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Indonesia ferry sinks in squall

A ferry carrying more than 200 people has tipped over off the coast of Sumatra in Indonesia, officials say.

A spokesman for the Indonesian maritime authorities told the BBC that the ship rolled after being hit by a big wave.

Several rescue boats have been deployed at the scene and a search operation is underway.

Ferry accidents linked to over-crowding and poor vessel maintenance kill hundreds of passengers in Indonesia each year.

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Blasts kill five in India's Assam

At least four people have been killed in at least two bomb blasts in the north-eastern Indian state of Assam.

The explosions happened in the town of Nalbari, about 70 km (43 miles) from the state capital, Guwahati.

Police said the devices had been placed in a bicycle. At least 10 other people were hurt, reports said.

The police reportedly suspect separatist militants from the United Liberation Front of Assam (Ulfa) carried out the blasts.

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Chinese mine blast toll doubles

At least 87 people are now known to have died in a coal mine blast in northern China, state media report.

Another 21 miners are reportedly still missing in the Xinxing pit in Hegang City, Heilongjiang province.

The toll has more than doubled from 42 dead earlier. Some 528 workers were in the mine when the blast hit before dawn on Saturday local time, said Xinhua.

The death toll makes the accident among the worst in recent years in China's notoriously dangerous mines.

Rescue official Zhang Fucheng was quoted by Reuters news agency as saying that attempts to reach the trapped miners were being hampered by dense gas and collapsed tunnels.

Xinhua said President Hu Jintao and Prime Minister Wen Jiabao had been in contact with rescue workers, and that Vice Premier Zhang Dejiang had visited the scene.

Lax safety

The blast in the mine, in the region bordering Russia, occurred at 0230 local time on Saturday (1830 GMT on Friday). More than 400 people managed to escape.

CHINA'S WORST MINE DISASTERS

- **Feb 1950:** Yiluo mine, Henan province - 174 dead
- **May 1960:** Laobaidong mine, Shanxi province - 684 dead
- **Sept 2000:** Muchonggou mine, Guizhou province - 162 dead
- **Nov 2004:** Chenjiashan mine, Shaanxi province - 166 dead
- **Feb 2005:** Sunjiawan mine, Liaoning province - 210 dead
- **Nov 2005:** Dongfeng mine, Heilongjiang - 171 dead
- **Aug 2007:** Xintai City, Shandong province - 181 dead
- **Dec 2007:** Rui Zhiyuan mine, Shanxi province - 105 dead

Many of the injured were being treated at the Hegang Mining Bureau Hospital, which said all 800 of its medical workers had joined the rescue operation, Xinhua reported.

The mine is operated by the state-owned Heilongjiang Longmei Mining Holding Group and has an annual capacity of 1.45m tonnes of coal, said Xinhua.

State-run mines are generally considered safer than private collieries, whose lax safety standards have contributed to a high rate of accidents.

Most are blamed on a failure to follow safety guidelines, often in an attempt to cut costs and meet an increasing demand for fuel.

The Chinese authorities have been trying to deal with the dangers by closing smaller mining operations and forcing local authorities to regulate the industry, says the BBC's Michael Bristow in Beijing.

The government closed some 1,000 small mines in a recent safety drive, and says the number of miners killed has been halved as a result.

But miners are still dying at a rate of six a day, and independent labour groups say many accidents are covered up in the drive for profit and coal.

In February, more than 70 workers were killed in an explosion at a mine in Shanxi province.

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Live - South Africa v England

Second one-day international, Centurion:

LIVE TEXT COMMENTARY (all times GMT)

e-mail tms@bbc.co.uk (with 'For Tom Fordyce' in the subject), text **81111** (with "CRICKET" as first word) or use **606** (Not all comments can be used)

By Tom Fordyce

0735: Teams Adil Rashid preferred to James Tredwell, Tim Bresnan gets the nod ahead of Liam Plunkett. No Ally Cook nor Joe Denly, and Paul Collingwood in the slot for his 171st ODI. Hashim Amla will open the SA batting in the absence of Big Jacques. **0733:** Let's not mess about - it's the toss. England skipper Andrew Strauss calls correctly and decides to stick South Africa. "It'll be a pretty good batting wicket, but it might get a bit slow later," he says. **0730:** "Every day is like Sunday," Morrissey once lamented. "Every day is silent and grey." Clearly the bequipped crooner had forgotten the joys of 50-over international cricket. Maybe he was more of a snooker man

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Israeli air strikes target Gaza

Several Palestinians have been injured after Israeli aircraft carried out airstrikes against targets in the Gaza Strip, officials say.

Israel's military said the attacks targeted two weapons-making factories and a smuggling tunnel.

The strikes were in retaliation for a rocket fired into southern Israel from the Hamas-controlled enclave, it added.

The attacks came a day after Hamas and other Gaza-based militants said they were going to stop firing rockets.

Fathi Hammad, who acts as Hamas interior minister, said the ceasefire aimed to prevent retaliatory attacks by Israel and build stability.

But he said rockets would continue to be fired from the Gaza Strip in the event of any Israeli incursions.

Sporadic attacks

Israel's military said Sunday's air strikes were in response to a rocket fired from the Gaza Strip on Saturday which caused no damage when it landed near the southern Israeli city of Sderot.

Hamas has observed a ceasefire for months, but other groups have carried out sporadic cross-border attacks.

Israel says rocket-building materials are still being smuggled into Gaza through tunnels dug from the Egyptian border.

Rocket attacks have decreased since Israeli forces launched an offensive against Hamas in the Gaza strip last December and January.

About 1,300 Palestinians and 10 Israeli soldiers were killed in the three weeks of fighting. Three Israeli citizens also died in rocket attacks during the operation.

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US healthcare bill clears Senate test

The United States Senate is preparing to hold its first vote on a major bill designed to overhaul US healthcare provision.

The vote, which requires 60 out of the 100 Senate votes to pass, will decide whether Democrat leader Harry Reid's bill can go forward for debate.

The Democrats need the votes of two independents to make up the 60, as the chamber's 40 Republicans are opposed.

US President Barack Obama has made healthcare reform a domestic priority.

Mr Reid's proposed \$849bn (£508bn) bill would extend coverage to 94% of eligible citizens, he said on Friday.

The legislation, which was outlined in a 2,074-page document, is said by Democratic aides to reduce deficits by \$127bn (£76bn) over a decade and by as much as \$650bn (£389bn) in the 10 years after that.

But it has been criticised by Republicans as being too expensive. They say they will block it, and debate is expected to be fiery.

Anything less than 60 votes for the initial measure will leave the bill vulnerable to Republican delaying tactics.

The House of Representatives narrowly passed its own version of the reforms earlier this month.

Medicare cuts

Under Mr Reid's bill, most Americans would have to have health insurance, while private insurers would be banned from refusing to provide insurance because applicants had pre-existing medical conditions.

NEXT STEPS

- 30 Nov - Senators return from Thanksgiving recess to debate and propose amendments to the bill
- At least three weeks later - Senators vote on final bill
- If passed, conference committee set up to reconcile Senate and House bills
- Both chambers vote on final version
- If passed, President Obama signs bill into law

Q&A: US healthcare reform

The US health system 'headache'

US healthcare: Who wants what

Insurance would be made more affordable with subsidies available to help those in lower income bands, the Democrats say.

People would also be able to take part in new insurance market places and be able to choose to buy government-sold insurance from 2014, a provision intended to help regulate the prices charged by private companies.

Large companies would be required by law to provide coverage to staff. The costs would be covered by government cuts on future Medicare spending.

Republican Senate leader Mitch McConnell said the bill had "been behind closed doors for weeks" and that the forthcoming debate would not be "short", the Associated Press news agency reported.

If the Senate passes its bill, it must then be reconciled with the House of Representatives bill and voted on again before the programme can become law.

Mr Reid's bill differs to the House bill in that he calls for an increase of a half percentage point in Medicare payroll tax for people with an income of over \$200,000 (£119,779) per annum - rising to \$250,000 (£149,724) for couples.

There is also a tax on high-value insurance policies that is not contained in the House version of the bill.

If approved, the legislation could lead to the biggest changes in American healthcare in decades.

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Azeri president threatens Armenia

Azeri President Ilham Aliyev has warned he is ready to use force to wrest control of a disputed enclave from Armenia if last-ditch peace talks fail.

He said talks starting on Sunday in Munich were the final hope of settling the Nagorno Karabakh issue peacefully.

A fragile ceasefire has been in place in the region since it was the scene of a brutal war between the two countries in the 1990s.

Both nations lay claim to the enclave, currently under Armenian control.

In comments broadcast on Azeri TV on Saturday, President Aliyev said that if the Munich talks failed to reach agreement he would be "left with no other option".

"We have the full right to liberate our land by military means," he said.

Western diplomats attending the talks, the latest in a round of internationally mediated meetings on the dispute, have said they hope the situation will not reach that point.

Some 30,000 people died in the Nagorno Karabakh conflict, which erupted after the mountainous region declared independence in 1991.

The region and seven surrounding Azeri district have been under Armenian control since the Russian-brokered ceasefire in 1994.

Azerbaijan has never ruled out military action to take back the land and has spent billions on dollars on building up its military.

The BBC's Tom Esslemont, in the South Caucasus region, says Mr Aliyev is using stronger language than ever before because the talks come at a critical time.

The meeting will be the first since Armenia and Turkey - an ally of Azerbaijan - normalised diplomatic relations after a century of hostility.

That move has left Azerbaijan feeling isolated, says our correspondent.

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Jackson glove sells for \$350,000

A rhinestone-encrusted glove worn by Michael Jackson the first time he performed the Moonwalk has been sold at auction for \$350,000 (£212,000).

The glove, among 70 items belonging to the late singer which went on sale in New York, was sold for nine times the expected price.

A jacket worn by Jackson on his 1989 "Bad" tour was sold for \$225,000 while a fedora hat went for \$22,000.

The auction in New York attracted thousands of bidders around the world.

Auctioneer Darren Julien said the 1983 television appearance when Jackson first displayed the Moonwalk - wearing the glove - had been his "most historical performance".

Mr Julien said he had had no idea the sale would be so big.

Prices for Michael Jackson memorabilia now outstrip those for items belonging to Elvis or Marilyn Monroe, he added.

"It's a tribute to his life and career - he's truly an amazing artist," said Mr Julien.

The glove was bought by Hong Kong businessman Hoffman Ma on behalf of a hotel in Macau China, where it will now go on display.

Including taxes and fees, the final amount paid was \$420,000.

Michael Jackson died at his home in Los Angeles in June at the age of 50 after a drugs overdose.

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Polls open in Romanian election

Polls are due to open in Romania in the first round of a presidential election, with 12 candidates vying for office.

The frontrunners are the centre-right incumbent, Traian Basescu, and his Social Democrat rival, Mircea Geoana.

The election is expected to put an end to the political crisis which followed the collapse of the centre-right government of Emil Boc in October.

For six weeks recession-hit Romania has been in the hands of a caretaker government.

Sunday's is the country's first presidential election as a member of the EU.

Mr Basescu, who has been president for five years, wants a mandate to overcome what he says is the blocking of his political reforms by opposition parties.

Mr Geoana - a former US ambassador and foreign affairs minister - is offering voters an ambitious economic stimulus package.

Latest polls show the Liberal candidate Crin Antonescu trailing in third place.

The BBC's Nick Thorpe in Bucharest says Romania's current lack of effective government is jeopardising the payment of the next segment of an IMF-led loan.

A run-off will be held on 6 December if no candidate wins an absolute majority in the first round.

The winner will appoint a new premier and have an influence on long-delayed reforms aimed at bringing the country up to EU standards.

Analysts say corruption is still widespread in Romania, nearly three years after the country joined the EU.

A referendum is also being held on Sunday to decide whether to scrap one of the two chambers of parliament and reduce the number of deputies.

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Large Hadron Collider's fast progress

By Paul Rincon

Science reporter, BBC News

Researchers working on the Large Hadron Collider (LHC) say they are delighted with the progress made since the machine restarted on Friday.

One official said the collider had done more in a few hours than it did in nine days of operations last year.

The LHC is being used to smash together beams of protons in a bid to shed light on the nature of the Universe.

Housed in a 27km-long circular tunnel under the Franco-Swiss border, it is the world's largest machine.

During the experiment, scientists will search for signs of the Higgs boson, a sub-atomic particle that is crucial to our current understanding of physics. Although it is predicted to exist, scientists have never found it.

"It's all been pretty positive so far... Now, [the team] is knuckling down to the hard work"

**James Gillies,
Cern**

[In pictures: LHC restarts](#)

[Large Hadron Collider: Guide](#)

[Q&A: Fixing a particle smasher](#)

[The LHC: worth the wait](#)

The machine was heavily damaged when an electrical fault caused a tonne of liquid helium to leak into the tunnel just nine days after it was first launched in September last year.

During 14 months of repairs dozens of giant superconducting magnets that accelerate particles at the speed of light had to be replaced.

Operated by the European Organization for Nuclear Research (Cern), the LHC will create similar conditions to those which were present moments after the Big Bang.

"We are further advanced now than where we were after five days of experiment last year," said Cern's director of accelerators Steve Myers.

He added that the extra year had allowed researchers to upgrade instrumentation and computer software.

Better beam

"It's all been pretty positive so far," said James Gillies, director of communications for Cern. "Now, [the team] is knuckling down to the hard work."

He added: "We're not expecting any major milestones to be reached over the next few days."

Operations team members spent Saturday injecting protons into the LHC's 27km-long "ring", attempting to improve the lifetime of the beams.

- 1 - 14 quadrupole magnets replaced
- 2 - 39 dipole magnets replaced
- 3 - More than 200 electrical connections repaired
- 4 - Over 4km of beam pipe cleaned
- 5 - New restraining system installed for some magnets
- 6 - Hundreds of new helium ports being installed around machine
- 7 - Thousands of detectors added to early warning system

"Right now we've got a beam lifetime of half an hour, which is pretty good for where we are. But ultimately, we want to keep a beam in the machine for 10-12 hours. There's a lot of detailed, nitty-gritty work in order to get there," said Dr Gillies.

Engineers had discussed the possibility of attempting to increase the collider's energy to a record-breaking level of 1.2 trillion electron volts this weekend.

Only the Tevatron particle accelerator in Chicago, US, has so far approached this energy, operating at just under one trillion electron volts.

However, this plan now looks unlikely. Instead, engineers will probably concentrate on preparing the machine for its first low-energy collisions, scheduled to happen in the next 10-15 days.

Progress on restarting the machine went more quickly than expected on Friday. It was not anticipated that engineers would try to circulate a proton beam until 0600 on Saturday at the earliest.

Two stable proton beams had already been circulated in opposite directions around the machine by midnight (GMT) on Friday.

Engineers first circulated a beam all the way around the LHC on 10 September 2008.

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Hearing for US army base 'gunman'

The army psychiatrist charged over the Fort Hood army base massacre in Texas has had his first court hearing - in a hospital room where he is recovering.

A military magistrate ruled that Major Nidal Hasan must remain for now in the military hospital at San Antonio.

He faces 13 counts of murder over the 5 November shootings at the base. More than two dozen others were injured.

Maj Hasan's lawyer told AP news agency his client, who is in intensive care, had been advised he is paralysed.

He was shot by civilian members of Fort Hood's police force during the incident.

Saturday's hearing came amid reports Maj Hasan had stepped up correspondence with a radical cleric before the attack.

'Politically correct'

E-mails obtained by the FBI showed the accused had begun to discuss secret financial transfers with Yemen-based al-Qaeda sympathiser Anwar al-Awlaki, according to the Washington Post.

It has emerged that at least 18 e-mails between Maj Hasan, a US-born Muslim, and Mr al-Awlaki had been intercepted by federal investigators.

Senate Armed Services Committee chairman Carl Levin said on Friday he would investigate why those communications were not passed on to military officials.

FBI and military officials have provided differing accounts of why the e-mails apparently did not reach army investigators before the shooting.

Arizona Senator John McCain told AP news agency on Saturday he believed "political correctness" had played a role in preventing concerns about Maj Hasan being acted upon.

Mr al-Awlaki, who was released from a Yemeni jail last year, was once an imam at the mosque in Falls Church, Virginia, where Maj Hasan and his family occasionally worshipped.

He now runs a website denouncing US policy. It has praised Maj Hasan's alleged actions at Fort Hood as heroic.

Meanwhile, Maj Hasan's civilian lawyer, John Galligan, said his client, had been told he is permanently paralysed.

Mr Galligan told AP news agency Maj Hasan - who is under guard - had no feeling from the chest down and limited movement in his arms.

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Eradicating polio

By Konnie Huq

TV presenter

Uttar Pradesh in northern India has a population of more than 190 million and the world's highest concentration of polio infection.

This is one of the final frontiers where the war against polio is being fought.

This crippling disease is now endemic in just four countries - India, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Nigeria.

In 1985 Rotary International spearheaded the campaign to eradicate polio and pledged to make sure all the world's children would be immunised against the disease.

This has meant cases have been cut by a staggering 99% since then.

But there is still 1% to go and so a huge army of volunteers have been mobilised to help and take part in the final push to rid the world of Polio.

I joined 86 British Rotarians on a trip to India to see Rotary's Thanks for Life/End Polio Now campaign in action as more than 65 million children in two northern Indian states under the age of five were to be targeted for immunisation against polio in just two days.

'Still endemic'

The campaign was to be focused in Uttar Pradesh (UP) and Bihar - the only two states left in India where the disease is still endemic.

Two million children in the Indian capital, Delhi, were also to be immunised, a process which has to be repeated every few weeks to ensure infallibility.

"One problem with polio is that, although crippling and debilitating, the disease is not life threatening"

I started my two day polio immunisation drive in the capital of Uttar Pradesh, Lucknow, at a particularly significant place - the Islamic Centre.

Until recently, 70% of the cases of polio were found to be affecting this minority community in UP because of unsubstantiated fears that the

drops were part of a Western plot to make Muslims infertile in an attempt to control the Islamic population.

One rumour even says that this conspiracy theory was started because the medical supplies boxes had been covered in the word STERILE!

Rotarian Ajay Saxena, member of Rotary International's India National Polio Plus Committee, was instrumental in getting Muslim leaders together and as a result, the immunisation campaign has been backed by the clerics and the rates of polio among the Muslim community have dropped to 30%.

While sitting down for a cup of tea at the Islamic Centre, with Maulana Khalid Rasheed, general secretary of the Islamic Centre of India, he told me: "The thing is that about five years ago there were a number of misconceptions prevailing in the Muslim community that the polio vaccination was a conspiracy of the foreign powers to make the Muslims infertile or impotent so that the numbers of Muslims in India could not be increased.

"We have been able to tell the Muslim community that the polio immunisation has nothing to do with any type of conspiracy. It is only to bring an end to polio in India.

"And that there is no such thing as a conspiracy as far as this vaccination is concerned and we have been successful in removing that misconception."

Administering vaccine

Soon the time came for me to administer the drops to children myself.

A potentially life-saving experience - just two drops can help stop a child being crippled by polio.

Some 2,700 booths had been situated in and around the streets of Lucknow giving out the vaccine.

The British Rotarians also played their full part in administering drops and helping to get parents out to the booths with their young ones.

At one polio booth I met Saleem - a 17-year-old polio sufferer - not lucky enough to receive the polio drops when he was a child.

Saleem is now an orphan as his parents died six months ago.

He is also homeless, living on the streets, existing hand to mouth.

He believes strongly that the immunisation drops are important.

One problem with polio is that, although crippling and debilitating, the disease is not life threatening. This means that hospitals see it as a low priority and more often than not will not treat it.

Saleem was told when he was younger that he would be treatable and able to walk again, but because of the lack of care on offer, he cannot walk and relies on a pair of old crutches he managed to obtain through a charity.

Disability burden

In a country like India, a disability means that you cannot work to earn money and so have to rely on handouts and begging.

Moreover poor families often can't cope with the financial and physical burden of a crippled child so are sometimes forced to abandon them.

Since Rotary pledged in 1985 to immunise all the world's children against polio, it has been working with the World Health Organization, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention to do just that.

Thanks to the work of Rotary more than two billion children have been immunised against polio worldwide.

"As long as one case of polio remains in the world - no child is safe from this deadly disease"

In India, the government has pledged a further \$657m to immunise the country's children against polio over the next three years.

Joining in the campaign now is Microsoft Founder Bill Gates who through his charity, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, has donated \$355m to Rotary to help in the battle to eradicate polio.

The immunisation campaign means no child is missed and that includes going to the slums.

Polio victims are often from poorer backgrounds as infection occurs through contact with the faeces of a polio sufferer.

Naturally insanitary conditions and poor hygiene are big contributors to the disease.

In Delhi, I accompanied health visitors and Rotarians to immunise children in an unbelievably cramped slum where 1,000 people live in

low level shacks making a living sifting through rubbish to find anything that could be recyclable.

The stench and squalor was like nothing I have seen, although I have visited numerous shanty town and slum areas before.

These people are living, eating and sleeping on a rubbish tip, in and among decay, debris and flies. Flies everywhere.

Last few miles

For the victims of polio there is some hope here though.

Although public hospitals are reluctant to treat the disease and private hospitals make no money from the poor people affected by the disease, progress is being made in Delhi's oldest hospital, St Stephen's, where there is a dedicated polio ward.

Head of the department of orthopaedics, Dr Mathew Varghese, said that improvements in water and sanitation, a key factor, meant the number of child polio cases they were seeing was dropping.

But as long as one case of polio remains in the world - no child is safe from this deadly disease.

There were about 500 new cases a day in India more than 20 years ago - now there are only about 500 a year, so the battle is being won.

So how near is a polio free India and a polio free world

Deepak Kapur, chairman of Rotary's India National Polioplus Committee told me: "At the beginning of the programme, there was no place in India that was polio free.

"Now, more than 99% of the job has been done but there is still a long way to go because the last few miles are the most difficult.

"And I expect since the virus is hiding in these last bastions, it won't be long before we actually win.

"Although I am not a soothsayer, I think that in 2011, we should be able to do it."

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Angola head urges action on graft

Angola's President Jose Eduardo dos Santos has called for a crackdown on government corruption.

The president, who has been in power for 30 years, said his country's oil wealth had been squandered by irresponsible officials.

Mr dos Santos said members of his MPLA party had been "too timid" in their attitude towards government spending.

Last week Angola was named by Transparency International as one of the world's most corrupt nations.

Mr dos Santos said the lack of supervision over spending had led to fraud and wasted public funds.

"The thing is to agree to a sort of zero tolerance "

Jose Eduardo dos Santos

Dos Santos - Angola's silent leader

In a speech to his party, he said: "Irresponsible people, people of bad faith, have taken advantage of this circumstance to squander resources and to carry out illicit and even damaging and fraudulent acts of management."

He called for further transparency and said good government required a lot more work.

"The thing is to agree to a sort of zero tolerance after the sixth congress," he said.

The party is due to hold a national congress next month.

Angola is Africa's biggest oil exporter, and investment from China has helped the economy make a remarkable recovery following decades of civil war.

But according to figures from the World Bank, most of the population lives on less than \$2 (£1.2) a day.

Human rights groups have urged Mr dos Santos - who is reported to be one of the richest people in the country - to lead by example. He denies any wrong-doing.

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Scotland 9-8 Australia

Scotland (3) 9

Pens: Godman 2 Drop-goals: Paterson

Australia (3) 8

Try: Cross Pens: Giteau

By James Standley

Scotland ended a 16-match losing run against Australia as an awesome defensive performance set up victory over the Wallabies at Murrayfield.

Australia dominated territory and possession but it was 3-3 at the break as Scotland fly-half Phil Godman cancelled out a Matt Giteau penalty.

A Godman penalty and Chris Paterson drop-goal saw Scotland edge ahead.

And although Ryan Cross went over for an injury-time try, Giteau's missed conversion handed the Scots victory.

The last time Scotland lowered the Wallabies' colours was way back in 1982 when they won 12-7 in Brisbane, but since that win the Australians have grown into a major force on the world stage, something that cannot be said about the Scots.

In recent times they have struggled to make an impression in the Six Nations, let alone at a global level, but after several years in the wilderness the appointment of Andy Robinson as coach has paid immediate dividends.

606: DEBATE

"You only had to listen to the Murrayfield crowd to understand the passion the Scots played with today."

BB

The former England boss may have opened his account with a win over Fiji last weekend but victory over the Wallabies looked highly unlikely.

No-one had told the Scottish players that they were not supposed to win, though, and they put their bodies on the line to clinch one of the biggest upsets of recent times.

The visitors' cause was not helped by the normally accurate Giteau missing three kickable penalties, in addition to the crucial late conversion, as he struggled to come to terms with the swirling wind in Edinburgh, but he did manage to get the scoreboard ticking over with a fifth-minute effort.

The Wallabies came desperately close to scoring the first try of the game soon after, but some heroic defence from the hosts saw powerful Australia number eight Wycliff Palu stopped inches short.

The visitors came even closer to a try when Giteau sprung Stephen Moore through a hole in the heart of the Scottish defence but more superb defence, this time from Rory Lamont and Chris Cusiter, prevented the hooker from getting the ball down.

Scotland suffered a blow as Cusiter was forced off with a head injury, and it looked as though it was only a matter of time before the Wallabies opened their try account, but as the game went past the 20-minute mark Scotland finally began to secure some possession.

A couple of powerful mauls from the forwards gave them some belief, and when the Australian pack infringed to halt a rumble from the Scottish eight, Godman punished the visitors with a well-struck penalty.

The Australians soon regained control of both territory and possession but more ferocious Scottish defence meant they could not cross the hosts' line, and a missed penalty and drop-goal from Giteau meant the two sides were locked together at 3-3 at the interval.

Australia continued to enjoy the upper hand but the Scots refused to yield and missed penalties from both Giteau and Godman ensured the game was still deadlocked approaching the final quarter.

Scotland were having some joy when they kept the ball at close quarters and they managed to edge ahead on a rare foray into enemy territory when Dean Mumm was caught on the wrong side of a ruck and Godman landed the difficult penalty.

Australia continued to enjoy the lion's share of the ball and it continued to look inevitable they would find a winning score.

But Scotland defended with a ferocity that would have warmed the cockles of ex-flanker Robinson's heart and Australia failed to keep their nerve when it mattered.

With 15 minutes to go Quade Cooper had a two-on-one overlap after the Aussies had sucked in the remaining defence but his miss-pass to Drew Mitchell was wastefully forward.

And when Scotland went up the other end and extended their lead to six points through Paterson's sweetly struck drop-goal even the most pessimistic of their fans started to believe victory could be theirs.

However, there was still time for Australia to launch a series of late attacks and they hammered away at the Scottish line with increasing desperation

As the clock ticked over into injury time a last assault from the Wallabies saw them come within inches of scoring several times before Giteau sent the ball wide for replacement centre Cross to power over.

That left the fly-half with a tricky conversion to spare the Wallabies' blushes but not for the first time the ball drifted to the left of the posts as the delirious Murrayfield crowd threatened to lift the roof off the stadium.

Scotland: R Lamont, S Lamont, A Grove, G Morrison, S Danielli, P Godman, C Cusiter (captain); A Jacobsen, R Ford, M Low, N Hines, A Kellock, A Strokosch, J Barclay, J Beattie.

Replacements: D Hall, K Traynor, J White, R Vernon, R Lawson, C Paterson, N De Luca

Australia: A Ashley-Cooper; P Hynes, D Ioane, Q Cooper, D Mitchell; M Giteau, W Genia; W Palu, G Smith, R Elsom (capt); M Chisholm, J Horwill; B Alexander, S Moore, Be Robinson.

Replacements: T Polota-Nau, S Kepu, D Mumm, R Brown, L Burgess, R Cross, J O'Connor.

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Enabling rhythms

By Robin Denselow

Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo

They rehearse in a tumbledown zoo, they are disabled and they come from one of the poorest nations on Earth. Congolese band Staff Benda Bilili have overcome more than most to put together an acclaimed tour of the UK.

Ricky Lickabu and his wife, Mafuta, usually makes their money trying to sell cigarettes from a stall outside the market in Kinshasa.

But business is rarely brisk in the Congolese capital and Lickabu sells just \$18 (£11) worth of cigarettes a day if he is lucky.

And the challenges he and his wife face are heightened as they are both disabled from polio.

This week, however, Mafuta Lickabu is on her own at the cigarette stall because her husband is in Britain on the first-ever UK tour with his band.

Staff Benda Bilili are being feted as among the most exciting and extraordinary newcomers of the year.

There is nothing new about a story of unexpected success in the music industry, but Staff Benda Bilili are surely unique.

They have overcome hardship and disability to make it from the streets of Kinshasa to the concert halls of Britain, and shown extraordinary ingenuity in the way they create their music.

And they are surely the only band in the world who have rehearsed their music, and then recorded an album, in a zoo.

Sanctuary

Like much of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kinshasa zoo is gradually recovering from years of hardship. During the chaotic period that marked the end of the Mobutu era, many of the animals here were taken as food by the hungry city population.

Today, there are leopards and monkeys in the cramped cages, and on a patch of grass in the middle of the zoo there are a group of polio-victims sitting playing electric guitars in their wheelchairs.

They have very basic equipment and only small amplifiers, but they sound tremendous, mixing gentle harmony songs about their disability

with rousing rumba tunes - the basis of most great Kinshasa music - with other influences from reggae to R&B.

Staff Benda Bilili came here because it was quiet and they had nowhere else to go.

The zoo is a place of relative calm amidst the noise and chaos, amidst the poverty and energy of the third largest city in Africa, and it happens to be close to the disabled centre where they had spent much of their time.

Lickabu first met fellow band-member and polio victim Coco Ngambali when they were both working on the ferry that crosses the vast Congo river between Kinshasa and Brazzaville, a good place for the disabled to do business as Mobutu had decreed that the disabled could travel on the ferry tax-free.

They were both musicians, but formed a band with other polio victims simply because other bands in Kinshasa refused to work with them.

"I knew how to sing and play guitar but other bands wouldn't work with me," said Lickabu.

"They said that I turned up late because I was in a wheelchair, and I couldn't dance.

"So I had to start a band with other handicapped musicians, and it worked out well."

The owners of the zoo gave them permission to rehearse, and they gradually developed their own style, while managing to keep themselves and their families alive by working as electricians, tailors or street vendors.

Five-star reviews

They started out playing in the streets, trying to target areas where they might be heard by foreigners who had more money than the average city dweller, and might drop the occasional dollar at the feet of the buskers in their wheelchairs.

Amazingly, it paid off.

They came to the attention of the Belgian record producer Vincent Kenis, a specialist in Congolese music, and he helped them to record not in a studio but in the open air, out in the zoo.

The band's debut album, *Tres Tres Fort (Very Very Strong)* was recorded by Kenis using microphones connected to his large laptop

computer, with power provided by a mains cable connected to a deserted refreshment bar nearby.

The album features the guitarists in the wheelchairs, of course, along with one other remarkable Kinshasa survivor.

Roger Landu is a teenager who used to live on the streets, but spent much of his time hanging around with Staff Benda Bilili. They eventually invited him to join them.

He had no money, but designed his own home-made instrument, which he made from an empty fish can, a piece of wood and one guitar string. Kenis showed him how to amplify the instrument, and he now plays like some DIY Jimi Hendrix.

Staff Benda Bilili are still not fashionable in Kinshasa - few people come to watch them rehearse in the zoo, or at the little club where they play near the airport.

But in Britain it has been a very different story.

Their first British tour has been a triumph, with five-star reviews from national newspapers.

It has been an extraordinary story - and now, hopefully, Staff Benda Bilili will be able to give up their day jobs and become full-time musicians.

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Chavez hails 'Carlos the Jackal'

Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez has defended jailed killer "Carlos the Jackal" and several world leaders he says are wrongly considered "bad guys".

In a speech to international socialist politicians, Mr Chavez said "Carlos", a Venezuelan, was not a terrorist but a key "revolutionary fighter".

He is serving a life sentence in France for murders committed in 1975.

Mr Chavez also hailed Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe, Iran's Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, and the late Ugandan dictator Idi Amin.

'Great nationalist'

Carlos, whose real name is Ilich Ramirez Sanchez, gained international notoriety in the 1970s as a mastermind of deadly bombings, assassinations and hostage-takings.

He was captured in Sudan in 1994 and handed over to France, where he was jailed for killing two French intelligence officers and an alleged informer in 1975.

In his speech late on Friday in Caracas, Mr Chavez said: "I defend him. It doesn't matter to me what they say tomorrow in Europe."

He said he believed Carlos had been unfairly convicted, and called him "one of the great fighters of the Palestine Liberation Organisation".

The Venezuelan leader has previously called Carlos a friend, and is reported to have exchanged letters with him in the past.

In his speech, Mr Chavez also described Presidents Mugabe and Ahmadinejad - who like Mr Chavez are strong critics of the US - as brothers.

About former Ugandan President Idi Amin, Mr Chavez said: "We thought he was a cannibal... I don't know, maybe he was a great nationalist, a patriot."

Idi Amin seized power in 1971. About 300,000 people were killed during his eight-year rule.

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Knox prosecutors seek life term

Prosecutors have asked for life imprisonment for the pair accused of murdering British student Meredith Kercher in Italy.

Miss Kercher, 21, from Coulsdon, Surrey, was found dead in her bedroom two years ago. Her throat had been cut.

Prosecutor Giuliano Mignini asked a jury in Perugia to convict Amanda Knox and Raffaele Sollecito on charges of murder and sexual violence.

Miss Knox, a US student, and her former Italian boyfriend deny the charges.

The prosecutor argued that Miss Knox, Mr Sollecito and a third man, Rudy Guede, who was convicted in a separate trial killed Kercher during a drug-induced sex game.

Guede, 22, was jailed for 30 years for murdering the British student.

Guede, who is originally from Ivory Coast, always denied any wrongdoing and has launched an appeal against his conviction.

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Archbishop and Pope make progress

The Archbishop of Canterbury is meeting the Pope in Rome amid tensions over the Vatican's offer to welcome disenchanted Anglicans into the Catholic fold.

Pope Benedict's proposal would allow Anglicans to convert while preserving many of their traditions and practices.

The archbishop, Dr Rowan Williams, has said he does not believe the initiative will harm relations.

However, some Anglicans have accused the Pope of interfering at a sensitive time for the Church of England.

The Vatican says its invitation came in response to pleas from Anglicans unhappy about the creation of women bishops.

BBC religious affairs correspondent Robert Pigott said: "Dr Williams says he accepts it was not intended to poach clergy or undermine relations.

'No unity'

"But he will go into his meeting with Pope Benedict knowing the nature of that relationship has changed. The Roman Catholic Church has all but given up on the idea of unity with Anglicans."

Dr Williams has signalled that he would like to build a new relationship, emphasising shared fundamental beliefs rather than "negative" secondary issues such as women clergy, our correspondent added.

Another cause of discord in the worldwide Anglican communion has been the election of an openly gay bishop and the blessing of same-sex unions.

Under the terms of the Pope's proposed Apostolic Constitution, groupings of Anglicans would be able to join "personal ordinariates".

This would allow them to enter full communion with the Catholic Church, but also preserve elements of the Anglican traditions including the possible use of Anglican prayer books.

The first English clergy could convert early next year.

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Egypt leader enters football row

Egypt's President Hosni Mubarak has stepped into a row with Algeria, vowing he will not tolerate the "humiliation" of Egyptian nationals abroad.

The dispute was triggered by violence following football World Cup qualifying matches between the two north African Arab nations.

Algeria won the crucial play-off, but each side has accused the other's fans of attacking their supporters.

The governing body of world football, Fifa, is investigating the violence.

The BBC's Yolande Knell in Cairo says in a country where political demonstrations are usually heavily suppressed this is an unusual site and a further sign of how strained Egypt's relationship with Algeria has now become.

In the televised statement to a joint session of parliament, President Mubarak said his country will not be lax in defending the rights and integrity of its citizens.

"Egypt does not tolerate those who hurt the dignity of its sons," he said.

Although he did not mention Algeria by name, our correspondent says it was clear he was referring to the row that has occurred following violence that spilled over following the matches on 14 and 18 November.

Mr Mubarak said: "We don't want to be drawn into impulsive reactions. I am agitated too, but I restrain myself."

Algeria has demanded that Egypt stop what it describes as "a media campaign" against it following the violence.

On Friday, riot police had to quell a violent demonstration near the Algerian embassy in Cairo. Egypt's interior ministry said 35 people were injured.

A day earlier, around 1,000 Egyptians burned Algerian flags in a street near the Algerian embassy.

Algeria beat Egypt 1-0 in a play-off in Sudan on Wednesday.

Threat to quit

Protesters were incensed by reports that Egyptian fans at the match had been attacked as they left the stadium.

Egypt has threatened to quit international football for two years after complaining to Fifa about Algerian fans' behaviour in Khartoum.

If Egypt does not go through with its threat, there is a chance the teams could meet again in less than three months, in the Cup of African Nations, hosted by Angola.

The two teams were drawn in different groups at Friday's ceremony but could meet each other in the later stages.

Egypt's foreign ministry had summoned the Algerian ambassador to hear complaints about reports of attacks on Egyptian fans in Khartoum and on Egyptian businesses in Algeria.

The Egyptian ambassador in Algiers was then recalled "for consultations".

Sudan has also summoned the Egyptian envoy in Khartoum, angry at Egyptian media coverage of the game's aftermath.

The Egyptian government alleges 21 of its citizens were attacked after the match, but Sudan says far fewer were injured.

The teams needed the play-off in a neutral country to decide on qualification after the final group match between them on Saturday saw Egypt win 2-0, meaning the two teams finished tied at the top of the group with equal points and identical goal difference.

Fifa has opened disciplinary proceedings against Egypt after the Algerian team bus was pelted with stones before the 14 November match in Cairo.

Three Algerian players were injured by rocks thrown as they arrived.

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Sri Lanka camps 'to be opened'

Sri Lanka says refugees living in camps since the government's conflict with Tamil Tiger rebels will have freedom of movement as of next month.

The camps were set up to house Tamils fleeing the final stages of the 25-year civil war which ended in May.

The special adviser to President Mahinda Rajapaksa also confirmed the authorities intended to close down camps which still house 130,000 people.

He said all the residents would be resettled by the end of January.

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Hand-wringing

By Henri Astier

BBC News

For a nation not particularly known for its moral qualms - it once hailed a head-butting footballer as a hero - the French feel surprisingly chastened about their questionable qualification for next year's World Cup.

Reactions to Thierry Henry's handball, which led to the goal that sent the national team to the South African finals at the expense of the hapless Irish, have ranged from embarrassment to outrage.

The incident in Wednesday's game has been commented on in newspapers, on websites, and in cafes up and down France.

It has even become of affair of state, with politicians weighing in. President Nicolas Sarkozy felt obliged to tell Irish Prime Minister Brian Cowen that he felt sorry for his people.

In an online poll for Le Monde, almost two-thirds of respondents agreed that the handball "discredits France's qualification".

Le Parisien newspaper summarised the national mood: "The handball of Henry has brought a decisive contribution to the theme 'being French is being ashamed of one's national team'."

In the leading sports newspaper L'Equipe, former France international Emmanuel Petit wrote that there was "nothing glorious" about the outcome, and that France should keep a "low profile".

National crisis

Former Manchester United hero Eric Cantona was even more outspoken in his indictment.

"We are all Irish"

Jacques Attali

"What shocked me most was that at the end of the match, in front of the television cameras, this player [Henry] went and sat down next to an Irish player to console him," Cantona thundered.

"If I'd been Irish, he wouldn't have remained on the field for three seconds."

Cantona also launched a stinging attack on national manager Raymond Domenech, calling him "the worst coach in French football since Louis XVI".

Historical analogies have been wielded by several commentators.

Jacques Attali, a former aide to the late President Francois Mitterrand, wrote on a website: "We are all Irish" - echoing a famous 2001 headline in Le Monde expressing solidarity with 9/11 victims: "We are all Americans".

One minister spoke of "cowardly relief" following the dubious qualification - a phrase used after the 1938 Munich agreement signed by Hitler and Western allies.

Sticking up for les Bleus

The crisis is reverberating across France's political spectrum.

Philippe de Villiers, who leads the conservative Movement for France, called on Mr Domenech to issue a "public apology" to the Irish.

And Green leader Daniel Cohn-Bendit said: "You had to have a pretty strong stomach to support France after a game like that."

"In an ideal world the game should be replayed," rued centrist leader Francois Bayrou. "But the world is not yet ideal."

Of course, Henry and his teammates have their defenders.

The French version of the online magazine Slate argues that those wallowing in the current "masochistic" guilt-fest are displaying "their ignorance of football".

No doubt many fans also feel the remorse is overdone, and in due course Gallic pride will surge again.

But for moment, the French cockerel is not crowing very loud.

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Mumbai suspects arrested in Italy

Italian police have arrested two Pakistanis suspected of providing logistical support for last year's attacks in Mumbai.

The father and son were detained in an early morning raid in the northern city of Brescia, police said.

They are accused of supplying cash from their money transfer agency to pay for an internet phone account used by people in contact with the attackers.

More than 170 people, nine of them gunmen, died in the November attacks.

Mohammad Yaqub Janjua, 60, and Aamer Yaqub Janjua, 31, are accused of aiding and abetting international terrorism as well as illegal financial activity.

They were identified after leads from India and the FBI, police said.

In July, Mohammad Ajmal Amir Qasab - a 21-year-old Pakistani man and the sole surviving attacker - pleaded guilty to 86 charges, including waging war on India, murder and possessing explosives.

He could face the death penalty if judges agree to impose the maximum sentence.

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Second separated twin out of coma

The second of two conjoined twins who doctors separated in Australia has woken from an induced coma.

The child, Krishna, suffered complications during the operation to separate her from her twin, Trishna, for which both were heavily sedated.

The sisters, who turn three next month, are expected to make a full recovery.

They had been brought to Melbourne from Bangladesh in 2007 for the operation. Born joined at the head, they had shared brain tissue and blood vessels.

The sisters now face a long recovery, and further tests will be carried out as they grow stronger, doctors said.

Risky process

The twin's emergence from their induced comas has been momentous both for their guardians and the team of specialists at Melbourne's Royal Children's Hospital, says the BBC's Phil Mercer in Australia.

Surgeons divided the twins' skulls in an extremely risky process on Thursday that took two years to plan.

The operation to separate their heads took 25 hours and was followed by six hours of reconstructive surgery.

There were grave fears that one or both of the girls would suffer neurological damage in the process.

Trishna, who woke shortly after the operation, has already been taken out of the intensive care unit and is said to be talking and behaving normally.

Krishna will require a longer period of recuperation, doctors said, because the surgeons had to make more changes to her body and blood circulation.

But her long-term prognosis was still "really really good", they added.

The twins had been rescued in 2007 from an orphanage in the Bangladeshi capital Dhaka, where doctors said they were unable to treat them as their condition got worse.

They were flown to Australia by a Melbourne-based charity, Children First Foundation.

The twins' mother was said to be overjoyed at the news of their separation. She said they would have a better upbringing in Australia.

"My babies are alive and doing well," a tearful Lovely Mollick told the Associated Press in an interview from her home south-west of the Bangladeshi capital Dhaka. "It's the best news I've ever got in my life.

"I am from a poor family and am not able to take care of them... I want them to get a proper education and live a good life."

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Paleo-celebrity

This year has seen the discovery in Ethiopia of Ardi, the fossil skeleton believed to be the oldest human relative. But long before Ardi came Java Man, who was unearthed in the Indonesian village of Sangiran 120 years ago. Christine Finn has been on a quest to find the origins of this paleo-celebrity.

Sunday afternoon in Solo, also known as Surakarta, and I had a date with Java Man.

"Sangiran Museum" the taxi driver asked me.

And so my first ever ride on a motorbike taxi began after the broadly-smiling driver convinced me an "ojek" was the only way to get there.

We wove through the hooting, revving, steaming Solo traffic along a road lined with motorbike parts and benzine stalls; the fuel funnelled from glass jars straight into the tanks. A refuelling stop as much as the warung or food stands dispensing spicy sata and nasi goreng.

Java Man. The name sounds like a 1970s men's aftershave. One possibly not much used because the face, lovingly reconstructed by the palaeontologists, suggested he was no great shaver.

He also had small, deep-set eyes and an enormous jaw.

But Java Man was still a hero when he surfaced at the end of the 19th Century: *Pithecanthropus erectus*, an early contender for the title of missing link between the first upright hominids and modern humans.

Fossil finds

The ojek roared into the countryside, turning off to a small village and the museum, its smart entrance overarched by a pair of mammoth tusks.

"I wait" said Mr Ojek. The museum was small, and all of the text was in Indonesian, which I could not read. We would be back in Solo within an hour.

A life-size diorama showed Java Man and his family.

He was pure Hollywood alpha male, all that was missing was a gold medallion.

He had a full complement of black body hair. As did Java Woman.

Charles Darwin's face peered out from a glass case, beside two names most identified with the ancient hominid: Eugene Dubois, the Dutch man who came across the top of his skull on the riverbank at nearby Trinil in 1891, and Ralph von Koenigswald, a German

paleoanthropologist, drawn to Sangiran in the 1930s by its rich fossil finds, which emerged especially after it had been raining heavily.

Koenigswald proved very popular with the locals who were soon earning money from all the fossils they brought to his door, some of which were the remains of ancient humans.

And all this fitted local legend.

A hero from Sangiran, an important archaeological excavation area in Java, was said to have once used supernatural powers to fight off marauding giants.

The resulting heap of corpses scattered around the village were soon concealed by a spring which gushed out of the pile.

Even today the Sangirans name their fossil finds "Balung Buto" or "Giant Bones".

There were plenty of "Balung Buto" in the museum but Java Man was not amongst them.

Treasure hunt

On a dusty shelf, I saw some plaster casts of the fragments but the originals, I discovered, were scattered in bigger museums.

This hardly thrilled my bones. But if I could not see Java Man, I could maybe see where he hung out with his family, and dip my toes in his local river.

I bought the museum's two most likely treasure maps: An academic report on Sangiran from 1987, written in English, which had a survey map, and a new illustrated children's guide, in Indonesian, which had photos of the landscape.

Mr Ojek was up for a challenge.

We hurtled off, and I think he was equally disappointed when we quickly found a sign which read: "*Homo erectus* 400 metres."

That was far too easy, I thought.

But Java Man's river bank was not to be found quite that quickly.

The sign, and others, led us round in circles.

Mr Ojek now took charge, stopping at intervals, the child's guide in hand, showing the photos to playing youngsters, villagers in their front yards, or fuelling their bikes.

The arms and fingers pointed in all directions.

So I went by foot alongside paddy fields to ask the farmers.

What a strange apparition, I thought as I walked - not Mr Ojek wielding his incongruous kids' book, but me, another Sangiran giant, melting in my bike helmet.

In the seeming middle-of-nowhere, we found a monumental, but rather neglected, concrete marker to another even earlier hominid, *Meganthropus paleojavanicus*, who lived there around 1.5 million years ago.

But it was all, it has to be said, a bit of an anti-climax.

However, Mr Ojek had glanced again at the guide. Now he reckoned he had found the river.

Final destination

After a short bike ride we were there - on a track reaching right into the Solo river.

The late afternoon light was fading, shadows were rising. It was perfect.

I walked down to the water trying to picture what it must have been like there a million years ago with the hairy Java man, his wife and Java children going about their business.

But I could not quite imagine it. The present was intruding too much.

The sight of water buffalo disporting, children splashing in the shallows and there, right in front of me, two 21st Century Java men, up to their knees in this river on a late Sunday afternoon - tenderly washing their motorbikes.

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Life in a city of three faiths

Jerusalem's Old City is a district containing a number of holy sites venerated by Muslims, Christians and Jews. The BBC's Heather Sharp, who moved into a home within its walls last year, reports on daily life in a dense tangle of narrow, winding alleyways.

Our first night was a disaster.

We had finally got the keys to our new home. A wiry teenager had wheeled our bed on a handcart through the narrow, carless streets.

But as we turned out the light, Arabic pop music, cheers and whistles blasted in through the window of our new flat as neighbours celebrated a wedding.

And after just a few hours sleep we were jolted awake by the sound of a massive, room-shaking bang.

We eventually worked out that it was not the start of the third intifada, or Palestinian uprising. It was just a cannon fired to signal the start of the day's fast during the Muslim month of Ramadan.

Uneasy truce

Jerusalem is a divided city in a divided land. And at its heart, is the Old City, itself divided into Muslim, Christian, Jewish and Armenian quarters.

It is home to Judaism's holiest site, Islam's third holiest and the spot where many Christians believe Jesus was crucified.

Control of the area is one of the toughest issues facing anyone trying to make peace between Israel and the Palestinians.

But even so, an uneasy coexistence is lived out day-to-day, all be it under the watchful eyes of clusters of armed Israeli police.

Orthodox Jews in black coats and fox fur hats pick their way through shouting Palestinian street hawkers, as they go to pray at the Western Wall.

There are single shops where tourists can pick up a Jewish menorah, an olive wood crucifix, or a plate depicting al-Aqsa mosque.

And I have watched two young men who run neighbouring coffee shops, one Muslim, one Jewish, tease and hug each other in an open display of friendship.

But relations are not often so cordial.

At politically volatile times, like Muslim Friday prayers during the Israeli operation in Gaza, the police presence multiplies dramatically, and tensions with it.

Pungent aromas

I once showed two Israeli guests the route to see my favourite rooftop view. "When do we get kidnapped" they half-joked anxiously, as we walked through the Muslim quarter.

We live in the Christian quarter, home to Palestinian and Israeli-Arab Christians.

Nearby is one solitary house displaying an Israeli flag. Skull-capped children play behind high fences, watched by security guards. It is part of the political struggle, house by house, for control of the old city.

And when the Jewish residents and the Palestinians who live next to them meet on the streets they pass in stony silence.

But while controversy is never far away, the sights and sounds of the Old City are often far more mundane.

There are cats everywhere. From mangy, yowling toms to adorable, defenceless kittens, they especially like to roam the meat market, with its bewildering array of animal innards.

And there are the smells, incense wafts from churches mixing with the aroma of roasting Arabic coffee, and the pungent reek of rotting vegetables.

Car-free streets

The only vehicles that can navigate the narrow streets are hand carts and small tractors, which groan their way up special concrete ramps on the stone steps.

"We hear the bells from the Holy Sepulchre church, the horn announcing the start of the Jewish Sabbath, and at dusk every night the Muslim call to prayer echoes over the forest of rooftop satellite dishes"

When we recently moved to a larger flat, we hired one of these tractors, piled our possessions into its trailer and watched them lurch their way to our new home.

Without car access there is a lot of carrying to do. We decided to start a roof garden. The locals looked on in bemusement as we slogged past carrying armfuls of foliage and backpacks filled with sacks of compost.

And there was the time I found myself trying to lug an electric radiator through crowds of South Korean Christian pilgrims, as they were reflectively walking the route Jesus is said to have taken to his crucifixion.

An acquaintance recently rang up and heard clanging monastery bells in the background. "You live in the Old City How do you stand all that religious noise" he asked.

We hear the bells from the Holy Sepulchre church, the horn announcing the start of the Jewish Sabbath, and at dusk every night the Muslim call to prayer echoes over the forest of rooftop satellite dishes.

Most of the time it is part of the furniture in this unique place where the world's three major monotheisms meet.

But I have to admit, when Ramadan came round again, and the massive, unexpected boom of the cannon erupted, a few very unholy words passed my lips.

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Tough lessons

The BBC's Middle East editor Jeremy Bowen considers how the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians has taught US President Barack Obama hard and humiliating lessons.

The land between the river Jordan and the Mediterranean Sea has great sunsets.

One the other day turned the sky from deep blue to pink, then angry orange, and flaming red.

The fading light glowed on the roofs of the expanding and illegal Jewish settlements that run, like little fortresses, along the mountain spine of the West Bank.

This is also a tremendous place to see a false dawn.

The finest was the first, the Israeli-Palestinian handshake on the White House lawn in 1993.

President Clinton, beaming, stood between Yasser Arafat and Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres, old enemies, now officially partners for peace.

That was the saddest too, because it might have worked. Two years later, Mr Rabin was assassinated by a Jewish extremist.

Another false dawn was a trip by Bill Clinton to Gaza in 1998. Yes, an American president in Gaza. It is not conceivable these days.

I mention this almost forgotten visit because, as another famous American once said about baseball, it is *deja vu* all over again.

Benjamin Netanyahu was prime minister of Israel in 1998, and he is again now.

Hillary Clinton was on the trip, as the president's wife, and now she is US Secretary of State.

Mr Netanyahu used to drive her husband mad.

After he had lectured the president about the Middle East, Mr Clinton famously asked his aides: "Who the (bleep) does he think he is Who's the (bleeping) superpower here" Only he did not say bleep.

There is a different man in the White House, but once again, he has had a crash course in Middle Eastern reality.

Failure to deliver

On a hot day at Cairo University back at the beginning of June, President Obama spoke of his country's unbreakable ties with Israel.

But he also had a passionate denunciation of the humiliations that Palestinians have suffered at the hands of their Israeli occupiers.

As a first step, President Obama wanted Israel to freeze construction for Jewish people in the occupied Palestinian territories.

Nearly six months on he might be using Bill Clintonesque language about Mr Netanyahu, who has refused to freeze settlement activity.

It is called that by the way because it is not just houses and flats, it is all the infrastructure and security that goes with them, which swallows up more of the land the Palestinians want for a state.

So President Obama has not been able to deliver on one of his first big promises.

In the Middle East, where the strength of a leader tends to be measured in an old-fashioned way, it is a humiliation.

Mr Netanyahu knows that, so do the Palestinians and presumably Mr Obama does too. He asked Saudi Arabia for some symbolic concessions for Israel, and got another refusal.

Bitter pill

The settlements really matter.

The acclaimed Palestinian writer, Raja Shehadeh, told me in Ramallah the other week that settlements make his neighbours think they are living in a vanishing land.

In the last few days another 900 homes for Jewish people have been authorised on occupied land in Jerusalem.

An exasperated President Obama responded by saying that Israel was making it harder to achieve peace and was embittering Palestinians in a way that could be very dangerous.

Israel says the occupied eastern side of Jerusalem is its own - a claim not accepted by, among others, the United States, Britain, the rest of the EU and of course the Palestinians themselves, who want it as their capital.

Israel cannot expect peace with the Palestinians while it builds on the territory they want for a state. But it might not have peace at home if it tries to remove settlements. They are an ideological poison pill.

Growing frustrations

President Obama identified peace between Israel and the Palestinians as an American national interest very early on in his time in power. He has no choice other than to keep on trying.

But what an agenda.

President Mahmoud Abbas, America's current Palestinian partner, is so fed up with the lack of progress towards independence that he has threatened to leave his job.

As for Mr Netanyahu, one normally astute Israeli journalist, going against the conventional wisdom, believes he is serious about peace with the Palestinians, but only so he can clear the decks to be ready if necessary for war with Iran and its allies in Lebanon early next year.

At least, unlike some of his predecessors, President Obama started working on the Middle East in the week he was inaugurated. So he has time for a rethink.

Not unlimited time. Raja Shehadeh also told me that the atmosphere at the moment reminded him of the time before the first Palestinian uprising in 1987.

Some economic progress perhaps, but a deepening rage that just needs a spark to explode.

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What will the Vatican talks achieve?

Will the meeting between the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Pope ease the tensions between the churches?

Malaysia activist's body exhumed

The body of a Malaysian opposition activist who died in police custody has been exhumed after a pathologist said there was an 80% chance he was killed.

Teoh Beng Hock fell nine stories to his death from the offices of the Malaysia Anti-Corruption Commission in July.

He was said to have committed suicide after being questioned over allegations that his boss had misused public funds.

The authorities will be conducting a second autopsy on the body, following suspicions of foul play.

Last month Thai pathologist Pornthip Rojanasunand said marks on the body suggested Mr Teoh had been tortured and strangled.

Her testimony had been sought by the opposition-led authorities in Selangor state - where Mr Teoh was an aide to a member of the state cabinet.

Abuse of power

The BBC's Jennifer Pak in Kuala Lumpur says her story gave credence to a widely held belief that Mr Teoh's interrogation was part of a government drive to discredit opposition politicians after their success in 2008 elections.

The ruling coalition's confidence was shaken after it lost its two-thirds majority for the first time in four decades.

The country's anti-corruption commission has called on a British pathologist to observe the second post-mortem on Mr Teoh's body.

The Malaysian government has accused the opposition of politicising his death.

In July, a member of the governing coalition quit to join the opposition Pakatan Alliance.

Chua Jui Meng said he was concerned about alleged abuse of power and Mr Teoh's unexplained death.

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Pope art

By David Willey

BBC News, Rome

Pope Benedict has invited international artists, sculptors, architects, musicians, film directors and even a solitary Italian prima ballerina to meet him under the soaring vaulted ceiling of Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel in the Vatican on Saturday to begin a new dialogue between the Catholic Church and the arts.

Five hundred invitations were sent out to leading figures in the arts around the world last September, and more than 250 acceptances have been received at the Vatican.

Among them are such well-known names such as Anish Kapoor, whose current exhibition at the Royal Academy in London is drawing crowds; Zaha Hadid, the Iraqi-born British architect whose striking new Maxxi Museum of Modern Art has just opened in Rome; Daniel Libeskind, the Polish-born American who won the competition for the reconstruction of the World Trade Centre site in New York; and F Murray Abraham, the American movie star of Syrian descent who won an Oscar for Best Actor for his role as Salieri in the Mozart film, *Amadeus*, in 1985.

It is an eclectic list in which Italians outnumber all the foreigners. Among them are sculptor Arnaldo Pomodoro; the doyen of film score composers, Ennio Morricone; and opera star Andrea Bocelli.

For the moment, the Vatican is being coy about revealing which artists refused the Pope's invitation or excused themselves on the grounds of a previous engagement.

The Sistine chapel choir will welcome the artists with a motet by the 16th Century composer Palestrina as they troop into the awe-inspiring chapel where Popes are elected, to hear extracts from a letter addressed by the late Pope John Paul II to the world's artists exactly 10 years ago.

Pope Benedict will then give his take on the long-established and rich connections between the Catholic Church as patron of most of the arts represented among his extensive guest list.

Crucified frog

Popes love to lecture their guests. John Paul described artists as "ingenious creators of beauty" in his address on the eve of the new

Millennium, and distinguished between the roles of "creators" and "craftsmen".

"The Church needs art," Pope John Paul wrote, "but can it also be said that art needs the Church" he went on to ask.

In today's growingly secular societies, art sometimes manages to offend the Church.

"The building of these churches, and the pride the parishioners take in them, show that we have a dialogue with the architects of modernity"

Archbishop Gianfranco Ravasi

A German artist, Martin Kippenberger, who exhibited a sculpture of a crucified frog at an art exhibition in Bolzano in northern Italy last year, got into hot water with the local ecclesiastical authorities.

Pope Benedict's new reaching out to artists is being masterminded by his newly-appointed culture commissar, Archbishop Gianfranco Ravasi, a biblical scholar, archaeologist and author, who now heads the Pontifical Council for Culture and the Church's commission for Cultural Heritage.

Within months of his appointment, Archbishop Ravasi was suggesting a Vatican cultural presence not only at the Venice Biennale but at the Frankfurt book fair and "an analogous presence in those places where the new artistic vocabulary is elaborated".

Addressing the issue of modern artists, he said in a recent interview with *Osservatore Romano*, the Vatican daily, "experience tells me that there is less a preconceived attitude of rejection [on the artists' part] than their conviction that the Church has long since taken another route. But when we show our interest, the responses we get are mostly positive".

'Devil's work'

The Vatican Museums were opened 500 years ago. A number of factors subsequently weakened the artists' relations with papal patronage.

Unification of Italy in 1870 reduced the Vatican possessions from a large swath across the peninsula to just 110 acres. As art trends gradually turned away from the figurative toward the abstract, many people, priests included, failed to keep up with the taste of art sophisticates.

"Today our problem is to get ordinary people to welcome this type of art. We need to help them to understand that art is part of the spirit," Archbishop Ravasi said.

A number of Roman Catholic churches have been built recently by such renowned architects as Renzo Piano of Italy, Richard Meier from America, and Tadao Ando of Japan - and celebrated by parishioners as well as by architecture critics.

"The building of these churches, and the pride the parishioners take in them, show that we have a dialogue with the architects of modernity," Archbishop Ravasi explains, "but there's another problem here: Often the great modern architects do not want interference with the purity of their buildings."

This architectural purity can conflict with the Church's reliance upon religious symbols.

When a church is too lacking in the traditional symbols of Catholicism, the parish priests tend to take their own initiatives, often with indifferent results, Archbishop Ravasi said.

Changing parishioners' taste will not be easy, he admits, even when a parish priest forsakes craft work for the avant-garde.

He tells the story of his introducing segments of modern music into the Church liturgy on several occasions in Milan.

"The church was filled with young people," he said. "It was a fine experience - but later I received letters of protest from older parishioners, some of whom considered the new music the Devil's work."

A small collection of modern art was first put on view in the Vatican as long ago as 1932. But it was Pope Paul VI who decided in the 1960s to extend the Vatican's huge collection of antique art to include major 20th Century artists.

Before the Sistine Chapel meeting, the invited artists are being taken on a guided tour of this collection which includes works by Francis Bacon, Graham Sutherland, Matisse and Georges Rouault. They will be gently encouraged to make a gift of one of their works to the Vatican collection.

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UN condemns Iran on human rights

A key UN committee has voted to approve a non-binding resolution condemning Iran for its crackdown on protesters following June's disputed elections.

The resolution also repeated annual criticism of Iran's human rights record, including the use of torture and an increasing execution rate.

It urged Tehran to end persecution of political opponents and release those imprisoned for their political views.

Iran's UN ambassador dismissed the resolution as politically motivated.

Mohammad Khazaee said such measures had "created an atmosphere of confrontation and polarisation" at the UN.

Friday's text was approved by 74 votes to 48 with 59 abstentions, which the US said was "the largest vote margin on such a resolution on Iran in the UN ever".

'Deep concern'

Deputy state department spokesman Robert Wood said it demonstrated the international community was "deeply concerned" about the human rights situation in Iran.

Powers 'disappointed' by response

Q&A: Nuclear issue

The resolution expresses "deep concern at serious ongoing and recurring human rights violations" in Iran.

But it said there was "particular concern" at the Iranian government's response to the 12 June elections and the "concurrent rise in human rights violations".

It comes as the major powers said they were disappointed with Iran's response to an offer of a deal over its nuclear programme.

President Mahmoud Ahmandinejad was declared the winner of June's election, resulting in large scale protests by supporters of opposition candidates who said the poll had been rigged.

The UN committee criticised the subsequent "harassment, intimidation and persecution, including by arbitrary arrest, detention or disappearance" of opponents of the government.

It also condemned alleged abuses of those in prison and "numerous deaths and injuries" in the crackdown.

The BBC's Barbara Plett in New York says some of those countries which did not vote for the resolution did have concerns about the state of political rights in Iran, but objected to the practice of singling out specific countries for condemnation.

Saudi Arabia broke ranks with Muslim nations and voted in favour of the resolution, possibly because it accuses Iran of backing Shia rebels in neighbouring Yemen, says our correspondent.

On Friday, following meetings in Brussels, the six world powers negotiating with Iran said they were disappointed by Tehran's failure to respond positively to a recent deal on its nuclear programme.

Iran has rejected the offer, which would allow it to continue to develop a nuclear reactor by exporting uranium to other countries to be enriched.

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Mussolini brain 'stolen by criminals keen to sell it on the web'

The granddaughter of Italy's fascist dictator Benito Mussolini has said that blood and parts of his brain have been stolen to sell on the internet.

Alessandra Mussolini, a former showgirl turned MP, said she immediately informed the police when she found out.

The listing, on auction site Ebay, reportedly showed images of a wooden container and ampoules of blood.

Ebay, which does not allow the sale of human matter on its site, said that the listing was removed within hours.

The initial price requested for the material was 15,000 euros (\$22,000; £13,000).

"This is very serious, these are the kinds of things we have to guard against," said Ms Mussolini, who was attending a seminar on internet crime when the listing was discovered.

Doctors' denial

The BBC's Mark Duff, in Milan, says that Alessandra Mussolini is a colourful character in her own right who has remained doggedly faithful to her grandfather's political legacy.

Ms Mussolini said that the remains were stolen from Milan's Policlinico hospital.

After Benito Mussolini was killed in 1945 his body was put on public display in a Milan square. It was then taken to the hospital for an autopsy.

However, doctors at the hospital denied any remains of the former Italian leader were kept at the premises, saying they were destroyed in the years that followed.

A spokesperson for Ebay said that the listing violated its own regulations and was promptly taken down.

"It was removed before 11am, a few hours after it was put online and before anyone had made any bids," said spokesperson Irina Pavlova.

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Profile: Herman van Rompuy

Belgian Prime Minister Herman Van Rompuy appears to be the frontrunner to be chosen as the EU's first permanent president at a summit in Brussels on Thursday.

The centre-right leader has a reputation as a good negotiator with a self-deprecating sense of humour, which has helped him to hold together a fractious coalition government.

But if his candidacy is successful that may be bad news for the troubled coalition of Dutch- and French-speaking parties, which could fall apart without his careful stewardship.

In linguistically divided Belgium, he is seen as a unifying force, taking an even-handed approach to resolving conflicts - a skill that would serve him well if he secured the new top job.

The low-key leader appears to have the support of both France and Germany, yet the UK government wants former Prime Minister Tony Blair to get the job.

Mr Van Rompuy, 62, is little known outside Belgium and has attended only two European summits.

A veteran politician from the Flemish Christian Democrat party, he was originally reluctant to take on the post of prime minister. He replaced Yves Leterme, who resigned amid a financial scandal last December, after just nine months in the job.

Safe pair of hands

Riven by post-election squabbling, Belgium had already been through two prime ministers in 12 months and seemed in danger of splitting apart, due to the arguments over devolution plans between Dutch- and French-speaking parties.

Something of a moderate in Belgium's increasingly polarised politics, Mr Van Rompuy was eventually persuaded to take on the job by Belgian King Albert II.

He was appointed prime minister last December, having held the position of president of the lower house of parliament since July 2007.

*"Three waves roll
Along the harbour
The trio's home"*

EU Trio-presidency
Herman Van Rompuy haiku
EU president: Names in the frame

The trained economist inherited a fragile government coalition and a nation facing a global economic crisis that had crippled Belgian banking giant Fortis.

He had previously served as budget minister in the Christian Democrat-led government from 1993 to 1999, during which time he took a tough stance on balancing the books, drastically reducing the country's public debt.

Before that, Mr Van Rompuy was leader of the Flemish Christian Democrats between 1988 and 1993.

He has penned several books - mainly on social and political issues - and is also an avid blogger and haiku writer.

He is said to sometimes compose the 17-syllable Japanese-style poems during political meetings and has been known to read out his compositions at such gatherings.

One offering on Mr Van Rompuy's website is called EU Trio-presidency, but any message therein about his political ambitions is well concealed:

"Three waves roll
Along the harbour
The trio's home."

National pride

People on the streets of Brussels have mixed emotions about the prospect of their prime minister becoming Europe's figurehead.

A sense of national pride is countered by one of foreboding about how Belgium's government would cope without him.

A poll by Euronews found respondents in the capital reluctant to lose a peace-maker "indispensable in keeping the peace between the different communities".

"It would be a pity," said another. "It would mean political instability in Belgium. A good thing for Europe a bad thing for Belgium!"

Before entering politics, Herman Van Rompuy worked at the Belgian central bank from 1972 to 1975.

One of a family of politicians, his younger brother, Eric Van Rompuy, is also a politician for the CD&V, while his sister, Christine Van Rompuy, is a member of the Workers Party of Belgium.

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Hungary's loss

The deportation in 1944 of thousands of Hungary's civilians to the Soviet Union, although on a similar scale to the deportation of its Jewish people to the death camps, receives little official attention in Hungary, as Nick Thorpe reports.

Arpad Kovari stands at the top of the steps at Nyiregyhaza railway station, nearly two metres tall, scanning the faces of the new arrivals from Budapest. He hides his disappointment well as I shake his hand.

He was hoping for a whole television crew, not a lone reporter, to listen to his tale of what he dares to call the Hungarian Holocaust: the deportation of some 600,000 Hungarians to Soviet labour camps after the Second World War and the death of at least 200,000 in captivity.

His father was one of them.

"My dad was a ticket collector," Arpad begins, as we drive through the traffic-lit streets of this autumnal city. He worked on the same railway on which I have just slid comfortably into Nyiregyhaza, washing a paprika omelette down with coffee and fresh orange juice.

On 1 November 1944, the Soviet army captured the town. The next day, all able-bodied men were ordered to their workplaces, to start clearing the ruins.

Arpad was three months old, the youngest of four sons. His father was 45. Arpad never felt his father's arms around him again.

Many graveyards

The workers were rounded up and marched to the next city, Debrecen. Between 2,000 and 3,000 of them - 4% of the population.

"For 20 years, Arpad Kovari has been trying to persuade the Hungarian state to create a day of remembrance for the Hungarian Holocaust"

There they were loaded into cattle wagons, which rolled into Romania in the bitter cold of the last winter of the war. The good boots and warm winter muffler worn by Janos Kovari, Arpad's father, were taken away.

According to fellow prisoners, he died of pneumonia in a transit camp in Focsani, in eastern Romania, three or four months later. There are no written records of his death, nor of his final resting place.

Nyiregyhaza is as rich in tombs as it is in apples. There are nine graveyards.

A small ceremony takes place each year on 2 November in the North Cemetery. Thanks largely to Arpad's efforts, "an unknown Hungarian civilian" was exhumed three years ago in the city of Baltsi in Moldova, and reburied here with honour.

Most of the Hungarians from Nyiregyhaza ended up in a work camp in Baltsi, those who survived the journey. And there most of them died - of malnutrition, over-work or disease.

Their remains lie scattered at the far end of a cemetery, and on open ground elsewhere in the city.

As the Eastern Front moved west, the Russians rounded up civilians in each town and village in Hungary. Budapest fell on 13 February 1945.

One hundred thousand men and women were taken to the Soviet Union from there alone.

Suppressed pain

During the ceremony in Nyiregyhaza, an elderly lady in a purple coat cannot stem her tears.

She was 15 when they took her father away. She remembers her mother pleading with him not to go, remembers him turning down sandwiches saying he would not be gone for long.

And how for three years she went with her mother to the railway station, always expecting that he would step down off a train and raise his hand.

And how eventually her uncle came back. He escaped one camp, walked barefoot for months, was caught, put in another camp, and was finally granted an amnesty in 1948.

"Don't wait for your husband any more," her uncle told her mother, bluntly. "I buried him with my own hands."

For 40 years, Hungarians could not speak about the missing; Soviet domination ruled out any discussion, so the pain incubated.

With the fall of communism, it burst out. It is still trying to find forms of expression.

'Hill of human bones'

For 20 years, Arpad Kovari has been trying to persuade the Hungarian state to create a day of remembrance for the Hungarian Holocaust, not in competition with the Jewish Hungarian Holocaust, he explains, but alongside it.

In the last letter of rejection from the president's office, he was told that civilians are all lumped together as "victims of communism" and remembered each year on 25 February.

Hungary also has days of remembrance for the Jewish and Gypsy victims of the Holocaust. The calendar is sinking under the weight of remembrance, one can almost hear the officials say. Let us keep a few days in the year when our memories are blank.

Crows flock over the North Cemetery, a flypast of birds, not military jets, joining their rough voices to the national anthem, above a planet littered with flowers and candles.

Three upright rails and the wheels of a railway carriage are mounted beside the grave of the unknown civilian, in honour of the railwaymen who never returned.

Back in his living-room, Arpad's three-year-old granddaughter, Jofie, brings me wooden elephants and antelopes to admire and stands quietly listening to our conversation.

On the table, Arpad has arranged photographs that he took on his trips east in search of the lost Hungarians.

"Maybe that one is your dad," Jofie tells him, wanting so much to be helpful and pointing to a group of men who are holding a cross on a small hill in the city of Baltsi.

"That hill," says Arpad, "is made of human bones."

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