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Germany

Bundesrat walkout gives shock clear run to Sea Accident Bill

By Birgit Strietzel in Cologne

THE controversial German Sea Accident Bill has passed the second chamber of the German parliament and will now become law.

During a turbulent meeting of the German Bundesrat, the states' chamber, members of the Christian Democratic Party left the meeting over a procedural dispute involving the voting over the government's immigration Bill.

Due to the walkout, the Sea Accident Bill was passed. There were too few votes for an amendment to stop passage, although the opponents of it should have had a majority in the chamber. Germany's five coastal states had proposed to refer the Bill to the arbitration committee between the two houses of the German parliament and to make major amendments.

The Bill centralises all accident investigations in one Hamburg-based authority and removes most of the powers of the local Seeamts, which have so far carried out investigations.

At the same time, the Bill closes investigations from public scrutiny, as the central authority — unlike the Seeamts — does not hold its hearings in public.

"The walkout of the parliament members shows how low maritime matters are on the list of some states," said Jochen Hinz, who insisted that he spoke only in his capacity as an elected representative of staff at the German shipping authority BSH. Mr Hinz is also president of the German Seeamts in Kiel, Hamburg and Rostock.

He added that local maritime associations, which

were fighting the Bill, are now deeply shocked.

"All the efforts of the opponents were thus in vain," said Ragnar Schwefel of the German liberal opposition party FDP.

Through the Bill, the Seeamts will also lose its responsibility over the withdrawal of maritime licences. This section is particularly resented by the Seeamts. Seeamt Kiel on Friday urged the German transport ministry to leave licence withdrawal in the hands of the Seeamts.

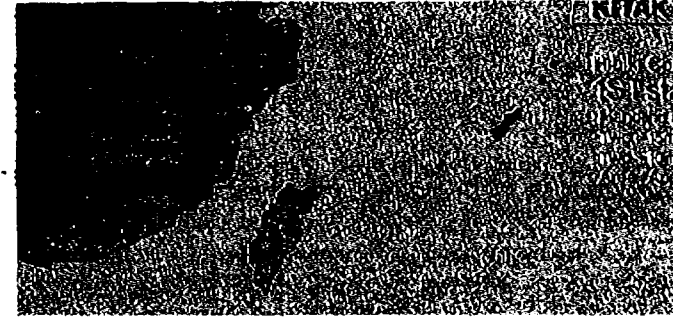
At the same time, it asked the transport ministry to increase the frequency of alcohol controls in German water, to commission an international study on masters' alcohol abuse with a look at reasons for excessive alcohol consumption, and to make

blood testing for alcoholism compulsory.

On Thursday, the Seeamt Kiel confiscated yet another German master's certificate, the latest in a series of withdrawals over the last two years. "The incident confirms the worrying tendency of increasing abuse," said Mr Hinz.

Between January 2000 and December 2001, the Seeamt in Kiel withdrew 20 licences. In the previous five years, the number had been six altogether.

In the latest case, the master caused an accident in Wismar last October, with a blood alcohol level of 2.8 parts per thousand. On Thursday, his licence was withdrawn for a year. Seeamt Kiel also ruled that he must pass a blood test proving that he is not an alcoholic before regaining the licence.



PSA Corp. and Kitakyushu City has conditions for the implementation of project on PFI basis that was given r A final agreement is supposed to be July of 2002, and "Hibiki" will open

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