

Brown in trouble over ministers' Libya visits

AGE CORRESPONDENT

LONDON

Aug. 27: British Prime Minister Gordon Brown is facing increasing pressure over the release of convicted Lockerbie bomber Abdelbaset Ali Mohammed Al Megrahi on compassionate grounds last week as details of UK ministerial visits to Libya were revealed on Thursday.

Mr Brown is struggling to escape claims that the release of Al Megrahi was linked to a lucrative trade deal between Britain and Libya. Details about meetings between British ministers and their Libyan counterparts will not help quell the claims. Three ministers visited Libya in the 15 months leading up to the release of the Lockerbie bomber, according to the Cabinet office papers quoted in the British media.

Megrahi release



Gordon Brown

Lord Jones, the then trade minister, travelled to Libya in May last year to speak to business representatives, the Cabinet Office said.

Former health minister Dawn Primarolo held talks with the Libyan Prime Minister in November and Bill Rammell, the then foreign office minister, held discussions with his Libyan counterparts in February, the reports said.

The then health secretary Alan Johnson, who is the home secretary now, also met Libyan health ministers at the World Health Assembly in Geneva last year. Former deputy prime minister John Prescott is the first senior Labour Party leader to support the decision to free the Lockerbie bomber. "If the man is dying, if compassion is passed as it is in the Scottish administration, and the medical authorities then gave proof to that effect as they did, then it's a decision for their legal authority," he told Sky News.

In contrast, justice secretary Jack Straw said he had never visited a prisoner in jail who was seeking compassionate release. Scottish justice secretary Kenny MacAskill had visited Al Megrahi in prison before releasing the cancer patient on compassionate grounds.

tradition



A sarcophagus resembling a buffalo burns at Gianyar, on Indonesia's Bali island, on Thursday during "ngaben", a cremation ceremony to send the deceased to the next life. PHOTO: AFP

TODAY in HISTORY

Today is Friday, August 28, the 240th day of 2009. There are 125 days left in the year.

HIGHLIGHTS IN HISTORY ON THIS DATE

- 1619** Ferdinand II was elected Holy Roman Emperor. During his reign the Thirty Year's War started as a result of his attempts to eradicate Protestantism.
- 1811** Poet Percy Bysshe Shelley eloped with Harriet Westbrook.
- 1830** In Baltimore, Maryland, *Tom Thumb* the passenger-carrying train locomotive, was demonstrated for the first time. In the United States, it was the first locomotive of its kind built.
- 1879** Cetewayo, last of the great Zulu kings, was captured by the British at the end of the Zulu Wars.
- 1883** Slavery was banned by the British Parliament throughout the British Empire.
- 1910** Montenegro proclaimed its independence from the Ottoman Empire, with Nicholas I as ruler.
- 1914** In World War I the Battle of Heligoland Bight took place between British and German ships in the North Sea.
- 1916** Germany declared war against Romania, and Italy declared war against Germany.
- 1963** Martin Luther King delivered his "I have a dream" speech to over 200,000 civil rights demonstrators in Washington D.C.
- 1973** Princess Anne became the first member of the British royal family to visit the Soviet Union when she arrived in Kiev for an equestrian event.
- 1982** The first Gay Games opened in San Francisco with 10 countries taking part in 17 athletic events.
- 1983** Menachem Begin announced his resignation as the Prime Minister of Israel.
- 1988** Seventy people were killed when planes of the Italian Air Force aerobatics squad collided in mid-air and one crashed into the crowd during an air show at Ramstein, West Germany.
- 1990** Iraq declared occupied Kuwait the 19th province of Iraq, renamed Kuwait City Kadhima, and created a new district named after President Saddam Hussein.
- 1994** Father Jean-Marie Vincent, a prominent Haitian Roman Catholic priest loyal to deposed President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, was shot dead by suspected paramilitary gunmen.
- 1996** The marriage of Britain's Prince Charles and Princess Diana, which took place with pomp and pageantry in the year 1981, ended with a rubber-stamp divorce.
- 1999** A space capsule bearing the last full-time crew to inhabit Russia's ageing *Mir* space station landed safely on the Kazakh steppe. —Reuters



Benjamin Netanyahu

Car slams into Israel PM convoy

Jerusalem, Aug. 27: A car in Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu's convoy was severely damaged after a woman driver slammed into it.

The woman apparently lost control of her car when she emerged from a side street as Mr Netanyahu's convoy was driving through a London intersection and crashed into one of the cars.

There were no human injuries. However, the convoy vehicle carrying security personnel and the woman's car were badly damaged.

The London police believes that the woman was drunk, the daily *Ha'aretz* reported.

Mr Netanyahu and his wife were on their way back to a London hotel after attending a dinner on Monday night when the accident took place.

The convoy did not stop and continued driving, in line with the security regulations. The Israeli PM is on a trip to London and Berlin. —PTI

Artificial trees to cut carbon emissions

AGE CORRESPONDENT

LONDON

Aug. 27: Climate change is a big issue for all the governments the world over and now a British engineers' lobby group has suggested that geo-engineering could be used to remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

A range of potential geo-engineering options available for reducing carbon

dioxide from atmosphere include artificial trees, algae-coated buildings, and reflective buildings and roofs, a report on climate change and geo-engineering by the Institution of Mechanical Engineers said on Thursday. "Geo-engineering could be another potential component in our approach to climate change that could provide the world with extra time to decarbonise the global economy,"

The most cost-effective way of reducing carbon dioxide is the use of machines, or carbon dioxide filters, which can remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere

the institute said. The most cost-effective way of reducing carbon

dioxide is the use of machines, or carbon dioxide filters, which can remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. The machines, like trees, capture carbon dioxide from the air which is passed through it. These machines are so effective that 100,000 such trees would be able to remove all carbon from transport-related emissions in the UK, the head of the institute's environment and climate change

group, Dr Tim Fox, said. Recommending use of algae to reduce carbon dioxide, the institute said that algae naturally absorb carbon dioxide through photosynthesis. Strips of algae can be fitted to the outside of buildings and then periodically harvested from the surfaces and used as biofuel. Reducing the amount of solar radiation absorbed by the earth's climate has the potential to cool the planet.

UK hunts for 'burqa bandits'

AGE CORRESPONDENT

LONDON

Aug. 27: The British police is trying to unmask the identity of burqa-clad bandit, or bandits, who have struck three times in the last two months.

In the latest incident on Monday, three armed men, one wearing a full veil worn by Muslim women, robbed a jewellery store in Banbury, Oxfordshire. They escaped with a haul worth £279,000.

The trio were armed with a silver revolver and a sledge hammer, the Thames Valley police said. The robbery follows two robberies in two separate travel agents in Luton and Dunstable in the past two months and these two incidents are being investigated by the Bedfordshire police. The first robbery happened at First Choice Travel in the Broadway, Dunstable, on July 7, at around 10.15 am. A man dressed in a black burqa entered the store and threatened two female members of staff with a knife before taking a substantial amount of cash and escaping through the back door.

practice makes perfect



Students rehearse in Beijing on Thursday for China's 60th anniversary celebrations on October 1. This fall's celebration, to be held in Tiananmen Square, will begin with a keynote address from Chinese President Hu Jintao followed by a military parade and performances involving 200,000 people, 60 floats, and fireworks. PHOTO: AP

Malay bans Muslims from BEP concert

SEAN YOONG

KUALA LUMPUR

Aug. 27: Malaysia's government has barred Muslims from a concert by US hip-hop stars the Black Eyed Peas in September because the event is organised by Irish beer giant Guinness, an official said on Thursday.

The prohibition comes amid a clampdown on alcohol consumption among Malaysia's Muslim majority. A Muslim woman who drank beer in public was sentenced to caning by an Islamic court in August, though authorities this week agreed to review the penalty. Officials also recently curbed retail sales of liquor in a central state. In family



Black Eyed Peas

and personal matters, Muslims in Malaysia are governed by sharia law, which forbids the consumption of alcohol. The Black Eyed Peas will perform at a theme park near Kuala Lumpur on September 25 as part of worldwide celebrations marking the 250th anniversary of Guinness' flagship brewery in Dublin. —AP

NaqaTube 'clean' YouTube version

Dubai, Aug. 27: Sick and tired of profanities and explicit nature of some video clips on YouTube, a group of Saudis have developed a "clean" alternative called NaqaTube (Naqa being the Arabic word for 'pure').

The aim, as they put it, is to prevent the youth from watching sexually explicit video clips online, an Arab News report quoted a moderator of the website as saying. With millions of youth logging into YouTube each day, the group launched NaqaTube, which is simply an amalgamation of "clean" clips from YouTube.

Abu Ibraheem, one of the moderators of the website, said that clips on NaqaTube are safe and often edited prior to being uploaded. The website's logo is "Participate with us in a clean website." The website also

The aim behind developing NaqaTube is to prevent the youth from watching sexually explicit video clips online



censors clips that are against the government, individuals and scholars, or which mock people in general, the report said. Women's images are totally forbidden, along with music.

"Our dream is to decline the number of visitors to YouTube. Our website has received from 5,000 to 6,000 visitors since its launch two months ago," Mr Ibraheem said.

Much of the material on the site is religiously inclined and the site's front page displays links and screenshots to over 10 channels mainly featuring scholars, preachers, children and other Islamic material.

The website also hosts clips of scholars from the Arab world delivering lectures and Islamic discourse. —PTI

Cambridge to archive dying cultures

London, Aug. 27: Experts at the University of Cambridge have launched an ambitious project to create a digital archive of languages and cultures that are fast becoming extinct in this age of globalisation.

Titled the "World Oral Literature Project", among the first activities is to archive the vocal repertoire of Tashi Tsering, the royal singer of Lo Monthang,

Mustang, Nepal. Four weeks of fieldwork were conducted with Tashi Tsering and Karma Wangyal Gurung in Mustang, during which 51 songs from the orally transmitted Kha Lu repertoire were recorded, transcribed and translated. Project managers say some Indian languages also need to be documented and preserved in the digital archive.

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"You cannot protect these cultures unless they have been documented first.

There might be a community in south India that has a series of songs once taught by their grandfathers which the youngsters no longer learn," Dr Mark Turin, a research associate at Cambridge and the project director, said.

"We can start by providing some equipment and training so that communities can document the songs, at the same time creating a perma-

nent archive. There are a number of benefits to globalisation...But there is also an urgent need to document their forms of cultural expression before they are eroded," he added.

The project led by the university's Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, has handed out around 10 grants to tribes from Mongolia to Nigeria. —PTI

Teacher burns students during lesson on 'hell'

Jakarta, Aug. 27: An Indonesian teacher has been suspended after she allegedly burned her students with matches to make a point that hell is much hotter than match fire, a media report said on Thursday.

The teacher at a junior high school in the West Java city of Bandung lit matchsticks and placed the flames close to her students' hands during an Islamic religious lesson on Tuesday, the Detik.Com news portal

The teacher wanted to make the point that hell is much hotter than match fire. She has been suspended pending an internal investigation.

said. "She said hell was mostly occupied by women. That's why we were targeted," Detik.Com quoted one of the students, Siti Nurjanah, as saying.

The teacher pressed the matchstick on the cheek of one of the students who blew the flame out because she was scared, the student reportedly said.

School principal Erik Sudeni said the teacher had been suspended pending an internal investigation.

Indonesia is the world's most populous Muslim country with more than 85 per cent of its 230 million people following Islam. —DPA

Dead Sea shrinks a metre per year

Washington, Aug. 27: Reports indicate that the Dead Sea is still shrinking fast, with water levels continuing to drop at the rate of about one metre per year.

Praised far and wide for the reputed healing powers of its minerals and waters, the Dead Sea has been luring visitors for thousands of years. But these days, tourists see a very different lake from the one that others would have witnessed a few decades ago. According to a report in National Geographic News, the sea sits in the lowest place on earth. However, in the last 40 years, it's dropped more than 80 feet.



Today, the Dead Sea continues to drop at the rate of about one meter per year. This dramatic shortage is particularly evident at Israel's Ein Gedi Spa on the southern shores of the Dead Sea.

"The beach was here, and now (it's) far away. In 30 years, the beach (will) have disappeared," said Alon Shachal, Ein Gedi Spa Manager. —ANI