

**By John Hooper
in Rome**

The British scored higher than the French, Germans and Italians in every category except sport.

Part of the problem is that Italy's stagnant economy has prompted the government to cut the budget of its culture ministry as well as to slash allocations to local authorities, which are responsible for many of festivals, libraries, museums and galleries. But it is also true that contemporary Italy's artistic output is modest. Antonio Paolucci, Florence's top arts official, said: "The next Michelangelo, if there ever is one, will certainly not be born in Italy, but rather China, or the US, or Brazil." (Guardian)

By Hassan Juma'a Awad in Basra

We see it as our duty to defend the country's resources. We reject and will oppose all moves to privatise our oil industry and national resources. We regard this privatisation as a form of neo-colonialism, an attempt to impose a permanent economic occupation to follow the military occupation.

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FOCUS

By Raymond Barrett

In the aftermath of these shootings, liberal MPs were widely quoted in the local media as saying that the Kuwaiti government had been happy to ignore the issue of fundamental Islamic groups advocating violence, as long as the actual violence took place elsewhere, in Afghanistan and Iraq to name but a few locations. This policy of containment was believed to be the most prudent course of action given the considerable weight that Islamist groups hold both

While some commentators have attempted to make a connection, it would be erroneous to compare the violence in Kuwait over the last month to that in Saudi Arabia over the last year, when Al-Qaeda linked groups launched a series of attacks against

The answer is in fact a reassuring one. Kuwait is not a police state like some of its neighbours, where the mere hint of dissent could have a political dissident in custody faster than you can say Mukabarat. For the most part, it is what you do in Kuwait that gets you in to trouble rather than what you say. However, the death in custody of one of those arrested in the raids over the last few weeks has raised questions that need to be

A 1984 law banning female drivers from wearing a veil that covers their faces was "reactivated" on the grounds that terrorists could use it to evade authorities. Unlicensed mosques built without planning permission (often made from galvanised steel) were ordered to be demolished on the grounds that they could be used as hiding places for militants on the run.

However, the problem with passing legislation in the immediate aftermath of shocking events such as what happened in Kuwait over the last month is the possibility of overkill. There has been strong opposition in the US to some of the legislation enacted following 9-11, with opponents arguing that the civil liberties that Americans hold dear have been dangerously compromised. One should be careful that in trying to counteract threats to civil society that you do not end up debasing that's society in the process.

Several hundred Russian "peacekeepers" are stationed in Transnistria - their presence part of an agreement signed in 1992 after Moldova tried unsuccessfully to reclaim the region. Voronin, despite being a Communist, is fer-

Moldovan opposition sources in contact with Western diplomats in the country say Moldova is next on the West's list for an "Orange Revolution" similar to what Ukraine experienced during the 2004 presidential elections. (In that case, the "orange" was the campaign colour of Western-backed candidate and

Sources on Capitol Hill said

In Europe, several NGOs and government groups also are supporting the Moldovan opposition. In particular, the Parliamentary

Support to this degree suggests the West might attempt to use both the election and confrontation over Transdniestria as a chance to move against Russia for a second time in a matter of months. The events in Ukraine have emboldened Washington and Brussels to broaden a

Moldova likely will become the next battleground. Not only will relations between the West and Russia further deteriorate, an action in Moldova will represent the second time that Washington and Brussels have worked together to contain Moscow. Finally, a Moldovan "revolution" - no matter what colour - will show Russia that, despite the Europeans' sweet talk about wanting better relations with Moscow, Europe is slowly drifting away. (Stratfor)

By Dr Sami Alrabaa

Certainly, the Iranian democracy is not perfect, but it is far better than many democracies supported by America. The Islamic Republic in Tehran recognizes the political rights of the country's minorities like the Turkomans and the Assyrians. Both ethnic/religious minori-

America is paying a high price for its double standard when it comes to promoting democracy in countries of the Middle East. People in countries like Jordan, Morocco, and Egypt, which lack real democracy, wonder why George Bush does not demand more democracy in these countries as forcefully as he does with Iran. The American double standard vis-a-vis democracy is eventually music to the ears of radicals in the region. And America should not wonder when the number of its enemies is increasing by the day. Consistency promotes credibility.