

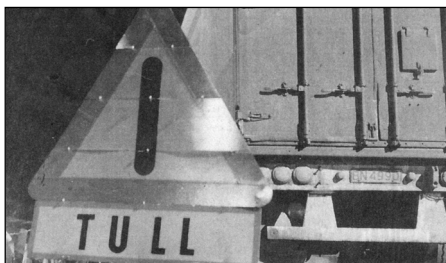
News at a Glance

SWEDES MISSING IN EARTHQUAKE

A Swedish woman and her three small children are missing after the Pakistani earthquake. The Swedish family lived on the ninth floor of the ten-storey Margalla tower in Islamabad, part of a complex where many UN staff and other westerners were living, that collapsed in the earthquake.

"The four Swedes were in the house when the earthquake occurred," said Gunilla von Bahr, a counselor at the Swedish embassy in Pakistan. The father of the missing family is a UN observer in Kashmir.

Six other Swedish families lived in the same building which was completely destroyed. Many had escaped by lowering themselves out of windows with sheets.



ALCOHOL PURCHASE ON-LINE RISK-FREE

Despite strict rules on importing alcohol to Sweden, the risk that wine or spirits which have been ordered online from abroad will be confiscated by customs is practically nil.

During all of last year only three packages of alcohol were checked, according to *Svenska Dagbladet*. The total contents of 18 liters of spirits were seized. Posten, Sweden's national postal service, is required by law to check suspicious items at two main offices, one in Skåne and one at Arlanda. The foreign internet suppliers, however, almost always use other distributors and the law is softer on the numerous courier firms which now also deliver post.

Swedish Customs gives priority to drug trafficking and smuggling of alcohol on a major scale in trucks and containers, not the small amounts that individual households purchase. The head of the government's alcohol inquiry, Kent Härstedt, feels that Sweden has underestimated the scale of online alcohol purchases but there are no figures. The current legal position on the matter is also somewhat unclear, with many apparently contradictory court judgements. The key question is whether the Swedish ban on the individual import of alcohol via an agent violates EU regulations, and an EU judgement is not expected until next year.



UNCLEAR EU STAND OVER UNION BLOCKADE

José Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission says the EU does not plan to cite Sweden for violating European labor rules in connection with a union blockade of a Latvian construction company. Barroso's statement comes in the wake of a declaration from Charlie McCreevy, the EU Internal Market Commissioner that the European Union would side against Sweden in an European Court of Justice case pitting Swedish construction workers against the Latvian company.

Byggnads, the Swedish Builders Union blocked a construction site in Vaxholm, outside Stockholm, for several months because the Latvian workers were being paid far less than is permissible in Sweden. The builders received free board and lodgings and a salary of 14 000 crowns per month, in accordance with their country's collective agreement. Byggnads demanded that the Latvian employers should adhere to Swedish standards and up the workers' monthly earnings by 10 000 crowns.

The Swedish government gave the union blockade its full support and discounted the Latvian plea of discrimination. Prior to the EU's expansion, Prime Minister Göran Persson had tried to introduce temporary restrictions on job opportunities for nationals of the new EU member countries but the Swedish parliament rejected the idea.

Sweden's Labor Court ruled that the union blockade was legal, stating that it was collective labor agreements in the country where the work was being done that should be applicable. The Latvian group argued that the union blockade violated European regulations on the free circulation of labour and services. The Swedish court also chose to seek a preliminary ruling from the European Union Court of Justice in this case. The Labour Court considers European legislation on this matter to be unclear.

Swedish Prime Minister Göran Persson has never doubted that Swedish workers are right
The Latvian company was forced to abandon the building site in Vaxholm before any definitive ruling and it has since been forced into bankruptcy.

BOOST IN SALES OF ENVIRONMENTAL CARS

The sales of environmental cars is going straight up in Sweden. The sales of certain cars has risen by more than 100 percent in one year.



Think car

Free parking, no congestion tax and cheaper energy are attracting buyers, many of whom feel that the environmental aspect is an added bonus.

Saab expects to sell 3 500 environmental cars this year and 5 500 next year. To get an engine that can use ethanol in a new Saab raises the price by SEK 8000. This is an amount that can be recovered in a relatively short time through cheaper energy and lower taxes. The price of a liter of ethanol presently is 8 kronor compared to 12 kronor for gasoline. Furthermore environmental cars will not be subject to the congestion tax to be introduced on a trial basis in Stockholm at the beginning of next year. Then there is the free parking in the major cities.

Hybrid cars that are partly run on electricity are just as popular as ethanol cars. The waiting time for Toyota's Prius is over six months even though it costs almost 60 000 kronor more than a gasoline car.

There are now 285 ethanol E85 stations in Sweden, an increase of 100 just in the last three months. Even stations offering biogas and natural gas are on the rise and there should be 58 of them by the end of the year. These are still just a drop in the bucket compared to the 3 839 gas stations in the country.