

# News Digest

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## Germany curtails payments

■ Disability checks to WWII veterans were stopped to those individuals suspected of committing Nazi atrocities.

BONN, Germany (AP) — Shamed by the protests of Jewish organizations, Germany put a stop Thursday to nearly 50 years of government disability checks for those suspected of being Nazi war criminals.

By unofficial counts, 50,000 German veterans suspected of atrocities during World War II are quietly drawing such benefits, including former members of the notorious Waffen SS.

Meanwhile, many Holocaust victims are still struggling for restitution from the German government.

Parliament sought to redress the balance Thursday, amending the 1950 Federal Benefits Law to strip veterans of disability rights if they "violated the principles of humanity or the law" during the Third Reich.

The vote came in a show of hands, with Chancellor Helmut Kohl's ruling coalition and most opposition lawmakers in favor of the

amendment.

"Atrocities must weigh heavier than war injuries," said Birgit Schnieper-Jastram, a lawmaker from Kohl's Christian Democratic Union.

About 1 million German war veterans or their families are receiving disability payments of as much as \$470 a month under the law.

The government had no estimate of how many veterans would be affected but said about 20 are known war criminals whose payments will be swiftly cut off.

They include former SS officer Heinz Barth, convicted for his role in the 1944 massacre of more than 600 villagers at Oradour, France. Barth, who was serving a life sentence, was released from jail in the eastern state of Brandenburg in July because of ill health.

Also affected is Wolfgang Lehnigk-Emden, who was convicted in absentia by an Italian court of ordering the 1943 massacre of 22 Italians. He has been living as a free man near the Rhine River city of Koblenz because a German court ruled that the killing fell under the statute of limitations.

To track other cases, ministry officials will compare records of war disability benefits with

files of Nazi war crimes suspects kept by German prosecutors, spokesman Josef Hecken said.

"We owe this to the victims," he said.

Any documentation linking a veteran to war crimes will be enough to allow authorities in Germany's 16 states to deny the benefits, he said. A conviction is not required.

Files of Germans who volunteered for the Nazi SS will be scrutinized especially carefully.

The 1950 benefits law did not exclude any units, even those assigned the most grisly tasks, to avoid branding all German soldiers as war criminals.

Kohl's government proposed the amendment under pressure from Jewish groups and opposition politicians after the disability pensions came to light early this year through reports in the German media.

In March, the Los Angeles-based Simon Wiesenthal Center threatened to launch an international campaign against Germany if it didn't stop the payments.

Three lawmakers from the leftist opposition Social Democrats dissented in Thursday's vote. They voiced concern that the new law turned benefits legislation into an instrument for catching criminals.

## New AIDS treatment won't cure disease

WASHINGTON (AP) — A drug "cocktail" that revolutionized the treatment of AIDS is unable to wipe out reservoirs of the virus hiding in certain blood cells, researchers found in a discovery that dims hopes for a cure.

The finding means that patients may have to take the AIDS drugs for the rest of their lives — while hoping for new types of treatment to stamp out the final traces of infection by the virus that causes the disease.

Three separate teams of scientists reported finding evidence that the HIV virus lurks in inactive white blood cells in patients who have been taking the drug cocktail for up to three years and seem otherwise virtually free of the virus.

Combinations of drugs that block two enzymes that the HIV virus uses to reproduce have been enormously effective in stopping the infection. In thousands of patients, the HIV virus in the bloodstream has been reduced to near undetectable levels, and CD4 blood cells, the principal target of HIV, have rallied to normal levels.

The success of the drugs raised hopes by some experts that HIV could be eradicated completely from the bodies of patients.

"Although we held out hope that the eradication hypothesis might pan out, I don't think that people really thought it would," said Dr. Joel Gallant of Johns Hopkins University, one of the co-authors of a paper in *Science*.

Despite the disappointment, Dr. Robert Siliciano of Johns Hopkins said that studies did find good news. He said none of the latent viruses studied had developed a resistance to the drug cocktail that has so successfully controlled the infection.

This means, he said, that as long as HIV patients continue to carefully and diligently take the three-drug cocktail, "they have an excellent chance of surviving the infection for a long time without developing symptoms of the disease."

All three studies found the latent virus in what are called resting CD4 lymphocytes.

These are immune system white blood cells that are primed to defend against antigens from bacteria or from other foreign molecules. Until they encounter antigens that are their specific target, the blood cells are inactive, or resting.

The researchers found that HIV virus had injected its DNA, or genetic instructions, into the DNA of a small fraction of these resting blood cells.

It is believed that when the resting blood cells were awakened, as by a new infection, then the DNA of the cells would start making new HIV virus, perhaps sending the virus on a new infective rampage. The researchers conducted laboratory experiments that showed that the latent HIV virus would start reproducing once the resting blood cells were awakened.

"Originally, there was hope that these resting cells would decay and after a certain amount of time they would all be gone," said Joseph Margolick, another Hopkins co-author. "That has not happened."

## Nader challenges Gates' empire

WASHINGTON (AP) — Consumer advocates, high-tech consultants and rivals of Microsoft Corp. railed against the giant computer software-maker Thursday as an out-of-control monopoly that should be reined in by the government.

"Imagine going into a shoe store and being told there is only one shoe you can try on," said Gary Reback, a California lawyer who has argued in cases against Microsoft.

"One size fits all. That's what we have in the desktop computer industry today," he said in a speech at the Ralph Nader-sponsored conference, "Appraising Microsoft and Its Global Strategy."

Microsoft officials and their allies gathered at the same Washington hotel said the Nader conference was a media event staged by competitors who have been unable to knock Bill Gates' empire from its place atop the industry.

Robert Herbold, Microsoft's executive vice president, said in a letter to Nader Thursday: "It is regrettable that you appear to have aligned yourself with a small band of Microsoft's detractors whose apparent goal is to enlist the government's assistance in their efforts to compete with Microsoft."

Herbold said Reback's boss, Larry Sonsini, is a director of Microsoft competitor Novell Inc., and owns 54,100 shares of Novell stock.

Executives for other Microsoft competitors also were on Nader's panels, including representatives from Netscape and Sun Microsystems.

Nader criticized Microsoft chief executive Bill Gates and his top executives for refusing repeated invitations to speak to the conference.

"It's like they think they are immune to public scrutiny," Nader told reporters at a news confer-

“*It's like they think they are immune to public scrutiny. What are they afraid of? What is Bill Gates afraid of?*”

RALPH NADER  
conference sponsor

ence later Thursday. "What are they afraid of? What is Bill Gates afraid of?"

Microsoft's Herbold responded, "For us to participate in this kind of environment would be like walking into an ambush with sharpshooters on every hilltop."

At issue is Microsoft's alleged attempts to use its popular computer operating system, Windows, to corner the market on Internet access by including free versions of its Internet Explorer software.

The Justice Department filed suit last month, accusing Microsoft of violating a 1995 consent decree barring the company from anti-competitive practices. It seeks fines of \$1 million a day and accuses Microsoft of threatening personal computer-makers with terminating their license for Windows if they alter Internet Explorer software.

"If monopolized markets abound in high tech, shouldn't the government step in?" asked W. Brian Arthur, an economics professor at the Santa Fe Institute also on the Nader slate.

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### Palstinians will declare statehood

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip (AP) — The Palestinians will declare statehood in 1999, with or without Israeli approval, Yasser Arafat said Thursday.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has warned that he would break off peace talks with the Palestinians if they declared statehood before the two sides have reached a final peace agreement.

"We will declare the establishment of a state whether Netanyahu wants us to or not ... even if part of the state remains under occupation and contains settlements," Arafat said in an interview published Thursday in Israel's *Yediot Ahronot*.

Arafat spoke in the run-up to Saturday's annual independence day celebrations, which mark Arafat's Nov. 15, 1988, declaration of Palestinian independence.

### Pope meets with gunman's brother

VATICAN CITY (AP) — The brother of the Turkish gunman who shot Pope John Paul II has met privately with the pope in an apparent attempt by the family to free the assailant from an Italian prison.

Vatican spokesman Joaquin Navarro-Valls said Thursday that John Paul met briefly Wednesday with Adnan Agca, whose brother, Mehmet Ali Agca, is serving a life sentence for the 1981 shooting. No details were released.

The gunman's family has been trying to win him a pardon or transfer to a prison in Turkey. It would be up to Italy, not the Vatican, to grant it, although the family has hoped for the pope's recommendation.

The Vatican has expressed skepticism on declarations of repentance and reform by Agca, who shot John Paul on May 13, 1981 in St. Peter's Square. The pope met Agca in prison in 1985.

### HIV cases rise dramatically in China

BEIJING (AP) — The number of official cases of HIV infection in China has climbed to 7,253, although experts say the real figure could be as high as 200,000, an official newspaper reported Thursday.

The virus, first detected in China in 1985, is spreading mainly through heterosexual sex and drug use, the *China Daily* said.

Last December, China said 5,157 people were infected with the HIV virus that causes AIDS. By June this year, the number was 7,253, the *China Daily* said.

"Medical experts estimate that some 150,000 to 200,000 Chinese are already affected," the newspaper said.

Sexually transmitted diseases are also spreading, with 398,000 cases reported last year, an increase of 12 percent compared to the year before.

A team of experts plans to tour China to deliver lectures about preventing the spread of AIDS.

### Four American oil workers killed

KARACHI, Pakistan (AP) — Americans living in Karachi stuck close to home Thursday, heeding new warnings from the U.S. State Department to watch for trouble after four American oil company workers were gunned down on their way to work.

A previously unknown group, the Aimal Secret Committee, claimed responsibility for Wednesday's killings and threatened more attacks if a Pakistani in custody in the United States gets the death penalty for the 1993 murders of two CIA workers.

In Fairfax, Va., additional security was ordered for the jury deliberating whether to recommend death for Mir Aimal Kasi, who eluded police for four years before being captured in June in a joint operation involving the FBI and Pakistani security forces.

Many Pakistanis were angered that Kasi was whisked out of the country without an extradition hearing. Tribesmen from his desert hometown of Quetta had sworn to avenge the capture.