

## Investigators charge Greek captain, sailors in wrecking of ferry

BY LISA ORKIN  
ASSOCIATED PRESS

**PAROS, GREECE** — The captain and three crew members of a Greek ferry boat that sank, killing at least 66 people, were charged Thursday with multiple counts of murder.

Investigators were focusing on reports that the ship, loaded with more than 500 passengers, was apparently on automatic pilot minutes before striking a well-marked rocky outcropping, bolstering accounts by survivors that crew members were watching a soccer match on television Tuesday night when the ship sank two miles from shore.

Efforts by navy divers and rescue crews to find at least eight missing people were hampered by a fierce gale that has stopped all boat traffic to and from this holiday island. Rescue teams said there could be up to 14 people missing.

Although the ship had just passed an inspection, a prosecutor was also investigating accusations the 34-year-old Express Samina had propulsion and steering problems. Described as a "rusting hulk" by the Greek Merchant Marine Mechanics Union, the ferry was to be decommissioned next year.

Greece's worst ferry sinking in 35 years has dealt a serious blow to this nation that prides itself on a maritime tradition dating back more than 2,000 years. In 1965, 217 people died in the sinking of the passenger ship Iraklion.

Survivors have also accused the crew of panicking and failing to organize the evacuation of the ship, saying life boats were not quickly deployed. Many attributed their rescue to the proximity of the shore and a small fleet of fishing boats that sped to the sinking vessel.

Premier Costas Simitis held an emergency Cabinet meeting to discuss the shipwreck. Government officials said no mercy would be shown to those found responsible for the sinking.

"Criminals, a blind course on autopilot," screamed a banner headline in the normally staid daily *Eleftherotipia*. "Murderers," ran another headline in the daily *Eleftheros Typos*.

Ship's captain Vassilis Yannakis, his deputy, Anastasios Psychoyos, and two crewmen were charged with four felonies, regional prosecutor Dimitrios Dadinopoulos said.

He said the charges included multiple counts of homicide with possible malice, causing serious bodily injuries with possible malice, violating maritime regulations, violating international regulations on avoiding an accident, and sinking a ship.

Officials plan to transfer the men to the island of Syros, the administrative

capital of the Cyclades island chain, to be questioned by an investigating magistrate.

Ship's owner Costas Klironomos also blamed his own crew, saying "all the indications point to human error and that there are members of the crew who have shown criminal negligence."

The ship left Athens' port of Piraeus on Tuesday afternoon and headed for Paros, the first of six stops that would eventually bring it to the tiny Lipsis islands near the Turkish coast. About 10 p.m., the 345-foot, 4,407-ton ferry rammed into the Portes islet.

Results of a preliminary investigation indicated the captain was not on the bridge and that his second in command took the helm when the ship was just 200 yards from the Portes outcroppings, which are clearly marked on navigational chart and have a light beacon visible for seven miles.

According to a transcript published in *Eleftherotipia*, Psychos told investigators he saw the rocks at the last minute and ordered the helmsman to turn the ship.

"When I saw the ship was headed for the two rocks, I personally grabbed the wheel and turned hard left. The bad thing happened though. It is my fault," he was quoted as saying.

But officials say it remains unclear why the ship rammed the rocks if claims are true that at least one crewmember, the helmsman, was on the bridge.

"It's a rock with a light on it ... in a frequently traveled area that has been passed thousands of times... my question is, why did this happen?" asked Coast Guard chief Andreas Sirigos.

Coast guard investigators were examining passenger reports that most of the crew was watching a European Champions League soccer match when the ferry crashed.

A survivor, Manolis Diktas, told state television "members of the crew, including officers, were watching the game."

A funeral service was held on this island for one of the dead, port authority official Dimitris Malamas, 43. He died of a heart attack when he heard news of the sinking. Hundreds of islanders gathered in the main cathedral as ships in harbor blew their horns.

Most of the dead were transferred by helicopter to a morgue in Athens, where relatives have been identifying the remains.

There were 72 foreigners on the boat, from Albania, Australia, Belgium, Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Norway, South Africa, Ukraine and two from the United States.

and bills to be introduced in January 2002. Denmark, Britain and Sweden opted out, while Greece, which was barred from membership because of high inflation and a budget deficit, will join on Jan. 1.

EU officials, who said a "yes" vote in Denmark would help the euro but a rejection would have no effect, planned to meet Friday morning in Brussels, Belgium, after the Danish vote.

Thursday's vote also was being closely watched by Sweden and Britain, whose governments support joining the EMU but plan to let the public decide in referendums. Even non-EU member Norway was watching as it undergoes renewed debate on whether to join the trading bloc at all.

Denmark already ties its fiscal and monetary decisions to those made by the 11-member euro zone, which forms the bulk of its export market. Supporters say membership in the European Monetary Union will give it more influence.

Many opponents say the euro threatens Denmark's extensive welfare state and will lead to an erosion of sovereignty, as more powers are ceded to EU headquarters in Brussels, Belgium, and the European Central Bank in Frankfurt, Germany.

Christina Dallmann, a 31-year-old student, checked "Ja," or yes. "I think it's better to be sitting at the table."

Danes stunned fellow EU nations in 1992 by rejecting the Maastricht treaty for a common currency and a common defense. A year later, voters approved a revised treaty with clauses allowing it to initially stay out of the currency and the defense cooperation.

## Military readiness debate continues

### Chiefs say U.S. military is still world's best

BY ROBERT BURNS  
ASSOCIATED PRESS

**WASHINGTON** — The debate over whether U.S. troops are combat ready has produced a paradox about today's military: While called the best in the world, it also is described as overworked, underpaid and short of ammunition, pilots and research dollars.

George W. Bush, the Republican presidential nominee, accuses the Clinton administration of running the military into the ground by sending it on too many overseas missions while skimping on defense dollars. Morale among the troops is sinking and combat readiness is on the decline, he proclaims.

In its defense, the Clinton administration points out that, last year, the troops

received the biggest pay raise in a generation, that defense investment is on the rise and that the highest re-enlistment rates are among those units operating abroad on such missions as peacekeeping in the Balkans.

For their part, the chiefs of the military services are quick to boast that the U.S. military is the best in the world.

"In my 37 years in uniform, I have never been around better soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines," Army Gen. Henry H. Shelton, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told the Senate Armed Services Committee on Wednesday. Shelton quoted a former Army chief of staff, retired Gen. John Wickham Jr., as saying recently, "The truth is that America has the strongest, best-equipped, best-trained and best-led military capability in the world."

"I think General Wickham has it right," Shelton said.

And yet, each of the military chiefs also told the Senate and House armed services committees they are worried war-fighting capability will erode unless

spending goes up dramatically.

"We must find the resources necessary to modernize the force," said Shelton. Otherwise, the cumulative strains of carrying out peacekeeping and other overseas missions — while also preparing for major wars — will erode combat readiness, he said.

Shelton did not say how much more should be spent, beyond the current budget of nearly \$300 billion. He said specific figures could be established after a planned review of national security strategy next year.

If the military is performing so remarkably well, what's all the fuss about trouble in the ranks?

Shelton, the highest-ranking military adviser to the president and the secretary of defense, said for several years the Pentagon has used money that was meant to buy new weapons and equipment to pay for training and other day-to-day costs. That has kept troops ready for combat, but at the cost of replacing aging equipment.

"Our equipment is wearing out at

much faster rate than expected," Shelton said. "Consequently, our troops are paying the price" by spending more time fixing mechanical problems instead of training for war, he said.

And Gen. Eric Shinseki, the Army's chief of staff, said troop reductions during the 1990s went too far.

"We need more people," he said. "Our soldiers believe that the Army is too small for the missions it is asked to perform." He did not say how many soldiers the Army needs beyond the 480,000 it now has on active duty.

Sen. Mary Landrieu, D-La., said the \$300 billion in military spending is more than five times larger than the military budget of Russia, the second largest spender. It is more than 22 times as large as the combined spending of the seven countries traditionally identified by the Pentagon as our most likely adversaries: Cuba, Iran, Iraq, Libya, North Korea, Sudan and Syria. And it is more than the combined spending of the next 12 biggest-spending nations, she said.

## Palestinians, Israeli police have clash during official's visit to religious site

BY DINA KRAFT  
ASSOCIATED PRESS

**JERUSALEM** — Helmeted Israeli riot police fired rubber bullets Thursday at hundreds of Palestinian stone-throwers at a Jerusalem holy site revered by both Muslims and Jews and hotly contested in Israeli-Palestinian peace talks.

The violence broke out just moments after the leader of Israel's hard-line opposition, Ariel Sharon, left the compound. Chants of "Murderer, get out!" followed Sharon.

Near the West Bank town of Ramallah, about 200 Palestinian university students angered by Sharon's visit threw stones at Israeli troops who fired rubber-coated steel bullets. Four Palestinians were injured, paramedics said. "Jerusalem is the capital of Palestine. Sharon, get out," read a banner carried by the group.

Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat said Sharon's visit was "very dangerous" and that Arab and Islamic nations should "move very fast" in protecting the shrine.

Also Thursday, an Israeli soldier critically injured in a bomb attack on an army convoy in the Gaza Strip died of his wounds.

The attack, blamed on Palestinian militants, occurred late Wednesday as

troops were escorting a convoy of Jewish settlers to the isolated settlement of Netzarim, just south of Gaza City. An officer was slightly injured in the attack.

No Palestinian group has claimed responsibility. Barak demanded that Arafat do more to rein in Islamic militants who are trying to sabotage Mideast peace efforts.

In the clashes at the Jerusalem shrine, Palestinian protesters, many of them teen-agers still carrying their school bags, threw stones, bottles and even a metal trash can at hundreds of helmeted police in full riot gear, some huddling behind large Plexiglas shields. The troops, deployed around the shrine to protect Sharon, fired several rounds of rubber bullets at the protesters and struck them with clubs to push them back.

At least three Palestinians were injured by rubber bullets, including a teenager who pressed his hands to his bloodied mouth and then fell to the ground. Four Palestinians, including two senior officials, were struck in the head by clubs. Police said about two dozen officers were injured by stones. One was rushed to a nearby ambulance on a stretcher.

The compound is the fault line of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Dead-

ly clashes erupted in 1990 and 1996, as rival claims to the site heated up.

The shrine is known to Jews as the Temple Mount, site of the former Jewish Temple, the most sacred shrine of Judaism. Muslims call it Haram as-Sharif, or Noble Sanctuary, home to two major mosques — Al Aqsa and Dome of the Rock — that mark the spot where tradition says the Prophet Muhammad ascended to heaven. The compound is the third holiest site of Islam, after Mecca and Medina.

Israeli-Palestinian peace talks are hung up because of a dispute over who will control the holy shrine. For now, Muslim clerics have autonomy in administering the site, although Israeli police remain in charge of security.

Palestinian leaders said Sharon's visit, intended to demonstrate Israeli sovereignty claims, was a provocation, but proved that Israel has no real control there. "He thought that this place belongs to the Israelis, but the way he entered, with thousands of police protecting him, was clear proof to all the world that the Israelis have no sovereignty here," said Faisal Husseini, a senior Palestinian official in charge of Jerusalem, who was struck in the head by a club.

Sharon, who staunchly opposes any concessions to the Palestinians in

Jerusalem, denied he was trying to provoke Muslim worshippers. "What provocation is there when Jews come to visit the place with a message of peace?" he said.

"The Temple Mount is in our hands," he said, using the phrase made famous by the late Israeli army officer Motta Gur when Israeli troops captured Jerusalem's Old City and the holy shrines in the 1967 Mideast war.

When Sharon began his visit Thursday morning, accompanied by members of his Likud party, about 1,000 Israeli police were deployed.

Young Palestinians defiantly shouted "Allahu Akbar" (God is great). Some tried to break through the police cordon but were pushed back. Mohammed Abu Hawa, a 17-year-old protester carrying a black school bag, said he and his classmates had come from nearby schools to try to prevent Sharon from entering the shrine.

Sharon is one of the most feared and reviled figures in the Arab world, the mastermind of Israel's 1982 invasion and occupation of Lebanon. He was forced to resign in 1983 when an Israeli commission found he bore some responsibility for the massacre of hundreds of Palestinians in Beirut refugee camps by Lebanese militias allied with Israel.

## Vote tight in Denmark on whether to replace currency with euro

BY KIM GAMEL  
ASSOCIATED PRESS

**COPENHAGEN, DENMARK** — The beleaguered euro faced a tight race in this tiny country Thursday as voters appeared evenly divided about whether to replace their krone with the EU's common currency, according to early exit polls.

The second of four exit polls being broadcast by the TV2 station said 52.2 percent of voters were against the euro, while 47.1 percent were in favor. The Megafon polling institute based the estimate on replies by 9,044 voters as they left the polling stations and earlier surveys, but a 3 percentage point margin of error indicated a statistical dead heat.

Lawmakers remained cautious about predicting the outcome of the Scandinavian country's fifth referendum on EU-related issues since it joined what became the European Union in 1973.

"I am not feeling very certain," Prime Minister Poul Nyrup Rasmussen, whose Social Democratic-led government supports joining the European Monetary Union, said after he cast his ballot.

An anti-euro activist warned it was too early to guess the outcome because many of the 4 million eligible Danes had yet to vote. Danish radio reported that turnout so far was 18 percent.

"It can still change because all active business people haven't voted yet," said Jens-Peter Bonde of the grass-roots Euro Movement. "It still can be a yes or a no."

The euro took effect in 11 of 15 EU countries in January 1999 for corporate and investment transactions, with coins

## Government overpaid drug companies millions in reimbursements, report says

BY CLAUDE MARX  
ASSOCIATED PRESS

**WASHINGTON** — The federal government overpays hundreds of millions of dollars a year for drugs through the Medicare program, congressional investigators report.

An 18-month study by the House Commerce Committee found that for dozens of drugs, most of which are used to treat AIDS and cancer, drug companies report one wholesale price publicly, then charge doctors a much lower price to encourage them to use the drug. The federal government reimburses at a rate similar to the publicly

announced price, so doctors can make large profits, a practice the report acknowledged is legal.

The committee chairman, Rep. Thomas Bliley, R-Va., criticized the Health Care Financing Administration, which runs Medicare, for not doing more to ensure reimbursement rates are more in line with what drug companies actually charge doctors.

The report found Medicare is overcharged by \$447 million per year.

Bliley, in a letter to the agency's administrator, Nancy-Ann Min DeParle, said the current reimbursement methods are "so deeply flawed that they invite rampant abuse" and the findings

have "frightening implications for public health."

The Clinton administration has proposed reducing the amount it reimburses physicians for drugs from 95 percent of the wholesale price to 83 percent of the wholesale price, but the idea has stalled in Bliley's committee.

HCFA does not need congressional approval to reduce the reimbursement for about 50 drugs for which the Justice Department already has determined drug companies were charging doctors artificially low prices. The agency plans to reduce those rates on Jan. 1.

HCFA's top Medicare payment official, Dr. Robert A. Berenson, said

the changes would "protect access to care for beneficiaries while reducing excessive drug charges."

Bliley said the agency needs to do more to force drug companies to change their pricing.

"The legislative proposals made by the administration have been deeply flawed, in part because they ignore the rampant price manipulations in which certain drug manufacturers have been engaged," he wrote.

State and federal prosecutors are investigating more than 20 drug makers for similar pricing arrangements. Its findings could add more drugs to the list for which HCFA may set prices.

## PILL

from page 4

facts to expect and how they must make three trips to the doctor for the procedure.

RU-486, now known by its chemical name, mifepristone, can be used only within 49 days of the beginning of the woman's last menstrual period. The woman takes three mifepristone pills. Two days later, she returns to the doctor to swallow a second drug, misoprostol, that causes uterine contractions to expel the embryo. She returns for a follow-up visit within two weeks to make sure the abortion is complete.

The FDA will allow mifepristone to be distributed only to doctors trained to accurately diagnose the duration of pregnancy and to detect ectopic, or tubal, pregnancies, because those women can-

not take mifepristone.

Also, the FDA restricted mifepristone's use to doctors who can operate in case a surgical abortion is needed to finish the job or in cases of severe bleeding, or to doctors who have made advance arrangements for a surgeon to provide care for them to their patients.

Studies show mifepristone is 92 percent to 95 percent effective in causing early abortion by blocking action of a hormone essential for maintaining pregnancy. Without that hormone, progesterone, the uterine lining thins and an embryo cannot remain implanted and grow.

The pill-induced abortion can be painful, causing bleeding and nausea. Heavy bleeding is a potentially serious side effect, but one the FDA determined is rare. In safety testing of the first 2,100 American women who took mifepristone, four bled enough to need a transfusion.

A small New York company, Dan-

co Laboratories, will market mifepristone under the brand name Mifeprex. It should be available in about a month. Abortion providers say the pill-caused abortion should cost the same as surgical abortion, but a Danco spokeswoman refused to confirm that Thursday.

The FDA's decision, coming in the midst of the presidential election campaign, is sure to generate fierce new controversy. Republican candidate George W. Bush opposes abortion; his father's administration banned RU-486 from this country in 1989. The pro-choice Clinton-Gore administration worked for seven years to bring mifepristone here.

Proponents argued that a pill-caused abortion offers an alternative to surgery that feels more like a miscarriage and typically is offered earlier in pregnancy than surgical abortion.

Bowing to that pressure, French manufacturer Roussel-Uclaf in 1994 turned over U.S. rights to the drug to the non-profit Population Council of New York,

which launched U.S. clinical trials needed for FDA clearance. Although the FDA actually declared mifepristone a safe and effective abortion method in 1996, final approval was delayed until now because Danco, created to market the drug, had trouble meeting federal manufacturing and labeling requirements.

The vast majority of today's 1.3 million annual U.S. abortions are surgical, although doctors in 1995 began publicizing the fact that a drug already sold to treat cancer, methotrexate, also could be used to induce abortion.

Health experts say mifepristone won't increase abortions — that didn't happen in Europe. But the FDA's formal approval may encourage more doctors who don't offer surgical abortions to offer the pill, thus making it easier for women, particularly in rural areas, to get an abortion without traveling hundreds of miles or entering surgical clinics often staked out by protesters.