

MARINE SAFETY NEWS

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INTERNATIONAL NEWS

MOODY'S REVIEWS BELGIAN REGIONS FOR DOWNGRADE

BRUSSELS: Belgium's financial troubles appeared to mount on Monday as Moody's Investors Service announced it was putting the country's three regions on review for a possible downgrade, along with three of their government-related issuers.

The news followed Friday's announcement that Moody's was putting the country's Aa1 ratings on review for possible downgrade, in part because the country was about to pay a significant sum to prop up the French-Belgian Dexia bank.

Over the weekend, Belgium agreed to buy the bank's Belgian subsidiary for USD 4 billion as part of a restructuring of the lender amid a liquidity squeeze. Moody's said late Monday it was placing the regions and the government-related issuers on review in part because of their possible exposure to losses stemming from the Dexia restructuring. (AP)

GERMAN OFFICIALS DENY USE OF TROJAN HORSE PROGRAMME

BERLIN: Germany's Interior Ministry says no federal security services were involved in using a Trojan horse programme to spy on people through their computers. The Chaos Computer Club hacker network said it had analysed a copy of the malware received from unidentified sources, and claimed it was a government surveillance programme. But Interior Ministry spokesman Markus Beyer told reporters no federal agencies were involved, and noted that the program used was about three years old and widely available.

Opposition Challenges Donner's Council Of State Appointment

The opposition groups on Monday stepped up to challenge the candidature of Home Affairs Minister Piet Hein Donner to the post of Council of State vice president. Christian Democrat party has nominated the minister to succeed Herman Tjeenk Willink.

However, Labour party leader Job Cohen, in an interview with a local media on Sunday, said that his party would introduce a motion against the appointment of Donner.

Cohen explained that since the Council of State was aimed at advising the government and Parliament on legislature issues and governance, the appointment of a minister as the head of it has no point.

Later, both the GroenLinks and the Socialist Party echoed the concern of Cohen and offered support to his motion.

The green party and the socialists are of the opinion that with the appointment of Donner, Christian Democratic is planning to bring the independent body under the control of the government and the minister will give advice on matters he is responsible for.

GroenLinks party leader Jolande Sap said: "As a minister, Donner has aligned himself with government policy and everything in the pipeline for the coming years."

Jolande Sap added that the vice president of the council should a politically neutral person and hopefully there are better candidates than Donner.

The left-wing liberal D66 party has not yet expressed its view on the matter although party leader Alexander Pechtold opined that Prime Minister Mark Rutte should look into the matter and should ensure transparency in choosing a candidate for such a key position.

He further called on the premier to uncover the 'shadow and mist' that hangs over the procedure for appointing the council vice president.

Meanwhile, ruling coalition partner of the Christian Democrats, the right-wing liberal VVD threw its weight behind Donner, saying that there is no valid reason to reject his appointment.

This is not the first time a sitting minister is being appointed as the vice president of the council, the VVD noted. Willem Scholten, who was succeeded by Willink, was the defence minister, when he was appointed as the VP of the Council of State, despite the strong objection from the Labour Party. Scholten continued to the post until 1997.

Ombudsman Urges Ministry To Support House Owners

National Ombudsman Brenninkmeijer has urged Infrastructure Minister Melanie Schultz van Haegen to take steps in helping house owners, who are facing problems in selling out their homes due to certain infrastructure development plans, which were being under consideration of the Mark Rutte government.

Brenninkmeijer said: "This is about house owners who are affected by plans for a bridge, a railway line or a road and who spend years wondering if the plan will go ahead. In the meantime, they cannot sell their house."

The ombudsman noted that some projects takes 'improbably long' time for planning and the government never takes into account of the plight of the house owners. He added: "The government waltzes over people and sometimes leaves them in uncertainty for 20 years. It's the arrogance of power and it should stop."

ProRail 'Prompt In Maintenance'

The state-controlled railway network operator ProRail has claimed that it is up-to-date in addressing the call for maintenance. ProRail Chairwoman Marion Gout-Van Sinderen added that certain funds were left over due to the delay in some large-level constriction projects, which were met with protests from local residents.

She made the remark in reference to a report of the national audit office, which last week stated that rail network did not spend some EUR 1.1 billion or 10% of its total budget since 2005.

The chairwoman explained: "In any case, the money for these projects has nothing to do with maintenance. We have spent 98% of the maintenance budget."

 WEATHER

Amsterdam: 12 to 17c Rain
 Rotterdam: 13 to 18c Rain
 Eindhoven: 13 to 18c Cloudy
 Groningen: 8 to 16c Rain

According to ProRail, it earmarked EUR 1.4 billion for construction in 2011 and within the first six months of the year, it had spent EUR 620 million for building stations, tunnels and viaducts. Meanwhile, the total spending on maintenance during the same period was EUR 270 million.

School Board Steps Down Over Migrant Plan

The entire members of a school board in Ede town have stepped down after a decision by the school management sparked an outcry among public. The prominent foundation earlier decided to put a strict ceiling on the number of migrant children admitted to one of its primary schools.

The foundation, which has 13 schools across Ede municipality, defended the strict limit for migrants, citing the need of more neighbourhood representation among the pupils.

However, the board faced severe criticism from the public over the policy, which according to the board undermined their integrity and they did not want to continue in the position any longer.

The statement issued by the board further stated that they no longer had faith in the Ede Municipal Council, which first voiced its concern against the discriminatory policy towards the migrants.

According to the board, it was the media that created the hype over the plan by painting "a distorted and over-simplified image" of its plan that was intended to promote integration.

Cows Disappear From Countryside: Report

The fame of the country, as a leader in premier quality diary products, is on the verge of a threat, as the number of cattle population is diminishing quickly along the countryside. The latest research of the CLM Research & Advice found that the number of cows around the fields in the country reduced by 60% within the last 25 years.

According to the study, the cattle population stood above 2.3 million in 1985, while the 2011 figures suggested that the number of cows has fallen under 1.1 million.

The fall in population was attributed to the shrinkage of the national herd and the changed mode of cattle rearing. Earlier, only 5% of the cattle were kept inside permanently but in 2011, at least 26% of the total cattle population were never sent out.

 SPORTS NEWS

Sweden Without Ibra Set To Meet Netherlands

A huge task is awaiting Sweden, which are all set to meet Group E leader the Netherlands on Tuesday, as they must end the latter's 'winning streak to qualify automatically for the 2012 European Championship. However, Sweden are under pressure, as they have to do it without suspended star striker Zlatan Ibrahimovic.

The Dutch have already won Group E and the Swedes are assured of a playoff spot regardless of Tuesday's result. But if Sweden wins at Rasunda stadium it will take the last automatic spot given to the best runner-up in the nine groups.

Sweden Coach Erik Hamren says beating the Netherlands is "a tough task, but not impossible."

Ibrahimovic will probably be replaced by Johan Elmander or Tobias Hysen. While Sweden is largely injury-free, the Netherlands is missing several key players due to injury, including playmaker Wesley Sneijder, goalkeeper Maarten Stekelenburg, winger Arjen Robben and defender John Heitinga. (AP)

Rooney To Learn UEFA Suspension On Thursday

England striker Wayne Rooney will discover the length of his Euro 2012 suspension on Thursday, European football governing body UEFA said on Monday. The 25-year-old Manchester United player will definitely miss England's first game in the tournament after kicking Miodrag Dzudovic in the 2-2 draw with Montenegro.

The governing body's disciplinary panel could decide to increase the punishment to three matches, but England remain hopeful it will only be a one-game ban after referee Wolfgang Stark admitted Rooney's acceptance of his red card could work in his favour.

England Coach Fabio Capello has warned Rooney that he cannot expect to stroll back into the Euro 2012 reckoning after serving his suspension. With qualification assured, Capello will use the November 12 friendly against world champions Spain to examine the striking options available to him. (AFP)

Tour De France Organisers Plan Route Slip-Up

Tour de France organisers inadvertently published next year's route on their official website according to several specialist cycling websites on Monday. Amaury Sport Organisation (ASO) refused to comment when contacted by AFP about the embarrassing slip-up over the race which gets underway in the Belgian town of Liege on June 30.

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 FINANCIAL NEWS

FOREIGN EXCHANGE

1 EUR = USD 1.3593

European Central Bank

The page is no longer accessible but Dutch journalist Stephan van der Zwan has some images he took of it on www.Wielerland.nl, the website that revealed the error.

The 2012 Tour will feature nine flat stages, five mountain stages including two finishing at altitude, two individual time-trials and a prologue.

There will also be two rest days. The race will comprise a total of 25 climbs of second, first or Hors categorie: one in the Vosges, three in the Jura, four in the Swiss Jura, six in the Alps and 11 in the Pyrenees. The official unveiling of the route is due to take place in Paris on October 18. (AFP)

Romero Will Not Defend Olympic Title

Britain's Olympic cycling champion Rebecca Romero confirmed on Monday that she will not compete at the London 2012 Games next summer. British Cycling said the 31-year-old double world champion, who claimed individual pursuit gold in Beijing four years ago, has left the Olympic Programme.

"Having suffered several setbacks at crucial points, I believe I'm no longer on a pathway which will see me fulfil my Olympic ambition to win a second Olympic gold medal," Romero said.

Former rower Romero is the only British woman to win Olympic medals in two different sports following her silver medal at the 2004 Games in Athens in the quadruple sculls. She was awarded an MBE in 2009 for her achievements. (AFP)