

## 'Citizens of 4 EU countries against single currency'

LONDON, June 20: The British, the Germans, the French and even the Belgians, are all opposed to the introduction of a single European currency, according to a poll published by The Independent newspaper yesterday, reports AFP.

The question put by the Harris Polling Institute was: 'Should there be a single European currency with key decisions on interest rates and monetary policy taken by a new European central bank?' This is a more detailed question than the one put by the European Commission in its regular polls on Monetary Union. The Independent commented, and it elicited a radically different response, especially in France and Belgium.

Out of 516 Belgians polled, 50 per cent said 'no' to a single currency compared to 40 per cent 'yes'.

In France, where 1,032 people were questioned, 55 per cent opposed Monetary Union against 43 per cent in favour, while of the 910 Germans polled, 70 per cent rejected the 'Euro' with just 29 per cent supporting the move to a single currency.

Unsurprisingly, the British, with a poll of 1,025 people, were 78 per cent against the abolition of the pound.

## IMF leaders meet on debt-easing plan

WASHINGTON, June 20: International Monetary Fund (IMF) leaders met Wednesday to discuss ways to finance a programme to help eight to 20 super-indebted countries, most of which are in Africa, IMF officials said, reports AFP.

Further progress was made today and deliberations will continue in the coming weeks to set the remaining unresolved issues, an IMF official said after a meeting of the Board of Directors.

The IMF is looking for between 500 and 900 million dollars for a debt-easing plan that is aimed at helping countries which have followed IMF structures but remained mired in economic woes.

The meeting Wednesday was the second in two weeks.

The debt plan will be discussed at a meeting of the Group of Seven industrialised democracies in Lyon, France from June 27-29.

After a meeting of IMF officials on June 12, authorities were considering selling some of the IMF's gold stocks to finance the plan.

The United States, Canada and Britain were for the sales while Germany and Japan were against. France appeared to be leaning toward using the gold as collateral for loans rather than selling it.

There are also other possibilities, according to a source outside the IMF, such as bilateral contributions.

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## Prospects brighten for summit

# EU nations back UK's plan to eradicate mad cow disease

BRUSSELS, June 20: European Union veterinary officials have unanimously approved a British plan for wiping out mad cow disease, the strongest sign yet of progress toward ending the EU's beef crisis, reports AP.

The breakthrough late Wednesday capped a day of feverish activity on mad cow disease as Britain and its EU partners worked to ease the crisis ahead of the EU's mid-year summit starting Friday in Florence, Italy.

Earlier Wednesday, the EU's executive body, proposed a scheme long-demanded by London for a staggered lifting of the union's worldwide export ban on British beef.

The plan will be referred to member nations for approval at the Friday meeting.

Britain, which has vetoed more than 100 EU measures in recent weeks, has said it would continue its campaign of obstructing EU business until the ban has lifted.

Backing for Britain's wide-ranging disease eradication scheme was seen as crucial to agreement on the ban-lifting plan.

"I'm sure this is the right stepping stone that we wanted to see," leading up to Florence, British Chief Veterinary Officer Keith Meldrum said after the vote in the EU's veterinary panel.

The unanimous vote came after Britain conceded to demands from several EU nations that it increase to more than 100,000 the number of prime beef cattle to be destroyed.

Britain had proposed culling about 80,000 animals at high risk for mad cow disease, but agreed to add another group of older cattle that also run some risk.

The vote marked the first time that veterinary panel members from Germany, Austria and Portugal — consistently sharp critics of Britain on the beef issue — backed proposals from London.

The EU Commission has proposed to relax the beef ban in stages as Britain does its part to slaughter targeted cattle and implement other safeguards against the cattle disease which scientists fear may be transmissible to humans.

The steps — which could take years to complete — include lifting the ban on cattle embryos, beef from herds certified as healthy and beef from animals too young to contract the disease.

Commission President Jacques Santer warned EU leaders would only endorse the plan if Britain first stopped its three-week campaign of disrupting EU business.

"To put it bluntly: we are waiting for the non-cooperation policy to end," Santer told the European Parliament in Strasbourg, France. "Without that commitment, there will be no agreement in Florence."

London also has threatened to disrupt the summit, a show-case event due to focus on major EU projects such as employment, a single currency and eventual expansion to Eastern Europe.

There was no immediate reaction from London to the ban-lifting plan, which was based closely on a British proposal.

However, the EU Commission's plan differed from the British proposal in that it eschewed a provision that would have lifted the ban on exports to non-European countries before lifting the ban on exports to Europe.

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## US Senate okays \$12.2b foreign aid bill

WASHINGTON, June 20: A Senate panel approved a 12.2 billion US dollars foreign aid bill on Tuesday without restrictions on aid to Turkey and international family planning contained in a House-passed measure, reports Reuters.

The bill, cleared by a Subcommittee for Action by the full appropriations committee, would make Russian aid conditional on its not transferring nuclear technology to Iran. Aid to Ukraine would depend on its not transferring arms to Libya.

The House last week voted to restrict 25 million US dollars in economic aid to Turkey unless it lifts its blockade on aid to Armenia and acknowledges genocide against the Armenians more than six decades ago.

The House of Representatives Bill also attached new abortion-related restrictions on international family planning aid. The Senate bill would maintain current law on family planning aid and did not contain the Turkey restrictions.

The Senate bill contained 626 million US dollars for the International Development Association (IDA) the interest-free loan window of the World Bank, about 100 millions US dollars more than the House measure.

Aides said it was hoped to get the figure up to 700 million US dollars later. The administration had asked for 934 million US dollars.

The bill was about 327 million US dollars more than the House measure and about 700 million US dollars below the administration's request. It provided the usual 5.1 billion US dollars for aid to Israel and Egypt 475 million US dollars for Eastern Europe, including 200 million US dollar for Bosnia, and 640 million US dollars for the former Soviet Union.

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