

Paris walks the tightrope

By Vaiju Naravane

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IN THE immediate aftermath of the attacks on New York and Washington, there was an outpouring of voluble sympathy and support for the United States from its European allies. Indeed, much was made of the re-invigoration of the Atlantic Alliance with the invoking of Article 5 of NATO's charter.

Ironically, however, a vacuum in effective policy has accompanied the invocation of a treaty instrument so long held to be the cornerstone of the Alliance's deterrence strategy. For, the U.S. has adopted a policy of dealing with Europe through a series of bilateral engagements. The role of international organisations such as the European Union and NATO has been in this instance reduced to declaratory statements of support and European sympathy has now given way to uncertainty and anger.

The Bush administration's arrogance and disdain for multilateral organisations, despite the present engagement with the United Nations, and international legal norms, the amalgam of engagement and unilateralism that passes for U.S. foreign policy is making Europe nervous. Britain, whose poodle-ism has reached its apotheosis, is widely considered the European arm of the U.S. Although France and Germany have publicly taken a stand against any unilateral strike, they view the unfolding of American policies on Iraq with a certain fatalism, a cynicism born of helplessness. In what observers are calling the Second Gulf War, it is now a foregone conclusion that the U.S. will attack Iraq.

Germany's stand has been the clearest so far — Berlin will not support strikes against Iraq, even if these were to be the product of a U.N. Security Council decision. The French position is more nuanced.

France this week voiced its toughest opposition yet to the U.S.-sponsored draft U.N. resolution threatening military action against Iraq, warning Washington that any attempt to bring about a "regime change" would violate international law.

In a front-page article in *Le Monde*, the Foreign Minister, Dominique de Villepin, said France wanted Iraq disarmed but could not and would not

support action that threatened to further destabilise the Middle East, without full U.N. approval. "France refuses an intervention that would not take fully into account all that is required for collective security," he wrote.

But the President, Jacques Chirac, hinted for the first time that, providing those conditions were met, France—a permanent member of the Security Council—would play its part in any U.N.-backed action. The French President wants two resolu-

France is steering a clever middle path between total opposition to the U.S. policy on Iraq and a British-style acquiescence.

tions, the second authorising military action only if Baghdad does not give weapons inspectors the unfettered access demanded in the first.

France, Russia and China have all expressed strong misgivings about the U.S. proposal. Russia distanced itself further from Washington by sharply criticising Anglo-American bombing raids on Iraq last weekend. That will herald the start of what diplomats are calling the "real negotiations" as the "sceptical three" spell out their key demands. There have been signs that Beijing may be preparing to abstain from the Security Council vote just as there are signs that Russia will go along if the U.S. in return agrees to turn a blind eye to its policy in Chechnya and agrees to underwrite the \$8 billion it is owed by Iraq.

Washington's intentions in Iraq are ambiguous. For the record, the U.S. argues that Saddam Hussein poses a grave threat to humanity and should be replaced by more democratic and less belligerent forces. What kind of regime change would the Americans like to see? The stability of Iraq dominated by the Kurds in the north and the Shias in the south, can be assured only by the Sunni majority in the centre, a majority firmly controlled by Mr. Hussein.

America's real motives, however, are another matter altogether. What does the Bush Administration really want? What is the hidden agenda? The game plan is not restricted to destroy-

ing Mr. Hussein's weapons of mass destruction and removing him from office. As Frances Fitzgerald points out in a recent article in the *New York Review of Books*, the conservative hardliners that make up the present U.S. administration want, quite simply, a re-distribution of the cards in West Asia, a total transformation of the region that would also result in a final, pro-Israeli solution to the Palestinian problem. September 11 showed up the limitations of U.S. policy towards friendly Arab regimes such as Egypt or

estinians. It is likely that he will attempt to push the Palestinians from the West Bank into Jordan with a resultant tumbling of the Hashemite Dynasty in Amman. Jordan, whose oil imports come almost exclusively from Iraq, has been the most vociferous opponent of an invasion of Iraq.

For the U.S., an invasion of Iraq would also mean direct control over the oilfields of West Asia. And for Europe, especially for France, therein lies the rub. France has backed the return of weapons inspectors but has serious reservations about an attack on Iraq. As one of the European states with substantial assets locked up in Iraq, France is fearful of losing its foothold in that country and experts say the very public quarrel between Paris and Washington hides a more close to the bone dialogue between the two countries. The U.S. has warned that any state wishing to oppose its policies in the Gulf could kiss goodbye to access to Iraqi oilfields and lucrative reconstruction contracts once hostilities have come to an end. Using the U.N. and the legitimacy it provides, France is steering a clever middle path between total opposition to the U.S. policy on Iraq and a British-style acquiescence. This has the dual advantage of preserving France's reputation for holding its own against U.S. hegemony and power politics while leaving the door open to joining forces with America once a showdown begins. As a permanent member of the Security Council as well as the Atlantic Alliance, France is in a more delicate position than China or Russia.

An invasion of Iraq will entail not just an aerial bombing campaign but the deployment of several hundred thousand ground troops. Some 250,000 troops were involved in the Gulf War 10 years ago. This time hostilities are expected to last longer since the plan is the occupation of Iraq and the installation of a "friendly" Government in Baghdad. France had actively cooperated with the U.S. lending its airpower as well as sending in ground troops during the Gulf War. Its seasoned diplomats, adept at steering their country out of sticky situations will no doubt find a way of running with the hare while hunting with the hounds.

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The need is to foster ties in every field ^{France}

By K. K. Katyal

PARIS, OCT. 3. "What we want is wide relations with India. Both France and India are real players in today's world and need to foster ties in every field, diplomatic, political, economic, scientific and cultural," says a senior official in the French Prime Minister's Secretariat.

Another — from the Foreign Office — speaks of the priority, given by their President, Jacques Chirac, to dealings with India. The reference is made to the strategic dialogue, and its scope and sweep — covering as it does, on the one side, the strategic balance in South Asia and the Indian Ocean, India's relations with Pakistan and China, Afghanistan and India's nuclear doctrine and, on the other, the unification of the European Union, particularly evolution of the common security and foreign policies, NATO and its doctrines.

France, as other powers in Europe, big and small, are now preoccupied with major issues of war and peace but officials do find time to talk to a visiting Indian journalist on bilateral ties and concerns. And understandably the India-Pakistan tension and New Delhi's nuclear stance figure at some length.

This is how the India-Pakistan problem is viewed: "We do not interfere with the internal matters of India and respect its sovereignty. We condemn all acts of terrorism and do not accept any justification for that. We have made it clear to the Pakistan President, Pervez Musharraf. But not all terrorist acts could be of Pakistan origin. We acknowledge his role in curbing terrorism."

Also, the "India-Pakistan tension is not merely a regional problem, but a matter of concern for the international community. Only a dialogue between the two countries

could lead to solution — dialogue at any level, official, non-official or any other channel."

The nuclear issue is seen thus: "Unlike the unrealistic approach of the U.S. and others, we did not choose to marginalise India (after its nuclear tests). That approach was quite wise and we were able to develop a good dialogue. India's action was not illegal but it was regrettable." A case is made for India accepting the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. When reminded that it was overtaken by events (and has not yet been ratified even by the U.S. Senate) we are told that New Delhi's ac-

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cession to the treaty would, nonetheless, be a good political gesture.

"Advance by India on non-proliferation" is also mentioned as a prerequisite for French help to India to set up nuclear power plants. At the practical level, the importance of such cooperation is recognised — India's energy requirements are colossal while France, which meets 80 per cent of its needs by nuclear power, has achieved a high degree of technological advance. But the French side cites its commitments to the Nuclear Suppliers' Group or the London Club, barring transfer of nuclear technology to a country, which does not accept full scope nuclear safeguards for its facilities. Efforts are still on to find a way out (as suggested by the presence last week of a delegation from India's Atomic Energy Commission). The space for a solution is not altogether non-existent — what India needs is nuclear energy technology for civilian uses and, as for the nuclear development, it has unilaterally accepted moratorium on tests.

In the economic sphere,

cooperation is far below the potential — a problem noted over the years by the people who matter on both sides but which has defied a solution. In the early nineties, it was understandable for the French to have reservations about the reform process — they were not sure whether it was durable and irreversible but there could be no such misgivings on that count now. The French private sector remains hesitant. My interlocutors mention three factors — hassles caused by the bureaucracy in India, weakness of the infrastructure and occasional crisis that frighten investors (even though overall stability and the vastness of the Indian market is recognised). The problem is not one-sided. The delegation of the CII goes back with the impression that India, too, needs to redouble efforts to acquaint the French on what it could offer.

These issues figure in the delegation's talks with the French Finance Minister, Francis Mer, and the head of Medef, the organisation of French trade and industry, Antoine Selliere. The Finance Minister notes the low-level of French investment and urges the two sides to address the causes.

He wants the CII to provide the list of all companies in India so as to drive home to the French side the reality — of their investments lagging far behind.

He will be in India later in the year for a meeting of the G-20 and promises to meet the businessmen again.

Yes, big French companies are already in India and the task now is to bring small and medium undertakings.

The sentiments, expressed by the French side, officials and others, are propitious.

How to translate them into reality is the main task now.

(Concluded)

1 0 OCT 2002

INDO

A case of two legitimacies

By K.K. Katyal 2/10-12

PARIS, OCT. 2. A sense of relaxation in the corridors of power can't be missed in conversations with officials and others even during a brief visit here. This is attributed to only one factor — the end of co-habitation. The Presidential and parliamentary elections earlier this year, as is known, meant control of the Presidency and a majority in the lower house of Parliament for the conservatives. Jacques Chirac was elected President for a second term while his party won the majority of seats in the National Assembly — 399 out of 577. In his previous term, Mr. Chirac had to deal with the Socialist majority in Parliament for five years.

What is the meaning, the significance, of the change? The top aide of the new Prime Minister, Jean Pierre Raffarin, says the outcome of the election is very interesting and astonishing — it dispels the impression that the French people like a "balance" of power — with the President and the Prime Minister belonging to different parties. The theory that it is good for the country to have checks and balances has been proved wrong. He calls it a case of two legitimacies — there is a personal link between the people and the President, who is directly elected, while the Prime Minister represents the expression of the majority in the National Assembly. With both belonging to the same party, it is described as a smooth division of labour.

The President represents France, gives general guidelines. The Prime Minister is to implement the guidelines." The point the aide seeks to make is that there could be tensions if the equation between them is disturbed.

The responsibilities of the French President, under the Constitution, fall into three categories. As the guardian of the Constitution, he can lay matters before the Constitutional Coun-

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cil, initiate constitutional review and make known his views on the interpretation of constitutional provisions. He is responsible for the proper functioning of the public authorities and the continuity of the State. And he is the guarantor of the external sovereignty of the State — he is to ensure the country's independence, the integrity of national territory and adherence to international treaties to which France is party. The main powers of the National Assembly are to adopt statutes and to supervise government policies.

As such, there is considerable scope for friction and clash — as was evident during the period of co-habitation that is just over or in the past when a Socialist President had to do business with a right-wing majority in the lower House.

On foreign policy, both the President and the Prime Minister are required to play key roles but apparently there had been

no occasion for major divergences. But "beneath the veil of unanimity, there have been sharp differences". In support is cited the case of the Africa policy in the past. Mr. Chirac showed considerable sensitivity to the problems of various African countries, he had personal links and knew most of the Heads of State and, as such, showed understanding of their problems, but the outgoing Socialist Prime Minister, Lionel Jospin, took a "remote, one-sided view".

Would there have been a clash on the Iraq policy if Mr. Chirac, hypothetically speaking, had to do business with a Socialist Prime Minister? The answer is in the negative. There is a promise of greater smoothness in decision-making on foreign policy.

As regards India, Mr. Chirac had no difficulty with Mr. Jospin but "now high intensity is to be given to the relationship" with New Delhi. Normally the Prime Minister does not travel abroad (beyond the European Union). But Mr. Raffarin, though in office for a few months, has already planned a visit to India — and to China and Russia — early next year. There is no tradition of institutionalised discussions with India (unlike the other two) but nonetheless New Delhi will be his "important destination".

He will be accompanied by a delegation of top French industrialists, as was the case with Mr. Chirac during his visit to India in January 1998.

France to phase out Sangatte camp

By Hasan Suroor

LONDON, SEPT 27. A major irritant in Anglo-French relations has been laid to rest with France agreeing to phase out the contentious Sangatte refugee camp whose proximity to the Channel Tunnel has made it a staging post for asylum seekers to try and enter Britain illegally.

Under an agreement, reached between the two countries on Thursday after months of wrangling, the camp will not accept any new inmates from November 15 and the place will be completely shut down next April.

Britain has agreed to take half of those who are found to be genuine refugees after a U.N. screening of the camp's over 1,000 existing inmates, mostly Iraqi Kurds, Turks and Afghans. Those who have their claims rejected would be deported and given money to return to their homes and rebuild their lives. But many said the 'compensation' — £1,300 — was not



Asylum seekers cover their faces while leaving the Sangatte Red Cross refugee camp as French police stand guard at the entrance on Thursday. — Reuters

enough as they had spent much more to get to Europe in search of better prospects. "I borrowed \$5,000 to get to England. I am

going to go every day to try and get on a ship to England," one asylum seeker said. The British Home Secretary, David Blun-

kett, who is determined to rid Britain of its image as a "soft touch" for asylum-seekers, hailed the agreement as a 'significant' step. "This is excellent progress and demonstrates the commitment of both Governments to tackling the problem of illegal immigration," he said after a meeting with his French counterpart, Nicolas Sarkozy.

The camp, set up by Red Cross three years ago, has been a constant source of irritation for the British Government as refugees try to clamber on to U.K.-bound trains and lorries in a desperate bid to get into Britain, even risking their lives. Its repeated pleas to France to close down the camp was met with a frosty response until now with the French Government blaming Britain's liberal asylum regime for attracting asylum seekers. Britain's asylum rules are comparatively softer than those of other European countries, but stung by criticism Mr. Blunkett has vowed to get tough on immigrants.

28 SEP 2003

THE HINDU

France not for unilateral action against Iraq

By K. K. Katyal

PARIS, SEPT. 26. France today rejected — in clear, unambiguous terms — the idea of unilateral action against Iraq and called for keeping the United Nations in the picture.

The stand of France was elaborated by its Foreign Minister, Dominique de Villepin, in an exclusive interview that covered a wide range of issues, notably bilateral ties with India, the situation in South Asia and the future of Europe.

In reply to pointed queries on Iraq, he made out a strong case for confining the current discussions to the return of weapons inspectors to Iraq and ensuring its compliance with the U.N. resolution in fulfilment of its obligations on nuclear non-proliferation. Changing of the regime is not the objective,



Dominique de Villepin

the responsibility of the U.N. "If we were to aim at changing regimes, then we are going into a process where we do not know

where to end. Also, who is to judge which regime is good or bad? It will be a source of instability and other countries might be a target after Iraq."

The present situation, according to him, needed to be treated in two separate phases — one, to assess the decision of Iraq (on unconditional return of inspectors to be precise about the technical arrangements, which, in any case, were there in Resolution 1284). There could be a new resolution on the same subject — practical arrangements for the return of inspectors, even though it is not absolutely necessary. But inclusion of the use of force in such a resolution was not acceptable — that would divide the international community at a time when consensus needed to be preserved. "We want the international community to send a

strong signal to Arabs and other countries that there was no hidden agenda. And if Iraq failed on compliance, the Security Council could meet again and consider various options." But that would be a separate phase, he said. The two phases were not to be mixed. "Let us not prejudge Iraq" he stressed. Any action that became necessary should be the responsibility of the U.N., not of the U.S.

In pursuance of these objectives, France was in touch with Russia and China. As he saw it, India and France had identical views on the subject.

As regards India-Pakistan problems, he favoured resumption of dialogue between the two countries. "The elections (in Jammu and Kashmir) mark an important stage in the return to stability. We condemn acts of violence."

27 SEP 2003

THE HINDU

French troops move in to protect children

By Vaiju Naravane

PARIS, SEPT. 25. Even as French paratroopers moved in to protect students and staff of a missionary school in the central town of Bouake, noisy anti-French and anti-American demonstrations shook Abidjan, the capital of the Western African state of Ivory Coast.

French soldiers today threw a security ring around the school in the central town of Bouake where rebels are still holding out in after a coup attempt failed last Thursday.

About 170 foreigners, mainly Americans, remain holed up at the school as fighting between rebels and government forces continues to rage. There are about 100 children among them. The school, which lies between rebel and army positions, came under fire on Tuesday and U.S. troops began moving from neighbouring Ghana to the Ivory Coast in order to evacuate the children and the school staff should this prove necessary.

"For the moment there is no word about evacuation," Michel Cousineau, the French commander in charge of securi-



Children play in the International Christian Academy in Bouake, Ivory Coast, in this recent photo.

ty at the school told journalists. "The school staff are happy to receive protection and they now feel safe".

Almost a week after a failed coup in the Ivory Coast the situation there remains tense. The Ivorian authorities have accused neighbouring Burkina Faso of being directly responsible for the instability that has now become chronic. Last week's coup claimed several lives including those of the Ivorian Interior Minister and former dictator and rebel leader, Rob-

ert Guei, who has been blamed for orchestrating simultaneous uprisings in three cities, the capital Abidjan, Bouaké in the centre and Korhogo in the north. A pro government newspaper has openly accused the Burkina Faso President, Blaise Compaore, of encouraging and arming the rebels.

Several Burkina Faso migrants living and working in the relatively better off Ivory Coast became the object of persecution at the hands of paramilitary militias in Abidjan earlier this

week. The President, Gbagbo, was out of the country when the attempted coup took place.

The French Government said it would back diplomatic efforts to restore order and that the French Foreign Minister, Dominique de Villepin, would attend a regional summit meeting in Morocco on Thursday. France has intervened militarily before and the French foreign affairs spokesman was tight-lipped about the role French soldiers are to play in the present crisis. "French troops are there as a preventive measure, as a precaution a technical measure for the safety of French nationals in Cote d'Ivoire. The perimeter of the action for the mission is clearly limited. As long as we consider there is a risk, the units will stay.

The Former Ivorian Prime Minister, Alassane Ouattara, had sought refuge in the residence of the French Ambassador in Abidjan. The present Ivorian crisis is also a settling of old scores and Mr. Ouattara's opponents have also been protesting against the French decision to give him protection and refuge.

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ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT / POLICE DETAIN NEO-NAZI *France*

A narrow escape for Chirac

By Vaiju Naravane

PARIS, JULY 14. The French President, Jacques Chirac, today narrowly escaped an assassination attempt during his inspection of the military parade in Paris to mark Bastille Day, France's national day.

Police said a 25-year-old gunman, known to them as "belonging to neo-Nazi and hooligan movements" fired one shot from a .22 calibre rifle before he was overpowered. An investigation into the security lapse that allowed him to get so close to the presidential motorcade has been ordered.

The man was carrying his rifle in a guitar case. He opened the case and drew out his rifle amid packed crowds lining the famous avenue of Champs Elysees just as Mr. Chirac passed by in an open motorcade. The assailant fired one shot at close range. The crowd raised an alarm and the man was quickly disarmed and arrested by police personnel. No one was injured and the military parade continued unaffected.

This was Mr. Chirac's eighth national parade since he was elected President in 1995, but his first after his dramatic re-election in May 2002.

The July 14 celebrations mark the fall of the Bastille prison in Paris at the start of the French Revolution in 1789. Over 4,000 soldiers took part in this year's parade amid heightened fears of terrorist attacks. Security has been stepped up following fresh revelations about terrorist cells with links to Al-Qaeda and other organisations operating in the country. Initial fears that an Islamic militant could have carried out the assassination attempt were quickly put to rest when the police issued a statement confirming the arrest of a man "belonging to neo-Nazi and hooligan movements".



A man is pinned down by police after he fired a shot during the Bastille Day parade on the Champs Elysees avenue in Paris on Sunday. — AP

AP reports:

Mr. Chirac on Sunday urged reform of France's asylum laws, quicker processing of asylum requests and stronger efforts against smugglers of illegal immigrants. In a wide-ranging televised interview on Bastille

Day, he also said the military needed strengthening and expressed support for the building of a second aircraft carrier.

In the interview, Mr. Chirac was not asked about and did not mention the attempt on his life hours earlier. — AP

THE HINDS

15 JUL 2002

SANGATTE / TIME-FRAME BEING WORKED OUT ✓

France to close down camp

PARIS, JULY 12. A refugee centre at the heart of growing tensions between Britain and France over illegal immigration will be closed down, the French Interior Minister, Nicolas Sarkozy, announced on Friday.

The announcement was made following a meeting between Mr. Sarkozy and his British counterpart, David Blunkett. The two men will visit the area in September to determine a "precise and definitive calendar," Mr. Sarkozy said.

The Red Cross-run centre near the Channel Tunnel has been used as a stepping stone for refugees trying to sneak into Britain, where asylum laws have been more lax than in France.

After being named Interior Minister in June, Mr. Sarkozy said he favoured closing the refugee centre — but not suddenly.

The centre will be closed between "the last trimester of this year" and "the first trimester of next year," he said.

Sangatte houses up to 1,500 refugees, many of whom are



ANY HOPE ON THE HORIZON?: Refugees of the Sangatte camp watch ferries from the beach near Calais, northern France, in this recent photo.

willing to risk their lives to reach Britain by clambering aboard trains under the English Channel, or trying to cross the tunnel on foot.

Last year, six people died trying to sneak through to Britain.

Britain has been pressing for the centre to close, as has Eurotunnel, the company that runs the Channel Tunnel. It has lost millions of dollars in lost

freight traffic because of the refugee problem.

The centre was set up in 1999 in an abandoned warehouse and meant to house some 650 people.

Mr. Sarkozy and Mr. Blunkett met on June 25 in London, but failed to reach agreement on a closing date for the centre. — AP

Landslide victory kickstarts French President's dash for reforms

Upbeat Chirac reappoints PM

FROM JOHN CHALMERS

Paris, June 17 (Reuters): French President Jacques Chirac formally reappointed his down to earth Prime Minister today after the Centre-Right's landslide victory in parliamentary elections, starting the clock in a dash for reform.

The Conservatives' surge in yesterday's voting ended the Left's five-year grip on the National Assembly and shut the far-right National Front out of the lower house altogether, less than two months after its leader Jean-Marie Le Pen shocked Europe by finishing runner-up to Chirac in a presidential election.

Chirac's newly founded Union for the Presidential Majority (UMP) and its allies won a commanding 399 seats in the 577-strong Assembly against just 178 for the Socialists and other Leftists, who are now outnumbered by more than two to one.

"The President of the Republic has entrusted Jean-Pierre Raffarin with the functions of prime minister again and asked him to form the government," Chirac's office said.

It was a bald statement that conveyed none of the triumph in the Elysee Palace, a home that Chirac seemed in grave danger of losing just a few months ago,



Supporters of French President Jacques Chirac's party celebrate with junior minister Tokia Saifi (in white shirt) as the results of the French parliamentary elections are announced in Paris. (Reuters)

amid allegations of sleaze and buoyant popularity ratings for his Socialist presidential rival.

Re-elected after mass street protests against Le Pen's anti-immigrant policies, the head of state now has a strong hand to cut taxes, ease labour laws and reform pensions after five years of paralysing "cohabitation" with a Left-wing government.

Yesterday's elections marked the latest step in the mainstream

Right's advance across western Europe, where similar parties have ousted Leftist administrations in Italy, Portugal, Denmark and the Netherlands and may do so in Germany in September.

Chirac first appointed the hitherto little-known Raffarin on May 6 to lead an interim government after his re-election at the expense of his previous prime minister, Socialist Lionel Jospin, who resigned when Le

Pen edged him out of the presidential race.

Raffarin, whose provincial common touch came as a breath of fresh air for voters tired of haughty rule by a Parisian elite, met Chirac to offer his resignation in keeping with electoral tradition. But his confirmation came as no surprise.

Officials said he would name a largely unchanged but bigger cabinet on Tuesday. However,

European affairs minister Renaud Donnedieu de Vabres resigned in a move that was expected because he is being investigated over party funding irregularities.

That was a small reminder of the sleaze that dogged Chirac's first term and which took a back seat during two rollercoaster months of double-round presidential and parliamentary elections.

Indeed, Chirac owes his re-found power more to voters' rejection of the far-Right — after Le Pen's shock resurgence in the first round of the presidential election — and a rejection of power-sharing rather than a popular embrace of his policies.

"Things are better now, the government will be more plausible, it can get things done," said Gerard Escaish, a Right-wing voter as he stood outside a Paris cafe.

The newly elected legislators from the UMP, the first grouping to unite most factions of the centre-right in modern French politics, were due to meet over dinner today.

On Tuesday, they are expected to name former premier and Chirac confidant Alain Juppe — a man with distinct presidential ambitions for 2007 — as the new movement's leader.

Chirac landslide buries Le Pen

T-4
19/6

from

Paris, June 16 (Reuters): French President Jacques Chirac's Centre-Right won a landslide parliamentary majority today, turning the tables on the Left and denying the anti-immigrant National Front any seats at all, exit polls indicated.

Polling institutes said Chirac's newly-founded Union for a Presidential Majority (UMP) and allies would win 385-405 seats in the 577-seat National Assembly against 172-192 for Socialists and other Left parties who had run the lower house for five years.

The National Front won not a single seat despite its veteran leader Jean-Marie Le Pen's shock success in a presidential vote in April. Le Pen came second to Chirac, edging out Socialist Prime Minister Lionel Jospin, who promptly resigned his post. "What is clear today is that one party, the UMP, is going to have more than 60 per cent of the seats," said pollster Roland Cayrol of the CSA institute as official counts started coming.

"It's the first time in the history of the Fifth Republic."

The UMP is the first grouping to unite the factions of the Centre-Right since the present constitution was adopted in 1958.

The swing to the Right should give it its biggest majority since 1993 and offer Chirac a strong hand to make tax cuts, ease labour laws and reform pensions after five years of paralysing "cohabitation" with a Left-wing parliament and government.

"This is very good. It's a big



A child stands next to his parents as they cast their vote in Tulle, France. (AFP)

majority. Chirac will be able to reorganise the government and put France back on track," said Catherine Levy, a supporter at the UMP's headquarters in Paris. The Socialists and their Communist, Green and other allies together had held 314 seats by the end of the previous legislature against 245 for the mainstream right.

"When a team loses, you need to change the team," said disappointed Socialist activist Simone Soussan, 68, a retired teacher speaking amid the gloom at the party's headquarters.

There was at least some good news for Jospin's interim successor as Socialist Party chief Francois Hollande, who held onto his seat. He may still face an inter-

nal leadership battle.

Less good for the Socialists, Martine Aubry, a former labour minister and architect of the party's controversial 35-hour standard working week, was beaten in the northern town of Lille.

Other losing leftists were former European affairs minister Pierre Moscovici, National Assembly Speaker Raymond Forni and party spokesman Vincent Peillon — all Socialists — as well as Greens national secretary Dominique Voynet.

The result had been widely expected after parties supporting Chirac, who had trounced Le Pen by four votes to one in the presidential runoff on May 5, took a comfortable lead in the first round parliamentary voting last Sunday.

In the bulk of constituencies, where no one won 50 per cent last week, two- or three-way runoffs were required today. Reflecting widespread voter apathy, abstention hit record levels. Pollsters estimated 38 per cent of people did not vote.

"I'm really quite sick of all this voting in such a short space of time," waitress Marie-Ange Angelique said in the Paris suburb of Nogent.

The victory of Chirac's camp marked the latest step in the mainstream Right's advance across western Europe, where similar parties have ousted left-wing governments in Italy, Denmark, the Netherlands and Portugal and may do so in Germany in September.

17 JUN 2002

THE TELEGRAPH

Trends point to big majority

Chirac vows fast reforms

FROM MARK JOHN (1-2) 11/6

Paris, June 10 (Reuters): French President Jacques Chirac's conservatives pledged to deliver fast on key reform promises today after trouncing the Left and far Right in the first round of a parliamentary election that pointed to a solid majority.

Winning an estimated 44 per cent in the first of the two voting rounds, the Centre-Right took a solid lead yesterday over the Socialists and their Communist and ecologist Greens partners, who scored a total of 37 per cent amid mass abstention.

With next Sunday's decisive runoffs seen freeing Chirac from the strait-jacket of five years' "cohabitation" power-sharing with Left-wing rivals, allies insisted they had been given a mandate for change and the political scope to achieve it.

"People are giving us the message: 'Watch it! Now we want results,'" Jean-Francois Cope, chief spokesman for Chirac's caretaker government told France Inter radio.

Pollsters saw the Centre-Right winning over 380 seats in the 577-strong National Assembly lower house, reversing the Left-wing majority of the past five years and making France the latest European country to swing Right after Italy, Denmark and Portugal.

Jean-Marie Le Pen's anti-immigrant National Front failed to repeat its leader's shock surge in



Jacques Chirac

April's presidential election, with its result falling to 11 per cent from 15 per cent five years ago as voters eschewed small parties.

Yet those who recalled the angry protests in 1995 when Chirac tried to introduce structural reforms advised caution — that unrest led to the Left's 1997 legislative victory. "The new government should have a large parliament majority. But that's no guarantee the reforms will find support on the streets," warned BNP Paribas economist Dominique Barbet.

THE TELEGRAPH

11 JUN 2002

Qui the people!

France
Chirac has won, now he must perform W/S

Jacques Chirac — overwhelming winner thanks to the expectedly huge kitty of keep-Le Pen-out votes — has two jobs as France's re-elected President. First the political task; leading conservatives to a victory in the parliamentary elections in June. Second, the presidential task, leading the French people and the political system out of the twin dangers of extremism and indifference, neither of which can be said to have been permanently tackled in the second round presidential voting. Chirac's choice of the loyal but unknown Jean-Pierre Raffarin as the interim Prime Minister — Lionel Jospin quit, as he promised — could cut both ways. A fresh face may appeal to voters, if combined with some bright ideas, and counter what will undoubtedly be a determined Socialist campaign to win back lost ground. On the other hand, the French conservatives have about half a dozen prima donnas (Gaullists and non-Gaullists both) who have been ignored by Chirac for prime ministership and whose resultant actions may be less than fully helpful when it comes to the June elections. There's also Jean-Marie Le Pen. Being vanquished in the final race for the Elysee Palace will not take away the attraction of a parliamentary prize, which will come if the National Front gets enough seats to hold the balance in the legislature.

Tough as winning the June elections is, it pales in comparison with the job of keeping the Fifth Republic's many groups and interests together. Chirac will rule a France where the native/immigrant problem is serious — Le Pen struck a chord here. French elite means, give and take a few provincial notables, the Parisian elite. Chirac must see that the less prosperous sections of French society does not see Paris as a different country; the Parisian elite behaves as if it is. Plus, there are pending policy quandaries. Can a man lampooned as "superliar" in TV satire shows and with enough scandals to match an Indian politician, give the French a feel good feeling? Even a second French victory at the soccer World Cup may not give Chirac enough momentum — and that is saying a lot.

THE STATESMAN

10 MAY 2002

W/C 11-12 **Right of Passage** 9/5 ✓

European political parties are engaged in a new and frenetic race to the right. French National Front leader Le Pen actually gave the far right a bad name by carrying things too far too soon. Now that he has been beaten back by the more established parties in France, the far right in Europe can once again look forward to rising with respectability. Close on the heels of French leftists, socialists and conservatives closing ranks to ensure the victory of Jacques Chirac in the second round of elections, comes news of disturbing developments across the Channel, in England. The anti-immigrant British National Party, openly committed to an "all-white Britain", won a respectable 18 per cent of the votes cast in the northern cities of Bradford, Burnley and Oldham. This is the highest percentage ever polled by the BNP in the last 20 years in these depressed cities that are tormented by racial conflict. Next day, Conservative Party MP Ann Winterton regaled a club dinner with a joke about an Englishman throwing a Pakistani out of a train window saying, "They are ten a penny in my country" underscoring that a Pakistani was not of any more value to England than a cigar to a rich Cuban or a Nikon camera to a wealthy Japanese. Ms Winterton was sacked from the Conservative Party's shadow cabinet after she refused to quit on her own saying that this was no "resigning" matter. Such jokes presage the flavour of the coming political season in Britain and the continent where new lines of racial divisions are being drawn.

Britain might be at loggerheads with the European Union on any number of issues including a common currency, but where it is assuredly one with the continent is in the matter of making Fortress Europe more impregnable against identifiable immigrants, specifically Muslims in the aftermath of 9/11. Austria's notoriously far-right politician Joerg Haider of the Freedom Party, whose populist nationalism won him a huge 27 per cent of the vote and provoked Europe-wide protests in 1999-2000, appears relatively moderate to those, such as Le Pen, who have followed in his wake. From the Netherlands' just-assassinated Pim Fortuyn and Belgium's Filip de Winter to Denmark's Pia Kjaersgaard and Switzerland's Chris Bloch, there is a swing to the far right rooted in a politics of hate against foreigners. The British, for all their much-vaunted multiculturalism, are not only part of this continental drift but actually a step ahead with their tried and tested success in a divide-and-rule policy. This instrument of colonial rule has been revived with a vengeance by the BNP. Anticipating race riots in north England, BNP chief Nick Griffin says that "whites were not the only ones responsible for such riots". Mr Griffin claims the support of sections of non-Muslim Asians, such as Hindus and Sikhs, revealing that his strategy is to break up the solidarity in the ghettos and make common cause with non-Muslims in the first stage of the onslaught directed against aliens. Obviously Britain is out to avenge Le Pen's defeat, and not make the mistakes he made. The expectation in Oldham — which witnessed last year the worst race riots in 15 years — as voiced by BNP leader Mick Treacy is that Le Pen "will give confidence to people, show them that the far-right can be elected".

French Lesson

Even as the Indian Upper House finally showed the way out of the Gujarat impasse by adopting a unanimous resolution, France was celebrating an event of enormous universal import. In what must surely rank as a quiet revolution, Jacques Chirac won the presidential election in the second round by a landslide vote of 82 per cent against his National Front rival Jean Marie Le Pen, who polled 18 per cent. These are record voting figures — the highest and lowest voting percentages — for any French presidential election under the fifth republic. Furthermore, the voter turnout in the second round was higher than the first, establishing that those who had stayed away earlier now rushed to stop Mr Le Pen. This election holds lessons not just for France but for India as well. When the Left and centre get fragmented and splinter into factions, each caught in its own sectarian agenda and personality cult, the extreme right is able to gain. The fight between the German socialists and the communists paved the road to Hitler's rise to power. The same kind of Leftist fragmentation and consolidation of extreme right enabled Mr Le Pen to outperform socialist leader Leonard Jospin in the first round of the recent French election. However, that victory scared the French Left enough to ensure it would rally around in favour of Mr Chirac. As one of them put it, while Mr Chirac was only an adversary of the Left, Mr Le Pen was its enemy. The French Left and centre adopted the sensible, classic strategic adage that the enemy's enemy is an ally. Result: 62 per cent of voters switched their votes to Jacques Chirac while only one per cent did so for Mr Le Pen.

In India, the fragmentation of the so-called secularists has helped religion-based parties to make inroads into the power structures of our polity. However, unlike in India, in France there is an effective mechanism for ensuring that the country does not slip into extremism — in the form of a second round of elections and the compulsion to obtain a minimum of 50 per cent of votes polled. The massive consensus in favour of Mr Chirac became possible because the constitution of fifth republic took into account the nature of factional politics and the history of coalition governance in France, and prescribed that the presidency should be based on an absolute electoral majority, which would necessitate consensus formation among different political parties. Even without the Le Pen factor, Jacques Chirac — with a 20 per cent popular vote in the first round — would have had to secure another 30 per cent to get elected. That would not have been possible without political give-and-take to gain additional support. This minimises the risk of ideological extremism in governance. Mere coalition politics without the electoral requirement of absolute majority of votes to get elected, leads to dominance of single constituency votebank politics and opportunistic and unstable coalitions based purely on division of political spoils. With a few fortunate exceptions, the evolution from factional politics to stable democratic governance still has a long way to go in most parts of the world. As we in India know only too well.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

MAY 2002

7 MAY 2002

Pro, anti-Le Pen rallies peaceful

By Vaiju Naravane

PARIS MAY 1. The spectre of the extreme right in France has shaken the French out of their apathy. Over a million people demonstrated in France today to protest against the xenophobic, extreme right wing National Front whose leader, Jean-Marie Le Pen, staged a stunning upset in the first round of presidential elections here on April 21.

Fears of street violence at May Day demonstrations proved to be unfounded and the two marches, one organised by Mr. Le Pen's extreme right National Front and the other by those opposed to him passed off peacefully.

Up to a million people demonstrated peacefully throughout France on Wednesday against Mr. Le Pen, by far the largest turnout yet against the ultra-nationalist politician since he qualified for Sunday's presidential runoff.

The marchers belonged to different trades unions, associations and political parties. The slogan today was "Together against Le Pen". Placards carried by the demonstrators read "No to racism, no to hate" and "The revolution has begun." A man had hung the sign "I eat fascists" around the neck of his pet dog.

At 4 p.m. local time, thousands of marchers, blocked in smaller back streets, were still trying to join the main demonstration as it crawled forward from the Place de la Republique to the Bastille. Police estimate there were 200,000 persons in Paris. The organisers claim there were at least twice that number.

The huge boulevard that takes cars five abreast was thick with people, chanting, singing, exchanging bouquets of lily of the valley, the customary greeting on May Day in France.

"I have always voted left and I have always taken part in the May Day celebrations, but this year it is special. I think all of France is here. We have heard the wake up call. Le Pen shall not be allowed to pass. There is no room for the likes of him here," said Mrs



UNFLAGGING ZEAL?: The French extreme-right National Front presidential candidate, Jean-Marie Le Pen, salutes supporters during a speech in Paris on Wednesday. — Reuters

Martine Couturier, a retired factory worker. Even before a massive demonstration in Paris reached its peak, turnout in dozens of cities across the rest of France had reached nearly 900,000, according to the Interior Ministry and media.

The National Front held its own rival demonstration with a wreath laying ceremony at the statue of Joan of Arc in Paris. Police say there were about 10,000 demonstrators though the National Front claims 100,000 persons joined in.

In a rambling speech that lasted an hour and a half and which was frequently interrupted by loud handclapping by his supporters, the 73 year old Mr Le Pen criticised his rival, incumbent conservative President, Jacques Chirac, who he said was guilty of corruption and dishonesty.

In an annual May Day event that took on added importance this year because of Mr. Le Pen's surprise candidacy, the candidate laid a bouquet of white flowers at a gilded

statue of Joan of Arc riding a horse and waving the national flag.

For Mr. Le Pen's National Front party, the 15th century peasant girl who led a series of victories against the English is a symbol of French resistance against foreign 'invaders'. Mr. Le Pen promised an "electoral earthquake" in the election's final round, which pits him against Mr. Chirac, who is expected to win easily. "The ground's going to crumble under their feet," he said.

Wednesday was clearly the climax of growing national protests against Mr. Le Pen. Some 3,500 police were deployed in Paris alone. Huge rallies were held in other French towns like Lyon, Bordeaux, Strasbourg, Grenoble and Toulouse.

In Paris, good-natured crowds shouting "Down with Le Pen!" packed the streets near the site of the former Bastille prison. Many were singing or playing musical instruments, and a few people handed out sing-along lyrics mocking the far-right leader.

Chirac names Rightist PM

Paris, May 6

JACQUES CHIRAC has named the conservative leader Jean-Pierre Raffarin as Interim Prime Minister after a landslide victory over the Far-Right Jean-Marie Le Pen.

Raffarin (53) will head a new conservative government that will serve for five weeks until next month's crucial parliamentary elections.

Chirac earlier promised that his government would respond to the nation's discontent, after voters from the Left and Right united to defeat Le Pen. Gaullist leader Chirac had won 82 per cent of the vote. Le Pen's 18 per cent meant he had won 5.8 million votes. It was the largest margin of victory ever achieved by a French President.

The turnout was 81 per cent, compared to a record low of 72 per cent in the first round. The higher turnout followed a two-week period of anti-Le Pen protests, which culminated on May 1 Lionel Jospin, the Socialist presidential candidate knocked out in the first round by Le Pen, formally resigned as Prime Minister this morning.

Chirac has accepted his resignation, and appointed Raffarin. Raffarin, a member of the Liberal Democracy party, used to be a marketing director and is largely unknown outside political circles. One of his visions for France is opening its markets to greater free trade. "I heard and



French President Jacques Chirac and his wife Bernadette greet supporters in the Place de la Republique in Paris after being re-elected President on Sunday. ^{AP}

understood your call that the republic lives, that the nation rallies, that politics change," Chirac said in his victory

speech, acknowledging discontent that led to an "exceptional" election. The Leftwing Liberation newspaper's front page

showed a photo of Le Pen retreating, under an enormous one-word headline: "Phew!"

Agencies

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

MAY 2002

TUESDAY, MAY 7, 2002

CELEBRATING A DEFEAT

France 49-10 7/5

A FRINGE CONTENDER in three previous elections who turned the main challenger this time, Jean-Marie Le Pen of the far right National Front has been defeated in the country's Presidential election and France can breathe easy. The resurgence of the far right has been halted. With parliamentary elections due next month, more battles lie ahead. But, for now, it is celebration time in Paris and three cheers for a defeat. The electoral shock of the first round when Mr. Le Pen outlasted and ousted the Prime Minister and socialist candidate, Lionel Jospin, so galvanised the country that the victory of the Gaullist incumbent, Jacques Chirac, became a foregone conclusion. Even the margin of victory became predictable in the aftermath of the first round shock. In a sublime irony, political leaders who till the week earlier were his bitterest of foes lined up to support Mr. Chirac. It was as if there was but one call: voters of France unite, you have nothing to lose but your extremist fringe. It was a very real threat, of a return to the fascist era of the last century. Mr. Chirac in the end found himself loaded with an embarrassment of political riches, thanks to Mr. Le Pen. A disaster has been averted but France will take long to live down the national shame of allowing an obnoxious personage like Mr. Le Pen to get so close to the Presidency.

The French election, if anything, is proof that voter apathy, an affliction that many democracies appear to be suffering from, can have disastrous consequences for the polity. Of two of the major factors that produced the shock in the first round a fortnight ago, voter apathy resulting from a blurred ideological setting ensured that the mainstream party candidates were denied their due support in the balloting. Another key factor in the first round was that like-minded parties such as the Greens and communists among the plethora

of candidates siphoned off votes from Mr. Jospin and paved the way for the emergence of Mr. Le Pen as the challenger. The second round voting, when the anti-Le Pen forces were mobilised fully to thwart him, was a more correct reflection of the support enjoyed by the National Front and its leader. The two-round election holds important lessons as the parties ready for the parliamentary battle. There will be keen interest around the world in the outcome of that election since, following political reforms, the French style cohabitation between President and Prime Minister is now co-terminus with the five-year life of parliament.

The immediate reality for the French is that a leader who had been branded a no-hoper and lacking in charisma will continue to lead the Republic for five more years and the "sick" man of Europe will continue to carry the label. France's voice of moderation in the councils of the Europe Union will remain muted even as the continent consolidates economic and political unity best symbolised by euro, the common currency. In the uneven Gaullist fight to defend the *exception française* (the French way of life), the odds will be weighted even more against the French. But as France and Europe assess the reasons for the rise and appeal of the extremist right — and left extremism as well, if one goes by the first round of the poll — the continent must brace itself for more after-shocks. Many European Union countries now record major mainstream electoral support for far right parties, the Dutch being the most probable new entrant. The reasons for the increasing acceptability of the far right parties must of course go beyond voter apathy and abstention. The Le Pen shock, much like the Jorg Haider bombshell did in Austria, can yet prove beneficial if History's lessons are remembered and retaught.

THE HINDU

7 MAY 2002

Chirac romps home on landslide verdict

Charles Bremner
The Times, London

PARIS, May 5. — Mr Jacques Chirac swept to landslide victory in Presidential elections tonight, winning 82 per cent of the mandate.

The turnout was massive, all eager to reject the Far Right doctrines of Mr Jean-Marie Le Pen, leader of the National Front.

Although Mr Le Pen's expected 18 per cent was the biggest ever presidential showing for an extremist candidate, the score showed he had failed to follow through on his success in the first electoral round on 21 April.

In contrast, the expected margin for Mr Chirac, achieved after an all-party uprising against Mr Le Pen, was by far the biggest since the creation of the Fifth Republic in 1958. The previous biggest win was by 57 per cent by Georges Pompidou in 1969. A relieved Mr

Chirac ordered his team to "show modesty in victory" because of the exceptional circumstances to his election to the Champs Elysee.

The 80 per cent turnout showed voters had heeded the call to stage a show of force to block the National Front leader after the surprise defeat of Mr Lionel Jospin, Socialist Prime Minister, in the first round. While Mr Le Pen, 73, hailed his performance as a victory in the face of what he called an establishment plot to destroy his candidature, the mainstream voiced relief after a two-week drama which had thrown French democracy into question. Mr Chirac, 69, was re-elected after an all-party front embracing most sections united behind his candidature.

With the poll regarded as a referendum on democracy, many voters made little effort to hide their discomfort at having to back Mr Chirac. Left-wing supporters

said they were performing their civic duty with heavy hearts, finding it hard to believe that they had to vote for a conservative politician.

Few voters followed Left suggestions to display their contempt for Mr Chirac by voting with gloves or clothes-pegs on their noses. In Villemagne, a Socialist-held town in the South-west, Left-wingers dressed in surgical coats offered to douse voters with mock disinfectant after they left the polling booths.

Mr Jospin, who leaves office tomorrow after five years in government, was one of only a handful of figures who did not explicitly call for a vote for Mr Chirac.

Pondicherry votes: More than 50 per cent of the 3,775 registered French voters in Pondicherry exercised their franchise today from the Union Territory, reports PTI. Of 1,888 votes cast, 14 were declared invalid.

Photographs on page 3

Massive turnout boosts Chirac chances

Paris, May 5

PRESIDENT JACQUES CHIRAC appeared poised to roll to victory in his bid for re-election on Sunday, after two weeks of protests over the candidacy of ultra-Right contender Jean-Marie Le Pen.

Voter turnout for the presidential run-off was on track to surpass the level of both the first round on April 21 — when a record-low 72 per cent cast ballots — and in the 1995 presidential run-off when 80 per cent of eligible voters went to the polls. In an early estimate, the Interior Ministry said Sunday's turnout was 82 per cent.

Many voters said they were eager to stop Le Pen, who favours expelling illegal immigrants and other draconian measures to combat rising crime, removing France from the European Union and giving the French preference in jobs, housing and health benefits.

Some Lettists, who sought to

shut Le Pen out of power, were so disgruntled about having to vote for the conservative Chirac that they put cloths on their noses and wore gloves to handle the ballot.

On Friday, France's Constitutional Council warned that anyone casting ballots with gloves — or guilty of other improper behaviour — could risk annulment of their votes.

A Chirac win appeared virtually certain, while newspapers of varying political stripes urged readers to back the incumbent against Le Pen.

Secretary of State Colin Powell, appearing on NBC's *Meet the Press*, said on Sunday of Le Pen's election chances: "I'm pleased that the polls suggest he will be overwhelmingly defeated by Mr Chirac."

A poll published on Friday in daily *Le Figaro* indicated that Chirac would win 75-82 per cent of the vote, compared with 18-25 per cent for Le Pen. The poll by the Ipsos agency surveyed 1,012

registered voters from April 30 to May 2.

Chirac cast his ballot on Sunday morning in the central Correze region, where he owns a chateau. Le Pen voted in the southwest Paris suburb of Saint-Cloud — home to his National Front party.

In brief comments to reporters, Le Pen said he was not worried about the outcome. "I'm expecting whatever they (the voters) give me," Le Pen said.

Christophe Chaveron, 34, who voted for the Green Party candidate on April 21, said he felt obliged to vote for Chirac even though the incumbent was not his first choice.

"It's clear that Le Pen must not win," he said as he left a polling station in a working-class neighbourhood of eastern Paris. "The fact that Le Pen has gotten this far shows that people don't understand. They think he's going to save us from public insecurity, but that's not true."

Others saw Le Pen as a vehicle



REUTERS PHOTO
French National Front leader Jean-Marie Le Pen leaves the voting booth after casting his ballot in the second round of France's Presidential elections in Paris on Sunday.

for change.

"I voted the same way I did in the first round: Le Pen," said re-

tired electrician Azdre Gleizol, 89. "There's no question whether Chirac will win — he will, but he

is just going to be a phantom, doing nothing president again."

AP

France
19-14
PRESIDENTIAL POLL / LE PEN MAY IMPROVE SHOWING

French vote in crucial round

By Vaiju Naravane

PARIS, MAY 5. Forty-one million French voters went to the polls today to choose a new President.

The choice is stark, with the incumbent Jacques Chirac, a conservative, pitted against the extreme right's Jean Marie Le Pen. Most people are likely to vote for the former in order to keep the xenophobic, extreme right out of the Elysee Palace.

A high abstention rate, a lacklustre campaign by the Socialist candidate and the fragmentation of the left wing votes between the moderate and extreme left resulted in the defeat of the Socialist Prime Minister, Lionel Jospin, at the hands of Mr. Le Pen. The extreme right won a record 20 per cent of the vote in the first round. Mr. Le Pen successfully played upon the public's fear of insecurity.

Although the turnout was higher today than for the first round, it compared unfavourably with earlier presidential elections. Only 26 per cent of the voters had exercised their franchise by mid-day, compared to almost 30 per cent at the same time in 1995.

Polling station No. 9 is located in a school in Paris' 15th district. Pascal turned 18 last August and this is his first vote. "I feel very guilty because I did not vote in the first round and look what happened. It made me realise that democracy is fragile and cannot be taken for granted. These past two weeks I've been out in the streets demonstrating with my friends. I want France to know and the world to know that the French are not a closed up, foreigner-hating people", he says.

The presiding officer is a kindly schoolteacher and he asks Pascal to return just before closing time at 8 p.m. to help count the votes. "I am asking young people to come and watch the electoral process. That is one way of getting them involved, of safeguarding democracy," he says.

Confidential opinion polls



A French voter is symbolically sprayed with a disinfectant in the southwestern town of Villemagne, France, after casting his vote in the second round of the presidential election on Sunday. It symbolises the voters' refusal of the political situation in which the Socialist Party presidential candidate, Lionel Jospin, was eliminated in the first round. — AFP

conducted this week indicate that Mr. Le Pen is likely to improve his first round score. "If Le Pen scores 30 per cent or more in the second round, France will be in big trouble. There are certain polls that indicate he might win as much as 30 to 35 per cent of the vote. If that were to happen it would become clear that the first round was not just a protest vote but a clear vote in favour of the xenophobic, anti-foreigner and ultra conservative policies advocated by the extreme right," said the political scientist, Olivier Duhamel.

Politicians across the board have called on voters to form a republican front against Mr. Le Pen. High abstention rates would work to the challenger's advantage. Mr. Chirac's first round score of less than 20 per cent was inglorious. A high score for Mr. Le Pen would further discredit the President and open the door to an uncertain result in the legislative elections scheduled for next June.

Reuters reports:

Mr. Le Pen, who has in recent days seemed resigned to defeat, was in breezy mood as he cast his vote in the west Paris suburb

where his National Front has its headquarters. "I make it a principle to be optimistic before one's fate is known," he told reporters.

"That way, if your optimism is not justified, you are unhappy for a short while but have at least been happy for a longer while."

Mr. Chirac, accompanied by his wife, Bernadette, posed for the cameras as he cast his vote in his family base in Correze, central France, but made no comment.

Mr. Le Pen's shock triumph galvanised opposition to him, driving voters of all political stripes into the streets to denounce his candidacy.

France's top newspapers took the unusual step of endorsing Mr. Chirac to block the xenophobic leader.

"Vote. Vote for the Republic, for democracy and against extremism. Vote for Chirac," urged the weekly *Le Journal du Dimanche*.

"The greater his (Chirac's) score, the more it is our victory — that of a France that wants to live in harmony." Many voters appeared to have taken that message to heart.

"Of course I voted for Chirac," said 26-year-old investment adviser as he left a polling station in Paris's trendy fourth arrondissement. "I tend more to the left, but it wasn't that difficult."

Commentators say today's vote could influence Mr. Chirac's choice of an interim Prime Minister to serve until the June 9 and 16 legislative elections for the 577-seat National Assembly.

The main favourites for the job are the provincial moderate, Jean-Pierre Raffarin, and the ambitious Gaullist, Nicolas Sarkozy.

Chirac set to become President again

PARIS, MAY 4. After an improbable Presidential campaign, the left-leaning Paris newspaper *Liberation* on Saturday summed up the feelings of millions of French voters with a front-page endorsement of the conservative incumbent, Jacques Chirac, over his ultra-right rival.

Mr. Chirac and the National Front leader, Jean-Marie Le Pen, battled down to the wire before the legally mandated campaign halt at midnight on Friday. Polls show Mr. Chirac will trounce Mr. Le Pen, though it will take a while for the French to get over the shock of the 2002 Presidential campaign.

On the eve of Sunday's runoff, *Liberation* ran a cover with an enormous one-word headline "Oui!" over a picture of a Chirac ballot entering a ballot box. The conservative daily *Le Figaro* featured a front-page editorial entitled "Chirac, of course." The electoral success of Mr. Le Pen, an anti-immigration candidate who once called the Nazi gas chambers "a detail of history," led to massive protests against him among people of many political tastes.

The end of campaigning on Friday marked the start of a political quiet period. In their last pitches to voters, Mr. Chirac urged France to reject the anti-foreigner views of his rival and Mr. Le Pen predicted there would be electoral fraud in Sunday's contest. The next official appearances of Mr. Chirac and Mr. Le Pen are not expected before early race results emerge at 8 p.m. local time (1800 GMT) on Sunday.

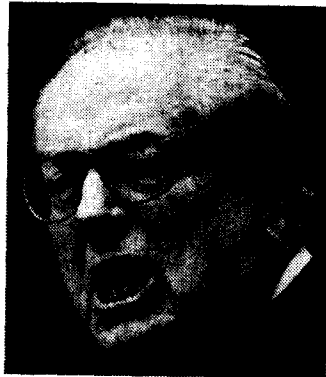
Polls show that the 69-year-old Chirac will sweep the runoff with overwhelming support from voters of all political stripes who want to reject Mr. Le Pen and his extremist platform. *Liberation*, in Saturday's editorial, urged voters to turn out massively for the vote "so that the percentage score of the leader of the National Front will be as low as possible."

A record 28 per cent of voters abstained in the first round on April 21. Many were uninspired by a race that polls had invariably projected to feature a runoff between two political veterans: Mr. Chirac and the Socialist Prime Minister, Lionel Jospin. The race has been one of the most divisive in modern French history. Mr. Le Pen's stunning qualification over Mr. Jospin in the first round vote on April 21 led to a wave of protests against him in the country.

On Friday, Mr. Chirac sounded a last-minute plea to left-leaning voters urging them to



Jacques Chirac



Le Pen

"stand in the way" of Mr. Le Pen, whom he called "an extremely dangerous" man. Mr. Le Pen, 73, says that if elected he will deport all illegal immigrants and assure French citizens priority in jobs, housing and social benefits. He wants to pull France out of the European Union and restore the franc as its currency.

In an interview with the American CBS evening news on Friday, he said his party "does not have anything in its programme which could be considered as fascist."

Ahead of Sunday's vote, Mr. Le Pen predicted foul play. "We are going to witness an enormous enterprise of fraud," Mr. Le Pen told a news conference on Friday, in remarks that appeared aimed at preparing his supporters for defeat.

As a purported example, Mr. Le Pen held up two ballots — one for Chirac and one for himself. The one for the President was slightly white, which Mr. Le Pen said was an effort to make voting for him less desirable — if only subliminally. Mr. Le Pen complained that his campaign posters were not being pinned up, that postal carriers were refusing to deliver his election manifesto to French households and that his supporters were being harassed. — AP

HD-10 2/5

Le Pen's rise

By Vaiju Naravane

IT IS a case of the "arroseur arrosé, the biter bit". That's what the Belgians, the Austrians and the Italians, the Danes, the Dutch and the Germans are saying, as France wakes up reeling from the outcome of the April 21 presidential elections. Almost a fifth of those who voted, gave their support to the extreme right wing leader, Jean Marie Le Pen, allowing him to score over 17 per cent of the vote and knock the socialists out of the second round.

Proud France that so haughtily gave condescending lessons in democracy to European countries where extreme right politicians have gained credence and popularity is today shamed and derided, jeered at by its European partners who find France's holier than thou attitude, righteous indignation and penchant for moralising almost impossible to bear. There has been much mulling over the Socialist Prime Minister, Lionel Jospin's defeat. Few disagree that he governed France with devotion and diligence over the past five years, introducing genuine reform, reducing unemployment by a million, extending healthcare and benefits to the poorest, privatising the public sector, reducing working hours, leaving the economy in a much healthier state than what he inherited.

Yet, he was spat upon, disavowed and punished in the cruellest way possible, for defeat at the hands of a communist, leftist or republican right winger would have been infinitely more honourable than the humiliation inflicted by a venom-spewing demagogue who advocates herding up and expelling immigrants, considers women to be little more than baby-making factories and dismisses the holocaust as "a detail of history".

Towards the end of the 1990s Europe was largely social democratic and the European Union was at pains to find the right balance between productivity, keeping the competitive edge in a market economy and social issues such as a redistribution of wealth to even out the imbalances pitting the haves against the have-nots.

Today there is a distinct veering to the right. Social democrats have lost

in Italy, Austria, Spain and Denmark, while Britain's Tony Blair and his New Labour can hardly be held up as a model of left wing policies. A more worrisome phenomenon is the strong showing by extreme-right parties such as Belgium's Vlaams Blok, Austria's FPÖ, Italy's Northern League and to some extent the reformed former fascist party Alleanza Nazionale, the People's Party in Denmark, the Truth and Life Party in Hungary, the Pim Fortuyn list in Holland, Germa-

gration, has become shall. French voters were so dd by the candidates' weary of inane sound bites, by thof any genuine public debates of importance, that 30 of them stayed away from thti-National Front demoin most major cities in Franca feeling of collective guilt e. However, 57 per cent of s-tioned say they are wout high crime rates and imm

France that so haughtily gave condescending lessons in democracy... is today shamed, derided, jeered at by its European partn

ny's Schill party and of course Mr. Le Pen's National Front. Evidently, local conditions contributing to the rise of these extremists differ from country to country. Many of those who vote extreme right are the unemployed, under-qualified who have been left by the wayside in the latest "survival of the fittest" push to adjust to brute market forces. And if there is one theme that has dominated extreme right wing rhetoric these past few years, it is immigration. Most right wing demagogues argue, and Mr. Le Pen is no exception, that high crime rates are a result of the high, unchecked immigration encouraged by the social democrats' habitually soft response to crime.

The French would like the world to believe that theirs is an open society whose philosophy is welcoming, even-handed and just. But today, with leaders such as Mr. Le Pen of the ultra-right, neo-fascist National Front egging them on, France is becoming withdrawn and xenophobic, even racist. In the climate of suspicion and hatred that prevails today, this dichotomy between the real and imagined France, between the France that wins universal approbation for its ideals and principles and the France that is intolerant and xenophobic, that wants to expel illegal immigrants and professes a policy of zero immi-

The majority of the Front in a generous mood. Thexious, worried, depressed air-ing. The future looks nd menacing with talk of thity and flexibility of the mee, which in simple terms mend to job security — for most, n-ing prospect. In this framid, the National Front's ideolec-ularly its claim that bootimigrants will create 6.5 mps, sounds both persuasive ac-tive. Mr. Le Pen paints a ing picture depicting hordes ni-grants descending on Franng the French, snatching thei-but statistics reveal otherwise, he past three years the numn-migrants coming legally ince has steadily declined and, an 50,000 immigrants came to n-try last year. France now rejper cent of all demands for posy-lum and the number of illn-igrants entering the countren reduced to a trickle.

Another interesting figur of unemployment. Joblessneog the immigrant community high as 20 per cent, a whole 10 pgh-er than the national averagper cent. The National Institut tics has also underlined only ten per cent are clandestinely are

main culprits are the French who do not like paying income tax or professional charges. (Only 50 per cent of the households in France pay income tax). The problems began in the 1950s when "Islamic immigration" first started. Since most of them came from France's colonies, there was an inbuilt attitude of contempt towards them. Most of these workers, unlike the majority of European immigrants, were illiterate and coloured. They were housed in shantytowns or *bidon villes* that gave way to housing estates on the periphery of large towns. France's North African immigrant slums were born. In the minds of many, these ghettos are synonymous with crime, drug abuse and trafficking, illiteracy, violence and Islamic fundamentalism.

Politicians have been heard complaining that "certain communities, particularly the North African Arabs, refuse to integrate". Perhaps they have not been encouraged to integrate and perhaps they cannot integrate in the way in which the French understand and use the word. For one thing they look, speak and behave differently from most Europeans. The French view of "integration" is also at the heart of this problem. France is so stuck in the rut of being French that any suggestion about introducing Arabic in schools for children whose parents speak the language at home is equated to "a threat to the French national identity".

The French used to tell a joke about Mr. Le Pen. It went like this: Mr. Le Pen becomes President and decides to expel all immigrants. An old Algerian who fought for the French against his own compatriots asks to stay on. Mr. Le Pen says: "Yes, on condition you can tell which of my two eyes is genuine and which is made of glass." The Algerian correctly points to Mr. Le Pen's left eye. "How did you guess?" Mr. Le Pen asks intrigued. "Mr. President," replies the Algerian, "It's the eye in which I detect a tiny glimmer of humanity." The French don't tell this more. It cuts too close to the

THE HINDO

2 MAY 2002

IMMEDIATE RELEASE FOR BUSINESS PURPOSES ONLY

France HQ-15

Polls give Chirac the lead

By Valju Naravane 15/9

PARIS, APRIL 14. Exactly a week before the first round of Presidential elections here, opinions polls are predicting that the incumbent President, Jacques Chirac, will emerge victorious in the second round run-off on May 5.

While it is a foregone conclusion that the second round run-off will be a fight to the finish between the conservative President, Jacques Chirac, and his Socialist Prime Minister, Lionel Jospin, never has the first round appeared so wide open. There have never been so many candidates in a French Presidential election — 16 this time, representing shades of political opinion from the extreme left to the extreme right.

There are at least four ecologists, the centre-left Noel Mamere and centre-right Corinne Lepage being the most prominent.

They are calling for stricter anti-pollution laws, controls on nuclear waste, automobiles, genetically modified foods and a host of other measures, including a writing off of Third World debt.

France's extreme right wing is present and flourishing, riding the crest of a popularity wave because of a record eight per cent increase in the crime rate and several highly visible attacks such as shootouts, acts of vandalism, armed robberies, prison escapes and assault against municipal officials, train and bus conductors. Jean Marie Le Pen, the now legendary leader of the extreme right



wing, anti-foreigner National Front and his former deputy turned rival, Bruno Megret, are expected to notch up record scores.

On the extreme left, several candidates, including Robert Hue, the leader of France's traditional communist party, the PCF, Arlette Laguiller of the Lutte Ouvriere (Worker's Struggle), contesting her fourth Presidential elections, and three others belonging to old-fashioned communist traditions, including Trotskyist are fighting for over 15 per cent of the vote. Arlette Laguiller, who has changed neither style nor substance since she entered politics over three decades ago, is leading this pack, tipped to win over 10 per cent of the vote.

Candidates from the traditional right, include former Ministers, Alain Madelin, and Francois Bayrou, both attempting to pose a puny challenge to the master of political manoeuvring, Jacques Chirac, the uncontested leader of the right-wing pack.

Somewhere between Mr. Chirac and Mr. Jospin is Jean Pierre Chevenement, the former Socialist Interior and Defence Minister who is now vacillating between right and left. Mr. Chevenement started out promisingly with support from those tired of seeing the same old faces dominating the political landscape. His republican rhetoric appeals to those disenchanted with European feder-

alism as preached by the two leading candidates.

The Socialist candidate, Mr. Jospin, after a promising start, has run into trouble. He has failed to send a clear message to his voters and lacks the warmth that characterises Mr. Chirac. Many see him as competent but heartless. Mr. Jospin has been badly hit by the spate of attacks against Jewish interests in France, presumably by members of the Arab community. Most centrist voters see him as being lax on crime and insecurity. The introduction of a 35-hour workweek now fails to evoke enthusiasm and voters see him as a dull plodder, not as an innovative man of ideas.

The first round will undoubtedly be a protest vote. Few are blind to the fact that Mr. Chirac faces allegations of financial wrongdoing dating back to the time when he was Mayor of Paris from 1974 to 1995. A satirical TV programme features a puppet called "supermenteur" (super liar). Dressed in a superman-like suit, supermenteur can lie his way out of any situation. In contrast, Mr. Jospin looks honest but drab. Being a loveable super liar is infinitely more desirable in the eyes of the voters to being honest but pedestrian.

The first round vote is likely to see the scores of the leading candidates decline as compared to previous elections. "I would be surprised if any of the top candidates manages to get over 18 or 19 per cent of the vote," says commentator Pierre Luc Seguillon.

HPD-15

French election turns abusive 1914

By Vaiju Naravane

PARIS, APRIL 18. The 90-second ad begins like a thriller: a hand slowly turning a doorknob, opening a door. Arab music blasts out of the room. The camera follows the footsteps of the extreme-right candidate, Bruno Megret, up to the music console. A click of the remote and the station now plays classical music. Mr. Megret slides into an armchair, beatitude writ large on his face, as a solemn voice proclaims: "Let's be master of our own home with Bruno Megret."

In another clip, Mr. Megret, a small, ferret-faced man with rodent teeth, brutally throws out a foreigner trying to jump the queue to the accompanying announcement: "The French come first."

With over a third of France's electorate of 40 million still undecided about their choice of candidate, the presidential campaign is turning increasingly spiteful, malicious, even abusive. The subliminal message delivered by the campaign clips used by both Mr. Megret and his former chief and rival, Jean Marie Le Pen, is that foreigners are uncouth, dirty queue-jumpers who play loud music and

have no place in civilised France.

"The single most important issue in this campaign is that of crime and insecurity. From there, it is just one step away to racism. It's like the blacks in America. An unnaturally high percentage of prisoners in France come from the North African Arab community. Why could Mr. Megret's campaign managers not have used Chinese or Indian music? Because they wanted to point fingers at the Arabs whom they see as a threat. I clearly see racism in France growing as a result of this campaign," sociologist Jean Grosjean told *The Hindu*.

The fact that Arab youths are the prime suspects in a series of attacks against France's Jewish community has further hardened the case. The attacks stem from a sense of solidarity with the Palestinians — a feeling that finds its roots as much in a commonality of origin, religion and language as in the French Arab's sense of isolation from mainstream French life. Many of France's four million-plus North African Arabs live in high-rise ghettos built in the late 1950s and '60s near the industrial sites where Arab immigrants worked. These infamous

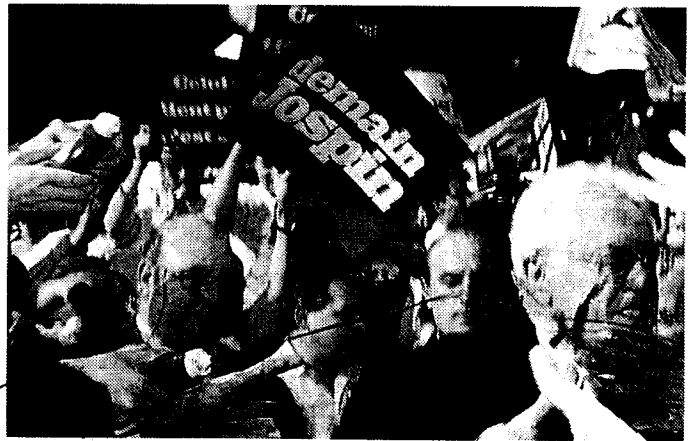
"cites" have become fertile ground for juvenile delinquency, drug trafficking and Islamic fundamentalism.

The French President, Jacques Chirac, in his electoral advert, also talks about a "system of impunity" that must be broken. Mr. Le Pen's clip paints a catastrophic scenario of "fear over the city", with pensioners "agonising over the safety of their pensions".

Over the past couple of weeks, opinion polls have given the conservative Mr. Chirac a

slim lead over his Socialist Prime Minister, Lionel Jospin. Political pundits say the two men are really running neck-and-neck, but that their combined score is bound to be less than fifty per cent — perhaps even less than 40 per cent — in next Sunday's first-round election. There are 16 candidates in the fray, the most for any French presidential election since the present Constitution was adopted in 1958.

Mr. Le Pen's extreme right-wing supporters are jubilant.



An activist spraying tomato ketchup on the French Prime Minister and socialist presidential candidate, Lionel Jospin, at a campaign rally in Rennes on Wednesday. — Reuters

19 Apr 2000

THE HINDU

Undecided voters may spring a few surprises

By Vaiju Naravane

PARIS, APRIL 20. Twenty-four hours before polling stations open, Jean-Louis, 44, is still agonising over his choice of candidate in the first round of the French Presidential poll on Sunday.

"I am a schoolteacher and I have always held the ideals of the Republic, Liberty, Equality Fraternity in great esteem. I have tried to transmit this to the students I have taught. The accent on equality and fraternity has led me to vote Left. But this time, I admit I am stumped. Sixteen candidates, no real debate over issues, a very poor performance by most of our leaders — despite the number of contestants, the choice is poor and I am flummoxed. I think I shall vote for the Greens in the first round and for the Socialists in the second," he says.

Marie-Chantal Dellanoy, a 50-year-old housewife, is no happier. Coming from a deeply religious family she has always voted for the Right, demonstrating in favour of state support for religious schools, for the right of employers to hire

and fire employees. This time around she too is stumped. "We all know that Jacques Chirac is less than honest, to put it mildly. I could never vote for the extreme right wing with their anti-foreigner bias. For me, God created all men equal and it is our duty to help the poor. The other candidates on the right are too soft or too radical. There are too many candidates and they are all mediocre. I think I shall vote for

the former Education Minister, Francois Bayrou, in the first round and for Chirac in the second," she says.

With over a third of the electorate still undecided, the first round of the French Presidential elections on Sunday could yet yield a few surprises.

The latest opinion polls predict a second-round photo finish between the incumbent Conservative President, Jacques Chirac, and his nearest rival, the outgoing Socialist Prime Minister, Lionel Jospin. A record 16 candidates are in the fray, representing opinion ranging from the extreme left to the extreme right, with a dotting of cen-

trists, ecologists both from the Left and the Right, ultra-liberals and anti-globalisation die-hards.

No candidate is likely to win over 21 per cent of the vote in the first round. The anti-foreigner National Front candidate, Jean Marie Le Pen, whose vigorous campaign equating high crime rates with the presence of foreigners has found favour with the working classes, is tipped to win 14 per cent of the vote.

The campaign has been singularly dull with a total absence of genuine debate or issues. European construction in which France has played a major role is entirely absent. Every candidate has promised to reduce taxes, improve health care and invest in education. The single dominant theme has been curbing crime and insecurity.

Strict electoral laws oblige the media to devote equal time and space to each candidate and this has made for fragmented reporting. The candidates have declined to take part in televised debates. "The absence of debate has left many people confused. Previously you had an hour-

long debate between the two leading candidates and you got a good idea of their personalities, the issues and their policies. Now there is no face-to-face combat.

Only sneaky snide remarks, indirect and indecent attacks made during election meetings," says a disgusted Jean-Louis.

Mr. Chirac, 69, has the gift of the gab, loves meeting people and is an effective campaigner. Mr. Jospin, uncomfortable in public and clearly lacking the common touch, has run an incoherent, defensive campaign that has turned many voters off.

For the past five years, the two men have been locked into a unique power-sharing exercise known in France as "cohabitation" under which the President and Prime Minister belong to opposing political families. Political observers say the last, prolonged bout of cohabitation has left Mr. Chirac a weakened President. They feel the real indication of where France is heading will come next June when the French vote for a new parliament.

FRENCH ELECTIONS — I

Green

21 APR 2002

First round witnesses voter apathy

By Vajju Naravane
PARIS, APRIL 21. Voter apathy marked the first round of the French presidential poll here, with less than 22 per cent of France's 40 million voters having cast their ballot at 3:00 p.m., just three hours before polling stations were to close.

While electoral officers expect a last-minute surge as polls close, they fear turnout will prove to be the lowest for a presidential vote since the Fifth Republic was constituted in 1958 by Charles de Gaulle. Some commentators said abstention rates could be as high as 35 per cent.

"It's a beautiful day, some parts of the country are in the

midst of school holidays, there are too many candidates, all uninspiring, debate has been non-existent and we're bound to see a repeat second-round scenario

FRENCH ELECTIONS — II

of the duel between Chirac and Jospin in 1995. So many reasons for a poor turnout," said journalist Alain Guede.

Although 16 candidates are in the fray for the first round, all opinion polls point to a second-round run-off between the Conservative Gaullist President, Jacques Chirac, and his Socialist Prime Minister, Lionel Jospin; the two also faced each other in the last presidential poll, held in 1995. Two years later, when Mr.

Chirac ill-advisedly dissolved Parliament and called for fresh elections, a left-wing coalition made up of Socialists, Communists, Greens and other leftist

parties was fervently voted into power. For the past five years, the two rivals have been locked into an uncomfortable, often hostile political power-sharing exercise known here as co-habitation.

Mr. Chirac is expected to emerge the frontrunner today, followed by Mr. Jospin. But neither candidate is expected to garner more than 22 per cent of the votes cast — a severe rebuke from voters disappointed with

both man's performance. "Just calculate. Suppose only 40 per cent of the electorate votes, that is to say there are only 16 million votes cast. Of these, Mr. Chirac wins 22 per cent, or about 3.5 million votes, while Mr. Jospin gets less than 3 million votes. What a slap in the face. How can either of these candidates confidently say they represent the French? This is a disavowal of their policies and their leadership," complains Mr. Guede.

Several small extreme candidates are expected to mop up votes from the leaders. The extreme right-wing leader, Jean-Marie Le Pen, is expected to come in third, with over 13 per cent of the vote.

FRANCE / JOSPIN SAYS HE IS QUITTING POLITICS

Jean-Marie Le Pen does a Haider

By Vaiju Naravane

PARIS, APRIL 22. France is stunned, in a state of profound shock. The emergence of the xenophobic and anti-Jewish extreme right-wing National Front leader, Jean-Marie Le Pen, as the country's second most popular politician has caused a political earthquake here.

Mr. Le Pen, who beat the Socialist Prime Minister, Lionel Jospin, to second place behind the incumbent Gaullist President, Jacques Chirac, will now be in the second round run-off on May 5. Mr. Chirac's score, a little less than 20 per cent of the votes cast is the lowest ever for a first round topper. A mere two percentage points separate him from Mr. Le Pen who polled 17.2 per cent of the vote.

Shortly after the results were announced, Mr. Jospin who led a lacklustre, uninspiring and incoherent campaign declared he was retiring from public life, leaving the Socialists without an effective leadership in the parliamentary elections slated for mid June.

Mr. Le Pen cleverly exploited the sense of disaffection present among working class people who feel let down by the political establishment. Playing on fear, he successfully raised the bogey of immigrant Arab criminality. The shock waves reverberated across Europe and newspapers were unanimous in describing the event as an earthquake. Not one, not the candidates, nor the media, the polling institutes or political commentators had ever imagined such a scenario. Opinion polls had indicated in recent weeks that Mr. Le Pen's popularity was on the rise but they consistently and confidently predicted a second round run off between Mr. Chirac

and Mr. Jospin.

As the results came in and Mr. Le Pen's face showed up on screens next to Mr. Chirac's, there were scenes of grief and shock at Mr. Jospin's campaign headquarters in Paris. Leftists staged a spontaneous protest at the Place de la Bastille in the capital with an estimated 20,000 persons gathering where the French Revolution started in 1789. Police fired teargas shells to disperse a crowd of violent youth at the Place de la Concorde in Paris. Some of the protesters smashed shop windows, including those of the famous Parisian restaurant, Maxim's.

"Ashamed and disheartened is how I feel today. This has come about because of a

FRENCH ELECTIONS — III

strange coming together of factors. Where does one begin to apportion blame? The politicians, of course, for being so far removed from the electorate, for their smug certainty; but also the polling institutes who systematically led the media to project a traditional left versus right duel as a foregone conclusion. We must also blame the protest voters who contributed to the fragmentation of the vote and the abstentionists who shirked their duty, opening the way for this disaster," political scientist Olivier Duhamel told *The Hindu*.

Although the traditional leftist vote was split between at least eight candidates, the combined Left won only 27 per cent of the vote.

The traditional Right fared only marginally better with 31 per cent of the vote. The extreme Right, between Mr. Le Pen and his former deputy and current rival, Bruno Me-

gret, has emerged the clear victor, with over 20 per cent. The French communist party was decimated, scoring less than four per cent. This vote signifies a radicalisation of politics in France as many left-wing voters abandoned their traditional base to vote for the anti-European, anti free market message of the former Interior Minister, Jean Pierre Chevenement and the anti-globalisation message of Trotskyists like Arlette Laguiller and Olivier Besancenot who scored over 10 per cent.

Left-wing leaders called on the population to vote for Mr. Chirac in the second round to keep the extreme right out.

The real test will come in the legislative elections in June when there are bound to be triangular contests in the first round. The votes of National Front candidates will be a deciding factor.

These results are being seen as a source of national shame. France was a fierce advocate of diplomatic sanctions against Austria when the extreme right-wing Freedom Party joined the Government there a couple of years ago.

More recently, France has been critical of Silvio Berlusconi for his pact with the Alleanza Nazionale, the reformed former Italian Fascist party and the xenophobic anti-foreigner Northern League.

The French derided Italian voters for choosing Mr. Berlusconi who has several cases of financial irregularity pending against him.

The French now have done no better. Mr. Chirac has used his presidential immunity to shield himself from investigations into a string of alleged corruption charges.

(Concluded)

THE HINDU

2 3 APR 2007

Backlash against Le Pen spreads

FROM PAUL HOLMES

Paris, April 24 (Reuters): France's presidential race took on the air of a referendum against the far-Right today and spread abroad as opponents of Jean-Marie Le Pen disrupted his visit to Brussels to deliver an anti-Europe message.

French Left-wing politicians, students and even the French Scout movement joined a tidal wave of support for conservative incumbent Jacques Chirac in the campaign to inflict a crushing defeat on anti-immigrant leader Le Pen on May 5.

"We didn't survive AIDS until now to see this," the radical AIDS group Act Up declared. "Act Up has decided to call to vote Chirac on May 5, with death in its soul."

Other unlikely allies rallying to the President included pro-

Communist CGT union, satirical weekly *Le Canard Enchaîné*, a gay pride group and Eric Halphen, a crusading magistrate who made his name investigating sleaze charges against Chirac.

"An anti-Le Pen referendum — that's what it's all about," Socialist finance minister Laurent Fabius told RTL radio.

A member of the European Parliament despite his distaste for a bloc he says has enslaved France, Le Pen travelled to Brussels today on his first trip abroad since Sunday's poll.

But he abandoned a news conference to discuss policy pledges including a referendum on withdrawing France from the 15-nation bloc after demonstrators wielding "Stop the Nazis" placards entered the room set aside for the meeting.

"We planned a press confer-

ence not a political meeting organised by supporters of Jacques Chirac," said Jean-Claude Martinez, spokesman for Le Pen's National Front party at the parliament.

Le Pen, a boisterous former paratrooper who wants to deport immigrants and restore the death penalty, stunned Europe on Sunday by placing just behind Chirac in the first round with nearly 17 per cent of votes, qualifying for the runoff.

Few in Brussels have much sympathy for a man who once dismissed the Nazi gas chambers as a detail of history.

"Le Pen is a parasite on the democracy of the European Parliament," said British Labour MEP Simon Murphy, noting that the National Front party leader had been barred from the assembly in the past for assaulting a woman politician.

"We have lifted Le Pen's immunity from prosecution three times, we've thrown him out once. We should never have let him back in," Murphy said in a statement.

Le Pen capitalised on a mood of deep public disaffection with mainstream politics after five years of the Chirac-Jospin tandem in a campaign that blamed crime on immigration.

Students speak out

Incensed by Le Pen's showing, some 200,000 protesters, many of them students, have taken to the streets of Paris and provincial France since Sunday night in sometimes violent demonstrations chanting "Vote the crook, not the fascist!"

The French section of human rights group Amnesty International issued a statement today rejecting Le Pen's policy of

"national preference" that would favour French over foreigners for jobs, welfare and housing aid. Prominent French bishops also came forward to condemn Le Pen individually amid criticism by the the French Bishops' Conference calling on the French to "discern the fundamental values of democracy" had been too weak.

"Since the first round, I have said clearly the National Front is based on a culture which is contrary to the spirit of Christianity," Olivier de Berranger, bishop in the racially-mixed Paris suburb of Saint-Denis said. Student groups have called more protests for Saturday. Trades unions have appealed for massive anti-National Front rallies on May 1, Labour Day in Europe, when Le Pen has also urged his supporters to turn out in force.



Bottles of French wine are emptied into a garbage bin at a Tel Aviv restaurant in protest against the results of the first round of French presidential elections. (AFP)

round presidential election. — AFP

FRANCE / LE PEN SPELLS GOALS

A shocked nation rues vote

France
H.D.-14
24/4

PARIS, APRIL 23 France's extreme right-wing leader, Jean Marie Le Pen, flush from the humiliating defeat he inflicted on the outgoing Prime Minister whom he edged out of the second round of the Presidential poll said he would take measures to end immigration. He also appealed for support from opponents of the European Union.

"My first priority shall be the recovery of French liberty and the exit of France from the Europe of Maastricht," Mr. Le Pen declared. "I am not an enemy of Europe. I am a partisan of a Europe of nations, a Europe of homelands, but I am a determined adversary of a supranational, federal, federalising Europe," he said. The 1992 European treaty signed in the Dutch town of Maastricht calls for greater European integration. The French voted for the treaty by a very narrow margin.

Mr. Le Pen also touched upon immigration, a subject he said was taboo in France. "If we do not stop this surge in foreign immigration, the country will be submerged and disappear. We cannot accept this," Mr. Le Pen said.

France was stunned by Sunday night's first round results that placed Mr. Le Pen against the Gaullist incumbent President, Jacques Chirac, in the second round run off scheduled for May 5. As realisation dawns of the enormity of what has happened, several spontaneous demonstrations have been organised. High school students in many large and small towns across France quit their classes to demonstrate. In several cities, youths clashed with the police.

Young people of colour, mostly from Africa or north African-Arab nations whose parents came here as immi-

grants say they feel even more vulnerable now. "Quite a few of those who have voted Le Pen have had no contact with foreigners. These are people living in small villages and communes in the countryside. They were terribly affected by the media blitz on insecurity and crime and Mr. Chirac's exploitation of that issue," said Selim, a student at the Sorbonne whose parents are from Tunisia.

"There is a terrible feeling of collective guilt and sentences tend to begin with the words 'If only...' If only we had returned from holiday in time to vote, if only the opinion polls had predicted correctly, if only we had not voted for extreme Left candidates in protest, if only the leftist parties had fielded fewer candidates, if only the media had not harped on insecurity... This feeling of collective guilt is going to give Jacques Chirac a thundering electoral victory, the biggest ever in the history of France.

By voting Le Pen, people have made sure that a corrupt, worn out and dishonest politician is voted in with a landslide. It like slamming shut the stable door after the horse has bolted," said banker Olivier Pisano, who is cursing himself for having voted Jean Pierre Chevènement.

Closed door meetings on the strategy to adopt for the June legislative elections have already begun. Mr. Chirac would favour a single right-wing party around him.

The Socialists, the Greens, the communists and independent leftists are yet unsure what they wish to do.

The heartburn is all the greater since it became known that the Socialist Prime Minister, Lionel Jospin, who announced his retirement from public life, lost the election by less than 195,000 votes.

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THE HINDU

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 24, 2002

WAKE-UP CALL IN FRANCE

HQ-10
24/4

THE SHOCK WAVES from the verdict in Sunday's first round of the French Presidential election will continue to be felt on the continent and beyond for a long time. The immediate fallout of the upset victory scored by the far right candidate, Jean-Marie Le Pen, is the eclipse of the Socialist Prime Minister, Lionel Jospin, who has announced that he is bowing out of politics altogether. In the longer term, the political after-shocks can be damaging to the fabric of the society. The eruption of popular anger, shame and revulsion at Sunday's result signals that there will be better mobilisation of political forces during the second round run-off. Mr. Le Pen will most certainly be stopped on May 5 by the incumbent Gaullist war-horse, Jacques Chirac. But Mr. Jospin's resignation from the Socialist Party will leave the left political forces without an effective leader during crucial parliamentary elections due in June. This can prove a crippling handicap in the three-way battle for the French Parliament between the Gaullists, Socialists and the National Front. The danger is that the political vacuum created by the fall of Mr. Jospin, who was hoping to succeed to the throne of Charles de Gaulle, will be sought to be filled by the xenophobic, anti-Semitic group led by Mr. Le Pen.

The increasing popular appeal of the National Front confirms a clear continent-wide shift to the political right, not in the least spurred by the ascendancy of the Republican party in the U.S. Much of western Europe — Austria, Germany, Italy, Portugal — has voted rightist parties to power in recent elections. Not all of them are xenophobic but many will not hesitate to raise the foreigner bogey to garner public support or boost sagging morale. Apart from voter apathy, which is proving a deep-rooted affliction of most democracies, there are other fac-

tors which have facilitated the emergence of fascist forces in Europe. One direct consequence: the Left is on the run, still to recover from the shocking collapse of the Soviet Union. In fact, Europe is fast seeing the erosion of the progressive liberalism that characterised politics in the mid-20th century. Founded and nurtured on the Left Bank of the Seine, the liberal spirit was forged in the fire of the fascism of Spain's Franco, Germany's Hitler and Italy's Mussolini. A half century later, today, the socialist in the mother country lies bruised and broken.

As the traditional political parties in France begin to decipher the results, it must be tempting to conclude that Sunday's vote was Europe's slow but unambiguous answer to September 11. Mr. Le Pen played on voters' insecurity about immigration, mostly Arab, and attempted to whip up anti-Semitism, both favourite themes with the fascist groups that vociferously support him. There have been attacks on Muslim immigrants in Paris and, during the run-up to the current election, synagogues in southern French cities were targeted. These were attempts by fringe groups impatient with the record of France, which has the largest Jewish and Muslim communities in Europe. The country is paying a heavy price for the failure of the mainstream parties to counter these fascist tendencies with clear ideological programmes. Fascism is like the plague bacillus which never dies or disappears for good, wrote Nobel laureate Albert Camus adding, it may lie dormant for some time before one day deciding to rouse up its rats again. Sunday's vote is proof that Europe's premier nation is yet to be rid of that political plague. Certainly men like Mr. Le Pen should not be allowed to devastate the social stability of France, the most liberal and pluralistic nation in Europe.

24 APR 2002

THE LONDON

French politicians rally behind Chirac

Paris, April 23

FRENCH POLITICAL leaders buried their differences today in a bid to present a united front against Jean-Marie Le Pen, the rightist leader whose qualification for the second round of the presidential election has convulsed the country.

Dominique Strauss-Kahn, a Socialist and former Finance Minister, said he would support the conservative president, Jacques Chirac, in the second round because "It is the honour of our country that is at stake."

But Le Pen immediately demonstrated a shrewd appreciation of the forces that brought him success. He declared that he was "the candidate of the French people against the candidate of the system." He added, "We are witnessing the toppling of a decadent, corrupt and ossified political system."

French politics have proved extraordinarily static in recent years even as the country has changed. There is little question that the prospect of more of the same led the French electorate to vote for Le Pen and relegate Lionel Jospin, the Socialist prime minister, to third place and elimination.

"This vote is the first to sanction the political class for not listening," said Laurence

Parisot, of the IFOP polling institute.

Le Pen's success pointed to significant shifts in the French and European political scenes that suggest it would be wrong to dismiss his qualification for the second round as a mere anomaly, analysts and pollsters said.

Across Europe, several trends have buoyed candidates of the right: a strong reaction to rising crime in the form of a call for more "law and order," a growing uneasiness over high immigration, and a thirst for a different message among voters who feel that traditional parties have moved toward an indistinguishable center.

"Anyone who speaks out against excessive and uncontrolled immigration or the abuse of asylum laws in the context of center-right politics is immediately branded an extremist," said Jörg Haider, the Austrian politician whose success provoked French ire two years ago.

Le Pen, a former paratrooper who has run for president thrice before and has always been popular with the elderly, gained support across the country and with all age groups, particularly among low-income voters who had supported the Communist Party in the past.

He carried several regions in

the industrial north, eastern parts of the country where unemployment is relatively high and the southern region of Languedoc-Roussillon. Chirac carried the center and west of the country, including Paris. Signs of shame were everywhere in France today. "NO" was the headline on the front page of the leftist newspaper *Libération*, a terse summary of the widespread incredulity that a man whose politics have been consistently marked by anti-immigrant bigotry could do so well.

Like the US, France feels that its values hold a universal message for mankind. It has been quick in recent years to hand out moral lessons to other European nations, like Austria, that have voted heavily for rightist candidates, making its sense of humiliation today that much harder to bear.

Le Monde published a column entitled simply "The Wound." Written by its publisher, Jean-Marie Colombani, it said: "France is wounded. And, for many of the French, humiliated."

Students marched out of classrooms to hold rallies against Le Pen, chanting slogans equating him with Hitler and calling his National Front a fascist organisation.

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France rallies call for Le Pen defeat

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FROM BRIAN LOVE

Paris, April 27 (Reuters): Thousands took to the streets of Paris today to urge fellow French voters to give far-Right leader Jean-Marie Le Pen a resounding rebuff in the May 5 presidential election runoff.

The march through the French capital and rallies in 30 other French towns came as Le Pen brushed off a new opinion poll which forecast that President Jacques Chirac would trounce him in the second round by taking a landslide 81 per cent of the vote. Wielding banners proclaiming "Nowhere for Nazis" and "We're Stronger than Hatred", more than 10,000 students, trade unionists and anti-racist activists set off from Paris' Place de la Republique towards the nearby Place de la Bastille.

Marches around the country this week have drawn up to 350,000 protesters a day. Two thousand police were deployed in the capital alone today after some isolated incidents of violence were recorded in Paris and elsewhere.

But the police presence remained discreet and eyewitnesses described the mood of the crowd as festive. Bands played rock music and a fusion of North



Demonstrators hold anti-Le Pen posters during a protest march in Madrid. (Reuters)

African and Western pop known in France as "rai".

"For we who lived through the age of darkness this is critical," said Robert Creange, head of the French Federation of World War II deportees, a group for victims of deportation to concentration camps during the Nazi occupation of France.

"We are putting our faith in the youth of France," he said as the march, which included a

smattering of celebrities such as actress Jane Birkin, moved off.

Environment minister and Green Party member Yves Cochet also took part in the march, defying an appeal by defeated Socialist Prime Minister Lionel Jospin for his government not to take to the streets.

Other prominent members of Jospin's Socialist party were also spotted on the march.