‘SIT DOWN GIRLIE’
Girlie goes to work

Workers’ exploitation
It has been claimed that Filipino ‘guest’ workers have been brought to Australia on skilled migration visas and are being exploited by employers demanding long hours at below normal rates. The Philippines Embassy has complained to The Weekend Australian and the Miscellaneous Workers Union has lodged complaints on behalf of three Filipino workers with the ACT Human’s Rights Commissioner. One Filipino woman was promised an annual wage of $39,100 for a 38-hour week. She was later told she was only entitled to be paid as a trainee.

Shirley Temple
A girl who began working very early in life, Shirley Temple, is now a grandmother and is 77 years of age. She will soon receive the 44th Actor’s Guild Lifetime Achievement Award in Los Angeles for her career and humanitarian efforts.

Give a girl a break
Kenneth Nguyen got himself a front page story in the Sunday Age (29 January 2006), by tracking Kylie Minogue on her ‘first public outing’ in Melbourne during her cancer treatment. Nguyen’s syrupy description of the ‘much-loved pop singer’ does not mitigate his breaching her privacy. The media is exempt from privacy laws but in this case bad taste gets a front-page story.

Working women
The Sunday Age (29 January 2006) features an Extra on working women and childcare. Written by Clare Hullady and Amanda Dun the report says: ‘This woman is smart ambitious and a busy mother. She works 16 hours a week and pockets less than $12 an hour. Why does she bother?’ The article points out that the financial reality for working mothers is grim. Women interviewed were back at work as much for the intellectual and social stimulation as for the money. None-the-less most desperately needed the money to pay the mortgage. Childcare waiting lists and the significant cost to hire a nanny (often around $150 a day) can be prohibitive. Sharan Burrow, the ACTU President, is quoted as saying that about 60% of women who work full time would work part time if positions were available for them. Average waiting lists for childcare are 18 months. Federal Sex Discrimination Commissioner, Pru Goward says: ‘We’ve got to stop seeing childcare as guilt money and start seeing it as early childhood development, and a necessary part of running a modern society, and accept it’s going to cost us’. She suggests government looks at more innovative solutions to the problem, such as tax breaks for businesses that offer on-site childcare and extension of the 30% childcare rebate for nannies where families are unable to get their children into childcare centres.

Bangin’ on
Bouquets to the medical team which has developed a world first vaccine to prevent human papilloma virus (HPV). Brickbats to politician Barnaby Joyce who raises the furphy of teenage sexual promiscuity. This life-saving development by Professor Susan Garland, Professor Marianne Fitson and Professor Dorian Rosenthal has the potential to save many, many lives. The vaccine must occur before sexual activity begins and therefore at a relatively young age. In their study, 79% of those interviewed were in favour of vaccinating their children against cervical cancer and 91% disagreed with the statement that vaccinating people against HPV would encourage them to become sexually active. Writing to The Weekend Australian (28-29 January 2006) the three professors note: ‘It would be shameful if ideologically driven arguments about young people’s sexuality got in the way of the community adopting lifesaving prevention measures. As always, discussion of sex generates considerable heat. Regarding the sexual health of our young people, we need to rely on evidence not rhetoric.’ Cervical cancer kills around 500 000 women worldwide a year. Barnaby Joyce was reported as saying: ‘Don’t you dare put something out there that gives my 12 year old daughter a licence to be promiscuous’.

Rights issues
Nicole Kidman has been awarded an Australia Day honour for her services to the arts. She has also become a good will ambassador for the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM). In advocating for women, however, she has refused to comment on her own views about abortion. UNIFEM has agreed with her stand saying reproductive health issues are under the mandate of the United Nations Population Fund. Why does this prevent UNIFEM members from speaking out about abortion? Surely they are both United Nations organisations. Sarah Madsen for the Women’s Electoral Lobby said, ‘People will have a legitimate expectation that she should answer questions about abortion’ (The Weekend Australian, 28–29 January 2006). ‘If she is an ambassador, then she should think carefully about these issues and be prepared to comment.’

UNAYUN
Una is a feminist lawyer.