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They're off to the races

A Tucson couple is traveling for the 22nd year to the "Super Bowl" of racing / Sports

NCAA Fast Break

EXPANDED COVERAGE EVERY THURSDAY

TODAY: Coach Steve Lavin tries to cope with the pressures of the UCLA legacy.

D'backs are in town

Pitchers and catchers get an early start on spring training. Sports

Bin Laden pilot says he bought plane here

NEW YORK — A former pilot for Osama bin Laden testified yesterday that the alleged terrorist sought an aircraft big enough to carry Stinger missiles in his war on Americans, but settled for a cheaper model bought in the Tucson area that crash landed in Sudan. It couldn't be determined yesterday where the plane was purchased in Tucson. The pilot made reference about a Tucson "boneyard," a constant term for the Aerospace Maintenance and Regeneration Center at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base. However, an official at the facility said yesterday the plane couldn't have been purchased from the storage center. The pilot, Essam Al-Radi, told

SEE AIRPLANE / A13

Bus kills 8 Israelis



Mass murder suspect: A Palestinian identified as Khalil Abu Odeh sits in the driver's seat of the bus he is accused of driving into a group of Israelis, killing seven soldiers and a civilian. Yesterday's attack in Azaar prompted earnings by the defense minister of a wider guerrilla war. Story, A9

Rich pardon probe begun, source says

NEW YORK — Federal prosecutors have opened an investigation into President Clinton's last-minute pardon of fugitive financier Marc Rich, a source familiar with the case said yesterday. U.S. Attorney Mary Jo White in New York is "trying to determine if there was a transfer of money to buy the pardon," the source told The Associated Press, speaking on the condition of anonymity. In a statement issued through a spokeswoman last night, Clinton said, "As I have said repeat-

Hopes high that Bush, Fox can crack immigration nut

President Bush's first trip abroad: First of three days of coverage. U.S. - Mexico SUMMIT. By Tim Stalter MICHIGAN DAILY STAR. The presidential summit tomorrow will likely lead to real progress on one of the most pressing issues in U.S.-Mexican relations: cross-border migration. Both President Bush and Mexican President Vicente Fox, who will meet in San Cristobal, Mexico, tomorrow, are looking for practical solutions to the

Tomorrow Hang on to your hats The rodeo rides into town, and we've got the lowdown in a special 12-page section. Check it out in Caliente On StarNet www.azstarnet.com

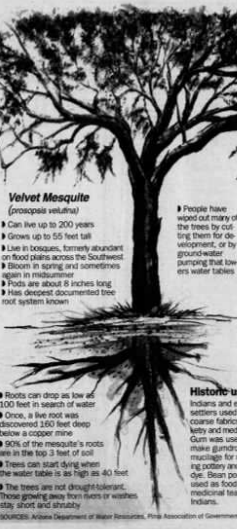
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Weather TODAY'S FORECAST Chilly, chance of morning rains High 56 / Low 34

Mesquites sickly; city calls wells blameless

By Tony Davis ARIZONA DAILY STAR. Bernard Simmons looks at the thick den of mesquites behind his brick house, he sees huge, dead branches piled everywhere — branches that have fallen off the trees. Last year, when Pima County officials conducted a study of some of the valley's wells, they concluded that the water table there had dropped enough since 1990 to raise concerns about the health of Simons' and hundreds of other mesquite trees near the Tanque Verde Wash northeast of Tucson. It's one of the few remaining large mesquite groves, or bosques, in the Tucson metro area. The Nature Conservancy last year identified this area as an important conservation site in a study analyzing top conservation priorities for the Sonoran Desert. A century ago, dense tree thickets were common sights along major washes such as the Rillito and Santa Cruz rivers, but pumping, climate change and other factors long ago killed most of the others



Velvet Mesquite (prosopis velutina) People have spotted out many of the trees by cutting them for development, or by groundwater pumping that lowers water tables. • Can live up to 200 years • Grows up to 50 feet tall • Like in bosques, formerly abundant on flood plains across the Southwest • Bloom in spring and sometimes again in midsummer • Fruits are about 8 inches long • Has deepest documented tree root system known

Mesquites in peril?

A new Pima County study warns that city-owned, Tanque Verde Valley wells are declining as overdrafting continues in the area. The study, which the city disputes, raises the possibility that pumping by Tucson Water, private water companies and private well owners is damaging the area's rich mesquite foliage. A 1990 study of 17 wells along a 6-mile stretch of Tanque Verde Creek found that as groundwater depths fell from 10 to 56 feet, mesquite trees exhibited increasing signs of stress. At water levels deeper than 59 feet, trees showed evidence of near-lethal stress.

