

Snapshots-2008-World

- ❖ **Silvio Berlusconi**, the leader of **Forza Italia Party**, was sworn in as Italy's **prime minister** for the fourth time in his political career. His coalition government has cabinet ministers from allies such as National Alliance and the Northern League.
- ❖ President **Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov** of **Turkmenistan** has ordered the removal of a **gold statue** of his predecessor **Saparmurat Niyazov** from the centre of the capital, **Ashgabat**.
- ❖ Pop star **Kylie Minogue** was made a knight in the **Order of Arts and Letters** for her "contribution to the enrichment of French culture" by the **French government** recently. The Order of Arts and Letters was established to recognise artists and writers, who have contributed significantly to the arts in France and throughout the world.
- ❖ The **world's longest sea bridge**, spanning a length of 36 km, was inaugurated in the **Yangtze River Delta** in Zhejiang province of China.
- ❖ President **Robert Mugabe** and his rivals signed a power-sharing agreement according to which Mugabe would remain **President** while main opposition leader **Morgan Tsvangirai** would be **Prime Minister**.
- ❖ U.S. President George W. Bush announced that the US planned to withdraw about 8,000 U.S. troops from **Iraq** by next February and send some 4,500 troops to **Afghanistan** next January.
- ❖ China successfully launched its third manned spacecraft as the **Shenzhou-7** blasted off on a **Long-March II-F** carrier rocket from the **Jiuquan Satellite Launch Centre** in **Gansu Province**.
- ❖ The **British government** has started introducing **bio-metric identity cards** for **immigrants** from India and other **non-European Union countries** with Home Secretary Jacqui Smith unveiling the design of the supposedly "forgery-proof" card.
- ❖ A key summit between Russia and the European Union ended with a triumphant victory for Moscow after a EU panel comprising French President **Nicolas Sarkozy**, European Commission President **Jose Manuel Barroso** and EU foreign policy chief **Javier Solana** accepted President **Dmitry Medvedev's** demands to get **Georgia** renounce the use of force against its breakaway territories.
- ❖ The EU also agreed to have **European peacekeepers** deployed only on **Georgian territory**, while Russian peacekeepers would stay in South Ossetia and Abkhazia.
- ❖ A Delta 2 rocket carrying the **GeoEye-1 satellite** was launched from Vandenberg Air Force Base on the central California coast recently. GeoEye-1 has the **highest resolution** of any **commercial imaging system**.
- ❖ **Microsoft Corp** is seeking a patent in India for an **electronic data snapshot generator**, co-invented by an Indian. The concept has been developed by **Ramakrishnan Natarajan** along with **Daniel C. Battagin**.
- ❖ **Russia and Venezuela** will hold joint naval war games in November in what could be a Russian response to a NATO naval build-up in the **Black Sea**. It would be for the first time the Russian Navy would participate in war games in South America.

- ❖ A **prison-cell painting** by Venezuelan President **Hugo Chavez** was auctioned for \$255,000 in Caracas to raise money for his socialist party.
- ❖ **Taro Aso** has succeeded **Yasuo Fukuda** as **Prime Minister** of **Japan** after a decisive win in the **House of Representatives**, the powerful **lower chamber** of **Diet** (Parliament). The upper chamber, **House of Councillors**, chose opposition leader **Ichiro Ozwa** for the same post in a run-off that Aso lost by 108 votes to 125. However, the preference of the House of Representatives prevailed under the due process.
- ❖ **Russia** has established **diplomatic relations** with **Abkhazia** and **South Ossetia** and vowed to defend them against aggression. Georgia's President **Mikheil Saakashvili** recently signed up to the plan and gave a written pledge to renounce the use of force against Georgia's former territories.
- ❖ Magician **David Blaine** (35) set a **new world record for breath-holding** at the Oprah Winfrey Show in Chicago, USA recently. His record of 17 minutes and 4 seconds beat the previous record of 16 minutes and 32 seconds set by Switzerland's Peter Colat.
- ❖ **Albert Hofmann**, the Swiss chemist who discovered the mind-altering drug LSD (**lysergic acid diethylamide-25**) in 1938 while studying the medicinal uses of a fungus found on wheat and other grains at the Sandoz pharmaceuticals firm in Basel, passed away at 102. For a time, **Sandoz** sold LSD 25 under the name **Delysid**.
- ❖ **Fernando Lugo**, a former Catholic bishop and liberation theologian standing for a centre-left coalition, was elected as **Paraguay's president**, ending the six-decade grip on power of the **Colorado Party**, the longest-ruling in the world.
- ❖ The party of President **Mikheil Saakashvili** comfortably won Georgia's general election. Posturing by both the Russians and the Georgians over the breakaway enclave of Abkhazia persisted.
- ❖ **Leonel Fernández** won the presidential election in the **Dominican Republic**, with 53.8 percent of the vote.
- ❖ Iran's conservatives have strengthened their hold over the new parliament after winning 69 percent of the seats in the 290-member parliament. The results showed the continued decline of the reformists, who were once a formidable force under the former President, **Mohammad Khatami** and the strengthening of the hold of conservatives led by President **Mahmoud Ahmadinejad** on the Iranian political system.
- ❖ The Constitutional Court in Bangkok has disqualified **Thailand's Prime Minister Samak Sundaravej** of the **People's Power Party** for "violating" the Constitution by presenting TV shows that caused a "conflict of interest" in the discharge of his duty. The crux of the case against Samak is that his shows on cooking put him on the payroll of a private company. **Somchai Wongsawat** is the new PM.
- ❖ Aso's **Liberal Democratic Party** (LDP) and its coalition partner, **New Komeito**, command a two-thirds majority in the **House of Representatives**. The main opposition outfit, the **Democratic Party of Japan**, controls the **House of Councillors**.
- ❖ **Tomiyasu Ishikawa**, a 71 year-old **Japanese climber** has received a certificate from **Guinness World Records** recognising him as the oldest person to have conquered the tallest peaks on the world's seven continents after he reached the summit of the 4,897-metre Mt Vinson Massif, the tallest mountain in Antarctica, on January 21.

- ❖ **John Wheeler**, the US physicist who coined the term “**black hole**”, has died at the age of 96. Involved in the Manhattan project that developed the world’s first atomic bomb, Wheeler was one of Albert Einstein’s last collaborators and also worked with Niels Bohr, the Nobel Prize-winning Danish scientist.
- ❖ President **Vladimir Putin** has become chairman of the dominant **United Russia party**.
- ❖ World’s shortest man, named **Pingpong**, was in New York to launch the 2009 edition of the **Guinness Book of World Records**, in which he is listed as the shortest man on the planet. The 20-year-old Chinese man is just 74.6 cm tall.
- ❖ **Paul Newman**, the Academy Award winning superstar passed away at the age of 93. He won numerous awards, including an **Academy Award** for his performance in the 1986 Martin Scorsese film, ‘**The Color of Money**’, three Golden Globe Awards, a BAFTA Award, a Screen Actors Guild Award, a Cannes Film Festival Award, an Emmy award, and many honorary awards.
- ❖ **Paul Newman** also won several national championships as a driver in **Sports Car Club of America** road racing and his race teams won several championships in open wheel **Indy Car racing**. Newman was a co-founder of **Newman’s Own**, a food company from which Newman donated all post-tax profits and royalties to charity. As of May 2007, these donations had exceeded **\$220 million**.
- ❖ The **US House of Representatives** defeated a **\$700 billion emergency rescue package**, ignoring pleas from President George Bush and congressional leaders to quickly bail out the staggering **U.S. financial industry**.
- ❖ Defence Minister **A. K. Antony** and his Russian counterpart, **Anatoly Serdyukov** have decided to extend the tenure of the joint panel on military and technical cooperation between their two countries by another 10 years. Formed in 2000, the **Indo-Russian Inter-Governmental Commission on Military Technical Cooperation (IRIGC-MTC)** is the only joint body in the military sphere which is headed by Defence Ministers of both countries.
- ❖ The **US House of Representatives** has approved a bill on the **India-U.S. nuclear deal**. The legislation will now go to the Senate. Once the Senate clears it, the agreement reached between the two countries three years ago will be ready for final ratification by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee.
- ❖ Indian and Pakistan have decided to open the **Wagah-Atari border road route** and the **Munabao-Khokrapar rail link to trade**. Pakistan President Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh agreed to open the two crossings for trade during their talks in New York recently.
- ❖ The **Wagah-Atari border** has been closed to normal traffic of people and goods since the 1965 India-Pakistan war. Trade in a handful of items was permitted last year. At present, Pakistan imports tomatoes, potatoes and onions from India through the crossing, while the major item of Indian import is cement. The recently inaugurated **Munabao-Khokrapar rail link** connects Sindh with Rajasthan and Gujarat, but has been restricted only to passengers.
- ❖ **Russia and Venezuela** plan to set up an **oil and gas consortium**, which could become a leading player in global energy markets. This was decided during the visit of Venezuela’s President Hugo Chavez to Russia recently. The consortium will be between Russia’s five leading oil and gas companies — Gazprom, LUKoil, TNK-BP, Surgutneftegaz and Rosneft — and state-owned Petroleos de Venezuela SA

- ❖ The **Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)** will help **Egypt** in conserving and maintaining the nearly 100-year-old–**Baron Palace**– in Cairo, which looks like a typical Hindu temple. The ASI has already completed such work at **Katsaraj** and **Ta Prohm Temple Complexes** in **Pakistan** and **Cambodia** respectively.
- ❖ The former US poet laureate **Louise Glück** has been given the **Wallace Stevens Award**, a \$100,000 prize for "outstanding and proven mastery in the art of poetry." Glück, who served as poet laureate in 2003-04, is known for such books as 'Averno', 'The Seven Ages' and 'Vita Nova'.
- ❖ Pakistan Army chief General Ashfaq Parvez Kayani appointed **Lt. Gen. Ahmed Shuja Pasha** as Director-General of the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI).
- ❖ New Delhi and Paris have signed an agreement on civil nuclear cooperation, the first of its kind since the Nuclear Suppliers Group agreed to lift international restrictions on India's nuclear trade. Formally called the "**Co-operation Agreement Between the Government of the Republic of India and the Government of the French Republic on the Development of Peaceful Uses of Nuclear Energy**," the agreement was signed by Atomic Energy Commission Chairman Anil Kakodkar and French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner in the presence of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and President Nicolas Sarkozy at the Elysee Palace.
- ❖ **Czar Nicholas II** has been recognised as a victim of Communist repression. Nicholas II and his German-born wife and five children were killed by revolutionary firing squad in 1918, less than a year after a victorious Bolshevik revolution in October 1917. **Russia's Supreme Court** recently declared that he and his family were victimised by Bolshevik authorities.
- ❖ Pakistan has become the first South Asian country to commission into service a **diesel-electric submarine**, **PNS Hamza**.
- ❖ **Pope Benedict XVI** canonised four Catholic figures, among them **Sister Alphonsa**, an Indian nun who became the country's first woman saint. Born in 1910 as Anna Muttathupandathu, and known as Alphonsa dell'Immacolata Concezione, **Sister Alphonsa** was known for her stoicism and compassion. After her death at 36 years of age in 1946, miracles were attributed to her. Her burial place became a pilgrimage site, especially for those seeking relief from ill health.
- ❖ **Princeton University** economist and **New York Times** columnist **Paul Krugman** won the **Nobel economics prize** for his analysis of how economies of scale can affect trade patterns and the location of economic activity. The Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences praised Krugman for formulating a new theory to answer questions about free trade.
- ❖ **Osamu Shimomura** of Japan and the US duo of **Martin Chalfie** and **Roger Tsien** won the **Nobel Chemistry Prize** for a fluorescent protein derived from a jellyfish, which has become a vital lab tool. Green fluorescent protein (GFP) has revolutionised research in medicine and biology, enabling scientists to get a visual fix on organ functioning, spread of diseases and response of infected cells to treatment.
- ❖ French novelist **Jean-Marie Gustave Le Clezio** has been awarded this year's Nobel Prize for Literature. The 68-year-old has been honoured with the 10 million kronor (£820,810) award for his distinguished life's work. Le Clezio's breakthrough as a novelist came in 1980 with '**Desert**', a work the Swedish academy praised for its "magnificent images of a lost culture in the North African desert." The author published his first novel, '**The Interrogation**', in 1964. The first Nobel Prize in Literature was awarded in 1901 to the French poet and philosopher **Sully Prudhomme**.

- ❖ Russia's Prime Minister **Vladimir Putin** marked his 56th birthday recently by presenting an instructional judo DVD film he helped make. The video titled "**Let's Learn Judo with V.V. Putin**" is the product of collaboration between Putin and Japan's former World and Olympic judo champion **Yasuhiro Yamashita**.
- ❖ **Ukrainian** President **Viktor Yushchenko** dissolved Parliament and called a snap election amid charges of trying to suppress a parliamentary probe into arms supplies to Georgia that were used in the attack against South Ossetia. Yushchenko accused his Orange Revolution partner Prime Minister **Yulia Tymoshenko** of ruining their coalition in Parliament for the sake of acquiring power.
- ❖ '**The Wrestler**', directed by **Darren Aronofsky**, has won the coveted **Golden Lion** for best picture at the Venice film festival. The film stars **Mickey Rourke** as a has-been professional wrestler pitifully loath to throw in the towel. The Silver Lion for best director was won by Russia's **Alexei German Jr** for '**Paper Soldier**'. Italy's **Silvio Orlando** and **Dominique Blanc** were winners in the best male and female categories respectively. Orlando starred in '**Il Papa di Giovanna**' and Blanc was in '**L'Autre**'.
- ❖ Actress **Natalie Portman** has been awarded the '**Movie for Humanity Award**' for **social commitment** at the **Venice Film Festival**. The 27-year-old received \$50,000 (£28,000), which she has donated to a charity in Tanzania.
- ❖ Oscar winner **Michael Moore** released his latest documentary free of charge on the internet. **Slacker Uprising** will be available as a download to North American viewers for three weeks from 23 September. The documentary follows Moore's tour across the US during the 2004 presidential campaign as he attempted to persuade young people to vote.
- ❖ Moore's 2007 documentary **Sicko** looked at the state of the **US healthcare system** and gained an Oscar nomination. Moore won the best documentary Oscar for his 2002 feature, '**Bowling For Columbine**'.
- ❖ US animator **Bill Melendez**, who drew **Snoopy**, **Charlie Brown** and other **Peanuts** characters in numerous movies and TV specials, has died at the age of 91. **Charles Schulz** was the creator of the **Peanuts comic strip**.
- ❖ **Michael Phelps** can soon add another accomplishment to his already-glowing résumé: Author. The record-shattering Olympic swimmer has earned an advance estimated at \$1.6 million from **Simon & Shuster** for a book, to be titled '**Built to Succeed**'.
- ❖ Republican **John McCain** unveiled a major surprise in the White House race by picking **Alaska governor, Sarah Palin**, as his running-mate.
- ❖ U.S. magazine **Esquire** has unveiled a **cover partly of electronic ink**. Using the technology that Amazon employed for its Kindle e-book reader, the magazine includes a panel flashing the message--'**The 21st Century Begins Now**' on the cover of its October issue, marking its 75th birthday.
- ❖ **South African** government's National Heritage Council has conferred Cuban leader **Fidel Castro** with its **Ubuntu Award**. "Ubuntu" refers to the importance of community. Africans revere Castro for his support of anti-colonial rebellions and of the anti-apartheid movement.

- ❖ Ruling Pakistan People's Party (PPP) chief **Asif Ali Zardari** was elected Pakistan's new **president**, securing a landslide victory in the elections beating his rivals—PML-N candidate Saeed-uz-Zaman Siddique and PML-Q leader Mushahid Hussain Sayed.
- ❖ Bond film bosses have decided not to make Sebastian Faulks' commemorative 007 book—'**Devil May Care**' into a film. Faulks was selected to write the book to commemorate **Ian Fleming's centenary**.
- ❖ The **United States** has proposed \$1 billion in **humanitarian and economic assistance** to help rebuild **Georgia** after its war with Russia. Vice President Dick Cheney visited Tbilisi to reaffirm Washington's support for this country's eventual NATO membership. His words of support for President Mikheil Saakashvili placed him on a direct collision course with Russia's leaders who have made clear that they see Georgia's membership of NATO as intolerable.
- ❖ **Ethiopia** is celebrating the unveiling of the reassembled **Axum obelisk**, one of the country's greatest treasures. The obelisk, at least 1,700 years old, was looted by **Italian troops** in the 1930s and returned to Ethiopia in 2005.
- ❖ Ukrainian President **Viktor Yushchenko** has threatened to dissolve parliament and call elections following new laws to trim presidential powers. The laws were introduced by the opposition and backed by Prime Minister **Yulia Tymoshenko's** bloc.
- ❖ Scientists have launched an ambitious online **Encyclopedia of Life** which aims to give information about all the 1.8 million species on Earth. The project which involves hundreds of noted scientists was first conceived by renowned biologist **Edward O Wilson**. It will take scientists 10 years to complete the online encyclopedia. Apart from universities, Adobe, Microsoft and the Wikimedia Foundation are also supporting EOL.
- ❖ 'Harry Potter' author **JK Rowling** earned more than any other celebrity, according to the annual **Celebrity 100 list**, compiled by **Forbes** magazine. Rowling took home \$300 million last year.
- ❖ Bosnian Serb wartime president **Radovan Karadzic**, wanted for genocide and war crimes, was arrested near Belgrade after 11 years on the run, in disguise and working as a doctor. Karadzic's arrest was one of the main conditions of Serbian progress towards European Union membership.
- ❖ **Russia** and **China** vetoed proposed sanctions on **Zimbabwe's** leaders, rejecting U.S. efforts to step up punitive measures against President Robert Mugabe's regime after a widely discredited presidential election.
- ❖ Nepali Congress leader **Ram Baran Yadav** was elected **Nepal's first President** defeating Maoist-candidate Ramraja Prasad Singh by 26 votes.
- ❖ **China** and **Russia** put a formal **end** to their decades-old **border dispute** after an agreement signed by visiting Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and his Chinese counterpart in Beijing spelled out the details of the handover by Russia of two border islands.
- ❖ **Jaipal Reddy**, a 39-year-old immigrant from Hyderabad, has set up "**Salam Namaste**" radio station in Houston to help build a bridge between Pakistanis and Indians kept apart by old animosities.
- ❖ Tamil Nadu **Chief Secretary L.K. Tripathy** while maintaining that the State government had not violated the Supreme Court's order **banning the bandh** on October 1, 2007 on the **Sethusamudram issue** has tendered an unconditional apology if the court was of the view that the order had not been effectively implemented.

- ❖ Indian-origin Judge **Navanethem Pillay** has been named the **United Nations'** new **Human Rights Commissioner**.
- ❖ Israel's Prime Minister **Ehud Olmert** has announced retirement from political life. He will step down from his post as leader of **Kadima Party** because of a series of corruption allegations swirling around him.
- ❖ The British government's controversial decision to drop a criminal investigation into allegations of corruption against **BAE Systems** has been upheld by the House of Lords, which is the country's highest court of appeal. Britain's biggest arms supplier, is alleged to have paid millions in secret commissions to win a £43-billion defence contract with Saudi Arabia in 1985
- ❖ The **15th SAARC Summit** organised at the Sri Lankan capital of **Colombo** on August 2-3 has adopted the **Colombo Declaration**, titled "Partnership for growth of our people". The declaration dwelt at length on terrorism and issues such as trade promotion and measures to face the challenges posed by climate change.
- ❖ The **15th SAARC Summit** also approved the **SAARC Convention on Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty (MLAT)**. The treaty's objective is to strengthen two SAARC conventions on Terrorism and Drug Trafficking. The SAARC heads of state also decided to develop a pan-SAARC toll-free helpline for women (1091) and one for children (1098) to help victims of trafficking.
- ❖ **Turkey's** powerful Supreme Military Council has sent out an uncompromising message of support for the country's secular system by appointing **General Ilker Basbug** (65) as the **new Army chief**. Basbug, who replaces retiring General Yasar Buyukanit, is known for his staunch anti-Islamist opinions.
- ❖ Prime Minister **Manmohan Singh** announced the allocation of an additional **\$450 million** in assistance to **Afghanistan** during his discussions with visiting Afghanistan President **Hamid Karzai**.
- ❖ **Lord Swraj Paul**, India-born British parliamentarian and Labour member of the House of Lords, lost to Malaysian Minister **Shafie Apdal** in a poll for the post of **chairperson** of the **Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA)** Executive Committee in Singapore.
- ❖ **Dr Arvind Subramanian**, a Senior Research Fellow of the Peterson Institute for International Affairs in Washington DC, has published '**India's Turn**', a thought-provoking book on India's macroeconomic developments. The book deals with the transformation of India from a sleepy giant in the first three decades since Independence to its present rate of growth since 1991.
- ❖ Thailand's revered **King Bhumibol Adulyadej** is the **world's richest monarch**, according to a **Forbes magazine list**. Bhumibol, who is worth an estimated \$35 bn, is followed by Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed al-Nahayan (United Arab Emirates), King Abdullah (Saudi Arabia), Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah (Brunei), Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid al-Maktoum (Dubai) and Prince Hans Adam II (Liechtenstein).
- ❖ A 33 year veteran of the US military, **Lieutenant General Ann Dunwoody**, has become the **first woman** to be nominated to the highest rank in the US Army, **four-star general**. She would take over as commander of Army Materiel Command, a branch of the army that provides logistics support to tens of thousands of US soldiers stationed around the world.
- ❖ **Iran** test-fired a series of missiles, including the **Shahab-3** that has sufficient range to hit Israeli cities adding still further to the tension between Iran and the West over Iran's nuclear ambitions. France's Total suggested that it would pull out of a gas development in Iran because it was too risky to invest in the country.

- ❖ The **US Senate** approved a controversial **surveillance bill** that grants immunity to telecoms companies that co-operated in a **warrantless wiretapping** programme. Barack Obama voted for the legislation.
- ❖ A suicide attack on the **Indian embassy in Kabul**, the Afghan capital, killed 41 people, including two diplomats. Afghan officials blamed the Taliban, but suggested they were abetted by Pakistan's ISI.
- ❖ Iraq's prime minister, **Nuri al-Maliki**, said that his government would not sign any new agreement with America governing the **future role of American troops** in Iraq unless it included clear deadlines for their withdrawal. Any new agreement would come into force at the end of the year. The American defence secretary, Robert Gates, insisted that a withdrawal must "depend on the situation on the ground".
- ❖ America's **George Bush** and France's **Nicolas Sarkozy** confirmed they would attend the opening ceremony of the **Olympic Games** in Beijing. Sarkozy had earlier indicated that his attendance depended on an improvement in China's behaviour in Tibet.
- ❖ **America** signed an agreement with the **Czech Republic** that will base a tracking radar system in the country and form part of a missile defence shield that America wants to build in Eastern Europe. Russia's president, Dmitry Medvedev, said he was "extremely upset" at the development.
- ❖ **Austria's** governing coalition fell apart. It had been formed by the **Austrian People's Party** and the **Social Democrats** in early 2007, but the partners repeatedly clashed over a range of policies, including taxes and pensions.
- ❖ The **International Criminal Court** indicted Sudan's president, **Omar al-Bashir**, accusing him of war crimes in Sudan's Darfur region, where up to 300,000 people are said to have been killed during the suppression of a rebellion. The Sudanese government reacted with outrage and denial.
- ❖ Russia and China vetoed a proposal by America and Britain in the UN Security Council that would have imposed an arms embargo on Zimbabwe and put travel and financial curbs on President **Robert Mugabe** and his closest colleagues.
- ❖ President **Nicolas Sarkozy** staged a huge summit in Paris to mark the establishment of a new **Union for the Mediterranean**. Some European and Mediterranean leaders attended, a diplomatic triumph for the French leader.
- ❖ **Russia** reduced its **oil supplies** to the **Czech Republic** by half for "technical reasons". The cut came just after the Czechs agreed to host a US missile-defence radar. The technical reasons did not affect oil supplies to any of the Czechs' neighbours.
- ❖ A former American soldier, **Robin Long** became the first American army deserter ever to be deported from Canada. He fled there in 2005 as his unit was about to be sent to Iraq.
- ❖ **Belgium's** political crisis re-erupted when the prime minister tendered his resignation after failing to push through devolution reforms. **Yves Leterme** had formed a government only in March, nine months after an election.

- ❖ **G-8 nations** have agreed to work toward a target of at least halving global greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 but emphasised they would not be able to do it alone, at their recent summit meeting at **Tokayo, Japan**.
- ❖ A Hindu temple in Cambodia, historic Malaysian towns and an agricultural site from Papua New Guinea are the latest additions to the **UNESCO's World Heritage List**. The 11th century **Preah Vihear** temple site, perched on a mountain top on the Thai-Cambodian border, the cities of the Straits of Malacca: **Melaka** and **George Town** in Malaysia, and the **Kuk Early Agricultural Site** in Papua New Guinea were included at UNESCO's list recently.
- ❖ A man tore the head off a **wax statue** of **Adolf Hitler** in Berlin, minutes after the new branch of the Madame Tussauds wax-work museum chain opened for the first time to the public in Berlin recently. Critics said it was inappropriate to display the Nazi dictator, who started World War II and ordered the extermination of Europe's Jews, in a museum alongside celebrities, pop stars, world statesmen and sporting heroes.
- ❖ **Titan Industries** has tied up with the **World Wildlife Fund (WWF-India)** to spread awareness about some of the most endangered species in India through a collection of uniquely designed Titan watches. Titan will design a special collection of watches inspired by some of the highly endangered species in India, which include the Asian tiger, Gangetic river dolphin, red panda and Indian rhino.
- ❖ Scientists bid a fond farewell on July 1 to the **space probe Ulysses**, which has circled the **Sun** gathering data for over 17 years, almost four times its expected lifetime. It was launched in 1990 and was the first major collaboration between **NASA** and the European Space Agency (**ESA**).
- ❖ Talk show queen **Oprah Winfrey** has topped the Forbes' list of the '**World's 100 Most Powerful Celebrities**' for the second year running. The 54-year-old's show makes yearly earnings of \$275 million.
- ❖ **Britain** has ratified the **Lisbon Treaty** that is designed to streamline the functioning of the expanded European Union (E.U.). However the treaty's future remained uncertain because of the recent "no" vote in the referendum held in Ireland.
- ❖ Technically, the **Lisbon Treaty** is "not operational" as the rules state the E.U.'s 27 members must ratify the treaty for it to become effective. Britain is the 19th member to ratify it. European Commission President **Jose Manuel Barroso** said the treaty would make E.U. more "effective, democratic and stronger on the global stage."
- ❖ The **Lisbon Treaty**, which replaced the draft E.U. Constitution after it was rejected by French and Dutch voters in 1995, provides for a new President of the European Council and an E.U. Foreign Minister.
- ❖ US Secretary of State **Condoleezza Rice** received the "**Stara Planina**" medal—Bulgaria's top honour for helping to free Bulgarian nurses from a Libyan jail. The five Bulgarian nurses and a Palestinian doctor, who had been sentenced to death on accusations of deliberately infecting 460 Libyan children with HIV.
- ❖ Actor and social activist **Shabana Azmi** and Sri Lankan cricketer **Sanath Jayasuriya** have been appointed **SAARC goodwill ambassadors** for a HIV/AIDS programme for the member-countries.
- ❖ The **Vatican** has slapped a **ban** on the filming of a prequel to 'The Da Vinci Code' called '**Angels and Demons**' in any of its churches in Rome, calling the work "an offence against God". 'Angels and Demons', the latest book from Dan Brown to be turned into a film, includes major episodes that take place in the Vatican and two churches in Rome.

- ❖ The British Queen has stripped Zimbabwe President **Robert Mugabe** of his honorary knighthood, issued in 1994, as a mark of growing outrage at the abuse of human rights in Zimbabwe. Mugabe was sworn in for a sixth term after an election many countries condemned as a sham.
- ❖ Gulf War veteran **Brian Hart** has developed inexpensive robotic vehicles that are capable of disabling car bombs and roadside explosives before they detonate. His firm **Black-I Robotics** was in news recently for a \$728,000 contract from the Pentagon in June to further develop the '**LandShark**' robot.
- ❖ **Denmark**, with its democracy, social equality and peaceful atmosphere, is the **happiest country** in the world, according to the US government-funded **World Values Survey**. **Zimbabwe**, torn by political and social strife, is the least happy, while the world's richest nation, the United States, ranks 16th. The survey, first done in 1981, has kept to two simple questions: "Taking all things together, would you say you are very happy, rather happy, not very happy, not at all happy?" And, "All things considered, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole these days?"
- ❖ A first edition of the book in which **Nicolaus Copernicus** presented his earthshaking theory of the cosmos has fetched more than \$2.2 million at an auction in New York. The 1543 book titled "**De revolutionibus orbium coelestium**" (On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Spheres) puts forth the astronomer's theory that the sun — rather than the earth — is at the centre of the solar system.
- ❖ The humble **custard cream**, a crispy biscuit, has made it into the Oxford English dictionary. "Noun. Biscuit with vanilla-flavoured cream filling," reads its definition.
- ❖ **London Metropolitan University** has been forced to **apologise to Beijing** following protests in China after it awarded an honorary degree to the **Dalai Lama**. Chinese students had reportedly threatened to boycott the university. Like other overseas students from outside the European Union, Chinese students pay full fee, which is many times more than what domestic students pay, and are therefore much sought after by Britain's cash-strapped universities.
- ❖ Swedish Vodka maker **Absolut** had to apologise and withdraw its controversial ad campaign in Mexico which showed large parts of the US southwest, including California, Texas, Arizona, Nevada and New Mexico, as Mexican territory. The controversial map was seen as a throwback to the 1830s when the states did belong to Mexico.
- ❖ **New Zealand** has become the first developed nation to sign a **free-trade agreement with China**.
- ❖ The **Vatican** has overhauled its list of **seven deadly sins** according to a report published in L'Osservatore Romano, the Vatican newspaper. The Vatican has added taking or dealing in drugs, polluting the environment, engaging in "manipulative" genetic science, carrying out morally debatable scientific experiments, paedophilia, abortion, and social injustices that cause poverty or "the excessive accumulation of wealth by a few" to its list of sins.