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N. IRELAND / RIVAL GROUPS REJECT PEACE PACKAGE

# Belfast witnesses night of rioting

By Hasan Suroor 23/7

LONDON, JULY 28. Fresh violence broke out in Northern Ireland on Friday even as the British and Irish Governments struggled to broker a peace deal that would put an end to the deepening political crisis over the IRA's reluctance to give up its weapons.

The Northern Ireland Secretary, Dr. John Reid, met Sinn Fein leaders today after a night of rioting in North Belfast. The cause was not known but both Unionists and Republicans blamed each other for starting the riots in which one man received gunshots and police were attacked with petrol bombs, bottles and stones. Pitched clashes were reported after some 300 rioters came on the streets on Friday night and as the trouble centred around the largely Protestant Ardoyne area, Unionists alleged that it was provoked by Republicans.

This is the second major flare-up this month which has been marked by mounting political tension following the resignation of the Unionist leader, Mr. David Trimble as head of the provincial coalition government. He resigned on July 1 to force the IRA to start decommissioning throwing the peace process in a tailspin. Shortly afterwards, there were a series of clashes in the run-up to the annual marching season by the Protestant Orangemen.

The marches themselves, however, passed off peacefully, but with militants on both sides spoiling for a fight, tension has been running high and a prolonged political vacuum is likely to help them gain further ground.

Observers said it was significant that Friday's violence came as the political stalemate deepened with mainstream Unionists and Republicans virtually rejecting a British-Irish compromise peace package even without knowing its full details.

The package, which was to have been announced yesterday, has been put off until next week amid clear signals that neither side is likely to accept it. Leaked details have angered



A man walks past a burned-out car following overnight riots in north Belfast on Saturday. — Reuters

Unionists as they believe the package makes too many concessions to Republicans without addressing their own concerns on arms decommissioning. Republicans, on the other hand, feel that it falls short of their minimum conditions for them to think of decommissioning.

The British Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair, however, sought to keep the hopes alive saying a solution was still possible. "We are quite convinced we have the right package of proposals — fair, reasonable — representing the best way of breaking the remaining impasse in the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement," he said. His Irish counterpart, Mr. Bertie Ahern described the package as "our best effort" to break the deadlock.

He said it was not possible to "do everything for everyone because of conflicting positions" but the two Governments had tried to put together a package which, they believed, would

be acceptable to both sides. Their optimism, however, was drowned in hardline political rhetoric. The Ulster Unionist Party's tough-talking M.P., Mr. Jeffrey Donaldson, seen as a potential successor to Mr. Trimble, accused Mr. Blair and Mr. Ahern of "misrepresenting" facts and said: "It's time for Tony Blair to come clean with the people of Northern Ireland instead of hiding behind a subterfuge of spin."

Mr. Donaldson and another party M.P., Mr. David Burnside have already called for abandoning the peace process and re-negotiating the Good Friday Agreement.

Meanwhile, the Democratic Unionist Party has blamed the IRA for stirring up trouble in vulnerable Protestant areas, while Sinn Fein blamed Friday's violence on the Protestant Ulster Defence Association. Whatever be the truth, the flare-up has further vitiated the climate.

23 JUL 2001

# EU releases rogue list

Reuters

BRUSSELS, Dec 28 — The European Union today published names of organisations and people it considers terrorists, fulfilling its pledge after 11 September terrorist attacks on the USA that it would make a list of extremist groups it sought to eradicate.

The 15-country bloc was stung into creating a joint definition of "terrorism" and creating a list of groups all its member-states would treat as terrorists following the attacks on America.

In a detailed regulation published with the list, EU countries agreed to work together to ensure that the groups and their financial supporters were suppressed and traffic in forged identity documents and arms by them stopped.

The text said EU leaders had declared terrorism a challenge to

the world and to Europe and had pledged to make the fight against terrorism a priority.

Published without fanfare or official comment in the bloc's official journal, the list includes groups active in the Basque region, Northern Ireland and West Asia. Many of the same groups appear on a US "terrorist exclusion list", published earlier this month.

Groups on both sides of the Northern Ireland struggle, such as the Real IRA and the Loyalist Volunteer Force, are listed but the Irish Republican Army, a group formerly considered terrorists by the British government but which has committed itself to the peace process, is not.

The radical Basque separatist group ETA appears, but the party widely considered its political wing, Batasuna, does not, despite Madrid's efforts to get it included.

EU diplomats who have spent

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weeks drawing up the list agreed not to include any political parties, a European Commission spokesman said. Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Hamas-Izz al-Din al-Qassem, which the list says is the terrorist wing of the Islamist group, Hamas, are on the list.

Lebanon's Hizbollah is not on the list though one of its senior members is on a separate list of alleged terrorists whose assets should be frozen. That list is aimed at bringing the EU in line with a United Nations resolution of 28 September on freezing terrorist assets. The 11 September attacks galvanised EU political leaders into creating a more wide approach to policing and into clamping down on "terrorism".

Earlier this month the bloc created an arrest warrant for a wide range of crimes, including terrorism, which, once issued in one country, would be valid throughout the EU.

THE STATESMAN

29 DEC 2001

# EU summit ends in rows, without deal

Brussels, December 16

IT WAS billed as a summit to mark the launch of a new European Union, which would re-engage with a public that has lost the faith.

Much was achieved by the leaders of the 15-nation bloc during a two-day meeting in Belgium, notably the establishment of a convention to debate widely how it works and how it might be reformed.

But hours of late wrangling on Saturday over the location of a dozen new agencies, which failed to end in a deal and featured an outburst by Italian premier Silvio Berlusconi, showed EU members still find it hard to rise above national interests.

Berlusconi, who demanded a new food standards agency be sited in the Italian city of Parma rather than in Finland, was unrepentant. "I said a strong 'No'," he told reporters as the two-day summit ended. "I bumped into a difficult hurdle but I did not give up."

Some of his counterparts were less confident the latest spat would do anything to improve the union's image.

"It's a bit petty," Swedish premier Goran Persson said. A bemused Persson, wondering why the row blew up at all, said the European public could scarcely care less.

It was hardly inspirational stuff. The leaders strived and failed to agree on sites for institutions including civil and maritime bodies, a police training college and an information technology security agency.



TONY BLAIR

Last year's Nice summit left EU leaders resolved never to argue in the same way again. There, the heads of government were supposed to agree on sweeping institutional reforms to pave the way to accept 10 or more new members in the years to come — but fell short.

Wrapping up the two-day summit, the 15 leaders took the unprecedented step of agreeing on a political convention to chart the future course of the union, adopting the Laeken Declaration on the Future of Europe.

The convention, due to start work in March, will draw up proposals for reforms to make the EU operate more smoothly and effectively as it prepares to welcome up to a dozen new members — mostly former Communist countries of central and eastern Europe — in the next

few years.

The Laeken Declaration, peddled by the Belgian presidency, set a new tone, stating that the Union was at crossroads as it prepared to enlarge and must become closer to its citizens.

The political convention will sit for a year and guide debate leading to a decision-making council in 2004.

Much is up for grabs, and there is even the long-term prospect of an EU constitution. But the portents for a major overhaul of the cumbersome bloc and its tangle of treaties were not encouraging at this summit. Belgium's first ambitious efforts were heavily diluted as Britain and Sweden complained that it had posed questions in a "leading" way designed to elicit the kind of federalist solution favoured by Belgium and Germany.

And some members derided the choice of 75-year-old ex-French President Valéry Giscard D'Estaing to head the convention. Britain, which has more to fear than most from a eurosceptic electorate scenting the creation of a federal EU state, seemed relaxed. That suggested it too thought the most far-reaching reforms would not be achieved any time soon.

Prime Minister Tony Blair said the EU was moving ahead more pragmatically under British and French influence.

"Of course Europe should cooperate more closely... but on the basis of nations coming together, not some sort of federal superstate," Blair said.

Reuters

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

17 DEC 2001

17 DEC

# E.U. warns U.S. against extending war on terror

16/12/01  
LAEKEN (BELGIUM), DEC. 15. The European Union today warned the United States against extending its international war on terrorism beyond Afghanistan without first seeking approval from the international community.

"There can be no possible geographical extension of these operations without the prior approval of the international community," the 15-member body said, a day after promising participation in a U.N.-mandated military force in Afghanistan. The warning came in draft conclusions made available in French that were expected to be approved by the summit.

The U.S. President, Mr. George W. Bush has repeatedly said that the current campaign against Afghanistan's Taliban regime, Osama bin Laden and his Al-Qaeda network is just the beginning of a U.S.-led "war against terrorism." Pentagon sources have suggested that further action against targets and organisations accused of ter-

16/12/01  
ational planning at the E.U.'s disposal.

Without guaranteed NATO assistance, the E.U. might have to move towards costly development of a parallel planning apparatus for peacekeeping and other missions in and around Europe. With defence budgets across the Union stagnant or in decline, the chances of that look slim. The Belgian Foreign Minister, Mr. Louis Michel, whose country holds the E.U.'s rotating presidency, conceded before the summit that failure to set a relationship with NATO in stone would make a declaration of operationality largely rhetorical. "If no access to NATO's resources can be secured, it must declare itself operational without such a declaration being based on any true capability," he told the European Parliament.

Turkey had threatened to veto access to NATO planning unless the Europeans guaranteed that its force would not be used in dis-



Belgium's Prime Minister, Mr. Guy Verhofstadt (left), gestures while speaking with his British counterpart, Mr. Tony Blair, at the Royal Palace of Laeken in Brussels on Friday ahead of the E.U. summit. — AP

rorist activity or complicity could include Iraq, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen.

In another development, the E.U. was set to declare its 60,000-troop rapid reaction force operational today despite the failure of diplomatic efforts to secure crucial access to NATO planning resources.

"The Union is henceforth capable of carrying out crisis management operations," the 15-nation bloc planned to say in a final summit declaration. "The development of means and capacities that the Union has at its disposal will allow it progressively to take on ever more complex operations." But the proclamation rang hollow after Greece refused to accept a deal under which its Aegean arch-rival, NATO ally Turkey, would have agreed to put the Western defence alliance's oper-

ates with Greece or over divided Cyprus. An E.U. aspirant located at the intersection of three crisis zones — the Balkans, West Asia and the Caucasus — it had also sought the automatic right to join E.U. security operations.

Hopes rose last week after the U.S., Britain and the Netherlands hammered out an accord with Ankara. But Greece, which came close to war with its neighbour as recently as 1996 over an Aegean islet, held out for assurances to match those won by Turkey. It objected to terms of the agreement under which non-E.U. NATO members — meaning Turkey — would be invited to join missions of the new force on a case-by-case basis and consulted on missions that could have an impact on their national security. — AFP, Reuters

THE HINDU

16 DEC 2001

# Agreement on Europe's future amidst protests

REUTERS  
BRUSSELS, Dec. 15. - European Union leaders meeting in Brussels today approved a landmark declaration on the future of Europe, ushering in a period of intensive debate on institutional reform of the 15-nation bloc, diplomats said. The final text of the Laeken Declaration, named after the royal palace in Brussels where the leaders met for a two-day summit, fell short of the federalist ambitions of EU president Romano Prodi, but retained a reference to the long-term prospect of an EU constitution.

The declaration poses a series of questions about how the EU can become more open, democratic and efficient, but does not try to anticipate the answers. Earlier drafts with more "leading questions" had upset states such as Britain and Sweden.

A Convention bringing together representatives of national governments and parliaments and of the EU's supranational institutions - the Commission and the Parliament - will seek answers to the questions posed in the declaration. The Convention, whose leader was due to be named later today at Laeken, starts its work on 1 March, 2002. It will make proposals to an inter-governmental conference where member states will have the final say on the future shape of the EU.

To help exchange rates Euro notes and coins will be

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launched in 17 days, according to the draft conclusions due to be issued today at the end of the summit.

The summit was marred for a second day by violent protests. Anti-capitalist marchers hurled Molotov cocktails at police and vandalised buildings and cars during a march against the summit, police said.

Scattered incidents erupted during the march by some 700 self-proclaimed anarchists. "No justice, no peace, fight the police," chanted a demonstrator.

Protesters threw two improvised petrol bombs - Molotov cocktails - at police, a police spokeswoman said.

Demonstrators damaged a bank and broke windows of various buildings and cars, eyewitnesses said. The incidents happened several miles (kms) from the elegant royal palace at Laeken where EU leaders met behind a heavy screen of security to discuss the future of Europe, the economic slowdown and the war in Afghanistan. At another point along the route, the march turned into a standoff between marchers and police. Scores of police in riot gear and backed by two water cannon trucks confronted the demonstrators before they moved on again, a Reuters reporter at the scene said.

At least one car had its window smashed and five or six protesters were led away by police, she said.

THE STATESMAN

16 DEC 2001

# UK, France blamed for Bosnia carnage

Paris, November 30

UN MEMBERS including France and Britain must share blame for failing to stop the 1995 massacre of up to 8,000 Muslim men and boys by Serb forces in the UN safe area of Srebrenica, a French report has found.

The parliamentary report, launched last year after allegations that a French UN commander in the area deliberately allowed the Serbs to capture the town, said UN peacekeeping operations were half-hearted and poorly resourced.

It criticised France, Britain and the United States, as permanent members of the UN Security Council which directed operations, for "undertaking commitments they did not respect

because they did not equip themselves with the means".

"The reason for the fall of Srebrenica is to be found in the lack of strong political will to intervene by France, Britain, the United States and the Bosnian authorities in Sarajevo themselves," the report concluded.

It said French General Bernard Janvier committed a "manifest error of judgement" by refusing to sanction air strikes against Serbs to stop them taking control of Srebrenica, but said there was no evidence he deliberately helped them. It said France's blame was particularly marked as a member of the UN Security Council and of the international Contact Group formed to try to end the war, and as the largest contribu-

tor of troops to the international mission in Bosnia.

"Srebrenica is also a failure for France," it said. The report further noted the "astonishing absence" of two British commanders of the UN operation during the siege of Srebrenica.

The report said it was now up to France, Britain and the United States in particular to capture Bosnian Serb wartime leader Radovan Karadzic and his military chief Ratko Mladic, both still on the loose.

What has been described as Europe's worst atrocity since World War II was committed in July 1995. Bosnian Serb forces steadily tightened their siege of the small town in eastern Bosnia, crammed with tens of thousands of Muslim refugees.

A small contingent of Dutch UN troops stationed in the town repeatedly requested air support from Janvier, who declined the requests—on one occasion because it had been submitted on the wrong written form.

Finally taking control of the town, Serb forces ferried women and children to Muslim territory on Serb buses and from July 13 systematically executed Muslim male prisoners, mostly by shooting.

Some Bosnians believe UN officials deliberately sacrificed Srebrenica to "straighten out" future borders, while others say the French prevented air strikes against the Serbs to secure the release of French soldiers taken hostage earlier that summer.

Reuters

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

1 DEC 2001

# Hardliners frown on IRA arms move

DAVID LISTER AND PHILIP WEBSTER  
THE TIMES, LONDON

## UK SECURITY POSTS

LONDON, Oct. 24. — Hopes that the IRA's decision to decommission some of its weapons would bring stability to Northern Ireland's fragile peace were dealt a blow yesterday when dissident Republicans called it a sell-out and hardline Unionists dismissed it as inadequate.

The IRA had been under pressure from London, Dublin and Washington to act, particularly after 11 September and the arrests in Colombia in August of three IRA suspects.

Its statement said: "Our motivation is clear. This move is to save the peace process and to persuade others of our genuine intentions."

Republican leader Mr Gerry Adams said it was a huge moment in the "history of our island. Let us not fritter it away."

The International Disarmament Commission declared that the IRA had put a quantity of arms, explosives and ammunition completely beyond use but gave no other details, saying that to do so would hinder the ultimate aim of scrapping all weapons.

The British army will today begin dismantling four military installations in a televised display of de-escalation.

Republican Sinn Fein (RSF), the splinter group which broke with mainstream Republicanism in 1986 and is widely seen as the Continuity IRA's political wing accused the Provisionals of a surrender "unprecedented" in Irish history.

LONDON, Oct. 24. — Britain will dismantle four security installations in Northern Ireland "as quickly as possible" following the Irish Republican Army's decision to disarm, Mr Tony Blair's official spokesman said today. Mr George W Bush has hailed the IRA decision.

The installations, comprising army posts and police stations, are in Magherafelt and Newtownhamilton in the south of the province. — AFP

THE STATESMAN

# E.U. backs U.S. plan to overthrow Taliban regime

By Batuk Gathani

BRUSSELS, OCT. 20. At the conclusion of the emergency Ghent summit on Friday night, the 15 European Union member-States, resolved to back the American drive to replace the Taliban regime in Afghanistan.

U.S. special forces have launched the ground phase of the war in Afghanistan. The military action launched in southern Afghanistan marks a "turning point" in the second week of the war in Afghanistan. The European Union final document did not specifically mention an overt overthrow of the Taliban regime as called for in the initial draft declaration.

As the French President, Mr. Jacques Chirac said: "This difference over wording did not hide the fact that there was 'no question' that the Taliban had to be replaced by a democratic regime and concluded that its (Taliban) internal and external behaviour justifies its replacement."

The final Ghent summit document says that under the auspices of the United Nations, the European Union should "work towards the emergence of a stable new government, legitimate and representative of all the Afghan population." At this stage, neither the European nor American officials have any idea of the contour and composition of a post-Taliban

administration and the current perceptions are based on "agreed generalities" as a European observer put it.

The Ghent summit also persuaded the European Central Bank to lower the interest rates to contain challenges posed by the economic slowdown. The ECB president, who has consistently championed the cause of the bank's independence, said there would be no cuts in interest rates until next year. Mr Wim Duisenberg, ECB president, told the E.U. leaders that the bank would not change its monetary policy unless the European inflation rate went below the current projection of less than two per cent in the next year.

The president of the European Parliament, Mr. Nicole Fontaine, urged the people and governments of Europe to agree swiftly on "joint, concrete measures" to strengthen civil defences and medical sectors against the threat of biological terrorism.

Justifying holding a mini-summit for an hour before the commencement of the main summit, the British Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair said Britain, France and Germany intended "no disrespect" to the other countries and added that E.U. support for the military action had strengthened since the bombing in Afghanistan began.

THE HINDU

21 OCT 2001



# E.U. summit to show solidarity with U.S.

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By Batuk Gathani

**BRUSSELS, OCT. 19.** The 15 member-States of the European Union are holding an emergency summit at Ghent in Belgium today to discuss the way forward in Afghanistan and West Asia.

A restricted pre-summit session in Ghent among French, British and German leaders has irritated the Italians. The three-way meeting was proposed by the French President, Mr. Jacques Chirac, to the chagrin of the Italian Prime Minister, Mr. Silvio Berlusconi, officials said privately. The E.U. President, Mr. Romano Prodi's "discomfiture" at the mini summit was apparent. It distracted attention from what could be a big shift in Europe's traditional post-war balance of power and influence. Since the September 11 events, the British Prime Minister — who was recently described as America's "most prominent travelling Ambassador" — is now a new member of the European Union's sacred trio replacing the traditional duo of Germany and France.

The mini-summit of the big three — Mr. Schroeder, Mr. Chirac and Mr. Blair — has been greeted with a cynical glee by the other E.U. member-States. Their only solace is that these are exceptional times. The Ghent summit is likely to see tensions of the war being debated in private but in the final communiqué, the E.U. leaders will show solidarity with the U.S. They will also address the



**The French President, Mr. Jacques Chirac (left), talks to the Belgian Prime Minister, Mr. Guy Verhofstadt (centre), as the Finnish President, Ms. Tarja Halonen, looks on during a photo session at a European Union heads of state summit at the Sint Pieters Abbey in Ghent in Belgium on Friday. At the second row behind stands the Austrian Prime Minister, Mr. Wolfgang Schuessel (left), the Belgian Foreign Minister, Mr. Louis Michel (second right), and the British Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair (right). — Reuters**

economic and political impact of the unfolding scenario in Afghanistan.

The European leaders are meeting for the first time since the military attack on Afghanistan and this is their first opportunity to assess the European Union's role in the fight against domestic

and global terrorism. The leaders are also worried by the impact of the post-September 11 events on the E.U.'s slowing economic performance.

This is a key issue on the agenda of the informal one-day summit. The economic slowdown in Europe is more pronounced with

falling consumer confidence and a decline in overseas orders. All this may trigger higher unemployment in the euro-zone region. There is pressure on the European Central Bank to cut interest rates. Last night, Mr. Schroeder called on the E.U. leaders to define a common European

security policy and urged the leaders to initiate institutional reforms.

## Differences surface

Vajju Naravane reports from Paris:

Despite loud declarations of unity and solidarity with the U.S. raids on Afghanistan, differences over what policy to adopt are surfacing in Europe.

The French Foreign Minister, Mr. Hubert Vedrine, fired the first salvo when he said the U.S. military action in Afghanistan had made other NATO members feel irrelevant. "E.U. member-States reacted with perfect unity. You could say the real problem arises for NATO which offered its services and was told 'Don't call us, we'll call you.' I can understand why people in NATO are asking 'What use are we?'"

NATO invoked its mutual defence clause for the first time in 52 years following the suicide attacks against America. Many European leaders are miffed at the way Britain has been singled out for special treatment by the U.S. President, Mr. George Bush. The French and Italians have repeatedly said their forces are at the disposal of the U.S. But American has chosen to go it alone so far.

Meanwhile, Sweden and other Nordic countries are worried at the continuing bombing of Afghanistan and the high number of civilian casualties. They have also questioned the U.S. intention of bombing other States.

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## E.U. summit to evolve common policy on Afghanistan

By Batuk Gathani

**BRUSSELS, Oct. 18.** The summit of the 15-nation European Union member states on Friday in the Belgian city of Ghent, is scheduled to be preceded by a separate summit of the leaders of France, Germany and Britain, "for talks on Afghanistan".

The leaders of the three countries will meet for an hour before the E.U. summit. They have acknowledged the need to consult at the "highest level" on the international situation, following the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks in the U.S. and the situation in Afghanistan. The initiative for the meeting was taken by the French President, Mr. Jacques Chirac, in the wake of cracks beginning to show in the Western alliance as the war in Afghanistan drags on with little tangible achievement on both the military and political fronts.

On Friday, the E.U. leaders will attempt to forge a common policy on Afghanistan. On Wednesday, the Foreign Ministers tried to "paper over" the cracks in the Eu-

ropean response to the Afghanistan crises. Overtly, the Foreign Ministers have resolved to maintain "total solidarity" with the U.S. and the Bush administration in its fight against terrorism. The Europeans are divided ideologically between the pragmatists comprising centre-right and middle-of-centre parties and so-called ideologues and anti-war factions, comprising centre-left parties. Politicians on both sides of the fence have to walk a fine line keeping in mind their domestic agenda and defining a broad role of the E.U. to help forge a new agenda in post-Taliban Afghanistan. Slowly but surely, Europeans are waking up to the reality that the war on terrorism may drag on for years — as Mr. Bush put it.

The bombing raid in Afghanistan will soon enter into the third week but the Northern Alliance — the Taliban's main opposition — has yet to launch a military offensive to take Kabul. The U.S. bombing has, however, crippled the Taliban's fighting power. The British have given the broadest

hint yet of the imminent use of ground forces. As allied warplanes pound targets in north of Kabul and other military installations, the scenario does not warrant a major offensive on the ground.

The Taliban stronghold of Kandahar has yet to be cracked. The military strategists at the NATO headquarters and bureaucrats and politicians in the European Commission and in the European Parliament have differing perceptions about the unfolding military and political scenario in Afghanistan.

The European security agencies have been embarrassed by revelations about the extent of penetration of Osama bin Laden's Al-Qaeda and similar organisations into major European countries. The intelligence agencies are busy co-ordinating their activities related to money laundering, freezing assets and tightening border controls and focusing on activities of religious and youth groups suspected to have links with Al-Qaeda.

The Europeans are also concerned about the consequences

of spillover effects of the American military air strikes, which have its embarrassing moments — like the destruction of a Red Cross warehouse and some half the volume of food supplies for refugees falling into the hands of the Taliban.

The E.U. will first debate how its member states could combat terrorism within its borders and secondly, what the E.U. as a whole could do about Afghanistan. It would also like to forge closer links with the United Nations.

The cynical European view is that Pakistan and Gen. Pervez Musharraf's Government are "getting maximum mileage" out of the crisis in Afghanistan as one European observer put it and hence it is argued that the E.U. should also sort out its priorities. "Bedding with a military regime, for military ends is not comfortable" quipped an European official who also feels that Pakistan needs to be "rewarded" for doing a U-turn on the Taliban and Osama.

THE HINDU

Burye  
18-17

# It's the loyalists now

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IT IS a deep irony and has not gone unnoticed that at a time when Britain is crusading against international terrorism, in its own backyard terror is thriving with the situation in Northern Ireland worsening by the day.

The expectation that the worldwide campaign against terrorists in the aftermath of America's "black Tuesday" would have a salutary impact on Britain's home-grown extremists has been belied and things have got so bad lately that last week, the Northern Ireland Secretary, Dr. John Reid, came close to declaring that the loyalist Ulster Defence Association (UDA), which has been involved in a number of violent incidents, was in breach of the official ceasefire, and another Protestant paramilitary outfit, the Loyalist Volunteer Force (LVF), is being investigated for the murder of a journalist on September 28.

Martin O'Hagan, 51, a senior *Sunday World* reporter, is the first journalist covering the Northern Ireland crisis to have been killed in what is seen to be a warning to the media to lay off terrorists. "His murder has drawn a new line in what is acceptable to print and what can get you killed in Ulster," according to an *Observer* columnist who knew O'Hagan. Journalists say it has

never been easy to report Northern Ireland but, by and large, they have been able to operate fairly freely even through some of the most vicious phases in the sectarian conflict.

The O'Hagan murder, however, has suddenly changed the situation and there is concern that this could be the beginning of a campaign by terrorists to force the media to toe their line — a new and

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*While the IRA has been under pressure, the loyalists have been playing havoc. Hasan Suroor on the situation in Northern Ireland.*

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uglier phase of intimidation which began with the harassment of small Catholic schoolchildren in North Belfast last month when, for days together, residents of a predominantly Protestant neighbourhood tried to prevent them from walking past loyalist homes to reach their school.

Tension over the issue still remains with the Catholics

saying that they have a right to use a public road and Protestants alleging that IRA supporters masquerading as "parents" are using children as a cover to infiltrate loyalist property and stir up trouble. Last week, there was fresh violence making it the worst summer in 20 years, according to the police.

The most disturbing aspect was the participation of little children raising concerns that "a new generation of hatred", as *the Independent* put it, was beginning to come of age. "The soldiers and the RUC (Royal Ulster Constabulary) look on them as a nuisance rather than a danger. But give them a decade and unless things change remarkably in the meantime, many of these children will know how to fire a rifle or revolver, will have learnt to manufacture and use bombs, and know exactly how much sugar is needed in a petrol bomb," the newspaper said.

Significantly, it is the loyalist outfits which have been more aggressive in recent weeks, presumably emboldened by the IRA's difficulties after some of its activists were found hobnobbing with an extremist group in Colombia; and more critically after Washington openly snubbed it for dithering on the issue of giving up its weapons and thus endangering

the fragile peace process.

Traditionally, Washington has been a friend of the Republicans because of a significant Irish electorate in the U.S. and, the Sinn Fein president, Mr. Gerry Adams, was feted in America even when he was persona non grata in Britain but after the September 11 attacks the equation has changed.

With Britain going out on a limb to support the U.S.-led coalition against terrorism, America cannot be seen to be soft towards an organisation that has been giving sleepless nights to Mr. Tony Blair.

So, while the IRA and its political wing, the Sinn Fein, have been under pressure, the loyalists have been playing havoc. The Sinn Fein's moderate loyalist coalition partner in the Provincial Government — the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) — has also become more aggressive and wants its expulsion from the Government if it does not get the IRA to start decommissioning.

The UUP chief, Mr. David Trimble, who plunged the peace process into a crisis after he resigned as head of the Government in July to force decommissioning, has not only ruled out a return until the IRA starts destroying its weapons, but has tabled a resolution in the Assembly against the Sinn Fein's continued participation in the coalition.

He has said that if the resolution is defeated, he would remove his Ministers from the Government — a move which would inevitably lead to the collapse of the peace process. Even if he does not carry out the threat, it would require all of Mr. Blair's fire-fighting skills to get the accord back on the rails considering that the IRA has shown no inclination to oblige.

Mr. Adams has made clear that the Republicans will not give in to "ultimatums", and to underline this the IRA has practically shelved its offer to destroy two of its arms dumps. Northern Ireland's political institutions have been at a standstill for three months now, and if a solution is not found over the next four weeks, the British Government would be forced, under the rules, to suspend the Assembly indefinitely or call for fresh elections. Neither of which inspires confidence in the future of the Good Friday Agreement.



Loyalist damage on the streets of Belfast.

THE HINDU

7 OCT 2002

# Europe drive against terrorists

By Vaiju Naravane

PARIS, SEPT. 21. With the arrest of suspected terrorists in France, and arrest warrants issued in Germany today, European Governments have started a concerted anti-terrorist campaign.

Several suspects were arrested earlier this week in France, Belgium and the Netherlands. Police in Europe are turning up fresh evidence that the terrorists who took part in the attacks against the United States on September 11 transited through several European countries.

On Friday morning, French police arrested seven suspected Islamic fundamentalists. They were being questioned by the DST, the French counter-espionage agency. Officials said the detentions were linked to a series of raids in Belgium and the Netherlands car-

ried out on the basis of declarations made by a Franco-Algerian arrested at Dubai airport in late July. The Spanish Interior Ministry said today that the 33-year-old Egyptian terrorist, Mohamad Atta, who was aboard the American Airlines flight that crashed into the World Trade Center's north tower had spent two weeks in Spain in July.

Spain's *El Mundo* newspaper reported that Atta had gone to Spain to meet a member of Osama bin Laden's Al Qaeda organization.

Spanish authorities said Atta stayed at a hotel in Salou, a seaside town, rented a car and left from Madrid airport on July 19. The hotel owner told reporters he found Atta "educated and likable" and that the man did not meet anyone during his two-day stay at the hotel.

Germany says it has issued warrants for a 29-year-old Yemeni national and a 26-year-old man of German-Moroccan descent on charges of "belonging to a terrorist organisation, carrying out the murder of several thousand persons and other serious crimes."

Investigators in Germany said there are as many as 100 suspected Islamic terrorists lying low in Germany. Regional Interior Minister, Mr. Fritz Behrens, said authorities had identified some of the so-called "sleepers" and taken "important steps so that our country does not become a base for mass murder." In the Netherlands, police charged two French men and one Dutch national for forging and falsifying documents with a view to planning an attack. Police in Prague are also looking into contacts made there by Mohammed Atta.

SEARCHED

22 SEP 2001

# School stand-off may hurt peace process

110-16 By Hasan Suroor

LONDON, SEPT. 6. The Northern Ireland Secretary, Dr. John Reid cut short his holiday in France and returned home today as the stand-off between loyalists and republicans over a disputed route to a school in north Belfast persisted.

Efforts by the Security Minister, Ms. Jane Kennedy on Wednesday to resolve the dispute failed with both sides blaming each other for this week's flare-up in which Catholic children, walking past loyalist homes in the predominantly Protestant neighbourhood of Ardoyne, have been verbally abused and attacked by residents. The situation was comparatively quiet today after Wednesday's mayhem following a bomb blast on the contentious school route, but tension remained high with residents jeering and whistling as parents escorted their children to the school through a security cordon.

The Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair, was reported to be concerned how the developments would impact on the peace process as analysts feared that loyalist violence was likely to harden the IRA's position on giving up its weapons. The peace process is deadlocked over the weapons issue and if no agreement is reached by September 23, the British Government would have to either suspend the Northern Ireland Assembly or dissolve it and call fresh elections.

"There are fears in the Government that the confrontation is endangering the peace process

armed groups reported to be active again, the ceasefire declared by major paramilitaries as part of the peace process was itself under pressure, raising fears of a new spiral of violence.

The depth of sectarian hatred, revealed by this week's developments, particularly the targeting of young school girls, has shocked Britain and Dr. Reid, normally not given to outbursts, denounced it as a descent into "barbarism." In a statement, he said another generation had been introduced to the "shameful side of our society" and regretted that "violent sectarian bigotry" had got to a point where even innocent children were not spared. "What we have seen develop in the past few days is the path to barbarism. I cannot believe the people of North Belfast want representatives and community leaders to talk together now," he said calling for an end to the protests as he planned to hold talks with the two sides to settle the dispute.

The loyalist/Unionist leadership came under pressure to rein in the protesters but the loyalists maintained that they were simply reacting to republican "intimidation" and accused the IRA of using children as "pawns". Local Unionist leaders condemned the violence but insisted that republicans were to blame for creating a provocative situation in the first place. They said all through the summer, loyalists suffered "intimidation" by republican extremists and demanded an end to it.



**GROWING TROUBLE: A Protestant school girl blows a whistle in protest against Catholic children walking through a Protestant area to a primary school in North Belfast on Thursday.** — AP

ess by taking the spotlight off efforts to put pressure on Sinn Fein and the IRA to decommission weapons before the latest deadline expires," *The Times* said. With extremist

110-121

# Talks to stem violence may yield little

By Hasan Suroor

LONDON, SEPT. 5. The situation in Northern Ireland worsened today and there were fears that it could spiral out of control after a bomb exploded in Ardoyne, north Belfast, where Protestant and Catholics have been engaged in a bitter row over a disputed route to a school.

For the third day in a row, young Catholic girls were jeered and abused as they nervously walked through a "security corridor", erected by the police, to reach the school which lies in the heart of a Protestant neighbourhood.

Commentators warned of the long-term political consequences of the rising sectarian tension which has led to violent clashes and reprisal attacks by the two communities.

Loyalists threatened "an-eye-for-eye" after a Protestant teenager was knocked down and killed by a Catholic motorist on Tuesday.

The boy, who had been throwing stones at Catholics, was chased by a woman motorist and mowed down in what the police were treating as murder.

The violence prompted calls for a political initiative to kick-start the stalled peace process. Observers believed that the sudden eruption of violence was a direct result of the political vacuum following the resignation of the Unionist leader, Mr. David Trimble from the provincial Government over the issue of arms decommissioning by the IRA.

They said armed extremist groups, opposed to the peace process, were exploiting the political crisis by playing on the deep-seated sectarian prejudices.

The Unionists, who have been demanding that the IRA should give up its weapons, were widely seen to have damaged their cause by targeting Catholic schoolchildren at a time when pressure on the republicans to disarm was growing.

"After what happened on the Ardoyne Road this week, howev-



Roman Catholic girls and their parents make their way through a Protestant area to Holy Cross Roman Catholic school in north Belfast, Northern Ireland, Wednesday. — AP

er, why should any republican militant feel under any pressure at all to cooperate," *The Guardian* asked.

The demonstration of Protestant hatred, it pointed out, was likely to have a negative impact on political opinion which had begun to appreciate the Unionists' viewpoint on decommissioning. *The Times* was equally

vehement that the behaviour of loyalist protesters was "foul" and "unacceptable".

Analysts drew parallels between what is going on in north Belfast and the scenes of racial hatred in America's Deep South in 1957 when white racists bullied and jeered black girls going to a school in Little Rock. The Holy Cross Primary School in Ar-

doyne could become Northern Ireland's Little Rock, one newspaper warned.

Fears of a negative political fallout were also beginning to haunt the Unionist/loyalist leadership and for the first time, there was an attempt to distance the "movement" from what were sought to be portrayed as "individual" acts of Protestant residents of north Belfast. Mr. Trimble denounced the violence and said there was a "serious danger" that the trouble could spread to other areas. Mr. Billy Hutchinson, a leading Progressive Unionist legislator, who had earlier said loyalists were simply "reacting" to the republicans' intimidating tactics sounded more contrite today. He said he was "sickened" by what was going on and was "ashamed to be called a loyalist".

The Northern Ireland Security Minister, Ms. Jane Kennedy was holding talks with political and community leaders today in a bid to defuse the situation, but given the surcharged mood on both sides, prospects of an early end to the tension looked slim.

Meanwhile, the blast this morning, in which two police officers were injured, happened when parents were escorting their children to the beleaguered Holy Cross school.

Protestants object to the Catholics walking past their homes to reach the school, and want them to use another route. Their complaint is that IRA men are using the children as a "cover" to encroach on loyalist territory and stir up trouble.

Catholics, on the other hand, maintain that the approach road to the school is public property and as residents of the area they have a right to use it. The explosion, which caused great panic, followed a night of violence during which loyalists set fire to police vehicles and attacked security forces.

HD-17  
19/8

# On edge in Ireland

Europe

**I**NCREASINGLY, THE Northern Ireland peace process is beginning to seem like an impossible jigsaw puzzle. Everytime they think they have got all the pieces in place, something, somewhere goes wrong and it is back to square one.

The situation in the strife-torn province in recent weeks has been swinging from despair to hope and back to despair again. After a fresh setback to the peace process this week one commentator summed it up aptly using the Sisyphian analogy. "The rock that was rolled all the way to the top of the mountain has now rolled all the way down," he said. And all in the space of a few days.

A little over a week ago, the immediate political crisis over arms decommissioning looked close to a settlement. The joint British-Irish peace package, offering a raft of concessions to the Republicans in the hope of a reciprocal gesture on decommissioning, drew a guarded but hopeful response both from Unionists and Republicans.

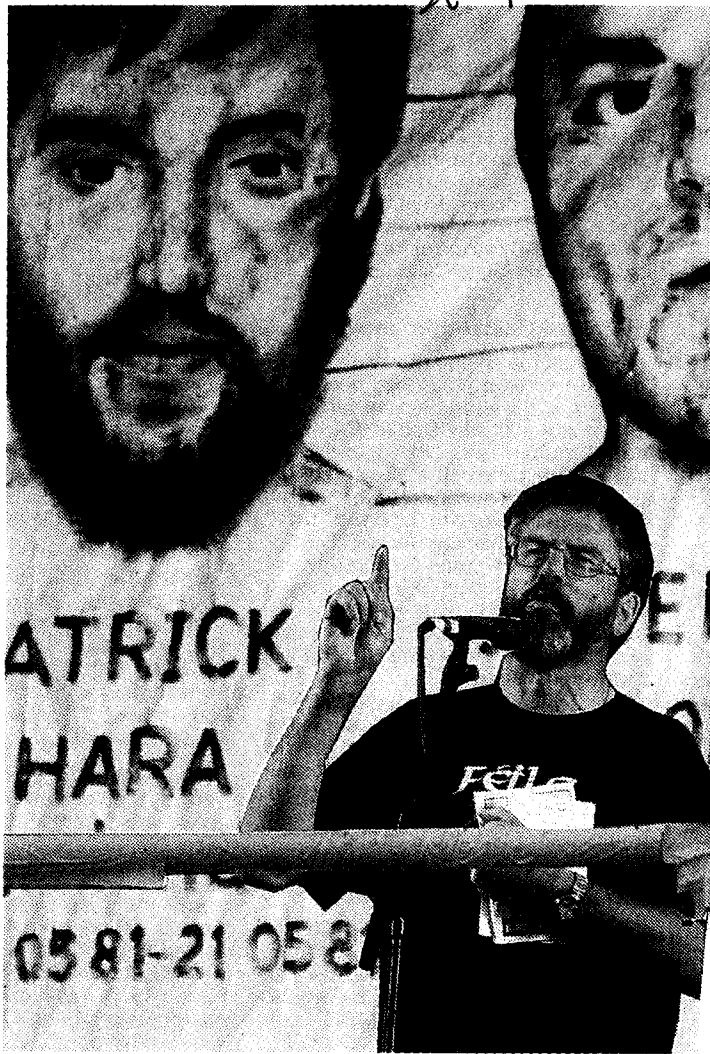
And then came the IRA's "historic" announcement that it had agreed with Gen. de Chastelain's decommissioning body a method to put its weapons "completely and verifiably beyond use".

The Sinn Fein president, Mr. Gerry Adams, who speaks for the IRA on political issues, hailed it as a "historic breakthrough" and Gen. de Chastelain was sufficiently impressed by what the IRA had told him to commend its offer to the British and the Irish Governments.

Even IRA-sceptics were of the view that this was by far the most significant declaration of its intent and deserved a chance despite the IRA's not particularly reassuring track record on the question of giving up its weapons.

Moderate Unionists too acknowledged that the offer appeared to be an advance on the IRA's earlier position and the first reaction of the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) chief, Mr. David Trimble, was not entirely negative.

But then hardliners struck — the very same elements who had forced Mr Trimble on July 1 to resign as head of the Provincial Government on the plea that Unionists were no



The Sinn Fein's Gerry Adams makes a point... will it ever end?

*The situation in Northern Ireland has been swinging from despair to hope and back. Hasan Suroor reports.*

longer willing to share power with Sinn Fein so long as the IRA, its armed wing, continued to hold on to its weapons.

Even before Mr. Trimble could give a considered response, his party's resident hawks such as Mr. Jeffrey Donaldson — seen as his main rival in the leadership tussle — rushed in to reject the offer saying nothing short of a start to the physical destruction of weapons would satisfy the Unionists.

The idea was to pre-empt Mr Trimble, regarded by Republicans as the only moderate Unionist they can do business with, and it worked in a climate where moderates on both sides have been losing ground to the hardliners.

Mr. Trimble was quick to pick up the cue and cast his lot with the rejectionists declaring that he had been led up the garden path by the IRA once too often in the past and was not inclined to go down the same road again.

The Unionists, he said, would return to the Government only after the IRA started destroying its weapons and announced a time-frame for completing the process.

To be fair, Mr. Trimble had few options if he meant to remain in business. Given the polarisation of Ulster politics along extreme positions there were only two options before him — say yes to the IRA offer and risk losing the party leadership or, having already

been pushed into resigning, stick to the hardline and prevent the real hawks from taking over the party. Not in a position to beat them, he decided to join them.

The Republicans were furious and accused him of wrecking the Good Friday Agreement. They made it clear that this was as far as they were willing to go and that the Unionists were living in "cuckooland" if they believed they could force them to buckle under pressure.

The Republicans were even more infuriated when the British Government, despite their opposition, suspended the Assembly for a day on August 10 to overcome a constitutional technicality and buy more time for negotiations. They called it an attempt to arm-twist them into starting decommissioning, arguing that what the suspension effectively did was to set a new six-week deadline for the two sides to come to an agreement with the onus of making this possible thrust on them.

The Government, they complained, had again given in to the Unionists. Instead of pressuring them to accept the IRA's offer, it had "rewarded" them for rejecting it, and now expected the Republicans to carry the can.

In a show of public anger, the IRA withdrew its offer of decommissioning altogether, accusing the British Government and the Unionists of putting hurdles in the way of "peackeping". The Unionists in turn denounced it as a "political stunt" to extract more concessions. This has pushed the clock back to where it started on July 1 with Mr. Trimble's resignation.

The IRA's credibility has been further compromised by the arrest of three of its activists in Colombia for allegedly hobnobbing with guerrillas in what is believed to be an arms-related deal, though the full facts are yet to be established.

If no agreement is reached by September 23, the Assembly would have to be either suspended again or dissolved in order to hold fresh elections — and barring the Northern Ireland Secretary, Dr. John Reid, few believe that, five weeks from now, there would be light at the end of the tunnel.

# Europeans disapprove of Bush's policies

By Batuk Gathani

*Europe 20-16 17/8*

**BRUSSELS, AUG. 16.** If the latest findings of a European opinion poll is any criterion, the divide between the U.S. and the European Union could be widening. It was revealed that four out of five citizens of Germany, France, Britain and Italy disapprove of the U.S. President, Mr. George W. Bush's conduct of foreign policy, which is seen as "catering exclusively" to U.S. interests. Hence, Europe's ties with the U.S. is rated as a new cause for concern.

Most European officials one talks to, overtly disapprove of Mr. Bush's foreign policy which is widely rated as "isolationist". The more extreme European perception is that it is even "patronising".

Eighty per cent of the Europeans strongly reject the U.S. withdrawal from the Kyoto global warming treaty. Mr. Bush's desire to abandon the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile treaty and his proposal to deploy a missile defence system are also rejected by most Europeans. These are the key dividing issues in the Western alliance.

Mr. Moisy, a respected deputy director of the French Institute of International Relations, has been quoted as saying, "For the first time since 1947, a mutual decoupling of the United States from Europe is truly possible." It is argued that the end of the Cold War, the changing political map and ideological contour of the E.U. and globalisation have caused "fundamental changes" in the 50-year relationship between the U.S. and Europe. Many Europeans feel that the U.S. is now logistically and economically more leaning towards the "Pacific rim" region in Asia. The Bush administration is seen as being increasingly immune to European aspirations on security and economic fronts.

Many feel that the U.S. in the 20's and 30's was isolationist and all this changed after the last World War by a new generation of "American internationalists" who rescued Europe from post-War economic misery with the Marshall Plan, followed by the creation of the United Nations and NATO. Now that the Soviet military threat has evaporated with the extinction of the Soviet Union, the U.S. is suspected of becoming more isolationist, self-centred and pursuing a foreign policy based on its own global interests.

An American commentator described this as a "fall-out from Bush's mulish policies" and argues that "there is no heavier piece of political lumber today than George W. Bush's determined campaign to challenge the existing standards and procedures of international cooperation" when it is realised that in seven months, the Bush administration has rejected in "aggressively-stated fashion" some half-a-dozen global treaties and negotiations, strongly favoured by the rest of the world."

Mr. Bush leaves a first impression that while his Government is not deliberately isolationist "it is comfortable with being isolated". Hence, a "subtle danger arises from an American President down-playing or manipulating international cooperation so aggressively."

Many Europeans strongly feel that Mr. Bush's decision to opt out of treaties projects a unilateral image that belies his desire to work more closely with European allies with the result that Bush administration "has found itself isolated against the allies it sought to cultivate."

Such European sentiments and anxieties are reflected in the latest opinion poll with the vast majority of the Europeans disapproving of Mr. Bush's policies. Amid such a flood of criticism of Mr. Bush's performance, more

seasoned European and American commentators are urging caution and follow a "wait-and-see" policy and warn against a "war of words" on both sides of the Atlantic, amid a newly-found quest that in final show of things Mr. Bush may ultimately "turn round" to pursue a more balanced trans-Atlantic dialogue.

Germany and France — key European "locomotive" economic and political powers — will hold general elections in 2002 and their politicians now gain by distancing themselves from Mr. Bush's policies which are widely rated as unpopular by an overwhelming majority of the Europeans.

The "trans-Atlantic agenda", six years ago indicated that the U.S. investment dollar will try to find a first home in the 15-nation E.U. market, at the cost of the U.S. lowering its investment profile in Eastern Europe and the emerging markets of Asia.

The trans-Atlantic accord was created after five months of intense negotiations during the Clinton presidency, as the first step to launching a free trade and investment zone in the Atlantic region.

Europeans are also convinced that despite the Bush rhetoric, this is still possible. The E.U. is already one of the largest overseas customers for U.S. goods and services. It is proposed that "trans-Atlantic agenda" could be the launching pad for creating a North Atlantic Free trade area (NAFTA), which would bring together three of the world's largest export customers for U.S. goods and services — the E.U., Canada and Mexico.

These markets would create a massive free trade area with a combined gross domestic product of \$ 10 trillions and a total population of more than 770 millions. For many Europeans, this is still the goal, not just a Utopia.

THE HINDU

17 AUG 2001



ULSTER / EFFORTS TO BREAK DEADLOCK FAIL

# N. Ireland Assembly suspended

By Hasan Suroor

LONDON, AUG 11. After failing to break the deadlock in Northern Ireland, the British Government has suspended the Provincial Assembly, giving six more weeks to Unionists and Republicans to come to an agreement on the thorny issue of decommissioning.

The new deadline for them to get the peace process moving again is September 23, but already doubts were being expressed if a breakthrough would be possible given the sharp Republican reaction to the decision.

Technically, the suspension is only for one day but it means that the institutions such as the power-sharing coalition created under the Good Friday Agreement can remain in place for another six weeks despite the political vacuum created by the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) leader, Mr. David Trimble's resignation as head of the coalition. He resigned a month ago to force the IRA to get rid of its weapons as envisaged in the Good Friday Agreement.

The Sinn Fein, the key Republican player in the peace process, denounced the suspension calling it a surrender to Unionists and warned that it would have a damaging effect on Republican opinion.

There was speculation that the IRA might review its offer of decommissioning which it announced early this week and break off communication with the independent international weapons inspectors charged with overseeing decommissioning.

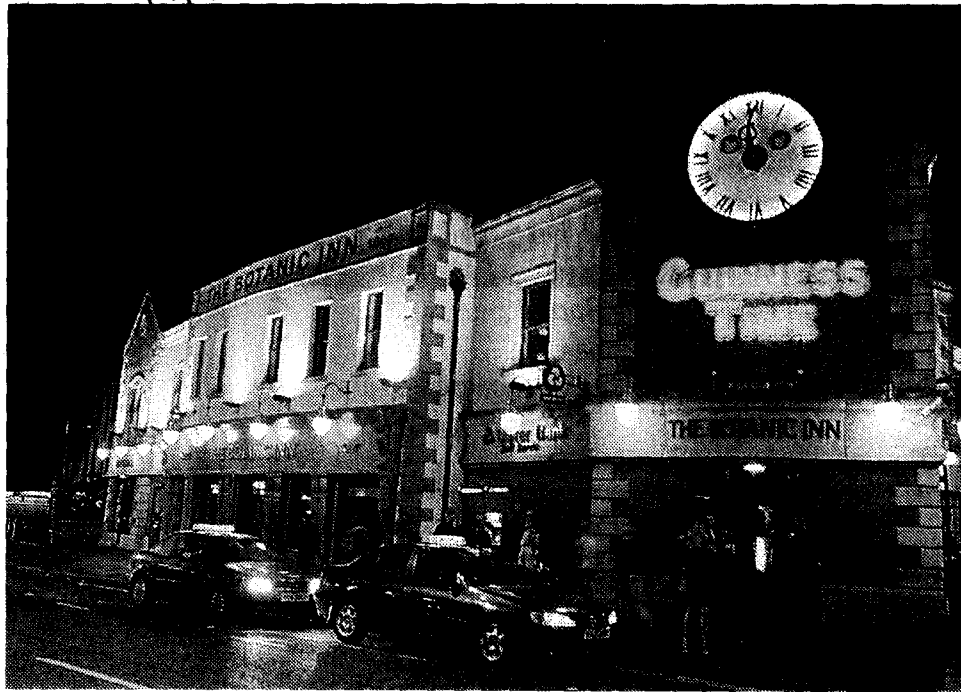
Observers recalled that it had done this after the Assembly was suspended on a previous occasion under similar circumstances. There were fears that far from paving the way for a solution, the suspension might cause Republicans to harden their stand on decommissioning.

Republicans were furious over the Unionists' refusal to accept the IRA's assurance that it was on the verge of decommissioning and had in fact agreed on a method to destroy its weapons.

The suspension was seen as a capitulation to the Unionists' insistence that they would not return to the Government unless the IRA physically started decommissioning and gave a time-frame to complete the process.

Republicans described the suspension as a breach of the Good Friday Agreement, prompting concern, as *The Times* noted, that the "IRA might pull out of talks with General John de Chastelain's disarmament commission and withdraw the plan to put its guns beyond use."

The Sinn Fein president, Mr. Gerry Adams,



As the clock above the Botanic Inn pub on the Malone Road in Belfast, Northern Ireland, struck midnight on Saturday, the Provincial Assembly was officially dissolved. — AP

accused the British Government of having done a "deal" with Unionists and said the Republican opinion would be "frustrated and angered" by the move.

Earlier in the week, the British Government was attacked by Unionists for not putting enough pressure on the IRA to disarm. They also believed that the British-Irish peace package, offering a number of concessions to Republicans on policing and their security concerns, had a pro-Republican "tilt".

The Republican outrage over suspending the Assembly was put on record by the Sinn Fein's chief negotiator, Mr. Martin McGuinness, who said: "No one should consider that the institutions can simply be suspended at the behest of David Trimble... without considering the effects of these actions, especially on nationalist and Republican opinion... David Trimble needs to recognise what people are saying on the streets."

Mr. Trimble, who had favoured suspension, left for a holiday, apparently satisfied with the decision but the hardline Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) attacked it saying the best course would have been to dissolve the Assembly and call for fresh elections. It accused

the Government of avoiding elections which, it said, would have resulted in more gains for it.

In the recent general elections, DUP performed well at the cost of the moderate UUP just as the Sinn Fein outperformed the more moderate Republican group, the SDLP. The British Government feared that an election might see both Republican and Unionist hardliners further improve their position, thus polarising extreme politics.

The Northern Ireland Secretary, Dr. John Reid, who took the decision to suspend the Assembly on Friday after consulting the Irish Government, claimed it was the "least worst" option, saying fresh elections were not in the interest of Northern Ireland. "I believe that it's (suspension) the way which minimises the destruction and possible damage to the peace process and maximises the opportunities to build on the progress already made", he said.

The Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair, holidaying in Mexico, concurred hoping that the extra time would allow both sides to bridge their differences — a hope not very widely shared in political circles.

THE HINDU

# N. Ireland Assembly headed for suspension

By Hasan Suroor

**LONDON, AUG 10.** The Northern Ireland Assembly was today headed for a brief suspension which would give the warring parties another six weeks to resolve their dispute over decommissioning. The suspension was likely to be for just 24 hours and a formal announcement was awaited ahead of tomorrow's constitutional deadline to find a way out of the political crisis following the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) chief, Mr. David Trimble's resignation as head of the provincial government to force the IRA to destroy its weapons.

The Northern Ireland Secretary, Dr. John Reid, and the Irish Foreign Minister, Mr. Brian Cowen, had extensive talks at the Hillsborough Castle, just outside Belfast, today amid conflicting suggestions from Unionists and Republicans. While hardline Unionists called for dissolution of the Assembly and

fresh elections, the Republicans opposed any move, including suspension, that would seem like capitulating to Unionists who are insisting that they would not return to the Assembly unless the IRA starts decommissioning.

The Sinn Fein president, Mr. Gerry Adams, said freezing the Assembly even for a day would amount to acquiescing to the Unionist veto on the IRA's offer on decommissioning. Unionists have rejected the offer because it does not set out a time-frame but the IRA insists that it would not act under pressure and would decide the timing and method of decommissioning in consultation with the independent international decommissioning body.

"The act of suspension by the British Government ...if this happens with the British Government acquiescing to a unionist veto changes everything", he said adding that the whole peace process

was at a "crossroads". Another senior Sinn Fein leader, Mr. Martin McGuinness, cautioned that the British Government must first calculate the effect of suspending the Assembly on nationalists and republicans. Such a move, he said, would be viewed as a "reward" for Mr. Trimble for bringing the peace process to a near collapse. There was speculation that Republicans might walk away from the peace process if the Assembly was suspended. It would be the second time that the Assembly would be suspended since it was set up following the Good Friday Agreement in 1998.

The anti-agreement Unionists, led by the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), called for a review of the peace process and fresh elections to determine public opinion. The DUP's deputy leader, Mr. Peter Robinson, said: "They should respect democracy and call elections." But the British and Irish

Governments were reported to be concerned that elections might lead to further polarisation with both Unionist and Republican hardliners gaining at the cost of the moderates as happened in the general elections when DUP and Sinn Fein made significant gains at the expense of the moderate UUP and SDLP respectively.

Mr. Trimble, pushed by his party hawks not to yield to the pressure to accept the IRA offer, attacked the Government for not pressuring the IRA to act more decisively on decommissioning.

"Opportunistic, sentimental soundbites appear to be the only mode of discourse for a Government with lists of apparent concessions (to Republicans)", he said. A short suspension, he said, would help if there was credible expectation that in the intervening period the IRA would move on decommissioning.

7/10/10

## 98 A BREAKTHROUGH IN ULSTER 40-12

THERE HAVE BEEN far too many false dawns over Northern Ireland that one hesitates to welcome even a genuine movement forward. For the first time in half a century, the troubled British province sees light beyond the dark tunnel of sectarian killings. In a move that has been characterised by its leader as historic, the Irish Republican Army has given a pledge to put its arsenal of weapons completely and verifiably beyond use. It is not the peacenik's ideal goal of total surrender of arms but decommissioning, by which the IRA will ensure that its considerable accumulation of weapons would be sealed away beyond use in a manner that involves no risk to the public and avoids any possibility of falling into the hands of hardline rivals. The Canadian General given the task of overseeing the decommissioning has said he is satisfied with the IRA proposal and that it is in accordance with the three-year-old, path-breaking Good Friday Agreement that actually ushered in the current peace process. The issue of getting rid of weapons has all along bedevilled the 1998 agreement, with the reported decision by the IRA, the most feared terrorist network in the world and a role model for outfits like Sri Lanka's LTTE, made possible by a package of proposals unveiled a week ago jointly by the British and Irish Governments.

The ceasefire, a landmark power-sharing mechanism set up under the peace process and the not inconsiderable progress at breaking down barriers achieved so far have ensured that neither side — the Protestant Unionists who want the province to remain with Britain and the Catholic Republicans who want merger with the sectarian friendly Irish Republic — is willing to take the blame for any setback or breakdown. The blueprint drawn up by the two Governments marked a major effort at accommodating the fears of the republican groups. The broad thrust

of the package covered reform of recruitment to the police force, which the republicans complained was now weighted in favour of the Protestants and did not fully reflect the composition of the province, and a programme of demilitarisation involving scaling down the presence of the British armed forces and the dismantling of army bases. There was an unmistakable eagerness to meet the demands of the republicans spearheaded by the IRA and its political arm, the Sinn Fein led by Mr. Gerry Adams. This had come about from the realisation that without a movement toward decommissioning of IRA arms, there was every possibility of the leadership of the rival Unionists slipping away from moderates like Mr. David Trimble and falling into the hands of hardliners. There was also the danger of obscurantist elements like Rev. Ian Paisley getting back to centre stage.

A hundred years of bloody sectarian strife in Northern Ireland is not about to end but the peace process has definitely been saved for now from the war-mongers on both sides of the religious divide. The massive car bomb explosion triggered in London by a splinter group of the IRA opposed to reconciliation and the killing of a Protestant teenager who was felled by a bullet intended for his Catholic friend underline the continuing, inexplicable tragedy that is Northern Ireland. Street clashes between Protestants and Catholics and paramilitary violence have continued even as the British and the Irish Governments battled with the peace process. Decommissioning of weapons was perhaps the most serious of obstacles. Considering that no terrorist outfit in the world has been successfully convinced by peace-makers to surrender their arms, what Britain and the Irish Republic have wrung out of the IRA and the Sinn Fein is a historic deal. Ulster may yet be beginning to see the light of peace.

8 AUG 2001

NORTHERN IRELAND / DECOMMISSIONING MOVE SHOT DOWN

## Unionists lukewarm to IRA offer

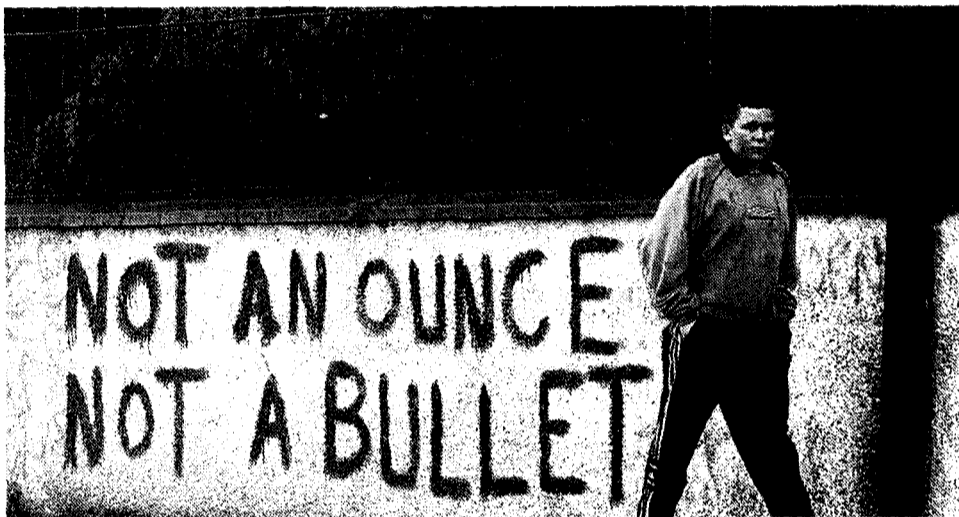
By Hasan Suroor

9/8  
LONDON, AUG 7. The IRA's "historic" move on decommissioning has been shot down by Unionists pouring cold water on hopes of an early breakthrough in Northern Ireland's deadlocked peace process.

Expectations were raised after the IRA on Monday announced that it was prepared to start a "process" leading to the destruction of its weapons — a move welcomed by the British and Irish Governments and grudgingly greeted even by sceptics. But the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) chief, Mr. David Trimble, whose party holds the key to a settlement, today ruled out any compromise with Republicans in the absence of a firm time-table for decommissioning. He said he wanted to see decommissioning actually start in order to be convinced that the IRA was serious about it. "We are glad to see that the IRA has taken a significant step towards decommissioning, but it hasn't begun decommissioning. We want to see that happen," he said.

Mr. Trimble, who is under pressure from his own party hawks to take a hardline, told the BBC that similar assurances by the IRA in the past had led to nothing. Twice, his party had gone into government with Sinn Fein on the basis of expectations that the IRA would start decommissioning but "on both occasions we were let down". His statement came ahead of a crucial meeting of his party legislators at which he was expected to face some tough questions. The party is believed to be evenly divided between moderates and hardliners with the latter often ending up pushing the agenda.

Mr. Jeffrey Donaldson, a leading party hawk, dismissed the IRA move as a "pre-cooked deal" between the British Government and Republicans. He said the main issue was whether the IRA was going to start decommissioning and when. Mr. Donaldson, who is seen as a challenger to Mr. Trimble in the leadership struggle, has enough clout in the party to swing opinion and it was he and his fellow hawks who forced Mr. Trimble to resign as head of the provincial Government last month plunging



A young boy walks past Republican graffiti following the latest IRA statement on weapons in West Belfast on Monday. — AP

the peace process into a crisis.

Republicans were predictably dismayed by the Unionists' reaction, and the Sinn Fein leader, Mr. Gerry Adams mocked Mr. Trimble for "pocketing" what he termed as the IRA's "historic initiative". Among those who accused the Unionists of looking the gift horse in the mouth was Mr. Albert Reynolds, a former Irish Prime Minister and one of the architects of the Good Friday Agreement. He told the BBC's Newsnight that under the Agreement, the issue of decommissioning was to be sorted out between the IRA and the international weapons inspection body headed by Gen. John de Chastelain and now that Gen. de Chastelain had confirmed the authenticity of the IRA move, there was no reason to doubt it. How decommissioning was to be done should be left to be decided by the General in consultation with the IRA and political parties should stay out of it. He also pointed out that handing over weapons or their destruction in the presence of Unionists was never envisaged in the Good Fri-

day Agreement. The decommissioning was to be a process — and it was to be left to the de Chastelain commission to handle it. Gen. de Chastelain said he believed that the IRA's proposal "initiates a process that will put IRA arms completely and verifiably beyond use".

*The Guardian*, meanwhile, claimed that decommissioning could start "within the next month" and that international arms inspectors would testify to having been present while IRA weapons were "destroyed before their very eyes". It said these two moves should answer Unionists' "anxieties" on the timing and method of decommissioning and if they still remained dissatisfied, then there would be a question mark over their commitment to "the very idea of power-sharing, as enshrined in the Good Friday Agreement." *The Times* was less enthusiastic saying that Unionists were justified in demanding a "reliable timetable" for decommissioning. What the Republicans had offered was a "route map" but "buying a map does not mean one has set out on a journey".

THE HINDU

• 8 AUG 2001

# Blast puts Ulster deal in doubt

Baron  
HO-12

By Hasan Suroor

LONDON, AUG 4. The latest initiative to defuse the political crisis in Northern Ireland today looked headed for a dead-end as the police warned of a "murderous" new phase in republican terrorism following Thursday's bomb blast in west London, alleged to be part of the terrorists' "worrying new agenda" to wreck the Good Friday Agreement.

Both Unionists and Nationalists were reported to be having second thoughts over the joint British-Irish peace package in the light of the new terrorist offensive and it seemed unlikely that they would be able to meet the August 6 deadline for a decision. Despite attempts to put on a brave face, it was clear that the Real IRA, believed to be behind the explosion, had succeeded in slowing down the momentum towards an early solution. The two sides admitted that it had made their task more difficult and that hardliners were back on top again. "It won't wreck the peace process as the Real IRA want but it will make a difficult job even more difficult," republicans told *The Guardian*.

Analysts said what the bomb had done was to blow a hole through the three most crucial elements of the peace package: decommissioning by IRA, police reforms and scaling down security in Northern Ireland. Until the bomb happened, there was considerable optimism over a breakthrough with the IRA expected to make a "gesture" on decommissioning in exchange for more explicit assurances on policing and security. But Thursday's blast has dramatically changed the situation and signals from the Sinn Fein/IRA camp today suggested a rethink. Their view seemed to be that decommissioning at this stage would be exploited by the Real IRA in its propaganda war

5/8  
against the IRA whom it portrays as a "traitor" to the Republican cause by signing the Good Friday Agreement.

With decommissioning clearly on hold, the package was seen to be in deep freeze as the Unionists have made it clear that the peace process cannot move forward so long as the IRA continues to hold on to its weapons. On policing and demilitarisation too, the Unionists' attitude hardened and the Ulster Unionist Party's chief negotiator, Sir Reg Empey denounced the proposals for police reforms as "an absolute nonsense". Unionists believed that any move that might weaken security at a time when police were warning of a new climate of violence was fraught with risk. They strongly opposed the proposal, contained in the peace package, to bring down military installations as demanded by the republicans. Independent observers echoed the view that any significant change in security profile at this stage would make the province more vulnerable to terrorism.

"If the Government's proposals (for scaling down security) were implemented, the British army would be dramatically circumscribed in its ability to monitor and interdict terrorist activity in the republican heartlands of South Armagh and Tyrone where the Real IRA has considerable and growing support," *The Times* said arguing that while compromises were necessary to secure peace, security itself should not be compromised.

Meanwhile, London was on full alert as police warned that there could be more terrorist attacks in the coming days. Heavy security marked the queen mother's 101st birthday celebrations and Londoners were told to be extremely vigilant.

THE HINDU

1998

# Bomb blast makes dent in N.Ireland peace process 4/8

By Rashmee Z. Ahmed  
Times News Network

LONDON: A huge bomb blast in a busy London area has ripped a hole through hopes for the deadlocked Northern Ireland peace process. Police blamed a dissident Irish Republican group for trying to destabilise crucial ongoing peace negotiations, even as the three-year-old Good Friday Agreement appeared to be near collapse.

The British government has urged political parties in Northern Ireland not to allow the bomb blast to deflect them from

trying to salvage the agreement. The 40-kg bomb, which was packed into a stationary car, was the largest in recent times. The explosion, which occurred in a busy area of west London in the early hours of Friday morning, injured seven people and caused damage estimated at hundreds of thousands of pounds.

It blew out shop and pub windows, scattered debris within a 200-metre radius and littered the pavements with glass. Residents and passers-by said they could feel the force of the explosion half-a-mile away. Doctors treating the victims said they were surprised there were no fatalities or life-threatening injuries, considering the ferocity of the blast.

British Prime Minister Tony Blair condemned the attack as "pointless", even as police said it was the "evil" work of Irish dissidents planning "mass murder". Sinn Fein, the political wing of the Irish Republican Army, said it was "absolutely wrong" and leading Irish politicians said it was a "barbaric" act.

Police say they suspect a dissident Irish Republican group called the Real IRA. Born out of a Republican split three years ago over whether or not to accept the peace process, the Real IRA

has previously concentrated on what the security services call "spectaculars", that is high-profile attacks on London targets, such as the headquarters of BBC television and MI6 intelligence service. The Real IRA, which is strongly opposed to the Good Friday Agreement, has not claimed responsibility for the blast so far, but it is the only group that has attacked mainland Britain in recent years.

Commentators say there is little doubt the latest attack is timed to destabilise the already-tenuous peace process. They say that by breaching security in London, the dissidents make it increasingly difficult for the British Army to reduce its presence in Northern Ireland, which is one of the crucial demands put forward by Republicans in exchange for the arms de-commissioning insisted upon by Protestant Unionists.

Analysts say the Unionists, who remain deeply suspicious of Republican intentions because of the lack of progress on decommissioning, would now find it even harder to consider a return to the power-sharing devolved administration so triumphantly set up under the terms of the agreement.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

4 AUG 2001

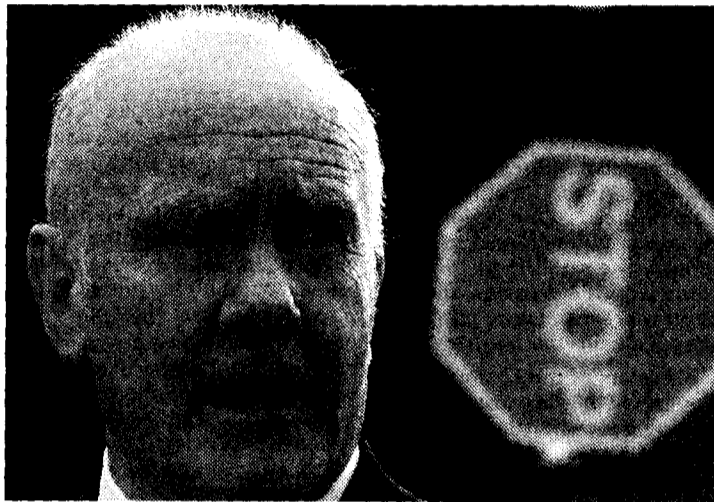
# Parties asked to respond by Aug. 6

By Hasan Suroor 2/8

**LONDON, AUG 1.** In what was seen as the last gamble to save the Northern Ireland peace process, the British and Irish Governments today confronted the political parties in the province with a take-it-or-leave-it compromise package warning them that their failure to reach an agreement would be "nothing short of tragic".

The parties have been told to give their response by August 6 — a week before the constitutional deadline to resolve the present political crisis ends. The immediate reaction, however, was not very hopeful as both sides indicated that their response would depend on how far the package addressed their concerns. Independent experts noted that the proposals appeared to be "tilted" towards Republicans with barely a passing reference to the Unionists' demand for IRA to give up its weapons. It was on this issue that the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) chief, Mr. David Trimble resigned last month as head of the provincial government, triggering the present crisis.

There was widespread scepticism if the package would be acceptable to the Unionists who continued to maintain that nothing short of iron-clad guarantees on decommissioning would satisfy them. They wanted to know from Republicans what they meant by offering to put their weapons "beyond use". The idea of merely putting concrete "caps"



**Britain's Secretary for Northern Ireland, Dr. John Reid, speaks to mediapersons at Stormont, Belfast, on Tuesday. — AP**

on some of their bunkers was not acceptable to Unionists who insisted that all arms dumps must be filled with concrete to render the weapons unusable. They also demanded a firm date when decommissioning would start.

The Northern Ireland Secretary, Dr. John Reid and the Irish Foreign Affairs Minister, Mr. Brian Cowen portrayed the package as a last chance to save the Good Friday Agreement and appealed to the political parties to consider it with a "cool head" and "steady nerves", and not to rush into a judgment. They denied that the proposals were tilted in favour of either side, and repeatedly urged leaders not to approach them as though they were a "league ta-

ble". They were not about "concessions" or "victory or defeat" for anyone, Mr. Reid said as he appealed to party leaders to keep the "big picture" in mind — the need to sustain the Good Friday agreement. There were going to be no winners if the agreement was destroyed, and the consequences would be damaging for everyone, he warned.

Mr. Cowen said the proposals on offer were "fair" and "balanced" and represented the collective endeavour of the two governments. They addressed the four major concerns — policing, decommissioning, demilitarisation and stability of political institutions set up in the wake of the Good Friday Agreement. Earlier,

Mr. Reid acknowledged that the package would not please everyone but said it was the best under the circumstances. It consisted of inter-independent proposals and political parties should not try to "pick and choose" what suited them.

They were intended to ensure victory for the people of Northern Ireland by sustaining an agreement that had arguably brought peace and prosperity to the province.

Details were not known, but analysts said the package appeared to be designed almost entirely to "win" over the Republicans in the hope that in turn, they would agree to start decommissioning.

Apparently, the package goes some length to address Republican concerns on police reforms, role for ex-paramilitary prisoners, and scaling down the British security presence in the province.

"It is very much aimed at winning over the Republicans and presumably the two Government expect a response from them on decommissioning", a commentator told the BBC.

The presumption in informed circles was that if Sinn Fein and IRA accepted the package then it would mean that they were willing to make a move on decommissioning as a reciprocal gesture. Their response on decommissioning was said to be "crucial" to the fate of the package. They were expected to meet at the weekend to take a decision.

# Loyalists threaten more violence

By Hasan Suroor

LONDON, JULY 31. A day before the expected announcement of the British and Irish Governments' much-awaited peace package on Northern Ireland, a loyalist group today threatened more violence in the "coming weeks, months and days" signalling a new phase of terrorism fuelled by the deepening political uncertainty.

The deadlocked peace process looked set for a long haul as rival political parties remained deeply sceptical if the "package" would satisfy them, and there were renewed calls for a review of the Good Friday Agreement which has got mired in a bitter row over arms decommissioning. The Unionists believe that the British-Irish compromise proposals are not likely to address what they term as the bottleneck of their position — that there can be no real peace so long as the IRA continues to hold on to its weapons. "If the IRA cannot move from their position on arms, I think there is going to be a substantial review of the agreement," the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) chief, Mr. David Trimble said.

The militants' threat to step up their violent campaign came amid increased tension following the murder of a youth of mixed parentage in North Belfast by loyalists prompting the Northern Ireland Secretary, Dr. John Reid to warn of a "tough and uncompromising" response. Dr. Reid, who reviewed the worsening situation today, said he was "disgusted" by the "cowardly" terrorist acts and warned that these "will be stopped."

The killing of 18-year-old Gavin Brett, the son of a Catholic father and Protestant mother, has caused outrage across the political divide as his murder is seen to be aimed at destroying the fragile harmony that still exists between the two communities at a personal level. He was speaking to a Catholic friend when he was shot dead by militants who later claimed they belonged to the Red Hand Defenders, a nom de guerre used by the Protestant paramilitary outfit, the Ulster Defence Association (UDA) which recently withdrew support for the Good Friday Agreement.

The Unionists were quick to distance themselves from the UDA. They denounced Brett's murder as "senseless and brutal" and said anyone who believed that this kind of violence helped their cause was "denuded". Republicans, however, blamed Unionists for creating a political crisis that was now being exploited by militants.

The growing cycle of violence and counter-violence, allegedly by terrorists released from prison as part of the Good Friday Agreement, has confirmed fears that a prolonged political vacuum is likely to be used by the anti-peace process elements to create more disturbances. Even the hardline mainstream Unionists are worried that the initiative could pass into the hands of armed extremists if a political solution is not found — but they want a solution on their own terms thus creating a vicious circle from which there seems to be no way out.



# Northern Ireland peace package put off

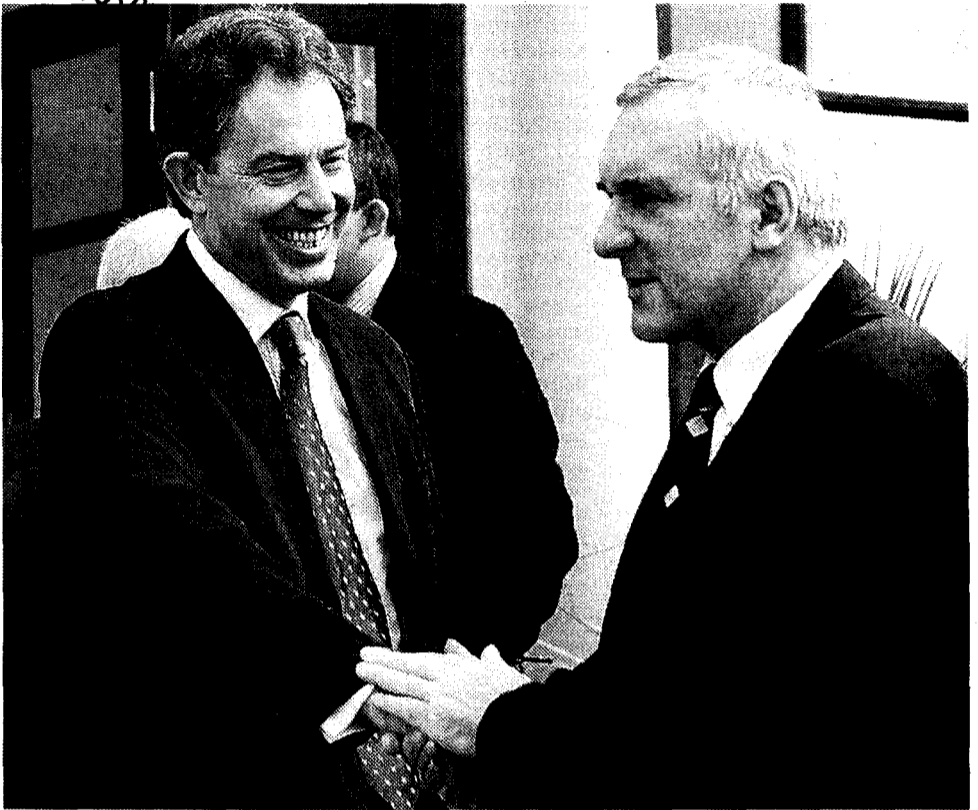
By Hasan Suroor

LONDON, JULY 27. The British and Irish Governments' "peace package" for Northern Ireland, which was expected to be announced today, has been put off until next week amid further hardening of positions both among Unionists and Republicans. Mr. Tony Blair and his Irish counterpart, Mr. Bertie Ahern, had another round of talks today to finalise the package and later they urged political parties to avoid "knee-jerk" reactions.

Unionist hardliners upped the ante as two senior Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) leaders, Mr. Jeffrey Donaldson and Mr. David Burnside, both MPs, called for abandoning the Good Friday Agreement saying they were not willing to share power with Sinn Fein so long as its military wing, the IRA, continued to hold on to its weapons. They asked the UUP leadership to pull out of the present power-sharing executive and join hands with other unionist parties such as Rev. Ian Paisley's hawkish Democratic Unionist Party to discuss "a new democratically accountable local administration." Mr. Donaldson, who has consistently opposed the Good Friday Agreement, declared that he had no faith in the peace package which he dismissed as an "IRA wish list". "We've just had enough and we want to go right back to the drawing board." The two MPs in a joint statement said the peace process had been on its "last legs" for sometime because of lack of progress on arms decommissioning by IRA and "we need a new peace process" minus Sinn Fein.

The UUP chief, Mr. David Trimble, who had been the voice of moderation until recently but has now been forced to take a hardline, was quoted as saying that he supported Mr. Donaldson's views. His spokesman told *The Guardian* that there was a "lot of anger and frustration" at the way the British and Irish Governments had handled Sinn Fein with "kid gloves" instead of forcing it to deliver on decommissioning.

The sharp Unionist reaction follows leaks from the peace formula which, it is believed, does not directly address the question of decommissioning and instead offers "conces-



The British Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair (left), meets his Irish counterpart, Mr. Bertie Ahern, at the Hardwick Hall Hotel near Sedgefield, England, in Mr. Blair's Parliamentary constituency on Friday. — AP

sions" to Republicans on policing and demilitarisation as an incentive to disarm. The Unionists have denounced this as "appeasement" of Republicans and are insisting that nothing short of decommissioning would persuade them to return to the peace process. The Republicans too are reported to be unhappy with what they believe the package offers them. It is said to fall short of their demands for police reforms and reduced British security presence in Northern Ireland.

The present political crisis began on July 1 when Mr. Trimble resigned as head of the pro-

vincial coalition Government to force the IRA to disarm. Under the constitution, a successor to him must be found within six weeks and the deadline ends on August 12. If the stalemate persists, the British Government would be forced to either suspend the assembly or call fresh elections.

The two Prime Ministers, however, maintained that the crisis could still be overcome and asked the parties to consider the proposals "carefully." "I hope the parties give them their support and work with them as best as they possibly can," Mr. Ahern said.

THE IRISH

28 JUL 2001

# Row over leaked plan to save Ulster pact

By Hasan Suroor

LONDON, JULY 25. A squabble has broken out over the leaked contents of the British and Irish Governments' proposed compromise package to save the Northern Ireland peace process threatened by irreconcilable differences over arms decommissioning by the IRA.

The row even before the package has been finalised has dashed prospects of an early end to the political crisis caused by the resignation of the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) chief, Mr. David Trimble as head of the provincial government to force the IRA to disarm. If no solution is found by August 12 — the constitutional deadline for finding a successor to Mr. Trimble — the British Government would be forced to either suspend the Assembly or call fresh elections.

There has been a sharp reaction from Unionists to reports that the package, expected to be an-

nounced later this week, does not deal strongly enough with decommissioning and instead offers "concessions" to Republicans on policing and their demand for reducing the British security presence in Northern Ireland. According to the "leaked" information, the proposals include greater role for ex-paramilitaries in policing, amnesty for fugitive convicted terrorists, a ban on use of plastic bullets by the police, and steps to scale down security. Officials of the Irish Government were quoted as saying that the proposals were intended to pave the way for IRA to start decommissioning.

However, neither Unionists nor republicans were happy. While Unionists dubbed the package as one more attempt to appease the Republicans without addressing their own concerns, the republicans said it fell short of their minimum demands which must be met before they start decommissioning. Senior Unionist leaders

made it clear that they were not willing to accept any arrangement which allowed Sinn Fein to continue to sit in the Government while its armed wing, the IRA, retained its weapons. They insisted that decommissioning was a key component of the Good Friday Agreement and there could be no further progress unless a beginning was made on this issue.

The acting head of the provincial government, Sir Reg Empey said: "We are not prepared to allow Sinn Fein to continue (in the Government) while the IRA continues to break its public promise to decommission its weaponry. If the proposed package does not deal with the decommissioning issue effectively then it is unacceptable." Unionist members of the Northern Ireland Assembly were reported to be unanimous in rejecting any proposal that did not tackle head-on the issue of decommissioning. Hardline Unionists were particularly angry over

what they termed as the British and Irish Governments' "appeasement" of Republicans. "The (two) Governments must place the burden of resolving this impasse on those who have brought it about — Sinn Fein and IRA. There is no justification for further appeasement of republicans to secure decommissioning," one hardline Unionist said.

Even as observers were dismayed, officials sought to keep their chin up saying that the package offered enough elbow-room to both sides. There was a view that it would be premature to be distracted by off-the-cuff reactions to "leaks", and a compromise could perhaps still be worked out once the detailed proposals were known and discussed. The two Governments, however, have made it clear that the proposals are being offered on a "take-it-or-leave-it" basis and there is no room for renegotiation.

THE MINUTE

# Decommissioning remains the touchstone

By Hasan Suroor

**LONDON, JULY 14.** The nearly week-long peace talks on Northern Ireland were reported to be collapsed on Saturday, deepening the uncertainty over the future of the Provincial Assembly and the power-sharing Government set up under the Good Friday Agreement.

But in a face-saving move it was decided that informal negotiations should continue even as speculation grew that the Assembly might be suspended to buy time for an agreement which hinges on the Republicans' willingness to give up their arms. Analysts, however, warned against a prolonged political vacuum saying it would only help extremists who had already become more visible since the present crisis began two weeks ago with the resignation of the Ulster Unionist

Party chief, Mr. David Trimble as head of the Government to force the IRA to start decommissioning.

The mood among the participants, as they emerged from the last round of talks this afternoon, was even more bitter and uncompromising than at the start of the "summit" on July 9 — their positions hardened by the recrimination over the Orange Parade-related violence in North Belfast on Thursday. While the Unionists blamed it on the IRA saying it justified their fears over continued possession of arms by the Republicans, the latter denounced it as a smear campaign and accused the police of rounding on Catholics who were trying to calm passions. This, they argued, "confirmed" their charge of police bias against Catholics and reinforced the demand for radical police reforms to make it more balanced and accountable.

The row, played out in front of TV cameras outside the scenic country mansion Weston Park where the talks were held, was an extension of the tough bargaining that went on around the negotiating table chaired by the British Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair and his Irish counterpart, Mr. Bertie Ahern. After the "summit" resumed on Friday, following a day's recess, Mr. Blair and Mr. Ahern spoke individually to leaders of various political parties in a bid to insulate them from the pressures of round-table discussions, but the deadlock on the key issue of arms decommissioning remained.

For Unionists, it was the bottom line before they could even consider moving forward on the Good Friday Agreement but Republicans insisted that decommissioning could not be isolated from their concerns over policing and the continued heavy presence of British security forces in Northern Ireland. The Sinn Fein leader, Mr. Gerry Adams, representing the IRA and mainstream Republicans, regretted that while they were under pressure to disarm, the "solemn promises" made to them by the British Government as part of the Good Friday Agreement had not been met. He said during the talks he had submitted proposals on police reforms, demilitarisation and human rights issues but on all these "the assurances from the British

Government have been short of what they publicly committed" under the Agreement. The way the police handled the rioting in North Belfast using plastic bullets and water cannons strengthened the Republicans' case for changes in the composition and structure of RUC.

An angry Mr Trimble, who accused the IRA of "orchestrating" the violence in North Belfast for "political reasons", was uncompromising on decommissioning. He said there was only one issue on which there had been no progress in the past three years and it was decommissioning. It was a key issue, and absolutely the bottom line if the peace process was to be continued forward. His hardline position is seen as a bid to counter the influence of the hawkish Democratic Ulster Unionist Party which made significant electoral gains in the recent general and local elections at the expense of Mr. Trimble's UUP.

The crisis created by Mr. Trimble's resignation needs to be resolved by August 12, which would mark the end of six weeks provided under the Constitution to find a successor to him. If the deadlock is not broken by then, the British Government has only two options — to suspend the Assembly or call for fresh elections. The latter option is unlikely because it is fraught with the risk of hardliners repeating their impressive electoral performance.

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# N Irish police hurt in clash with rioters

Belfast, July 12

NINETEEN POLICE and two civilians were hurt in riots and guerrillas fired guns in the air ahead of hard-line Protestant parades on Thursday, the height of Northern Ireland's volatile "marching season."

Those incidents, and a "loyalist" militia threat to retaliate if Catholics broke truces, jolted the already shaky peace process in the British province, where more than 3,000 people have died in 30 years of sectarian and political violence.

Later on Thursday, thousands of members of the Protestant Orange Order were to parade in cities, towns and villages to mark "The Twelfth of July" — high point of annual processions commemorating ancient victories over Roman Catholics.

Northern Ireland's minority Catholics, who broadly favor integration with the mainly Catholic Irish Republic, see the parades as provocation by majority Protestants seeking to maintain British rule.

In Portadown town, 19 police officers and two civilians were hurt in clashes in a "loyalist" area close to a bonfire — one of many lit across the province at midnight to celebrate the centuries-old battlefield victories.

Surrounded by a cheering crowd of several hundred, five masked members of the Ulster Freedom Fighters (UFF) —



Loyalists hold a Union Jack flag at a midnight bonfire on Wednesday in Belfast to commemorate the defeat of the Catholic King James by the Protestant King William of Orange at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690.

armed with sub-machine guns and handguns — fired volleys as bonfires blazed in the Shankill loyalist stronghold in the capital, Belfast. Three gunmen from the rival Protestant Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) put on a separate similar display.

Police said they fired plastic

bullets and used two water cannon on loan from Belgium to disperse Protestant rioters in Portadown who threw petrol bombs and tried to attack a Catholic housing estate.

A police spokesman said none of the 19 officers was seriously injured. Around 200 rioters were

involved. A loud blast thought to be an exploding pipe bomb was heard. Army experts defused a second pipe bomb that was thrown at police but failed to explode.

At the UFF show of strength, a guerrilla leader told the crowd: "Should the republican pan-

nationalist front decide to go back to war then we accept the challenge. We, the second battalion of the Ulster Freedom Fighters, want to assure the 'loyalist' people that we are prepared for whatever lies ahead." The crowd roared its approval and chanted "UFF" and "No surrender."

Sectarian tension and sporadic violence have accompanied the run-up to "The Twelfth," putting pressure on political efforts to save the 1998 Good Friday peace accord — plagued by deadlocks over guerrilla disarmament, policing reforms and Britain's military presence.

Three days of talks between leading Protestant and Catholic politicians broke up on Wednesday with no breakthrough, but British Prime Minister Tony Blair and Irish Republic Prime Minister Bertie Ahern — the co-hosts — persuaded the feuding parties to return to the negotiating table on Friday.

The UFF, one of the most ruthless Protestant guerrilla groups, had added to growing strains on the peace pact on Tuesday by withdrawing its support for the deal — although it said it was not returning to war against the Catholics.

Like the Irish Republican Army and other mainstream guerrilla groups, the UFF and UVF are observing a cease-fire while the politicians talk.

Reuters

# Loyalist walkout hits Ulster talks

Rosie Cowan and Owen Bowcott

Dublin, July 11

TALKS AIMED at ending Northern Ireland's political deadlock are to continue for a third unscheduled day today despite serious setbacks when the province's largest loyalist paramilitary group said it no longer supported the Good Friday agreement and representatives of another quit the current negotiations.

Downing Street confirmed that Tony Blair is expected to stay on at the talks today and the Prime Minister's questions in the Commons will be taken by Robin Cook. The Deputy Prime Minister, John Prescott, is abroad.

Blair and his Irish counterpart, Bertie Ahern, continued intensive negotiations into the early hours with the Ulster Unionists, Sinn Fein and the SDLP at a secluded stately home, despite an announcement by the Ulster Freedom Fighters that they no longer backed the agreement and a withdrawal from the talks by the Progressive Unionist party.

But there were no signs of the IRA disarmament that the Ulster Unionist leader, David Trimble, needs if he is to return as head of

the province's power-sharing government next month. The Prime Minister wants to work out a deal on police reform and a security scale-down, which could persuade republicans to move. However, the mood at Weston Park, on the Shropshire-Staffordshire border, appeared bleak.

The Sinn Fein president, Gerry Adams, who left for a few hours to give a speech in London, told his audience he did not believe the arms issue would be resolved within the deadline imposed by Trimble's "contrived and calculated" resignation. "Neither will it be resolved on British government or unionist terms or on the basis of threat, veto or ultimatum," he said. While there was no suggestion that loyalist paramilitaries were about to end their ceasefires, nationalists feared their disillusionment, combined with heightened sectarian tension during the Protestant marching season, could spill over into violence.

In Belfast, the UFF — the more militant wing of the Ulster Defence Association — said it could no longer tolerate further concessions to nationalists nor back an agreement despised by loyalists.

The PUP, which took part in discussions before the smaller

parties left Weston Park on Monday, said it was pulling out of the talks because Adams refused to spell out what republicans wanted in return for decommissioning. David Ervine of the PUP said he repeatedly asked Adams to define what the IRA meant when it said last year it would put arms beyond use in the context of the removal of the causes of conflict, but got no clear answers.

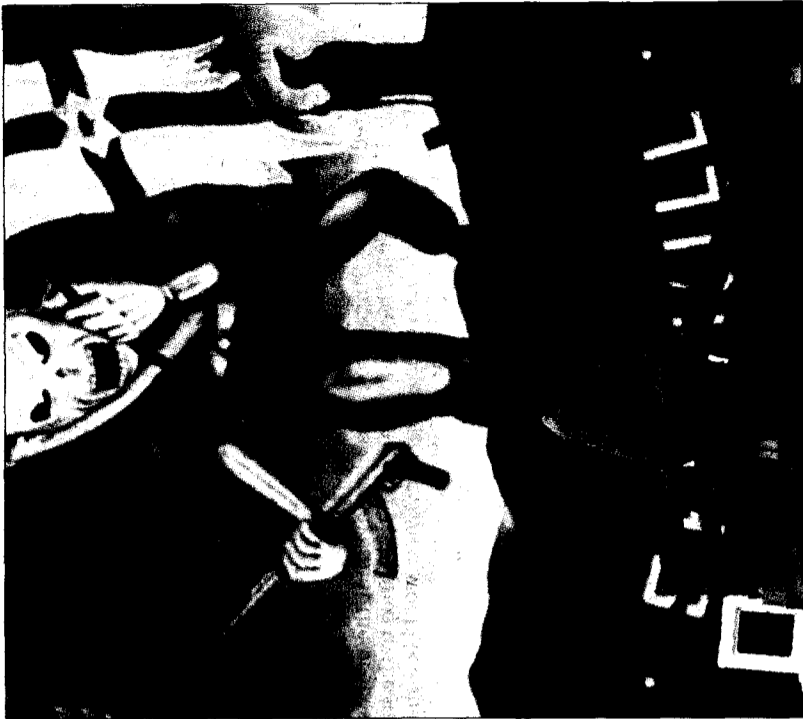
While loyalist paramilitaries always indicated they would decommission only when the IRA did so, yesterday's developments diminished hopes of a coordinated process, which might have encouraged republicans to make a move.

The RUC chief constable, Sir Ronnie Flanagan, has previously said the UDA/UFF is fragmented and individual members are suspected of numerous attacks on Roman Catholics in the past year.

Sinn Fein's Alex Maskey, who claimed the UFF ceasefire had already broken down, said: "The reality on the ground for some time has been the UFF orchestrating and carrying out attacks on Catholics."

At Weston Park, the SDLP chairman, Alex Attwood, condemned the loyalists' withdrawal.

The Guardian



A Protestant youth prepares a bonfire under the shadow of a Loyalist mural in the Protestant, Shankill Road area of West Belfast, Northern Ireland on Tuesday. The mural in the background is in support of the Ulster Freedom Fighters.

HD-17  
57

## Anti-Semitism charge against Haider dropped

**VIENNA, JULY 4.** Austria's public prosecutor has decided not to press charges of incitement to racial hatred against Mr. Joerg Haider, the former leader of the far-Right Freedom Party, over his infamous "dirty Jew" speech.

The Justice Ministry denied on Tuesday that the Justice Minister, Mr. Dieter Bohndorfer, who was appointed by the Freedom Party, had influenced the decision. The case stemmed from a complaint of anti-Semitism laid by the leader of Austria's Jewish community, Mr. Ariel Muzicant.

At a party meeting on Ash Wednesday, Mr. Haider told cheering supporters that he could not understand how someone called Ariel could have so much dirt sticking to him.

Mr. Haider claimed that it was a pun on words as Ariel is also a brand of washing powder, but critics said it was a clear reference to the Nazi belief that Jews were dirty.

Mr. Muzicant made a complaint after the speech, but on Tuesday the public prosecutor, Mr. Karl Schober, said that after looking into the facts it had been decided to take no further action.

He said there was not enough evidence that the remarks had been made to incite hatred against Jews.

Mr. Haider officially stepped down as Freedom Party leader in May last year in the face of international criticism when his party was elected into coalition Government.

He remains Governor of Carinthia and the

most powerful individual in the party. Ms. Rita Koch, a prominent member of the Jewish community in Vienna, said: "The comments were deliberately meant to raise questions about how Jews can be connected with something clean as they are supposedly always dealing with dirty business."

It was said for those who understand and take delight in anti-Semitic idioms. It is definitely an incitement against the Jewish community." She claimed that the Government had intervened to make sure the case went no further.

"I am very shocked. We are living in a dictatorship country," she said.

"If Mr. Muzicant feels that his community is affected by the comments, then he should be heard."

But Mr. Robert Jirovsky, the chief public prosecutor at the Ministry of Justice, said: "I can definitely rule out that the Ministry of Justice or the Justice Minister influenced or ordered this decision. I know because I worked on this case myself. The public prosecutor reported to us and we agreed with his conclusions, although we did not in any way influence what he decided. I admit that under certain circumstances we could say something if we disagreed with a decision, but that was not the case here." — ©Telegraph Group Limited, London, 2001.

THE HINDU

July 2001

# 'No progress on IRA decommissioning'

By Hasan Suroor

LONDON, JULY 2. The prospects of an early end to the deadlock in Northern Ireland further receded today after Gen. John de Chastelain's disarmament commission, in a much-awaited report, said there had been no indication from the IRA on destroying its weapons.

The commission pointed out that it had had a number of "lengthy meetings" with IRA since March and in each of these meetings it was assured of IRA's "commitment" to put its arms beyond use but how this would be done and when had not been spelt out.

The report, released a day after the Ulster Unionist leader, Mr. David Trimble, resigned as head of the power-sharing provincial Government to force the IRA to start decommissioning, was seen as a setback to the efforts by the British and Irish Governments to save the peace process. It prompted calls for a tougher stand against the IRA's political arm, Sinn Fein, including its expulsion from the Northern

Ireland Government in which it shares power with Unionists. But commentators ruled out any precipitate action by London saying it would make a compromise even more difficult. Sinn Fein's expulsion would "close the door completely to decommissioning", *The Independent* said.

The de Chastelain Commission, which has inspected IRA's arms dumps several times, expressed its disappointment over lack of progress on disarmament but said it would continue its work despite calls to withdraw from the process. It said that the continued maintenance of the 1997 ceasefire by IRA and its decision to open up some of its arms dumps for international inspection indicated that its commitment to put its weapons beyond use "completely and verifiably" was made in "good faith." "We have, however, been unable to ascertain how the IRA will put its arms beyond use, except for the assurance that it will be complete and verifiable. The

IRA has taken note of our need for this information but until we know what method will be used, we cannot judge if it meets our remit", it said adding that the IRA had expressed eagerness to continue with his engagement with the commission.

The response from other paramilitary groups has been equally negative. The Ulster Volunteer Force, a major loyalist group, told the commission that it would not consider disarming until it knew of IRA's plans.

"Given the conditions the IRA, UVF and UFF say they require before they will put their arms beyond use, we believe we cannot influence that activity by making demands or by setting deadlines. But we will continue to do what we can to implement our mandate through continuing contact and discussion with each of the three paramilitary groups, insisting that the objectives of the legislation calling for arms to be rendered permanently inaccessible or permanently

unusable are respected," the commission said.

Mr. Trimble, meanwhile, remained firm that there was no question of returning to the Government until IRA started disarming even as Sinn Fein accused him of engineering a crisis. "IRA weapons have been silent for seven years and everybody knows there is no threat to the peace process from Sinn Fein nor, I believe, the IRA," a Sinn Fein leader told BBC Radio 4's Today programme saying if Mr. Trimble was really committed to the Good Friday Agreement he would not have resigned.

The Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair's official spokesman expressed disappointment over the outcome of the commission's talks with IRA but said efforts to find a solution would continue. "In terms of where we are at the moment, no one is underestimating the difficulties that we face. Equally, no one should underestimate the shared determination between the two Governments to try and move this forward," he said.

# Direct rule cloud on N. Ireland

**Belfast, June 28** (Reuters): Britain could re-impose direct rule on Northern Ireland, dashing hopes of peace for years, if the province's first minister David Trimble resigns this weekend, analysts say.

If Protestant leader Trimble goes ahead with his threat to resign on Saturday over disarmament by Catholic paramilitary groups, there will be a six-week grace period while arrangements are made for the future of the British province.

The crisis led to a meeting in Belfast today between British Prime Minister Tony Blair and Irish Prime Minister Bertie

Ahern over Trimble's threat to resign unless the Irish Republican Army (IRA) begins to disarm. With the IRA so far not budging, it looks like Trimble will be out, throwing a province slowly emerging from 30 years of sectarian violence, thanks to a 1998 power-sharing agreement between pro-British unionists and Irish nationalists, into crisis once again.

"It (Trimble's resignation) is a step in a crisis but it's really a six-week crisis, and probably much longer," said Paul Bew, a professor of politics at Queen's University in Belfast. "If after six weeks, if what we all hope for (disarma-

ment) has not occurred, then it may very well be back to direct rule," he added. Under laws connected to the so-called Good Friday agreement, elections for the joint positions of first and deputy first minister must be held within six weeks of one of them stepping down. Northern Ireland is now heading into the traditionally stormiest period of the year, when Protestant loyalists parade their past victories over Catholics.

Blair and Ahern's visit is seen as mostly designed to plot the next steps rather than to somehow save Nobel Peace Prize winner Trimble, whose star is waning even within his own party. Trimble,

under pressure from hardliners within the Ulster Unionist Party questioning his role in the peace process, has led the clamour for the IRA to start scrapping its stockpile of arms.

To shore up his party at this month's general election, Trimble made the resignation threat but his party lost ground to both the IRA's political ally Sinn Fein and the hardline Protestant Democratic Unionist Party.

Trimble was re-elected as leader of his party, the largest unionist grouping, but was unopposed. A question mark hangs over what Britain's minister for the province John Reid will do.

THE TELEGRAPH



HD-17  
2/16

## Castles in the air?

AS JUNE draws to a close, Italy shimmers in the noonday sun. Magazines are packed with advertisements for swimsuits and sun creams, exotic holidays and diet pills. "Everybody's mind is on the vacations. No one is bothered about the Government. The heat makes it difficult to work — something Italians find difficult to do even in the best of circumstances. So it will only be in September, when people have returned to their jobs with their pockets empty and the summer behind them, that criticism of the new Government will begin in earnest," says the sociologist, Mr. Manuel Silva.

The media magnate, Mr. Silvio Berlusconi, and his right-wing coalition called the House of Freedoms were given a convincing majority in both Houses of Parliament in elections held on May 13. However, it was barely ten days ago that he formed his new Government.

Even his critics admit that Mr. Berlusconi was able to woo men of stature such as the former WTO chief, Mr. Renato Ruggiero, into his Cabinet. Key portfolios such as Economy and Finance, Justice and the Interior have been given to highly respected, technocrats from Mr. Berlusconi's own Forza Italia (Let's go, Italy) party, which has emerged as the country's single largest political formation.

For example, Mr. Giuliano Tremonti, architect of Mr. Berlusconi's economic agenda for the electoral campaign has been named Super Minister of Economy and Finance, ensuring that Mr. Berlusconi controls both treasury receipts as well as expenditure. Mr. Berlusconi's confidante Claudio Scagola is in charge of the Interior Ministry, which deals with income tax raids and the law and order machinery in general.

The media tycoon has also been clever enough to give the problematic portfolios to his coalition partners. His *bete noire*, Mr. Umberto Bossi, the raucous, xenophobic leader of the anti-foreigner Northern League has been made Minister for Devolution and Territorial Reforms.

Mr. Bossi who was responsible for bringing down the first Berlusconi Government in 1995 is now in charge of federalism and national integration, while Mr. Roberto Maroni, also of the Northern



Mr. Silvio Berlusconi addresses Parliament... tall promises.

### *Italy's poor economic situation is giving rise to doubts about the feasibility of Mr. Berlusconi's ambitious plans. Vaiju Naravane reports.*

League, has been saddled with the difficult portfolio of labour relations where he will have the unenviable task of managing inflated state pensions which are a huge drain on Italy's economy.

The wily Mr. Berlusconi will keep his troublesome allies both busy and vulnerable. Notwithstanding his judicious choice of ministers, Italy's poor economic situation is giving rise to doubts about the feasibility of Mr. Berlusconi's ambitious plans for his countrymen. "Mr. Berlusconi made wild campaign promises and even a lay person could have foreseen that the figures did not add up.

You cannot raise pensions, lower taxes by as much as 30 per cent and undertake huge investments in infrastructure all in the same breath. His was a populist campaign if ever there was one and the Government is now trying furiously to back-pedal," says Mr. Giovanni Porzio, a journalist.

Just last week, the Government announced that it had discovered a huge hole in the country's finances and that the tax cuts would have to be postponed for an unspecified period. Undoubtedly, the same excuse will be proffered to

explain the delays in infrastructure building.

Mr. Berlusconi has also suffered some embarrassment at the hands of Mr. Bossi who began his ministerial term on a predictably loud note saying he continued to believe in the idea of Padania, a separate sovereign state in Italy's wealthy northern plain. While that was acceptable behaviour from a rabble-rousing local politician, whose rhetoric exploited a sense of fear and insecurity among his constituency of small farmers and businessmen, it cannot be tolerated in a Minister of Cabinet rank, especially one responsible for devolution and territorial reform.

Even as the leader of the Northern league, Mr. Bossi favoured the break up of Italy into three separate republics so that the poor south would not sap the resources of the wealthy north. His latest declarations can hardly bring cheer to Italian southerners.

"More and more people are privately expressing doubts, but chambers of commerce and other industrial associations are keeping mum for the moment. After all, they did give Mr. Berlusconi their support and they would look foolish

withdrawing it now. Besides, there is a genuine wait and watch attitude.

I do not expect any pronouncements before autumn when the Government will have run out of its customary 100-day grace period," says Ms. Thesi Kness-Bastaroli, president of Milan's powerful Foreign Press Association.

Mr. Manuel Silva agrees with her. "There is only a surface calm. Underneath everyone is troubled by questions about how the public will react. After all, Mr. Berlusconi went to great pains to convince the people of his sincerity and generosity. If neither is forthcoming soon the backlash will be violent.

In an extremely theatrical television appearance, Mr. Berlusconi made a pact with the Italian people, promising them he would not stand for re-election if he failed to fulfil at least four of his five main campaign promises. It now appears he will be unable to cut taxes, increase pensions or invest in infrastructure, at least in the short term. Italians chose to disregard the dictates of logic and believe in the fantastic promises he made.

The election in May was decided on the basis of emotion rather than reason. If Mr. Berlusconi fails to deliver the response is likely to be an equally emotional phenomenon of rejection," concludes Mr. Silva.

THE END

119-16  
29/6

# Dragging it on and on... and down?



**Sinn Fein leaders after the Downing Street summit... a hardening of positions.**

**T**HIS HAS been a bad week for Northern Ireland, where at the best of times peace sits on a knife's edge. The outbreak of violence in Belfast within hours of the collapse of peace talks at Downing Street reflects the new, more militant mood in Northern Ireland after the recent elections which saw moderates on both sides lose ground to the hardliners. After days of rioting, tension was still simmering at the weekend amid signs of increased belligerence across the sectarian divide.

The week saw a marked hardening of positions, evident as much in the rhetoric of major players as in their body language as they emerged from Downing Street last Monday after talks with the British and Irish Prime Ministers, Mr. Tony Blair and Mr. Bertie Ahern. The hitherto moderate Unionist leader, Mr. David Trimble, shook with rage as he lashed out at the IRA for dragging its feet on giving up its weapons and repeated his threat to quit as head of Northern Ireland's ruling coalition if there was no progress on the issue by July 1. The Sinn Fein chief, Mr. Gerry Adams, speaking for the IRA, was equally livid and accused Mr. Trimble of trying to "hijack" the peace process. A leader of the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP), declaring "plague on both your houses", pronounced the Good Friday

Agreement virtually dead saying it was in "big trouble".

The first hint of how "big" the trouble was came the next day when Belfast exploded — and for the next four days Catholic and Protestant extremists slugged it out in what has been described as the worst rioting in a long time. The trouble, which started outside a Catholic school in North Belfast, a volatile area, over flaghoisting by Protestants,

provincial police force to the satisfaction of his Catholic constituency. The SDLP, having lost its position as the principal nationalist/republican voice in Northern Ireland thanks to an anti-moderate swing in the June 7 elections, was reduced to playing second fiddle while Mr. Adams flexed his muscles. He ruled out any compromise dismissing Mr. Trimble's resignation threat as political

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*The longer the stalemate in Northern Ireland lasts, the greater is the danger, says Hasan Suroor.*

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soon spread to other areas plunging the beleaguered Good Friday Agreement into deeper crisis.

The Downing Street summit was billed as a major initiative by Britain and Ireland to get the stalled peace process moving but despite official optimism it was never going to be easy to defy the logic of election results which hardliners see as a verdict in their favour. Mr. Adams, whose party gained significantly at the expense of his more moderate republican rival, Mr. John Hume's SDLP, was predictably hawkish in pressing his two main demands — scaling down the British security presence in Northern Ireland, and a revamp of the

brinkmanship and making clear that there was no question of meeting his July 1 deadline for arms decommissioning.

With the "summit" ending in mutual recrimination, the very future of the power-sharing coalition looked bleak prompting speculation that the British Government might be forced to suspend the Provincial Assembly to allow passions to cool. If this happens, it would be the second time in less than three years since the Good Friday Agreement was signed that such an extreme measure was taken. Inevitably, this has raised questions about the fragile nature of the peace process in Northern Ireland and even the supporters of the

agreement have begun to wonder if it wouldn't be a good idea to have another look at the way it has been sought to be implemented.

A crisis has been brewing for months and for all practical purposes the Good Friday Agreement is at a standstill despite two high-profile interventions by the former U.S. President, Mr. Bill Clinton, and frequent nudges from Downing Street. Virtually a civil war has been raging inside the power-sharing executive at Stormont after Mr. Trimble decided to bar Sinn Fein Ministers from attending cross-border ministerial meetings as a punishment for lack of progress on arms decommissioning. It was intended to appease his own party hardliners who had been pressing him to take a tougher position on decommissioning.

In the event, the move succeeded neither in achieving decommissioning nor in heading off challenge to his leadership from his party rivals. If anything, it hardened positions on both sides and Sinn Fein's spectacular performance in both general and local elections is seen as a vindication of its position. Similarly, the gains made by the anti-agreement Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) at the cost of Mr. Trimble's Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) have been interpreted by the DUP leadership as a vote of no-confidence against the pro-agreement Unionists. The polarisation between hardline Unionists and Republicans is complete.

Within the UUP, the hawkish lobby has stepped up its campaign against Mr. Trimble's leadership arguing that the election result is a verdict against his "softly softly" policies. It is a measure of the new equations in the UUP that when Mr. Trimble went to the Downing Street summit he was forced to take with him the hardliner, Mr. Jeffrey Donaldson — one of his bitterest critics and a potential candidate to replace him — a signal to Sinn Fein that henceforth it would need to contend with more demanding voices. With the political temperature in Northern Ireland at boiling point, a stalemate can only help extremists and the danger of the sort of violence witnessed in Belfast this week can hardly be exaggerated.

THE HINDU

ULSTER / VIOLENCE SPREADS IN BELFAST

# Summer of unrest ahead?

By Hasan Suroor

LONDON, JUNE 22. Northern Ireland looked headed for a summer of unrest as sectarian violence spread to other parts of Belfast on Thursday and Protestants began fleeing Catholic dominated areas to safer places even as the Northern Ireland Secretary, Dr. John Reid held talks with provincial leaders to defuse the crisis.

Efforts to salvage the beleaguered peace process, however, were in a shambles with militants on both sides stepping up their campaign of terror and intimidation, chillingly brought home by T.V. footage of missile-throwing mobs, frightened schoolchildren and a woman bleeding from the head after being hit by a metal object. The trouble, which erupted in North Belfast on Tuesday, spread to the western parts of the city on Thursday and the police said the pattern suggested the involvement of paramilitary outfits, opposed to the Good Friday Agreement. "When guns are brought into the equation there is some paramilitary involvement," a senior police officer told journalists.

The first hint of trouble in West Belfast came when the police, who were removing unexploded pipebombs, were attacked by allegedly Protestant youths. In the clashes that followed, several people, including a number of policemen, were injured after they were hit by flying missiles. Police who retaliated with plastic bullets were caught up in a cross-



The remains of a burnt out car, on the Ardoyne Road, north Belfast, after a second night of rioting on Friday. — AFP

fire of accusations and counter-accusations from rival sides.

While the senior Sinn Fein leader, Mr. Martin McGuinness accused the security forces of "collaborating" with Unionists, the latter claimed that the police were targeting them. A Progressive Unionist Party leader, Mr. Billy Hutchinson complained that the police had hit him with "batons and shields" when they tried to push back a Unionist crowd as, for the third day, Belfast witnessed running battles between the police and rioters who burnt vehicles, attacked properties and hurled abuses.

Five Protestant families moved out of a Catholic neighbourhood after being allegedly intimidated by local militants. They alleged a republican campaign to drive

Protestants out of the area by constantly harassing them. One woman told a newspaper that the place had become "too dangerous" to live. "We couldn't stay any longer," she said. One old man said he never thought he would live to see "this day". "Those (Protestant) families have all lived in those houses right throughout all the troubles....it's just got too bad for them to live here," he was quoted as saying.

Children looked frightened — and some broke down — as their parents escorted them through the ravaged streets. "These children are in hysterics. If the Good Friday Agreement means anything it should mean kids can go to school in peace," a Sinn Fein leader said, blaming Protestants for the tension. The Catholic Holy

Cross school where the trouble originally started on Tuesday symbolises the communal divide in the area, with both Protestants and Catholics trying to assert their presence.

Disturbances began when Protestants tried to put up flags on lampposts outside the school and one flag-hoisting youth was apparently attacked by Catholic hotheads. "The lad was just putting up a flag in his own area. Then they were unloading baseball bats. I couldn't believe it," a woman told *The Guardian*. The violence is seen as a manifestation of a bitter turf war between the two communities — reflected as much in the Protestants' bid to hoist their flags in what they regard as their territory, as in the Catholics' resistance to it. *The Times* pointed out that "prospects of an early resolution looked bleak as both loyalists and republicans gave warning that they would defend their areas".

Meanwhile, no progress was reported at Dr. Reid's talks with Nationalist and Unionist leaders as arms decommissioning by IRA remained the main sticking point. Republicans said the Unionists were "obsessed" with decommissioning while the real stumbling block was lack of progress in police reforms and demilitarisation. Dr. Reid denied suggestions that the British Government was thinking of suspending the Northern Ireland Assembly to force the two sides to come to an agreement.

THE IRISH

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HD-16 246

# Rioting in Belfast shatters peace

By Hasan Suroor

**LONDON, JUNE 21.** The all-too-fragile peace in Northern Ireland was rudely shaken as violence erupted in north Belfast on Tuesday and continued sporadically until late on Wednesday.

While the rioting subsided, tension persisted amid fears of more trouble in the run-up to the annual Drumcree Orange parade which invariably heightens the sectarian divide in the region as Protestants insist on marching through Catholic neighbourhood.

Army was patrolling the streets today while community leaders appealed for calm amid a deepening sense of crisis. The fate of the Good Friday Agreement hung in the balance as a breakthrough on arms decommissioning — the main stumbling block to peace — seemed unlikely. The IRA, in a statement, made it clear that it would not succumb to pressure, a reference to the Ulster Unionist Party chief, Mr. David Trimble's threat to resign as the head of the Northern Ireland ruling coalition if there is no progress on decommissioning by July 1.

North Belfast is a chronic flash-point with Protestants and Catholics separated by what is ironically known as a "peace line", in effect a symbol of mistrust and hate that divide the two

communities. The trouble apparently began outside a Catholic school when parents collecting their children were attacked with stones, allegedly by Protestant activists. The retaliation was swift and soon the confrontation turned into a full-scale riot with mobs from both sides resorting to arson and stoning.

Hundreds of youths fought pitched battles with security forces who used plastic bullets to beat the attack. In what was described as the worst violence in a long time, mobs went on a rampage, burning vehicles, attacking homes and shops, and hurling petrol bombs and missiles at policemen. Several police officers were injured. A schoolbus carrying children was attacked but fortunately no harm came to them.

A senior officer of the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC), which is viewed with deep distrust by Catholics, described the incident as "very serious" with security forces coming under sustained attack. The involvement of various militant outfits, belonging to both sides, was not ruled out, prompting speculation that this could be an attempt to sabotage the British and Irish Governments' efforts to revive the peace process.

The violence, which came a day after peace talks at Downing Street collapsed amid angry re-

crimination, was widely condemned even as two sides traded charges and blamed each other. The Security Minister of Northern Ireland, Ms Jane Kennedy, said the trouble had "nothing to do with grievances — real or imagined". It was plain lumpenism — "a mob at its most primitive". Ms. Ann Tanney, principal of the Catholic school where the trouble started, called for restraint saying

it was important that children were not brought up in an atmosphere of "hatred and fear".

A Sinn Fein leader, Mr. Gerry Kelly, accused Protestant loyalists of heightening tension in the area ahead of next month's Orange march. One newspaper said the scale of the clashes was "greater than the familiar marching season disturbances which annually afflict the district".



**A Catholic mother holds her daughter's hand as armed police keep loyalist protesters away from Catholics during a stand-off at a school in north Belfast's Crumlin Road on Thursday. — Reuters**

# I'm out of patience: Trimble

AP-16  
2/7/6

By Hasan Suroor

**LONDON, JUNE 19.** The much hyped Downing Street "summit" on Northern Ireland here on Monday collapsed in a heap of recriminations with not the slightest progress on any of the issues which threaten the peace process.

Both the Unionists and Nationalists emerged from the meeting in an angry mood, making it clear that they were not willing to compromise on their respective demands. In their separate meetings with the British Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair and his Irish counterpart, Mr. Bertie Ahern, the two sides refused to budge from their positions — the Unionists insisting that the IRA must start putting its arms beyond use immediately, and the Nationalists clinging equally vehemently to their demand for radical police reforms and scaling down British security in Northern Ireland.

The Ulster Unionist Party chief, Mr. David Trimble was livid as he came out of the meeting saying his patience was "at an end" and he would not tolerate any further delay in arms decommissioning. He reiterated his decision to quit as the First Minister of Northern Ireland on July 1 if there was no progress on the issue by then. Mr. Trimble accused the IRA of dragging its feet on decommissioning, a key element of the Good Friday Agreement. "Speaking personally, my patience is at an end on this issue. If we do not see the republican movement keeping the promise it made then, I will vacate the office in a fortnight", he told reporters.

The Sinn Fein leader, Mr. Gerry Adams was equally uncompro-



The Irish Prime Minister, Mr. Bertie Ahern (left), and his British counterpart, Mr. Tony Blair, after talks on the Northern Ireland peace process at 10 Downing Street on Monday. — AP

mising and ruled out any concessions under pressure. "Let's not have the process hijacked," he said, referring to Mr. Trimble's threat to resign. He said, "With goodwill, all of these issues will be

resolved" but added that this would not be possible "between now and July 1". The British Government, he maintained, should not be seen giving in to the Unionists' "threats and ultima-

tums". He believed the British Government lacked the political will to "seize the nettle" on the two issues which the Republicans have put forward as a pre-condition for further movement on the Good Friday Agreement — police reforms and reduced security presence.

One newspaper said according to some reports, the talks with the Sinn Fein delegation were "very stormy". Downing Street declined to comment beyond saying that efforts to carry forward the peace process would continue.

The SDLP, which supports the Unionists' demand for arms decommissioning but also wants more progress on police reforms and disarmament, pressed its demand for "full implementation" of the Agreement.

In other words, it wanted both sides to keep their side of the bargain. A party leader said after the meeting that the peace process was in "big trouble".

Monday's "summit" had been billed as a major initiative to get the Good Friday Agreement back on the rails after the setback to the pro-Agreement elements in the recent general and local elections.

Hardliners on both sides gained significantly at the cost of the moderate forces, prompting calls for a review of the Agreement, and particularly the way in which it has been implemented.

Mr. Trimble, who has been under enormous pressure to get the IRA to start decommissioning or quit the power-sharing executive with the Nationalists, faces a leadership challenge from party hardliners later this week.

THE MINDEN  
10 JUN 2001

# Bush begins Europe trip

ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON, June 12. — US President Mr George W Bush began his first official trip to Europe, eager to sell his missile defence system, support Nato expansion and convince US allies that despite trans-Atlantic tensions, they have a "trustworthy friend" in Washington.

European leaders have criticised Mr Bush's condemnation of the 1997 Kyoto treaty on global warming and plan to raise the issue with him. The President also faces questions on his proposed missile-defence plan, trade disputes, peacekeeping troops in the Balkans and expanding Nato's membership. "I'm used to explaining positions that some people don't agree with," Mr Bush told a group of European journalists before his departure yesterday.

On his first stop today in Madrid, Spain, Bush was scheduled to meet King Juan Carlos and Queen Sofia. He will hold talks tomorrow with Nato allies in Brussels, Belgium. On Thursday, he'll be in Sweden to attend a summit of US and EU officials. After a state visit in Poland on Friday, Mr Bush will travel to Slovenia to meet Russian President Mr Vladimir Putin. **Protests over execution:** Anti-death penalty protesters lit



King Juan Carlos of Spain kisses the hand of US First Lady Mrs Laura Bush after the Bushes's arrival in Madrid's Zarzuela Palace on Tuesday. — AP/PTI

candles in the streets outside US embassies in Europe and held up posters of Timothy McVeigh, a report from Madrid says. "Bush, a compassionate killer!" read a sign held aloft by Spanish human rights activists, whose crusade was energised by a Spaniard who returned a free man on Sunday after three years on death row in USA.

**Global warming:** Mr Bush sought to placate Europe yesterday by pledging America's leadership in the battle against global warming. But he once again rejected the 1997 Kyoto accords, with their mandatory reductions in greenhouse gas

emissions, adds *The Times*. London.

"America's unwillingness to embrace a flawed treaty should not be read by friends and allies as any abdication of responsibility," Mr Bush insisted just hours before departing for his first official trip to a continent still outraged by his rejection of the Kyoto accords last March. "To the contrary, my administration is committed to a leadership role on the issue of climate change."

However, he endorsed Kyoto's attempt to forge a global response to a threat that respected no national boundaries.

THE STATESMAN

13 JUN 2001

## Rising concern over falling euro

By Batuk Gathan

BRUSSELS, JUNE 3. The euro has now fallen to a new low against the dollar amid a spate of bad news of slow economic growth and stubborn inflation in the 12 euro-zone member-states. The crisis is compounded by the widening communication gap between investors and the European Central Bank (ECB). The ECB President, Mr. Wim Duisenberg's latest comments are interpreted by markets as a signal that the Bank is not likely to intervene in the currency markets to support the euro.

The euro was launched in January 1999 at \$1.17 and now hovers at fewer than three U.S. cents above the all-time low of 0.82 cents in November. The more pessimistic perception in the markets is that the fall below the sensitive psychological barrier of 0.80 would push euro-zone inflation to four per cent.

The ECB's guideline to euro-zone countries is to keep below two per cent but none of the 12 euro-zone countries has been able to abide by it and the current rate of euro-zone inflation is 2.9 per cent. The more pessimistic view is that the countries could experience the dreaded stagflation, but the silver-lining is that some forecasters predict that inflation may fall below two per cent by the end of the year. The euro has also hit a record low against the Japanese yen. This prompted a Japanese financial diplomat to say that the recent sharp fall of the euro against the yen was "undesirable".

The spectre of Europe's economy slowing fast and its currency hitting an all time low against world's major currencies have prompted a prominent banker to say that "the euro is being punished for ECB's perceived lack of competence".

Though Britain has chosen to remain out of the eurozone, London banks and financial institutions have made preparations for euro currency trading when euro coins and currency notes will be in circulation in January. London is still the world's major foreign currency capital after New York, Frankfurt and Tokyo. The 12 euro nations represent a population of some 303 millions with an economic output closely approaching that of the U.S., the world's largest or \$-8 trillion plus economy.

The global financial landscape has changed dramatically, since euro unleashes a seismic shift in global asset values. European asset managers in euroland's countries have a free choice of asset investment in the member-states. For example, an Italian insurance company can now invest in German companies and hence investment choices have suddenly multiplied from Athens and Rome to Helsinki and from Lisbon to Berlin.

In coming decades, more European countries from the formerly communist-ruled European region will also join the E.U. in the shadow of the European Monetary Union and the euro. The expanded E.U. has all the potential to be the world's second or even first biggest economic and fiscal superpower, which can be either an ally or rival of the U.S.

# Question mark over Ulster pact

By Hasan Suroor

LONDON, MAY 24. While little is likely to change in London after next month's general election, with Labour set to return to a second term in office, there is anxiety in Belfast that the Good Friday Agreement could be in trouble if the pro-agreement parties do not do well.

Reports from Northern Ireland indicate deep disenchantment among Protestants with the peace deal which they think has been used by the IRA and its political arm, Sinn Fein, to gain political legitimacy without delivering anything in return. The Ulster Unionist Party (UUP), representing the moderate Protestant opinion, is seen to have been let down by the British Government which, at the time of the agreement, had made a number of promises that remain unfulfilled.

The UUP chief, Mr. David Trimble, London's pointman in Belfast, is facing a backlash for having "failed" to get the British Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair, to deliver on those promises. The anger against Mr. Blair is being directed at Mr. Trimble and if this were to translate into votes on June 7, the future of the Good Friday Agreement could be truly in danger.

For, a vote against the UUP means a vote for the anti-agreement Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) which has been able to sell the line that the agreement has been hijacked by Sinn Fein.

"Blair, once Trimble's greatest asset, is now his biggest liability", a newspaper said, point-

ing out that three years after the Good Friday Agreement was signed on the back of a "series of handwritten assurances" by Mr. Blair there was "widespread perception among Protestants that Blair has let them down." Outside the formal agreement, whose key element was laying down of arms by the IRA, Mr. Blair was stated to have assured the Unionists that those who used or threatened violence would be excluded from the Northern Ireland Government and prisoners would not be released unless violence was given up completely.

Angry Unionists point out that the IRA has not even started laying down its arms — and yet, not only its prisoners have been released but its political front, Sinn Fein, continues to be in the Government.

They argue that the continued possession of arms by the IRA constitutes a threat of violence — and in a sense, Republicans are sitting with guns on the table. "Tony Blair lied to us. The IRA have kept their guns, got their prisoners out of jail and continue their violence", one voter was quoted as saying.

*The Guardian* in a report said the DUP, which has vowed to wreck the agreement, hoped to take three seats from the UUP and emerge as the largest Unionist Party in Northern Ireland. This would have grave consequences for the peace process, according to observers who said Mr. Trimble remained the best hope for peace. He has appealed to moderates across the sectarian divide to vote for his party in order to save the agreement.



# Economic slowdown in euro zone continues

By Batuk Gathani

**BRUSSELS, MAY 23.** In a new setback for the German economy which is already marked by plunging business confidence and surging inflation, the 'euro' — the 12-nation common currency — hit a six-month low against the dollar on Tuesday after France and Italy produced disappointing economic results.

As Germany's economic prospects look depressing, senior economic advisers to the centre-left Government of the Chancellor, Mr. Gerhard Schroeder, also cast doubts whether Germany could reach its target of two per cent economic growth this year. Germany, rated as the euro-zone's "locomotive" economy, is reeling under the impact of the U.S. economic slowdown. The crises are further compounded by the current depression in Germany's construction industry, which is laying off workers.

It is also becoming obvious that the recent reduction in interest rates effected by the European Central Bank (ECB) has not had any significant impact. Two weeks ago, in a surprise move, the ECB cut euro-zone interest rates by 0.25 per cent for the first time in more than two years. The decision was taken amid lacklustre economic data in the 12 euro zone countries, which showed signs of slowdown. The ECB called its decision to lower the interest rate as a strategy to boost business confidence in the euro zone.

But the strategy has so far not worked if last night's economic data is any criterion. The ECB's policy-making council met today to review the situation with the con-

tinuing trend of pessimism among businesses in Germany. The ECB's current focus is to keep the euro zone's inflation rate in check. The policy of lowering interest rates is described as an "adjustment" rather than "change in direction" of the bank's policy.

The ECB has joined the ranks of the U.S. Federal Reserve, Bank of Japan and Bank of England in reacting to a visibly slowing global economy. The ECB's decision this month coincided with Bank of En-

gland's decision to cut the interest rate by 0.25 per cent. The current British interest rate is 5.25 per cent. According to the speculation in financial markets, the Federal Reserve may again cut the interest rate and if so, this will be the fifth such time measure by it this year.

The ECB's key rate now stands at 4.5 per cent. The bank justified its decision to lower inflation pressures as the economic growth in the euro-zone region slows. The silver lining on the otherwise gloo-

my horizon is that European wages remain stable. But the inflation for the whole of Germany has risen this month to 4.1 per cent from 3.3 per cent in April. This is much higher than the inflation rate of below 2 per cent, required by the ECB.

Today's reality is that the much-heralded and long-awaited interest rate cut by the ECB has yet failed to support the 'euro' which has fallen to a record low against the dollar. The euro currently trades around 86 cents (U.S.), which represents a significant depreciation in value against the dollar. The euro was launched at the rate of 1.17 to the dollar in January 1999.

Independent observers point out that the ECB rate cut has raised more questions about the bank's ability to communicate with markets and understand its sentiments. Some are even accusing it of "sheepishly" following dictates by the International Monetary Fund and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development which have consistently pressed the ECB to cut the interest rate.

Not all European businessmen, bankers and industrialists share the ECB's perception that business confidence can be boosted by cut in interest rates. This is widely rated as a strategic "grey" area.

Many Europeans also feel that this interest reduction strategy may create new uncertainties about the conduct of pan-European monetary policy. It remains to be seen how the ECB can continue to assert and consolidate its much-cherished independence from politicians and business lobbies.



**A worker wipes the euro logo on top of the so-called Euro-Clock in downtown Frankfurt, Germany, in this May 16 file picture. The clock counts down the days to Jan. 1, 2002, when the euro currency will be introduced simultaneously in 12 European countries.**

THE HINDU

24 MAY 2001

# Moderation is the message

**T**HE MODERATE nationalist Basque party, PNV, emerged triumphant in last week's crucial regional elections in Spain's troubled Basque provinces. The Partido Nacionalista Vasco which has been in power for the last 22 years and stands for Basque independence from Spain through peaceful means won 33 out of 78 seats — over 42 per cent of the popular vote.

Spain's Prime Minister, Mr. Jose Maria Aznar's conservative Popular Party (PP) was trounced, proving that even moderate Basques disapprove of his tough policy towards the nationalists. The PP had urged voters to throw out the Basque nationalists and seize what it called "a historic opportunity for the future of Spanish democracy". This is the most serious strategic reversal Mr. Aznar has suffered since his re-election a year ago.

Also on the losers' dais were Euskal Herriarok or EH, political wing of ETA, the Basque terrorist organisation, and the Basque socialist party. EH lost seven of the 14 seats it held in the outgoing Parliament; the socialists, like the PP, won 19 seats. With turnout as high as 80 per cent, Basque voters made their desires plain: they do not favour the terror campaign launched by ETA. Neither do they approve of the tough, no-dialogue stand adopted by Mr. Aznar.

ETA (Euzkadi Ta Askatasuna) did not wait long to make its displeasure felt. On May 15, a journalist, Mr. Gorka Landaburu, who has long campaigned against ETA's violent tactics, was the victim of a letter bomb attack. He lost an eye and two fingers and suffered extensive burns. For over 30 years, ETA has been waging a relentless separatist war against the Spanish Government. Over 800 people have been killed and hundreds injured in terrorist attacks in the name of Basque self-determination and unification. ETA describes the three million Basques as "a nation divided".

The Basque country lies in the northeast of Spain, in a region running from the Bay of Biscay to the foothills of the western Pyrenees in France. On the Spanish side, it is made up of the highly industrialised provinces of Navarre, Guipuzcoa, Alava and Biscay. On the French side, the Basques live in the lower Pyrenees region. In December 1999, ETA decided to interrupt a self-decree, 14-month-long ceasefire and revived its terror

*The Basque voters have made it plain: they do not favour ETA's terror campaign nor do they approve of the Spanish Government's no-dialogue stand, writes Vaiju Naravane.*

campaign. Some 30 persons have been killed this year alone. Not a week seems to go by without an attack, mainly in the Basque country, but also in the capital, Madrid — proof that ETA can strike when it wants, where it wants. Worse, it has now widened its net, aiming not just for policemen or "agents of the state" but targeting journalists, businessmen, politicians and

language is unique, resembling no other in Europe. Their desire for political independence was formally expressed by Sabino de Arana Goiri with the founding of the PNV in 1894.

ETA was born in 1959 as a result of schism within the PNV. The old party disapproves of armed struggle and is willing to settle for a high degree of autonomy within the Spanish

people who are being kept artificially apart. We live in a rich, industrialised part of the world with incomes of over \$ 16,000 dollars a year. East Timor can win independence, but not us. What sort of hypocrisy is this?"

In September 1998, ETA and EH declared a unilateral ceasefire. They said they had the Irish agreements in mind and invited the Government to make a gesture in return. Only one meeting between representatives of the Government and the various Basque parties was held, in Switzerland in May 1999. It lasted four hours at the end of which the two sides agreed to disagree. Like the Irish Republican Army, which is their model, the ETA guerrillas refused to disarm at the start of the peace process, a condition rejected by Madrid. The Basques wanted all their political prisoners to be transferred to jails in their region, not scattered in the various corners of Spain. The Government flatly refused.

Many political commentators, like Carmen Guruchaga, blame the Government for failing to establish a constructive dialogue with the terrorists. Others argue that ETA never intended to make any concessions and used the ceasefire to buy itself time, re-arm and re-group. Mr. Aznar's conservative Government has sworn it will take a tough line on ETA terrorism. "Their campaign is bestial and brutal. But we will not submit. We shall fight harder than ever. They can still kill a lot more people but they cannot kill freedom, neither in Spain nor in the Basque country," Mr. Aznar said. The Prime Minister himself has been an ETA target and narrowly escaped an assassination attempt in 1995. The former Interior Minister, Mr. Jaime Mayor Oreja, who comes from the Basque country was handpicked by Mr. Aznar to lead the PP's campaign in the Basque elections. He failed miserably.

Mr. Aznar is going to have to re-think his policy towards the Basques. The highly popular and charismatic leader of the PNV, Mr. Xabier Arzalluz, said: "We have called for talks with all concerned, even those close to ETA. Madrid has been punished for its warrior mentality and for its reliance on police methods."

The PNV has yet to decide whether it will lead a minority Government or seek a larger consensus by approaching the socialists and communists. It has also not disclosed whether it will be happy with autonomy or pursue an irredentist agenda.



**A demonstration in Madrid against ETA's violent ways.**

employees of the state.

Carmen Guruchaga a well-known commentator on Basque politics says: "The nationalists have a huge following in the Basque country. Their funds come from contributions sent in by supporters. All the polls indicate that the people from the Basque provinces think of themselves as Basque first and Spanish afterwards."

The Basques are one of the most ancient peoples of Europe, identified even in Roman times as unconquerable. Their

state. ETA, on the other hand, has been demanding the right to self-determination as a precondition for talks.

Mr. Eusebio Lasa Altuna, who heads the economic section of EH, says the Basques have never been properly consulted about what they want. "We did not ratify Spain's new Constitution. We did not vote for the European Union. We must be consulted. That is a key issue," he says. Mr. Arnaldo Otegi, EH spokesman, presses home this point. "We are three million

# Italy may not face sanctions threat

110-16  
16  
By Batuk Gathani

**BRUSSELS, MAY 15.** The European Union governments have reacted cautiously to the Italian election results and the Foreign Ministers refrained from commenting on the advent of the 59th post-war government, headed by Italy's richest man and media tycoon, Mr. Silvio Berlusconi.

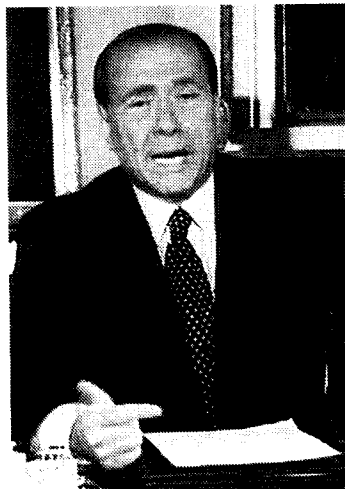
The silver-lining on the political scene there is that Mr. Berlusconi will command a healthy majority backed by solid centre-right majority in Parliament. The government will be subjected to less dependence on Mr. Berlusconi's xenophobic ally and former northern separatists, Mr. Umberto Bossi. Seven years ago, Mr. Bossi and his neo-fascist party pulled the rug under Mr. Berlusconi's seven-month government and triggered his downfall. Such a possibility is now rated as remote.

Mr. Romano Prodi, President of the European Commission and himself a former prime minister of Italy, said Mr. Berlusconi's government would be "fully legitimate". The German Chancellor, Mr. Gerhard Schroeder, said he 'respected' the Italians' choice and hoped the Government would maintain the country's pro-European stance. The Swedish Prime Minister, Mr. Goran Persson, whose country holds the six-monthly rotating presidency of the E.U., said Sweden would not take the initiative to isolate Italy with diplomatic sanctions — like those imposed on Austria when the Austrian government invited the far-right xenophobic Austrian Freedom Party led by the controversial Mr. Joerg Haider into coalition.

Mr. Haider said the E.U. had "burnt its fingers" over the sanctions. The sanctions against Austria were criticised by other E.U. member-states and eventually dropped in an embarrassing diplomatic u-turn.

According to the E.U. policy on diplomatic sanctions on a fellow E.U. country, such a decision would require the support of four fifths of the European Council of Ministers and the assent of the European Parliament, to decide if any member-state poses a clear danger or serious violation to principles of freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law. This is stated in the 'Nice treaty' which is yet to be ratified by the member-states. According to observers, this process may be finalised before the end of 2002.

The new government will embark on a programme of reduction of taxation, government



**Mr. Silvio Berlusconi, during a speech taped at his home in Arcore, near Milan, Italy, on Monday. Mr. Berlusconi's conservative coalition registered an emphatic win in the general elections. — AP**

bureaucracy and insist on more transparency and accountability in a society inflicted by sleet. Mr. Berlusconi is expected to face much "bureaucratic inertia" as the notoriously over-staffed civil service will oppose all job-killing reforms.

The government would have implications for the rest of Europe and would rank among the four European centre-right governments, with a new message for deregulation and deep tax cuts.

At the best of times, politics in Italy have never been smooth and the naturally sceptical Italians have never taken their politicians seriously. In 1990s, a series of scandals involving the mafia organised crime connections with senior politicians had suggested that corruption in the Italian public life is almost a way of life. 'The Northern League' — a rightwing party in the prosperous north Italy, threatened tax revolt and even secession of the prosperous northern part from the poorer southern region.

The reality is that despite overt and embarrassing corruption, most Italians are beneficiaries of the post-war economic miracle, which has provided a good standard of living and most Italians have been at peace with themselves.

Italy is often described as an odd country and is much more peculiar than it appears. At one time, the Italian industrialists were seriously worried about the challenge posed by the European single market and Italy's return to short-lived governments.

THE HINDU

# Berlusconi gets narrow lead in Italian polls

ASSOCIATED PRESS

ROME, May 14. — Media baron Mr Silvio Berlusconi held a narrow lead in both chambers of parliament in his bid to win back the premiership with a coalition of Right-wing allies. But it was unclear if he had captured the majority needed to govern, according to projections and partial vote counts early today.

Between Italy's complex electoral system, uncounted votes from yesterday's election and several parties refusing to declare their allegiance, it was not immediately clear whether the billionaire businessman had the numbers in parliament.

By morning, no one had claimed victory in a country where chronic political instability has yielded 58 governments since World War II.

"What counts is the breakdown the seats" in parliament, said Mr Enrico La Loggia, a top leader in Berlusconi's Forza Italia Party. A parliamentary majority is 50 per cent plus one vote.

A combination of slow ballot counting and Italy's complex electoral system — a mix of direct and proportional representation — held up calculation of the breakdown.

The projections, announced on state TV, indicated Berlusconi's Centre-Right coalition would win 42.6 per cent of the Senate Upper House of parliament, which was up for renewal yesterday, and his Centre-

Left rival, former Rome mayor Mr Francesco Rutelli, would take 39.1 per cent.

Mr Berlusconi's Centre-Right coalition was projected to win 45.4 per cent of the directly elected seats in the larger, Lower Chamber of Deputies, with 43.7 per cent projected to go to Mr Rutelli's bloc.

**4 ministers set to lose:** Four ministers in Italy's Centre-Left government looked set to lose their constituencies in the general polls, according to computer projections, adds Reuters.

Finance minister Mr Ottaviano del Turco and environment minister Mr Willer Bordon, who hold seats in the Upper House, or Senate, lost their district votes by five and 11-point margins respectively.

And interior minister Mr Enzo Bianco, heavily criticised for his ministry's handling of the polls, which newspapers described as "chaotic", went down to a 12-point defeat in his constituency. He sits in the Lower House Chamber of Deputies.

Communications minister Mr Salvatore Cardinale was also set for defeat in the Lower House, with latest data giving him 38 per cent of the vote in his constituency to 56 per cent for his Centre-Right rival.

All four men could, however, retain their seats in parliament through the proportional representation system which accounts for a quarter of the seats.

THE STATESMAN

15 MAY 2001

# Berlusconi storms back to power

By Vaiju Naravane

PARIS, MAY 14. The Italian media tycoon, Mr. Silvio Berlusconi (64), today stormed back to power when his conservative House of Freedoms alliance won a comfortable majority in the Chamber of Deputies (lower House) and a majority in the Senate.

Mr. Berlusconi's main rival, Mr. Francesco Rutelli of the left wing Olive Tree Alliance fared poorly in the elections, winning only 160 seats in the 630-member Chamber of Deputies

as against Mr. Berlusconi's score of over 380 seats. In the 315-member Senate, Mr. Berlusconi's alliance has won 204 seats.

These figures will change when the final count comes in. Mr. Berlusconi's spokesman, Mr. Paolo Bonaiuti, said the House of Freedoms alliance had "won a clear majority in both the Senate and the lower House which would guarantee stability and credibility to the country."

The vote was a complicated affair with sep-

arate ballot papers for the legislative and municipal polls and for the 25 per cent seats which are decided on the basis of proportional representation. There were huge queues of voters outside polling booths and the voting had to be extended up to 11 p.m. to allow everyone to vote.

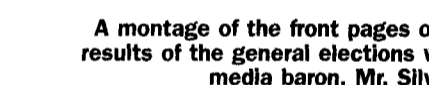
The heavy turnout had buoyed the spirits of Mr. Rutelli who said on Sunday that good voter mobilisation would mean more votes for him. But voters clearly expressed their choice in favour of the man widely seen as the personification of Italy's most spectacular success story.

That said, the vote was not the plebiscite for which Mr. Berlusconi had hoped. He is far from getting the two-thirds majority required for ushering in constitutional changes and in the Senate, he would well have to depend on the votes of his fractious electoral ally, the Lega Nord.

The results show that the vilification campaign against Mr. Berlusconi by the left wing alliance did not pay off. Most of the European press had focused on the media tycoon's huge conflict of interests (he owns 50 per cent of Italy's television stations and now as Premier, will have control over the state-run Rai television network) between running the Government and looking after his business empire.

His interests include publishing, television, cinema houses, insurance, real estate and dot-com companies. He has also been under investigation for tax evasion and fraud. Two cases are still pending against him. None of the other charges have stuck.

None of the smaller parties, with the exception of the Lega Nord and the re-founded Communist Party, got a single seat in Parliament or the Senate since they polled less than the minimum 4 per cent of the national vote required to win seats.



A montage of the front pages of Italian dailies on Monday, featuring the results of the general elections with banner headlines announcing that the media baron, Mr. Silvio Berlusconi, is ahead. — AP

THE TIMES

# Berlusconi tipped to win race ✓

By Vaiju Naravane

ROME, MAY 12. It's a glorious, sunny day. "If the weather is as good tomorrow, we're not going to bother voting. We'll go to the Villa Borghese for a picnic. In any case, neither of the candidates impresses me. One is a turncoat, the other a thief. Why bother?" says Ms Maria Grazia with a toss of her luxuriant red-brown mane.

Mr. Ricardo and Ms Maria Grazia are in their thirties, dynamic and intelligent. She has her own line of clothing for "modern and professional women" while Mr. Ricardo is an engineer with a well-known heavy electrical company. They are both part of the 22 per cent segment of undecided voters who are going to swing Sunday's legislative and municipal elections in Italy.

The "thief" in question is the media magnate, Mr. Silvio Berlusconi, Italy's wealthiest citizen who is still under investigation for fraud and tax evasion. His House of Freedoms

## ITALIAN POLL — V

coalition with the xenophobic Lega Nord and the reformed fascist Alleanza Nazionale has been credited by some polling institutes with a huge margin of votes which will give him an absolute majority. Other polls indicate that Mr. Berlusconi's coalition will squeak past but without a substantial majority.

The "turncoat" is Mr. Berlusconi's Left wing rival, Mr. Francesco Rutelli, former Mayor of Rome who is the candidate of the large, mainly leftist Olive Tree Alliance. He started out as a member of the Radical Party and then moved to the Greens. He has now launched a new centre-left platform called the Marguerite Alliance.

Mr. Rutelli has been criticised by people like Mr. Ricardo and Ms Maria Grazia who are confirmed anti-Papal centre-leftists, for his fluctuating positions towards the Vatican. "He really opposed the Roman Catholic Church when the struggle for divorce was underway. But as Mayor of Rome, he did his level best to



The centre-right Italian prime ministerial candidate, Mr. Silvio Berlusconi, at a rally in central Rome on Friday before he wound up the campaign for Sunday's elections. — Reuters

cosy up to the Pope. He had agreed to assist Gay Pride with their parade in Rome. When the Pope objected, he pulled out state funding. Now he has got married in the church with the Pope's blessing. How he can reconcile his deep political beliefs with the retrograde stance of the Vatican on AIDS, contraception, artificial insemination etc is beyond me," says Ms Maria Grazia.

Most Italians seem unfazed by the corruption charges against Mr. Berlusconi, charges that the Milan magistrates have found it difficult to substantiate, so well has he allegedly covered his tracks. Mr. Berlusconi has spent ten times the money the Left has managed to scrape together and his campaign spending is

said to be in the region of 400 million dollars. This is peanuts for a man whose declared personal fortune is estimated at over \$12 billions.

Recently, intellectuals like the writer, Mr. Umberto Eco, and Mr. Jean Michel Folon, the French painter and graphic artist, have come out strongly against what they call "Berlusconi's dumbing down of Italian society." Mr. Eco in a signed article in *La Repubblica* said it was every Italian's moral responsibility to vote against Mr. Berlusconi. Mr. Folon had designed posters for Mr. Rutelli's campaign showing a soaring dove over the red, white and green of the Italian flag. The caption reads: Freedom has no house.

(Concluded)

THE HINDU

13 MAY 2001

# Immigrants anxiously await outcome

By Vaiju Naravane

**CREMA (NORTHERN ITALY), MAY 10.** Lekh Ram rises at 3 a.m. He dresses hurriedly and steps across the road to the dairy where the lowing of some three hundred Lombardy cows rends the air. He pulls on rubber boots and an olive green rubber apron, then leads the cows into the milking shed next door, expertly attaching the milking machine to their swollen udders. After nine years on the job, the gestures have become mechanical.

Lekh Ram came here on a tourist visa, began working clandestinely and then was "regularised" when he found this job. He is perfectly integrated into the Italian society with two school-going children and earns the equivalent of 1,600 U.S. dollars per month with free housing. Many Indians working on farms and dairies in Northern Italy's rich Lombard plain, however, work illegally. They do not have resident papers and their employers use them to evade taxes. They are underpaid, overworked and live in perpetual fear of being caught and deported. The possibility of the Lega Nord, the xenophobic party led by Mr. Umberto Bossi, the aggressive, anti-foreigner politician of the North, strikes fear in their hearts.

The Northern League is part of the media magnate, Mr. Silvio Berlusconi's conservative coalition

## ITALIAN POLL — III

known as the House of Freedoms. Informed sources in Milan indicate that the latest opinion poll which cannot be published in Italy, credit Mr. Berlusconi's Forza Italia (Lets go, Italy) Party with as much as 30 per cent of the vote in legislative and municipal polls scheduled for May 13. The Lega will, according to the same poll, win an estimated 5.5 per cent of the votes, while the former Fascist Party, the Alleanza Nazionale, strong in Rome and in the south, is expected to win 13 per cent. If these predictions come true, Mr. Berlusconi will have an absolute majority in both Houses of Parliament. The Lega's score will determine how much Mr. Umberto Bossi influences national policy, especially on matters of immigration.

"I come here only when Lakh Ram calls me in an emergency. Otherwise he is the boss," explains Carlo, one of the three brothers who own the dairy farm. The milk is collected in a container capable of holding eight quintals of liquid, then sent to a Dairy Farmers' Cooperative to be converted into Italy's famous Gorgonzola cheese. There are about 700 Indians working on farms and dairy farms in the rich plain of Lombardy in Northern Italy. In the Parma region which produces parmegiano reggiano or Parmesan cheese, many of the large dairies with over 1,000 cows are run

entirely by Indian farmers, almost all of them from Punjab and Haryana, the majority being Sikh. Lakh Ram, now in his mid-40s, comes from Rohtak in Haryana.

"I paid Rs. 40,000 to an agent to get me here. I would go to the dairy secretly at night with a friend to learn the job. I also had an Italian tourist visa when I arrived. Now things have changed. Indians coming without papers to Italy can no longer take aeroplanes because the checks are stricter. They pay upto Rs. 4 lakhs to agents who put them on to ships that come here through Turkey. But once here, they are on their own and jobs have become difficult to find," explains Lakh Ram.

The queue outside the Indian Consulate in Milan is long. Avtar Singh, who comes from a village near Amritsar, says his brother gave an agent "several lakhs" to bring him here in a boat. The journey was long and supremely uncomfortable with very little food and extremely cramped quarters. Bewildered, alone and without any knowledge of Italian, he painfully made his way to Milan. Now Avtar Singh has found illegal employment washing dishes in a restaurant. He is trying to obtain an Indian passport, the first step in his Italian paper chase. In London, bookmakers place the odds at 1 to 1.3 on a Berlusconi victory, and 1 to 3.5 on a win by his left-wing rival, Mr. Francesco Rutelli.

Mr. Berlusconi's last major television appearance on this campaign was described as "smooth and convincing" by most political pundits. He signed a symbolic "contract" with Italy promising not to stand for re-election in 2006 if he failed to make good on at least four of his five priorities which include massive job creation, tax reduction, infrastructure building, reducing the national deficit and increasing pensions for poor retirees. But Mr. Berlusconi's bombshell was the announcement that the president of Ferrari, the Formula One motor racing champion, Mr. Luca Cordero di Montezemolo would join his Cabinet.

"You must not underestimate the significance of this. While it enthruses the average Italian for whom Ferrari symbolises national honour and all that is good in Italy — creativity, dynamism, innovation — this announcement is even more important for the industrial and business community. It means that Mr. Berlusconi, who was for long rejected by Italy's bourgeoisie and aristocracy as a slum boy who tried to elbow his way into their gilded circles, has finally been accepted. Mr. Montezemolo belongs to the old Italian aristocracy. His induction into a future cabinet means that Mr. Berlusconi has received the benediction of Italy's industrial pope, the Fiat chairman, Mr. Gianni Agnelli himself," says commentator Bruno Crimi.

THE HINDU

11 MAY 2001

# A campaign of insults and name-calling

By Vaiju Naravane

ROME, MAY 8. "They are at each other's throats like dogs. They are dogs and may they all go to hell with their lies and their false promises." Strong words indeed from a practicing Roman Catholic who has a crucifix swinging gently from the rearview mirror of his cab. But Antonio, 52, and father of three who has been "putting in a eleven-hour day for the last years and taking home a pittance" is prepared to damn his country's politicians twice over.

Although Italy has one of the most generous pension and health care schemes in Europe, and where tax evasion is something of a national sport, Antonio feels his standard of living has been eroded steadily in the last decade and a half. "I no longer expect anything from these *laddri* (thieves). Look at Berlusconi. No one knows where the money came from. He's managed to cover his tracks so well that even the judges cannot get at him. What will he do when the entire State machinery is at his disposal?"

## ITALIAN POLL — I

He is bound to put his hand into the till again. Old habits die hard, you know. The only person even remotely worth voting for is Gianfranco Fini. They say he's a fascist. But all that is old hat," says Antonio hurtling at breakneck speed in the crowded, narrow streets of Rome's Jewish ghetto.

Italy goes to the polls on May 13 to elect a new parliament and municipal councils in what political commentators say is a "particularly vicious and savage campaign". The President, Mr. Carlo Azeglio Ciampi called on his country's feuding politicians to lower the tone of their slanging matches after a particularly bitter exchange between the Left-wing leader, Mr. Massimo D'Alema and the conservative candidate, Mr. Silvio Berlusconi. It is a campaign where insults and vulgar jokes are being freely traded between the contenders.

"I shall never tire of repeating that good governance in a healthy democracy requires mutual re-

spect," Mr. Ciampi said. He has so far kept out of the political arena. But the sheer viciousness of Saturday's name calling contest between Mr. Silvio Berlusconi, Italy's richest man who is the leading Conservative candidate and Mr. D'Alema, the leader of the Democratic Left Party left even the most liberal voters reeling. Opinion polls no longer give Mr. Berlusconi the 20-point lead he once enjoyed over the Left-wing Olive Tree Alliance which is led by Mr. Francesco Rutelli, the good-looking former Mayor of Rome.

"I would not touch Rutelli, not with a barge pole. Berlusconi makes my stomach churn. So who is left? There is Emma Bonino, the former European Human Rights Commissioner but her political tactics and hunger striking have put me off," says 44-year-old journalist Marcella. Ms. Bonino, who is leading a small independent list which has tied up with the Radical Party, has been on hunger strike to protest against the "unfair treatment" meted out to her party by the media, particularly television, which either belongs to Mr. Berlusconi or is State-run. Last week, she broke off her hunger strike only to start again on Sunday.

Mr. Berlusconi, who is estimated to have spent over \$300 million on his campaign so far, would like this poll to become a plebiscite in his favour and has done his level best to needle his opponents. He himself is locked into a rather uneasy coalition with his former allies, Mr. Umberto Bossi of the anti-immigrant Northern League and Mr. Gianfranco Fini of the National Alliance, the re-baptised if not entirely reformed former Italian Fascist Party. Mr. Francesco Rutelli was not a unanimous but a compromise candidate. He has received quite a few barbs and not enough backing from his own political family. But in recent weeks as the possibility of Mr. Berlusconi being elected became stronger, the leftists have closed ranks and Mr. Rutelli has managed to narrow the gap between him and the leader of Forza Italia. But it is Italy's 22 per cent undecided voters who will seal their fates.

THE HINDU

9 MAY 2001





Mr. Silvio Berlusconi and Mr. Francesco Rutelli... vying to capture Rome.

A/D-17  
6/5

## Rich man running

**T**HE STREETS of Milan are plastered with posters big and small. The *Allianza Nazionale* jostles for space with the *Lega Nord*. The left wing *Olive Tree Alliance* attempts to out-shout Mr. Silvio Berlusconi's *House of Freedoms*. The Greens, the Radicals, the Liberals, the Independents, the Christian Democrats, the Communists and a myriad other local and regional parties fight for a place in the sun. Yes, in Italy, it's election time again.

There are unending and repetitious TV debates, radio round tables and public meetings. The Italians, who have seen almost fifty Governments come and go since the end of the Second World War, now just live through the din and the noise, the hype and hyperbole with a practised, somewhat superior sneer. For, as everyone knows, elections only mean a grand spectacle and promises, it is tacitly agreed, cannot and will not be kept.

Legislative and municipal elections are to be held on May 13. The two main contenders are the media magnate and industrial tycoon, Mr. Silvio Berlusconi, by far Italy's wealthiest man, who heads a conservative coalition called *The House of Freedoms*, and Mr. Francesco Rutelli, the good-looking, media-savvy former Mayor of Rome, who has emerged as the compromise consensus candidate of the outgoing *Left-wing Olive Tree Alliance*.

Mr. Berlusconi who served as Italy's Prime Minister for a short, chaotic eight-month period in 1994, has since, with his *Forza Italia* (Let's go, Italy) party, become the *Leader of the Opposition*. He has once again joined hands with Mr. Umberto Bossi, the rude, uncouth, unpredictable and xenophobic politician from

the wealthy Lombard north, and Mr. Gianfranco Fini, who has been struggling to give the former Italian Fascist Party (the *MSI* or *Movimento Sociale Italiano* founded by the dictator, Benito Mussolini) a change of image by re-baptising it the *Allianza Nazionale* and re-centring its extreme nationalist politics. But both Mr. Bossi's *Northern League* and Mr. Fini's *National Alliance* are anti-immigrant and Mr. Berlusconi, in the almost certain event of a victory, is expected to crack down on illegal immigration, especially from the Balkan states.

However, immigration and how to deal with it are the least of Mr. Berlusconi's headaches right now. His two main worries are, respectively, in the immediate fu-

comes Prime Minister. But it would have been better if he had taken some concrete steps to resolve this before becoming a candidate. Then, he has several legal cases pending against him. He has been cleared of some, others have fallen by the wayside because of the statute of limitations. But there are several which are still pending. And the 22 per cent or so of undecided voters who will make a difference in this election are in the process of weighing up these facts. However, in 1994, when Mr. Berlusconi was a candidate no one questioned his legitimacy either as a candidate or as Prime Minister. And the Left too did nothing to remove the ambiguities in the law."

The charges against Mr. Berlus-

con weekly *The Economist* last week declared Mr. Berlusconi "not fit to lead the Government of any country, least of all one of the world's richest democracies."

The weekly enumerates the nine legal cases against Mr. Berlusconi and attempts to untangle the intricate financial web that shrouds his companies and business interests.

Major European newspapers have been intensely critical of Mr. Berlusconi. Spain's *Il Mundo* has published details about tax evasion practised by Mr. Berlusconi's TV channel there and a judge, Mr. Baltasar Garzon, has asked that the media tycoon's European parliamentary immunity be lifted so that corruption charges may be filed.

All this has left the Italians unfazed. Says a commentator, Mr. Bruno Crimi, "What the international press has revealed about Mr. Berlusconi's past is nothing new for Italians. I think we have digested him. What most people are saying is: He has taken enough. Perhaps he now wants to give back to the country. And although there are all these cases against him, he has done exactly what most Italian businessmen have done.

"Tax evasion is almost a necessity if you want to survive in business. He has done it better than others and he has been clever enough not to get caught. Perhaps, they say he will apply the same acumen and intelligence to the governance of the country. In any case, most Italians feel that he is someone to be lauded rather than decried and until proven guilty, in the eyes of the law and his fellow citizens, Berlusconi is innocent."

*In Italy, it's election time again. And, says Vaiju Naravane, the country's wealthiest man, Silvio Berlusconi, is one of the main contenders for power.*

ture and in the months ahead, the 22 per cent fringe of undecided voters upon whom his success will depend, and the antics of Mr. Bossi who has a vested interest in a poor Berlusconi performance, lest his own voters desert him for *Forza Italia*.

Mr. Sergio Romano, political commentator and former top level diplomat, says Mr. Berlusconi's conflict of interest will weigh heavily when undecided voters make up their minds on the eve of polling day. "It is clear that Mr. Berlusconi who has all kinds of business interests — he owns television channels, a publishing house, a newspaper, an insurance company, real estate and housing projects — has a real problem of conflict of interest. He says he will resolve this as soon as he be-

come heavy. He has come under investigation for money laundering, connections with the mafia, tax evasion, bribing politicians, judges and police officers and taxmen and has even been suspected of complicity in murder. Mr. Berlusconi himself stoutly denies all these charges saying they have been cooked up by left wing judges who have tried to persecute him since he became Prime Minister in 1994.

Several of his defenders, who are quite convinced he has done all this and worse, find him admirable and are openly enthusiastic about his ability to hoodwink the state and its institutions and his capacity to keep judges double guessing while amassing a personal fortune estimated at upwards of \$ 12 billions. The British

# Anti-Europe move gets a boost

HD-16

By Hasan Suroor

LONDON, MAY 2. Just when Labour thought that the focus had quietly shifted away from Europe, freeing it from an inconvenient baggage in the build-up to next month's general election, the issue has come to haunt it again following reports of a controversial German plan which is likely to give an unexpected boost to the Tories' anti-Europe campaign.

The plan, which is credited to the German Chancellor, Mr. Gerhard Schroeder and is to be discussed by his party later this month, envisages a radical restructuring of the existing governing arrangements in Brussels bringing it closer to the idea of a European government with a bicameral Parliament and an indirectly elected president. National leaders such as the British Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair would end up as Senators in the Upper House of the reformed European Parliament which would have far more powers than the existing legislature.

In Britain, this has stoked fears of a European "superstate" causing unease even among Euro-enthusiasts while the Tories have seized on the issue to claim that it confirms their worst apprehensions over closer political integration with Europe. The Tories have consistently warned against "surrendering" national sovereignty to the European Union and the party chief, Mr. William Hague provoked a storm recently when he charged that the Blair Government, with its enthusiasm for Europe, was turning Britain into a "foreign land". The Labour Party and the Blair Government too have maintained that there is no questioning of giving up national

sovereignty while seeking closer partnership with Europe.

Commentators today recalled Mr. Blair's combative remarks in Warsaw last October when he countered the Tories' charge on the issue saying that his vision of a Europe was that of a "superpower not a superstate". He emphasised that national parliaments and governments would remain "the primary source of democratic accountability in Europe." The German proposal, however, is seen to be in sharp contrast with Mr. Blair's vision.

An analyst in *The Times* argued that under the Schroeder plan the "primary source of authority within the E.U. at the moment, the Council of Ministers in which our representatives can still wield their ever-diminishing veto, will be reduced to an Upper House." "For Tony Blair the choices he has been trying to fudge are becoming much starker, much more quickly than he would like," he said. The pro-Europe *Guardian* had no doubt that the plan created a "huge headache" for Mr. Blair and the Foreign Secretary, Mr. Robin Cook as they prepared for a general election. "It will allow the Conservatives to claim that the Government's friends in Europe are working on ideas which would make a mockery of national sovereignty," it pointed out.

Europe is an emotive issue in Britain and Labour is generally seen to be out of sync with public mood on it. It has been trying hard to play down Europe on the eve of the general election, and significantly neither the party nor the Government has commented on the Schroeder plan controversy hoping that it would go away.

THE HINDU

- 3 MAY 2001

## Schroeder party backs plan for united Europe

**BERLIN, MAY 1.** The German Chancellor, Mr. Gerhard Schroeder's Social Democratic Party (SPD) called on Monday for its plans for a European government to be placed at the top of the E.U.'s political agenda.

The party general secretary, Mr. Franz Muntefering, said the proposals to united Europe within 10 years had been drawn up by a group headed by the Chancellor. In a reference to Britain and other states reluctant to hand over sovereignty, Mr. Muntefering said all E.U. leaders had a duty to address crucial issues about the next steps forward.

As well as backing plans to turn the European Commission into a government for Europe with an elected president — and creating a more powerful, two-tier European Parliament — the SPD demands far greater co-operation over tax.

Its blueprint for Europe's future, entitled Responsibility for Europe, said the single currency created new demands for harmonisation of economic policies.

"An internal market and a common currency also demand a stronger harmonisation in tax policy, in particular in relation to business taxes, taxing capital gains, taxing the use of energy and the arrangements for VAT and sales tax, as well as a common capital market."

It added: "There is no alternative to further integration and Europeanisation."

The SPD ideas include turning the E.U. Council of Ministers, comprising ministers of the 15 member states, into a parliamentary chamber similar to the Bundesrat upper House representing Germany's Federal states.

It says that Europol, the European police agency, should be turned into "an operational European police vested with executive rights according to the model of (Germany's) Federal Criminal Office".

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THE HINDU

1-20-01

# Scotland — inching towards independence?

ED CROPLEY  
EDINBURGH

**G**IVING Scotland its first Parliament in nearly 300 years was a gamble for Tony Blair — dish out some home rule and hope it blunts the swords of any bravehearts fighting for full-blown independence.

But as the proud northern nation's fledgling devolved government gears up for its second birthday in July, the plot appears to be deviating from the British Prime Minister's pre-arranged script.

At first glance, developments are not too worrying — a Labour-Liberal coalition dominates the Edinburgh-based Holyrood Parliament and the regional administration, the Scottish Executive, seems content with its remit of domestic issues such as health, education, welfare and policing.

In Opposition, the Scottish National Party (SNP), which views the new Parliament as a stepping stone to independence, is certainly to be taken seriously.

Led by two capable economists, they aim higher than impassioned references to kilts, haggis and Scotland's bloody struggles against the English, and have gobbled up some hefty Labour majorities in two by-elections.

But despite the support of former James Bond star Sean Connery, the world's most famous Scot, the SNP seldom win more than 30 percent support in opinion polls.

Instead, analysts say the real threat to Blair's brave new map of Britain could come from within as Scotland's rulers grow ever more 'native' and start wagging their tail abroad, an arena supposedly reserved for central government.

"It's very subtle, but there has been a sub-

stantive change," said Alex Wright, a political lecturer at Dundee University.

"When the Scottish Parliament was set up, there was no political leadership regarding foreign affairs. Now ministers have understood there needs to be leadership over foreign relations."

The biggest shock for anti-devolutionists came this month when Scotland's First Minister Henry McLeish capped a triumphant US 'Tartan Week' tour with a 25-minute Oval Office tete-a-tete with US President George W. Bush.

Labour stalwart and veteran 'unionist' Tam Dalyell, who wants to retain the status quo established by the 1707 Act of Union between England and Scotland, was predictably outraged.

McLeish's camp — and the SNP — were cock-a-hoop that the head of a nation of 5.5 million people lacking a full government had landed an audience so early in Bush's term, getting in before a host of prominent world leaders.

Plans to appoint a senior civil servant to the British embassy in Washington to look after Scottish matters such as tourism and trade lent further grist to the separatist mill.

"This legitimises the whole concept of an independent Scottish voice abroad," said SNP leader John Swinney, adding that it was "a significant step in the independence process".

Labour officials deny claims within a

time. It would be a long and tortuous process," said Graham Leicester of the Scottish Council Foundation, a political think tank.

But the relationship between London and Edinburgh has had its hiccups, and Labour have been quick to stamp on any Scottish uppishness.

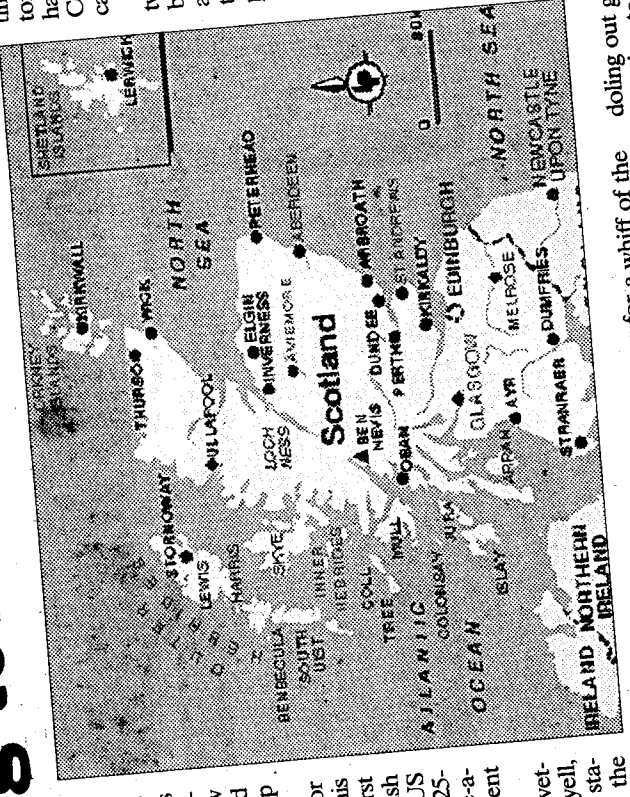
An mooted plan in January to rename the Scottish Executive the Scottish government drew a swift rebuttal from Downing Street — one senior Westminster figure was quoted as saying: "They can call themselves the White Heather Club if they want, but they'll never be the Scottish government."

The Scottish executive has also caused headaches by doling out generous deals to teachers and promises to pensioners which trade unions and old people now want South of the border.

But analysts say the Achilles Heel of the young relationship could be Brussels where Scotland already has its own independent representative, Scotland House, answering to Scotland alone.

"The Scottish Executive is having to ride two horses in Brussels — there are areas where Scottish interests are not necessarily compatible with the rest of the UK," Wright said.

Like a host of British leaders before him, Blair must be hoping carefully laid plans don't run into trouble over Europe. — Reuters



Scottish press evereager for a whiff of the William Wallace spirit that the move heralded the start of a dedicated Scottish diplomatic corps.

But the McLeish mantra — that Scotland remains "a proud nation within the Union that makes up the United Kingdom and within the larger European Union" — is in danger of wearing thin as Scotland peeks its head well above the international parapet.

"When you have a foreign relations role it makes you much more visible as a separate country," said James Kellas, a political analyst at Glasgow university.

If Scotland has set off on a road to freedom, then it is likely to be a lengthy trip. "It took so long even to opt for devolution, going one step further is going to take a long

INDIAN EXPRESS

1 MAY 2001

# Campaign starts for Italian poll

By Vaiju Naravane

PARIS, APRIL 14. Italy's campaign for legislative elections to be held on May 13 kicked off on Friday with the media magnate, Mr. Silvio Berlusconi (with a personal fortune estimated at \$12 billions), sending a colour biography of himself to 21 million families who make up the nation's 49 million electors. The cost of the operation is estimated at a staggering \$75 millions.

Mr. Berlusconi heads the right wing Freedom House alliance, bringing together his own Forza Italia party, the Alleanza Nazionale, the now reformed Italian Fascist Party (MSI) and the discredited anti-foreigner Northern League led by the maverick politician, Mr. Umberto Bossi. Opinion polls place Mr. Berlusconi firmly in the lead by between 6 to 20 points.

The left wing Olive Tree Alliance composed of several small and big parties and the Greens is led by Mr. Francesco Rutelli, the young and good-looking former mayor of Rome. Mr. Rutelli has few friends within his own political family and both the Prime Minister, Mr. Giuliano Amato, respected former professor of economics, and the former Prime

Minister, Mr. Massimo D'Alema, have not been tender towards him.

Last Thursday, the three leaders appeared together for the first time to mobilise voters from the Left. Mr. Amato has made some crushing comments about Mr. Rutelli's opportunism and lack of intelligence while Mr. D'Alema has maintained a stony silence about the capabilities of Mr. Rutelli who wrested the nomination of the Left wing Alliance with support from the Greens.

This time the communists of the Refounded Communist Party have decided not to join the Olive Tree Alliance. The former anti-corruption judge turned politician, Mr. Antonio Di Pietro, with his Italy of Values party, the former European Human Rights Commissioner, Emma Bonino's political list and the European Democracy party founded by the former Catholic trade union leader, Sergio D'Antoni, have decided to stay away from alliances and run on their own for the 630 seats in the Lower House as well as 315 senatorial seats up for grabs for a five-year term.

Mr. Berlusconi in a carefully prepared campaign has taken the offensive almost immediately. He



Silvio Berlusconi

has demigrated his rival, Mr. Rutelli, calling him a man of straw, a virtual leader and a man for all seasons. Mr. Berlusconi's biography, a richly illustrated, glossy affair, entitled 'An Italian Story' paints him as a poor man, albeit gifted with dynamism and a spirit of enterprise, who out of nothing builds one of the biggest media, construction and retailing empires in Europe.

The independent daily *La Repubblica* in a scathing editorial today snorted: Only an idiot will believe this fable where angelic



Francesco Rutelli

entrepreneur, at 30, miraculously finds enough money to build a television empire.

Mr. Berlusconi's propaganda appears to work, however. We still do not know the origin of his money, his real situation vis a vis the judiciary, what he intends to do in government or how he will resolve his conflicts of interest. With a rain of lira notes, Mr. Berlusconi has once more been able to shift the electoral keel from the field of political reason to that of emotion generated by advertising.

THE HINDU

15 APR 1994

# Mediating international conflicts

By Mukund Padmanabhan

OSLO, APRIL 13. Soon after the establishment of the United Nations, Norwegian foreign policy was declared as "as pro-American as it dared", "as pro-Soviet as it had to be" and "as pro-UN as it possibly could be". The contribution of this small nation to the U.N. has been quite disproportionate to its size.

It has been reflected not only in financial assistance to the U.N.'s development activities, but also to its peace-keeping activities. Relatively recently, Norway's contribution to peace-keeping has resulted in an important parallel activity—that of mediation or attempts at conflict resolution around the world.

Like peace-keeping, mediation has given this country of some four and half million high international profile. In India, Norway's affair with playing a third-party mediator in conflicts is associated largely with its recent effort in Sri Lanka, where it is attempting to coax the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE towards the negotiating table. But its mediatory endeavors began much earlier.

Norway played a critical role in facilitating the negotiations between the Guatemalan Government and leaders of the guerilla movement, which eventually led to the signing of the ceasefire in 1996. Norway supported the process towards peace financially on the ground that it was important to lay the foundations for economic development to prevent the conflict from recurring. In fact, the coun-

try's very role as a mediator emerged because of developmental work undertaken by some NGOs such as Norwegian Church Aid, which enjoyed good contacts with both the Government and the guerillas.

As for Norway's involvement with the peace process in the West Asia, it emerged from political contacts on both the Israeli and Palestinian side. Weaknesses in the official Washington-backed peace process led to the establishment of the secret Oslo channel in the early Nineties and resulted in the Oslo peace accord between the Israeli Prime Minister, Mr. Yitzhak Rabin,

## THE NEW NORWAY - II

and the PLO Chairman, Mr. Yasser Arafat. Norway continues to be involved in the region, though the strife in the region continues with new complexities and fresh challenges.

In comparison, the engagement in Sri Lanka is only a couple of years old. But there is some excitement in Oslo over recent developments, which culminated last week in the Sri Lankan Government's announcement that talks with the LTTE are likely to be held shortly.

What is responsible for the emergence of Norway as a mediator in international conflicts. At a general level, Norway's effort at conflict resolution has flown from its so-called "love affair" with the U.N. and the image of itself as the land which gives out the Nobel peace prize.

But they are specific factors which have

facilitated this role. "We are a small nation", says the Norwegian Prime Minister, Mr. Jens Stoltenberg. "Nobody is afraid of us and they know we don't have any ambitions of becoming a player in the international arena". Mr. Knut Toraasen, Special Adviser to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs reckons that it could have something to do with Norway history as a neutral nation, which it was before it joined NATO following World War II when it was occupied by Germany. "Our contributions to development assistance and missionary and NGO activity have also helped to understand other countries better," he says.

Both peace-keeping and mediation receive strong public support in Norway. The country has participated in 37 of 53 peace-keeping operations and contributed 60,000 people (out of a total of around 8 lakhs) to the various U.N. peace-keeping efforts.

The main theatre of operation has been Lebanon, where Norwegian peace-keepers were replaced by those from India a few years ago. Today, the vast majority of Norwegian troops (1400 out of 1500) are deployed in the Balkans as part of the U.N.-mandated NATO-led operation.

This has resulted in a feeling in some quarters that Norway should refocus its peace-keeping priorities. The argument is that Norway's efforts should be spread more globally and not concentrated in Europe, where it is essentially at part of NATO and playing a "peace-enforcing" role.

(Concluded)

THE HINDU

14 APR 2001

# 149-17 The Norwegian oil and gas adventure

By Mukund Padmanabhan

BERGEN, APRIL 12. Ask the average Norwegian to list two things that lend this country of some 4.5 million an international profile and you will be struck by the unanimity of the replies.

The first, not surprisingly, is oil — a resource which has lent Norway's economy an enviable health and provided it with a trade surplus even as its European neighbours struggle to contain large deficits. The second is Norway's new role as a mediator in conflicts around the world and its vigorous participation in international peace-keeping missions. "The first is a lubrication for the economy, the second is a salve for strife," says a Foreign Ministry official.

It was in 1971 — the first year that oil was produced from the Norwegian sector of the North Sea — that the country entered what could well be described as the Oil and Gas Age. Since then, development has taken place at a frenetic pace. Today, it takes the country a mere three days to produce as much oil as was produced during all of 1971.

Today, Norway which exports some 90 per cent of its oil, is the second largest exporter in the world. It is on the verge of becoming the top five world-wide producers of gas and at present controls about half the remaining petroleum resources in Europe.

"When we first found oil in the Sixties, our politicians did not fully understand its

value. But they made two decisions. One was to use this resource for the benefit of the Norwegian people. The other was to use it to develop other kinds of industry in order not to be over-dependent on oil," says Mr. Olav Akselsen, Minister for Petroleum and Energy.

Norway's petroleum wealth has been used to fund the country's extensive welfare state. Although tax rates are high, Norway serves up an impressive array of entitlements. Health care and education are naturally free but it's hard to think of another country which hands out subsidies to poets and painters or offers those suffering from arthritis fully paid trips to foreign spas.

## THE NEW NORWAY — I

At the same time, there is a fear that Norwegians are becoming soft from comprehensive welfarism brought about by oil revenues. A parallel worry is of becoming overly dependent on petroleum which successive Governments have attempted to avoid (and with reasonable success) by making and channelling investments into other sectors.

At one level, the petro-numbers do not look all that attractive. Norway possesses only about one per cent of the world's oil reserves and about three per cent of world-wide gas reserves. What lends these figures their impressive edge is that, unlike most

other countries, Norway is able to export the vast majority of what it produces. The total power requirements of the country are met via hydro-power (though it is likely that Norway will be forced to turn to gas for additional electricity generation shortly.)

Technological developments in the oil industry have also benefitted Norway immensely. Only recently, a number of oil and gas fields in the continental shelf were regarded as uneconomic. No longer. In a part the Troll field, the company Norsk Hydro is engaged in tapping oil from what is essentially a gas province.

The oil below the company's Troll C rig is a very thin layer of between 12 and 14 metres. Although the gas layer is much thicker, Norsk Hydro prefers to tap the more lucrative oil — something that Mr. Gisle Johanson, the company's Manager for Information and External Affairs, says would have been unproductive and difficult to undertake without new technology.

The other piece of good news for Norway is that it is sitting on much more petroleum reserves than it had bargained for. Oil and gas reserves are being constantly revised, and invariably upwards. Troll C's managers say that the total oil reserves in the field has been revised to 1.3 billion barrels — up from the last estimate of 900 million barrels.

"We're just lucky," says Mr. Gry Haaheim, Adviser to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. "It's just one more piece of good news in Norway's oil and gas adventure."

THE HINDU

13 APR 2001

# IRA offers to resume disarmament talks

Belfast, March 8

IRA GUERRILLAS said on Thursday they would reopen talks with Northern Ireland's disarmament commission, but urged Britain to stick to its side of the bargain in the tortuous peace process.

"This is a statement put out unilaterally and is not part of any choreography that I am aware of," Gerry Kelly, assembly member of the IRA's political ally, Sinn Fein told. He was calling on people to see the statement on its own merits rather than a manoeuvre in the overall political process.

The IRA made the surprise announcement as British Prime Minister Tony Blair and Irish Prime Minister Bertie Ahern headed for Belfast for talks with the feuding parties intended to bolster the shaky 1998 Good Friday peace accord.

Ahern delayed a planned trip to Japan to travel to the British-ruled province for the discussions. Pro-British Protestant par-

ties have called for months for the anti-British Irish Republic Army to renew contact with the disarmament commission led by General John de Chastelain.

But the IRA has refused further action on handing in its weapons until Britain moves on the thorny issues of policing and cutting troop levels in the province. The IRA announcement said that it remained committed to "the quest for lasting peace." Ahern said earlier this week a stop-gap formula was needed to keep the Good Friday deal afloat and the sides were heading for "a difficult summer".

Northern Ireland's leader David Trimble dismissed the nationalists' statement as saying nothing new. "It doesn't even say as much as what was contained in the May 6 statement, which had a clear promise and one they (the IRA) failed to keep," he said.

"The statement has all the hallmarks of a pre-emptive strike designed to avoid pressure on them and to avoid blame.

Reuters

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

9 MAR 2001



# Bid to revive Ulster talks fails

By Hasan Suroor

107  
RD-16  
**LONDON, MARCH 9.** Yet another attempt by the British Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair, and his Irish counterpart, Mr. Bertie Ahern, on Thursday to revive the stalled Northern Ireland peace process failed to produce any result amid indications that no major initiative should be expected until after the general elections in May. There was no significant progress on either of the three key issues holding up the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement — arms decommissioning by the IRA, reduced British security presence in the province and further police reforms.

At the end of a day-long all-party talks at the Hillsborough Castle, just outside Belfast, even as Mr. Blair claimed that differences were "narrowing" down, the Sinn Fein Chairman, Mr. Mitchel McLaughlin, called it a "very unproductive day's work."

While the Sinn Fein tried to make much of an IRA statement earlier in the day announcing its decision to re-engage with the international arms decommissioning body led by Gen. John de Chastelain, the Unionists shrugged it off as a "publicity stunt" saying that mere re-engagement was not enough and what they wanted to see was real progress on arms decommissioning — an euphemism for surrendering arms.

The Ulster Unionist chief and the First Minister of Northern Ireland, Mr. David Trimble, said: "It is fairly obvious that this statement is simply a pre-emptive strike attempting to shift blame for failure on to others rather than a serious attempt at progress." He recalled that a similar decision was announced by the IRA last summer but its contact with the decommissioning body did not go beyond one telephone call. He gave no indication that he planned to lift his ban on the Sinn Fein Ministers attending cross-border meetings unless there was visible progress on decommissioning.

The Sinn Fein leader, Mr. Gerry Adams, on the other hand, thought the IRA's announcement was hugely significant and created "space" for reciprocal initiatives from the British Government and the Unionists. "The

question hanging over these talks is — is the space going to be used by the Prime Minister (Bertie Ahern) and the British Prime Minister?" he said. He expected the British Government to respond to the Republicans' demand for scaling down security in Northern Ireland and further reforms of the revamped Royal Ulster Constabulary.

The IRA made it clear that its decision to re-engage with the decommissioning body would be successful only if the British Government delivered on its "obligations" on these two issues. Right through yesterday's marathon talks, the Republican complaint was that the British Government had not fulfilled its obligations under the Good Friday Agreement.

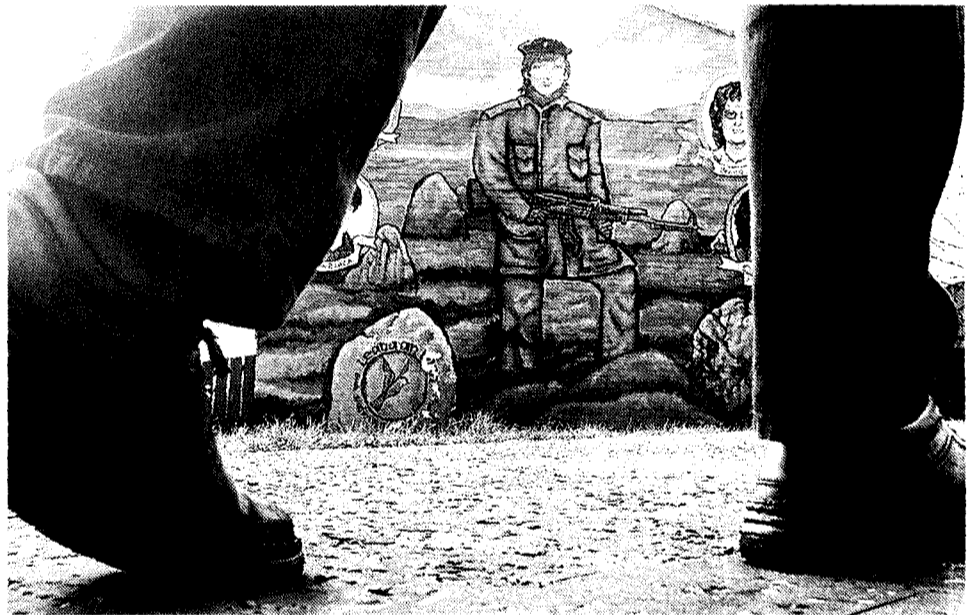
The talks, described as "full and frank", were marked by the "blame game" with the Republicans blaming the Unionists and the British Government, and the Unionists pointing their finger at the Republicans for the slow progress on the peace process. The participa-

nts, however, were conscious of the pressures on them from extremists from within their own ranks to either deliver or abandon the agreement.

The shadow of the Real IRA which is trying to usurp the Republican leadership from moderate hands loomed large over the talks with both sides hesitant to appear to make any concessions that could be exploited by extremists, particularly the Real IRA which has acquired a high profile after last week's daring bomb attack at the BBC's offices in London.

Mr. Blair acknowledged that there were issues which remained to be resolved but emphasised that the gap was closing. On police reforms, he expected progress by June.

On decommissioning, he said: "We welcome the step that has been taken by the IRA today. But there is an expectation now that this must go on to be a substantial re-engagement with the commission for decommissioning."



A man walks past a Republican mural in Andersonstown area of west Belfast, Northern Ireland, on Thursday. — Reuters

THE HINDU

10 MAR 2001

Europe  
HD-16

# Haider party loses heavily 273

By Vaiju Naravane

**PARIS, MARCH 26.** Racism and xenophobia has failed to pay dividends to Austria's extreme right Freedom Party (FPO) in the municipal elections in Vienna held on Sunday. The populist leader, Mr. Jorg Haider, could not make much of an impact despite a virulently anti-Semitic and anti-for-



**The Vienna Mayor and top candidate of the Social Democrats, Mr. Michael Haeupl, at the City Hall in Vienna on Sunday. — AP**

eigner campaign. And although the FPO polled over 20 per cent of the votes, its score was down by over seven per cent since the last elections held in 1996.

For a party which has traditionally built its strength on its position as a vociferous and strident critic of whatever party was in power, its presence in the Government has proved a handicap, especially given the fact that the present right wing coalition has

had to push through several unpalatable economic reforms to reduce Austria's budget deficit.

The FPO has often denounced the European Union's dictates. And when it had to submit to the draconian norms laid down by Brussels, it was a difficult pill to swallow. The FPO's performance within the Government has also proved disastrous with three of its Ministers being forced out for sheer incompetence.

The FPO joined the right wing national coalition last February, giving rise to a public outcry and the imposition of sanctions against Austria by the other 14 members of the E.U. These sanctions were quietly dropped two months ago.

The FPO's loss in the Vienna elections has been the Social Democrats' gain. The Green Party too has seen a rise in its vote from 8 per cent to over 12 per cent. Vienna has been governed by the Socialists for almost a century and the present Mayor, Mr. Michael Haeupl, is almost certain to retain Vienna City Hall. These elections are the first major test of the Government's popularity before the legislative polls in 2003.

The Popular Party led by the Chancellor, Mr. Wolfgang Schussl, won 15 per cent of the vote, a drop of just 1 per cent since 1996.

Mr. Haider is not expected to change his low profile strategy. He is reportedly reserving his strength for the legislative polls of 2003.

THE HINDU

1 2003

# Communists win poll in Moldova

By Vladimir Radyuhin

MOSCOW, FEB. 26. Communists cruised to a sweeping victory in the parliamentary elections in Moldova on Sunday, staging the first comeback for the party in the former Soviet Union since it broke up 10 years ago.

The Communist Party won about 70 seats in Moldova's 101-member Parliament, increasing its strength by 30 seats. With Moldova officially rated Europe's poorest country, the Communists had been predicted to make gains, but few analysts expected their victory would be so overwhelming. It enables Communists to form the Government, elect the President, and amend the Constitution without looking for support from other parties.

Parliamentary elections were called by the outgoing President, Mr. Petru Lucinschi, after the legislature failed four times in December to elect a successor.

The election results in Moldova reflect popular anger at pro-market reforms, pursued by a string of non-Communist Governments

over the past 10 years. The economy of the 4.3-million nation, squeezed between Ukraine and Romania, is based on agriculture, which has suffered from reforms, droughts, and the economic crisis in Russia, the main market of Moldova's fruit and vegetables. Most Soviet-era factories have shut down, forcing thousands to flee the country in quest of jobs.

Moldova's problems have been aggravated by the secession of a Russian-speaking sliver of the country called Trans-Dniester. In the ensuing civil war an estimated 1,500 people died before Russian forces intervened to stop the fighting in 1992. About 2,500 Russian troops are still deployed in the breakaway Trans-Dniester.

The Communists promised to re-unite the country, to make the Russian the second official language and to join a close economic and political union with Russia and Belarus.

While former Communist leaders have come to power in several former Soviet republics, Communist parties are not at the helm anywhere.

THE HINDU

27 FEB 2001

# Europe's undeclared war on human traffickers

Rory Carroll in Zagreb

**H**ANDS CUPPED over headsets, the cavedrop-pers awaited another conversation in a foreign tongue. Even when translated the transcripts would yield little, for when using cellphones the human traffickers always spoke in code.

Not this time. A Slavic accent came on the line. "Pronto?" Then a Asian accent replied: "Si, pronto." They were speaking Italian. The Croat had excellent Italian but not his Chinese colleague. Using dialect or allusions were not options. Words had to be enunciated. A van would take the group from Ljubljana and drop them at a service station outside Trieste by 3pm. "D'accordo, ciao," signed off the snakehead.

A few months later the gang, led by Josip Loncaric, was broken up by Slovenian and Italian police. They had discovered an Achilles heel of transnational trafficking.

That is one of the few bright spots in a grim European Union

war against illegal immigration. Europe's government hope coordinated assaults can cut the influx and allay voter concern that illegal immigration is out of control.

However, interviews with traffickers, migrants, investigators, analysts and magistrates in five countries reveal an adaptable foe ready for the challenge. These are networks capable of shooting or bribing their way out trouble.

Last November, Hungarian police at the Ukrainian border uncovered a cache of guns with silencers, radio equipment, tuned to police frequencies, night-vision glasses, binoculars, hand grenades and motorised rubber dinghies.

Last summer French police broke up a Chinese smuggling ring which laundered £170 million - enough to corrupt officials for decades. "Profits are recycled into bribes. You get a lot of guards on tiny salaries getting rich and driving fancy cars," said Duc Tran of the International Organisation for Migration in Zagreb.

More formidable is a *modus*

*operandi* which has evolved to make bosses untouchable and their networks resilient. Rather than build monolithic hierarchies like drug traffickers, they subcontract to freelancers in transit countries.

"It is best to envisage smuggling groups as loosely structured organisations that consist of constantly shifting relationships," says a report by Professor Ronald Skeldon of the University of Sussex.

An Italian parliamentary report identified three categories. At the top are regional bosses, especially in China, West Asia and the Indian subcontinent. They find clients, forge alliances, set prices, stipulate conditions and make payments.

At the middle level are bosses in transit countries, especially Turkey and the Balkans, who organise safe houses, commission false documents, choose routes, pay bribes and hire local criminals as drivers, guides, lookouts and guards. Drugs, tobacco and arms are included in some shipments.

At the lowest level are minor smugglers in transit and destina-

tion countries valued for their local knowledge. Paid per job, they are expected to maintain equipment, establish rapport with corrupt officials, monitor beaches, train and bus stations, and hand over points. Few smugglers remain outside the system. "The days when we cut our own deals with passengers is over. Now it's all middle men," said one veteran Albanian smuggler.

Waiting at the destination are representatives of the origin country boss. They detain migrants until outstanding debts are paid. At times, migrants may work in sweatshops or as prostitutes. Human trafficking has become the world's fastest growing criminal business.

Routes are well established. Chinese via Belgrade, where Slobodan Milosevic was happy to generate visa payments. Migrants from West Asia, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka via Sarajevo, where Bosnia obliged fellow Muslims. Last year more than 50,000 are estimated to have passed through on the way to western Europe.

Guardian News Service



A demonstration against migrant restrictions in Barcelona, Spain, on Sunday. Photo: AFP

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

6 FEB 2007

# Pitching for Olympic Truce

By K. K. Katyal

The Olympic Games yes, but how many people are aware of the Olympic Truce? Even though it is an integral part of the Olympic spirit or the movement and has a special relevance for strife-torn areas, South Asia not excluded. A non-government foundation set up last year seeks to fill this gap — and to promote the ideals of peace, friendship and international understanding. Its symbolic seat is in Olympia, the birthplace of the Olympic Games, and the administrative headquarters in Athens, the venue of the first Games of the modern era over a century ago and the host city of the 2004 sport event.

The message of the Olympic Truce is simple — it is a call for all conflicts and hostilities to cease for the duration of the Games, and seven days before and seven days after. It is based on a positive belief — “if we can stop fighting for a few days, maybe we can do it forever”. This concept was blessed by the U.N., with the General Assembly adopting a resolution in 1993, urging member-States to observe the Olympic Truce and, two years later, supporting the ideal of a peaceful and better world through sport and Olympic ideal. It figured in the millennium summit declaration.

How was the idea mooted? Let us begin from the beginning, that is, from the Greece of 8th Century B.C. Tired of devastation caused by fighting, the warring kings beseeched Apollo, the god of poetry and music, to suggest a way out. They were told to organise sports contests in Olympia, as a means of fostering peace. That was done and simultaneously they signed what was to be the longest-standing peace accord in history, the Olympic Truce.

How the truce is to be activated in the present-day context is explained by the director of the Olympic Truce Centre, that conducts the activities of the foundation, Mr. Stavros Lambrinidis, a diplomat of standing. A person with strong practical sense, he has no illusions about the job he handles. It is not one more peace movement, but a low-key process of

preparing a master-plan to make the concept known and to encourage its observance. The purpose is to see that it becomes a household word, that specific programmes are formulated by educational institutions, athletes, journalists and others and that truce-making is encouraged in conflict areas.

The foundation is not out to create a utopia or provide a panacea but to set up a window of opportunity, linking the truce with the Olympic Games. There is to be no fanfare, no overselling, he says. He cites some significant successes. At the last Olympic Games in Sydney, the two Koreas participated under one flag, disregarding their political differences. Happily, the process of inter-Korea reconciliation is already on now for some time. And in

## GREECE TODAY — III

1998, a pause in the U.S. plan to bomb Iraq coincided with the Olympic Games in Japan. The respite, thus provided, was used by the U.N. Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for peace efforts.

The concept, the director agrees in reply to a question, could be of considerable use in South Asia (where the ceasefire in Kashmir has helped create a climate of peace). The spirit of the truce is not to be restricted to the period of the Games but could well be promoted whenever or wherever conflicts erupt. The Greek Government fully supports the initiatives of the Centre, as is evident from the comments of the top leaders.

Says the Greek Prime Minister, Mr. Costas Simitis: “It is our desire and intent to support the effort of reviving the ancient tradition of the Olympic Truce; we shall be able to contribute to the advancement of the goals of the Olympic Charter, as well as those outlined in the United Nations resolutions.” The Foreign Minister, Mr. George Papandreou, lauds the concept thus: “Achieving a truce during the Olympic Games would constitute a small rev-

olution in international affairs. It would educate future generations on the importance of tolerance and negotiation as a means of conflict resolution.”

From the Games and the truce to monuments and marbles may be a far cry but there is an equally exciting story of another foundation — Melina Mercouri Foundation, named after a celebrated film star-turned-activist and politician who became the Minister of Culture for some 10 years. One of her passions was the campaign for the “Restitution of Parthenon Marbles”, the sculptured decorations of the buildings on the Acropolis, in Athens, the high-point of the ancient Greek civilisation — in particular of the Temple Parthenon — removed by a British ambassador, Lord Elgin, a century ago.

The charm of her personality, her radiance, her international fame as a film star and as an activist for democracy, human rights and empowerment of women gave a big impetus to the campaign — through the UNESCO and every other conceivable forum. After her death, the campaign is conducted by her husband, Mr. Jules Dassin, the director of her films — ‘Never on a Sunday’ and other hits — who now heads the foundation. Sitting in his office, virtually under the shadow of the Acropolis, he gives the highlights of the campaign conducted by her. His eyes glow as he recalls her activities, in the UNESCO and elsewhere, her efforts with the British Government (the marbles are now in a London museum). And her words — “We are not asking for the return of a painting or a statue: we are asking for the restitution of part of a unique monument, the particular symbol of a civilisation” or “I hope the sculptures are returned while I am alive. But if they come later, I will be reborn.” He is hopeful. Though the British Government is not committal yet, the campaign is backed by a vast majority of MPs and other section now — as it was by notable figures of the past, Byron, Shelley and Hardy.

(Concluded).

THE HINDU

4 FEB 2001

# A challenge and opportunity

By K. K. Katyal

When it comes to discussing India- Greece relations, both officials and non-officials in Athens scratch their heads to find out if there are any problems. In the end, they give up and begin cataloguing the high-level visits exchanged by the two sides — by the Presidents, the Prime Ministers and others — over the years. Incidentally, the President, Mr. K. R. Narayanan, is due to go to Athens in April, and the Greek Prime Minister, Mr. Kostas Simitis, will be here on Sunday.

Greece supports India's stand on Kashmir and other issues, which have become touchstones for measuring, as it were, the degree of friendship. On the nuclear issue, Greece has taken the line of the European Union — regretting the tests by India and calling for accession to the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty — minus the stridency, that marked the attitude of some others in the Union. It does not favour the policy of sanctions. On the other side, India's position on Cyprus — recognition of the Government in Nicosia and non-recognition of the Turkish Cypriot- controlled part of the island — conforms to Greece's policy stand.

The frequency of cultural exchanges is another notable feature. In India, a chair for Greek studies is to be established at the Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi. A corresponding gesture by Greece for a similar chair on India in Athens — and not outside Athens — is awaited.

The economic content of the relationship, however, is noticeably meagre. This is seen both as a challenge and an opportunity by the private sector as also by the Government (in its role as the facilitator). In a recent interview, Mr. Simitis was asked how this weakest link in bilateral ties could be strengthened. He found it a "difficult question" but the fact that a delegation of industrialists will accompany him during his visit suggests a conscious bid to remedy this unsatisfactory situation.

What accounts for the present low level of economic dealings — both in trade and in-

vestment? The president of the Federation of Greek Industries, Mr. L. Antonacopoulos, provides the answer — "the economy of Greece is geared to the E.U. economy. Our eyes are fixed on the E.U." In the close neighbourhood, the shattered Balkan region will embark on a gigantic task of reconstruction, and Greece, naturally will like to make full use of opportunities there.

The Balkan is also seen as the theatre of cooperation between India and Greece — through joint ventures. India's technical know-how, on the one hand, and the political association and capital of Greece, on the other, could be combined usefully to mutual benefit, according to the Federation president, especially because of the vast scope for reconstructing the infrastructure. Joint ventures are

## GREECE TODAY — II

also favoured as the new norm of economic cooperation in India and Greece, apart from third countries — based on India's advance in computer technology. The Greek business representatives make a case for simplified arrangements for the stay in their country of Indian experts in information technology. They are aware of the incentives announced by Germany and the U.K., apart from other E.U. member-countries.

The industrialists accompanying Mr. Simitis are expected to utilise their visit for gaining first-hand acquaintance with the economic environment and opportunities through meetings with their Indian counterparts. They are keen on early action on two matters — an agreement for the avoidance of double taxation and a convention of mutual protection of investments — considered important for facilitating business relations.

The present unsatisfactory state of economic relations is clearly brought out by dull statistics. Greece's global exports in 1998 were to the tune of \$ 10.6 billion and imports, \$ 27 billion. India's share in the first case was 0.24

per cent and in the second, 0.2 per cent. And the trade balance is against Greece — in the first six months of last year, for instance, Greek imports totalled \$ 59.6 million and exports \$ 32.3 million, leaving a deficit of \$ 27.3 million. In 1999, the total volume of trade was no more than \$ 132.7 million.

Greek officials make no secret of the constraints, from which there is no escape because of their membership of the E.U. On multilateral issues, to quote a senior official of the Directorate General for Political Planning and Administration, "we have to go by the community solidarity. We can't say 'no' to our partners. It is an unhappy element in India-Greece economic relations." Of the 28 proceedings against India, thus, Greece went with the E.U. in most cases — of unanimous voting — but sided with New Delhi in one or two matters, where the vote was split. In one case — of textiles — Greece, it was pointed out, changed its vote after India met its WTO obligations on custom- related issue. This is understood by India.

However, a recent case of rejection of the tender by the BHEL has caused dismay, especially because its bid was the lowest and its technical expertise clearly established. The tender was about the supply and upgradation of "ash filters," floated by the Public Power Corporation.

The decision to reject the Indian bid and invite fresh tenders with the condition — that the bidders must have previous experience in this field in West European countries, the U.S. and Japan — served to exclude the BHEL. Some among the Greek officials say the Government could not interfere in the working of the corporation, an autonomous body; according to others, they have to abide by E.U. guidelines.

These explanations have not carried conviction in India. Given the smooth equation between the two countries at various levels, it should not be hard to sort out the problem and ensure that New Delhi does not get a wrong signal — of discrimination.

THE HINDU

3 FEB 2001

# Twin issues that influence Hellenic polity

By K. K. Katyal

History and tradition are writ large in Athens — you can't miss major landmarks as you drive through the city. This is as it should be in the capital of a country known as the cradle of several architectural cultures and as the home to an ancient civilisation. But also evident now are the modern influences — not only through signs of a society turning consumerist, inevitable in this globalisation era, but also in the styles of new buildings — of hotels and the like — with their modernity in some cases, blending with the imposing grandeur of the museums, art galleries and theatres, in other cases, standing apart. The European profile of Greece is bound to get sharper and clearer from now onward — after all, it is a peninsula, jutting out from Europe's land mass into the Eastern Mediterranean, now integrated with the European Union.

Even a brief visit to Athens is enough to know what influences today's Greece — the biggest factor is its membership of the E.U. and another important

## GREECE TODAY — I

issue is the state of its relationship with Turkey. These influences are clearly discernible in policy decisions, foreign and domestic. With Turkey, it is engaged in a dialogue from the beginning of 1999. Contrary to the belief outside Greece, it was not a case of earthquake diplomacy, starting as it did some months before a major natural disaster struck Turkey, evoking sympathy and support from Greece.

The membership of the E.U. and related issues have broad public support — with minor exceptions, all major parties in Parliament as well as public opinion, back closer integration with the grouping. The European dimension is considered vital for the country's future. Ironically, that was not the case in 1981 when Greece joined the Union as its tenth member. The majority of the political parties doubted the usefulness of this course for the country's troubled economy, severely hit by the recession of the seventies and the oil crises of 1973 and 1979.

Significantly, the Athens agreement of 1961, under which Greece began its two-decade transition to full membership, was frozen in April 1967 in the wake of the military coup in the country, to be revived seven years later after the restoration of parliamentary democracy. Implied in the suspension and revival of Greece's candidature for the E.U. was an important message — that its institutions will need to conform to the standards and the patterns of the Union. This process was already under way. As mentioned in an official publication — "About Greece", brought out by the Ministry of Press and Mass Media — "membership of the E.U. had important consequences in the *modus operandi* of the political system. New and powerful institutions have been created. This is especially true of the Hellenic parliament. The policy style became more open... Party political control over society seems to have been relaxed and patterns of clientelism minimised. The process of reducing the size of the State and its role in national

economy is well under way." Particularly important is the government's plan for a clear demarcation of the functions of the Church and the State. The Prime Minister, Mr. Costas Simitis' ideas of giving a secular character to the State, in keeping with the E.U. orientations, have strained his relationship with the Orthodox Church. But the political stability of the government could well take care of this and other problems, like resistance to the policies of privatisation and liberalisation in the economic area. Mr. Simitis has another advantage — divisions in the ranks of the opposition.

From January 1, Greece is part of the economic and monetary union of the E.U. — and both the government and businessmen were happy about it. Also, for six years, from 2000, Greece could count on E.U. funding to the tune of \$27 billion.

## Ties with Turkey

Greece's relationship with Turkey is not quite smooth, what with the halting movement of the rapprochement process. Mr. Simitis does not see any slowdown in the efforts to sort out mutual differences. Perhaps, he has in mind the official-level contacts from June 1999. (A senior Foreign Office representative emphasised the talks had begun three to four months before the earthquake in Turkey).

As a result, the two sides signed nine agreements — among other subjects, on tourism, cultural exchanges, environment and illicit immigration.

Greece, it was pointed out, had acquainted Turkey with its experience of the processes, that had to be gone through by candidate countries for entry into the E.U. (Turkey is making a bid for it). Pointed attention was drawn by officials to Greece's gesture at the Helsinki summit of the E.U. in December 1999, when it did not exercise its veto on Turkey's candidature for the Union.

And the summit took a significant decision — on the unimpeded entrance of Cyprus into the E.U., without making it conditional on the solution of the problem of the island, caused by its division (as a result of Turkish invasion, according to Greece or because of the control of Turkish Cypriots on one portion, according to Turkey). Greece felt sore that Helsinki understanding on Cyprus was not being followed. But the main — and intractable — differences between Greece and Turkey relate to the delimitation of the continental shelf in the Aegean Sea, where there are a large number of Greek islands in the vicinity of Turkey. Greece insists on strict adherence to the international treaty on the law of seas in support of its claim to the 12-mile limit of territorial waters.

Apart from contesting that, Turkey opposes Greek military presence in the islands. The problem, it is clear, will continue to affect bilateral ties — with none too happy manifestations.

Although both Greece and Turkey are members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, their perceptions of security interests differ widely.

(To be continued)

2 FEB 2001

# Moves on to kickstart Ulster peace process

By Hasan Suroor

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LONDON, JAN. 31. The now-off-now-on Northern Ireland peace process could be up and running again if fresh proposals being discussed get a nod from everyone.

After many months during which moderates were seen to be losing the initiative there is optimism that a breakthrough is possible, though a more cautious view is that "real" progress may not be apparent until after the general elections in May.

Broadly, the proposal envisages a symbolic beginning on arms decommissioning by the IRA in exchange for reduced British security presence in Northern Ireland. The Unionists are reported to be willing to take a more flexible view of the mode of arms decommissioning, and not insist on laying down of arms by the IRA or their physical destruction.

The Ulster Unionist Party chief, Mr. David Trimble, has said that he would be satisfied so long as arms were rendered "unusable in a permanent and verifiable way." This could take the form of burying them deeply or spoiling them with chemicals. "I think the Government may have put proposals to them and I know the Irish Government has put pressure on them. We hope they're going to tell us how they're going to put their weapons beyond use in a permanent and verifiable way," Mr. Trimble said on BBC's Breakfast with Frost.

The new Secretary for Northern Ireland, Mr. John Reid, is holding talks with leading political figures from the province to familiarise himself with the law of the land, and the Irish Prime Minister, Mr. Bertie Ahern, is flying down to London to discuss the compromise proposals with Mr. Tony Blair, and Mr. Reid. Mr. Ahern has played down reports of a "deal" but raised hopes of a compromise on decommissioning and reducing British security presence in Northern Ireland. The demilitarisation — scaling down security — might involve the demolition of two watchtowers to which the Sinn Fein and IRA have been objecting. A compromise on a new policing arrangement is also likely to be a part of the "deal."

Mr. Trimble, who is under pressure from party extremists to pull out of the coalition if there is no progress on decommissioning, is particularly keen on an early breakthrough. The Sinn Fein, though veering towards an agreement, is publicly taking a tough posture, with hardliners saying that Mr. Trimble is playing to the gallery. But *The Sunday Times* quoted a Republican source as saying that the IRA is "prepared" to make a move and does not want to "lose this peace process." The newspaper said the compromise proposals were reported to have been "sanctioned... in principle" at a meeting of senior IRA members.

The Government is playing it by the ear saying that while things are moving, it is best to keep fingers crossed until an agreement is reached. If indeed a breakthrough is achieved, the former Northern Ireland Secretary, Mr. Peter Mandelson, could legitimately claim some credit for doing the spade work.

Meanwhile, a court has held as illegal the Ulster Unionists' ban on the Sinn Fein Ministers attending cross-border ministerial meetings. Mr. Trimble has said he would challenge the verdict, but observers said he might not rush into it immediately in view of the attempts going on to break the deadlock. But if the attempts fail he would come under increased pressure from hardliners to appeal against the judgment.

THE HINDU

1 FEB 2001



# Ulster peace process inching forward

NO-17  
19/11

By Hasan Suroor

LONDON, JAN. 18. No immediate breakthrough was expected in the stalled Northern Ireland peace process even as the British Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair, flew into Belfast on Wednesday and held talks with leading political figures who must move from their rigid positions in order to push the Good Friday agreement forward.

Mr. Blair's visit lent official weight to the U.S. President, Mr. Bill Clinton's emissary, Mr. Jim Steinberg's "peace mission". In a TV interview after the first round of talks, Mr. Blair made it clear that he was not expecting a deal to be signed and sealed and delivered immediately. Asked specifically if there would be an agreement today, he said: "Well, I don't know about today. I don't think people are expecting that to happen but I think ... there is a sense of urgency in moving the process forward again, and therefore, I'll do whatever I can to help it".

He said he acknowledged that there was a sense of *deja vu* everytime he visited Belfast with people saying, "Oh, no, not again" but pointed out that it was a lot better to keep the momentum going than not doing it. "I feel deeply committed to Northern Ireland", he

said hoping that in the end, "some sort of agreement" would emerge.

Officials in Belfast sought to play down the expectations and emphasised that what was important was that people to the dispute were talking. "This itself is progress", an official said on phone from Belfast. The idea, she said, was to keep the dialogue going. The Prime Minister, she explained, was trying to explore the various viewpoints and find a way out.

Mr. Blair's discussion with the Sinn Fein, the Ulster Unionists and the SDLP among others centred around the four main sticking points: arms decommissioning by the IRA; demilitarisation which means reduced British security presence in Northern Ireland; police reforms; and the Ulster Unionists' ban on the Sinn Fein Ministers from attending cross-border ministerial meetings.

The most crucial element is the arms decommissioning and Mr. Blair, in his interview, emphasised that the IRA must deliver on its commitment to put its weapons beyond use. The Unionists have threatened to pull out of the power-sharing arrangement with the Sinn Fein if it does not get the IRA start the process of arms decommissioning.

THE IRISH

19/11/99

# Again, Ulster peace moves fail

By Hasan Suroor

LONDON, JAN. 20. Yet another high-profile initiative to revive the Northern Ireland peace process has failed though the Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair maintained that the "political will (to resolve the issues) does exist" even as he warned that a failure to push forward the process could have tragic consequences.

"We only have to look at the Middle East to see what happens when we give up the peace process," he said as he wound up a two-day visit to Belfast. Mr. Blair, who had extensive talks with key political leaders, admitted that there were "some very tough issues still to be sorted out." Though he did not list them, the reference clearly was to arms decommissioning by IRA, a crucial element of the Good Friday Agreement on which the Republicans have not delivered so far. The Sinn Fein's attempt to link it with other issues, including its demand for reduced British security presence in the province has created a deadlock which, if not resolved quickly, could seriously jeopardise the peace process. The Unionists have threatened to walk out of the power-sharing arrangement with Sinn Fein if there is no progress on arms decommissioning very soon.

Mr. Blair is reported to have had "constructive" and "frank" discussions with the Sinn Fein leaders, Mr. Gerry Adams and Mr. Martin McGuinness, both on arms decommissioning and security but produced no agreement. Details were not known but apparently the Prime Minister failed

to persuade them to relent. Mr. Adams accused the British Government of "reneging" on its promises, reflected in the Good Friday Agreement, and ruled out any settlement unless his party's demands were accepted. "If people keep to the path they have been on, whatever be the terms of the (Good Friday) agreement the chances of sorting this out are very limited," he said after the talks.

Reports suggest that while the British Government is inclined to consider the issue of reduced security, it wants the Sinn Fein to demonstrate its commitment to arms decommissioning by re-engaging with Gen. John de Chastelain's disarmament body as a starting point for decommissioning.

The Sinn Fein has been virtually boycotting the Chastelain Commission and instead it has been talking to independent experts who have examined IRA weapons dumps and declared them to be safe and beyond use. The Sinn Fein argues that this amounts to starting the process of decommissioning, whereas the Unionists and the British Government want the weapons to be physically destroyed or at least taken out of IRA's possession.

Mr. Blair rejected the Sinn Fein's charge that his Government had not kept its promises and reiterated its commitment to peace. London maintains that it has already scaled down security in Northern Ireland and brought about police reforms as envisaged in the Good Friday Agreement. The Sinn Fein has rejected the reforms calling them inadequate.

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21 JAN 2001