

Dutch voters reject EU constitution

AP, The Hague

European leaders may have to scrap the proposed EU constitution after Dutch voters rejected it by a massive margin, voicing their concern over dwindling national identity in a rapidly expanding union and their distrust of increasingly powerful bureaucrats.

The outcome in the Netherlands from the referendum Wednesday three days after a similar vote in France was likely to halt the European momentum, which had been welcomed by some as creating a new world power but disdained by others as smothering their cultures in a vast superstate.

With 99.8 percent of the ballots counted, unofficial results showed 61.6 percent voted "nee," while 38.4

percent said "ja." The level of opposition and the turnout of 63 percent exceeded all projections.

Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende conceded defeat Wednesday night and said his government would accept the will of the people.

Parliament, which has the final say on ratification because the referendum was nonbinding, meets on Thursday to debate the results.

Balkenende acknowledged the huge gap that has emerged between the politicians and the electorate.

"The idea of Europe has lived for the politicians, but not the Dutch people. That will have to change," he said. "We will need to bring across the message that there are doubts here about the fast pace of

change, the Dutch identity and other, financial, concerns."

The vote was seen by some as symbolic of an introverted attitude by the Dutch in recent years as they struggle to deal with issues such as integration, a shrinking economy and fears over Islamic radicalism.

It was the first vote held in the Netherlands on the Dutch involvement with Europe, and opponents spoke of a breakthrough for European democracy. The extent of the opposition was a shock to the political establishment, which campaigned for the charter until the final hours of voting.

The treaty must have the backing of all 25 member states to enter into force in 2006. But with the clear rejections by two founding EU

members this week, there seemed no hope for salvaging the constitution in its present form.

"The verdict of these referendums now raises profound questions for all of us about the future direction of Europe," British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw said in London.

Gerrie Elfrink, a young Socialist Party city council member said politicians had conceived Europe behind closed doors without consulting the people.

"We in Holland, we feel Dutch. We want to work together with France, Germany and England. But we want to be Dutch. Europe exists only in the minds of politicians in Brussels," he said.



PHOTO: AFP

Volunteers desperately try to save over 100 whales beached at Dolphin Bay near Busselton, 230kms south of Perth yesterday. Many of the pod (or gam) are in extreme distress after being out of the water since dawn, at least one has died.

Press writes up obituary of EU constitution

AFP, Paris

Beaten up and left for dead, the EU constitution is little more than a wreck that it would be better to bury right away, European newspapers said yesterday after Dutch voters landed it a fresh mortal blow.

Metaphors of death filled the editorial columns of major dailies which saw no chance of resurrecting a text now soundly rejected in referendums in both France and the Netherlands, two founding members of the European Union.

"If France's vote dealt the treaty a critical blow," said the Guardian in Britain, "the Dutch have now deliv-

ered the coup de grace."

France's Liberation said the constitution was "brain dead." In Spain, the influential El Pais said Wednesday's Dutch vote following the French referendum Sunday "confirms that this long project is in its death throes."

The Turkish press joined in. "Killed by France, buried by the Netherlands," headlined the daily Akasam.

Dutch voters spurned the treaty, designed to streamline and harmonise the way the expanding European Union is run and prevent institutional paralysis, with 61.6 percent turning it down.

AMNESTY CHALLENGES US Open Guantanamo Bay to observers

AFP, Tokyo

The head of Amnesty International yesterday hit back at US outrage over the group labelling Guantanamo Bay a "gulag" and challenged Washington to open the military detention centre to outside inspections.

US President George W. Bush and other government figures have said they were shocked when the human rights group accused the United States of running "a new gulag of prisons around the world beyond the reach of the law and decency".

The secretary general of London-based Amnesty International, Irene Khan, on Thursday defended the comment and said the US response lacked substance and was "defensive and dismissive".

"We have not seen from them a more detailed response to the concerns we have expressed in our report," she told a news conference on a visit to Tokyo.

"Our answer is simple: if that is so (that the allegations are unfounded), open up these detention centres. Allow us and others to visit them.

400 Palestinian inmates freed by Israel

REUTERS, Betunia

Israel freed 400 Palestinian prisoners yesterday in a long-delayed gesture it said was meant to bolster moderate President Mahmoud Abbas but which Palestinians said was not enough to advance peace-making.

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon acted under US pressure to help strengthen Abbas, who faces a Hamas challenge that could undermine Israel's plans for evacuating Jewish settlements in the Gaza Strip starting in August.

Woodward tells how FBI man became 'Deep Throat'

REUTERS, Washington

A chance encounter with a senior FBI official in 1970 grew into a friendship and as the Watergate scandal unfolded the official became the "Deep Throat" source for the stories that helped bring down President Richard Nixon, reporter Bob Woodward wrote in The Washington Post yesterday.

Woodward said he was a young Navy lieutenant on an errand at the White House when he first met Mark Felt, who was unveiled this week as the instrumental source for the Post's

Watergate stories written by Woodward and Carl Bernstein.

"I asked Felt for his phone number and he gave me the direct line to his office," Woodward wrote. He said he came to regard the senior FBI official as a friend and a mentor and kept in touch with him. Felt was promoted to the No. 3 position at the FBI in July 1971, about a year before J. Edgar Hoover's death and the Watergate break-in, and two months before Woodward joined The Washington Post.

Beirut blast kills anti-Syrian journalist

AFP, Beirut

Prominent anti-Syrian journalist Samir Kassir was killed yesterday in a car bomb explosion in a residential sector of mostly Christian east Beirut, an AFP correspondent said.

The body of Kassir was in the front passenger seat of a car parked in the Ashrafieh neighbourhood, which was immediately sealed off by the Lebanese army and internal security forces.

Witnesses said another person was injured in the explosion and taken to hospital.

The killing came four days after the start of Lebanon's first parliamentary elections free of the presence of Syrian troops, whose withdrawal from the country was completed in late April after a 29-year deployment.

The victim's brother, Sleiman Kassir, told AFP that "Samir lived all his life in danger."

50 killed in Ivory Coast clashes

AFP, Abidjan

Men armed with machetes and rifles stormed two western Ivory Coast villages overnight, killing at least 50 people in what security forces and local officials described Wednesday as ethnic clashes.

"The bodies of 50 people, all of them Guere, have been taken to hospital," said Marcel Djahi, mayor of Duekoue, a town in the loyalist southwest considered a tinderbox for the ethnic and communal violence that has marked the three-year conflict in Ivory Coast.

An official death toll of 41 has been confirmed, with some 64 people injured, said armed forces spokesman Lieutenant Colonel Jules Yao Yao.

Clinton accused of raping a nurse

ASIAN NEWS INTERNATIONAL, Washington

Former US President Bill Clinton has been accused of raping a nurse, in a shocking new book, called Their Lives - the women targeted by the Clinton machine.

According to Contactmusic, author of the book lawyer Candice E Jackson was so disgusted by the fact that Clinton neatly ignored his infidelities in his bestselling autobiography My Life, she decided to expose several women she claims he sexually abused.

Jackson's controversial book focuses on seven women, including Clinton's alleged mistress, Jennifer Flowers, radio host Sally PerdueE, White House intern Monica Lewinsky and the alleged rape victim, Juanita Broaddrick.

Broaddrick says she met Clinton, then the Arkansas Attorney General, in 1978, when he made a campaign stop at the nursing home where she worked.

'Little Mermaid' stable after legs separated

REUTERS, Lima

A Peruvian baby girl known as the "Little Mermaid" is able to wriggle her two legs after her fused limbs were surgically separated on Wednesday, in what local doctors said was the second such operation worldwide.

Thirteen-month-old Milagros Ceron was born with a rare defect called Mermaid syndrome, or sirenomelia, which often kills sufferers within a few hours of birth.

Doctors hope the girl, whose name means "miracles" in Spanish, will be able to walk by her second birthday.

"Fifteen hours after surgery ended ... her vital signs are stable and she's awake," said Dr. Luis Rubio, the surgeon who led an 11-member team during the overnight operation.



PHOTO: AFP

Combo made out of two photographs showing Peruvian Doctor Luis Rubio holding 13-month-old baby Milagros Ceron, affected by the congenital malformation named Sirenomelia prior to her surgery on May 31 at a hospital in Lima (at left), and another one at right depicting her legs already separated, after a successful five-hour-long intervention on Wednesday.

NORTH KOREA SAYS US Stealth bomber move signals nuke war

AFP, Seoul/ Vienna

North Korea yesterday said the deployment of 15 US F-117 Stealth bombers to South Korea was part of preparations for a pre-emptive nuclear strike on the country.

The deployment announced by Washington last week was an unpardonable act, said the Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of the Fatherland, a state organisation in charge of Korean affairs.

"We... bitterly denounce the deployment of Stealth fighter bombers in South Korea by the United States as a... provocation of a war against the North and the worst

malicious challenge to the Korean nation," the committee said in a statement.

It was Pyongyang's first official reaction to the deployment, which Washington described as "routine training".

"This proves that the US scheme of pre-emptive nuclear attack is systematically going over from violent words to operational plan and from the plan to the stage of military action," the committee said.

The deployment was also Washington's way of trying to spoil the atmosphere for an inter-Korean festival in Pyongyang on June 14-17 to celebrate the fifth anniversary of a watershed inter-Korean summit on June 15, 2000, it said.

"This is an unpardonable provocation tantamount to turning a gun mouth to the reunification fete of the Korean nation celebrating the fifth anniversary of the historical June 15 joint declaration," the statement said.

The United States and North Korea remain locked in a tense standoff over Pyongyang's nuclear weapons programme.

North Korea has boycotted China-hosted nuclear disarmament talks -- which also include the United States, South Korea, Japan and Russia -- since June last year.

In February the regime declared it had built nuclear weapons and vowed to increase its nuclear arsenals.