



THE INDEPENDENT

THE BROADER VIEW

No 5,061

www.independent.co.uk

TUESDAY 7 JANUARY 2003

★ ★ ★ 55p



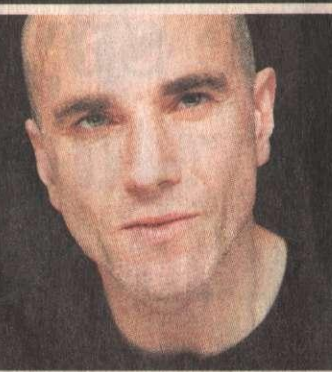
JOHANN HARI: Our new columnist on why rap music is not to blame for gun violence

COMMENT, THIS SECTION, PAGE 13

DANIEL DAY-LEWIS

David Thomson on a reluctant superstar

COVER STORY, REVIEW



Government's green agency invests millions in companies that pollute

BY MARIE WOOLF
Chief Political Correspondent

THE GOVERNMENT'S environment watchdog body has been investing tens of millions of pounds in oil companies and firms that have been sharply criticised for their records on green issues.

The Environment Agency, which is in charge of flood protection, has invested £64m in oil firms that have been condemned for contributing to flooding by causing climate change. Last year the agency's pension fund invested £46m in BP Amoco - its largest holding - and £18m in Shell. Both firms have been fined large sums by the agency for polluting water with petrol or oil products.

The watchdog also invested £19m in Barclays Bank, which has been challenged by green groups for allegedly helping to finance logging in the Indonesian rainforest. Barclays has also been criticised for reportedly helping to arrange finance for the Yusefeli dam in Turkey, which would flood environmentally sensitive areas.

MPs and environmental campaigners called on the Environment minister Michael



£46M

BP: Fined £60,000, thought to be the highest fine in the UK for pollution from a petrol station, after leaking petrol endangered drinking water in Luton



£18M

SHELL: Fined £20,000 by the Environment Agency in 1998 for spilling 140 tons of a non-toxic soap into the Manchester Ship Canal from an oil refinery

Blunkett to outlaw the carrying of replica guns in public

BY JASON BENNETTO
Crime Correspondent

A BAN on carrying replica guns in public and a law to prevent under 18-year-olds owning air pistols are to be introduced as part of a crackdown on firearms.

News of the tightening of Britain's gun laws came as David Blunkett confirmed plans for a five-year minimum sentence for illegal possession and use of a firearm.

The Home Secretary also decided to act against imitation firearms - used by robbers in an estimated six out of ten hold-ups, and by young men as "fashion accessories" and a means of intimidation. Airguns have also been involved in a series of fatal shootings and injuries.

A new offence of carrying a replica or blank-firing gun in public without a reasonable excuse is to be created, punishable by a fine or, in extreme cases, by a jail term. The exact number of replica guns in circulation is unknown but it is thought to be in excess of 500,000. The new law will stop short of an outright ban on imitation firearms and will allow enthusiasts to keep collections.

It is already a crime to

the agency to abandon its stocks immediately.

Friends of the Earth said it was a "scandal" that the body charged with protecting Britain's environment had a financial interest in companies that are responsible for pollution. "This is astounding," a spokesman said. "BP has been prosecuted for a succession of environmental and safety breaches in the last three

years. As an oil company it has a heavy responsibility for the climate change that's causing so much flooding which the Environment Agency has a duty to try and prevent."

A Labour MP said it was "inconceivable" that the Environment Agency should not pursue an ethical investment policy that ruled out the purchase of shares in companies it investigates. Alan Simpson,

MP for Nottingham South, said: "Investing in the same companies that are prosecuted raises serious questions about a conflict of interest."

Last autumn, BP was fined £60,000, thought to be the highest fine in the UK for pollution from a petrol station, after fuel leaked into groundwater in Luton. Shell was fined £20,000 by the Environment Agency in 1998 for spilling 140 tons of a

non-toxic soap into the Manchester Ship Canal.

Last night, a spokeswoman for Shell said the company took its environmental performance "extremely seriously". She said: "We endeavour to maintain high standards, report on incidents that have happened and what we have done about them every year."

BP Amoco said: "Our environmental record is a good

one. From time to time we make mistakes and when we do we take action to correct them."

Barclays said it had no direct investments in Asia Pulp and Paper Group, which has been accused of logging in Indonesia. "As a general rule Barclays policy is to maintain relationships with companies able to demonstrate good environmental performance and risk management," a spokesman said.

About 11,000 employees contribute to the Environment Agency's pension fund, which is worth more than £200m and is also funded by contributions from the Government.

Nigel Reader, the Environment Agency's finance director, defended the fund, which is managed by a number of investment managers under the guidance of a committee. He said that the agency did not use

an ethical investment fund but was willing to apply some environmental criteria without excluding stocks.

"Like any pension fund, the overriding duty is to maximise the return in the fund - that is the overriding criteria," he said. "We are not saying 'thou shalt not invest in oil companies'. But we do have the opportunity to apply best environmental practice."

ca, or to possess one with intent to cause fear of unlawful vio-



lence, both carrying maximum jail terms of 10 years.

The minimum age for owning an airgun will be raised from 14 to 18. Under the proposals for a five-year minimum jail term for firearm possession or distribution, revealed by *The Independent* a month ago, judges will be given discretion to hand out smaller sentences.

In 2001, the average sentence of 757 people convicted for possession or distribution of firearms was 18 months, although some were given a community sentence. In London alone, police are seizing more than 140 guns a month.

Proposals for the tougher approach to gun possession follow a high-profile campaign by the Metropolitan Police and on the back of growing evidence that gun crime is taking a grip in Britain. It was highlighted by the double murder of two teenagers who were killed in a hail of bullets at a New Year party in Birmingham.

Mr Blunkett's proposals were greeted with praise by the police but described as a knee-jerk reaction by the Tories, the shooting industry and a civil liberty group.

Further reports, page 4

Behavioural experts to be sent into schools

BEHAVIOURAL consultants are to be sent into secondary schools across England as part of a drive to eliminate disruptive acts by pupils.

From September a national network of behaviour experts will show teachers how to control antisocial students while keeping the attention of the rest of the class.

Schools will also be urged to re-examine the timing of the school day to minimise disruptive students' opportunities to cause trouble and to use out-of-school clubs to support formal lessons. Staff will be

BY SARAH CASSIDY
Education Correspondent

encouraged to make their lessons more exciting after evidence that students lose interest during the middle of sessions if they have not been well planned.

Teachers will be trained to recognise the signs that a student is becoming disenchanted with their studies and at risk of becoming disruptive.

Although the initiative is not compulsory, ministers believe all schools could benefit from it, not just those where

pupil behaviour is a severe problem.

The problem of bad behaviour in schools has proved a difficult issue for the Government to tackle. Charles Clarke, the Secretary of State for Education, recently admitted that disruptive behaviour was a "very serious and deep-seated" problem for some schools. Research commissioned by the National Union of Teachers (NUT) has found that teachers were being driven out of the profession by bad behaviour in class.

Since his appointment in

October, Mr Clarke has announced a range of headline-grabbing initiatives to tackle the issue, including bringing in Army officers to run one-on-one tutorials for disruptive children and doubling police patrols outside schools.

The behaviour clampdown will run alongside a new "intervention programme", which will encourage more secondary schools to identify pupils aged 11 and 12 who are falling behind their classmates and help them to catch up. It will be followed in the summer of next year by a campaign to

tackle the problem of thousands of children who fall behind when they transfer from primary to secondary school.

The NUT warned that the strategy would fail if it ignored teachers' existing expertise in favour of "top-down prescription" from central government.

John Bangs, the union's head of education, said: "We have no problem with the idea of more training - some of it is very good - but what is needed is separate special schools for when kids are so difficult that they cannot stay in a mainstream school."

Britain is braced for temperatures of -20C

THE FREEZING weather showed no signs of abating yesterday, with savage frosts expected overnight and forecasters predicting temperatures as low as minus 20C in some parts of Britain.

Many people returning to work were left stranded as their cars froze and batteries died. Their journeys were made worse by recent floods.

Weather forecasters predicted snow showers along the east coast of England and throughout the South-east

BY TERRI JUDD

with temperatures expected to fall to between minus 5C and minus 10C overnight. But that was balmy compared with temperatures in parts of the Scottish glens, which were due to fall to about minus 20C.

"Over the next 24 hours it is going to stay severely cold," the Met Office said. "Over the week it is going to stay cold - bitterly cold on Tuesday and Wednesday - but Thursday and Friday are not so bad."

REGULARS

Leaders	12	Crossword	24
Letters	13	Media	Review 8
Obituaries	14	TV&Radio	Review 20-23



ABROAD

Belgium €3.25; Cyprus €61.00; Egypt £811.00; France €3.20; Hong Kong HK\$42.00; Jordan J Dinar 2.70; Netherlands €3.50; Singapore S\$8.55; USA \$4.40

IN THIS SECTION

Saddam accuses US of forcing inspectors to spy

President Saddam Hussein accused Washington yesterday of forcing UN weapons inspectors inside Iraq to engage in "intelligence work" and issued a defiant warning that his country would defeat any invading army. **News, page 2**

KFC is cruel to chickens, says animal rights group

Kentucky Fried Chicken, the world's biggest chicken restaurant chain, is using animal welfare standards that are unacceptable, an animal rights group claims today. The group plans to hold demonstrations at KFC branches. **Home, page 5**

Poland's EU bid tainted by media bribery claim

Polish prosecutors questioned the editor of the country's leading newspaper yesterday at the start of an inquiry into allegations that he took bribes on behalf of government figures in return for changes to a media ownership bill. **Europe, page 8**

Travel ban threatens Middle East summit

Tony Blair might be forced to cancel a London conference on the stalled Middle East peace process next week after Israel barred Palestinian delegates from attending, in retaliation for a suicide attack in Tel Aviv that killed 22 people. **World, page 9**

IN THE CITY



The insurance group Britannic warned it would not pay a 2002 shareholder dividend and with-profits policyholders were not likely to receive bonuses for last year. **This section, page 15**

Sale!

Book now. Seats selling fast.

Now flying from Stansted and Bournemouth

+

buzz™

The low cost airline that gives you more

buzz.co.uk