The government has set up a commission to carry out an urgent investigation into the accusations made by some opposition Members of Parliament, who claim that UK weapon dealers have been buying old Soviet military technology. The dealers are said to have sold the weapons to countries which are blacklisted by the international community because of their own violent domestic situations. The Foreign Office has refused to comment further.

Climate change experts have said that emissions of CO₂ gases should start to slow down by 2030 if China agrees to cut back on its emissions. China currently has the highest levels of CO₂ emissions in the world, but its government is cautious about setting a target for reductions because it wants to continue developing the economy to catch up with the richer nations who, historically, have been responsible for the problem.

The Danish toymaker Lego®, famous for its bright-coloured blocks all over the world, has increased its UK market share in the first six months of this year – despite the recession. Consumer sales of the toy have gone up by about 20%, and the UK managers of the company claim that parents are still looking for a classic, good-quality, best-selling product.

Chemical researchers say we should be eating more popcorn and other breakfast cereals, which have often been branded as junk food. According to scientific research, popcorn contains high levels of polyphenols, a type of antioxidant which helps protect human cells from damage. And what about other popular treats? There is still debate about whether chocolate, wine, tea, and coffee really lower the risk of diseases such as heart problems or cancer.

The US Open started today, and Britain’s Andy Murray will be looking for a win against Argentina’s Juan Martin del Potro. Previous matches have gone to four or five sets and Murray said that the temperatures of 30°C made conditions tough and demanding. However, he was optimistic he would go through to the next round.

Director Martin Scorsese has had problems making his biopic on Frank Sinatra, due to opposition from the singer’s family. One of Sinatra’s daughters, an executive producer of the movie, said the movie was too hard on her father and showed him in a negative light. Scorsese is well known for his tough approach to film directing.

After several years of serious studying, British graduates are finding it more and more difficult to find a job after finishing university. As a result, in 2009 the government decided to promote and fund a trial scheme which offers struggling graduates the opportunity to go on a ‘gap year’ trip around the world, to work and learn new skills. The gap year has always been traditionally associated with undergraduate students, who usually take a year off before starting their university degree.

The government scheme was designed to help graduates participate in overseas projects via the organization Raleigh International, and encouraged them to work on development projects where they might be involved in building basic infrastructure such as schools or health centres. One of the main objectives of the scheme was to help the participants develop what many employers call ‘soft skills’, which include leadership, working in teams, and communication skills, making graduates more attractive in a highly competitive job market. Participants were expected to contribute £1,000 to pay towards the cost of their flight and any vaccinations needed for the trip, which would normally cost an individual about £3,000.

The government also said that their intention was principally to help young graduates from poorer backgrounds, who naturally had more difficulties to finance these types of trips.

The scheme, however, received many criticisms and was described as a quick way to reduce the unemployment figures during a period when very large numbers of graduates were without a job for at least six months. Some people believed that the project was using taxpayers’ money for a programme that was only a short-term solution to long-term unemployment problems.

Despite the criticism, the programme generally gave out a positive message, claiming that an overseas expedition was a perfect way to provide graduates with some excitement and optimism in times of economic crisis and depression.
Extract 6

Summer is a great time for music festivals, so how about dedicating your time to a good cause and working for an NGO, a non-governmental organization such as Oxfam? If you apply to be a campaigner, you can get access to many of the UK’s best music festivals for free. You won’t earn much money and the payment goes to the organization you are volunteering for, but you do get to see all the concerts.

Extract 8

Daniel Barenboim is a prestigious musician and world-famous orchestral conductor who has dedicated his life to music. He was born in Argentina in 1942. His parents were of Russian Jewish descent and he spent some of his childhood years in Israel. He learned to play the piano from the age of five and made his first public appearance as a pianist in 1952 in Vienna and Rome. In the 1950s he dedicated more of his time to conducting, and he was soon working with the most important symphony orchestras in Europe and the United States.

In the early 90s he met the Palestinian-born writer and university professor Edward Said, and they discovered they had a lot in common regarding ideas about Israeli and Palestinian cooperation. As a result of this meeting and friendship, Barenboim set up the West-Eastern Divan Workshop, a project which aimed to bring together talented young musicians from Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Tunisia, and Israel. The objective was to gather these young people together in a neutral place in order to make music under the guidance of many top world musicians. Weimar in Germany was the chosen location because of its fine cultural history. Despite initial difficulties and tensions among the players, the West-Eastern Divan Workshop took off and it later established a more permanent base in Seville in Spain, from 2002.

After each summer workshop the orchestra gives public concerts, and in 2004 it gave its first, historic performance in the Palestinian city of Ramallah. Barenboim has since created other music projects in the hope that music can promote tolerance. These include music kindergartens in Ramallah and Berlin, as well as the Early Childhood Music Education Project in the Middle East. In 2002 he received the Prince of Asturias prize for Concord for his efforts to bring conflicting nations together through music.
Professor Boyd:
Most certainly. Some

Presenter:
Mm, I think that’s basically

Professor Boyd:
Most certainly. Some
universities are now offering podcasts to
first-year students about how to cope with
specific periods of stress, and others are even
considering shifting first-year exams to later
dates to see if this helps reduce anxiety. It’s
not about over-protecting students from the
realities of university life, it’s about being
practical and looking for ways to make the
whole process a more positive and more
productive experience.

Presenter: Professor Christine Boyd, Julie
Wilson, thank you both very much.

Extract 4
School uniform is what I remember. I know a
lot of people are in favour of it because it stops
kids being competitive about clothes, but ours
was really horrible. The boys were all right
because they just wore grey trousers, white
shirts, and grey sweaters, but the girls had
to wear dark purple and light blue, and you
couldn’t wear trousers until the sixth form.
You had to wear a below-the-knee, pleated
skirt. It was just so embarrassing!

Extract 5
I’ll always remember a teacher from
secondary school who really got me interested
in reading, and now I’m just so grateful
because books are so important to our lives.
His name was Mr Bayliss. He was quite
shy and quietly spoken, but he managed to
motivate the whole class, even the students
who messed around a lot. Maybe it was the
kind of books he chose, but even the worst
student could read poetry well, and out loud in
class, by the end of the fifth year.

Extract 6
I went to a girls-only school – I don’t
recommend it. I know they say that there’s
a good case for splitting up girls and boys at
certain ages because they develop and learn
in different ways, but single-sex schools don’t
prepare you for real life. Girls can be almost
too competitive when they are all together.
The only good thing was that our school was
next door to a boys’ school, so in the break we
were always at the wire fence making dates or
passing cigarettes – normal things teenagers
do.