

Italy's new prime minister promises to cut taxes and create jobs

ap news capsules

By the Associated Press INTERNATIONAL

ROME — Billionaire media mogul Silvio Berlusconi returned to the familiar Italian airwaves to accept his electoral victory, promising Italians that as prime minister he will keep his promises to cut taxes and create more than a million jobs.

Appearing on state television Monday night against a backdrop of gilt-framed oil paintings and antiques at his Milan villa, Berlusconi said he would need only a short time to form a government following his coalition's victory in both houses of Parliament.

"I am convinced that you all feel the need for a government that governs and for a premier who speaks less and works more and better," Berlusconi said, reading from a prepared statement.

His center-left challenger, Francesco Rutelli, conceded defeat hours earlier, ending a campaign that grew increasingly bitter as questions mounted about Berlusconi's possible conflicts of interest, his legal battles, and choice of right-wing partners.

The same questions explained reaction to Berlusconi's victory in Europe, where right-wing forces welcomed a new conservative government but left-leaning leaders were far more cautious. President Bush congratulated Berlusconi and the State Department said Washington hoped to "enjoy a cooperative and fruitful relationship" with his government.

TOKYO — It's finally official: The Imperial Palace today formally announced Crown Princess Masako is pregnant after nearly eight years of

marriage to Japan's royal heir.

The announcement by Kiyoshi Furukawa, grand master of the crown prince's household, comes one month after the notoriously close-mouthed palace issued a terse statement that Masako, who is 37, was "showing signs" of pregnancy.

"It has been determined that the crown princess is three months pregnant," he said. "If all goes well, the baby will be born in late November or early December."

If the baby is a boy, he would be second in line to the throne after his father, Crown Prince Naruhito, the eldest son of Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko. No male children have been born to the royal family since Naruhito's younger brother 35 years ago.

Masako, a graduate of Harvard University and former diplomat in Japan's Foreign Ministry, wed Naruhito in 1993.

NATIONAL

OAKLAND, Calif. — Yvonne Westbrook recalls when getting relief from the symptoms of multiple sclerosis meant venturing into seedy parks to buy bags of marijuana from drug dealers.

So she worries that the U.S. Supreme Court's unanimous ruling Monday could mean a return of those days. The high court said there is no exception in federal anti-drug laws for patients to use marijuana to ease their pain from cancer, AIDS or other illnesses.

Westbrook is fearful the ruling could mean the end for the dozens of distri-

bution clubs that sprang up after California passed Proposition 215, the state law allowing people to grow and possess medical marijuana. "With the clubs you're able to go to a clean, safe, secure environment," she said.

Voters in Arizona, Alaska, Colorado, Maine, Nevada, Oregon and Washington also have approved ballot initiatives allowing the use of medical marijuana. In Hawaii, the Legislature passed a similar law and the governor signed it last year.

Patients like Westbrook could still use marijuana for medical reasons in states that allow it, legal experts said. But it would be more difficult to obtain because distribution violates federal law.

AUSTIN, Texas — The Texas House has rejected a bill that would have given juries in the nation's No. 1 death penalty state a new sentencing option for murderers: life without parole.

The 72-65 vote against the measure Monday was close enough that the bill's sponsor, Rep. Juan Hinojosa, said he would try to get members to reconsider it as soon as today. The Senate already approved the bill.

Texas law allows juries two options for capital murder convictions: death, or a life sentence with the possibility of parole after 40 years.

Some lawmakers and prosecutors have objected to the bill, saying it would make it difficult to get death sentences. Experts for both sides have testified that convicted murderers sentenced to life under the current law are

unlikely to get out of prison before they die.

WASHINGTON

WASHINGTON — Americans, collectively, are growing older. And they're expanding their ideas of what it means to "settle down."

There was a 71 percent increase in the number of unmarried partners living together between 1990 and 2000, the latest census finds. It dwarfed the growth in married-couple households, up 7 percent the past decade.

Data released by the Census Bureau today also showed larger increases in other alternative arrangements: a 25 percent increase in the number of women living with their own child but without a husband; and a 21 percent growth in the number of people living alone.

Later this year the Census Bureau will reveal more details, such as how many unmarried couples were in same-sex relationships, or how many people living alone were elderly widows.

Still, the figures should place new pressure on lawmakers to deal with the issues of changing family structures, said Thomas Coleman, executive director of the American Association of Single People.

Those issues include expanding employee benefits for domestic partners and recognizing same-sex partnerships.

WASHINGTON — The number of airplanes, vehicles and people on runways continues to grow, and the head of the National Transportation Safety Board warns that a catastrophic accident could result.

Carol Carmody, acting chairwoman of the National Transportation Safety Board, said she fears that two large air-

liners could wind up colliding on a runway unless the problem of incursions is reduced. Generally, incursions are defined as passengers, planes or vehicles that appear on runways but aren't supposed to be there.

The problem is getting worse. In 2000, there were 431 runway incursions, compared with 321 in 1999, Federal Aviation Administration records show.

Incidents this year are running ahead of last year's pace, with 130 incursions during the first four months of 2001, compared with 118 during the same period in 2000.

"Every day, we keep hearing about a new runway incursion," Carmody said in an interview Monday. "As long as there are these kinds of numbers, it makes the possibility of a catastrophe more likely."

Federal Aviation Administrator Jane Garvey has called reducing runway incidents "one of the most important FAA safety initiatives."

WASHINGTON — FBI field offices were told in December that some Oklahoma City bombing records could be discarded, but those instructions were retracted a month later after archivists discovered that some offices had failed to turn over all their evidence to lawyers for Timothy McVeigh, a government official said.

The initial guidance went out in December, the official said Monday, four days after it was revealed the FBI withheld thousands of pages of evidence from lawyers for the convicted bomber.

The revelation was the latest twist to the FBI's mishandling of investigative materials in the Oklahoma City bombing case. The FBI failed to turn over to

McVeigh's lawyers some 3,135 pages of investigative materials, including interview reports, and physical evidence such as photographs, tapes and letters.

In another development, the FBI's Baltimore bureau late last week turned up seven more documents that should have been forwarded, a government official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said Monday night.

WASHINGTON — Aggressive new guidelines for doctors treating people at risk for heart disease could nearly triple the number of Americans taking drugs to lower their cholesterol.

The new guidelines, unveiled today, recommend use of different tests to screen for high cholesterol and revise the optimal standards for good and bad cholesterol.

Diabetes would be added to the conditions indicating an increased risk for heart disease.

Under the guidelines, the number of Americans using prescribed cholesterol drugs could jump from about 13 million to 36 million, the National Institutes of Health estimated. The number of people prescribed a restricted diet to lower cholesterol would also grow sharply.

"Studies show conclusively that lowering the level of low-density lipoprotein, or LDL, the bad cholesterol, can reduce short-term risk for heart disease by as much as 40 percent," said Dr. Claude Lenfant, director of the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute.

The guidelines, being published in this week's issue of the Journal of the American Medical Association, also take more note of "good" high-density lipoprotein.

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