

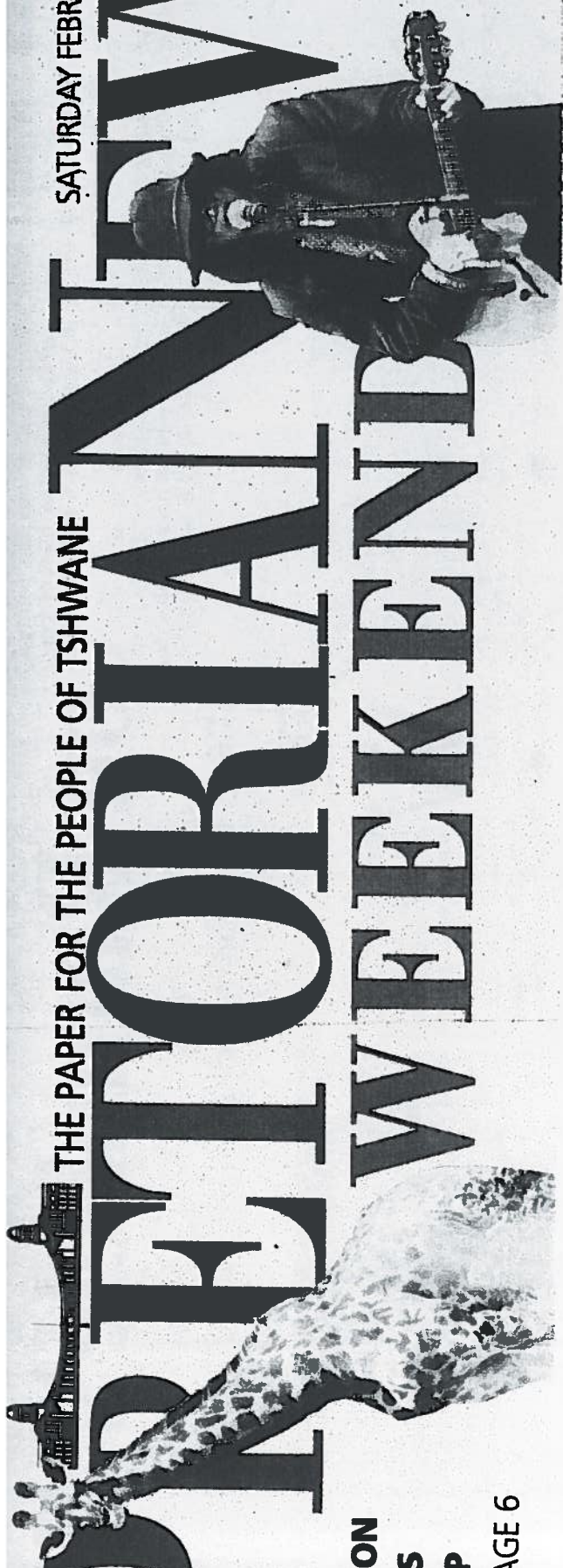
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Asylum seekers hit hard by policy shifts – rights group

SOUTH Africa is going through a major shift in its approach to asylum seekers and refugees, Lawyers for Human Rights (LHR) said yesterday. "The changes amount to a substantial reduction of asylum seeker and refugee protection culminating in increased danger of sending people back to face persecution."

"Since early 2011, these shifts have resulted in group exclusion,

access barriers, the limitation of basic rights, the closure of existing refugee reception offices with the intention of moving them to borderlines, and finally, backlogs in appeal cases due to the restructuring and undercapacitation of the Refugee Appeals Board."

LHR released a report, *Policy Shifts in the South African Asylum System: Evidence and Implications*,

yesterday. "There are implications for the respect for constitutional rights and administrative justice, for the rational use of tax monies, as well as public health concerns."

The government and the ANC had viewed the management of asylum as a question of security and had reoriented Home Affairs as a security department, it said.

However, there was no evidence provided of how asylum seekers and refugees posed a security threat.

LHR said its report was based on the belief that revised policies should meet basic criteria to enable the country to meet its domestic and international commitments. It called on the Public Protector to investigate border officials denying asylum seekers entry – Sapa