

An illegal immigrant holds his real passport Tuesday while sitting among 432 illegal immigrants arrested by Thai authorities. Thai officials arrested the immigrants from countries of the Subcontinent (India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh and Burma) during border checks since the beginning of 1997. Most of the immigrants were in possession of fake passports or expired work permits and were trying to reach Malaysia, a favoured country for - AFP/UNB photo migration.

Mahathir gets King Faisal Prize:
Saudi Arabia has awarded King Faisal International Prizes to Malaysia's prime minister, an Iraqi professor and five Western

scientists. AP reports from Riyadh.

overflow. AP reports from Athens.

The 750,000 riyal (200,000 dlrs) prizes are awarded annually in five categories: service to Islam medicine, science, Islamic studies and Arabic literature. The service to Islam prize was awarded to Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamed for his support of the rights of Muslim minorities in southeast Asia. The science prize went to two American scientists at the University of Colorado, Carl E. Wieman and Eric A. Cornell, for their work in physics.

Frank Sinatra improving: Frank Sinatra is making good progress in his recovery from a mild heart attack and could go home by Friday, a hospital spokesman said. AP reports from Los Angeles.

Sinatra is alert and chats with visitors, Cedars-Sinai Medical Centre spokesman Ron Wise said Monday. Paramedics were called to Sinatra's Beverly Hills home last Thursday, and the 81-year-old singer was taken to Cedars-Sinai, for what Dr. Rex Kennamer called an "uncomplicated heart attack," meaning it did not cause serious, permanent damage. It was Sinatra's third hospitalisation in two morths. He was at Cedars Sinail for eight days in November for a pinched nerve and pneumonia. Last Monday, he was hospitalized one day for an undisclosed procedure.

Flood claims 5 in Greece: Torrential rain killed at least five people in central and southern Greece, knocking out power lines and causing rivers and streams to

Sunday's downpours were accompanied by gale-force wind that pounded the region for more than 10 hours. The meteorological service said the storm was the worst in 40 years. Hardest hit was Corinth, 52 miles (83 kilometres) west of Athens, where the body of a 77-year-old woman washed up on the shores of the coastal city.

Iran seeks closer ties with KSA: Iranian state radio called on Tuesday for closer ties between Iran and Saudi Arabia to foil what it called "plots" by the Untied States to undermine their relations. Reuter reports from Tehran.

Developing economic and political cooperation with Saudi Arabia's is necessary now, more than every, to foil plots by the regional countries' common enemy US" Tehran radio said. It was commenting on the current visit to Saudi Arabia by Iran's commerce minister.

3 Niger opposition leaders detained:
Three Niger opposition leaders were detained Tuesday as part of investigations against them, the Interior Ministry said, AFP reports from Niamey.

The three were former President Mahamane Ousmane, Mahamadou Issoufou and Mamadou Tandja. The arrest came after an opposition rally Saturday calling for access to the media that the Niamey police said was illegal. The three had been under house arrest since Saturday but were Tuesday "detained for the investigation." Niger Interior Minister Idi Ango Omar told AFP.

Philippines plans to buy 18 jets: The Philippines plans to buy 18 fighter jets in the next five years to put muscle into one of the weakest military forces in Asia, AP reports from Manila.

Armed forces chief Gen Arnulfo Acedera announced that the government has allotted 56 billion pesos (2.15 billion dollars) to buy multi-role, twin-engine jets, newspapers reported Wednesday. The Philippine Star and other papers quoted Acedera as saying the list of candidates has been narrowed to the Russian-made MiG-29, the US F-18 and the still-to-bedeveloped Eurofighter. The Philippine air force has five Vietnam war-era F-5s and about 30 less-advanced combat aircraft.

Illegal trade on rise in Vietnam: The number of cases of smuggling and illegal trade discovered in Vietnam last year jumped by 62.5 per cent over the previous year, the Communist Party newspaper reported Wednesday, AP reports from Hanoi.

The state-controlled newspaper, People, said 92,600 cases of smuggling, producing fake goods, or running illegal businesses were discovered. Heroin, other narcotics and explosives, all of which are banned, are the most commonly smuggled goods, the newspaper said. Special investigators also reported massive amounts of electronic appliances, medicine, cigarettes, and antiques that were smuggled.

France welcomes Hebron accord

PARIS, Jan 15: France welcomed today the agreement reached between Israelis and Palestinians on the future of the West Bank city of Hebron.

reports AFP. "This agreement had been awaited for a long time. France hopes it will be implemented very soon," a Foreign Ministry statement said.

The accord, whereby Israel will hand over 80 per cent of Hebron to the Palestinian Authority. "should constitute a new departure for the peace pro-cess in all its aspects." the statement added.

The other provisions of the provisional agreement on autonomy in the West Bank and Gaza should be rapidly put into

The statement said France paid tribute to the tenacity of the negotiators on both sides who managed, despite tension and difficulties, to find com-

mon ground. Also praised were the diplomatic efforts of the United States, which gave an important impetus to the conclusion of the agreement, and the personal contributions of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and King Hussein of Jordan.

Belgrade Mayor sacked for backing student protestors

BELGRADE, Jan 15: Belgrade Mayor Nebojsa Covic has been sacked from President Slobodan Milosevic's ruling Socialist Party along with two other leading officials, state-run Belgrade radio reported Tuesday. reports AFP.

Covic recently publicly backed student protestors who had joined opposition demonstrations in the capital.

The party's chief in Belgrade. Branislav Ivkovic, was also drummed out of the party, the radio said, citing unofficial

A third SPS official in Serbia's second city. Nis, was also sacked, it added. Mile Ilic was the city's former party chief. The decision was handed

down by the party's executive committee, the radio said. Ilic had been sacked from his position as the local party boss six weeks ago after the dis-

covery of numerous cases of

electoral fraud in the city. Eight weeks of mass street demonstrations forced Milosevic on Tuesday to finally recognise opposition victories in Belgrade and Nis in November 17 municipal elections.

Yeltsin improving

MOSCOW, Jan 15: Boris Yeltsin's doctors say he's recovering well from double pneumonia, while the president's aides dismiss talk of impeaching the Russian leader as a gfoundless attempt to sair up controversy, reports AP.

Yeltsin, who's spent a week at the Central Clinical Hospital outside Moscow, was described as "significantly better" Tuesday evening, according to the Kremlin.

"His physical activity has increased and only some occasional wheezing sounds in his lungs remain, the presidential press service added

Based on previous statements by the Kremlin and Yeltsin's doctors, the president could be released this week. though no date has been set.

The president's critics, meanwhile, have been on the attack, questioning Yeltsin's

fitness to govern. A Communist lawmaker has urged parliament to impeach Yeltsin, though the move ap-

peared to have limited support. Major wins 1st important vote in parliament

LONDON, Jan 15: British Prime Minister John Major comfortably won the first important vote in parliament since he lost his overall majority last month, reports Reuter.

In a late-night Tuesday vote on the finance bill implementing the 1997/1998 budget, the government defeated a hostile amendment put down by the main opposition Labour Party

by 322 votes to 287. The outcome of the vote had never been seriously in doubt, but the margin of victory will be a boost to Major, who wants to delay Britain's general election until may to give more time for the strong economy to revive his conservative party's for-

"I am prepared to play it long, yes, of course I am prepared to play it long," he told reporters earlier in Lahore, Pakistan, who asked him about the timing of the election.

Major left Pakistan more than an hour early so he could be sure of getting back to London in time to vote.

Jewish settlers blast Netanyahu for Hebron deal with PA

HEBRON, West Bank, Jan 15: Jewish settlers in Hebron accused Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of selling them out today by agreeing to hand the West Bank city over to Middle East war

Palestinian rule, reports AFP.
"Netanyahu has fallen into Yasser Arafat's trap." said Noam Arnon, a spokesman for the 400 militant Jewish settlers living in this city of 120,000 Palestinians. "He let us down."

Moshe Benzimra, another spokesman for the settlers, said that Jews "will stay in Hebron. and will fight to stay here for-

We will also look into legal

ways of fighting against the

surrender of Benjamin Netanyahu, he said Some 150 leaders of Israeli settlements in the Palestinian territories held an emergency meeting in Jerusalem on Tuesday ahead of the Netanyahu Arafat summit which wrapped up the deal on

Palestinian rule. They plan to put pressure on

handing cover Hebron to

ministers and MPs to block a deal, which they fear would lead to the surrender of most of the territories captured in the 1967

Meanwhile, Israeli troops and police were on alert in Hebron early today in case of protests by Jewish settlers at the accord between Israel and the Palestinians on the future of the city initialled earlier, Israeli radio reported.

The radio said police rein forcements had been drafted in as the army prepared to evacuate 80 per cent of the West Bank city in line with the agreement. The radio said the troop

within five days. It said the military wanted to keep incidents to a minimum, and could be redeployed within 48 hours once the green

light was given.

movements should take place

Key peace agreements between Israel & Arabs

- March 26, 1979: Egypt becomes the first Arab country to

sign a peace treaty with Israel. - Sept. 13. 1993: After months of secret talks in Oslo, Norway, Israel and the PLO agree on an interim framework for autonomy in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat shakes hands with Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin at the White House. A final peace treaty is foreseen by 1999.

- May 4, 1994: Israel and the PLO sign detailed agreement on first stage of autonomy in Gaza and Jericho.

 Oct. 26, 1994: Jordan and Israel sign peace treaty calling for close economic and political cooperation; Jordan becomes Israel's closest ally in region.
— Sept. 28, 1995: Israel-PLO

agreement reached on second stage of autonomy: self-rule in most Palestinian areas of the West Bank and Palestinian elections.

- Jan. 14, 1997: Israel and the Palestinians sign an agreement on Israel's long-delayed pullout from most of Hebron and parts of the West Bank.

Saudi Arabia deports 77 Indian children

NEW DELHI, Jan 15: Saudi Arabia repatriated 77 Indian children who had been begging and had no travel documents after being abandoned in the Kingdom police in Bombay said Tuesday, reports AFP.

The children were flown to Bombay late Monday aboard a Saudi Airlines flight, the Indian embassy in Riyadh said. "An investigation is contin-

uing," an embassy spokesman said when contacted by telephone from Dubai. He said the Saudis informed

India's consulate general on

January 5 that a total of 77

children were in a Deportation Centre in Jeddah. "Consular officials visited the Deportation Centre immediately to ascertain the identity

of these children," he added.

After the children were given proper travel documents, "the Saudi authorities deported these children on a flight from Jeddah to Bombay on January 13." he added.

In Bombay, police said the children most of them girls aged between six and 14 years. had gone to Jeddah in 1996 for a Muslim religious festival and were accidentally separated

from their parents. Their parents had to give up the search for the missing children and returned home before the expiry of their visas. United News of India said adding the Saudis later found them begging on Jeddah's

The children, from the economically-backward district of Murshidabad in India's east have been temporarily housed in a state-run facility in Bombay

Each year, Saudi Arabia expels 350,000 to 450,000 foreigners who lack proper documents. Around six million of the 18 million people living in Saudi Arabia are foreigners.

Atlantis docks with Russian station Mir

CAPE CANAVERAL, Florida. Jan 15: Astronauts and cosmonauts cheered and embraced early Wednesday after shuttle Atlantis docked with the Russian space station Mir for a US crew swap 240 miles (384 kilometers) above Earth, reports AP.

NASA's John Blaha, who has been living on Mir since September, beamed as he hugged each of the six shuttle astronauts, including his replacement, Jerry Linenger. The laughter was loud and infectious; it sounded like a rowdy party or football game. "Welcome! Welcome!" Blaha

said. Welcome to space station Mir!" The cosmonauts passed out the traditional Russian welcoming gift: small packages of bread and salt. "Mmmmm," the astronauts said, munching. Linenger was impressed with

both the bread — he asked for seconds - and his home for the next 4 1/2 months. "Home looks great. It looks

fantastic", he said. "John looks good. Everybody looks good, happy... going to be a good life. Faces were pressed to windows when Atlantis crept up to

Mir and docked late Tuesday.

The linkup came as the two

huge spacecraft soared south of

Moscow, both traveling at

17,500 mph (28,000 kph). "We see someone in the window of Mir with their thumb out", said shuttle commander Michael Baker, who guided Atlantis in at a scant inch (2.5

cms) per second. That someone

was Blaha. Blaha was back at the porthole an hour later, waving and waiting for the hatches to open. "It's nice to see you guys". Blaha said. "I saw you coming as a shiny star.

Blaha and his two Russian crewmates waited impatiently in the docking tunnel for the opening of the shuttle hatch, delayed slightly by minor communication problems. The three Mir men gestured for the shuttle astronauts to come in. They finally did.

Atlantis and Mir, which had docked four times previously. will remain joined in orbit for five days so the nine space travelers can move nearly 6,000 pounds (2,700 kilograms) of supplies and experiments back and forth.

The combined mass of the two spacecraft is 530,950 pounds (238,930 kilograms).

Earlier in the day as the gap narrowed, Blaha sent this message from Mir to his colleagues on Atlantis: "All bags are packed. Ready for transfer."

Journalists demand media freedom in Sri Lanka

Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad holds the key to the city of Beverly Hills,

CA., he received from the city's mayor before speaking to entertainment leaders Tuesday at

the Beverly Hills Hotel. Mahathir is promoting his Multimedial Super Corridor, a venture

that would create a multimedia and entertainment empire that would stretch from

COLOMBO, Jan 15: Hundreds of journalists demonstrated in Sri Lanka's capital Wednesday. demanding a halt to police harassment and calling for media

Malaysia to Southeast Asia.

freedom, reports AP. The journalists, some with white handkerchiefs tied across their mouths to symbolize restrictions on speech, began with a sit-in on the sidewalk in front of the city's main railway ter-

minal. They later shouted slogans and waved placards against police raids of newspaper offices and calling for media freedom. The protesters dispersed after

nearly three hours without any incidents.

The demonstration followed the recent arrest of journalist under anti-terrorism laws for erroneously reporting that Tamil rebels had overrun a police commando camp in eastern Sri Lanka.

Ishini Wickremasinghe Perera, news director of a private radio station, was released on bail two weeks ago and ordered to appear in court again on March 12.

Authorities denied Ms. Perera's report Saturday on fighting in the east, and Police

Wickremasinghe Chief Rajaguru accused her of creating ethnic and religious disharmony.

AFP/UNB photo

Tamil rebels, who have been fighting for independence in the northern and eastern provinces for 13 years, have in the last six months inflicted heavy defeats on the Sri Lankan army in the eastern front, causing worry in the government about military morale. More than 46,000 people have been killed in the eth-

nic war. The president has accused some of the media of behaving like "a wild ass."

Off the Record

Caution for anxiety

WASHINGTON: People who suffer from anxiety and depression are more than twice as likely to develop high blood pressure, US federal scientists reported on Tuesday, reports Reuter.

High blood pressure, also known as hypertension, can lead to fatal heart problems or strokes Researchers from the national centre of health statistics, a

branch of the centres for disease control, said that their finding applied to blacks and whites, but the risk of high blood pressure was higher for blacks. Lead researcher Bruce Jonas and colleagues studied 3,000

men and women from age 24 to 64. They had no high blood pressure at the start of the study, but as he tracked them for seven to 16 years, he found a pattern. Even intermediate levels of anxiety and depression were as-

sociated with a 60 per cent greater likelihood of developing hypertension. That was true even when other factors, such as education, smoking, alcohol use, body mass, were taken into

China's restaurants charging customers-for not eating food!

BEIJING: New-style restaurants in China are charging customers-for not eating food, reports Xinhua.

Chinese dinners are flocking to help-yourself restaurants where a set fee is charged for as much as they can eat. But to discourage customers from piling more onto their plates than their stomachs can handle some of the restaurants

fine customers for over-indulgence. The trend has even seen waitresses being trained to help customers save money. In Shenzhen, the south China boom city, people are proud of eating less expensive food and leaving no food at all at the table.

according to the Chinese intellectuals' newspaper Guangming Daily Tuesday. Waitresses in restaurants in the city used to lure customers

with expensive sea food so that they could make more money, the newspaper reports. "Now, it is different," it says, adding that waitresses are being trained to help customers choose cheaper food and even point

them to self-service tables. Any food left on the table is often taken home by customers. with helpful waitresses providing paper bags or boxes for the leftovers, it reports.

Axeman

MOSCOW: A Russian pensioner hacked six fellow mourners to death with an axe Sunday after his wife's funeral, ITAR-Tass news agency said, reports Reuter.

Ivan Likharev, who is in his 60s, "could not even remember what started the quarrel.

Neighbours called police to his house in the village of Verkhneye Moshevo, near Perm in the northern Urals, they found two bodies lying in the garden and another four indoors. Tass did not say whether the victims were members of the dead woman's family.

Islamic group in US explains Ramadan to employers

Joanne L Nix writes from Washington

three-day visit.

On the first day of Ramadan, a Washington-based Islamic group issued a new handbook for employers explaining Islam

in the workplace. Club January 10, members of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) announced the publication of "An Employer's Guide to Islamic Religious Practices," produced by CAIR's American-Muslim Research Centre (ARC). It deals with topics such as Islamic dress in the workplace, minimum requirements for Islamic prayer, Muslim dietary laws, and legal precedents for reli-

gious accommodations. The news conference also

from the "Discover Islam" exhibit, which is available to churches, schools, libraries, museums, business organiza-At the Washington Press tions and other groups throughout the United States. The entire exhibit may also be viewed on the Internet's World Wide Web.

included a display of posters

The posters were designed to correct various misconceptions about Muslims. Many Ameri-

cans are not aware that: More than a billion people from all races, nationalities, and customs across the globe are Muslims.

- There are an estimated 6 million Muslims in America

and demographers say Islam is the fastest growing religion in this country. - Only 18 per cent of Mus-

lims live in the Arab world. The world's largest Muslim community is in Indonesia. Substantial parts of Africa

and Asia contain Muslims while significant minorities are found in the Central Asian Republics, India, China North and South America, Eastern and Western Europe.

A workers' rights campaign also involves educational materials (brochures, fact sheets, posters, videos etc.) to be distributed to managers of Fortune 500 companies, small business and the general public. Materials outlining the rights and responsibilities of employees will also be distributed to the Muslim community.

"The booklet does not preach

Islam to employees. It condenses Muslim practices to help busy managers identify and understand the points quickly." said Dr. Mohamed Nimer, author of the booklet and Director of CAIR's American-Muslim Research Centre. "Our office receives calls almost every day from Muslim workers who believe they have been discriminated against because they wish to carry out the obligations of their faith."

He reported that the discrim-

ination can take many forms including not allowing time or space for daily prayers or unpaid time off for Friday prayers. For Muslim women employees, he said, the source of the discrimination is often prejudice against Islamic dress.

Canadian Prime Minster Jean Chretien (L) is congratulated by Philippine President Fidel

Ramos (R) after handing over the official flag of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation

(APEC) at Malacanang Palace Tuesday. Canada will host the 1997 APEC after the

Philippines' hosting in Subic in November last year. Chretien is in Manila for an official

According to Martin McMahon, a lawyer who has handled several religious discrimination cases for Muslims in the workplace, about 60 per cent of the cases he handles concern prejudice against Muslim women who wish to wear head scarves in the workplace. But, he said, "Most employees are willing to resolve (religious issues) amicably."

McMahon said that CAIR

lim workers' rights in companies such as JC Penney, Sears, and Quality Inn Hotels. He pointed out that all of the cases resulted in judgments in favour of the Muslim clients because the rights of religious workers are already clearly guaranteed under the 1964 civil rights law. which prevents companies from excluding people simply for observing their religious tradition. The narrow exception to this law, McMahon said, is when religious attire or customs hinder job performance or safety.

has successfully defended Mus-

AFP/UNB photo

(The author is USIA staff

"Worship freedom declining in Russia"

WASHINGTON, Jan 15: Russians enjoy less religious freedom than three year ago and government agents again are threatening the rights of Protestant minorities, a Moscow-based expert observer

reported Tuesday, reports AP. Freedom of worship flour ished briefly after the collapse of the Soviet Union five years ago but has been declining since 1993, said Lawrence Uzzell. Moscow representative of the Keston Institute of Oxford. England, which monitors religious life in former communist

countries "In religious freedom as in many other areas of life. Russia is to a large extent a lawless

state, "Uzzell told the US Commission for Security and Cooperation in Europe. The commission, set up by Congress to monitor compli-

ance with the 1975 Helsinki Accords on Security and Cooperation in Europe, includes members of Congress. administration officials Uzzell recommended that the United States and other

Western countries warn Russian leaders that they cannot expect their country to gain full-integration into Europe and the West "while they continue and even intensify violations of fundamental rights. including rights guaranteed by their own constitution