

Canadians note increase in refugees from U.S.

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Body

There's been a huge increase in the number of Americans making refugee claims in Canada since the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

The 135-percent jump in the past year isn't a surprise as due process in the United States has changed with more "arbitrary policing" than before, said immigration lawyer David Matas.

The Immigration and Refugee Board said 191 people filed refugee claims citing persecution in the United States, compared with 81 in 2001. Nancy Duarte of Canada's Citizenship and Immigration department is monitoring the increase.

Vancouver immigration lawyer Phil Rankin said most of the claimants he has dealt with suffer mental illnesses that lead them to wrongly believe they are persecuted in the United States. Others are trying to avoid prosecution.

There has been an overall increase in all refugee claims, said Janet Dench, executive director of the Montreal-based Canadian Council for Refugees.

Optimism sinking

A poll by Maclean's magazine shows only 26 percent of Canadians are more optimistic about the future than they were a decade ago.

That is the lowest number of optimists recorded in Maclean's annual year-end poll since 1996 - despite a healthy economy, interest rates near historic lows and peace in their own backyard.

"As a nation we're pessimistic, anxious and frustrated," said Bob Marshall, Maclean's assistant managing editor.

In brief

More "weird, wild and wacky weather" is in the forecast in the coming year, says Environment Canada climatologist Dave Phillips. It was a strange year for weather in 2002 with a balmy winter while spring was colder than January, followed by a "punishingly hot" summer. Predictions are it will be unusually warm and stormy because of an El Nino weather system this year.

Manulife Financial Corp. is waging a hostile takeover bid for Canada Life for about \$6.4-billion. The 200,000 shareholders, mainly in Canada and the United States, have 60 days to examine the bid of \$40 in cash for each share. Manulife already owns about 9 percent of Canada Life's shares. Canada Life executives call the bid too low.

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Facts and figures

Canada's dollar continues under pressure and is lower at 63.56 U.S. cents while a greenback returns \$1.5733 Canadian before bank exchange fees.

The Bank of Canada key interest rate remains 2.75 percent. The prime lending rate is 4.5 percent.

Canadian stock exchanges were higher, with the Toronto index at 6,607 points and the Canadian Venture Exchange 1,053 points.

Lotto 6-49: (Dec. 28) 12, 14, 15, 27, 28, 39; bonus 34. (Jan. 1) 2, 5, 32, 34, 38, 49; bonus 7.

Regional briefs

The Council of Canadians is concerned that a bill passed by the Alberta government could open the door to water exports to the United States. The national watchdog group said the bill, which allows an interbasin water transfer between the South and North Saskatchewan River basins, could force Canada to export water under the North American Free Trade Agreement. Canada has an environmental prohibition on water basin transfers to protect Canadian water from export.

A decision is pending on whether to end cod fishing in three zones off Newfoundland and in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. The move to protect a dwindling stock would affect almost 1,000 fishermen. Federal Fisheries Minister Robert Thibault will make a decision before the April 1 start of the season.

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