

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 27, 2006



**Manning (staffing?)
the word barricades**

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By Roger Cohen
**A message of hope for Iraqis,
if only Bush would say it**

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**An elite-level frequent flier
card isn't what it used to be**

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Mr. Ricardo Lagos Escobar

Saddam may hang in 30 days, court rules

But president of Iraq
might need to agree

By James Glanz

BAGHDAD: An appeals court upheld the conviction of Saddam Hussein on charges of crimes against humanity on Tuesday, ruling that he should be sent to the gallows within 30 days even as the bombings and assassinations that have increasingly swept Iraqi streets since the end of his brutal reign continued without pause.

The decision of the appeals court, delivered with little notice by the chief judge as the country settled into its nighttime curfew, upheld the convictions and the death sentences that Saddam and two co-defendants received on Nov. 5 from a court set up pass judgment on his years in power.

The appeals verdict, covering one case involving the execution of 148 men and boys in the northern town of Dujiail in 1982, came as Saddam was facing trial on a second set of allegations that he had ordered the murders of tens of thousands of Kurds, whose bodies have in some instances been exhumed from grisly mass graves and minutely described in the courtroom.

Saddam was not present when the chief judge, Aref al-Shahen, delivered the results of the appeal to a few reporters in the Council of Ministers building within the walled and fortified section of Baghdad known as the Green Zone.

The entire session, which was televised, took no more than 15 minutes, and after taking a few questions Shahen abruptly rose from his seat and left the room.

The answer to one question asked of Shahen will determine whether Saddam survives beyond Jan. 27 — when the 30-day limit comes to an end — or indeed hangs, as the verdict specifies. The question is whether Iraq's president, Jalal Talabani, and his two vice presidents must approve the death sentence or whether Saddam can go straight to the gallows.

Although the Iraqi Constitution specifies that the three, collectively known as the presidency council, must approve all death sentences, the charter governing the special court states that

SADDAM, Continued on Page 5



Pipeline blast kills hundreds in Nigeria

A Nigerian rinsing soot from his face after a ruptured gasoline pipeline burst into flames in Lagos on Tuesday while scavengers were collecting the fuel. The fire killed at least 260 people and injured dozens, the Red Cross said. It was unclear what ignited the gasoline. Most of Nigeria's 130 million people remain deeply poor, despite the fact that the country is one of the world's largest oil producers. This inequity motivates those who sabotage the pipelines as well as villagers who pilfer the fuel. Page 5

Akintunde Akinleye/Reuters

Russians keep up pressure on energy

A year after Ukraine,
Gazprom threatens
to cut gas to Belarus

By Andrew E. Kramer

MOSCOW: Gazprom, the Russian energy monopoly, threatened Tuesday to halt natural gas supplies to Belarus if that country did not agree to a large price rise by Monday.

The strong Russian position suggests that Moscow is turning aggressive in energy pricing even with countries that have been close allies.

Belarus now has the least expensive gas in the former Soviet Union, other than Russia itself. Gazprom, which has more energy reserves than any other company in the world, is insisting that Belarus more than double the price it pays, though that would still remain below world levels.

Gazprom warned that Belarus was behaving "irresponsibly" in the talks over both pricing and a Russian demand to surrender control of a key export pipeline, saying this resistance was putting Belarus's energy supply at risk.

The threat came almost exactly a year after Gazprom cut off fuel supplies to Ukraine, another key country, causing intense supply jitters in Western Europe. After a din of criticism, Gazprom turned the gas back on after three days.

But in the energy markets now, the Kremlin is dictating terms with greater assertiveness than it has at any time since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Even those who might have once criticized the government, from investors to foreign governments, have largely acquiesced to the new reality confronting them. (News analysis, Page 3)

Gazprom already owns one of the two major export pipelines that run through Belarus and is negotiating for a share in the second, a move that would tighten the company's beargh on European supplies.

Gazprom said exports to Poland and Germany through two pipelines that pass through Belarus were not at risk.

The company spokesman, Sergei Kupriyanov, said Gazprom had been stockpiling gas in underground reservoirs in Western Europe to ensure uninterrupted supplies further down the pipeline, even if Belarus were to be switched off.

"Time is flying," Gazprom's chief executive, Aleksei Miller said in remarks carried on Russia's NTV television.

"Responsibility for what has taken shape today lies with the Belarussian side," he said, addressing a Belarussian delegation led by a first deputy prime minister, Vladimir Semashko.

"Gazprom and the Russian Federation met you halfway on all issues," Miller said. "We offered the most preferential regime. We think these conditions are more than good."

Gazprom's tough negotiating suggested an unraveling of the special relations between Russia and Belarus, which are joined in a loose if dysfunctional union state. Russia is one of the last allies in Europe of the Belarussian

BELARUS, Continued on Page 3

Islamist forces in Somalia are forced to retreat

By Jeffrey Gettleman

NAIROBI: Frontline Islamist forces in Somalia retreated Tuesday toward their stronghold in Mogadishu, Somalia's battle-scarred seaside capital.

Prime Minister Meles Zenawi of Ethiopia, citing internal military reports, said the Islamists had suffered numerous casualties as the Ethiopia-backed forces of the transitional government advanced. The Associated Press reported from Addis Ababa.

"I hear reports of close to 3,000 injured in Mogadishu's hospitals," Zenawi was quoted as saying, adding that "well over 1,000 might have died," a "significant proportion of them" not Somalis. The Islamist fighters, who had

seemed invincible after taking Mogadishu in June, now seem powerless to stop the steady advance of the transitional government forces.

First Burhakaba, a large inland city, fell to the government forces, then Dinsoor, not far away, and Bulo Burto, where just a few weeks ago, Islamists were threatening to behead people who did not pray. By Tuesday afternoon, the transitional government troops were within 100 kilometers, or 60 miles, of Mogadishu and calling for the Islamists to surrender.

The Islamist leaders refused, saying they would take their fight "everywhere," which some people viewed as a veiled threat to unleash guerrilla tactics and suicide bombs.

The fast-moving developments seemed to confirm what UN officials on the ground in Somalia had been saying since the fighting erupted a week ago: that the young forces of the Islamists were no match for the better-trained, better-equipped Ethiopia-backed troops, with their tanks and fighter jets.

Still, the conflict is far from over. Thousands of people continue to march in the streets of Mogadishu, rallying behind the Islamists, and analysts are unanimous in their view that an Ethiopian occupation of Mogadishu, a city thick with weapons and xenophobia, could become a bloodbath.

In Baidoa, the seat of the transitional government, political leaders said they were planning on taking the capital.

"We feel great," said Hussein Saylan, chief of the transitional cabinet. "We're moving swiftly toward Mogadishu and the Islamists are panicking. We're finishing them off as we go."

Witnesses reported Ethiopian fighter jets and helicopter gunships firing missiles at Islamists retreating in pickup trucks, easy targets in the open desert.

In Mogadishu, the Islamists began fortifying the airport, radio station and other key buildings, preparing for a siege. Sheik Sharif Sheik Ahmed, a top Islamist leader previously considered a moderate, vowed at a news conference that the Islamists would never buckle.

"The war is entering a new phase,"

SOMALIA, Continued on Page 5

Israel approves West Bank settlement

By Steven Erlanger

JERUSALEM: Israel has approved the construction of a new settlement in the occupied West Bank for the first time in a decade, according to the Israeli Defense Ministry and settler groups speaking Tuesday.

The announcement comes days after Prime Minister Ehud Olmert of Israel held a first substantive meeting with the Palestinian president, Mahmoud Abbas, and is bound to embarrass the Palestinian leader, already being criticized by political rivals in Hamas for carrying out an Israeli and American agenda with little to show for it.

Olmert, pressed by Washington to help build up Abbas, promised to give him \$100 million in Palestinian funds withheld by Israel, about 20 percent of the amount being held, but only for humanitarian purposes.

Abbas aides, however, said the money would be used to strengthen his Fatah movement and pay salaries to Fatah loyalists.

Olmert also promised to dismantle 27 of the 400 or so checkpoints in the West Bank, despite criticism by the Israeli commander of the region.

But the announcement Tuesday of the new settlement would seem to run

counter to Olmert's rapprochement with Abbas, though one government official hinted that it might be part of a deal with settlers to get their tacit acceptance later for the removal of illegal outposts.

An Israeli official, however, insisted that the settlement was not "new," but rather a revival of a settlement approved in 1981 that, by the mid-1990s, had become a school for training people before they entered the army.

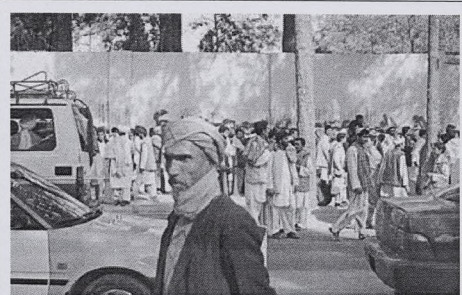
The defense minister, Amir Peretz, the dovish head of the Labor Party, gave his approval to a promise made by his predecessor — Shaul Mofaz, then of Likud and now of Kadima and the current transport minister — that houses would be built on the site of an army base in the northern Jordan Valley. The houses would be used to resettle Israelis who were forced to leave settlements in the Gaza Strip in 2005, according to a Defense Ministry official.

The old base, an installation of the Nahal infantry brigade, was abandoned, and its buildings are being used by the army to train young people. The

new settlement will be called Maskiot, and approval was given for the construction of about 30 houses. The Israeli official insisted that all construction would be privately funded. They will be used by the 20 families of the hard-line Gaza settlement Shirat Hayam, which resisted evacuation and wanted to move as a group. To get them to leave Gaza peacefully, the army promised to keep them together.

The decision, the official said, "sort of went through, and now it's done and done."

SETTLEMENT, Continued on Page 5



Paving with good intentions?

Hundreds of Afghans lining up for work visas outside the Iranian Embassy in Herat. Iran has helped Afghanistan rebuild, spreading its influence. Page 2

**Surgeon says Castro
doesn't have cancer**

A Spanish surgeon who flew to Cuba last week to help treat Fidel Castro on Tuesday denied reports that the Cuban leader was suffering from cancer and insisted that he was recovering slowly but progressively from a serious operation. Page 3

**U.S. military ponders
more foreign recruits**

The U.S. armed forces are considering expanding the number of non-citizens in the ranks, including disputed proposals to open recruiting stations overseas and put more immigrants on a faster track to U.S. citizenship if they volunteer. Page 4

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**U.S. economy appears
to be both hot and cold**

The U.S. housing market has fallen into a deep freeze; so has the auto industry. Yet on other fronts, including commercial construction and high-end consumer spending, economic activity appears to be sizzling. That is making it hard for the Fed to decide which risk is greater: recession or inflation. Page 9

**SOS: Radio hobbyists
fear for the Morse Code**

The American amateur radio community has been shaken by news that the U.S. government will no longer require proficiency in Morse Code — the language of dots and dashes that has been the community's lingua franca — as a condition for a license. Page 10

CURRENCIES | New York

	Tuesday 4 P.M.	Previous
€1 =	\$1.3098	\$1.3141
£1 =	\$1.9538	\$1.9595
¥1 =	¥119.145	¥118.81
₹1 =	₹1.2233	₹1.2186

Full currency rates | Page 15

OIL | New York

	Tuesday 4 P.M.	Change
Light sweet crude	\$61.10	↓ \$1.31

STOCK INDEXES

	Tuesday	Change
The Dow 4 P.M.	12,407.63	↑ 0.52%
FTSE 100	Closed	—
Nikkei 225 close	17,169.19	↑ 0.45%

**Companies avoid visas
into 'Fortress America'**

For increasing numbers of international business travelers, visa and customs regulations are making trips to the United States a thing of the past. Companies now say that U.S. rules have become so onerous that it is often simpler to meet customers, business partners and employees elsewhere. Page 9

**Stuck in Kurdish prison
with no trial in sight**

The Kurdish prison population in Iraq includes at least several hundred suspected insurgents, and yet there is no legal system to sort out their cases. The government that holds the prisoners says they are dangerous, but it also concedes to being stymied. Page 4

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Roger Cohen
Globalist

Words of hope for Iraq, if only Bush said them

Here's a speech President George W. Bush might address to Iraqis as a year of bloodshed draws to a close:
I want to address myself today to the Iraqi people. You stand at the end of a year of anguish that has made you doubt your government, your army and police, your American ally and, no doubt, the very existence of your fragmented country. I share your dismay and I sense your outrage. Some of your suffering results from mistakes for which I take responsibility. But we must all try to look forward. The past is instructive. Yet the past will not put food on your tables, nor deliver electricity to your homes. I can feel hatred; it cannot feed you. I spoke of mistakes. We freed you of the tyrant Saddam Hussein. Yet we did not have a serious plan for the consolidation of that freedom nor a serious estimation of the social revolution that the end of tyranny would bring. I understand now the instinct of liberated Shiites to be among Shiites, Sunnis among Sunnis, Kurds among Kurds. Each group feels safer that way. Each would prefer to rule than be ruled. Each would rather wield the stick than suffer its blows. Modern Middle Eastern history scarcely counsels any other course. Yet consider the millions of cell-phones you have all acquired since the dictatorship was ended. They are made for communication, not for the building of walls. Consider the goods you've imported, the cars and the air conditioners. That trade is about opening up, too. I know, we've put walls around the Green Zone, we've put concrete and razor wire between you and your government. But those walls will come down one day as surely as the barriers of hatred that have hardened these past three years.

Walls take you backward. They crumble before the liberating technologies of our age. Iraq is marked today by lines of division. Yet it can rise above them. It must, because the alternative is too terrible to contemplate. I ask you: If Iraq were so unnatural a creation, would it take so much blood to try to break it apart?

Some of my critics have found a new name for my decision to overthrow Saddam Hussein. They call it: "The War of the Imagination." By that, I guess they mean that I imagined the threats Iraq posed, imagined its weapons of mass destruction, imagined a wave of liberation in the Middle East and imagined a smooth transition from dictatorship to democracy. O.K., perhaps I did let my imagination run away with me a little. But there's a publication over here called *The New York Review of Books*, no friend of mine, and it recently ran an article called "The War of the Imagination" over a photograph of an Iraqi searching for the remains of his relative among one of Saddam's mass graves. One thing I did not imagine was Saddam's secret police coming for you in the night. One thing I did not imagine was a terror so deep you were scared even to think ill of the now-judged despot.

One thing I did not imagine was how Saddam borrowed from the Nazis to organize his Baath Party and bor-

rowed from Stalin for his personality cult. America helped free Europe of those totalitarian scourges. There are those who believe the Middle East was unworthy of, or unready for, or unmovable by, a similar liberation. They argue that the drawing of such parallels between Europe and the Middle East is foolish or naïve. I think otherwise. And I cherish the hope, still, that you will not squander the opportunity the United States has now offered you.

The description I prefer is a "War of Creation." What's at stake now is nothing less than the creation of modern Iraq. That's the solemn responsibility of Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki, and I give my solemn undertaking that the United States will do all it can to help him. You never owned the Iraq of the Baathists, nor of the monarchy, nor of colonial rulers. Yet you can own this Iraq.

You can make it yours, make it one and make it whole. For that to happen, loyalty to the flag, to your elected government, to the new uniforms of the army and the police, must rise above loyalty to tribes, to kinship, to hard that will be. We fought wars against our former rulers and among ourselves to forge our nation. These are not matters of days or weeks or even years. They are generational struggles. Yours has just begun.

I spoke of mistakes. We will not compound them by cutting and running, or even cutting and walking. But America cannot make the new Iraq; you must. Wherever and whenever we can we will hand responsibility to you.

Over time we will cut and, if that is your wish, end our military presence. Germany is a friend and we still have soldiers there. Vietnam is now a friend, too, and our soldiers are gone, but we have forces nearby. People tend to forget the role America's far-flung garrisons play in the unprecedented peace and stability that much of humanity enjoys. Neither you nor I

Iraq is marked by lines of division. Yet it can rise above them. It must.

have the privilege of such forgetfulness. It is fashionable to mock my country and to describe Iraq as lost. But fashion is not the best moral compass, nor the best policy guide. We will work hard in the coming year to bring Israelis and Palestinians closer, to engage where we can with your neighbors, and to blunt fanaticism.

For too long America was a status-quo power in the Middle East while it changed the status quo in Europe and Asia. You suffered from that as you have suffered from our policy change. The difference is you now have your future in your hands. I urge you to seize that opportunity.

E-mail: rocohen@nytimes.com

Tomorrow: Alan Riding on the troubled marriage of art and money.

IN OUR PAGES | 100, 75 & 50 YEARS AGO

1906: Ancient Gilt Reliefs

BOMBAY: Further news which has now reached here with regard to Dr. Stein's exploration of Khotan, shows that the excavations at the ruined temple on the Hangaya Tuti resulted in the discovery of many interesting small terra cotta reliefs which once decorated the temple walls. The style of these sculptures agrees closely with that of the Rawak Itupa reliefs, dating approximately from the 5th or 6th century A.D. The presence of richly gilt pieces strikingly explains the hypothetical explanation given by Dr. Stein of the origin of tea-gold, namely that it was obtained by washing from the culture strata of the old Khotan capital at Yaktan. Proceeding to the ruined sites east of the Khotan oasis, Dr. Stein examined the Khadali site, where he recovered a large number of paper manuscripts in Sanskrit, Chinese, and the unknown language of old Khotan.

1931: Apathy at Guillotine

PARIS: Silhouetted against the fog-wrapped light of a street-lamp in the boulevard Arago, Georges Gauchet, slayer of a jeweller in the avenue Mazart, went to his death under the guillotine at 708 yesterday morning (Dec. 26) with an indifference which astounded 250 police, 50 newspapermen, and the executioner, M. Deibler. Awakened at 6.20 in his cell in the Santé prison, whose gray bastions loomed feebly in

the early morning mist over the high wall where the guillotine was set up, Gauchet maintained the incredible apathy which he had shown since he refused to speak in his own defence at the trial last summer. "Have courage, Gauchet," advised M. Campinchi, his attorney, whose plea for grace which the slayer declined to sign, was turned down by President Doumer last Thursday. "That is useless, because I don't know what courage is," was the reply.

1956: France Backs Israel

PARIS: Israel drew France's attention yesterday (Dec. 26) to new and openly Egyptian commando attacks on its territory and received French assurances of support of Israel's position under the United Nations cease-fire set-up. Ambassador Jacob Tsuri left a memorandum with French Foreign Minister Christian Pineau — similar action was taken by Israeli envoys in Washington and London — giving details of the new fedayeen attacks and pointing out the anxiety of the Israeli government over the open boasts by the Cairo radio that "death squads" are being organized by Egypt and neighboring Arab countries. M. Pineau was understood to have immediately affirmed to Mr. Tsuri the French position — as stated recently to the French National Assembly by M. Pineau himself — that France will use its influence in negotiating a Suez Canal and general Middle East settlement.

AT HOME ABROAD

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Iran's influence spreading to Afghanistan

By David Rohde

ISLAM QALA, Afghanistan

Two years ago, foreign engineers built a new highway through the desert of western Afghanistan, past this ancient trading post and on to the outside world. Nearby, they strung a high-voltage power line and laid a fiber-optic cable, marked with red posts, that provides telephone and Internet access to the region.

The modernization comes with a message. Every 8 to 10 kilometers, or 5 to 10 miles, road signs offer quotations from the Koran. "Forgive us, God," declares one. "God is clear to everyone," says another. A graceful mosque rises roadside, with a green glass dome and Koranic inscriptions in blue tile. The style is unmistakably Iranian.

All of this is fruit of Iran's drive to become a bigger player in Afghanistan, as it exploits new opportunities to spread its influence, and ideas farther across the Middle East.

The rise of Hezbollah, with Iran's support, has heightened the extent of Tehran's sway in Lebanon, and the American toppling of Saddam Hussein has allowed it to expand its influence in Iraq. Iran has been making inroads into Afghanistan, as well.

During the tumultuous 1980s and 1990s, Iran shipped money and arms to groups fighting first the Soviet occupation and later the Taliban government. But since the United States and its allies ousted the Taliban in 2001, Iran has taken advantage of the central government's weakness to pursue a more nuanced strategy: part reconstruction, part education and part propaganda.

Iran has distributed its largesse, more than \$200 million in all, mostly here in the west but also in the capital, Kabul. It has set up border posts against the heroin trade, and next year will begin work on new road and construction projects and a rail line linking the countries. In Kabul, its projects include a new medical center and a water testing laboratory.

Iran's ambassador, Muhammad Reza Bahrami, portrayed his government's activities as neighborly good works, with a certain self-interest. Iran, he said, is eager to avoid repeating the calamities of the last 20 years, when two million Afghan refugees streamed over the border.

"Our strategy in Afghanistan is based on security, stability and developing a strong central government," he said. "It is not only benefits the Afghan people, it's in our national interest."

And as the indications of other motives. Iranian radio stations are broadcasting anti-American propaganda into Afghanistan. Moderate Shiite leaders in Afghanistan say Tehran is funneling money to conservative Shiite religious schools and former warlords with longstanding ties to Iranian intelligence agencies.

As the dispute over Iran's nuclear program has escalated, leading the United Nations Security Council to impose sanctions on Iran on Saturday, Iranian intelligence activity has increased across Afghanistan, American and Afghan officials say. This has included not just surveillance and information collection but the recruitment of a network of pro-Iranian operatives who could attack American targets in Afghanistan. Last week, in London, British officials charged the interpreter for NATO's commanding general in Afghanistan with passing secrets to Iran.

Discerning Iranian motives, however, is notoriously difficult. Government factions often have competing agendas. Even so, the question of Iran's intentions in Afghanistan has come under a microscope in recent weeks amid debate in Washington over whether to deal with Tehran as part of a possible solution in Iraq. Some American officials suggest that Iran's seeming cooperation in Afghanistan may be something of a model for Iraq.

So far, even as it declines to talk with the Iranians about Iraq, the Bush administration has adopted a posture of easy détente over Afghanistan. American officials say that they are watching closely, and no evidence has emerged of recent arms shipments to Iranian proxies, as it did in Iraq, or of other efforts to destabilize the country. Iran's Shiite leaders appear to be maintaining their historic opposition to the Sunni Taliban, who consider Shiites heretics. Iran, they also say, is failing to gain popular support among Afghans, 80 percent of whom are Sunni Muslims.

Of far greater concern, according to American, European and Afghan officials, is Pakistan, America's ostensible ally against terrorism. They say the Pakistanis have allowed the Taliban to create a virtual ministate and staging base for suicide attacks just across Afghanistan's eastern border. Suicide at-



Afghan subcontractors building a school as part of the reconstruction effort in Herat, near a library built by Iran.



A sign inscribed "God is great" posted on a highway in Afghanistan built by Iran.

tacks have quintupled, to 115 this year from 23 in 2005, killing more than 200 Afghan civilians.

Western diplomats say that, at the very least, Iran's goals in Afghanistan are to hasten the withdrawal of American troops, prevent the Taliban from regaining power and keep the Afghan west firmly under Tehran's sway.

"Keep this area stable, but make it friendly for them," said a senior European diplomat in western Afghanistan. "Make it difficult for outsiders to operate here."

Afghanistan, analysts say, is one example of the way Iran is increasingly spending its oil money in a variety of countries to realize its self-image as an ascendant regional power.

One Western official said that by focusing on high-profile construction projects, diplomacy and public rela-

tions, Iran was, in effect, employing American Cold War tactics to increase its soft power in the region.

In Iraq, that means not just financing an array of Shiite political parties and militias; the Iranian ambassador in Baghdad, Hassan Kazemi-Qomi, said Tehran was already providing power and planned to build three hospitals and set up a \$1 billion loan fund for Iraqi businesses. Similarly, Iran gave Hezbollah not just weapons and training but money for roads, schools and social services that made it the de facto government in south Lebanon. Iran has a small but growing presence in Syria, too.

Iranian officials cast themselves as a counterweight to the United States, which they say has mishandled opportunities to stabilize Afghanistan and Iraq. "U.S. policies, particularly under the current administration, have created a huge amount of resentment around the world," said a senior Iranian official, who requested anonymity because he was not authorized to comment publicly. "I'm not saying Iran is gaining power all over the world. I'm saying the U.S. is losing it fast."

Afghanistan, a fragile mosaic of eth-

nic and religious groups, has long been susceptible to intervention from more powerful neighbors. As the world's largest predominantly Shiite country, Iran is the traditional foreign backer of Afghanistan's Shiites, roughly 20 percent of the country's population.

During the anti-Soviet jihad of the 1980s, Iranian Revolutionary Guards financed and trained fundamentalist Shiite militias, as well as Sunni fighters. In the civil war after the Russian withdrawal in 1989, Iran was a patron of the Northern Alliance, while Pakistan supported the ultimately victorious Taliban.

When the Taliban were ousted in 2001, Iran promised to help stabilize Afghanistan. In Germany that December, it was Iranian diplomats who stepped in to save foundering talks to form a new Afghan government, persuading the Northern Alliance to accept the agreement. Soon after, Iran pledged \$560 million in aid and loans to Afghanistan over five years, a "startling" amount for a nonindustrialized country, according to James Dobbins, the senior American envoy to Afghanistan at the time.

A week later, President George W. Bush situated Iran on the "axis of evil." But even as they assailed that characterization, Dobbins said, Iranian officials privately offered to train Afghan soldiers. The Bush administration rejected the offer.

Today, the \$4.5 billion American training and reconstruction effort dwarfs Iran's. But while the United States has built schools, government buildings, roads and clinics, a 2005 government audit found that reconstruction had been slowed by inconsistent financing, staff shortages and poor oversight. Amid the Taliban resurgence and public perception of corruption in the government of President Hamid Karzai, recent opinion polls show optimism declining across the country.

Moderate Shiites agreed. "We worry about the situation," said Abbas Nayan, a Shiite member of Parliament. "Right now, the Iranians have a strong hand."

In interviews, three Shiite officials said new religious schools were being built with Iranian money. They also said that more Afghans were celebrating formerly obscure Shiite holidays.

Western diplomats said Iran's influence waned two years ago, after the United States doubled aid to Afghanistan and removed Ismail Khan, the governor of Herat and a powerful Iranian-backed warlord who dominated the west.

Since then, though, American troops have turned responsibility for Herat over to the Italians, and this year, the United States cut aid to Afghanistan by 30 percent. Iran, meanwhile, has kept its aid money flowing steadily and continued to back its proxies in the region, according to a Western diplomat.

In February, Herat experienced its first religious violence in decades. Six people were killed as Sunnis and Shiites staged gun battles on city streets, according to religious leaders.

Some local officials blamed Khan's protégé for fomenting the violence. Others attributed it to rising grass-roots Sunni-Shiite tensions.

In Kabul, though, an Afghan government official, desperate for aid, say they have decided to trust Iran's intentions.

"History may prove that overly optimistic," said Jawed Ludin, Karzai's chief of staff. "But it is in our interests today to trust our Iranian neighbors and expect the same in return."

hopers to build the new railway, all with Iranian financing.

Dabbaghi said his company was trying to work in neighboring countries, but he complained that the United States was spreading "mass propaganda," lobbying governments not to hire Iranian companies, especially in Afghanistan.

In Kabul, American contractors, advisers and aid projects clearly dominate the city, but Iran is there, too. In addition to a handful of Iranian experts at government ministries, Iranian advisers have trained more than 1,200 Afghan teachers, librarians and diplomats.

Last year, the Iranian Embassy opened the Iranian Corner, a room in Kabul University's main library filled with computers, books and magazines from Iran, promoting Iran's ancient culture and modern achievements. Librarians say it is more popular than the adjoining United States Embassy-sponsored American Corner, primarily because it has a better Internet connection.

Afghanistan's economic reliance on Iran has increased in another way, as Taliban attacks have slowed the economy. Each morning, hundreds of Afghan men line up outside the Iranian missions in Herat and Kabul for visas to work in Iran. Iranian officials said they expected to issue up to 450,000 visas to Afghans this year, nearly twice the 250,000 issued in 2005.

In the murky world of western Afghanistan, centuries of Iranian influence have left many local people with a perception of Iran as all-powerful nemesis. Many said their lives would be in danger if they publicly criticized Iran or its Afghan proxies. Behind every suspicious event in the Afghan west, they contend, lies an Iranian hand.

Such accounts are clearly exaggerated. Still, Western and Afghan officials say that, beyond its much-trumpeted reconstruction program, Iran is also engaging in a range of activities it is less eager to publicize.

Qari Ahmad Ali, a Shiite commander once backed by Iran, said that since 2001, his former patrons had funneled millions of dollars to Shiite schools and charities in western Afghanistan. He said the Sadaqia Madrasa, one of the largest Shiite religious schools in Herat, was at the center of an effort to spread Shiite fundamentalism.

"Iran does not have military activities," Ali said. "They have political and social activities."

A senior Afghan intelligence official said that Radio Mashhad, a state-run station in northeastern Iran's largest city, broadcast anti-American messages over the border.

"Iran is providing a lot of assistance for religious and cultural activities in Afghanistan," said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because of the secret nature of his work. "That is the easy way to build influence."

Moderate Shiites agreed. "We worry about the situation," said Abbas Nayan, a Shiite member of Parliament. "Right now, the Iranians have a strong hand."

In interviews, three Shiite officials said new religious schools were being built with Iranian money. They also said that more Afghans were celebrating formerly obscure Shiite holidays.

Western diplomats said Iran's influence waned two years ago, after the United States doubled aid to Afghanistan and removed Ismail Khan, the governor of Herat and a powerful Iranian-backed warlord who dominated the west.

Since then, though, American troops have turned responsibility for Herat over to the Italians, and this year, the United States cut aid to Afghanistan by 30 percent. Iran, meanwhile, has kept its aid money flowing steadily and continued to back its proxies in the region, according to a Western diplomat.

In February, Herat experienced its first religious violence in decades. Six people were killed as Sunnis and Shiites staged gun battles on city streets, according to religious leaders.

Some local officials blamed Khan's protégé for fomenting the violence. Others attributed it to rising grass-roots Sunni-Shiite tensions.

In Kabul, though, an Afghan government official, desperate for aid, say they have decided to trust Iran's intentions.

"History may prove that overly optimistic," said Jawed Ludin, Karzai's chief of staff. "But it is in our interests today to trust our Iranian neighbors and expect the same in return."

Alan Cowell contributed reporting from London, Michael Moss from Baghdad and Michael Slackman from Damascus.

Pakistan to fight rebels with border fence

From news reports

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan will fence and land-mine parts of its border with Afghanistan to prevent cross-border militancy, the Foreign Ministry said Tuesday.

Afghanistan, increasingly critical of Pakistan for not doing enough to stop cross-border incursions, immediately rejected the plan as neither helpful nor practical.

Pakistan will also deploy additional paramilitary troops at the frontier, the Pakistani foreign secretary, Riaz Mohammed Khan, said during a news conference.

"This is a part of our established policy," he said. "We are taking measures to prevent any militant activity from Pakistan inside Afghanistan."

Pakistan had previously suggested a fence. But Afghanistan said that would unfairly divide ethnic Pashtun communities straddling the border.

This has been the deadliest year in Afghanistan since U.S.-led military forces removed the hard-line Taliban government from power in 2001. More than 4,000 people have been killed, most of them in fighting and bomb attacks in areas near the Pakistani border.

The violence and a war of words over Taliban safe havens in Pakistan have strained relations between the two U.S. allies in the war on terrorism. President Hamid Karzai of Afghanistan this month leveled some of his strongest criticism yet at Islamabad.

Pakistan has denied helping the insurgents. But Pakistani officials say

militants are crossing the frontier that stretches 2,400 kilometers, or 1,500 miles, from snow-covered mountains in the north to remote deserts on the border with Iran in the south.

In Kabul, a spokesman for Karzai said that terrorists had to be confronted directly and that a fence would not help. "We must confront terrorists in a real manner," said the spokesman, Khaliq Ahmad. "Fencing or mining the border is neither helpful nor practical. That is why we are against it."

Pakistan has deployed about 80,000 troops on its side of the border and Khan said that additional paramilitary forces would be sent to the border area. He did not say when construction of the fence would begin, nor did he elaborate on which sections of the border would be sealed. (Reuters, AP)

Turkmen nominate successor to leader

From news reports

ASHGABAT, Turkmenistan: Legislators handed a Soviet-style unanimous nomination for president Tuesday to the man who has stood in as caretaker since Turkmenistan's autocratic leader, Saparmurat Niyazov, died last week.

The acting president, Kurbanguly Berdimukhamedov, seems certain to win on Feb. 11 in Turkmenistan, which has never held an election judged free by Western monitors.

Berdimukhamedov urged Turkmen to vote "to guarantee our future prosperity and demonstrate our unity" and promised to protect the country's "stability and peace."

Turkmenistan, an isolated former Soviet republic, sits atop a rich store of natural gas in Central Asia north of Iran and Afghanistan. Both the West and Russia are interested in its stability, which was called into question upon Niyazov's death last week.

Turkmenistan's five million people, mostly Muslims, were ruled with an iron grip by Niyazov, who promoted an all-encompassing personality cult around himself, ordering citizens to call him Turkmenbashi, or The Father of All Turkmen.

"We'll keep alive the legacy of Saparmurat Turkmenbashi the Great," Berdimukhamedov said after the People's Council unanimously approved him as a presidential candidate. As acting president, he had been barred by the Constitution from seeking the presidency, but the council approved a constitutional amendment to allow such a campaign.

Berdimukhamedov, who was a deputy prime minister under Niyazov, unexpectedly rose to acting president after the speaker of Parliament, Ovezgeldy Atayev, who under the Constitution was to take that role, was charged with criminal offenses.

Former Foreign Minister Avdy Kulyev, now living in Norway, said that Berdimukhamedov's victory in February was a certainty and that his rise to power indicates that the old regime is going to stay in place.

Opposition leaders who had been exiled by Niyazov have said they intend to return to Turkmenistan following his death, but they have not succeeded. Most opposition figures live in exile and have no influence inside Turkmenistan.

Niyazov had long groomed Berdimukhamedov as a successor, Kulyev said. "Niyazov protected him, didn't touch him," Kulyev said.

Berdimukhamedov pledged to preserve "our ancient democratic traditions" as revived by Niyazov. In the last presidential election, in 1994, Niyazov was the only candidate, winning 99.9 percent of the vote.

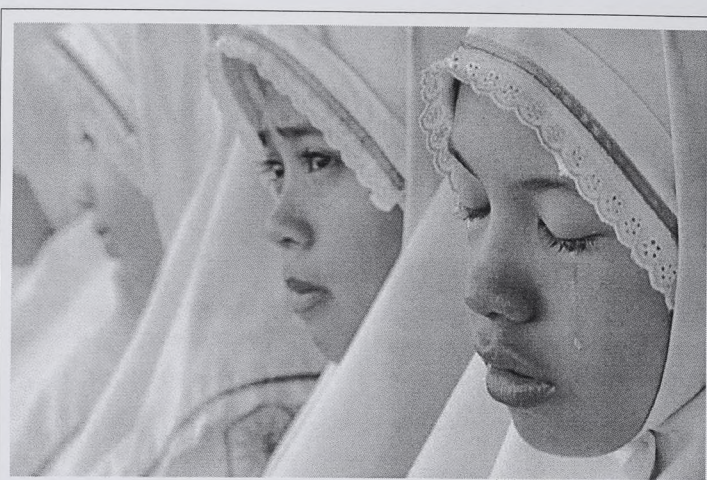
The country's chief election official, Murad Kariyev, said he would "do everything" to make Berdimukhamedov president "because he is a worthy successor" to Niyazov.

Apparently in an effort to create the appearance of a pluralistic election, the People's Council, which is made up of 2,500 lawmakers who were either elected or appointed, also picked five other candidates, all virtually unknown.

"There are sometimes complaints that there is no democracy in Turkmenistan; you have seen yourself this is not so," Kariyev said.

"We could elect Gurbanguly Myrziyayev as president right now, but we will not deviate from laws set by our great leader," Kariyev said.

Kariyev said voting would be fair and open to foreign observers, though he said local observers were better. He also said transparent ballot boxes would be used. (AP Reuters)



PRAYERS FOR TSUNAMI VICTIMS — In Aceh Province, Indonesia, hit hardest by the Indian Ocean tsunami of Dec. 26, 2004, students wept and prayed Tuesday. Officials say 230,000 people were killed and nearly two million left homeless.

Strong earthquake shakes Taiwan

By Keith Bradsher

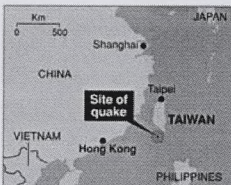
TAIPEI: A strong earthquake shook the entire island of Taiwan on Tuesday, followed by three powerful aftershocks, but the quake did not produce a tsunami. Local media said the seismic activity had killed at least one person and injured at least 20.

Taiwan's Central Weather Bureau estimated the initial earthquake, which took place at 8:26 p.m., at 6.7 on the Richter scale, while the United States Geological Survey put it at 7.1.

The Pacific Tsunami Warning Center in Hawaii said that there was no threat of a Pacific-wide tsunami. The Associated Press reported that the Japan Meteorological Agency had issued but then withdrawn a warning after concluding that no tsunami had occurred.

The quakes came on the second anniversary of a far more powerful earthquake off Sumatra in Indonesia — estimated at 9.1 on the Richter scale — that triggered a tsunami that killed 230,000 people around the coastline of the Indian Ocean, most of them in Indonesia, and left nearly two million people homeless.

A second quake shook Taiwan eight



minutes after the first, and was estimated by local officials at 6.4 on the Richter scale and by the U.S. Geological Survey at 7.0. A third shock followed four minutes later that was estimated at 5.2 by Taiwan officials, and a fourth shock followed three hours later that was measured at 5.5.

The first two quakes were unusually long, each lasting more than a minute, and all four took place close to Taiwan's southern tip, officials said.

Taiwanese television stations showed rescuers using power equipment to dig through the remains of a building that collapsed and trapped eight inside in Kenting, an aging beach resort that

faces the epicenter of the first quake. Calls to Kenting could not be completed because all circuits were busy.

A woman answering the phone at the Ambassador Hotel in Kaohsiung, a city of 1.6 million people about 80 kilometers, or 50 miles, northwest of the epicenter, said there was little damage there and the city was calm.

The initial quake and the first aftershock could be readily felt anywhere in Taiwan.

A reporter's hotel room swayed in Taipei, 300 kilometers from the epicenter, and the building creaked repeatedly for 10 to 15 seconds during the most powerful shaking from each of the first two quakes; the third was not perceptible. The hotel was not evacuated and the streets were quiet and peaceful afterward.

A Taiwanese official warned in a televised news conference Tuesday night that there would probably be further aftershocks.

Taiwan lies in one of the most earthquake-prone regions of the world. An earthquake on Sept. 21, 1999, measured 7.7 on the Richter scale and killed more than 2,000 people in northern and central Taiwan.

Castro doesn't have cancer, surgeon says

The Associated Press

MADRID: A Spanish surgeon who flew to Cuba last week to help treat Fidel Castro on Tuesday denied reports that the Cuban leader was suffering from cancer and insisted that he was recovering slowly but progressively from a serious operation.

"He hasn't got cancer," said Dr. José Luis García Sabrido, chief surgeon at Gregorio Marañón Hospital in Madrid. García Sabrido flew to Havana on Thursday to see Castro and consult with the Cuban leader's medical team on how his treatment was progressing.

"While respecting confidentiality, I can tell you that President Castro is not suffering from any malignant sickness," the Spanish doctor said, adding that he could not give precise details on the nature of Castro's condition. "It is a benign process in which there have been a series of complications."

Castro, 80, has not appeared in public since undergoing emergency intestinal surgery in July, but has since released little information on his condition. Castro placed his younger brother, Raúl, in charge of the government.

His medical condition is a state secret, but the Cuban authorities have denied that he suffers from terminal cancer, as U.S. intelligence officials have claimed. But Cuban officials have stopped insisting that Castro will return to power.

Asked whether he thought Castro would be physically capable of once again governing Cuba, García Sabrido said, "If his recovery is absolute, then naturally, yes."

"I think that in these moments his decision to delegate power implies that he must now be dedicated to his recovery," he added. "What happens in the future will be an absolutely personal matter."

There was no mention of García Sabrido's visit in the Cuban state media.

Some doctors believe Castro may suffer from diverticular disease, which can cause bleeding in the lower intestine, especially in people over 60. Severe cases may require emergency surgery.

García Sabrido wrote in the medical journal Archives of Surgery in 1988 about a temporary stomach "zipper" that Spanish surgeons had used on patients to provide repeated easy access for draining and treating abdominal infections. On Tuesday, he ruled out another op-

eration for Castro for the moment.

"It is not planned that he will undergo another operation for the moment," he said. "His condition is stable. He is recovering from a very serious operation."

He said he was impressed by Castro's good spirits.

"He wants to return to work every day, but medical recommendations demand caution," he said, adding that one of the problems the Cuban medical team faced was limiting the president's activities.

"He is a patient of 80 years and he will have the limitations of recovery of a person of his age," García Sabrido said. "His intellectual activity is intact, I'd say fantastically. I was amazed at his capacity to relate personal and historical anecdotes."

A doctor at the Gregorio Marañón Hospital for the past 35 years, García Sabrido, 61, said that although it was the first time he had treated Castro, he had visited Cuba many times, on a professional basis and knew the Castro family.

Born in Madrid, García Sabrido said his specialty was the digestive system and transplants. He has studied in several countries, including the United States, Canada and the Netherlands.

Russia strong-arms energy-hungry West

Moscow can afford to ignore its critics

By Steven Lee Myers

MOSCOW: Inside the Kremlin last week, the executives of three major international companies — Royal Dutch Shell, Mitsubishi and Mitsui — heaped praise on the man whose government had effectively forced them to cede control of the world's largest combined oil and natural gas development.

"Thank you very much for your support," Shell's chief executive, Jeroen van der Veer, told President Vladimir Putin during a six-month regulatory assault on the project, Sakhalin 2, at the cost of granting control to the state energy giant, Gazprom. "This was a historic occasion."

It was also a telling one, with lessons that extend beyond energy policy to include such disparate matters as the murders of Alexander Litvinenko, a former KGB agent in London, and Anna Politkovskaya, a prominent journalist.

Putin's Russia, buoyed by its oil and gas riches, has become so confident and so arrogant, its critics say — that it has become impervious to the criticism that once might have modified its behavior. And those who might have once criticized, from investors to foreign governments, have largely acquiesced to the new reality confronting them.

The Kremlin is now dictating its terms with greater assertiveness than it has at any time since the collapse of the Soviet Union 15 years ago this coming Monday. Many had hoped that Russia's presidency of the Group of 8 industrial nations this year would temper Putin's diplomacy by a factor.

Russia began 2006 by making good on a threat to cut off natural gas supplies to Ukraine to get a higher price for Gazprom. The shut-off, though brief, provoked a storm of concern and fear in Europe about dependency on Russian energy, but Russia is ending 2006 by warning Belarus of the same fate.

What criticism that has been directed against the Kremlin has had little effect. Vice President Dick Cheney of the United States leveled the harshest criticism to date when he accused the Kremlin of using oil and gas as "tools of intimidation or blackmail."

That was in May, and U.S. policy toward Russia has changed imperceptibly, with one significant exception: The Bush administration struck a deal to allow Russia's long-coveted membership in the World Trade Organization.

Russia since last year has been enjoying some feeling of euphoria, that feeling that we have so much money, so many resources that we can do what we want," said Fyodor Lukyanov, editor of the journal Russia in Global Affairs.

The reality is that the United States or Europe has little leverage beyond persuasion. And persuasion no longer works, as the Kremlin's campaign against Sakhalin 2, the largest foreign investment project in Russia, showed.

The campaign was so transparent that it seemed comical, beginning with the surprise inspections of a colorful and hitherto little-known environmental inspector, Oleg Mitvol, who threatened to fine Sakhalin 2's developers for every tree they cut down.

As the campaign unfolded, analysts issued warnings. Government protesters, but in the end the Kremlin got what was clearly the goal from the start: state control of a lucrative project that opens the gas market to Asia.

And the three companies with the most to lose said nothing critical as they sold 50 percent plus one share of Sakhalin 2 for what some analysts called a discounted price of \$745 billion. Putin declared instantaneously that its environmental problems could "be considered resolved."

"Experience has disappointed many foreign investors in Russia," said Valery Nesterov, an energy analyst at Troika Dialog, an investment firm in Moscow. And yet, when it comes to energy or other investments, it does little to deter them. "The attraction is so large," Nesterov said, adding that companies like

Shell still held out hope of winning access to Russia's other fields.

The Sakhalin affair has revived memories of the government's assault on Yukos Oil and its founder, Mikhail Khodorkovsky, in 2003 and 2004, a case that was also seen as selective at best. So has the result.

When that started, even Russia's supporters worried of the damage the Yukos case would cause to the country's reputation, especially among investors. If the damage was done, however, it is hard to quantify it now.

The company is a rump of its former self, under bankruptcy receivership with its major assets now belonging to the state oil company, Rosneft. Khodorkovsky, once the richest man in Russia, remains in a Siberian prison, reportedly facing a new round of criminal charges that could keep him there.

The effect on investors, however, was most revealing. Russia's stock market plunged 21 percent in the month following Khodorkovsky's arrest, with the Russian Trading System Index dipping below 500. It is now above 1,800. Yukos is a painful memory only for those who paid dearly.

The connection to the murders of two prominent Kremlin critics — Litvinenko in self-exile in London and Politkovskaya here in Moscow — might seem tangential, but the response to them also underscores the new reality of a newly confident Russia.

There is as yet no evidence directly linking anyone in Russia to the killings, even if critics have been quick to say so, reviving some of the worst fears about the country Russia has become.

After Litvinenko's murder, The Daily Telegraph in Britain declared flatly, "Russia is rotten to its heart." A recent cover of The Economist showed Putin dressed like a gangster, holding a gasol-

'That feeling that we have so much money, so many resources that we can do what we want.'

ine nozzle as a machine gun. The British government, by contrast, has said nothing even remotely so critical.

Wealth has clearly emboldened Putin and those around him to ride out any criticism directed toward them.

At a roundtable interview this month, the first deputy prime minister and chairman of Gazprom's board, Dmitry Medvedev, brushed aside questions about the company's management, its corporate philosophy, its investments in newspapers and other ventures seen as political. He suggested that the Kremlin, perhaps, has been right, while all its critics have been wrong.

"The value of Gazprom in 2000 was \$9 billion," said Medvedev, often cited as the potential successor to Putin's. "Today it is between \$250 and \$300 billion."

Critics warn that Russia is ignoring the consequences of its behavior, that the monopolistic policies of Gazprom, the erosion of political competition and the easy dismissal of critics as Russia-haters blinds the Kremlin to the dangers of the overly centralized system Putin has created.

Mikhail Kasyanov, Putin's prime minister from 2000 until 2004 and now one of his biggest critics, said that the foreigners who rush to join Russia's boon were equally shortsighted.

"Investors are very shortsighted," he said in an interview.

Even in the long term, though, history may be on Russia's side. "It pains a lot of people here to admit that Russia is not 'like us,'" Katinka Barysch, chief economist of the Center for European Reform, a research group in London, wrote in an electronic message, saying that Europe's energy interests would trump other concerns about Russia. "But unless the country slides into full-scale dictatorship or chaos, we will put our interests first."

Lawmakers aim to ease path to U.S. citizenship

By Rachel L. Swarns

WASHINGTON: Counting on the support of the new Democratic majority in Congress, Democratic lawmakers and their Republican allies are working on measures that would place millions of illegal immigrants on a more direct path to citizenship than would a bill the Senate passed in the spring.

The lawmakers are considering abandoning a requirement in the Senate bill that would compel several million illegal immigrants to leave the United States before becoming eligible to apply for citizenship.

The lawmakers are also considering denying financing for 700 miles, or 1,100 kilometers, of fencing along the border with Mexico, called for in a law championed by Republicans and that passed

with significant Democratic support.

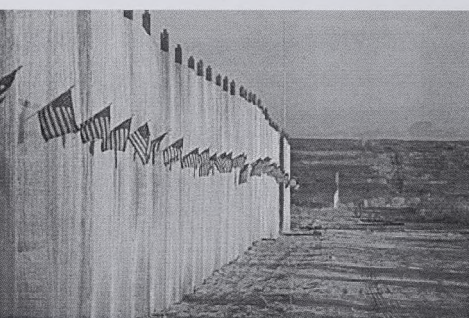
Details of the legislation, which would be introduced early next year, are being drafted. The lawmakers, who hope for bipartisan support, will almost certainly face pressure from some Republicans and conservative Democrats to compromise on the issues.

The Senate plans to introduce its immigration bill next month, with an eye toward passage in March or April, officials said. The House is expected to consider its version later. President George W. Bush said last week that he hoped to sign an immigration bill next year.

The leading lawmakers drafting the legislation include Senator Edward Kennedy, a Democrat from Massachusetts, and Senator John McCain, a Republican from Arizona, along with Representative Jeff Flake, a Republican from Arizona, and Representative Luis Guterrez, a Democrat from Illinois.

"I'm very hopeful about this, both in terms of the substance and the politics of it," said Kennedy, the incoming chairman of the Senate Immigration, Border Security and Citizenship Subcommittee. Kennedy acknowledged that there would be hurdles. But he and other lawmakers say that Republicans and Democrats are now more likely to work together to repair a system widely considered to be broken.

House Republicans blocked debate of the bill that passed the Senate this year, saying it amounted to an amnesty for lawbreakers and voicing confidence that the stance would touch off a groundswell of support in the congressional elections. The strategy largely failed.



A fence erected by the Minuteman Civil Defense Corps, a private group that supports tighter border controls, near the US-Mexican border at Naco, Arizona.

Hispanic voters, a swing constituency that Republicans covet, abandoned the party in large numbers. Several Republican hard-liners, including Representatives John Hostetler of Indiana and J.D. Hayworth of Arizona, lost their seats.

Domestic security officials have voiced support for important elements of the framework under consideration. Michael Chertoff, secretary for homeland security, has repeatedly raised doubts about the effectiveness of border fencing in remote desert areas. Bush signed the fence bill this year, but Congress did not appropriate enough money for it.

Officials say that they would also prefer a less burdensome process than the original Senate bill outlined.

That bill divided the estimated 12 million illegal immigrants into three

groups: those living in the United States for five years or more, those there for two to five years and those present for less than two years.

All but the illegal immigrants living in the United States for five years or more, roughly seven million, would have to leave the country briefly to be eligible for legal status. Those in the country for fewer than two years would not be guaranteed a slot in a guest-worker plan.

Domestic security officials said that the original plan would have been enormously difficult to administer because many illegal immigrants lacked documentation to prove how long they had been in the United States. The officials said that it would have fueled a market in fraudulent documents as illegal immigrants scrambled for proof of residency.

Gazprom pressures Belarus over price

By Rachel L. Swarns

BEARUS, From Page 1

dictator, Aleksandr Lukashenko.

"The demand shows Putin is abandoning any myth of the union state," Lilia Shevtsova, an associate at the Carnegie Center in Moscow, said in an interview by telephone. "Lukashenko is desperate and backed into a corner."

Still, Gazprom's final asking price for Belarus is among the lowest offered to Russia's neighbors: \$105 to \$110 per 1,000 cubic meters, in a combination of cash and shares in the national pipeline operator, Beltransgaz. But that would more than double Belarus's current price of \$46.68 per 1,000 cubic meters.

Gazprom said Belarus wanted to pay rates in line with those paid in the neighboring Russian province of Smolensk, or about \$40 for residential consumers and \$54 for industrial customers, citing a treaty related to the union state.

Gazprom says it is intent on filling out its bottom line by raising prices throughout the former Soviet Union, putting an end to a decade of subsidies.

Belarus uses about 21 billion cubic meters a year, about a third of the demand in neighboring Ukraine. It exports another about 30 billion cubic meters of Russian gas to Poland and Germany, compared with the 100 billion cubic meters of gas exported via Ukraine.

The chief negotiator for Belarus, Deputy Prime Minister Vladimir

Semashko, left talks in Moscow without a deal Tuesday. "We still have time until the 31st of December," he said.

Gazprom has slowly raised prices in neighboring countries while trading special deals for footholds in the local gas distribution business or access to the skein of export pipelines that is essential to its hugely profitable business.

Ukraine, for example, will pay \$135 per 1,000 cubic meters in 2007 while Gazprom won a concession to distribute gas through a joint venture, RosUkrEnerg.

By comparison, Georgia last week agreed to short-term supplies at a price of \$235 until it secures an alternative. Georgia refused to sell its pipelines to Gazprom.

Armenia, a traditional Russian ally in the south Caucasus, secured a deal to pay \$110 until 2009 but surrendered a strategic segment of pipeline linking that country with Iran, another big gas supplier. Moldova agreed Tuesday to pay \$170 and allow Gazprom a larger role in its domestic companies that distribute natural gas.

In the bargain, Gazprom said that if Belarus insisted on keeping the pipeline, it would have to pay \$200 per 1,000 cubic meters, an offer that Belarus refused. In a combined deal, Gazprom demanded \$75 and \$80 in cash and \$30 worth of shares in Beltransgaz, for 1,000 cubic meters.

Correction

An article in Tuesday's late editions on Ségolène Royal, the Socialist candidate for president of France, incorrectly stated that Elisabeth Guigou was a target of sexist criticism when Guigou was minister of justice. The incidents happened when Guigou was a candidate in regional elections in 1992. The article should also have said that France's two main parties preferred to lose a huge share of their funding — not campaign funding — rather than promote women for the National Assembly.

2032 P04 -03

In Kurdish custody, with no trial in sight

Prison population includes insurgents, but legal system fails to sort out fates

By C.J. Chivers

SULAIMANIYA, Iraq: The inmates began their strike with an angry call: "Allahu akbar!" — God is great — they shouted, 120 voices joining in a cadence punctuated by whooping.

They thrust their arms between the metal bars and ripped away the curtains and plastic sheets covering the windows facing the prison courtyard. Their squinting faces were exposed to light.

Their Kurdish guards gathered, ready to control a prison break.

There was no break. The inmates were able only to shove their bunks against the doors and barricade themselves in their cells. They settled into a day of issuing complaints.

They were not allowed the Koran, they said. Their rations were meager and often moldy. Sometimes the guards beat them, they said, and several inmates had disappeared. The entire inmate population had either been denied trials or had been held beyond the terms of their sentences, they said, lost in legal limbo in the Kurdish-controlled region of Iraq.

The prison strike here, on Dec. 4, ended when the local authorities agreed to transfer three unpopular guards and to allow copies of the Koran in the cells. But it exposed an intractable problem that has accompanied Kurdish cooperation with the United States in Iraq.

The Kurdish prison population has swelled to include at least several hundred suspected insurgents, and yet there is no legal system to sort out their fates. So the inmates wait, a population for which there is no plan.

The Kurdish government that holds the prisoners says they are dangerous, and points out that the population includes men who have undertaken terrorist or guerrilla training in Iraq or Afghanistan. But it also concedes to being stymied, with a small budget, limited prison space and little legal precedent to look back on.

"We have not had trials for them," said Brigadier Sarkawt Hassan Jalal, the director of security in the Sulaimaniya region. "We have no counterterrorism law, and any law we would pass would

not affect them because it would not be retroactive."

The problems reach back to before the American-led invasion, when northern Iraq was a Kurdish enclave out of Saddam Hussein's control.

At the time, the Kurds in northeastern Iraq were fighting Ansar al-Islam, a small insurgent and terrorist group that seized control of a slice of territory along the Iranian border in 2002.

The Kurds captured several prisoners and suspected insurgents, but had no clear idea what to do with them, other than to hold them in cells.

Several weeks after the war started in 2003, an attack by American special forces and Kurdish fighters pushed Ansar al-Islam off Kurdish turf. But the border with Iran had not been sealed before the attack.

Most of the insurgents escaped. In the years since, Ansar al-Islam's ideological war has spread throughout Sunni Arab regions of Iraq, becoming a far more dangerous insurgency. Kurdish jails have swelled with people accused of participating in it.

Many of the detained men exude menace. But others claim innocence, and Kurdish officials say they have a limited capacity to disentangle the groups.

Brigadier Hassan Nouri, the Kurdish security official responsible for the prisons in northeastern Iraq, said the detainees' status resembles that of the American-held detainees in Guantanamo Bay. "We cannot let them go, and we will hold them as long as we have to," he said.

The size of the detainee population is unclear. In this prison run by the local security service on a Kurdish military base at Sulaimaniya's outskirts, 120 accused insurgents are held.

Hania Mufti, a researcher for Human Rights Watch who has investigated the prison conditions and the absence of due process for the inmates, said that about 2,500 people were being held by the security services of the two ruling Kurdish parties. She estimated that two-thirds of them had been accused of participating in the insurgency.

Mufti said she has encouraged Kurdish political leaders to set up an inde-



The Sulaimaniya prison, where as many as 30 inmates live in a cell about six meters by seven meters large and share a toilet.

pendent commission to review each of the cases of the accused insurgents.

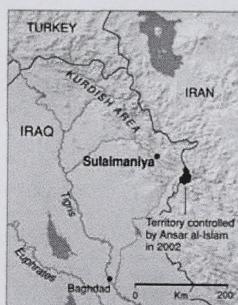
"We're not saying, 'throw open the doors of the prisons,'" she said, but rather are suggesting that the Kurds create a means to examine the merits of each man's detention, and to determine why and whether each of them should be held and for how long, and under what conditions.

Kurdish officials have not yet developed such a policy; the detainees are essentially warehoused. The strike in early December exposed the strains the unresolved status had placed on the Kurdish government and the inmates alike.

The four visible cells here, spaces of about six meters by seven meters, or 20 feet by 24 feet, each were packed with 30 men. The men shared a toilet on the floor outside the cells, in a hall. The group seethed. One inmate shouted at two journalists behind the bars, "Stop your hatred toward Islam! Otherwise we will kill you!"

Speaking from a law enforcement perspective, Jalal said the close quarters and evident anger had made many of the inmates more radical, and that the prison serves as an insurgents' nest.

The detainees themselves blame the Kurds. As the disruption began, one inmate who had been outside the cells to



meet a family member was swiftly pushed into a guard bunkroom and left with two journalists.

The man, Yunis Ahmad, of Kirkuk, said he had been held two years without being charged. He was briefly detained, he said, by the American military, and then turned over to the Kurds.

Behind him on the wall of the guards' room hung two pieces of heavy electric cable, a common tool for beatings. Ahmad said that the Americans had

treated him decently, interviewing him politely and giving him food and juice. But since being in Kurdish custody, he said, he had been tortured, including having a bed placed on him and then being nearly crushed with weights and having his arms almost pulled from his shoulder sockets by the guards.

"I promise you, if they pulled your arms like that, you will confess to being in Al Qaeda," he said.

He was an Islamic cleric, he said, and his brother was an insurgent.

He said he did not know the reasons for his incarceration. "The people who are here don't know why they are here," he said.

The International Committee for the Red Cross has an office in Sulaimaniya.

Its head of mission declined to comment about the prisoners' allegations, other than to say that the organization visits the prison and the inmates and is in contact with the Kurdish authorities.

The U.S. military said it was also not directly involved in these jails. "We just don't have that role in the Kurdish legal system," said Major Derrick Cheng, a spokesman for the 3rd Brigade, 25th Infantry Division.

"We have security overwatch in the area, but we don't have an immediate or direct role in the prisons."

Iranians ask if tensions with the U.S. can ever end

Young people suggest civility might work

By Anne Barnard and James F. Smith

TEHRAN: At a time of worsening tension between Iran and the United States, many Iranians are asking whether the two estranged nations can still move past their old arguments and at least communicate civilly, if not reconcile.

Young Iranians are often quick to say they do not like their government's handling of the issues that divide the two countries, but many also say the U.S. policy of isolating Iran has worsened things. From reformists to hard-liners, Iranians suggest that the United States needs to take the first step toward resuming a diplomatic dialogue by showing Iran some respect.

"If the United States just corrects its behavior against Iran, we can open the door," said Deputy Foreign Minister Saeed Jalili, who has worked closely with the nation's leading clerics. "We have a proverb: 'We don't expect any benefits, but just don't hurt us.'"

Formal contacts between the two countries all but stopped when the countries broke relations after the seizure of American diplomats at the U.S. Embassy in Tehran in 1979, at the height of the Islamic Revolution that toppled the shah. Under U.S. policy, American diplomats are not allowed to talk to Iranian officials. The governments grant few visas for each other's citizens, and last month Iran began fingerprinting arriving American visitors, matching the U.S. practice for Iranians.

But many Iranians go out of their way to tell visiting Americans that they think their government's "Death to America" antipathy to the United States is pointless rhetoric at best.

In a restaurant in Isfahan, a city whose blue-tiled mosques testify to its history as the former seat of Persian dynasties, two dozen miniature flags lined the shelf above an impressive dessert tray. The flags of Paraguay and several African countries were there, but the American flag was nowhere to be seen.

Asked about it, the owner leapt from his chair.

"You are Americans? We apologize!" he exclaimed. "It's the politicians. That's just how it goes here. I am a fanatic of America — I love those people! I was a manager in the Cheesecake Factory."

The restaurateur, an Iranian in his 20s who did not want his name published, confided that the recipe for the fudge mint cake beneath his row of flags came home with him from Atlanta, where he worked for the restaurant chain for two years.

The mixed message matches Iranians' mixed feelings about the United States: they may like American people, movies and music, but most do not like the U.S. government or its policies in the Middle East. And they are eager for Americans to draw the same distinction: Iranians, they insist, are not the same as the Iranian government.

Prospects for increased contact received a boost this month when the Iraq Study Group, the bipartisan American panel established to frame solutions to the Iraq crisis, recommended that the U.S. government talk directly to Iran, which as a Shiite country has affinity and influence with many of the majority Shiites in neighboring Iraq.

Talks with Iran would be a significant departure from the policy of President George W. Bush of isolating the country that his 2002 State of the Union speech called part of an "axis of evil." Bush insisted recently that he would not deal with Iran until it abandoned its uranium enrichment program.

Iranian officials have reacted cautiously to the Iraq report. "They haven't changed their policy, why should we change ours?" said a Foreign Ministry spokesman, Mohammad Ali Hosseini.

Others reacted with threats. In a recent interview, Mohammad Ali Ramin, a close adviser to President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, said the United States should have talked to Iran throughout the process of planning and executing the Iraq war. Now, he said, the only thing to talk about is under what terms Iran would allow U.S. forces to safely leave Iraq.

'Uncle Sam wants you' may be heard abroad

By Bryan Bender

WASHINGTON: The armed forces, already struggling to meet recruiting goals, are considering expanding the number of noncitizens in the ranks, including disputed proposals to open recruiting stations overseas and put more immigrants on a faster track to U.S. citizenship if they volunteer, according to Pentagon officials.

Foreign citizens serving in the U.S. military is a highly charged issue, which could expose the Pentagon to criticism that it is essentially using mercenaries to defend the country. Other analysts voice concern that a large contingent of noncitizens under arms could jeopardize national security or reflect badly on Americans' willingness to serve in uniform.

The idea of signing up residents who are seeking U.S. citizenship is gaining traction as a way to address a critical need for the Pentagon, while fully absorbing some of the roughly one million immigrants that enter the United States legally each year.

The proposal to induct more noncitizens, which is still largely on the drawing board, has to clear a number of hurdles. So far, the Pentagon has been quiet about specifics, like who would be eligible to join, where the recruiting stations would be, and what the minimum standards might involve, like English proficiency. In the meantime, the Pentagon and the immigration authorities have expanded a program that accel-

erates citizenship for legal residents who volunteer for the military.

Since the terror attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, the number of immigrants in uniform who have become U.S. citizens has increased from 750 in 2001 to almost 4,600 last year, according to military statistics.

With severe manpower strains because of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and a mandate to expand the overall size of the military, the Pentagon is under pressure to consider a variety of proposals involving foreign recruits, according to a military affairs analyst.

"It works as a military idea and it works in the context of American immigration," said Thomas Donnelly, a military scholar at the conservative American Enterprise Institute in Washington and a leading proponent of recruiting more foreigners to serve in the military.

As the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan grind on, the Pentagon has warned Congress and the White House that the military is stretched "to the breaking point."

President George W. Bush and Robert Gates, his new defense secretary, have acknowledged that the size of the military must be expanded to help alleviate the strain on ground troops.

That has led Pentagon officials to consider casting a wider net for noncitizens who are already in the United States, said Lieutenant Colonel Bryan Hilferty, an army spokesman. "Already, the army and the Immigra-



A newly naturalized U.S. soldier attending a citizenship ceremony at a military base in Afghanistan. The Pentagon is considering recruitment of more noncitizens.

tion and Customs Enforcement division of the Department of Homeland Security have "made it easier for green-card holders who do enlist to get their citizenship," Hilferty said. Other army officials, who asked not to be identified, said personnel officials were working with Congress and other parts of the government to test the feasibility of going beyond U.S. borders to recruit soldiers and marines.

Currently, Pentagon policy stipulates that only immigrants legally residing in the United States are eligible to enlist. There are about 30,000 noncitizens who serve in the U.S. armed forces, making up about 2 percent of the active-duty force, according to statistics from the military and the Council on Foreign Re-

lations. About 100 such noncitizens have been killed in Iraq and Afghanistan.

A recent change in U.S. law, however, gave the Pentagon authority to bring immigrants to the United States if it determines it is vital to national security. So far, the Pentagon has not taken advantage of it, but the calls are growing to use this new authority.

Some top military thinkers believe the United States should go as far as targeting foreigners in their native countries.

"It's a little dramatic," said Michael O'Hanlon, a military specialist at the nonpartisan Brookings Institution and another supporter of the proposal. "But if you don't get some new idea how to do this, we won't be able to achieve an increase" in the size of the armed forces.

Other nations recruit foreign citizens: In France, the famed Foreign Legion relies on about 8,000 noncitizens; and Nepal's Gurkhas have fought and died with British Army forces for two centuries.

Senator vows to fight Bush on increase in troops

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON: Senator Joseph Biden, incoming chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said he would fight President George W. Bush if the administration decided to send more U.S. troops to Iraq.

Biden, who has his eye on the Democratic presidential nomination, also warned that if congressional Republicans did not join him in speaking out against Bush, they — not Democrats — would suffer in the 2008 elections.

"I just think it's the absolute wrong strategy," Biden said Tuesday of an increase in troops.

Bush is reviewing his options in Iraq, after Republicans lost control of Congress in the Nov. 7 elections and an independent bipartisan panel determined that Bush's plan was dangerously off-track.

The Iraq Study Group, led by former Secretary of State James Baker 3rd and Lee Hamilton, the former Democratic congressman from Indiana, concluded that the United States could pull combat troops out of Iraq by early 2008.

The few troops left behind would be tasked with advising Iraqi units.

Although administration officials say that all options remain on the table pending Bush's final decision, which is to be announced next month, a surge of up to 30,000 troops is widely considered an option favored by Bush.

Biden said he was interested in the study group's findings and wanted to hold hearings on Iraq beginning Jan. 9.

CROSSWORD

Edited by Will Shortz

- Across**
- Indian chief
 - Spilling point
 - Wild
 - Without help
 - Mystique
 - Exploits
 - Unsuccessful batter's intro?
 - It can take your breath away
 - Spiegel magazine
 - Sizes up or down?
 - Koh-i- diamond
 - "Waterloo" quartet
 - Hot dog vendor's intro?
- Down**
- 33 Spiritual leaders
 - 34 Letters on Challenger
 - 35 Nefariousness
 - 36 Blazing gun
 - 37 Belt-attachable device
 - 39 Nicknamed guardedly
 - 40 Clouds (up)
 - 42 Work ___ sweat
 - 43 Assign, as the blame
 - 45 Guard's intro?
 - 48 Is bedridden planner's worry
 - 50 Cow-headed goddess
 - 51 Rough-cut
 - 54 Start and end of the Three Musketeers' motto

Solution to December 26 puzzle

FRIGS ALIA EDGE
REINIR ABRELEAIB
ALGOBE OPENBARS
MOOSEMOUSSE RET
EARED NNE SAD
DDAY LADDS REBA
GOD RIR PTE REA
ERODER ANE REA
MEAD SACRE CPAS
RES DOE SLAIN
ORB HOARSEHORSE
COOLIDGE RESALE
HAREHAI RNEEDER
OWEN YOS PRES

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13		
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59									60				61	
62									63				64	
65									66				67	

Puzzle by Manny Nosowsky

The New York Times

- 26 More and more of news shows nowadays
- 27 Stubble remover
- 28 Baja buddy
- 29 Dearie
- 30 Former Mrs. Trump
- 31 Olympus competitor
- 32 Sweat
- 37 "Don't give me that!"
- 38 Knuckle draggers
- 41 Hurt
- 43 23rd in a series
- 44 "That just shouldn't happen"
- 46 "Peace on earth," e.g.
- 47 Collins, former space shuttle commander
- 48 Tropical escape
- 51 Tea for two place
- 52 Anthem opener
- 53 Second
- 54 Fit
- 56 Write-up info
- 57 Karaoke need
- 58 Hagen-Dazs alternative
- 60 Sorry
- 61 Piece-keeping grp.?

BRIDGE

Frank Stewart

Tin my wife's doghouse again," Louie told me. "When I asked her what she wanted this year, she said to surprise her. So I did — with an outdoor motor."

Louie got a nasty surprise in today's deal. When he and North got to four hearts, West tried a "short-side" double, knowing trumps would break badly.

Louie took the ace of spades and led a trump, half-expecting East to show out. He was agast when West discarded on the queen. Louie returned a club to dummy and finessed again in trumps, but he lost two trumps, a spade, a club and a diamond.

Bad Break

Four hearts was a winning contract. After Louie sees the bad trump break, he must concede a diamond. He wins the spade

North dealer
N-S vulnerable

North
♠ A 4 2
♥ 7 5 4
♦ A 7 6 3
♣ A K 7

West
♠ Q J 10 9 8
♥ None
♦ K 8 5
♣ Q 10 6 3

East
♠ 7 5
♥ K 10 9 8 6
♦ Q 10 9 2
♣ 8 4

South
♠ K 6 3
♥ A Q J 3 2
♦ J 10
♣ 9 5 2

North East South West
1 ♣ Pass 1 ♣ 1 ♠
1 NT Pass 2 NT Pass
3 ♣ Pass 4 ♣ Db!(1)
All Pass
Opening lead — ♣

ruffs a diamond. Louie then leads a club to dummy for another trump trick. He wins five trumps, two spades, two clubs and a diamond.

Daily Question

You hold: ♠ K 6 3; ♥ A Q J 3 2; ♦ J 4; ♣ 9 5 2.

Your partner opens a club. You bid a heart; he raises to four hearts. The opponents pass. What do you say?

Answer

Your partner has not made a shut-out bid: He has a hand worth about 20 points with balanced pattern and four-card heart support. Slam is possible, but your three low clubs portend a possible club loser and your jack of hearts may be a wasted honor. Pass and take your sure game.

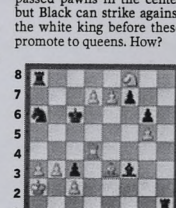
return, takes the ace of diamonds, ruffs a diamond, leads a club to dummy and

CHESS

Raymond Keene

Winning Move

Black to play. This position is a variation from Dally-Smith's British Championship, Plymouth, England, 1992. White has two monster passed pawns in the center but Black can strike against the white king before these promote to queens. How?



Solution

1... Nxd4! Rxd4 Rxd3! 3

ILLUSTRATION BY GUY CLAPP
STRICTLY FORBIDDEN
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Mr. Ricardo Laeoz Escobar



RETRACING STEPS IN INDIA — For the first time since the tsunami, these sisters visited the beach near where their mother had died in Tamil Nadu State, one of the hardest-hit areas in India. Sivaranjini, 13, and Bhanpriya, 10, live in an orphanage, where their father sent them and their three sisters after the disaster destroyed homes and schools across the region.

Moving on, 2 years after 'the end of the world'

By Seth Mydans

BANDA ACEH, Indonesia: "This is it," said Safrial, a carpenter, to his two young sons when a towering tsunami of black water rushed toward them two years ago. "This is the end of the world."

For most people who lived around him it was; and today Safrial, 45, hammers and sweats in the sun in a neighborhood where he knows the names of more of the dead than of the living. He hammers constantly, even as he talks. "This was a test from God," he said. "For those who died, it was disaster. But for the survivors, we must pass the test and become better people in every way."

Not everybody has met the challenge, he said. In Aceh, too, where the tsunami hit the hardest on Dec. 26, 2004, the process of recovery has been a mixture of progress and disappointment.

All across the ravaged cityscape, scraped bare by the waves, thousands of tiny, toy-box houses have sprung up in recent months as a program of rebuilding gains momentum.

But many of the new houses are empty because they lack water, sanitation and electricity and because there are no schools, clinics or commercial activity nearby. Many of the people whose homes they replaced were swept away to their deaths.

Old landmarks are gone, and it is bewildering to trace a remembered path through this sketch of a city.

At night, the heart of the ruined area is almost as dark and silent as it was before construction started. This city of ghosts is being rebuilt in part as a ghost town. The tsunami, caused by an earthquake off the shore of Aceh, took 230,000 lives and left nearly two million people homeless in more than a dozen nations, particularly India, Sri Lanka and Thailand as well as here in Indonesia.

One of the worst natural disasters in modern history, it stirred an unparalleled outpouring of pledges of aid that totaled as much as \$10 billion.

On a stub of a ruin amid the new houses here, a fading spray-painted message reads: "Sunday 26 December 2004 in the morning: the world is crying for Aceh." But by some estimates only one-third of the promised aid has been distributed to affected countries, and much of that has been lost to corruption, mismanagement, political squabbles and bureaucratic dead ends. Hundreds of thousands of people still have no permanent homes or jobs, and it seems that many will live out their lives as refugees of the tsunami.

In India, the British aid group Oxfam estimates that 70 percent of affected people still live in temporary shelters. In Sri Lanka the revival of a civil war has made life even more precarious for survivors.

The beaches of Phuket in southern Thailand seem to be an exception, with life and tourism thriving again, though the scars of trauma remain. The last 451 unidentified bodies, out of more than 5,000 who died, are being buried and their DNA is being kept on file. Many of the problems of reconstruction are playing out here in Aceh, where 170,000 people died and more than half a million lost their homes.

Hundreds of small earthquakes, as well as floods and landslides, have added to the misery since then. In the past few days, at least 70 people have been killed in the area by flash floods.

"We are constantly overwhelmed by the massive task confronting us," said the head of the government's reconstruction agency, Kuntoro Mangkusubroto, at a conference of donors in New York last month.

One of the poorest provinces in Indonesia, Aceh cannot easily absorb the \$7.1 billion in international aid that has been pledged, he said, and does not have the capacity to carry out the massive re-



A NEW START IN INDONESIA — Recently built houses in Kajibu village in Aceh Province, the region that was hit hardest by the tsunami. Corruption and bureaucracy have been blamed for slowing the recovery process.

building that is needed. Some projects have been put on hold, he told reporters here, because the province has only nine asphalt plants and cannot meet the demand.

Although joblessness is a critical problem, most construction workers come from outside the affected area because there are not enough skilled workers here, said Ian Small, Oxfam's senior program manager for Aceh.

But Kuntoro said many of the problems had been brought on by the people responsible for reconstruction. Coordination among hundreds of aid groups is "the challenge of challenges," he said in New York, as projects conflict or overlap. "Corruption is endemic. We cannot let down our guard for a moment." Donors have been diverted by "childish games" of internal politics.

He said 57,000 houses had been built, about half the needed number estimated by Oxfam. But he said 100,000 people remained in temporary barracks.

Here and there among the new pink and rust-colored houses are the tile floors, carpeted by creepers, that are all that remains of many of the buildings that were swept away.

Standing by a broken flight of steps that leads only into bushes, Azahara Amin, 41, a jobless office worker, pointed to patches of weeds that were once the homes of his neighbors.

"This is a house, and this is a house over there," he said. "These were four more houses here. They all belonged to my relatives; most of them are dead. Only four houses have been rebuilt."

With most documents lost to the tsunami, it is often impossible to confirm ownership. If an owner has died, an heir must be found and once a house is built there may be no one to occupy it.

Kuntoro said that 140,000 properties had been measured for distribution but that only 7,000 deeds had been handed out because complex regulations had not yet been drawn up.

Another 25,000 families have no chance for resettlement because they had not owned land or because their



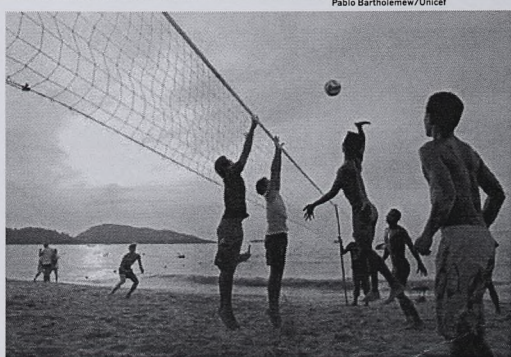
FACING EXTINCTION IN INDIA — These children, on India's Little Andaman Island, are among only 94 surviving members of the Onga ethnic group, which was displaced by the tsunami.

land was permanently inundated, Oxfam said.

Despite the problems, a new kind of normalcy has emerged here as life shifts from tents to barracks to houses and people patch together the gaps left in their lives by the tsunami.

The world did not end two years ago for Safrial, the carpenter, who ran with his sons to safety at the Grand Mosque several blocks away. But Nur Aini, a college teacher whose house he was repairing the other day, must live with the loss of her 18-year-old daughter, who was torn from their home by the waves.

"She was just about to graduate and become a doctor," Aini said with a quiet smile. "But that was not her fate, and we have to accept it. She's gone, but we continue."

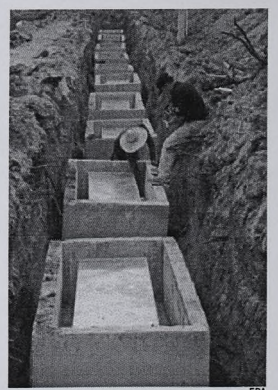


Pornchai Kittiwongsakul/Agence France-Presse

Survivors of the Asian tsunami struggle to rebuild their homes and their lives amid rubble, corruption, poverty and memories of the dead.



TRANSIENT LIVING IN SRI LANKA — Thanga Amma, 61, outside her temporary shelter in Hikkaduwa. Thousands of people in Sri Lanka are without homes.



LIFE AND DEATH IN THAILAND — People still mourn as coffins are buried at a tsunami memorial ceremony, above. But Phuket has begun to regain its sense of fun as tourism, and volleyball, return to its beaches, below.

iht.com/asia
More photographs of the recovery effort two years after the Asian tsunami, a process that has been a mixture of progress and disappointment.

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Nicholas D. Kristof

Fighting brothels with books

Three years ago, I purchased two teenage girls from the Cambodian brothels that enslaved them and returned them to their families.

Those readers had honorable intentions (I think) and simply wanted to do something concrete to confront global poverty and sex trafficking.

I'm still in touch with the two girls and visited them on this trip (video of them is at nycimes.com/kristof); one is back in the brothel, and the other is now married and pregnant with her first child in her village.

So in this holiday season let me share the (happy) story of a group of kids who have found a way — from Washington state, no less — to fight illiteracy and sex trafficking here in this remote and squalid town of Pailin in western Cambodia.

I stumbled across their effort by chance as I visited an elementary school here that bore an English sign with the name "Overlake School."

"Many of my students have e-mail addresses," said the teacher, Tay Khy. "They e-mail students in America."

This remarkable scene — barefoot students with Yahoo accounts — came to pass because Francisco Grijalva, principal of the Overlake School in Redmond, Washington, read about a U.S. aid group called American Assistance for Cambodia (www.cambodia-schools.com) that builds schools in rural Cambodia.

The students responded enthusiastically. They held bake sales and talent shows and gathered the \$15,500 necessary to build a school.

In 2003, Grijalva led a delegation of 19 from his school for the opening of the one in Cambodia. Overwhelmed by the experience, the American students then decided to sponsor an English teacher and an e-mail system for the school. This year, a dozen of the American students came to teach English to the Cambodian pupils.

Kun Sokkea, a sixth-grader at the Cambodian school, keeps a picture that the Americans gave her of their school and marvels at its otherworldly beauty. She inhabits a world that few American pupils could envision: Her father died of AIDS, her mother is now dying as well, she has never been to a dentist and she has just one shirt that she can wear to school.

She led me to her home, a rickety wooden shack with no electricity or plumbing. Kun Sokkea fetches

drinking water from the local creek — where she also washes her clothes. When I asked if she ever drank milk, she said doubtfully that she used to — as a baby, from her mother.

Neither of her parents ever had even a year of schooling, and if it hadn't been for the American students, she wouldn't have had much either. That would have made her vulnerable to traffickers, who prey on illiterate girls from the villages.

Building schools doesn't solve the immediate problem of girls currently enslaved inside brothels — that requires more rigorous law enforcement, crackdowns on corruption and outspoken diplomacy (it would help if President George W. Bush spotlighted the issue in his State of the Union address).

Meanwhile, the Americans insist that they have benefited just as much from the relationship. "After going to Cambodia, my plans for the future have changed," said Natalie Hammerquist, a 17-year-old who regularly e-mails two Cambodian students.

As for Grijalva, he says: "This project is simply the most meaningful and worthwhile initiative I have undertaken in my 36 years in education."

No investment in poor countries gets more bang for the buck than educating girls.

No sanctuary

Here is the latest twist on Darfur's never-ending horrors: Refugees from the neighboring Central African Republic have fled to Darfur recently as the killings and atrocities have spilled across Sudan's borders.

There is no lack of hand wringing. This month, President George W. Bush's special envoy, Andrew Natsios, gave Sudan until Jan. 1 to allow a somewhat more robust peacekeeping force into Darfur.

While Natsios' demands drew the usual sneers from Khartoum, Sudanese officials appeared genuinely spooked by news that the International Criminal Court's prosecutor would soon be ready to present war-crimes charges against those responsible for the atrocities.

sure if it is real. Even before the court moves, the United States should rally Western governments to freeze the assets of all Sudanese officials implicated in the genocide.

Prime Minister Tony Blair has called for imposing a ban on Sudanese military planes and helicopters flying over Darfur. That would at least stop them from bombing and strafing villages. Western planes could also attack jamjaweed militias once they crossed into the Central African Republic and Chad.

Natsios is a good diplomat. But the crisis needs someone with more clout. Bush and Blair should jointly appoint a high-level envoy — former President Bill Clinton or Richard Holbrooke, the Bosnia negotiator, come to mind — to warn Sudan's protectors that the West is finally ready to act, with their backing or without it.

Still flying high

Globalization is tough to sell to average people. Economists can promote the very real benefits of a robustly growing world: when they sell more overseas, businesses can employ more people.

It is worth taking note, therefore, of a good-news trade story for an icon of American manufacturing. The Boeing 747 looked as if it was heading toward obsolescence in the difficult environment for air travel after Sept. 11, 2001.

Much of the credit for this good news goes directly to globalization and trade. As Leslie Wayne reported in The New York Times, expanding global trade is a main reason for the aircraft's renewed success, with many of the orders coming for air freighters rather than passenger planes.

Fear and bigotry

Besides Santa Claus, the Christmas season usually brings some reminder that the worst way to acknowledge the importance of religious faith in America is by demanding that the entire nation follow one particular theology.

Not so for a radio talk host named Dennis Prager, who claimed that using the Koran would "embolden Islamic extremists."

and Boeing's — and America's — good fortune.

It is important to bear in mind just how much America has benefited from free trade at a time when protectionist sentiment — particularly of the China-bashing variety — is growing.

A large part of the problem is the disposition of the spoils of globalization. While liberalized trade has meant faster growth, lower inflation and huge profits, the benefits in America have gone disproportionately to the wealthy.

According to the World Bank's recent report, Global Economic Prospects, trade in goods and services went very likely more than triple by 2030. Over the same period, the global economy is expected to expand from \$35 trillion in 2005 to \$72 trillion — ushering hundreds of millions around the world out of poverty and into the global middle class in the process.

Ellison, who traces his ancestors in the United States to 1742, has behaved with extreme grace throughout the incident. As for Prager and Goode, we appreciate their help in demonstrating how very fast things can get both nutty and unpleasant once the founding fathers' wise decision to avoid institutionalizing any religious faith gets breached.

History lessons • By Catherine Field After Kim Jong Il

aced with a present that seems turbulent and hard to fathom, we often look to the past for guidance. And that temptation to look to history for our compass is especially strong in the case of the weird, unpredictable state of North Korea.

Looking at the trickle of desperate North Koreans now fleeing this tyrannical regime via third countries, many observers are seduced by an apparent parallel with the events of 1989 in Europe.

But a closer look suggests that the comparison with the North Korea of today may be little more than a mirage. For one thing, China is clamping down on the exodus. Those caught crossing its borders from North Korea are abruptly sent home, probably to labor camps and punishment for their families.

It's tempting then to accuse China of buttressing Kim Jong Il, North Korea's leader, by this tough policy of playing the de facto role of a policeman who patrols the walls of his paranoid, dictatorial state.

But China's approach, comes with the acquiescence of South Korea, Japan and the United States. They all want regime change, but not in turmoil or bloodshed, where no one knows whose finger is on

the nuclear button. South Korea, in particular, has closely studied German unification and says it could not afford that sort of instant melting.

It combined the advent of a younger leadership in the Soviet Union, with the economic decline of the Soviet bloc and a doctrine that was clearly burnt out. My memories of East Berlin on Nov. 9, 1989, are of a human tide that had slipped the grip of a defunct ideology.

Today, Germans are still paying the high price of unification. But at least East Germany came with a dowry of a decent infrastructure, functioning agriculture, a stable social structure and an education population with a fairly good idea of the world on the other side of the wall.

Kim Jong Il's "paradise," by contrast, is a basket case. My strongest memories of North Korea are of people foraging for food by the roadsides or seeking to trap an eel by the outlets of field drains.

Some argue that such handouts have not led to any improvement in the lives of North Koreans in the past, and that such aid amounts to sustaining a rogue nuclear state. But the fact is that Kim's reign will end one day, and the only question is when and how chaotically. If Germany does carry a lesson for the Korean Peninsula, it is that a state that feeds its people, has some basic infrastructure and a few contacts abroad is a far better prospect for peaceful reunification than one that is starving, ignorant — and nuclear armed.



Greg Baker/AP Photo

Handwritten notes: Ottobu 274-9098, 210-2558, 9-997-6810, Tironi: 275-2795, 09-230-5291

Catherine Field is a journalist based in Paris.

Paul Krugman

Helping the poor, the British way

It's the season for charitable giving. And far too many Americans, particularly children, need that charity.

Scenes of a devastated New Orleans reminded us that many Americans remain poor, four decades after LBJ declared war on poverty. But I'm not sure whether people are crossing the poverty line.

And there's no excuse for our lack of progress. Just look at what the British government has accomplished over the last decade.

Although Tony Blair has been President George W. Bush's obedient manservant when it comes to Iraq, Blair's domestic policies are nothing like Bush's. Where Bush has sought to privatize the social safety net, Blair's Labor government has defended and strengthened it.

Britain's poverty rate, if measured U.S.-style — that is, in terms of a fixed poverty line, not a moving target that rises as the nation grows richer — has been cut in half since Labor came to power in 1997.

Brown, the chancellor of the exchequer and Blair's heir apparent. There's nothing exotic about his policies, many of which are inspired by American models. But in Britain, these policies are carried out with much more determination.

For example, Britain didn't have a minimum wage until 1999 — but at current exchange rates Britain's minimum wage rate is now about twice as high as ours. Britain's child benefit is more generous than America's child tax credit, and it's available to everyone, even those too poor to pay income taxes.

Income inequality has been stabilized but not substantially reduced: as in America, the richest 1 percent have pulled away from everyone else, though not to the same extent.

But there's no denying that the Blair government has done a lot for Britain's have-nots. Modern Britain isn't paradise on earth, but the Blair government has ensured that substantially fewer people are living in

What are the lessons to be learned from across the pond?

OTHER VIEWS | Opinions from around the world

A painful reality for EU fishermen

LONDON: The European Union's announcement of the 2007 fishing quotas has provoked the usual outcry. But a painful reality risks being drowned out by this clamor: Present levels of cod fishing in Europe are unsustainable. It is not in the interests of any of Europe's fishing fleets, nor the communities they support, for cod to become effectively extinct.

Europe is unsustainable. It is not in the interests of any of Europe's fishing fleets, nor the communities they support, for cod to become effectively extinct. The EU's cod recovery program has failed to yield significant results over the past three years. New thinking is needed. Fishing quotas are no longer a matter of balancing the economic interests of the member states of the EU, but of preserving the ecology of European waters. It is clear that decisions on these matters were taken out of the hands of fisheries ministers and placed in the hands of Europe's environment ministers.

Progress in Bahrain

DOHA: In a region plagued by ideological and sectarian conflicts, the Bahraini move to elect a Christian woman to the post of second deputy speaker of the upper house, the Shura Council, is a significant indication that some of us still believe in tolerance and coexistence between cultures. As a woman and a Christian in an open-minded state like Bahrain, Alif Samaan has had no problem being one of the leading faces of local politics. But in the standards of a region where clerics continue to divide moderates and extremists and pushed into further divisions because of foreign intervention, the Bahrain step serves as a reminder of our heritage of multiculturalism. The Shura Council also has a Jewish representative. That makes it one of the few places in the world where members of the three religions work to devise national policies under one roof. Bahrain must be congratulated.

Newspapers under attack

SEOUL: The government and political parties are attempting to impose excessive regulations on newspapers, provoking the Korean Association of Newspapers to urge them to stop interfering in the newspaper market. Excessive regulations on the newspaper market will diminish press freedom and HERALD seriously damage management autonomy. The revised newspaper law bill drafted by the ruling party includes provisions that may be unconstitutional. The draft bill includes the cancellation of newspaper's registration as a penalty for violating the newspaper law. Such regulations at a time when newspapers are experiencing unprecedented financial difficulties threaten the viability of the industry. The government should take pause and consider the actions of other countries that are actually relaxing media regulations to improve competitiveness.

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