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THE AUSTRALIAN
MONDAY DECEMBER 20 2004
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SPORT
Ooh, aah, vintage McGrath
Glenn leads demolition team

FEATURES
NAOMI WOLF THE NEXT TV SEX SENSATION

One-stop welfare to drive work

Samantha Maiden

THE complex array of welfare payments could be streamlined into a single working-age benefit, under a renewed push by the Howard Government to encourage the jobless, disabled pensioners and single parents to get into work.

Outlining a new "work first, welfare second" reform push to tackle tax and welfare disincentives and boost workplace participation, Workplace Relations Minister Kevin Andrews also hinted at further childcare assistance for middle-income mothers returning to work.

The plan could include stripping childcare entitlements from the unemployed and low-income single mothers, who can currently secure up to four days of taxpayer-funded childcare at a discount rate, and redirecting support to mothers in the paid workforce.

But age pensions would remain protected from the reforms, with the Howard Government's election promise to index welfare payments to retirees prohibiting a single system for all.

A discussion paper outlining reform options to introduce a single welfare payment and simplify the system would be presented to cabinet in the new year, Mr Andrews said yesterday.

"There are 2.7 million working-age Australians currently on welfare payments," Mr Andrews told *The Australian* yesterday.

"The current system is confusing and there are disincentives in the system which mean that even if people want to work, they are not provided with the incentive.

"If we want to maintain our economic prosperity, we must boost productivity. And there's an ethical element to this, which is to assist people who want to work."

Mr Andrews said some welfare recipients feared that under the current system, if they found work and stopped receiving the pension they would not be able to reinstate their entitlements if the job did not work out.

"It would be much better to have people have a go," he said. "For the people who are so disabled they can't work, there's no suggestion they would be forced to seek employment."

A single welfare payment was first proposed by the landmark McClure report in 2000, commissioned by the Howard Government, with a base sum plus add-ons to reflect personal circumstances. But the upfront costs of a major overhaul of the system and a hostile Senate have stalled the introduction of the last major plank of the McClure reforms.

Under a recent shake-up of the ministry, working-age payments including the disability support pension and the Newstart Allowance have shifted to the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations and are the responsibility of Workforce Participation Minister Peter Dutton.

In an interview with *The Australian*, Mr Dutton said he was keen to boost training opportunities for mothers returning to work and to encourage single mothers to move from welfare to a job.

"We've got disincentives for middle-income earners in terms of childcare costs and effective tax rates," he said.

"We want to make sure we have a system that provides choices for parents — to stay at home and a choice to make it financially rewarding to return to work."

Streamlining the system would also encourage welfare recipients, including disability support pensioners and single parents who secure payments through Centrelink, to take advantage of training and support available through the Job Network scheme.

A meeting of relevant ministers and departmental secretaries to discuss the reform options will be held after the Christmas break.

UNDER REVIEW
Basic pension payments

■ YOUTH ALLOWANCE
Under-18 at home: $174.30 fortnightly.
Under-18 independent: $318.50.
Single with children: $417.40.
Partnered with children: $349.80.

■ PARENTING ALLOWANCE
Partnered: $356.
Single: $470.70.

■ DISABILITY SUPPORT PENSION
Single under-18 at home: $264.40.
Single under-18 independent: $408.60.
With a partner: $393.
Over-21, or under-21 with children: $470.70.
Source: Centrelink

Camera reveals cash on menu for mayor

Frame 1: Alfred Tsang waits for money

Frame 2: He gets the cash

Frame 4: He puts it in his pocket

Frame 5: He checks for onlookers

Frame 3: Alfred Tsang accepts cash from Michael Saklawi at the lunch to discuss the development of council-owned land

Jennifer Sexton

THE mayor of a suburban Sydney council has been caught on hidden camera accepting a thick wad of $100 bills from a local developer at a lunch in which they discuss a development project on council-owned land.

Alfred Tsang, the mayor of inner-west Strathfield, is seen in this sequence of pictures discussing over red wine with Michael Saklawi the redevelopment of a 800sq m council-owned carpark.

The 12 minutes of footage taken about four months ago opens with Mr Tsang telling Mr Saklawi the redevelopment in South Strathfield must have 1.5 times the number of free public car spaces. It is not known why the money was handed to Mr Tsang. He refused to comment last night, citing an investigation by the corruption watchdog into Strathfield council.

Mr Saklawi says in the video he does not "want anybody to know".

"I am straightforward and simple," says Mr Tsang, who had been mayor for just four months at the time of the meeting.

Just moments before the cash is exchanged, the two men clink wine glasses in a quick toast.

Mr Saklawi, who is sitting behind the camera opposite Mr Tsang and cannot be seen in the film footage, then asks Mr Tsang where he wants the money to be paid. After some deliberation, Mr Tsang says: "If you can, give it here."

Mr Tsang, looking anxious and nervous, is then handed across the table a wad of $100 bills worth several thousand dollars.

"I have done what I have to do," Mr Saklawi says.

On the tape Mr Tsang says the development of the carpark, understood to be at the back of the Crossways Hotel near the corner of the Hume Highway and Homebush Road, South Strathfield, will be good for the local people. "Basically, we get it for nothing," Mr Tsang says. "I am making Strathfield a better place . . . I am doing it for the area."

This explosive footage, leaked to *The Australian*, was passed to the Independent Commission Against Corruption several weeks ago as part of an investigation into allegations of corruption and collusion between local councillors and developers.

Mr Tsang said on the phone last night he could not comment on the allegations because of the ICAC's continuing investigation.

"A lot of this sort of dirt is throwing on me," Mr Tsang said. "If you have any information about receiving bribes, I strongly suggest you to contact ICAC."

When told *The Australian* had a copy of the video, and described what could be seen on the footage, Mr Tsang paused before saying he would not comment.

When *The Australian* spoke to Mr Saklawi on the phone at his western Sydney home yesterday, he said: "I have nothing to tell you. I am having my lunch. Thank you." He then hung up.

ICAC's investigation follows a bitter battle for control of Strathfield council. The Australian Labor Party previously held power, led by mayor John Abi-Saab and with the support of the Unity Party's Mr Tsang. Mr Tsang withdrew his support for the ALP after the last council election in April and was elected mayor with the support of three Liberal councillors and the independent deputy mayor, Elizabeth Gewandt.

Ms Gewandt — who did not know what was shown on the

Continued — Page 2

Brain gain eases emigrant headache

Elizabeth Colman

THE nation's much-feared brain drain may be less of a threat than thought, and may in fact be reversing to become a "brain gain" in some areas, new research has revealed.

Using previously unavailable techniques to track travellers' movements, a study by the Department of Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs has uncovered a hidden class of returnees — emigrants coming back to Australia and bringing newly developed skills with them.

Comparing the data gathered at immigration points with the cards filled out by travellers at arrival and departure points, the study found that of those who declared their intention to leave Australia permanently in the 1998-99 year, at least 24 per cent had returned by June 2003.

The authors of a report on the issue, to be published today in the December issue of the Monash University journal *People and Place*, had access to the personal identifier data, a first since the PID was introduced by the Howard Government to track travellers' movements in 1998.

RATE OF RETURN
People who said they were leaving permanently, 1998-1999
Status at June 30, 2003

Returned to Australia	24%
Not coming back	59%
Will return eventually	11%
Other	6%

Source: DIMIA

The data relied on by experts who have claimed Australians were emigrating in large numbers was not "precise", the report says.

The study indicates that many of those thought to be leaving permanently to join the Australian diaspora could in fact be contributing to a brain gain by bringing back skills learned overseas.

Those more likely to return to Australia were aged between 15 and 24 and had spent time in China, Taiwan or Indonesia, according to the report, which collected information from Australian-born people and overseas-born migrants who had gained permanent residence.

The lowest return rate was for those who departed for the US, Britain and New Zealand.

"Self-reported data has its limitations. People can change their minds. Also, people may misinterpret instructions," the report says.

"In more recent years there have been . . . major changes in the content and processing of overseas arrivals and departures data.

"Emigration from Australia, especially emigration of younger skilled Australians, has been a topic of debate. Part of the debate has been around the size of the loss of skills to the Australian community from persons leaving permanently, as against the gain in skills from persons gaining experience and qualifications overseas and then returning. Accurate information on emigration and return rates of Australians is clearly

Continued — Page 4

Countdown to blast

JAKARTA police have published details of the last minute before the Australian embassy bombing in September, and highlighted the brazen timing of mastermind Azahari bin Husin.

Racing back to his terrorist colleague waiting on a motorbike, senior bomb-maker Azahari shouted that they had just 15 seconds to get clear before the device went off.

In that last minute, Azahari pulled the explosives-laden truck into a bus lay-by close to the embassy in Jakarta and reset the detonator, according to a police chronology.

He then jumped out, leaving suicide bomber Heri Golun to get into the driver's seat for the short drive to the embassy gates. Running back to the waiting green Kawasaki motorbike, Azahari shouted at the rider to get going, police say. The rider, Hassan, sped off with Azahari riding pillion. Police say Hassan had felt the bomb-maker twist around to look back at the explosion.

"Azahari detonated the bomb," said Police Commissioner Saragih at a comprehensive reconstruction of the attack yesterday. "Fifteen seconds, and then it exploded."

The bomber and 10 others were killed in the September 9 blast. Police have stepped up their search for the two masterminds: Azahari and fellow Jemaah Islamiah operative Noordin Mohammad Top.

More than 100 police worked on the two-day reconstruction of the attack. Hassan and accused blast field commander Rois were at the scene in front of the embassy yesterday, shackled and tightly guarded by police in black combat outfits and black balaclavas.

Full story — Page 3

INSIDE

Editorial, Letters	6
Opinion	7
Features	8
Worldwide	9-12
TV, Crosswords	13
Arts	14
Sport	15-21
Classifieds	10, 21, 26
Weather	22

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