

HAMBASTEGI

PAPER OF THE INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF IRANIAN REFUGEES



March 19, 2001

IFIR – Sweden’s Successful Campaign

In an effort to change asylum policies and end the current biased attitude of the immigration authorities towards Iranian asylum seekers, IFIR Sweden has organised numerous protests and direct actions, including sit-ins and occupations, which were publicised in the media and well-received by the public.

On February 16, hundreds of Iranian asylum seekers from thirteen cities and refugee camps from all over the country gathered at the Swedish parliament in Stockholm and displayed a magnificent show of unity. It was the largest demonstration of Iranian asylum seekers in recent history. Speakers at the demonstra-

tion included: Esmail Moloodi, the Director of IFIR- Sweden, Asgar Karimi, member of the political bureau of the Worker-communist Party of Iran, and representatives of the Left Party of Sweden, the Swedish Socialist Party for Social justice and the Student Movement. A delegation comprising of nine people from

different refugee camps led by Esmail Moloodi met with a representative of the ruling Social Democratic Party who is also the spokesperson of the Swedish Parliamentary Committee in Defence of Democracy in Iran. The MP agreed to raise the issue at the parliamentary committee and further cooperate with IFIR.

Support Demands of Iranians in Pakistan

On Monday, March 12, several Iranian refugee claimants, including political opponents, student activists and religious converts began a hunger strike in Pakistan to demand that the UNHCR grant them refugee recognition and resettlement to a safe third country. The hunger strikers are Vahid Younessi (case number I-

17447), Eskandar Farzad (I-17337), Farshid Jalali (I-16778), Khalil Ibrahim (I-16776), Aeid Safari (I-17435), Fereidoun Ghorbanian (I-17281), Mohammad Farajzadeh (I-17481), and Hassan Parsa (I-17684).

IFIR calls on groups and indi-

viduals to send letters of protest to the UNHCR in Pakistan asking that their casefiles be reviewed and that Iranians be granted protection from deportation back to Iran.

Send your protest letters to:

E-mail: pakis@unhcr.ch

Fax: 0092-5127-9455

Quote of the Week

“I was in Iran some-time ago; you have a good country.” - Statement made by Philip Rud-dock, Australian Immigration Minister, to an Iranian asylum seeker detained in Port Headland Detention Centre. The asylum seeker, currently in Villawood Detention Centre mentioned this to IFIR-Australia branch representatives visiting the centre.

Editor: Maryam Namazie
Asst. Editor: Javad Aslani

E-mail: ifir@ukonline.co.uk

Tel: 0044 7730 107 337

Fax: 0044 208 813 9734

Address: P.O. Box 27236
London N11, England

Web Site: www.hambastegi.org

Editorial:
Dead on Refusal
by Maryam Namazie
page 2

Editorial

dead on refusal

by maryam namazie



of Mohammad Reza Mikaelie-diba, a 25-year-old Iranian asylum seeker was recovered from a canal in Northern Holland. That same week, Farrokh Shiri, a 37-year-old asylum seeker, was arrested in the UK after having threatened suicide with a ball-bearing gun at the Penzance YMCA where he lived. All had despaired after being refused; Alaei was fearful of being refused.

In the past three months, several Iranian asylum seekers have committed suicide in the UK and Holland. Saeed Alaei, a 26-year-old Iranian asylum seeker, hanged himself 4-5 days before Christmas in Nelson, Manchester. On January 18, Ramin Khaleghi, a 27-year-old Iranian asylum seeker, was found dead in his room at the International Hotel in Leicester. On March 7, the body

The UK and Dutch governments' high refusal rates are an important aspect of their policy to depress, deter, traumatise, break and even kill asylum seekers. One main reason for the increased refusals is the general anti-asylum environment after the end of the Cold War. Mainly, however, it has to do with European governments' attempts to legitimise the

Islamic regime in the face of increasing protests in Iran.

According to the April – December 2000 UK Home Office statistics (there are no country specific statistics for January – March available on their web site), the average refusal rate for Iranians was 82 percent. 1999 refusal rates for several countries (available on the UNHCR web site) reveals enormous variations depending on the closeness of relations. In the UK in 1999, 50 percent were refused while in Holland 80 percent were refused compared to the US' 11 percent and New Zealand's 0 percent refusal rates of Iranian asylum claims.

Clearly, refusals have nothing to do with actual asylum claims or conditions in Iran but everything to do with political and economic interests.

Online Demonstration against Deportation

The organisations "No one is Illegal" and "Libertad!" have called on groups, organisations and individuals to show their outrage at deportations through a temporary blockade of the Lufthansa homepage. Every year more than 30 000 people are deported from Germany by airplane. Lufthansa sells the vast majority of the so-called "deportee-tickets." Consequently, "Deportation Class" is big business. However, it is not only that. Since May 28, 1999 when the Sudanese citizen, Amir Ageeb, died on board of a Lufthansa flight as a result of ill-treatment by three German border guards, the company has faced growing pressure to renounce this dirty business. Because of pressure, the Captains' Association has recommended that its members refuse the forced boarding of people or those handcuffed. The Public Workers Union has also called on its members to take measures to stop the deportation flights.

For more information, on joining this Internet-based demonstration contact, online-demo@gmx.net or see www.deportation-alliance.com and www.libertad.de/projekte/depclass/demo.

Afghan Refugees Rights Violated in Iran

The arrest and deportation of Afghan refugees in Iran continues. On February 25, a truck transporting over 100 Afghan refugees was stopped on its way to Isfahan and all its occupants detained. A few days earlier, a similar number of Afghan refugees were arrested.

Afghan refugees in Iran live in substandard conditions; they work long hours receiving meagre wages. They face racism, mistreatment and abuse at the hands of the Iranian authorities. They are arrested and deported back to Afghanistan to face the Taliban, drought, misery and

hunger.

The IFIR condemns the Islamic regime's continued violations of Afghan refugee rights. All Afghan refugees must be granted the indefinite right to live and work in Iran.

Scandal in Danish Courts and Policies

A group of Danish lawyers have challenged the outcome of some asylum cases on the basis that the judge and jury in asylum determination hearings were asleep during proceedings. In response to these allegations, the accused have announced that their eyes were closed in the proceedings to increase their "concentration."

In continuation of the Danish government's inhuman practices, the Danish interior minister

has presented a bill to parliament which aims to remove the possibility of re-opening rejected asylum cases. In the past, a large number of rejected cases have been re-opened and earlier negative decisions overturned.

While the Danish government fully expects this bill to become law, the united efforts of progressive individuals and organisations can push back the bill and demand fair determination procedures.

Turkish Asylum Seeker Killed by Swedish Police

On March 10, a Turkish asylum seeker was shot dead by Swedish police in Linköping. The 25-year-old man from Turkey had gone into hiding when his asylum application had been refused last summer. He had fled inhumane conditions in Turkey only to be killed because of the inhuman asylum policy of the Swedish government.

The Swedish government's asylum policy has forced thou-

sands of asylum seekers into hiding to evade capture and deportation back to persecution. Many have lived years without benefits, healthcare and schooling for their children and in constant fear and anxiety of being deported.

IFIR – Sweden strongly condemns the police brutality and holds the Swedish government and its asylum policy directly responsible for this crime.

international refugee news

* Arrests

Up to 84 people, including 60 Kurds from Turkey were detained after crossing into Italy illegally from Slovenia. Under an agreement recently signed between Rome and Ljubljana they will be immediately returned to Slovenia. Last year about 20,000 "illegal immigrants" were detained along the 300-kilometre (187 mile) Italy-Slovenia border. (Agence

France Presse, March 16, 2001)

Malaysian authorities Friday detained 16 "illegal immigrants" from Myanmar, including a woman, in the northernmost state of Perlis, which borders Thailand. The group, aged between 16 and 28, were arrested by the anti-smuggling unit. They would be charged under the Immigration Act for entering the

country illegally. (Agence France Presse, March 16, 2001)

Malaysian Marine police detained 127 Indonesian "illegal immigrants," 114 of who are men, near Pantai Sepang Besar. They were handed over to the police for further action. (New Straits Times (Malaysia), March 15, 2001)

Turkish authorities have

detained 48 "illegal immigrants" from Afghanistan, Senegal and Pakistan and nine accused smugglers. Turkish police arrested more than 94,000 "illegal immigrants" last year and hundreds of thousands travel through Turkey each year on their way to the European Union. (Reuters, March 7, 2001)

* Children

A BBC documentary will

Violence and Torture against Women Conference

Maryam Namazie, IFIR's Executive Director, will be speaking at an Amnesty International conference on Torture and Violence against Women on March 24 at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London. The conference will look at the following themes: Legal elements of "Torture" with particular reference to torture in police and military custody, under what circumstances might domestic violence amount to torture, medical issues concerning torture of women, state responsibility for Non State Actors – "Due Diligence," discrimination in the law and routes of redress. For more information, contact: maristella.filuppucci@amnesty.org.uk, Women's office, Amnesty International, 99-119 Rosebery Avenue, London EC1R 4RE.

expose the illegal trade in children who have been taken from local authority care in West Sussex and made to work the streets in Italy. The victims, mostly from African countries, have been disappearing from care homes for the last two years. The numbers who have gone missing have dropped recently as the county council works more closely with the police to step up security at a special social services home dedicated to child asylum seekers. It is thought around 40 children have gone missing from West Sussex in total. (Press Association (U.K.), March 8, 2001)

*** Deaths**

As many as 40 people were killed when a boat carrying "illegal immigrants" from the Dominican Republic, Haiti and China capsized 6 miles northwest of St. Martin in the Leeward Islands. Two survivors were found. Rescuers had recovered 23 bodies and at least 17 others were missing and presumed dead. (United Press International, March 16, 2001)

Six undocumented immigrants from Mexico died and 14 were injured when the van they were travelling in was hit by a truck on Interstate 76 east of Sterling, US. (The Denver Post, March 13, 2001)

Four Cubans who embarked for the Florida Keys, US, over the past two months all died mysteriously from head injuries. (The Miami Herald, March 15, 2001)

Malaysian police, who initially believed there were only 26 "illegal immigrants" on a boat which cap-

sized near here last week, discovered two more bodies near Pulau Kaca bringing the number of dead in the boat tragedy to 16. 12 survivors had been picked up several hours after the incident. The "illegals" were from Pakistan, Nepal and Myanmar. (New Straits Times (Malaysia), March 15, 2001)

Spanish authorities launched a search and rescue mission for two boats reported missing off the southern Spanish coast and believed to be carrying around 60 immigrants from Morocco. Last month Spanish rescue officials found the bodies of 10 north African immigrants who died while trying to cross the Mediterranean in makeshift rafts. Official estimates say 500 people die each year making the attempted crossing from northern Morocco to Spain. (Agence France Presse, March 13, 2001)

*** Deportation**

Fifty-one "illegal immigrants" from Albania, Georgia, Russia and Armenia were detained for deportation following a police round up in Greece. (The Associated Press, March 16, 2001)

Labour has pledged to deliver a big increase in "failed" asylum seekers being thrown out of Britain. Next year, for the first time, the wives and children of "failed" asylum seekers thrown out of the country will be counted in official statistics, giving an instant 25 per cent increase. The Home Affairs Select Committee said a major reason the UK attracted more applications than any other country in Europe was because so few "failed" asylum

seekers were sent back. In 1999, 2,700 refugees were deported - despite 11,000 claims being rejected. Straw has pledged to throw out 12,000 failed asylum seekers this year and 30,000 in 2002. (The Daily Mail (U.K.), March 7, 2001)

Zambian immigration authorities have deported 117 foreign nationals of different origins who entered the country illegally. Moreover, nine Congolese nationals were arrested last week for illegally entering the country, and five others are in detention pending prosecution. Zambia hosts a total of 532 "illegal immigrants" from Malawi, Tanzania, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and some European countries. Last year, 7,983 were deported and 136 were prosecuted and fined for infringing on Zambia's law. (Xinhua News Service, March 7, 2001)

*** Detention**

The nation's first detention centre for "illegal-immigrant" families seeking asylum in the United States has opened in what used to be a nursing home. The dormitory-style Family Shelter Care centre, opened in central Pennsylvania is operated by the Immigration and Naturalization Service. It now houses 10 Colombian families. The agency usually uses hotel rooms to house immigrant families while their claims for asylum are processed. Adults who arrive illegally in the United States without children are usually held in federal detention centres or county jails. (The Associated Press, 3/16/2001)

The US New Hamp-

shire Department of Corrections and the state police launched an investigation into allegations of sexual misconduct at the Goffstown women's prison. The move quickly followed the Immigration and Naturalization Service's removal of eight female detainees housed in the facility. (The Concord (New Hampshire) Monitor, March 14, 2001)

Canada must improve the way it handles detained asylum seekers, a United Nations rights expert said in a report. In her report to the UN Human Rights Commission, Gabriela Rodriguez Pizarro - a special investigator on the human rights of migrants - said she had received reports that asylum seekers were being held for long periods while awaiting a decision on their refugee status. Visiting detention centres and talking to former inmates, she said she had discovered cases of verbal abuse and manhandling by guards. (The Associated Press, March 15, 2001)

The Home Office is facing a multi-million pound compensation bill after two Albanian asylum seekers jailed for entering Britain on "bogus" documents were given GBP 80,000 between them. It follows a landmark High Court ruling that refugees should not be penalised for entering a country illegally. Between 500 and 1,000 are thought to have been prosecuted each year between 1994 - when prosecutions were stepped up - and the High Court judgment in 1999. (The Daily Mail (U.K.), March 15, 2001)

Three Romanian immigrants who disappeared from Oakington “reception centre” near Cambridge after entering Britain hidden under a Eurostar train will be jailed when they are caught and treated as “wholly illegal,” the Home Secretary, Jack Straw, said. (The Independent (UK), March 9, 2001)

Letting outside lawyers hold meetings for new detainees of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) so prisoners can learn their legal rights under U.S. law was approved three years ago. However, advocates have sought for 18 months to be allowed to do so at the INS detention centre on Varick Street in Manhattan without results. They have kept records of ignored phone calls, unanswered letters and the centre’s return of certified mail marked “refused.” The INS adopted “standards” – not enforceable in court—for its treatment of detained immigrants; the 1998 rules applied to all INS-run facilities and last fall were extended to other jails and prisons where the INS rents space. According to the INS, the size of the daily detention population has grown to an average of 20,000 detainees, up from 8,200 in 1997. Four of the 36 standards govern minimum legal access. They promise telephones, access to lawyers and a properly stocked law library. They restrict strip searches after detainees meet with lawyers. Because the deportation proceedings are civil matters, those detained do not have a right to have a lawyer, and 90 percent typically do not. Advocates say the “rights

presentations” are important—especially at Varick Street, Navarro says, “because most of the people are transferred to distant locations where there are no pro bono services and few resources for the detainees.” Varick Street’s record on group rights presentations is not the centre’s only violation of the standards, according to immigration advocates. They say that: Legal Aid lawyers’ meetings with detainee clients are interrupted by lunch breaks. Advocates’ phone numbers are not posted next to telephones in at least one unit. The law library is sometimes missing necessary materials. Detainees are routinely strip-searched after meetings with their lawyers. (The National Law Journal, February 26, 2001)

A Sri Lankan man who witnessed the death of a fellow inmate at Melbourne’s Maribyrnong immigration centre in Australia has been sent to Port Phillip Prison without being charged with a criminal offence. Advocates fear he will become lost in the state prison system and say it is inappropriate that an asylum seeker be held with convicts. Tennakoon, 27, was interviewed by police after his friend and fellow inmate Viliami Tanginoa fell to his death from a basketball pole at Maribyrnong just before Christmas. At the time, Tennakoon told The Age how Mr Tanginoa died in his arms. He claimed he was maltreated by Australasian Correctional Management staff and held in an isolation cell for several days after giving a statement about Tanginoa’s death. The Notice of Transfer given to

Tennakoon said only that “your behaviour in detention has been unacceptable for the low security IDC environment”, but Tennakoon was moved to Port Phillip as punishment for speaking to the media. (The Age (Australia), March 7, 2001)

* Economics

New York’s population topped 8 million in the 2000 Census, a record for the nation’s biggest city and a vivid illustration of the impact of surging immigration that is transforming the nation. Cities that attract immigrants have turned around decades of population loss. “New York is a prototypical case of a place where if not for immigration, it would not be the vibrant city that it is,” said William Frey, a demographer. (The Washington Post, March 16, 2001)

Canada must dramatically boost immigration levels to counter the social and economic impact of an aging population, says a new report by Statistics Canada. Canada has one of the lowest birth rates in the world as well as one of the highest life expectancies. The combination makes for an older population that must be supported by an increasingly smaller proportion of workers. (The Calgary Herald, March 14, 2001)

Britain needs more immigrants to avoid a crisis caused by falling birth rates and an ageing population, a study, called Jewels in the Crown, said. It found that as life expectancy rises the need for a younger workforce would grow - and its author suggests immigration may be part of the solution. Unless

levels of immigration were increased by around 20%, the UK population would fall by three million by 2050; as a consequence Britons would need to work into their seventies to support the large number of elderly people and fund more of their own health and pension care. It also found that immigrants have contributed to the British economy and that certain service sectors depended on them, especially the NHS. (British Broadcasting Corporation, March 7, 2001)

* Legislation / Laws

The European Union and central and Eastern European nations seeking to join the 15-nation bloc agreed to step up judicial cooperation in an attempt to curb “trafficking” of “illegal immigrants.” Within the EU, thousands of victims of human trafficking are forced into prostitution or labour in sweatshop factories for years to pay off their debt to traffickers who provided passage out of their home countries. The EU estimates that around a half million “illegal immigrants” enter its member nations every year. (The Associated Press, March

**Next
Issues:
Monday,
April 2,
2001**

16, 2001)

Greek parliament is debating draft legislation to determine the fate of an estimated 750,000 immigrants in Greece. The bill would impose stiffer penalties on human traffickers but give many undocumented immigrants a "second chance" to register. (The Associated Press, March 16, 2001)

The European Union yesterday took its war against people-traffickers into the Balkans from where thousands of "illegal immigrants" are smuggled into Western Europe. Justice and interior ministers pledged in Brussels to send 30 police and immigration officers to help Croatia and Bosnia control their own porous borders and stop the racketeering. However, having responded to an Anglo-Italian initiative to send EU personnel to the front line, ministers found it harder to agree upon common penalties for trafficking. Britain has the toughest maximum sentence of 10 years, while other countries impose terms of up to four years. Straw met colleagues from Germany, France, Italy and Spain in London last week, angering those who want to see EU-wide action, not individual initiatives by some member states. (The Guardian (U.K.), March 16, 2001)

The introduction in the Canadian House of Commons of Bill C-11 will reduce the rights of refugees and immigrants. The bill is a revised version of C-31. Among many serious problems in the bill, some areas of particular concern are: – The bill does

not live up to our international human rights obligations, for example under the Refugee Convention and under the Convention against Torture. Under the provisions of the bill, people could be sent back to persecution or to torture, in violation of Canada's obligations. – The bill greatly expands powers of detention, including giving even greater discretion to immigration officials to detain refugees and immigrants. – The bill creates a refugee determination system with serious flaws, denying access to a hearing to people who may be at risk of persecution (for example, people who have ever before made a refugee claim). The procedures under the proposed Pre-Removal Risk Assessment are inadequate (for example, lack of independent and qualified decision-makers and oral hearings only in exceptional circumstances). – The bill fails to adequately address the problems of refugees in limbo (recognized refugees who wait years to get permanent residence). – The bill reinforces measures of interdiction, which affect refugees trying to escape from persecution. Among the changes are increases in penalties for people who engage in people smuggling, even if they were motivated only by humanitarian concerns. Someone who helps family members flee persecution can be denied access to a refugee hearing or lose permanent residence, without access to an appeal. – The bill broadens inadmissibility provisions, including creating a new category for organized criminal-

ity, with dramatic impacts on people's rights, but without any requirement that the person actually have committed any crime. The already unfair security certificate process by which permanent residents can be stripped of status is made even unfair. (Canadian Council for Refugees, press release, March 14, 2001)

The French Cabinet adopted a wide-ranging crime bill that would fight bankcard fraud, protect people against pit bull attacks and tackle clandestine immigration. The bill, which is likely to go before lawmakers in April, would crack down on human trafficking rings that slip immigrants into Britain on the train that passes through the Channel Tunnel. If passed, the law would allow French and English police to check voyagers' papers as soon as they step in the Eurostar train, which leaves from Paris' Gare du Nord station. More than 1,000 "illegal immigrants" are caught every month trying to travel to Britain from France via the tunnel. (The Associated Press, March 14, 2001)

Russian Human Rights Commissioner Oleg Mironov will meet with the leaders of communities of refugees from Afghanistan, Iraq, Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Somalia and Sudan, who are residing in Moscow and the Moscow region to discuss problems of the refugees and draft recommendations for power institutions to assist the migrants. More than 20,000 refugees are dwelling in Moscow and suburbs at present. (Itar-Tass, March 14, 2001)

Jack Straw's attempt to return hundreds of asylum-seekers to Germany from the UK was dealt a serious blow when appeal court judges ruled that he had acted unreasonably. He was ordered to investigate the outcome for asylum-seekers sent back to Germany, as few receive refugee status. Figures produced at an earlier court hearing showed that in 1998, 60 per cent of Kosovan Albanians were granted refugee status or leave to remain in the UK compared with 3 per cent in Germany. Lord Phillips of Worth Matravers, the Master of the Rolls, ruled that the Home Secretary's decision to return Bajram Zeqiri, a Kosovan Albanian, to Germany, a "safe country", was unreasonable. The test case will affect at least 115 other cases in which Kosovan Albanians are alleging that Germany was unsafe because it interpreted asylum laws more strictly than the United Kingdom. The Home Secretary was ordered to pay costs and was refused leave to appeal to the House of Lords. (The Times (U.K.), March 13, 2001)

Euro-MPs, faced with a growing influx of migrants fleeing poverty and tyranny, wrestled with proposals aimed at controlling immigration. The parliamentary Committee on Citizen's Freedoms and Rights, Justice and Home Affairs, which processes immigration law drafts, recommended rejection of a French initiative on mutual recognition of decisions expelling third country nationals. It voted thumbs down on a Finnish proposal that would

give the Council of Europe broad powers regarding visa applications. It recommended rejection of a Portuguese proposal giving the council the power to regulate the period during which third-country nationals exempt from visa requirements are free to travel within the EU. In addition, it accepted, with a raft of amendments, a French initiative for an EU law setting minimum standards for giving temporary protection in the event of a mass influx of displaced persons, and "measures promoting a balance of efforts between member states in receiving such persons." Antonio Vitorino, EU Commissioner for Justice and Home Affairs, said "the management of immigration falls to the member states... We need to take into account the states' legitimate interests... as well as (those of) persons seeking asylum... It's a very difficult and complex issue." Hartmut Nassauer, the parliamentary committee's rapporteur, said "it has heard first hand of the painful and tragic situations these men, women and children encounter when they enter the well-guarded territory" of the EU, alluding to another committee — the Committee on Petitions — the front-line assessor of appeals from immigrants and asylum seekers. "Everyone knows there are two different strands of opinion in the community." On the one hand, he said, there is the realization that "if we are to prevent the economic, social and human decline of our ageing European continent... massive recourse to immigration" will become "inevitable." The other

"strand of opinion," he said, was "of all those who harbour fears and fantasies about the barbarian hordes coming to exploit our prosperity and destroy our civilisation and culture. "The two attitudes intersect or conflict," he said, "depending on the country involved and its political situation. (Agence France Presse, March 13, 2001)

The British Government would violate the human rights of a Tanzanian national who claimed he was being tortured if it deported him, the European Court of Human Rights has ruled. Said Mohammed Hilal's, a political activist, request for asylum in the UK, in February 1995, was refused and subsequent appeals were refused. However, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that if he was ordered to return, the Government would breach Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights. That article refers to the prohibition of torture, inhuman or degrading treatment. The Government has been ordered to pay Mr Hilal's costs of £12,583. (Press Association (U.K.), March 7, 2001)

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees said his organization wants continued support from Japan including an agreement to consider accepting more refugees. Japan accepted 10,919 refugees between 1975 and 2000, according to foreign ministry figures, equivalent to less than 437 people a year. Japan accepted just 16 refugees in 1999, when the United States took in 85,010 to resettle, according to UNHCR. (Agence France Presse, March

7, 2001)

*** Living Conditions**

Asylum seekers in Atherton, UK are set to benefit from a budget of GBP 218,000 to provide accommodation for destitute asylum seekers in the area. The sum is equivalent to GBP 24 a week for each of the 35 families currently seeking asylum. It will be used by Wigan Council to provide around 168 houses and flats over the next five years — a 79 per cent increase on current levels. (This is Lancashire (U.K.), March 16, 2001)

Families of asylum seekers are to get an extra GBP 50 a week "from the taxpayer" to cover the cost of housing, food and clothing. The decision by Home Secretary Jack Straw to increase the amount of government compensation available to local authorities means they will now be able to spend up to GBP 350 a week supporting families. The cost to the state will be at least GBP 31 million a year and will push the overall bill for dealing with destitute asylum seekers towards the GBP 1 billion-a-year mark. It comes after complaints from local authorities that the existing cash compensation of up to GBP 300 a week per family had failed to meet their bills. A Home Office spokesman said: "The GBP 350 figure is a maximum upper limit and not necessarily the rate at which money will be spent." (The Daily Mail (U.K.), March 15, 2001)

Government plans to house asylum-seekers in so-called flotels have resurfaced with a decision to appoint a consultant to assess the suit-

ability of sites for berthing the vessels. The use of the controversial flotels to house asylum-seekers was suggested last spring when the Government drew up proposals to reduce accommodation shortages. The Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform said the flotel option was on the back burner while objections from ports and harbours were dealt with. Fire-safety advisers at the Office of Public Works and the Department of the Environment have expressed strong reservations in the past about fire safety in flotels. (The Irish Times, March 5, 2001)

*** Protests**

Asylum seekers held a protest on Monday 19 March to protest against a racist attack on Friday March 16, against Farid Hosifar, an Iranian asylum seeker, who was viciously attacked by racists in Sunderland, UK. Another protest has been organised for Thursday March 22. (IFIR March 19, 2001)

On March 12, several Iranian refugee claimants, including political opponents, student activists and religious converts began a hunger strike in Pakistan to demand that the UNHCR grant them refugee recognition and resettlement to a safe third country. The hunger strikers are Vahid Younessi (case number I-17447), Eskandar Farzad (I-17337), Farshid Jalali (I-16778), Khalil Ibrahim (I-16776), Aeid Safari (I-17435), Fereidoun Ghorbanian (I-17281), Mohammad Farajzadeh (I-17481), and Hassan Parsa (I-17684).

(IFIR Press Release, March 20, 2001)

About 250 people, including 40 children, most of them refugees from Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo, demonstrated against Sweden's decision to repatriate refugees to the Balkans. Organizers said that there is no existing judicial system in the refugee's homelands and that the Swedish authorities have not considered individual reasons for asylum applications, the children's well-being or the situation in their home countries when refusing residential permits. (The Associated Press, March 7, 2001)

*** Racism / Fascism**

On Friday March 16, Farid Hosifar, an Iranian asylum seeker, was viciously attacked by racists in Sunderland, UK. Because of repeated stabbings on his back and one hand, he received 48 stitches. (IFIR Press Release, March 19, 2001)

Controversial plans to convert an A-listed hotel in Glasgow, UK into a hostel for asylum seekers have been dropped. While the company gave no official reason for pulling out, it is believed public hostility to the bid was another major factor in the decision. (The Scotsman (U.K.), March 16, 2001)

At least half the Woomera Township opposes the Australian government's proposed trial release of women and children from the detention centre into the local community. Ruddock said informal polling in the community showed a 50-50 split. (The Age (Australia), March 5, 2001)

(The Guardian (U.K.), March 15, 2001) The Liberal Democrat leader, Charles Kennedy, came close to accusing William Hague of playing the race card in pre-election campaigning, charging the Conservative leader with being 'soft on racism and soft on the causes of racism'. Kennedy claimed that his Conservative counterpart's warnings that 'Britain was becoming a foreign land' were 'playing on some people's fears and pandering to some people's prejudices'. The accusation came on the day that leaders of Britain's five parliamentary parties signed a joint declaration promising not to exploit race issues or stir up prejudice at the general election. Hague had warned that a second term of Labour government would create a 'foreign land' in a speech, which also contained promises to lock up all asylum seekers and immediately deport those losing their claims.

(The Associated Press, March 15, 2001) A Stuttgart court found three skinheads, aged 18 to 22, guilty of charges including arson and bodily harm for an arson attack on a hostel for asylum-seekers last August in the nearby town of Waiblingen. It sentenced them to between five and six years in prison.

Spanish police have questioned three minors suspected of attacking and injuring two immigrants with baseball bats last week. A group of youths attacked two people with chains and baseball bats at a disused warehouse occupied by immigrants. A Bulgarian man had to receive

hospital treatment after the attack in the country's southeast, while an Ecuadorean man was treated at the scene. The gang is also suspected of setting fire to a disused shed where other immigrants lived. (Agence France Presse, March 13, 2001)

"Illegal immigrants" could threaten Australia's livestock industries by carrying diseases such as foot-and-mouth, West Australian Senator Ross Lightfoot said. Lightfoot, who last year described illegal immigrants as "disease carriers," said the outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease in the UK proved the need to maintain high vigilance against "illegal immigrants." (The Australian Associated Press, March 6, 2001)

*** Restrictive Measures / Militarisation of Borders**

Australia's tough stance on "illegal immigrants" is working. No "illegal immigrants" had arrived for a month until a boat carrying more than 100 suspected "illegal" Indonesian immigrants was intercepted. Five boats carrying 435 "illegals" were intercepted in the same month last year, while four boats carrying 345 "illegals" were intercepted in January this year. (Agence France Presse, March 6, 2001)

Britain's contribution to an EU taskforce fighting mass "illegal immigration" in the Western Balkans will be deployed as soon as arrangements can be put in place, Home Secretary Jack Straw said. Straw said the teams would help train local staff. The migrant trail leads back to China, Iran, Iraq and Turkey.

(Press Association (U.K.), March 15, 2001)

Malaysia and Thailand will sign a joint border patrol agreement next week aimed at checking smuggling activities and "sneaking in of illegal immigrants." The agreement will pave the way for security forces to mount joint patrols. (Xinhua News Service, March 13, 2001)

Two boats believed to be carrying about 225 "illegal immigrants" from the Middle East have been intercepted off Western Australia's far northern coast in the past two days, Australian Customs officials. (Agence France Presse, March 8, 2001)

Norway is considering imposing mandatory genetic testing for immigrant candidates seeking to join relatives in the country. As part of a pilot project begun last year, Somalis seeking to join relatives in Norway but who lack proper identity papers are offered DNA tests to prove their family ties. (Agence France Presse, March 7, 2001)

Police in southeast China's Fujian province have apprehended 61 stowaways who were planning to "sneak" into Japan jammed in a wooden boat. (Agence France Presse, March 6, 2001)

*** Women**

The European Commission will propose granting temporary asylum to women brought to the EU to work as prostitutes provided they cooperate in investigating their "exploiters," Justice and Internal Affairs Commissioner Antonio Vitorino said. (Agence France Presse, March 8, 2001)