

Thatcher signals fight to stop EEC superstate

Brussels-ruled identikit Europe 'would be highly damaging'

By Simon Heffer in Bruges

THE PRIME Minister last night issued her most uncompromising declaration yet of her intention to defend British parliamentary sovereignty against the EEC bureaucracy. In doing so she further inflamed her dispute with other European leaders over the nature of British participation in the EEC.

In a speech to the College of Europe in Bruges, she sent the clearest signal yet to Brussels that she intends to fight for an EEC that reflects "the traditions and aspirations of all its members".

Hirohito dilemma for doctors

By Robert Whyman
in Tokyo

JAPAN last night braced itself for the worst, as worries deepened about the medical condition of 87-year-old Emperor Hirohito.

Palace officials said his condition was stable, but a team of court physicians was understood to be in a dilemma over how to treat a blockage in the Emperor's digestive system. They are believed to fear their patient is too feeble to withstand an operation.

The Cabinet discussed contingency plans including selection of the formal title of the next emperor's era. Ministers also reviewed security arrangements.

In public senior officials sought to dismiss reports that the Emperor, the world's longest-reigning monarch, had lapsed into a critical condition. Their expressions, however, betrayed the seriousness of bulletins conveyed to the Prime Minister from the palace.

Crown Prince Akihito, 54-year-old heir to the throne, and Princess Michiko visited the palace several times during the day.

The Cabinet will formally decide at a meeting later this week to ask Crown Prince Akihito to carry out the largely ceremonial duties on behalf of Emperor Hirohito, government sources said.

Unconfirmed reports that Prince Aya, a grandson of the Emperor, was deferring his return from Britain were seized upon as an indication that the position might not be as grave as feared at first. Prince Aya, who is 22, went to Britain in the summer to study at Oxford.

An Imperial Household Agency spokesman said the Emperor had been given blood transfusions and placed on an intravenous drip. A swelling pancreas is reported to be preventing him eating solid food.

The state broadcasting station NHK reported that the Emperor vomited blood again during the day and had developed symptoms of jaundice.

The vigil began late on Monday night when court physicians hurried to the palace to treat the Emperor who had taken a turn for the worse a year after he had an intestinal bypass operation which gave rise to complications.

At the time, there was speculation that the Emperor was suffering from cancer of the pancreas.

A stream of official cars took other members of the imperial family, political leaders and foreign ambassadors to the tightly-guarded palace after an early

She added: "To try to suppress nationhood and concentrate power at the centre of a European conglomerate would be highly damaging and would jeopardise the objectives we seek to achieve."

Although the Brussels commission made no comment, a senior EEC diplomat said last night that the stage is now set for a "prolonged major clash of approach between Britain and her Community partners".

The Prime Minister ridiculed attempts to merge national characteristics into what she termed "some sort of identikit European personality."

In what will be construed as an implicit attack on M Jacques Delors, president of the European Commission, Mrs Thatcher declared:

"We have not successfully rolled back the frontiers of the state in Britain, only to see them reimposed at a European level, with a European superstate exercising a new dominance from Brussels."

M Delors, addressing the TUC two weeks ago, cheered the Labour movement with his commitment to steer through new rights from Brussels that would provide some protection for trade unions against the full rigours of the market economy.

But Mrs Thatcher gave a warning against regulations that would make the labour market less flexible and less competitive. She added: "We in Britain would fight attempts to introduce collectivism and corporatism at the European level."

Although the Prime Minister joked with her audience about reports of her anti-Europeanism—"It must seem like inviting Genghis Khan to speak on the virtues of peaceful co-existence"—there was no doubt that her words will reverberate around the Community and signal a fresh strain on relations between Britain and her partners unless Mrs Thatcher's demands regarding sovereignty and deregulation are met.

Mrs Thatcher reaffirmed her commitment to Europe, but she added: "Working more closely together does not require power to be centralised in Brussels or decisions to be taken by an appointed bureaucracy."

"It is ironic that, just when those countries such as the Soviet Union, which have tried to run everything from the centre, are learning that success depends on dispersing power and decisions away from the centre, some in the Community want to move in the opposite direction."

She continued: "We want to see Europe more united and with a greater sense of common purpose. But it must be in a way which preserves the different traditions, parliamentary powers and sense of national pride in one's own country."

Mrs Thatcher also signalled her determination to force the EEC to make further cuts in agricultural subsidies, branding the Common Agricultural Policy

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"unwieldy, inefficient and grossly expensive."

She accused some of Britain's partners of stifling enterprise and added: "The lesson of the economic history of Europe in the 1970s and 1980s is that central planning and detailed control don't work, and that personal endeavour and initiative do."

She expressed the hope that the single-European market in 1992 would not offer an excuse for more central regulations.

She cited examples of how Britain had taken the lead in encouraging enterprise by removing barriers—as in telecommunications, air transport and opening coastal trade to the merchant navies of Europe.

But she added: "I wish I could say the same of many other Community members."

Mrs Thatcher argued that the creation of a European central bank, which many Conservative Right-wingers resist because of the sacrifice of control over the economy that it would entail, was a side issue.

The "practical requirements" were to implement the EEC's commitment to free movement of capital, to abolish exchange controls and to establish a free market in financial services. These requirements had already been met in Britain.

Although committed to the single European market, she affirmed that "we cannot totally abolish frontier controls if we are to protect our citizens from crime and stop the movement of drugs, of terrorists, and of illegal immigrants."

This had been underlined by the trapping of IRA terrorists by a German Customs officer.

Later Mrs Thatcher had dinner and talks with the Belgian Prime Minister, Mr Martens, and members of his government. She was said to have reiterated the views expressed in her speech "very vigorously".

Her speech is certain to appeal to a large contingent of the Conservative party. She does, however, risk provoking outbursts from her pro-European backbenchers, such as Mr Edward Heath.

Her remarks are almost certain to be seized upon by the Labour party, at its conference in a fortnight's time, since Labour have been moving towards

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Europe almost as quickly as some leading Tories have been moving away from it.

● Alan Osborn reports from Brussels: There was no immediate response to Mrs Thatcher's remarks by M Delors. He "will make his position known in due course," said a Commission spokesman.

There is little love lost between Mrs Thatcher and M Delors. Although the Prime Minister said at the EEC summit in Hanover that she "fully backed" his re-appointment as president of the Commission, she is said to regard the French former finance minister as the chief architect of the "airy-fairy" notions about Europe that she despises.

Lord Cockfield, architect of the single market proposals, who is being replaced as senior British EEC Commissioner, said yesterday before Mr Thatcher made her speech "It does not matter that I've been sacked.

"This will make no difference to the goal of a Community without frontiers and approximated indirect tax rates by 1992."

Addressing the economic committee of the European Parliament, Lord Cockfield said he would leave behind in Brussels "a strong team of officials" to see the programme through.

Dr Barry Seal, leader of the British Labour group in the European Parliament, said that, if Mrs Thatcher was sincere, she should use her veto power to halt the single European market. "She is saying one thing at home and another abroad."

EEC officials made clear privately that, while the content of Mrs Thatcher's speech was not entirely unexpected, they were disappointed that she had not shown greater willingness to share in M Delors' aspirations for the next decade which they argued were "broadly accepted by all the other members".

M Delors said in July that he believed that by 1995 some 80 per cent of all national legislation in the Community would be handled by Brussels. He referred to the existence of an "embryo European government" then.

This view is not widely shared among other governments.

While all EEC members will be on the alert to maximise their advantages from the single market, major objections in principle to many of its chief requirements will come only from Britain.

Officials in Brussels said it was theoretically possible to go ahead without London's approval on such matters as tax harmonisation and even on the creation of a European central bank. But the abolition of frontiers was described as "inconceivable without the co-operation of all twelve members".