

NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL NEWS

HEADLINES

220 immigrants feared drowned

AUSTRALIA: Up to 220 people bidding to enter Australia illegally are believed to have drowned when their boat sank.

Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock said today the sinking had been widely discussed by boat people held in detention centres in Australia.

The apparent sinking came to light when immigrants began asking to phone home to tell relatives they were not on the missing boat.

"Suggestions are that a boat with something of the order of 170 to 220 people may have foundered en route to Australia," Ruddock said.

Dash for tickets

UK: Lottery bosses are expecting a rush of ticket sales for tonight's midweek draw when a guaranteed £15m jackpot is up for grabs.

This will be followed by a further £20m guaranteed jackpot this Saturday.

A spokeswoman for operator Camelot said it was expected that 90 per cent of sales of tickets would take place in the final hours leading up to the draw.

Prayer murders

PAKISTAN: Eleven people were killed and 30 others injured when gunmen opened fire on a prayer meeting of Shiite Muslims in Pakistan, police said today.

The attack, in Mulwali, 90 miles northwest of Islamabad, saw at least four gunmen escape after storming the prayer meeting, police said.

Forced landing

CANARY ISLANDS: More than one hundred passengers were today stranded on the Canary Island of Santa Maria after engine failure forced their British West Indian Airways plane to land.

Among those on board the stricken aircraft was a legal team en route to conduct a Royal Commission of inquiry into the judiciary in Trinidad, headed by former Lord Chancellor Lord MacKay of Clashfern and Geoffrey Robertson QC.

Euro warning

UK: Bank of England Governor Eddie George has issued a stark warning of the dangers for Britain of joining the euro unless the economic conditions were exactly right.

He expressed "relief" Britain had not signed up for the first wave of monetary union last year as it would have almost certainly led to an inflationary boom as UK interest rates were slashed to euro-zone levels.

'I shot myself'

ARIZONA: A school teacher who said she was shot in her empty classroom has confessed to Arizona police that she shot herself.

Kathy Morris had also sent herself threatening letters, Pima County sheriff's spokeswoman Deanna Coultas said.

Morris told authorities she did it to highlight the lack of security at the school.

Blow to Monica

US: Weight-loss company Jenny Craig Inc is alleging Monica Lewinsky is its "spoiled brat" at least for now.

Company officials will not say whether Lewinsky will appear in future campaigns. She is being replaced by new ads featuring non-celebrity clients.

Girl, 10, trapped

KENT: A 10-year-old girl was trapped under rubble when a car plunged into her family's home as she slept, police said.

The girl, who has not been named, was "shocked but uninjured" after the BMW crashed into the house on Benover Road, Maidstone, Kent, at 6.02am.

Investigation of weapons at murder suspects' house

New tests in Lawrence case

FORENSIC tests were being carried out today on a knife and metal bar found at a house where two of the five prime suspects in the Stephen Lawrence murder inquiry used to live.

Scotland Yard said the items had been buried in the garden of a house in Bournbrook Road, in Eltham, south east London, close to where Stephen Lawrence died from stab wounds after being attacked by a racist gang seven years ago.

The address was listed in the Lawrence inquiry report as the home of suspects Jamie and Neil Acourt in 1993. It now has new occupants.

A police spokesman said the blade was about the same size as a red-handled knife shown during a recent television appeal for more information.

Deputy Assistant Commissioner John Grieve, head of Scotland Yard's racial and violent crime taskforce, said last night: "We know there are people out there who know exactly what happened to Stephen Lawrence."

"Now is the time to come and speak to us. It could just prove to be the final piece of the puzzle."

Mr Grieve said that DNA tests were being carried out on a yellow-lined jacket and a knife found in Eltham soon after the murder.

Three people were arrested and released on bail in connection with the killing in April 1993.

They were not among the five previously identified as suspects in the case - Jamie and Neil Acourt, Gary Dobson, Luke Knight and David Norris.

Neil Acourt, Luke Knight and Gary Dobson were formally acquitted of the murder of Stephen four years ago when a private prosecution brought by the Lawrences collapsed.

The case against Jamie Acourt and David Norris was dropped before it reached court.

Timetable

Chronology of events following the murder of Stephen Lawrence:	Timeline of the prosecution:
22 April 1993: Stephen Lawrence attacked and fatally wounded in south east London.	September 1994: Lawrences family began a private prosecution.
7 May 1993: Acourt, Knight and Gary Dobson arrested.	25 April 1995: In murder trial against Neil Acourt, Knight and Dobson, the judge instructed the jury to find the defendants "not guilty".
10 May 1993: David Norris committed to the police.	13 February 1997: Jury at High Court decided to find him "not guilty".
13 May 1993: Acourt charged with murder.	24 February 1999: Publication of the MacPherson report.
21 June 1998: Lord Hogg charged.	
29 July 1999: CPS	



ON THE MOVE: WPC Janice Jarvis and PC Ken Hynd from the Royal Parks Constabulary, wearing roller-blades in Kensington Palace Gardens, as part of its community policing operation. The officers will be a high visibility presence in areas where skaters congregate and will foster good relations with park visitors. The RPC's in-line skating patrol will be inaugurated later today on the road in front of the Albert Memorial.

Lifeline thrown to rural post offices

THE Treasury today threw a lifeline to struggling post offices as a mass lobby of postal workers headed to Parliament.

Trade Minister Alan Johnson said an amendment would be tabled to the Postal Services Bill confirming that subsidies would be available to post offices facing closure.

The ideas of subsidies were first proposed in the Performance and Innovation Unit.

Its report is due to go to Downing Street this spring and includes proposals to transform sub-postmasters and mistresses into "rural consultants".

Possible new services include paying credit card bills and providing a collection point for internet shopping.

Today, a coachload of postmasters from branches in Hull and across the East Riding were due to attend a 2,000-strong demonstration in London where a petition signed by more than three million people was due to be handed in to Downing Street before postmasters lobbied their MPs.

Hull's rail vandalism hotspot

HULL'S Hesse Road is one of the worst areas in the region for railway vandalism, according to Transport Police, on the day a major new campaign was launched to boost rail safety.

They claim people regularly risk their lives by using tracks as shortcuts and train passengers are at risk from youngsters hurling bricks at trains and placing obstacles on the line.

PC Graham Stephens, of Hull's British Transport Police, said: "Fatalities will continue until people realise the dangers."

"We have had bricks thrown at trains regularly and it is frightening for passengers."

"We do catch people but often if it is a first offence they will only receive a caution and the next time it happens, we are not talking about a harsh punishment."

Recent reports suggest around 400 people in Britain die of TB every year.

Some experts say this is likely to rise, following a government decision to suspend the national BCG vaccination programme due to a shortage of supplies.

PATIENTS who came into contact with a hospital doctor suffering from tuberculosis have a "slight" risk of infection, a hospital said today.

Lancaster Royal Infirmary said the patients were being contacted urgently.

Spokeswoman Anne MacGregor said: "We cannot say just how many people will be contacted - it is a large number. Of those, some will be asked to come into a special clinic."

She added a news conference today would reveal more details about what would be done to protect patients.

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THE support came after his libel action against Professor Deborah Lipstadt and Penguin books ended in the judge calling him an anti-semitic. Mr Irving, 62, told BBC1 Breakfast News that he faced financial ruin.

But Professor Lipstadt told the same programme: "You have to treat whatever he says with a tremendous grain of salt and a tremendous question mark."

Infant class sizes fall

FEWER THAN 180,000 infant pupils remain in classes of more than 30 in English primary schools, official figures confirmed today.

The statistics show the Government on course to hit its target of completely removing over-size classes for five, six and seven-year-olds by 2002.

This January, there were also 22,000 fewer eight to 11-year-olds in classes of more than 30.

Education Secretary David Blunkett said the drop "gives the lie to the claim that lower infant class sizes are at the expense of older primary pupils".

Announcing the details today, Mr Blunkett also allocated a further £175m to continue the class size campaign.

He said: "Since the election, 300,000 children who would otherwise have been in large infant classes have benefited."

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Exam stress investigated

SCHOOL assessments of seven-year-olds could be changed if they are found to be causing children great stress, Education and Employment Secretary David Blunkett suggested today.

He said he would "seriously consider" changing the system if complaints that youngsters undertaking the assessments were experiencing pressure were true.

The assessments were supposed to take place under normal classroom conditions, rather than test conditions, he added.

Mr Blunkett told BBC Radio 4's Today programme: "If we could show that the assessment was actually putting children at seven under pressure and we couldn't organise for teachers to be able to do it as part of the normal class work, then I would very seriously consider changing it."

E-mail fans for Irving

HISTORIAN David Irving told today how he had received hundreds of supportive e-mails since a humiliating High Court libel defeat in which he was branded a racist.

"Over the last 24 hours or so since the judgment came out I have had 322 e-mails from all over the world - I was up to 4am reading through them - from people who have read my books and are saying 'What on earth is going on here, Mr Irving?'"

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Duo de with bin

TWO readers are wins in the Mail game.

Ruth Atkinson, Hedon, and John Church Lane, Ca each in the latest popular competition.

Both winners for a full house to cash prize.

Mrs Atkinson, assistant, has no will spend her win.

She said: "I'm because I don't want to treat my money, but I am Mr Wilkinson, retired, said: 'I've first time I have like this.'"

He and his wife spend the money.

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Children's Day to awareness

PARENTS are encouraged to show appreciation for youngsters' special recognition the NSPCC's Children's Day on May 3.

The NSPCC has a variety of fund-raising leading up to and on the day.

Area appeals Christine Saxon, important for parents to recognise all the children do.

"We hope they Children's Day to also to help raise awareness of children and parents' support and Children's Day awareness of children, particularly in the Stop campaign to abuse against you."

If you want more or require a Child publicity pack, call (01482) 837822.

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