

SKATING QUEENS



Gold medalist Sasha Cohen of the United States, centre, flanked by silver medalist Fumie Suguri, left, of Japan and bronze medalist Viktoria Volchkova, of Russia, during the Skate Canada competition in Quebec City.

Out with the old as Turks go to the polls

Turkey. The first Turks cast their votes in eastern Turkey early yesterday in an election expected to bring a complete overhaul of the political landscape in the NATO member and European Union candidate country.

Turkey goes to the polls seeking change after two years of economic crisis that are expected to play into the hands of a party pledging social justice but suspected by some of Islamist tendencies. (Reuters)

Breakthrough in Sri Lanka peace talks

Thailand. The second round of Sri Lankan peace talks ended yesterday with a series of breakthroughs, including an agreement by Tamil rebel and government negotiators to discuss power-sharing after 19 years of civil war.

The four-day talks also resulted in major agreements to set up two key committees - one to handle humanitarian and reconstruction needs in war-torn areas of northern and eastern Sri Lanka; the other to ensure the resettlement of people displaced from strategic areas now occupied by government troops. (AP)

Oracle secure second place in Cup race

Sailing. Software billionaire Larry Ellison's Oracle BMW Racing overtook US rivals OneWorld to reach the quarter-finals of the America's Cup challengers series in second place after winning two delayed races on yesterday.

Sweden's Victory Challenge claimed fifth place on a comeback from Britain's GBR Challenge and also won the right to choose who they sail in the quarter-finals. (Reuters)

Sun Micro steadfast on Microsoft suit

United States. One of Microsoft Corp's most tenacious rivals, Sun Microsystems Inc, vowed on Friday to keep fighting Microsoft with a billion-dollar lawsuit and urged state attorneys-general to appeal their antitrust case despite a legal setback.

A federal judge on Friday endorsed an antitrust settlement between Microsoft and the US Department of Justice, dismissing the protests and proposals of nine states that sought stricter terms against the software maker. (Reuters)

British police thwart "Posh Spice" kidnap

Scotland Yard got lead from newspaper report of plot

Detectives foiled a plot to kidnap Victoria Beckham, the pop star wife of England soccer captain David Beckham, and have arrested five people.

Scotland Yard said armed officers arrested four men and one woman in London's Docklands area and in Morden, south of London, on suspicion of theft and conspiracy to kidnap.

The arrests were made after information was passed to police by tabloid Sunday newspaper The News of the World, whose reporters had infiltrated a gang of Romanians and Albanians.

"As a result of information from the News of the World, SO7 Kidnap Unit conducted an operation to arrest a group of individuals who are suspected of having been involved in theft and a conspiracy to commit kidnap," said Detective Chief Superintendent John Coles, head of London's anti-kidnap unit.

The five were being held at central London police stations. "I'm in absolute and total shock," Victoria Beckham, who shot to fame with the Spice Girls, told the newspaper.

"It's clear these people were serious and that, of course, has scared the life out of me. It's ter-

rifying that someone would want to do that to you and your children," she added.

Victoria has been the target of a kidnap scare before. The Beckhams hired a bodyguard after newspapers reported in January 2000 that police had uncovered a plan to snatch Victoria and her son Brooklyn and hold them for one million pound ransom. No arrests were made.

In March 2000, police were called in after reports the couple had been sent a photograph of Victoria with a bullet drawn on it and the message "You are going to get what's coming to you". (Reuters)



New York City delegation members including New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg, left, celebrate their city being named the US candidate city to host the 2012 Olympic Games.

New York City chosen as US candidate for 2012 Olympics

Other cities bidding for Games include London, Moscow and Paris

The US Olympic Committee on Saturday chose New York City as its candidate to stage the 2012 Summer Olympics after the city put on a flashy presentation that promised triathlon in Central Park and boxing in Madison Square Garden.

The victory sets the stage for the next big competition when the International Olympic Committee in Switzerland chooses the winner in 2005 from among other major world cities such as London, Moscow and Paris. The United States last hosted a Summer Olympics in Atlanta in 1996.

New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg cautioned that the city still had to win against its international rivals. The decision by the USOC to favour New York's bid over that of San Francisco was made after both cities made presentations, with NY's delegation making the case for the city. (Reuters)

Two killed 40 injured in Indonesia quake

Heavy rain yesterday forced thousands of residents to return to their destroyed houses a day after a massive earthquake of a magnitude as high as 7.7 rocked Indonesia's Aceh province, killing two people and injuring at least 40.

Indonesia's Meteorology and Geophysics Agency said Saturday's quake was magnitude 5.6 and was centred onshore. But Australian scientists said they registered an offshore epicenter that was much stronger, regis-

tering 7.7 and capable of massive damage and loss of life. The Hong Kong Observatory and the US Geological Survey both recorded the quake at 7.5.

Another earthquake with a magnitude of 4.8 struck the same region hours later, Indonesian seismologists said.

More than 4,000 people spent the night in makeshift tents in football fields and mosques, fearing more aftershocks. A bridge over a river collapsed.

Two people were killed - a 60-year-old woman found under

the rubble on Saturday and a man who died early yesterday at the main hospital in Sinabang on Simeulue island, 400 kilometres (250 miles) from Sumatra's northern tip.

At least nine people including a child in a coma, were treated in tents outside the hospital.

"There may be others trapped under rubble. We cannot get to them as the roads are bad," said a hospital spokesman. He said the hospital desperately needed oxygen tanks, blankets and tents. (AP)

Radical cleric frequent visitor to Australia

Australia. The alleged spiritual leader of the radical Islamic group Jemaah Islamiyah visited Australia 11 times in the 1990s, probably in a bid to establish influence in the country, the government said yesterday.

Federal Attorney-General Daryl Williams said Abu Bakar Bashir, currently being held by Indonesian police on charges of ordering a deadly string of church bombings, last visited Australia in 1998. (AP)

Butler case prompts criticism of royals

Britain. The dramatic collapse of the theft case against the late Princess Diana's butler Paul Burrell prompted calls yesterday for the British justice system to be administered in the name of the people rather than the monarch.

Queen Elizabeth's belated intervention in the trial last week, just before Burrell was about to take the stand, allowed the 44-year-old butler to walk free. (Reuters)

Sad Italy buries earthquake dead

Italy. Family, friends and neighbours were steeling themselves yesterday for the mass funeral of 26 children and three adults killed when an earthquake flattened an Italian town's only school and crushed buildings.

The tiny white coffins will be carried up the parched slopes of San Giuliano di Puglia to the cemetery for the mass burial in the small central-south Italian farming town, which has been devastated by the tragedy. (Reuters)

Beauties wear Gadhafi T-shirts at contest

Libya. Women from around the world gathered in Libya this week for the nation's first international beauty pageant, where contestants ditched swimsuits and sequins for T-shirts and dresses adorned with pictures of Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi.

Libya hosted the pageant and Internet users from all over the world chose the new "Miss Net World." Britain's Lucy Layton won the title on Saturday. Layton and 22 other women from around the world met Gadhafi and toured the north African country's beaches, desert and monuments for a week. (AP)

Big support for Ivory Coast government

Ivory Coast. Tens of thousands of people marched in Ivory Coast's main city Abidjan on Saturday to back President Laurent Gbagbo as rebel and government negotiators took a break from talks to end the war in the West African country.

Demonstrators chanting "We want Gbagbo", converged on a central square from all parts of the city to hear speeches from youth leaders. (Reuters)