

Reporting the real world



## GROWTH SLOWS

Last year Lotto sales grew by 1.5%, the slowest growth in its ten-year history

Irish news page 5



## BABY PLAN OK

Diane Blood can use her dead husband's sperm to try to have a baby

International news page 11

## PADRAIG TOPS

Padraig Harrington is the best of the Irish players in the Dubai Desert Classic



Sports news page 19



IMPERIAL CALL, with Conor O'Dwyer in the saddle, at the tail of a group of horses working out in Clonmel yesterday. "All his problems are behind him now, he's on schedule for the Cheltenham Gold Cup, the only race that matters," said trainer Fergie Sutherland after yesterday's session. The Gold Cup is just 13 days away. Read Pat Keane's full report on page 15. Picture: Kieran Clancy.

# Divorce floodgates are opened

by Mark Hennessy  
Political Correspondent

1,000 applications in courts within minutes of ending of ban

THE divorce floodgates opened yesterday with over 1,000 applications within minutes of the historic ending of the State ban on marriage dissolution. The Government estimates that well over 40,000 couples will seek divorce, but dismissed fears that it will cause chaos in the courts. Equality and Law Reform Minister, Mr. Mervyn Taylor said he believed that applications from up to 45,000 couples will be spread over years "after an initial flood."

Several thousand marriages are expected to be dissolved this year by judges of the Circuit and High Courts - where delays can range from just weeks to up to over a year. The introduction of divorce will ease the number of judicial separations before the courts, Minister Taylor said, as he launched a booklet for those whose relationships are in trouble. Meanwhile, the Catholic Church's counselling service, Accord, urged the

Government to back greater use of marriage guidance: "People believe it is a good idea for everyone but themselves," said a spokesman. From yesterday, a spouse can lodge a bill for divorce before the courts, along with claims for maintenance, property, and custody of, or access to, any children of the relationship. Indeed, a spouse will have to provide a separate affidavit, guaranteeing the welfare of the children, to comply with

the constitutional safeguards offered to them. Early yesterday, the chairperson of the Divorce Action Group, Mags O'Brien she will produce a do-it-yourself guide to help couples go before the courts without legal representation. Insisting that he was not defending the earnings of the legal profession, Minister Taylor urged couples to consider the substantially strengthened Legal Aid Board service. "People should be wary of the do-it-

yourself approach, which is sometimes advocated out of a misguided sense of begrudgery," said the Minister. "Let me make clear to the cynics that I hold no brief to improve the incomes of solicitors. But I do hold a brief to ensure that people's rights are protected. "Divorce is a serious legal matter and they would be well advised to get legal help. To those who will be availing of a private solicitor, they would be well advised to 'shop around'.

Without legal knowledge, people could find themselves floundering: "It is a solicitor's responsibility to think of these things, and they are liable for damages if they do not do so." Up to 150,000 copies of the Minister's pamphlet 'Services for Marriages in Difficulty', will be circulated to Legal Aid Board offices, Law Society members and a range of public offices. Following a series of over-subscribed seminars around the country, Minister Taylor said he was confident that lawyers were ready to meet the challenge.

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## Seamist first mate not guilty, captain to be sentenced today

by Liam Heylin

THE biggest drugs trial in the history of the State - arising out of the seizure of £47 million worth of cocaine on a boat in Cork harbour - ended yesterday when the jury returned a verdict of not guilty against the first mate - the fourth and final member of the crew to walk free. The captain of the Seamist, Gordan Richards, will face sentence today as he pleaded guilty to possession of the illegal drug for supply before the trial of the four members of the crew commenced. After two hours of consideration the jury returned a verdict of not guilty for ship's mate Roman Smollen, Saint Lucia, West Indies, on charges of possession and unlawful importation of the drug. Prosecution senior counsel had told the jury that there was "more than ample evidence" to convict the defendant on both counts, as there had been

enough evidence for them to "infer" that he knew the shaft of the vessel's dumb-waiter was packed with drugs. Mr Smollen, who has British citizenship, declared afterwards that he was "very relieved and very pleased to have been found an innocent." "The experience was a nightmare and I am glad it's over." The trial was the first to have been prosecuted under the Drug Trafficking Act of 1996 and most of the three weeks was spent in legal argument about the admissibility of evidence in the absence of the

jury. The jury made their feelings about their role in the trial known when they complained about the fact that they were paid no expenses for the trial which began on February 5. "We feel we have been treated disrespectfully. "A lot of us are out of pocket quite a bit," the foreman of the jury said. Judge A.G. Murphy said there was no legal provision for the payment to jurors. "I have every sympathy, and no power to do anything about it." The other three members of the crew were found not guilty earlier in the week by direction of the judge to the jury, following legal argument. Howard Charles Graham Miller from Ambleside, Cumbria, England, James Noel from Saint Lucia, West Indies, and Teresa Da Silva Roy, Terrazas, Puerto De La Cruz, Venezuela, were each acquitted on the charges against them.



Roman Smollen: "I'm glad the nightmare is over."

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## Gilligan's wife says he may settle his tax bill



Geraldine Gilligan: "The VAT man cleared me."

JOHN GILLIGAN, at present in detention in Britain, may settle his tax affairs in this country, according to his wife who proved to the courts that she was not liable for a £1.6 million tax bill. Geraldine Gilligan, who separated from her husband in July, 1995, has remained in regular contact with him since he was arrested while carrying £300,000 through Heathrow. He is awaiting trial in a British court on a money laundering charge - money believed to have come from drugs deals. Yesterday, on RTE's Liveline, Mrs Gilligan told Marian Finnu-cane that her husband - a self-confessed suspect in the Veronica Guerin murder - made a lot of his

money on gambling, on horses and in casinos. She said she intends going back to court to get back the property seized by the Criminal Assets Bureau. "I paid my taxes like everybody else did. "I have an accountant. I had a VAT inspection last November and I got the all clear." "We are speaking, we talk, we always did. Just because we separated we weren't at each other's throats. "He is asking if he can come back to live with me. Sometimes I feel good and sometimes I feel maybe it mightn't be a very good idea." She said the £300,000 found on Gilligan when he was arrested in

Britain was related to gambling and his business interests. "I know where he got it but I can't go into that. If it transpired that he was involved in drugs I wouldn't have anything to do with him. But I know he wasn't. "He was never ever convicted of drugs," she said. She said she never met Veronica Guerin. She said John was devastated and shocked at the news of Veronica's murder. "I think John will be home very soon. He is going to have to sort out his tax affairs here. "He got his own tax assessment as well. I think his is two million pounds."

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