

Court to rule on drug practices

WASHINGTON -- The Supreme Court agreed Monday to decide whether taking a hallucinogenic drug as a religious practice can be made a crime.

The justices voted to review a ruling that Oregon officials violated religious freedom by denying unemployment compensation to two men fired for using peyote at religious ceremonies.

In their decision, expected sometime next year, the justices necessarily must resolve whether any state may criminally prosecute someone for the religious use of peyote.

In other matters, the court:

- Cleared the way for the partial merger of Detroit's two daily newspapers.
- Agreed to let the Bush administration, through the solicitor general's office, participate in the April 26 oral argument scheduled for an abortion-regulation case from Missouri.

State officials are asking the

justices to use the case to reverse or limit the court's 1973 decision legalizing abortion.

- Let stand the criminal convictions of 10 people who participated in a 1985 protest demonstration at a Philadelphia abortion clinic.
- Refused to revive libel lawsuits, one in Oregon and one in Wyoming, against Hustler magazine and its publisher, Larry Flynt, by two women active in fighting pornography.
- Turned down the appeal of California death row inmate William George Bonin, the "Freeway Killer" of four teen-age boys in Orange County.
- Refused to bar Oklahoma prosecutors who seek incriminating evidence from forcing the surgical removal of a bullet from a murder suspect's arm.
- Left intact decisions thwarting a Florida-based company's requirement that all its employees attend weekly Christian devotional services. Lower courts said

the mandatory services violated an atheist's rights.

In the peyote case, the Oregon Supreme Court last year ruled that its state's criminal law makes no exception for the religious use of peyote, a cactus "button" containing the hallucinogen mescaline.

But the state court ruled that the federal Constitution's First Amendment, which protects religious freedom, bars state officials from denying unemployment compensation to two members of the Native American Church.

In effect, the state court said Oregon criminal law must make an exception for "good faith religious use of peyote by adult members of the Native American Church."

The two men, Galen Black and Alfred Smith, had been fired from their Douglas County, Ore., jobs counseling people who suffer from drug or alcohol addiction.

There is no dispute that both

men are members of the Native American Church and sincerely believe that peyote is part of the church's religious practices.

Lawyers for the two men said using small quantities of the drug in that church is comparable to sacramental use of small quantities of wine in Christian religious ceremonies.

The case was before the nation's highest court last year, and the justices voted last April to send it back to the Oregon Supreme Court.

The April decision held out the possibility that states in which peyote is outlawed may deny unemployment benefits to workers fired for using it during religious ceremonies.

But Justice John Paul Stevens, in writing for the court then, noted that the federal government and some states exempt the religious use of peyote from criminal prosecution.

Cristiani wins Salvadoran vote

SAN SALVADOR, El Salvador -- Alfredo Cristiani, who has tried to end memories of his right-wing party's links to death squads that killed thousands of his countrymen, was recognized as the victor Monday in the presidential election.

Fidel Chavez Mena, candidate of the incumbent Christian Democrats, conceded and told a news conference, "I have called him personally to congratulate him and express my desire that God illuminate him in governing the country."

Cristiani, of the Republican Nationalist Alliance, or Arena, will take over from President Jose Napoleon Duarte on June 1. Although Duarte was one of the United States' top allies, he was unable to end nine years of civil war with leftist rebels that left 70,000 dead.

In Washington, the State Department said it was prepared to support the new Salvadoran government, but only if it protects democracy and protects human rights.

Four detainees escape, all seek refuge

JOHANNESBURG, South Africa -- Four black detainees on a hunger strike escaped Monday from a Johannesburg hospital, fled 38 miles to Pretoria and sought refuge at the West German Embassy there, officials said.

The four men, who have been held without charge for between 10 months and 23 months, demanded the South African government guarantee they and all other political detainees will be freed.

"We have committed no crime," the escapees said in a statement. "We have been kept in detention for so long that we felt we had to embark on a life-and-death hunger strike to dramatize our plight in detention and to ultimately secure our immediate

release."

West Germany's Foreign Ministry said the four are in "administrative custody." The embassy in Pretoria said no decision has been made about them.

The men said through the Detainees Aid Center that they belong to organizations affiliated with the banned United Democratic Front, the country's largest anti-apartheid coalition.

They escaped from Hillbrow Hospital in Johannesburg, where they had spent five weeks being treated for fasting, according to the South African government and their statement.

Hundreds of detainees have taken part in hunger strikes since January, demanding their freedom or to stand

trial. The government says it has freed more than 400 detainees in the past month and that about 350 remain in custody.

Some 30,000 people have been held without charge for varying lengths of time since a state of emergency was imposed 33 months ago.

South African Foreign Minister Pik Botha said his government is in contact with the West Germans and "the matter was receiving attention." Botha did not elaborate on what actions his government plans.

The men identified themselves as Job Sithole, 21; Ephraim Nkoe, 28; Mpho Lekgoro, 24; and Clive Radebe, 28. All are from black townships around Johannesburg and Pretoria, and have been active in youth

and student organizations.

They did not disclose how they escaped the hospital and got to the West German Embassy.

Journalists were not allowed inside the embassy, but from the gates four black men clad in T-shirts and jeans could be seen standing in the foyer of the building.

The embassy, surrounded by 13-foot high walls, is less than a half-mile from Union Buildings, South Africa's administrative capital.

People have escaped from South African custody and taken refuge in foreign diplomatic missions several times in recent years.

Most recently, three detainees escaped from a hospital in September

and holed up in the U.S. Consulate in Johannesburg for more than 40 days before deciding to leave. The South African government promised the three men, all United Democratic Front members, would not be detained or restricted once they left the consulate. The three have spoken regularly on behalf of the organization in recent months.

In another incident, Klaas de Jonge, a Dutch citizen accused of smuggling weapons for the African National Congress guerrilla movement, took refuge in the Dutch Consulate in Pretoria for more than two years before he was returned to the Netherlands in September 1987 in an exchange involving prisoners in four countries.

Transport sector gives warning on bomb ploys

LONDON -- The Transport Department told airlines and airports Monday there is a "high and continuing risk" of more devices like the bomb in a radio-cassette player that destroyed Pan Am Flight 103, killing 270 people.

The department said it sent a telex as a reminder of its previous warnings, which have been the subject of controversy, and to suggest new safety measures. Transport officials would not elaborate on the statement.

Pressure grew for the government to explain whether the Flight 103 disaster on Dec. 21 could have been averted with better dissemination of warnings and information about bombing equipment found before the explosion over Lockerbie, Scotland.

Opposition politicians have demanded Transport Secretary Paul Channon resign because of how he handled events before the bombing, which killed all 259 people on the Boeing 747 and 11 on the ground.

The Evening Standard newspaper said police believe the bomb contained only one or two pounds of explosives, but its location near a weakened seam in the baggage hold increased its effect.

Inspector Tom McCullough of the Lockerbie police, who are conducting the investigation, refused comment beyond saying the report was "most likely speculation by the press."

A source the Evening Standard

did not identify was quoted as saying: "If the bomb had been almost anywhere else it might have killed half a dozen people or maybe even just shredded some bags."

In Washington, a member of Congress said Pan Am still is not following many anti-terrorism measures an Israeli security firm suggested to it more than two years ago.

Rep. Cardiss Collins, D-Ill., said in a letter to the Federal Aviation Administration the security consultant concluded the airline was not careful enough in checking baggage, did a poor job of questioning passengers boarding planes and was slow in reacting to warnings of possible terrorist activity.

She quoted from reports KPI Inc. gave Pan Am in 1986 after reviewing Pan Am security at nine airports, including Frankfurt and London's Heathrow Airport. Flight 103 originated in Frankfurt and changed planes at Heathrow.

One of the KPI reports said: "Pan Am is highly vulnerable to most forms of terrorist attack. The fact that no major disaster has occurred to date is merely providential."

Opposition lawmakers in London continued claiming Monday that the public was not given a full explanation of events before the bombing. Channon made no comment.

Recession is possible

WASHINGTON -- The recent spurt of inflation is raising fears of a recession, with some economists predicting Monday that a downturn could begin in the second half of 1989.

These analysts believe that the Federal Reserve, faced with alarming news of increasing price pressures, will squeeze credit so tightly that an economic slump will be all but inevitable.

"Once you get inflation up to the levels we have right now, it has taken a recession to cool things off. That is an unfortunate fact of life," said Bruce Steinberg, senior economist at the New York investment firm of Merrill Lynch.

Inflation worries were heightened last Friday when the government reported that prices at the wholesale level had shot up a full percentage point for the second straight month.

It was the worst back-to-back inflation news in nearly eight years and it sent stock and bond prices plunging as investors worried that the Federal Reserve would be forced to drive interest rates higher in an effort to dampen demand.

Markets continued to be battered by inflation worries on Monday, with the Dow Jones industrial average of 30 stocks down sharply again after the 48.57 point drop on Friday, which had been the worst decline in nearly a year.

Investors were braced for an even bigger market drop Tuesday if the government's monthly check of consumer prices comes in with a worse-than-expected number.

Economists were looking for consumer prices to rise by about 0.5 percent in February. They feared that

a figure as high as 0.7 percent could send markets into a tailspin. Even a 0.5 percent increase would translate into an annual advance above 6 percent, sharply higher than the price increases of 4.4 percent or less during the past seven years.

The Bush administration sought to play down inflation worries on Monday with White House spokesman Marlin Fitzwater telling reporters that a number of recent business reports paint a picture of a slowing economy which will be enough to break any inflationary pressures.

But private economists said fears were now so widespread that the Federal Reserve will be forced to take actions that will likely send a variety of consumer and business interest rates higher.

"We are looking at potentially the worst inflationary bout since the late 1970s and early 1980s," said Allen Sinai, chief economist of the Boston Co. "It is a policy problem of immense proportions for the Federal Reserve and it will require sharply higher interest rates and potentially a recession to deal with."

Starting a year ago, the central bank, under Chairman Alan Greenspan, began gradually nudging interest rates higher in an effort to keep inflation from getting out of control.

Some economists complained that the Federal Reserve was too tentative, especially in the second half of 1988, and now is faced with the need to slam on the brakes.

The Fed increased the discount rate to 7 percent on Feb. 24 in a move widely seen as a signal that it intended to move more strongly against inflationary pressures.

Daily Nebraskan

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