

karim kabiri must be granted asylum

Iranian asylum seeker, Karim Kabiri, faces deportation to Iran from Moscow, Russia where he was arrested on 21 February. Kabiri, a 29-year-old affiliated to the Iranian Writers' Association in exile, fled from Iran about six weeks ago after having been arrested several times, reportedly in connection with his political activities and his part in anti-government student protests. According to his brother, Kabiri initially fled to Cuba, where his application for political asylum was rejected. He then took a flight to Moscow, and tried to get off the plane when it landed in Ire-

land to apply for political asylum there. Apparently, he was not allowed to leave the transit zone and was put back on the plane. He was arrested on arrival in Moscow. Kabiri intended to apply for political asylum in the Russian Federation, but he may have been denied the opportunity to do so. It is frequently reported that asylum seekers arriving at Moscow's international airport are forcibly returned to their countries of origin before their asylum claims have been considered.

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asylum facts vs. myths

(updated with uk figures for 2000)

Myth #1: "Britain receives more than its share of refugees"

In fact ... Indeed in 2000, the United Kingdom received the largest number of asylum applications (97,900 or 22% of the total number of applications lodged in Europe), followed by Germany (78,800 or 17%) and the Netherlands (43,900 or 10%) However, when compared to the size of the total national population, Slovenia received the largest number of asylum-seekers in Europe during 2000 (4.7 refugees per 1,000 inhabitants), followed by Belgium (4.2), Ireland (2.9) and Netherlands

(2.8). Britain fell from 9th place in 1999 to 10th with 1.6 asylum seekers per 1,000 inhabitants. Provisional data provided by Governments to UNHCR indicate that asylum applications in 25 European countries in 2000, decreased by 4% compared to 1999. On a more global note, according to World Refugee Survey 2000, in 1999 nearly 27 million people in 24 countries were forced to flee wars, repression and other forms of persecution, making the world refugee population total rise for the first time in 7 years. At

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Editorial

who is to blame for the dover 58?

by maryam namazie



Perry Wacker, a lorry driver, is currently on trial for the deaths of the Dover 58, the 58 Chinese who were found suffocated in a lorry in Dover, Britain last June 18. In court, the only 2 survivors of this tragedy relived the last desperate hours as 54 men and 4 women suffocated around them when the air vent was shut in order to evade the authorities. They described how they pounded on the side of the lorry and screamed for help as they gasped for breath and how they kicked at the doors of the sealed truck as the air ran out during their hellish journey.

Wacker is being held respon-

sible for this tragedy and being charged with 58 counts of manslaughter and conspiracy to smuggle the so-called illegal immigrants into the country.

However, this is not the real story. Wacker is in fact the fall guy and scapegoat.

The real story is that 60 living, breathing human beings with lives, with friends and families, with hopes and aspirations, were forced to hide like animals in a container to reach Britain because closed borders and Fortress Europe left them no other choice. In fact, the air vent was shut so that border control guards would not hear their voices and find them.

The real story is that the "illegals" were genuine not "bogus" asylum seekers who fled hardship, low wages, unemployment and lack of religious, political and personal

freedoms. Had they arrived alive, they would most likely have all been refused as one survivor was. At present, poverty, misery and lack of freedom in China are not politically expedient to amount to persecution for the West. At one time they were.

The real story is one of collaboration with persecutors to stop the flow of people seeking more tolerable lives. Just last month, an EU delegation visited China to hammer out strategies to stem the flow of Chinese "sneaking" into Europe.

The real story is that racist Western government policies and asylum procedures condemn the vast majority to lives not worthy of human beings.

In fact, the real story is not about Wacker; he was merely facilitating their escape and entrance into Britain. He is but a scapegoat, diverting attention away from those who are truly responsible. Clearly, Wacker is being made to take the fall for top-level officials and policies, which should be on trial instead of him.

As an aside:

On February 23, another scapegoat, Mohamed Aflanzadeh, an Iranian truck driver who tried to smuggle 81 Kurds into Greece was sentenced to nine years and five months imprisonment. Western governments portray their war on smugglers as concern for the lives of "illegal immigrants," yet the 81 Kurds – found alive - are to be forcibly deported back to persecution where they can be suffocated and murdered by repressive regimes...

IFIR IN THE NEWS

The International Federation of Iranian Refugees has been in the news including in the Big Issue, Red Pepper, CARF magazine, Channel 4 TV, BBC TV and Radio, as well as many Farsi speaking radio and print media.

asylum facts vs. myths

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the beginning of the Millennium, 35 million people were uprooted.

Myth #2: "Majority of asylum claims in the UK are bogus"

In fact ... More than half (55%) of decisions (including appeals) in 2000 resulted in protection being granted. Most asylum seekers are refused not because their cases are bogus, but because they travelled through other countries on their way to Britain or because of lack of information and good legal advice. In addition to that, in 2000, on average 24% of asylum seekers were refused because they did not fill in or submit their complex statement of evidence form (SEF) within 10 working days of their arrival. The 20 page long form must be completed in English and supporting evidence must be translated. In 1999 1,085 applications were refused on non-compliance grounds, in 2000 this figure was 23,795 which represent an increase of 2093% in 2000. These refusals will obviously be taken for an appeal and many will result in granting protection.

Myth #3: "They come here to claim our generous benefits"

In fact ... This is the most common allegation against asylum seekers and refugees. Apart from being false, this statement is utterly offensive

and racist. The belief that people claim asylum in the UK so they can live on benefits 30% below those considered good enough for UK citizens is laughable. It implies that they do not deserve better because of who they are and where they are from, and that 'our' poverty is too good for them. Asylum seekers are entitled only to the equivalent of 70% of Income Support and even this in the form of humiliating vouchers. A single adult gets £36.54 in vouchers a week and just £10 of that amount can be converted to cash. In addition, asylum seekers are not allowed to apply for work for the first six months after their arrival and if they are waiting for an appeal, they are prohibited from working.

Myth #4: "Asylum seekers are a burden on the economy and taxpayer"

In fact ... The Government's own report for 1999 -2000 shows that the cost of supporting asylum seekers, including legal aid, welfare benefits, housing, health and education was £597 million or £10.15 per head of population per year or 0.17% of total Government spending (Hansard, 12 April 2000, 227W). Indeed, this is how Tony Blair, Prime Minister answered the question about the cost in House of Commons: "Let me give the House the facts. The total cost of asylum is less than one fifth of 1 per cent of Government spending."

Myth #5: "They are just

economic migrants abusing the system"

In fact ... Refugees are people who have been forced to flee their homes by human rights abuses and they deserve the chance to start a new life. They deserve to be treated with respect and dignity because they did nothing wrong. Even criminals are presumed innocent until proven guilty. To deny some applicants a fair and humane hearing is to say that some human beings are of less value than others are. After all, Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states: "Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution." Equally, economic migrant should not be a dirty word. People have always moved around the world in search of better life. They bring diversity, skills and zest for life. According to a Home Office study, it is estimated that immigrants contribute around 10% more to Government revenues than they receive in Government expenditure. (RDS Occasional Paper 67).

Myth #6: "Refugees who come to the UK using false documents are bogus"

In fact ... For many refugees fleeing persecution or death, a false travel document is the only means of escape. Often governments refuse to issue passports to known political dissidents - or imprison them if they apply. The fact that asylum seekers use false travel documents tells us nothing about whether the person is a

refugee or not. Because refugees often cannot obtain all the necessary papers, article 31 of the 1951 Geneva Convention prohibits governments from penalising refugees who use false documents. Most governments, including the UK, require travellers to have visas, creating an enormous obstacle for refugees trying to escape persecution. The more governments put up measures to stop people travelling to their territory, the more refugees are forced to use false documents and turn to smugglers to help them escape.

Myth #7: "Increased immigration leads to an increase in crime"

In fact ... There is no established connection between immigration and crime. Asylum seekers are people like the rest of us - a few end up in jail, most are law-abiding. In fact, they are themselves victims of physical and verbal abuse and racist attacks. The real scandal is that thousands of asylum seekers are locked up every year in detention centres and prisons while their cases are decided - even though they have committed no crime.

Myth # 8: "Thousands of asylum seekers disappear after they are refused"

In fact ... Thousands of refused asylum seekers are being deported from the UK every year. In 2000, 49,163 persons (dependants included) were removed and deported. 11,493 of them were asylum seekers. Many

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of them were sent back into the hands of their persecutors. In December 2000 there were 1,195 persons kept in detention centres and 44 prisons in the UK. Their only crime is that they applied for asylum in the UK.

Myth # 9: "Asylum system is a shambles"

In fact ... Asylum system is a shambles, but to blame asylum seekers for that would be as to blame all those who are ill and injured for the problems of National Health Service. The Government is now facing a backlog of more than 60,000 claims. It is spending additional money, time and resources to keep asylum seekers isolated, excluded and poor in order to score cheap political points. Asylum seekers are presumed guilty and it is almost impossible for them to prove their innocence. In the process, they are humiliated with vouchers and degraded through dispersal.

The fact sheet was produced by the NCADC, www.ncadc.org.uk.

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The International Federation of Iranian Refugees (IFIR) calls on groups and individuals to send letters of protest urging the Russian authorities not to deport Karim Kabiri to Iran, where he would be in danger of imprisonment and ill treatment and demanding that he be granted asylum.

Letters can be sent to:

President
of the Russian Federation
Vladimir Vladimirovich
PUTIN
g. Moskva
Kreml
Prezidentu Rossiyskoy
Federatsii
PUTINU V.V
Russian Federation

Fax:
011 7 095 206 85 10
/ 7 095 206 51 73
/ 7 095 230 24 08

E-mail: president@gov.ru

(Information obtained from Amnesty International, UA 47/00 dated 23 February 2001)

international refugee news

*** Arrests**

Fifty-two "border-crossers" have been found in the Balassagyarmat region near Slovakia, including Bangladeshis, Pakistanis, Chinese and Palestinians. The 52 will be handed over to the Hungarian authorities, and "procedures relating to the policing of foreigners will be launched against them." (Hungarian Radio (Budapest), March 1, 2001)

Greek authorities arrested 35 Iraqi Kurds who were illegally brought to an Aegean island and four smugglers. The Kurds were taken to a hospital for examinations, where three of them were treated for high fevers. (February 28, AFP)

British troops in Cyprus detained 26 Iraqis found at British bases territory. Another three Iraqis were taken into custody by Cypriot police. Fifteen Iraqis who entered Dhekelia Base last month were sentenced to two months jail each by a British bases court for illegal entry into Cyprus. The 15 will serve their sentences in a bases prison, after which their refugee status will be reviewed under due process of law. (February 28, AFP)

Last year, the Polish border guard detained 6,613

people - 10 per cent more than the year before - for illegally crossing the state border. Together with individuals turned back by the services of neighbouring states, there were 9,994. A further 1,500 people were detained by the border services in neighbouring countries. (Trybuna (Warsaw, Poland), February 28, 2001)

German police detained 21 people believed to be "illegal immigrants" from Iraq after they had crossed the border from Austria. (Agence France Presse, February 20, 2001)

*** Collaboration with Persecutors**

China is showing a strong commitment to tackling "illegal immigration" in its southern provinces, but an increasing number of people are now heading to Europe from the North-East. An EU delegation was in China to hammer out strategies to stem the flow of Chinese "sneaking" into Europe. (Reuters, March 2, 2001)

*** Deaths**

Two survivors of the Dover lorry tragedy in which 58 Chinese "illegal immigrants" died spoke for the first time of the panic that gripped the 60

END DEPORTATIONS!

A website has been designed to help international anti-deportation activists coordinate and share information. <http://www.deportation-alliance.com/ba/>

people packed into the airtight container as they began to suffocate on the fourth day of the trial of Perry Wacker, a Dutch lorry driver charged with 58 counts of manslaughter and conspiracy to smuggle "illegal immigrants." (The Guardian (U.K.), March 2, 2001)

Fourteen Zimbabwean "illegal immigrants" to Botswana died in a road accident as Botswana police were "repatriating" them. (Reuters, March 1, 2001)

A body was found in the wheel well of a US Airways jet at San Francisco International Airport. The unidentified man was discovered a few minutes after landing. Stowing away in an airliner wheel well is often fatal because as the wheels retract, the area is enclosed, with little oxygen and warmth. (CNN, February 20, 2001)

Britain's biggest rail freight operator may axe services from France and Italy because of the thousands of "illegal immigrants" who stow away on its trains. The desperation of refugees was graphically illustrated earlier this month when an Iraqi Kurd died and another broke both legs after they leapt 20ft (6m) from a bridge on to the roof of a train heading for Britain through the tunnel. (The Independent (UK), February 21, 2001)

*** Deportation**

The UNHCR denied charges by the Lebanese government that it is sanctioning the deportations of refugees and asylum seekers. "In spite

of the ongoing cooperation with the office of the Surete Generale (security services), UNHCR has on various occasions expressed its strong concern about the situation facing refugees and asylum seekers in Lebanon particularly their deportation," UNHCR chief said. Lebanese authorities denied charges made by Amnesty International that it mistreats people entering the country "illegally," saying it had expelled "illegal migrants" in coordination with UNHCR. Since September 2000, more than 300 asylum seekers who had been detained for entering Lebanon illegally have been forcibly repatriated. (February 28, AFP)

Some 77,000 "illegal immigrants" landed on Italian coasts during the period 1999-2000, according to an Italian parliamentary report. Last year, Italy deported 66,000 "illegal immigrants." (Xinhua News Agency, February 28, 2001)

Indonesia will deport 148 Afghans who have been stranded in remote Irian Jaya province since they failed to reach the Australian coast by boat three months ago. Irian Jaya governor said UNHCR had offered help in the deportation of the Afghans. (February 28, AFP)

Cyprus police intercepted a boat carrying suspected "illegal immigrants" as part of a drive to stem a recent flow of clandestine landings. Seven men aged between 25 and 35 and believed to be Iraqis were onboard. The patrol boats accompanied the boat to a distance away from Cyprus territorial waters. "No land-

ing" policies are widespread. The island's status as a candidate for EU membership has prompted Cyprus to act firmly with immigrants lest it be considered a soft spot for landings for those seeking safe passage to the continent. Several boatloads of people, often with young children and mostly Iraqi Kurds, have arrived in poorly maintained boats over the past few months. Many have promptly been deported. (Reuters, February 26, 2001)

Iran's police arrested 100 "illegal" Afghan immigrants crammed on a truck heading for Isfahan. The police department said they will be "repatriated" after undergoing legal procedures. Three days ago, 100 other Afghans were arrested in the same district. (IRNA news agency (Tehran, Iran), February 25, 2001)

Canadian Immigration officials are labouring hard to find a way to deport a Mexican woman after two airlines refused to fly her because she is almost eight months pregnant. Her husband was deported to Mexico. (The Toronto Sun, February 23, 2001)

*** Detention**

Staff at the Woomera detention centre in Australia racially abused and intimidated detainees and treated them like prisoners, the Commonwealth Ombudsman has found. In the second damning report on Australia's detention centres, Oliver Winder found women and children were at risk of possible harm

in male-dominated centres. Winder recommended alternative forms of detention for whole families, women at risk and individuals with special needs outside the major centres. (The Age (Australia), March 2, 2001)

A Palestinian inmate at the Maribyrnong detention centre in Australia has been kept in an isolation cell for four months and denied access to a toilet as punishment for attempting suicide. Since his solitary confinement, he had become ill, experiencing vomiting and diarrhoea, but had not received treatment. (The Age (Australia), February 26, 2001)

The situation in immigration detention centres in Australia remained volatile, with at least five serious disturbances and a suicide since December. Immigration Department secretary Bill Farmer said tensions were running high. (The Australian Associated Press, February 20,

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Doctors had sought permission to resuscitate hunger strikers at detention centres for "illegal migrants" about 20 times in the past three years, immigration department secretary Bill Farmer said. (The Australian Associated Press, February 20, 2001)

*** Legislation / Laws**

The UK Tory leadership has urged its Parliamentary candidates to limit the use of the word "Conservative" in their election literature and make asylum a key campaign issue. (The Independent (U.K.), March 2, 2001)

The European Commission said it was considering several options in tackling eastern European immigration following the EU's planned eastward enlargement. (Deutsche Presse-Agentur, March 1, 2001)

Organised crime and "illegal immigration" were top items as interior and justice officials from the G8 group of leading industrialised nations met. The French delegation was leading calls for action on "illegal immigration and human trafficking," joined by the British delegation. The decisions at the meeting will become a part of the final declaration of the G8 summit of heads of government and heads of state in Genoa on July 20-25. (Agence France Presse, February 27, 2001)

The UN refugee agency criticised Italy for being the only country in the European Union yet to pass legislation to provide adequate protection for asylum seekers. A

bill, which would offer legal protection and assistance to political asylum seekers entering Italy, was introduced into parliament three years ago has repeatedly failed to pass the lower house Chamber of Deputies. (Reuters, February 22, 2001)

An overhaul of the Immigration Act is returning to the Canadian Commons with some concessions. It is expected to reduce appeals for serious criminals, implement security screening of claimants, introduce penalties of up to \$1 million in fines and life in prison for those who smuggle migrants into Canada. (The Canadian Press, February 21, 2001)

In Australia, new laws were being drafted to crack down on illegal arrivals, with greater penalties for those escaping detention or committing breaches of the peace. They would also give greater powers to search detainees and visitors. The department was looking at clarifying powers to restrain violent detainees. (The Australian Associated Press, February 20, 2001)

*** Living Conditions**

UN Secretary General will visit Pakistan next month, including Afghan refugee camps near Peshawar. UNHCR said the makeshift Jalozai camp in NWFP, where some 80,000 Afghans live, could soon become a "death camp." More than 20 people, mostly children, had succumbed to preventable illnesses recently. The authorities have refused to provide a new site for the Afghans, and have denied they

are genuine refugees. A UN screening process found about 80 percent of them were genuine. (February 28, AFP)

UK local authorities that rely on central government funding to support destitute asylum seekers were told by the High Court today that thousands of refugees are not covered by the scheme. A judge ruled that the Home Office's National Asylum Support Service applied only to people whose need for support and accommodation arose "solely" from their destitution, and not to those who were also in need because of sickness, disablement or old age. (Press Association (U.K.), February 27, 2001)

Pakistan has told some 100,000 Afghan refugees to either move to another camp nearby or go back to Afghanistan, where drought and war have created a new exodus of refugees in recent months. Some 170,000 Afghans have poured into the NWFP since September, but the provincial government has refused to find new sites for them. (Agence France Presse, February 22, 2001)

*** Membership in a Social Group**

Chicago immigration officials have granted political asylum to a 10-year-old autistic boy whose mother had claimed his disability is so misunderstood in Pakistan that he would be tortured and persecuted if they returned there from the US. "His asylum was granted not on the basis of being disabled or autistic," said director of the

Chicago Office of Asylum for the U.S. Department of Immigration and Naturalization Service. "It's the persecution his disability itself causes. He fits the classic definition of a refugee." (The Chicago Tribune, February 21, 2001)

*** Protests**

Hundreds of Kurdish "immigrants" held a sit down protest blocking the gate of the French holding camp where they have been housed since their arrival two days earlier aboard a beached ship. The protest lasted three quarters of an hour, during which time traffic was barred entering the camp. The demonstrators returned peacefully to their quarters. According to a translator, they have four demands. "Firstly, the way they are housed. It is not comfortable and it is too cold. Secondly, the food. It was alright at first, they were very hungry, but they want something more varied, and more hot food," he added. They are housed in converted military warehouses in the town of Frejus, southern France, and fed on army rations. "Also they want medical treatment for their children. And lastly they want the status of political refugees, and they want the process speeded up." (AFP, 19 February 2001)

The situation in immigration detention centres in Australia remained volatile, with at least five serious disturbances and a suicide since December. Immigration Department secretary Bill Farmer said tensions were running high. The situation in deten-

tion centres remains volatile, with a less compliant population," Farmer said. There had been two disturbances within 24 hours at Port Hedland in Western Australia in January and at Curtin in WA. (The Australian Associated Press, February 20, 2001)

Doctors had sought permission to resuscitate hunger strikers at detention centres about 20 times in the past three years, immigration department secretary Bill Farmer said. (The Australian Associated Press, February 20, 2001)

*** Racism / Fascism**

Far-right offences in Germany jumped by 59 percent last year. Authorities registered 998 violent far-right crimes last year - a jump of 34 percent from 1999 and the highest figure since a wave of such attacks. (The Associated Press, March 2, 2001)

The Association of Chief Police Officers in the UK published a guide aimed at promoting good community relations between asylum seekers and host communities where racism is being stirred by inflammatory language. The guide urges local police to establish an early dialogue with MPs, media editors and local authorities to "reduce the opportunity for misunderstandings or unintentional inflammatory statements." The deputy chairman of the Commission for Racial Equality said there was some evidence of politicians stirring up local opposition to asylum seekers. (March 1, Financial Times)

A Greek court convicted a

man who went on a shooting spree targeting immigrants on Oct. 22, 1999 on two counts of murder and seven counts of attempted murder for killing a Georgian and wounding five others from Asia and Africa. He also killed an Iraqi Kurdish immigrant and wounded two others three days earlier. (The Associated Press, February 28, 2001)

Britain's Europe minister attacked xenophobic politicians who whip up fears about immigrants, lamenting the "disturbing" rise of the far-right in countries like Austria. (Agence France Presse, February 28, 2001)

Polls say Italian media magnate Silvio Berlusconi stands a good chance of winning this spring's national elections. In Belgium, Foreign Minister Louis Michel said the European Union should impose sanctions on Italy if Berlusconi wins in alliance with the xenophobic politician Umberto Bossi. (The Associated Press, February 28, 2001)

When an Italian woman and her 12-year-old son were murdered in the town of Novi Ligure, Italian newspapers were quick to point the finger at immigrants. Playing on fears of foreigners, right-wing political parties took up the cry. Anti-immigrant rallies were scheduled. Then, police announced they had arrested the woman's 16-year-old daughter. (The Associated Press, February 24, 2001)

Iran's police arrested 100 "illegal" Afghan immigrants crammed on a truck heading for Isfahan. The great number of Afghans living in Iran is commonly cited as one of the

reasons "contributing to the high rate of unemployment and drug abuse in the country." (IRNA news agency (Tehran, Iran), February 25, 2001)

The Austrian far-right Freedom Party was accused of inciting racists with a series of anti-foreigner election posters plastered all over Vienna, including "Foreigners: I understand the concerns of the Viennese." (Agence France Presse, February 22, 2001)

Italian police arrested 12 people accused of belonging to a banned racist organization, Blood and Honor. In a synchronized operation, Austrian police arrested a German citizen, in Vols, near Innsbruck, Austria. Italian law forbids organizations that promote racial, ethnic and religious discrimination. (The Associated Press, February 20, 2001)

Jack Straw, the UK home secretary, will announce new powers giving statutory force to the official campaign to tackle institutional racism in schools, hospitals, and universities and across the whole public sector, including the police and prisons. (The Guardian (UK), February 21, 2001)

Plagued by a sharp rise in hate crimes, Germany is forming special federal police units to counter neo-Nazis. (The Associated Press, February 20, 2001)

*** Restrictive Measures / Militarisation of Borders**

Canadian immigration is inspecting the contents of private mail and storing the in-

formation on a computer database as part of its battle against people "smugglers and international criminals." (National Post (Canada), March 2, 2001)

A high-tech scanning system to screen all visitors to Canada has "Big Brother" overtones, warned Immigration Minister a few days after she touted such a plan. (The Calgary Sun, March 2, 2001)

A Canadian federal law that has barred chronically ill or disabled people from immigrating to Canada is being challenged in court as a violation of the Constitution by a German woman who was refused permanent residency in Canada because she has multiple sclerosis. (National Post (Canada), March 2, 2001)

US President Bush wants to beef up law enforcement on the border, and split the Immigration and Naturalization Service into two parts. (The Tucson Citizen, February 28, 2001)

Italy plans to do a feasibility study on whether to set up a European border police modeled after a bilateral effort under way between Germany and Italy. (Agence France Presse, February 27, 2001)

Belgium and France will sign an agreement on cross-border border police and customs cooperation on March 5 to concentrate the two countries' resources more effectively in the fight against cross-border crime and "illegal immigration." France has already set up joint police stations with neighbouring Germany and Spain. (Agence France Presse, February 25,

2001)

An Iranian truck driver who tried to smuggle 81 Kurdish "illegal immigrants" into Greece in the back of his vehicle was sentenced to nine years and five months jail for human trafficking and ordered to pay a fine of eight million drachmas (approx 21,500 US dollars). (Agence France Presse, February 23, 2001)

A spokesman for Eurotunnel said it had asked the British government to send troops to the French side of the tunnel to help keep out would-be asylum seekers. The consortium has suggested that a detachment of Gurkhas, Nepalese troops with a reputation for toughness, should be deployed to the tunnel entrance at Coquelle, near Calais. A regiment of 800 Gurkhas is stationed at Folkestone, southeast England, near to the other end of the tunnel. However, the appeal was dismissed by British ministers, who have said it was up to tunnel operators to make their own security arrangements. (Agence France Presse, February 22, 2001)

Britain's Immigration Minister called on Eurotunnel to beef up security on its platforms to stem the tide of "illegal immigrants" using the channel tunnel as an entry point into Britain. (Reuters, February 21, 2001)

*** Risky Routes**

About 100 Iraqi Kurds left a French military camp almost two weeks after their ship ran aground on the French Riviera. The group was the last of 910 immigrants that

arrived on a cargo ship on February 17. The refugees have gone to other temporary shelters, mostly in southern France. The immigrants endured a weeklong voyage in the cramped hold of a freighter, hoping to slip into Europe. The crew abandoned the vessel when it ran aground. They were held for four days at the military camp in Frejus and were allowed to apply for political asylum. (The Associated Press, March 2, 2001)

Most of the Kurdish immigrants shipwrecked on the French Riviera earlier this month applied for asylum, but about 200 appeared to have opted to melt away and continue their journeys. Three quarters of the refugees have regularised their situation. (February 28, AFP)

Some 300 would-be immigrants, including at least 100 women and children, landed on the Italian coast, the latest group to make a risky sea voyage to reach Western Europe. Most of the passengers were Kurds, Pakistanis and Afghans. (The Associated Press, February 27, 2001)

English, Welsh & Scottish (EWS), Britain's biggest rail freight operator, may axe services from France and Italy because of the thousands of "illegal immigrants" who stow away on its trains. It said some migrants hid inside wagons while others rode on the outside of trains, wrapped in foil to keep them warm. Others breathed through pipes in a hopeless attempt to evade carbon dioxide detectors used to discover people hiding inside trucks. (The Indepen-

dent(UK), February 21, 2001)

*** Support**

The practice of female genital mutilation should be specifically outlawed in Ireland, according to a voluntary organisation of development workers, Comhlamh. Its co-ordinator said, "The bottom line is that it's torture and we cannot sustain any cultural norm which involved torture of children, regardless of the sensitivities and traditions". (The Irish Times, March 1, 2001)

Skilled immigrants to Australia will boost living standards by \$5.3 billion over the next seven years, Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock said. (Dow Jones Newswires, March 1, 2001)

As the French government offers medical benefits and shelter to 908 shipwrecked Iraqi Kurds, the immigrants are being greeted in the streets with free food, clothing and a general outpouring of hospitality. (February 25, AP)

According to the poll conducted by the CSA institute in Paris, France, 78 percent of those asked were against the Kurdish refugees being expelled from French territory. Almost 60 percent favoured their being granted all the rights of asylum once their cases had been assessed. 20 percent said they should be sent back to their country of origin - Iraqi Kurdistan. Lionel Jospin, the premier, was quick to adapt to the change in the public's mood. When the refugees first appeared he said France had to be careful "not to reward the criminal

organisations dedicated to this kind of traffic". However, the government's tone later softened, letting the refugees apply for asylum. This was in part simple realpolitik to avert an embarrassing challenge in the courts by human rights lawyers. The issue of political repression by the Iraqi regime against Kurds has been for instance well proved. In addition, most of the boat people appear to have been persecuted because they were members of the minority Yazdi religious sect. (The Financial Times (U.K.), February 23, 2001)

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