

# TE WAHA NUI

FREE

"The Big Mouth" — an AUT journalism publication

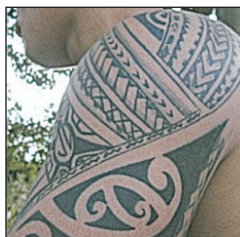
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PHOTO: JAMES LITTLE

THE WORLD PASSES BY: Maori students are still dropping out of university despite an increase in scholarships. (Picture posed by model.) See page 22 for the full story.

## Flu threat grounds Kiwi's horses

By Elizabeth Allan

A former AUT University journalism student is concerned her event horses destined for Australia are going to be stuck in New Zealand thanks to equine flu.

Laura Wallace, 21, has two horses booked to fly to Melbourne on September 15 and one waiting to be flown back from Hong Kong, in preparation for the Australian International Three Day Event in November.

The event, involving dressage, cross-country and showjumping, is one of the most important fixtures in the Oceania eventing calendar.

"But as both Australia and New Zealand have shut down their borders, we've been told we have to sit tight and wait and see, which makes it hard to do anything," she says.

Equine flu broke out in Australia over the last weekend in August, leading to the cancellation of race meetings and events, and a temporary ban on the transportation of horses.

Wallace says New Zealand has never had any cases of equine flu and Victoria, where she wants to send her horses, has no reported cases.

"And they're going to be in Adelaide where there are none so it gets to the stage where you think, just let me fly my horses, please.

"But I can't help feeling sorry for the racers and trainers because it's devastating for them.

"Racing is New South Wales' fourth biggest industry so you can imagine the chaos it's causing."

Wallace says there have been previous outbreaks of equine flu in England, Europe, South Africa and Japan.

"We've been lucky that we don't have it."

Symptoms of equine flu include a high fever, nasal discharge, a persistent hacking cough, depression and lack of appetite.

The flu does not affect humans.

## Dying for his faith

By Joe Barratt and Spike Mountjoy

On hunger strike for more than a month, Ali Reza Panah is weak, suffering memory loss, and still no closer to release from his Auckland prison cell.

Panah's supporters are dispelling claims his conversion to Christianity was just so he could remain in New Zealand.

The Iranian asylum seeker wants to remain here until it is safe to return to Iran — but because his visa has expired the New Zealand Government is trying to deport him.

A convert from Islam to Anglican Christianity, Panah could face harm if he returns to Iran.

This is backed up by Amnesty International, which has called on the New Zealand Government to grant temporary visas to Iranian Christian converts until it is safe for them to return.

Panah is refusing to sign papers that would see him deported. This has resulted in his imprisonment for more than two years.

And that is a complete waste of taxpayers' money, says his ex-boss, Bruce Keane.

Panah worked for more than a year as a drainlayer for Keane until his visa expired and he was remanded at Mt Eden Prison.

"He was hard working, honest and learned quickly," says Keane.



"Panah often worked a 70-hour week and had saved up to buy a unit to live in.

"He had a lot to offer New Zealand."

Panah has been on hunger strike for more than a month to "prove he's a genuine Christian because the Government doesn't believe him", says Panah's support person from the Hope and

Peace Foundation, Homeira Fatthi.

"He said it was a huge dishonour and disrespect denying he was a Christian.

"He feels this is a last resort to prove his belief," says Fatthi.

She says the last time she saw Panah he had been in the medical unit at Mt Eden Prison.

He was in a wheelchair, had lost weight, had dark rings around his eyes and his hands were cold.

"He is getting forgetful. He was repeating himself," says Fatthi.

Despite becoming a Christian before arriving in New Zealand, Panah has come under fire from the New Zealand First deputy leader Peter Brown, who has questioned the authenticity of the conversion.

"A disturbing similarity in each of the cases of the failed Iranian asylum seekers is an apparent attempt to rot the system after all appeals have failed by converting to Christianity, then claiming that they could not be deported due to safety concerns resulting from their 'conversion' if returned home,"

says Brown in a media statement.

"Ali Panah, the current cause célèbre of the human rights brigade, is a case in point. Through his refusal to admit he has no valid claim to remain here, Mr Panah has brought his current situation on himself."

His statement is at odds with Keane's experience of Panah.

Keane says Panah used to bring a bible to work and quoted from it regularly.

"He was always preaching to us," says Keane.

"It's a pretty rough sort of work-place, so we used to give him a bit of flak about it, but he would always take it with a grin. "There is no doubt it is for real. He even tries to get me to pray with him when I go visit him in prison."

Keane cannot understand why Brown would claim the conversion was a "rort".

"Why didn't they ask us? The people that know him."

Panah's local parish is also supporting him, with Rev Clive Sperring, stating: "I have no doubt whatsoever that his faith is genuine."