

Meet underlines Bimstec-Japan trade

R. Kulkarni
Statesman News Service

KOLKATA, Dec. 17. — At the first international conference on Towards Bimstec-Japan Comprehensive Economic Cooperation: Vision and Tasks Ahead, held on 16-17 December, multi-lateral trade between Bimstec member countries and Japan was emphasised.

Reading the declaration, Lt Gen (Retd) Mr BS Malik, president, Centre for Studies in International Relations and Development (CSIRD) Kolkata, which organised the meet, said there was a consensus that Japan can play a

leading role in extending ODA and giving soft loans to Bimstec countries. Japan can also help in upgrading the technological base in these countries. "In view of the discussions, excess capacity in construction and excess foreign exchange returns in Japan can find an easy answer through investment in Bimstec countries," said Mr Malik.

There is also potential among member countries to exchange oil and natural gas, besides the exchange of young scholars, Mr Malik said.

Mr Hidenao Yanagi, minister, Embassy of Japan, New Delhi said:

"We may increase assistance to Bimstec countries in the coming years. If India is serious about wanting to increase connectivity with other Bimstec countries, we can be of assistance."

Mr Shigeru Tsumori, professor, department of international social sciences, Toyo Eiwa University, Japan and former ambassador of Japan to Myanmar said: "Japanese government is slowly moving to expand cooperation, particularly to India. But cooperation is not purely economic, it is also on the political and strategic level."

THE STATESMAN

EU leaders agree to seven year budget

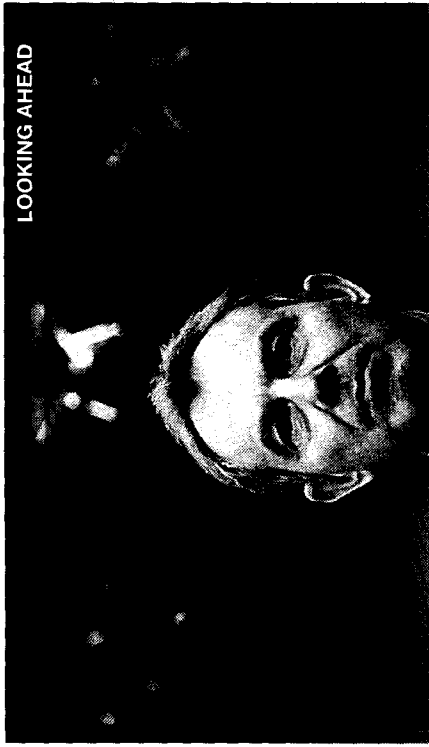
Failure To Reach Consensus Would Have Left Spending Frozen At 2006 Levels

18/12
 5/10
 18/12
 R. Aliem - 8-2

Brussels (Belgium): European Union leaders agreed early Saturday on a seven-year spending plan for the 25-nation bloc—a hard-won deal seen as key to shaping the future of an enlarged EU and to restoring faith in its unity.

“This is about getting an agreement that allows Europe to move forward,” British prime minister Tony Blair said after he and his fellow leaders approved the deal.

The blueprint offered by Blair after hours of intense negotiations Thursday and Friday caps spending at euro862.4 billion between 2007-2013. It slashes Britain’s cherished EU budget rebate by euro10.5 billion (\$12.6 billion) over seven years—a substantial increase into EU coffers that would help fund economic development in the 10 new member states across eastern



on the move, that we avoid paralysis and that we keep open to the idea of a modern enlarged Europe”.

He also called it an ‘important political signal’ for the European Union, which risked further undermining its credibility if leaders did not leave Brussels with a deal on future spending after a two-year battle over the 2007-2013 budget. Failure to reach a deal would have paralysed the EU’s finances, left spending frozen at 2006 levels and hobbled economic development in the poorest regions. It would also have undermined the credibility of the bloc, already jolted this year by French and Dutch voters rejecting the EU’s first ever constitution in national referendums.

The tense negotiations had split the 25-nation bloc into two camps—one led by Blair, the other by his old

sparring partner French President Jacques Chirac—both of whom are trying to shape the future direction of the European Union.

Most member states had rejected Britain’s earlier package as too austere. Many of the bloc’s new member states, including Poland, Hungary, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, demanded more money to build new roads and other infrastructure. UK, bowing to French and German pressure, agreed to raise spending by some \$15.8 billion, mostly by cutting its rebate, to placate the Poles, who had threatened to veto a deal if they did not receive more money.

Blair has been accused of betraying Britain’s interests by giving up a chunk of the rebate. The budget fight laid bare two different visions of Europe.

massive agricultural subsidies.

European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso said the deal was “good for Europe”, adding that it was important to “keep Europe

and central Europe.

In return, the EU countries—crucially France—agreed to a spending review in 2008-09 that could lead to new cuts in the EU’s

East Asia Summit, a forum for dialogue on strategic issues

Countries should strive for a seamless web of trade and ties: Manmohan



A MILESTONE: Prime Minister Manmohan Singh with his Australian and Malaysian counterparts, John Howard and Abdullah Badawi, prior to signing the Kuala Lumpur Declaration at the East Asia Summit on Wednesday. - PHOTO: AFP

Amit Baruah

KUALA LUMPUR: Monday's meeting of the heads of government here decided to set up the East Asia Summit (EAS) as a forum for dialogue on "broad strategic, political and economic issues" of common interest and concern to promote peace, stability and economic prosperity in East Asia.

The heads of government from 16 countries — 10 from the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and India, China, South Korea, Japan, Australia and New Zealand — issued the Kuala Lumpur "declaration" on the EAS after nearly three hours of discussions.

It would be an "open, inclusive, transparent and forward-looking" forum in which ASEAN would be the "driving force", working in partnership with the

other six countries, the declaration said.

Participation in the EAS would be based on criteria established by ASEAN.

It would be hosted and chaired by an ASEAN member-country, which holds the ASEAN Chair, and held back-to-back with the annual ASEAN summit.

The EAS modalities would be reviewed by all the participating countries, the declaration said, without making any reference to a role for the "ASEAN plus three" forum, which groups China, South Korea and Japan with ASEAN.

The EAS called for fostering strategic dialogue and promoting cooperation in political and security issues to ensure that the countries lived in peace with one another and with the world at large in a "just, democratic and

harmonious environment".

Areas of focus

The forum would focus on promoting development, financial stability, economic integration and growth, eradicating poverty and narrowing the development gap through technology transfer and infrastructure development, capacity building, good governance and humanitarian assistance and promotion of financial links, trade as well as investment expansion and liberalisation. Cooperation was also planned in environmental protection, prevention of infectious diseases and natural disaster mitigation.

Speaking at the leaders' "retreat", Prime Minister Manmohan Singh appreciated the ASEAN initiative to convene the EAS, stressing that a "safe and

experienced driver" would take the forum to its destination.

Calling upon the leaders not to stop at sectional free trade area (FTA) agreements, Dr. Singh wanted greater economic integration at the Asian level for which he suggested that the EAS set up a follow-up mechanism consisting of officials and experts. This mechanism would prepare a roadmap.

Dr. Singh said all countries in the region should strive for harmonious relationships and seamless trade and investment ties.

"We are on the cusp of a new opportunity. We should seize it," the Prime Minister was quoted as saying by External Affairs Ministry official Rajiv Sikri.

Other leaders at the summit made a range of proposals. "There were no contradictory

remarks," Mr. Sikri said, stressing that it was a meeting of friends without any misunderstanding.

(China and South Korea have been very critical of Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi's visits to the Yasukuni shrine — an issue which prevented a routine summit of the three countries taking place in Kuala Lumpur.)

Asked whether there was a danger of the EAS becoming a "talk shop", Mr. Sikri said one had to talk to exchange ideas. "It will be more than a mere talk shop."

While the United States was not invited to the first EAS as it did not meet the ASEAN criteria, Russian President Vladimir Putin addressed the formal session as a "guest" of the Malaysian hosts.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 15, 2005

140-10
15/12
See also. B. Att.
A new regional
architecture

It has been a series of purposeful meetings in Kuala Lumpur this week for most of Asia. India's presence and participation, first, in a summit with the Association of South East Asian Nations and, then, in the first East Asia Summit are a good augury for the country and its ultimate integration with that region. At the India-ASEAN summit, the focus was clearly on trade and economic cooperation. Recognising India's economic clout and the opportunity it presents, ASEAN leaders pressed for the early adoption of the India-ASEAN Free Trade Area, which is to come into force next year. This was followed the very next day, by the summit of leaders of 16 East Asian Countries — stretching from India to Australia, and representing basically, the ASEAN and its dialogue partners in this region. Here too, economy and trade were the core issues and a historic decision was taken to work towards the world's largest free trade area, covering all these economies. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's suggestion to set up a committee of officials to work on the framework was accepted. Significantly, ASEAN was recognised as the core of the East Asia Summit (EAS), which will be held every year. The Chairperson of ASEAN will also chair the EAS and the two meetings will take place back to back. So far things have worked out exactly the way that ASEAN wanted and it will firmly be in the driver's seat of EAS. R. Alliance

In the Kuala Lumpur declaration, the 16 leaders have committed themselves to promoting "development, financial stability, energy security, economic integration, and growth," besides narrowing the development gap through technology transfer. The "open, inclusive, transparent, and outward looking forum" will focus on strategic dialogue, promoting cooperation in political and security issues so that the countries can live "at peace in a joint, democratic and harmonious environment." There must be the obvious realisation that EAS includes countries as diverse as Australia, Japan, South Korea, China, and India, besides Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, and Myanmar. It will indeed be a two- or even three-tier forum of economies that will require major adjustments to integrate. As far as India is concerned, EAS can be seen as the penultimate step in its integration with the East, and a stepping-stone to joining the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum. The objectives of the 'Look East' policy, initiated by the P.V. Narasimha Rao regime, are now being realised. It is important for India to keep fully engaged with the East, even while continuing its partnership with Europe or the U.S. In the East, much of the attention has so far been on China, and these countries, particularly the 10-member ASEAN, have consciously moved towards India because they do not want to lose out on the opportunities offered by an emerging economic power house. More than any other grouping or forum in which India has tried to participate, ASEAN and EAS hold great promise for the future.

Russia looks to Southeast Asia

R. Allu ✓
ASEAN ✓

Vladimir Putin moves to pave a road for business in Southeast Asia.

Dmitry Kosyrev

AT THE ASEAN-Russia summit in Malaysia on December 13, Russian President Vladimir Putin focussed on practical here-on-the-ground issues, detailing factors that promote or hinder Russia's effort to become for Southeast Asian nations an economic partner on the same scale as China, India, or Japan.

A first-political-then-economic partnership is a thing of a distant future. What President Putin clearly decided to do during his ASEAN appearance was to pave a road for business in Southeast Asia.

For Moscow, Russia's development from a "dialogue partner" to a "summit partner" of ASEAN is a logical and timely event, fully in line with the process of trade turnover growth.

On the surface, the \$4 billion to \$4.5 billion on the Russia-ASEAN books do not seem a great deal of money (though it is expected to hit \$5.5 billion this year). However, the growth is fast, a billion dollars every year.

Related events in Kuala Lumpur, held simultaneously with the summit, were a clear demonstration that Russian businesses have made substantial, if not always smooth, progress in Southeast Asia in the last few years.

The 3rd ASEAN Business and Investment Forum that brought together major regional businessmen and senior government officials from ASEAN member and partner states was held at the Shangri-La Hotel, a 10 minutes' walk from the magnificent steel-and-glass conference centre taken over by the political leaders.

On Russia's day at the summit — called the Second (the first was in 2000) ASEAN-Russia Business Forum — all were prepared for a presentation from

Leonid Reiman, the Russian IT and Communications Minister. Though Mr. Reiman apologised for being unable to come personally on account of illness, his presentation was read and distributed among the audience, and it was really something worth waiting for. Russia, a country that has 22 million frequent Internet users and year after year posts 30 per cent growth for its IT sector but still ranks far behind India or Malaysia in the minds of Asian IT market players, has made some very hard to refuse offers.

Tuesday's proposals, moreover, were hardly a blind shot. Russian IT specialists have been on first-name terms with their Southeast Asian counterparts for years and know what the region needs most.

Among Russian hardware brought to Kuala Lumpur, eyes were glued to the Air Firefighter, the Be-200 amphibian, and to what has long been considered a secret weapon — the wing-in-ground (WIG) craft, a unique low-altitude vehicle.

In a region where small islands and swamps account for a good part of the terrain and, more importantly, where people rapidly take to every new gadget, a WIG show could steal the limelight.

And the timing for the Russian technology show was good — on December 9-11, Malaysia hosted another technological event, the LIMA 2005 arms show on Langkawi Island, where Russia, with its Yak-130 Mitten G5 trainer aircraft, probably the world's best advanced trainer now, was one of the key players.

Back in 2000, at the first ASEAN-Russia Business Forum, both the general mood and the agenda clearly showed Russia was seen as a country to watch. Now it is a country to talk to. — **RIA Novosti**

5

THE HINDU

Summit will reinforce ASEAN vision: Malaysia

Processes should move on parallel tracks without overlapping

Amit Baruah

R. Aliman
KUALA LUMPUR: The Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) has agreed that the East Asia Summit (EAS) and the "ASEAN plus Three" (China, Japan and South Korea) processes should move on parallel tracks without overlapping.

In a formulation contained in the ASEAN Chairman's (Malaysia's) statement, the grouping also decided to propose the convening of the EAS on an annual basis to the other participants at the inaugural December 14 summit.

Community building

"We also agreed that the EAS should be a 'top-down' forum for leaders to exchange views. We looked forward to the signing of the Kuala Lumpur Declaration on the East Asia Summit.

"We agreed that the efforts of the EAS to promote community building in this region will be consistent with and reinforce the vision of the ASEAN Community ..." Addressing a press conference, Malaysian Foreign

• **EAS to be a 'top-down' forum for leaders to exchange views**

• **China, South Korea and Japan urged to resolve their differences**

• **Myanmar told to take concrete steps towards democracy**

Minister Syed Hamid Albar expressed the hope on Monday that China, South Korea and Japan would resolve their differences over issues of history.

"They must not bring the spill-over [of their problems] to the ASEAN plus Three process," Mr. Hamid said, admitting that these were sensitive issues left over from history. On Myanmar too, ASEAN leaders were direct, dropping their previous resistance to taking a stronger position. Mr. Hamid said Myanmar should not use "empty language" as far as the restoration of democracy was concerned. "They should do something

which we can see and feel." According to the Chairman's statement, Mr. Hamid as Chairman of the ASEAN Standing Committee would visit Myanmar to learn "first-hand" of the progress made in implementing its "roadmap" to democracy.

"We noted the increased interest of the international community on developments in Myanmar. In this context, we took note of the briefing by Myanmar on the latest developments in the implementation of the roadmap to democracy.

"We encouraged Myanmar to expedite the process and welcomed the invitation by Myanmar to the Foreign Minister of Malaysia ...to visit Myanmar to learn first-hand of the progress. We also called for the release of those placed under detention," the statement said, without making a reference to the continued detention of pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

In a separate declaration, ASEAN leaders also agreed to establish an "ASEAN Charter" to serve as a legal and institutional framework of ASEAN.

13 DEC 2005

THE HINDU

Can the East Asia Summit be independent?

Regional
Alliance
12/12
10-11

Relevant to the EAS' evolving politics is ASEAN's decision to avoid inviting the U.S. to the December 14 meet.

P.S. Suryanarayana

FOR THE first time since the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) began engaging the major powers, one of its initiatives is being driven by issues relating to the importance of being either China or India.

Behind the diplomatic scene, the implementation of ASEAN's proposal of an East Asia Summit (EAS) has been influenced by interventions from China and India. To the credit of Beijing and New Delhi, neither has rocked the ASEAN boat or hurt each other. Nor has the summit, being held in Kuala Lumpur on December 14, become a non-event.

The first-ever EAS will be attended by the leaders of the 10 ASEAN countries, besides China, Japan, South Korea, India, Australia, and New Zealand. The EAS was first agreed upon by the well-established forum of ASEAN+3 last year, the 'Plus Three' being China, Japan, and South Korea.

The ASEAN, which remains in "the driving seat" for the EAS process, later invited India, Australia, and New Zealand.

With this, the EAS' space has expanded from ASEAN+3 to a virtual ASEAN+6 (a nomenclature not in official use). Moreover, with countries outside the geographical footprint of East Asia joining ASEAN+3, the scope of the December 14 summit became a contentious issue, until it was resolved at the ministerial level on December 10.

Relevant to the evolving politics of the EAS is ASEAN's conspicuous decision to avoid inviting the United States to the first-ever summit.

Washington and Western experts are, therefore, assessing the prospects of a potential economic bloc in a region of utmost strategic importance to the U.S. As now envisioned by some ASEAN players, the proposed "East Asian Community (EAC)" will be an economic bloc with security and cultural dimensions as well. But the EAC has not yet been fully defined.

Identified by ASEAN+3, only last year, as a long-term objective, the EAC (not to be confused with the EAS) is at the centre of the ongoing debate on the scope of the December 14 summit and of the roadmap for the future (inclusive of a web of free-trade agreements). And this debate encompasses the importance of India and China in the East Asian context.

China's rise

The ASEAN had come into existence with an eye on China and with the often-tacit but sometimes-open support of the U.S. during the now-bygone Cold War era. Of particular concern to the U.S. today is the rise of China as a potential economic superpower with enormous military muscle. And, the prospect of China being able to dominate the proposed EAC is, therefore, critical to U.S.' calculus in both strategic and economic terms.

• Prospects of proposed 'East Asian Community' being assessed

• ASEAN remains in the 'driving seat'

• Draft EAS formula evolved

Authoritative Chinese sources say Beijing is aware of the game plan of some ASEAN countries that tend to think India can be counted on to "balance China" in a future EAC.

Discounting the notion that India and China themselves might wish to confront each other in this fashion, the sources say that ASEAN+3 can indeed serve as the "foundation" for the proposed EAC.

In China's world view, political and security-related cooperation among the EAS-participants and confidence-building exercises by them are no less important for their first-ever summit. The message is that the focus of the EAS need not be entirely economics, a domain where the ASEAN+3 (and not India or Australia) has already done considerable work towards the creation of the EAC.

Non-confrontational approach

Adopting an equally non-confrontational approach, India's interlocutors have, during the negotiations over the EAS' draft declaration, emphasised the need for a clear "vision." The idea of the EAC "meshes" well with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's year-old call for the eventual formation of a wider "Asian Economic Community."

Yet the possibility exists that ASEAN+3, as the potential prime mover for the EAC formation, might marginalise India in this process. But the EAS offers India a unique chance to be in on the East Asian scene, as a dialogue-partner of not just the ASEAN but ASEAN+3 as well (China included).

Mindful of these realities, India has helped the ASEAN evolve a draft EAS formula that reflects the commitment of all the participants (the virtual ASEAN+6) to deepen integration and to work towards the creation of a community in the region. A broad generality, yes; but a draft formula that does not slam the door on India's face.

While Singapore, a key ASEAN player, took the initiative for India's inclusion as an important EAS-participant, Japan is known to have worked for the inclusion of Australia, a U.S. ally, and also New Zealand.

For the U.S., which is now wooing India as well for a strategic *entente*, the EAS' slate of participants may serve as an "offshore balancing" of China. "Offshore balancing," as defined by Stephen M. Walt of the Harvard University, "exploits the tendency for regional powers to worry more about each other than about the United States." Will the EAS buck this tendency?

S-E Asian leaders praise India, China potential

Press Trust of India

Launch pad set for 8-10% GDP growth: PM

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec. 11. — With India's visibility as an economic powerhouse growing rapidly, South-east Asian countries are calling for speeding up regional unity and market liberalisation in order to "stay in the game" and compete in the global economy. "Combined, these two economic powerhouses (India and China) will shift the centre of gravity of the world economy towards Asia," Singapore's Prime Minister Mr Lee Hsien Loong today told business leaders here on the sidelines of the 11th summit of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean).

However, to remain competitive, the 10-member Asean must take firm decisive actions and speed up regional integration, he said. "In order to stay in the game, Asean must therefore take decisive action," he added.

The comments came ahead of the Prime Minister, Dr Manmohan Singh's meetings with Asean leaders

ON BOARD SPECIAL AIRCRAFT, Dec. 11. — Unveiling the economic agenda for the new year, the Prime Minister today said the UPA government has set the launch pad in the past 18 months of its rule to push the GDP growth to 8-10 per cent annually. En route to Kuala Lumpur, Dr Manmohan Singh told reporters that the Rs-1,74,000-crore Bharat Nirman Programme, Rs-100,000-crore Urban Renewal Programme and the National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme have set the stage for pushing the GDP growth to the higher level of 8-10 per cent. — PTI

tomorrow and the first-ever East Asia Summit on Wednesday.

Mr Lee said Asean was getting closer to its goal of integration by 2020 by bringing down trade barriers and unifying markets among the 10-member economies, but things have to move faster.

Malaysian Prime Minister Mr Abdullah Badawi also voiced similar sentiments yesterday, telling a business conference that "to keep pace with China and India, Asean would need to maintain the momentum of improving its business-friendly environment." "Instead of being a mere follower of the tide of change, Asia itself will become an agent of change," he said.

In his remarks, Mr Lee added that Asean was bringing down its trade barriers and unifying markets among the grouping but it needed to be accelerated.

He was of the view that though foreign investors were favouring India and China due to their vast market, the unification of the 10 countries could help give the region greater leverage.

Mr Abdullah had urged the Asean members to seek deeper economic integration with India. He noted that the combined economies of the two countries was expected to edge out the United States as the top economy by 2050.

12 DEC 2005

THE STATESMAN

Spats over trade, Japan cloud ASEAN talks

Kuala Lumpur: Asian ministers wrangled on Friday over the rice trade and Myanmar's poor human-rights record, while a bitter row between China and Japan cast a shadow over preparations for next week's regional summit.

The Malaysian hosts hope the two-day ASEAN summit will break ground on a range of pressing issues facing the region, including the bird flu threat, the annual haze hazard, terrorism and closer economic integration. But once again diplomatic spats and perennial bugbears distracted from the main order of business as economic and foreign ministers thrashed out the agenda for their leaders, convening on Monday.

China announced it was pulling out of three-way ministerial talks with Japan and South Korea over Japanese Premier Junichiro Koizumi's repeated visits to a Tokyo shrine that features war criminals among those honoured at the site.

The visits have stirred anger in China and South Korea—both of which were occupied by Japanese forces—and Chinese Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing blamed Koizumi for Beijing's withdrawal from Friday's scheduled talks. "The leader of a certain country

is still worshipping war criminals. Surely this is wrong," Li told reporters.

"For an important leader of an important country to be so arrogantly and blatantly hurting the feelings of the people of other Asian countries, what sort of behaviour is this?" he said. "Can one accept this? Nobody can." A Japanese official confirmed that the three-way talks, a regular feature of the annual "ASEAN-plus-three" meetings, would

not take place this year. "There's no way we can hold it without China," the official said. Ministers meanwhile took Myanmar to task over the glacial pace of promised reforms, saying that



DIVIDED WE STAND

the military junta which runs the country would have to show more progress if it wanted the region's support.

"We discussed the question of Myanmar, of the need for Myanmar to be more responsive to the wishes of the international community, and I think this has been clearly stated," Malaysian foreign minister Syed Hamid Albar said. "We have discussed Myanmar in a very frank manner," Indonesian foreign minister Wirayuda said. Agencies

10 DEC 2005

THE TIMES OF INDIA

EU cracks shadow Hong Kong meet

K.A. Badarinath
New Delhi, December 5

SERIOUS DIFFERENCES within the European Union membership reported on the farm policy that sets targets for cutting down domestic and export subsidies are bound to adversely impact the impending WTO trade talks at Hong Kong next week.

Britain's Chancellor of Exchequer Gordon Brown's demand for review of the trade-distorting EU common agriculture policy (CAP) has infuriated the fellow members including the union's trade commissioner Peter Mandelson.

After a meeting of G-7 finance ministers in London, Brown has sought a fundamental review of EU's GAP leading to fissures in the union. According to reports emanating from London, Brown has asked for deep cuts in domestic and export subsi-

dies on farm products from the Union.

Meanwhile, France has joined the issue with the contention that developing countries like India would not benefit from the tariff cuts on agriculture products. While Brazil and Argentina are seen as immediate beneficiaries of such cuts, French Foreign Minister

Philippe Douste-Blazy has reportedly maintained that lowering tariffs might not lead to surge in exports from developing countries led by G-20 and G-90 group of least developed countries.

Serious differences among EU membership are bound to cast a deep shadow on the Hong Kong Ministerial conclave of WTO beginning next Monday.

In a related development, it is learnt that trade negotiators from India have more or less reconciled to the fact that a deal is not likely to happen ei-

ther on agriculture, non-agriculture products or services at Hong Kong later next week.

Indian negotiators believe that the second draft proposal dished out by WTO secretary general Pascal Lamy has improvements but nowhere within the range for agreement. Though, US is still optimistic of the outcome, a Commerce Ministry source said, "Differences are so vast that a deal is unlikely at Hong Kong".

Union Commerce and Industry Minister Kamal Nath, meanwhile, commenced an exercise to build political consensus on trade issues. He met leaders from various political formations in National Democratic Alliance (NDA) led by BJP.

Nath is scheduled to continue the consultations with trade unions and ruling party alliance as well as supporting parties on Tuesday.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

EU team, LTTE hold talks

Associated Press

KILINOCHCHI, (Sri Lanka), Dec. 1. — The head of a European truce monitoring team met with a top Tamil Tiger leader today to discuss a faltering cease-fire with the Sri Lanka's government.

Mr Hargrup Haukland met with SP Thamilselvan, chief of the separatist rebels' political wing, in Kilinochchi, a northern rebel-held town 275 kilometres north of the capital, Colombo.

Thamilselvan refused media interviews after the meeting and Mr Haukland spoke briefly and said tensions in the island nation's volatile northeast are easing. "Based on the information I have, not only from east but also north, tension in the area is not high. It's quite relaxed," Mr Haukland told reporters. Tamil Tiger leader Velupillai Pirabhakaran warned on Sunday that he would intensify the Tigers' struggle for an independent homeland in Sri Lanka's north and east next year if the minority Tamils' grievances are not addressed. In his annual policy speech, Pirabhakaran also invited the country's newly elected hardline president, Mr Mahinda Rajapakse, to come up with a solution to the drawn-out civil conflict.

Mr Rajapakse has said his government is committed to ending all violence in the country and resuming

the stalled peace process.

The cease-fire has come under increasing strain in recent months because of an upsurge in violence resulting in the deaths of dozens of soldiers, rebels and civilians. The military and the rebels both deny they are responsible for the turmoil.

India 'briefed'

The Sri Lankan foreign minister has told India that it wants a review of the cease-fire agreement with the Tigers and has invited the LTTE for negotiations. The foreign minister, Mr Mangala Samaraweera, on his first overseas tour after taking over office, met the Prime Minister, Dr Mamohan Singh, and the minister of state for external affairs, Mr E Ahamed. Mr Samaraweera told India that while the regime of newly-elected President Mahinda Rajapakse was committed to the maintenance of the cease-fire, it desired a review "so that implementation of the agreement can be made effective". A joint statement issued on the occasion of the minister's visit said Sri Lanka had extended a "firm invitation to LTTE to negotiations to discuss a political situation". "President Mr Rajapakse views openness, transparency and inclusivity in the peace process, for its acceptance and eventual success," said the joint statement.

02 DEC 2005

THE STATESMAN

EU accepts Iran's call for fresh nuclear talks

Tehran/Barcelona: Britain, France and Germany agreed on Sunday to exploratory talks with Iran on resuming negotiations over its disputed nuclear programme, which broke down in August, EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana said.

"A letter has been conveyed to Iran this afternoon... from the three countries and myself. We offered Iran to have conversations, dialogue to see if we have enough common basis to start negotiations," he told reporters at a Euro-Mediterranean summit in Barcelona.

An EU diplomat said the letter called Iran's resumption of uranium ore conversion a "major setback" but dropped the previous European insistence that talks on long-term co-operation could only restart if Iran resumed a full suspension of activities related to uranium enrichment.

The letter set no date but Iran's official IRNA news agency said ambassadors of the so-called EU3 countries had accepted a resumption of the talks in December, quoting a state-

ment issued by Iran's Supreme National Security Council.

Iran's chief nuclear negotiator, Ali Larijani, wrote to the EU3 this month calling for the resumption of talks, which collapsed in August when Tehran reactivated a plant converting uranium ore into a gas, a precursor to making enriched nuclear fuel.

The International Atomic Energy Agency's 35-nation board decided on Thursday not to refer Iran to the UN Security Council.

According to the EU, the EU3 letter said talks could cover a Russian proposal, backed by Washington and the EU.

That plan would allow Iran to maintain a civilian nuclear programme but uranium enrichment, the most sensitive stage of the nuclear fuel cycle that can be used to make fuel for bombs, would be transferred to Russia under a joint venture.

However, Foreign Ministry spokesman Hamid Reza Asefi reiterated that Iran's right to a full nuclear cycle on its soil was non-negotiable. AP



An Iranian Basiji militia woman at a rally held in support of Iran's N-programme recently

29 NOV 2005

E.U. agrees to give Teheran a breather on nuclear issue

Iran rejects appeal to consider Russian offer; IAEA calls for talks

28/11
HD-16

VIENNA: The European Union has agreed to give Iran more time to negotiate on its nuclear programme but warned Teheran against making any "unilateral moves" to increase its atomic activities, a senior E.U. official said on Thursday.

British ambassador Peter Jenkins said the European Union has "acceded to the request of several board members" of the U.N. watchdog International Atomic Energy Agency "who have asked for more time for diplomatic dialogue on the future of Iran's nuclear programme."

"No unilateral move"

Mr. Jenkins, who was speaking for the E.U. presidency at an IAEA board of governors meeting, said Iran should "seriously" consider a Russian compromise proposal that would allow it to enrich uranium in Russia.

He said Iran should "refrain from any further unilateral move which could aggravate the situation," a clear reference to proceeding to actual uranium enrichment.

Meanwhile, U.N. nuclear watchdog chief Mohamed El-Bardei said on Thursday he hoped international talks could resume on guaranteeing that Iran will not make nuclear weapons.

Diplomats said a decision by the E.U. and the United States not to push for referral at the meeting had averted a potential clash with Russia and China, which oppose any such move.

The Western powers, along



Activists of the Opposition National Council of Resistance of Iran stage a demonstration demanding referral of the country's nuclear file to the U.N. Security Council, in front of the U.N. building in Vienna on Thursday.

- PHOTO: REUTERS

with developing countries such as India and South Africa, now seem to agree Russia's proposal offers the best route forward.

However, Iran has made clear

it intends to pursue uranium enrichment on its own soil, and Teheran's chief nuclear negotiator, Ali Larijani, said this would be the main topic of any future

discussions with the Europeans and Russians. Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki told reporters that his country had yet to receive any proposal,

and claimed it would be a non-starter. "It is natural that Iran wants to keep these activities within its own borders." - AFP, Reuters

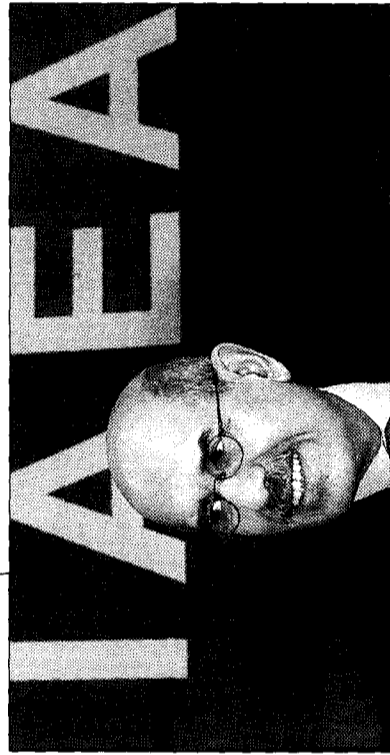
Iran has nuke plans, says EU

ASSOCIATED Press
Vienna, November 24

THE EUROPEAN Union is accusing Iran of possessing documents used solely for the production of nuclear arms and is warning of possible referral to the UN Security Council, according to a statement made available on Thursday.

The statement was described by a diplomat as a summary of what Britain, France and Germany would tell a closed session of the International Atomic Energy Agency board which began meeting on Thursday. The statement said the EU would accuse Iran of possessing suspicious documents that "have no other application than the production of nuclear weapons."

"Failure to make progress" on easing international concerns about Iran's nuclear programme "will hasten the day when the board decides that a report to the Security Council must be made," said the



IAEA chief Mohamed ElBaradei at the opening of a board of governors meeting in Vienna on Thursday.

REUTERS

statement to be delivered by Peter Jenkins, the chief British delegate to the IAEA.

The EU also reserves the right to call an emergency board meeting before the next scheduled gathering in March — for possible Security Council referral — "if Iranian behaviour makes it necessary," the statement said.

ElBaradei, including a finding showing the Iranians in possession of what appeared to be drawings of the core of an atomic warhead.

But the main issue is Iran's refusal to give up its right to uranium enrichment, which can be used not only to generate power but also to make weapons-grade material for nuclear warheads. A plan floated in recent weeks foresees moving any Iranian enrichment plan to Russia. There, in theory, Moscow would supervise the process to make sure enrichment is only to fuel levels. But Iran insists it wants to control the complete fuel cycle domestically.

Meanwhile, the UN nuclear watchdog began a meeting where it was expected to postpone calling for UN Security Council action over Iran's atomic programme. "There is hope that there will be resumed negotiations" on winning guarantees that Iran is not developing atomic weapons, a European diplomat, who did not want to be named, said.

The statement alluded to new revelations of concern contained in a report drawn up for the board meeting by IAEA head Mohamed

25/11

2 5 11 2005

EU ready to revive Iran talks

Vienna. European Union powers are willing to revive nuclear talks with Iran to discuss a Russian proposal aimed at defusing an impasse over what the West believes is an Iranian atomic bomb programme, diplomats said on Tuesday.

Under President Putin's proposal, Iran would be allowed to continue converting uranium ore but would ship it to Russia for enrichment, a system which, in theory, would prevent Iran from producing weapons-grade uranium. "We are considering a meeting in December in Vienna. The Iranians would have to say they want to meet and talk about the Russian proposal," diplomat from the so-called EU3 said. Reuters

E.U. backs plans for more aid, debt relief to Africa

Sharper razor fences will not stem the flow of poor immigrants

LUXEMBOURG: The European Union acknowledged on Wednesday that higher and sharper razor fences will not stem the flow of poor Africans trying to get into Europe and called for a massive development, aid and debt relief programme to curb attempts to gatecrash rich nations.

"Our intention is, during the coming days and weeks, to intensify Europe's commitment toward Africa," said E.U. Justice and Home Affairs Commissioner Franco Frattini. The 25-member nations endorsed the approach at a meeting of E.U. Justice and Home Affairs Ministers.

Mr. Frattini said 95 per cent of the migrants trying to sneak into the E.U. through two fenced Spanish enclaves in Morocco were from the poor, sub-Saharan region, highlighting the need to intensify aid.

Symptom of bigger disease

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Antonio Guterres, who attended the E.U. talks here, said the problems in Melilla and Ceuta highlighted by the deaths of 11 African would-be immigrants were only a symptom of a bigger disease.

"The disease to be cured needs a massive involvement of the international community," said Mr. Guterres after meeting the E.U. ministers. He stressed the need for debt relief and economic support.

"We wish to join in this," said



DASHED HOPES: Senegalese would-be immigrants await further transportation at the Dakar international airport, Dakar, Senegal, on Tuesday. — PHOTO: AP

British Home Secretary Charles Clarke, whose country holds the E.U. presidency. At the same time in Brussels, the E.U. head office presented a new development aid strategy on Wednesday focused primarily on alleviating poverty in Africa and on keeping E.U. member-states committed to their promises to double aid to the continent.

African Union Commission Chairman Alpha Oumar Konare, who was at E.U. headquarters in Brussels, called for closer coordination to stem the problem,

but said the E.U. had to help fight the root of the problem, which he said was rural poverty in Africa.

In Rabat, Moroccan Interior Minister Mustafa el Sahel said: "We expect of Europe big humanity. We expect of Europe big generosity. We expect of Europe, for sure, to aid sub-Saharan countries ... it has a moral responsibility."

Spain's Justice Minister Juan Fernando Lopez Aguilar said there was need for a "substantial increase of funds in all areas and

to give the necessary aid to Morocco, which has limited means."

Referring to the two Spanish enclaves in Africa, he said "there is a barrier between the desperate and the promised land of Spain and Europe."

Mr. Frattini is proposing a \$60-million "Regional Protection Programme" designed to help countries such as Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova and North African states handle the influx of asylum seekers heading for Europe. — AP

THE HIRCU

13 NOV 2005

Tuesday, November 08, 2005

 PRINT THIS STORY

Close this window

International

European Union demands Iranian nuke compliance

Mark John

BRUSSELS, November 7 The European Union insisted on Monday that Iran comply with an international resolution that it freeze all sensitive nuclear activities but said it was studying a new offer of talks from Tehran.

British Foreign Minister Jack Straw said the EU had not "so far" discussed economic or diplomatic sanctions on Iran if it did not comply with the resolution by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

"What we would like to see is Iran implementing the terms of the resolution of the board of governors of the IAEA that was passed in September," Straw, whose country holds the rotating presidency of the 25-member EU, said. "(The possibility of sanctions) has not been discussed so far. I'm not going to speculate on the future," he told a news conference after a meeting of EU foreign ministers.

Straw said the EU was studying a letter by chief Iranian nuclear negotiator Ali Larijani to Britain, Germany and France seeking a revival of talks which broke down in August when Iran resumed uranium ore conversion.

It was the first direct approach by Iran since President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, took office in August. Straw did not say when or how the EU might respond.

US officials are sceptical about the new Iranian move.

"Is this real or cosmetic? It's too early to say. So we are letting the Europeans take the lead on this because they are doing the negotiating," said a State Department official who requested anonymity.

The EU has demanded that before negotiations can resume, Tehran resume a freeze on conversion of uranium ore into a gas that can be used to make highly-enriched nuclear fuel. One EU official, who declined to be named, said the so-called EU3 powers might compromise on conversion if Tehran agreed to a permanent suspension of uranium enrichment. —Reuters

URL: http://www.indianexpress.com/full_story.php?content_id=81572

Ads By Google

Print Sure PDF workflow
Server with unlimited remote PDF preflight upload desktop clients.
devzerog.com/printsure

Acrobat PDF to DOC, Word
Convert PDF to Word - Free Trial Instantly Converted - Try Now
www.verypdf.com

France demurs on farm subsidy cuts

France, the biggest beneficiary of the European Union's (EU) Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), has threatened to veto the 25-member grouping's latest proposal at the World Trade Organisation (WTO) that is regarded as critical for the success of the stalled Doha development round of global negotiations. The EU's formulation announced on Friday entails slashing tariffs on farm goods up to a maximum of 60 per cent, in addition to its earlier commitment to lower agricultural subsidies by 70 per cent. Out of France's receipts of 13 billion euros from the EU in 2006, the CAP is expected to provide 9.4 billion euros. The country's small but powerful farm lobby is hence apprehensive that Britain and its European allies will use the Hong Kong ministerial meeting of the WTO to precipitate the unfinished part of the 2003 reform of the CAP. But France's stance *vis-à-vis* the WTO's proposal is at odds with the advanced world's bid to secure market access for industrial products and services in the developing countries. The CAP, with in-built subsidies – initially as price guarantees and then by way of payments, to boost production – was Europe's response to the severe food shortages in the post-war decades. But the regime of generous subsidies led to high cost, intensive farming, and over-production, all of which proved unsustainable in the face of the need to enhance competitiveness. A staunch advocate of the EU's enlargement, France was expected to shoulder the financial burden of the commitments to 10 agriculturally backward East European countries, which are recent entrants into the Union. It thus concurred with the European Commission's 2003 proposals on CAP reform albeit in a diluted version.

The thrust of the new-look CAP was to ensure that production of food was geared to demand rather than to the amount of subsidies and price guarantees. Nevertheless, the CAP still accounts for about 40 per cent of total spending in the EU on account of the new system of Single Farm Payments disbursed as incentives for promoting environment and animal-friendly farming practices. In the run-up to the Hong Kong ministerial meeting in December, environment and consumer lobbies are stepping up pressure, arguing that burdens on European tax-payers as well as on farmers in the developing countries that remained largely unaltered despite the 2003 reform must be addressed expeditiously. The U.S. is likewise demanding that the quantum of goods that will continue to attract higher tariffs should be lowered to 1 per cent, rather than 8 per cent as announced by the EU. Britain – holder of the six-monthly rotating Presidency of the E.U. Council – has made no secret of its commitment to a complete liberalisation of trade in agriculture in Europe, and Germany is also believed not to be backing France's moves at the WTO. Jacques Chirac's right-wing coalition which was recently rebuffed by the electorate in the referendum on the E.U. constitution, is unprepared to deal with another adverse political fallout in the context of the 2007 general election.

0 1 NOV 2005

E.U. member nations warned on CIA jails

Germany fears it was hub for "rendition" flights

Luke Harding

BERLIN: The European Union's top justice official has warned that any E.U. country found to have operated secret CIA prisons could lose its voting rights.

In a move that increases pressure on the U.S. to explain the activities of the CIA, justice and home affairs commissioner Franco Frattini said there would be "serious consequences" if reports of CIA jails in Europe turned out to be true.

"I would be obliged to propose to the Council [of E.U. Ministers] serious consequences, including the suspension of voting rights in the Council," Mr. Frattini said at a counter-terrorism meeting in Berlin.

Mr. Frattini's remarks follow claims that the CIA set up a covert network of "black sites" in eastern Europe in the wake of September 11. Earlier this month, Human Rights Watch

claimed that the agency secretly interrogated Al-Qaeda suspects at Soviet-era jails in Poland and Romania. Both countries deny it. Poland's President Aleksander Kwasniewski reiterated in a broadcast by news station TVN24 that his country has never hosted any CIA prisoners.

U.S. urged to clarify

British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw has urged the Bush administration to clarify the issue amid further reports that secret CIA planes carrying terrorist suspects regularly stopped off in several European countries. Germany's Foreign Minister Franz-Walter Steinmeier will raise the subject during his first visit to Washington. His symbolic fence-mending trip to the U.S. has been overshadowed by new allegations that the CIA used Germany as a hub for its so-called "rendition"

flights. During the flights Islamist prisoners were allegedly transferred to third countries where they could be interrogated beyond the reach of international human rights legislation.

Last week, the *Berliner Zeitung* reported that at least six CIA planes had touched down at Frankfurt's Rhein-Main air base. The claims are embarrassing for Angela Merkel, Germany's new Chancellor, who wants to repair relations with the U.S. Several European governments have launched their own investigations into clandestine CIA prisoner-transfer landings.

The European Commission has also asked the U.S. to confirm the existence of secret CIA military jails, which almost certainly breach the European convention on human rights and the international convention against torture. — ©Guardian Newspapers Limited 2005

EU stares at an uncertain future

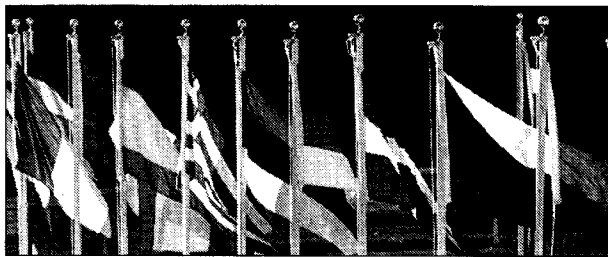
Hampton Court (England): EU leaders have moved no closer to resolving their divisions over a new budget, nor how to appease renewed French threats of vetoing world trade talks amid calls that Europe needs to accept urgent reforms to keep up with rising economic powers China and India.

A vague agreement to work for economic renewal pushed by summit host British Prime Minister Tony Blair did little to clear up a sense of paralysis and drift in the 25-nation bloc.

Blair's one-day informal talks on Thursday were focused on pushing his counterparts to accept that more change was needed in wake of the effects of globalisation and also to show Europeans that the EU was a benefit to their every-day lives.

"People want to push Europe forward again," Blair said at the end of the talks.

He said the leaders agreed to work toward cutting red tape, opening up services markets to more competition, crafting a common energy policy to cope with



A vague agreement to work for economic renewal pushed by summit host Tony Blair did little to clear up a sense of paralysis and drift in the 25-nation bloc

high oil prices, trimming welfare systems and boosting funds for research and education. Blair said there was also broad backing to set up a billion-euro "globalisation adjustment fund" which officials said would be used to help workers in the EU hit by job losses blamed on global competition, as well as boosting the fight against illegal immigration.

French President Jacques Chirac agreed the fund was a good idea, but issued strong threats at the talks that France would not accept more cuts in farm aid in exchange to get an EU budget deal or a world trade agreement. Chirac said he

may veto an agreement on world trade talks if the EU makes excessive concessions in cuts in farm subsidies and import tariffs, raising fears the EU's already sensitive unified stance at the world trade talks was set to implode.

"There is no way we are going to take an extra step," Chirac told reporters.

France has long defended the system of subsidies, known as the Common Agricultural Policy, from which it benefits disproportionately. That EU farm aid programme, which also limits imports of goods from other countries, has come under fire from the EU's trade partners. Agencies

THE TIMES OF INDIA

29 OCT 2005

Bird flu a global threat, declare EU nations

RAW *1911*
Luxembourg: European Union foreign ministers on Tuesday declared the spread of bird flu from Asia into Europe a "global threat" requiring broad international cooperation. At a special meeting, the ministers were to issue a statement saying they recognize bird flu poses a serious, global health threat if it shifts from birds to human beings and one "that requires a coordinated international reaction."

One day after bird flu was recorded in Greece's Aegean Sea islands, they also called on the EU executive Commission to speed up the drafting of stronger EU rules designed to prevent, combat and eradicate bird flu.

On Tuesday, Greece banned the export of live birds and poultry meat from the area where the EU's first bird flu case was detected. Poultry from Turkey and Romania have already been banned by the EU as bird flu found there was confirmed as being the deadly H5N1 strain. Tests were also being carried out on birds in Bulgaria and Croatia.

The draft EU statement referred to the need for the EU to coordinate any efforts to stamp out bird flu in consultation with specialised United Nations organizations. Officials stressed the EU does not consider bird flu to be a European problem but that it recognizes there is a threat of a pandemic. Agencies

► Earlier report on Page 16

Russia-EU ties — a time of change

The Europeans have accepted in principle the Russians' initiative to replace the 1994 Partnership and Cooperation Agreement.

Nikolai Kaveshnikov

THE BIGGEST achievement at the Russia-EU summit was not understanding on specific matters, but the Europeans' acceptance in principle of Russia's initiative to formulate a comprehensive agreement that would replace the 1994 Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PSA). "An updated legal basis corresponding to modern realities is required," said Russian President Vladimir Putin, commenting on the outcome of the summit.

The 1994 agreement no longer corresponds to present-day realities, above all current relations between Russia and the European Union. Back then, having just started the creation of a market economy, Russia suffered a severe economic crisis. Today, Russia has a stable market economy, which for all the structural imbalances demonstrates a high growth rate.

The European Union has changed too. In 1994, it comprised 12 countries, which had just drawn up a programme of establishing

an economic and currency union and were making the first attempts to pursue a common foreign policy.

Today, the EU includes 25 countries. It has a common currency and has worked out a concept of a common foreign policy and security. The EU has created instruments for implementing these policies and it has gained considerable experience in doing so.

However, as the countries of Central and Eastern Europe joined the EU, it entered a period of profound and painful transformation. Contradictions within the Union intensified, as revealed by difficulties involved in the ratification of the EU constitution and differences of opinion as regards the future development of the EU.

The PSA was an important agreement for its time. It set a new political framework for relations between Russia and the EU, and formulated a principle of strategic partnership. Though largely declarative, this partnership created a general favourable background for the development of relations. A system of joint institutions based on

PSA concepts is functioning quite effectively. Contacts within these institutions have been gradually increasing mutual trust. Following the agreement, several important accords have been signed — on police cooperation, cooperation in science and technology, a multilateral programme of nuclear security.

In May 2005, the roadmaps for four "common spaces" were signed. Though they are nothing more than a declaration of intent and contain too many general words, still they charted a direction for further cooperation.

But the past years have also revealed many shortcomings in the PSA wording. In the first place, formally covering three spheres — economics, politics and culture — the PSA devotes little attention to the latter two.

The political dialogue that is really going on concerns numerous subjects not mentioned in the agreement. The format of this dialogue has changed after the creation of the EU-Russia Permanent Partnership

Council.

With regard to trade, the PSA copies the GATT-WTO provisions. During the early 1990s it was an important step forward, but in a couple of years, after Russia joins the WTO, this part of the agreement will lose all meaning.

More importantly, the chief purpose of the agreement — to assist Russia in carrying out economic and political reforms — has become outdated.

Today, Russia-EU relations are based on the principle of cooperation between equal partners and partial integration in some sectors of the "common spaces."

Relations between Russia and the EU have turned into a series of ambitious project proposals and tough bargaining over a multitude of specific issues.

This new agreement will help define areas of practical cooperation on the basis of common or close values. — **RIA Novosti**

(The writer is Senior Researcher with the Institute of Europe, Russian Academy of Sciences.)

✓ 49-11

710

✓

EU's troubled path to enlargement

Despite Monday's offer to Turkey on its membership application, the wrangling that preceded it in Luxembourg has again left the European Union looking uncertain of its path.

Simon Tisdall

TO BORROW a phrase from the Queen of England, 2005 is turning into the European Union's *annus horribilis*. Its dreams of ever closer union were shattered when French and Dutch voters rejected the EU's draft constitution. The subsequent EU summit was one of the most acrimonious on record, with additional rifts opening up over the budget and Britain's rebate.

And now, despite Monday's last-gasp, patched-up offer to Ankara on its membership application, the wrangling that preceded it in Luxembourg has again left the EU looking weak, out of touch, and uncertain of its path.

The fact that Austria, reneging on previous commitments and claiming it alone was "listening to the people," could block the process for almost two days exposed the

structural weakness of collective EU decision-making.

And when Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan bypassed EU leaders and appealed to the United States to help put a stop to the squabbling, the EU's public humiliation seemed almost complete.

"This has been a very difficult year for the EU, there's no question," a senior diplomat said. "What has been happening in Luxembourg is dismaying. But it's part of the bigger problem about where Europe is going. The votes on the constitution gave the impression of a shambles, the budget was another big blow. Both could have been avoided."

"The Turkey issue has not been handled very diplomatically by the British," the diplomat said.

"Many people in Europe feel this. The British could have managed Cyprus and Austria in a better way. But they waited too

long. And the arguments are not over."

Whether or not predominantly Muslim, secular Turkey eventually achieves full membership, the row has caused considerable damage — and threatens to do more. Much of European public opinion opposes Turkey's bid. It has become entangled with immigration, employment, and religious issues.

It has triggered the airing of ill-disguised racial prejudice. None of these problems was resolved on Monday. The Turkey question has been exploited by politicians such as Germany's Angela Merkel and France's Nicolas Sarkozy, and this is unlikely to stop. It has allowed Turkish nationalists to characterise Europe as a Christian club intolerant of Muslims.

And EU ambivalence has raised fears that Mr. Erdogan's reforms will lose support and stall. To make matters worse, diplomats say

the EU is poorly placed at present to dig itself out of trouble. Its traditional "motor" — the Franco-German alliance — is out of petrol. French President Jacques Chirac has been weakened by political reverses and, more recently, by illness. In Germany, nobody is entirely sure who is leading the country.

Monday's events are also likely to intensify criticism of Britain's EU presidency, especially over budget reform and the cost of expansion. "The basic problem is that the country that was most in favour of enlargement does not want to pay for it," the senior European diplomat said.

Like the EU after a bruising year, Britain's credibility is on the line. One reason, perhaps, why Tony Blair is going to Paris on Friday to confront his old sparring partner, Mr. Chirac. — ©Guardian Newspapers Limited 2005

R. Hillier
by

Oil Giants Total And BP Bow To Political Pressure, Slash Oil Prices

EU turns heat on US over fuel bills

Jan Strupczewski
MANCHESTER 10 SEPTEMBER

THE European Union urged the United States on Saturday to use less oil and kept the pressure up on oil companies to curb record prices that threaten to hit the euro zone's already sluggish economic growth.

Oil giants Total and BP bowed to intense political pressure on Friday and cut petrol prices at the pump in France immediately to help ease the pain of surging fuel and energy bills for households and businesses. It was not immediately clear whether there would be price cuts in other parts of Europe or if other oil companies would cut their prices too.

The European Union's 25 finance ministers, meeting in the northern English city of Manchester, planned to take a joint public stand on the rise in oil prices and call for endeavours to reduce oil consumption in the United States in particular. "We will use our G7 meetings in Washington in two weeks to have a frank word with our American colleagues," Luxembourg Prime Minister Jean-Claude Juncker told reporters



UNITED WE STAND: Britain's Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown (front centre) with French minister for economy, finance and industry Thierry Breton (left) and Jean-Claude Trichet, President of the European Central Bank (right) and other EU finance ministers at an EU meet in Manchester, England, on Saturday - AP

before the meeting started.

The G7 - the United States, Japan, Germany, France, Italy, Britain and Canada - meets in

two weeks' time in Washington.

Juncker says that if oil remained expensive in the fourth quarter, economic growth in the euro

zone this year could be around 1.0 percent rather than the previously expected 1.3%.

Oil prices around current lev-

els in 2006 would also shave some 0.3 percent off next year's growth, he said after a first day of talks in Manchester on Friday. Oil prices, boosted to record highs of nearly \$71 per barrel by the damage inflicted on US refineries and oil rigs by hurricane Katrina, eased on Friday to around \$64 per barrel after the International Energy Agency began releasing reserves. "Two million barrels a day from the decision of the International Energy Agency is working well," Austrian finance minister Karl-Heinz Grasser told reporters in Manchester. "We have got the impact on the oil market that we wanted after Katrina. We think this is ok now," he said.

While euro zone ministers agreed on Friday that cutting taxes on fuel was not the right response to growth risks posed by expensive oil, French finance minister Thierry Breton made oil firms Total and BP cut prices at the pump by threatening to slap a special tax on their extra profits. Total, which made profits of about 1.5 million euros an hour in the first six months of this year, said it would cut unleaded fuel prices by 3 euro cents per litre and diesel by two cents. -- Reuters

Italian PM speaks out against EU monetary, fiscal policy

Bari (Italy)
10 SEPTEMBER



THE creation of the euro and the European Union's budget rules have deprived EU governments of two important ways to help ailing economies, Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi said on Saturday.

Berlusconi, who has adopted an increasingly euro-sceptic stance ahead of a tough re-election battle next spring, said EU policies left him with few options to help lift his country out of stagnation.

"We no longer have our own cur-

rency so we no longer have the possibility to devalue," Berlusconi said in a speech at the opening of a trade fair in the Italian port town of Bari. "When a government says: 'What can I do to relaunch my economy during a recession?', it doesn't have the instruments which are fundamental to be able to do it."

"It can't intervene on taxes, it can't intervene on currency devaluation, it can't even intervene with injections of government money into public construction works," he said, referring to the EU rules which limit a country's budget deficit to 3% of gross domestic product.

A junior party in Berlusconi's centre-right coalition, the Northern League, is campaigning for Italy to

quit the euro, something Berlusconi has dismissed as "impossible" and "not in our interests".

But Berlusconi has made anti-EU rhetoric a hallmark of his re-election stance as he prepares to fend off a challenge from opposition leader Romano Prodi who, as a former EU Commission president, is closely associated with the bloc.

Berlusconi on Saturday criticised monetary policy makers in Frankfurt and Washington for allowing the euro to become "hyper-valued", something which continued to threaten Europe's competitiveness.

"The decision of the European Central Bank to keep a high euro exchange rate has penalised European and Italian products," he said. - Reuters

Germany raps the 'sinners'

Manchester
10 SEPTEMBER



THE United States and China are the "biggest sinners" on energy efficiency and need to do more to tackle the issue, German Deputy Finance Minister Caio Koch-Weser said on Saturday. "I think that in the appropriate forums - at the annual meeting in Washington, G7 - attention should be drawn to the fact that the biggest sin-

ners on energy efficiency - the United States and also China now - need to address this issue with greater intensity," Koch-Weser told reporters at an EU meeting in Manchester. With oil surging to record highs above \$70 per barrel in recent weeks, improving crude oil production and refining capacity was a central theme of the ministers' talks, with many urging the US to become more energy efficient. - Reuters

EU ready to review anti-dumping rules

OUR CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Jan. 14: In an attempt to boost bilateral trade, the European Union today agreed to review anti-dumping measures against products from India and decided that Indian goods not meeting phytosanitary standards will not be destroyed.

"They (EU) have agreed to review anti-dumping measures against products from India," said Kamal Nath, Union minister of commerce and industry, after a two-hour long meeting with the new EU trade commissioner, Peter Mandelson.

"They have also agreed not to destroy consignments which do not meet phytosanitary standards," he added.

During the meeting, India raised issues, including market access, problems faced by marine exports to European Union countries and the new general system of preferences.

"It was also reiterated that issues like agriculture, non-agriculture market access and services get equal importance in negotiations," said Nath.

"We want to see steps that take the Doha development agenda forward and discussed how to move forward with the new European Commission," he added.

The two countries have agreed to conclude a

bilateral investment agreement and institute early warning system to identify and remove trade irritants.

Mandelson, however, expressed disappointment that despite the growing interest in investment in India by EU companies, actual investment levels remained low. He said India needs a predictable regulatory environment.

He added that the new European Commission will push for economic reforms to strengthen competition in Europe's single market and "improve the way we regulate our economy".

Nath said the development dimension should remain at the heart of WTO negotiations. He added that EU should take a leadership role in resolving the implementation-related concerns of the developing countries and in operationalising the special and differential treatment clauses.

The EU should also ensure that the principle of 'less than full reciprocity' is applied without fail while according concessions to the developing countries, he said.

He expressed the hope that the Doha work programme will now get the necessary impetus and reach early fruition, leading to substantial market access for developing countries in agriculture, non-agricultural products as well as the key areas of services.

THE TELEGRAPH

15 JAN 2005

Europe revives bid to lift China arms ban

Though US Wants Embargo, EU Says It's 'Part Of History'

Shanghai: The European Union (EU) is determined to lift a 16-year-old arms embargo against China but hasn't decided when to do so, EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana said on Tuesday. The United States strongly opposes lifting the embargo, saying the move could alter the military balance in Asia—particularly in the Taiwan Strait—and threaten China's archrival Taiwan and US forces in Asia.

Solana said EU countries were still debating when and how the embargo might be lifted. "We want to take a decision that is part of a solution, not part of a problem, and therefore it has to be well explained and understood by everybody," he said. "Both sides are looking for the right time—this an agreement which is part of yesterday and not part of tomorrow," he said at a briefing in Shanghai after attending the EU-China summit in Beijing.

"We want to resolve it. We think that it's part of history, but we have to find the manner and the moment when this can be done without any difficulty, any problem," he added refusing to lay out any timetable.

The embargo was imposed after China's communist leaders sent tanks and troops to crush pro-democracy demonstrations in Beijing's Tiananmen Square in 1989, killing hundreds and possibly thousands. China has never given a full accounting of the incident.

European leaders, in an initiative led by France and Germany, agreed last December to draft an accord on scrapping the embargo. But the move lost steam amid fierce opposition from the US and China passing the controversial anti-secession law for Taiwan.

Solana denied that the anti-secession law had influenced the EU, although observers believe the law sent the wrong message around the world by raising cross-strait tensions. The law passed in March paved the way for China to take Taiwan by force should the island ever formally declare independence.

Washington has continued to express concern about annual increases in China's military budget. A Pentagon report issued in July said China is determined to project military power be-



Blair sees a changing China

Beijing: British Prime Minister Tony Blair said on Tuesday that he sensed a sea change in the way communist China is engaging with the world, praising its openness and frankness in lengthy talks with counterpart Wen Jiabao. Blair held eight hours of discussions with Wen over the course of his two-day stay and said he noticed subtle differences from previous visits. "There was a genuine sense of engagement. The one thing that I found that was, I would say, different from the very first visit I would have had to China was that there was no desire to escape this topic (democracy)," the British premier said, who has been trying to boost Europe's trade links on a two-day visit to China.

yond Taiwan and is buying new weapon systems from Russia while modernising its tactics and improving training.

A joint statement issued after the EU-China summit said the EU "reaffirmed its willingness to continue to work toward lifting the embargo". Solana reiterated that the embargo, when lifted, would be replaced with a "code of conduct" governing what weapons and technologies could be

sold to China and for what purposes.

Solana denied US objections had blocked the ban's lifting, but said Washington's views had been taken into account.

Washington has threatened to retaliate if the ban is lifted by limiting transfers of military technology to Europe. The EU doesn't "live in isolation", Solana said. "The EU does not make any decision according to the demands of others," Solana said. Agencies

EU, China reach textiles deal

0 6 11-20-07
R. Altm. 8.11

Beijing: China and the European Union reached an agreement on Monday to unblock millions of Chinese garments that have piled up at EU borders because they exceed import quotas, an EU official close to the talks said.

But Chinese Commerce Minister Bo Xilai cautioned that the two sides had not put pen to paper.

Asked by reporters if there had been a deal, Bo said: "Nearly ... We haven't signed a final agreement."

The search for a solution to release the mountain of bras, sweaters and other textiles has split the 25-member EU, embarrassed the EU's executive Commission and cast a shadow over a China-EU summit taking place in Beijing.

"After long but constructive discussions, the EU and China have succeeded in reaching an agreement to resolve the textile dispute," the EU official close to the talks said.

Bo and European Trade Commissioner Peter Mandelson met on Monday morning to put the finishing touches to the deal after meeting late into the evening on Sunday.

Bo said he was not sure an agreement would be signed on Monday but, on the whole, he did not anticipate further problems.

"We've solved most of the issues," he said.

tors, such as the Nordic states and Germany, have demanded the swift release of the goods.

But EU member states with large textile industries of their own, such as France, Italy and Spain, have clamoured for cuts in Beijing's import quotas for 2006 and 2007 in return for releasing the impounded goods. Beijing has resisted.

Compounding the mess is the fact that some of the textiles have landed in the EU without either a Chinese export license or an EU import license.

Details of the proposed solution were not available but the EU official said it was within the terms of the June agreement.

"The EU and China propose to share the burden equitably in accounting for the unlicensed textiles currently held in customs," said the source.

China, which enjoys economies of scale thanks to its modern factories and cheap labour, has seen a surge in exports not only to the EU but also to the United States following the abolition of global textile quotas on January 1.

Washington has slapped emergency curbs on an array of Chinese garment and textile exports but has failed to negotiate a replacement pact along the lines of the EU's June deal. Agencies



EU Trade Commissioner Peter Mandelson (R) and China's Commerce Minister Bo Xilai after attending the EU-China Business Summit in Beijing

growth of between 8 and 12.5% a year in 10 categories of Chinese textiles exports to the EU during the period 2005-2007.

Those quotas were quickly filled as buyers and sellers rushed to get in under the wire, leading to container loads of goods worth hundreds of millions of euros being blocked across Europe.

Countries with strong retail sec-

ZONAL POWER

Need For Economic Integration In Black Sea Region

5/16
2/18

By ALEXANDER YAKOVENKO

The role of the Black Sea region in international politics and the global economy is constantly growing due to its strategic location and economic potential. At the same time, the countries in the region are themselves coming to a deeper understanding of the potential advantages of joint business initiatives and the need for broad economic integration and large-scale projects, including infrastructure, transport and environmental projects.

The region has long been of particular geopolitical importance for Russia. It is a zone of Russian strategic interest. Russia is pursuing a consistent policy to transform the region into a zone of peace, stability and good-neighbourliness, and is confident that this policy is in the interests of all the Black Sea countries.

Regional cooperation

These goals can be achieved, in part, through the effective operation of the Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC). Russia was directly involved in setting up this regional economic organisation. The other founding states are Azerbaijan, Albania, Armenia, Bulgaria, Greece, Georgia, Moldova, Romania, Turkey and Ukraine. Serbia and Montenegro joined the BSEC later on.

The main objectives, areas of cooperation and mechanisms of the BSEC are set out in the Istanbul Declaration, which was signed by heads of state and government in 1992. The Charter was signed in 1998 and came into force in May 1999, and since that time the BSEC is functioning as a full-fledged international organisation. The zone covered by the BSEC, i.e. the territory of all its member states, is nearly 20 million square km. The total population of the BSEC member states is over 340 million and their aggregate GDP is about \$1.3 trillion.

The BSEC has 15 working

The author is the Deputy Foreign Minister of Russia

groups, the most active of which are those on transport, energy, on combating organised crime and emergency assistance.

Russia considers the BSEC to be a unique organisation for promoting economic cooperation and stability in the Black Sea region. It intends to take the ne-

cessary measures to consolidate the organisation's activities and believes that the clear and resolute political desire of its member states to make the BSEC more effective should be translated into consistent implementation of its decisions and the adoption of new initiatives. The member states should be addressing specific issues that are of direct relevance to the people and economies of the region.



cessary measures to consolidate the organisation's activities and believes that the clear and resolute political desire of its member states to make the BSEC more effective should be translated into consistent implementation of its decisions and the adoption of new initiatives. The member states should be addressing specific issues that are of direct relevance to the people and economies of the region.

Economic development

By working together with other international organisations, the BSEC could play a more significant role in resolving problems that have a direct impact on the region's economic development, political climate and confidence-building measures. Each member of the BSEC has its own priorities. Russia's priority is accelerated economic and social development of its Black Sea regions (the Krasnodar and Stavropol territories and the Rostov region). Therefore, Russia is keen to promote economic ties bet-

ween its Black Sea regions and the regions of other BSEC member states.

Regional cooperation should be enhanced by the agreements that are reached at ministerial meetings. Various initiatives are put forward at these meetings, which are held fairly regularly.

Initiatives advanced by Russia, which are in the interests of all BSEC member states, include bringing forward plans to harmonise the energy systems of eastern and western European countries, the creation of a Black Sea electricity ring, and the establishment of regular passenger ferry crossings between the Black Sea ports. Russia supports the concept of the coordinated development of highways around the Black Sea and the promotion of waterways, including internal waterways. The country is interested in proposals on cooperation to develop the regional transport infrastructure and link it to European and Asian transport arteries.

These and several other proposals were discussed in detail at ministerial meetings held in the past few months (ministers for transport, energy, home affairs, justice, state administration and tourism). It was clear from the discussions that the member states want to focus on practical aspects of regional ties. Evi-

dently, the task now is to agree on a system for monitoring the implementation of decisions made at such ministerial meetings. Such a mechanism will be crucial to increasing the organisation's effectiveness. Russia plans to submit proposals on this matter in the near future.

Russia is particularly interested in projects promoting internal reforms and the economic integration of the countries in the region into an international labour division system. The first steps towards this goal have been made in the BSEC Project Development Fund, a division of the organisation that was established in 2002, and which Russia believes has great potential.

Financial pillar

The financial pillar of the BSEC is the Black Sea Trade and Development Bank, which was established in 1999 in the Greek city of Thessaloniki. The bank has financed about 60 projects, of which over a dozen are being implemented in Russia. Important projects in the south of Russia include projects to support small and medium-sized enterprises and to construct cargo terminals in Novorossiisk.

Russia, Greece and Turkey are the biggest shareholders in the bank. This gives Russia the right to permanent representation on its board of directors. Since the establishment of the bank, a Russian representative has held the post of vice-president, and it was decided by the board at the end of July, following lobbying by Russian diplomats, that in 2010-2014 the presidency would pass to Russia.

It will of course benefit Russia to have a Russian representative as chairman of a respected international financial structure. This will confirm the growing weight of Russia in the international financial community and the Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation. It will also create a favourable background for our country when the BSEC presidency passes to Russia in May-October 2006.

Turbulent times ahead for European Union

Vaiju Naravane

THE EUROPEAN Union as a political entity is today rudderless and adrift. The double 'No' to Europe's new Constitution by France and The Netherlands, two of the EU's founder members, has robbed the 25-member body of its dynamism and sense of purpose. The negative vote has ushered in uncertainty and introduced a certain paralysis with doubts being cast over plans to welcome new members and deepen and strengthen the Union's existing internal political ties and institutions.

Euro-optimists say this is only a passing phase, that earlier EU treaties have been rejected by the Irish and the Danes and that the Constitution Treaty, so ignominiously turfed out by the French and the Dutch, could be "re-submitted" for ratification. There is, however, a profound difference between the earlier and current situations. The Constitution Treaty was agreed upon after months of bickering, compromise, and fine tuning and it would be extremely difficult, some say impossible, to get a revised text that would accommodate specific French or Dutch concerns. In France, in any event, the same text cannot legally be re-introduced since the people have already spoken, and a new amended document appears more than doubtful.

The Constitution would have meant a decisive step forward in the process of building a strong supranational political entity with more powerful European democratic institutions. This dream now lies shattered, much to the chagrin of leaders committed to the idea of a United States of Europe that would challenge U.S. hegemony and power. The defeat of the European Constitution has given rise to an unprecedented degree of *shadenfreud*, barely concealed malicious glee, on the other side of the Transatlantic divide.

Legally speaking, all 25 members have to ratify the Treaty for it to come into force. From that point of view, the Constitution then is already a dead document, a fact that EU leaders are finding difficult to admit. They have bought themselves time and put off the inevitable by calling for a "pause in the ratification process." Under

Uncertainty and a certain paralysis mark the European Union, with doubts being cast over plans to welcome new members and strengthen existing internal political ties and institutions.

the revised agreement, the European Council is expected to review the situation in the hope of finding a solution if, by October 2006 (two years after the Treaty's signing), four-fifths of the 25 members have ratified the document with just one or two states failing to do so. But it is highly unlikely that the Treaty could be put to a second vote and in all likelihood, EU leaders will, after a respectable delay, bow to the inevitable and abandon the document altogether.

This leaves the management and the governance of the EU in the hands of earlier, unsatisfactory documents, especially the Nice Treaty. One of the *raisons d'etre* of the Constitution Treaty was the fact that managing a club of 25 had become hugely difficult with laws designed for a restricted body of ten. The rejection of the Constitution means that the EU will plod along with clearly ill-designed and inadequate instruments of governance. And although further political integration so desired by those dreaming of a strong political union is likely to come to a standstill, the present institutions will continue to function. The EU shall certainly remain an effective and powerful common market; but without a coherent foreign or defence policy, it will again fail to acquire the political clout an entity of its size and economic weight should ideally wield.

The rejection of the treaty has had far reaching political consequences raising questions about whether or not the EU will be able to go ahead with plans to welcome new members. Bulgaria, Romania, Croatia, Macedonia, and other Balkan laggards have all been made promises of eventual membership, some firmer than others. The EU would not like to go back on them for

fear of losing influence in the forever unstable Balkans. But many of these promises will now be placed on the backburner. The negative vote on the Constitution also appears to have shot down Turkey's hopes of ever joining the EU, and although accession talks are scheduled to begin in October this year, the mood of EU citizens as opposed to their governments appears to be resolutely against Turkish membership. This opposition has much to do with the rise of Islamic terrorism in Europe. The 'No' vote in the referenda especially in The Netherlands but also in France was linked to questions of national identity where Islam was seen as a rising threat from within and where multi-culturalism found little place.

Fate of the Euro

Another factor of uncertainty is the fate of the Euro. The result of the two referenda had an immediate negative impact on the common currency depressing its value against the U.S. dollar and fuelling speculation that certain countries such as Italy, performing badly against international competition, or even Germany would wish to pull out of the Euro zone. This fortunately has not happened but it is quite likely that France and Italy, their protectionist hackles up, might try to bar new EU members from acceding to the Euro zone.

One of the most significant victims of the 'No' vote has been the Franco-German axis, long considered to be the locomotive of Europe, and the influence it wields within the EU. Many in Europe who deplored Franco-German attempts to dominate the agenda to their own advantage see this as a positive development, one leading to

new leadership roles and challenges. The referendum has severely affected the political fortunes of President Jacques Chirac, while German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder has suffered a series of electoral reverses, giving rise to uncertainty about the effectiveness of the Franco-German combine and its role in the immediate future.

The French rejection of the treaty has turned Mr. Chirac into a lame duck president with his popularity levels plummeting into the 20s from a high of 80 per cent-plus during the war on Iraq. It is therefore unlikely that France will give the go-ahead to any new EU initiative before the next French presidential election in 2007.

Mr. Schroeder too is in big trouble and likely to lose next September's legislative poll. The new German Chancellor is widely expected to be Angela Merkel, a Thatcherite clone from the former East Germany, who approved of the war on Iraq and has called for closer transatlantic ties. So some strain in the Franco-German relationship is to be expected at least until 2007 when the possible election of Mr. Chirac's ace rival, the maverick right winger Nicolas Sarkozy, might permit a *rapprochement*. But at this stage it is impossible to predict the direction that might take, simply because Mr. Sarkozy being a populist leader is unlikely to adopt measures unacceptable to his people.

The majority of the French rejected the Treaty on the grounds that Europe was moving too quickly towards the "Anglo-Saxon model" of job flexibility and free market capitalism. It just might prove too risky for Mr. Sarkozy, given the French penchant for violent protests (remember 1968 and 1995 when all life in France came to a standstill?), to join hands with Ms. Merkel and lead France down a path that would favour pro-market reforms. And again, in Germany, other surprises could come our way in the guise of Oskar Lafontaine, the Social Democrat leader who could undermine Ms. Merkel.

Elsewhere in Europe too political instability is in the air. Poland is expected to swing right later this year with the Law and Justice Party finding favour among voters in all the polls conducted recently. In Italy, on the other hand, elections in early 2006 could see Mr. Berlusconi's fractious right wing coalition being replaced by a centre-left coalition led by former European Commission chief Romano Prodi. In this climate of political uncertainty no government is prepared to propose any new initiatives.

One of the debates launched by the electoral campaigns preceding the referenda was which socio-economic model would be best for Europe. The French have insisted that their model ambitiously called the European social model with generous pension and health care schemes, a high level of regulatory protection in the workplace, and high professional taxes would be the best bulwark against the onslaught of globalisation and the attendant erosion of workers' rights.

British Prime Minister Tony Blair claims the U.K. model with low or moderate taxes, deregulation, and highly flexible labour markets is where the future of Europe lies. While the U.K. might be doing relatively well in purely GDP terms, its performance does not hold up when examined on the quality of life index. Essential services, education, and health care remain poor, as does productivity. Most Europeans remain unconvinced by the U.K. model where a vertiginous expansion in low-wage employment has been responsible for the faster growth rate.

These opposing visions of where Europe should go have resulted in greater rivalry amongst European leaders and a jockeying for leadership. There has already been a bitter stand off on the EU budget for 2007-2013 with Mr. Chirac and Mr. Blair exchanging barbs on the Common Agriculture Policy (which sucks up 40 per cent of the EU budget and benefits mainly French farmers) versus the British rebate which means Britain will pay practically nothing to support the ten new EU entrants requiring development funds. Mr. Blair who currently holds the rotating EU presidency is likely to try and carve out a leadership role for himself, something the French are likely to resist. How long Mr. Blair himself will remain in office is another question, although his handling of the London bombings appear to have given him a new lease of life. All in all, tough times ahead for Europe.

CARTOONSCAPE



সংযুক্ত ইউরোপের গোড়াপত্তন

রাজনৈতিক সংযুক্তি

চলতি বছরে অবশ্য ইতিমধ্যেই সদস্য হতে আগ্রহী ফ্রোয়েশিয়া ও তুর্কি এই নিয়ে আলোচনা শুরু করে দিয়েছে। আয়তনে বৃদ্ধি পাওয়ার সঙ্গে সঙ্গে স্বভাবতই দক্ষ পরিচালনা, শাসন শৃঙ্খলা বা সিদ্ধান্ত গ্রহণের প্রয়োজনীয়তা উপলব্ধি করা গিয়েছিল। আর এই কারণেই সংযুক্ত ইউরোপকে ভাল ভাবে পরিচালনা করতে নাইস চুক্তিতে বেঁধে দেওয়া হ'ল নতুন নিয়ম নীতি। ২০০৩-এর ১ ফেব্রুয়ারি এই নীতি চালু হয়েছিল।

বলা হয়, আগামী ২০০৬ সালে আবার ওই নীতির পরিবর্তন করা হবে। সংযুক্ত ইউরোপের সব সদস্য দেশের সম্মতি নিয়ে তৈরি হবে নতুন সংবিধান।

উল্লেখ্য, গত বছর দশটি দেশ সংযুক্ত ইউরোপে যোগ দেওয়ার পরেই মোট ২৫টি দেশকে একসূত্রে বাঁধার উদ্দেশ্যে সরকারি স্তরে বহু-আলাপ আলোচনার মাধ্যমে চালু হয় সংবিধান। তবে, সব কটি দেশের সমর্থন মিললে তবেই ২০০৬-এর নভেম্বরে চূড়ান্ত রূপ নিতে পারবে সংযুক্ত ইউরোপের সংবিধান।

ইউরোপের সাম্প্রতিক সংকট

এই মুহূর্তে তীব্র সংকটের মুখে সংযুক্ত ইউরোপ। আর, সংযুক্তিকরণের যে আদর্শ নিয়ে

জোট বেঁধেছিল ২৫টি দেশ তার মূল ভিতটাই এখন হঠাৎ নড়ে উঠেছে। কারণ, প্রবলের সম্মুখীন হয়েছে সংযুক্ত ইউরোপের সংবিধান।

সংবিধান সমর্থন করা নিয়ে একে একে গণভোট ও সংসদীয় ভোট অনুষ্ঠিত হতে শুরু করেছে ইউরোপের দেশগুলিতে। ইতিমধ্যেই ১০টি দেশে স্বীকৃতি পেয়েছে বর্তমান সংবিধান। কিন্তু সব চেয়ে বড় আঘাত হেনেছে সংযুক্ত ইউরোপের অন্যতম দুই প্রতিষ্ঠাতা সদস্য রাষ্ট্র ফ্রান্স ও হল্যান্ড। ফ্রান্সের ৫৫ শতাংশ ও হল্যান্ডের ৬২ শতাংশ ভোটদাতা সংবিধানের বিরুদ্ধে রায় দিয়েছেন। ইউরোপের রাজনৈতিক-প্রশাসনিক বিশেষজ্ঞদের একাংশের মতে, গণভোটের এই ফল একেবারেই বিস্ময়কর নয়।

বরঞ্চ বেশ স্বাভাবিক ভাবেই বিভিন্ন প্রশাসনিক কার্যকলাপের প্রতি তীব্র অনাস্থাই প্রকাশ পেয়েছে সেখানকার আমজনতার আচরণে। তবে সংযুক্ত ইউরোপের ভবিষ্যৎ এই ভাবে আকস্মিক ধাক্কা খাওয়ায় কার্যতই এখন ভয় পাচ্ছে ব্রিটেন। এমনকী, আপাতত দেশে গণভোট স্থগিত রাখতে চাইছে ব্রিটিশ সরকার।

কেন আস্তা হারাল সংযুক্ত ইউরোপের সংবিধান

ইউরোপীয় সংবিধান প্রত্যাখ্যান করার অর্থ ইউরোপীয়রা

তাদের নেতাদের থেকে যেটুকু এত দিন আশা করে এসেছে সংবিধান তা পূরণে ব্যর্থ, এই বিষয়টিকে এক রকম স্পষ্ট করে দেওয়া।

সব দেশকে একত্রিত করে এগিয়ে চলার পরিকল্পনা তাই থেমে যাওয়ার উপক্রম হ'ল তার প্রথম পদক্ষেপেই। বস্তুত, জনতার আচরণে পরিষ্কার, তাঁদের চাহিদা ছিল উন্নয়ন, সামাজিক সংযুক্তিকরণ, অর্থনৈতিক, রাজনৈতিক ক্ষেত্রে সক্রিয়তা। কিন্তু এই সমস্ত বিষয়কে সাধারণ মানুষের নাগালের মধ্যে পৌঁছে দিতে ব্যর্থ হয়েছেন নেতারা।

এই মুহূর্তে ফ্রান্স সহ সারা ইউরোপেই জনসংখ্যার এক বড় অংশ কর্মহীন। বর্ধিত হারে চীন ও ভারতের মত উন্নয়নমুখী বাজারে ইউরোপীয় সংস্থাগুলির ছড়িয়ে পড়াই এর কারণ বলে মনে করছেন সেখানকার জনসাধারণ। এর

জন্য সংবিধানের নীতিসমূহকেই কার্যত দায়ী করেছেন তাঁরা।

নেতাদের গৃহীত সিদ্ধান্তের বিরুদ্ধে আমজনতার ক্রমবর্ধমান অসন্তোষ জমাট বেঁধেছে।

সংযুক্ত ইউরোপের চুক্তিকে পুনর্বিবেচনা করার সুযোগ করে দেওয়ার উৎকৃষ্ট উপায় সংবিধান প্রত্যাখ্যান করা।

সামাজিক, অর্থনৈতিক ও রাজনৈতিক নিরাপত্তাহীনতা। বিশেষত রোমানিয়া, বুলগেরিয়া ও

তুর্কির মতো মুসলমান প্রধান দেশগুলি সংযুক্ত ইউরোপের সদস্য হতে আগ্রহ প্রকাশ করেছে। ফলে, নিজেদের অভিন্নতা, সংস্কৃতি ও সার্বভৌমত্ব নিয়ে কিছুটা দ্বিধাগ্রস্ত ইউরোপের অনেক দেশই।

রাজনৈতিক সংকটের হাত ধরেই সংযুক্ত ইউরোপ অর্থনৈতিক সংকটের সম্মুখীন

ইউরোপের রাজনৈতিক সংকট স্বাভাবিক ভাবেই ছড়িয়ে পড়ছে অর্থনৈতিক স্তরে। এই মুহূর্তে বেশ বিপদের মুখে সেখানকার অভিন্ন মুদ্রা ব্যবস্থা 'ইউরো'। ইউরো ত্যাগ করে তার পুরনো মুদ্রা লিরা-তে ফিরে যাওয়ার দাবি দানা বাঁধছে ইতালিতে। জার্মানিতেও ইউরোর পরিবর্তে ডয়েশমার্কের ফিরে যাওয়ার আগ্রহ দেখা গেছে।

ইউরোপীয় সংবিধানের ক্রমবর্ধমান সংকট ইউরোর ভবিষ্যৎকে অনিশ্চিত করে তুলছে। বিদ্রিত হয়েছে নগদ টাকার বাজার। যদিও এই প্রবণতাকে সাময়িক আখ্যা দিচ্ছেন অনেক বিশেষজ্ঞই। তবে সংযুক্ত ইউরোপের গণভোট যে ইউরোকে বেশ কিছুটা চাপে রেখেছে তা অস্বীকার করার উপায় নেই।

(শেষ)

বাচস্পতি



সূত্রধার

ASEAN: Myanmar *R-Asian* relinquishes turn for chair

28/7 *10-15*
**It will also not
preside over the
meetings with its
dialogue-partners.
This has saved the
ASEAN from
embarrassment in
the context of
objections from some
of the key dialogue-
partners.**

P. S. Suryanarayana

SINGAPORE: Myanmar on Tuesday relinquished its turn to chair the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 2006 under a rotation principle. It will also not preside over the ASEAN's meetings with its dialogue-partners, which include India, China and the U.S.

This saved the ASEAN from much embarrassment in the context of objections from some of the key dialogue-partners.

A view that quickly gained currency in the regional diplomatic circles was that the military government had not at all responded positively to the demand for democratisation. There was also no word about the demand that Aung San Suu Kyi, democracy campaigner, be set free. The Foreign Ministers, now meeting in Vientiane (Laos) for their annual session,

said in a statement their colleague from Myanmar, U Nyan Win, had informed that "it would want to focus its attention on the ongoing national reconciliation and democratisation process".

Instead of chairing the group next year, Myanmar would want to "give its full attention to the process" during 2006 that would be "a critical year," the ASEAN said in a collective statement that announced Yangon's decision.

Sincere appreciation

Expressing "complete understanding" and "sincere appreciation" on this score, the Foreign Ministers said "the Government of Myanmar has shown its commitment to the well-being of ASEAN and its goal of advancing the interest of all (10) member-countries." Noting that Myanmar had not allowed their "national preoccupation to affect ASEAN's solidarity and cohesiveness".

Myanmar could take its turn to chair the group when "ready" to do so, the statement emphasised. The ASEAN adopted a two-stage approach to meet the objections from the U.S. and the European Union. First, the military rulers of Myanmar were assured that the group would not interfere in its internal affairs by setting any kind of norms for the extent and pace of democratisation. Secondly, Yangon was given the chance to decide on its own volition about the chairmanship issue in the interests of the ASEAN and its dialogue-partners.

Asean pledge to fight terror

Associated Press

VIENTIANE (Laos), July 29. — Asia's biggest security forum agreed today to put efforts on fighting terrorism, keeping the Straits of Malacca piracy-free and fending off conflicts through diplomacy, as it ended an annual session bereft of some of the region's top diplomats.

The forum capped a six-day minister's conference of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations that saw Australia shed past reservations and sign a nonaggression pact with its neighbours, joining efforts to build an Asia trade bloc at par with those in Europe and North America.

The 10-member Southeast Asian bloc was joined by 15 other Asia-Pacific nations, including East Timor, today for the ASEAN Regional Forum in Laos to discuss terrorism, the situation in the Korean peninsula and the safety of the Straits of Malacca — world's most pirate-infested waterway.

The ARF today agreed on a new doctrine to empower its chairman to convene committees for intervening to resolve brewing conflicts, though details were to be worked out later. Despite being ambitious, the gathering in the Laotian capital was marred by the absence of top diplomats from USA, Japan, China and India, who had sent their deputies instead.

Ministers at the meetings in

Myanmar shut out

VIENTIANE (Laos) July 29. — Militarily-ruled Myanmar cannot take up the chairmanship of Asean until it restores democracy, the Thai foreign minister said today, asserting that "the pressure is not off" junta just because it has relinquished the rotating leadership for 2006. Once democracy is restored, "then we would allow them and welcome them to the chair, to come back and be at the front line," foreign minister Mr Kantathi Suphamongkhon told reporters at a meeting of the Asean and its security partners. — AP

Vientiane said they did not believe that "no-shows" would diminish the forum's profile. Instead, the officials said that ARF's role was bound to expand, given the lack of any other regional body equipped to smooth the many points of friction in the region — India-Pakistan, North and South Korea, China-Japan and various other disputes — that often involves conflicting claims over islets or other waterways.

Singh croons

Minister of state for external affairs Mr Rao Inderjit Singh and members of his delegation sang a song extolling the strength of the ARF at the dinner hosted by the Laos government. Russia displayed its creativity with foreign minister Mr Sergey Lavrov appearing in a skit, dressed as the hooded and menacing *Star Wars*' villain, Darth Vader.

THE STATESMAN

EU, China pact on textile trade

BRUSSELS, Sept. 5. — The European Union and China have reached an agreement on unblocking Chinese textile imports held at European borders, the European Commission said today.

EU Trade commissioner Mr Peter Mandelson and his Chinese counterpart commerce minister Bo Xilai, in Beijing, reached a deal on future quota limits, allowing some 75 million garments into the EU, EU spokeswoman Ms Françoise Le Bail told reporters.

"The aim is to release as quickly as possible the textiles which are currently

blocked at customs," she said.

The EU's 25 member states will need to approve the deal before the clothing can go on sale in European stores.

The agreement effectively raises import limits to allow in excess clothing amid growing concern that a flood of cheap Chinese goods undercuts European producers.

European governments still have to agree the details of how the extra imports should be unblocked. Talks broke off in Brussels on Friday and are due to continue today.

— AP

EU proposal insists Iran give up nuclear fuel work

98-7
1/8
PARISA HAFEZI
TEHRAN/BRUSSELS,
AUGUST 5

THE European Union on Friday insisted Iran give up nuclear fuel work and called an urgent meeting of the UN nuclear watchdog, IAEA, on Tuesday, which could refer Tehran to the UNSC for sanctions.

But a senior Iranian nuclear negotiator said the Islamic republic would resume work at a nuclear fuel plant regardless of EU proposals for political and economic incentives that included support for building nuclear power stations.

"As Iran will have an assured supply of fuel over the coming years, it will be able to provide

the confidence needed by making a binding commitment not to pursue fuel cycle activities other than the construction and operation of light water power and research reactors," said a copy of a summary of the proposals obtained.

"This proposal shows we have presented Iran with two choices. The first is the right choice, the second is the wrong choice," an EU diplomat said. "If Iran chooses the second, it can mean only one thing—that it desires nuclear weapons. By contrast the first choice offers a series of incentives."

The bloc offered to guarantee supplies of fuel for light-water nuclear power reactors, but insisted Iran "commit to return-

ing all spent fuel elements" to the supplier. Spent fuel can also be used in atomic weaponry.

Iran also had to agree to stop building a heavy water reactor near the town of Arak that "gives rise to proliferation concerns", the proposal said.

The trio said in return, they would work to speed up the signing of a Trade and Cooperation Agreement with Iran, back Iran's entry into the World Trade Organisation, promote energy cooperation, and work together on regional security.

Iranian officials said the offer also included backing for Iran to be the main route for oil and gas exports from Central Asia, but the summary made no specific mention of this. —*Reuters*

01 A2-11-11-11-11

The impasse over European Union reform

“Europe can emerge even stronger, if we have the courage to be honest with each other.”

Jan Peter Balkenende R. A. M. A. M. ^{by}
FOR MORE than 50 years, the member-states of the European Union have been overcoming obstacles together. The Union's current situation is not the end of the road, but a new beginning. Europe can emerge even stronger, if we have the courage to be honest with each other.

Why have we reached this impasse? Not because Dutch and French voters rejected the constitutional treaty, nor because European leaders failed to agree on a budget for the Union. Those events were the result of developments beneath the surface, which received too little attention for far too long. Seen from that vantage point, we should not blame each other or talk about a crisis, but think about how to make the most of this opportunity for reflection and reform.

Changed public attitude

Despite the result of our referendum, when Dutch people are asked “Do you support EU membership?” more than three-quarters say yes.

Only in Luxembourg and Ireland is the percentage higher. None the less, it is increasingly clear that the public's attitude towards Europe has changed. The desire for peace and stability is no longer an iron-

clad argument for further European integration.

In a relatively short time, the EU has undergone tremendous growth, which made it possible to spread prosperity and stability to the new member-states. But as diversity has grown, it has weakened the people's sense of belonging to a larger whole, and not just in the Netherlands.

Many people are worried about the future. Despite their concerns, very little money is available to reform the EU, even though reform is vital to establish a position of strength relative to the United States and China. Most of the EU budget is reserved for agricultural subsidies and support for regions in wealthy countries – a fact that has not escaped public attention. In this period of slow growth, it would be irresponsible to increase the total budget. There is a better solution: reforming the existing budget to prepare for the future.

We have had a rude awakening: but it may have been just the wake-up call we need. Ordinary people want to be more involved in the EU's development. The fear of a European superstate played a decisive part in the Dutch referendum debates, as did concerns about the fast pace of European integration. The EU exists for its citizens, and their concerns and wishes should play a central role in decisions about Eu-

ropean cooperation. I am pleased that the member-states have agreed to a period of reflection. After we have thought things through, I do not believe we will settle for an enhanced customs union. We depend on the EU for much more.

Do we want an EU that focuses primarily on consolidation of vested interests, or one that pursues reform and displays solidarity with the less prosperous member states and the world around it? European agriculture is of great importance, and we must not overlook farmers and their families.

Subsidies from Brussels

But the current system, with rivers of subsidy flowing out of Brussels, cannot last until late in the 21st century. And is it fair for Brussels to spend so much of its limited resources on regions in rich member-states? Would that money not be put to better use in the poor regions of the less prosperous new member-states?

How can we develop a new financial system offering greater scope for research, innovation, international environmental policy, and the fight against trans-national crime? When the European council discussed the budget for the years ahead, these questions loomed large.

The Netherlands wishes to show solidarity and be a dependable European partner.

The proof is in our actions. For years, Dutch families have been paying more towards European solidarity than families in other wealthy member-states. What the Netherlands would like is to make a net contribution comparable to the member-states in a similar economic situation.

This is an entirely legitimate wish. It is neither unfair nor selfish for the Netherlands, which for years has made the largest net contributions per head of population, to ask for the same treatment as comparable wealthy countries.

Thanks to painful reforms, we have stayed within the bounds of the stability and growth pact. Dutch citizens have had to make sacrifices. But by creating a stable financial and economic climate, we are laying the foundation for growth in Europe.

We want a Union with which the public can feel comfortable; which shows solidarity with the least prosperous member-states; and in which vital reforms prevail over vested interests.

Some fear that everything Europe has achieved is under threat. This period of reflection is an opportunity to ward off lurking threats and lead the EU to new resilience and legitimacy. – ©Guardian Newspapers Limited 2005

(The writer is the Prime Minister of the Netherlands.)

21 JUL 2005

THE HANCO

সংযুক্ত ইউরোপের গোড়াপত্তন

(পূর্ব প্রকাশিতের পর)

কয়েক শতাব্দী ধরে ইউরোপ যেন ছিল বিশ্বের রণক্ষেত্র। ১৮৭০ থেকে ১৯৪৫ এর মধ্যে ফ্রান্স ও জার্মানি তিন বার যুদ্ধে জড়িয়ে পড়ে। প্রাণহানি হয় অগুনতি। ক্রমশ ইউরোপের অনেক নেতা উপলব্ধি করেন এই মহাদেশে পাকাপাকি ভাবে শান্তির পরিবেশ গড়ে তুলতে গেলে দেশগুলিকে রাজনৈতিক ও অর্থনৈতিক ভাবে সংযুক্ত করতে হবে।

তবে, ভিত তৈরি হয় অর্থনৈতিক সংযুক্তিকরণ থেকেই। ১৯৫১ সালে ফ্রান্সের বিদেশ মন্ত্রীর প্রস্তাব অনুযায়ী পশ্চিম ইউরোপের ছ'টি দেশ মিলে ইউরোপিয়ান কোল অ্যান্ড স্টিল কমিউনিটি গঠন করে। এই ছ'টি দেশ হল বেলজিয়াম, পশ্চিম জার্মানি, লাক্সেমবার্গ, ফ্রান্স, ইতালি ও হল্যান্ড। এই পরীক্ষা এতই সফল হয়েছিল যে, ওই ছ'টি দেশ ১৯৫৭ সালে ইউরোপিয়ান অ্যাটমিক এনার্জি কমিউনিটি ও ইউরোপিয়ান ইকনমিক কমিউনিটি গঠন করে। এই চুক্তি সই হয় রোমে। নিজেদের মধ্যে বাধা সুরিয়ে একটি সংযুক্ত বাজার তৈরির পরিকল্পনা শুরু করে এই দেশগুলি। এর দশ বছর পরে, ১৯৬৭ সালে, এই তিনটি কমিউনিটি মিশিয়ে তৈরি হয় সংযুক্ত কমিশন।

গোড়ায় সংযুক্ত ইউরোপের সদস্য দেশগুলির পার্লামেন্ট ইউরোপীয় পার্লামেন্টের সদস্যদের নির্বাচন করত। ১৯৭৯ সালে প্রথম সাধারণ নির্বাচনের মাধ্যমে ইউরোপীয় পার্লামেন্টের সদস্যদের নির্বাচন করা হয়। এর পর থেকে পাঁচ বছর পর পর সাধারণ মানুষের ভোটেই এঁরা নির্বাচিত হন।

ইউরোপের দেশগুলির মধ্যে সম্পর্কর ক্ষেত্রে সম্ভবত সব চেয়ে

গুরুত্বপূর্ণ চুক্তি হয়েছিল ১৯৯২ সালে হল্যান্ডের শহর ম্যাসট্রিخته। এই চুক্তির ফলে সদস্য দেশগুলির মধ্যে প্রতিরক্ষা, আইন ও স্বরাষ্ট্র ইত্যাদি ক্ষেত্রে সহযোগিতার অধ্যায় শুরু হয়। বস্তুত, ম্যাসট্রিচ্চ চুক্তির হাত ধরেই শুরু হয় সংযুক্ত ইউরোপের। ফলে কয়লা ও ইস্পাত থেকে শুরু করে ইউরোপের দেশগুলির মধ্যে ক্রমশ সহযোগিতার ক্ষেত্র বিস্তৃত হতে থাকে।

অর্থনৈতিক সংযুক্তির প্রেক্ষাপট

ইউরোপের দেশগুলির মধ্যে আর্থিক সংযুক্তির কথা আলোচনা করতে গেলে প্রথমেই বলতে হয় সব রকমের বাধা দূর হয়ে মসৃণ বাণিজ্য



সম্পর্ক তৈরি হতে কিন্তু লেগে গিয়েছিল অনেকটা সময়। পাশাপাশি একটি অভিন্ন বা সংযুক্ত বাজার যেখানে দ্রব্য, পরিষেবা, জনগণ ও মূলধন স্বাধীন ভাবে চলাচল করতে পারে তা তৈরি হতেও সময় লেগেছিল অনেকটা। ১৯৯০ সাল থেকে ইউরোপের বেশির ভাগ দেশের অভ্যন্তরীণ সীমানা থেকে পাসপোর্ট ও সরকারি নজরদারি ব্যবস্থা তুলে নেওয়া হয়। ফলে এক দেশ থেকে অন্য দেশে সাধারণ মানুষের যাতায়াতের পরিমাণও বহু গুণ বৃদ্ধি পায়। সামগ্রিক ভাবে ইউরোপের দেশগুলির অর্থনৈতিক সংযুক্তির পিছনে এর একটি বিশেষ ভূমিকা ছিল সন্দেহ নেই। তবে, ইউরোপের দেশগুলির অর্থনৈতিক সংযুক্তির একটি গুরুত্বপূর্ণ অধ্যায় হ'ল

অভিন্ন মুদ্রা ব্যবস্থার প্রচলন। চিন্তা ভাবনা চলাছিল বেশ কিছু সময় ধরেই। শেষে ১৯৯২ সালে সংযুক্ত ইউরোপ, ইউরোপিয়ান সেন্ট্রাল ব্যাঙ্কের পরিচালনায় অভিন্ন মুদ্রা ব্যবস্থা চালু করতে ইকোনমিক অ্যান্ড মানিটারি ইউনিয়ন (ই এম ইউ)-এ যাওয়ার সিদ্ধান্ত নেয়। শেষ পর্যন্ত ২০০২ সালের ১ জানুয়ারি সংযুক্ত ইউরোপের অভিন্ন মুদ্রা ব্যবস্থা 'ইউরো' চালু হয়। ১৫টি দেশের মধ্যে ১২টি দেশ জাতীয় মুদ্রা হিসাবে গ্রহণ করে ইউরো নোটস ও কয়েনস। এই দেশগুলি হ'ল বেলজিয়াম, জার্মানি, গ্রিস, স্পেন, ফ্রান্স, আয়ারল্যান্ড, ইতালি, লাক্সেমবার্গ, হল্যান্ড, অস্ট্রিয়া, পর্তুগাল ও ফিনল্যান্ড। ইংল্যান্ড অবশ্য যোগ দেয়নি এই ইউরো-বলয়ে।

রাজনৈতিক সংযুক্তি

ইউরোপের দেশগুলি যে দ্রুত রাজনৈতিক সংযুক্তির প্রয়োজনীয়তাও উপলব্ধি করেছিল সে কথা প্রথমেই বলা হয়েছে। তাই ক্রমশ কলেবরে বৃদ্ধি পেতে লাগল সংযুক্ত ইউরোপ। ডেনমার্ক, আয়ারল্যান্ড ও ব্রিটেন ১৯৭৩ সালে নিজেদের যুক্ত করে। এর পর ১৯৮১ সালে গ্রিস, ১৯৮৬-তে স্পেন, পর্তুগাল, ১৯৯৫-তে অস্ট্রিয়া, ফিনল্যান্ড ও সুইডেনের অন্তর্ভুক্তি ঘটে।

যথারাবাহিকতা বজায় রেখে ২০০৪-এ মোট ১০টি দেশ সাইপ্রাস, দ্য চেক রিপাবলিক, এসতেনিয়া, হাঙ্গেরি, লাভভিয়া, লিথুয়ানিয়া, মল্টা, পোল্যান্ড, স্লোভাকিয়া ও স্লোভেনিয়াকে স্বাগত জানায় সংযুক্ত ইউরোপ। আশা, ২০০৭-এ বুলগেরিয়া ও রোমানিয়াও যোগ দেবে সেখানে।

(চলবে)

বাচস্পতি

EU trade spat now involves India too

R. Allia
B. U.

98-12
117

REUTERS

BRUSSELS, JUNE 30

THE European Union and China plunged into a second trade spat on Thursday, as Brussels launched a probe into the possible dumping of Chinese and Indian footwear on the 25-member bloc's market.

"If as a result of the investigation started today, it is demonstrated that predatory prices are practised then action will be considered," said European Commission trade spokeswoman Claude Veron-Reville.

The investigation concerns the sale of Indian and Chinese "safety", or reinforced, shoes on the European market at below the cost of production — known as predatory pricing, or dumping.

European manufacturers requested the probe, which may last up to 15 months, but the executive Commission in charge of trade policy in the EU hopes to finish it within 9 months.

Brussels and Beijing only recently resolved a dispute over surging imports of Chinese textiles to the wealthy bloc, agreeing to a maximum 12.5 per cent a year rise in imports until 2007-end.

"It is alleged that the vol-

umes and the prices of the import product concerned have ... (caused) a worsening of the financial situation of the community (shoe) industry," said the EU's official journal.

If the EU finds against the two Asian states, it could levy extra duties on their exports to the bloc.

A senior Chinese official would visit Brussels next Monday to discuss trade statistics and the shoe issue could be raised then, Veron-Reville said.

Beijing has already said it is firmly opposed to an investigation by the EU into allegations that Chinese exporters are dumping exports of safety shoes.

Chinese textile and shoe exports have exploded since the scrapping of global quotas in both sectors on January 1 this year.

The United States has placed emergency curbs on Chinese textile imports and the two sides have failed to reach a deal.

Earlier this month, the European Commission said there had been a year-on-year rise of 681 per cent in imports of six categories of Chinese footwear in the first four months of this year, while prices slipped 28 percent over the same period. — Reuters

EU must change, warns Blair

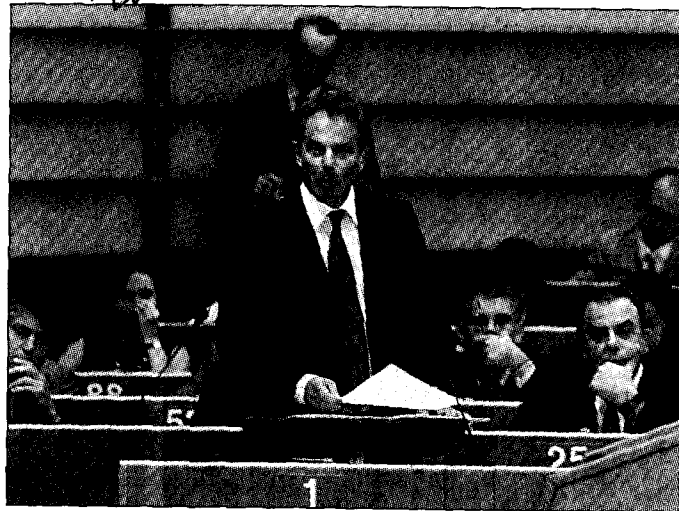
JAMES Sturcke
Brussels, June 23

BRITISH PRIME Minister Tony Blair warned on Thursday that the EU must change or see its members failing to meet the challenges of the modern world. Blair told the European parliament recent "no" votes on the EU constitution in France and Holland had shown that people had a "deep discontent" with the current state of the EU.

To a mixture of cheers and jeers, Blair said he had always been a "passionate pro-European" and that the debate over the EU's future direction should be conducted not by trading insults but by the exchange of ideas.

"The issue is not between a free market Europe and a social Europe, between those who want to retreat to a common market and those who believe in Europe as a political project," Blair told Euro MPs.

"This is not just a misrepresentation. It is to intimidate those who want change in Europe by representing the desire for change as betrayal of the European ideal, to try to shut off serious debate about Europe's future by claiming that



Blair speaks at the European Parliament in Brussels on Thursday.

the very insistence on debate is to embrace the anti-Europe.

"This is a mindset I have fought against all my political life. Institutions survive through change," he added.

Blair said the EU should be "proud" of what it had achieved over the past 50 years, and that there was "no shame" in having to change. He said that in order to compete with the US and the growing economies

of China and India, the union had to "work together today to keep its place in the world".

"All institutions have to do it, and we can — but only if we re-marry the European ideals we believe in with the modern world we live in," he added.

He described the EU's current plight as a "crisis of political leadership", and said it was a time for moderate leadership or those at the political

extreme would take over. Blair was speaking at the start of a three-hour debate marking the UK's assumption of the EU presidency next month.

He insisted Britain was not in the midst of an "extreme Anglo-Saxon market philosophy that tramples on the poor and disadvantaged", and said the country had invested hugely in its social services and public sector.

Amid claims that he had wrecked last week's EU budget summit by failing to compromise on Britain's rebate, Blair denied reports he had brought up the common agricultural policy at the last moment.

"I have said simply two things: that we cannot agree a new financial perspective that does not at least set out a process that leads to a more rational budget, and that this must allow such a budget to shape the second half of that perspective up to 2013," he said. "Otherwise it will be 2014 before any fundamental change is agreed, let alone implemented."

Blair said he would try to get a deal on the EU's 2007-2013 finances during the six months of the UK presidency.

GNS

সংযুক্ত ইউরোপের গোড়াপত্তন

কয়েক শতাব্দী ধরে ইউরোপ যেন ছিল বিশ্বের রণক্ষেত্র। ১৮৭০ থেকে ১৯৪৫ এর মধ্যে ফ্রান্স ও জার্মানি তিন বার যুদ্ধে জড়িয়ে পড়ে। প্রাণহানি হয় অগুনতি। ক্রমশ ইউরোপের অনেক নেতা উপলব্ধি করেন এই মহাদেশে পাকাপাকি ভাবে শান্তির পরিবেশ গড়ে তুলতে গেলে দেশগুলিকে রাজনৈতিক ও অর্থনৈতিক ভাবে সংযুক্ত করতে হবে।

তবে, ভিত তৈরি হয় অর্থনৈতিক সংযুক্তিকরণ থেকেই। ১৯৫১ সালে ফ্রান্সের বিদেশ মন্ত্রীর প্রস্তাব অনুযায়ী পশ্চিম ইউরোপের ছ'টি দেশ মিলে ইউরোপিয়ান কোয়ালিটি স্টিল কমিউনিটি গঠন করে। এই ছ'টি দেশ হল বেলজিয়াম, পশ্চিম জার্মানি, লাক্সেমবার্গ, ফ্রান্স, ইতালি ও হল্যান্ড।

এই পরীক্ষা এতই সফল হয়েছিল যে, ওই ছ'টি দেশ ১৯৫৭ সালে ইউরোপিয়ান অ্যাটমিক এনার্জি কমিউনিটি ও ইউরোপিয়ান ইকনমিক কমিউনিটি গঠন করে। এই চুক্তি সই হয় রোমে। নিজেদের মধ্যে বাধা সরিয়ে একটি সংযুক্ত বাজার তৈরির পরিকল্পনা শুরু করে এই দেশগুলি। এর দশ বছর পরে, ১৯৬৭ সালে, এই তিনটি কমিউনিটি মিশিয়ে তৈরি হয় সংযুক্ত কমিশন।

গোড়ায় সংযুক্ত ইউরোপের সদস্য দেশগুলির পার্লামেন্ট ইউরোপীয় পার্লামেন্টের সদস্যদের নির্বাচন করত। ১৯৭৯ সালে প্রথম সাধারণ নির্বাচনের মাধ্যমে ইউরোপীয় পার্লামেন্টের সদস্যদের নির্বাচন করা হয়। এর পর থেকে পাঁচ বছর পর পর সাধারণ মানুষের ভোটেই এঁরা নির্বাচিত হন।

ইউরোপের দেশগুলির মধ্যে সম্পর্কের ক্ষেত্রে সম্ভবত সব চেয়ে গুরুত্বপূর্ণ চুক্তি হয়েছিল ১৯৯২ সালে হল্যান্ডের শহর ম্যাসট্রিخته। এই চুক্তির

ফলে সদস্য দেশগুলির মধ্যে প্রতিরক্ষা, আইন ও স্বরাষ্ট্র ইত্যাদি ক্ষেত্রে সহযোগিতার অধ্যায় শুরু হয়। বস্তুত, ম্যাসট্রিষ্ট চুক্তির হাত ধরেই শুরু হয় সংযুক্ত ইউরোপের। ফলে, কয়লা ও ইস্পাত থেকে শুরু করে ইউরোপের দেশগুলির মধ্যে ক্রমশ সহযোগিতার ক্ষেত্র বিস্তৃত হতে থাকে।

অর্থনৈতিক সংযুক্তির প্রেক্ষাপট ইউরোপের দেশগুলির মধ্যে আর্থিক সংযুক্তির কথা আলোচনা করতে গেলে প্রথমেই বলতে হয় সব

শেষে ১৯৯২ সালে সংযুক্ত ইউরোপ, ইউরোপিয়ান সেন্ট্রাল ব্যাঙ্কের পরিচালনায় অভিন্ন মুদ্রা ব্যবস্থা চালু করতে ইকোনমিক অ্যান্ড মানিটারি ইউনিয়ন (ই এম ইউ)-এ যাওয়ার সিদ্ধান্ত নেয়।

শেষপর্যন্ত ২০০২ সালের ১ জানুয়ারি সংযুক্ত ইউরোপের অভিন্ন মুদ্রা ব্যবস্থা 'ইউরো' চালু হয়। ১৫টি দেশের মধ্যে ১২টি দেশ জাতীয় মুদ্রা হিসাবে গ্রহণ করে ইউরো নোটস ও কয়েনস।

এই দেশগুলি হ'ল বেলজিয়াম, জার্মানি, গ্রিস, স্পেন, ফ্রান্স, আয়ারল্যান্ড, ইতালি, লাক্সেমবার্গ, হল্যান্ড, অস্ট্রিয়া, পর্তুগাল ও ফিনল্যান্ড। ইংল্যান্ড অবশ্য যোগ দেয়নি এই ইউরো-বলয়ে।

রাজনৈতিক সংযুক্তি

ইউরোপের দেশগুলি যে দ্রুত রাজনৈতিক সংযুক্তির প্রয়োজনীয়তাও উপলব্ধি করেছিল সে কথা প্রথমেই বলা হয়েছে।

তাই ক্রমশ কলেবরে বৃদ্ধি পেতে লাগল সংযুক্ত ইউরোপ। ডেনমার্ক, আয়ারল্যান্ড ও ব্রিটেন ১৯৭৩ সালে নিজেদের যুক্ত করে।

(চলবে)

বাচস্পতি



সূত্রধার

রকমের বাধা দূর হয়ে মসৃণ বাণিজ্য সম্পর্ক তৈরি হতে কিন্তু লেগে গিয়েছিল অনেকটা সময়।

পাশাপাশি একটি অভিন্ন বা সংযুক্ত বাজার যেখানে দ্রব্য, পরিষেবা, জনগণ ও মূলধন স্বাধীন ভাবে চলাচল করতে পারে তা তৈরি হতেও সময় লেগেছিল অনেকটা। ১৯৯০ সাল থেকে ইউরোপের বেশির ভাগ দেশের অভ্যন্তরীণ সীমানা থেকে পাসপোর্ট ও সরকারি নজরদারি ব্যবস্থা তুলে নেওয়া হয়।

ফলে এক দেশ থেকে অন্য দেশে সাধারণ মানুষের যাতায়াতের পরিমাণও বহু গুণ বৃদ্ধি পায়। সামগ্রিক ভাবে ইউরোপের দেশগুলির অর্থনৈতিক সংযুক্তির পেছনে এর একটি বিশেষ ভূমিকা ছিল, সন্দেহ নেই। তবে, ইউরোপের দেশগুলির অর্থনৈতিক সংযুক্তির একটি গুরুত্বপূর্ণ অধ্যায় হ'ল অভিন্ন মুদ্রা ব্যবস্থার প্রচলন। চিন্তা-ভাবনা চলছিল বেশ কিছু সময় ধরেই।

Summit ends in disaster, EU unity in tatters

R. Alton
B. W.



British Prime Minister Mr Tony Blair and his foreign minister Mr Jack Straw at a press conference after the European summit in Brussels on Saturday. AFP

Agence France Presse

BRUSSELS, June 18. — Europe's leaders tore into each other after an EU summit on long-term finances imploded today, ripping away a veneer of unity to expose fundamental differences over the bloc's future.

France and Britain engaged in the most savage recriminations, reminding the European press of Trafalgar and Waterloo but also revealing the depth of the crisis facing the 50-year-old alliance.

EU leaders had hoped the two-day summit would spur the 25-nation European Union to pull together after French and Dutch voters rejected a first-ever EU constitution.

"People will tell you next that Europe is not in a crisis," Luxembourg Prime Minister Jean-Claude Juncker, who holds the EU presidency, said as the summit ended in acrimony.

"It is in a deep crisis." The gap between Britain, which clung to its long-cherished budget rebate, and most of its 24 EU partners proved impossible to bridge in a desperate, last-minute round of EU diplomacy.

Recriminations broke out as hopes for a deal on the 2007-2013 budget, worth about 100 billion euros a year, were crushed. "I believe a deal would have been possible. The fact that there wasn't one is solely due to the inflexible stance of the British and the Dutch," German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder told reporters. The Dutch had demanded a cut in their annual budget payments. "In reality we were close to an agreement," added French President Jacques Chirac. "I deplore the fact that the United Kingdom refused to contribute a reasonable and equitable share of the expenses of enlargement."

Squabbles over budget provisions dominate Brussels summit

European Union mired in one of the worst crises in its 50-year-old history

Vaiju Naravane

PARIS: Squabbles over money continued to dominate the concluding day of one of the most important European Union summit meetings in recent times as leaders from Britain and France camped on diametrically opposing positions on subsidies, pay-backs and contributions to the Union's budget.

Spectacular battle

The most spectacular battle pitted Britain against the rest of Europe, which wants London to surrender an annual budget rebate worth Euros 5.3 billion.

"This is a sorry day for Europe. President Chirac has brought up the question of the British rebate in order to divert attention from his own failures, while Tony Blair is adopting a hard line on farm subsidies.

Mr Blair needs to show his electorate back home that he is not soft on Europe while President Chirac, after his defeat in the recent referendum, has to reassure French farmers that he will stick by them.

Once again, domestic politics is dominating the European agenda.

The result is bad faith, intransigence and lack of compromise," a Brussels diplomat told *The Hindu* in a telephonic interview.

Undoubtedly, the European



HANGING TOUGH: British Prime Minister Tony Blair (left) looks at French President Jacques Chirac during the E.U. summit in Brussels on Friday. - PHOTO: REUTERS

Union is mired in one of the worst crises in its 50-year-old history. The rejection of the proposed European Constitution Treaty by France and The Netherlands has led to heightened nationalistic

and anti-E.U. feelings in several European countries.

Fearing a chain reaction that would lead to the rejection of the treaty by several other member states, the E.U. decided to in-

crease the ratification period to beyond the 2006 deadline.

Promptly, Denmark, the Czech Republic and Portugal announced they would delay their own referenda, while Luxemburg announced it would ask Parliament to decide whether next month's scheduled vote on the Constitution should go ahead.

Dispute over rebate

As far as the negotiations over the E.U. budget for 2007-2013 were concerned, Britain, which has flatly refused to give up its multi-billion annual rebate, found itself facing the hostility and disapproval of the other 24 members, who are calling for a more equitable contribution to E.U. coffers.

As European Union leaders braced for what could be marathon talks on the budget, British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw reiterated London's refusal to abandon its budget rebate, which is at the heart of the high-stakes row. "We continue to believe it is wholly justified," he told reporters after Mr. Blair met for 30 to 45 minutes with Luxembourg's Prime Minister Jean-Claude Juncker who, as the summit's President, is struggling for a breakthrough. Britain argues that the vast sums spent on agriculture - more than 40 per cent of the total E.U. budget - are no longer justifiable.

R. Allianee
B.U.
10-15 L
1876

18 JUN 2005

THE HINDU

Poland to go ahead with referendum

WARSAW: Poland plans to proceed with a referendum on the European Union Constitution, despite the British Government's decision to shelve its vote following French and Dutch rejections of the charter, government leaders said on Monday.

"Poland should say in a referendum what it thinks," President Aleksander Kwasniewski told reporters.

"This is a matter of our co-responsibility for what happens in Europe. We are too big of a nation, we are too important in the new Europe, to not to say what we think about the treaty and the entire European perspective," Mr. Kwasniewski said.

Foreign Minister Adam Rotfeld said the referendum should be held "the sooner the better" and that he would like to see it take place on October 9 along with presidential elections to ensure high turnout.

Poland was the largest of 10 countries that joined the bloc in May 2004 and Mr. Rotfeld said membership had given the country an economic boost.

"We should continue this journey, because the year that we have been in the European Union has proved to be profitable for Poland, for Poland's growth," he said.

The decision came after Mr. Kwasniewski discussed the issue with legislators, members of independent organisations and representatives of the influential Roman Catholic Church.

The Government decided it was worthwhile going ahead with a vote, despite word earlier in the day that Britain would put off indefinitely holding a referendum in light of the Dutch and French rejections. — AP

Britain shelves move to hold vote on E.U. statute

There is need for further "discussions" by E.U. leaders: Jack Straw

Hasan Suroor

LONDON: Britain, on Monday, decided to "postpone" plans for a referendum on the controversial European Union Constitution in the wake of emphatic "no" votes in France and the Netherlands.

Foreign Secretary Jack Straw told the Commons that the Government would not continue with the "second reading" of the bill that would have paved the way for a referendum next year. But he kept the doors open for a rethink by not withdrawing the bill altogether.

Mr. Straw said the bill could be brought back "should the circumstances change". But at this stage, there seemed no point in pressing ahead with it until the "profound" questions thrown up by the results of the French and Dutch referendums were resolved.

There was need for further "discussions" and "decisions" by E.U. leaders, he said. The issue would be discussed at an emergency summit of E.U. leaders late next week.

The decision, which had been widely expected after Prime Minister Tony Blair's call for a "time for reflection" following the rejection of the constitution by French and Dutch voters, was seen as a snub to Germany and France who want the ratification process to continue.

Observers described the deci-



SIGN OF THE TIMES: An anti-European Union Constitution banner seen outside Downing Street in London on Monday. — PHOTO: REUTERS

sion as a "challenge" to the French and German attempts to drive the change in Europe regardless of the wishes of the people.

Hours before Mr. Straw made the announcement, *The Times* said that Britain was "challenging the arrangement" under which France and Germany tended to "impose" decisions on

other E.U. member-states. It also reported that British officials were engaged in "intense" efforts to gather allies to counter a "Franco-German axis" ahead of next week's E.U. summit.

Mr. Blair, who takes over the E.U.'s rotating presidency next month, had planned to call a referendum next spring year as the last grand moment before his

proposed departure from Downing Street towards the end of his current term.

Britain is as deeply divided over the E.U. Constitution as voters in most other European countries, and after the decisive "no" votes in France and the Netherlands it would have been uphill task for Mr. Blair to win a referendum.

EU rift widens over budget contribution

Paris/London, June 10 (Reuters): France and Germany mounted a fierce campaign by EU leaders today to persuade Britain to accept a reduction of its annual EU budget rebate to help reach a deal on the bloc's long-term finances.

British Prime Minister Tony Blair, looking isolated, opened the way to a compromise by suggesting a deal

would be possible if EU leaders agreed to a major overhaul of the budget.

But tension rose after his finance minister said London could veto any move to cut the multi-billion euro payback and President Jacques Chirac ruled out any compromise over the big farm subsidies that France receives from Brussels.

A showdown is looming at an EU summit next week. Failure to agree to the 2007-2013 funding programme would ruin efforts to show the 25-nation bloc is back on track after French and Dutch voters' rejection of the union's planned constitution.

"I think there'll be a deal in the next week... There is political pressure. It is easier to get a deal when there is pressure," European monetary affairs Commissioner Joaquin Almunia said in London.

Britain's rebate was won in 1984 when it was one of the poorest EU countries and got little back from Brussels in farm subsidies, which at that time made up 75 per cent of the EU budget.

THE TIMES GRAPH

Acrimonious exchanges at European Union summit

Differences over budget cuts, financial benefits

110: 16/16

Vaiju Naravane

PARIS: The European Union's first summit meeting after the historic rejection by France and The Netherlands of the proposed E.U. Constitution Treaty got off to a rocky start in Brussels on Thursday with acrimonious exchanges between Europe's main leaders on the contentious question of the next budget.

Loudly expounded differences over budget cuts and who should give up which benefits threatened to tear the E.U. even further apart, with portentous questions hanging over the Constitution and the political future of Europe.

France has spearheaded the movement for the cancellation of a multi-billion-euro rebate

given to Britain in 1984 when that country was in the grip of recession. Today, Britain has one of the healthiest economies in the Union and other member states say the rebate is no longer justified.

Blair firm

Britain Prime Minister Tony Blair has stubbornly refused to budge on the question, saying discussion was possible only if generous farm subsidies received by France and other nations were also placed on the negotiating table. In the face of growing outrage from other states on the rebate, Mr. Blair is under fierce domestic pressure not to budge on the refund. The Right-leaning *Times* urged Mr Blair to "stick to his guns" when he meets with his European

counterparts. British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw warned that London would not be afraid to use its veto to block the E.U. budget if the rebate — won by former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher — was under threat.

European leaders had hoped an agreement on the 2007-2013 budget would give them much-needed political momentum to overcome any paralysis after the French and Dutch refusal to ratify the Constitution.

The two crises — the budget row and the turmoil over the Constitution — have unmasked deep differences over the E.U.'s direction, from how it communicates with ordinary Europeans to its plans to enlarge further and even over the future of its single currency, the euro.

Lesson that must be heeded by the EU

The European Union has suffered an unprecedented blow, reflecting a massive miscalculation at the top.

Simon Tisdall

THE DEPTH and ferocity of French and Dutch opposition to the European Union constitutional treaty undoubtedly caught Europe's political elite by surprise. Now they may be forced to piece together a Plan B, having maintained all along that no such alternative exists.

Opponents of European integration are gleefully anticipating the EU's imminent collapse. Optimists suggest a stronger Europe could emerge. The truth about what happens next probably lies somewhere in between. The EU has suffered an unprecedented blow, reflecting a massive miscalculation at the top.

Drama of the moment

But as Jose Manuel Barroso, the Commission president, noted this week, Europe has faced big problems before — and has usually overcome them. That might sound a tad complacent. But the drama of the moment can be exaggerated, too, officials suggested.

"In France and elsewhere, there was a big debate that reached far beyond the political classes. This is very welcome," a senior European diplomat said on Wednesday.

"The referendums showed Europe is important to ordinary people. In France the turnout was 70 per cent. That's enormous. Of course, there are domestic factors. But for too long political leaders have been saying Europe is important but not asking the people what they think, doing it without them. Now the voters have said we want to be listened to.

"What they actually said is that they want more, not less Europe — a more social Europe, a more democratic Europe, a different Europe. That's positive," the diplomat said.

Doubts about whether this voters' message will actually be absorbed and acted upon in Brussels and elsewhere potentially undermine such upbeat assessments. Even before the referendum results were known, Euro-enthusiasts were examining ways of implementing key parts of the treaty whatever the verdicts.

Charles Grant, director of the Centre for European Reform, argued for example that plans to appoint an EU "foreign minister" need not be scrapped just because the treaty as a whole might fall. Mr. Grant has a good point, even if it does not appear particularly democratic. American neo-conservatives will be immensely gratified if Europe retreats into more easily manipulated, opposing camps of nation states.



ROUNDLY REJECTED: Members of the Dutch Socialist Party celebrate after the results of the EU referendum were announced in Amsterdam. — PHOTO: REUTERS

A different perspective comes from Asia. China and regional states back a strong Europe as a balancing pole to the United States' unilateralism, although Beijing may try to exploit the EU's confusion to get its way on issues including the arms embargo and textile exports.

For the emerging democracies of eastern Europe, any weakening of collective EU confidence and resolve is potentially far more serious. EU membership has become an almost existential issue not only for Bulgaria and Romania, due to join in 2007, but also for Turkey, the Balkan states, Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova. Their hopes of membership have been continually raised, often irresponsibly.

But the EU now looks to have overreached

itself. If Brussels accepts that one of the voters' messages was opposition to further enlargement (and associated large-scale immigration), the geopolitical fallout could be severely destabilising.

Also obscuring the way ahead is the fact that key EU governments are badly placed at present to handle the crisis, yet alone articulate a revamped European vision. Germany and Italy are facing elections; French politics are in disarray; and Tony Blair, beset by Euroscepticism, is a weakened figure.

Myriad ramifications

Yet it is Mr. Blair, taking on the EU presidency next month, who must try to sort out the various interpretations of what the voters really meant — and where Europe goes

now. Despite these myriad, unpredictable ramifications, the votes usefully focussed minds on what was most important, according to the senior European diplomat.

"Everyone knows the EU has brought peace to Europe. Everyone knows it has brought prosperity, although that prosperity is not equally shared.

"Everyone knows that individual countries cannot act alone when it comes to problems like the Middle East or Iran or crime and illegal immigration. They must work together. There is no choice.

"Europe must answer the people's questions. They want to know who is in charge of my life? Who decides? But the ambition for Europe is still there." — ©Guardian Newspapers Limited 2005

সংযুক্তির চ্যালেঞ্জ

ফ্রান্সের পর নেদারল্যান্ডস। ইউরোপীয় ইউনিয়নের সংবিধানকে ইউনিয়নের দুই প্রতিষ্ঠাতা সদস্যই গণভোটে প্রত্যাখ্যান করায় ইউনিয়নের গোটা ধারণাটিই চ্যালেঞ্জের সম্মুখীন হইয়াছে। দুই দেশের রায় দেখিয়া ব্রিটেনও তড়িঘড়ি গণভোট পিছাইয়া দিয়াছে। ব্রিটিশ সাম্রাজ্যের সূর্য বহু কাল অস্তাচলে যাইলেও ব্রিটেন তাহার অনন্যতা ইউরোপের কাছে বিসর্জন দিতে বরাবরই দ্বিধাগ্রস্ত ছিল। বিশেষ করিয়া যে-ইউরোপে ফ্রান্স এবং জার্মানির ওজন ব্রিটেনের ওজন অপেক্ষা অধিক হওয়ার সম্ভাবনা। কথা ছিল ইউনিয়নের সব সদস্য রাষ্ট্রকেই গণভোটে অভিন্ন সংবিধান অনুমোদন করাইতে হইবে। সেই পরিকল্পনা এ ভাবে ধাক্কা খাওয়ায় ইউনিয়নের সাফল্য লইয়াই সংশয় দেখা দিয়াছে। অভিন্ন মুদ্রা 'ইউরো'র দরও ক্রমাগত পড়িতেছে। হয়তো মার্কিন যুক্তরাষ্ট্রের ধাঁচে একটি সংযুক্ত ইউরোপীয় যুক্তরাষ্ট্র গঠনের প্রকল্পটিই বানচাল হইতে চলিয়াছে।

ইউরোপ বরাবরই বিভিন্ন স্বতন্ত্র, সার্বভৌম জাতির রাষ্ট্রের সমাহার, যে-রাষ্ট্রগুলির অনেকে পরস্পরের সহিত সংঘর্ষের মধ্য দিয়াই আপন জাতীয়তা অর্জন করিয়াছে। সেই শতাব্দীপ্রাচীন ইতিহাসের জের যদি বা উপেক্ষা করা যায়, বিভিন্ন ইউরোপীয় রাষ্ট্রের ভিন্ন-ভিন্ন অর্থনৈতিক বিকাশের স্তর ও অগ্রাধিকারকে অগ্রাহ্য করা কঠিন। পূর্ব ইউরোপের অনগ্রসর রাষ্ট্রগুলি ইউনিয়নের অভিন্ন বাজারের সুবিধা কাজে লাগাইয়া এক দিকে যেমন আপন শক্তা শ্রমশক্তির জন্য পাইকারি কর্মসংস্থান করিতে পারিয়াছে, অন্য দিকে তেমনই আর্থিক দিক দিয়া উন্নত ও শক্তিশালী দেশগুলির কর্মীবাহিনী এই অসম প্রতিযোগিতায় বেকারত্বের সম্মুখীন। ফ্রান্স ও নেদারল্যান্ডস, দুই দেশেরই গণভোটে এই অনিশ্চয়তার প্রতিক্রিয়া প্রবলভাবে প্রতিফলিত হইয়াছে। এক দিকে স্বতন্ত্র জাতির রাষ্ট্রগুলির একটি ভৌগোলিক-রাজনৈতিক এককে সুসংহত হইয়া আত্মবিলোপের অনিচ্ছা, অন্য দিকে দুর্বল, অনুন্নত, প্রাক্তীয় ইউরোপের সহিত এক পণ্ডুক্তিতে বসিয়া ভাগ করিয়া অন্নপান খাওয়ার অনাগ্রহ। এই দুইয়ের মিশ্রণেই ইউরোপের জন্মমত ইউনিয়নে সংযুক্তির বিরুদ্ধে আলোড়িত হইতেছে। যত দিন যাইবে, ফ্রান্স ও নেদারল্যান্ডসের দেখাদেখি অন্যান্য ইউরোপীয় দেশেও জনাদেশ অভিন্ন সংবিধানের বিরুদ্ধে সংহত হইতে থাকিবে। এই ধাক্কায় আপাতত সর্বাপেক্ষা ক্ষতিগ্রস্ত রোমানিয়া ও বুলগেরিয়া, যে-দুই দেশের আগামী দুই বছরের মধ্যে ইউনিয়নের অন্তর্ভুক্ত হওয়ার কথা ছিল। আর তুরস্কের সদস্যপদ প্রাপ্তির সম্ভাবনা তলাইয়া যাইবে। ইসলামি সন্ত্রাসবাদের বাস্তবতা, ক্রুসেড ও অটোমান সাম্রাজ্যের হাতে দলিত হইবার স্মৃতি এমনিতেই খ্রিস্টান ইউরোপকে মুসলিম তুরস্ক সম্পর্কে সংশয়বিড়ম্বিত রাখিয়াছে।

তাহার অর্থ এই নয় যে ইউরোপীয় ইউনিয়নের প্রকল্পটি মৃত। অভিন্ন বাজারের সুবিধা ও লাভ, পাসপোর্টমুক্ত, সীমান্তরহিত পর্যটন ও যাতায়াত, শুল্কমুক্ত বিনিয়োগ ও বাণিজ্যের মুনাফা এতটাই বেশি যে, লাভবান দেশগুলি তাহা সহসা হাতছাড়া করিতে চাহিবে না। তবে ইউরোপের রাজনৈতিক সংহতির বিষয়টি অনন্ত কাল মুলতুবি হওয়ার সম্ভাবনা প্রবল। যে যুক্তরাষ্ট্রীয় কাঠামো ইউনিয়নের আদি প্রবক্তারা ভাবিয়া রাখিয়াছিলেন, তাহাতে লীন হইতে বিভিন্ন দেশের আপত্তির প্রেক্ষিতে কাঠামোটিকে আরও বিকেন্দ্রীভূত করা দরকার, যাহাতে কোনও দেশেরই স্বাতন্ত্র্য বিসর্জন দেওয়ার আশঙ্কায় জর্জরিত হইতে না হয়। 'আমরা সবাই ইউরোপীয়', এই পরিচয়ের পাশাপাশি 'আমরা ফরাসি, ওলন্দাজ, জার্মান, ইংরেজ, অষ্ট্রীয়' প্রভৃতি স্বাতন্ত্র্যচিহ্নগুলিও যেন উজ্জ্বল থাকে। সেই সঙ্গে বিভিন্ন সদস্য রাষ্ট্রকে স্বীয় আর্থিক অগ্রাধিকার অনুসরণ করিতে দেওয়ার স্বাধীনতাও মঞ্জুর করিতে হইবে। যেমন ব্রিটেন বা জার্মানি যদি অনিয়ন্ত্রিত বাজার অর্থনীতি অনুসরণ করিতে চায়, তবে ফ্রান্সকেও শ্রমিক-কর্মচারীদের নিরাপত্তা বিধান কিংবা কাজের সময় বাঁধিয়া দেওয়ার 'সমাজতান্ত্রিক' স্বাধীনতা দিতে হইবে। এ ব্যাপারে ইউনিয়নের তরফে কোনও গা-জোয়ারি করিতে গেলে ফল হইবে বিপরীত। সদস্য রাষ্ট্রগুলিকে জাতীয় স্তরে এই স্বাধীনতা মঞ্জুর করিয়াও ইউনিয়নের অভিন্ন বাজারের সংহতি অর্জন করা সম্ভব। কী ভাবে সেটা করা হইবে, সেটা নির্ধারণ করাই ইউনিয়নের সামনে এখন সবচেয়ে বড় চ্যালেঞ্জ।

Dutch voters expected to go French way, say no

White House weighs French 'Non' on charter

ELISABETH BUMILLER
WASHINGTON, JUNE 1

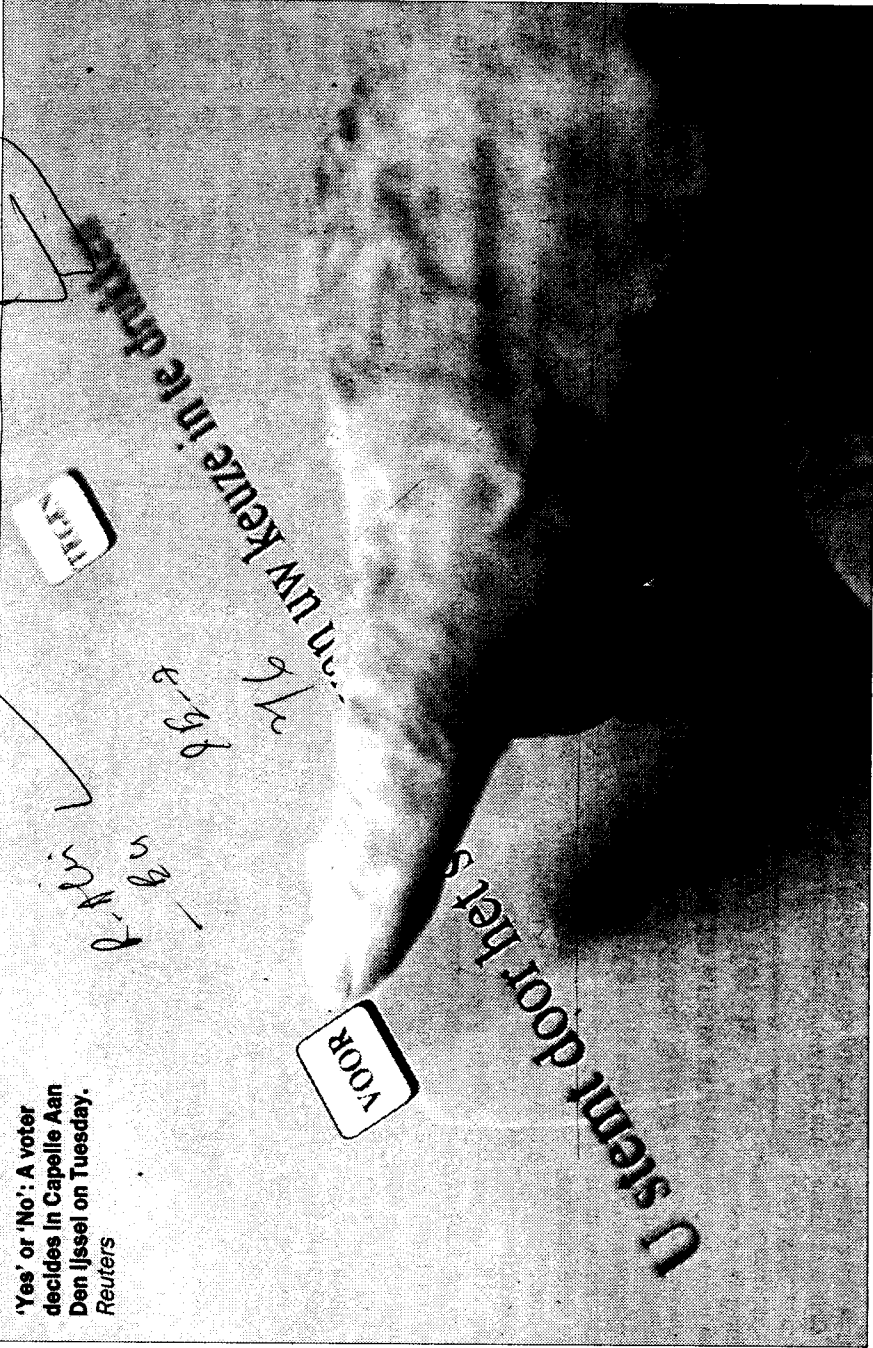
THE White House took a public position on Tuesday of benign aloofness to France's vote against a Constitution for Europe and the continent's political disarray, saying that Europe's future was for Europe alone to decide.

Behind the scenes, however, there is considerable debate about what the vote means for the relationship between the United States and Europe. There is a feeling among European policy experts that the more significant development is the weakened positions of Prime Minister Tony Blair of Great Britain, Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder of Germany and President Jacques Chirac of France. The setbacks for these leaders, the experts say, will have far more lasting effects on the White House dealings with Europe on issues like Iran

European policy experts feel the positions of British PM Tony Blair, Germany's Schroeder and France's Chirac have been weakened, especially in White House dealings

States. Still, one senior administration official said that the vote was worrisome because it made Europe more unpredictable, even as some factions in the administration could see it as checking the growing powerhouse across the Atlantic. Although Bush has repeatedly spoken of his desire for a strong Europe, some administration conservatives have seen a unified and independent-minded Europe as an unwelcome counterweight to American independence.

William Kristol, editor of the conservative magazine *The Weekly Standard*, said: "There's now a chance for fresh thinking in Europe, and that fresh thinking could be more open to something like Bush's view of the world."
—NYT



'Yes' or 'No': A voter decides in Capelle Aan Den IJssel on Tuesday.
Reuters

Chirac to complete new government

TIMOTHY HERITAGE
PARIS, JUNE 1

FRENCH President Jacques Chirac was expected to complete his new government on Wednesday after a shake-up forced on him by voters who snubbed the EU constitution in a poll widely seen as a rejection of his policies.

Chirac named trusted ally Dominique de Villepin as Prime Minister on Tuesday and brought in likely Presidential hopeful Nicolas Sarkozy as number two in the cabinet to try to appease voters angry at high unemployment and failed economic policies.

Presidency sources said the final government line-up was likely to be announced on Wednesday or Thursday, and the new cabinet's first meeting would be on Friday morning.

Chirac said in a nationwide address on Tuesday evening that the French people needed to rally together at a difficult time after Sunday's referendum and the government's priority would be tackling unemployment, now at a five-year high of 10.2 per cent.

He vowed to preserve the French social model and rejected doing things the "Anglo-Saxon"

France committed to Europe: Chirac

PARIS: President Jacques Chirac has reassured his partners in the EU that France remains committed to the 25-nation bloc, despite its overwhelming of the EU constitution. In a letter to other EU leaders, he wrote that member states should continue the ratification process and EU leaders should start weighing the implications of France's rejection at a summit on June 16 and 17. Chirac wrote: "France will continue to take its full place (in the EU), while honouring its commitments, and I will personally guarantee this," he wrote.
—Reuters

member states last year, needs the approval of all members to go into force. A Dutch 'No' might prompt eurosceptic Britain to shelve its referendum. A second rejection after France would deliver a heavy blow to EU leaders' hopes of streamlining decisions in an expanded bloc and could further weigh on the euro.

The referendum vote is not legally binding, but lawmakers say they will be guided by it if turnout is over 30 per cent.

A rejection would be the latest milestone in a period of unprecedented turmoil in previously staid Dutch politics since the 2002 murder of anti-immigration populist Pim Fortuyn, who accused the elite of losing touch with ordinary citizens.

Opposition to Turkey's bid to join the bloc and concerns over Brussels possibly undermining liberal Dutch policies on gay marriage and abortion have also helped fuel the 'No' campaign. Supporters of the constitution

have said the Netherlands risks isolation in the EU if it votes 'No'. Balkenende was one of few in the 'Yes' camp professing optimism: "There are very good arguments to say 'Yes'. If we want to make progress in Europe we need a 'Yes', he told journalists after voting. Domestic fallout from a Dutch 'No' is seen as limited, unlike the French 'Non'. —Reuters

member states last year, needs the approval of all members to go into force. A Dutch 'No' might prompt eurosceptic Britain to shelve its referendum. A second rejection after France would deliver a heavy blow to EU leaders' hopes of streamlining decisions in an expanded bloc and could further weigh on the euro.

The referendum vote is not legally binding, but lawmakers say they will be guided by it if turnout is over 30 per cent.

A rejection would be the latest milestone in a period of unprecedented turmoil in previously staid Dutch politics since the 2002 murder of anti-immigration populist Pim Fortuyn, who accused the elite of losing touch with ordinary citizens.

member states last year, needs the approval of all members to go into force. A Dutch 'No' might prompt eurosceptic Britain to shelve its referendum. A second rejection after France would deliver a heavy blow to EU leaders' hopes of streamlining decisions in an expanded bloc and could further weigh on the euro.

The referendum vote is not legally binding, but lawmakers say they will be guided by it if turnout is over 30 per cent.

A rejection would be the latest milestone in a period of unprecedented turmoil in previously staid Dutch politics since the 2002 murder of anti-immigration populist Pim Fortuyn, who accused the elite of losing touch with ordinary citizens.

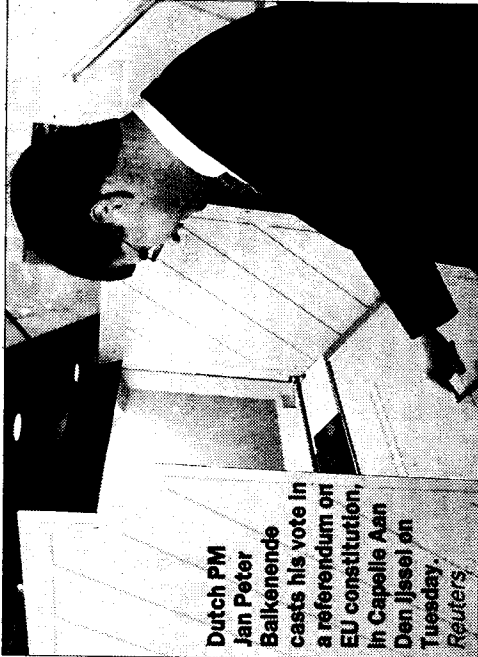
Opposition to Turkey's bid to join the bloc and concerns over Brussels possibly undermining liberal Dutch policies on gay marriage and abortion have also helped fuel the 'No' campaign. Supporters of the constitution

member states last year, needs the approval of all members to go into force. A Dutch 'No' might prompt eurosceptic Britain to shelve its referendum. A second rejection after France would deliver a heavy blow to EU leaders' hopes of streamlining decisions in an expanded bloc and could further weigh on the euro.

The referendum vote is not legally binding, but lawmakers say they will be guided by it if turnout is over 30 per cent.

A rejection would be the latest milestone in a period of unprecedented turmoil in previously staid Dutch politics since the 2002 murder of anti-immigration populist Pim Fortuyn, who accused the elite of losing touch with ordinary citizens.

Opposition to Turkey's bid to join the bloc and concerns over Brussels possibly undermining liberal Dutch policies on gay marriage and abortion have also helped fuel the 'No' campaign. Supporters of the constitution



Dutch PM Jan Peter Balkenende casts his vote in a referendum on EU constitution, in Capelle Aan Den IJssel on Tuesday.
Reuters

EU CHARTER MAY BE PUT ON HOLD AFTER FRENCH, DUTCH REJECTION ■ LATVIA SAYS YES

CONSTITUTIONAL CRISIS

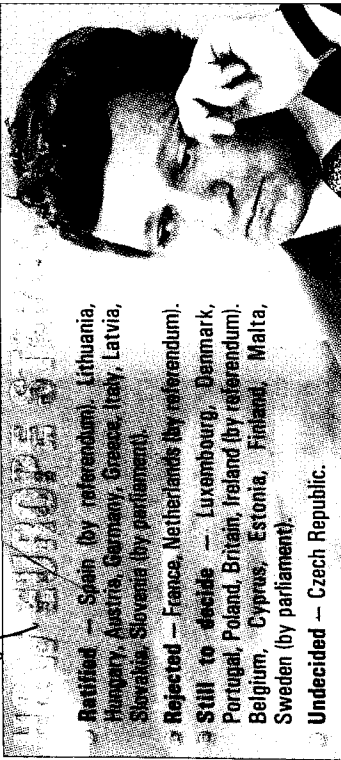
Stephen Castle in Brussels

June 2. — British-inspired plans to put Europe's Constitution on ice after two crushing referendum rejections were gaining ground today as the European Commission changed position on the issue.

Mr Tony Blair's expected initiative would avoid pronouncing the Constitution dead, but delay any referendum in the UK until after France and the Netherlands had reversed their emphatic "no" votes on the Constitution.

To become law, the Constitution needs to be ratified by all 25 nations but Germany, France, and Luxembourg, which holds the EU presidency, have called for the ratification of the treaty to continue. That raises the prospect of a fierce clash at an EU summit to be held in Brussels in two weeks time.

A spokeswoman for the European Commission President, Mr



European leaders signed the EU Constitution in October 2004. It is to take effect in 2006 if approved by all 25 nations and the European parliament.

- ✓ **Ratified** — Spain (by referendum), Lithuania, Hungary, Austria, Germany, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Slovakia, Slovenia (by parliament)
- ✗ **Rejected** — France, Netherlands (by referendum)
- ⊖ **Still to decide** — Luxembourg, Denmark, Portugal, Poland, Britain, Ireland (by referendum), Belgium, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, Malta, Sweden (by parliament)
- ⊖ **Undecided** — Czech Republic.

that they could not hope to persuade voters to back a treaty which could not, as things stand, come into effect. However the UK is determined not to accept the blame for declaring the treaty dead.

The looming clash over the future of the Constitution came as the fallout from the crushing votes in the Netherlands and France became clear. Both the French and Dutch rejections of the Charter are being blamed in part on a reaction against the admission to the EU of 10 new, mainly ex-Communist nations last year. Meanwhile many voters in France staged a rebellion against the "Anglo-Saxon" free market liberalism they see behind many EU policies.

The malaise gripping the EU will become Mr Blair's personal problem next month when Britain takes over the six-month rotating presidency of the EU.

Diplomats are bracing themselves for new obstacles to their

plans to open membership talks with Turkey on 3 October, and over moves to start similar discussion with Croatia. Although EU member states have agreed to admit Romania and Bulgaria in 2007, these plans could be put back by one year.

Also today, Latvia ratified the Constitution, with lawmakers voting to approve its adoption a day after Dutch voters rejected it. AP adds from Riga. The 71-5 vote in Latvia's 100-member parliament was widely expected after the Charter was approved in a first reading on 19 May. Twenty-four legislators abstained or were absent.

Mr Janis Lagzdins, chairman of the ruling coalition's People's Party, said Latvia was showing the rest of Europe the way ahead.

"This was a symbolic step by the Latvian parliament and state that shows that Latvia and other new member states are for the new united Europe and its fundamental law." — **The Independent**

Rich keep the poor just where they want them ^{of Alliance}

The EU is keeping the poorer nations exactly where it wants them: beholden to their patrons.

George Monbiot ^{p. 13} ^{1/6}

REJOICE! THE world is saved! The Governments of Europe have agreed that by 2015 they will give 0.7 per cent of their national income in foreign aid. Admittedly, that is 35 years after the target date they first set for themselves, and it is still less than they extract from the poor in debt repayments. But hooray anyway. Though he does not become president of the EU until later this year, Tony Blair can take some of the credit, for his insistence that the G8 summit in July makes poverty history. It is inspiring, until you understand the context.

Everyone who has studied global poverty — including European governments — recognises that aid cannot compensate for unfair terms of trade. If they increased their share of world exports by five per cent, developing countries would earn an extra \$350 billion a year, three times more than they will be given in 2015. Any government that wanted to help developing nations would surely make the terms of trade between rich and poor its priority.

This, indeed, is what the U.K. appears to have done. In March it published the most progressive foreign policy document ever to have escaped from London. A paper by the U.K. Departments of Trade and International Development promised that: "We will not force trade liberalisation on developing countries." It recognised that a policy that insists on equal terms for rich and poor is like pitting a bull mastiff against a chihuahua. Unless a country can first build up its industries behind protectionist barriers, it will be destroyed by free trade. Almost every nation that is rich today, including the U.K. and the U.S., used this strategy. But the current rules forbid the poor from following them. The EU, the paper insisted, should, while opening its own markets, allow poor nations "20 years or more" to open theirs.

But two weeks ago the *Guardian* newspaper obtained a leaked letter showing that the European Trade Commissioner, Peter Mandelson, was undermining the U.K.'s new policies. His most senior official complained that the policy document was "a major and unwelcome shift ... Mandelson is taking up our concerns and will press for a revised UK line."

Double game

We are being asked to believe, in other words, that a man who owes his entire political career to Mr. Blair, and who has repaid him with nauseating sycophancy, was conspiring to destroy his cherished policy. It does not look likely, and it does not take a great imaginative effort to see a double game being played. Before the election, Mr. Blair makes one of his tear-jerking appeals for love, compassion and human fellowship, and gets the anti-poverty movement off his back. After the election he discovers, to his inestimable regret, that love, compassion and human fellowship won't after all be possible, as a result of a ruling by the European Commission.

This outcome was predicted by the World Development Movement when

the remarkable paper was published in March. "Time will tell if the U.K. ... will put real political capital into this announcement, or if they will hide behind the European commission and claim inability to affect the negotiations."

The idea that Mr. Blair had no more intention of introducing fair terms of trade than I have of becoming a Catholic priest gains credence from the U.K.'s support for the bid by Pascal Lamy, Mr. Mandelson's predecessor, to become head of the World Trade Organisation — a post he won on Thursday. Making Mr. Lamy head of the WTO is as mad as making, say, Paul Wolfowitz ... er, satire doesn't really seem to work any more.

Everyone seems to have forgotten that Mr. Lamy was the man who destroyed the world trade talks in Mexico in September 2003. He tried to force through new rules on investment, competition and procurement, which would have allowed corporations to dictate terms to the poor world's governments. He persisted with this policy even when he had lost the support of European governments, and when it became obvious that his position would force the poorer nations to pull out. For cynics like me, it was not hard to see why. For the first time in the WTO's history, the poor nations were making effective use of collective bargaining and demanding major concessions from the rich. By destroying the talks, Mr. Lamy prevented a fairer trading regime from being introduced. He left the rich countries free to strike individual treaties with their weaker trading partners. And the U.K. and the rest of Europe hid behind him.

Continued exploitation

So the poor world is going to need the extra aid, in 2015 and far beyond. This means that it will remain obedient to the demands of countries with an interest in its continued exploitation. Those demands have done more than anything else to hold it down. As the World Bank's own figures show, across the 20 years (1960-80) before it and the IMF started introducing strict conditions on the countries that accepted their loans, median annual growth in developing countries was 2.5 per cent. In the 18 years after (1980-1998), it was 0.0 per cent.

The British Government has made its own contribution to the poor world's misery by tying aid disbursements to the privatisation of essential public services. It has been paying the Adam Smith Institute, a rightwing lobby group, up to £9 million a year to oversee privatisation programmes in developing countries.

Last week Tanzania pulled out of a deal the British Government had rigged up for the British company Biwater to privatise water supplies in Dar es Salaam.

While using the right language and flattering their critics, the U.K. and the EU are keeping the poorer nations where they want them: beholden to their patrons. Suddenly, an increase in aid doesn't look like such good news after all. — ©Guardian Newspapers Limited 2005

China revokes export tariffs on textiles

(u)
R. N. Ganesan
B. U.

Wants to avoid "double pressure" on its exports; ready for talks

BEIJING: China announced on Monday that it would no longer impose export tariffs on 81 categories of textile products as of June 1, 2005.

A previous decision to quintuple the export tariffs on 74 textile categories, on which export tariffs were imposed from January 1 this year, was revoked, according to sources from the Customs Tariff Commission of the State Council, China's Cabinet. The export tariff on flax yarn will also be abolished, the Commission said.

"If some countries have imposed restrictive measures upon China's textile goods, then China needs to revoke export tariffs on these goods, because the country cannot make its textile export shoulder double pressures," said Chinese Minister of

Commerce at a press conference held by the State Council Information Office.

"Since the U.S. and the European Union (EU) have imposed quantitative restrictions on China-originated textile goods, how can the Chinese government continue to impose export tariffs?" Mr. Bo said. The Chinese government must treat their enterprises fairly, he added.

Monday's decision was announced in the wake of the EU decision to impose quotas on imports of Chinese textiles, as well as U.S. decision to re-impose restrictions on seven kinds of Chinese textile and clothing imports recently.

On January 1, 2005, when the global textile quotas were eliminated, China voluntarily im-

posed export tariffs on some textile goods so as to limit its export growth. On May 20, China again decided to raise the export tariffs on 74 categories of textile products, with a 400 per cent hike for most of the products.

The U.S. and the EU, disregarding these voluntary measures taken by China however, still imposed strict restrictive measures on textile import from China since the beginning of this year.

"If developed countries had eliminated their textile quota restrictions step by step, the surge of Chinese textile exports to their markets this year would be avoided," said Mr. Bo Xilai.

The U.S. and the EU retained most of their quota restrictions on competitive textile products

from developing countries to the last minutes, which led to the rapid growth of Chinese textile exports immediately after the global quotas were cancelled, he said. China was willing to properly solve the textile trade disputes with the U.S. and the EU through negotiations, Mr. Bo Xilai said. He said, "If developed countries had eliminated their textile quota restrictions step-by-step, the surge of Chinese textile exports to their markets this year would be avoided."

The Chinese government, attaching great importance to the relations with the U.S. and the EU, had taken a series of measures to voluntarily limit its textile export, including lowering export tax rebate rate and levying export tariffs on some textile goods, he said. — Xinhua

31 MAY 2005

THE HINDU

EU's heart troubled

Devirupa Mitra in Brussels

May 31.— It is a surreal time in Brussels — the “heart” of Europe, when two countries in the period of four days will reject the Constitution decisively. The French have already indicated a big “non” (no) on Sunday, and the Dutch are also expected to say “nee” (no) tomorrow.

As an European parliament official said, there was a state of shock when the results started to roll in, though the polls had already indicated which way it would go. “You may see members of European parliament walking with a glazed look,” he said.

Not that it was unexpected, with the polls consistently giving higher numbers to the negative side. “But, before the ballots were counted, there was always hope,” said a European Commission official. However, the referendum in France is not necessarily seen as a reflection on Europe, but is being given a spin of being an internal plebiscite.

The director of the European Policy Centre, Dr Cameron Fraser, said the Constitution text was “unreadable”. “It is a paradise for constitutional lawyers.” But EC officials are at pains to establish that it is not the end of the road. “The ratification process will continue,” an official said, pointing out that the earlier treaties of Amsterdam, Maastricht and Nice continue to stand.

01 JUN 2005

THE STATESMAN

French voters reject EU constitution

f. Alianer. fu

ELAINE Sciolino
Paris, May 29

TURNING ITS back on half a century of European history, France decisively rejected a constitution for Europe on Sunday plunging the country into political disarray and jeopardising the cause of European unity.

The victory for the no vote — 55 percent to 45 percent — came in a nationwide referendum on the European Union constitution after a bruising campaign that divided France and alarmed Europe.

Foreshadowed in recent polls, the no vote could doom the 448-article treaty because all 25 members of the European Union must ratify it before it can take effect.

The rejection could signal an abrupt halt to the expansion and unification of Europe, a process that has been met with growing disillusionment among the wealthier European Union members as needier countries like Poland and Slovakia have negotiated their entry.

President Jacques Chirac, who had predicted France's isolation in Europe if the constitution was rejected, smiled stiffly as he struggled to mask his disappointment.

"The decision of France creates a difficult situation for the defense of our interests in Europe," he said in a brief statement broadcast live on television. Hinting at possible cabinet changes, he added, "I'll tell you in the very next days my decisions regarding the government and its priorities."

Early this month, Chirac had vowed not to change his government if the referendum

failed, saying it was "neither a plebiscite nor a moment of political change."

But the vote, which made France the first country to reject the treaty, has wounded the French president. More than 50 years ago, France was a founding member of the six-country precursor to the current European Union.

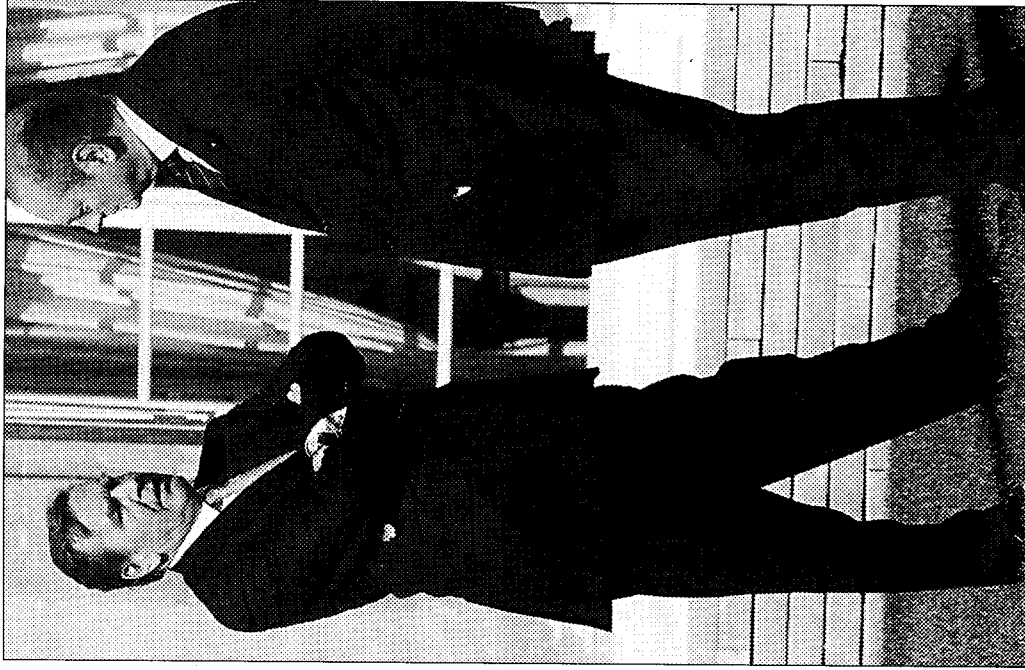
Chirac had assumed that through the constitution, a document similar in some ways to the Constitution that binds the US, France could promote a stronger, more unified Europe that could project not only economic but also political power around the world. He repeatedly spoke of a "multipolar world" with Europe as one of the poles counterbalancing the United States.

After the vote, some extreme opponents of the constitution called for Chirac to resign.

"We're tonight before a major political crisis," said Philippe de Villiers, head of the right-wing Movement for France and a vocal lobbyist against the constitution. He added that Chirac had two choices: resignation "given the fact that he had been so personally involved" or the dissolution of Parliament.

Jean-Marie Le Pen, the head of the far-right National Front, faulted Chirac for threatening the French with "chaos" if they voted no, adding, "He isn't qualified, it seems to me, to remain as the head of the country."

About 70 percent of France's registered 41.8 million voters cast ballots, a high turnout on a Sunday that was also Mother's Day here. Throughout the day, in Paris, electronic billboards all across town said: "Don't let the others decide for you. Go vote."



German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder (L) with French President Jacques Chirac in the Elysee Palace in Paris. The Franco-German axis — referred to as the driving force of the European project — faced an uncertain future with the rejection of the EU constitution by France, despite Schröder's insistence that the ties were not in danger.

Pollsters said the rejection reflected French voters' anger at the 72-year-old president and his centre-right government for failing to improve the country's troubled economy, as well as fear that the treaty would erode France's generous cradle-to-grave social safety net.

The New York Times

France all set to form new government

Paris, May 30

PRESIDENT JACQUES Chirac met on Monday with his beleaguered prime minister, widely expected to be fired after France roundly rejected the European Union's first constitution in a referendum that threw the bloc's future into disarray.

Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin gathered his ministers at his office before going to the presidential Elysee Palace for a 30-minute meeting with Chirac. He later confirmed that Chirac would act quickly to limit damage and heed the cry for change within France that the EU referendum produced.

"There will be developments today or tomorrow," Raffarin said later, refusing comment on whether he had offered his resignation. French voters' defeat of plans to bind the 25 EU members more tightly together threatened to set those plans for broader integration back by years.

But it also was a humiliating blow to Chirac and a disavowal of the French government's policies. About 55 per cent of voters opposed the constitution — the first rejection in Europe.

The jolting results left Chirac, who had urged voters to approve the charter, little choice but to make changes, which he said on Sunday night would come "within the very next days."

AP

Blair should feel relieved at 'Non'

VIVIAN Dutt
London, May 30

TONY BLAIR might shed a few political tears for the 'Non' verdict by the French but he would be the most relieved person in Europe. Blair believes that the rejection of the treaty by one of the EU's founding members has changed everything and cannot be ignored. The 'Non' vote has overnight removed the vexing problem of whether to hold British referendum on the European Constitution and when.

The prospect of it now being held has receded, although the foreign secretary, Jack Straw, would not be drawn on the issue. However, he did not commit the Government to a referendum, leaving open the possibility that it will declare the treaty dead.

Shortly after the "no" result was clear, Straw said the French referendum raised "profound questions" about the future of Europe. "Tonight's result ... probably deserves a period of reflection by all 25 member states."

He said Britain must respect the French result. "The European Union is a union of democracies, the people of France have just cast their vote on the treaty and voted 'no' by a clear margin. As I said a few weeks ago a 'no' vote by France or any other member state would create a problem for the EU."

"But given the issues in the campaign in France and the apparent scale of the result it is ... more significant than that. Indeed, the result raises profound questions for all of

us about the future direction of Europe, about the challenges to us and the rest of the world, about the ability of the European Union to respond to those challenges and the demands of its citizens.

Blair is expected to make a cautious statement for fear of being accused of influencing the outcome of the Dutch referendum on Wednesday. The Dutch are almost certain to also vote "no", probably by an even bigger majority than in France.

Blair had previously said the referendum would go ahead, so long as there was a treaty to vote on. But in practice, the French result could be a fatal blow to the constitution. A final decision on Britain's planned middle of next month, but a Downing Street aide conceded: "A double 'no' would be a very big blow."

A double rejection will have serious ramifications for the Government. Whatever its outcome, a UK referendum was viewed by Labour figures as a natural moment for Blair to step down, with Gordon Brown replacing him. That would have enabled a contest in the summer, followed by Mr Brown's coronation at Labour's conference in autumn 2006.

The result also means Britain's presidency of the European Union, which begins in July, will be dominated by the constitution. Mr Blair and Mr Brown had wanted economic reform to be the key issue of the presidency. Instead they will be in charge of picking up the wreckage from the French and Dutch votes.

After France's dramatic rejection, what next?

Vaiju Naravane

CALLED TO the polls to ratify the first-ever European Constitution on Sunday, the French said an emphatic, unambiguous "no." Their verdict sent shock waves throughout Europe. This is the first time that a large and important founder member of the European Union has opposed further European integration. For the treaty to come into effect the Constitution must be ratified, by referendum or by parliamentary vote, by all the 25 members of the EU. Rejection by France makes this document a dead letter and the verdict is likely to lead to a gridlocked Europe, where narrow national interests take precedence over a pan-European compromise. The vote signifies an unambiguous refusal of the EU in its present shape and form, which the majority of French voters consider too pro-business and ultra-liberal.

This verdict has also had the effect of a tidal wave in national politics. Almost 55 per cent of the electorate rejected the document. And although the victory of the "no" camp had been largely predicted in opinion polls, it did not in any way take away from the magnitude of the defeat suffered by the leaders of the "yes" camp, starting with President Jacques Chirac and including the Centre-Right UDF and Socialist parties.

Concluded in spring 2004 between the EU's 25 member-nations, the constitution aimed at improving the way it functions. The present Treaty of Nice that governs the EU was widely considered obsolete and new institutions were needed to streamline the working of an EU enlarged to 25. The proposed constitution, drafted by a convention led by former French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, includes provisions for an elected EU president and foreign minister and gives extended powers to the EU Parliament. It also includes, in Part III, the notion that

Rejection by France makes the European Constitution a dead letter and the verdict is likely to lead to a gridlocked Europe.

EU business will be conducted on the basis of a non-subsidised free market economy.

It is around this chapter that the Leftist opponents of the constitution campaign built up their case. The French Communist Party (PCF), the Trotskyist party and the Revolutionary Communist league (LCR), along with large sections of the Green Party and rebels from the mainstream Socialist Party that had called for a "yes" vote, argued that the constitution was pro-business and anti-worker. The leaders of the "no" vote in the Leftist camp have emerged victorious from the referendum.

But it is Mr. Chirac who has received the most brutal blow. He now has the difficult task of convincing France's EU partners that his country remains deeply committed to the European project despite having flung out the Constitution on its ear. He will also have to explain the significance of this rejection. He will have to do this from a position of fragility and weakness, as a leader who no longer enjoys the confidence of his people.

It was a badly shaken Mr. Chirac who made a short, televised speech just a few minutes after the devastating results came through. He said he had "taken note" of the electorate's verdict and promised a "new impulse" to his action. He also called on his compatriots to rally together in the defence of France's "national interest," in other words behind him, in his role as the head of state and guarantor of the French Constitution.

This is President Chirac's third consecutive electoral defeat following regional and European elections in spring last year. President Chirac chose to ignore those warning calls, refusing to

dump his immensely unpopular Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin. The extent of the present defeat will oblige him to change tack and nominate a new Prime Minister, in all probability the present Interior and former Foreign Minister Dominique de Villepin. But will that change much?

Mr. Chirac also appears overwhelmed by the rivalry, lack of unity and jostling within his own ruling UMP Party. In contrast to Mr. Chirac's listless address, his main rival, UMP general secretary Nicolas Sarkozy, said the vote should lead to a "major turning point in our economic and social policy." But because of his dislike of his younger rival, it is unlikely that Mr. Chirac will nominate the extremely popular Mr. Sarkozy for Prime Minister. His change of government is therefore likely to anger voters further and could damage his party's chances in the presidential and legislative polls that are only two years away.

Socialist Party general secretary Francois Hollande, one of the losers of the referendum with President Chirac, expressed the Left's disgust at the Conservatives' lack of dynamism when he said: "We can hope for nothing from Jacques Chirac and should harbour no illusion about the next government. It will be the same policy, with alas, the same results as before."

Political observers in Paris are hard put to understand what they describe as Mr. Chirac's "suicidal behaviour." In 1997, he dissolved Parliament despite having a comfortable majority and lost the elections ushering in another round of co-habitation (where the President and the Prime Minister belong to opposing political fam-

ilies). In the 2002 presidential poll, Mr. Chirac won 82 per cent of the vote, benefiting from the Leftist vote that was transferred to him to bar the way to ultra Right leader Jean-Marie Le Pen. But he dilapidated that capital too, with the result that Mr. Chirac enters the last two years of his reign disavowed by the public and with his domestic and international image in tatters. There is no hope for a third term for Mr. Chirac. In terms of domestic politics, the referendum of May 29 will have been his swansong.

On the international stage too, Mr. Chirac is likely to become an object of ridicule. A couple of weeks ago he said in an interview that he "would have great trouble carrying a negative message from France to international summits abroad." Mr. Chirac's enemies, from President George W. Bush to the leaders of small European nations to whom he easily and often trotted out moral lessons, are probably savouring his defeat.

A shout of anger and despair

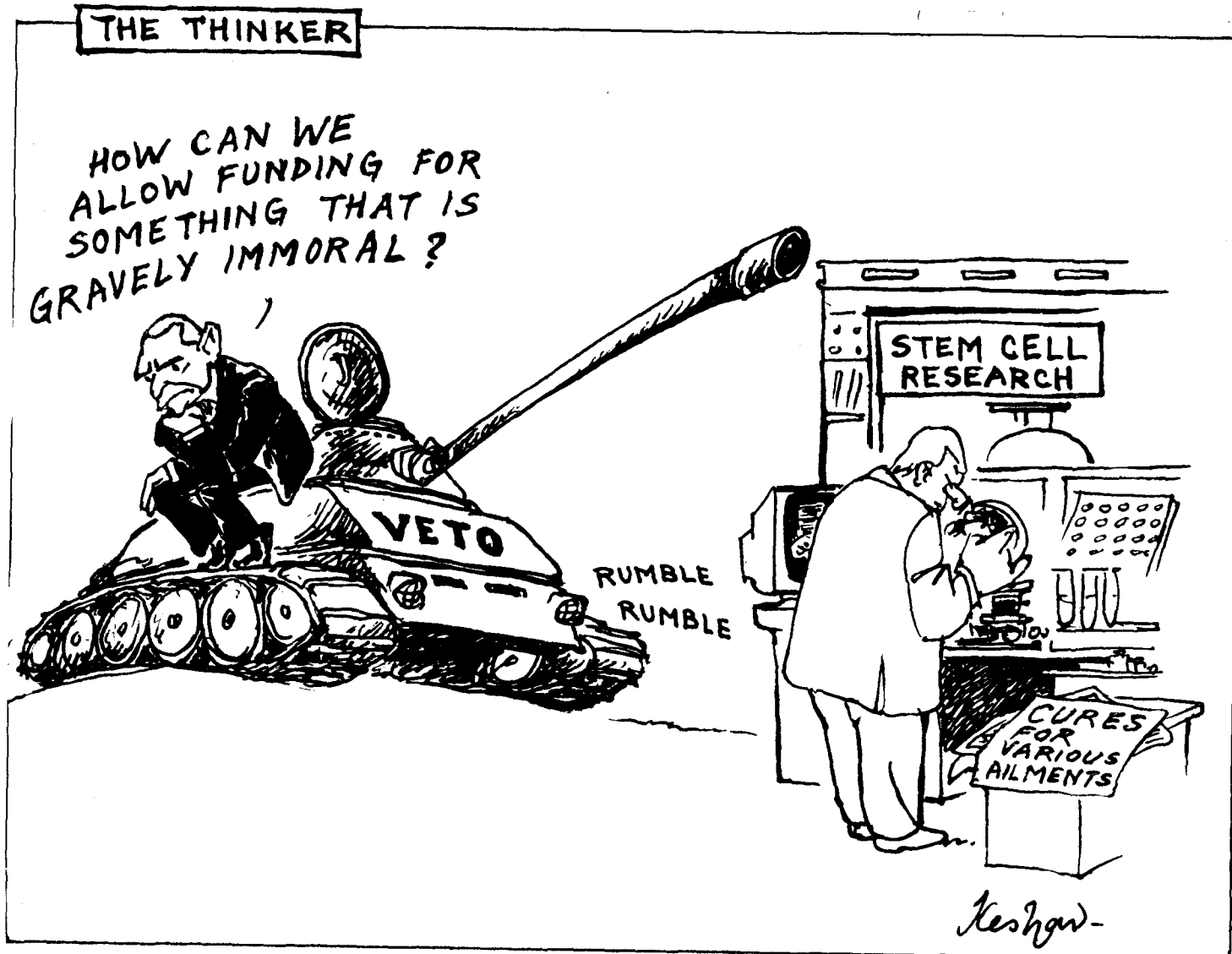
The French vote was, above all, a cry of pain, a shout of anger and despair at the bankruptcy and lethargy of the ruling classes. "In such a scenario of generalised disaffection, there were men and women who exploited the feeling of fear and uncertainty. We now find ourselves faced with a disaster fuelled by populist politics. This tidal wave has in fact been a referendum on and a rejection of several things at once and has crushed everything that came in its path: European construction, EU enlargement, the elites, structural reform, the regulation of liberalism, internationalism and even generosity," commented Serge July, editor of the Leftist daily *Liberation*.

The French vote, he says, was one that expressed fear and protectionism. Fear that the French industry will be uprooted to be re-implanted in cheaper areas of Europe such as Poland or the Baltic republics. Fear of a vast wave of cheap labour coming from Eastern Europe to snatch away French jobs. Fear of losing the generous social security, health and retirement benefits that French workers enjoy. On the extreme Right, this fear was also supplemented by a hatred of the governing elites and the fear of losing French sovereignty. The referendum ended up pitting the elites against the people, poorer blue and white collar workers against the educated upper and middle classes. It also pitted wealthy inner cities against poorer suburbs and the countryside. To Jean-Marie le Pen's xenophobic voters, this "no" was also a means of keeping Turkey — Muslim and foreign — outside the EU forever.

"France has cut off its nose to spite its face. The 'no' vote was carried forward by a destructionist élan that is difficult to comprehend. After this irresponsible drunken revelry, France is going to find itself suffering from one of the worst hangovers in its history," a senior diplomat in Brussels told *The Hindu*. "The French vote will give rise to a paradox. We will now be governed by the Nice Treaty which is more ultra-liberal than the Constitution could ever be. EU institutions will be even more ungovernable than before. French Leftist leaders say they will renegotiate the treaty. That is absurd. There are 25 member-states. Each nation wants something different. The constitution was a fruit of four years of negotiation and of compromise. On what basis will they negotiate now? And who will wish to negotiate and on what? The French will realise that the Leftist parties who sold them the 'no' vote on a string of half-truths have no political project to speak of. Where do they think we can go from here," he asked bitterly.

The immediate aftermath of the French "no" will be a debate within the EU on whether there is any point in carrying on with the ratification process. The British are of the opinion that the constitution should be laid to rest and other avenues explored for an exit from this impasse. It is likely, however, that the ratification process will continue because, as Luxemburg leader Jean Claude Juncker said, 45 million French voters should not be allowed to snatch away the right of franchise of the rest. Clearly turbulent times lie ahead, both for France and for Europe.

CARTOONSCAPE



ফ্রান্সের গণভোট

ইউরোপীয় ইউনিয়নের অভিন্ন সংবিধানের উপর গণভোটে ফরাসি ভোটাররা নেতিবাচক রায় দিয়েছেন। এই রায় ফরাসি প্রেসিডেন্ট জাক শিরাকের পক্ষে এক বিরাট ধাক্কা। কারণ শিরাক ও তাঁহার নেতৃত্বাধীন ফ্রান্স বরাবরই ঐক্যবদ্ধ ইউরোপের প্রবল প্রবক্তা। ইউরোপকে ঐক্যবদ্ধ করার ঐতিহাসিক প্রেরণাটিও ফরাসি বিপ্লবের ফসল এবং পরবর্তী কালে নেপোলিয়ন বোনাপার্টই জাগাইয়া তুলিয়াছিলেন। তাই ইউরোপীয় দেশগুলির সংহতি, সংহত ইউনিয়নে একই মুদ্রা (ইউরো) চালু, সীমান্তের কড়াকড়ি তুলিয়া ইউনিয়নের দেশগুলির নাগরিকদের অবাধ যাতায়াতের ব্যবস্থা, প্রতিটি প্রদেশেই ফ্রান্স নেতৃত্ব দিয়াছে। এমনকী ইউনিয়নের সদস্যসংখ্যা বাড়িয়া পঁচিশ হইবার পিছনেও পশ্চিম ও পূর্ব ইউরোপের সব দেশকে লইয়া চলিবার ফরাসি তাগিদ ভোটাররা মানিয়াছেন। অভিন্ন সংবিধানের প্রক্ষে তাঁহারা বাঁকিয়া বসিলেন।

রাজনৈতিক পর্যবেক্ষকদের ধারণা, এই পরাজয়ের পিছনে রহিয়াছে ফ্রান্সের বর্ধমান বেকারত্বের বিরুদ্ধে ফরাসি ভোটারদের ক্ষোভ। ইউনিয়নের কলেবর যত বাড়িতেছে, ততই অপেক্ষাকৃত অনগ্রসর দেশগুলির শক্তা শ্রমশক্তির কাছে প্রতিদ্বন্দ্বিতায় দক্ষ ফরাসি কর্মীদের কাজ খোয়াইবার ভয়ও বাড়িতেছে। বাণিজ্যিক লাভজনকতার উপর ইউনিয়নের জোর ফরাসি অর্থনীতির রাষ্ট্রায়ত্ত্ব ক্ষেত্র ও সরকারি পরিষেবাকে ধ্বংস করিয়া দিবে, এমন শঙ্কাও প্রচারিত। বামপন্থী ও সমাজবাদী ভোটাররা যে এই শঙ্কাকে কাজে লাগাইয়াছেন, তাহা নিশ্চিত। আরও চারটি রাষ্ট্র ইউনিয়নের সদস্য হওয়ার জন্য অপেক্ষাকৃত, যাহাদের মধ্যে মুসলিমপ্রধান তুরস্কও রহিয়াছে। ফ্রান্স-সহ ইউরোপের অনেক রাষ্ট্রের মানুষই তুরস্কের ব্যাপারে দিগ্ভ্রান্ত। ইসলাম-ইউরোপ সংঘাতের স্মৃতি এবং অটোমান সাম্রাজ্যের দীর্ঘ প্রাধান্য সহ্য করিবার গ্লানি ইউরোপীয় জনমানসে এখনও এত বিরূপ প্রতিক্রিয়া সৃষ্টি করে যে কামাল আতাতুর্কের নেতৃত্বে তুরস্ক আধুনিক, ধর্মনিরপেক্ষ প্রজাতন্ত্র হইয়া উঠিলেও তাহাকে ইউরোপীয় ইউনিয়নের অন্তর্ভুক্ত করিতে তাঁহাদের প্রবল আপত্তি। হান্টিংটনের 'সভ্যতার সংঘাত'-এর তত্ত্ব নিঃসন্দেহে আকাশ হইতে পড়ে নাই। পাশ্চাত্যের সমাজ এখনও মুসলিমদের সঙ্গে অভিন্ন সংবিধানের অংশীদার হইতে চায় না।

ফরাসি ভোটারদের এই ধাক্কাই ইউনিয়নে ফ্রান্সের প্রাধান্য কিয়দংশে খর্ব হইবে। বিরোধীরা ইউনিয়নের সংবিধান নুতন করিয়া খসড়া করার দাবি জানাইলেও কর্তৃপক্ষ তাহা মানিবে না। ফ্রান্সের ফল দেখিয়া নেদারল্যান্ডসের শাসকরাও উদ্ভিন্ন, তাঁহারা ওলন্দাজ ভোটারদের কাছে ফরাসি রায় উপেক্ষা করার আর্জি জানাইয়াছেন। বুধবার নেদারল্যান্ডসে গণভোট। এই সব ঘটনা আবার ইংল্যান্ডে অনুষ্ঠেয় গণভোটকেও প্রভাবিত করিতে পারে। ইউনিয়নে লীন হইবার প্রক্ষে সে দেশে তো পূর্ব হইতেই প্রতিবাদী স্বর মুখর। আর এ ধরনের প্রতিটি সমস্যা ইউনিয়নের অভিন্ন মুদ্রা 'ইউরো'র দর কমাইতে পারে। তবু ইউরোপ যে বিভিন্ন জাতির নিজস্ব স্বাতন্ত্র্য অক্ষত রাখিয়াই আর্থ-রাজনৈতিকভাবে একটি অখণ্ড ও সম্মিলিত এককে রূপান্তরিত হইবার পথে অগ্রসর হইতেছে, তাহা ঠিক। সমস্যা আসিতেছে। দীর্ঘ কাল ধরিয়া ইউরোপের এই সব জাতি পরস্পরের সহিত যুদ্ধবিগ্রহে লিপ্ত থাকিয়াছে যে সংশয় রাতারাতি দূর হইবার নয়। তবে এ ধরনের যুক্তরাষ্ট্রীয়তার অভিমুখে যাত্রা যে সকলের পক্ষেই অর্থনৈতিক ভাবে লাভজনক, সেই উপলব্ধি হইতেই ইউনিয়নের ধারণাটি উত্তরোত্তর জনপ্রিয় হইতেছে এবং একদা যাহারা সমুদ্রত ইউরোপের বাহিরে ছিল, সেই ক্রোয়েশিয়া, বুলগেরিয়ার মতো দেশও ইহার সদস্য হইতে উদ্বীর্ণ। দক্ষিণ-পূর্ব এশিয়ায় 'আসিয়ান' ও দক্ষিণ এশিয়ায় 'সার্ক'ও ইউরোপীয় ইউনিয়নের পদাঙ্ক অনুসরণ করিতে পারে। তবে দক্ষিণ এশিয়ার দেশগুলিতে এখনও বাণিজ্যই অবাধ হয় নাই, জাতীয়তাবাদগুলির বয়সও মাত্র অর্ধশতাব্দী, কাহারও বা সিকি শতাব্দী। আর্থিক লাভের তাগিদ স্বাজাত্যের অহমিকাকে অগ্রাহ্য, এমনকী খর্বও করিতে পারে। তবে 'সে অনেক শতাব্দীর মনীষার কাজ'!

Dutch take the clue from French, set to deliver snub to E.U.

R. Allinson B.A. 100 14 21/0

"No" camp comfortably ahead of the Constitution supporters in the Netherlands

Ian Traynor

LONDON: Dutch Government leaders have issued desperate pleas for the public to back the European Constitution as the Netherlands, in the shadow of the French vote, prepared to deliver a large snub to the E.U. in the referendum scheduled to be held on Wednesday.

Three days before the Dutch vote in their sole referendum of modern times, opinion polls put the No camp comfortably ahead of the constitution supporters, confirming a public opinion trend that has held consistently for more than a month.

The poll findings gave the No camp a lead of around 14 points, with a 3 per cent margin of error. For more than a month, several opinion polls each week have consistently highlighted a strong if surprising wave of Euroscepticism in the Netherlands.

Lacklustre campaign

The weekend surveys indicated that the lacklustre Yes campaign was staging a mild recovery, but not enough to shift the balance when the country votes on Wednesday.

The unpopular Christian Democrat Prime Minister, Jan Peter Balkenende, appearing on Dutch television on Sunday before the result of the French referendum was known, sounded forlorn about the probable imminent rejection of a Constitution he helped negotiate. He

urged voters not to listen to the message delivered by the French electorate, but to make their own minds up.

All the signs, however, are that the Dutch have already taken that advice, with the polls showing steadily firmer opposition to the constitution than in France.

A senior Interior Ministry official, pro-constitution, said a French No would cause people to stay away on Wednesday, convinced there was no point in voting.

Maurice de Hond, a leading pollster whose latest survey put the No camp ahead 57-43, agreed that an expected low turnout would be even lower following a French snub.

In contrast to France, the campaign in the Netherlands has struggled to catch fire and turnout may be under 40 per cent.

The Foreign Minister, Ben Bot, on Sunday echoed the Prime Ministerial plea, calling on the Dutch to take their own decision, after earlier urging voters to stay away from the ballot stations if they did not understand the constitution properly. That statement was seized on by opponents as both elitist and defeatist, and symptomatic of a Government campaign which has failed to make its arguments resonate when confronted by the easier and more potent criticisms of the anti-constitution camp. — ©Guardian Newspapers Limited 2005



STAR-CROSSED: European Union foreign policy chief Javier Solana addressing a news conference in Brussels on Monday. — PHOTO: REUTERS

Europe looks on as French vote on EU constitution

French President Jacques Chirac casts his vote in Serran, southwestern France on Sunday. AP/PTI



TIMOTHY HERITAGE
PARIS, MAY 29

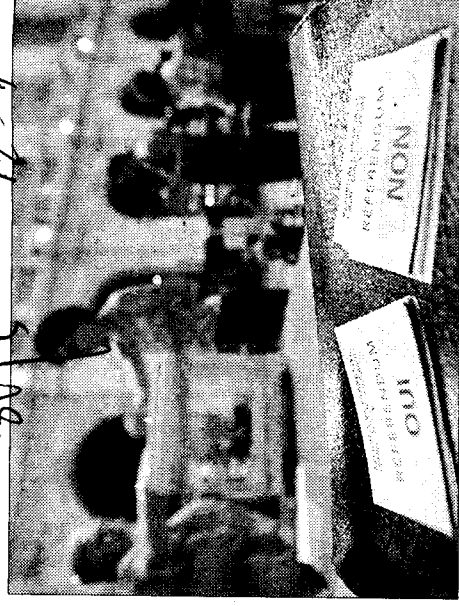
THE French began voting in a referendum on the European Union's new constitution on Sunday with Europe watching anxiously after final opinion polls pointed to a rejection that could kill the charter.

The last surveys put the 'No' camp clearly ahead with up to 56 per cent expected to vote down the treaty at the end of a heated campaign that divided France and became a debate on the government's economic record as well as the future of Europe.

Polling stations opened at 8 a.m. across mainland France, with the weather fine. Around one-in-five voters were left undecided when campaigning ended on Friday.

"Europe at stake," left-leaning newspaper *Libération* declared on the front of its weekend edition above a picture of two dice whose faces spelled out 'N-O-' and 'O-U-'.

There is also a great deal at stake for President Jacques Chirac, for whom a rejection

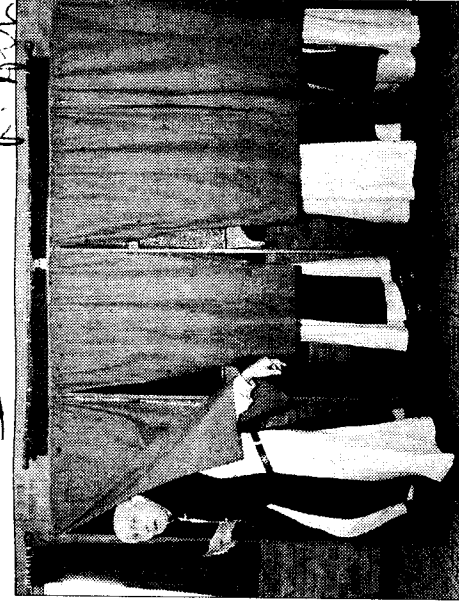


(L) Voters queue to vote at a polling station in Marseille. **(R)** A Trappist monk leaves a voting booth in Godewaersvelde, northern France on Sunday. Reuters

of the treaty would be a big setback two years before presidential and parliamentary elections.

Chirac (72), has said he will not quit but he would be likely to respond to a 'No' vote by dismissing unpopular Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin. Interior Minister Dominique de Villepin, a trusted ally, leads the race to replace him.

France has almost 42 million registered voters. First exit polls projecting the result are expected when the last polling stations close at 10 p.m. The Interior Ministry is expected to issue an official estimate for the result sometime after 11 p.m. Many commentators expect the outcome to be ex-



tremely close in voting that began in overseas French territories on Saturday.

The constitution was signed by EU leaders last October in Rome after long and tough negotiations. It sets rules for the EU that are intended to make decision-making easier after the bloc's enlargement from 15 to 25 member states in May 2004.

The charter requires the approval of all member states to go into force. If it were rejected, the EU would continue to operate under its current

movement on the same side as the leadership of the opposition Socialist Party which is usually its foe.

The 'No' camp is led by Socialists defying the party line, the far-right National Front and the Communist Party.

Even most politicians who oppose the treaty say they are pro-Europe but argue the charter is flawed, dislike the way the EU has developed and say France's influence in it has declined.

Supporters say the treaty will help make Europe and France stronger in the face of economic threats from other countries such as China. They say a French 'No' would kill the treaty.

Opponents say the treaty enshrines economic policies that have failed to stop the loss of jobs to low-wage economies, including countries outside the EU. They say a 'No' vote would force the EU to redraft the treaty and improve it.

Nine countries have approved the charter and none has rejected it. Opinion polls show Dutch voters could oppose it in a referendum on June 1. —Reuters

FRANCE VOTES NO TO EUROPEAN CONSTITUTION

EU's future in disarray

Associated Press

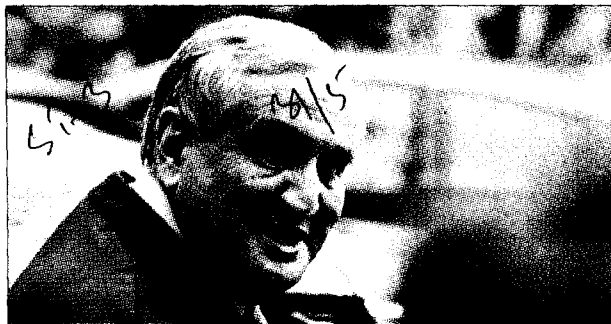
PARIS, May 30. — The French President, Mr Jacques Chirac, today met with his beleaguered Prime Minister, who was widely expected to be fired after France roundly rejected the European Union's first Constitution in a referendum that threw the bloc's future into disarray.

Mr Chirac spent 30 minutes with Mr Jean-Pierre Raffarin, who confirmed "there will be developments today or tomorrow". He refused to say whether he had offered his resignation, telling reporters only: "I am going for a stroll around Paris. See you later."

Aides to Mr Raffarin, in office since May 2002, were seen packing up boxes at the Matignon Hotel, the Prime Minister's office.

The referendum results were a humiliating blow to Mr Chirac and a disavowal of his government, left reeling by the decisive victory of those rejecting the Constitution — some 55 per cent.

But the results also threw the EU's future into disarray. Plans to bind the



IN THE LINE OF FIRE: The French Prime Minister, Mr Raffarin, leaves the presidential palace after a meeting with Mr Chirac in Paris on Monday. — AFP

25 EU members more tightly together through a Constitution threatened to be set back for years.

Mr Chirac chose to hold a referendum rather than take the EU Constitution to parliament, where it would have passed with a wide majority. He worked today to control damage.

Other key figures called to the presidential palace included Mr Nicolas Sarkozy, the ambitious head of the governing party, the Union for a Popular Movement, with his eye on the 2007 presidency. A chief rival of Mr Chirac, he is among possible choices to replace Mr Raffarin.

France's repudiation of the EU Constitution came

ahead of Wednesday's referendum in the Netherlands, where polls show even more resistance to the draft. The document must be ratified by all 25 EU members to take effect in November 2006.

With a nearly 70 per cent turnout, the referendum results left Mr Chirac little choice but change. "It is your sovereign decision, and I take note," the President told the nation last night after results were announced. He said, dryly, that he would inject "new and strong impetus" into the centre-right government "within the very next days", coded language seen as reading that Mr Raffarin would go.

Blair keeps options open

Associated Press

LONDON, May 30. — The British Prime Minister today said it was too early to say if Britain will hold a referendum on the proposed EU Constitution, although the French "no" may have spared Mr Tony Blair the politically risky choice of trying to persuade Britons to sign up to the charter.

Foreign Secretary Mr Jack Straw indicated Britain would wait a week to announce its intentions.

Mr Blair was speaking to reporters in Tuscany, Italy, a day after France rejected the treaty in a referendum that cast serious doubt on whether the ratification process will continue across Europe. To date, nine countries have approved the text, which needs to be unanimously adopted.

Mr Blair, who was expected to call a popular vote on the charter next year, may now be spared the hard pressed battle to win a "yes" vote in Britain.

EU at critical juncture

Supporters of the constitution say streamlined decision-making in Brussels will be the only way to get things done. Euro-sceptics, however, fear a United States of Europe, writes JULIAN COMAN

What is the European Union constitution treaty and why does it matter? Depending on who you believe, the proposed constitution is either a manifesto for a monolithic European superstate, or a much-needed route to a more efficient, decisive EU.

The 300-page document pulls together and formalises all the successive treaties and agreements that have accu-

mulated over the years, and draws up arrangements for the EU of the 21st century.

There are 460 articles. It's not an easy read. What are the key clauses? If the constitution is adopted, the EU will have a new

anthem, (Beethoven's *Ode to Joy*) a president and a foreign minister. The president would serve a 30-month term, ending the system of a six-month rotating presidency of the Council of Ministers.

The appointment of a foreign minister would finally answer the question asked by successive US Presidents — "Who do I call when I phone Europe?" And a revised voting system with more majorities for countries to use a veto would be introduced.

With 25 members, and more on the way, supporters of the constitution say streamlined decision-making in Brussels will be the only way to get things done. Otherwise, say "yes" campaigners, we can look forward to years of wrangling and paralysis in Brussels as 25 countries engage in perpetual horse-trading.

The constitution would also enshrine freedom of speech and religion, the right to shelter and education, and give greater power to the hitherto toothless European Parliament. The EU political brand would finally be enshrined in a formal legal document.

Who's objecting and why? Anti-federalists see the constitution as a fast track to a much-feared United States of Europe, in which national sovereignties, long safeguarded by the veto system, will be trampled underfoot. Europe, they argue, already has its own currency, free movement within its borders and a raft of harmonised eco-

conomic legislation. What is the point of going any further? Except to achieve what Euro-sceptics have always warned was being plotted in Brussels: a single European state.

Are the suspicions warranted? Yes and no. The powers of the new EU foreign minister, for instance, will be limited by the fact that member-states retain a right

to "opt-out" of his policies. The president will become the recognisable "face" of the EU but will not have executive powers. So comparisons with the US President are misleading. On tax harmonisation, opt-outs for individual states will still be available.

How is the ratification process going? It started at a

per cent backed the constitu-

tion in February, though turnout was only 42 per cent. In theory, all 25 members of the EU must endorse the constitution treaty for it to become effective. That seems increasingly unlikely. France may vote against the constitution on Sunday, and the Netherlands may follow suit three days later.

If that double whammy

paign has been dominated by immigration, worries over Turkey's possible accession to the EU, and resentment at the high level of national contributions to the Brussels coffers.

For good measure, the newer east European members of the EU, such as the Czech Republic, Estonia and Slovenia, fear the constitution is a charter for the bigger members in the West to impose their will and rig the European market.

What happens if the French and Dutch do vote "no"? There would probably be a formal pause in the ratification process while the EU heads of government pondered their next move. There might need to be a wholesale renegotiation of the treaty, which would mean starting all over again.

Mr Blair has vowed to carry on campaigning for the constitution, whatever the results in France and the Netherlands. But if both countries do vote "no", that is almost certain to be a futile exercise. The EU is entering one of the most critical weeks in its history.



A woman with a child walks past electoral boards for the campaign to approve the EU constitution in a referendum on Sunday, in Paris. — AFP

takes place, the constitution may die on its feet before a referendum in more traditionally Euro-sceptic countries such as Britain and Denmark can even be held.

France and the Netherlands! Why are two founder-members of the European Economic Community wary of signing up? France, and particularly the French left, is

The Statesman CROSSWORD

NO 22932

Yesterday's solution

CRIMINAL RICE OIR D
A N N L O O K S H A R P
M O N T H S S C L A
B I J A S S C L A
R E S U R R E C T I O N M E N
I F N A O I
D O R B E T T L E A S D I C
G E S L E V P O S
E V E N S R E L I E F P O I N T
B E E N E N A
L E I T H E R E B E L L I G H T
U U E R L T I
E S T I M A B L E A M I G O
T I A A T M N
F I N D E R S K E E P E R S

ACROSS

- Forceful man behind business (6)
- Think friend has pocketed change (8)
- Likely place for printing one's contact details? (2,3,5)
- Sadly, letters regularly fall out of mailbags (4)
- Piece of writing about border plant (8)
- Former leader keeping dry in a shelter (6)
- Box for mineral? (4)
- Thus I ask permission to leave dance (6-2)
- Deceitful type in prison briefly, one in Sardinian location (8)
- Some Mancunians rejected Asian language (4)
- Bachelor enlisted by old firm (6)
- ENSA group, perhaps, having soldiers for an audience (8)
- A society girl, after retiring, tucked up? (4)
- Buried old artists as arranged (4,2,4)
- He's eaten by live creature, a monster (8)
- Teased badly, being staid (6)

DOWN

- Former member of acting profession, a melder children misinterpreted (7,8)
- Report beginning of decay on one's vegetable plot (8)
- Child consumes a small piece of brown bread (5)
- Notre Dame's arranged to expel leader of opium dealers (9)
- Design piece of furniture appropriate for the garden? (9)
- Fish stuck in tangled reeds got away fast (9)
- Defeat signifies the end of the line (8)
- Party organiser's brought in a collection of plants (6)
- Make a mess of writing up, for instance, date of birth (5)
- Religious education test taken again (5)

NOTE: Figures in parentheses denote the number of letters in the words required. (By arrangement with The Independent, London)

Euro-crisis

The first two countries to vote on the new constitution of the European Union — a corpus of rules designed to make the European Union easier to run since it expanded to 25 members — seem to be readying to vote No. Incidentally, France and the Netherlands have been two of the EU's most fervent supporters. Rejection by even a single country could in theory kill the constitution as it needs to be ratified by all the 25 member states. EU leaders say they have no 'Plan B' to fall back on if the French or Dutch voters reject it. Opponents of the treaty, meanwhile, hope it will be renegotiated if France rejects it.



WHERE EUROPE IS BECOMING A DIRTY WORD

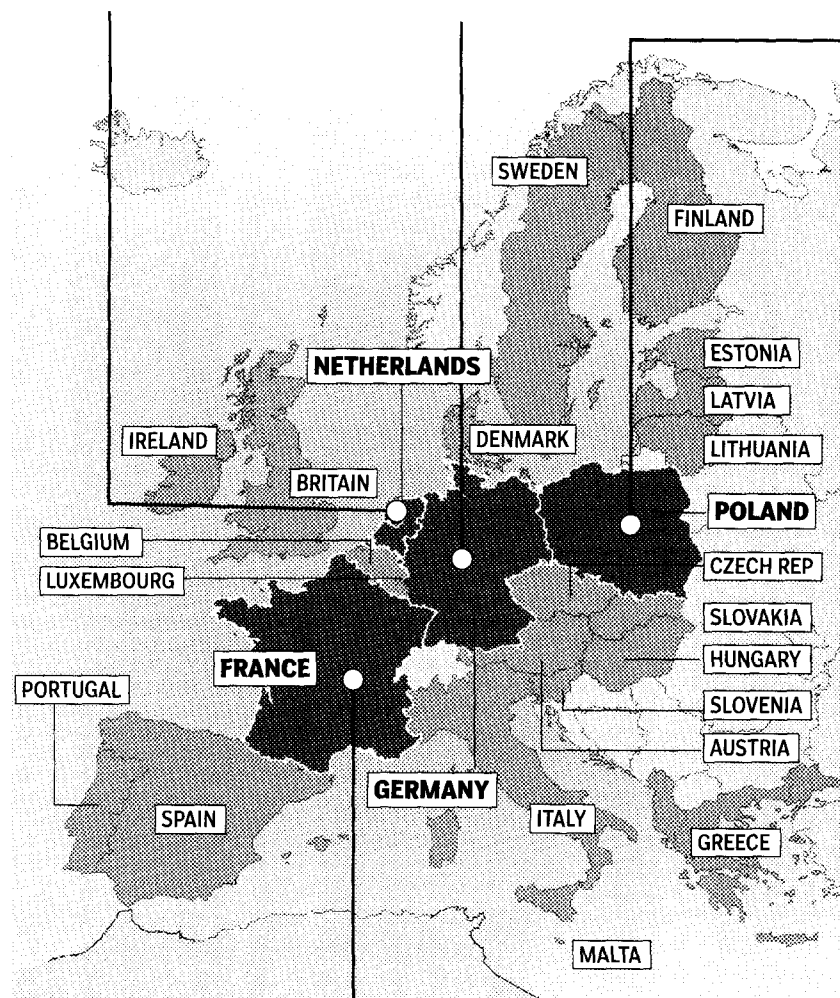
Dutch double up

Are the Dutch tired of Europe? That will be the real question on June 1, when the Netherlands holds its referendum on the European constitution, just three days after the vote in France. Polls show voters who reject the constitution have the edge over those likely to vote "yes," and the gap is growing. But they also show a majority either won't vote or are confused by the paperback-sized document and haven't made up their minds. The underlying motive seems to be discontent with Europe itself.

Germans revolt against economic reform

The question being asked after Chancellor Gerhard Schröder's calling on Sunday for early elections is what, other than surprise, does Schröder get out of his gesture? Schröder's decision came after his Social Democrats lost power in North Rhine-Westphalia, a key German state his party held for 39 years. The balloting showed unmistakably that if Schröder is fed up with being on the losing side of state elections, Germany is fed up with him. Schröder is at the head of a party burdened by a contradiction. It was the traditional party of the working

class, but like the British Labour Party, the German Social Democrats, understood that traditional working class politics had become obsolete in a world of globalised competition. Germany's main problem is its high cost of labour. Schröder tried to persuade the party's left that reform was in its economic interest, and that his reform would be kinder and gentler. Schroeder's party had feared that on Sunday working class supporters of the Social Democratic Party would stay at home. They did far worse — they came out and voted against the Social Democratic candidates.



Poland's plumbers

A faceless Slavic handyman has emerged as a symbol of the struggle to persuade a disgruntled French electorate to vote in favour of the EU constitution. For opponents, the "Polish Plumber" represents fears that under a tighter union, people from poorer European nations will take jobs away in France where one in 10 is already unemployed. Supporters dismiss arguments that France will be flooded by foreign workers. An ex-EU commissioner Frits Bolkestein sparked a controversy by saying he would have appreciated a Polish plumber when his French countryside home sprung a leak and he was unable to find one nearby. Leftists were scandalised. The local mayor vowed to send him a list of unemployed French plumbers. Mentioned in campaign pamphlets, internet chat rooms, newspaper columns and by politicians on both sides, the plumber reference has become omnipresent. But Piotr the plumber, as he is called, won't go away.

French fear loss of identity in crisis of confidence

For one French pundit, it is about "the last kick of the dying French exception". Another cites "the bankruptcy of the political class". For a third, the explanation lies in "our essential ungovernability"; a fourth believes France is "in the grip of a profound identity crisis". France's referendum on the European constitution next Sunday has plunged the nation into a bout of tortured introspection. And at present — as a seventh successive poll confirmed yesterday — what has emerged is a clear temptation to say *non*. "It's intriguing," said Pascal Perrineau of the Centre for the Study of French Political Life, "because there is a historical, if passive, consensus

in France in favour of Europe. But as soon as you ask a concrete question, pro-EU sentiment melts." The concrete question is simply: Do you approve the treaty establishing a European constitution? But what it has triggered is not so much a melting of pro-EU sentiment as a meltdown of French certainties and confidence — of France's view of itself and its place in the world. Besides the clear-cut anti-Europeanism of the far right and the far left, and the deep unpopularity of the present centre-right government, a mass of less precise complaints and concerns — what Perrineau calls "the confluence of very many sources of unease and discontent" —

are fuelling France's no vote. Leading pollster Roland Cayrol has noted that blue and lower-grade white-collar workers, the self-employed and farmers are planning to vote no, whereas professionals, managers and graduates are opting for the yes. "There's a clear division between a well-off, confident France and an anxious, struggling France," he said. "These are two countries." The most frequently heard argument against the treaty: that it enshrines a vision of an over-competitive, free-market, "Anglo-Saxon" Europe that will kill French jobs and destroy France's social and public services. Few French leaders are prepared to say that the country needs to change.

Chirac makes final bid to swing E.U. vote

2005
19 15
R. Arunima
BU
Polls predict rejection of Constitution



SAYING NO TO EUROPE: A student puts up campaign posters calling for a "No" vote in Sunday's referendum on the European Union Constitution in a street of Aix-en-Provence, southern France, on Friday. — PHOTO: AP

Vaiju Naravane

PARIS: The French President made a last-ditch attempt on Friday, the penultimate day of campaigning, to convince voters to adopt the E.U. Constitution in a referendum on Sunday. The latest polls show the "no" camp gaining ground further and pollsters predict French voters will boot out the document by a record 55 per cent.

No camp has edge

A sure sign of a victory for the treaty's opponents was the fact that Mr. Chirac's supporters have begun a post-mortem of their mistakes even before the vote has taken place. Mr. Chirac said "France would be in a less strong position to defend its interests" should the "no" camp prevail. "It is an illusion to think that Europe will start out again happily with another plan. There is no other plan. Europe would be broken down — searching for an impossible consensus."

He promised a "new political impetus" after the vote. On Sunday, France's 42

million voters will practically be holding the future destiny of Europe in their hands as they go to the polls to adopt or reject the Union's first-ever Constitution. Mr. Chirac tried to persuade undecided voters — estimated at about one in five — that the Constitution will enhance French force in the E.U., protect the country's social model and improve E.U. institutions.

Rejectionists include the far-right leader Jean-Marie le Pen, the Communist and Trotskyist party chiefs, Eurosceptic nationalist Philippe de Villiers and the former Socialist Prime Minister Laurent Fabius.

A "no" vote in Sunday's referendum would badly undermine Mr. Chirac's political authority, but he has said he will not resign, no matter what the result. Rejection of the treaty also could plunge the E.U. into a period of uncertainty.

Luxembourg Prime Minister Jean-Claude Juncker, whose country holds the rotating E.U. presidency, urged the French to vote "yes".

E.U. ready to put China arms issue on hold

By David Gow

BRUSSELS, MARCH 23. E.U. leaders seemed ready to postpone lifting the arms embargo on China last night, responding to Beijing's adoption of a secession law designed to prevent Taiwan's moving to independence.

The 25 Heads of State and Government gathered in Brussels for the E.U. spring summit were under competing pressure from Washington and Beijing. The U.S. Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, has called on the E.U. not to upset the balance of power in the Asia-Pacific region, while China insists that the E.U. must keep to its timetable for lifting the embargo.

Although E.U.-China relations are not officially on the agenda, a senior diplomat said it was bound to be discussed, after the recent visit to Washington of a delegation from the Council of Ministers Secretariat.

Another told Reuters: "It is clear that China

has not fulfilled certain conditions for lifting the embargo, notably by not raising tensions in the region."

A third said the secession law had blown plans for lifting the embargo out of the water.

The E.U. has been working on a code of conduct to govern resumed arms sales to China. Senior diplomats and politicians have argued that this would preclude its sending the kind of high-tech weapons the U.S. fears Beijing could use to attack Taiwan.

But China, with strong backing from France, ever-anxious to provide a counterweight to the U.S., insists that the E.U. must keep to its timetable.

Condemning the embargo as unfair, the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman said: "It is unreasonable to link China pushing the E.U. to lift the arms embargo and China passing the anti-secession law." — ©Guardian Newspapers

Limited 2005

MARS AND VENUS-II

US And EU Must Build Cohesive Strategies

By HARSH V PANT

The rise of EU as an economic powerhouse has been driven by the rise of Germany as the locomotive economy in Europe. The balance of power within EU has significantly shifted in favour of Germany after its unification and thereby its willingness to accept a subordinate role in Nato as well as Europe has diminished. Already an economic power, it is inevitable that it will seek military capabilities with all its attendant consequences.

With the end of the Cold War, Asia has emerged as the main target of the US trade and investment. This means that the focus of the US will now be Asia as it tries to manage its economic relations and consequently paying less attention to its problems with Europe. The European nations may do likewise, thereby eroding the cohesion of the trans-Atlantic relationship.

Aspirations

These factors manifest themselves in a number of dimensions. The end of the Cold War means that both the US and EU have a lot of options, free as they are from the rigid bipolarity of the Cold War. The US can afford to look towards Asia while ignoring Europe while Europe can ignore the demands imposed by its relationship with the US. It is in this context that the relative importance of Nato in the post-Cold War period needs to be judged. Going by structural logic, it seems certain that sooner or later Nato will dissolve. However, the extension of Nato has been one of the surprising developments of the last decade. It is a moot point, however, whether Europe still sees Nato as central to their strategic relationship with the US.

On the contrary, the growing economic clout of EU has led to a rise in the political-military aspirations of its members. This has directly led to the European Security and Defence Policy, involving the creation of a European Force with command structure and political direction formally independent of Nato. The US has not reacted positively to this development arguing that it will lead to duplication of capabilities, decoupling of the Nato and the EU, and discrimination against

those members of the Nato who are not members of EU. It is not clear, however, whether the European force can in any way compete with Nato's technological sophistication. It seems certain that it will be a long time before Europe can

possibility of influencing global politics in significant ways. Europeans see an America obsessively preoccupied with identifying enemies requiring military response while refusing to invest in encouraging political accommodation or



develop military muscle independent of Nato.

Some other spheres of major disagreements between the US and EU have been over the creation of the International Criminal Court, the Kyoto Protocol on climate change, the ban on antipersonnel land mines, the bio-diversity treaty, the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, treatment of the environment in the World Trade Organisation, regulation of genetically modified food, and a verification mechanism for the Biological Weapons Convention. The abrogation of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty by the US was also seen by Europe as a highly unilateral step taken without considering its impact on the security of the European allies.

Influence

Underlying these conflicts are some fundamental differences in the way the US and Europe perceive the post-Cold War world. While the US in general has been quite skeptical of the process of European integration, especially its future trajectory, Europe, with some justification, views itself as part of a historic project with the

transition within authoritarian regimes. Americans see Europeans as pursuing economic advantage through trade with America's enemies while refusing to invest in military forces to counter "rogue" regimes.

The US has also complained about the lack of burden sharing by the Europeans. The Europeans see this as unjustified as it pays a larger percentage of the UN's core budget and a much larger percentage of the UN's funds and special program costs. Its development assistance to the less-developed countries also remains unmatched. The US has found it difficult to accommodate EU's desire for a larger global role. The US still wants to be the agenda-setter and leader of the alliance while calling on Europe to share greater burden in managing global affairs.

It is in America's interest that its European allies share its burdens and for this it is important to treat Europe in commensurate with its economic power. The trans-Atlantic relationship is in flux today as both the major actors, the US and EU, are trying

locate their position in the international system and it is the resulting disturbance that is producing much of the problems in this relationship. It will be some time before this relationship gets stabilised and the form that it will take will define the contours of future of international politics.

Today, anti-American sentiment is at an all-time high in Europe and anti-Europeanism is gaining ground in the US. Whereas the US viewed the war in Iraq as central to its efforts to confront and finally eliminate global terrorism, Europeans argue that this US-led war in Iraq has merely given terrorism a new base and a new cause to rally behind. This perceptual gap largely reflects the different modern histories, cultures, and approaches to terrorism of the US and Europe.

Share burden

Notwithstanding these differences, both sides need to realise that Europe and America complement each other in many ways in maintaining the stability of the present international system. Europe needs to take the threat of transnational terrorism and the spread of weapons of mass destruction more seriously while the US should realise that brute military force might not always lead to desired ends. It is in America's interest that its European allies share its burdens and for this it is important to treat Europe in commensurate with its economic power.

The US might have the capability to fight all its wars on its own but it is difficult to assume that it would certainly like to fight all its wars alone without any allies. And for whatever it is worth, the best ally the US can hope for is EU. But rather than trying to get the better of each other, they should try to build better and cohesive strategies to deal with the present-day international security threats.

A rupture in the trans-Atlantic relationship will not only harm the interests of Europe and the US but will also be a grave setback to international peace and stability. Perhaps, it's time for Mars and Venus to renew their old love-affair.

(Concluded)

EU bows to US on China arms ban

Cites Move On Taiwan, Puts Off Lifting Embargo

By Steven R Weisman

Washington: Yielding to pressure from President George W Bush and threats of retaliation from Congress, the European Union has put off plans to lift its arms embargo on China this spring and may not press the issue until next year, American and European officials said on Monday.

The officials said that in addition to American pressure, European nations have been shaken by the recent adoption of legislation by the Chinese National People's Congress authorising the use of force to stop Taiwan from seceding. The Chinese action, they said, jolted France and undercut its moves to end the embargo before June. "Europe wants to move forward on the embargo, but the recent actions by China have made things a lot more complex," said a senior European official. "The timeline has become more difficult. The timeline is going to have to slip."

The embargo was imposed after China's crackdown on pro-democracy demonstrators in Tiananmen Square in 1989, and although some countries have eased their restrictions, it has curbed the supply of weapons to China while also becoming a major irritant in China's relations with the West.

A senior State Department official said European "signals" of a shift in position had been transmitted in the last few days, most notably by Javier Solana, the European Union's foreign policy chief, and by a comment from the British foreign secretary, Jack Straw, over the weekend.

Straw said in a television interview in Britain on Sunday that the problems of lifting the embargo "have actually got more difficult rather than less difficult", and that the Chinese action on Taiwan had created "a dif-

ficult political environment" that had stirred concern by both conservatives and liberals in Europe.

In Beijing early on Monday, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said Straw's "sobering comments" reinforced the United States' continuing concern that lifting the embargo now would alter the balance of military forces in the region and undercut American efforts to get China to improve its human rights record.

Rice returned from Asia on Monday evening after several tough comments directed

at China and, less directly, at Europeans. With tensions building in the Taiwan Strait, she said, and China seeking advanced technology for its navy, the sale of European equipment would jeopardise American efforts to secure the area. "After all, it is American forces here in the Pacific that have played the role of security guarantor," she said.

European officials say the European Union will not back off its commitment, made last December and pressed by President Jacques Chirac of France, to lift the embargo at some point, but that doing so now would not be worth jeopardising relations with the US.

American and European officials said internal European

politics had played a role in the timing of the planned easing of restrictions: Prime Minister Tony Blair of Britain was willing to go along with the move, but he did not want it to occur while he serves as president of the European Union.

The presidency alternates among the union's 25 members every six months. Blair, who takes over at the end of June, could not be seen as defying American wishes on such a critical issue, those officials said. Some European and American officials said action on the embargo would probably wait until next year, after he has stepped down. NYT News Service



Do not link sanctions to
anti-secession law: Beijing

Beijing: China urged the EU on Tuesday not to delay plans to lift an arms embargo on it, saying the ban was political discrimination and outdated. "We hope the EU will make the political decision to lift the ban as soon as possible," Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Liu Jianchao told a news conference. "It's unreasonable to link China pushing the EU to lift the arms embargo and China passing the anti-secession law."

Liu defended the legislation, saying it was aimed at peaceful reunification—not war—and at containing Taiwan's separatist forces. Reuters

Rice warns EU allies on arms sales to China

27/7 95 7
R. Alvarado

GLENN KESSLER
BEIJING, MARCH 21

US SECRETARY of State Condoleezza Rice sternly warned European allies on Monday that they "should do nothing" that alters the military balance of power in Asia through sales of sophisticated weapons to China, suggesting that those arms ultimately could be directed at Americans.

"It is the United States—not Europe—that has defended the Pacific," Rice said at a news conference in Seoul before she flew to Beijing for talks with Chinese officials.

The European Union had appeared all but certain this year to lift an embargo on weapons sales imposed after the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre of democracy demonstrators. US officials have expressed dismay over the decision, especially after China passed a law this month authorising the use of force against Taiwan if it moves toward formal independence.

Rice also held talks this weekend in Japan and South Korea, both of which fear China will improve its military capabilities. Rice cited US concerns about rise of Chinese military

FROM THE WASHINGTON POST



US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice with Chinese Foreign Minister LI Zhaoxing in Beijing. Reuters

spending and the increasing sophistication of Chinese military power. "The European Union should do nothing to contribute to a circumstance in which Chinese military modernisation draws on European technology or even the political decision to suggest that it could draw on European technology," she said.

The United States will bolster its forces in response to such sales in order to keep the current military balance intact, she added.

Hours after Rice made her statement, British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw said in

London that the rising tensions between China and Taiwan have made it harder to lift the embargo.

Rice struck a careful public balance this weekend, offering softer diplomatic language while also visiting an underground military command center in South Korea that would direct a war against North Korea.

While Rice stressed that the United States was committed to a diplomatic resolution, she has begun to suggest that US patience with the North Koreans was waning. —LATWP

Europe's try for one Constitution

By Vaiju Naravane

R. Arinewas
EU H.D. - 10 1/3

Despite the qualified success of the referendum in Spain, the European Union Constitution faces a tougher battle for approval in Britain, France, and the Czech Republic.

EUROPEAN LEADERS are congratulating Spain on becoming the first European nation to ratify the EU's new Constitution. 77 per cent of those voting said "Yes" to the document that is expected to substantially change the way the Union is governed.

And yet, victory was overshadowed by the low turnout. Just 42 per cent of Spain's electorate of 34.6 million bothered to vote, making this the lowest voter participation since Spain established a democracy in 1978. More than 76 per cent of the electorate voted in the general election that brought the Spanish socialist party (PSOE) to power in March last year, while 45 per cent voted in the European elections in June.

This was the fourth referendum Spain has held since the restoration of democracy following the death in 1975 of dictator General Francisco Franco and although the favourable outcome was never in doubt, the vote divided opinion in the country's regional powerhouses of Catalonia in the northeast and the Basque region in the northwest.

The Spanish Government and the EU used every trick in the publicity book to get voters interested in the debate over the Constitution. Celebrities were asked to read parts of the Constitution on radio and television shows. Spanish footballers were called in to endorse the document, brandishing quotes from the Constitution around the pitch and participants in the Spanish equivalent of the Big Brother TV reality show were roped in and coached to discuss its salient points during prime time viewing. All to no avail.

Nearly 58 per cent of Spanish voters stayed away from last Sunday's poll. Paradoxically however, those who did vote declared themselves massively in favour of the new EU Constitution. In spite of the disappointing turnout, Spanish Socialists hailed the result as a clear victory for supporters of a European Constitution at the start of a complex referendum season.

Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero decided very early on that Spain would be the first country to hold a referendum on the Constitution to underscore his Government's commitment to Europe. After voting on Sunday morning, he urged citizens to vote "to open the door to a stronger and more united Europe" and in one of the few quotable

quotes that marked this campaign described the referendum as an "arm of mass construction." Although Spain's leaders are crowing victory, it is doubtful if this vote will set a trend in Europe for referenda to be held in Britain, France, and the Czech Republic.

In Spain the Constitution created divisions amongst the regions. While mainstream moderate nationalists favour the proposed text, pro-independence Basque radicals voted against. The issue of "national identity" within the European Union is something both "yes" and "no" camps want addressed. In a Europe of peoples they wish to be recognised as having their own separate identity rather than be submerged by the Spanish state.

For the moderate Basque Nationalist Party (PNV), in government in the Basque regional parliament, the Constitution represents "a step in the right direction." The party nonetheless continues to hope the treaty can be tweaked in the future to "establish a European political space... respectful of regional diversities."

In contrast, the banned, hardline pro-independence Batasuna, the political wing of armed separatist group ETA, opposed the Constitution which they see as "ignoring the reality of peoples [and] their languages." The proposed text defends a "Europe of states" which "denies the right of self-determination" to the continent's peoples, one of the main demands of hardline Basque nationalists, the party said.

Moderate Catalan nationalists in the powerful Convergence and Unity (CiU) party hesitated long and hard before choosing to support the text. The CiU made its support conditional upon the Madrid Government's agreement to the use of Catalan in Europe.

Abstention rates in both Catalonia and the Basque country were higher than the rest of Spain with analysts pointing to scepticism on the part of militant nationalists.

But the rest of Spain, wholeheartedly pro-European and not unaware of the benefits EU membership has brought their nation, voted "yes".

Spain's EU membership has acted as an effective booster rocket for its economy, a key argument used by the Government and the "Yes" camp. According to Jose Antonio Herce, director of Spain's Foundation of Applied Economic Studies (FEDEA), EU membership has provided a "sustainable" boon.

The statistics speak for themselves: Average per capita Spanish GDP on EU entry stood at just 68 per cent of the average for the Union as a whole. In the 18 years that followed it rose 18 percentage points and now stands at 95 per cent of the new average.

Last year, for the tenth year in a row, Spanish economic growth outstripped the EU average as GDP raced ahead 2.6 per cent across 2004, according to a Bank of Spain estimate.

Unemployment, while still at the high end of the EU spectrum, has fallen from 20.6 per cent of the active population in 1986 to 10.38 per cent last year, which saw 461,300 new jobs created.

Spanish infrastructure has grown apace, the country now boasting 8,000 kilometres of motorways and highways criss-crossing the country, with official figures showing that EU development funds amounted to 40 per cent of the cost of building them. In all, Spain received more than 105 billion euros (81 billion euros at current rates) in EU aid between 1987 and 2003, according to official figures.

But despite the success, albeit mitigated of the Spanish referendum, the European Union Constitution faces a tougher battle for approval in Britain, France, and the Czech Republic.

The Constitution must be approved by a majority of EU member-states between now and mid-2006, either by a referendum or by a vote of parliament. Lithuania, Hungary and Slovenia have already obtained parliamentary approval.

For now, Britain is the only country where opinion polls show opponents of the Constitution outnumbering its supporters, although the "No" vote is making stea-

dy and worrisome headway in France as well. Recent opinion polls indeed show that a good quarter of Britons would vote no. However, a Mori poll conducted last September also showed that 19 per cent were undecided, 23 per cent leaning against, but ready to change their opinion if they were convinced the Constitution was good for Britain. So the situation in Britain remains iffy.

In the Czech Republic, Parliament is divided over the Constitution and has still not passed the special law needed to organise a referendum. Czech Prime Minister Stanislav Gross' pro-European centre-left coalition enjoys a narrow majority in the House of Deputies and is not in a position to muster the required three-fifths majority to secure parliamentary ratification of the Constitution.

In January, the Czech Republic's Eurosceptic right-wing opposition Civic Democrats (ODS) introduced a bill to hold a referendum on the Constitution before the end of the year. Gross has repeatedly said he would like a referendum to be held simultaneously with parliamentary elections in June 2006, arguing that an extensive awareness campaign about the Constitution has to be arranged first.

Of all the worst-case scenarios, only a French "non" would seriously call into question the EU's future, according to experts. Although the latest opinion polls indicate that is unlikely, President Jacques Chirac has expressed concern that the issue could be confused in voters' minds with Turkey's application to join the EU.

Turkey finally received the green light in December to start EU membership talks later this year. But that decision has apparently only fuelled criticism that the EU may be overstretching itself. France, one of the original six countries that founded the EU's forerunner, is already worried about its waning influence over a 25-member bloc in which English is increasingly the *lingua franca*.

French Prime Minister Jean Pierre Raffarin said recently that an early date, possibly April 2005 will be fixed for the holding of the referendum. There is increasing worry in President Chirac's ruling conservative UMP party that an increasing "No" vote might carry the day.

Such a vote could be interpreted as a disavowal of the conservatives and a lack of confidence in Mr. Chirac himself.

US boast masks divisions

5-3
28/2
R. Avianes
1790

Brussels, Feb. 22 (Reuters): President George W. Bush won a largely symbolic pledge from Nato allies, including Iraq war critics, to help train Iraqi security forces today at a summit staged to showcase resurrected transatlantic partnership.

But US-European differences over China and Iran resurfaced with Bush voicing concern at EU plans to end an arms embargo on Beijing, and France pressing Washington to offer Tehran incentives to curb its nuclear programme.

And France and Germany renewed calls for a reform of transatlantic relations that would give greater weight to the emerging, enlarged EU as the key US partner, challenging the primacy Washington accords to Nato.

Bush said after a summit of the 26 Nato leaders that the Cold War defence alliance remained the central security organisation binding Europe and the US.

"I think it is the vital relationship for the US when it comes to security," he said. "It is a relationship that... has worked in the past and is adjusting so that it works in the future." French President Jacques Chirac said he sensed in talks with Bush last night that the US leader understood what he called the new European reality, in which the EU was taking on ever greater weight, including in defence.

"Europe and the US are real partners. So we need to dialogue and listen to each other more," he told the summit.

"We must also, as the German chancellor has underlined, continue to take account of the changes that have occurred on the European continent," Chirac said.

Nato secretary-general Jaap de Hoop Scheffer trumpeted the agreement of all 26



Bush in Brussels. (AFP)

allies to make some contribution to the Iraq training mission as a sign of the alliance's rediscovered unity.

But that boast masked wide divergence in the level of help on offer. France, agreed for just one of its officers at Nato headquarters to help coordinate offers of equipment to the Iraqi military. Asked if he was satisfied with such token contributions, Bush shrugged: "Every contribution helps."

The US is to provide around 60 trainers out of a total close to 160. France, Germany and Belgium remain adamant that their personnel not serve inside Iraq.

Bush voiced worries that EU plans to end a ban on arms sales to China could change the balance with Taiwan, which Washington is committed to defend, but hinted he could accept EU assurances that it would not lead to dangerous technology transfers.

Bush plotter

A Virginia man, arrested and held in Saudi Arabia, has been returned to the US to face charges of supporting al Qaida, and was accused of plotting in 2002 and 2003 to kill Bush, court documents made public today said.

Spanish voters endorse E.U. Constitution

By Nicholas Watt and Ben Sills

MADRID, FEB. 21. The European Constitution passed its first major hurdle last night when Spanish voters overwhelmingly endorsed the historic document in the first of 10 referendums that will be held across Europe over the next 18 months.

As voting ended across Spain, the Ministry of the Interior said 77 per cent had approved the constitution and 17 per cent had said no — based on results from the 57 per cent of the ballots that had already been counted.

However, European leaders, who had hoped that voters in one of the most pro-E.U. countries would turn out in large numbers, will be disappointed that less than half the population bothered to vote. The turnout was 42 per cent. Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero, Spain's young socialist Prime Minister, immediately hailed the result after he took a gamble in holding the first referendum to impress France and Germany with his pro-European credentials.

Low expectations

Government sources in Madrid had carefully lowered expectations in the week — saying at one point they expected a mere 30 per cent of voters to turn out — which allowed them to de-

scribe last night's figures as a triumph.

But there will be nerves in chancelleries across Europe as leaders of the other nine countries holding referendums assess their chances of enthusing their voters. One in 10 voters in Spain, which has benefited to the tune of £60 billion since joining the then EC in 1986, said they understood the Constitution.

Jacques Chirac, the French President, who appeared at a rally in Barcelona to endorse the yes campaign, is likely to fear that the low turnout in Spain will be exploited by the no camp in France which is building up a strong momentum. Amid fears that he could be facing a rerun of the 1992 Maastricht treaty referendum — when the no camp almost overturned the yes side's strong lead — Mr. Chirac is expected to announce a short campaign a week today. As the result of the Spanish referendum was digested across the continent, pro-Europeans expressed delight. Denis MacShane, Britain's Europe Minister, said: "The Spanish people have rejected the appeals of the no camp strongly and have voted clearly in favour of the new treaty. This is a welcome result on the eve of the meeting between the E.U. and the United States. The new treaty strengthens the role of member

states in Europe."

The British Government will be looking to Spain's conservative People's Party, led by Mariano Rajo who campaigned for a yes vote, to win round Tories in Britain.

"Perhaps the Spanish conservatives in the PP can now come and explain to British Tories why the new treaty makes sense for all mainstream democratic parties," Mr. MacShane said.

Voting got off to a slow start in Madrid yesterday — at one polling station turnout had reached just 13 per cent by 1p.m. The vast majority of those who did turn up were either pensioners or approaching retirement.

With 300,000 people eligible to vote for the first time yesterday, there had been hopes that the Madrid's famously nocturnal and often political disinterested young people would get to the polling stations later on to boost the numbers.

Those younger voters who did show up were more likely to have actually read the constitution than the pensioners. Vicente (20), a student making his way home long after polling had opened, said: "The constitution makes out that immigration is a problem, but I don't see it like that. I'm also opposed to the free market so I'll vote no." — ©Guardian Newspapers Limited 2004

THE HINDU

22 FEB 2005

CRUCIAL YEAR FOR POLITICAL UNION

THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT has endorsed by an overwhelming majority the treaty of Rome (2004) that established a Constitution for the countries of the European Union (EU). This is the third ratification of the landmark document after Lithuania and Hungary, two recent entrants into the EU, decided 'yes' through a parliamentary vote. It is true the recent integrationist victory still does not make it binding on individual member states to ratify the Constitution. But the outcome is politically symbolic because Europe's transition from an economic entity into a political union has encountered dogged opposition. Curiously, antipathy towards the new Constitution has spawned an unlikely coalition of forces, some of whom yearn for more unity while others reject *in toto* the idea of integration. While the new Constitution is far from perfect, it needs to be judged against the imperative of evolving political institutions compatible with the unprecedented expansion of economic and technological cooperation. The anti-Europe forces typically prey on the fears of an ill-informed public by raising the bogey of a centralised super-state that will erode the sovereignty of nation-states. The fact is that the European Constitution — to a large extent, a consolidation of prevailing domestic laws — is intended to coexist with national Constitutions. Paradoxically, the resistance has penetrated the very institutions of the EU that embody the spirit of integration, notably the European Parliament.

Against this backdrop, the basic requirement that each of the 25 member-states should ratify the Constitution before it can come into force in late 2006 assumes real significance. While a majority of countries have opted for a parliamentary vote, nine member-states are expected to hold referenda on the Constitution. It is a reasonable expectation that the outcome of a parliamentary vote will reflect the positions of the

relevant governments. However, the outcome of a referendum will be uncertain, especially in countries like the United Kingdom where Euroscepticism is alive and kicking. In fact, the strongest opposition in the European Parliament came from MEPs belonging to the Czech Republic, Poland, and the U.K. The prospects for ratification will critically depend on public perceptions of the merits of political union in relation to issues that matter. Eurosceptics have been running a highly organised campaign of misinformation about the new Constitution, as well as the implications of an enlarged Europe for the countries concerned. This could have an adverse impact on a direct popular vote that is meant to decide on the specific question of a common Constitution for the EU. Moreover, there are apprehensions of poor voter participation, which usually makes for negative verdicts. These fears are not unfounded considering that the 2004 polls to the European Parliament witnessed the lowest voter turnout since the introduction of direct elections in 1979.

Next month, Spain will initiate a 'sudden death' referendum exercise as it were, and it will be followed by the Netherlands and Luxembourg. The outcomes of these referenda will be highly indicative of the popular mood across Europe in this crucial year for political union. Recent opinion polls indicate the contest tightening, although by no means threateningly, even in countries where there has traditionally been a strong pro-European sentiment. For instance, there is a perception that the commencement of formal negotiations later this year on Turkey's accession to the EU could have a bearing on the referendum in France where the issue has generated considerable debate. The hope is that the attractions of global peace, democratic solidarity, and the idea of uniting to make Europe stronger on the world stage will prevail over narrow, short-term considerations. //

Summit blueprint to combat disaster

Jakarta Post/ANN

JAKARTA, Jan. 7. — The special Asean leaders' meeting here has issued a declaration on action to strengthen emergency relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction in the aftermath of the tsunami disaster. "The task requires resources that cannot be borne by any individual country," the declaration stated.

The agreement was reached under the following heads:

Emergency relief

- Mobilise additional resources to meet the emergency relief needs of victims.
- Request the United Nations

to mobilise the international community to support the relief programmes in the affected countries. It welcomed the Flash Appeal by the UN. It will request the world body to appoint a Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for the above purpose; to convene an international pledging conference; and to explore the establishment of a "standby arrangement" on the global level for humanitarian relief efforts.

- Strengthen coordination and cooperation between national and international relief efforts to ensure effective and immediate distribution of assistance.
- Support the efforts of the

affected countries to ensure an effective channeling and utilisation of assistance from donors.

Rehabilitation and reconstruction

- Support and emphasise the importance of national rehabilitation and reconstruction programmes.

■ Call on the international community, the World Bank, and international financial institutions to provide funds for the viability and sustainability of those programmes.

- Establish a partnership, upon the request and the leadership of the country concerned, involving donor countries and regional as well as international financial

institutions, to support the respective national programmes of the affected countries.

- Welcome the initiative of several countries on the moratorium of payments of the external debt of the affected countries to augment their capacity to carry out rehabilitation and reconstruction.

■ Promote and encourage private sector participation for rehabilitation and reconstruction.

Prevention and mitigation

- Support Asean's decision to establish regional mechanisms on disaster prevention and mitigation, among others, utilisation of military and civilian personnel in disaster relief operations. A

regional instrument on disaster management.

- Establish a regional early warning system such as Regional Tsunami Early Warning Center on the Indian Ocean and Southeast Asia.

■ Promote public education and awareness as well as community participation in disaster prevention and mitigation.

- Develop and promote national and regional human and institutional capacity, transfer of know-how, technology, and scientific knowledge in building and managing a regional early warning system and disaster management through international cooperation and partnership.

57-3 8/1
ASB ATV

U.S. frowns on E.U. move to lift arms embargo against China

By Hasan Suroor

16/1
LONDON, JAN. 15. A quiet trans-Atlantic row is reported to be simmering over an European Union move to lift its 15-year-old ban on arms sales to China.

Media reports on Saturday said that America was "alarmed" at the prospect and had told Britain not to "cave in" to the German and French campaign which, Washington feared, could threaten its own strategic interests in the region.

The controversy erupted as the British Foreign Secretary, Jack Straw, prepared to visit China next week in a sign of increasingly closer relations with

Beijing. The E.U. proposal to lift the arms embargo was reported to be high on the agenda during his talks with Chinese leaders, and observers noted that the fact that Britain was due take over the rotating presidency of the E.U. later this year made its role crucial.

Mr. Straw has already indicated that the ban could be lifted by June, but before that happens Britain wants the E.U.'s code of conduct on arms exports to be tightened further to prevent misuse of weapons by a recipient country. The revised code would also make arms sales by E.U. countries more transparent by requiring

them to share details of sales with other member-nations.

"Britain is not opposed to lifting the embargo but wants it 'done properly' in ways that would prevent E.U. states being played off against each other in the lucrative Chinese military market—or jeopardise the stability of the region," a report in *The Guardian* said.

But, according to *The Daily Telegraph*, America was "deeply sceptical" of such assurances and the newspaper quoted "well-placed sources" as saying that the issue could "explode into a new trans-Atlantic row, more bitter even than the dispute over Iraq."