WASHINGTON, DC, USA: Thanks to poor dental hygiene, researchers are gaining a more detailed understanding of what people ate thousands of years ago in what is now Peru. Dental plaque scraped from the teeth of people who lived as much as 9,200 years ago revealed traces of cultivated crops, including squash and beans, according to a report in the latest online edition of Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

These ancient people also ate peanuts and a local fruit known as pacay, according to the report by Dolores Piperno, a staff scientist at the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute and the National Museum of Natural History, and Tom Dillehay, Professor of Archaeology at Vanderbilt University. They studied 39 teeth from six to eight individuals. Found in northern Peru’s Nancho Valley, the teeth were uncovered in the remains of round, house structures in a settlement dated to 9,200 to 5,500 years ago.

“Some teeth were dirtier than others. We found starch grains on most of the teeth. About a third of the teeth contained large numbers of starch grains,” Piperno said in a statement.

The teeth study indicates that the diet of these people contained cultivated crops and was stable over time. In addition, some of the grains had been cooked, the researchers noted. They said they hope the future analysis of starch grains from teeth will lead to other findings about ancient people, perhaps showing a difference in diet between Neanderthals and early modern humans.

US cuts dental jobs

NEW YORK, NY, USA: The United States suffered a grim roll call of job losses this month as a number of major manufacturing and service companies said they would slash costs to cope with the deepening economic crisis. The cuts come three days after government figures showed that US employers axed 533,000 jobs from payrolls in November, the most in 34 years, and that the nation’s unemployment rate hit 6.7 percent, the highest since 1993.

Economists expect the unemployment rate to rise to as much as eight percent by late next year. Jobs data for December looks to be bleak as Dow Chemical Co, the largest US chemical maker, said it would close 20 facilities, divest several businesses, and cut 5,000 jobs.

Others taking the scythe to their workforces included diversified manufacturer 3M Co, which said it would cut a total of 2,300 jobs in the fourth quarter. The company said it had already cut 1,800 of those positions and that it would cut another 500 in the fourth quarter. The job losses will occur mainly in the United States, Western Europe and Japan.

Danaher Corp, a US conglomerate whose products include Craftsman tools and dental equipment, said it was eliminating 1,700 jobs, shuttering 13 facilities and freezing salaries.

The announcements came as the White House was reviewing a plan by Democratic lawmakers aimed at averting the collapse of automakers General Motors Corp and Chrysler LLC and saving 350,000 threatened jobs as the two companies face a cash squeeze.

President-elect Barack Obama, who will take office on 20 January, said the downturn demanded action to create new jobs, which economists say means a spending and tax plan of US$500 billion to US$700 billion.

Job losses in November were the steepest since December 1974, when 602,000 jobs were shed, and much worse than the consensus on Wall Street for a 540,000 reduction.
No dental care costly for patients with diabetes

DETROIT, MI, USA: Overall medical and pharmacy costs in people with diabetes can be lower by more than 10 per cent per year in individuals receiving regular, non-surgical periodontal treatments. According to a study by the University of Michigan, USA, the same procedures were linked to as much as 19 per cent lower diabetes-related medical underscoring the importance of the link between medical and dental health.

“Working with the Michigan Blues, we found insured adults with diabetes in Michigan who receive routine periodontal treatment, such as dental cleanings and scaling, have signifi-
cantly lower medical care costs than those who do not.” George Taylor, the study’s principal in-
vestigator and associate profes-
sor at The University of Michi-
gan School of Dentistry, said. “The results of our analyses provide additional evidence supporting a beneficial role for periodontal treatment in im-
proving overall health in people
with diabetes and in lowering
overall costs.”

The study analysed five
years of claims data from Blue
Care Network, a Michigan-based
Health Maintenance Organisa-
tion, and was funded by the Blue
Cross Blue Shield of Michigan
Foundation. The claims data
pool consisted of 2,674 members
with diabetes aged 18-64 with at
least twelve consecutive months
of medical, dental, and pharma-
caceutical coverage.

“Our belief is that research
like this can have positive effects
on the quality of care and cost of
treating patients with diabetes,”
Dr Ira Strumwasser, executive
director and CEO of the BCBSM
Foundation, said. “This study
demonstrates our effort to im-
prove the health of all Michigan
residents.”

The Blue Cross Blue Shield of
Michigan Foundation is dedi-
cated to improving the health of
Michigan residents by supporting
health care research and inno-
vative health programmes.

Revised manual for
dentistry in Europe

BRUSSELS, Belgium: An up-
dated guide on the training and
work requirements for dentists
and other dental professionals
who want to practise in member
states of the European Union has
recently been published by the
Council of European Dentists
(CED). It describes the different
legal and ethical regulations,
dental training requirements,
oral health systems, and the or-
ganisation of dental practice in
32 European countries, includ-
ing Croatia, which is due to join
the EU next year.

There has been considerable
interest from dentists and gov-
ernment officials about the or-
ganisation of dentistry in the
EU, and we believe this guide
addresses all the professional is-
ues that dentists need to take on
board to make the move to prac-
tise in another country as hassle-
free as possible,” commented
Dr Anthony S. Kravitz, main au-
thor of the 406-page manual.

The English edition is avail-
able for download on the CED
website. French and German
editions may be published at
a later date, Council officials
said.