



PRAYER ALERT...

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BRITISH ISLES & IRELAND

■ **FRIDAY FOCUS: 15th August - Hope in the credit crunch - Proverbs 3:9-10; Hebrews 13:5-6**

There will be millions of people facing huge financial challenges in the next few months.

Confess: for God to show mercy on our nation for our high national and personal debt rates (February 2008 personal debt stood at £1,421bn).

Pray: for a spiritual awakening to change our materialistic culture; for wise leaders to manage our finance industries; for anyone I know who is caught in the negative equity situation, coping with rising mortgage payments or struggling with debt.

Consider: supporting an organisation working with those in debt.

More: <http://www.worldprayer.org.uk/pagesys.cfm?plD=144>

■ **Student debt 'could top £17,500'**

Students who started university in the UK last year can expect to owe more than £17,500 by the time they leave, according to an annual poll on debt. The Push survey of 2,000 students also suggests that the average debt tops £4,500 for each year of study - nearly 10% more than last year. The rise suggests students are being badly hit by the credit crunch. Another poll of 3,385 students for the National Union of Students found many under-estimated their living costs. According to the NUS survey of 3,135 current students and 250 would-be students, they spent £710 a year on groceries when they expected to spend £510. They spent £740 on household bills but thought they would spend £580 and £100 more on travel than the expected sum of £285. The Push survey revealed considerable differences between universities, with 11 breaking the £20,000 mark for projected debt. It also revealed differences between students in universities in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Pray: For all who have to cope with debt while going through higher education, that they will be good stewards, keep their debt to a minimum and benefit from the experience. (Ro.13:8)

More: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/7556441.stm>

■ **The grade 'A' problem for Universities**

At least one in 10 teenagers will get three straight A-grade passes today, as more pupils than ever before receive top grades in their A-levels. More than one in four scripts are expected to be awarded an A grade with less than three per cent of scripts set to be marked as a fail. The figures highlight the growing dilemma facing university admissions staff as they attempt to select the brightest candidates for popular courses amidst claims of growing grade inflation following 26 consecutive years of rises in the A-level pass rate. Some admissions officers are now calling on more schools to adopt the International Baccalaureate which, they argue, makes it easier to differentiate between the brightest pupils. This year, The Independent has established, about 12,000 teenagers who will receive three A-grade passes at A-level have been turned down for places at Oxford and Cambridge universities.

Pray: for the students as they try to find suitable university places and for all those who will loose out. (Ob:12a)

More: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/universities-the-grade-a-problem-894506.html>

■ **Jobless total up as economy slows**

The number of people out of work rose by 60,000 in the three months to June, taking the official unemployment rate to 5.4%, official figures showed. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) said unemployment increased to 1.67 million between April and June. The data suggests that a slowing economy is taking its toll on the labour market. The ONS also said the number of people claiming jobless benefits in July rose by 20,100 to 864,700. Average earnings in the three-month period grew at an annual pace of 3.4%, down from 3.8% in the previous period and the weakest rise since August 2003. This could ease fears about soaring inflation, which stood at 4.4% in July, and lessen the likelihood of an interest rate rise to contain price rises. This was more than twice the government's target figure, while retail price inflation, often used for setting wages and benefits, was 5%.

Pray: that as the economy slows down and the credit crunch bites deeper for the government to be given wisdom to deal with the excesses.

More: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/7557925.stm>

■ **Christian councillor accuses 'mega-mosque' group of broken promises**

Newham councillor Alan Craig last night accused Tablighi Jamaat, the controversial Islamic sect behind plans for a giant mosque near the site of the 2012 Olympics, of breaking its promises about keeping local people informed. He called on them to 'immediately come clean with their plans'. Cllr Craig criticised the group for not being more transparent with the details of its proposals for the mosque, saying that enquiries to its public relations advisers, Indigo Public Affairs, had 'regularly drawn a blank'. He also criticised the group for failing to meet their promise of a 'Work in Progress' open day this summer. Tablighi Jamaat has also come under fire from moderate Muslims. Dr Taj Hargey, of the Muslim Educational Centre of Oxford, accused the group of espousing a virulent intolerant form of Islam that will 'generate social friction rather than community cohesion', whilst Dr Irfan al-Alawi, of the Centre for Islamic Pluralism, accused the group of being linked to terrorist activities in Pakistan and Britain. (see also Prayer Alert 0708, 4707, 4507, 3707, 3607)

Pray: for Alan Craig and all those involved in opposing this controversial mosque that God would equip them with wisdom and courage for the task. (Pr.4:6-8)

More: <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/christian.councillor.accuses.megamosque.group.of.broken.promises/21200.htm>

■ **Crackdown on illegal knife sales**

An initiative to crack down on the illegal sale of knives to under-18s is being launched. Underage teenagers will be sent into shops to try to buy knives, under the supervision of police and Trading Standards officers. It is part of new measures announced by Home Office Minister Vernon Coaker to 'get tough' on the problem. The scheme will take place in 10 designated knife crime hotspots across England and Wales. Last year the legal age limit to buy a knife was raised from 16 to 18 and the maximum sentence for carrying a knife has been doubled from two to four years. But Mr Coaker said more still needed to be done. Alf Hitchcock, deputy assistant commissioner for Scotland Yard, said: 'Stamping out knife crime and getting weapons off our streets cannot be down to police alone - retailers must take responsibility for their actions too'. (See also Prayer Alert 3108, 3008, 2708)

Pray: for the success of this initiative leading to a reduction in the premature deaths of young people. (Ps.72:12-14)

More: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/7553694.stm>

EUROPE

■ **Georgia: Russia warned over 'Soviet past'**

UK Foreign Secretary David Miliband has warned Russia against hankering after a Soviet past in its border disputes. He told the BBC, Russia had been trying to assert the concept of 'ex-Soviet space', which was 'not acceptable'. Russia had adopted a 19th Century approach and 'blatant aggression' in Georgia, when it should be asserting itself economically, he said. Mr Miliband told BBC Radio 4's Today programme there had been 'blatant aggression' by Russia outside South Ossetia, in Abkhazia and into parts of Georgia. 'The sight of Russian tanks rolling into part of a sovereign country on its neighbouring borders will have brought a chill to the spine of many people, rightly, because that is a reversion to - it's not just Cold War politics, it's a 19th Century way of doing politics.' He added: 'That is simply not the way international relations can be run in the 21st Century.'

Pray: for those involved not to look back to the past but look forward to the possibilities of peace and reconciliation. (Ps.37:37)

More: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/7557887.stm

■ **Georgia: Churches damaged in conflict**

Three evangelical churches in the capital of South Ossetia have been damaged by the conflict between Russia and Georgia, according to reports. People who escaped the conflict told Russian Ministries that the churches in the battleground town of Chinvali were assisting locals before they were damaged. Other churches in the region are also reportedly offering physical, emotional and spiritual help to those affected by the violence. 'They (the churches) got together, and were trying to minister to the families of refugees that are pouring out of South Ossetia into North Ossetia and into other Russian provinces there,' Russian Ministries senior vice president Sergey Rakhuba told Mission Network News. 'We are mobilising Christian counsellors, those who are trained and already have experience, especially after Beslan and Chechnya,' he added. Russian Ministries has workers in the affected areas, including South Ossetia.

Pray: that the authorities can come to a peaceful, diplomatic solution to this fighting. Pray that support and resources will reach the families that have lost everything. (1Tim.2:1-3)

More: <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/georgia.churches.damaged.in.conflict/21205.htm>

WORLDWIDE

■ India: Emergency prayer alert

Prayer is needed for India, where Hindu nationalist forces are advancing strategically and gaining political ground in the lead up to the next federal elections due by May 2009. Their political propaganda is profoundly anti-Christian and causing persecution to escalate dramatically and intensify. For example, with elections scheduled for December in Madhya Pradesh state, Christian leaders say their community is increasingly targeted as part of an effort by the Bharatiya Janata Party to consolidate Hindu nationalist (Hindutva) votes. 'This year alone, since January we have recorded 35 major incidents of atrocities against the Christian community,' said Anand Muttungal, spokesman for the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Madhya Pradesh. 'When we talk of major incidents, we do not count minor incidents like cases of harassment, beatings, attacks on church halls and filing false cases against Christian workers.'

Pray: especially against the work of extremists, for the government and India's courts that judges would uphold and defend India's constitutionally guaranteed religious freedom so that the Gospel will be powerful and effective. (Pr.11:21)

More: <http://www.win1040.com/EPA/index.htm>

■ Zimbabwe: Mugabe rival 'barred from travel'

Zimbabwe's main opposition party says authorities have confiscated travel documents from its leader and other officials ahead of a regional summit. The Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) said the documents were taken at the airport in the capital, Harare. MDC leaders were due to travel to South Africa this weekend after power-sharing talks in Zimbabwe were adjourned. The MDC has been negotiating with President Robert Mugabe in efforts to end Zimbabwe's post-election crisis. The BBC's Jonah Fisher in Johannesburg says MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai and two senior colleagues were planning to fly to South Africa for talks with President Thabo Mbeki, who has been the chief mediator at the negotiations. (See also Prayer Alert 3108, 3008, 2808 etc.)

Pray: that the Lord would have compassion on Zimbabwe and bring the leaders to their knees before Him. (Ps.90:13)

More: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/7560954.stm>

■ Iran: Elderly Christian couple die from injuries caused by police

A 62-year-old church leader and his wife have died as a result of injuries sustained from a police raid on their home. Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), citing the Farsi Christian News Network (FCNN), says Abbas Amiri died in hospital on July 30, 2008, in Isfahan, Iran. Mr Amiri was one of a number of church members who was physically assaulted by police officers who raided his home in Malek Shahr on July 27, 2008 during a Sunday gathering of the house church. CSW is also saddened to confirm that Mr Amiri's wife, Mrs Sakineh Rahnama, died on August 3, 2008 in Masjid-Soleiman, from the injuries and emotional stress she suffered during the police raid and the loss of her husband. 2008 has seen a serious increase in the number of detentions and physical mistreatment of non-Muslims in Iran. Two church leaders who were arrested in Shiraz in May 2008 are still being kept in poor conditions, with no charges brought against them. (See also Prayer Alert 3108, 3008)

Pray: that God would send His angels to protect the believers against persecution. (Lk.4:10)

More: <http://www.assistnews.net/Stories/2008/s08080074.htm>

■ Darfur: Sudan 'launches attack'

Sudan's government has launched a major offensive against rebel bases in the far north of Darfur, two rebel factions have said. A commander from a faction of the Sudanese Liberation Army said about 270 vehicles and 500 Janjaweed fighters were involved in the attack. Nine rebels and nine civilians had been killed, he said. An army spokesman declined to comment. The government has previously denied links to Janjaweed fighters. He said the attacks were part of a plan by the government to destroy all of the rebel bases in northern Darfur. Chad has accused Sudan of harbouring and supporting Chadian rebels. Analysts say the two countries are fighting a proxy war using each other's rebel forces. Violence in Darfur began in 2003 when rebel groups complaining of discrimination against black Africans began attacking government targets.

Pray: for this troubled area as each side accuses the other of causing the conflict. Pray for the innocent who are the ones that suffer. (Ps.46:9)

More: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/7559196.stm>

■ Philippines: Tens of thousands displaced in fresh fighting

At least 130,000 villagers in the southern island of Mindanao have been displaced in fresh fighting as troops struggle to flush out a band of Islamic separatist rebels who illegally occupied 22 villages in the province of Cotabato after a land deal was aborted by the Supreme Court last week, officials said. Army troops pounded rebel positions while at least two attack helicopters dropped rockets in a marshland area where Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) rebels have entrenched themselves, putting up a flag and rejecting repeated demands to vacate. Lieutenant General Cardoso Luna, who heads the military taskforce going after the rebels, said troops were prepared for a 'drawn-out war'. Luna told IRIN: 'They have defied the orders to vacate, so we have decided to enforce the law and drive them out, and if they resist, to neutralise them.' As of 12 August, the government reported that the rebels had begun withdrawing from some villages but still held most of them and fighting was continuing.

Pray: for a speedy solution to this fighting and for those that suffer because of it.

More: <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=79788>

■ **Laos: Dozens of Christians detained**

At least 90 Christians in Laos, including church leaders, remained missing, as part of an apparent government backed crackdown on Christian worship services in three provinces of the Asian nation. Most believers were apparently detained last month, when officials rounded up Christians in Katin village, in Saravan province. They were reportedly taken away after residents seized a Christian villager and poured rice wine down his throat, which flooded his lungs and killed him. When mourning family members buried him and put a wooden cross on the grave, village officials accused them of 'practicing the rituals of the enemy of the state.' Soon after officials rounded up some 80 men, women and children and detained them in a local school compound for three days in an attempt to force the adults to renounce their faith. In one of the latest incidents, on Sunday August 3, Pastor Sompong was rearrested, plus two other believers were detained, Compass Direct News said.

Pray: for the Christians in Laos that God would strengthen them for the battle and deliver them from persicution. (Is.41:10)

More: <http://www.bosnewslife.com/asia-pacific/laos/3740-laos-detains-dozens-of-christians>

■ **UNAIDS director salutes work of faith groups on AIDS**

Dr Peter Piot, the executive director of the United Nations AIDS agency UNAIDS since its creation in 1995, has praised the work of faith-based organizations in the campaign against HIV/AIDS, and said his own attitude to religion has changed over the past 13 years. 'When I started this job I saw religion as one of the biggest obstacles to our work, particularly in the area of prevention,' Piot told a 5 August media conference at the 17th International AIDS Conference taking place in Mexico City. 'But I've seen some great examples of treatment and care that came from the religious community, and lately in the area of prevention,' he said. Like Piot, Craig McClure, executive director of the International AIDS Society, credited faith-based organizations for being among the first to care for children orphaned by the disease and for those dying from AIDS-related illnesses.

Pray: for all the workers working in this field, especially Christians, as they fight this insidious disease. (Lk.9:1-2)

More: <http://www.eni.ch/featured/article.php?id=2156>

PRAISE REPORTS

■ **Syria and Lebanon: To work towards drawing border**

Syria and Lebanon agreed on Thursday to resume work towards formally demarcating their borders but Damascus said the boundaries of the disputed Shebaa Farms would not be drawn until Israel withdrew from them. Demarcation of the borders between Syria and Lebanon would be a major step towards meeting international demands on Damascus to formalise ties with its smaller neighbour. Lebanese President Michel Suleiman and his Syrian counterpart Bashar al-Assad agreed the step at a summit in Damascus, according to a joint statement. Asked whether that would include the Shebaa Farms, Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al-Moualelem said: 'The definition of the Shebaa Farms cannot happen under occupation.' Lebanese group Hezbollah cites the occupation of the Shebaa Farms as one reason for keeping its arsenal. Israel considers Shebaa Farms part of the Golan Heights while Syria and Lebanon say they are part of south Lebanon, from which Israel withdrew in 2000. (See also Prayer Alert 2408)

Praise: God for these discussions that they would lead to a final solution to this long standing problem.

More: <http://uk.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idUKLE9730920080814>

■ **Nepal: Finally opening up to Gospel, says GFA missionary**

The world's formerly only official Hindu country is now open to the preaching of the Gospel, a Christian missionary working there declared joyfully this past weekend. Christians were reportedly arrested and imprisoned for preaching the Gospel in Nepal, speaker Narayan Sharma, Gospel for Asia's Nepal country leader, said at the GFA 'Renewing Your Passion' Conference in Dallas, Texas. He recounted when he himself was arrested and put into a dungeon-like prison cell because he shared his faith. In April, Nepal held its first election for a new legislative assembly, and in May lawmakers legally abolished the monarchy and declared the country a republic. The king was previously considered to be a god. Newly elected officials also promised to allow religious freedom in the government. Now, Gospel programmes are aired over the same government-owned radio stations that used to carry reports of Christians being arrested, Sharma said. 'The Bible says that after the night, joy comes in the morning, and morning has come to Nepal!'

Praise: God for this opportunity for Christians to share the Gospel. (Ps.30:5b)

More: <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/nepal.finally.opening.up.to.gospel.says.gfa.missionary/20510.htm>

PRAYER FORUM OF BRITISH ISLES & IRELAND

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