:00am. ---------------------------------"

" Accusations of drug use against the Chinese swimming team have been renewed, with seven members winning medals at the World Cup Short Course Championships in Hobart last night. The Chinese team won five events, one less than Australia's six victories in the pool. The head coach of the Australian team, Don Talbot, described the Chinese performances as suspicious, after the relatively unknown swimmers dominated the World Cup in Shanghai last week."

" A surge in monthly employment figures has failed to prevent the national jobless rate going back up. That is because there has also been an explosion in the number of people looking for work. With newspaper job advertising running at a 10-year high, Australians have rejoined the hunt for work with a vengance in December. The participation rate has skyrocketed by half of a percentage point. So even though the number of Australians with a job surged by 56,000, the bulk of them full-time, the unofficial unemploymewnt rate headed back up, after dropping to a nine-and-a-half year low in November, of 6.7 per cent. The jobless rate now stands at 7 per cent. The Federal Employment Minister, Peter Reith, says the figures are a good start to the new year. ""Well they're very good figures, we've had 55,800 jobs created, that's stronger than the market expectations,"" he said. ""The trend unemployment rate at 6.9 per cent is the lowest since July 1990, and we have a record high participation rate for females at 54.8 per cent, so they're very strong numbers."" --------------------------------"

" An expert on the Holocaust in Latvia says it is unlikely alleged Naza war criminal Konrad Kalejs was involved in the murder of Jews. Professor Andrew Ezergalis has authored a book on the subject with the support of the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington. Professor Ezergalis says at the time of killings in 1942, Mr Kalejs was serving as a Lieutenant in actions in northern Russia. He says photographs of Mr Kalejs wearing an SS uniform would not have been taken until almost two years after the murders. ""There's no question about him being a member of the commando, but the question is, is there any kind of a proof?"" he said. ""You see you just can't try anyone for just membership in an orgainsation, though evil any organisation may be. ""The organisation may be criminal but at the same time nobody could be convicted on the basis of membership alone."" -----------------------------------"

" In the United States, the Justice Department has dismissed as ""inaccurate"", reports that it plans to seek the break up of software giant Microsoft. According to USA Today, anti-trust prosecutors had settled a long-standing internal dispute on what remedies the government could seek against Microsoft. But while the department has not denied that a decsion has been reached, it says there are serious inaccuracies in the suggestion that it wanted to Microsoft split into separate companies - one selling the famous Windows licencing system, a second handling applications such as its office programs and possibly a third to deal with Microsoft's web holdings. The Federal Government and a number of states took Microsoft to Federal Court over its tactics against a rival Internet company, Netscape. In November, the judge issued a scathing finding of facts in the case, accusing the company of abusing its position but no final ruling or remedy has been announced. ---------------------------"

" The Seven Television Network is teaming up with a US Internet player in a deal to develop online and broadband businesses in Australia. Seven has today named NBC Internet Incorporated as its partner in the venture. NBC Internet is 47 per cent owned by General Electric's NBC, which has maintained a news and programming relationship with Seven for almost 40 years. On the Australian Stock Exchange, Seven Network shares have been as high as $5.58, but were up just 13 cents just after 11:00am AEDT, at $5.42 in a market that is a little weaker overall. ----------------------------------"

" Scientists are determined to prove once and for all that drinking wine is good for your heart. The Grape and Wine Research and Development Corporation has conducted one of the world's first human clinical trials as opposed to previous ones conducted on animals. The news appears to be good for people who consume a moderate amount of wine. The trial found that certain components of wine called phenolics, when absorbed into the body decrease the amount of bad cholesterol that can cause heart disease. -----------------------------------"

" The La Nina weather pattern is impacting on Queensland's weather conditions again, this time bringing exceptionally cold summer maximum temperatures. Queensland Centre for Climatology figures show differences of between 3 and 5 degrees across southern and western Queensland. Climatologist Dr Roger Stone says while it is not unusual for cooler temperatures to be associated with the La Nina pattern, it is an extreme year. And he says the most affected industry is cotton. ""We would hope that we'll get some warm weeks or months over the next couple of months to help the crop along, but as I've been saying, the chances of that happening are actually not high at the moment,"" he said. ""So in a sense we're hoping that the forecast information will not be correct so we can help the cotton crop through."" ----------------------------------"

" Bad crowd behaviour at last night's one day match at the MCG has been condemned by players, who say they only want to get on with the game. India fans hurled plastic bottles onto the field during last night's match against Australia and 70 people were ejected from the ground. Ricky Ponting says the behaviour spoiled the night. ""I don't know what you can say to them, it just seems that a certain stage when they're unhappy with an umpire's decision that they want to ruin it for everyone else,"" he said. ""It was only one little section of the crowd last night that tried to ruin the game for everyone else, so I'm not sure how you can say it to them and it's just a matter of them hopefully wanting the game to continue and they can sit back and watch a good game of cricket."" Meanwhile Ponting says he was surprised to be given the job of vice-captain and admits he would be interested in taking the top job. ""Well I mean there's been a little bit of talk about it for the last six or eight months, whatever, but I sort of never thought too much about it just yet because there's always been Steven [Waugh], Shane [Warne] and Mark [Waugh] and those guys would've been ahead of me, so I can start thinking a little bit more about it now."""

" The Australian Democrats have shelved plans to hold a Senate inquiry into the fuel contamination crisis. The Democrats say they are satisfied with the Government's new terms of reference for the Transport Safety Bureau's investigation. The Transport Minister, John Anderson, has ordered the bureau to broaden its inquiry to examine production and quality control procedures in the aviation fuel refining industry. The Opposition is continuing to demand a fully independent inquiry. But Democrats Senator John Woodley says he is prepared to let the Transport Safety Bureau run its own investigation, before deciding whether a separate Senate committee inquiry is needed. ""We've got confidence in the ability of the Australian Transport Safety Bureau to do this. ""But we will be having some hearings next week which will involve an examintion of CASA's role and it will be easy enough for us, if we believe there are still questions not answered, to initiate a Senate inquiry in the next few weeks."" ----------------------------------"

" The Westpac Bank is standing by its warning that official interest rates will move much higher this year than earlier predicted. The bank believes its revised outlook has been bolstered by the latest reading of consumer confidence. The start of the Year 2000 has been characterised by global stockmarket volatility and fears of rising interest rates. Despite this the Westpac/Melbourne Institute index of consumer sentiment has risen 2.9 per cent for January. Westpac senior economist John Peters says ongoing falls in the national jobless rate are buoying the mood of Australian households. And he says consumer activity will continue to be a driver of above-trend economic growth. ---------------------------------"

" Thousands of small businesses will today begin receiving vouchers which are meant to offset the cost of the goods and services tax (GST). The Federal Opposition says the $200 vouchers are an insult and a farce. It is estimated the cost of moving to the new tax system will be around $7,000 for the average small business. The Government last year set aside more than $500 million to help with the transition. ---------------------------------"

" The company that led last years fatal canyoning excursion in Interlaken, in Switzerland, says eight of its employees will face manslaughter charges. The company has pre-empted an official investigators report. Twenty-one young people, 14 of them Australian, died in the canyoning disater in Interlaken last July. The Swiss investigating Magistrate is not due to release his report into the incident until the middle of next month, but the company says eight of its employees have been informed that they will face manslaughter charges. One of those facing charges, the head of the company George Hodler, says their defence will continue to be that they had no control over the conditions that lead to the tragedy. He says his companies lawyers believe they have a strong case. The parents of those who died have made it clear that they believe more precautions should have been taken and the company should not have allowed their children to particiapte on that day. The trial is not expected to begin until late May or June. -----------------------------------"

" The Uniting Church is today advertising for staff to work in Australia's first trial of a legal heroin injecting room. The chairman of the Uniting Church's board for social repponsibility, the Reverend Harry Herbert, says staff need to be selected to start planning how the room is to operate. The staff search is beginning despite the church's failure so far to select a suitable location in Sydney's Kings Cross. Mr Herbert says it will take three or four months to set up the room once the site is agreed on. ""There are still a couple of very viable properties under consideration at the moment, and we are quite optomistic that we will have that solved in a few weeks,"" he said. ""It was always going to be difficult to find a site which has to be approved by the Police Comissioner, the Director General of Health, the local community have to be reasonably satisfied with it, and it has to meet the requirements so that its a practical site for an injecting facility."" ----------------------------------"

" New South Wales pharmacists have been warned they risk being 'struck off' for failing to restrict and monitor the sale of pseudoephedrine tablets. The abuse of the tablets to make amphetimines lead to strict controls being brought in four years ago. The best known brand Sudafed has now been reformulated to prevent them being used to make amphetimines, commonly known as speed. But other brands can be still be broken down. A letter to all pharamcists from the Pharmacy Board of New South Wales says illicit manufacturers can get methylamphetimines with a street value of $6,000 out of a pack of 90 tablets. The board says authorities have informed it that a number of chemists are ignoring rules to store packs of more than 60 tablets in the dispensary and to check to bona fides of anyone try to buy more than 30 tablets. The board says failure to observe the rules may be grounds for professional misconduct charges. -----------------------------------"

" The Centre for Disease Control in Darwin has confirmed there has been a significant increase in the number of people being treated for dengue fever. The centre has been notified of 14 cases so far this year, compared with a total of four cases for the whole of 1998. Last year around 15 cases were notified to the centre, mostly among people coming from South East Asia and from East Timor. Dale Fisher, an infectious diseases doctor based in the Top End, says the increase this year is due mainly to people returning from East Timor with the disease. ""Aedes aegypti is easily the most abundant mosquito in urban areas of East Timor and that is the mosquito vector of dengue,"" he said. ""That mosquito doesn't carry malaria interestingly and that's why I beleive we're not seeing as much malaria as we are dengue. ""And fortunately that mosquito doesn't exist anymore in the Top End of the Northern Territory."" --------------------------------"

" The air search on the Great Barrier Reef for an American tourist missing since Tuesday has been scaled down. Ursula Clutton, 80, disappeared while snorkelling on Agincourt Reef, north-east of Port Douglas, on Tuesday. Brian Hill from Australian Search and Rescue says Queensland Police now take over the search. ""Australian Search and Rescue has conducted a very extensive search covering approximately 700 square nautical miles,"" he said. ""There's been four aircraft, there's been navy divers, unfortunately we've found nothing and the search has now been handed back to the Queensland Police."" Mrs Clutton was reported missing after staff of a dive company conducted a head count of passengers before leaving Agincourt Reef. ----------------------------------"

" Environmental group Greenpeace says it is likely a shipment of nuclear reactor fuel, which is being returned to Britain from Japan, will travel past Australia. A Japanese nuclear power company is sending the fuel back because its British manufactuers falsified quality control data. It is the second time British Nuclear Fuels has falsified information about the fuel which was to be used at the power company's Takahama plant. Greenpeace's Jean McSorley says the return shipment will pass through the South Pacific and Tasman Sea. Ms McSorley has condemned the decision to return the cargo saying the shipment poses a significant environmental threat. --------------------------------"

" Australia has won its second match in the pre-Olympic soccer tournament in Adelaide. The Olyroos defeated Egypt 1-0, but the home side struggled to overcome a very physical opponent. For the second consecutive game Egypt finished the game with 10 men. Acting captain Abdel Azziz Said seeing red after picking up two yellow cards. Five other cards were dished out, three in the first half for fouls on Lucas Neill. Neill was also booked. The goal came from the free-kick following Said's dismissal, Kasey Wehrmann finding the head of player of the match Hayden Foxe in the 78th minute. The Olyroos play Korea on Saturday night to decide the tournament winner, after the Koreans earlier beat Nigeria 3-0."

" The National Australia Bank (NAB) says the Australian economy ""continued to party"" in the December quarter. The bank has released its latest quarterly survey of business conditions, concluding that there had been significant improvements in trading, profitability and employment. It says the survey results imply an annual economic growth rate of 4.5 per cent. The bank notes a lift in stock levels in the latest quarter reflecting seasonal and Y2K effects, but also due, in part, to the impact of the ""buyers' strike"" on the car industry. Despite strong demand in the economy, the survey has found a continued absence of wage and price pressures. ----------------------------------"

" Australian consumers remain in an upbeat frame of mind at the start of 2000. Not even share market volatility and the threat of higher interest rates have dinted their confidence. The optimism of Australian households has shown up in the Westpac/Melbourne Institute consumer sentiment index. It is up 2.9 per cent in January. Westpac senior economist John Peters says confidence is proving resilient. ""The survey was actually taken last weekend at that was against the backdrop of the highly volitle global equity markets last week and intensified speculation about higher domestic interest rates in early 2000,"" he said. And Mr Peters says the latest index reading bolsters the bank's view that official interest rates will be raised by 0.5 points on each of three occasions before the end of June. -----------------------------------"

" A Queensland researcher has developed a new technique to eradicate fruit fly outbreaks in Southern Australia. Professor Dick Drew, from Griffith University, says a high protein bait can be mixed with insecticide to control fruit fly. The new bait which is still awaiting government approval has been used succesfully overseas to control the insect in known fruit fly areas. Professor Drew says only minute amounts need to be used to protect an orchard, which will lower costs for producers. He says the flys prefer the bait over fruit, which makes it highly effectivce in destroying outbreaks in Southern Australia where the insect is not established. Professor Drew says the new bait may also improve exports and be a real benefit to organic growers who are concerned about using chemicals. The bait is expected to be available later this year. ----------------------------------"

" Australian scientists have uncovered new underwater volcanoes and rich petroleum deposits off south-east Australia. A research vessel has just returned from a two-week voyage from Lord Howe Island to the Great Australian Bight. Using sophisticated sonar technology, scientists have been able to map ocean depths of up to 5,000-metres for the first time. Releasing the findings today, chief scientist Peter Hill says in the past two weeks they have learnt more about the ocean floor than in the last 50 years. The research was carried out by the Australian Geological Survey organisation, as part of the Federal Government's national oceans policy. -----------------------------------"

" Two pilots have combined their efforts to break the distance record for tandem paragliding in New South Wales' north. Manilla based Godfrey Weness, and his co-pilot Suzi Smith, took off from Mount Borah to fly 223 kilometres in 7.15 hours. The couple flew at heights of up to 3,000 metres to achieve the record, and landed 100 kilometres west of Moree. It is the first time in the sport's history that a pilot has held both the solo and tandem open distance world records at the same time. In 1998 Mr Weness flew 335 kilometres across northern New South Wales to break the existing record for solo paragliding. -------------------------------"

" Australia's Mark Phillippoussis has begun the Kooyong Tennis Classic on a positive note, with a three set win over world number two Yevgeny Kafelnikov. Phillippoussis won 7-6, 6-7, 6-1, and showed no sign of the shin and achilles problems which forced him to pull out of last week's Hopman Cup. In the second match of the tournament world number one Andre Agassi is playing South Africa's Wayne Ferreira, and later this afternoon Pete Sampras plays Richard Krajicek. Nicholas Kiefer plays Thomas Enqvist."

" The Federal Government is set to broaden an investigation into the cause and management of the aviation fuel contamination crisis which has grounded up to 5,000 planes. The acting prime minister has also told Mobil to settle financial disputes with aviation operators affected by the dirty fuel. The Transport Minister and acting prime minister, John Anderson, has spoken to Mobil executives, urging the company to enter into mediation with the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association. Mr Anderson says the grounding of up to 5,000 planes is a very serious problem and says he is frustrated it has taken so long to resolve. ""Every effort needs to be made, particularly by Mobil, to get on top of this, where possible to facilitate alternative arrangements for fuel delivery, but in particular to sort out the causes of the problem,"" he said. And while Mr Anderson has ruled out Opposition calls for an independent inquiry, a Senate Committee has decided to investigate the Civil Aviation and Safety Authority's (CASA) role in the contamination crisis. The Senate's Rural and Regional Affairs Transport Legislation Committee will question CASA over the matter when it appears at a scheduled hearing next week. The safety authority has been criticised for not informing pilots of the fuel problem three days after it was notified by the supplier, Mobil. Claims have also surfaced that a similar situation allegedly occured up to two years ago in Victoria. Meanwhile a Tasmanian regional airline, grounded as a result of the fuel contamination crisis, has stood down most of its employees. Island Airlines says 12 staff have been stood down indefinitely. The grounding of the airline's two planes has resulted in the cancellation of flights to Flinders Island and other centres in Tasmania and Victoria. The airline's chief executive officer, Rod Matthews, says employees are being asked to take holidays now but he hopes the standowns will only be necessary for a few days. ""Most of them are in Launceston. They're our aircrew, our pilots and they're the ones that are effected immediately,"" he said. ""Some of our office staff in Hobart are still doing some work, where they have to do secretarial work. ""But, it's the air crew and the ground handlers that are the worst affected at this stage."" ----------------------------------------"

" United Nations investigators in East Timor have uncovered the bodies of as many as 18 people in graves on East Timor's west coast. It is hoped the discovery will lead to the prosecution of the militia who took part in two massacres near the town of Liquisa. They were the two acts of militia violence which first drew the world's attention last April, the Liquisa church massacre which claimed up to 53 lives and the Dili massacre which claimed at least 12. Up to 18 of those bodies have now been found in marked graves just west of Liquisa. The bodies are being exhumed and examined by UN civilian police. The UN hopes to proseucte those responsible believing this may identify those who ordered the killings. ----------------------------------"

" There are reports of more deaths in sectarian fighting in Indonesia's eastern Maluku Islands. President Abdurrahman Wahid has ordered his security forces to block ships entering island waters and for police to arrest any passengers carrying weapons. President Wahid's action follows reports that 400 Muslims boarded a boat in the capital Jakarta, heading for the Maluku capital Ambon. Calls for a holy war have been mounting following unconfirmed reports of 2,000 Muslims being massacred on nearby Halmahera Island. President Wahid, a respected moderate Muslim leader, says any threat against Indonesian sovereignty or its people will be dealt with. There has been a sharp escalation in religious fighting in the last fortnight, and more than 700 Christians and Muslims killed. -----------------------------------"

" The Prime Minister, John Howard, says his government will this year shift its focus from tax reform to social policy. Mr Howard has singled out the Job Network and drugs policy as important government achievements. Writing for The Australian newspaper, Mr Howard is keen to emphasis what he calls bedrock institutions - the family and old values such as personal responsibility. He says the Government will continue to nurture the concept of a social coalition, where business, government and the community work together to help the disadvantaged. But he says at the root of such a coalition is mutual obligation - flagging more changes to how welfare recipients will pay their way in society. He says the Job Network is one of the most creative social initiatives ever attempted in an OECD country and also points to the government's tough on drugs strategy, which he says has brought community organisations to the policy-making table. -----------------------------------"

" Unions will push ahead with a 24-hour strike at BHP's Port Kembla steelworks in New South Wales tonight, despite being ordered by the Industrial Relations Commission (IRC) to call it off. BHP yesterday succeeded in having the order granted, claiming the strike will cost it $3 million in lost earnings and jeopardise its market share. The ruling remains in place for the next three months and also covers a stoppage planned at the Sydney Steel Mills this Friday. However the Australian Workers Union (AWU) and four other unions will defy the direction, in an attempt to force BHP to abandon plans to place iron ore workers in the Pilbara region on individual contracts. The AWU's Andrew Whiley dismissed the company's claims in the commission that fruit growers may have to plough produce into the ground if manufacturers are not supplied with enough canning tin because of the strike. ""Well it's a fairly alarmist statement by employers and I've heard a lot of alarmist statements by employers about what will happen if workers go on strike,"" he said. ""I take all those comments with a grain of salt, let's wait and see."" Meanwhile BHP has warned the AWU it will take legal action if the industrial action continues. The company's human resources manager, Rob Crawford, says the strikes by the steel division will not stop the company from continuing to pursue individual contracts for its iron ore staff in Western Australia. Mr Crawford says BHP cannot standby while it and its customer's businesses are damaged. ""While ever the campaign continues and our steel business suffers we then we have little alternative but to take the next step and bring the damaging campaign to an end,"" he said. When asked what the next step may be, Mr Crawford said, ""I'm not prepared at this stage to disclose which remedy we will pursue but suffice to say we will take the appropriate remedy to bring this matter to an end"". --------------------------------"

" A search has resumed this morning in the waters off Cairns, in far north Queensland, for an 80-year-old woman missing after a snorkelling trip. The American tourist was one of 300 people on a sightseeing tour at Agincourt Reef, 50 kilometres north-east of Port Douglas. She was reported missing just after 3:00pm yesterday and an extensive air search failed to find her. Two fixed wing planes and a helicopter are involved in the search. Meanwhile, an autopsy will be carried out today on the body of a 32-year-old French tourist who died while snorkelling at Heron Island off central Queensland. ----------------------------------"

" World record holder Michael Klim is to compete in the World Cup swimming event in Hobart tomorrow after all. Klim has rearranged his training schedule to take part and he is expected to arrive in Hobart tonight. Event organiser Colin Davis says a top African-American swimmer is also another late entry. ""Shabir Mohammed, who is quite a giant of a man and is probably going to be the first African-American to potentially represent the USA at the Olympics, he's also coming,"" he said. ""In fact, he defeated Klim in a couple of events in the US Open Swimming Championships."" ------------------------------------"

" Acting Prime Minister and Transport Minister John Anderson has acknowledged the aviation fuel contamination crisis is having a devastating impact on the general aviation industry. Mr Anderson says he is deeply aware of how serious the crisis has become. Up to 5,000 small to medium-sized planes have been grounded in eastern Australia as the Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA) and Mobil search for a test and cleaning method to establish the extent of fuel contamination. Several aviation industry operators have begun laying off staff and freight and passenger services to rural areas have been cut. Mr Anderson has dismissed calls for an independent investigation into the crisis but says he is looking at all options for a quick resolution. ""This is now a very serious problem indeed which is having a devastating effect on the general aviation industry,"" he said. -----------------------------------"

" A surge of 27 per cent in the value of News Corporation stock is keeping the Australian share market in record territory. The buying frenzy over News Corp has occurred since the announcement of a merger between US Internet leader America Online and the world's biggest entertainment company, Time Warner. On the local market at about 3:00pm AEDT, News Corp shares were up a massive $4.05 to a record $18.60. That has pushed up the All Ordinaries index to a new all-time high of just under 3,174, up 67 points or 2 per cent on the day. -----------------------------------"

" A meeting on Queensland's Gold Coast is drafting standards which will govern the use of or digital video discs (DVDs) in personal computers. Representatitves of Japanese and American firms are discussing the future of DVD technology at Surfers Paradise. Convenor, Del Allan says within two years, consumers will be able to use DVDs with much more flexibility than is currently available. ""You will be able to buy a DVD drive that you will be able to write to as well as read from,"" he said. ""For example, you can go on vacation and you take a bunch of video. You can either send a video to a friend which you duplicate if you have two camcorders or you can bring it into your computer, edit it, create yourself a nice little family story of the vacation and send it off to a bunch of relatives in a DVD,"" Mr Allan said. ----------------------------------"

" The Australian Cancer Society has launched a gruesome national TV advertising campaign to try to shock people into avoiding skin cancer. The society says Australia has about 1,000 skin cancer-related deaths per year - the highest rate in the world. The commercial graphically depicts how a cancerous mole spreads to other parts of the body, before being cut out by a surgeon. Professor Ian Olver, from the Royal Adelaide Hospital, says it likens skin cancer to a time bomb. Sunsmart's Craig Sinclair says the commercial is aimed at the young people who still see a suntan as a fashion accessory. ""A commerical like this is graphic, because we know that it works with the target group,"" he said. The 30 second advertisement will be aired nationally from tonight. --------------------------------------"

" A Sydney court has been told that ecstasy and cocaine found hidden in a shipping container in Brisbane have an estimated value of $26.4 million. Two Sydney men and a Surfers Paradise retiree have been refused bail on charges of conspiring to import the drugs into Australia. Shipping documents said the container from Malaysia held farm equipment. When Australian Federal Police dismantled the hydraulic rams in Brisbane they found almost 250,000 ecstasy tablets, nine kilograms of ecstasy powder and nine kilograms of cocaine. After replacing the drugs, police then followed the narcotics south to Sydney where yesterday they arrested three men, aged from 38 to 60. A Sydney magistrate today heard the two local men and a Surfers Paradise resident are alleged to be the organisers of the drug importation. Authorities say the 76 kilograms of ecstasy is a record seizure, more than doubling an 11-year-old record. ----------------------------------"

" One of Australia's biggest construction empires, the Grollo Group, is to be carved up after nearly 50 years. The Grollo family companies are to be formally split between the sons of Bruno and Rino Grollo. A family spokesman says the split is an amicable arrangement, the result of the Grollo sons having different ambitions for businesses. The split is expected to be finalised within weeks and is intended to create a line of succession once current company heads, Bruno and Rino Grollo, retire. The family spokesman says Bruno Grollo's sons, Daniel and Adam, will get control of the family flagship Grocon construction company and a range of development projects said to be worth nearly $2 billion. Rino Grollo's son, Lorenz, heads a new company Equiset, which will control Mt Buller Ski Lifts, the family's 50 per cent share of the Rialto towers and development of an expansion project for the University of Melbourne. ----------------------------------"

" Former One Nation Senator-elect Heather Hill is tomorrow expected to announce that she will contest the Bundamba by-election in Queensland. Mrs Hill is today meeting supporters before finalising her candidacy. She will have to run as an Independent because it is unlikely that her new political party, the City Country Alliance, will be registered in time for the by-election on February 5. Meanwhile, alliance leader Bill Feldman says two people have nominated to contest the Woodridge by-election for the party. He says one is a former barrister and another a local businessman. The successful candidate, who will also have to run as an Independent, is likely to be announced in the next few days. --------------------------------"

" Australian cricket captain Steve Waugh is predicting the triangular one-day series could be dominated by bowlers. After practice for tomorrow's game against India, Waugh said the series could follow the pattern seen in the first two matches in Brisbane. ""It'll be a pretty close series, particularly now it's all day-nighters,"" he said. ""I think that helps the bowlers a bit more and Pakistan are a strong bowling side. ""India have got good bowlers as well, so that's probably why you didn't see too many big runs the other night and that may be the case for the rest of the series as well."" Meanwhile, Damien Fleming will return to the Australian team for tomorrow's one-day match against India at the MCG, with Shane Lee also set to be included, alongside his brother Brett. Both teams are coming off losses to Pakistan and Waugh concedes his team may have had a little trouble adjusting after the Test series. ""Perhaps we were just thinking too far ahead, maybe a fraction complacent, but I'm not too worried,"" he said. ""We play a lot of one-day cricket - hopefully 10 or 11 games this year and that's our bad game out of the road."" Pakistan bowler Shoaib Akhtar is playing down talk of heroics after he dragged a boy from the path of an oncoming vehicle in Brisbane. After defeating India in a one-day match last night, Akhtar was signing autographs outside the Gabba when he noticed a nine-year-old boy walk in to the middle of the road. Akhtar says he is just happy the boy was not injured, as the car was very close to hitting him."

" The Internet company America Online (AOL) is set to acquire Time Warner, the world's largest media and entertainment company, for more than $500 billion in stock. It has being described as the biggest corporate merger ever, and indicates that the Internet will be one of the most dominant features of the media landscape of the future. Under the terms outlined overnight, AOL will take 55 per cent of the holdings in the new company AOL Time Warner, with each side appointing half the new board of directors. Time Warner executives say the combination will allow greater distribution opportunities for their media. Meanwhile, AOL says the link up will add enormous value to the online services currently available to its subscribers. ""We are very excited about joining forces with Time Warner because we share a common vision for the future,"" America Online's chairman and chief executive Steve Case said. ""Time Warner is the first major media company to not only recognise, but fully embrace the new interactive world. Together we can change the future for the better."" Time Warner's chairman Gerald Levin says the two companies are a natural fit. ""I am a broadband person, I am an interactive guy, I have been building networks all my life,"" he said. ""And this really provides the opportunity, just as we are in this remarkable digital century and Internet world, to bring the bearer of everything from communications to content to distribution together in really a socially-meaningful way."" The shareprice of Times Warner soared at the news, which also sparked a wider rally in technology stocks, investors hoping this will leading to further mergers in the industry. Shareholders have yet to approve the deal, which will also require anti-trust clearance from federal regulators. ------------------------------------"

" The company at the centre of Australia's largest fuel contamination problem says compensation for the aviation industry will take some time to sort out. Up to 5,000 planes have been grounded until they are cleared of problems caused by contaminated fuel that was supplied by Mobil late last year. The Civil Aviation Safety Authority says testing and cleaning of the planes could take anywhere between a week and more than a month. Mobil spokesman Alan Bailey admits it is a major problem for the aviation industry. ""The issue of compensation and so on is really something that has to be dealt with in the future, it's not something that we can resolve at this point in time,"" he said. ""Our main focus is on the safety of our customers and their aircraft operations and doing what we can to get them back into the air safely as soon as is possible. ""There's a lot of work that's obviously going to need to be done."" ----------------------------------"

" The Australian Democrats will today request that accused Nazi war criminal Konrad Kalejs appear before a Senate committee which is currently examining the Anti-Genocide Bill. The Democrats say it would give Mr Kalejs the opportunity to table a letter he says he received from the Prime Minister last year. The request comes as the Australian Federal Police (AFP) examines a weekend radio interview by Mr Kalejs for any fresh evidence. The AFP is also taking a closer look at a photograph showing him in an SS uniform. Mr Kalejs has consistently denied claims that he was a member of a Nazi unit responsible for the deaths of more than 30,000 Jews. -----------------------------------"

" In the United States, talks between Syria and Israel will resume next week after breaking up without an agreement on land and security. However as Israel's Prime Minister and Syria's Foreign Minister prepared to leave the West Virginia talks, US President Bill Clinton said he is not discouraged by the failure to reach a settlement. ""We are on a track in which the Israelis, the Syrians, the Lebanese and already the Palestinians have committed themselves to work through these very difficult, long-standing issues over the course of the next two months,"" he said. Isreal's Foreign Minister says the talks never came close to an agreement, while sources in the Syrian delegation claim the sticking point continues to be the final border between the two countries, and how much of the Golan Heights Israel is prepared to relinquish. -----------------------------------"

" Catholic leaders in Germany have been desperately trying to quash suggestions that the country's top Bishop has called for the Pope to resign. The Bishop says he has been misunderstood. The head of the German Bishops' Conference, Bishop Karl Lehmann, has rocked the Vatican with his suggestion that if the Pope thought he was no longer capable of leading the church he would have the strength and the courage to say he could no longer fulfil that which needs to be done. Bishop Lehmann says his comments have been misundertood and says he had in no way called for the Pope to resign. But many in the church share his concerns over the state of the pontif's health. Pope John Paul II is 79-years-old and is suffering form Parkinson's disease. He has looked increasingly frail over the past few months. According to tradition, the Pope reigns for life and Pope John Paul II has told his cardinals he believes he has a divine mission to continue. --------------------------------------"

" A national strategy to deal with introduced marine pests should be in place by March. A taskforce report containing 57 recommendations has been forwarded to members of the Federal Parliament's standing committees on conservation, transport and fisheries. The taskforce chair, Rex Pyne from the Northern Territory's Fisheries Department, says the first component provides for the prevention of outbreaks and incursions of new marine pests. He says the second area covers coordinating emergency responses to such incursions and outbreaks. ""The third component involves the undertaking of a longer-term mitigation and control measures to combat established marine pests,"" he said. ""The taskforce proposes that the Commonwealth Government explore the options of developing statuatory plans to reduce, eliminate, or prevent the impact of introduced marine species on the biodiversity of Australia."" ----------------------------------"

" Australian cycling champion Tracey Gaudry has been forced out of a race at Sorrento tomorrow after a crash involving some of Australia's top women cyclists. On Sunday afternoon an out of control car ploughed into a group of 16 riders on the Melbourne to Geelong Highway. Five of them were knocked off their bikes. One suffered a broken wrist, while Gaudry has severe bruising to most of her body. She still hopes to defend her national crown at the Australian Championships at Portarlington in Victoria on Sunday. ""The body's pretty battered,"" she said. ""I've got a lot of contusions and muscle damage in terms of spasms but I don't have any broken bones which I attribute to obviously a very good upbringing, lots of calcium. ""The head took a bit of a bash so I'm quite headachy but the big problem for me is the mind in terms of images of the accident and just the danger of the nature of our sport. ""So that's something that will heal in time and the body hopefully will heal before this weekend,"" Gaudry said."

" Freed CARE Australia worker Branko Jelen has been officially welcomed to Australia by the Governor-General after an emotional reunion with colleagues Steve Pratt and Peter Wallace. Mr Jelen arrived with his wife and two children at Canberra airport this morning. Yugoslav citizen Branko Jelen was arrested with fellow CARE Australia workers Steve Pratt and Peter Wallace as they tried to cross the Yugoslav border during the Kosovo crisis last year. The two Australians were released from a Belgrade military prison in September and have been working for Mr Jelen's release since. Mr Pratt, who lives in Canberra, says he will keep in close contact with Mr Jelen who plans to live in the Australian Capital Territory. ""We're in a good position to do as much as we can to get him oriented and settled down,"" Mr Pratt said. Mr Jelen has been welcomed by the Governor-General Sir William Deane at Government House where he has removed a yellow ribbon tied to a balcony while he remained in jail. Mr Jelan says it will take some time to come to terms with his nine month ordeal. ""It's very hard to speak about that after all this time and I'm not ready yet to speak about all that,"" he said. ----------------------------------"

" The demand for labour in Australia appears to be at a new 10-year high. The ""positions vacant"" columns in daily papers are growing again after a brief pause in November. The number of job advertisements in the major dailies is tracked by the ANZ Bank, where the chief economist is Saul Eslake. ""The number of job advertisements in newspapers rose 4.9 per cent in December, that more than reverses the 2.1 per cent decline that we reported for November,"" he said. ""In fact the level of advertising in seasonally adjusted terms in December was the highest since November 1989."" Mr Eslake says employment should grow by an average of 20,000 extra places a month over the next three months. That could take the national jobless rate down to 6.25 per cent by June, although the return of previously discouraged job-seekers might more realistically see it sitting at 6.5 per cent by mid-year. -----------------------------------"

" Telstra plans to buy one of Australia's top Internet service providers, as it increases its activites in the high-growth sector. Telstra has signed a preliminary agreement to buy OzEmail's business assets for more than $300 million. Under the proposal, OzEmail would run as a stand-alone business, with its own management and board, retaining the OzEmail brand. Telstra is promising continuity of service for customers, with network services still to be provided by the firm, UUNET. The deal still needs further negotiation and must be approved by the Telstra and UUNET boards and competition authorities. Shares in Telstra were up 12 cents, a short time ago, to $7.96, in a stronger overall market. -----------------------------------"

" The Australian Medical Association (AMA) says it has not been consulted about Federal Government plans to cut rebates for ultrasound tests in early pregnancy. Obstetricians and gynaecologists say they have been told the government rebate for early term pregnancy ultrasounds will be reduced from $80 to $30 on February 1. Early term ultrasounds are those conducted before the standard 17 or 18 week test to check for abnormalities. The AMA's Dr David Brand says there are concerns that too many ultrasounds are being conducted, but good patient care is the most important outcome. ""I think the combination of community expectation and medical legal pressure mean that ultrasounds are simply done and done early,"" he said. ""We want to make sure that this initiative in fact doesn't make it worse and doesn't put undue pressure on doctors not to order tests when they might be quite appropriate, and doesn't discourage patients from having appropriate tests done either."" ---------------------------------"

" A survey by Australia's biggest recruitment firm has found a high level of workplace frustration with the Internet. Morgan & Banks says that information from more than 1,000 survey respondents indicates that the time taken to download information is the major cause of what it has dubbed ""Internet rage"". The firm says 16.1 per cent of employees suffer ""Internet rage"", and almost 67 per cent complain about the waste of time. Morgan & Banks says women are more impatient than men when it comes to the new technology. -----------------------------------"

" Queensland Premier Peter Beattie has announced that two by-elections in State seats in the south-east will be held on Saturday, February 5. Peter Beattie visited the Governor in Brisbane this morning before announcing the date. He says the by-elections in the Labor held seats of Woodridge and Bundamba will be tough political battles. The Government must win both by-elections to secure its one-seat majority. -------------------------------------"

" Snowtown, in South Australia's mid-north, which gained infamy from the discovery of eight bodies in its former bank last year, is to get a public relations makeover. Residents have spoken to an Adelaide-based public relations firm to help improve the town's image. Chris Rann, of Rann Communications, says about two-thirds of residents are concerned about the commercialisation of the town following the events that took place there. He says residents are looking for ideas to move forward in a positive way. ""You may be able to create some positive distractions and do some things which make the people of Snowtown feel better about themselves and perhaps attract people to the town for reasons other than the horific association with the event that occurred there,"" he said. -------------------------------------"

" Shane Warne expects to be unavailable to the Australian side for up to two weeks as he recovers from an injury suffered yesterday. Warne strained muscles in one side of his body during the match against Pakistan at the Gabba, forcing him to use a runner while batting. The spin bowler arrived in Melbourne this afternoon where he will undergo a medical scan later today. Warne says although he is feeling better, the pain was severe. ""I think this shoulder was probably the painfullest thing I've ever had but this just hurt last night, just grabbed - something felt like someone was shoving a knife in my back,"" he said. ""So look, hopefully it's just something minor like a minor little strain or something like that and it might only be a week or two, but hopefully it's not worse than that."" Meanwhile, Western Australia has made a change to its line-up for the one day game against South Australia at the WACA ground on Wednesday. Former Canberra paceman Stuart Karpinnen will play his first game for the Warriors, in place of Brad Williams, who has a slight hamstring strain."

" The Acting Prime Minister, John Anderson, has accused the Opposition of mounting an unnecessary scare campaign over accused Nazi war criminal Konrad Kalejs. The Government has denied claims by Mr Kalejs that John Howard wrote to tell him he would not be charged with war crimes abuses because of a lack of evidence. Acting Opposition leader Simon Crean says Australia is risking its international reputation and wants new claims investigated. But Mr Anderson says Mr Crean has missed the point because there is no new evidence. ""I again see the leader of the...acting leader of the Opposition, making, I think, some fairly irresponsible claims about the way we may or may not be perceived as a country that...harbours inappropriate people, or people who have acted inappropriately in the past,"" he said. ""In the end you have to be able to back these things up and I think really to make these sort of allegations, the sort of claims that Mr Crean has made, can hardly be seen to be responsible."" \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*"

" Freed CARE Australia worker Branko Jelen has arrived in Canberra with his family this morning. After spending nine months in a Yugoslav jail Mr Jelen hopes to start a new life in Australia. A Yugoslav citizen, Mr Jelen was arrested with fellow CARE Australia workers Steve Pratt and Peter Wallace while trying to cross the Yugoslav border during the Kosovo crisis, in March last year. All three were imprisoned after being found guilty of espionage. Mr Wallace and Mr Pratt were on hand this morning to welcome Mr Jelen. Yugoslav authorities freed the Australians in September last year, but Mr Jelen remained behind bars. After months of lobbying, he was finally freed on New Year's Eve after a grant of clemency from Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic. The Australian Government has agreed to give Mr Jelen and his family residency in Australia. Mr Jelen will be formally welcomed to Australia by CARE patron, Governor-General Sir William Deane, at Government House later this morning. \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*"

" Business confidence remains at its highest level in almost 10 years. A survey by the Australian Chamber of Commerce has found almost three-quarters of businesses believe economic conditions remain good. But concerns remain over the level of business investment, which many believe will continue to slow throughout the year. Chamber chief executive Mark Patterson has also repeated his warning against a further rise in interest rates. Mr Patterson says it would be a major mistake if interest rates were used to try to slow the economy. \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*"

" Christians and Muslims on Indonesia's troubled eastern island of Ambon are bracing themselves for more sectarian violence a year after the hostility between them began. On nearby islands, thousands of people continue to flee their homes, fearing more fighting. The death toll after a year of fighting has reached more than 1,500. There is an uneasy calm in Ambon City at the end of the Muslim fasting month Ramadan. The city is divided into heavily guarded Christian and Muslim sectors. The business centre is already in ruins - a tangle of metal, broken glass and rubble, with no early plans to rebuild. In neighbouring North Maluku Province thousands of refugees continue to pour into the city of Ternate fearing sectarian violence on surrounding islands. Indonesia's popular Vice-President Megawati Sukarnoputri has defended her government's lack of initiative in solving the crisis. Her latest response is that Christians and Muslims themselves must take on the responsibility to find peace. \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*"

" Obstetricians and gynaecologists want the Federal Health Minister to justify cuts to rebates for pregnant women. They have been told the Government rebate for early term pregnancy ultrasounds will be reduced from $80 to $30 on February 1, but no reason has been given. Chairman of the Australian Association of Obstetric and Gynaecological Ultrasonologists, Victor Hurley, says it appears to be a reaction to the budget blowout from MRI machine rebates. He is urging the Government not to force up the cost of ultrasounds when abnormalities are now being detected much earlier in pregnancy. ""It's now also possible to pick up a majority of foetuses that are carrying major chromosome abnormalities, particularly Down's Syndrome,"" he said. ""Once again this was a diagnosis that was previously only made much later in pregnancy and only a small proportion of major chromosome problems had previous been detected."" He says specialists can not provide the services any cheaper and costs will be passed onto women, meaning many will delay their first ultrasound by six weeks. ""If major problems are found then which have a significant impact on the pregnancy it's a catastrophic event. ""By bringing these examinations forward into the earlier months of pregnancy while the effects are still devastating I think it makes the process more acceptable and less traumatic to pregnant women."" \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*"

" BHP and the union movement are again locked in battle over individual employment contracts. BHP has issued a statement saying half of its iron ore division has signed away collective bargaining rights. BHP wants the entire workforce on individual contracts and says it is determined to achieve the goal in the face of union-organised disruptions. ""We're already starting to see benefits of the new system where people are rewarded for taking initiatives and providing results,"" president of BHP's iron ore division Graeme Hunt said. Mr Hunt says two-thirds of the company, overall, are on contracts. But Andrew Whiley from the Australian Workers Union (AWU) disputes the figures. ""They haven't got half the workforce. The clear majority of the workforce want a collective agreement,"" he said. ""Management is doing its best to muddy the waters and confuse the issue."" The AWU is stepping up its campaign to force BHP to bargain collectively by calling industrial action at plants in Victoria, New South Wales and Western Australia this week. Mr Hunt says the company is committed to individual contracts as a way of increasing productivity. ""We always expected that there may be some people who were satisfied to stay on the existing collective EBA system,"" he said. ""We're quite comfortable with moving forward, managing those two systems but I think over time more people will consider their position and move across to where the majority of their workmates are now."" \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*"

" Fighting is again raging in the Chechen capital, Grozny, with a pause in Russia's offensive there apparently now at an end. But Russia's progress remains slow, with Chechen rebels scoring another apparent victory. Moscow is sending back-up to its beleaguered troops in Chechnya who increasingly complain openly about a lack of food and far higher casualties than the 500 officially conceded. Moscow's weekend declaration of a pause in its offensive in Grozny appears to have ended, with fighting again raging there, after two weeks in which Russian troops have become bogged down against a more vigorous than expected Chechen defence. And the Chechens have delivered another blow to Russian morale, claiming success behind Russian lines in the recapture of at least part of the town of Shali. The Chechens have in the past week retaken several Russian-held towns, making a mockery of Moscow's frequent promises of a relatively quick victory in the republic. \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*"

" Leading ultra-Orthodox Jewish rabbis in Israel have banned their followers from using the Internet. Three months ago a ban was initiated by the influential Belz Hasidic sect, and it has since been endorsed by virtually every ultra-Orthodox Jewish sect in Israel. A journalist at an ultra-Orthodox paper says the rabbis had met and started with the proposition that they ban computers. But they decided that was going too far because computers had proved valuable in teaching the Bible and in running businesses. However the Internet, with its proliferation of links to pornography sites, was ruled out of bounds. \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*"

" Melbourne's Elwood Beach is unlikely to host the Victorian leg of the One Summer series next year, after the discovery of syringes on the beach on the weekend. The men's international beach volleyball competition was abandoned on Saturday after syringes were found in the sand. Yesterday's women's event was moved to another part of the beach, but was also cancelled after the court's gradient was deemed too dangerous to play on. And iron man competitor Jonathon Crowe required a blood test after he stood on a syringe and was pricked on Saturday. Event spokesman Andrew Fraser says the problems mean One Summer organisers will consider other beaches next summer. ""Victoria won't miss out. We'll definitely be back in Victoria next year, just most likely at an alternative venue I would imagine,"" he said. Lifesaver Crowe, 31, from Wollongong, now faces three months of uncertainty over contracting HIV or hepatitis. Crowe broke down during a press conference yesterday. Chances of contracting AIDS or hepatitis from discarded needles are small but the risk is real. Crowe, who has competed as an ironman for a decade, yesterday put a brave face on his dilemma but broke down as he spoke of his fears. The incident has highlighted the debate on supervised injecting rooms and needle exchanges. The Mayor of Port Phillip, Dick Gross, says some injecdting drug users are not disposing of their needles responsibly and this is a reality of life in inner urban areas."

" The Federal Opposition says the Prime Minister should release a letter which alleged Latvian war criminal Konrad Kalejs claims to have received. Mr Kalejs says the letter from the Prime Minister states there is no proof of his having committed war crimes and there is therefore no reason to prosecute him. Acting Opposition leader Simon Crean says the letter may throw some light on the Government's attitude. ""If Mr Kalejs won't release the letter, then the Prime Minister should,"" Mr Crean said. ""Let's have a look at what the letter says. Let's have a look at when the letter was dated. But it's an interesting claim by Mr Kalejs. Let's have a look at it,"" he said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Immigration Minister is preparing for another overseas campaign to curb the flow of people arriving on Australian shores illegally. Philip Ruddock is about to embark on a visit to the Middle East, following the recent influx of illegal arrivals from the region. Mr Ruddock will visit Jordan, Syria, Turkey, Iran and Pakistan. He says he hopes to provide the governments with information on people smuggling operations. ""We certainly need to ensure that those people who are involved in this insidious people smuggling and trafficking in people is something that is dealt with. ""I hope that the intelligence information we've received here from people that have come, about the routes that they have taken, the people they have dealt with, will assist in helping to clamp down on some of that illegal activity."""

" Meanwhile, the Immigration Department says two groups of suspected illegal immigrants are in Darwin, enroute to the Woomera detention centre in South Australia. An Australian naval vessel, carrying some of the 120 people who arrived on the Ashmore Reef last Wednesday, intercepted another boat late on Friday, 140 kilometres west of Darwin. That boat had 44 adults from Afghanistan on board and four Indonesian crew. The Navy escorted the boat to Darwin, where the four Indonesians are being questioned by authorities. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Indonesian troops have returned order to the streets of the country's eastern city of Ambon after a fortnight of violent clashes between Christians and Muslims. Thousands of Muslims have attended prayers to mark their biggest annual religious festival. Armoured military vehicles continue to roll through the streets of Ambon but troops have not been needed for more than a day to break up religious clashes which have resulted in much of the city being destroyed and the loss of hundreds of lives. Separated from most of Ambon's Christians by barbed wire and barricades thousands of Muslims flocked to Ambon's main mosque for prayers to mark the religious holiday. A leading Muslim scholar called for self-restraint from all forms of provocation dividing religious groups. The Indonesian military has undertaken a massive sweep to seize weapons used by Christian and Muslim gangs and it has blockaded the harbour allowing only ships carrying badly needed food and supplies to enter port. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The colleagues of a police constable who was fatally shot in the stomach at a south-west Sydney police station are expected to be interviewed by police investigators over the next few days. Initial reports said 27-year-old Constable Matthew Potter shot himself in the stomach on Friday morning. Constable Potter died after being shot in the stomach with a Glock service pistol at the Eagle Vale police station on Friday. At the time police reported the wound was self-inflicted. Constable Potter was previously in the Army and a military policeman and was described by his superior as an excellent officer. The police crimes agencies are now interviewing colleagues, including the constable who was with constable Potter at the time of the shooting. The investigation is under the direction of the deputy state coroner. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Oil producers will try to extend the life of the Elang-Kakatua fields in the Timor Gap, northwest of Darwin, with a new drilling program. Joint venture partner Petroz says the companies will spend about $10 million drilling a sidetrack well from Elang One, during this month and next. Petroz says a successful program will result in more reserves and extend the life of the project. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australian cricket captain Steve Waugh says he can understand why the national umpiring panel has spoken out against allegations of bias and racism from the touring Pakistan and Indian teams. In a statement to team captains, officials and the match referee at a meeting in Brisbane yesterday, umpire Darrell Hair said any complaints about umpiring should be made to the match referee or not at all. Australian Cricket Board chief executive Malcolm Speed has criticised the move, but Waugh says he can understand the umpires' frustration as they have a tough job. ""You've got the snick-o-meter and then they're showing lb's all the time and they're showing replays and they've got the big screen at the ground so there really is a lot of pressure on the umpires, not just from the players watching the replays but the whole crowd. ""If there is a mistake made they get magnified 10 times so it is difficult - I think everyone's more under the microscope. ""So perhaps what they're saying is probably right, they should get more respect."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Alleged Nazi war criminal Konrad Kalejs is back on Australian soil after arriving at Melbourne Airport last night. He was given a small but noisy reception by protestors at the airport. Nazi hunters accuse Konrad Kalejs of being an officer in a death squad in Latvia during World War II, responsible for the deaths of 30,000 people. Mr Kalejs arrived in Melbourne on a Singapore Airlines flight, enroute from England, where the 86-year-old Australian citizen had been living under a false name. He left before deportation. About 20 protesters staged a noisy demonstration at Melbourne airport as his plane touched down last night, but Mr Kalejs slipped away under escort through a restricted area. Mr Kalejs has denied there is any truth to the allegations against him."

" Meanwhile, Jews in Latvia have reacted angrily to news that Mr Kalejs has returned to Australia. Latvian authorities have formally reopened investigations into Mr Kalejs's wartime activities. In the Riga synagog, Rabbi Mordechi Glazman was visibly angry. Latvian authorities have written to Britain and Israel seeking any further evidence against Konrad Kalejs. But presidential spokesman Karlis Freibergs said not to expect any action soon. ""Currently the prosecutor claims that there is insufficient evidence in Latvia to press charges against Mr Kalejs and to seek his extradition,"" he said. Mr Kalejs served with commandos accused of killing thousands of Jews. But Latvia says it has no hard evidence to directly link him to atrocities. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association says it is horrified at the impact of another national alert over contaminated aviation fuel. Yesterday's Civil Aviation Safety Authority alert has grounded thousands of piston-engine aircraft over concerns about contaminated Avgas fuel distributed by Mobil. Association president Bill Hamilton says the economic ramifications of the grounding are horrendous as the aviation business is an integral part of the economy, particularly in country areas. ""All the freight services to the remote areas the smaller towns mail parcel services, such things as organ delivery, blood delivery, has just been put on the ground,"" Capt Hamilton said."

" The Civil Aviation Safety Authority has ordered that light aircraft affected by fuel contamination be inspected before and after every flight. All piston-engine aircraft operators and owners who have used the contaminated fuel from Mobil's Altona refinery are required to keep records to prove the inspections have taken place. The authority's Peter Gibson says fuel filters must be checked for signs of black contamination deposits. ""Information from Mobil has indicated that the problem of new contamination from the fuel still exists in many light aircraft up and down the eastern seaboard of Australia,"" he said. ""So we're requiring all light aircraft owners and operators to reinspect their aircraft before further flight and after each flight to inspect the fuel system again to make sure there's no contamination."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) is being asked to investigate the computer industry over its handling of the Y2K bug. Queensland Labor Party backbencher Neil Roberts wants the ACCC to investigate whether there has been collusion in the industry to use the problem to reap profits. About $12 billion has been spent rectifying the problem in Australia. Mr Roberts has questioned the need for that expenditure saying the industry was aware it was an issue in 1981. ""Consumers, governments, companies all over the world have been duped by the industry, yes that's right,"" he said. ""Everyone I feel has been forced in a sense to pay enormous costs to fix up a problem the industry knew existed and could've done something about many, many years ago."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Clinton administration's top anti-drugs campaigner says he is confident there will be an effective international doping agency in place before the Sydney Olympics. But he does not think the International Olympic Committee (IOC) should run it. The US drugs watchdog, Barry McCaffrey, says he believes any international doping agency needs to be independent and it cannot be that if it continues to be based at the IOC's headquarters in Lausanne. Mr McCaffrey was speaking in Lausanne ahead of next week's meeting of the world anti-doping agency (WADA). The WADA is currently headed by IOC vice president Richard Pound. Mr McCaffrey says he does not think that arrangement should continue either. ""Mr Pound needs to understand that this WADA has to get out of Lausanne and that he is only setting it up,"" he said. ""We need an agency that the athletes of the world think is independent and will act to create a drug-free Olympics."" He said he was confident the agency would move to another location before the Sydney Games begin in September. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Bill D'Arcy has announced his resignation from Queensland parliament. The Labor Member for Woodridge and Deputy Speaker has been under pressure to quit state politics for some time. Bill D'Arcy was at the centre of the ""net bet"" gaming scandal and even though he was eventually cleared of any wrongdoing, the ALP is keen to bring in new blood. Mr D'Arcy was first elected to state parliament in 1972 and says he is resigning because of ill health. ""Health has played a tremendous part in my decision, but also family and wanting to perhaps lead a much more private life than the media have let me over the last few years,"" he said. The Woodridge by-election is expected to be held on the same day as the Bundamba by-election which became vacant following the resignation of Bob Gibbs. He is taking up a state trade commission role in Los Angeles. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australians are taking part in celebrations to mark what would have been the 65th birthday of rock music legend Elvis Presley. Celebrations are underway around the world, from Memphis to Melbourne, to mark the birth of Elvis. In Memphis, Elvis Day has been proclaimed and fans can watch a concert with original band members. In Melbourne, celebrations are more modest and centre on the Elvis Presley shrine in the General Cemetry in Carlton. The President of Australia's Elvis Presley Fan Club, Robyn Goss, says some people enroll their kids when they are born and the legend continues. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Suspected war criminal Konrad Kalejs has been given special treatment on his arrival at Singapore's Changi Airport. Airline officials and police whisked the 86-year-old out a side entrance to avoid reporters when he arrived on a flight from Britain. Konrad Kalejs flew out of London last night. He was taken from the back of the plane and transported across the tarmac in an airlines van to a connecting flight to Melbourne. Mr Kalejs, who is travelling alone, was escorted by a number of airline and police officials. Mr Kalejs has been an Australian citizen since 1957. While investigated for war crimes, no case against him has been proved. ------------------------------------"

" Corporate Australia has turned pessimistic on its profit outlook, and an official survey has cited upcoming tax changes as the key reason. The Bureau of Statistics carries out Australia's most comprehensive study of business expectations, based of a random example of 4,500 enterprises. Over the March quarter business expects aggregate profits to drop by 5.6 per cent, 52 per cent of company's are forcasting a decline, while only 29 per cent believe they will increase earnings. The bureau notes that the short-term outlook does reflect seasonal factors, however over the entire year profits are only expected to grow by 1.4 per cent overall. And while large and medium businesses expect improvement, small business is projecting a decline. The bureau also says an increasing number have indicated their profits are likely to be adversly affected by tax reform. -----------------------------------"

" Thousands of light aircraft have been grounded across Australia today over renewed fears contaminated fuel is still causing engine failures. The Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA) is issuing a new nation-wide warning to piston engine aircraft that may have been affected by the AVGAS fuel scare. Authority spokesman Peter Gibson says there have been several reports of engine failures, including one at Moorabbin airport, in Victoria, yesterday. He says the contaminated fuel is still posing a risk. ""The problem with the fuel contamination is very serious, it has the potential to cause engine failure and has now caused a number of engine failures in recent days,"" Mr Gibson said. ""So it is very important that all light aircraft owners that use AVGAS that has come from Mobil or BP, they must check their fuel systems again and check there are no signs of contamination."" CASA says Mobil has revised the date of suspected contaminated fuel from its Altona oil refinery from November 24 to the 21st. ---------------------------------"

" Australian experts say a growing body of evidence is suggesting that breast cancer screening is reducing death rates, despite international research suggesting screening may not save lives. Research published in the prestigious Lancet journal has found that a number of international trials claiming as much as a 25 per cent reduction in the death rate are biased and unreliable. Breast cancer is the most common cancer in Australian women. But Dr Paul Jelfs, from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, says Australian screening programs are detecting more cancers, and deaths are showing a slight decline. ""At the moment we're loking at about 2,600 women dying of breast cancer each year, and round about 9,500 women being diagnosed,"" he said. ""We would look for a decline that would see, as the population grows, that those number of deaths actually holds relatively steady, so the risk of death actually declines."" -------------------------------------"

" The Queen will visit Australia in the last two weeks of March. The government has released the first details of her trip. The Queen's visit was confirmed last year but the acting Prime Minister John Anderson says she will arrive in Sydney on of March 17 with her husband, the Duke of Edinburgh. During the two week trip they will tour New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania, the Australian Capital Territory and Western Australia, as well as a brief stopover in Alice Springs. The Queen says she intends to visit the remaining states when she returns for the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting next year. Mr Anderson says details of the visit are still being finalised, but he hopes it will be possible for the Queen to visit a number of regional areas. -----------------------------------"

" Die-hard Elvis fans will be able to revere the King this weekend at Parkes in central-western New South Wales when a celebration takes place to mark his birthday. The eighth annual Elvis Revival will include an Elvis look-a-like contest, impersonators and the unveiling of an Elvis plaque on a wall of honour. Organiser Susan McGrath says the King is as popular now as ever. ""You would be surprised just how many Elvis people there are about actually,"" she said. ""I had a lady from Orange ring yesterday. She's got three dogs and they're all called Elvis, Priscilla and Lisa Marie. ""She actually told me she does not think he is dead."" ------------------------------------"

" The Jerusalem based Simon Wiesenthal Centre says it will try to find new evidence to force Australia to bring alleged Nazi war criminal Konrad Kalejs to trial. Mr Kalejs, whom the centre holds responsible for the deaths of 30,000 people, mainly Jews, is en route to Australia after being threatened with deportation by Britain. The Simon Wiesenthal Centre, which tracks down suspected Nazi war criminals, says it will do everything in its power to bring Mr Kalejs to trial. But centre director Efram Zuroff, who claims Australia is a haven for war criminals, is not optimistic. He hopes Latvia will ask Australia to extradite Mr Kalejs, allegedly a commander of a police death squad operating in Latvia during World War II. ""There's a new law in Australia which facilitates the extradition of Nazi war crime suspects to the countries in which the crimes were committed,"" he said. ""Let Mr Kalejs be the first person extradited under that law, and let justice be done."" ------------------------------------"

" The Australian Shareholders Association is pressing for full public disclosure of what is known as the Yannon affair and its lengthy investigation. No charges will be laid over controversial transactions, involving Coles Myer in the early 1990s. The 11-year saga, covering the transactions themselves, then a five-year investigation by the corporate regulator, was ended yesterday with a decision by the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP). Yannon initially cost Coles Myer $18 million when the retailer helped another firm, controlled by the then chairman Solomon Lew, to buy a large parcel of stock. Shareholders Association chairman Ted Rofe says the matter should not die and both Coles Myer shareholders and taxpayers should hear exactly what happened through a report to Parliament. ""I don't think it's sufficient to say that an investigation has gone on for five years without telling the people who have paid for that investigation what the results of the investigation were,"" he said. -----------------------------------"

" Russia has lost between 80 and 200 soldiers in the battle for the Chechen capital Grozny in the last 10 days. Surviving Russian soldiers are painting a grim picture of the fighting. Returning Russian soldiers tell of Chechen ambushes and traps in a war of attrition for Grozny that has put paid to Moscow's claims that it would capture the city by the start of the new year. Russian forces are apparently continuing to make slow gains in the mountains to the south, but Russian newsagencies and military sources say that in the fight for Grozny alone, Russian casualties in the past 10 days are between 80 and 200. The figures cannot be confirmed. No reliable casualty figures are known for the Chechen side either. But the guerillas, whom Russia considers terrorists, are for now continuing a determined defence, despite Russia's superiority in numbers of men and in weaponry. ------------------------------------"

" The United Nations Transitional Adminstration in East Timor says it is ready to take action against a Darwin businessman who has had his business license cancelled. Wayne Thomas was first asked in December to move his Timor Lodge, in a former army barracks in Dili, but the deadline was extended until last Monday. Mr Thomas claimed to have an agreement with the local owner of the site, but the UN disputes the ownership and says Mr Thomas needed its authorisation. A spokesperson for the United Nations administration, Refik Hodzic says Mr Thomas will be evicted, but he will not say when. ""We have already had our civil officers serve him the notice and verify his compliance, or non-compliance I should say, with the notice,"" he said. ""And we are ready to take necessary measures when we see them fit operationally."" ----------------------------------"

" The Young Liberals movement wants the Federal Government to remove all restrictions on cross media and foreign media investment in Australia. The motion was passed at the Young Liberals national conference on the Gold Coast. National president Marc Dale says delegates are concerned at the small number of media players in Australia, and they believe a relaxation of ownership laws would bring more people into the market. ""One of the things which needs to be trialled in this country is a removal of some of the regulations in order to allow for greater diversity in the media,"" he said. ""Now it is worth a try because the current situation is clearly not working. ""We've got a lot of dominance by a couple of key players and quite frankly there are only a limited number of people in Australia who have the capital or the interest in setting up a newspaper. ""So I think in relation to newspapers we have to consider some options offshore."" ------------------------------------"

" Freed Care Australia aid workers Peter Wallace, of Mackay, and Steve Pratt, of Sydney, will be reunited with their Serbian colleague Branko Jelen in Canberra on Monday. The three were jailed on espionage charges in Yugoslavia last year. The two Australians were released from a Belgrade military prison four months ago. Mr Jelen was granted his freedom on New Year's Eve by President Slobodan Milosevic. Mr Jelen hopes to settle his family in Australia. -----------------------------------"

" South Africa has clinched a place in Saturday's final of the Hopman Cup in Perth. The South Africans, Amanda Coetzer and Wayne Ferreira, sealed their spot in the final by winning the first set of the mixed doubles against the United States, 7-6. Thailand, Australia and Austria are still in contention to be the other finalist."

" Australia's second biggest home-lender now believes official interest rates increases will be much more severe than earlier predictions. The Westpac Bank expects authorities will tighten rates by a total of 1.5 percentage points. Westpac's earlier thinking was that the Reserve Bank could limit its policy moves to just 0.75 of a percentage point over the cycle, starting with last November's rate increase of 0.25 of a percentage point. But Westpac is now predicting a further rise of 0.5 per cent next month, followed by 0.5 per cent in April, and back to 0.25 per cent at the top of the cycle in June. It says the Reserve Bank will recognise that adjustments of just 0.25 per cent are insufficient to effectively moderate the behaviour of Australian consumers. ------------------------------------"

" The sex industry's Eros Foundation says it is seriously considering a High Court challenge to new Internet pornography laws. The new laws, introduced on New Year's Day, impose financial penalties on Internet service providers who fail to weed out R and X rated material. But Eros Foundation president Fiona Patten says the new laws will create an uneven playing field. She says the foundation believes the laws may be unconstitutional. ""Section 51 allows for free trade across state borders, so at the moment this is why the mail order system works in the ACT, ACT has legal X-rated videos therefore we can legally post them to anywhere in Australia,"" she said. ""Now if we can post them, why can't we send them online using Telstra, there should be no difference and the law should protect us in both forms of transport."" ---------------------------------"

" Researchers at Newcastle University are joining an international study looking into a possible genetic link between families who have lost a child to Sudden Infant Death Sydnrome (SIDS). Maree Gleeson, from the Hunter Immunology Unit, says research in Britain, France and Germany has found that some infants appear to have an over-reaction to infections, which could make them susceptible to SIDS. Doctor Gleeson says even if a genetic link can be found, the research will not replace current knowledge about how parents can reduce the risk of SIDS. ""They're extremely important, the risk factors that have been identified are absolutely critical that parents do follow those guidelines put out by the SIDS association,"" he said. ""Our research is not necessarily looking at the risk factors, many of which have been idenitified, we're looking at the underlying mechanism of the way these factors contribute to the susceptibility to SIDS."" -----------------------------------"

" One of the most acclaimed filmmakers in the German language, Bernhard Wicki, has died in Munich at the age of 80. The Swiss director, who co-directed the Hollywood war epic <i>The Longest Day</i>, died after a long illness. He began his career as an actor, but will be remembered as a director. In 1959 he made the highly regarded anti-war film <i>Die Bruecke (The Bridge)</i>. Other films include <i>The Visit</i> with Ingrid Bergman and Anthony Quinn in 1964 and <i>Morituri</i> with Marlon Brando in 1965. ------------------------------------"

" Mexico has said it will block any attempt by Konrad Kalejs, the Australian citizen accused of being a Nazi war criminal, to enter the country. Mr Kalejs is thought to be planning to leave Britain later today, ahead of an order to leave the country by next Sunday or face deportation. A British newspaper has claimed that Mr Kalejs, who has been living at a retirement home in central England, is planning to travel to Mexico, where he is said to have friends. But the Mexican embassy in London says immigration officials have been told to bar the 86-year-old Latvian-born Australian. There have also also been new demands for Mr Kalejs to be arrested before he attempts to leave Britain. The calls came after the former head of Australia's disbanded war crimes unit, Robert Greenwood, told the BBC that Mr Kalejs' war-time activities had never been fully investigated by Australian authorities. A leading parliamentarian says this is contrary to assurances given by Canberra to the British Government. -----------------------------------"

" The Jerusalem-based Simon Wiesenthal Centre has discovered that a second Australian citizen it believes to be guilty of Nazi war crimes has recently died. The centre has told Channel Nine the man was believed to have served in a police battalion that was involved in mass murder in Belarus and Poland during World War II. The centre's director, Dr Effrayem Zuroff, has accused the Australian Government of leniency for failing to help prosecute the alleged war criminal. ""Let me just add that this person, I think it's fair to say, was the beneficiary of the benign neglect of the Australian Government and was consequently able to die in peace and tranquility without ever having to pay for his crimes,"" he said. ------------------------------------"

" An Australian mining company has been accused of involvement in clashes between Muslims and Christians in Indonesia's eastern islands. A helicopter used by Newcrest Mining allegedly supplied ammunition to one of the warring sides. Quoted by Indonesia's official newsagency Antara, members of an Islamic group in Indonesia's north Maluku province also accused Newcrest Mining of using a helicopter to fly people involved in communal clashes. More than 500 people have died in a fortnight of fighting on Halmahera Island, close to where Newcrest operates a gold mine. One Islamic group member says he saw the Newcrest helicopter hovering above where one of the clashes was going on. But the company's managing director, Gordon Golt, has denied any involvement in the clashes. He says during the helicopter the was lent to the Indonesian military to carry out peacekeeping missions. -----------------------------------"

" Chechen rebels claim to have retaken more ground from Russian forces in the capital Grozny. And while the war on the ground continues, Russians are preparing for a Presidential election on March 26. The driving force behind the war in Chechnya, acting President Vladimir Putin will face voters on March 26. And he looks certain to be confirmed as Boris Yeltsin's successor. With Russia severely limiting information about the war, Russian voters continue to give strong support to it and its architect. Russia still says the war is going to plan. But Chechen rebels say they have retaken part of a Grozny suburb that was in Russian hands, after earlier seizing back control of four strategic villages. A Chechen spokesman took the propaganda offensive, saying it was a turning point. Meanwhile, the Chechen President called for a three day truce, to allow investigators to check claims that Russia has used chemical weapons. Moscow lashed back declaring all the claims lies, although it is clear that Chechen resistance continues to surprise Moscow. -------------------------------------"

" The latest survey released by the New South Wales Chamber of Commerce has revealed business confidence in the State has risen to its highest point in four years. The Saint George Bank survey for the December quarter involved 445 businesses from every industry sector in New South Wales. Chamber chief executive Katie Lahey attributes the high level of business confidence to higher employment, rises in consumer spending and investment and the recovery of export sales. ""I think businesses are starting to settle down a bit now with the GST,"" she said. ""They realise the reality and they are starting to make some investment decisions based on a world with GST. ""Some sectors are travelling particularly well, the finance and insurance sectors, property and business services have had a particularly good quarter and are looking forward to the next one."" ------------------------------------"

" Young Liberals are calling for a national memorial to be built in Canberra to commemorate Aboriginal communities destroyed by European colonisation. A federal Young Liberals conference beginning on the Gold Coast today will debate the proposal. The motion, put forward by the New South Wales branch, proposes the monument should recognise past injustices to indigenous people and be used as an educational tool for achieving reconciliation. It says it should include the names of tribes and other indigenous communities which were wiped out by colonisation and that it should be completed by next year's Centenary of Federation. The Gold Coast conference will also debate a motion calling on the Federal Government to shelve plans to restrict information on the Internet. Delegates will also consider the pros and cons of heroin trials and injecting rooms. ------------------------------------"

" The Marsupial Cooperative Research Centre in Newcastle appears close to developing a contraceptive for possums. It is hoped the work will help reduce the impact of brush tail possums in New Zealand. The Marsupial Cooperative Research Centre's David Kaye says introduced brush tail possums are doing enormous damage to the environment in New Zealand. Dr Kaye says the research has focused on developing vegetables which have been genetically modified, so possums which eat them have reduced fertility. ""We're looking at doing some feeding trials in New Zealand around the middle off next year, using carrots that have been genetically manipulated so that they're making proteins that if the animals react to the proteins we hope result in reduced fertility,"" he said. Dr Kaye says the research is also looking at similar contraceptives for kangaroos and koalas, which could be used in areas which are overpopulated. ------------------------------------"

" Australian swimming hero Des Renford will be buried near Sydney's Coogee Beach today, after a funeral mass at St Mary's Cathedral. The marathon swimmer died just before New Year's Eve from a heart attack - he was aged 72. He is best remembered for swimming the English Channel a record 19 times, earning himself the title 'King of the Channel'. Mr Renford's wife and three sons will be joined at the funeral by the New South Wales Premier Bob Carr and members of Australia's swimming fraternity. -----------------------------------"

" At the Australian Men's Hardcourt Tennis Championships in Adelaide, Australians Jason Stoltenberg and Lleyton Hewitt will face-off the quarter-finals. Hewitt defeated fellow South Australian Dejan Petrovic 6-0, 6-2, while Stoltenberg overcame German qualifier Christian Vinck 3-6, 6-4, 6-4. Stoltenberg says he will have work hard to beat the in-form Hewitt. ""It's just a matter of trying to play my own game concentrate on myself, if I can do that well I'll have a chance of winning and if I don't it's going to be tough,"" he said. ""You always know Lleyton's going to play a very solid match, he's going to make a lot of balls, it's just up to me as to how I play."" ------------------------------------"

" The Bureau of Meteorology says the 1990s was Australia's warmest decade since detailed records began 90 years ago. The bureau also says five years during the 1990s were among Australia's 10 warmest years on record, with 1998 the nation's warmest year ever. Meteorologist Dean Collins says the rise was small, 0.33 degrees above the long term average. Mr Collins says increasing warmth may be becoming a trend, with the 1980s being the warmest on record a decade before. But he says he cannot say for certain that this new decade will be warmer still. ""It's a almost a linear increase I guess you would say,"" he said. ""The climate is really, it is changing on all different time scales so we can't really say how the noughties will come in. ""There's a certain amount of randomness that you just can't predict."" ----------------------------------"

" More than half of the 4,000 light aircraft affected in the contaminated fuel scare remain grounded since Christmas. Sydney-based lawyer Spencer Ferrier says he is planning a ""representative action"" against the oil company, Mobil, on behalf of aircraft owners and pilots. Mr Ferrier, who is collecting evidence over the AV-GAS fuel scare, says the scare has seriously affected the aviation business. ""We are going to run this as a representative action,"" he said. ""It's quite clear there is very much a common problem and if we can demonstrate the cause of the common problem, then anyone who suffered damage as a result of having that would be able to run a separate action. ""That saves a lot of legal fooling around that is necessary in the running of a class action case."" Mobil has promised to provide compensation to some light aircraft owners affected by the fuel scare within five days of claims being approved. The contaminated fuel scare is estimated to have cost the aviation industry more than $50 million. -----------------------------------"

" Sydney Festival organisers appear set to make up for last year's losses with pre-festival ticket sales at their highest level in the event's 24-year history. Last year's takings from Sydney's annual summer season of local and international performances and exhibitions failed to meet costs. This year's festival gets under way on Saturday - a week later than normal - with Japanese drummers, Dutch dancers and a German opera leading the bill. The festival's Virginia Lovett says the later opening date has helped boost this year's ticket sales. ""We opened on the 2nd last year, people were still on holiday,"" she said. ""I think having that week-and-a-half after Christmas, people are focused. They've said 'right, festival is opening soon' and they've bought a lot of tickets in the last couple of days."" ------------------------------------"

" Immigration Minister Phillip Ruddock says Australia will follow the rule of law in handling alleged Nazi war criminal Konrad Kalejs. After residing in an English retirement village, the 86-year-old is expected to arrive in Australia later this week after being served with a notice that the British Government plans to deport him. In Sydney this afternoon, Mr Ruddock said local or overseas individuals or organisations should produce any evidence they have against Mr Kalejs to the Australian Federal Police. ""And it's important if you believe in the rule of law to follow due process,"" he said. ""You wouldn't like it if somebody made allegations in relation to you without producing evidence to relevant authorities to enable you to deal with any charges that might follow."""

" Meanwhile, the Australian Federal Police say they have no plans at present to investigate the actions of Konrad Kalejs. Mr Kalejs is accused of being a leading member of a Nazi death squad in Latvia, which was responsible for the murder of more than 30,000 people. Mr Kalejs has denied the charge. Federal police say Mr Kalejs was investigated after his deportation from Canada two years ago but the evidence proved inconclusive. A spokesman says if new information comes to light it will be assessed. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The head of a recent Federal inquiry into rural banking has hinted at stronger action against banks who withdraw services in country areas. The chairman of the House of Representatives Finance Committee, David Hawker, says banks are obliged to provide services to people in country areas. This follows Reserve Bank figures showing three major banks have cut back agency networks, while still closing branches. Mr Hawker admitted rural transaction centres and agencies are only a partial solution to the withdrawal of bank branch services. ""Oh yes, banks do have a social obligation and I do believe they have to provide that service,"" he said. ""And, therefore, if need be, I think the Government will have to look again at what pressures need to be brought to bear on banks to make sure that service is there."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Carr Government says New South Wales is still in the running for the national headquarters of Virgin Airlines. Queensland's Acting Premier Jim Elder yesterday indicated the contest for Virgin is now between Brisbane and Melbourne. The airline has yet to announce where it will base its headquarters when it arrives in Australia in July. However, the NSW Premier Bob Carr disagrees with Queensland that Virgin is now only considering Queensland or Victoria. ""We are very much in the running,"" he said. ""We are talking to Virgin. I suppose in our own style we are not throwing around the incentives that other states are inclined to throw around but we never have. ""We promote the business advantages of being here and we are not proflicate with taxpayers' money."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australia's Jelena Dokic has suffered a surprise defeat in her opening match of the Hopman Cup tennis event in Perth, losing to Thailand's Tamarine Tanasugarn in straight sets. Tanasugarn won 6-1, 6-4 to give Thailand a 1-0 lead over the defending champions. ""My return is one of my good weapons too,"" she said. ""So I just try to concentrate on my game serve too because that's a key thing, so I just try and concentrate and focus."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australia's female beach volleyballers have been told they can ignore an international directive which instructs them to wear skimpy bikinis during competition. The Australian beach volleyball tour has decided competitors can decide what to wear during competition. The tour's Craig Carracher says this may lead to some athletes wearing less than the International requirements. ""Many athletes actually wear uniforms well and truly within the skimpy requirements that the international federation have imposed,"" he said. ""In fact the six centimetre rule, as it's been called for the bikini line, is in fact quite large really against what some of the women wear here - they're down to three and four centimetres."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Authorities in Latvia have reportedly re-opened investigations into alleged Nazi war criminal Konrad Kalejs. Mr Kalejs is an Australian citizen who is currently facing deportation from Britain. A leading British war crimes investigator says the Latvian ambassador in London has told him that police in Riga have re-opened an investigation into Mr Kalejs. Greville Janner, the former secretary of the British Parliament's war crimes group, says Ambassador Normans Penke has told him that Latvian police have begun re-interviewing potential witnesses and are seeking new evidence about Mr Kalejs' alleged crimes. If the Latvian police believe they have enough evidence for a successful prosecution, they will then seek to extradite the 86-year-old from which ever country he is residing in. Britain has given Mr Kalejs until next Sunday to show cause as to why he should not be deported to Australia. -------------------------------------"

" There has been some progress in the stalled peace negotiations between Israel and Palestinian authorities. The Palestinians have signed the maps for a long-overdue Israeli withdrawal from a further 5 per cent of the West Bank. The signing paves the way for the pull-out of Israeli troops and the transfer of more land to Palestinian control. It is seven weeks past the date on which the interim Sarm-el-sheikh peace agreement dictated Israel should have handed over another 5 per cent of the West Bank. Palestinian negotiators were not satisfied with largely unpopulated desert land that Israel offered, but today agreed to the transfer without change to the Israeli maps. Already a number of Israeli military bases have been evacuated with the handover to be completed within 48 hours. Another 6 per cent of the West Bank is due to be given to the Palestinians in two weeks time. It is believed they will have extracted guarantees from Israel on the maps for that withdrawal by accepting the current transfer. -----------------------------------"

" The Lebanese army claims to have overcome Sunni extremists in the country's north after five days of the bloodiest sectarian violence seen since the end of the civil war. The clashes may be linked to the Syria-Israel peace talks in the United States. Estimates suggest around 40 soldiers, militiamen and civilians have been killed in the fighting that erupted after an ambush on an army patrol inland of the northern Lebanese city Tripoli. Today the Government announced that it had killed or captured the bulk of the group Sunni rebels identified by the army as from the outlawed Wahabite Takfir group. Other Sunni muslim clerics today condemned the attacks on soldiers, while Lebanese newspapers speculated about a possible connection between the violence and yesterday's attack on Russia's embassy in Beirut. Other commentators say it is the first day of tension between Iranian and Syrian influenced groups in Lebanon as a result of the Syria-Israel peace process. ------------------------------------"

" Norway's worst-ever train crash has taken at least seven lives and seriously injured 18 people, with 26 still unaccounted for. Authorities suspended rescue efforts for the night after fires in the carriages were finally put out. One of the two passenger trains that hit head-on was believed to be travelling at high speed. The two trains collided near the town of Rena, about 120 kilometres north of the the capital, Oslo. At least two of the carriages caught fire after the collision and continued burning for some hours. Nita Kapoor, of Norwegian State Railways, says the collision is the worst train accident in Norwegian history. ""We have a very, very high safety record and we have actually in the past five or six years no record of any casualties of passengers,"" she said. ""It's a traumatic incident both for Norwegian State Railways and for the Norwegian people."" ------------------------------------"

" A Coffs Harbour man who was part of a group attacked on a recent tour to Papua New Guinea's Kokoda Track says the trekkers were unaware of the risks involved. Builder Phillip Pinch was part of a group that was ambushed and robbed by a local gang on New Year's Day at the start of the track. He says his wife was shot at in a terrifying attack and there were no official warnings about the dangers of using the Kokoda Track. ""We were not aware of any risks involved in this, the expatriates we were with, and people who had lived there for 30 years and weren't aware of any risks,"" he said. ""And only after returning to Australia and speaking to the Department of Foreign Affairs were we aware that they had issued a warning on their web site, that was never available to the media."" ------------------------------------"

" The national holiday road toll has moved to 59 after three fatal car accidents in Victoria during the night. A 19-year-old South Clayton man was killed when his vehicle ran off the road at Keysborough, in Melbourne's south-east, at about 10-30 last night. The car hit a power pole and then a concrete barrier, before bursting into flames. A 16-year-old boy was also injured in the accident. An 18-year-old woman was killed when her car ran into a tree at St Albans, in Melbourne's north-west. Police say another man was killed - also in a single vehicle accident - at Ballarat. The deaths take Victoria's holiday road toll to 15 while New South Wales still has the highest number of deaths at 18. Queensland has recorded nine deaths on the road during the holiday period, while South Australia has recorded five, WA and the ACT four deaths each, the Northern Territory three and Tasmania one. ----------------------------------"

" Australia is sitting of top of the cricket world, after stringing together six wins from six Test matches. The Australians have recorded a 3-0 whitewash of India, beating the tourists by an innings and 141 runs in the third Test at the SCG. Indian opener VVS Laxman scored 167 while man of the match Glenn McGrath took 10 wickets for the game. Australian captain Steve Waugh says he had a great deal of faith in his team at the beginning of the season. ""Our goal was to win all six Test matches this summer,"" he said. ""Maybe that was a bit optimistic before the first Test match but I just had a look around the room and saw the talent and it was just a matter of getting the desire to the level that we wanted to be at. ""The first Test we played superbly and from there on in we didn't look back."" The Australians will now turn their attention to the one-day format. Australian selectors have named a 13-strong squad for the first four matches of the triangular limited-overs series against India and Pakistan. The team is: Steve Waugh, Shane Warne, Michael Bevan, Damien Fleming, Adam Dale, Adam Gilchrist, Shane Lee, Brett Lee, Damien Martyn, Glenn McGrath, Ricky Ponting, Andrew Symonds and Mark Waugh. Pakistan yesterday lost its second consecutive one-day match to Australia A, this time in Adelaide by six wickets. Australia A skipper Shane Lee was unbeaten on 40 and says he is pleased his form has paid off, with his selection in the Australian one-day squad. ""I was very happy with scoring a few runs today and a few wickets over in Perth so my personal form's good and hopefully I can carry that into the one-day series."" ------------------------------------"

" Australia will be hoping to bounce back after its shock loss to Thailand in the Hopman Cup in Perth. Defending champions Mark Philippoussis and Jelena Dokic take on Austria tonight while the USA meets Belgium in today's early session. Meanwhile, South Africa is firming as favourite after winning its second tie of the tournament. Wayne Ferreira and Amanda Coetzer won their singles matches overnight against Sweden, after defeating Belgium on Sunday. Ferreira says a few big serves helped him to victory. ""You need that these days,"" he said. ""Everyone serves so huge [and] if you can get away with easy points it makes it a lot easier."" ------------------------------------"

" Staff at Victoria's Phillip Island Nature Park south of Melbourne are caring for more than 100 fairy penguins caught in an oil slick over the weekend. Volunteers have again mounted rescue missions on the beaches overnight. Thick patches of oil were found on about three kilometers of the southern coast of Phillip Island's Summerland Peninsula. About 20 volunteers spent the night waiting for oil-covered penguins to wade ashore. Six of the birds have died and 110 penguins are being treated. Nature Park manager Ray Leivers says patches of oil remain and more penguins will be hurt as they walk through. ""They can die in two ways: one is that it matts their plumage and this means they're no longer insulated when they go to sea and they can die of exposure, or if the oil is on their breast they can preen it and ingest it and that can kill them as well,"" he said. Mr Leivers says its breeding season for the penguins and many of the ones being treated will have chicks which will starve. The Minister for Ports, John Pandazopoulos, says every effort will be made to find and prosecute those responsible. He says the Victorian Government will not tolerate environmental vandalism. ""We still do have some cowboys of the sea that for whatever purpose, oil ends up getting in our waterways and it should not be happening,"" he said. ""It's had a major impact obviously on the penguins, the beaches are all open now in that area, but there is a bit of work to do on clean up. ""And of course we also have to find the offending vessel which we will pursue to the full extent of the law."" -------------------------------------"

" A Nazi-hunting agency urging the arrest of alleged war criminal Konrad Kalejs, says Australia must take action against him and other suspected war criminals. The 86-year-old is an Australian citizen and is said to be planning to return to the country from his current residence in a British nursing home. He was accused by the Simon Wiesenthal Centre in Israel of collaborating with Nazis in the murder of thousands of civilians in Latvia, most of them Jews - a claim denied by Mr Kalejs. Director of the centre, Dr Effran Zuroff, claims like many alleged war criminals, Mr Kalejs posed as a refugee to obtain his Australian citizenship. He says the Australian government should prosecute him for lying on his immigration forms and strip him of his citizenship, barring him from the country. ""The longer the delay, that's only to benefit the Nazi war criminals, because every day that goes by without that legislation in place, every day that goes by without the proper investigations being conducted, is only in favour of the Nazis who stand a greater chance of dying in Australia in peace and tranquility,"" he said. -----------------------------------"

" The United States is continuing to criticise Russia's handling of the Chechen war, although Washington remains guarded in its comments on acting President Vladimir Putin. US secretary of state Madeleine Albright has accused Russia of wanton action against civilians in Chechnya, and says its offensive is likely to be counter productive. She says Mr Putin is riding a tiger in his direction of the war, but says it is important that the US maintains a productive relationship with the new President. ""He is a tough person. He is somebody that is very determined, action-oriented,"" she said. ""I think we're going to have to watch his actions very carefully. But I think we've got to be really careful here not to recreate an enemy."" Meanwhile, Mrs Albright says no deal has been sealed between Israel and Syria in advance of a new round of talks set to begin in the US tomorrow. ------------------------------------"

" The New South Wales Chamber of Commerce is warning businesses not to become too complacent over the lack of major Y2K based computer failures. The Federal Government's National Coordination Centre says key services in Australia continue to operate normally. But the chamber's Katey Lahey says the real danger period begins tomorrow. ""The test will be this week and most of the rest of this week when businesses start to go back to work,"" she said. ""And we are really saying to businesses you do have to test your systems to make sure you have survived Y2K. ""You need to make sure your computers are free of viruses, that you have not been contaminated, and that hackers haven't got into your system over this period."" ----------------------------------"

" Australia's business sector is urging the government to continue its reform agenda this year. The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) has acknowledged the year 2000 will not be easy because of the slowing economy and the introduction in July of the GST. But it says the government must focus on more changes to industrial relations and reform of the welfare sector. Chamber chief executive, Mark Paterson, says business investment also needs a boost. ""It has been slowing, we're not seeing overly robust levels of investment growth, we've already seen businesses curtail some of their investment decisions as a result of the moves that have been already made by the Reserve Bank,"" he said. ""We'd hope that there are no further moves by the bank to further curtail investment."" ------------------------------------"

" The acting Prime Minister, John Anderson, says Aboriginal teenagers are no longer listening to their tribal elders for advice. Mr Anderson has recently toured towns in western New South Wales. He says reconciliation is one of the great challenges for Australia in the year 2000. But Mr Anderson says that cannot happen without the help of Aboriginal elders. ""I tackled this in one of the towns in my electorate recently in relation to a very small group of Aboriginal kids who were roaming the streets at night,"" he said. ""The elders wanted to stop them and they kept saying to me that the trouble is that every time we try to pull them into line we get a recital of their rights they know their rights, law, chapter and verse."" ---------------------------------"

" The Australian Men's Hardcourt Championship gets underway at Memorial Drive in Adelaide today, with many of the world's top ranked players taking part. Thomas Enqvist, Tim Henman, Magnus Norman and Dominik Hrbaty are all among the top 20 players in the world, while the Australian contigent is lead by Lleyton Hewitt, Andrew Ilie, Richard Fromberg and Jason Stoltenberg. And two other crowd favourites, South Australian Mark Woodforde and his Davis Cup doubles partner, Todd Woodbridge, have received wildcard entries. Tournament director Colin Stubs says both are in the singles draw, and will team up again in the doubles. ""There's a 16 pair doubles draw as well and I guess the Woodies will be heading up that field and will be keen to,"" he said. ""They had a pretty ordinary year. ""This year's been a fairly ordinary one for them but they'll be very keen to start the new year in good fashion and expect a good showing from them too."""

" The Federal Opposition has attacked plans for increased private health insurance premiums. The health insurance industry says increases in medical technology costs and uncertainty over the take-up of gap insurance will push up premiums. It is anticipated most policies will rise between 5 and 7 per cent from March. Shadow Health Minister, Jenny Macklin, says there is no justification for any hike in premiums. ""Well, none that I can see, particularly when you realise it's going to cost the average family about $140 a year extra which, of course, people can't afford,"" she said. ""And the last thing we want to see is people dropping out of private health insurance because the prices are rising so rapidly."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Justice Minister Amanda Vanstone says the Federal Government will not stop alleged war criminal Konrad Kalejs from returning to Australia. The 86-year-old Australian citizen reportedly wants to return to Australia from Britain following pressure from the Simon Wiesenthal Centre which claims he collaborated with the Nazis to murder thousands of Latvians - claims denied by Mr Kalejs. The centre also claims he lied on his immigration documents to gain Australian citizenship. Senator Vanstone says that is an issue for Immigration officials but in the meantime Mr Kalejs is innocent until proven guilty. ""The Australian Government's attitude to any citizen is that they are innocent of anything until they are proven guilty,"" she said. ""It's no secret that Mr Kalejs was the subject of investigation and sufficient information wasn't found to proceed with a prosecution."""

" However, the Federal Government has rejected claims that Australia could become a safe haven for suspected Nazi war criminals. The Immigration Minister, Philip Ruddock, says all migrants who now come to Australia must say whether they have been involved in offences against humanity. ""If people fail to disclose those matters to us it would obviously enable us to question then their immigration status in Australia,"" Mr Ruddock said. ""So any suggestion that Australia could become a haven to war criminals is obviously quite fallacious."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The national road toll has risen to 55 after a further two people were killed on New South Wales roads. One man died in hospital today from injuries sustained when he was hit by a car in the Newcastle suburb of Newlambton, on New Year's Day. Another man has been killed this afternoon in an accident on the New England Highway, in the Northern Tablelands. New South Wales continues to have the greatest number of fatalities with 18, followed by 11 in Victoria and eight in Queensland. Western Australia and South Australia have each recorded five deaths, the ACT four, the Northern Territory three and Tasmania one. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Three people who were rescued from flooded areas near Newman, in Western Australia's Pilbara today, have been admitted to hospital for observation. A Perth couple, camping at Kalgan pool north of the town, were picked up by police helicopter this morning after their vehicle was washed away. Police say the pair got their radio equipment working and made contact with someone in Alice Springs yesterday who rang for help. A Newman resident was also rescued by police helicopter after being stranded at the Fortescue River-Jiggalong Road crossing. Acting Sergeant Dave Curtis from Newman police says all three are fine, but have been taken to hospital as a precaution. He says the Perth pair did well to save their communications equipment from the vehicle. ""Any precaution that people can take, be it EPIRBS or HV radios or whatever, anything that can help people locate them is obviously a boon,"" he said. Meanwhile, the State Emergency Service (SES) says flood waters in Newman have receded and residents are once again mopping up. SES spokesman Gil Murray says about five millimetres of rain fell on the town last night and more rain is expected today, but it should not cause further flooding. He says the roads to the remote communities of Jiggalong and Cotton Creek are still closed, but airdrops of fresh supplies are not necessary at this stage. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Prime Minister, John Howard, says Australia's preparation for the Y2K computer bug has been well worth it. Business and governments around the country spent $12 billion ensuring all systems were Y2K compliant. The only glitch involved bus ticket validation machines in Tasmania and South Australia although the government has warned more problems may emerge over the next couple of days. But Mr Howard says the fact that nothing major has happened vindicates the government's actions. ""But I don't think we are completely out of the woods until everybody goes back to work [and] we start using all those complicated financial systems,"" he said. ""I think when that happens incident-free we can breath a sigh of relief. But it looks pretty good at the moment and all those precautions have been well and truly rewarded and that's good."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Beattie Government says it is a step closer to wooing the national headquarters of Richard Branson's Virgin Airlines to Queensland. The airline was planning to set up shop in either Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide or Brisbane by July this year. But Queensland's acting Premier Jim Elder now says the field has narrowed to two. ""We understand it now, from our sources, that it's between Brisbane and Melbourne."" he said. ""I think if our sources tell us that it's between Brisbane and Melbourne then there's every indication that the Adelaides of this world and the Sydneys of this world haven't been as successful as Melbourne and Brisbane in putting their case."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The British Government has told an Australian man, accused of being a Nazi war criminal, that it intends to deport him. Konrad Kalejs has previously been deported from the United States and Canada. Konrad Kalejs has been served with a notice stating that the British Government intends to deport him to Australia, because his presence in the United Kingdom is not conducive to the public good. Mr Kalejs, who has been living at a retirement home in central England since September last year, has a week to appeal. The 86-year-old is accused of being a leading member of a Nazi death squad in Latvia, responsible for the murder of more than 30,000 Jews - a charge he denies. The Nazi-hunting Simon Wiesenthal Centre in Jerusalem has expressed disappointment that Britain decided not to prosecute Mr Kalejs under the UK's war crimes legislation. But the government says a police investigation uncovered insufficient evidence for a prosecution. Meanwhile back home, the Federal Government is about to be called on to investigate allegations an Australian citizen is a Nazi war criminal. The Simon Wiesenthal Centre says the man, who was an officer in the a German Police Battalion, was allegedly involved in the mass murder of civilians in the Belarus region in 1941. The centre has told the ABC it will be handing the information over to the Federal Government within the next two days. Immigration Minister Phillip Ruddock says the matter should be dealt with by the Australian Federal Police. ""It is, certainly in my view, better that rather than assertions being made in the public media about individuals that evidence, if it's there, be provided to the relevant authorities and that those investigations be allowed to proceed properly and appropriately,"" he said. -----------------------------------"

" Indian Prime Minister Athel Bihari Vajpayee has called on the international community to declare Pakistan a terrorist state. It has accused Islamabad of masterminding the hijacking of an Indian jet. The hijacking ended on New Year's Eve when New Delhi agreed to release three jailed pro-Kashmiri militants. The call came as a bomb explosion in Kashmir killed 17 people. Speaking to reporters Mr Vajpayee blamed Pakistan for masterminding the eight day hostage crisis. New Delhi agreed to swap 160 hostages on board the Indian airliner for three Kashmiri separatist leaders in prison in India. Mr Vajpayee accuses Pakistan of an active and sustained role in fermenting terrorism in India. Pakistan denies any involvement in the hijacking drama and says it will arrest the hijackers if they are found in Pakistan. -----------------------------------"

" In the United States a new round of talks between Syria and Israel have opened in West Virginia, amid warnings about the difficulties of achieving peace between the two nations. US President Bill Clinton opened the talks this morning at Shepardstown, a small resort town 120 kilometres from Washington. For the next week at least Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Syria's Foriegn Minister are expected to negotiate the terms of a possible Israeli pullout from the Golan Heights, and the guarantees of peace in southern Lebanon. Both sides have entered the talks with crucial differences in where any new border should lie. The White House says Mr Clinton will keep his schedule clear to play a broker role during the talks if necessary. -----------------------------------"

" Australia's major banks have again been accused of letting down their customers. Figures from the Reserve Bank show that although bank closures have slowed, the banks are still failing to provide alternative services. The Financial Services Minister, Joe Hockey, says regional Australians are being forced to take up new technology, without having it properly explained to them. He says the banking sector should work more closely with telecommunications carriers to bring new services to the bush. ""Internet banking is very exciting,"" he said. ""It saves a lot of time, you don't need to travel to the bank branch to do it if you can get cash out from the local eftpos at the bottleshop or at the newsagent. ""It's a lot easier than driving 100 kilometres to a bank branch. ""So we've got to use new technology to service us, rather than simply to service the commercial interests of banks."" -----------------------------------"

" The New South Wales Farmers Association has called for quick action to improve mobile phone services in rural communities, following the phasing out of the analog system. The association is concerned that a number of areas are not covered by the new CDMA system. The New South Wales Farmers Association says the Federal Government and telecommunications carriers had assured rural communities they would not be disadvantaged when the analog mobile phone system was phased out on December 31. But Hunter area manager Col Parker says he has received reports of black spots in the new CDMA system, which need to be addressed immediately. Mr Parker says CDMA coverage should be extended to cover all areas which used to have analog service. He says mobile phones have become a very important service to farmers in remote areas. ""They're extremely important. I mean there's often times when you are in a remote part of the farm using machinery and if an accident happens it's your only contact with the outside world,"" he said. -------------------------------------"

" A light-hearted poll in a British newspaper has given Sydney the prize for the organising the world's most impressive celebrations to welcome the new year. Under the headline ""Aussies rule the world...again"" the tabloid Daily Mirror newspaper ruefully concludes that Sydney's fireworks spectacular was simply the best in the world. The paper scored Sydney with full marks out of a possible 30 for fireworks, atmosphere and setting, with celebrations in Rio de Janiero, London, Paris and New York close behind. After victories in the cricket, rugby and Davis Cups, the Daily Mirror asks if there is no stopping Australia's relentless drive to be bigger and better than everyone else ""Doesn't it just make you sick?"" The paper asks. ----------------------------------"

" Australian batsman Justin Langer will be aiming to score his first double century in Test cricket today, when play begins on day three of the third Test against India at the SCG. Australia will resume on 4 for 331, with Langer on 167 and Ricky Ponting 34. That is in reply to India's 150. Langer says his side's big lead is a significant advantage on a wicket with still plenty of life in it. ""I think that's a great sign for us because if I'm still playing and missing at 150 there's a lot of life in the wicket, it's a new ball wicket and if we can get enough runs ahead I think the Indians are going to have a very hard time batting on it with the new ball,"" he said."

" The Federal Government has warned that problems caused by the Y2K bug could take at least three months to fix. The Parliamentary Secretary for Communications, Ian Campbell, predicts there will be some Y2K problems in Australia, but nothing serious enough to affect the economy or lives. He has also warned some Y2K problems might not emerge until well into the new year, with February 29 likely to trigger more problems. ""The year 1900 wasn't a leap year, the year 2000 is, so even if for example a computer is able to operate through the change from 1999 to 00 some of them may well find a problem when they get to the 29th of February because it won't recognise that date,' Senator Campbell said. ""That's another example of what could cause problems, so we'll be on alert for quite a few weeks,"" he said. He says the only guarantee he can give is that there will be Y2K glitches in Australia. The Federal Government is setting up a national headquarters in Canberra from tonight, to oversee any emergencies from power blackouts or other failures. ""My advice is that...there will probably be Y2K remediation work going on focused on at least the next quarter, and could well be right throughout the year, because people will discover errors that have been made as they occur over coming months,"" Senator Campbell said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Prime Minister says Australia enters the new century with greater cause for hope and optimism than any other nation. Mr Howard has delivered an upbeat New Year's message to all Australians. Mr Howard says Australia goes into 2000 with an economy stronger than it has been for decades, with robust growth, low inflation and interest rates, and falling unemployment. He says the new tax system will deliver even more benefits. ""It will make us even more competitive in the world,"" he said. But Mr Howard says by far the nation's greatest asset is its spirit as a people. And he has appealed to all Australians to draw on their goodwill, perseverance and patience to help each other and those who are less fortunate, and strive for reconciliation with indigenous people. ""It is from that spirit that we derive the sense of mateship displayed to each other in times of crisis,"" Mr Howard said. The Opposition Leader, Kim Beazley, says all Australians should feel pride in the past as the nation enters the new millennium. Mr Beazley says his overriding message for the new year is one of optimism. He says his year 2000 wish is for happiness for all Australians and the chance for them to aspire to whatever they want. ""With a thoroughgoing understanding that nothing is easy, and that it were for us to build the sort of future we want, will mean that all of us have to have the opportunity to contribute from the skills we're capable of. And for those of us who aspire to be in government or are in government, that's got to be our principle focus,"" he said. The Governor-General, Sir William Deane, says the biggest challenge for Australia next century is to bring people closer together and bridge the gap between the haves and have nots. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Crowds are building around Sydney's foreshores for New Year's Eve celebrations. Sydney will host the largest firworks display the country has seen to mark the dawn of the year 2000. Thousands of people have lined Sydney Harbour foreshore since early today to secure vantage spots, while boats are anchoring in their positions. Crowds are also turning out for Melbourne's biggest firework display, to be launched from high-rise buildings and sites around the city. Revellers are flocking to Cottesloe Beach, Perth's focal point for year 2000 celebrations. Brisbane's Southbank display looks set to attract 150,000 people, while Victoria Square in Adelaide is luring people with music and visual arts, despite a no-alcohol rule. Alcohol has also been prohibited from the streets of Darwin, but they will be serving drinks at two city street parties, with organisers expecting 25,000 people Hundreds of Aboriginal people will gather at the base of Uluru this evening and at dawn tomorrow, to welcome in the New Year, with traditional dancing and ceremonies. At sunset, the traditional owners of the Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park will dance - a performance to be broadcast nationally and overseas. Jo-anne Wilmott from the park's board says Aboriginal people are using the broadcasts to show the world the strength of their culture. ""For them they want to share their cultural heritage, the really powerful and enriching experience of being of one on this country sharing it with the rest of Australia as well as the rest of the world says to them that this is the point in time that we need to start sharing,"" she said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Canberra will no longer host the next Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM). The Prime Minister over a year ago announced that Canberra would be the venue for the CHOGM meeting in 2001 - to coincide with the centenary of Australia's Federation. But Mr Howard now says, after careful assessment of the options available, the government has decided Brisbane will host the meeting instead. Mr Howard says the experience at the recent CHOGM meeting in South Africa showed clearly that Canberra would not be able to meet the logistical demands for a meeting of its size. The Prime Minister says he can understand some people in the ACT will be disappointed and he is too. Mr Howard has already briefed the ACT Chief Minister, Kate Carnell, on the reasons for the government's decision. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Tributes are flowing in for Australian marathon swimmer Des Renford who died last night. Renford, 72, swam the English Channel 19 times and became known as ""the King of the Channel"". Duncan Taylor from the Channel Swimming Association has described him as an example people loved to follow. Former secretary of the Commonwealth Games Association, Arthur Tunstall, has praised his charity work. And fellow marathon swimmer Susie Maroney says she owes much to the ""king"". ""You know, if Des didn't do his marathon swimming then I wouldn't be doing it,"" she said. ""So I owe Des a lot and I'll always remember him."" Des Renford leaves his wife Pattie and three children. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" As attempts to discover the whereabouts of the five men who hikacked an Indian Airlines plane continue, the pilot has spoken of his ordeal. Devi Sharan says he was ordered by the hijackers to crash land the Airbus A-300 in Pakistan if permission to refuel in Lahore had been refused. Captain Sharan says the men were so well-armed any attempt to overpower them would have been useless. ""That guy was the chief, who came first in the cockpit. Then I saw a third man and in total I counted five. So everybody was reporting to him...they were actually telling that everything was under control,"" he said. The hijackers disappeared from Kandahar airport in Afghanistan, after setting free more than 150 hostages, having earlier killed one of them. \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*"

" Homeowners have begun cleaning up damage from a flash flood that struck the Pilbara town of Newman overnight. Almost 60 millimetres of rain fell in a four-hour period from midnight, flooding about 20 homes to a depth of up to a metre. Senior Constable Dave Curtis says the town was caught unprepared by the rains. Many people were unable to erect protective sandbags that saved a number of homes during flooding after Cyclone John in December. Constable Curtis says the floodwaters have begun receding. ""We've just been checking around the highways to see what normal floodways are like,"" he said. ""They seem to be pretty good and they're dropping pretty well. ""In town most of the areas have receded fairly well, there is a lot of rubbish lying around, a bit of silt and all the rest."" \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*"

" Three 16-year-old girls missing in a conservation park 80 kilometres south of Adelaide have been found safe and well. Constable Mark Jarman says there were serious concerns for the three teenagers who had set off for a bushwalk yesterday afternoon in the Deep Creek Conservation Park with little food and water. ""All three of them were winched to safety by the Rescue One Helicopter and taken back to the park rangers' headquarters where they're being treated by ambulance personnel,"" he said. ""There's no injury, just a few cuts and scratches and they're a little bit shaken up but all-in-all they're quite fit and well. ""They lost their way during the night. They'd just been crawling round in the scrub for quite some time and lost their coordinates and hence they've become lost."" \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*"

" The Y2K bug may have been a fizzer, but experts say the biggest downer may be all the money Australia spent making itself compliant. Australia spent $12 billion planning and testing public utilities. Y2K expert from RMIT University, Dr Graham Marsh, says the figures seem even worse when you compare them to the rest of the world. ""So far, those countries who've spent much less per capita have actually had just as little impact with Y2K as we have,"" Dr Marsh said. ""I suppose you can say it's a fizzer that we've spent $500 per person, someone was saying last night, in Australia and nothing went wrong."" Many small business operators will not know whether the Y2K bug will affect them until they return to work this week. But Y2K experts are downplaying the chance of major problems. Dr Marsh, says it is good the bug has, so far, left Australia unaffected. ""It's less exciting, but it's certainly a good thing that it's fizzed I think, because there could have been repurcussions around the world, economically, socially, health-wise. ""People could have had life support systems fail on them. There could have been major accidents, but none of that has occurred so far. So that's great,"" he said. The New South Wales Government has defended the money spent to protect the state against potential computer malfunctions, saying Y2K was a problem which could not be ignored. The government will continue to monitor for the Y2K bug, despite declaring the date switch to 2000 a success. Minister for Information Technology Kim Yeadon says the vigilance will continue for the next weeks and months - but he expects any problems will be relatively minor. \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*"

" Sydney's New Year's Eve fireworks spectacular has been hailed a great advertisement for the entire state, which could be worth millions of dollars in tourism revenue. Friday night's 26-minute show cost around $6 million to stage, with funding coming from private sponsors and the Sydney City Council - the state government paid for policing and public transport costs. Sydney's Lord Mayor Frank Sartor says it is a pity the government does not contribute directly to the event, especially since it received so much international television coverage on the night. ""I'd imagine that the exposure that we got over sort of the 24-hour period as everyone talked about the imminent New Year's Eve celebrations for themselves but looked at Sydney as they were talking about it in all the major news bulletins - to have that kind of prime-time positive exposure would have to be [worth] tens of millions of dollars,"" he said. \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*"

" The small West African nation of Gambia has emerged as one of the only countries in the world to be seriously affected by power blackouts and other disruptions in the New Year. The International Y2K Cooperation Centre, based in the US, says the Gambian energy sector experienced significant power outages while air and sea transportation, the financial sector and government services have been crippled. However, the centre claims the power outages were not Y2K-related and the problems in the other sectors cannot be blamed entirely on the Y2K bug. Failures have been reported in the Gambian Treasury Department, the National Tax Service and at the Customs Service. Experts attribute the problems to a delay in international assistance promised to Gambia to prepare for Y2K. The country has declared tomorrow a non-working day to reduce pressure on its crippled services. \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*"

" A dangerous fire at a Victorian power station in the La Trobe Valley in Gippsland has been brougt under control. It broke out at the Hazelwood Power Station shortly before 8:00am AEDT in the number four power generator after a liquid coupling failed on the conveyor system. Seventy-five volunteer firefighters faced fireballs which hampered their attempts to put out the blaze. The company has closed two of its eight generators as a safety precaution. \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*"

" Fears of a major oil spill off the Victorian coast have been allayed after an aerial survey this morning. Oil has come ashore at the Nobbies on Phillip Island and at Point Leo on Westernport. Authorities are trying to find an unidentified ship which illegally discharged an oily substance off the coast near Westernport. One penguin has died from contact with the oil and three terns are being cared for in the animal hospital at the Phillip Island Nature Reserve. The Western Port Harbour Master and Regional Incident Controller, Dick Cox, surveyed the scene by helicopter this morning. ""It's not a big spill, [there's] nothing visible from the air and we're going to do a beach assessment,"" he said. ""I've got people on the beaches on Mornington Peninsula side of Westernport Bay checking the beaches. Parks rangers are checking their beaches and we're doing an assessment on Phillip Island."" Acting Minister for Ports Sherryl Garbutt says all relevant authorities are taking part in the operation. ""The Maritime Safety Authority has responsibility for the discharge, Parks Victoria for cleaning up along the shoreline and EPA [Environment Protection Authority] for prosecuting any offending vessels,"" she said. \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*"

" Australia has woken up after the Christmas-New Year's Eve period to its worst ever credit hangover. The nation owes credit card companies a record $13.5 billion. The Australian Consumers Association's Mara Bun says there are a few key messages for people who may have spent too much. ""Now that we are through the [Christmas-New Year] period, for some people who are able to pay off these levels [of] debt, absolutely do, because [the credit card rate of] 15, 16 per cent is very high as an interest rate,"" Ms Bun said. ""For those who have greater difficulty [paying off the debt it's] time to plan to really work your way through the problems, because doing nothing is never really a good solution,"" she said. \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*"

" A small ship packed with more than 400 people trying to enter the United States illegally has run aground off the Florida coast, just south of Miami. Coastguard crews managed to take all those on board to safety. Most of the migrants are from Haiti. The coastguard says its officers did not use force. A spokesman says the boarding party persuaded the illegal immigrants there was a real danger of the boat capsizing at low tide. After five days at sea in cramped and insanitary conditions they were also tempted by the prospect of a decent meal. The coastguard counted 406 people onboard the 60-foot wooden boat. They are currently being held aboard coastguard cutters offshore while officers try to determine if this was lucrative immigrant smuggling operation or a desperate collective attempt by poor people to start the new century with a new life in America."

" The Acting Prime Minister, John Anderson, says Australia should be proud of its Y2K rollover achievement. There were no Y2K problems to key service deliveries such as transport, health, water or to government services. The only hiccup involved bus ticket validation machines in Tasmania and South Australia. Mr Anderson says the $12 billion cost of getting the country Y2K ready has actually helped the economy. ""I don't think it's done any harm and I think it's probably strengthened if you like the information technology that now underpins our economy for 2000 and beyond,"" he said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer has praised Boris Yeltsin, who has resigned as Russian President. Mr Yeltsin has handed the reigns of office to his preferred successor, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin who assumes the presidential powers for three months, before elections are required. Mr Downer says Boris Yeltsin has shown a committment to democracy, openess, and engagement with the West. ""His standing down, and the smooth transition to now President Putin will, I think, be yet another illustration of the commitment that he's made to strong democratic institutions in Russia,"" he said. ""And that isn't a small point, that is an enormously important point given the history of Russia during the course of what is now the last century. ""He was a very important president. ""Of course, he became old, as everybody does, and was subject to a fair amount of ridicule in recent years but don't let's forget that he was one of very, very few leaders, Russian leaders during the course of this century, who had that commitment."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A Supreme Court injuction has failed to stop a group of bushwalkers hiking to the top of Mount Warning in far northern New South Wales. An Aboriginal group wanted to stop last night's hike by 60 bushwalkers and 12 National Parks officers, saying it would desecrate a sacred area. A solicitor for the Bundjalung Tribe won a interim injunction from a Supreme Court Judge to close the site from between 2:00am and midday. However, the order was unable to be served. Tribe spokesman John Roberts says he is angry that the wishes of his people have been ignored. ""It's impossible for them to manage and stop desecration of 72 people on a mountain, on a small area,"" he said. ""It's just impossible and not only that there are stones and everything else missing from the top of the mountain, stones that's been there for years, hundreds of years."" The tribe will apply to have Mount Warning placed under the Federal Heritage Protection Act. They will apply to Federal Environment and Heritage Minister, Robert Hill, for a permanent order to protect their sacred site. John Roberts says trust between his people and the National Parks Service has been shattered. ""It doesn't say anything for reconciliation, it puts one big hole in reconciliation. There is no way that my people can even look at national parks and try and trust them with the handling of our sites and sacred places, we can't trust these people,"" he said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Australian Medical Association (AMA) says the start of a new year is the right time to fight fat. The average Australian is now gaining one gram of body fat a day. AMA Queensland president Beres Wenck says as the population runs to fat it will have a devastating impact socially and financially with increases in heart disease, diabetes, cancer and depression. ""So what we're doing is proposing to move in the millennium,"" Dr Wenck said. ""We used to have this 'Life be in it' campaign and we need some slogan or motto or New Year's resolution to actually start us moving. We seem to have got lazier and slower over the past decade."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Former Beatle George Harrison is due to undergo tests today after which doctors will decide whether he is fit to return home. The 56-year-old musician spent the new century's eve in a west London hospital where he is being treated following a knife attack. His wife Olivia spent yesterday by his bedside. A 33-year-old man has appeared in court charged with the attempted murder of Mr Harrison and his wife. Michael Abram is to be detained at a medium secure psychiatric unit under the Mental Health Act. Mr Harrison was stabbed in the chest when he tackled an intruder at his home early on Thursday. He was saved from more serious injury when his wife hit the attacker over the head with a table lamp, knocking him unconscious. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australian cricket captain Steve Waugh is shocked to hear that Pakistan's Shoaib Akhtar has been sent home because of concerns over his bowling action. Akhtar, who is rated as the fastest bowler in the world, has been banned by the International Cricket Council (ICC). The ICC has ruled that Akhtar's bowling action is suspect, forcing him out of the upcoming one-day series against Australia and India. Steve Waugh says it is disappointing that Australian fans will miss out on seeing the fiery paceman in the one-dayers. ""It's disappointing for the player and probably a little bit disappointing for the game because he's such an exciting bowler,"" Waugh said. ""But there are rules there and if people think he's broken those rules then they have got to make a judgement on it."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" \* Hijacked pilot tells of ordeal \* Newman, WA, starts clean-up after flash flood \* Girls missing in SA bush found safe \* Y2K bug spending questioned after smooth changeover \* Sydney's New Year fireworks could boost tourism \* Gambia New Year disruptions 'not Y2K-related' \* Vic power station fire controlled \* Vic oil spill fears allayed after survey \* Australia awakes to worst credit hangover \* Coastguard rescues illegal migrants off Florida --Scroll down for further details---------------------------------"

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" The Y2K bug may have been a fizzer, but experts say the biggest downer may be all the money Australia spent making itself compliant. Australia spent $12 billion planning and testing public utilities. Y2K expert from RMIT University, Dr Graham Marsh, says the figures seem even worse when you compare them to the rest of the world. ""So far, those countries who've spent much less per capita have actually had just as little impact with Y2K as we have,"" Dr Marsh said. ""I suppose you can say it's a fizzer that we've spent $500 per person, someone was saying last night, in Australia and nothing went wrong."" Many small business operators will not know whether the Y2K bug will affect them until they return to work this week. But Y2K experts are downplaying the chance of major problems. Dr Marsh, says it is good the bug has, so far, left Australia unaffected. ""It's less exciting, but it's certainly a good thing that it's fizzed I think, because there could have been repurcussions around the world, economically, socially, health-wise. ""People could have had life support systems fail on them. There could have been major accidents, but none of that has occurred so far. So that's great,"" he said. The New South Wales Government has defended the money spent to protect the state against potential computer malfunctions, saying Y2K was a problem which could not be ignored. The government will continue to monitor for the Y2K bug, despite declaring the date switch to 2000 a success. Minister for Information Technology Kim Yeadon says the vigilance will continue for the next weeks and months - but he expects any problems will be relatively minor. \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*"

" Sydney's New Year's Eve fireworks spectacular has been hailed a great advertisement for the entire state, which could be worth millions of dollars in tourism revenue. Friday night's 26-minute show cost around $6 million to stage, with funding coming from private sponsors and the Sydney City Council - the state government paid for policing and public transport costs. Sydney's Lord Mayor Frank Sartor says it is a pity the government does not contribute directly to the event, especially since it received so much international television coverage on the night. ""I'd imagine that the exposure that we got over sort of the 24-hour period as everyone talked about the imminent New Year's Eve celebrations for themselves but looked at Sydney as they were talking about it in all the major news bulletins - to have that kind of prime-time positive exposure would have to be [worth] tens of millions of dollars,"" he said. \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*"

" The small West African nation of Gambia has emerged as one of the only countries in the world to be seriously affected by power blackouts and other disruptions in the New Year. The International Y2K Cooperation Centre, based in the US, says the Gambian energy sector experienced significant power outages while air and sea transportation, the financial sector and government services have been crippled. However, the centre claims the power outages were not Y2K-related and the problems in the other sectors cannot be blamed entirely on the Y2K bug. Failures have been reported in the Gambian Treasury Department, the National Tax Service and at the Customs Service. Experts attribute the problems to a delay in international assistance promised to Gambia to prepare for Y2K. The country has declared tomorrow a non-working day to reduce pressure on its crippled services. \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*"

" A dangerous fire at a Victorian power station in the La Trobe Valley in Gippsland has been brougt under control. It broke out at the Hazelwood Power Station shortly before 8:00am AEDT in the number four power generator after a liquid coupling failed on the conveyor system. Seventy-five volunteer firefighters faced fireballs which hampered their attempts to put out the blaze. The company has closed two of its eight generators as a safety precaution. \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*"

" Fears of a major oil spill off the Victorian coast have been allayed after an aerial survey this morning. Oil has come ashore at the Nobbies on Phillip Island and at Point Leo on Westernport. Authorities are trying to find an unidentified ship which illegally discharged an oily substance off the coast near Westernport. One penguin has died from contact with the oil and three terns are being cared for in the animal hospital at the Phillip Island Nature Reserve. The Western Port Harbour Master and Regional Incident Controller, Dick Cox, surveyed the scene by helicopter this morning. ""It's not a big spill, [there's] nothing visible from the air and we're going to do a beach assessment,"" he said. ""I've got people on the beaches on Mornington Peninsula side of Westernport Bay checking the beaches. Parks rangers are checking their beaches and we're doing an assessment on Phillip Island."" Acting Minister for Ports Sherryl Garbutt says all relevant authorities are taking part in the operation. ""The Maritime Safety Authority has responsibility for the discharge, Parks Victoria for cleaning up along the shoreline and EPA [Environment Protection Authority] for prosecuting any offending vessels,"" she said. \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*"

" Australia has woken up after the Christmas-New Year's Eve period to its worst ever credit hangover. The nation owes credit card companies a record $13.5 billion. The Australian Consumers Association's Mara Bun says there are a few key messages for people who may have spent too much. ""Now that we are through the [Christmas-New Year] period, for some people who are able to pay off these levels [of] debt, absolutely do, because [the credit card rate of] 15, 16 per cent is very high as an interest rate,"" Ms Bun said. ""For those who have greater difficulty [paying off the debt it's] time to plan to really work your way through the problems, because doing nothing is never really a good solution,"" she said. \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*"

" A small ship packed with more than 400 people trying to enter the United States illegally has run aground off the Florida coast, just south of Miami. Coastguard crews managed to take all those on board to safety. Most of the migrants are from Haiti. The coastguard says its officers did not use force. A spokesman says the boarding party persuaded the illegal immigrants there was a real danger of the boat capsizing at low tide. After five days at sea in cramped and insanitary conditions they were also tempted by the prospect of a decent meal. The coastguard counted 406 people onboard the 60-foot wooden boat. They are currently being held aboard coastguard cutters offshore while officers try to determine if this was lucrative immigrant smuggling operation or a desperate collective attempt by poor people to start the new century with a new life in America."

" The Acting Prime Minister, John Anderson, says Australia should be proud of its Y2K rollover achievement. There were no Y2K problems to key service deliveries such as transport, health, water or to government services. The only hiccup involved bus ticket validation machines in Tasmania and South Australia. Mr Anderson says the $12 billion cost of getting the country Y2K ready has actually helped the economy. ""I don't think it's done any harm and I think it's probably strengthened if you like the information technology that now underpins our economy for 2000 and beyond,"" he said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer has praised Boris Yeltsin, who has resigned as Russian President. Mr Yeltsin has handed the reigns of office to his preferred successor, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin who assumes the presidential powers for three months, before elections are required. Mr Downer says Boris Yeltsin has shown a committment to democracy, openess, and engagement with the West. ""His standing down, and the smooth transition to now President Putin will, I think, be yet another illustration of the commitment that he's made to strong democratic institutions in Russia,"" he said. ""And that isn't a small point, that is an enormously important point given the history of Russia during the course of what is now the last century. ""He was a very important president. ""Of course, he became old, as everybody does, and was subject to a fair amount of ridicule in recent years but don't let's forget that he was one of very, very few leaders, Russian leaders during the course of this century, who had that commitment."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" A Supreme Court injuction has failed to stop a group of bushwalkers hiking to the top of Mount Warning in far northern New South Wales. An Aboriginal group wanted to stop last night's hike by 60 bushwalkers and 12 National Parks officers, saying it would desecrate a sacred area. A solicitor for the Bundjalung Tribe won a interim injunction from a Supreme Court Judge to close the site from between 2:00am and midday. However, the order was unable to be served. Tribe spokesman John Roberts says he is angry that the wishes of his people have been ignored. ""It's impossible for them to manage and stop desecration of 72 people on a mountain, on a small area,"" he said. ""It's just impossible and not only that there are stones and everything else missing from the top of the mountain, stones that's been there for years, hundreds of years."" The tribe will apply to have Mount Warning placed under the Federal Heritage Protection Act. They will apply to Federal Environment and Heritage Minister, Robert Hill, for a permanent order to protect their sacred site. John Roberts says trust between his people and the National Parks Service has been shattered. ""It doesn't say anything for reconciliation, it puts one big hole in reconciliation. There is no way that my people can even look at national parks and try and trust them with the handling of our sites and sacred places, we can't trust these people,"" he said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Australian Medical Association (AMA) says the start of a new year is the right time to fight fat. The average Australian is now gaining one gram of body fat a day. AMA Queensland president Beres Wenck says as the population runs to fat it will have a devastating impact socially and financially with increases in heart disease, diabetes, cancer and depression. ""So what we're doing is proposing to move in the millennium,"" Dr Wenck said. ""We used to have this 'Life be in it' campaign and we need some slogan or motto or New Year's resolution to actually start us moving. We seem to have got lazier and slower over the past decade."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Former Beatle George Harrison is due to undergo tests today after which doctors will decide whether he is fit to return home. The 56-year-old musician spent the new century's eve in a west London hospital where he is being treated following a knife attack. His wife Olivia spent yesterday by his bedside. A 33-year-old man has appeared in court charged with the attempted murder of Mr Harrison and his wife. Michael Abram is to be detained at a medium secure psychiatric unit under the Mental Health Act. Mr Harrison was stabbed in the chest when he tackled an intruder at his home early on Thursday. He was saved from more serious injury when his wife hit the attacker over the head with a table lamp, knocking him unconscious. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Australian cricket captain Steve Waugh is shocked to hear that Pakistan's Shoaib Akhtar has been sent home because of concerns over his bowling action. Akhtar, who is rated as the fastest bowler in the world, has been banned by the International Cricket Council (ICC). The ICC has ruled that Akhtar's bowling action is suspect, forcing him out of the upcoming one-day series against Australia and India. Steve Waugh says it is disappointing that Australian fans will miss out on seeing the fiery paceman in the one-dayers. ""It's disappointing for the player and probably a little bit disappointing for the game because he's such an exciting bowler,"" Waugh said. ""But there are rules there and if people think he's broken those rules then they have got to make a judgement on it."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Staff at Victoria's Phillip Island Nature Park south of Melbourne are caring for more than 100 fairy penguins caught in an oil slick over the weekend. Volunteers have again mounted rescue missions on the beaches overnight. Thick patches of oil were found on about three kilometers of the southern coast of Phillip Island's Summerland Peninsula. About 20 volunteers spent the night waiting for oil-covered penguins to wade ashore. Six of the birds have died and 110 penguins are being treated. Nature Park manager Ray Leivers says patches of oil remain and more penguins will be hurt as they walk through. ""They can die in two ways: one is that it matts their plumage and this means they're no longer insulated when they go to sea and they can die of exposure, or if the oil is on their breast they can preen it and ingest it and that can kill them as well,"" he said. Mr Leivers says its breeding season for the penguins and many of the ones being treated will have chicks which will starve. The Minister for Ports, John Pandazopoulos, says every effort will be made to find and prosecute those responsible. He says the Victorian Government will not tolerate environmental vandalism. ""We still do have some cowboys of the sea that for whatever purpose, oil ends up getting in our waterways and it should not be happening,"" he said. ""It's had a major impact obviously on the penguins, the beaches are all open now in that area, but there is a bit of work to do on clean up. ""And of course we also have to find the offending vessel which we will pursue to the full extent of the law."" -------------------------------------"

" A Nazi-hunting agency urging the arrest of alleged war criminal Konrad Kalejs, says Australia must take action against him and other suspected war criminals. The 86-year-old is an Australian citizen and is said to be planning to return to the country from his current residence in a British nursing home. He was accused by the Simon Wiesenthal Centre in Israel of collaborating with Nazis in the murder of thousands of civilians in Latvia, most of them Jews - a claim denied by Mr Kalejs. Director of the centre, Dr Effran Zuroff, claims like many alleged war criminals, Mr Kalejs posed as a refugee to obtain his Australian citizenship. He says the Australian government should prosecute him for lying on his immigration forms and strip him of his citizenship, barring him from the country. ""The longer the delay, that's only to benefit the Nazi war criminals, because every day that goes by without that legislation in place, every day that goes by without the proper investigations being conducted, is only in favour of the Nazis who stand a greater chance of dying in Australia in peace and tranquility,"" he said. -----------------------------------"

" The United States is continuing to criticise Russia's handling of the Chechen war, although Washington remains guarded in its comments on acting President Vladimir Putin. US secretary of state Madeleine Albright has accused Russia of wanton action against civilians in Chechnya, and says its offensive is likely to be counter productive. She says Mr Putin is riding a tiger in his direction of the war, but says it is important that the US maintains a productive relationship with the new President. ""He is a tough person. He is somebody that is very determined, action-oriented,"" she said. ""I think we're going to have to watch his actions very carefully. But I think we've got to be really careful here not to recreate an enemy."" Meanwhile, Mrs Albright says no deal has been sealed between Israel and Syria in advance of a new round of talks set to begin in the US tomorrow. ------------------------------------"

" The New South Wales Chamber of Commerce is warning businesses not to become too complacent over the lack of major Y2K based computer failures. The Federal Government's National Coordination Centre says key services in Australia continue to operate normally. But the chamber's Katey Lahey says the real danger period begins tomorrow. ""The test will be this week and most of the rest of this week when businesses start to go back to work,"" she said. ""And we are really saying to businesses you do have to test your systems to make sure you have survived Y2K. ""You need to make sure your computers are free of viruses, that you have not been contaminated, and that hackers haven't got into your system over this period."" ----------------------------------"

" Australia's business sector is urging the government to continue its reform agenda this year. The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) has acknowledged the year 2000 will not be easy because of the slowing economy and the introduction in July of the GST. But it says the government must focus on more changes to industrial relations and reform of the welfare sector. Chamber chief executive, Mark Paterson, says business investment also needs a boost. ""It has been slowing, we're not seeing overly robust levels of investment growth, we've already seen businesses curtail some of their investment decisions as a result of the moves that have been already made by the Reserve Bank,"" he said. ""We'd hope that there are no further moves by the bank to further curtail investment."" ------------------------------------"

" The acting Prime Minister, John Anderson, says Aboriginal teenagers are no longer listening to their tribal elders for advice. Mr Anderson has recently toured towns in western New South Wales. He says reconciliation is one of the great challenges for Australia in the year 2000. But Mr Anderson says that cannot happen without the help of Aboriginal elders. ""I tackled this in one of the towns in my electorate recently in relation to a very small group of Aboriginal kids who were roaming the streets at night,"" he said. ""The elders wanted to stop them and they kept saying to me that the trouble is that every time we try to pull them into line we get a recital of their rights they know their rights, law, chapter and verse."" ---------------------------------"

" The Australian Men's Hardcourt Championship gets underway at Memorial Drive in Adelaide today, with many of the world's top ranked players taking part. Thomas Enqvist, Tim Henman, Magnus Norman and Dominik Hrbaty are all among the top 20 players in the world, while the Australian contigent is lead by Lleyton Hewitt, Andrew Ilie, Richard Fromberg and Jason Stoltenberg. And two other crowd favourites, South Australian Mark Woodforde and his Davis Cup doubles partner, Todd Woodbridge, have received wildcard entries. Tournament director Colin Stubs says both are in the singles draw, and will team up again in the doubles. ""There's a 16 pair doubles draw as well and I guess the Woodies will be heading up that field and will be keen to,"" he said. ""They had a pretty ordinary year. ""This year's been a fairly ordinary one for them but they'll be very keen to start the new year in good fashion and expect a good showing from them too."""

" The Federal Opposition has attacked plans for increased private health insurance premiums. The health insurance industry says increases in medical technology costs and uncertainty over the take-up of gap insurance will push up premiums. It is anticipated most policies will rise between 5 and 7 per cent from March. Shadow Health Minister, Jenny Macklin, says there is no justification for any hike in premiums. ""Well, none that I can see, particularly when you realise it's going to cost the average family about $140 a year extra which, of course, people can't afford,"" she said. ""And the last thing we want to see is people dropping out of private health insurance because the prices are rising so rapidly."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Justice Minister Amanda Vanstone says the Federal Government will not stop alleged war criminal Konrad Kalejs from returning to Australia. The 86-year-old Australian citizen reportedly wants to return to Australia from Britain following pressure from the Simon Wiesenthal Centre which claims he collaborated with the Nazis to murder thousands of Latvians - claims denied by Mr Kalejs. The centre also claims he lied on his immigration documents to gain Australian citizenship. Senator Vanstone says that is an issue for Immigration officials but in the meantime Mr Kalejs is innocent until proven guilty. ""The Australian Government's attitude to any citizen is that they are innocent of anything until they are proven guilty,"" she said. ""It's no secret that Mr Kalejs was the subject of investigation and sufficient information wasn't found to proceed with a prosecution."""

" However, the Federal Government has rejected claims that Australia could become a safe haven for suspected Nazi war criminals. The Immigration Minister, Philip Ruddock, says all migrants who now come to Australia must say whether they have been involved in offences against humanity. ""If people fail to disclose those matters to us it would obviously enable us to question then their immigration status in Australia,"" Mr Ruddock said. ""So any suggestion that Australia could become a haven to war criminals is obviously quite fallacious."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The national road toll has risen to 55 after a further two people were killed on New South Wales roads. One man died in hospital today from injuries sustained when he was hit by a car in the Newcastle suburb of Newlambton, on New Year's Day. Another man has been killed this afternoon in an accident on the New England Highway, in the Northern Tablelands. New South Wales continues to have the greatest number of fatalities with 18, followed by 11 in Victoria and eight in Queensland. Western Australia and South Australia have each recorded five deaths, the ACT four, the Northern Territory three and Tasmania one. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Three people who were rescued from flooded areas near Newman, in Western Australia's Pilbara today, have been admitted to hospital for observation. A Perth couple, camping at Kalgan pool north of the town, were picked up by police helicopter this morning after their vehicle was washed away. Police say the pair got their radio equipment working and made contact with someone in Alice Springs yesterday who rang for help. A Newman resident was also rescued by police helicopter after being stranded at the Fortescue River-Jiggalong Road crossing. Acting Sergeant Dave Curtis from Newman police says all three are fine, but have been taken to hospital as a precaution. He says the Perth pair did well to save their communications equipment from the vehicle. ""Any precaution that people can take, be it EPIRBS or HV radios or whatever, anything that can help people locate them is obviously a boon,"" he said. Meanwhile, the State Emergency Service (SES) says flood waters in Newman have receded and residents are once again mopping up. SES spokesman Gil Murray says about five millimetres of rain fell on the town last night and more rain is expected today, but it should not cause further flooding. He says the roads to the remote communities of Jiggalong and Cotton Creek are still closed, but airdrops of fresh supplies are not necessary at this stage. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Prime Minister, John Howard, says Australia's preparation for the Y2K computer bug has been well worth it. Business and governments around the country spent $12 billion ensuring all systems were Y2K compliant. The only glitch involved bus ticket validation machines in Tasmania and South Australia although the government has warned more problems may emerge over the next couple of days. But Mr Howard says the fact that nothing major has happened vindicates the government's actions. ""But I don't think we are completely out of the woods until everybody goes back to work [and] we start using all those complicated financial systems,"" he said. ""I think when that happens incident-free we can breath a sigh of relief. But it looks pretty good at the moment and all those precautions have been well and truly rewarded and that's good."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Beattie Government says it is a step closer to wooing the national headquarters of Richard Branson's Virgin Airlines to Queensland. The airline was planning to set up shop in either Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide or Brisbane by July this year. But Queensland's acting Premier Jim Elder now says the field has narrowed to two. ""We understand it now, from our sources, that it's between Brisbane and Melbourne."" he said. ""I think if our sources tell us that it's between Brisbane and Melbourne then there's every indication that the Adelaides of this world and the Sydneys of this world haven't been as successful as Melbourne and Brisbane in putting their case."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Government has warned that problems caused by the Y2K bug could take at least three months to fix. The Parliamentary Secretary for Communications, Ian Campbell, predicts there will be some Y2K problems in Australia, but nothing serious enough to affect the economy or lives. He has also warned some Y2K problems might not emerge until well into the new year, with February 29 likely to trigger more problems. ""The year 1900 wasn't a leap year, the year 2000 is, so even if for example a computer is able to operate through the change from 1999 to 00 some of them may well find a problem when they get to the 29th of February because it won't recognise that date,' Senator Campbell said. ""That's another example of what could cause problems, so we'll be on alert for quite a few weeks,"" he said. He says the only guarantee he can give is that there will be Y2K glitches in Australia. The Federal Government is setting up a national headquarters in Canberra from tonight, to oversee any emergencies from power blackouts or other failures. ""My advice is that...there will probably be Y2K remediation work going on focused on at least the next quarter, and could well be right throughout the year, because people will discover errors that have been made as they occur over coming months,"" Senator Campbell said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Prime Minister says Australia enters the new century with greater cause for hope and optimism than any other nation. Mr Howard has delivered an upbeat New Year's message to all Australians. Mr Howard says Australia goes into 2000 with an economy stronger than it has been for decades, with robust growth, low inflation and interest rates, and falling unemployment. He says the new tax system will deliver even more benefits. ""It will make us even more competitive in the world,"" he said. But Mr Howard says by far the nation's greatest asset is its spirit as a people. And he has appealed to all Australians to draw on their goodwill, perseverance and patience to help each other and those who are less fortunate, and strive for reconciliation with indigenous people. ""It is from that spirit that we derive the sense of mateship displayed to each other in times of crisis,"" Mr Howard said. The Opposition Leader, Kim Beazley, says all Australians should feel pride in the past as the nation enters the new millennium. Mr Beazley says his overriding message for the new year is one of optimism. He says his year 2000 wish is for happiness for all Australians and the chance for them to aspire to whatever they want. ""With a thoroughgoing understanding that nothing is easy, and that it were for us to build the sort of future we want, will mean that all of us have to have the opportunity to contribute from the skills we're capable of. And for those of us who aspire to be in government or are in government, that's got to be our principle focus,"" he said. The Governor-General, Sir William Deane, says the biggest challenge for Australia next century is to bring people closer together and bridge the gap between the haves and have nots. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Crowds are building around Sydney's foreshores for New Year's Eve celebrations. Sydney will host the largest firworks display the country has seen to mark the dawn of the year 2000. Thousands of people have lined Sydney Harbour foreshore since early today to secure vantage spots, while boats are anchoring in their positions. Crowds are also turning out for Melbourne's biggest firework display, to be launched from high-rise buildings and sites around the city. Revellers are flocking to Cottesloe Beach, Perth's focal point for year 2000 celebrations. Brisbane's Southbank display looks set to attract 150,000 people, while Victoria Square in Adelaide is luring people with music and visual arts, despite a no-alcohol rule. Alcohol has also been prohibited from the streets of Darwin, but they will be serving drinks at two city street parties, with organisers expecting 25,000 people Hundreds of Aboriginal people will gather at the base of Uluru this evening and at dawn tomorrow, to welcome in the New Year, with traditional dancing and ceremonies. At sunset, the traditional owners of the Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park will dance - a performance to be broadcast nationally and overseas. Jo-anne Wilmott from the park's board says Aboriginal people are using the broadcasts to show the world the strength of their culture. ""For them they want to share their cultural heritage, the really powerful and enriching experience of being of one on this country sharing it with the rest of Australia as well as the rest of the world says to them that this is the point in time that we need to start sharing,"" she said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Canberra will no longer host the next Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM). The Prime Minister over a year ago announced that Canberra would be the venue for the CHOGM meeting in 2001 - to coincide with the centenary of Australia's Federation. But Mr Howard now says, after careful assessment of the options available, the government has decided Brisbane will host the meeting instead. Mr Howard says the experience at the recent CHOGM meeting in South Africa showed clearly that Canberra would not be able to meet the logistical demands for a meeting of its size. The Prime Minister says he can understand some people in the ACT will be disappointed and he is too. Mr Howard has already briefed the ACT Chief Minister, Kate Carnell, on the reasons for the government's decision. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Tributes are flowing in for Australian marathon swimmer Des Renford who died last night. Renford, 72, swam the English Channel 19 times and became known as ""the King of the Channel"". Duncan Taylor from the Channel Swimming Association has described him as an example people loved to follow. Former secretary of the Commonwealth Games Association, Arthur Tunstall, has praised his charity work. And fellow marathon swimmer Susie Maroney says she owes much to the ""king"". ""You know, if Des didn't do his marathon swimming then I wouldn't be doing it,"" she said. ""So I owe Des a lot and I'll always remember him."" Des Renford leaves his wife Pattie and three children. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" As attempts to discover the whereabouts of the five men who hikacked an Indian Airlines plane continue, the pilot has spoken of his ordeal. Devi Sharan says he was ordered by the hijackers to crash land the Airbus A-300 in Pakistan if permission to refuel in Lahore had been refused. Captain Sharan says the men were so well-armed any attempt to overpower them would have been useless. ""That guy was the chief, who came first in the cockpit. Then I saw a third man and in total I counted five. So everybody was reporting to him...they were actually telling that everything was under control,"" he said. The hijackers disappeared from Kandahar airport in Afghanistan, after setting free more than 150 hostages, having earlier killed one of them. \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*"

" Homeowners have begun cleaning up damage from a flash flood that struck the Pilbara town of Newman overnight. Almost 60 millimetres of rain fell in a four-hour period from midnight, flooding about 20 homes to a depth of up to a metre. Senior Constable Dave Curtis says the town was caught unprepared by the rains. Many people were unable to erect protective sandbags that saved a number of homes during flooding after Cyclone John in December. Constable Curtis says the floodwaters have begun receding. ""We've just been checking around the highways to see what normal floodways are like,"" he said. ""They seem to be pretty good and they're dropping pretty well. ""In town most of the areas have receded fairly well, there is a lot of rubbish lying around, a bit of silt and all the rest."" \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*"

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" Australian cricket captain Steve Waugh is shocked to hear that Pakistan's Shoaib Akhtar has been sent home because of concerns over his bowling action. Akhtar, who is rated as the fastest bowler in the world, has been banned by the International Cricket Council (ICC). The ICC has ruled that Akhtar's bowling action is suspect, forcing him out of the upcoming one-day series against Australia and India. Steve Waugh says it is disappointing that Australian fans will miss out on seeing the fiery paceman in the one-dayers. ""It's disappointing for the player and probably a little bit disappointing for the game because he's such an exciting bowler,"" Waugh said. ""But there are rules there and if people think he's broken those rules then they have got to make a judgement on it."" -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Federal Government has warned that problems caused by the Y2K bug could take at least three months to fix. The Parliamentary Secretary for Communications, Ian Campbell, predicts there will be some Y2K problems in Australia, but nothing serious enough to affect the economy or lives. He has also warned some Y2K problems might not emerge until well into the new year, with February 29 likely to trigger more problems. ""The year 1900 wasn't a leap year, the year 2000 is, so even if for example a computer is able to operate through the change from 1999 to 00 some of them may well find a problem when they get to the 29th of February because it won't recognise that date,' Senator Campbell said. ""That's another example of what could cause problems, so we'll be on alert for quite a few weeks,"" he said. He says the only guarantee he can give is that there will be Y2K glitches in Australia. The Federal Government is setting up a national headquarters in Canberra from tonight, to oversee any emergencies from power blackouts or other failures. ""My advice is that...there will probably be Y2K remediation work going on focused on at least the next quarter, and could well be right throughout the year, because people will discover errors that have been made as they occur over coming months,"" Senator Campbell said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" The Prime Minister says Australia enters the new century with greater cause for hope and optimism than any other nation. Mr Howard has delivered an upbeat New Year's message to all Australians. Mr Howard says Australia goes into 2000 with an economy stronger than it has been for decades, with robust growth, low inflation and interest rates, and falling unemployment. He says the new tax system will deliver even more benefits. ""It will make us even more competitive in the world,"" he said. But Mr Howard says by far the nation's greatest asset is its spirit as a people. And he has appealed to all Australians to draw on their goodwill, perseverance and patience to help each other and those who are less fortunate, and strive for reconciliation with indigenous people. ""It is from that spirit that we derive the sense of mateship displayed to each other in times of crisis,"" Mr Howard said. The Opposition Leader, Kim Beazley, says all Australians should feel pride in the past as the nation enters the new millennium. Mr Beazley says his overriding message for the new year is one of optimism. He says his year 2000 wish is for happiness for all Australians and the chance for them to aspire to whatever they want. ""With a thoroughgoing understanding that nothing is easy, and that it were for us to build the sort of future we want, will mean that all of us have to have the opportunity to contribute from the skills we're capable of. And for those of us who aspire to be in government or are in government, that's got to be our principle focus,"" he said. The Governor-General, Sir William Deane, says the biggest challenge for Australia next century is to bring people closer together and bridge the gap between the haves and have nots. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Crowds are building around Sydney's foreshores for New Year's Eve celebrations. Sydney will host the largest firworks display the country has seen to mark the dawn of the year 2000. Thousands of people have lined Sydney Harbour foreshore since early today to secure vantage spots, while boats are anchoring in their positions. Crowds are also turning out for Melbourne's biggest firework display, to be launched from high-rise buildings and sites around the city. Revellers are flocking to Cottesloe Beach, Perth's focal point for year 2000 celebrations. Brisbane's Southbank display looks set to attract 150,000 people, while Victoria Square in Adelaide is luring people with music and visual arts, despite a no-alcohol rule. Alcohol has also been prohibited from the streets of Darwin, but they will be serving drinks at two city street parties, with organisers expecting 25,000 people Hundreds of Aboriginal people will gather at the base of Uluru this evening and at dawn tomorrow, to welcome in the New Year, with traditional dancing and ceremonies. At sunset, the traditional owners of the Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park will dance - a performance to be broadcast nationally and overseas. Jo-anne Wilmott from the park's board says Aboriginal people are using the broadcasts to show the world the strength of their culture. ""For them they want to share their cultural heritage, the really powerful and enriching experience of being of one on this country sharing it with the rest of Australia as well as the rest of the world says to them that this is the point in time that we need to start sharing,"" she said. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Canberra will no longer host the next Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM). The Prime Minister over a year ago announced that Canberra would be the venue for the CHOGM meeting in 2001 - to coincide with the centenary of Australia's Federation. But Mr Howard now says, after careful assessment of the options available, the government has decided Brisbane will host the meeting instead. Mr Howard says the experience at the recent CHOGM meeting in South Africa showed clearly that Canberra would not be able to meet the logistical demands for a meeting of its size. The Prime Minister says he can understand some people in the ACT will be disappointed and he is too. Mr Howard has already briefed the ACT Chief Minister, Kate Carnell, on the reasons for the government's decision. ------------------------------------------------------------------"

" Tributes are flowing in for Australian marathon swimmer Des Renford who died last night. Renford, 72, swam the English Channel 19 times and became known as ""the King of the Channel"". Duncan Taylor from the Channel Swimming Association has described him as an example people loved to follow. Former secretary of the Commonwealth Games Association, Arthur Tunstall, has praised his charity work. And fellow marathon swimmer Susie Maroney says she owes much to the ""king"". ""You know, if Des didn't do his marathon swimming then I wouldn't be doing it,"" she said. ""So I owe Des a lot and I'll always remember him."" Des Renford leaves his wife Pattie and three children. -------------------------------------------------------------------"

" As attempts to discover the whereabouts of the five men who hikacked an Indian Airlines plane continue, the pilot has spoken of his ordeal. Devi Sharan says he was ordered by the hijackers to crash land the Airbus A-300 in Pakistan if permission to refuel in Lahore had been refused. Captain Sharan says the men were so well-armed any attempt to overpower them would have been useless. ""That guy was the chief, who came first in the cockpit. Then I saw a third man and in total I counted five. So everybody was reporting to him...they were actually telling that everything was under control,"" he said. The hijackers disappeared from Kandahar airport in Afghanistan, after setting free more than 150 hostages, having earlier killed one of them. \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*"

" Homeowners have begun cleaning up damage from a flash flood that struck the Pilbara town of Newman overnight. Almost 60 millimetres of rain fell in a four-hour period from midnight, flooding about 20 homes to a depth of up to a metre. Senior Constable Dave Curtis says the town was caught unprepared by the rains. Many people were unable to erect protective sandbags that saved a number of homes during flooding after Cyclone John in December. Constable Curtis says the floodwaters have begun receding. ""We've just been checking around the highways to see what normal floodways are like,"" he said. ""They seem to be pretty good and they're dropping pretty well. ""In town most of the areas have receded fairly well, there is a lot of rubbish lying around, a bit of silt and all the rest."" \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*"

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Hundreds of people have been forced to vacate their homes in the

Southern Highlands of New South Wales as strong winds today pushed a

huge bushfire towards the town of Hill Top. A new blaze near Goulburn,

south-west of Sydney, has forced the closure of the Hume Highway. At

about 4:00pm AEDT, a marked deterioration in the weather as a storm

cell moved east across the Blue Mountains forced authorities to make a

decision to evacuate people from homes in outlying streets at Hill Top

in the New South Wales southern highlands. An estimated 500 residents

have left their homes for nearby Mittagong. The New South Wales Rural

Fire Service says the weather conditions which caused the fire to burn

in a finger formation have now eased and about 60 fire units in and

around Hill Top are optimistic of defending all properties. As more

than 100 blazes burn on New Year's Eve in New South Wales, fire crews

have been called to new fire at Gunning, south of Goulburn. While few

details are available at this stage, fire authorities says it has

closed the Hume Highway in both directions. Meanwhile, a new fire in

Sydney's west is no longer threatening properties in the Cranebrook

area. Rain has fallen in some parts of the Illawarra, Sydney, the

Hunter Valley and the north coast. But the Bureau of Meteorology's

Claire Richards says the rain has done little to ease any of the

hundred fires still burning across the state. "The falls have been

quite isolated in those areas and generally the falls have been less

than about five millimetres," she said. "In some places really not

significant at all, less than a millimetre, so there hasn't been much

relief as far as rain is concerned. "In fact, they've probably hampered

the efforts of the firefighters more because of the wind gusts that are

associated with those thunderstorms."

Indian security forces have shot dead eight suspected militants in a

night-long encounter in southern Kashmir. The shootout took place at

Dora village some 50 kilometers south of the Kashmiri summer capital

Srinagar. The deaths came as Pakistani police arrested more than two

dozen militants from extremist groups accused of staging an attack on

India's parliament. India has accused Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba

and Jaish-e-Mohammad of carrying out the attack on December 13 at the

behest of Pakistani military intelligence. Military tensions have

soared since the raid, with both sides massing troops along their

border and trading tit-for-tat diplomatic sanctions. Yesterday,

Pakistan announced it had arrested Lashkar-e-Taiba chief Hafiz Mohammed

Saeed. Police in Karachi say it is likely more raids will be launched

against the two groups as well as other militant organisations accused

of targetting India. Military tensions between India and Pakistan have

escalated to a level not seen since their 1971 war.

The national road toll for the Christmas-New Year holiday period stands

at 45, eight fewer than for the same time last year. 20 people have

died on New South Wales roads, with eight fatalities in both Queensland

and Victoria. Western Australia, the Northern Territory and South

Australia have each recorded three deaths, while the ACT and Tasmania

remain fatality free.

Argentina's political and economic crisis has deepened with the

resignation of its interim President who took office just a week ago. Aldolfo Rodregiuez Saa told a stunned nation that he could not rescue

Argentina because key fellow Peronists would not support his default on

massive foreign debt repayment or his plan for a new currency. It was only a week ago that he was promising a million new jobs to end

four years of recession, days after his predecessor resigned following a

series of failed rescue packages. After announcing that the senate leader, Ramon Puerta, would assume the

presidency until congress appoints a new caretaker president, the

government said he too had quit and another senior lawmaker would act in

the role. Fresh elections are not scheduled until March leaving whoever assumes

the presidency with the daunting task of tackling Argentina's worst

crisis in 12 years, but this time, isolated by international lending

agencies.

Six midwives have been suspended at Wollongong Hospital, south of

Sydney, for inappropriate use of nitrous oxide during work hours, on

some occasions while women were in labour. The Illawarra Area Health Service says that following an investigation

of unprofessional conduct, a further four midwives have been relocated

to other areas within the hospital. The service's chief executive officer, Tony Sherbon, says no one was put

at risk, because other staff not involved in the use of nitrous oxide

were able to take over caring for women in labour. "Well we're very concerned and the body of midwives to the hospital -

there are over 70 midwives that work in our service - are very annoyed

and angry at the inappropriate behaviour of these very senior people who

should know better," he said. "And that's why we've take the action of suspending them and we'll

consider further action next week."

The Federal Government says it should be safe for Afghani asylum seekers

in Australia to return home when the environment becomes secure. The Government has suspended their applications while the interim

government is established in Kabul. The Foreign Affairs Minister Alexander Downer has refused to say for how

long the claims process has been put on hold. But he says the major threat to most people seeking asylum is no longer

there. "Many Afghans who have tried to get into Australia or for that matter

into Britain and other countries in north-west Europe have claimed that

they are fleeing the Taliban," he said. "Well, the Taliban is no longer in power in Afghanistan, the Taliban is

finished." Meanwhile, there has been a mass airlift of detainees from Christmas

Island to the Pacific Island of Nauru. In total, more than 300 people have been flown from the island in two

operations using chartered aircraft. The second airlift today delivered 180 asylum seekers to Nauru where

they will await processing of their claims for temporary visas. The Department of Immigration says there are now 211 detainees remaining

on Christmas Island. A spokesman says a decision regarding their future is yet to be made.

The United States team of Monica Seles and Jan-Michael Gambill scored a

decisive victory over unseeded France in their first Hopman Cup match at

Burswood Dome in Perth. The pair, runners-up in the $1 million dollar mixed teams event last

year, both won their singles encounters to give the US an unbeatable 2-0

lead. The 28-year-old Seles, currently ranked eighth, recovered from a shaky

start to overpower Virginie Razzano, 18, who is ranked 72nd. Seles had to fight hard to get home in straight sets, winning 6-3, 6-4

in 62 minutes. Then the 24-year-old Gambill (ranked 21st) wore down a determined Arnaud

Clement, 24, (18th) to win 6-4, 6-4 in 91 minutes. The Americans are aiming to go one better than last year when they were

beaten by Swiss pair Martina Hingis and Roger Federer in the final of

the eight-nation contest. Gambill said the win was a great way to start the tennis year. "I got a little tentative at the end, but it was a great start to my

year," he said. "Arnaud is a great scrapper and I am delighted to beat him, even though

I am frankly a bit out of shape. "That is one of the reasons I am here. I will be in shape by the end of

the tournament. "I just aim to keep improving in the new year, and if I do, I think I

have a chance to beat anyone when I am playing well." Gambill was pressed hard by Clement before taking the first set in 47

minutes. But the American gained the ascendancy in the second set, breaking in

the third and fifth games. Seles said she had expected her clash with Razzano to be tough. "She was a top junior player in the world, so it was no surprise that

she fought so well," she said. Seles said she still had the hunger to strive to regain her position at

the top of her sport. "This is why you play," she said. "But I want to try not to peak too

early this season. "Seles, slow into her stride, slipped to 2-3 in her opening set against

Razzano but recovered quickly, claiming the set after snatching four

games in a row. In the second set, Seles broke her opponent in the opening game and

completed victory with relative ease despite Razzano's tenacious

efforts.

Hundreds of canoeists are enjoying hard-earned New Years Eve celebrations following five days paddling in the Murray River Marathon. After more than 400 exhausting kilometres battling hot and dusty

conditions, a Melbourne team took out the strongly contested K-one Cup this afternoon. Two hundred and thirty canoes left Yarrawonga last Thursday, with just

over 200 paddling across the finishing line at Swan Hill. The others fell victim to the gruelling conditions. The event raised about $170,000 for the Red Cross.

There has been welcome relief for firefighters in New South Wales

overnight with milder weather allowing them to strengthen containment

lines around the most severe fires. But fire authorities are not getting overly optimistic as dry and hot

weather is forecast to continue. The weather bureau is forecasting temperatures in the high 30s and

westerly winds until at least Friday, which means fire authorities are

reluctant to get too excited about last night's favourable conditions. Marks Sullivan from the Rural Fire Service says fire fighters are

remaining on guard. "A lot of fires that have been burning in the areas around Sydney and

the north coast and further south have been burning within areas that

are known and are contained," he said. "However, that's not to say that these fires won't pose a threat given

the weather conditions that are coming up over the next few days." Despite the caution, the Rural Fire Service says most of the state's

fires that threaten property are burning within containment lines. Greater Sydney is ringed by fires to the north, west and south. Two of

those flared overnight. One at Appin in the southern highlands was quickly brought under

control. Another flare-up at Spencer, north of the city, is not contained on its

north-western flank, but is not threatening property. In the lower Blue Mountains west of Sydney, firefighters have spent the

night setting up a 20 kilometre containment line to protect communities

along the Great Western Highway from Glenbrook to Bulaburra. Two fires burning near Cessnock, west of Newcastle, are still within

containment lines. In the state's north, aircraft will this morning check if lightning from

a large electrical storm overnight has sparked any new fires above

Grafton. Aircraft have also been used in the Shoalhaven area in the state's south

to drop incendiary devices that start fire control lines in inaccessible

areas. The Rural Fire Service Commissioner Phil Koperberg says if fire activity

increases hundreds of New Year's Eve fireworks celebrations in New South

Wales will be cancelled.

Some roads are closed because of dangerous conditions caused by bushfire

smoke. Motorists are being asked to avoid the Hume Highway between Picton Road

and the Illawarra Highway, where police have reduced the speed limit

from 110 kilometres an hour to 80. In southern Sydney, Picton Road is closed between Wilton and Bulli,

Appin Road is closed from Appin to Bulli Tops, and all access roads to

Royal National Park are closed. Motorists are also asked to avoid the Illawarra Highway between the Hume

Highway and Robertson, and the Great Western Highway between Penrith and

Springwood because of reduced visibility. In north-western Sydney only local residents are allowed to use Wisemans

Ferry Road and Upper Color Road under police escort.

Work is continuing this morning to restore power supplies to tens of

thousands of homes that were blacked out during wild storms that struck

south-east Queensland last night. Gale force winds uprooted trees and brought down power lines, damaging

homes and cars. Energex and Ergon energy have had every available person working through

the night to restore power at 150 locations in and around Brisbane, west

to Toowoomba and north to the Sunshine Coast. At Boonah south-west of Brisbane, protective tarpaulins were ripped from

homes still undergoing repairs, following severe storms just before

Christmas. At Nambour, four people were rescued after high voltage power lines fell

across their car trapping them inside. And at Landsborough fierce winds sent a large tree crashing into a

house, but no one was injured.

Peru has entered two days of official mourning for the more than 220

people killed in a fire that's destroyed part of downtown Lima. Police say the fire began when a fireworks cache exploded in a shop just

four blocks from Peru's Congress in a heritage-listed area famed for its

Spanish colonial-era architecture. Early evening crowds buying traditional fireworks for New Year's Eve

celebrations were trapped by the flames as they raced through

surrounding markets and four-storey apartment buildings. Local residents blame vendors of illegal fireworks and say the death

toll was exacerbated by poor traffic control in the adjoining, narrow

street where cars - themselves engulfed by fire - trapped fleeing

victims. Hospitals have urged the public to donate medicine for the hundreds of

burns victims. Peru's President Alejandro Toledo has cut short his beach holiday to

oversee an inquiry.

President General Pervez Musharraf says Pakistan wants to defuse the

brewing crisis with India, but was prepared to respond vigorously to any

attack. "Pakistan stands for peace, Pakistan wants peace, Pakistan wants to

reduce tension," he said. "Let the two countries move towards peace and harmony. "However, Pakistan has taken all counter measures, if any war is thrust

on Pakistan, the Pakistan armed forces and the 140 million people of

Pakistan are fully prepared to face all consequences with all their

might." The President said he had received the "support of all political

parties". President Musharraf also said he welcomed the intervention of the

international community in trying to defuse the potentially explosive

crisis. "We would like anybody to play a useful and positive role in defusing

the tension." The United States, the European Union and the Group of eight

industrialised nations among others, have all called on India and

Pakistan to exercise restraint and resolve the stand-off through

dialogue. President Musharraf repeated his offer of holding talks with Indian

Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee. "I am for dialogue and I keep on saying this and India keeps on

rejecting which gives me a feeling that I am begging to India. If they

accept it we do not reject it at all," he said. On Friday he said he was willing to meet Prime Minister Vajpayee on the

sidelines of the January 4-6 South Asian Association for Regional

Cooperation (SAARC) summit in Nepal. India ruled out any face-to-face talks. Military tensions erupted between India and Pakistan after the bloody

December 13 raid on the Indian parliament. India accuses Pakistan's military intelligence of masterminding the

assault, but Pakistan denies the allegation. With both countries massing troops along the border, Pakistan Foreign

Minister Abdul Sattar warned Saturday that the dispute was growing

"dangerously tense" and any small act of provocation could snowball

into conflict. President Musharraf said one of the goals of Sunday's meeting was "to

take stock of the internal situation, the domestic environment". "I want to eradicate militancy, extremism, intolerance from Pakistani

society and I also said I would like to eradicate any form of terrorism

from the soil of Pakistan." However he warned the "tension that has mounted on our eastern border in

fact is creating obstacles and hurdles".

Talks between Afghan and British officials in Kabul have ended without

final agreement on the deployment of a international security force. The lack of a suitable translation of the document meant a further

delay. Authorities in Kabul have been giving conflicting signals for weeks now

over the number of peacekeepers they would allow and the role the

international force would play. The Foreign Minister, Dr Abdullah, appeared to be ending the confusion,

saying an agreement was about to be signed. "There is already the agreement, so it was finalised," he said. But a spokesman for the Interior Minister, Yunis Kanooni, emerged soon

after to say there was no agreement and nothing to sign. Scores of British peacekeepers are already patrolling the streets of

Kabul in tandem with Afghan police. But proposals to enlarge the force to as many as 5,000 international

peacekeepers have been criticised by some commanders as tantamount to

foreign occupation.

The Israeli army has killed three Palestinian militants who attacked one

of its armoured vehicles in the northern Gaza Strip. The three Palestinians opened fire with rifles at the vehicle between

the Jewish settlements of Alei Sinai and Nitzanit, on the northern edge

of the Gaza Strip. They were killed by shell fire from a tank, the sources said. During the fire fight an Israeli army observation post called in tank

fire which killed the three gunmen. The killing brings the death toll of 15 months of the Palestinian

uprising against Israeli occupation to 1,121 people, including 865

Palestinians and 234 Israelis. Alei Sinai was attacked on October 2 when two gunmen from the radical

Islamic group Hamas infiltrated the settlement and opened fire on the

residents, killing two teenage Israelis. Two Palestinian gunmen also killed an Israeli settler in Alei Sinai on

December 2 before being killed by the army.

Only a protest will can now stop Bumblebee 5 from wining the overall

handicap honours in the 57th Sydney to Hobart yacht race. The Ian Murray-skippered boat appears to have clinched the coveted title

after its nearest rival, Zeus Two failed to finish in the early hours of

this morning. Zeus Two is still eight hours away from the finish line. The nine metre yacht is among 16 boats still to finish. All four Tasmanian boats have finished. Meanwhile, a South Australian yacht in the Sydney to Hobart has been

towed to St Helens on Tasmania's east coast after losing its rudder. Liberator, skippered by Geoff Catt, got into trouble yesterday 46 miles

from Eddystone Point when it apparently struck an object. The were no reported injuries onboard.

South Africa is considering playing left arm spinner Nicky Boje in this

week's third Test against Australia in Sydney. Boje was forced to withdraw from the South African squad before the

start of the tour due to injury. South African captain Shaun Pollock says he hopes Boje arrives in time

to prepare for the Test. "Nicky Boje might be out in time," he said. "As soon as he was fit and ready he was going to come over but we'll be

picking the best possible eleven for the Sydney Test."

Spain has begun its Hopman Cup campaign in Perth with a 3-0 victory over

Argentina. Arantxa Sanchez-Vicario and Tommy Robredoboth won their singles matches,

and then teamed to win the mixed doubles. Sanchez-Vicario says she is hoping to win her second Hopman Cup title

after winning the tournament with her brother Emilio in 1990. "It would be very nice to start the year off and as I say it's always

tough but it's a very good start for me and I'm looking forward with

Tommy to see if we can be the champions again," she said. Today, the United States will play France. Meanwhile, world number one Lleyton Hewitt says he will not be putting

pressure on himself to win next month's Australian Tennis Open in

Melbourne. Hewitt yesterday teamed with fellow Australian Alicia Molik to beat

Switzerland 3-0 in their opening tie at the Hopman Cup in Perth. Hewitt says his first objective will be to reach the second week of the

grand slam event. "I think if I play my best tennis and give a 100 per cent no matter who

I play I think I'm in with a good chance of getting through to the

second week and if that happens then most times in a grand slam it's

sort of anyone's tournament from there," he said.

New Zealand has rewarded Lord of the Rings director Peter Jackson in its

New Years Honours list. Jackson, who has spent seven years on filming the Tolkien classic in his

home country has been made a companion of the New Zealand Order of

Merit. The first of three films employed a cast of over 2,000 and had a budget

of $534 million - far and away New Zealand's biggest production ever. There is no chance Jackson himself will become a Lord though - New

Zealand's Labour Government last year dropped knighthoods in favour of

local honours.

The next few hours are crucial for firefighters on alert in the Blue

Mountains. Firefighters are working on a 25 kilometre fire front in the area, which

it is feared will devour homes if the wind picks up this afternoon. The weather bureau had initially predicted 80 kilometre an hour

southerly wind gusts, but has revised its forecast to 30 kilometres an

hour. The wind change is expected to reach the Blue Mountains in the next

hour. Mark Williams, the incident controller for the Blue Mountains region,

says fire crews will stop back-burning as soon as the wind change nears

the area. "Soon as we get word the southerly change for instance, is getting close

to the Blue Mountains area, we initially stop our back-burning," Mr

Williams said. "Tie it into a local creek or something as close as possible so that

it's contained within that area, so we don't have further outbreaks."

Argentine President Adolfo Rodriguez Saa has asked the country's banks

to help re-establish peace by facilitating the payment of pensions and

salaries to workers and retirees. He says he issued the appeal at a meeting with leaders of the banking

community. "I'm very concerned about what has happened in Argentina," Mr Rodriguez

Saa said. He says he has asked banks to remain open from 8:00am to 8:00pm Monday,

to be able to cash checks of up to 1,000 pesos or $US1,000 per person.

The nation's road toll has risen to 37, after another death on New South

Wales roads. A 38-year-old man, who was injured in a crash on the mid-north coast

last week, has died in hospital. A 16-year-old boy, who was a passenger in the car when it hit a

telephone pole, remains in critical condition. New South Wales has recorded 18 holiday deaths. Seven people have died on Queensland roads, five in Victoria, three in

the Northern Territory, two each in Western Australia and South

Australia. The ACT and Tasmania remain fatality free.

The Federal Government says new national fuel quality standards for

petrol and diesel will greatly reduce toxic emissions from cars and

trucks. The Federal Minister for the Environment, David Kemp, says state and

territory inspectors will conduct random fuel sampling at refineries,

distributor terminals, and petrol stations across the country. He says the new laws, introduced today, will cut the pollution from

vehicles and it is hoped this will lead to a reduction in respiratory

illness in the community. Lead in petrol will be prohibited under the new laws. The 2.5 million cars built prior to 1986, which use leaded petrol, will

be required to use lead replacement petrol. Mr Kemp says it is expected emissions of major pollutants such as

benzene and carbon monoxide will be reduced by at least 40 per cent by

2010. By 2020, emissions of those pollutants will be reduced by 70 per cent.

Americans' fears about airplane security continue to increase, after a

man made it through two separate flights with a loaded gun in his

carry-on luggage. The man was finally stopped before boarding a third plane in Memphis. The man had travelled from Florida to Atlanta, and then Atlanta to

Memphis. He was attempting to board his return flight last night when he was

stopped by security personnel for a random check. They discovered a loaded 9mm Beretta semi-automatic pistol in his hand

luggage. The man acknowledged the gun was his, and was released on $5,000 bail. There is no suggestion he was planning any sort of terrorist attack, but

his ability to complete two flights while carrying the weapon has again

highlighted airline security problems. The incident follows last week's drama when a man was able to board a

plane from Paris to Miami with explosives in his shoes.

A team of police is currently escorting two Swiss tourists back to the

safety of a central Australian community after their vehicle sank in

sand in the Finke River overnight. A police spokesman says police were called to the area 100 kilometres

west of Alice Springs, after an emergency beacon was activated and

received by Australian Search and Rescue. The tourists had tried to cross the river when their vehicle became

submerged in soft sand. The spokesman says a ground unit also attended, but police officers had

to walk the final 12 kilometres to reach the stranded Swiss nationals

who were stuck in the vehicle. The tourists and the rescue team are expected to walk for about four

hours this morning before driving to the Hermansburg community.

The handicap winner of the Melbourne to Hobart yacht race is close to

being decided. "San Miguel", skippered by Gary Clapham, crossed the line at 9:30am AEDT

and is favourite to take the race on handicap. Almost half the fleet has crossed the finish line. After leading since the race began three days ago Kontrol crossed the

line at 2:15am. Another Victorian boat, Tevake, claimed second place just one minute

clear of Wild Card, the only Tasmanian entry in the fleet. The fast-finishing Tevake crossed the line at 6:15am to be runner-up for

the second year in a row. Kontrol skipper Peter Blake says modifications to his boat have been

more than successful.

Firefighters in New South Wales have spent another night back-burning in

preparation for the weekend's heatwave conditions. No more homes were lost overnight, despite more than 50 fires still

raging around the state. Firefighters are fearing the worst with hot and windy conditions

forecast over the next two days. Spencer north of Sydney, and the lower Blue Mountains continue to be of

the greatest concern. Homes between Bulabarra and Lapstone are set to be in the line of fire

if the forecast wind changes materialise in those areas. Extensive back-burning was conducted overnight, with firefighters

concentrating on areas south of Sydney at Sutherland, Illawarra and

Shoalhaven. At Spencer, firefighters are desperately trying to stop the flames from

spreading across the Hawkesbury River. However, there is some relief in sight for exhausted firefighters, with

the arrival this morning of 130 officers from Queensland. Those firefighters are heading to the Hunter region to help battle a

blaze at Cessnock.

Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf says he is ready to meet Indian

Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, as fears grow of a war between the

two countries. Tensions have escalated since a suicide attack on the Indian Parliament

two weeks ago. India alleges the attack was backed by the Pakistani intelligence

service. General Musharraf says Pakistan will never initiate a conflict between

the two countries. He says he is prepared to hold talks with the Indian Prime Minister at a

regional summit in Nepal next week. "I don't mind meeting him but as I've said once before, you can't clap

with one hand," General Musharraf said. "If there is a willingness from the other side there will be a

willingness from my side."

Swedish Round the World ocean racer Assa Abloy has taken line honours in

the 57th Sydney to Hobart. Assa Abloy, accompanied by a large spectator fleet, sailed up the

Derwent River in light winds this morning. It crossed the finishing line just under two days and 21 hours after

starting the journey in Sydney. A large crowd lined the Hobart docks to welcome the yacht. Swedish maxi Nicorette is in second place, two nautical miles behind

Assa Abloy. Five other Volvo 60s are nearby. The crew of the Assa Abloy will not be able to spend too much time

celebrating - the Round the World yachts have only a few hours rest

before racing on to Auckland.

A United States federal magistrate has refused to free on bail a British

man accused of trying to detonate his explosives-laden shoes on a

transatlantic flight. At a hearing in United States Federal Court, Federal Bureau of

Investigation agent Margaret Cronin said Richard Reid was in possession

of a "functioning, improvised device," which "if placed beside an outer

wall could have or would have created a large hole in the fuselage of

the plane". The device contained an explosive called TATP. US Magistrate Judith Dein refused to grant bail for Reid, 28, but left

open the possibility of his release later. Reid is charged with intimidation and interfering with a flight crew -

offenses that carry 20-year jail terms. No additional charges were filed. He allegedly tried to set fire to his sneakers Saturday on an American

Airlines flight from Paris to Miami that was diverted to Boston. Investigators say the explosives in his shoes were powerful enough to

have created a major disaster.

The Palestinian leadership is calling for US peace envoy Anthony Zinni

to return to the region to work for a cease-fire and a return to peace

talks. Mr Zinni, a retired Marine Corps general, was sent to the region in late

November by US Secretary of State Colin Powell. However, he was recalled earlier this month after failing to bring a

halt to the bloodshed. A statement issued after a meeting chaired by Palestinian leader Yasser

Arafat called for a "quick return of Zinni and his team to proceed to

the application of the Mitchell Plan and the Tenet Memorandum." The internationally-backed Mitchell Plan calls for an end to

Israeli-Palestinian violence and the implementation of

confidence-building measures, before a return to peace talks. The Tenet Memorandum, a blueprint for implementing a cease-fire, was

agreed several months ago but failed to take hold on the ground. The Palestinian leadership underscored the "importance of the role

played by the American administration in the peace process, with the

support of Russia and the European Union." The US State Department has said Mr Zinni will only return when he and

Mr Powell believe his presence could be effective in bringing about a

cease-fire.

The Northern Territory Aids Council says it is not surprised the

Territory's rate of HIV infection through male to female sex is twice

the national rate. A report in the Centre for Disease Control Bulletin says 21 percent of

HIV infections in the Territory were from male to female sex, compared

to 10 per cent nationally. The council's Frank Farmer says it is another reason for people to

practice safe sex. "We do need to be reminded, I think people become a bit complacent and

they feel that it can't happen to them," Mr Farmer said. "What these statistics show is that there is a shift in the means of

transmission... previous figures were about 80 per cent, but male to

male contact has turned around here so that it is a bit of a wake up

call for people."

There is a one in 20 chance of a dramatic rise in world sea levels over

the next century due to global warming, according to a new risk

assessment. The survey by the British Antarctic Survey (BAS) and Norwegian

environmental safety organisation Det Norske Veritas, says there is a 5

per cent chance of the giant West Antarctic Ice Sheet disintegrating due

to climate change. Scientist David Vaughan says if that happens, sea levels would rise by

one metre in the next 100 years. "You have to balance the likelihood against the severity of the impacts,

and in this case even a 5 per cent chance of this happening is really

damn serious," he said. Scientists have already predicted a rise in sea levels of 50 centimetres

over the next century, due to a combination of climate change and

increased extraction of ground water. Mr Vaughan says that estimate did not factor in melting Antarctic ice. "So we might be looking at something like 1.5 metres in the next

century," Mr Vaughan said. Mr Vaughan says the possible break-up of the West Antarctic Ice Sheet,

which accounts for 13 per cent of ice on the frozen continent, is not

related to the impact of human industrial activity on the climate. He says it is part of a far older process. However, he says major world polluters cannot walk away from the

problem. "The potential impacts of a major change in the West Antarctic Ice Sheet

are severe - sea level rise will be fantastically expensive for

developed nations with coastal cities and dire for poor populations in

low-lying coastal areas," Mr Vaughan said.

An earthquake measuring 4.1 on the Richter scale has shaken parts of

Western Australia's wheatbelt overnight. Geo-science Australia says the epicentre was in Burakin, 240 kilometres

north-east of Perth. A spokesman says the earthquake, which occurred at about 12:30am,

follows a larger quake in September which measured over five on the

Richter scale. Shane Bradford of Ballidu just west of Burakin, says the quake shook his

house and woke him from his sleep.

New South Wales firefighters are hoping lighter winds will help ease

their workload today but are predicting "nasty" conditions over the

weekend. While the winds are expected to ease somewhat today, the weather bureau

says temperatures will be higher. More than 100 fires are still burning across New South Wales. The Rural Fire Service says the change may allow it to concentrate more

on preventative action, but there is no room for complacency. Mark Sullivan, from the Rural Fire Service, says while conditions may be

a little kinder to them today, the outlook for the weekend has them

worried. "It certainly appears from the weather forecast, with very high

temperatures and high winds that it certainly could be a nasty couple of

days ahead," Mr Sullivan said. One of the areas causing greatest concern today is the 30-kilometre long

blaze in the lower Blue Mountains. Firefighters are also keeping a close eye on a blaze at Spencer north of

Sydney, which yesterday broke through containment lines. There are concerns that fire may jump the Hawkesbury River. Backburning continues in the state's central west and south of Sydney in

the Shoalhaven. In the Illawarra, firefighters have been able to carry out back-burning

operations in three areas. Operations were carried out in parts of Mt Kembla, as well as an area

bounded by Appin Road and the Old Princes Highway at Helensburgh. An area west of Windy Gully near Cataract Dam was also targeted. Meanwhile, Illawarra police have arrested three teenagers in relation to

bushfires at Shellharbour, on the south coast of New South Wales. A spokesman says three small fires were extinguished around 7:30pm AEDT

yesterday. A short time later police arrested three 15-year-old boys from

Shellharbour, Barrack Heights and Shell Cove. All three have been interviewed but no charges have been laid.

Pakistan's Foreign Ministry has announced retaliatory sanctions against

India, saying it would also downgrade embassy representation and ban

Indian planes from its airspace. "Pakistan regrets the Indian decision to downgrade embassy

representation by 50 per cent and confine staff to the municipal limits

of New Delhi and ban access to airspace," ministry spokesman Aziz Ahmed

Khan said. "Such efforts will only increase tension and we are forced to take

retaliatory actions. "We will downgrade their embassy staff here, confine them to Islamabad

limits, and will also ban their access to Pakistan's airspace." As tension mounted between the two rivals after the December 13 attack

on the Parliament complex in new Delhi, Indian Foreign Minister Jaswant

Singh earlier announced a set of new sanctions. Pakistani aircraft would not be allowed to fly over Indian airspace from

January 1, and the Indian embassy in Islamabad and the Pakistan mission

in New Delhi will have to reduce their staff by 50 per cent, he said. Pakistani embassy staff would be confined to movement within New Delhi,

he added. Mr Singh said the measures were being taken as a result of Pakistan's

attempts to "dupe" the international community with "cosmetic measures

and non measures" against militant groups operating in its territory. India has accused Pakistani military intelligence of sponsoring the

Parliament attack and has threatened retaliation, including possible

military action.

A spokesman for Afghanistan's Defence Ministry claims Osama bin Laden

has fled to Pakistan. Defence Ministry spokesman Mohamad Habeel says the Saudi-born dissident

is in hiding under the protection of supporters of a radical Islamic

leader who helped to create the fundamentalist Taliban. "Osama himself is under the protection of Maulana Fazalur Rehman in

Pakistan, but we don't know for sure in which part of it," Mohamad

Habeel said. "He lives in areas which are under the influence and control of Fazalur

Rehman supporters, I cannot say from which sources we have received this

information. "Bin Laden and his men are no longer here [in Afghanistan]." Mr Rehman, who is under house arrest, is head of the Jamiat

Ulema-i-Islam Party, a long time supporter of bin Laden, the leader of

the Al Qaeda network which is blamed for the September 11 attacks on New

York and Washington. Mohamad Habeel said bin Laden's support in Afghanistan had collapsed

completely. "His supporters have no presence any more," he said. "There may be individuals here who have hidden, but altogether we can

say that his resistance is over. "His last remaining forces have fled to areas along the border with

Afghanistan and Pakistan."

New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani today bade farewell to the city he has

led for the past eight years, calling for a "soaring, beautiful"

memorial to be built on the site of the World Trade Centre. Mr Giuliani, speaking just four days ahead of his final day in office,

further defended his tough stance on crime and homelessness. Time magazine's 2001 Person of the Year also praised New York's

diversity as the source of strength pulling the city through the

difficult aftermath of September 11's deadly attacks. "This place has to be sanctified," Mr Giuliani said. "This place has to become a place which, when anybody comes here, they

are going to feel the great power and emotion of what it means to be an

American." During his reign, many in the city's black and Hispanic communities

decried Mr Giuliani's 'knee-jerk' support for New York's Police

Department during police brutality scandals. However, the Mayor insists his policing strategy has been highly

effective. "The reality is that the model that was adopted for dealing with crime

in New York City is the very, very best way to ensure you can make your

city safe," Mr Giuliani said. "I felt that my job as the mayor was to turn around the city, because I

believed - rightly or wrongly - that we had one last chance to do that." Mr Giuliani, a Republican, has served two terms as New York City's Mayor

since 1993. Term limits prevent him from seeking a third term in office, and he will

be succeeded by billionaire media mogul Michael Bloomberg.

Australia's quicks and opening batsmen have put the side in a dominant

position going into day three of the Boxing Day Test match against South

Africa at the MCG. Australia is no wicket for 126, only 151 runs shy of South Africa after

Andy Bichel earlier starred as the tourists fell for 277. When play was abandoned due to rain a few overs short of scheduled

stumps yesterday, Justin Langer was not out 67 and Matthew Hayden 55. The openers went on the attack from the start, with Langer's innings

including six fours and Hayden's eight. Earlier, Shaun Pollock and Nantie Haywood launched a vital rearguard

action to help South Africa to a respectable first innings total. The pair put on 44 runs for the final wicket to help the tourists to

277. The South Africans had slumped to 9 for 233 through a combination of

Australia's good bowling, good fielding and good luck. After resuming at 3 for 89 yesterday morning, the tourists looked to be

cruising as Jacques Kallis and Neil McKenzie added 72 without loss. But then Bichel suddenly had them reeling after snatching two wickets in

two balls. First he had Jacques Kallis caught behind for 38, although Kallis could

consider himself very unlucky as replays showed his bat was a long way

from the ball. On the next ball, Bichel snatched a sharp return catch to dismiss Lance

Klusener first ball and have a shot at a hat-trick. Bichel missed out on the hat-trick and Mark Boucher and Neil McKenzie

again steadied the South African innings, adding 67 before the

introduction of part-timer Mark Waugh to the attack paid off for

Australia. Waugh removed Boucher for 43, caught by Bichel. Brett Lee then chipped in, trapping McKenzie leg before for 67 with a

perfect inswinger. Bichel continued his good day in the field, running out Claude Henderson

for 5 with a direct-hit from the in-field. Lee roared in to Allan Donald, bouncing him and then catching the edge

with a rising delivery, which Ricky Ponting happily swallowed at third

slip to remove the returning paceman for a duck. Bichel did not get his hat-trick but ended with the best figures of the

Australian bowlers, after also picking up the final wicket of Nantie

Haywood for 14. Lee took 3 for 77 and Glenn McGrath 2 for 66.

A rafter who raised the alarm after most of his party was swept into the

Franklin River, in Tasmania's south-west, says for nearly 24 hours he

did not know whether his four friends had survived. Richard Romaszko was rafting down the Collingwood River when the party

was hit by a huge water swell just before the junction with the

Franklin. Mr Romaszko pulled himself to safety and, after camping overnight, he

alerted a tour group. He was able to use the group's satellite phone to raise the alarm. A second member of the party was found nearby yesterday afternoon, while

the other three were winched out by helicopter about 8:00pm AEDT. Mr Romanszko says he went into survival mode. "When we hit the bottom of the rapid there was a big wave that

overturned the rafts," he said. "Before we knew it, we were in the

Franklin River. "At least my raft was upside down and the guy who was with me, his raft

was upside down."

A total of 14 yachts have now retired from the Sydney to Hobart Yacht

Race, after three more yachts pulled out of the classic overnight, one

of them with an injured skipper. Terra Firma arrived at Eden, on the New South Wales south coast, early

today. Skipper Peter Bartels is in hospital with neck injuries, but his

condition is not serious. Also returning to Eden is Grundig, which has hull damage. Krakatoa is back at Ulludullah, due to a sea sick crew member. The Round the World racers still lead the fleet off Lady Barron on the

southern end of Flinders Island, sailing in light winds. Illbruck holds a two nautical mile lead over Team Tyco, while Team News

Corp is a further two nautical miles astern, with Assa Abloy close by. Team Tyco will not have its result recorded, after failing to meet a

mandatory radio check when off Green Cape.

Firefighters across New South Wales are gearing up for a wind change

that may bring further property losses today. More than 100 fires now ring two-thirds of the greater Sydney area. The blazes stretch south of the Royal National Park and north of

Wollongong all the way to the Blue Mountains and up towards the edge of

the Baulkham Hills shire. Fires are also burning around Huskisson on the far south coast, and as

far inland as Mudgee, Narromine and Kempsey, and the Richmond Valley in

the north. However, the major areas of concern today are the southern Sydney

suburbs of Heathcote and Engadine. Thousands of residents in those suburbs were evacuated overnight. Senior forecaster with the Sydney Weather Bureau Ian Robertson, says the

greatest risk will come when winds change direction this afternoon. "We're looking at another dry day ahead throughout the state,

particularly along the coast... more average sort of temperatures but

the trick will be the winds," Mr Robertson said. "We're looking at south-west winds this morning, an east to south-east

sea breeze along the coast, which is going to make things quite

challenging for firefighting." Between 4,000 and 5,000 firefighters are currently battling the blazes. Crews have already been brought in from Victoria, but the Rural Fire

Service says it expects to call on other states for help. Service spokesman John Winter says property losses have been high. "We are estimating that around 150 homes have been lost, obviously there

are areas we're yet to confirm property losses," Mr Winter said.

The man accused to trying to blow up an American Airlines flight on

Sunday could not have acted alone, according to a British Islamic leader

who knew Richard Reid well. Abdul Hak Baker is the head of the Brixton mosque in south London, where

28-year-old Mr Reid had worshipped. Mr Baker says Mr Reid is a petty criminal who had converted to Islam

while in jail. He says Mr Reid had become more and more militant in his outlook, after

becoming involved with a group of Muslim extremists. The mosque leader says Mr Reid was easily led and he is not surprised at

what happened. "I wouldn't say we were totally surprised, because we said if we

remember how he left us this is what he was believing in," Mr Baker

said. "This was the type of jihad that he was beginning to believe in. "September the eleventh would have had a profound effect on him." Meanwhile, US television is reporting Osama bin Laden loyalists held

prisoner in Afghanistan have told US troops Mr Reid trained in their

camps.

Virgin Blue has begun offering $5 flights from Melbourne to five major

cities, in an aggressive attempt to stave off potential competition from

a revamped Ansett. The 10,000 midweek seats are only available on the Internet until

Monday, for travel between January 9 and March 27. The one-way fares are for flights to Sydney, Brisbane, Adelaide,

Launceston and Canberra. Vigin Blue spokesman David Huttner says the fares are to thank customers

for their support, particularly in Victoria, which has become Virgin's

second largest operational base. However, he says it is also very much about ensuring the airline's

position in the market. "Suggestions recently in the press by Mr Fox that Ansett's main goal is

simply to put Virgin Blue out of business, well, you know, we wish them

the best of luck in that endeavour," he said. "Everybody else has failed so far but if that's the only goal in

business, they claim to be in the spirit of competition then well, good

on them."

After a bad start to the holiday period on Australia's roads, there have

been no fatalities reported for two days. The last fatality was on Christmas Day when a 45-year-old man died after

falling off his motor bike in the New South Wales Hunter Valley. That state has recorded 10 of the 26 deaths in Australia since the

holiday period began. In Victoria, where five people have died, a teenage boy suffered life

threatening injuries when he was run down by a car at Baccus Marsh, west

of Melbourne, early this morning. Five people have died in Queensland, three in the Northern Territory,

two in Western Australia and one in South Australia. There have been no deaths recorded in Tasmania or the ACT.

A Palestinian man has been shot dead as Israeli forces charged into

Palestinian-controlled land in the northern West Bank in hot pursuit of

gunmen who opened fire on them earlier, Palestinian officials said. Walid Saadi, 53, was killed by heavy machine-gun fire as tanks and

helicopters fought a pitched battle with the Palestinian gunmen, holed

up in a house on the edge of the town of Jenin after attacking an

Israeli Army post, Palestinian medics said. Israeli military sources said two armed men had been shot, although it

was not immediately clear if Saadi was one of them or a civilian caught

in the intense fire. Israeli forces did not say how many gunmen they were facing down,

although officials had earlier said it was two. An army spokesman said the gunmen had been heading through

Israel-controlled territory east of the town when they ran into an army

post and opened fire. It claimed they had been planning to attack the nearby Jewish settlement

of Qadim. The Israeli soldiers returned fire, but the men escaped into Palestinian

self-rule land next to the northern town of Jenin. The army chased them into land under the control of the Palestinian

Authority and tracked them down to a house where the men took cover. The Palestinians then threw two grenades at soldiers and border police,

injuring one policeman slightly. A firefight erupted around the house, Palestinian and Israeli security

officials said, during which the tanks fired two shells into the

building. Helicopters also opened fire, killing Saadi, Palestinian officials said. According to Jenin hospital officials, two Palestinians were injured in

the exchange, as the tanks and two jeeps entered 400 metres into

Palestinian territory to besiege the house.

Sir Nigel Hawthorne, the British actor best known for his role as the

scheming civil servant in the BBC hit Yes Minister, died

Wednesday from a heart attack aged 72, his agent said. Hawthorne had been battling cancer for the past 18 months and had just

come out of hospital where he had been having chemotherapy treatment,

said Ken McReddie. He said the cancer treatment had been going well and the heart attack

was unexpected. Hawthorne died peacefully at home with his partner and a friend,

McReddie added. "He was a brilliant actor and a wonderful friend, I feel very sad and

extremely cut up," he said. Playing the smug civil servant Sir Humphrey Appleby who always knew

better than his master, Hawthorne's performances in Yes, Minister

won him a host of awards and the glowing approval of then prime minister

Margaret Thatcher. The role led to a sequel, Yes, Prime Minister, as well as a range

of more substantial role on stage and screen, including the lead role in

the 1995 film The Madness of King George for which he was

nominated for an Oscar.

Seven yachts have been forced to retire from the Sydney to Hobart yacht

race, after a storm hit the fleet off the New South Wales south coast

overnight. South Australian yacht SAP Ausmaid and Secret Men's Business both lost

their masts in the storms this morning. Last night, one of the favourites for line honors, Victorian maxi Wild

Thing, was forced to head back to Sydney with sail damage. Simply Red, Broomstick, Cadibarra and Sting also sustained damage in the

storm and were forced to head back to Sydney. Volvo ocean racer Tyco, leads the race ahead of Assa Abloy.

Australia will be aiming to take early wickets on day two of the second

cricket Test against South Africa at the MCG. The Proteas will resume at three for 89 after day one was badly affected

by rain with only 40 overs possible. Australian paceman Glenn McGrath, who has two wickets, says the catch

taken by Matthew Hayden yesterday is typical of Australia's outstanding

slips fielding this summer. "In the series so far there's been some great catches - Ricky Ponting in

the last Test, occasionally I get one myself," he said. "It gives you so much more confidence when you know 99 per cent of the

catches that go flying to the slips or through the slips are going to be

taken."

Thousands of firefighters remain on the ground across New South Wales

this morning, as they assess the extent of fires burning around Sydney

and on the state's south coast. Firefighters are battling a fire band stretching from around

Campbelltown, south-west of Sydney, to the Royal National Park. Hundreds of people have been evacuated from small villages to the south

and south-west of Sydney. Authorities estimate more than 60 properties have been destroyed in the

greater Sydney area. Fourteen homes have been destroyed in the Hawkesbury area north of

Sydney, and 20 properties have been ruined at Jervis Bay. John Winter, from the New South Wales Rural Fire Service, says

firefighters' main concern is the fire band from Campbelltown through to

the coast. "That is going to be a very difficult area today, we do expect that the

Royal National Park is likely to be impacted by fire later in the

morning," he said. "Certainly in terms of population risk and threat to property that band

is going to be our area of greatest concern." In the ACT, it appears the worst of the fire danger may have passed

though strong winds are expected to keep firefighters busy today. The fires have burned more than 800 hectares over the past two days. Yesterday, winds of up to 80 kilometres an hour fanned blazes in a dozen

areas, including Queanbeyan, O'Connor, Mount Wanniassa, Red Hill and

Black Mountain. Strong winds are again predicted for today but fire authorities are

confident they have the resources to contain any further blazes. A total fire ban is in force in the ACT today and tomorrow. Emergency Services Minister Ted Quinlan has paid tribute to the efforts

of firefighters. "There has just been a whole body of people that have been magnificent

in sacrificing their Christmas for the benefit of the community," he

said.

European monarchs have reflected on the impact of the September 11

terrorist attacks in the United States in their traditional Christmas

messages. The sombre mood was typified by Britain's Queen Elizabeth II, who said

2001 brought many people "more than their fair share of trials and

disasters". "The terrorist outrages in the United States last September brought home

to us the pain and grief of ordinary people the world over who find

themselves innocently caught up in such evil," she said. The Queen also expressed her belief in the importance of faith at such

times. "In these circumstances so many of us, whatever our religion, need our

faith more than ever to sustain and guide us. "Every one of us needs to believe in the value of all that is good and

honest." Sweden's King Carl XVI Gustaf also referred to September 11 in his

annual Christmas speech to the nation, describing how the attacks

concerned everyone and had changed life itself. "The need for community and friendship beyond borders is even greater

following these tragedies," he said. Spain's King Juan Carlos said the outrages in America opened a new stage

in world history. "The terrible attacks of September 11 on the US, of a previously unknown

magnitude, have shaken the conscience of humanity and shattered many of

the ideas on which we base the way we live," he said. However, King Juan said the international community's reaction showed no

tolerance for that kind of attack. "The reaction of the international community has show in a clear way its

willingness in the future to prevent those who think that violence and

terror are valuable instruments for imposing their ideas and exercising

their tyranny," he said.

Afghan security forces have arrested a wounded Arab Al Qaeda fighter,

but seven others with weapons and explosives remain barricaded in a

hospital in the southern city of Kandahar. A spokesman for provincial governor Gul Agha, Akbar Jan, says the man

was arrested when he left his ward. "One Arab, believed to be a Yemeni, was taken into custody when he came

out of his ward for a bandage," Mr Jan said. He says the other seven are carrying weapons including pistols, grenades

and explosives. "We are trying to persuade them not to detonate their explosives and to

surrender their weapons," Mr Jan said. "We are concerned about the safety of other patients." The Arabs, wounded in earlier US bombing of Kandahar airport, were

admitted to Mirwais Hospital before the departure of the Taliban militia

earlier this month. Before fleeing, the Taliban had handed over some weapons including

grenades and explosives so the Arabs could protect themselves. They have been threatening to blow up their hospital room if any attempt

is made to arrest them.

Russian authorities have sentenced Chechen warlord Salman Raduyev to

life in prison for a 1996 hostage siege in which more than 200 people

died. Salman Raduyev is probably the most important Chechen fighter Russian

authorities have ever caught. A relative of the first Chechen president, he was at the forefront of

the insurgency leading raids against federal troops. He was jealous of the achievements of his fellow commanders. He resolved to outperform his rival and in January 1996, masterminded a

hostage taking in the neighbouring republic of Dagestan. Apparently, the aim was to destabilise Dagestan and spread the war to

the rest of the Caucuses. He ran out of luck as Russian solders were not prepared to negotiate and

cornered Raduyev on the Chechen border.

Skippers are expecting a spectacular start to the 57th Sydney to Hobart

yacht race today, with the weather bureau forecasting spinnaker-friendly

westerly winds. A total of 76 entrants are in this year's race, including eight

round-the-world yachts, which are expected to give last year's line

honours winner, Swedish maxi Nicorette, a run for its money. The round the world yachts are set for a flying beginning, with a

200-metre headstart designed to get them out of harm's way. The boats will have to round a buoy further north near Sydney heads, to

equalise the distance. Ludde Ingvall, the skipper of Nicorette, says the split start could help

the maxis next year. "Split starts are good and maybe next year they will move all the big

boats into the front line so that we can get away without hitting

somebody," he said. Skipper Ingvall says his start tactics are easy. "At the start it's easy - don't break and don't collide and don't go

around and don't make yourself look silly," he said. The New South Wales Weather Bureau says there is a possibility of waves

of up to five metres in Bass Strait for this year's Sydney to Hobart

yacht race. Severe weather forecaster Ken Batt says if a low pressure system

develops more off Tasmania, the worst case scenario could be strong

winds and large seas. "As the yachts hit the stronger winds in Bass Strait you'd be looking at

say four to five metre significant wave heights," Mr Batt said.

A project working on ways to reduce the debt of prisoners in Australian

jails has run out of money. The Criminal Justice Coalition's Prison and Debt Project has been

developing tools to educate prisoners and their families about their

financial rights. Spokeswoman Anne Stringer says funding from a non-profit organisation

has run out and she is now looking for government support to trial the

education programs. Ms Stringer says if successful, the programs may stop prisoners from

reoffending to repay accumulated debt. "As soon as you get out of prison, Centrelink starts deducting the money

you owe them from your benefit payment so your income is vastly

reduced," she said. "You may not have a place to live and your car's probably been

repossessed. "Your chances of getting employment and starting to pay back the debt is

very very slim."

Police are interviewing a 21-year-old man for stealing a car with a

child inside from the Northside Shopping Centre in Alice Springs. Senior Sergeant Michael Potts says the 20-month-old boy was left on

Elliot Street when the offender discovered the child shortly after

taking the car. Members of the public found the boy sitting on a kerb and returned him

to his parents. Police pursued the man in the stolen vehicle along the Stuart Highway

and Tanami Road for about 160 kilometres before he ran out of petrol. Senior Sergeant Potts says the man was caught after a short chase

through the bush and is currently being interviewed by police.

Melbourne's weather is one of the question marks hanging over the second

Test between Australia and South Africa, due to start at the MCG this

morning. Melbourne's shaky early summer weather is not yet on the improve. This is Test cricket's traditional day of days and it is receiving

Melbourne's traditional greeting - cool and cloudy with possible

showers. The other questions are over each team's pace attack. South Africa will probably be forced to take a huge punt on veteran Alan

Donald, while Australia is unlikely to punt on Brad Williams, returning

Andy Bichel to Test cricket. Williams was called up to the 12 after Jason Gillespie was ruled out of

the Test due to a right shoulder injury. Bichel says he is looking forward to the challenge of a call-up to the

starting side. "I feel that I'm ready to go for this game and I'm looking forward to

it," Bichel said. "The Boxing Day Test has been a good one for me. I've got great memories

of it, so hopefully I can repeat those." The day is likely to provide conditions any quick bowler would relish -

bouncy with some seam, beckoning the captain who wins the toss to turn

his attack loose.

An American Airlines flight from Paris to Miami has been diverted to

Boston Airport under escort by two United States fighter jets, after a

passenger attempted to ignite explosives he was wearing in his shoes. Director of Boston's Logan International Airport Tom Kinton says quick

action by flight attendants on the 767 jetliner averted a potentially

serious incident. "The flight attendants became alerted to a smell of sulphur which is a

match, and immediately took action when they saw what this individual

was attempting to do and literally tackled the individual," he said. The FBI has arrested a 28-year-old mantravelling on what is reported to

be a fake British passport. The 185 passengers and 12 crew members have been taken off the plane.

Afghanistan's new interim government is to meet for the first time later

today after an historic inauguration ceremony in the Afghan capital

Kabul. Interim President Hamid Karzai and his 29 fellow cabinet members are

looking to start rebuilding Afghanistan's war-ravaged economy. Mr Karzai says he expects the reconstruction to cost many billions of

dollars after 23 years of war. "Afghanistan must go from an economy of war to an economy of peace," Mr

Karzai said. "Those people who've earned a living by taking the gun must be enabled

with programs, with plans, with projects to put the gun aside and go to

the various other forms of economic activity that can bring them a

livelihood," he said.

Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf believes there is a strong

possibility Osama bin Laden could have been killed in the United States

bombardment of the Tora Bora caves in eastern Afghanistan. "Maybe he is dead because of all the operations that have been

conducted, the bombardment of all the caves that have been conducted,

there's a great possibility that he may have lost his life there,"

General Musharraf said on Chinese state television. During the visit to Pakistan's close ally China, General Musharraf said

Pakistan had stepped up security along its porous border with

Afghanistan in a bid to capture the suspected terrorist mastermind. "We have huge borders between Afghanistan and Pakistan," he said. "The Tora Bora region in which he was supposed to be operating has ...

about eight passes leading into Pakistan over mountains at a height of

about 13 to 14,000 feet ... We are guarding each one of these passes. "If he does enter, if we identify him, he will be handed over". US and Afghan forces have been searching for signs of bin Laden, the

number one suspect in the September 11 attacks on New York and

Washington, around Tora Bora since forces from his Al Qaeda network

fled last weekend. US warplanes and Afghan forces had launched extensive attacks on the

network of caves where Al Qaeda members had been hiding out. An Afghan commander in charge in the Tora Bora caves region said

Saturday that bin Laden had probably gone to Pakistan. The Pentagon said on Monday that it had no idea where bin Laden was now

although it believed he had been in the Tora Bora region until a few

days before.

Australian cricket selectors have made just one change to the squad that

beat South Africa in the opening Test for the second Test beginning in

Melbourne on Boxing Day. As predicted, Queensland pace bowler Andy Bichel replaces spin bowler

Stuart MacGill, who was 12th man for the Adelaide Test. MacGill took five wickets for New South Wales on day one of the tour

match against South Africa at the SCG Thursday, but it was not enough to

sway selectors. The full squad is: Steve Waugh(c), Adam Gilchrist(vc), Matthew Hayden, Justin Langer, Ricky

Ponting, Mark Waugh, Damien Martyn, Shane Warne, Brett Lee, Jason

Gillespie, Glenn McGrath and Andy Bichel.

Israel has rejected Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat's bid to make his

annual visit to Bethlehem for Christmas Eve during an security cabinet

meeting early today. "The security cabinet made its decision based on the fact that Arafat is

not working to dismantle terror organizations and to foil terror attacks

against Israel and to arrest and punish terrorists, including the

murderers of tourism minister Rhavam Zeevi," a statement from Prime

Minister Ariel Sharon's office said. Earlier, Mr Arafat declared he would walk to Bethlehem for Christmas Eve

Mass if he has to if Israeli authorities refused him access to the

biblical town. Mr Arafat's statement comes as Palestinians in Gaza buried six teenagers

killed in the worst internal Palestinian violence in seven years. The funerals in Gaza were peaceful, with Palestinian police staying away

and mourners agreeing no weapons were to be carried. This has been a difficult week for Yasser Arafat: he put his reputation

on the line by ordering the arrest of some key Palestinian militants in

the most important radical group Hamas, then declared an end to its

campaign of suicide bombings and other attacks against Israel. Another smaller, but important radical group, Islamic Jihad, might

follow Hamas's lead. But the key to all this is Israel's reaction. If it eases its blockade

of towns in the West Bank, then Yasser Arafat will have something to

show for his efforts.

A Victorian couple is seeking approval to have a baby that has been

genetically matched to their first child in a bid to save the toddler

from a rare blood disease. The in-vitro fertalisation (IVF) technique involves testing a three day

old embryo for inherited genetic disease and ensuring it is a perfect

match. The young child has a disease called franconi-anaemia and without a bone

marrow donation from a sibling is likely to die before the age of 15. The toddler's parents have requested permission to create another child,

but the procedure extends beyond the boundaries of normal IVF technology

where embryos are screened for inherited genetic diseases. Approval must be given for blood stem cells from the placenta to be

transplanted to the critically ill child. Professor Alan Trounson deputy director of the Monash Institute of

Reproduction and Development says the institute is ready to carry out

the procedure. "There is nothing in the law that would prevent that decision being made

by the infertility treatment authority," Professor Trounson said.Professor Trounson does not expect any opposition to the technology. "Who wouldn't think about how you could save a sick child's life. "I would have thought at Christmas time that's exactly what you would

want to do, and that's exactly how you would be supportive of a family

making that kind of decision." The technology has already been used to save a child in the United

States.

Japanese officials say their Coast Guard has sunk an unidentified boat

after an exchange of fire in the East China Sea. The BBC reports the unidentified boat, which resembled a fishing

trawler, was spotted cruising off south-western Japan by a naval

reconnaissance plane. More than 20 Japanese coastguard vessels were mobilised to give chase. Japanese officials said warning shots were fired on several occasions,

but the boat ignored orders to stop and continued heading west towards

China. The officials said crew members appeared on deck brandishing metal pipes

and several hours after the chase began there was an exchange of gunfire

in which two Japanese sailors were injured. The patrol boats then sank the vessel and its 15 man crew was thrown

into the sea. Some reports said it resembled a North Korean spy boat, but there was

also speculation it could have held Chinese smugglers. Meanwhile, the Coast Guard is continuing efforts to recover crew

members. Six of the 15 on board have so far been recovered from the ocean,

although rough weather is said to be hampering rescue efforts.

Tight security is causing headaches for American travellers this

Christmas. The September 11 attacks and a weaker US economy have caused a huge drop

in the number of people flying in America. But at the start of the holiday season many are venturing back into the

skies for the first time and have not been prepared for the increased

security. Queues have stretched for up to half a kilometre as suitcases have been

opened and Christmas presents unwrapped. Even drivers dropping off passengers have had their cars searched as

they approach airport terminals. But airlines are making no apologies and say the tight security controls

will remain.

A high profile church leader says the Governor-General must clarify his

statement defending his handling of alleged child sexual abuse at a

Queensland Anglican school. Prime Minister John Howard is defending Dr Peter Hollingworth against

criticism about the way he dealt with the claims of abuse at a Toowoomba

Anglican school when he was the Anglican Archbishop of Brisbane. Child protection groups still want the Governor-General to resign. The Reverend Tim Costello, who is the president of the Baptist Union of

Australia, says further explanation is needed. "I don't think he should step down at this point but I do think that

having begun the process with an explanation and a clarification which

still leaves some things unclear, there is probably further work on just

clarifying and understanding the import of what happened," he said. Meanwhile, Federal Opposition leader Simon Crean has described Dr

Hollingworth's explanation as insufficient. Mr Crean says there are inconsistancies regarding where Dr Hollingworth

received legal advice and this must be cleared up. "We heard the Prime Minister today saying that the Governor-General

never said he got the legal advice from the Chief Justice, but that begs

the question as to who he got the legal advice from," he said. "I think it's terribly important that we understand where the legal

advice came from and who gave it."

The Chief of the Army, Lieutenant-General Peter Cosgrove, has confirmed

an Australian man linked to Osama bin Laden served with the Australia

Army in East Timor. But he denies reports the man was a member of the the 3rd Battalion,

Royal Australian Regiment. Lieutenant-General Cosgrove says the man was discharged from the Army,

but he says he will not comment on the circumstances of the discharge

out of respect for the man's family. He says the Australian Defence Force can take take no responsibility for

its soldiers once they have left the service. "When you leave your job now will your previous company make any

assessment about your skills and what you might carry to another area?"

he said. "It's unreasonable beyond saying that they are the laws of the land and

I guess people will assess more when any laws of this land have been

breached by any individuals' actions."

Argentina's Government has crumbled after at least 20 people were killed

and hundreds injured in nationwide riots. Argentina's President Fernando de la Rua has resigned and called for a

national unity government with the opposition Peronists. The President's resignation followed 48 hours of rioting across the

country. People took to the streets protesting against the Government's economic

austerity program. Argentina is now on the brink of defaulting on its next debt repayment,

which could be the largest default ever. The opposition parties are reported to have rejected the call for a

national unity government. In Washington, the International Monetary Fund said it would work with

the new cabinet. Government policy has previously ruled out any devaluation of the peso,

fearing a run on the currency and an even greater debt crisis. The Government has also declared a 30-day state of siege in an effort to

restore order.

A pay freeze dispute involving Qantas and its maintenance workers will

remain unresolved over the Christmas period. The parties failed to reach agreement during talks in the Industrial

Relations Commission in Melbourne this morning. More than 2,000 employees have imposed work bans and stoppages in their

campaign for a 3 per cent pay rise. Both the union and Qantas say there will not be flight disruptions.

After months of delays, the company behind plans for a multi-billion

dollar Timor Sea gas development has reached an agreement with East

Timor, to allow the project to go ahead. Six months ago, Phillips Petroleum indefinitely delayed its plan to

build a $1.5 billion pipeline to bring gas from the Bayu-Undan gasfield

to Darwin. The company blamed the delay on its concerns with East Timor's tax

regime. But today Phillips has announced it has reached a deal with East Timor's

new Government which will allow the gas project to go ahead. In a statement the company says it welcomes the tax and fiscal package

offered by East Timor's Council of Ministers, and says it is an historic

day. But a Phillips spokesman says the deal must first be ratified by

Australia, which will share the revenue from the gas project with East

Timor.

An Iraqi defector who has applied for residency in Australia claims he

has information about top secret chemical and biological weapons plants

in Iraq. The man who calls himself Abu Mohammad told ABC Radio he worked for

almost a decade as a chemical engineer on Saddam Hussein's military

plants, before escaping to the west. He says he can provide documents on the manufacture of weapons and

pinpoint the exact locations of secret sites. "New factories are built in place of old factories that [were] bombed

and in another place and there's substituted places to any factory," he

said. The former chief weapons inspector for the United Nations in Iraq,

Richard Butler, told ABC Radio he believes the claims could be true. "I've read a lot of such reports from defectors, from people who've left

Iraq, I can't tell you how many," he said. "You get a feel about them and as I read what he said, I thought my

goodness this has a real ring of authenticity about it. "Just the detail, the names of places, the sorts of stuff he was

discussing, I thought this is true," Mr Butler said.

The Queensland Premier says he accepts full responsibility for a

mentally ill killer being able to flee overseas. Claude John Gabriel stabbed to death a Gold Coast teenager in 1998 and

was receiving treatment for a mental illness. However, he absconded from a Queensland mental health facility earlier

this year and went to live in Melbourne. He is now thought to be in Rome. Premier Peter Beattie says the Queensland Government is seeking legal

advice about whether it can force Gabriel to return. "Why he had a passport is beyond me I have to tell you and I'm pretty

cranky about that, that he had a passport and left the country," he

said. "I'm very unhappy about how this whole matter has been handled and I've

made that very clear."

In the United States, Australian actress Nicole Kidman has been

nominated for two Golden Globe best actor awards for her roles in the

Australian-made musical "Moulin Rouge", and in her new thriller "The

Others". "Moulin Rouge" also is one of two pictures leading the Golden Globe

nominations, with six possible awards. It is vying for best musical or comedy picture of 2002, best actress in

a comedy or musical, best actor in the same category for Ewen McGregor,

best director for Baz Luhrmann, best original score and best original

song. The other film to pick up six nominations is the Ron Howard directed "A

Beautiful Mind" starring Oscar winner Russell Crowe. Crowe was nominated as best actor in a drama for his portrayal of a

troubled math genius in the film.

Australian cricket selectors have made just one change to the squad that

beat South Africa in the opening Test for the second Test beginning in

Melbourne on Boxing Day. As predicted, Queensland pace bowler Andy Bichel replaces spin bowler

Stuart MacGill, who was 12th man for the Adelaide Test. MacGill took five wickets for New South Wales on day one of the tour

match against South Africa at the SCG yesterday, but it was not enough

to sway selectors.

The Prime Minister has thrown his full support behind the

Governor-General, Dr Peter Hollingworth. Child rights campaigners have accused Dr Hollingworth of trying to

cover-up child abuse allegations at a Toowoomba Anglican school when he

was Archbishop of Brisbane. In a statement released earlier this week, the Governor-General said the

allegations were unfounded, but there are continuing calls for Dr

Hollingworth to resign. But Mr Howard says he has confidence in the Governor-General. "I don't have any direct knowledge of this [matter but] I've talked to

him about it and I've tried to form a judgment," Mr Howard said. "The criticism made is that he's involved in a cover-up, well there's no

evidence of that, that's ridiculous."

The United Nations Security Council has authorised a multinational force

to help keep the peace in the Afghan capital of Kabul, with Britain

leading the troops and the United States prepared to rescue them in an

emergency. The 15-member council voted unanimously just two days before a vanguard

of some 250 British soldiers who will be deployed tomorrow. Afghanistan's new interim government, with Hamid Karzai as Prime

Minister, is to be sworn in on the same day. The initial mandate for the new force, called the International Security

Assistance Force (ISAF), is for six months, subject to renewal and is

under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, which allows the use of force. The contingents are to help guard government buildings to ensure the new

Afghan interim government has a chance to end 22 years of warfare. But the resolution does not give any troop numbers, which Britain

estimates could eventually reach 5,000 with NATO members France, Turkey,

Italy, Canada, Spain and possibly Germany among the early arrivals. The US military will be in overall charge in case of a conflict and

would help rescue the new troops in an emergency. The new force was established in principle for Kabul and its environs as

part of a UN-brokered landmark accord, signed on December 5 in Bonn,

Germany, among anti-Taliban Afghan groups. The agreement set up an interim government, to be followed by a

transitional government and elections called for in two years. Foreign Minister Alexander Downer says despite an offer of troops, it

seems likely Australian forces will not be needed for peacekeeping

duties in Afghanistan.

US President George W Bush has marked the 100th day of the campaign

against terrorism by calling on his allies to freeze the assets of two

non-US organisations suspected of supporting terrorism. One of the groups is based in Kashmir, the other is alleged to have

helped Al Qaeda develop nuclear weapons. President Bush says a former scientist at Pakistan's atomic program had

established a group called UTN, after assisting Osama bin Laden's

network develop a nuclear bomb. "UTN claims to serve the hungry and needy of Afghanistan, but it was the

UTN that provided information about nuclear weapons to Al Qaeda," he

said. He also linked a Kashmiri group to the attack on the Indian Parliament

last week. "LAT is an extremist group based in Kashmir and is a stateless sponsor

of terrorism," he said. Mr Bush says the international financial crackdown has frozen $130

million in terrorist assets.

The death toll in Argentina's food riots has risen to 20. Local media reports say four more people died this morning in clashes

between police and protesters near the presidential palace in the

capital, Buenos Aires. President Fernando de la Rua has called on the opposition to take part

in a government of national unity and apparently will resign if it does

not. Looting and rioting has generally given way to more peaceful

demonstrations against the faltering government blamed for a 43-month

recession. Heavily armed police using powers under a 30-day state of siege decree

are attempting to prevent large public gatherings, but union leaders say

workers and the unemployed will not stop until the government is removed

and living standards restored. With Argentina's discredited economy minister now gone, the Government

hopes to approve a new budget acceptable to the International Monetary

Fund (IMF) to avoid default on the $150 billion foreign debt. The presidents of neighbouring Brazil and Chile say they fear the social

unrest could infect their own nations unless Argentina and its leaders

can resolve the crisis quickly.

The Woomera Detention Centre in outback South Australia has experienced

its first quiet night this week since Sunday. It seems the Government's decision to put a freeze on the processing of

visa applications is working. From outside the centre, it appeared there were no major incidents at

the facility all day yesterday and no unrest overnight. At about 1:00am (ACDT) this morning a minibus load of security officers

left the centre and extra police resources brought into the town in

recent days were stood down. The Immigration Department claims the damage bill from the arson attacks

and vandalism at the centre over the past month has reached $2 million. A spokeswoman has rejected claims that 950 detainees at the Woomera

centre are to be relocated to Port Augusta's El Alamein centre next

month saying there is room for another 1,000 people at Woomera.

The private business sector has to comply with national privacy laws

from today which force them to implement new codes for the handling of

personal information. The Government and the credit sectors are already obliged to protect

private data, but this is the first time the same rules have been

applied to the private sector. The new laws are about consent, knowledge about data use, accuracy and

security. In health, data must only be used for the purpose it is taken, for

example treatment. The Federal Privacy Commissioner, Malcolm Crompton, says hospitals and

doctors collecting health information now have to ask for consent. "They're not in a position any more of being able to give that

information out in an identifiable form to research organisations or to

pharmaceutical companies and probably most important of all, we now have

a right of access to that information, we can now go in and ask for our

medical record and we have the right to see it," he said. The laws also apply to companies running competitions who collect names

and details, as they will have to state whether the data is intended for

marketing. Mr Crompton says a large culture change is happening, but it is backed

by his enforcement powers. "Often we're able to broker a solution without having to use the powers

very strongly, but I think both consumers and organisations should rest

assured that we will use the powers under the act if we need to do so. "But there's very clear evidence that in the vast majority of

circumstances we wont have to," he said.

Dozens of people were injured, some seriously, and others were trapped

after a roof collapsed at a South African shopping centre, burying some

children on a skating rink, witnesses and police said. Initial reports spoke of up to 50 people trapped at the Kolonnade

shopping centre, in the north of the capital, but Pretoria emergency

spokesman Johan Pieterse later said police had rescued four people from

the rubble and could not immediately locate any more. "Police and police dogs are still inside but can't find anyone else just

now," he added. By 6:00pm local time (3:00am AEDT), two hours after the collapse, 21

injured people, mostly adults, had been taken to hospitals around the

city by ambulance or helicopter, Mr Pieterse said. "Most of those injured were those standing at the glass wall watching

people ice skate," he added. Some of the injured included children skating on the ice rink, who were

partially buried in rubble when the roof gave way, witnesses said. Some 100 square metres of roofing were believed to have collapsed. A new floor had recently been added to the shopping mall, above the

rink, and "the roof had leaked, but according to us everything was

fine," ice rink manager Brian Bellis told the AFP news agency. There was "a lot of dust and smoke and then people were just running and

screaming, running away from where it happened," the South African

Broadcasting Corporation radio quoted one witness as saying. Several people, including young children, were brought out on stretchers

while others were helicoptered to hospital. About 100 police and soldiers cordoned off the area. One bystander, Marius duPlessis, said he was searching for his

20-year-old son who had been working at the centre. "His car is there, but he is nowhere to be found. He is not on the

casualty list, so I'm just praying that he's not inside," he said.

Zimbabwe has been given five weeks to stop the political violence and

invasions of white-owned farms or face possible suspension from the

Commonwealth. A meeting in London of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group has

listed Zimbabwe - the first step ahead of what could mean much tougher

action. Under pressure from Australia and the United Kingdom, the issue of

Zimbabwe's consistent breach of democratic principles under the Harare

declaration is finally and formally on the table. The Commonwealth group is waiting for a response from Zimbabwe to

request to allow observers for the upcoming election. Australia's Foreign Minister Alexander Downer says if there is not a

substantial change in Zimbabwe significant sanctions are possible. "[The] Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group does have a number of

weapons available to it and one of them is suspension," he said. At the same time, Fiji's suspension was lifted after its return to

democracy.

A rare calm in the Palestinian territories has been shattered with the

death of a Palestinian, killed in a firefight with Israeli forces as

they moved back into a suburb of Nablus that they had left just hours

earlier. Tanks and armoured cars moved into an autonomous Palestinian area of

west Nablus that they had quit in the morning, although the army said

the movement had been a "tactical change" and not an official

withdrawal. Tanks also returned to a West Bank village, evacuated hours earlier. The withdrawal had been seen as a sign that the security situation had

improved slightly after a dramatic drop in violence following

Palestinian leader, Yasser Arafat's peace call on Sunday. But the clashes and the killing, the first since Monday, ruptured the

peace. Mr Arafat, apparently getting tough on Islamic extremists defying his

call for a cease-fire with Israel, sent his police in the pre-dawn hours

today to arrest a senior official of the radical Islamic group, Hamas,

in Gaza City. Seven people were injured when the police clashed with armed protesters

as they tried to arrest Abdel Aziz al-Rantissi. Weeks of knife-edge tensions had scaled down late yesterday as Israeli

and Palestinian officials held their first joint security meeting since

US peace envoy Anthony Zinni was recalled to Washington. The Palestinians called the meeting a "failure", but Israeli officials

said it had gone well. They moved their forces out of west Nablus and the West Bank village of

At Tira and Beitunya, but later sent them back in. No forces returned to Beitunya, however. The areas had been stormed after Hamas suicide bombers killed 26 people

in Jerusalem and Haifa at the beginning of the month.

The owner of a nudist resort in South Australia's Riverland is expecting

hundreds of people from across Australia to participate in his planned

mass nude photo shoot. Following in the footsteps of American Spencer Tunick, who has

photographed large groups of people in the nude around the world,

Pelican Point Nudist Resort owner, Rex Bakes, wants to do the same at

his Lake Bonney resort on January 2. Mr Bakes says there has been a lot of interest so far. "I've spoken to people in New South Wales and Victoria and in South

Australia so far and we even had a priest and his wife coming from Perth

until today, but unfortunately the poor man has had a heart attack," he

said. "It has received a lot of interest from all around the place, but it's

all about people turning up on the day."

Defence Minister Robert Hill has provided further details of two

Australian men believed to have trained with the Al Qaeda terrorist

network in Afghanistan. A 25-year-old man thought to have entered Afghanistan at the beginning

of August has previously served with the Australian Army. Senator Hill says the Government believes the man suffered from

depression and retired from the defence force. The Government says a 28-year-old man left Australia in March, but it is

not yet known when he entered Afghanistan. The man has no record of military service in Australia. Authorities are continuing investigations into the men and their

whereabouts but say neither man entered Afghanistan with David Hicks,

who is also accused of fighting alongside the Taliban.

Afghanistan's interim government has agreed to accept a 3,000-strong

multinational force for six months as the United Nations geared up for

vote authorising the force today. Disagreements between US allies over defining the mandate of the force

and its relationship with the US military operation in Afghanistan had

held up a vote on the resolution for days. But UN diplomats said last night a resolution would be adopted by the

15-member Security Council today, or by early tomorrow at the latest. In Kabul, Mohammad Qasim Fahim, defence minister in the interim

administration to be inaugurated on Saturday, announced the agreement on

the security force yesterday after talks with British military

representatives. He said the peacekeepers would only be allowed to stay for six months,

leaving when the six-month mandate of the interim administration led by

Hamid Karzai comes to an end. After six months, a "Loya Jirga" assembly of Afghan elders is to appoint

a new transitional government that will lead Afghanistan into elections. The UN draft resolution defines the role of the peacekeeping as

assisting the interim authority with "the maintenance of security in

Kabul and its surrounding areas, so that the Afghan interim Authority as

well as the personnel of the United Nations can operate in a secure

environment".

The Opposition leader, Simon Crean, says a child abuse scandal in

Brisbane has damaged the Office of the Governor-General and its

incumbent Dr Peter Hollingworth. Child advocates have called on Dr Hollingworth to step down as

Governor-General, saying he did not do enough to prevent abuse of

children in an Anglican school when he was Archbishop of Brisbane. Mr Crean says he is not calling on Dr Hollingworth to resign but he says

there are still unanswered questions. "I think it has tarnished the Office of the Governor-General, the fact

that it took so long for this statement to come out," he said. "Many people have been calling for it, me included. "I think if we are to avoid further damage to the office, we need to

clear it up completely." Brisbane's Lord Mayor says the Governor-General's explanation of his

handling of child sex abuse allegations at a Queensland school raises

more questions than it answers. Jim Soorley, who is a former Catholic priest, says the explanation does

not wash. "Within the Christian tradition, bishops are regarded as shepherds," he

said. "It's very clear that he was not a good shepherd and there are serious

consequences for that. "I think his actions are not the actions of a good shepherd and I think

there are still questions to be answered."

It has been confirmed two asylum seekers at the Woomera Detention Centre

have mutilated themselves during the current unrest. The department has confirmed two asylum seekers harmed themselves

yesterday. An ambulance was seen entering and leaving the facility at high speed

but the director of nursing at Woomera hospital says no one from the

detention centre has been admitted there since Monday night. Unrest continued at the facility overnight with a collective voice of

detainees chanting "visa". The Immigration Department has confirmed at least 50 to 60 detainees

breached compound fencing into a prohibited zone in the facility

overnight. Twenty-two buildings have been destroyed or damaged by fire in three

days. It is thought the cooler temperatures, expected in Woomera today, may

lead to heightened daytime detainee activity. South Australian police are expected to reveal details soon of their

operations after three days of detainee riots. Meanwhile, a coalition of Australian religious leaders is calling for a

greater intake of refugees. Leaders from Christian, Islamic and Jewish communities are meeting in

Melbourne in response to what they say is a detention system out of step

with religious values. The Reverend Tim Costello says it is important for Christians to

remember Jesus was a refugee. He says Australians need to look beyond the small number of trouble

makers at the Woomera Centre. "If the Taliban was such an evil government for us to go to war against

and risk our boys dying, then surely those fleeing that government

deserve our compassion," he said.

Hamas militants have fought gun battles with Palestinian security forces

in the Gaza Strip, trying to arrest one of the Islamic group's senior

political leaders. Reports say the fight erupted in the Gaza Strip after dozens of Hamas

members surrounded the home of Abdel-Aziz al-Rantissi when Palestinian

police arrived to detain him. The Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, under international pressure to

crack down on militants after a wave of suicide bombings in Israel in

the past month, has outlawed the military wings of Hamas and other

groups and arrested dozens of militants.

Argentina's Economy Minister Domingo Cavallo is reported to have

resigned in the face of mounting unrest over the country's crumbling

economy. The reports in a number of local media outlets could not be officially

confirmed. The news comes as police used teargas to disperse tens of thousands of

people who had massed near the presidential palace in Buenos Aires and

in other parts of the city to protest against the declaration of a state

of emergency. It was declared after mounting popular discontent and widespread looting

in the past few days with people over the state of the economy, which

has been in recession for four years.

The Australian Transport Safety Bureau has called for pilots to be

better trained on the risks of air turbulence. It is a response to helicopter crash last August which claimed the life

of media personality Shirley Strachan. Mr Strachan was on a solo navigation training flight on August 29 when

he crashed into Mt Archer on Queensland's Sunshine Coast. Witnesses told of seeing Mr Strachan apparently struggling to control

his aircraft just prior to the crash. Safety bureau director Alan Stray says the helicopter was struck by

severe air turbulence, a phenomena known as a mountain wave. It caused one of the helicopter rotors to flap and strike the tail boom. While reluctant to attribute blame, Mr Stray says mountain waves are not

uncommon and Mr Strachan could have been better advised of local weather

conditions prior to the flight. He says the accident is a wake up call to flight trainers to ensure

students are fully educated on the dangers of weather phenomena. The helicopter training company which owned the aircraft Mr Strachan

died in has declined to comment in detail on the findings. Blue Tongue Helicopters owner, Helen Gillies, says the company respects

the findings of the Australian Transport Safety Bureau. Mrs Gillies says the investigation was a thorough one, but says that the

incident is still too painful to discuss.

The former chief financial officer of retailer Harris Scarfe will face

court on 32 charges following inquiries by the Australian Securities and

Investment Commission (ASIC). The charges to be faced by Alan Hodgson from Beaumont in Adelaide's

eastern suburbs, include 18 counts of acting dishonestly as an officer

of Harris Scarfe, six counts of acting dishonestly as an employee of the

company and eight counts of giving false information to the Australian

Stock Exchange. The matter has been brought by the Commonwealth Director of Public

Prosecutions following ASIC's investigation of the company. The original Harris Scarfe business went into receivership in April with

debts of about $160 million. A management buyout by executives not connected with the original

company was finalised last month. The buyout saw the closure of 12 stores around Australia and the

retention of 23 others in South Australia, Victoria and Tasmania.

The coroner investigating the death of a race marshal at the 2001

Australian Formula One Grand Prix in Melbourne, has indicated he will

not stand in the way of next year's race. On the last day of hearings into the death of race marshall Graham

Beveridge, the Grand Prix Corporation's legal team sought judicial

assurance next year's event would be able to go ahead. Coroner Graeme Johnston said his recommendations were unlikely to alter

the corporation's plans for the 2002 race and they would include nothing

that could not reasonably be dealt with before the forthcoming race. Ross Ray QC, representing the Grand Prix Corporation and the Australian

Confederation of Motor Sports, outlined plans to increase the height of

debris fences and seek safety assessments from independent experts.

Up to 5,000 soldiers will be deployed in Afghanistan later this month as

an international force to provide security for the country's interim

government, which is scheduled to take power this weekend. British Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon says up to 1,500 British troops

will lead the force, which will begin its deployment from December 28. Named the International Security Assistance Force, it will be based in

the capital, Kabul, and it is expected to be there for at least three

months. Announcing the British deployment, Mr Hoon said with the current

tensions in Afghanistan, it will be a difficult and sometimes dangerous

mission. An advance unit of 100 British marines will be in the country by the

weekend with the United Nations expected to mandate the force before

then. Australian involvement in the peacekeeping operation in Afghanistan is

to be determined by Britain. Australia has offered to take part in the force, but British defence

sources have not revealed the nature of Canberra's offer. The sources say Britain has received too many offers for light infantry,

but not enough for engineering, mine-clearing, and other logistical

needs. Meanwhile, Afghan forces have begun handing over captured Al Qaeda

fighters to a new interrogation centre at the US military base of Camp

Rhino in southern Afghanistan. The numbers are likely to swell as the hunt continues for Al Qaeda

loyalists fleeing toward Pakistan. Fifteen foreign fighters, captured near the northern city of

Mazar-e-Sharif, have now been transferred to the interrogation centre at

the US marine base outside Kandahar. Another five prisoners, including the Australian, David Hicks, are being

held offshore on a US military ship. Anti-Taliban forces are continuing search for some 500 Al Qaeda

fighters, believed to be still at large in the mountains around Tora

Bora near the Pakistan border. Local commanders said they had captured 40 foreign fighters over the

past few days and were holding them at the nearby city of Jalalabad,

pending orders from Kabul. A B-52 bomber circled Tora Bora throughout the morning, but no air

strikes were launched.

After the torching of more than 20 buildings over the past three days,

the situation at the Woomera Detention Centre overnight appeared

relatively calm. There was, however, tension inside the South Australian facility, with

up to 50 detainees breaking into a prohibited zone. The group became a problem for staff after breaching a fence within the

centre. At one point, staff considered using water cannon to control the

detainees. It is not known if they actually resorted to any tough action but a

group of men wearing riot gear, possibly Star Force police officers

brought in on standby, could be seen in one of the compounds. Late yesterday, government authorities confirmed that two detainees had

committed acts of self harm. One of them needed stitches and is believed to have been taken away in

an ambulance. No other details have been released.

Anti-child abuse groups are calling on Australia's Governor-General to

resign or explain to a full Senate inquiry how he handled claims of

alleged sexual abuse at a Queensland Anglican school. Dr Peter Hollingworth has released a statement responding to claims he

failed to act on abuse at the Toowoomba school in 1990 when he was the

Anglican Archbishop. In a three-page statement, Dr Hollingworth says he could no longer stand

by and allow completely unfounded allegations to be made about him. He says at the time of the alleged abuse, legal obligations played

heavily in his decision not to intervene personally. The Governor-General says he relied on advice from church officials at

the time, who told him not to intervene because it would jeopardise the

church's insurance policy. Hetty Johnston, from the People's Alliance Against Child Sexual Abuse,

says the Governor Generals version of events is hard to believe. "If Dr Hollingworth denies these allegations and refutes them, the

voracity of those people who have made these allegations against him

need to be tested in a Senate inquiry because there is a lot evidence

that disputes the voracity of the statements made by Dr Hollingworth,"

Ms Johnston said. Queensland Premier Peter Beattie says while the Governor-General has

faced serious criticism about his sensitivity in the situation, legal

and insurance considerations are a sad reality. "The Governor-General's comment that the issue would have been

approached differently and better, now might seem hollow to those

involved, but he must be given credit now for having issued [a]

statement. "I am sure that armed with the wisdom of hindsight, the issue would have

been better handled," Mr Beattie said.

The Flanders graveyard of thousands of Australian World War I soldiers

in Belgium could be overrun by a motorway. Flemish authorities are considering a new bypass through the heart of

the Pilkem Ridge battlefield, the site of the opening infantry campaign

of the Third Battle of Ypres from July to November 1917, in which 9,200

Australian servicemen lost their lives. Five thousand of the Australians are accounted for, but if the proposed

route gets the go ahead, many of the thousands still missing will be

buried under bitumen and heavy traffic. The proposed route would split the battlefield in two, and also run

close to about a dozen war cemeteries in Belgium maintained by the

Commonwealth War Graves Commission. The route of the motorway is to be decided early next year.

Federal Labor MP Carmen Lawrence says there is a lot of momentum within

the party for the ALP to change its policy on asylum seekers. Dr Lawrence says maintaining the policy will lose the sympathy of some

sections of the community who have thought very carefully about the

issues. She says it will also annoy others who supported the Coalition's stance

and see the ALP as compromised. The Member for Fremantle says Labor did not suffer in the polls after it

differentiated itself from the Coalition in 1996 and 1998. "We committed to native title, we refused the extinguishment options

that Howard put forward," she said. "We indicated our willingness to give an official apology on behalf of

the nation to the Stolen Generations and we didn't lose a single vote,

in fact we came the nearest to winning an election after having been

nearly obliterated in 1996."

A senior Hamas official has said the radical Palestinian movement has

decided to stop suicide bombings against Israel. He told the Agence France Presse news agency that Hamas had taken an

internal decision to end what it calls "martyrdom operations", but it

was not going to make an official declaration. The official refused to say what tactics the radical group would use in

its avowed struggle to end the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land,

or if it would revert to grisly attacks if Israel carries out more

"targeted" killings, which have taken a heavy toll on Hamas operatives. "We can't predict anything," the official said. An official from Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat's Fatah movement also

said there had been a meeting of various Palestinian factions in the

West Bank on Wednesday and that Hamas had informed them they were

halting their operations. The suicide attacks triggered a massive Israeli armed response and

sweeping international condemnation. The Fatah official, who likewise asked to remain anonymous, said Hamas

had said it did not want to damage Palestinian national unity by

carrying on with such operations. Hamas suicide bombers blew themselves up in Jerusalem and Haifa, in

northern Israel, at the beginning of this month, killing 26 people and

provoking the heaviest Israeli air raids against Mr Arafat's

administration to date. Israel's Prime Minister Ariel Sharon severed all ties with Mr Arafat

last week after another Hamas attack, which used gunmen and roadside

explosives rather than suicide bombings. Mr Arafat in turn ordered the closure of dozens of Hamas offices and has

started arresting its militants. A senior Israeli Defence official was quoted by army radio on Tuesday as

saying Hamas had shifted the focus in its guerrilla war against Israel,

and now planned to attack strategic targets rather than "soft" ones,

such as public buses or crowded shopping areas. The defence source said the focus will be on attacking strategic

buildings and senior Israeli officials.

Foreign Minister Alexander Downer says the Commonwealth's democracy

watchdog should put Zimbabwe formally on its agenda in the first step to

possible suspension from the organisation. Mr Downer says ministers from the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group

(CMAG) should review whether the reported violence and intimidation in

Zimbabwe means it has violated the Commonwealth's code of good

governance. CMAG ministers from Australia, Bangladesh, Barbados, Botswana, Britain,

Canada, Malaysia and Nigeria will meet in London tomorrow for talks on

Zimbabwe. In recent meetings, they have suspended both Fiji and Pakistan following

military coups. However, their talks on the violent campaign of farm occupations in

Zimbabwe have been restricted to informal discussions, as President

Robert Mugabe's government holds power through recognised elections. Mr Downer also says the Commonwealth ministers should maintain pressure

on President Mugabe to allow international observers to oversee

presidential elections next March.

Legal abortion in Tasmania is one step closer with the lower house of

Parliament voting to change the state's abortion laws. After a marathon 16-hour debate, the House of Assembly this morning

passed by 15 votes to eight, a Private Member's Bill which would allow

medically sanctioned abortions. Debate on the bill began at 11:30am AEDT yesterday and at 5:00am today

Speaker Michael Polley declared a result. Just before 10:00pm, the Deputy Premier Paul Lennon, Police Minister

David Llewellyn and Labor backbencher Steven Kons abstained from voting

on the bill's second reading. Then came seven hours of debate on proposed amendments calling for

further expert opinion, post procedure counselling, cooling off periods

and calls to stop the bill being retrospective. But apart from an amendment to ensure a specialist assessment, and

written consent for the procedure, the bill passed unchanged. The Legislative Council will begin debate on the bill at 9:00am today.

England batsman Michael Vaughan has become just the seventh player in

the history of Test cricket to be given out handling the ball. Vaughan was on 64 when he flicked the ball with his hand towards a

fielder on the first day of the third and final Test against India at

Bangalore. The Englishmen says he was disappointed in the appeal by the Indians,

which he believes was not in the spirit of the game. "In the laws, I shouldn't have done it, but I thought I was just helping

out the fielders," he said. "I feel a bit disappointed on their behalf, one of their players

appealed, I'm not too sure who it was, but a bit disappointed really." England finished the opening day at 6 for 255. Mark Ramprakash was out for 58, he and Vaughan adding 113 for the fourth

wicket after England was struggling at 3 for 93.

Staff at the Woomera Detention Centre are still on red alert as a result

of continuing disturbances involving detainees. A further eight buildings were set on fire overnight and a spokesman for

Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock says damage from fires at the

facility over the past month is now estimated at $2 million. He says six detention officers were injured during last night's

disturbance, out of which four have returned to work. He says damage to the buildings ranged from minor to extensive. It is understood some detainees had helped staff extinguish fires last

night. The spokesman says up to 300 detainees had tried to break through the

main fence during last night's disturbance and tear gas was used to

prevent any escape.

Australian authorities are to be granted access to David Hicks, arrested

by the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan. The Attorney-General, Daryl Williams, says the 26-year-old from South

Australia is still being held in custody by the United States aboard the

USS Peleliu in the Arabian Sea. Mr Williams says the suspected Al Qaeda fighter will interrogated by a

team of ASIO and Federal Police officers. "What is proposed is that he will be interrogated by an ASIO/AFP team,"

he said. "He was captured by the Northern Alliance team in a conflict situation. "He's held in military custody and whatever is the appropriate practice

in that context will be followed," Mr Williams said. "I do not imagine that he will be offered legal representation in these

present circumstances."

The Pentagon says the US military is continuing to search caves in the

Tora Bora region, in eastern Afghanistan, even though local Afghan

forces have pulled out. US officials say they are still unsure whether suspected terrorist

mastermind Osama bin Laden is in the region. The United States Government says it is still no closer to finding bin

Laden and that for now, the US mission will stay focused in Tora Bora,

even though local anti-Taliban fighters have pulled out, because they

believe there are no Al Qaeda members left. Deputy Defence Secretary Paul Wolfowitz has discussed options for the

military campaign beyond Afghanistan. "I think the places that we're going to be looking at immediately beyond

Afghanistan first and foremost, those places where we think senior Al

Qaeda might be trying to escape to," Mr Wolfowitz said. US forces have now captured 15 prisoners, but are not receiving useful

information from them. In Afghanistan, local tribal leaders now believe bin Laden will not be

captured. Mujaheddin returning from the mountains, say they have seen no Al Qaeda

fighters and doubt they will find bin Laden. Hundreds of anti-Taliban troops are still scouring the hilltops for bin

Laden loyalists, believed to be fleeing towards Pakistan. Meanwhile, the UN Security Council is still debating key issues in a

resolution authorising a multinational force to help provide security in

Afghanistan, just days before an interim government is scheduled to take

power in the country. Around 100 British Royal Marine commandos are expected in Kabul this

weekend to spearhead the force, but local leaders are still haggling

over the total number of peacekeepers and the UN is trying to define

their mandate. Britain will be leading the force, with contributions expected from

several countries including Australia.

The Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA) says it has already warned

operators of piston-engined aircraft of the potential dangers of running

engines with an overly lean fuel mixture. The recommendation is a key feature of the Transport Safety Bureau's

main report into last year's fatal Whyalla Airlines crash in South

Australia's Spencer Gulf. The Australian Transport Safety Bureau today released its report into

the crash, which killed eight people in May last year. The report has ruled out pilot error, saying mechanical failures in both

engines forced the pilot of the plane to ditch the aircraft. The Civil Aviation Safety Authority says it is already acting on four

safety improvement recommendations, with further regulation changes due

before the end of the year. The authority says it has also begun to encourage conservative fuel

leaning. Other recommendations relating to operating and maintenance procedures

for high powered piston engines and procedures for ditching aircraft are

still to be investigated by CASA, before a formal response is released. Meanwhile, the husband of crash victim, Teresa Pawlik, says he is yet to

digest the full report, but is relieved it has been completed. Wal Pawlik says he and his family are still coming to terms with the

loss. "You carry on don't you? I think it's been much more difficult for my

daughters. That's about all I can say on that," he said.

The Northern Territory's coroner has found that an Aboriginal boy who

died in custody nearly two years ago should not have to be in detention. In February last year, the teenager died in hospital from compression of

the neck after hanging himself in the Don Dale Juvenile Detention

Centre. In his report, the coroner, Dick Wallace, said the 15-year-old was a

lonely and negelected orphan who had been offending since he was 13. In January last year, the teenager was given a mandatory 28-day sentence

for stealing stationery. However, the coroner said the boy had been eligible to undertake a

diversionary program of victim-offender conferencing instead of being

sent to detention. The court had not considered that option and neither the prosecutor nor

the boy's lawyer had told the magistrate there was an alternative to a

custodial sentence.

Ansett's administrators are confident of paying out the entitlements of

almost 5,000 workers who opted for redundancy when the airline collapsed

last September. About 4,000 workers have been paid their entitlements overnight and it

is expected another 800 will be paid out by the end of the week. Administrator Mark Mentha says Ansett's new owners will now decide how

many of the remaining employees will be offered jobs, with the remainder

to be paid redundancy packages next year. He says it was always hoped the money would be handed over before

Christmas as some workers had been without payment for up to 12 weeks. "We would've preferred these payments to have been made a month ago but

just the difficulty, in terms of the sheer size of the redundancy

programs being undertaken at Ansett and difficulties in negotiation that

have prevailed and the complexity of the Federal Government scheme and

getting it through the Federal Court has certainly made life difficult,

but we're very pleased that the money started flowing yesterday," Mr

Mentha said.

The secretary general of the Law Council, Michael Lavarch, says the

Government's proposed new ASIO laws need guarantees to protect the

rights of individuals. The Federal Government wants to give officers the power to detain

suspects for 48 hours without legal representation. ASIO already has the power to jail people for up to five years if they

refuse to answer questions. Mr Lavarch, a former Labor attorney-general, says he is concerned ASIO

could use the laws to detain people indefinitely. "The government's yet to make its case - it's a very draconian power and

if it is required in order to protect public safety, it's absolutely

essential that there be important safeguards," he said.

The HIH Royal Commission has heard evidence that there were doubts about

the company's ability to pay all of its creditors three months before

its collapse. A partner for accountancy firm Ernst and Young, John Gibbons, says he

and his colleague, Kim Smith, attended a meeting with HIH on November

28. Mr Gibbons has told the commission, HIH chairman Ray Williams and

finance director Dominic Federa were at that meeting. Mr Gibbons said Mr Smith noted that if HIH was wound up on that date

there would be a clear shortage of assets to pay creditors. He says the directors were told it was highly likely all creditors would

not receive 100 per cent returns. The commission has also heard that the accountancy firm told the

directors that even with HIH's restructuring plans there was potential

for insolvency.

Australian cricket captain Steve Waugh has supported fast bowler Brett

Lee after criticism of his intimidatory bowling to the South African

tailenders in the first Test in Adelaide. Earlier this month, Lee was fined for giving New Zealand tailender Shane

Bond an unsportsmanlike send-off during the third Test in Perth. Waugh says tailenders should not be protected from short-pitched

bowling. "These days you're earning big money, you've got a responsibility to

learn how to bat," he said. "I mean there's no times like 20 years ago when it was not professional

and sort of a bowlers' code. "These days you're professional, our batsmen work very hard at their

batting and expect other tailenders to do likewise." Meanwhile, Waugh says his side will need to guard against complacency

after convincingly winning the first Test by 246 runs. Waugh says despite the dominance of his side in the first Test, South

Africa can never be taken lightly. "It's only one Test match out of three, or six whichever way you want to

look at it, so there's a lot of work to go," he said. "But it's nice to win the first battle definitely, it gives us a lot of

confidence going into Melbourne, you know, the big crowd there, we love

playing in front of the Boxing Day crowd, so that will be to our

advantage as well." South Africa begins a four-day match against New South Wales in Sydney

on Thursday in the lead up to the Boxing Day Test. Veteran fast bowler Allan Donald will play in the warm-up match and is

likely to take his place in the team for the second Test. South African captain Shaun Pollock expects a much better performance

from his side in the Melbourne Test. "We still believe that we didn't play to our full potential, so if we

can improve on our aspects...the output we put out on the field will be

a lot better and we still believe we have a side that is good enough to

beat Australia on our day," he said.

Fresh palls of smoke are billowing from the Woomera Detention Centre in

South Australia's far north. Trouble at the centre has entered day three, with a plume of smoke 20

metres high into the air and up to 100 metres across the compound this

morning. Thirteen buildings were either destroyed or damaged by fire on Monday

night. Overnight fires and rioting appeared to have abated just after midnight

local time. Three fire crews, one ambulance and several police have attended the

scene. A water cannon and three tear-gas canisters were used to subdue

detainees, who throughout the night were thought to be chanting "visa". It is not known whether anyone has been injured or arrested overnight. The acting Immigration Minister, Daryl Williams, says the Government is

not losing control of Woomera. He has told Channel Nine, vandalism is not going to get visas for the

detainees. "The detainees, who have been provided with very good facilities and who

to our knowledge have absolutely no complaint about the facilities

there, are engaging in this campaign of damaging and destroying

buildings in order to put pressure on the Australian authorities to

grant them a visa," he said. There is a plea for so-called high-risk detainees to be separated from

the rest of the population ath the Woomera Detention Centre in the wake

of continued disturbances there. South Australian Labor MP Lyn Breuer, whose electorate covers Woomera,

says higher risk detainees must be separated from women and children at

the centre. "I think that will probably have to be the ultimate solution, we will

have to send high risk detainees to other areas," she said. "We can't keep them in an environment where there are young children

there...it's all a very nasty situation and I have particular concerns

for the people that are guarding them as well, because one of them is

going to get hurt very badly, very soon."

The Federal Government has called on Labor not to delay its plans to

increase the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation's (ASIO)

powers to combat terrorism. Labor wants a parliamentary inquiry to be set up to examine proposals to

significantly increase ASIO's powers to detain and interrogate suspects. Under proposed legislation to go before Parliament next year, ASIO would

have the power to detain suspects for up to 48 hours without charge and

legal representation. If the Opposition's push for an investigation is successful, that could

postpone debate on the bill for up to several months. But Labor's spokesman on Home Affairs, John Faulkner, says the

Opposition does not want to unnecessarily delay the proposed

legislation. "We want to make sure that it is dealt with quickly by the Parliament

but we also want to make sure that these important and unprecedented new

powers for ASIO get the most thorough public examination and airing

that's possible," he said. Attorney-General Daryl Williams says the Government is relying on Labor

not to obstruct the bill's passage. "We're looking to Labor's support for this," he said. "Labor has supported the counter terrorism proposals we put forward and

we believe that this is an appropriate one for them to support as well." Meanwhile, the Federal Government is under pressure to release more

details about plans to place armed security officers on domestic

flights. The Police Federation and unions are criticising the Government's

handling of security at Australia's airports. The Federal Government says armed air marshals will be on all domestic

flights by Christmas, a move which has the Police Federation concerned. Chief executive Mark Burgess there are not enough details. "We know very little about what is proposed, we know virtually nothing

about the training that these people will be afforded," he said. Warren Bennett, from the Board of Airline Representatives, says he

understands why the plans are being put in place, but says airlines are

wary of the move. "It's always a bit of a concern to the captain that there would be

anyone with some sort of weapon on the plane," he said. Unions are also worried, saying workers at airports are not being given

adequate training to cope with upgraded security measures after the

terrorist attacks of September 11.

The Pentagon says the US military is continuing to search caves in the

Tora Bora region, in eastern Afghanistan, even though local Afghan

forces have pulled out. US officials say they are still unsure whether suspected terrorist

mastermind Osama bin Laden is in the region. The United States Government says it is still no closer to finding bin

Laden and that for now, the US mission will stay focused in Tora Bora,

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Laden loyalists, believed to be fleeing towards Pakistan. Meanwhile, the UN Security Council is still debating key issues in a

resolution authorising a multinational force to help provide security in

Afghanistan, just days before an interim government is scheduled to take

power in the country. Around 100 British Royal Marine commandos are expected in Kabul this

weekend to spearhead the force, but local leaders are still haggling

over the total number of peacekeepers and the UN is trying to define

their mandate. Britain will be leading the force, with contributions expected from

several countries including Australia. But the UN's deputy envoy to Afghanistan, Ahmed Fawzi, says he is not

concerned about the administrative delays. "This is not something we can push through, it's not instant coffee and

water," he said. "You have to go through all the details and it's a very complex

operation to put together a force like this. "Yes, it was what we had in mind, yes, these are exceptional

circumstances, yes, we need to move extremely fast in order to provide

the environment necessary for the new interim administration to work in

secure circumstances," Mr Fawzi said. In Brussels, the US Defence Secretary, Donald Rumsfeld, has told NATO

allies to prepare for the threat of nuclear, chemical and biological

attacks on their biggest cities. He has told a NATO defence ministers' meeting that the September 11

attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon may be a preview of

what is to come, if they do not make adequate preparations. "The nexus between states with weapons of mass destruction and terrorist

networks raises the danger that September the 11th could be a preview of

what could come, if the enemies of freedom gain ability to strike our

nations with weapons of increasingly greater power," Mr Rumsfeld said. The Federal Government says Australian authorities may soon have access

to suspected Taliban fighter David Hicks. The 27-year-old is on board the USS Peleliu in the Indian Ocean. Attorney-General Daryl Williams has told Channel Nine it is still not

known whether he will be brought back to Australia after interrogation. He says that depends on what information Australian officials receive.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has described economic conditions

in Australia as "reasonably robust", in the release of its latest world

economic outlook. The IMF says prospects globally remain subject to considerable

uncertainty, but a number of factors should help support recovery in

2002, including the stimulus still in the pipeline from policy decisions

by central banks and governments around the world. A sharp weakening in oil prices should also contribute. The IMF says growth in Australia is expected to reach 3.3 per cent in

2002 - stronger than this year, but half a percentage point lower than

projected in its October outlook. Australia's exports, while sustained so far by a weak currency, could

come under pressure if global growth and commodity prices remain weak.

Fire has damaged part of St John the Divine cathedral in New York, one

of the world's largest cathedrals. New York firefighters battled the blaze for four hours before bringing

it under control. Fire officials say there were no reported injuries, but the cathedral's

gift shop had been badly damaged and the sanctuary suffered some smoke

and water damage. The fire started at around 6:30am on Tuesday, local time, in the

church's gift shop, but around 200 firemen were able to stem the flames'

spread, preventing major damage to the sanctuary itself. Thick black smoke and bright orange flames had billowed from the immense

structure in north-western Manhattan, near the Columbia University

campus. The cause of the fire is as yet unknown. Firefighter Robert Savarese, who was among the first to enter the

church, said the main problem was visibility. "We knew which direction the fire was coming from, and we just went

toward it," he said. Mr Savarese was among a group of firemen inside the building when Third

Division Deputy Chief Edward Dennehy, who was standing outside, noticed

flames pouring out of the building's roof. "The guys in side thought it was a small fire because they could not see

through the thick smoke," Mr Dennehy said. "The ceiling could have collapsed." The firefighters battling the blaze inside were pulled out, and the fire

was subsequently attacked with thick fire hoses from atop a tall crane.

The radical Palestinian group Hamas has reportedly shifted the focus in

its guerrilla war against Israel. A senior Israeli Defence official has told Israel Army Radio the

Palestinian organisation is now planning to attack strategic targets. Hamas has carried out numerous suicide bombings in Israel, but its

targets have tended to be what are known as soft ones, such as public

buses, or crowded shopping areas. But now, the Israel official says Hamas' focus will be on attacking

strategic buildings and senior Israeli officials and he admits that

stopping the group will be next to impossible. Hamas has rejected a call by Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat for an end

to all military operations against Israel, and a return to peace

negotiations.

Joseph Gutnick, the saviour and former president of the Melbourne

Football Club, has failed in his bid to be re-elected as president,

after stepping down earlier this year. He was also dumped from the board. Gabriel Szondy and his Team Vision ticket comprehensively beat Mr

Gutnick's Melbourne First ticket, in an election which saw 75 per cent

of the club's more than 16,000 members vote. Mr Szondy says he is pleased it was such a decisive victory. "We're very happy that the members have voted so overwhelmingly in

support of the ticket and it hasn't been cherry-picked," he said. He attributed the victory to both the presence of former Demon's great

Robert Flower on his ticket and Mr Gutnick's ill-timed attempt to settle

the presidency issue mid-season. Arriving at the club's annual general meeting last night, Mr Gutnick

said regardless of the outcome, he expected the result to unite the

club. "It shouldn't divide the club, we should drop all our differences and

work together."

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Lee after criticism of his intimidatory bowling to the South African

tailenders in the first Test in Adelaide. Earlier this month, Lee was fined for giving New Zealand tailender Shane

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can improve on our aspects...the output we put out on the field will be

a lot better and we still believe we have a side that is good enough to

beat Australia on our day," he said.

The Immigration Department says overnight fires at the Woomera Detention

Centre are part of a deliberate criminal campaign by detainees. It says 13 buildings were damaged or destroyed. A spokesman for the department says the first fire was lit at about

11:00pm (ACDT) last night, after two earlier demonstrations about visa

applications. He says detainees threw rocks, chairs and other objects in an effort to

stop staff and local fire brigade officers from putting out the fires. The department estimates the damage bill from fire-related incidents at

Woomera has reached more than $1.5 million since November 20. Last night, three accommodation blocks were destroyed, as well as a mess

hall and a computing facility. The department say no detainees were injured, but 15 detention centre

officers were treated for smoke inhalation.

The Federal Cabinet has today endorsed a series of anti-terrorism

measures at a meeting in Sydney. New legislation will give more power to Commonwealth agencies, including

allowing ASIO to detain people with information about terrorism for up

to 48 hours without legal representation. Terrorism offences will also be inserted in the criminal code and

security agencies will be given the power to access unread emails. Attorney-General Daryl Williams says the measures should win widespread

community support. "The balancing process that we've undergone in working out the ASIO

paths I believe is a fair one and I believe that the public will

strongly support it, as I said I hope the Labor party will get behind it

as well," he said. Mr Williams has appealed for the Opposition to support the new

anti-terrorism measures. "We're looking for the Labor Party to get behind us on all of these

proposals and we need the cooperation of the states and territories in

relation to some of them," Mr Williams said. Mr Williams also says the first group of 22 air security officers will

have finished their training this weekend but he won't reveal when they

will take to the air.

US and Afghan forces scoured Afghanistan's eastern highlands for Osama

bin Laden, as United States President George W Bush expressed certainty

the terror suspect would be caught, even though his whereabouts remain a

mystery. For the first time in two weeks, the Tora Bora battleground fell silent,

as tribal forces claimed they had defeated bin Laden's Al Qaeda fighters

defending a complex of caves and tunnels that served as their

headquarters. US warplanes suspended their bombing raids at the request of a local

commander whose US-backed forces were scouring the mountainous area for

fleeing Al Qaeda members, according to the Pentagon, which said there

were still pockets of resistance in the area. US commandos also were on the ground searching for bin Laden, though the

US administration said it had no clue whether he was still in the area. "A few days ago we believed he was in the area," Rear Admiral John

Stufflebeem said in Washington. Asked where bin Laden was now, the Pentagon spokesman said, "anybody's

guess is the latest thinking". But President Bush expressed certainty it was just a matter time before

the United States catches up with the man accused of masterminding the

September 11 attacks on US cities. "We get all kinds of reports, that he's in a cave, that he's not in a

cave; that he's escaped, that he hasn't escaped," he said. "There's all kinds of speculation, but when the dust clears, we'll find

out where he is and he will be brought to justice."

Australia is continuing to negotiate with the United States Government

in an effort to interview the Australian, David Hicks, who was captured

fighting alongside Taliban forces in Afghanistan. Mr Hicks is being held by the United States on board a ship in the

Afghanistan region, where the Australian Federal Police and Australian

Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) officials are trying to gain

access. Foreign Affairs Minister Alexander Downer has also confirmed that the

Australian Government is investigating reports that another Australian

has been fighting for Taliban forces in Afghanistan. "We often get reports of people going to different parts of the world

and asking us to investigate them," he said. "We always investigate, sometimes it is impossible to find out. "We just don't know in this case, but it is not to say that we think

there are a lot of Australians in Afghanistan, the only case we know is

Hicks." Mr Downer says it is unclear when Mr Hicks will be back on Australian

soil, but he is hopeful the Americans will facilitate Australian

authorities interviewing him.

Yasser Arafat has accused Israel of escalating violence by killing three

Palestinians, including a child, one day after he called for an end to

all anti-Israeli attacks. Israel Prime Minister Ariel Sharon said he was waiting for action and

not "empty promises" from the Palestinian leader. He also accused Mr Arafat of "doing nothing to prevent" attacks, in a

telephone call with French President Jacques Chirac, the Prime

Minister's office reported. President Chirac, meanwhile, said Mr Arafat remains the only negotiating

partner for Israel, in separate calls with Prime Minister Sharon and the

Palestinian leader. A televised address late yesterday by Mr Arafat, in which he said the

persistent attacks must end and that perpetrators would be punished, was

hailed by United Nations Middle East envoy Terje Roed-Larsen as "a

potential turning point in the search for an end to the violence". But the largest Islamic radical group, Hamas, issued a statement vowing

to continue its holy war and slamming his peace call as an invitation

for Mr Sharon to "exterminate" Palestinians. Mr Arafat has closed dozens of Hamas and Islamic Jihad offices in

response to punishing Israeli air attacks and massive international

pressure to jail Islamic extremists who have killed dozens of Israelis

in attacks this month. But the violence has continued. Today, Palestinian gunmen launched their first ambushes, wounding three

Jewish settlers, including a father and three-year-old boy, in two

separate shootings in the West Bank. The Israeli Army, which during the day said there had been a marked drop

in violence immediately following Mr Arafat's speech - killed three

Palestinians in separate incidents. In the first, Israeli troops trying to arrest a wanted Hamas member in

Hebron shot the suspect dead as he tried to flee a raid on his house in

a Palestinian-controlled area of the West Bank town, Palestinian police

said. After Mr Sharon cut off ties with Mr Arafat last week for failing to

prevent successive attacks, Israel has said it will take security

matters in the Palestinian territories into its own hands. Israeli troops operating in West Bank land nominally under Palestinian

control near Nablus also shot dead a Palestinian security officer

approaching an army post set up on self-rule territory.

Unions representing Qantas maintenance workers have warned of escalating

industrial action if the company rejects an offer to have a long running

dispute arbitrated. The parties were locked in private talks yesterday in the Industrial

Relations Commission after more than 3,000 maintenance workers earlier

voted to reject Qantas' proposed wage freeze. The national secretary of the Australian Manufacturing and Workers Union

(AMWU), Doug Cameron, says the unions have done everything possible to

resolve the dispute. "If Qantas is not prepared to accept private arbitration, there is

absolutely no alternative for these workers to take further industrial

action, escalate the industrial action if necessary to ensure that they

get a fair go from this company who seemed determined to crush them

underfoot," he said.

Australia has beaten South Africa by 246 runs in the first Test at the

Adelaide Oval. Needing 375 for victory, the tourists were dismissed late in the second

session on the final day for 128. Glenn McGrath and Shane Warne each took three wickets, while Jason

Gillespie and Brett Lee picked up two apiece. Warne was named man of the match. Jacques Kallis was the major resistance for the Proteas, notching an

unbeaten 65. But he was ably assisted by his number 10 and 11 batsmen, Makhaya Ntini

and Nanti Hayward, who frustrated the Australians for the best part of

two hours. Set 375 for victory and starting the day at 2 for 17, the task was made

much harder when Boeta Dippenaar was on his way early this morning,

caught at first slip by Shane Warne from the bowling of Glenn McGrath. Two balls later Neil McKenzie, top scorer in the the Proteas' first

innings, was out leg before wicket not playing a shot to McGrath. Lance Klusener and Kallis shared in a 33-run partnership, before

Klusener, on 18, edged Gillespie to Warne at first slip. Mark Boucher became the third duck of the innings, getting a glove to a

ball down the leg-side, Adam Gilchrist completing Gillespie's second

wicket. Captain Shaun Pollock scored 1 before he was brilliantly caught at silly

point by Ricky Ponting, Warne's second victim. Claude Henderson lasted just four balls after the luncheon interval

before popping a catch to Ponting, his fifth for the match, at silly

point from Warne's bowling. From there it seemed the match would be over in a matter of minutes,

with Ntini and Hayward not expected to offer much resistance. But Ntini batted for more than an hour for his four runs, sharing with

Kallis in the highest partnership of the innings, 38 runs. But he fell to Brett Lee, a swinging yorker deflecting off his pads and

crashing into the stumps. Hayward also proved a menace to the Australians, taking more than half

an hour for his 12 runs before he was caught behind from Lee's bowling

and the innings was over. His innings was not without incident though, a Lee yorker crashing into

his toes, sending him to the ground for a lengthy examination of the

injury. He was out three balls later. Australia is now 1-0 in the best of three series. The next Test starts on Boxing Day at the MCG.

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in an effort to interview the Australian, David Hicks, who was captured

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Relations Commission after more than 3,000 maintenance workers earlier

voted to reject Qantas' proposed wage freeze. The national secretary of the Australian Manufacturing and Workers Union

(AMWU), Doug Cameron, says the unions have done everything possible to

resolve the dispute. "If Qantas is not prepared to accept private arbitration, there is

absolutely no alternative for these workers to take further industrial

action, escalate the industrial action if necessary to ensure that they

get a fair go from this company who seemed determined to crush them

underfoot," he said.

The latest business expectations survey is raising hopes of a solid

economic start to the new year. The Dun and Bradstreet survey has identified positive projections for

sales, profits, investment and employment. Of the organisations questioned by Dun & Bradstreet during November, 48

per cent were looking for an increase in sales in the first quarter of

the new year. Twenty per cent were planning to take on extra staff compared with 15

per cent who said they had been shedding labour. Profit projections are well up, while investment intentions have

improved slightly. The survey has also found companies are finding it significantly easier

to comply with the goods and services tax (GST).

At least four people, including two policemen, have been killed during

an attempted coup in Haiti overnight. Armed commandos had stormed the national palace in the Haitian capital

after midnight, local time and seized control of radio communications

equipment. The attackers, understood to be former members of the Haitian military,

fired at security guards as they entered the palace - the official

residence of President Jean Bertrand Aristide. But the President was at another home in the capital Port-au-Prince

during the attack. It is understood some of the gunmen have been arrested and the Haitian

Government says it is now back in control. President Aristide was deposed in a coup 10 years ago, but was returned

to power in 1994 after a United States invasion. He was recently re-elected for five years.

A new report has revealed there are fewer young people using homeless

services than widely thought. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare report shows just over 1

per cent of people aged between 15 and 24 used such services over the

past year. The main reason for young people seeking assistance was based on family

or relationship difficulties. The report suggests the older people become, the less they use homeless

services.

The Federal Opposition wants tougher penalties for ships which spill oil

after last week's spill which affected Phillip Island. Volunteers hope to clean up the last of the oil at Phillip Island today. Authorities are still trying to track down the source of the spill,

which affected 360 fairy penguins. Shadow Environment Minister Kelvin Thomson says better deterrents are

needed to prevent further spills. "One of the problems with oil spills appears to be a lack of prosecution

action and I believe that it is important that people who recklessly or

negligently cause oil spills, which seriously damage the environment are

subject to prosecution action," he said.

The United States Space Shuttle Endeavour has touched down at Florida's

Kennedy Space Centre after a 12 day mission, bringing home a crew that

had been on the International Space Station since August. The shuttle, carrying outgoing space station commander Frank Culbertson

and Russian cosmonauts Vladimir Dezhurov and Mikhail Tyurin, along with

four other astronauts, landed at 12.55pm local time. Taking over from the trio are Russian commander Yuri Onufrienko and US

astronauts Carl Walz and Dan Bursch, who travelled to the station aboard

Endeavour on December 5. Earlier Monday, the seven US and Russian astronauts on board Endeavour

woke up to the tune Please Come Home for Christmas, by the rock group

Bon Jovi. On Sunday, the Endeavour crew deployed a small satellite called

Starshine 2 from a canister located in the shuttle's payload bay. More than 30,000 students from 26 countries will track the satellite as

it orbits earth for the next eight months. The students will collect information in order to calculate the density

of the upper atmosphere, NASA said. On Saturday, Endeavour undocked from the space station after making a

last-minute maneuver to dodge a piece of Soviet-era space refuse. The Endeavour mission, the 12th shuttle trip to the International Space

Station, brought some three tonnes of equipment and materials for

scientific experiments to the station. The trip, carried out under extremely tight security, was the first

since the September 11 attacks on the United States.

Federal Science Minister Peter McGauran says he is confident security

measures at the Lucas Heights nuclear reactor in Sydney are adequate,

despite a major protest this morning.

Dozens of Greenpeace demonstrators walked through the front entrance of

the facility this morning, unfurling anti-nuclear banners on a radio

tower and the reactor building.

More than 40 people were arrested.

Mr McGauran says guards and police quickly had the situation under

control.

"We won't be rushed into any change of security procedures, because we

know we have very strong security," he said.

"It was really a decision by the guards at the time to make a risk

assessment, and they decided these demonstrators, particularly given

their large numbers, could not be stopped.

"But quickly New South Wales police could be called," he said.

US forces backed by their Afghan allies are pursuing hundreds of Al

Qaeda militants who have fled into the mountains after losing their

bases near Tora Bora in eastern Afghanistan.

Local Afghan commanders say the militants have been flushed out of all

their cave hideouts by weeks of heavy American bombing and a decisive

ground assault.

But American defence officials have been more cautious, saying the fight

is far from over.

They say up to 2,000 Al Qaeda members are on the run.

The U-S has conceded that the whereabouts of Osama bin Laden remain a

mystery despite reports that his Al Qaeda network appears close to

defeat in Afghanistan.

A Yemeni man who surrendered says saw bin Laden in the area 10 days

ago.

Senior officials say they are certain that bin Laden was in the Tora

Bora mountains in eastern Afghanistan and point to bin Laden's

distinctive voice being heard on a hand held radio.

Local Afghan commanders say they have overrun all the Al Qaeda caves.

However the head of the US Central Command, General Tommy Franks, says

it will take some time to confirm reports that Al Qaeda fighters are on

the run.

"We are in fact with these opposition force commanders down in the

vicinity of Tora Bora," he said.

"They are making progress, but I think it's accurate to say that it's

going to be a while before we have the area of Tora Bora fully under

control," he said.

Qantas has moved to assure travellers there will be no disruption to

flights over the Christmas period, despite threats of industrial action.

Qantas maintenance workers have rejected the airline's proposals for a

wage freeze.

As negotiations over the dispute continue in the Industrial Relations

Commission, Qantas Chief Executive Geoff Dixon has expressed his

disappointment at the maintenance workers' actions.

Mr Dixon points out 92 per cent of the airline's workforce have already

agreed in-principle to accept a wages freeze together with an incentives

scheme.

Mr Dixon claims maintenance workers earn, on average, 28 per cent above

average weekly earnings and also receive generous staff travel benefits.

Mr Dixon has assured nervous travellers that even if the workers do go

out on strike, Qantas flights will not be disrupted.

Maintenance unions are refusing to soften their stance against a Qantas

wage freeze proposal.

Qantas and two maintenance unions are continuing negotiations in the

Industrial Relations Commission, where unions produced a leaked airline

briefing paper which says Qantas is prepared to escalate the strike to

force a resolution.

The Governor-General will issue a statement this week to answer

allegations about his response to alleged sexual abuse at a Queensland

school.

Dr Peter Hollingworth was the Anglican Archbishop of Brisbane when a

teacher at a Toowoomba Anglican school allegedly abused students there

more than a decade ago.

Pressure has been mounting on Dr Hollingworth to speak out after public

criticism of his role in responding to the claims of abuse.

A spokeswoman says Dr Hollingworth is becoming concerned that if he does

not respond publicly to the allegations, he may jeopardise the standing

of the position of Governor-General.

The spokeswoman says Dr Hollingworth will issue a written statement in

the next few days after obtaining legal advice.

Four people were killed and eight others injured when a fire broke out

overnight at a hotel in central Paris.

A fire service spokesperson says the fire, which was brought under

control within two hours, could have been an act of arson.

The number of people staying in the hotel du Palais at the time the fire

was not immediately known.

The inferno began at around 3am in the elevator shaft of the six-storey

hotel, next to the Theatre du Chatelet in Paris' first arrondissement,

the centre of the French capital.

The flames spread quickly via the shaft to the building's roof.

Firemen helped several hotel guests to safety through the windows of

their rooms.

Two of the victims were found asphyxiated on the fifth floor. One of the

injured was said to be in serious condition in hospital.

According to police, one man was arrested at the scene and an inquiry

has been opened.

The theatre was undamaged.

The condition of former Indonesian dictator Suharto has improved, a day

after the 80-year-old former ruler was put on an intravenous drip and

given oxygen to assist his breathing.

Doctors performed a series of tests early today and said Suharto's

condition had picked up slightly since yesterday.

"He is still attached to an IV drip, but the doctors said 'Bapak'

(father's) condition is much better than yesterday's," a staff member

told AFP on the condition of anonymity.

"The doctors are still talking to his children," he said.

Suharto fell ill on Sunday when he and his family received some 100

visitors, including ex-ministers and former vice presidents at his

family house for celebrations to mark the Muslim festival of

Eid-al-Fitr.

The former president ruled Indonesia for 32 years before he was forced

from office in 1998.

He has been fitted with a pacemaker and suffered at least one slight

stroke as well as periodic breathing and urinary complications.

He underwent an emergency appendectomy on February 24 this year.

The staff said doctors had planned on hospitalising Suharto on Sunday,

but Monday's test result showed he could be treated at home.

"His breathing rhythm is normal and unlike yesterday, he does not

required an oxygen mask," the staff member added.

Suharto has been charged with embezzlling 5.775 trillion rupiah

($AUD1.102 billion) of public funds during his time in office.

But he has repeatedly failed to appear in court to answer the charges

with his lawyers arguing that he is too ill to stand trial.

The new Solomon Islands Prime Minister has told his people that there

are tough times ahead.

Sir Allan Kemakeza, the parliamentary leader of the People's Alliance

Party, was elected Prime Minister on the first ballot.

Sir Allan heads up a team consisting of the surviving members of the

outgoing government and a large grouping of newly elected independents.

One of those held one of the most senior positions in the Malaita Eagle

Force militia that conducted last year's coup, while others who have

backed him were elected after being endorsed by the rival Guadalcanal

militia, the Isatabu Freedom Movement.

That ethnic conflict has left the Solomons economy close to collapse and

hundreds of high powered guns remain with the militants.

Sir Allan is putting his trust in God.

"The times ahead are not going to be easy," he said.

"These will be times of sacrifice."

Sir Allan says that he also hopes to get agreement on disarming rival

militias in the country within his first 100 days in office, in an

attempt to remove any remaining high powered weapons from the community.

He believes it was his contacts with the grass root militias on both

sides of the ethnic war that led to the success of the Townsville Peace

conference that brought the war to a halt.

Sir Allan, a former policeman, says the police force, part of which took

part in last year's coup, needs to be overhauled.

"Both must go together, the disarmament program as well as the

restructuring of the police force," he said.

He says law and order will be one of his government's priorities.

Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat's call for an end to attacks on

Israelis has been met with a mixture of hope, scepticism and defiance.

Under enormous international pressure to halt the violence, Mr Arafat

has called for a halt to all armed operations against Israel, including

suicide bombings, and vowed that the perpetrators would be punished.

France, Britain and the United States have welcomed the announcement.

The Israeli Cabinet Minister, Ephraim Sneh, says while it is a positive

sign, the Palestinian Authority has to act on its words.

"If he proves that he really means to act very very forcefully,

sincerely, effectively, and seriously against the Islamic Jihad and

Hamas and his own Tanzin movement that will be a positive sign," he

said.

Australia has picked up two wickets in South Africa's second innings

late on day four of the first Test at the Adelaide Oval. Chasing 375 for victory, the Proteas are 2 for 17 at stumps, with

openers Hershelle Gibbs and Gary Kirsten back in the pavilion. Gibbs was out for 9 after chipping Glenn McGrath to Justin Langer at

short leg. Then on the last ball of the day, Shane Warne picked up the wicket of

Kirsten, caught at silly point by Ricky Ponting, for 7. An impressive century to Matthew Hayden helped Australia build a big

lead, the home side declaring its second innings at 7 for 309, an

overall lead of 374. Hayden and Mark Waugh shared a 181-run partnership for the third wicket,

ensuring South Africa would be chasing a big target. Hayden scored 131 before he was bowled by Kallis, attempting to lift the

run rate. His innings came from 207 balls, including 12 fours and four sixes. Waugh scored 74, before a top edge ballooned into the air and was safely

taken by wicket keeper Mark Boucher to give Claude Henderson his first

wicket. Adam Gilchrist was out for 22, caught on the square-leg boundary by Neil

McKenzie to give Jacques Kallis his third wicket. Captain Steve Waugh followed shortly after, caught by his opposite

number, Shaun Pollock, from Henderson's bowling, for 13. Shane Warne was the last wicket to fall, clean bowled by Henderson, for 6.

The hunt for Osama bin Laden has shifted to the forests around the cave

complex of Tora Bora after a swoop through the last caves failed to

reveal any sign of the Saudi-born fugitive.

US special forces are now combing the forests alongside anti-Taliban

militias.

Up to 500 Al Qaeda fighters are believed to have scattered into the

hills, many heading south toward the Pakistan border.

Local commanders have warned they will shoot any villager who shelters

them.

US bombing runs have eased off in the past 12 hours as American special

forces move to deeper into the forest to coordinate the hunt.

Earlier, US forces intercepted a voice communication they believed could

be bin Laden speaking by short range radio to his fighters.

However, a senior Afghan commander, Haji Zaman, said he believed bin

Laden had left the Tora Bora area.

US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, on a visit to US troops at Baghram

air base outside Kabul, said the battle against the Taliban and Al Qaeda

was not over.

"There are still pockets of Taliban and Al Qaeda forces that have

drifted into the mountains and could reform and there is a good deal yet

to be done," he said.

Israel has reacted with caution to a promise from Palestinian leader

Yasser Arafat to hunt down suicide bombers and end armed attacks against

Israeli targets.

Mr Arafat made the commitments during a speech broadcast on Palestinian

television.

The Palestinian leader said Israel was using suicide attacks as a

pretext for waging war on Palestinians and that such operations were

therefore against Palestinian national interests.

Israel will be looking to see whether Mr Arafat is offering anything

more than words.

He has promised to round up suicide bombers before but very few in fact

have been arrested.

Mr Arafat said peace was the only way of resolving the conflict and that

the changed world situation since the attacks in the United States on

September 11 had to be taken into account.

The United States Government says it is keenly watching to see whether

Mr Arafat's actions match his words.

The White House says it will continue to engage in the peace process,

despite the withdrawal of its Middle East envoy.

The Bush administration says the Palestinians are more to blame than the

Israelis for the current disarray in the peace process, primarily

because of Mr Arafat's inability to control terrorists in his ranks.

Secretary of State Colin Powell says it is time for Mr Arafat to exert

control.

"But as President Bush said the other day and we have been saying

repeatedly, as leader, he has to lead he has to act like a leader," he

said.

The White House says it will continue to play a role in the Middle East

and expects its envoy General Anthony Zinni to return when he can play a

productive role.

A dispute which could threaten air services returns to the Industrial

Relations Commission today.

Qantas maintenance workers have rejected the airline's proposals for a

wages freeze.

The dispute involving 3,000 maintenance workers has been running for

around six months.

After lengthy negotiations last weekend, Qantas had sought a ballot of

the maintenance workers.

The unions claim 90 per cent of the workforce voted against the

company's latest offer.

The national secretary of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union

(AMWU), Doug Cameron, did not rule out the grounding of Qantas jets if

the dispute continues and he says the company would only have itself to

blame.

"If Qantas doesn't come to the party, I think it's inevitable that the

industrial action will continue and that will be Qantas'

responsibility," he said.

A new report suggests the costs of an aging Australian population have

been exaggerated.

The report issued by the Australia Institute says a detailed examination

of population and health data shows an aging population will not create

an unsustainable burden on a shrinking workforce.

Far from being an economic and social burden, it found the majority of

older people enjoyed healthy and independent lives, many making

financial contributions to their families and participating in voluntary

community activities.

The paper challenges the assumption an older population will see health

costs rise to unsustainable levels.

It says rising health costs are caused mainly by factors other than

aging such as the growth of medical technology, rising consumer demand

and escalating prices.

Striking Latrobe Valley power workers will meet today to consider

ongoing industrial action.

The company, Yallourn Energy, believes Victoria's power supply is under

threat.

Sixty-five maintenance workers downed tools two weeks ago over job

security.

Terry Lee from the Australian Workers Union fears up to 200 jobs at the

plant are at risk.

Mr Lee says the strike action has been timed to avoid power supply

interruptions in Victoria.

"The only power that will be interrupted is the power Yallourn Energy

would at this time like to be selling into the market," he said.

But Yallourn Energy mine manager, Lindsay Ward, says all power

generation at the plant has been halted and blackouts are possible.

Mr Ward admits about 35 jobs at the plant will go when the company

modernises its coal mining operations.

The members of the newly-elected Solomon Islands Parliament meet today

to choose a prime minister.

The much-criticised finance minister in the last government, Snyder

Rini, could have the numbers to win.

The prime minister who was forced to resign after last year's coup,

Batholomew Ulufa'alu, has told national radio he has heard rumours that

if he is elected there could be another coup.

That is one of the reasons the group he hoped to lead dumped him last

week in favour of his former foreign minister, Patterson Oti.

The person with the longest list of supporters is Mr Rini, who has given

massive import duty remissions on beer and cigarettes to favoured

importers despite the parlous state of the Government's finances.

The editor of a British tabloid has defended the resumption of its name

and shame campaign against paedophiles saying parents have the right to

know of potential dangers in the community.

The paper published the names of convicted paedophiles who had failed to

submit their names to the sex offenders register.

The News of the World created uproar last year when it published the

names and addresses of child sex offenders with vigilante groups formed

and in some cases attacking the wrong men.

The latest campaign, which is limited to naming those who have absconded

without registering, comes in the wake of the conviction of known

paedophile Roy Whiting for the murder of eight-year-old Sarah Payne.

News of the Worl editor Rebekah Wade says it is the public's right to

know.

"If you have paedophiles in society that aren't monitored, they will

strike again," she said.

"If the police cannot monitor them, then it is only right and fair if

you have a family with three young children then you have a general

right to know that to protect your children."

British Home Secretary David Blunkett has promised more community

involvement in the supervision of known offenders.

Australia will be looking to score quickly today to set South Africa a

challenging victory target on day four of the first cricket Test in

Adelaide.

The Australians will resume their second innings at 0 for 3, an overall

lead of 68.

South Africa was dismissed late yesterday for 374 with Shane Warne

taking five wickets for the 20th time in his Test career.

Warne says Australia is well placed to win.

"I was very happy with our position in the match, 10 wickets in hand and

70 runs ahead on a pitch that's deteriorating. I think I'd much rather

be in our shoes than theirs," he said.

But he says Australia will need to bat well today.

"South Africa can come out and bowl us out for 150 and suddenly they're

chasing 200, or we can make 200 to 250 and they need 300. It's going to

be a great last two days."

Osama bin Laden admitted planning the September 11 terrorist attacks on

the United States in a videotape released by the Pentagon today.

In the videotape lasting roughly one hour bin Laden explains planning

aspects of the operation and his own calculations in advance concerning

the scale of the damage to the World Trade Center in New York and the

number of casualties.

He said he expected the fire and gas from the attacks on the World Trade

Center to topple the floors above the points where hijacked planes

struck, not the entire structure.

"We calculated in advance the number of casualties from the enemy who

would be killed based on the position of the tower," he said, according

to a transcript translated into English from the Arabic.

"Due to my experience in this field, I was thinking that the fire from

the gas in the plane would melt the iron structure of the building and

collapse the area where the plane hit and all the floors above it only,"

he said.

"That is all that we had hoped for."

The video tape showed bin Laden speaking to supporters in a room,

possibly in Kandahar in mid-November, the Pentagon said in releasing the

amateur videotape, which it said was made with the knowledge of bin

Laden and those present.

The tape showed the end of the meeting first, followed by an unrelated

segment of videotaped material, and ending with a segment recorded at

the beginning of the meeting.

"We had notification since the previous Thursday that the event would

take place that day," he said, speaking to unidentified sheikh.

"We had finished our work that day and had the radio on, It was 5:30 pm

our time. I was sitting with Dr. Ahmad Abu-al-(Khair)," he said.

"Immediately, we heard the news that a plane had hit the World Trade

Center."

"After a while, they announced that another plane had hit the World

Trade Center.

The brothers who heard the news were overjoyed by it," he said.

United States air strikes on Al Qaeda fighters have intensified

following the collapse of surrender talks with the Northern Alliance.

The battle for Tora Bora appears to be heading towards a bloody climax.

Northern Alliance commanders have now abandoned all attempts to secure a

peaceful surrender of Al Qaeda militants trapped in the mountainous area

of Tora Bora.

Truckloads of armed men have been seen heading toward the area,

suggesting a full scale ground attack is imminent.

US aircraft have been bombarding the militants' position since first

light effectively blocking any possible retreat.

Around 4,000 Pakistani troops have fanned across the border in a bid to

prevent any Al Qaeda fighters escaping.

The Defence Minister, Robert Hill, says the Australian Government is

still trying to interview suspected Taliban fighter David Hicks.

Senator Hill says the Government does not know much more than what is on

the public record about the 26-year-old's background.

He says he was not aware he had applied to join the Australian Defence

Force, or that Australian authorities have known about him for some

time.

Senator Hill has told Channel Seven the Government does not know what

motivated the man to fight alongside Taliban forces.

"In rare circumstances this does happen, as we know there's one American

who has been captured after fighting for the Taliban. "Occasionally people decide to exercise a violent option in pursuing a

particular political or religious belief and I think you ought to

probably address the questions to the psychologists or the

psychiatrists," Senator Hill said.

Kashmiri militant groups denied involvement in Thursday's attack on the

Indian Parliament, accusing Indian intelligence instead.

"We want to make it clear that Kashmiris have no connection with this

attack," said the Muttahida Jihad Council (MJC), an alliance of 18

groups fighting Indian rule in Kashmir.

"We believe it was carried out by Indian intelligence agencies to

achieve their motives about the Kashmir issue," the groups added in a

statement.

The attack on the Parliament building in New Delhi left at least 12

dead.

The Indian authorities have not said who they believe was behind the

killings.

But the Kashmiri groups accused the Indian Government of masterminding

the attack in a bid to divert attention from what they called increasing

international pressure over Kashmir.

An investigation is underway into what procedures were followed by New

South Wales health authorities over the transfer of a woman infected

with a deadly bacteria to a hospital in Adelaide.

The woman infected with the bacteria, pseudomonas, was transferred from

Sydney's St George Hospital late last month to the Intensive Care Unit

at Adelaide's Queen Elizabeth Hospital.

Four people receiving treatment in the unit have since been infected

with the bacteria and one of those has died.

The South Australian Human Services Department is now investigating the

circumstances surrounding the transfer of the infected woman.

New South Wales health authorities maintain the Queen Elizabeth Hospital

was given adequate information about the patient.

A statement from the St George Hospital says "all information about the

patient's condition including the bacterial information was provided to

staff in Adelaide in discussions over a two-week period to prepare for

the effective and safe transfer".

A leading Adelaide microbiologist says resistance to antibiotics will

continue to increase.

Associate Professor John Turnidge, who is the director of Microbiology

and Infectious Diseases at the Women's and Children's Hospital, says it

is becoming an ever increasing problem.

"If we continue to use antibiotics at the current rate we imagine that

the problem will just accumulate, we'll just get more and more resistant

bacteria.

"There are national efforts underway to try and reduce the amount of

antibiotic use whether it's appropriate or inappropriate use just to try

and relieve the pressure for selecting for resistant bugs and causing us

headaches like this," he said.

Israeli helicopter gunships and warplanes have swooped again on

Palestinian cities after the Jewish state dropped a political bombshell

on Palestinians with a decision to cut ties with Yasser Arafat in rage

at a deadly bus ambush.

Apache helicopters and F-16 fighter-bombers blasted security targets in

Gaza City, which had been pounded the night before in repeated air raids

after Palestinian militants killed 10 Israelis in the West Bank raid.

In Ramallah in the West Bank, also hit by missiles less than 24 hours

earlier, rocket strikes sent clouds of flames and smoke in the air over

a ruined police station close to the centre of the town, which has been

partly reoccupied by Israeli tanks.

The police station was bombed last October after a Palestinian mob

lynched two Israeli soldiers there.

Large parts of Ramallah were plunged into darkness after the raid.

In Jenin to the north, US-made Apaches blasted a building of Mr Arafat's

Fatah movement, witnesses said.

Earlier, Israeli troops shot eight Palestinian children near the Rafah

border crossing with Egypt in the southern Gaza Strip, killing one,

Palestinian hospital officials said.

Israel had said it would send its forces into Palestinian self-rule

areas to track down militants Mr Arafat has failed to arrest despite

huge international pressure and more than a week of repeated air

strikes.

Late Wednesday local time, following the bus ambush which killed 10

Jewish settlers in the West Bank, F-16s blasted security targets in Gaza

City, Nablus and Gaza international airport.

Apache helicopters also hit a Palestinian Broadcasting Corporation

station in Ramallah, and tanks and army bulldozers moved in yesterday to

plough the remains into the ground and dynamite the radio mast, a

symbolic blow against Mr Arafat's increasingly shaky authority.

Israel's right-wing Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, with the backing of a

security cabinet dominated by nationalists, declared Mr Arafat

"irrelevant" after Islamic and secular Palestinian militants carried out

the bus ambush.

Israel said Mr Arafat had forfeited his role as a peace partner by

refusing to crack down on Islamic hardliners.

"I think we are close as we've ever been to a full military

confrontation between Israel and the Palestinian Authority," UN Middle

East envoy Terje Roed-Larsen warned.

"Undoubtedly if that happens this will either, in the best case, weaken

the institutions of the Palestinian Authority so much that there will be

very little central authority, or the Palestinian Authority will be

completely crushed," he said.

The Australian and South African sides for the first cricket Test

starting at the Adelaide Oval today are not expected to be finalised

until just before the start of play.

Australian captain Steve Waugh and his South African counterpart, Shaun

Pollock, will decide on their lineups after an inspection of the pitch

shortly before the start of play.

The match holds special significance for Waugh and his twin brother

Mark, who play their 100th Test together.

Steve Waugh is not placing too much relevance on the milestone.

"[I] don't want to read too much into it I guess and then get too

carried away but later on when we retire and look back on it it will be

significant.

"It's nice for the family, mum and dad all the sacrifices they made you

know with us growing up and also our brothers so you know it's nice for

the family," he said.

The Federal Government is negotiating with the United States and other

countries about the fate of an Adelaide man suspected of fighting

alongside the Taliban in Afghanistan.

David Hicks, 26, was captured by Northern Alliance forces three days

ago, and is now in the custody of American troops.

The head of the Victorian Law Institute, John Corcoran, says Mr Hicks

could face a charge of treason under Australian law, the only crime

punishable by death.

"If the circumstances are permitted, he could be charged with treason

under the Commonwealth Crimes Act, which does have the death penalty,"

he said.

If charged under the Foreign Incursion Act, the penalty is less severe

carrying a maximum 14-year jail sentence.

But the Defence Minister, Robert Hill, says it is too early to say

whether the Government will take legal action.

"These issues are being looked at, but he was only captured a few days

ago and it's difficult to ascertain all the facts," Senator Hill said.

The Government is currently holding talks with the United States about

Mr Hicks' fate.

The Shadow Foreign Affairs Minister, Kevin Rudd, has urged the

Government to set up immediate diplomatic access to the suspected

Taliban fighter.

Mr Rudd says consular officials must start to try and establish the

facts about the 26-year-old who has been arrested by the Northern

Alliance.

The Australian Government is trying to ascertain whether he has broken

any Australian laws but says he could also be a prisoner of war in

Afghanistan.

Mr Rudd, who is in the Pakistan capital Islamabad, says if a diplomatic

presence is not available, there are other means.

"For example, International Council of Red Cross I understand from

sources here in Islamabad, is assisting in providing access to

individuals currently held by the Northern Alliance of varying

nationalities," Mr Rudd said.

The Israeli Government has declared Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat

irrelevant and has decided to break off all contacts with him.

The dramatic move followed a Palestinian ambush on a bus carrying

Israeli settlers in the West Bank, that killed 10 people, and a double

suicide attack in the Gaza Strip, that injured four Israelis.

In response, Israeli jets and helicopters have attacked Palestinian

targets across the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

The Israelis say they hold Mr Arafat directly responsible for the latest

incidents and will have nothing to do with him.

The Government position was spelt out by spokesman Raanan Gissin.

"In no way does it imply or was there any directive to hurt to harm or

to expel Arafat personally," he said.

"We are not attacking Arafat personally, we don't have a quarrel with

Arafat the person.

"We have a real quarrel and a real fight and struggle against terrorism,

against Arafat when he represents terrorism, when he support terrorism."

The Federal Opposition says the unemployment rate has fallen because

many job seekers have given up looking for work.

Employment Minister Tony Abbott says there is a degree of volatility in

the labour market with a significant increase in October's figures and a

significant fall in the November unemployment rate.

But Mr Abbott says the latest figures are encouraging and he is not

overly concerned by a reduction in the number of people looking for

work.

"From month to month these figures bounce around, but the participation

rate even with this month's drop is still at high historical records,"

he said.

Labor leader Simon Crean says 4,000 jobs were created last month, but

32,000 people stopped searching for work.

"The unemployment rate hasn't come down because jobs are being created,

it has come down because people have given up on looking for jobs."

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the next two days.

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The action by members of the Finance Sector Union has been timed to

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The union's Geoff Derrick says the strike is not just about pay.

"Certainly pay's in there, it needs to be but the key issue for us has

been around workloads.

"We've got a million hours of overtime being worked a week in this

industry [and] most of it is unpaid," Mr Derrick said.

Westpac's David Lording says today's action is unjustified.

"We have an 8 per cent pay increase over two years for all eligible

staff on the table, it's a very generous pay offer.

"We would also like to introduce a number of other initiatives that will

assist our staff balance in particular their work and family life, we

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"What we would like is for the union to come back to the negotiating

table rather than continuing on with these PR stunts."

Mr Lording says there are contingency plans in place to ensure branches

can stay open.

"We are hoping to offer normal banking services for our customers," he

said.

Senior Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) officials

giving evidence at the Royal Commission into the Building Industry have

been overwhelmed by support from union members.

About 700 construction workers have walked off the job for the third day

to demonstrate outside the commission venue.

Mounted police escorted the protesters from Melbourne's City Square to

Collins Place.

Morning traffic ground to a halt at the intersection of Russell and

Collins streets when the crowd stopped to chant union slogans.

CFMEU Victorian secretary Martin Kingham says he has been astounded by

the strong support shown by union members on each day of the hearings.

He maintains the union has been treated unfairly as it faces allegations

of intimidation and using standover tactics on work sites.

Mr Kingham is currently giving evidence before the commission.

It is the last day of hearings before the Christmas break.

The Labor leader, Simon Crean, says senior Labor figures Bob Hawke and

Neville Wran will be used to help modernise the party.

Labor's national executive is meeting in Canberra.

Mr Crean will put his views on the changes Labor needs to make.

The executive is expected to ask Mr Hawke and Mr Wran to oversee the

process.

Mr Crean says they know what needs to be done.

"Bob Hawke and Neville Wran understood the importance of modernising the

party and that's why they were successful leaders of the country.

"I'm sure we don't need to teach them to suck eggs, what I want them to

do is to give us guidance as to how we can bring the new approach to

Labor in 2002 to enable us to properly present and gain the confidence

of the majority of the Australian people," the Opposition leader said.

The mind games are continuing as Australia and South Africa have their

final hit-outs in the lead-up to the first cricket Test beginning in

Adelaide tomorrow.

Shane Warne says he is looking for a new batsman to dominate following

Daryl Cullinan's non-selection, while Proteas batsman Jacques Kallis

says there is no Australian bowler good enough to get him out.

Australian paceman Glenn McGrath begs to differ.

He believes he will return to his best against South Africa if he can

keep the form he had late in the series against New Zealand.

McGrath says he was happier with the way he bowled as the series went

on, as the rain that dogged the series also meant there were not as many

chances to take wickets.

"It would have been nice to get a few more nicks. I felt great in

myself, the rhythm's back, I'm bowling long spells and everything's

going well," he said.

"It's just I didn't get the wickets I would have liked, so hopefully

they'll come in this series."

He says the Australian and South African sides are at level pegging, but

the Proteas have more to prove.

"There's probably more pressure on South Africa. We're the number one

side at the moment, they have to actually beat us.

"They're not the underdogs going into the series and there should be

some good, hard cricket played out in the middle but the pressure's

probably on them rather than us."

Israeli warplanes have bombed Gaza City security buildings close to

Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat's offices, in swift revenge for a

deadly ambush on an Israeli bus, Palestinian security officials said.

The planes hit naval police offices and the police headquarters which

was already flattened in air raids last Thursday, officials said.

The other targets were not immediately identified.

Palestinian hardliners had earlier killed 10 Israelis in an attack on an

Israeli bus in the West Bank, while two suicide bombers blew themselves

up in a Gaza Strip Jewish settlement, injuring four Israelis at the

same time.

Israel launched almost simultaneous retaliatory strikes on Nablus, a

town close to the scene of the bus ambush.

Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat immediately closed down all

institutions belonging to the militant Hamas and Islamic Jihad groups

after the bus ambush.

"The Palestinian Authority in an urgent meeting headed by Mr Arafat has

taken a decision that Palestinian security forces will immediately close

down all Hamas and Islamic Jihad institutions, including education,

health and political offices," an official statement said.

The Palestinian Authority earlier condemned the Palestinian attack on

the bus near the Jewish settlement of Immanuel in the West Bank in which

10 people were killed, and two suicide bombings in the Gaza Strip in

which three people were wounded.

The US special envoy to the Middle East, Anthony Zinni, told Mr Arafat

to jail extremists "immediately" after the bus ambush.

"Chairman Arafat and the Palestinian Authority must move immediately to

arrest those responsible for these attacks and destroy the

infrastructure of terror organisations that support them," the retired

Marine Corps general said in a statement.

A radical offshoot of Yasser Arafat's Fatah movement, the Al-Aqsa

Brigades, said in a statement that it and Hamas were jointly responsible

for the attack, in a statement received by the AFP news agency.

Ezzedin al-Qassam, the military wing of Hamas, earlier claimed

responsibility for the bus ambush, the television station run by

Lebanon's Shiite Muslim movement Hezbollah reported.

An Israeli Defence Ministry spokesman, in a statement received by AFP,

said the attack was carried out by Hamas militants whose names figured

on a list of 33 activists wanted by Israel.

Israel last week said it gave the list to Mr Arafat.

At least two helicopters have landed near Tora Bora mountain in eastern

Afghanistan, in what could be the start of a raid against Al Qaeda

fighters, an AFP journalist said.

The helicopters landed around 11:00pm local time (5:30am AEDT), a few

hours after Al Qaeda fighters rejected a deadline set by Afghan militia

leaders for them to surrender or face death.

US warplanes have been bombing the network of caves and tunnels for

eight days as part of the hunt for Al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden.

Several witnesses have spoken in recent days of seeing members of US or

British special forces near the frontline between the local Afghan

militia and the followers of bin Laden.

They could not be seen but could be clearly heard as they came into land

and strong lights were seen in the same district.

US B-52 bombers and other warplanes staged a series of attacks on the Al

Qaeda positions in the White Mountains after bin Laden's fighters failed

to surrender.

All four crew members of a US B-1 bomber that has crashed in the Indian

Ocean near Diego Garcia have been rescued, US military officials said.

Pentagon spokesman Navy Captain Timothy Taylor, said initial reports

said that all four were aboard the destroyer USS Russell which was

rushed to the scene after the crash.

The B-1 bomber, which usually carries a crew of four and is armed with

bombs and cruise missiles, was engaged in the air war over Afghanistan.

Pentagon officials said they had heard about the crash just after 5:30am

(AEDT) and were unable to say whether the plane was headed to Diego

Garcia, or flying from the Indian Ocean island.

It is thought the Australian arrested in Afghanistan for fighting

alongside the Taliban is from Adelaide's northern suburbs but the

Salisbury Park family of 26-year-old David Hicks is remaining silent.

The president of Adelaide's Islamic Society, Walli Hanifi, says Mr Hicks

approached him in 1999 having just returned from Kosovo, where he had

developed an interest in Islam.

He says Mr Hicks wanted to know more about the faith, but left after a

few weeks.

Late yesterday afternoon, Mr Hicks' Salisbury Park family told media the

Australian Federal Police had told them not to comment.

Local residents confirmed a member of the family called Mr Hicks had

travelled to Kosovo in recent years and has not been seen for around

three years.

But most, including Karen White, agree they cannot imagine Mr Hicks

fighting for a terrorist regime.

"Not, unless he's changed now, but when he left here, no he wasn't, he's

just a normal teenage, adult boy," she said.

But a man known as Nick, told Channel Ten he is sure the man detained in

Afghanistan is his friend David.

He says in 1999 David told him about training in the Kosovo Liberation

Army.

"He'd gone through six weeks basic training, how he'd been in the

trenches, you know, killed a few people, you know confirmed kills and

had a few of his mates killed as well," the man said.

Australia and the United Nations have openly clashed in Geneva, over how

best to deal with asylum seekers and illegal immigrants.

At a refugee conference, Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock has

rejected criticism of Australia's strong stand on asylum seekers from

the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Ruud Lubbers.

Mr Lubbers says some government leaders base their refugee policies on

fear and mistrust, instead of cooperating to share the burden.

In a speech at the beginning of the meeting, Mr Ruddock rejected that

criticism.

Australia has a very fine record," he said.

"We are a generous contributor to the United Nations High Commission for

Refugees' budget.

"When burden sharing is requested, we respond.

"We honour our obligations to those people who are refugees and those

who seek asylum in Australia."

Mr Ruddock alsosaid the 50-year old convention could be at risk because

of its overly legalistic system which gives too many favours to asylum

seekers.

The former managing director of One.Tel has denied claims he mislead the

board while the company was effectively insolvent.

Jodee Rich says civil proceedings brought by the Australian Securities

and Investment Commission (ASIC) against him, two other former directors

and the former chairman, are baseless.

ASIC claims that the true financial position of One.Tel was not made

known to the other directors of the company.

However, Mr Rich says there are discrepancies in the way ASIC has

handled the investigation.

"I am concerned that as part of this process ASIC has not given us the

opportunity to respond to the many claims that they alleged six months

ago and that we haven't had an opportunity to respond to these claims

that they are now bringing to us," he said.

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A British man has been found guilty by a unanimous verdict of the kidnap

and murder of an eight-year-old schoolgirl whose death in July 2000

shocked Britain and set off a rampage of anti-paedophile vigilantes.

Roy Whiting was sentenced to life imprisonment for the abduction and

murder of eight-year-old Sarah Payne with a recommendation by trial

judge Justice Richard Curtis that he never be released.

"You are indeed an evil man. You are in no way mentally unwell. I have

seen you for a month and in my view you are a glib and cunning liar,"

Justice Curtis said.

There were cheers of delight as the verdicts were read out by the

foreman at Lewes Crown Court.

The jury of nine men and three women had been deliberating for nine

hours.

As soon as the verdicts were declared, the court heard details of

Whiting's previous conviction for the kidnap and indecent assault of a

nine-year-old girl in 1995.

Prosecutor Timothy Langdale told the jury how the defendant threw the

child into the back of his dirty red Ford Sierra and locked the doors.

"He had driven her somewhere. She didn't know where. When she asked

where they were going he said, 'shut up', because he had a knife," Mr

Langdale said.

"The defendant told the girl to take off her clothes. When she refused,

he produced a rope from his pocket and threatened to tie her up.

"What he actually threatened was that he would 'tie her mouth up'.

"She took her clothes off as he had ordered her to do."

Mr Langdale then gave graphic details of the abuse to which Whiting

subjected the terrified child.

Whiting was given a four-year jail sentence in June 1995 after admitting

carrying out the attack in March that year.

But he was released in November 1997 despite warnings from probation

officers, who were convinced there was a danger he would attack another

child.

They set out their warnings in a pre-sentence report, prepared after the

first assault, and in the parole report before he was released from

prison.

He was kept under supervision for four months after his release, but was

not being monitored by July last year, when eight-year-old Sarah was

abducted and killed.

Whiting has been arrested three times in connection with the case, but

the first and second times was released without being charged.

Sarah disappeared on July 1 last year, prompting a massive police

search.

Her partially-buried naked body was found 16 days later in a field and

police believe she was strangled or suffocated.

The AFL's leading goal kicker, Tony Lockett, will nominate for the

pre-season draft after all.

Lockett approached the Sydney Swans about a return to the game last week

but after much media speculation, decided it was not in the best

interests of his family to come out of retirement.

Today, the 35-year-old changed his mind.

He has informed the Swans of his intention to nominate for next

Tuesday's pre-season draft.

In a statement released a short time ago, Lockett says last week he felt

rushed and did not feel comfortable with his decision.

He says over the weekend he had time to think the matter through with

his family, who support his comeback.

Sydney says it is delighted Lockett has decided to make a return and it

intends to draft him.

The Pentagon believes it has finally confirmed the whereabouts of Osama

bin Laden to an area in eastern Afghanistan where the search had been

focusing.

The United States Air Force dropped a 6,800 kilogram bomb called the

Daisy Cutter into the mountains of the Tora Bora region two days ago.

It wreaked havoc in the caves and tunnels of the Al Qaeda hideout and

prompted a flurry of communications.

The United States intercepted those communications and the Pentagon now

believes Osama bin Laden is on the run in those mountains and many of

his fighters were seriously injured by the blast.

Chairman of the Joint Chiefs General Richard Myers, said the bomb was

effective.

"I don't want to go into details, it would have had the desired effect."

The United States has now deployed gunships along the Pakistani border

to try and stop Osama bin Laden crossing into Pakistan.

A French Moroccan man has been charged in the United States with

conspiracy in the terrorist attacks of September 11.

It is the first indictment directly related to the suicide hijackings.

News of the charge came as President George W Bush delivered a major

foreign policy speech.

Zaccarias Moussaoui sought flying lessons a month before the hijackings.

Attorney-General John Ashcroft claims he was an active participant in

the attacks.

"Moussaoui is charged with undergoing the same training, receiving the

same funding and pledging the same commitment to kill Americans as the

hijackers," he said.

Three months to the day since the attacks and President Bush says

missile defence is now more essential than ever before.

"We must protect America and our friends against all forms of terror,

including the terror that could arrive on a missile," he said.

President Bush says the United States now needs a dramatically retooled

military, armed with hi-tech weapons and real-time intelligence.

Australian families of the victims from the Interlaken tragedy have

welcomed today's guilty verdicts against six employees from the

Adventure World canyoning tour company.

A Swiss court has found the six of the eight employees guilty of

culpable manslaughter after the tragedy which killed 21 people, 14 of

them Australians.

They have been given suspended jail sentences of up to five-months and

fined between $5,000 and $7,000.

Two guides who survived were acquitted.

Gary Redmond, who lost his 26-year-old son Scott and 24-year-old

daughter-in-law Alissa, says he is satisfied and relieved with the

outcome.

"All along we hoped that justice would prevail and that whatever the

penalties that apply in Switzerland that are appropriate should apply,"

Mr Redmond said.

Some of the families are threatening civil action, but Mr Redmond says

the verdict means closure for his family

"I'm not of the view that anything that now comes out of this whether

there be any further benefit to accrue to us or the survivors, that it

will in any way compensate for the loss of our loved ones," Mr Redmond

said.

The families say that they are still to receive an apology from

Adventure World, but Bill Peel, whose son Billy died in the 1999

canyoning accident and is in Switzerland for the court hearing, has

welcomed today's verdicts

"I always felt that they were guilty because the duty of care was never

used...and now the judge has confirmed everything we believed," Mr Peel

said.

The family of a Bendigo woman killed in the canyon disaster has also

welcomed the verdict.

Kylie Morrow's mother Elizabeth, says the verdict has made the tour

guides accountable for their negligence, and proves the young people who

lost their lives did not act recklessly.

"I'm not sure where we go from here but you know we've got other

children and we've got each other and family and life goes on even when

you don't want it to sometimes.

"Our lives have been changed forever and nothing that happens from now

on can be any worse than what we've been through," Ms Morrow said.

The Federal Agriculture Minister, Warren Truss, says he has not been

able to win any changes to the farm bill being debated by the United

States Congress.

Mr Truss has led a delegation of Australian farmers to Washington

lobbying for some of the Government subsidies to farmers to be removed.

He says he has not achieved any changes to the amount of Government

protection for US farmers.

Mr Truss says that will mean Australian farmers will suffer.

"We're especially concerned at the clear intent of the farm lobby to

seek to entrench a mentality of farm subsidies in the USA.

"It is obvious that the US, which was once proudly boasted to be the

most efficient farmers in the world, have now degenerated to a situation

where US farmers are dependent on the taxpayers for around half their

income," Mr Truss said.

The secret Australian budget for the boat people pacific solution is set

at $400 to $500 million.

The estimate, approved by Cabinet in September when Nauru first agreed

to house and process asylum seekers, was based on a joint submission

from Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock, the Foreign Minister,

Alexander Downer, and the then defence minister, Peter Reith.

It covered everything from the defence costs in transporting boat people

to health care, camp construction and guarding asylum seekers.

The participation of at least three government departments means the

costs of setting up the boat people camp in Nauru can be allocated

across different portfolios.

Some of the first distribution of cash was used to meet Nauru's unpaid

bills.

Australia is pushing on with the Pacific solution, with agreement

yesterday to boost the number of boat people places in Nauru from 800

people to 1,200.

Japanese car maker Mitsubishi, has confirmed that it has asked for more

money from the Australian Government.

Mitsubishi sources in Japan say that the car maker has applied for

strategic investment coordination.

In short, the company wants a grant from the Australian Government.

The company has refused to say what the money would be used for or how

much it wants, although it has reaffirmed its commitment to upgrade its

current model of Magna at its Adelaide plants.

The grant would be on top of the several hundred million dollars that

has already been promised to Mitsubishi under a car assistance plan.

Socceroos coach Frank Farina says he could sign a new contract in "three

or four days" after a positve meeting this morning with Soccer Australia

chairman Ian Knop about a new contract.

Farina says he is "very close" to signing the new deal but wants more

information about what Australia's program will be heading to the next

World Cup qualifying attempt.

"I want to be happy with that and the direction we are going there, but

all the discussions thus far have been very good and this morning's was

excellent," he said.

Farina wants more information about who his support staff will be.

When a question was put to Farina about that issue Mr Knop stepped in to

stop the coach's answer.

"We agreed that this is all we were going to say," Mr Knop said.

"We are putting together a program of working together on a long-term

basis and that's where I'd like to leave it."

Mr Knop also responded to a report that Soccer Australia is considering

a $10 levy on junior players to get the organisation out of debt .

He says the board of Soccer Australia is committed to see the junior

system work and the board is not interested in"kicking it".

The Federal Government says ASIO and the Australian Federal Police have

interviewed the family of an Australian man who has been fighting with

the Taliban in Afghanistan.

The 26-year-old man was arrested by the Northern Alliance at the

weekend.

The Federal Attorney-General Daryl Williams says he cannot confirm media

reports the man has family in Adelaide.

But he says he has had more extensive training than American John Walker

Lindh who was arrested on December 1 for fighting with the Taliban.

"He is understood to have travelled to Europe in mid-1999 to join the

Kosovo Liberation Army, he then travelled to Pakistan November 1999

where he undertook some training.

"He entered Afghanistan as we understand it in 2000 and he has actually

undertaken extensive training with Osama bin Laden's Al Qaeda network,"

Mr Williams said.

Turning grief into defiance, Americans have paused in remembrance, three

months after the deadly September 11 attacks, as a resolute President

George W Bush forecast certain victory in his war on terrorism.

At 8:46am New York time (12:46am AEDT), the exact moment when a hijacked

airliner steered on a suicide mission sliced into one of the twin towers

of the World Trade Centre, ceremonies in Washington, New York and around

the world honoured some 3,300 people killed on an unprecedented day of

horror.

"Today, the wrongs are being righted, justice is being done," Mr Bush

said.

"We still have far to go, and many dangers still lie ahead, yet there

can be no doubt how this conflict will end.

In New York, firefighters, police officers and community leaders

assembled in the wreckage-strewn crater where the World Trade Centre

stood, until its signature towers were levelled on the bright sunny

morning of September 11.

Under grey skies, a lone tenor sung Let There Be Peace on Earth before a

priest, a rabbi and an imam addressed a solemn crowd, watched by New

York mayor Rudy Giuliani, who shepherded his city through September's

tragedy.

Bagpipers performed a haunting rendition of Amazing Grace as cranes and

the heavy machinery of construction workers excavating the site stood

idle.

At the Pentagon, the target of another hijacked airliner, a US flag was

unfurled in front of a gaping hole in the building, where reconstruction

is already under way.

A lone Christmas tree, daubed with red lights, was fixed to the roof,

metres from where the plane hit.

Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld vowed never to forget the 184 victims

who died at the Pentagon, the thousands more killed in New York and on

those on a hijacked plane that crashed in rural Pennsylvania, apparently

after the intervention of passengers.

"In the skies over Pennsylvania they showed those who believed that

Americans would not fight back that they were ready to roll," Mr

Rumsfeld said.

The first person has been charged over the terrorist attacks in the

United States three months ago.

Zaccarias Moussaoui was charged in connection with the September 11

terrorist attacks as a result of the wide-ranging federal probe of the

attacks, United States Attorney-General John Ashcroft said.

Moussaoui, 33, a French national of Moroccan origin, faces six counts in

connection with the terrorists attacks against the World Trade Centre in

New York and the Pentagon outside Washington that left more than 3,000

people dead, Mr Ashcroft told a press conference.

Four of those counts carry the death penalty.

The indictment also cites a list of unindicted co-conspirators headed by

Osama bin Laden, head of the Al Qaeda network, and Ayman al-Zawahiri,

head of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, as unindicted co-conspirators.

The list of co-conspirators also includes the 19 hijackers who

commandeered the four jets that were used as aerial targets on September

11, as well as two men who sent funds to the alleged terrorists.

Six Swiss tour company staff have been found guilty of manslaughter over

the deaths of 14 Australians and seven others in a canyoning disaster.

Two guides who survived the accident on July 27, 1999, were acquitted.

Adventure World president Stephan Friedli, vice-president Peter Balmer

and director Georg Hoedle were each given a five-month suspended

sentence and a fine of 7,500 Swiss francs (about $A8,800).

General manager Felix Oehler received five months and a fine of 5,000

francs, base manager Bernhard Gafner four months and 4,000 francs, and

lead guide Bernhard Steuri three months and 4,000 francs.

All six will pay one-eighth of the court costs and one-eighth of the

plaintiffs' costs, about 27,000 francs each.

Guides Simon Wiget and Stefan Abegglen were acquitted.

Peter Dewar, whose son Bradley died in the 1999 disaster, says more

legal action is planned.

"I guess if anything the main thing we were waiting for was a verdict of

guilty or not guilty," Mr Dewar said.

"The guilty verdict at least leaves something open for civil action, we

already have legal representation in place."

Mr Dewar said he hopes civil action would be a further "form of

punishment for the guilty".

Bill Peel of Mackay in north Queensland, whose son Billy died in the

canyoning accident, is disappointed with the verdict.

"It's Swiss law and we have to abide by it, I was very angry, very angry

I couldn't believe it.

"We were told this when the lawyer came to Australia 18 months ago but

it was still hard to believe it was true...oh well at least they are

guilty and they have to live that the rest of their lives and that's

some punishment anyway," Mr Peel said.

A United Nations panel of judges in East Timor has found 10 militia gang

members guilty of crimes against humanity.

They were given jail terms up to 33 years for their part in a massacre

soon after the territory's vote for independence two years ago.

A three-judge panel found the men guilty of killing two nuns, three

priests and an Indonesian journalist, as well as carrying out other

murders in East Timor's Los Palos district.

They also found the gang members guilty of torture, persecution and

forced deportation.

The court heard how soon after the vote the militia gang members, still

loyal to Indonesia, carried out 13 murders, burnt several villages and

forced residents of Los Palos to flee their homes.

They are the first people to be convicted of crimes against humanity in

connection with the violence that surrounded East Timor's vote for

independence.

The United States Federal Reserve has cut a key interest rate by a

quarter-point to a 40-year low of 1.75 per cent and left the door open

to further easing to help bring the US economy out of recession.

It was the 11th cut this year to the federal funds target rate and the

fourth since the September 11 suicide attacks in New York and

Washington.

The key rate, which determines overnight borrowing costs between banks,

is at its lowest level since July 1961.

Policy makers also cut the discount rate, at which commercial banks can

borrow from the Federal Reserve, by the same quarter-point margin to

1.25 per cent.

"Economic activity remains soft, with underlying inflation likely to

edge lower from relatively modest levels," the Federal Open Market

Committee said in a written statement.

The US economy officially slid into a recession in March, ending an

unprecedented 10-year expansion period.

The terrorist shockwave has escalated the task of rebuilding growth,

experts said.

Drug education campaigns appear to be paying dividends with new figures

showing a 10 per cent drop in drug related deaths last year.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1,570 people died from

drug related causes in the year 2000.

That figure is a substantial drop from 1999 when 1,740 Australians died

of drug related causes.

Across the states and territories, New South Wales recorded the biggest

decrease.

The bureau's David Payne attributes the decline of drug deaths to the

heroin drought in some parts of the country, better equipped ambulances

and emergency wards and above all, effective federal and state drug

education campaigns.

"They have put a lot of money into the program.

"There has been a fall and while you can't discern a trend from that,

the figures are going in the right way, right direction," Mr Payne said.

The number of adults and children being diagnosed as obese is on the

increase.

The findings of a new study have worrying implications for the future of

Australia's health system.

The study by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare shows the

number of people diagnosed as either obese or overweight has increased

by 2 per cent over the past two years.

The institute's Statistics Unit director, professor Helena Britt, says

the findings have grave implications.

"There seems to be a shift of 1 per cent going up and if we do that

every year for the next 10 years we are in big trouble."

Professor Britt says there has been a drop in deaths from heart disease

over the past two decades, but if the rise in obesity continues it could

reverse that trend, at a great cost to the community.

Up to 12 per cent of Australia's children are also now obese.

Professor Helena Britt says this is the first time there have been

reliable statistics available to show the prevalence of obesity among

children, using a new international standard.

She says the results are frightening for the future health of

Australia's adults.

"This is a worry for future heart disease because there has been

research demonstrating a relationship between adult heart disease and

childhood obesity so its something we have to watch as a society," she

said.

Nutrition Australia dietitian Rachael Bradford says the results, while

disturbing, are not surprising.

She says Australians need to look at lifestyle and resist the temptation

of convenience food to avert the trend.

"I think it's got to do with our nation having less physical activity,"

Ms Bradford said.

"There's a lot of automation with Australia because we are such a

privileged country so people are using automobiles, cars more, and not

doing as much walking."

United States peace envoy Anthony Zinni has told a meeting of Israeli

and Palestinian security officials he had decided to continue his

mission to end 15 months of bloodshed, US and Israeli sources said.

On Sunday, Mr Zinni walked out of an Israeli-Palestinian security

meeting and gave both sides 48 hours to show they were serious about

halting violence.

"Zinni said he was responding favourably to requests to continue his

mission," an Israeli security source said, describing today's US-hosted

meeting as positive.

A US diplomatic source told the Reuters news agency: "Zinni is

continuing his mission".

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat

met Mr Zinni yesterday and urged him to continue a two-week-old mission

marred by constant violence, including Palestinian suicide bombings and

retaliatory Israeli air raids.

Milestones in the history of radio will feature on all six ABC radio

networks today which marks 100 years since Guglielmo Marconi's first

transatlantic broadcast which signalled the birth of radio.

To celebrate, all six radio networks - ABC FM, Local Radio, NewsRadio,

Radio Australia, Radio National and Triple J - will broadcast a

five-minute simulcast at 11:55am (AEDT) this morning.

They will play audio from the top 10 radio news stories of the past 100

years, as voted by listeners.

These include coverage of World War I and II, the assassination of

President John F Kennedy, the landing on the moon and the terrorist

attacks of September 11.

About 60,000 bank staff will walk off the job this week in what is

thought to be the first national stoppage of its kind in three decades.

The stoppage will occur on Thursday and Friday.

It will involve staff from the National Australia Bank, ANZ and the Bank

of Melbourne, and will coincide with the banks' general meetings.

Tony Beck, of the Finance Sector Union, says the timing is to enable

members to deliver their complaints first-hand.

"We have proxies from customers and shareholders, and we'll be attending

the annual general meetings to say there's industrial action, staff have

had enough," he said.

"They want better support, better service, better recognition, saying to

the directors: 'you need to understand there's a crisis in this

industry'."

Anti-Taliban fighters say they have captured key areas in the

mountainous Tora Bora region in eastern Afghanistan.

The military success comes as the White House considers publicly

releasing a videotape which officials say shows Osama bin Laden showing

pleasure and surprise at the extent of damage caused by the September 11

attacks.

The video was found in a home in Afghanistan 10 days ago.

US President George W Bush says when he saw the tape he was reminded of

how just the United States' war on terror is.

"Those who see this tape will realise that Osama is guilty of incredible

murder," he said.

"He has no conscience and no soul ... he represents the worst of

civilisation."

The White House says it will be a couple of days before legal experts

decide whether the tape can be released.

Meanwhile, reports from London say United States army officers have

secretly entered Somalia in the first indication of the extension of the

war against terrorism.

Five military personnel have held discussions with a rebel Somali group

to find the location of suspected terrorist camps.

Since the September 11 attacks, the US has taken several steps against

Somali individuals and organisations.

Israeli helicopters have again attacked Palestinian targets in the Gaza

Strip.

It is the latest in a series of attacks designed to put pressure on the

Palestinian Authority to take tougher action against militants accused

of violence against Israelis.

Two helicopters returned to the skies above Gaza's north in the early

hours of Tuesday morning.

Eyewitnesses report seeing them fire as many as four missiles into a

security post in the north-eastern township of Bayt Hanum.

The small one storey building is a local command station for Yasser

Arafat's personal guard, Force-17.

The building was completely destroyed, but nobody was injured in the

attack.

Israel has accused Force-17 of direct involvement in the preparation and

execution of attacks against its people.

But the Palestinian Authority insists it is a legitimate force and a key

part of the Palestinian security infrastructure.

A 31-year-old Middle Eastern woman is said to be responding well to

treatment after being diagnosed with typhoid in a temporary holding

centre on remote Christmas Island.

It could be 48 hours before tests can confirm whether the disease has

spread further.

Two of the woman's three children, a boy aged 13 and a 10-year-old girl,

have been quarantined with their mother in the Christmas Island

hospital.

A third child remains at the island's sports hall, where locals say

conditions are crowded and hot.

All 540 detainees on Christmas island are being monitored by a health

team for signs of fever or abdominal pains, the key symptoms of typhoid,

which is spread by contact with contaminated food or water.

Hygiene measures have also been stepped up.

The Western Australian Health Department is briefing medical staff on

infection control procedures but locals have expressed concern the

disease could spread to the wider community.

Qantas has unveiled Australia's latest airline today, launching its

single-class "leisure carrier", Australian Airlines, which will start

operating in the third quarter of next year.

Initial flights will be from Cairns to Osaka, Nagoya, Singapore, Taipei,

Hong Kong and Fukuoka.

The board of Qantas gave the go-ahead for the new airline at a meeting

last week.

Although wholly owned by Qantas, it will have its own separate

management and will operate independently of Qantas.

An initial fleet of four Boeing 767-300 aircraft will eventually be

increased to 12 and services will be extended to every Australian

mainland capital, including Perth and Darwin.

Australian Airlines is currently negotiating with various unions on

wages, conditions and work practices.

Australian Airlines is expected to announce it will base its operations

in Cairns, following yesterday's Queensland Cabinet approval of an

incentive package for the airline.

The new airline plans to cut costs by outsourcing some maintenance work

and reducing the number of flight attendants.

Chief executive Denis Adams says Australian Airlines will operate at far

less cost than Qantas, so that re-opened routes to Asian cities will be

profitable.

Mr Adams says some maintenance work could be outsourced to Singapore,

Taipai or Auckland.

He says savings will also be achieved with flexibility in the workplace,

including conditions, work rules and rostering.

The Queensland Tourism Industry Council's Daniel Gschwind, says the

airline will open up new routes from Asia for all international

tourists.

"It will give them greater incentive to travel to regional Queensland,

travel to the Whitsundays, travel to Brisbane even and further south.

"It will generate enormous traffic through Cairns and it will energise

the whole state from an international tourism perspective," Mr Gschwind

said.

Australia has linked $10 million of aid to a new agreement with Nauru to

accept an extra 400 asylum seekers.

The deal means Nauru will take up to 1,200 asylum seekers under

Australia's Pacific solution.

Foreign Minister Alexander Downer signed the understanding today with

Nauru's President Rene Harris.

Mr Downer inspected the Nauru camps and says they are are practical and

efficient.

"I had a good look at the sanitation, the ablution blocks and thought

they were pretty good," he said.

"The asylum seekers have various things to do. There are volleyball

facilities and soccer facilities.

"Television is available, they can see 21 different channels on TV.

"The catering is good, there are three meals a day provided."

The Australian Transport Safety Bureau is investigating the overnight

crash of a Royal Flying Doctor Service aircraft near Mount Gambier, in

South Australia's south-east, which claimed the life of the 54-year-old

pilot.

The crash has been described as both a double tragedy and a miraculous

story of survival.

The aircraft was on approach to Mount Gambier Airport when it came down

in a block of scrub and young pine trees, about four kilometres short of

the runway.

It levelled a 200-metre-long path through the vegetation before breaking

up and catching fire.

The pilot was killed, but the only other person on board, a 34-year-old

nurse from nearby Millicent, suffered only minor injuries.

Chief Inspector Bronwyn Killmier says she was stunned that the nurse

walked away virtually unscathed.

The aircraft had been flying from Port Augusta to collect a six-year-old

boy and take him to Sydney for a liver transplant.

Chief Inspector Killmier says the boy and his mother had been waiting at

the airport.

"The donor went to another person, it is a double tragedy, I mean the

pilot's family as well as the six-year-old boy's family."

The Australian cricket team has arrived in Adelaide to prepare for the

first Test against South Africa starting on Friday.

Leg-spinner Stuart MacGill, who is in the squad in place of pace bowler

Andy Bichel says he is not perturbed by reports of a clash of

personality with fellow spinner Shane Warne.

MacGill says they have always got on well in the five Tests where they

have both played.

"Cricket teams all over the world are made up of very different people

and whilst I'm saying that 'yes, I am different to Shane', I'm also

different to Glenn McGrath and Jason Gillespie and it's the same thing I

think you'll find in most local cricket clubs," he said.

Warne has also played down reports of a rift, saying he and MacGill have

no problems, but that he does enjoy the rivalry.

South Africa will go into Friday's first Test against Australia in

Adelaide with most of its batsmen in good form.

The South Africans scored 5 for 390 in their second innings in the match

against Western Australia in Perth with centuries from Jacques Kallis

and Neil McKenzie, and half centuries from Gary Kirsten and Lance

Klusener.

Most of the Tora Bora mountain complex in eastern Afghanistan, where

Osama bin Laden's Al Qaeda fighters have been hiding, has been captured

by Afghan militia forces, military commander Hazrat Ali said.

"We control all of the Melawa and Tora Bora area, except for one place,"

Mr Ali told reporters, adding that Al Qaeda still held the very top of

the mountain.

"We have captured all of the Al Qaeda places with heavy weapons," he

said, speaking through an interpreter.

The rout came on the seventh day of a fierce offensive by United States

warplanes and Afghan militiamen on the Tora Bora area, which is riddled

with caves used by Afghan mujahideen during the 1979-1989 war against

the Soviets.

Earlier, Mr Ali's spokesman, Amin, told the AFP news agency that

anti-Taliban forces had captured a number of strategic heights in the

White Mountains range, in which Tora Bora is situated, from Al Qaeda

fighters.

"We have taken Melawa, Palanai and a large portion of Anzare Sar," Amin

said.

Four Saudi-born Al Qaeda fighters had been killed he added.

Amin said US warplanes had been pounding the area heavily but had in the

last few hours stopped the bombing "due to our advances".

Local commanders are convinced bin Laden, wanted for the September 11

terrorist atrocities in the United States, is holed up in the Tora Bora

area with his followers.

The Israel Government has expressed regret and promised an investigation

into how two children were killed and several others were injured during

a botched assassination attempt on a leading Islamic Jihad militant.

The children died when helicopter gunships fired on two cars in the West

Bank city of Hebron.

Israeli forces were attempting to kill Mohammed Sidr, a man they say is

responsible for many attacks.

He escaped injured, but alive but two boys aged three and 13 died.

Israeli Government spokesman Arye Mekel says he deeply regrets the

deaths and that many Israeli children have also suffered.

"What happened here is being investigated and hopefully it will never

happen again, but we have to understand this is a war," Mr Mekel said.

Another Palestinian was killed in the West Bank town of Ramallah when

his truck exploded shortly before the arrival of US envoy Anthony Zinni

who was there to see Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat.

Mr Zinni met with Mr Arafat in a fresh attempt to broker a cease-fire

with Israel, a Palestinian official said.

The meeting in Ramallah followed talks between Zinni and Israeli Prime

Minister Ariel Sharon, a day after the US envoy threatened to quit if

the two sides failed to agree on a truce.

"President Arafat asked Mr Zinni to put pressure on Israel to stop its

assassinations, its military escalation and to lift the blockade on

Palestinian territories," Nabil Abu Rudeina, an advisor to Mr Arafat

said.

Mr Arafat also pledged that he was determined to cooperate with the US

peace envoy in his quest to secure an Israeli-Palestinian cease-fire.

On Sunday, Mr Zinni told Palestinian and Israeli security officials they

had 48 hours to make "substantial progress" or else he would return to

Washington, ending a two-week-old peace mission, an Israeli official

said.

United States Secretary of State Colin Powell said in Berlin that the US

and Germany were working "to get the violence down" in the Middle East

in order to get back to peace talks.

Speaking to reporters after meeting with German Chancellor Gerhard

Schroeder and Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer, Mr Powell said: "We are

trying to get the violence down so the negotiating process can begin".

He said "we will continue to work as hard as we can to get both sides",

Israel and Palestine, back to the peace process.

In Brussels, the European Union challenged Mr Arafat to dismantle the

"terrorist networks" of Hamas and Islamic Jihad, and to publicly call

for an end to the Palestinians' armed intifada.

Foreign ministers from the 15 EU member states issued the

strongly-worded message after talks in Brussels with Israeli Foreign

Minister Shimon Peres and the Palestinian international cooperation

minister Nabil Shaath.

Unions are already expressing their dissatisfaction with the royal

commission set up to investigate claims of fraud, corruption and

violence in the building industry.

Royal Commissioner Terrence Cole QC is investigating the claims.

On the first day of the inquiry yesterday, there were allegations of

witness intimidation, and a warning from Counsel Assisting the

Commissioner, Lionel Roberts QC, that there would be charges against

anyone involved in making threats.

Unions have been quick to express their dissatisfaction.

The Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union's (CFMEU) John

Sutton says the focus of the investigation is too narrow.

"I think we're going to have to make our voice heard because from what

I've seen it's a very one sided process and a very unsatisfactory

process to simply be zeroing in on the trade unions as if there's no

other issues in the building industry," Mr Sutton said.

Several thousand Melbourne construction workers will walk off the job

today in a show of support for union leaders giving evidence.

The security at Collins Place in Melbourne is being stepped up in

preparation for the rally.

Union officials are promising a peaceful gathering to show support for

various officials who are giving evidence today, including the CFMEU's

Martin Kingham.

United Nationals secretary-general Kofi Annan has accepted the 2001

Nobel Peace Prize in the Norwegian capital, Oslo, declaring that to save

one life is to save humanity itself.

Mr Annan told a gala audience the world must respect the individual,

whose fundamental rights he says have been sacrificed too often for the

good of the state.

The 63-year-old UN chief, a native of Ghana, shares this year's 100th

Nobel Peace Prize with the United Nations as a whole.

His award was for bringing new life to the world body in his fight for

human rights, and against AIDS and terrorism.

Qantas maintenance workers will decide by secret ballot whether to

accept the airline's offer of an incentive payment from company profits.

Unions will advise members to reject the offer because it includes a

wage freeze.

Qantas management and unions have been locked in negotiations for two

days over the proposed 12 to 18-month wage freeze.

Unions say the workers deserve a pay rise, while Qantas maintains it

cannot afford it because of the global downturn in the airline industry.

The results of the secret ballot will be put before the Industrial

Relations Commission next Monday.

Failure to resolve the issue could result in industrial action over the

Christmas holidays.

One person has died after a Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS) aircraft

crashed near the city of Mt Gambier in South Australia's south-east,

last night.

The RFDS says a Beech 200 aircraft apparently came down just before

midnight (ACDT), in an area called Dismal Swamp, about 15 kilometres

north of Mt Gambier.

The aircraft, with two crew members on board, had come from Port Augusta

to Mt Gambier to fly a six-year-old boy to Sydney for medical treatment.

However, a spokesman for the RFDS says no passenger was aboard the plane

at the time.

One of the crew is believed to have died from injuries and the other is

believed to be not as badly hurt.

No other details have been released and police have sealed off the crash

site.

Officers from the Bureau of Air Safety Investigation will head to the

scene today to determine the cause of the crash.

New statistics released by the Cancer Council reveal some alarming

trends about lung cancer.

The report reveals lung cancer now rivals breast cancer as the leading

cause of cancer death among women.

The statistics, covering the past three decades, also show high numbers

of lung cancer cases and deaths in poorer areas such as some parts of

Sydney and far western New South Wales.

The Cancer Council's chief executive officer, Andrew Penman, says

another trend is in the type of lung cancer which is believed to be

caused by changes in the design of cigarettes.

"Modern cigarettes are particularly dangerous to the peripheral airways

and they're causing lung cancers deeper in the lungs than traditional

cigarettes say 40 years ago," he said.

About 2,200 people die from lung cancer in New South Wales each year.

Conservationists have applauded the one-year jail sentence given to a

man who logged protected rainforest trees.

Brett Dempsey, 31, of Ravenshoe pleaded guilty to destroying 23

rainforest trees in a World Heritage Area on north Queensland's

Herberton Range in December last year.

Dempsey is the first person to be prosecuted under the Wet Tropics World

Heritage Protection and Management Act.

The Wilderness Society's Lyndon Schneiders says he hopes the court's

decision will help protect Queensland's world heritage rainforests.

"It's irrelevant what tree it was, the issue was it's the world heritage

area and what sort of management do you have there and the management is

[to] protect those world heritage values," Mr Schneiders said.

"That is the reason for implementing the World Heritage Management Act

and that's the reason for drawing up these plans.

"It doesn't matter if you'd gone in and logged two trees or 500 trees,

you've got to look at it in the different circumstances, but I think a

jail sentence in this instance is appropriate."

Ian Thorpe has emulated Kieren Perkins feat by being named Australian

swimmer of the year for the third consecutive year.

The champion 19-year-old dominated the July world championships in

Japan, winning several gold medals.

Thorpe's coach Doug Frost has been named coach of the year.

Meanwhile, the Australian cricket team has arrived in Adelaide to

prepare for the first Test against South Africa starting on Friday.

Leg spinner Stuart MacGill, who is in the squad in place of pace bowler

Andy Bichel says he is not perturbed by reports of a clash of

personality with fellow spinner Shane Warne.

MacGill says they have always got on well in the five Tests where they

have both played.

"Cricket teams all over the world are made up of very different people

and whilst I'm saying that 'yes, I am different to Shane', I'm also

different to Glenn McGrath and Jason Gillespie and it's the same thing I

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South Africa will go into Friday's first Test against Australia in

Adelaide with most of its batsmen in good form.

The South Africans scored 5 for 390 in their second innings in the match

against Western Australia in Perth with centuries from Jacques Kallis

and Neil McKenzie, and half centuries from Gary Kirsten and Lance

Klusener.

Meanwhile South African vice-captain Mark Boucher says veteran fast

bowler Allan Donald is a strong contender for the match despite a

limited preparation after a long injury layoff.

"I don't think it's lack of bowling that Allan's had, he's been working

really hard, he's had a lot of time off to rest, so I think he should be

fine," he said.

The United States is intensifying its bombing of the mountains of

eastern Afghanistan in a concerted attempt to flush out Al Qaeda

fighters.

The Pentagon says more than 80 strike aircraft - most of which were

FA-18 fighter jets flying from aircraft carriers stationed in the area -

have flown sorties over Afghanistan.

They were accompanied by long-range B-52 bombers who targeted areas of

the White Mountains near Jalalabad where Osama bin Laden is believed to

be leading his fighters.

In Washington, there is some division about what to do with the man

accused of the September 11 attacks.

As the BBC reports, dealing with bin Laden and Mullah Mohammad Omar is

one of the most difficult problems confronting the United States and

senior officials are disagreeing publicly on the issue.

Vice-President Dick Cheney says that if either man was captured by other

forces they must be handed over to the United States to face justice.

The Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld has suggested they could be tried

elsewhere.

Mr Cheney said the leaders were exactly the sort of people who would be

tried by the military courts.

He gave a strong defence of the court saying extremists had used

previous open trials to learn new ways to attack the United States.

A new study shows that nearly one third of the Aboriginal and Torres

Strait Islander population in Australia have been arrested in the past

five years.

The study conducted by the Australian National University for the New

South Wales Bureau of Crime Statistics is the first to compare the

arrest rates of the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal population.

It finds that unemployment, alcohol and assault rates were the main

causes.

Study author Boyd Hunter says policy both on a community and government

level must deal with these issues if the arrest rate is to be decreased.

"Addressing the supply of alcohol in remote communities is seen as the

most likely avenue for reducing rates of abuse, alcohol abuse and hence

reduce arrest rates in those communities," he said.

The Royal Commission into collapsed insurance giant HIH has been told

directors, including chairman Ray Williams, made a bid for huge

termination payouts shortly before provisional liquidation.

Chief liquidator Anthony McGrath told the commission a resolution was

passed at a board meeting on December 14 last year to pay Mr Williams a

termination payout worth three times his annual salary at $5 million.

Mr McGrath says the payout has not been made.

"My understanding is that he has been paid his statutory entitlements

for annual leave and long service leave, but no severance payment has

been made at this stage," he said.

Mr McGrath went on to outline requests from fellow director George

Sturesteps, who asked for twice his annual pay at the same meeting.

On March 15, only hours before the company was placed into provisional

liquidation, director and chief financial officer, Dominic Fodera, asked

for twice his annual salary as termination payment.

Mr McGrath says he viewed the requests as inappropriate for company

directors and that he was concerned as provisional liquidation seemed

imminent at the time.

Unions representing Qantas maintenance workers have not ruled out

disruptions to Christmas flights following a breakdown in negotiations

with management.

The issue of a wage freeze was not resolved after two days of hearings

before the Industrial Relations Commission.

Qantas has put an offer to workers but unions will advise members to

reject it because it does not include a pay rise.

Doug Cameron from the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union says Qantas

is being greedy.

"Any disruption to Christmas flights is clearly on the head of Qantas,"

he said.

"Qantas have been the company that have been absolutely belligerent in

their approach towards their own employees.

"Qantas are the company that are trying to cut the wages of the

lowest-paid skilled workers in the country and Qantas is the company

that have created this situation and they have come and not moved one

inch in bargaining."

Unions say maintenance workers deserve modest pay rises and an improved

career structure.

But Qantas maintains it has to impose a wage freeze because of the

global downturn in the airline industry.

Doug Cameron from the Manufacturing Workers Union says members will

decide by secret ballot whether to step up industrial action.

"Every time Qantas has come to the table they've been arrogant, they've

been belligerent," he said.

"Their position is that these workers will bow to the will of Qantas and

our view is that is unacceptable for a company that's built its

reputation for safety, built its reputation for reliability on the back

of the workers who are earning $30,000 a year."

Qantas says it is confident an agreement will be reached following the

secret ballot.

Olympic 400 metres champion Cathy Freeman will return to competition at

the Melbourne Track Classic on March 7.

Freeman began training six weeks ago after taking a break from the sport

following the Sydney Olympics.

The Melbourne Track Classic is a lead-up event to the Australian

Championships in Brisbane, which double as the Commonwealth Games

selection trials.

The Middle East peace process is under new pressure after an ultimatum

from the United States special envoy Anthony Zinni.

After two weeks of frustration, he has given Israel and the Palestinians

a 48 hour deadline to make some progress or he would go back to

Washington.

His mission has been accompanied by an upsurge in suicide bombing

attacks on Israel and a tough Israeli response.

Earlier, Israel rejected a temporary ceasefire offer by four militant

Palestinian groups to halt their attacks through to the end of Ramadan

next week if Israel agreed to stop assassinating their members.

A spokesman for the Government says Israel deals only with the

Palestinian Authority and not with terrorist organisations.

The conditional ceasefire offer was made by Hamas, Islamic Jihad and the

military wing of Yasser Arafat's Fatah faction and follows a sharp

upsurge in fighting in the past 10 days.

Authorities are trying to track down the crew of a vessel that landed

undetected at Cocos Islands carrying 69 asylum seekers.

The group of Sri Lankan men was found aboard their boat moored to the

south of the Islands yesterday afternoon.

Shire president, Ron Grant, says investigations are underway as to the

whereabouts of the crew, after the asylum seekers told authorities they

had left in another boat after dropping them off.

"Unfortunately for them there's two P-3 aircraft, the Royal Australian

Air Force here at the moment and one's getting prepared to fly off and

obviously they will be looking to see if there is another boat," he

said.

Mr Grant says the Sri Lankans have not yet been brought ashore.

The Royal Commission into the Building Industry has ended the first day

of public hearings in Melbourne.

Counsel assisting Lionel Robbards QC told the commission of a culture of

fear in the building industry.

He said some witnesses were afraid to come forward after being

physically threatened.

The Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) secretary,

Martin Kingham, will respond to allegations made against the unions when

he gives evidence tomorrow.

It coincides with a rally by thousands of building workers outside

Collins Place, where the commission is being held.

The United States says a video tape found inside Afghanistan proves

beyond doubt Osama bin Laden was behind the attacks on the World Trade

Centre and the Pentagon.

The tape is alleged to show bin Laden discussing the success of the

mission.

In the 40-minute tape, bin Laden is said to be at a dinner when told a

plane had crashed into the World Trade Centre.

He is alleged to have told others present what had happened and they

cheered.

US Vice-President Dick Cheney says the video shows bin Laden was clearly

behind the attacks.

"There've some disputes in some quarters about it, but this is one more

piece of evidence confirming his responsibility," he said.

Republican Chuck Hagel of the Foreign Relations Committee says the

administration must make the tapes public.

"The world needs to see this," he said.

"Some officials hope it will be shown to counter concerns in the Muslim

world that bin Laden has been unjustly accused.

Osama bin Laden was said to be staging a defiant stand in the Afghan

mountains, as Taliban rule finally came to an ignominious end with the

surrender of the last province under their control.

A spokesman for the Northern Alliance said bin Laden was now leading the

defence of his mountain hideouts in person, with about 1,000 loyal

fighters from his Al Qaeda organisation.

"Osama himself has taken the command of the fighting," Mohammad Amin

told the Reuters news agency from the eastern city of Jalalabad.

"He, along with around 1,000 of his people, including some Taliban

officials, have now dug themselves into the forests of Spin Ghar after

we overran all their bases in Tora Bora.

"He is here for sure," Mr Amin said.

"American planes have been carrying out regular and severe bombings to

kill him."

Mr Amin added that at least one of bin Laden's Arab fighters had been

killed in "very intense" fighting.

The Saudi-born Islamist accused by Washington of ordering the September

11 attacks on the United States appeared ever more isolated after his

Taliban protectors handed over the Zabul province to tribal elders.

"The rule of the Taliban in Afghanistan has totally ended," the

Pakistan-based Afghan news agency Afghan Islamic Press (AIP) said in

reporting the surrender of Zabul.

At least 24 civilians were killed and 15 injured in weekend bombing

raids by US warplanes in Afghanistan's south-eastern Paktika province,

the Afghan Islamic Press (AIP) said late Sunday.

The Pakistan-based news agency, quoting informed sources, said the US

jets blasted several vehicles at Sharana, the provincial capital of

Paktika, on Saturday, killing 14 people and injuring several others.

The dead were five children, four women and five men.

Another 10 people were killed when US planes bombarded vehicles in

pre-dawn raids on Sunday in the Mosh Khil area near Sharana, AIP said.

It said a mosque was destroyed in the raids.

AIP said Taliban rule had been ended in Paktika and the administration

was being run by a tribal Shura (council).

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon said Israel might step up its military

operations in the West Bank and Gaza Strip following a new Palestinian

suicide bombing in Haifa.

"Our operations are yielding impressive results but we have not finished

our action and because of what is happening we might have to step up our

activities," Sharon told Israeli public radio.

Earlier on Sunday a Palestinian suicide bomber tried to blow himself up

at a bus station in the northern Israeli town of Haifa, injuring several

people.

The militant was seriously wounded in the botched attack and was quickly

shot dead by two policemen who feared he was about to activate a second

bomb.

Mr Sharon was speaking during a weekly cabinet meeting that was held at

the West Bank headquarters of the Israeli armed forces, near the Jewish

settlement of Beit El and the Palestinian town of Ramallah.

Israeli cabinet ministers were driven to the meeting in an armored bus,

the radio said.

Mr Sharon has sent in his warplanes, helicopter gunships and tanks to

Palestinian police stations across the territories to pile pressure on

Mr Arafat to arrest and sentence Islamic extremists behind a wave of

suicide bombings on Israeli cities in the past week.

Two Palestinians were killed and more than 120 injured in the air

strikes.

An International study has found thousands of Australians are involved

in the child sex industry, but it remains a largely invisible problem.

The report author and national director of Child Wise, Bernadette

McMenamin, says the 10-year study revealed a growing number of

Australians are involved in paedophilia, child pornography and child sex

tours.

It also found a growing number of children are working as prostitutes in

order to survive.

Ms McMenamin says the advent of the Internet has made it easier for

offenders to promote sex tours, share images and information, and

establish international networks.

The child sex trade report has made 29 recommendations to the Federal

Government on how to improve investigations of child sex offences and

provide improved services to affected children.

Ms McMenamin says Australian authorities are ignoring the growing number

of children working as prostitutes, preferring to call them homeless or

children without support.

Ms McMenamin says more needs to be done to address the role of

commercial sex in survival on the streets

"We're currently not meeting their needs, they're falling through the

gaps, they are not entering services because the services aren't gearing

towards the needs that these young people have when they're on the

streets and they're really, really vulnerable," she said.

Qantas management and unions representing the airline's maintenance

workers will meet again today after marathon talks last night failed to

resolve a wage dispute.

Unions are fighting a proposed 12 to 18 month wage freeze and to secure

a better career structure for their 2,500 employees.

Bill Shorten of the Australian Workers Union (AWU) says the unions will

not rest until a satisfactory outcome is reached.

"After eight hours, the AWU and AMWU are still talking to Qantas, we

will resume tomorrow morning at 11am [AEDT] in the Industrial Relations

Commission to see if we can't work through this position our members now

find ourselves in," he said last night.

Meanwhile, Ansett workers will sing Christmas carols in front of the

Prime Minister's Kirribilli residence in Sydney this morning to remind

John Howard about their owed entitlements.

The Transport Workers Union (TWU) will hold a 24-hour picket outside

Kirribilli House and says about 16,000 workers and their families are

facing a bleak Christmas.

The News South Wales secretary of the TWU, Tony Sheldon, says the

Government promised to deliver about $195 million in entitlements.

Mr Sheldon says the financial situation for many workers has reached

crisis point.

"There's been very little delivered by this Government, a lot of

promises, a lot of noise was made before the federal election but very

little in substance.

"It's important John Howard delivers for the tourism community, for the

Ansett workers and for the Australian community generally," Mr Sheldon

said.

An Iraqi doctor, being held at Sydney's Villawood Detention Centre,

claims he was prevented from receiving a human rights award.

Dr Aamer Sultan had been awarded a special commendation at yesterday's

Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission awards in Sydney but was

not able to receive the honour in person.

Dr Sultan says he had been hoping to attend the ceremony but says the

management at Villawood stopped him from going.

"I submitted a formal request to the centre manager who promised me that

he will present the matter to migration management here who are the main

authority here.

"They also came back that unfortunately we can[not] fulfill this request

for you, but they didn't give any explanation."

Dr Sultan says he was disappointed by the decision.

The Immigration Minister, Philip Ruddock, has written a letter of

complaint to the Medical Journal of Australia, about an article penned

by Dr Sultan on the psychological state of detainees at Villawood.

The journal has published research Dr Sultan conducted with former

visiting psychologist to the centre, Kevin O'Sullivan.

Their survey of 33 detainees over nine months found all but one

displayed symptoms of psychological distress at some time.

The article says 85 per cent acknowledged chronic depressive symptoms,

and close to half of the group had reached severe stages of depression.

Australian's casinos generated a $3.1 billion income in the 2000-2001

financial year.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics has found gambling was the biggest

money winner for casinos, making up 80 per cent or $2.5 billion of total

income.

Governments also did well, taking more than $500 million from the

casinos for gambling taxes and levies while the 20,000 employees were

paid more than $800 million for their work.

But despite the expense, the profit for Australian casinos increased by

19 per cent for the year.

At the end of June this year, there was almost 11,000 poker and gaming

machines and more than 1,000 gaming tables across Australia.

The royal commission into the building industry will hold its first

public hearings in Melbourne today.

The Howard Government established the commission in July prior to

calling the federal election, prompting union claims of a political

witch-hunt.

But Royal Commissioner Terence Cole QC has stressed the independence of

his inquiry.

He will examine claims of corruption, coercion and anti-competitive

behaviour in the industry.

Unions had initially refused to cooperate with the inquiry, but key

union figures, including Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union

(CFMEU) secretary Martin Kingham, have been summonsed to give evidence.

A finding is not expected for 12 months.

Geoff Huegill has continued his record-breaking ways at the World Cup

short course swimming in Melbourne, bettering the Australian record in

the 100 metres butterfly.

Huegill beat fellow Australian Michael Klim, backing up after last night

setting a world record in the 50 metres butterfly.

Israeli tanks and troops have launched two incursions in the Gaza Strip

near the Palestinian self-rule city of Khan Yunis, arresting several

people and searching houses.

Witnesses say undercover soldiers wearing masks arrived first, followed

by tanks and additional troops.

Palestinian officials say they were looking for Iffam Abu Daka, one of

the leaders of the militant Democratic Front.

Earlier, an Israeli F-16 fighter jet struck three buildings in the

Palestinian police headquarters in Gaza City, injuring at least 18

people.

Palestinian officials say two four-storey buildings inside the compound

were engulfed in flames and destroyed.

The Federal Government has confirmed there is a blowout in the Defence

budget because of the cost of sending troops to Afghanistan.

Defence Minister Robert Hill says the Government will have to consider

delaying some Defence projects because of the cost of sending troops to

the war against terrorism, but says no projects will be scrapped.

Senator Hill says the cost of the deployment means some projects

outlined in last year's Defence white paper will have to be

reprioritised.

He says the Government's options are to boost defence spending or to

delay some projects.

"Now what I'm saying is you can't enter into major undertakings like

contributing to the war against terrorism without knowing it's going to

cost extra money," he said.

"We have to fund that, there are a range of options to do that."

The Federal Opposition says Senator Hill must reveal which projects

would be affected.

Shadow Defence Minister Chris Evans says the Government should also come

clean on the cost of using the Navy to intercept asylum seekers.

The Australian Government is continuing to talk to Indian authorities

about a man who has confessed to planning attacks against Australia

amongst other countries.

Twenty-eight-year-old Mohammed Afroz, who undertook pilot training in

Australia in 1997 and 1998, has been charged with waging war against

India.

He has also made claims about planning terrorist attacks in Australia

with the Rialto Towers in Melbourne one target.

While the Government is taking the claims seriously, there is some

skepticism about them.

The Attorney-General Daryl Williams says some of the detail of the

claims simply has not been accurate.

The claim the man's relatives in Europe have links to Osama bin Laden's

terrorist network has been found to be untrue.

Australia is asking India for permission to talk to the man, but

Government sources say they will not confirm if the request has been

granted.

A gunman has died after he went on a shooting rampage that left another

person dead and several more people wounded at a factory in Goshen,

Indiana, officials said.

The gunman was found dead at the scene, but "it's not clear whether the

suspect shot himself", Elkhart County Sheriff's Department said in a

statement.

Officials said a second person was killed and several more were wounded.

The shooter was fired from Nu-Wood Decorative Millwork factory after

getting into a fight around lunchtime Thursday local time and threatened

to return with a gun, the wife of one employee told WNDU television.

Four victims were taken to Goshen General Hospital shortly after the

incident began around 3:00pm (7:00am AEDT) hospital spokeswoman Donna

Rohrer said.

Three of them "were being evaluated", for their injuries, a fourth

casualty was airlifted to a hospital in Fort Wayne, Indiana, she said.

Police were unable to enter the factory for over one hour, but witnesses

told CNN that crack police squads eventually made their way in around

4:45pm.

New Zealand's ambassador to Brazil, Denise Almao, said she had

identified the body of murdered sea hero Sir Peter Blake, but she would

not say how he died.

According to initial police reports, Mr Blake was shot dead by pirates

who bordered his yacht, Seamaster, off the town of Macapa, in the mouth

of the Amazon River.

He was said to have been shot twice in the back, although his mother

said she had been told that he was shot in the head.

Joyce Blake also told Radio New Zealand that unidentified people had

held a grudge against her son.

Ms Almao told the radio station she had gone to Macapa to identify the

body.

"He was shot twice," she said. She would not say if he was shot in the

back.

Two other crew members who were injured in the attack had been treated

in hospital and had returned to the Seamaster, Ms Almao said.

"They seem okay. The injuries they suffered were not serious."

New Zealand Prime Minister Helen Clark says she feels devastated by Mr

Blake's death.

"I think he is to the waters what Sir Edmund Hillary has been to the

mountains. You couldn't find a more public-spirited man than this," she

said.

Ms Almao said Brazilians were also in shock and were providing every

sort of assistance.

"My impression is that there is a very active investigation proceeding,

that everyone from the governor on down is offering every assistance and

I think they are doing their utmost to bring the perpetrators to

justice," she said.

A Swiss fireman has told a court how he snapped a photograph of a body

being swept along by a two-metre high wave as a flash flood rushed down

a river gorge.

Markus Gerber said he took the photo to prove that his eyes were not

deceiving him as he saw the wave sweep down the Saxet canyon following a

thunderstorm on July 27, 1999.

"I needed proof that I was not deceived that there was a human being in

the wave," Mr Gerber said.

"I couldn't tell if there was anyone else in the wave, I was expecting

that this was a single case."

But Mr Gerber's optimism was wrong.

The flash flood had swamped a group of tourists on a canyoning

excursion, killing 18 tourists, 14 of them Australians, and three

guides.

Eight staff of the now-defunct Adventure World company are charged with

manslaughter through culpable negligence for allowing the tour to go

ahead despite the risk of flood from the storm.

Mr Gerber became angry as he told the court he had tried to convince

Adventure World vice-president Peter Balmer of the need for closer

cooperation between his company and the emergency services.

"For one-and-a-half or two years I called Mr Balmer and tried to

convince him to see that Saxetbach was dangerous, but Mr Balmer assured

me that they were all right, there were no problems there," Mr Gerber

said.

"I finally called him again and said the fire brigade would not take

responsibility if anything happened."

Asked if he rang Adventure World on the day of the accident to warn them

about the storm forecast, he said: "No".

The United States offered full and direct approval to Indonesia's 1975

invasion of East Timor, a move by then-president Suharto which consigned

the territory to 25 years of oppression, official documents released

today showed.

The documents prove conclusively for the first time that the United

States gave a 'green light' to the invasion, the opening salvo in an

occupation that cost the lives of up to 200,000 East Timorese.

General Suharto briefed US president Gerald Ford and his secretary of

state Henry Kissinger on his plans for the former Portuguese colony

hours before the invasion, according to documents collected by George

Washington University's National Security Archive.

When Mr Ford and Mr Kissinger called in to Jakarta on their way back

from a summit in Beijing on December 6 1975, Suharto claimed that in the

interests of Asia and regional stability, he had to bring stability to

East Timor to which Portugal was trying to grant autonomy.

"We want your understanding if we deem it necessary to take rapid or

drastic action," Suharto told his visitors, according to a

long-classified State Department cable.

Mr Ford replied: "We will understand and will not press you on the

issue. We understand the problem you have and the intentions you have."

Mr Kissinger, who has denied the subject of Timor came up during the

talks, appeared to be concerned about the domestic political

implications of an Indonesian invasion.

"It is important that whatever you do succeeds quickly, we would be able

to influence the reaction in America if whatever happens happens after

we return.

"The president will be back on Monday at 2pm Jakarta time. We understand

your problem and the need to move quickly, but I am only saying that it

would be better if it were done after we returned."

The invasion took place on December 7, the day after the Ford-Suharto

meeting.

Mr Kissinger has consistently rejected criticism of the Ford

administration's conduct on East Timor.

During a launch in 1995 for his book <i>Diplomacy</i> Mr Kissinger said

at a New York hotel it was perhaps "regrettable" that for US officials,

the implications of Indonesia's Timor policy were lost in a blizzard of

geo-political issues following the Vietnam War.

Jason Stoltenberg will become the new coach of world tennis number one

Lleyton Hewitt, after coach Darren Cahill decided to end his contract

with the talented 20-year-old.

Darren Cahill started officially coaching Lleyton Hewitt in 1999.

Since then the young South Australian has risen to be the world's top

male player, a US Open and Davis Cup champion.

The breakup of the relationship was confirmed in a statement released by

Hewitt's managers late this morning.

In it Cahill says it has been a rewarding three years, and he is

confident that Hewitt will not skip a beat.

Hewitt says he is grateful for the guidance he has been given by Cahill,

and that Stoltenberg will provide him with invaluable experience and

dedication, which he is quite enthusiastic about.

Stoltenberg says he looks forward to helping Hewitt evolve his game

further.

The former Wimbledon semi-finalist will travel full-time with Hewitt on

the tennis tour.

They will begin working together after Christmas with their first

tournament together coming in January - the Hopman Cup in Perth.

A senior Taliban official confirmed the Islamic militia would begin

handing over its last bastion of Kandahar to Pashtun tribal leaders on

Friday.

"This agreement was that Taliban should surrender Kandahar peacefully to

the elders of these areas and we should guarantee the lives and the

safety of Taliban authorities, and all the Taliban from tomorrow should

start this program...," former Taliban ambassador to Pakistan Abdul

Salam Zaeef told CNN in a telephone interview.

He insisted that the Taliban would not surrender to Hamid Karzai, the

new Afghan interim leader and a Pashtun elder who has been cooperating

with the United States to calm unrest among the southern tribes.

"The Taliban will surrender to elders, not to Karzai ... Karzai and

other persons, which they want to enter Kandahar by the support of

America, they don't allow to enter Kandahar city," he said.

"The Taliban will surrender the weapons, the ammunition, to elders."

A suspect allegedly involved in planning terrorist attacks on Australia

has been detained and charged with waging war against India.

If convicted 28-year-old Mohammed Afroz faces hanging or life

imprisonment.

Police say Afroz was arrested on October 2 after he was found staying in

a hotel close to his home.

They say Afroz had claimed Osama bin Laden's Al Qaeda network was

planning terrorist attacks in Australia, Britain and India similar to

the September 11 attacks on the United States.

Razzak reportedly told police four al-Qaeda suicide squads in total had

been tasked to carry out hits on the World Trade Centre in New York, the

British parliament, a tower block in Australia and India's parliament in

New Delhi.

Police say an email sent by Afroz to an address in Australia had

mentioned plans to attack Britain's House of Commons after hijacking a

plane.

The Press Trust of India says Razzak spent $212,000 on flying lessons in

Australia, Britain and the United States.

The Hindustan Times newspaper has also quoted unidentified officials as

saying Afroz admitted during questioning the Al Qaeda network had sent

him to flight training schools in Australia, Britain and India.

Mumbai police have reportedly recovered an "American credit card" from

Razzak and a passport with visas for Australia, Britain, Thailand and

the United States.

India's Home Minister Lal Krishna Advani released details of the claims

yesterday.

Refugee support groups are strongly critical of Federal Government

claims that the "Pacific Solution" program is working well.

The Immigration Minister, Philip Ruddock, says he is pleased with the

program, which uses Pacific Island nations to process asylum seekers

wanting to come to Australia.

President of the Hazara Ethnic Society of Australia, Hassan Ghulam, says

the Australian Government is bullying smaller nations into accepting

asylum seekers.

"If the Pacific countries wanted refugees they can clearly raise their

voice in the United Nations and say, 'yes we are accepting refugees'.

"And why Australia, who gives this authority to the Australian

Government to force the Pacific countries to accept refugees in this

form or in the other form?" he asked.

Several people, believed to be as many as 35, have been shot at a

northern Indiana factory in the United States.

Police said the person who did the shooting was still inside the

building.

Preliminary reports suggested a disgruntled employee might be behind the

mass shooting at Nu-Wood Decorative Millwork factory at the industrial

park in Goshen, which occurred around 3:14pm local time (7:14am AEDT).

"We're hearing as many as 35 have been shot but we can't confirm that,"

said a Goshen police dispatcher.

"We haven't been able to get inside."

She said the person who fired the shots at the factory near Goshen was

still inside the facility.

The city is about 200 kilometres east of Chicago.

The armed wing of the radical Islamic movement, Hamas has threatened to

attack officials from the ruling Palestinian Authority if the Hamas

spiritual leader, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, or any of its militants are

harmed.

It follows the death in Gaza City last night of a Hamas supporter during

clashes that erupted when Palestinian police put Sheikh Ahmed Yassin

under house arrest.

Those clashes have created an unstable situation in Gaza.

It was Palestinian against Palestinian as hundreds of police confronted

3,000 Hamas supporters, who determined their leader would not be

arrested as part of the crackdown on militants.

Stone-throwing youths were met with baton charges, but still the

Palestinian police do not have control around the Sheikh's house.

The action came against the backdrop of frantic diplomatic activity

aimed at averting all-out conflict.

The Egyptian Foreign Minister made an emergency visit to both Israeli

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and the Palestinian leader, Yasser Arafat,

urging negotiation rather than confrontation.

Palestinian Authorities say they have detained 160 suspects but so far,

the Israeli Government says Mr Arafat has not done enough.

A security meeting has been arranged between the Israelis and the

Palestinians to try to defuse the growing crisis between them.

Mr Arafat says the meeting has been set up by the US special envoy to

the Middle East, Anthony Zinni.

At the same time, the Bush administration is stepping up the pressure on

Mr Arafat, saying he must do more to put militants behind bars.

Reserve Bank Governor Ian Macfarlane says he is confident Australia will

ride through the current world economic slump, largely brought on by the

United States.

Mr Macfarlane told a gathering in Sydney last night, Australia's growth

is remarkably good by world standards and inflation should come down in

the next 18 months.

He predicts the United States economy will show signs of recovery from

mid-year, and that as a result it is highly unlikely that the Reserve

Bank will raise interest rates in the next six months.

"Calendar year 2001 has been a difficult one for the world economy and

the first half of 2002 looks like remaining weak before recovery gets

underway.

"Therefore this period will be classified as a world recession like

those of the mid 70s, the early 80s and the early 90s," Mr Macfarlane

said.

"The Australian economy has got through the first half of it in

reasonably good shape."

New laws requiring all packaged food products containing genetically

modified (GM) crops to be labelled, come into effect today.

But the association representing food and grocery companies says

consumers will have to look hard to find any on the shelves.

Head of the Australian Food and Grocery Council, Mitch Hooke, says since

the laws were first proposed companies have been cutting genetically

modified ingredients out of their products.

"A lot of our companies have sidestepped the products of this technology

at this stage to avoid any kind of risk in the market that their brands

and their products will be brought into disrepute or that consumers will

sidestep their products.

"There is not a real and tangible benefit in the technology's products

for consumers at this stage," Mr Hooke said.

Indonesian troop re-enforcements have started arriving in central

Sulawesi as the government attempts to end days of deadly clashes

between Christians and Muslims.

Violence in the last week has claimed at least eight lives and left

thousands of people homeless.

More than 2,000 police and soldiers are being sent in to disarm rival

groups and restore calm.

There have been no new reports of violence, but residents in the

Christian town of Ten Tena say they fear further attacks by Muslim

militiamen taking up positions in the hills around the town.

In a region where fighting between Muslims and Christians has claimed

hundreds of lives in the last two years, many blame the latest upsurge

in violence on the arrival of members of the Laskar Jihad Muslim Militia

from training camps in Java and from the neighbouring Maluka Islands.

America's Cup winner Sir Peter Blake, one of the most successful

sailors in yachting history, was killed in a shooting in Amazonia,

Brazil, today, his sponsors said.

Mr Blake, 53, was aboard a boat with his crew when they were attacked by

pirates and he was shot dead, they said.

AFP reported the sponsors, PR company Jour J, as saying he was killed

while leading a sailing expedition up the Amazon river, in the western

Amazon Basin.

The New Zealander won the America's Cup twice in 1995 and 2000 with Team

New Zealand.

Mr Blake was a two-time winner of the Sydney-Hobart race and also won

the Tour of Australia and the Whitbread round-the-world race in 1990.

He captured the Jules Verne Trophy in 1994 with a record-breaking

non-stop voyage.

He received an OBE for services to yachting in 1991.

A meticulous planner and a gifted leader, Mr Blake's fierce

determination to win always inspired immense loyalty from his crews and

unlimited confidence from his backers.

The New Zealander was the only man to compete in the first five

Whitbreads and his 1989 victory in Steinlager 2 came with an

unprecedented clean sweep as his team walked off with line, handicap and

overall honours on each of the race's six legs.

Steinlager 2 beat a field of 23 boats from 13 countries.

Mr Blake's numerous sporting accolades included two New Zealand

Sportsman of the Year awards and four New Zealand Yachtsman of the Year

awards.

He was also chosen to succeed the late Jacques Cousteau as captain of

the marine research vessel Calypso 2.

The Federal Government says a man who has claimed to have been planning

terrorism attacks against Australia trained as a pilot in Australia in

1997 and 1998.

The man, in custody in India, is not an Australian citizen.

The Attorney-General, Daryl Williams, says the man left Australia in

December 1998 and has not been back.

Mr Williams says investigations are continuing.

He will not say who the man is, what his nationality is, or where he did

his pilot training.

"Can I say we are not aware of any specific threat in relation to this

man or any other person for that matter in Australia," Mr Williams said.

The three US soldiers killed by a misguided US bomb in Afghanistan were

from a US Army special forces unit based at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, the

Pentagon said.

The three were identified as Master Sergeant Jefferson Donald Davis, 39,

of Tennessee; Sergeant First Class Daniel Henry Petithory, 32, of

Massachusetts; and Staff Sergeant Brian Cody Prosser, 28, of California.

The Pentagon said they served in the 3rd Battalion, 5th Special Forces

Group, based at Fort Campbell, Kentucky.

The three were killed when a 900 kilogram bomb dropped by an Air Force

B-52 bomber landed too close to their position north of Kandahar in

southern Afghanistan.

A tense stand-off is continuing in Gaza City between hundreds of

supporters of the Hamas spiritual leader Sheikh Ahmed Yassin and

Palestinian police trying to place him under house arrest.

Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat ordered the arrest, but when scores of

police approached his home they were driven back amid heavy exchanges of

gunfire.

Up to 2,000 Hamas supporters have arrived from across the city after

word spread of the attempted arrest.

The 63-year-old Sheikh is revered by the Hamas militants who have

carried out the bulk of the suicide bombings against Israel since 1994.

However the Palestinian head of security, Jabril Rajoub says militant

groups must recognise who is in control.

"This is very difficult, but I don't think that we can surrender to

individuals or groups who are trying to behave as if they are dictating

their understanding on this authority," he said.

"I hope that those groups, that those individuals will conclude the

right conclusion and understand there is one authority."

The Immigration Minister, Philip Ruddock, says the so-called Pacific

Solution is working as a way of deterring people from coming to

Australia and he does not want to abandon it.

Mr Ruddock says the Government would only change its policy of using

Pacific Islands to process asylum seekers if so many people arrived they

could not all be housed on the available islands.

Mr Ruddock says the significant fall in the number of people arriving

illegally in Australia is a sign the Government would not change the

policy.

"What I'm saying is the policy works.

"If you face changed circumstances you may have to change your approach

but that doesn't suggest that what you're doing is unable to cope or is

in any way ineffective, when clearly we had something like 1,000

arrivals in August, something like 1,200 in September and between the

10th of November and now we've had no boat arrivals," Mr Ruddock said.

The Federal Education Minister, Brendan Nelson, says he accepts the need

for the Government to look for ways to cut waste and reduce spending.

The Treasurer, Peter Costello, says the Government's expenditure review

committee, or razor gang, will try to make cuts before the next budget,

especially to programs which have served their purpose and are no longer

needed.

Mr Costello last made sweeping cuts when the Coalition was elected in

1996.

Labor says the Government should start by slashing its own spending on

advertising for Government programs.

Mr Nelson will not identify any areas within his new portfolio which

could be cut and says he is not afraid of the scrutiny of the senior

ministers in the razor gang.

"Whilst the razor gang might be described in pejorative or critical

terms by some of my colleagues, it's there ultimately to serve the best

interests of Australian taxpayers.

"I don't think there's anything that should be feared but seen to be

something that's responsibly looking after the best interests of

Australian taxpayers," Mr Nelson said.

Two Swiss guides who survived the 1999 Interlaken canyoning accident -

in which 14 Australians died - have denied any wrongdoing in leading the

trip into the Saxet River.

A court in Switzerland has been told the huge wall of water which swept

down the river was an unpredictable natural catastrophe.

Both Simon Wiget and Stefan Abegglen told the court of their sorrow

about the accident, but denied making any mistakes, nor did they think

weather conditions were inappropriate.

Asked if they had received adequate training in weather analysis from

their Adventure World supervisors, they said they had.

But when asked what specific training they received, they were unable to

give detail.

They also acknowledged their salaries as guides were dependent on the

number of trips they took and the number of people who accompanied them.

For some of the Australians the day ended with an emotional visit to the

river where their children died.

The US space shuttle Endeavour has blasted off from the Kennedy Space

Centre en route to the International Space Station (ISS) with a

replacement crew.

Endeavour's launch was delayed three times, most recently by bad weather

over the space centre yesterday.

The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) had earlier

pushed back the launch twice due to problems with the docking of a

Russian cargo ship at the station, rectified on Monday by a spacewalk

completed by two Russian cosmonauts.

The shuttle is taking to the station its fourth long-term crew - Russian

commander Yuri Onufrienko and Americans Carl Walz and Dan Bursch - and

is due to return to earth on December 16 with the current crew members,

who have been on the station since August.

The shuttle is also carrying the Italian Raffaello module, laden with

3.5 tonnes of equipment, food, supplies and materials for scientific

experiments.

It was the first US space shuttle launch since September 11 when

hijacked airliners left around 3,500 people dead and missing in New

York, Washington and Pennsylvania.

Tight security surrounded the space centre during the launch.

Australian swimmers have won nine of the 12 events contested at the

skins swimming event in Sydney last night.

The 50 metres races were swum in an elimination format with four races

to determine the overall winner.

Geoff Huegill won the 50 metres butterfly in 24.21 seconds and is

looking forward to the World Cup event in Melbourne tomorrow.

"Every race is just getting better and better in terms of jumping in and

making sure that I nail the first 15 [metres] under water and exploding

out of the water and really working turns and trying to nail finishes,"

he said.

Elka Graham won the womens 300 metres freestyle which was contested by

having three races over 100 metres.

She says former champiom Kieren Perkins was behind her victory.

"I swam with Kieren this morning and he gave me some awesome advice. He

told me to close my eyes [in the last 25 metres] and to absolutely go

for it," she said.

American Ed Moses won the men's 50 metres breaststroke while Liesel

Jones took the women's event.

World champion Matt Welsh was the first swimmer eliminated from the 50

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Queensland where she trains children.

"The thermostat's broken on the old one, it just goes up and down and I

went in yesterday and it was 36 degrees in the water and it was just

terrible. It was like a spa," she said.

Three US troops and five members of the Afghan opposition were killed by

a stray US bomb near Kandahar in Afghanistan, the Pentagon said.

The Pentagon had earlier confirmed that two US special forces soldiers

were killed and 20 others wounded north of Kandahar when a B-52 bomber

dropped a 2,000-pound bomb too close to them.

"The B-52 was flying in support of opposition forces north of Kandahar,"

said Pentagon spokeswoman Victori Clark.

"We have an update since this morning, and unfortunately the number of

US forces killed is now three."

Rival Afghan factions signed an historic power-sharing agreement to form

a post-Taliban government and set the country on the road to recovery

and democracy after two decades of war.

The accord was sealed after nine days of exhausting negotiations and

paves the way for a six-month interim administration headed by moderate

Muslim Hamid Karzai, from the dominant Pashtun ethnic group.

The deal gives the Northern Alliance control of three key portfolios in

the 30-member cabinet, which includes two women and is due to be up and

running by December 22.

It also gives a symbolic role to the former king and provides for a UN

security force for Kabul.

The agreement was signed in the German city of Bonn by the leaders of

the four delegations and UN special envoy for Afghanistan Lakhdar

Brahimi to applause from an audience which included German Chancellor

Gerhard Schroeder.

"We were the champions of resistance and will be proud to be the

champions of peace," said Yunus Qanooni, the Northern Alliance's chief

negotiator and the interim government's interior minister.

A delegate from the so-called Peshawar group, Sayed Hamed Gailani,

summed up the atmosphere in a single phrase.

"There are two things evident today: Yesterday's rain does not have the

courage to cry, and the sun cannot hide its smile," he said.

The appointment of Karzai, a 44-year-old tribal Pashtun tribal leader

currently fighting the Taliban near their last stronghold of Kandahar,

was seen as an attempt to balance Afghanistan's delicate ethnic mix.

It cements a whirlwind transformation in Afghanistan's fate since the

September 11 attacks on New York and Washington, the trigger for massive

US air strikes that have dislodged the Taliban militia from most of the

country and put the Northern Alliance back on top.

Showing the strain from nine days of frantic diplomacy, Brahimi

recognised the accord was far from perfect, and that its signatories

were not fully representative of the Afghan people

The Foreign Minister, Alexander Downer, has expressed concern about a

man who was arrested in India and has reportedly confessed to planning

suicide attacks in Australia.

The man was arrested a month ago in India on suspicion of links to Osama

bin Laden's Al Qaeda network.

India's Home Minister, LK Advani, has been quoted by the Reuters news

agency as telling a meeting of business and industry leaders in New

Delhi that the man has confessed to planning suicide attacks in

Australia and Britain, as well as on the Indian Parliament.

The report says Mr Advani says Indian authorities have confirmed and

verified the confessions.

Mr Downer has told Channel Seven it should not be dismissed.

"I understand that his claim, that he wanted to conduct suicide attacks

against a number of countries including Australia, is a claim that he

believes," Mr Downer said.

"I don't think this is a hoax or should be treated as a hoax.

"I think these are claims that need to be taken seriously - we can be

grateful for the fact that he has been arrested by Indian authorities."

Israel has demanded the arrest of 36 Palestinian militants and given

leader Yasser Arafat just 12 hours to comply.

The Government says if those on the list are not rounded up in time, the

army will resume its attacks on Palestinian targets.

Mr Arafat was told of the deadline by the Israeli Foreign Minister,

Shimon Peres, in a telephone conversation.

The Palestinian leader said his security forces could not move to make

the arrests because of fear of Israeli bombing.

So now, he has just 12 hours in which his men will be given free rein.

Mr Arafat has accused the Israelis of attempting to sabotage attempts to

jail militants and undermine his authority.

An Israeli Foreign Ministry spokesman earlier said Mr Arafat was

finished and it was time for a new Palestinian leader.

Two Swiss guides who survived the 1999 Interlaken canyoning accident -

in which 14 Australians died - have denied any wrongdoing in leading the

trip into the Saxet River.

A court in Switzerland has been told the huge wall of water which swept

down the river was an unpredictable natural catastrophe.

Both Simon Wiget and Stefan Abegglen told the court of their sorrow

about the accident, but denied making any mistakes, nor did they think

weather conditions were inappropriate.

Asked if they had received adequate training in weather analysis from

their Adventure World supervisors, they said they had.

But when asked what specific training they received, they were unable to

give detail.

They also acknowledged their salaries as guides were dependent on the

number of trips they took and the number of people who accompanied them.

For some of the Australians the day ended with an emotional visit to the

river where their children died.

High interest rates on credit cards have prompted a call for an inquiry

by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC).

The Australian Consumers Association (ACA) says banks are not passing on

all Reserve Bank interest rate cuts.

The association's Katherine Wolthuizen says while the Reserve Bank again

cut official interest rates yesterday, credit card interest rates remain

high.

"We would certainly like to see a proper investigation into that and

hopefully some movement to bring the banks to account for it.

"They don't like being regulated and sometimes the threat of regulation

can cause them to amend their ways, but of course they do have a very

long way to go," Ms Wolthuizen said.

Centrelink is urging people affected by job cuts at regional pay TV

operator Austar and travel company Traveland to seek information about

their income support options.

Traveland has announced it is shedding more than 500 jobs around

Australia, and Austar is letting 400 employees go.

Centrelink finance information officer Peter Murray says those facing

uncertain futures should head to Centrelink in the next few days.

"Centrelink is the shopfront now for Commonwealth services for income

support and the employment network so that it is important.

"If people haven't been to us before they might get a pleasant surprise

at the range of services that we do offer to try and help them through

situations where things might have changed for them," Mr Murray said.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) has moved to clarify

what it says are misunderstandings about a report on the Indian economy,

launched by Foreign Minister Alexander Downer.

The 172-page document released on Monday says Australian firms could

become more competitive by outsourcing to India's information technology

(IT) sector.

The Community and Public Sector Union has been critical of the report,

saying DFAT is encouraging Australian businesses to export jobs to

India.

But the department says the aim is to boost Australia's export potential

and encourage competitiveness in the industry.

DFAT does not want to make any further comment and the Minister's office

says he is not available for interview.

Counting is proceeding very slowly in the Solomon Islands national

elections, as officials are keen to avoid any allegations of vote

tampering.

There was a heavy police presence around the three counting centres in

the Solomon Islands capital, Honiara, when the first ballot boxes were

opened late last night.

Counting in some of the more remote of the 50 seats in the Solomon

Islands Parliament will not even start until Saturday after the ballot

boxes are transferred to a single location.

A large contingent of international observers are monitoring the count

in an election that is regarded as crucial if the Solomons is to break

out of a cycle of economic and social disintegration, flowing from a

bitter ethnic war between armed militants from its two largest

provinces.

Australian swimmers have won nine of the 12 events contested at the

skins swimming event in Sydney last night.

The 50 metres races were swum in an elimination format with four races

to determine the overall winner.

Geoff Huegill won the 50 metres butterfly in 24.21 seconds and is

looking forward to the World Cup event in Melbourne tomorrow.

"Every race is just getting better and better in terms of jumping in and

making sure that I nail the first 15 [metres] under water and exploding

out of the water and really working turns and trying to nail finishes,"

he said.

Elka Graham won the women's 300 metres freestyle which was contested by

having three races over 100 metres.

She says former champion Kieren Perkins was behind her victory.

"I swam with Kieren this morning and he gave me some awesome advice. He

told me to close my eyes [in the last 25 metres] and to absolutely go

for it," she said.

American Ed Moses won the men's 50 metres breaststroke while Liesel

Jones took the women's event.

World champion Matt Welsh was the first swimmer eliminated from the 50

metres backstroke, which was eventually won by Australia's Ray Hass.

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Queensland where she trains children.

"The thermostat's broken on the old one, it just goes up and down and I

went in yesterday and it was 36 degrees in the water and it was just

terrible. It was like a spa," she said.

There has been another suicide bomb attack in the Middle East, this time

in Jerusalem.

Three people have been injured after an apparent Palestinian suicide

bomber blew himself up outside the Hilton Hotel in west Jerusalem.

Israeli police say the three were standing at a bus stop and were hurt

by flying glass when the explosion occurred near an entrance to the

former Hilton Hotel.

The suicide bombing follows a wave of Israeli air strikes against

Palestinian security installations in the West Bank and Gaza Strip after

25 people were killed at the weekend in several suicide bombings.

Four Afghan factions have reached agreement on an interim cabinet during

talks in Germany.

The United Nations says the administration, which will take over from

December 22 will be headed by the royalist anti-Taliban commander Hamed

Karzai.

It concludes more than a week of negotiations outside Bonn and is aimed

at restoring peace and stability to the war ravaged country.

The 44-year-old former deputy foreign minister, who is currently

battling the Taliban around the southern city of Kandahar, is an ally of

the exiled Afghan king Mohammed Zahir Shah.

He will serve as chairman of an interim authority that will govern

Afghanistan for a six-month period, before a Loya Jirga or grand

traditional assembly of elders, in turn appoints an 18-month

transitional government.

Meanwhile, United States Marines are now reported to have been deployed

in eastern Afghanistan where opposition forces are closing in on

al-Qaeda soldiers.

Reports from the area say there has been a gun battle between the

opposition and al-Qaeda close to the Tora Bora cave complex where Osama

bin Laden is thought to be hiding.

In the south of the country, American marines are taking part in patrols

around the air base they have secured near Kandahar, but are unlikely to

take part in any assault on the city.

However, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Richard

Myers says they are prepared for anything.

"They are prepared for engagements, they're a robust fighting force and

they're absolutely ready to engage if that's required," he said.

The Reserve Bank has cut official interest rates again, still concerned

about the slowing global economy.

The central bank has delivered a further cut of 0.25 of a per cent.

It is the sixth rate cut for the year, taking the cash rate to 4.25 per

cent.

The cut has been quickly passed on in full by all the major banks and a

host of smaller lenders.

The Reserve Bank says international conditions remain weak, with the US

and Japanese economies in recession, Europe stalled and contractions in

a number of Australia's east Asian trading partners.

The bank says 2001 and 2002 combined will produce the weakest period of

growth since the early 1980s, although the threat of an even sharper

decline after the September 11 attacks in the US has abated somewhat.

Low interest rates and a sharp drop in oil prices should see a recovery

start in the 12 months ahead.

Westpac's Bill Evans is among those who believe the cut will not be the

last.

"The Reserve Bank has certainly not closed the door to further rate cuts

next year," he said.

Federal Treasurer Peter Costello has warned continued economic growth in

Australia is dependent on an uncertain world outlook.

The latest figures show the economy grew by 1.1 per cent in the

September quarter.

Mr Costello is stressing the seriousness of the current global economic

downturn.

"As serious as anything we've seen in the last two decades," he said.

Both he and the Reserve Bank governor, Ian MacFarlane believe the timing

of any pickup is unclear.

Mr Costello is hopeful about the United States prospects next year and

says a pickup sooner rather than later in the year could keep Australia

in a strong position.

"I think with every confidence, the December quarter is going to be

strong, if the US comes back we might defy again what has happened in

the world," he said.

Shadow Treasurer Bob McMullan says the Treasurer is left relying on

things out of his control.

"All the Treasurer has got in plan for 2002 is the hope the American

economy will pick up in time," he said.

He says the Government has limited its own ability to respond to the

international shocks by spending too much this year.

The AFL's all-time leading goalkicker, Tony Lockett, will decide within

the next week if he will make a comeback.

Lockett has told the Sydney Swans he is interested in coming out of

retirement and placing himself in this month's pre-season draft.

Lockett retired at the end of the 1999 season and will turn 36 in March.

Swans chief executive Kelvin Templeton says the club would welcome

Lockett back.

"We're not putting any undue pressure on him," Mr Templeton said.

"The approach really came from Tony to us, rather than the other way."

Mr Templeton says if Lockett does make a comeback, the club would not

expect him to play every game.

"He certainly could play a role, albeit a reduced role from the one the

fans knew him to hold a couple of years back," he said.

The Royal Commission into HIH has been adjourned until Monday after

interviewing of the first witness ended abruptly.

Lawyers acting on behalf of several former HIH directors requested that

cross-examination of David Lombe and an inspector appointed by insurance

watchdog, the Australian Prudential Regulation Authority (APRA) be held

at a later date.

The commission was due to hear evidence from Mr Lombe after the details

of his report for APRA were read in this morning's hearing.

The report raises allegations that corporate governance was inadequate

and concealed the true state of HIH's financial position.

The report questions the solvency of HIH prior to it being placed into

provisional liquidation on March 15.

It raises issues of intangible assets like tax and goodwill, being

treated as tangible for the acquisition of Allianz to boost the

financial position of HIH.

The report also says significant losses by HIH in the United States and

the United Kingdom were concealed from APRA at meetings last year.

The commission has also heard APRA had serious concerns about the

accounting practices being followed by HIH in July last year.

Darwin Aboriginal custodians will become property developers at

Palmerston, after the settlement of a native title claim lodged seven

years ago.

It is the first claim to be settled in the Darwin region.

The agreement was due to be signed off before the last Northern

Territory election, but was delayed by the death of an elder's son.

The Larrakia people plan to take a lease from the Territory Government

under commercial terms and develop almost 50 hectares in the new

Palmerston suburb of Rosebury over the next few years.

The agreement will also mean that a further 200 hectares at Rosebury and

Bellamack will be free for urban growth without native title concerns.

The Larrakia have also withdrawn their claim from the Archer Sporting

Complex at Palmerston.

The Defence Minister, Robert Hill, has announced more Australian SAS

troops have arrived in Afghanistan.

The forces which arrived today, join the advance party which has been in

the south of the country since Monday.

Senator Hill says further deployments will happen as they are required.

He says for security reasons specific tasks, locations and missions will

not be revealed.

Meanwhile, a senior member of the Northern Alliance attending the

UN-sponsored Afghan talks in Bonn said that an interim Afghan

administration would assume power on December 22.

Ahmad Wali Masood, brother of the assassinated legendary Alliance

commander Ahmad Shah Masood, also said he expected the four Afghan

groups locked in intensive dialogue for eight days would reach agreement

on composition of the government later on Tuesday.

"I expect a result tonight," Wali Masood said, adding that all four

Afghan groups negotiating in Bonn had submitted their lists of nominees

to the United Nations.

Earlier on Tuesday, diplomatic sources indicated that new interim

government for Afghanistan was expected to be installed in Kabul next

week.

"The interim government will be installed one week after the signature

(of the Bonn accord) and thereupon enjoy international recognition,"

said a western diplomat among official observers at the conference.

"This will mean that (ousted president Burhanuddin) Rabbani is no longer

recognised," the source said.

Diplomats observing the UN-sponsored Afghan talks said they expect a

formal signing ceremony for the power-sharing deal, which aims to pave

the way for a democratic Afghanistan, to be signed at the Petersberg

talks on Wednesday.

Israel launched massive air raids across the West Bank and Gaza Tuesday,

piling pressure on Yasser Arafat with a rocket strike on a police post

next to his offices, after Prime Minister Ariel Sharon branded his

administration a "sponsor of terrorism".

Israeli F-16 warplanes launched a series of strikes on Gaza City, while

Apache helicopters fired rockets on Palestinian security offices in Khan

Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip and on the West Bank towns of Salfit

and Tulkarem.

They also fired missiles on a security post just metres from Mr Arafat's

offices in Ramallah, but the Palestinian leader, who was in his office

at the time, was unhurt.

But two policemen were slightly wounded, officials said.

Israeli army spokesman Brigadier General Ron Kitrey said Mr Arafat was

not targeted.

Two people were killed in the Gaza strikes and around 120 injured, half

of them schoolboys, Palestinian hospital officials said.

The attacks came as Israel's Foreign Minister Shimon Peres said he did

not believe Israeli forces would take direct action against the

Palestinian leader.

The strikes also came a day after Mr Sharon, furious that Mr Arafat had

not stopped hardline Islamic groups, who killed two dozen Israelis in

devastating suicide attacks at the weekend, ordered his forces to blast

symbols of Mr Arafat's power.

Gunships destroyed Mr Arafat's three helicopters in Gaza City, while

bulldozers ploughed up the runway at Gaza international airport used by

Mr Arafat for his frequent travels abroad.

Palestinian officials called Mr Sharon's campaign an attempt to topple

Mr Arafat and destroy his self-rule Palestinian Authority.

Mr Arafat told CNN television that Mr Sharon was trying to torpedo his

own crackdown on terrorism with the airstrikes.

"He doesn't want me to succeed, and for this he is escalating his

military activities against our towns, our cities, our establishments,"

the Palestinian leader said.

French Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine accused Israel of conducting a

deliberate policy aimed at eliminating Mr Arafat.

"Arafat has been weakened by the harassment of the Israeli army ... and

as a result people are using his weakness as an argument to say that

since he can not re-establish order in his own camp, he should in some

way be eliminated."

However, Britain's Prime Minister Tony Blair and US President George W

Bush expressed "sympathy" with Israel and called on all sides "to do

anything they can to stabilise the situation".

Mr Sharon's hard words and air strikes opened major divisions in his

cross-party government, with left-wing Mr Peres denouncing what he

called a bid during Monday's emergency cabinet meeting to cause "the

downfall of the Palestinian Authority".

The region had been braced for a huge Israeli retaliation after three

Palestinian suicide bombers from the hardline Islamic movement Hamas

killed 25 people on Saturday and Sunday in the suicide attacks in

Jerusalem and Haifa.

Mr Sharon made a national address after blasting Gaza City and Jenin in

the West Bank on Monday, accusing Mr Arafat of having "chosen the path

of terrorism" and being "the greatest obstacle to peace and stability

in the Middle East".

Mr Peres said the move by Mr Sharon's dominant right-wingers "in effect

means Israeli policy is based purely on force with no political hope".

Public radio said Mr Peres had called all the ministers from his Labour

Party for a special meeting Wednesday to discuss the fallout of the

strikes and Mr Sharon's accusation that Mr Arafat was "responsible for

everything that has happened here".

Chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erakat, speaking after Mr Sharon's

speech Monday evening, said the words amounted to a "declaration of

war".

He called on the United States and Europe to rein in Mr Sharon and

dispatch international observers to oversee the spiralling conflict.

Interest rates and economic growth take centre stage for Australian

financial markets today.

A rates cut is still expected despite what is thought to be a

respectable set of national accounts.

The Australian economy has been held up as one of the few to be still

ticking over well, while so many others around the world are in

recession or slowing sharply.

Today's national accounts for the September quarter will be the

definitive measure. SG Australia chief economist Glenn Maguire says he expects a quarterly

figure of just under 1 per cent.

"If we do see economic growth up around 0.9 per cent, which is the

market consensus, that is actually a relatively very good outcome," he

said.

That would translate to an annual growth rate of 2 per cent.

Mr Maguire says domestic economic activity remains centred on the

housing sector.

"I think the national accounts will reveal that the bulk of economic

growth is being driven by the housing sector and those areas which are

related to the housing sector, such as retail trade and manufacturing."

But he says some areas of weakness are emerging.

"Company profits were quite soft.

"Also average earnings are likely to post a softer footing over the

quarter as well, so looking forward, softer incomes, probably softer

production as well suggest that the domestic economy will be slowing as

we move into 2002," Mr Maguire said.

Financial markets are also waiting on a possible announcement from the

Reserve Bank after its board meeting of yesterday.

There is a high level of expectation that rates will be cut by 0.25 per

cent.

The Australian Trade Commission says there are signs of recovery on

global markets three months after the September 11 terrorist attacks.

Senior Austrade staff from across the globe are in Adelaide to discuss

the impact of the attack on the US and major international markets.

Austrade's executive general manager Roger Bayliss says the vast

majority of global equity markets have bounced back and growth is

expected to return by the third quarter of next year.

Mr Bayliss says while there are serious challenges ahead, Australian

firms should not retreat.

"The most important point is to really study your markets.

"Get good advice, make sure you're looking after your customers well,

and certainly not staying in your shell, or in your cocoon, and adopting

a very aggressive approach to overseas marketing," Mr Bayliss said.

The Labor Party is set to have a wide-ranging review of its structures,

with frontbencher Martin Ferguson pushing for the process.

The new Labor leader, Simon Crean, is taking a set of proposals to next

Thursday's national executive meeting.

Mr Ferguson wants the meeting to call a review.

He says suggestions for party changes, such as the call by frontbencher

Joel Fitzgibbon for the scrapping of a New South Wales rule forcing

Labor members to belong to a union, should be dealt with internally.

"Perhaps the time has come for us to actually sign up to a federal

executive process which actually enables debate to go forward in a

highly constructive way rather than individual proposals being put out

there without an end game in sight," Mr Ferguson said.

He says he is happy for the process to include looking at abandoning the

60-40 rule, but says scrapping the rule would only be a minor factor in

the party's self-examination.

"For a long time I've believed there is a requirement for the Labor

Party to actually have a hard look at whether or not an archaic formula

of union representation is the key to our future."

Computer virus experts have warned of a new "goner" computer virus that

can erase data from a user's hard drive.

According to McAfee.com, a leading anti-computer virus software company,

the virus is attacking both home and business computers.

The company has given the virus a high-risk rating, its most serious

warning.

The virus, also known as a worm, gets into computers via Microsoft's

Outlook email program.

If a user activates the virus by opening up an infected email

attachment, it can create havoc.

The virus, the company warned, "can delete files from users' computers.

The Goner worm then emails itself to every email address contained in

the user's address book".

This new virus comes right after the Badtrans Internet worm, another

Outlook attacker that replicates itself by sending copies out to

everyone on a user's address list.

Badtrans, however, did not erase data.

McAfee is recommending that users upgrade their anti-virus software.

The company also warns against opening up unexpected attachments.

Defendants in the Interlaken canyoning trial in Switzerland are

continuing to deny they played any role in the deaths of 21 people,

including 14-Australians, who drowned in 1999.

When chief guide Bernard Strureewas asked why he did not call off the

canyoning trip on that fateful July afternoon, he said the water level

was so low there would be enough time to evacuate the river if it

flooded.

Mr Struree told the court guides were instructed to leave the canyon if

water levels rose or changed colour, adding they were always advised to

pull out if a strong storm was forecast.

But like those before him, when asked if he remembered what the weather

conditions were like at 4:00pm that afternoon, he said he had not

noticed.

The witnesses are providing few insights, nor are they being sternly

challenged and two days of evidence is revealing little.

Tomorrow the Australian families will take the journey to the Saxet

River gorge to pay tribute to those they lost.

The New South Wales State Emergency Service (SES) says it has now

received 5,000 calls for help in the wake of Monday's fierce storms.

Natural disaster areas have been declared throughout Sydney and

surrounding areas and parts of the state's north-west.

In Sydney, more than 2,000 homes, mainly in the northern suburbs, remain

without power.

SES spokeswoman Laura Goodin says several hundred volunteers will be

back in the field this morning.

"We've had about 5,000 calls for help of which we've completed about

two-thirds.

"We've had about 800 volunteers in the field being helped out by the

Royal Fire Service and the New South Wales Fire Brigades and we're

expecting to have most jobs completed by about Friday," Ms Goodin said.

The extensive storm damage has prompted a warning about people falsely

claiming to work for the SES.

The warning, from Fair Trading Minister John Aquilina, follows reports

from the suburb of Hornsby that people claiming to work for the SES are

asking for payment from the storm victims.

Mr Aquilina has reminded householders that the SES is a volunteer

organisation and does not charge for its work or employ sub-contractors.

He has suggested residents contact the police if they are approached by

such people.

The Government is also warning householders against dealing with

unlicensed tradespeople.

A survey of literacy and mathematical skills of 15-year-old Australian

school students has shown some alarming trends in boys' education.

The survey was part of a study undertaken by the Organisation for

Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and involved 31 countries,

including the United States, Canada, Brazil and Japan.

The head of the Australian Council for Educational Research, Professor

Geoff Masters, says although the overall Australian results are very

encouraging, there are some alarming signs.

"Boys tend to have more negative attitudes to reading, they read less

often than girls, they are less interested in reading narrative texts,

storybooks for example," he said.

Hundreds of fans stood vigil today for the immersion of George

Harrison's ashes into the Ganges river at the Hindu holy city of

Benares.

But officials and sect leaders remained tightlipped on when or where

last rites for the former Beatle, a long-time devotee of the Hindu Hare

Krishna sect, would take place.

He was closely attached to Benares, where devout Hindus come to scatter

the ashes of their dead relatives in the Ganges in a ritual symbolising

the journey of the soul towards eternal salvation.

The Beatles' former lead guitarist died on Thursday of cancer, aged 58,

amid chants and prayers of Hare Krishna devotees who were at his

bedside.

According to details of the ceremony released by members of the Hare

Krishna movement yesterday, Harrison's widow Olivia accompanied by son

Dhani were to scatter some of the ashes early this morning in a

"discreet" ceremony at Hinduism's holy river.

Some of Harrison's ashes could also be immersed in the Ganges at

Allahabad - another holy spot for devout Hindus - about 130 kilometres

upstream from Benares, a spokesman for the Hare Krishna group said.

Tomorrow Harrison's family members were supposed to take part in a

special prayer meeting in Vrindavan, the birthplace of Lord Krishna, 150

km north of the Indian capital.

The news brought hundreds of journalists, fans and curious onlookers to

Benares' 80-odd "ghats" - platforms or steps from which the ashes are

strewn into the river - this morning.

But as the day wore on, local administration officials and Hare Krishna

devotees in Benares refused to confirm when and where along the Ganges

the ceremony would take place.

Australia has escaped with a draw after a dramatic final day of the

third Test against New Zealand in Perth.

Set 440 to win, Australia finished the match at 7 for 381 with Adam

Gilchrist not out 83.

Australia retains the Trans-Tasman Trophy after the rain-affected series

ended 0-0.

During the final day Zimbabwean umpire Ian Robinson made two

controversial decisions in favour of Australia.

Captain Steve Waugh and Jason Gillespie both were given not out despite

television replays showing they were caught behind by wicket-keeper Adam

Parore.

Israeli forces have launched attacks on some of the key Palestinian

symbols of autonomy, including Gaza International Airport.

The strikes come as Israeli authorities announced they were stepping up

military operations against Yasser Arafat's Palestinian Authority.

The Palestinian leadership, meanwhile, appealed for intervention from

the United Nations Security Council after Israeli air strikes yesterday

and accused Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon of declaring war on the

Palestinians.

Mr Sharon's Government also placed Force-17, the armed group in charge

of Mr Arafat's protection, and the Tanzim military groups of his Fatah

faction on its list of terrorist organisations, a senior Israeli

official said.

The decisions were taken in a five-hour marathon late-night session of

the national unity government, said the official, who asked not to be

named.

In a series of incursions and air strikes, the Israeli military targeted

Mr Arafat's symbols of power, after holding him to account for a spate

of deadly suicide bombings by Palestinian Islamic militants.

The Israeli army carried out reprisal attacks against targets in the

Gaza Strip and West Bank.

Israeli tanks advanced to about 500 metres from Mr Arafat's offices in

the West Bank town of Ramallah, witnesses and Palestinian security

officials said.

In the Gaza Strip, Israeli forces penetrated the airport Mr Arafat uses

for his travels abroad and started to churn up the only runway, a

Palestinian liaison official said.

Mr Sharon, blaming Mr Arafat for the weekend suicide bombings that

killed 25 Israelis, earlier sent his airforce to blast the Palestinian

leader's heliport in Gaza and offices in the West Bank town of Jenin.

The radical Islamic movement, Hamas, claimed responsibility for the

suicide attacks.

Shortly after Apache combat helicopters struck Gaza City and F-16

fighter bombers hit Jenin, Sharon made a hard-hitting televised address,

telling Israelis a "war of terrorism" had been foisted on the Jewish

state.

"In choosing to try to win political accomplishments through murder and

in choosing to allow the ruthless killing of civilians, Arafat has

chosen the path of terrorism," Mr Sharon said.

"Arafat is the greatest obstacle to peace and stability in the Middle

East," Mr Sharon charged.

Traveland's wholly-owned travel centres have ceased operating from

today, leaving more than 550 staff seeking other jobs.

The failed company's administrators say they have a buyer for

Traveland's franchise network but have not been able to save the company

stores.

One of the administrators, Richard Albarran, says the deal, which is yet

to be approved by a committee formed today of creditors, will

unfortunately leave hundreds of people who have booked holidays through

the company stores out of pocket.

"The dollar value is approximately a tad over $1 million," Mr Albarran

said.

They will now be entitled to make claims through the Travel Compensation

Fund.

The meeting of company's creditors was told this morning staff are owed

nearly $9 million in entitlements.

The Australian Services Union's Luke Foley says he will be doing

everything he can to ensure they receive every cent.

"Ansett administrators are liable for perhaps the lion share of those

employee entitlements, we're confident that'll be met," Mr Foley said.

And more than 400 staff are to lose their jobs at Australia's biggest

regional pay television operator, Austar.

The company has this morning announced wide-ranging restructuring plans.

Management at the struggling pay TV operator has now completed a review

of all its activities.

As a result of this review, the Austar board has decided to outsource a

number of existing functions, cease operating its own Internet network

and streamline other processes.

The company anticipates annualised savings of around $90 million.

More than 400 staff will be made redundant from the end of December.

Austar has given assurances that redundant workers will receive their

full entitlements and redundancy payments in line with company policy.

The company says they will receive all statutory entitlements and

redundancy payments in line with company policy.

On the stock exchange, Austar shares rose five cents to 31.5 cents

shortly before 1:00pm AEDT.

Afghan opposition leaders meeting in Germany have reached an agreement

after seven days of talks on the structure of an interim post-Taliban

government for Afghanistan.

The agreement calls for the immediate assembly of a temporary group of

multi-national peacekeepers in Kabul and possibly other areas.

The four Afghan factions have approved a plan for a 29-member ruling

council composed of a chairman, five deputy chairmen and 23 other

members.

The council would govern Afghanistan for six months, at which time a

traditional Afghan assembly, called a loya jirga, would be convened to

decide on a more permanent structure.

The agreement calls for elections within two years.

At the royal commission inquiry into the collapse of insurance giant

HIH, it has been revealed that a report on the solvency of the company

was given to the board in November last year.

The company was placed into provisional liquidation in mid March.

Counsel assisting the royal commissioner Wayne Martin QC tabled a report

by accountancy firm Ernst and Young on HIH's solvency.

The commission was told that the report stated the view there was an

extreme risk the company's liabilities would not be satisfied.

The Ernst and Young report was handed to the board in November last year

with the Australian Prudential Regulatory Authority (APRA) receiving a

copy in December.

Mr Martin says despite this report the company continued trading and

APRA took no action to stop it.

The commission was told, one had to take into account people who took

out policies after this report in the belief the company was trading

solvently.

The hearing continues.

A director of a defunct Swiss company that organised a canyoning trip in

1999 that ended with 21 people dying, 14 of them Australians, has denied

responsibility for the tragedy.

Along with two co-directors who are also charged with manslaughter,

Adventure World director Stephan Friedli appeared in court on the first

day of their trial.

He described the deaths of 21 people in the Saxeten River Gorge as an

accident that was unforeseeable and not preventable.

Friedli said he was aware of the possibility the river could flood, but

when asked whether his company carried out risk analysis he replied: "We

know the region, we live here".

To the question, "you know what you are accused of, have you made any

mistakes?", Mr Friedli replied: "No, I don't think so".

Widespread damage from yesterday's violent storms in New South Wales has

forced the Government to declare more areas of the State natural

disaster zones.

Up to 700 volunteers and fire fighters are continuing the big mop-up.

State Emergency Services (SES) volunteers are still clearing some of thehuge trees that came crashing down on homes in Sydney's north.

Martin Walker was sitting on his back deck when the storm struck

"It sounded like a freight train was about to hit our house.

"You could hear it coming with such ferocity and as it hit, all the

trees just seemed to bend and there was stuff hitting the back of our

house," Mr Walker said.

Pitwater, Bankstown, Sutherland, Hurstville and Liverpool in Sydney, and

Gunnedah and Tamworth, in the state's north-west, have been added to the

list of natural disaster areas.

New South Wales Premier Bob Carr has inspected one of the worst hit

parts, Wahroonga in Sydney's north.

"I'm struck by the unpredictability of this storm damage, we've had

storms before but never winds of this force and it was uneven and

unpredictable in its impact," Mr Carr said.

The final damage bill is expected to be more than $10 million.

The Federal Government is under fire from unions over a new departmental

report which recommends Australia outsource information technology (IT)

to India.

The document says India has a low cost skilled workforce.

The Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Alexander Downer, has given

his support to the document from his department entitled "India: New

Economy, Old Economy".

The report says sectors like IT, finance and telecommunications offer

attractive direct investment opportunities.

It also says Australian firms could become more competitive by

outsourcing to the Indian IT sector.

The Community and Public Sector Union's Wendy Caird says the Government

seems to be encouraging local companies to export jobs to India.

"I think that's quite alarming, obviously labour is a great deal cheaper

in India and that's assisted by the Indian Government removing labour

laws and bankruptcy laws," Ms Caird said.

The union says while the initiative may create jobs in India, it will

not help Australia's rising unemployment.

Australian fast bowler Brett Lee has been fined $8,250 for yesterday's

on-field outburst during the third cricket Test against New Zealand in

Perth.

Lee has not been suspended for any games which will allow him to play in

the first Test against South Africa in 10 days.

The penalty represents 75 per cent of Lee's match pay for the five-day

Test.

Match referee Jackie Hendriks found Lee guilty of using crude or abusive

language and making offensive gestures after dismissing Shane Bond at

the end of the New Zealand innings yesterday.

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon has opened an emergency security

Cabinet meeting after placing blame for recent suicide attacks squarely

on Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat.

"I called an urgent meeting of the heads of all the security systems and

very shortly the Government will hold a special session, the Government

will meet in order to make decisions about how to deal further with

terrorism," he said in a national address on public television.

The Government was to discuss its policy on the Palestinian Authority,

which Mr Sharon implied was the enemy of the Jewish state and should

bear the consequences.

"Those who rise up against us to kill us are responsible for their own

destruction," he said, in a statement interpreted by a Palestinian

official as a call for war.

"Arafat has made his strategic choices, a strategy of terrorism: in

choosing to try to win political accomplishments through murder and in

choosing to allow the ruthless killing of civilians, Arafat has chosen

the path of terrorism," Mr Sharon said.

"The Government represents practically the whole of the Israel public

and we have the paramount goal and need for unity in order to cope with

all the brutalities facing us," he added.

"Tonight we heard a declaration of war," said chief Palestinian

negotiator Saeb Erakat on CNN television.

"Sharon has chosen the path of darkness."

Even before his address, Israeli helicopters and warplanes attacked

targets in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, including Arafat's offices and

a police headquarters in Jenin and the Palestinian leader's three

helicopters in Gaza City.

The air strikes were launched on Palestinian targets in the wake of

weekend suicide attacks by the Islamic militant group Hamas which left

26 Israelis dead.

Meanwhile, Hamas has defied the Palestinian state of emergency and

called for more suicide attacks against Israel at the funeral of a

gunman who killed a settler.

More than 1,000 supporters of the hardline group gathered to bury

19-year-old Muslim al-Aarage, one of two Palestinians who shot the

settler dead on Sunday in the north of the Gaza Strip before being

killed by Israeli soldiers.

"The suicide operations will continue as long as the enemy continues its

occupation" of Palestinian lands in the Gaza Strip and West Bank, a

militant from the group told a crowd with a loudspeaker.

"When Sharon kills women and children our people have the right to

defend ourselves. Then they call us terrorists," he said.

"Every religion and law in the world gives us the right to defend

ourselves," he said, shortly before the air strikes began.

Security services have arrested some 100 militants from Hamas and its

smaller rival Islamic Jihad in the crackdown since Sunday.

Human rights group Amnesty International has condemned "deliberate

attacks" by the Palestinian suicide bombers at the weekend.

"These attacks are horrifying and tragic," Amnesty said in a statement.

"We call on armed groups to end immediately the direct targeting of

civilians which contravenes the most fundamental principles of

humanity."

The organisation called on the Israeli Government and the Palestinian

Authority to remember "that no abuses of human rights by armed groups

can excuse violations of fundamental human rights and humanitarian law".

Opposition forces claimed to have captured half of Kandahar airport

after fierce fighting with Taliban troops as residents reported a

further cranking up of US bombardments on the city.

"We have now taken half of the airport," said Gul Lali, a key lieutenant

to former Kandahar governor Gul Agha.

Lali said that their forces had killed 11 foreign Taliban fighters in

the operation and overrun a building that appeared to have been used as

an office by members of suspected terrorist mastermind Osama bin Laden's

Al Qaeda network.

"These were 11 of bin Laden's men, from Egypt, Libya and Saudi Arabia.

Nineteen more were injured," Lali said from the battleground.

Opposition commanders had earlier expressed confidence that the airport

would fall by the end of the day, with the Taliban's defence tactics

hamstrung by aerial attacks from US warplanes.

"We can hope but I am not 100 per cent sure we will capture it by the

end of the evening," a spokesman for Gul Agha said after speaking to the

opposition leader at noon local time.

Bombing raids by US warplanes on Taliban positions around the airport

had helped the push, according to fighters on the ground.

Residents who left Kandahar early Monday confirmed that there had been

no let-up in the US bombing.

Abdul Masood, 30, said at that planes were now flying in five-strong

sorties.

"The frequency has increased. They now come within an interval of half

an hour," he said.

"They are targeting the airport area and Taliban positions outside the

city.

"They are also hitting the road between the city and the airport. I saw

at least four trucks which had been overturned, lying on the road."

Masood also said he had reports that some opposition soldiers had been

killed in a suicide attack by Taliban supporters.

"Some people told me that several Arabs with grenades strapped around

their abdomen managed to enter an advancing column at Torkotal (near

Kandahar airport). I believe there were heavy casualties."

His claims could not be independently verified but a doctor working for

the relief agency Muslim Hands said that he had treated six of Agha's

men after they crossed the border Monday. They were later dispatched to

Chaman hospital.

Nearly 100 civilians have been killed and 200 wounded in three nights of

US airstrikes near Jalalabad, the provincial military chief said.

Commander Haji Mohammad Zaman said the bombs targeted an area south of

Jalalabad near the Tora Bora mountain cave complex where terror suspect

Osama bin Laden is believed to have a hideout.

Zaman, who directs military operations in Nangarhar province, said the

first night of bombings left nearly 80 civilians dead and 150 wounded.

A second night of air raids killed eight civilians and wounded 18, he

said, and the third night left eight dead and many people injured.

The Prime Minister, John Howard, has revealed he will go to Indonesia

for a summit meeting with Indonesian President Megawati Sukarnoputri.

There have been talks underway since Mr Howard was re-elected on the

timing and venue for the summit.

Mr Howard has now revealed he expects to travel to Indonesia for the top

level meeting in February or March.

It will be his second visit to Jakarta within a year.

The two leaders met in Jakarta in August shortly after President

Megawati took on the role.

Australia and Indonesia are co-hosting an international summit on people

smuggling issues in February and those issues are expected to again be a

key part of the bilateral talks.

Australia and Indonesia are also discussing the resumption of military

ties.

President Megawati signalled the relationship between the two nations

had strengthened by sending a congratulatory letter to Mr Howard after

the election.

Businessmen Solomon Lew and Lindsay Fox have called on the Federal

Government to help break Qantas' dominance to ensure their bid for

Ansett is successful.

The pair met with the Victorian Premier, Steve Bracks, yesterday to

update him on the progress of the bid.

Over the weekend, the Federal Government ruled out further assistance

for the proposal.

Mr Lew says he has not requested financial assistance from the

Government, but a review of trade practices could be important.

He says he is also hopeful the Government will help break Qantas'

dominance of the aviation industry.

"We are concerned of the fact that at this point in time...the largest

competitor has over 90 per cent market share and the Deputy Prime

Minister, John Anderson, did quote both to Lindsay and myself and

publicly that he would regulate it to 65 per cent," Mr Lew said.

He says the bid does not require any other government help.

"At no time did we ever ask the Government for any grant or any cash

payment or any dollars from taxpayers.

"What we asked for was for business from the Government, which will be

forthcoming in our opinion, and an assurance that there would be a

trade practices review of the current airline situation."

A director of a defunct Swiss company that organised a canyoning trip in

1999 that ended with 21 people dying, 14 of them Australians, has denied

responsibility for the tragedy.

Along with two co-directors who are also charged with manslaughter,

Adventure World director Stephan Friedli appeared in court on the first

day of their trial.

He described the deaths of 21 people in the Saxeten River Gorge as an

accident that was unforeseeable and not preventable.

Friedli said he was aware of the possibility the river could flood, but

when asked whether his company carried out risk analysis he replied: "We

know the region, we live here".

To the question, "you know what you are accused of, have you made any

mistakes?", Mr Friedli replied: "No, I don't think so".

The storm clean-up in Sydney will resume in earnest this morning as

fresh crews are brought in to replace State Emergency Service (SES)

personnel who worked through the night.

The storm hit Sydney early yesterday afternoon and two schoolgirls died

when a tree fell on them at a reserve at Hornsby Heights in the city's

north.

A number of other people were injured as the storm brought down trees

and power poles and lifted roofs.

New South Wales Emergency Services Minister Bob Debus says welfare and

emergency funding arrangements have been put in place with the

declaration of natural disaster areas in Campbeltown, Hornsby, Warringah

and Kurringai.

"Welfare services become available if they are needed, local government

is refunded any money it spends on the clean-up or that it spends on

repairing its own infrastructure.

"Low interest loans, if they are needed, are available to small business

to help them get back on their feet again," Mr Debus said.

Energy Australia says power has been restored to 35,000 customers and

work will continue today to reconnect those still without electricity.

Energy Australia's Peter Leete says work will concentrate around the

worst hit areas.

"The worst of the problems we have still got are in Sydney's northern

suburbs which seem to be the worst hit of all, and that's around

Hornsby, St Ives, Turramurra and Frenches Forest," Mr Leete said.

Four hundred SES volunteers are responding to more than 3,000 calls for

assistance.

The volunteers have worked throughout the night to remove trees from

homes and roads.

The SES' Laura Goodin says it will take several days before the damage

is cleared up.

"While the SES has received fewer calls for help than in the storm two

weeks ago, many of the jobs in this storm are actually quite complicated

involving large trees or extensively damaged homes and businesses.

"We're estimating that most of the tasks will be completed by Friday if

no new storms develop," Ms Goodin said.

Outside Sydney, the storms caused damage in north-east of the state and

the lower Hunter.

Scores of homes and farm buildings have been damaged and literally

hundreds of trees have been brought down.

The storms, accompanied by gale force winds and hail, left large areas

around Tamworth, Gunnedah and Quirindi without electricity and telephone

services.

The royal commission into the collapse of insurance giant HIH will

resume in Sydney this morning.

On the first day of public hearings yesterday, royal commissioner

Justice Neville Owen warned all parties not to break confidentiality

agreements, following the possible leak of a report to the media last

month.

He told the commission one of the single biggest factors in the

company's collapse was that it did not plan for future claims and did

not have prudential margins over the estimate of future liabilities.

He says all parties involved in the crash will have a chance to put

their views.

"Of course fundamental principles of fairness require that before that

stage of the inquiry is reached, any person whose interest might be

adversely affected by a finding of a fact or a recommendation must be

made clearly and unequivocally aware of that risk and be given ample

opportunity to present any evidence and submissions relevant to that

issue," he said.

Around 1,000 people have braved the cold for a vigil in the hometown of

former Beatle George Harrison, who died last week.

"Tonight we are gathered here in memory of George Harrison, a true son

of Liverpool, whose music reached out to the whole world and shaped a

generation," Lord Mayor Gerry Scott said.

Plans for a candlelight vigil had to be scrapped due to fierce northern

winds, and Harrison was honoured instead by dozens of pictures of the

guitar hero, who died of cancer at age 58.

After a minute's silence the crowd heard a recording of "My Sweet Lord,"

Harrison's biggest solo hit after the break-up of Liverpool's Fab Four,

the most famous rock group in history.

Harrison's family requested a second minute of silence to be held at

9:30pm local time.

"We felt we had to come tonight because losing George is like losing one

of the family," said Elsie May, who joined the throng in paying tribute

to the Beatle known as the Silent One.

"His music shaped our lives, and in the past we would take our children

to see the Beatles when they were passing in a cavalcade. He was a

wonderful man," she said.

Leanne McCormack, a university student, said: "George was a talented

musician and his music touched the lives of millions of people.

"I wanted to come here tonight to pay my respects because he was such a

talented man. I feel lucky to have been staying in Liverpool when he

died as it has been really moving to see all the different memorials."

Just before the ceremony, students from Harrison's school, Dovedales

Juniors, planted a tree in his memory close to another tree planted two

years ago in memory of John Lennon, another Beatle gunned down by a

crazed fan in 1980.

Australian cricket coach John Buchanan says his team will be going into

the final day of the series deciding third Test against New Zealand in

Perth aiming to win the game.

Australia will resume at 2 for 69 after being set 440 to win.

Matthew Hayden is on 31 and Mark Waugh eight after Justin Langer was

dismissed for a duck and Ricky Ponting 26.

Buchanan says the outcome of the first session will determine whether

Australia continues to pursue victory.

"Hopefully we get through that without too much damage to our upper

order," he said.

"Lunchtime I think will be a good time to reassess where the game

actually stands."

Meanwhile Australian fast bowler Brett Lee faces a possible ban after

being charged over alleged misconduct during day four of the match.

Lee faced a disciplinary hearing last night over an incident where he

twice pointed New Zealand tailender Shane Bond towards the dressing room

after bowling him.

He also allegedly used abusive language towards the Kiwi number 10

batsman.

South African match referee Jackie Hendriks will announce his verdict

before play begins today.

Defence Minister Robert Hill has confirmed Australian troops arrived in

Afghanistan this morning.

Senator Hill says it is an advance party and the rest of the troops will

arrive within the next few days.

He says Australian forces will operate with US troops in southern

Afghanistan to fight the Taliban and Al Qaeda networks.

Senator Hill says the operation could take several months.

Israeli soldiers have shot dead five Palestinians in two West Bank

towns.

An Israeli military source said the soldiers shot four Palestinians near

Jenin, when Palestinian gunmen opened fire on an army patrol and the

troops returned fire.

Another Palestinian was killed by Israeli soldiers near the West Bank

city of Tulkarem, a Palestinian security source said.

Meanwhile, Palestinian police have arrested three senior leaders of the

hardline Hamas group in a crackdown that netted more than 75 Islamic

militants following a wave of suicide attacks in Israel, a Palestinian

security source told the AFP news agency.

A Hamas official confirmed the arrests of two senior leaders, Ismail Abu

Shanab and Ismail Haniya, and said police have issued arrest warrants

for another two, but he refused to name them.

The security source said more than 75 militants from Hamas and the

smaller Islamic Jihad were rounded after Yasser Arafat's Palestinian

leadership vowed to crackdown on them for a wave of anti-Israeli suicide

assaults.

Most of the arrests came after the Palestinian leadership declared a

state of emergency in the Palestinian territories giving police sweeping

powers to round up militants.

The royal commission looking into the collapse of insurance giant HIH

says the possible leak of a confidential document is a criminal offence.

Royal commissioner Justice Neville Owen has opened the public hearings

into the collapse, more than eight months after the company was placed

into provisional liquidation.

In his opening statement, Justice Owen called on all parties to adhere

to the confidentiality requirements of a royal commission.

Justice Owen says there could have been a leak of a report on the role

of auditors, circulated in early November.

"It is possible that someone, to whom the commission delivered a copy of

the report in strict confidence disclosed its contents to the author of

the article.

"If so, there may have been a breach of section 6B (4) of the Royal

Commissions Act 1902, that is a criminal offence," he said.

Forward indicators of the Australian labour market are failing to

improve, with a further decline in newspaper employment advertising.

The ANZ Bank job advertisement series has measured a 0.8 per cent fall

in the number of employment notices placed in major daily newspapers

during November.

ANZ chief economist Saul Eslake says it is the third drop in a row, to

just under 19,000 per week on average, the lowest level since March

1997.

He says the survey points to a national unemployment rate of 7.25 per

cent early in the new year and provides added justification for a cut in

official interest rates this week.

Meanwhile, the Olivier Recruitment Group's measure of Internet job

advertising has recorded its biggest drop since it was started almost

two years ago.

It has dropped 14 per cent, following a 9 per cent fall in October.

The latest result suggests 9,500 fewer jobs were advertised in

cyberspace during November.

The Olivier Internet Job Index is now the lowest it has ever been.

The company's director, Robert Olivier, describes the job market in

Australia as "shot to pieces".

The Greens have officially won their second Senate spot in Federal

Parliament.

The Senate count for New South Wales has been finalised with Kerry

Nettle from the Greens taking the final position from long time

Democrats Senator Vicki Bourne.

Senator Bourne says she is very lucky to have served in the Parliament

for 12 years and has nominated serving as an observer at the East Timor

independence ballot as the high point of her career.

She has wished Kerry Nettle well, saying it is a great honour and a

great responsibility to be elected to the Senate.

Eight people are to appear in a Swiss court tomorrow charged with the

manslaughter of 18 tourists and three guides, after the 1999 Interlaken

canyoning tragedy.

The first three defendants are managers of the now defunctoperator,

Adventure World.

Twenty-one people including 14 Australians were killed when a

thunderstorm struck when they were canyoning down the Saxeten River

Gorge near Interlaken.

A massive wall of water hit the group and swept them to their deaths.

It will be alleged the company, Adventure World, allowed the trip to

proceed with no safety provisions in place, that they employed

inexperienced staff and guides who had a lack of knowledge about the

violent weather changes which can occur in the mountains.

If convicted they face one year jail sentence.

The administrator of the financially troubled travel chain, Traveland,

says he is confident he will have a buyer for the former Ansett

subsidiary by the end of the working day.

Traveland went into voluntary administration last week for the second

time in three months, leaving its 550 employees uncertain about their

future.

Administrator Jeff McDonald says he has had offers for some, or all of

the chain, from every large competitor in the travel industry.

"We're going to be getting back to those people who have expressed an

interest and there's quite a number and saying to them, 'put your best

offer in'.

"We've actually got sale contracts going out to all those people today

and we're really looking at accelerating the whole thing so that we can

make some final decisions," Mr McDonald said.

France is celebrating victory over Australia in the Davis Cup tennis

final, after Nicholas Escude defeated Wayne Arthurs in four sets in the

deciding rubber yesterday.

Pat Rafter was forced to withdraw from the match with a recurring arm

injury just hours before he was to take the court.

The deciding rubber was to be Rafter's farewell match before taking an

indefinite break from the sport.

Arthurs, who has not played a singles match since October, says he was

bitterly disappointed to lose.

"Any tennis players dream to be out there in front of a partisan

Australain crowd. You couldn't ask for anything more in your tennis

career and I'm just unbelievably disappointed I didn't get the job

done," he said.

Team captain John Fitzgerald has defended the decision to play Rafter in

the doubles on Saturday, saying he was always in doubt for the final

match.

"There was no guarantee he could have played. I tell you anyone with

less character wouldn't have lasted nearly as long.

"There was no guarantee he could play the doubles to start with, let

alone the singles and if he had a day off there was still no guarantee."

Rafter failed to show up to the post-match media conference.

Team officals said he was tired, however Todd Woodbridge hit out at the

media for wanting to ask him about his future plans.

"It's been [asked] 55 times every day for two and a half weeks, I mean

what do you want him to say?" he asked reporters.

French team captain Guy Forget says the victory in part makes up for

France's defeat against Australia in Nice two years ago.

"You're back in Australia against a better team on grass, against the

number one player in the world and you pull off a win, it's very, very

exciting and the way it happened is just very, very special," he said.

Escude says winning the match for France is the highlight of his career.

The Palestinian Authority has launched a crackdown on Islamic militants

arresting more than 70 members of the Islamic Jihad and Hamas groups in

the wake of a weekend of deadly bomb attacks against Israel.

The Israeli Government is warning of a harsh response to the attacks,

the latest in the coastal city of Haifa.

A lone suicide bomber boarded a bus in the northern Israeli town and

detonated a device that killed 15 Israeli passengers, some of them blown

clear of the wreckage.

That attack came just 12 hours after a triple bombing in Jerusalem which

killed 10 young Israelis.

Several Israeli Government ministers suggested that Yasser Arafat and

the Palestinian leadership should now be toppled.

A decision on a military response is likely to be made later today when

Israeli Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon, returns from the United States.

After the White House demanded action, the Palestinian Authority has

declared a state of emergency and launched late night raids to arrest

scores of Hamas and Islamic Jihad members in the West Bank and Gaza

Strip.

Secretary of State Colin Powell says the United States believes Saudi

fugitive Osama bin Laden is in the "southern and eastern part" of

Afghanistan.

Mr Powell says it is "just a matter of time" before bin Laden is found

and the ruling Taliban defeated.

Appearing on the CBS "Face the Nation" program, Mr Powell reported on

the status of the US operation in Afghanistan.

"[The Taliban] still hanging on in Kandahar and some of the southern

provinces and the mountains to the east and to the south but they are

under enormous pressure," he said.

"It is just a matter of time before we achieve our objectives."

Mr Powell says US President George W. Bush does not care how long the

campaign takes.

"He wants Osama bin Laden, he wants Al Qaeda ripped up and the Taliban

has to be totally removed from power," Mr Powell said.

"You can be sure that we are looking [for bin Laden] and we have quite a

few ideas to pursue."

The United States has a total of 1,500 to 2,000 troops on the ground in

Afghanistan, according to Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld.

"We have got 1,500 to 2,000 people," he said.

Officials had earlier announced that over 1,000 US Marines are deployed

near the southern city of Kandahar, the last stronghold of Afghanistan's

ousted Taliban militia.

The US forces also include light infantry troops in the north.

Mr Rumsfeld also confirmed non-US coalition forces are also on the

ground.

US officers in Afghanistan say British, German and Australian liaison

officers are working with the US Marines in southern Afghanistan.

A new economic report claims Australia's economy is strong enough to

break its close link with the United States economy and resist following

it into recession.

The BankSA Trends bulletin says Australia's economy has been boosted by

strong rural exports.

It also says the Australian share market has been more stable over

recent months and has built up a stronger immunity to the threat of

recession.

BankSA's acting managing director Colin Taylor, says Australia is now

very capable of avoiding slumping with the US as the world economy

slows.

"It doesn't necessarily follow that Australia will follow the patterns

in the states, although normally that would be the case," Mr Taylor

said.

"What we're finding at the moment is that the Australian economy is

quite strong, our rural sector is quite strong and the values on our

stock exchange companies are also at levels which are relatively

consistent."

Meanwhile, forecasting firm BIS Shrapnel says interest rates are set to

remain low and will contribute to an economic boom in the middle of the

decade.

The firm has released its latest set of long-term projections.

Malaysian police have arrested a man believed to have smuggled thousands

of boat people into Australia.

The arrest comes after a two-year investigation by the Australian

Federal Police (AFP) and Department of Immigration.

Naeil Ahmad Abdullah, 41, was arrested in Malaysia last month for

allegedly transporting thousands of boat people from the Middle East to

Indonesia and into Australia.

AFP Commissioner Mick Keelty says the arrest will have a significant

impact on people smuggling.

"What we often forget is this is transnational crime at its best," he

said.

The AFP says the arrest would not have happened without the coordinated

effort of Malaysian and Australian authorities and believes it will lead

to further arrests.

A royal commission will begin this morning in Sydney into the collapse

of insurance giant HIH.

While the commission held an initial procedural hearing in September,

today the public hearings will begin, more than eight months after the

company was placed into provisional liquidation.

More than one million pages of documents have already been subpoenaed

from witnesses including former directors, the Australian Securities and

Investments Commission (ASIC) and the Prudential Regulatory Authority.

The terms of reference include determining what contributed to the

collapse, whether any laws were broken and whether regulations need to

be changed.

Western Australian Justice Neville Owen heads the commission, but today

it is expected to hear mainly from Counsel Assisting, Wayne Martin QC.

A spokesman for the commission, John Dickie, says it faces a great

challenge.

"The issues are quite complex really and certainly I think it's the

first one into a corporation collapse like this one," Mr Dickie said.

The inquiry is expected to be finished by the end of next June.

Eight people are to appear in a Swiss court tomorrow charged with the

manslaughter of 18 tourists and three guides, after the 1999 Interlaken

canyoning tragedy.

The first three defendants are managers of the now defunctoperator,

Adventure World.

Twenty-one people including 14 Australians were killed when a

thunderstorm struck when they were canyoning down the Saxeten River

Gorge near Interlaken.

A massive wall of water hit the group and swept them to their deaths.

It will be alleged the company, Adventure World, allowed the trip to

proceed with no safety provisions in place, that they employed

inexperienced staff and guides who had a lack of knowledge about the

violent weather changes which can occur in the mountains.

If convicted they face one year jail sentence.

There is a renewed attempt to move the debate over choosing an

Australian head of state forward, after a conference in southern New

South Wales at the weekend.

In Corowa, delegates adopted a proposal which recommended a plebiscite

to direct another constitutional convention and referendum on a republic

and Australian head of state.

A committee will meet in about four weeks to work on the next step in

the campaign.

One of the proposal's developers, historian Walter Phillips, hopes there

is a vote on an Australian head of state in about five years.

"I think that in five or six years we should be pretty near if we can

get this process going and carried forward.

"Now we have to persuade our political leaders that it is something they

should take up, that's going to be one of the problems," Mr Phillips

said.

A third case of mad cow disease has been confirmed in Japan.

A panel of experts at Japan's Health Ministry has confirmed that another

cow has the disease.

Officials say all meat and organs from the dairy cow will be

incinerated.

It is Japan's third case of mad cow disease and a ministerial spokesman

says he cannot tell how many more cases will be found as a nationwide

test continues.

The government has not determined the source of the outbreak.

Unions and a major electricity producer will take part in

government-sponsored talks this afternoon, in a bid to end a long

running dispute over an enterprise bargaining agreement.

The row has been running nearly two years, and has led to work bans as

unions press their case.

The Victorian State Government has called in Yallourn Energy and power

industry unions to try and resolve the dispute, which could lead to

blackouts.

The Yallourn Power station is Victoria's third biggest, producing a

fifth of the state's electricity.

Despite in-principle support for a new enterprise bargaining agreement

being reached last year, it still has not been signed off.

Yallourn Energy takes the matter to the Industrial Relations Commission

tomorrow, seeking compulsory arbitration.

Victoria's Industrial Relations Minister, Monica Gould, admits the

dispute is frustrating.

"We want this matter resolved as soon as possible and the only way to do

that is for the parties to sit around the table and negotiate an

outcome," she said.

Rival Afghan factions are deadlocked over the shape of a future

government.

The Northern Alliance has demanded a 10-day adjournment of power-sharing

talks in Germany, after its President Burhanuddin Rabbani objected to

the appointment system for an interim administration.

President Rabbani has objected to the plans for an interim government to

be drawn up by appointment as discussed in Bonn, saying the interim

leaders should be voted in by Afghans themselves.

He also says there is no real need for a sizeable international security

force.

President Rabbani says he would prefer local Afghan factions drew up

their own internal security forces of around 1,000 personnel.

But if the world insisted there should be an international security

presence, there should be no more than 100 or 200 personnel in their

security forces he says.

President Rabbani's objections are likely to cast doubt on his

delegation's ability to commit the Northern Alliance to any course of

action decided upon in Bonn.

He now threatens to undermine the very process he claims to support in

the quest for a stable government in Afghanistan.

George Harrison the guitarist, songwriter and film producer was widely

known as the "quiet" Beatle.

As the youngest Beatle, he had to be snuck in underage to venues prior

to the band's phenomenal success in the early 1960s.

He was responsible for some of the band's classic songs, such as

Taxman, Here comes the Sun and Something.

But up against the genius of Paul McCartney and John Lennon, his songs

were hard-pressed to make it onto vinyl.

Resentment built up and Harrison withdrew from the limelight.

After the Beatles broke up he found solo success in 1971, with the track

My Sweet Lord, although he was successfully sued for plagiarism

and had to pay out half-a-million-pounds in damages.

Always against a Beatles reformation, he famously declared in 1989 that

the band would reform when Lennon was no longer dead.

In later years he was beset by lung and throat cancer.

He was lucky to survive a stabbing by an intruder in his UK home in

1999.

He was known for his love of eastern mysticism, motor racing and his

second wife Olivia, who saved his life in the knife attack.

Virgin Airline's first dawn flight between Launceston and Melbourne got

away on time this morning, despite passengers being checked-in through a

tent.

Virgin Blue has set up a temporary marquee terminal at Launceston

airport after it was told by Ansett administrators that it could no

longer share its terminal space.

Virgin's deputy chief executive Rob Sherrard says the airline had an

agreement with Ansett to use the check-in facilities for its lunchtime

Launceston to Melbourne service but this could be terminated with seven

days notice.

Virgin was told last Thursday, it would have to move out throwing into

disarray the airline's plans for second daily flight to Tasmania

launched this morning.

Mr Sherrard says he has not heard from the administrators since.

"Basically they were unwinding the contract that we had and we certainly

were not able to access the terminal for our second daily flights to

Launceston and of course Canberra as well," he said.

"That meant we had to make alternative arrangements."

A team of Australian and Israeli scientists have conducted what they

believe is successful research into using human embryo cells to repair

brain damage.

But their findings have been released just days after US president

George W Bush criticised similar research by a team of Americans.

Earlier this week Massachusetts based company Advance Cell Technologies

said it had successfully cloned an early stage human embryo.

The announcement sparked recriminations from US Congressmen with

President Bush saying he was 100 per cent against any type of human

cloning.

Now an Australian-Israeli team has used excess IVF embryos to create

precursor brain cells which they injected into the brains of baby mice.

The findings show the brain cells grew to be indistinguishable from

other brain tissue.

While the research could prove useful in treating a variety of

conditions including Parkinson's disease, it is likely to come under

fire from human rights groups as it involves the destruction of human

embryos.

Today is World Aids Day and the latest figures show that 40 million

people are living with HIV world-wide.

The latest United Nations report on the AIDS epidemic has found Eastern

Europe and the republics of the former Soviet Union are becoming the new

battleground in the fight against the disease.

UN officials say in Russia the number of people carrying HIV doubles

almost annually, while Ukraine has become the first nation in Europe to

report 1 per cent of its adult population is HIV positive.

The officials say a combination of economic insecurity, high

unemployment and deteriorating health services are behind the steep

rise.

The Federal National Party has rejected a possible merger with the

Liberals' at this stage, but it has not ruled out the option over the

next three years.

Liberal Party President Shane Stone is reported as saying amalgamation

has to be considered as a strategy for the future of the Coalition.

It comes as the two parties fight over numbers and muscle within the

parliamentary groupings of the Coalition.

National Party President Helen Dickie says merging the two parties is

not necessary.

"I guess you cannot categorically rule out anything. There will be

discussions by all states, but the states at this stage have led me to

understand that certainly amalgamation for them is not an issue," she

said.

A University of Canberra academic's proposal for a republic will be one

of five discussed at an historic conference, starting in Corowa today.

The conference is part of Centenary of Federation celebrations and

recognises the Corowa conference of 1893 which began the process towards

the federation of Australia in 1901.

University of Canberra law lecturer BedeHarris is proposing three

referenda to determine the republic issue.

They would decide on whether the monarchy should be replaced, the

codification powers for a head of state and the choice of a republic

model.

Doctor Harris says any constitutional change must involve all

Australians.

"I think it is very important that the people of Australia be given the

opporunity to choose or be consulted at every stage of the process."

Australia will take on France in the doubles rubber of the Davis Cup

tennis final today with the tie levelled at 1-1.

Wayne Arthurs and Todd Woodbridge are scheduled to lead Australia in the

doubles against Cedric Pioline and Fabrice Santoro.

However changes can be made to the line-up up to an hour before the

match and Australian team captain John Fitzgerald suggested he might do

just that.

"We'll make a team appraisal of the whole situation, go over the pros

and cons and make a decision"

French team captain Guy Forget says he will not make changes but does

not know what to expect from Australia.

"Todd is the best doubles player in the world right now so I expect him

to play," he said.

"I would probably use Wayne Arthurs but I don't know what to expect

really."

Pat Rafter salvaged Australia's Davis Cup campaign yesterday with a win

in the second singles match.

Rafter overcame an arm injury to defeat French number one Sebastien

Grosjean in three sets.

The Australian says he is happy with his form.

"It's not very pretty tennis, there isn't too many consistent bounces,

you are playing like I said a bit of a classic old grass court," Rafter

said.

Rafter levelled the score after Lleyton Hewitt's shock five set loss to

Nicholas Escude in the first singles rubber.

But Rafter says he felt no added pressure after Hewitt's defeat.

"I knew I had a good team to back me up even if we were down 2-0," he

said.

"I knew I could win on the last day, I know the boys can win doubles, so

even if we were down 2-0 I still feel we are a good enough team to win

and vice-versa, they are good enough team to beat us as well."