

BRIEFS
WORLD

SANTA CRUZ DE TENERIFE, Canary Islands

Flight crew foils hijacking attempt

A cunning pilot thwarted a hijacking by discreetly warning the passengers in French — a language the gunman didn't speak — that he would knock the attacker off-balance with a rough landing, and that they should be ready to pounce.

The ploy worked.

As Capt. Ahmedou Mohamed Lemine landed the Air Mauritania Boeing 737, he slammed on the brakes, then abruptly accelerated, throwing the hijacker to the floor, officials said Friday. The forewarned passengers and crew threw boiling water from a coffee maker on the man's face and chest, then beat him into submission.

"The man deserves a medal," Air Mauritania spokesman Ahmedou Ahmedou said of Lemine, a 20-year veteran of the airline, after the ordeal ended Thursday evening.

HONG KONG

Disaster predicted during Year of Pig

Sunday marks the start of the Chinese New Year, and it's a lucky one for those starting out in life. But the rest of us are in for a rough ride.

Expect epidemics, disasters and violence in much of the world.

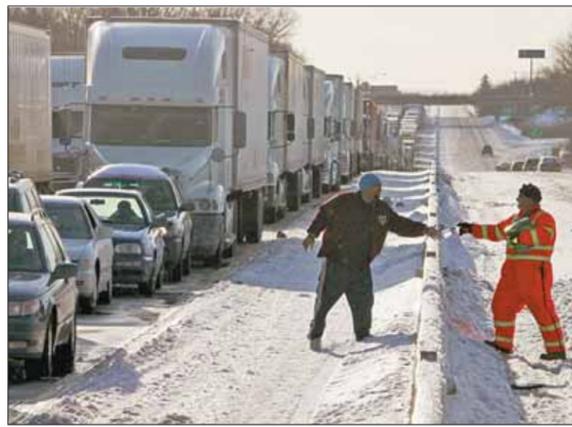
"The Year of the Pig will not be very peaceful," said Hong Kong feng shui master Raymond Lo.

Feng shui is the ancient Chinese practice of trying to achieve health, harmony and prosperity by using specific dates, numbers, building design and the placement of objects.

The pig is one of 12 animals (or mythical animals in the case of the dragon) on the 12-year cycle of the Chinese zodiac, which follows the lunar calendar. According to Chinese astrology, people born in pig years are polite, honest, hardworking and loyal. They are also lucky, which is why many Chinese like to have babies in a pig year.

"Any children born in The Year of Pig will receive help from others throughout their lives," Lo said.

Ronald Reagan was a pig. So are Arnold Schwarzenegger, Woody Allen and Elton John.



A motorist takes a bottle of water from Frank Gergar, right, with the Steel City Volunteer Fire Company, along Interstate 78 in Bethel, Pa., on Thursday.

Motorists freed from Pennsylvania highways

By MICHAEL RUBINKAM
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

ALLENTOWN, Pa.

The final of hundreds of stranded motorists were freed, but Pennsylvania highways remained shut Friday as crews struggled to clear ice and snow following a monster storm that has been blamed for at least 24 deaths in the Northeast and Midwest.

Gov. Ed Rendell publicly apologized for Pennsylvania's "totally unacceptable" handling of the storm and a tie-up on a 50-mile stretch of Interstate 78, which stranded hundreds of motorists for as long as 24 hours. He

blamed an "almost total breakdown in communication" among state agencies.

State Transportation Secretary Allen D. Biehler said I-78 and I-80 would remain closed so workers could clear them. The icy mixture, up to 6 inches thick, became rock-hard as overnight temperatures plummeted to the low teens and single digits.

The sprawling storm system, which caused deaths from Nebraska to New England, blew out to sea Thursday, leaving huge snow piles, frigid temperatures and tens of thousands without power.

Numerous areas saw more

than a foot of snow, and about 300,000 customers lost power at the height of the storm.

Vehicles started getting stuck on I-78 around midday Wednesday, but it took more than a day for state police to close all the entrance ramps. Pennsylvania officials, including Rendell, could not explain why it took so long.

At New York City's Kennedy Airport, JetBlue travelers continued to experience delays and cancellations Friday as the airline struggled for a third day to recover from a storm-related backlog that left angry passengers stuck in grounded planes for hours.

Thirteen salmonella cases reported in Indiana

From staff and wire reports

SYLVESTER, Ga.

Thirteen cases of salmonella have been confirmed in Indiana during the national outbreak associated with Peter Pan peanut butter, the Indiana State Department of Health reported.

Health officials advise against eating Peter Pan and Great Value peanut butter, which is manufactured at the same plant.

Government and company scientists went through the ConAgra Foods plant Friday, trying to fig-

ure out how salmonella got into batches of the spread.

Out of the scientists' way, about 40 workers did maintenance work at the plant, spokesman Chris Kircher said. But no jars of peanut butter rolled off the lines at the shuttered plant.

The plant has been shut down since Wednesday, when federal health officials linked its peanut butter — Peter Pan brand and certain batches of Wal-Mart's Great Value house brand — to a salmonella outbreak that has sickened almost 300 people nationwide since August.

No deaths have been reported.

The plant employs about 100 people, and other than the local hospital, it is the largest employer in Sylvester, a town of about 5,900 people in south Georgia's peanut country.

All workers are getting paid during the shutdown, Kircher said.

"We're working alongside the FDA to investigate this matter and take whatever measures are necessary to get that plant up and running," Kircher said.

The affected jars of peanut butter have a product code located on

the lid of the jar that begins with the number 2111. Great Value brand peanut butter has not been implicated in the outbreak but is believed to be at similar risk of contamination.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has reported 288 salmonella cases in 39 states.

Symptoms include vomiting, diarrhea, fever, cramps, nausea, and gas usually 18 to 36 hours after exposure. Symptoms may last 48 to 72 hours.

Most cases of salmonella infection are short lived, and do not require medical care or antibiotics.

"We're working alongside the FDA to investigate this matter and take whatever measures are necessary to get that plant up and running."

Chris Kircher
Spokesman for ConAgra Foods on the salmonella outbreak traced to the company's peanut butter

Wage bill passes in House, Senate

By BRUCE SMITH
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

CHERAW, S.C.

Louise McQueen has scrimped all her life, working two jobs while raising two daughters alone and now earning \$5.47 an hour as a cook in a small restaurant. So it's a comfort to her in this rural corner of South Carolina that Congress this week moved closer to raising the minimum hourly wage to \$7.25 over the next two years.

"I can get by, but this is going to help me a lot," said McQueen, 54, who has taken one vacation in her life and who considers her sole

luxury to be watching television.

More than 10 percent of hourly workers in South Carolina, Louisiana and Mississippi would see wage increases if the federal proposal goes through — the highest such percentages in the nation, according to the Washington-based Economic Policy Institute. In South Carolina, that translates to 179,000 people.

The House and Senate have approved bills raising the hourly minimum wage from \$5.15 to \$7.25 over two years. The Senate bill paired the wage hike with tax breaks for small businesses. The House, initially reluctant to add

similar tax cuts, passed a smaller tax package on Friday. House and Senate negotiators will have to work out the differences.

Economists say many of the low-wage workers expected to see their pay increase right away live in rural areas like Cheraw, where unemployment is high and there is less competition for labor.

Some businesses, such as restaurants, may lose money from such an increase because their workers would have to be paid more. Others, such as tobacco companies and dollar stores, would likely see more profits, according to Merrill Lynch.

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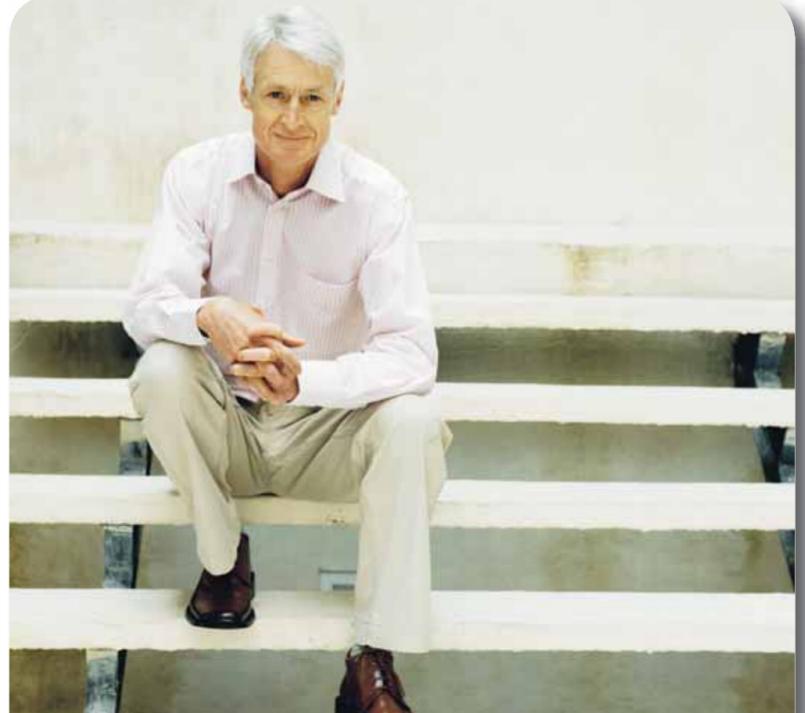
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