

Bus hijackers demand flight to Russia

Agencies

GERAKAS (Greece), Dec. 15. — A bus with 26 people on board was hijacked early today in an Athens suburb by two armed men demanding to be flown back to Russia, police and government officials said.

The two men, armed with rifles, boarded the bus in the early hours, firing shots into its roof and halting the vehicle on a thoroughfare in the suburb of Gerakas, where police surrounded it.

Government officials would not confirm reports that the men, identified by sources in the Athens prosecutor's office as Albanians with criminal records in Greece, were demanding euro1 million (\$1.33 million). They said their initial demand was for a driver to take them to the airport. Premier Costas Caramanlis delayed a trip tomorrow to a EU summit in Brussels in order to deal with the crisis, his spokesperson said.

The hijackers have released 17 hostages so far. According to police figures, six hostages were still on the orange-and-blue bus.

The released hostages were taken to a nearby police command centre.

Authorities had initially said that 26 people were taken hostage when two armed men stormed the bus at 5.45 a.m. (9.15 a.m. IST). The private radio station Alpha said someone claiming to be one of the hostage-takers had



A hostage is released from the hijacked public bus as police special forces vehicles surround it near Athens on Wednesday. — AFP

called it via a mobile phone taken from a woman passenger on the bus. The caller, who said his name was Hassan, demanded that police move away from the vehicle so it could be driven to the airport, located about 15 km away, the radio said.

A police officer said the men were Russians and wanted to fly back to their country and, were demanding that a driver board the bus to drive it to the airport. The bus driver and ticket collector, plus one woman passenger, had managed to escape from the vehicle when the hijacking took place.

Bus company president Mr Nikos Koutsogiorgas said no one had been injured and police negotiators were talking with the hostage-takers to try to end the drama. It was unclear what motivated the two men to hijack the bus.

Police said they had provided the men with a mobile telephone to maintain contact. One of the hostages reached on his mobile phone by local media said the hijackers had a sawn-off shotgun, a pistol and a bag filled with grenades. The hostage takers had drawn the curtains and were occasionally firing in the air from its windows.

The bus was running a night service from the city of Marathon to Athens. The area was cordoned off by police, while snipers and special forces surrounded the vehicle and ambulances stood by.

The incident marked the fourth such hostage-taking in Greece in the last five years. In May and July 1999, two similar incidents took place with the Albanian hostage-takers at the time demanding money and safe passage to their country.

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THE STATESMAN
THE STATESMAN

Europe's far-Right parties plan coalition

440-12
11/12
By Ian Traynor

VIENNA, DEC. 10. Europe's anti-immigrant parties should unite in a new pan-European movement under the leadership of the Austrian politician, Jorg Haider, a leading Belgian hardliner says in an interview published today.

Filip DeWinter, the leader of the extreme Flemish separatist party in Belgium, said moves were afoot to form a cross-border, extreme Right grouping in the European Parliament, pooling Mr Haider's Freedom Party, France's National Front, his own Vlaams Belang, the Dutch New Right Party and Italy's Northern League.

The coalition should run on a single platform in the next European

elections in 2009, Mr DeWinter told the Vienna weekly magazine, *News*. Mr DeWinter, the head of the renamed Vlaams Blok which was branded a racist organisation last month by Belgium's Supreme Court and could have been banned had it not relabelled, said he had been discussing the move with Mr Haider.

One of Mr Haider's key lieutenants, Andreas Molzer, had a meeting in Antwerp last week with likeminded figures from Belgium, the Netherlands, France and Italy. Mr Molzer, an early strategist behind Mr Haider's rise in Austria, is now a Member of European Parliament for Mr Haider's Freedom Party. — ©Guardian Newspapers Limited 2004

Germany talks tough, France holds fire Saddam aides to face trial

Paris, Dec. 10 (Reuters): France and Germany responded defiantly today to a US decision to bar their firms from competing for prime contracts to rebuild Iraq, a move which could open a new rift in troubled transatlantic relations.

The US unveiled plans yesterday to limit competition for 26 reconstruction contracts in Iraq worth up to \$18.6 billion, excluding countries such as Germany, France and Russia which opposed the war.

France said it would study whether the US move was legal and Germany said it could not accept the American decision.

"That would not be acceptable for the German government. And it wouldn't be in line with the spirit of looking to the future together and not into the past," a spokesman for German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder said in Berlin.

He did not say what action Germany might take.

In an apparent effort not to sharpen the brewing diplomatic row with Washington, President Jacques Chirac, foreign minister Dominique de Villepin and other ministers avoided re-

porters' questions after a cabinet meeting.

But a foreign ministry spokesman said France and its partners — an apparent reference to Germany — were studying the legality of the US decision. "We do not wish to comment at this stage," foreign ministry spokesman Hervé Ladsous said in a statement.

"We are studying the compatibility of these decisions with international competition law together with our partners that are involved, notably in the European Union and the European Commission," he said, giving no other details.

In a policy document released yesterday, US deputy defence secretary Paul Wolfowitz cited national security reasons for limiting competition for the prime contracts in Iraq. Firms from other countries can compete for sub-contracts.

The decision should go some way to placating countries such as Britain, Italy and Spain which provided troops to Iraq but whose firms were excluded from deals that went to US firms.

The contracts cover electricity, communications, public

buildings, transport, public works, security and justice. The decision is a new irritant in the relationship between the US and other European countries, already dogged by differences over trade, defence and other issues.

US President George W. Bush eased some of the friction last week by scrapping controversial steel duties he had imposed to protect US producers, prompting the EU to say it would no longer strike back with retaliatory sanctions.

But mistrust remains on other trade issues and the creation of a European Union defence force to operate independently of Nato.

France and Germany want the EU force to have a military headquarters independent of Nato. Washington opposes this.

Schroeder has recently visited the US twice in an effort to repair political and business ties with Washington.

US relations with France, which has a vision of a "multipolar" world which appears to run counter to the US role as the world's only superpower, remain troubled.

Those relations could be fur-

ther strained by a fraud case involving the acquisition by French bank Credit Lyonnais of the assets of failed US insurance company Executive Life in 1991.

Under US law at the time, banks could not own insurers, and under state law foreign governments were banned from owning California insurers. Credit Lyonnais was owned by the French government at the time of the Executive Life acquisition.

Failure to reach a settlement could push France into a long and costly court battle and sour ties with the United States.

A US military transport plane was forced to return to Baghdad's international airport after an explosion in one of its engines shortly after takeoff, the US military said today.

A spokeswoman at the airport said the cause of the incident yesterday was under investigation.

"Yesterday morning at 0100 GMT a C-17 plane declared an in-flight emergency shortly after takeoff. There was an explosion in one of its engines, but it returned safely," said the spokeswoman.



French President Jacques Chirac (right) with foreign minister Dominique de Villepin after their cabinet meeting on Wednesday. (AFP)

Baghdad, Dec. 10 (Reuters): Iraq formally established a special tribunal today to prosecute members of Saddam Hussein's deposed regime for crimes against humanity, paving the way for trials of the fugitive leader's top lieutenants.

Officials in the US-led administration say the trials will be held in Iraq with Iraqi judges, although foreign judges may also take part as observers. Of the 55 Iraqis on a US most-wanted list, 38 have been captured and two killed. Officials say trials would begin next year with the prosecution of some of the 38 in custody.

The head of the US-backed governing council Abdel Aziz al Hakim said the tribunal will try ousted Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein in absentia. The US will hand over key members of Iraq's former regime to face the special tribunal. Hakim told a news conference that Iraqis who had committed crimes against humanity during war with Iran and Kuwait could also face the tribunal, being set up to account for Saddam's murderous rule.

In Mosul, gunmen opened fire today on US soldiers guarding a fuel station. One soldier was killed and one wounded, the US 101st Airborne Division said.

In the firefight, a member of the Kurdish peshmerga militia, allied to the US military, was killed by American soldiers.

"A car stopped opposite our headquarters with four men inside. They opened fire at the Americans and also in our direction," said Mirhan Nouri, the peshmerga officer responsible for security at the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan headquarters in Mosul.

The equations in Europe

By Vaiju Naravane

10-10
9/12

THE BATTLE lines are drawn. As the European Union gears up to the Summit meeting in Brussels this weekend on the adoption of an ambitious constitution for the pan-European body, Spain, Poland and Britain have decided to lead the attack. Objections to the constitution have piled up thick and fast with maximum bickering centring around the question of weighted voting for E.U. decision making. Foreign policy, the composition of the E.U. Commission and whether or not there should be a specific reference to the Christian religion have also led to a war of words.

Spain and Poland, which made significant gains in 2000 at the bitterly disputed Nice Summit, have 27 votes each to Germany, Britain, France and Italy's 29 votes each. Germany, the most populous state in the European Union, has 82 million inhabitants while Poland and Spain each have about half that number. The new constitution for a European Union enlarged from the present 15 to 25 members seeks to correct these imbalances and simplify the voting system by adopting weighted majority voting that would require a simple majority representing 60 per cent of the population of Europe.

Britain has its own axe to grind. Its Foreign Secretary, Jack Straw, said Britain would not support weighted voting on foreign policy. Nor would it contemplate the appointment of an independent E.U. Foreign Minister. At the European Foreign Ministers meeting in Naples at the end of November, Mr. Straw brandished a British veto against proposals aimed at introducing voting on any of Britain's "red line" off-limit subjects deemed crucial to the preservation of nation-

al sovereignty: taxation, foreign policy, employment, immigration, justice or social security.

But worse was in store. Mr. Straw declared Britain supported the position of Poland and indicated London would back Warsaw's obduracy in opposing the introduction of a weighted majority vote.

Many smaller states also clamoured for and in principle won the right to retain a Commissioner each at Brussels. They needed this, they said, to counter the possibility of being dominated by power-hungry larger states. The constitution draft-

the prime movers and shakers in Europe so far, with egg on their face. Franco-German cooperation had been the key driving force behind European integration in the wake of the Second World War. Germany's Konrad Adenauer and France's Charles de Gaulle, visionaries both, realised that the time had come to move from historic rivalry and a disastrous wars for domination to equally historic cooperation and integration. In the early decades of the European Union, these two countries were the undisputed masters of the fledgling body of six.

new NATO recruits but also partly because they were irked and worried by the Franco-German duo's unbridled arrogance.

A similar situation has arisen in the economic policy arena. France and Germany have both systematically violated the Growth and Stability Pact and pressured E.U. Finance Ministers to suspend punitive sanctions against the huge deficits they have run up during the past three years. A replay of economic policy differences between the Franco-German duo and other members is likely to arise in future negotiations on the budget. This had led many smaller nations to band together to resist what they see as Franco-German bullyboy tactics.

These alliances are beginning to bear fruit. What happened in Naples late November was a mini revolution against the dictates of the "European locomotive" with many smaller nations seeing this as a fight between David and Goliath. Several European nations now agree that the combined power of France and Germany must be curbed if Europe is to move forward in a harmonious and equitable way and new coalitions are beginning to emerge. France and Germany's response has been to step up bilateral cooperation. Officials on both sides have openly talked about a Franco-German fusion if the E.U. fails to adopt the present draft constitution. However, this intensification of Franco-German cooperation might now hold back European integration. The more France and Germany create the impression that they are attempting to jointly dominate the E.U., the more reluctant will others become to give more power to these institutions.

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That influence was somewhat reduced when membership of the European Economic Community (EEC) as it was then known went up from six to nine; then from nine to 12 to 15. However, even among the 15, a bilateral Franco-German compromise could effectively set the agenda because they often represented opposing sides of an argument and a compromise between them was usually acceptable to the rest. The balance of power between these two major players often reassured the other members of the E.U. and made for harmony. The end of the cold war and the emergence of new members from Eastern Europe as well as a greater coalescence between France and Germany's vision of Europe has skewed that equation. The conflict over Iraq underlined this point when both France and Germany decided to defy the U.S. Several states sided with the U.S. partly because they were

ed by a special E.U. Convention led by the former French President, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, had recommended paring down the commission in an enlarged Europe to 15 voting and 10 non-voting members. The number is likely to go up to 31 since large countries — Britain, France, Italy and Germany, Spain and Poland — will clamour for two commissioners each.

The only significant area of accord has been defence and that too after Germany, France, Belgium and Luxembourg agreed to drop their demand for a E.U. military headquarters separate from NATO. Again Britain was acting to protect U.S. interests and the agreement underlined that NATO would remain at the heart of Europe's defences, postponing France and Germany's dearly held wish to develop an independent European defence arm.

All this left France and Germany,

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Double Dutch

As violence grips the Netherlands following van Gogh's killing, some mainstream Dutch politicians have broken from their traditionally tolerant approach, calling for a crackdown on their own Muslim citizens. SHADA ISLAM on the issues testing European tolerance

THE killing of controversial Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh by a suspected Islamic extremist and the subsequent spate of retaliatory attacks on Muslim targets are a damaging blow to relations between European Union's 15 million Muslims and their host communities. Dutch violence has also spotlighted the need to speed up the integration of Muslim immigrants in the EU and sparked off a debate on the place of Islam in an increasingly secular Europe.

Van Gogh, who had just made a controversial film condemning Islam's treatment of women, was shot and stabbed in Amsterdam as he cycled to work. Van Gogh's killer has been identified as 26-year-old Mohammed Bouyeri, a Dutch-Moroccan. Another five alleged Islamic radicals face charges of forming a terrorist conspiracy to murder van Gogh.

The outpouring of anti-Islamic and anti-immigrant sentiments in the Netherlands after van Gogh's murder reflects a harsh new reality in a country once known for its tolerance. Van Gogh's brutal slaying has been condemned by Muslim groups in the Netherlands, anxious to distance themselves from the crime. Nonetheless, a recent poll conducted by Dutch TV showed that 47 per cent of all people in the Netherlands now feel less tolerant of Muslims. Since the van Gogh murder, mosques have been set on fire and bombs exploded in Islamic schools across the Netherlands.

Many Dutch politicians, including members of the ruling centre-right coalition (Christian Democrats and Liberals) have lashed out against the country's one million Muslims. Deputy Prime Minister Gerrit Zalm has declared a "war" on Islamic extremists. Rightwing Dutch MP Geert Wilders wants all mosques attended by radicals to be closed. The EU's outgoing internal market chief Frits Bolkestein, also a Liberal from the Netherlands, has latched on to the fact that van Gogh's killer is of Moroccan origin (but also Dutch) to ask the Moroccan king to stop "his" citizens from engaging in terrorist acts. It was not in Rabat's interest, said Bolkestein, to be seen as an "exporter of murderers".

But is it in the Netherlands' interest to be known as a country where people in power, when faced with a very public national trauma, are unable or unwilling to control their language and emotions? Responsible politicians in a mature European democracy must show grace under fire, says Claude Moraes, a Socialist member of the European Parliament who heads the assembly's recently launched group on anti-racism and diversity. "Politicians need to be more thoughtful," says Moraes. There is also concern that far right parties in the Netherlands are exploiting van Gogh's murder to foment further conflict with the Muslims in the country.

Racial and religious violence in the Netherlands is prompting serious worry in the rest of Europe: Political leaders fear that the bloody events may signal the beginning of a new, more violent phase in already-tense relations with their own Muslim minorities.

Van Gogh's killing and the subsequent anti-Muslim hostility is potent proof that despite their public wishes to avoid a "clash of civilisations" and strong efforts to build bridges with Arab and other Islamic countries, European governments have done little to engage in a real dialogue with their own Muslim citizens. Islamophobic sentiments are certainly on the



A Dutch protestor with a banner that reads "Violence never has the last word", and (below) Theo van Gogh.

rise throughout Europe, according to reports published by the Vienna-based Centre for Monitoring Racism and Xenophobia. The 11 September attacks on US cities and the Madrid railway bombings have made ordinary Europeans increasingly wary of their Muslim co-citizens.

While tough measures are clearly needed to clamp down on Islamic extremist groups, terrorist organisations, and networks linked to Al-Qaida, crackdowns are further inflaming inter-community and inter-religious tensions, making the integration of Muslims even more difficult.

One result of this widening divide has been the radicalisation of young Muslims. While young women are wearing headscarves to underline their Islamic identity, young Muslim



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men are being tempted by the "seductive discourse" of radicals, says Marco Martiniello of the Centre for Ethnic and Migration Studies at the University of Liege. The fact that even multicultural societies such as the one in the Netherlands have failed to eliminate discrimination, with Muslims facing racism at school and unable to secure good jobs or find proper housing, is a further strain on inter-community relations.

"Discrimination and exclusion" of Europe's Muslim minorities is a fact of life, Dutch immigration minister Rita

Verdonk admitted recently. "Young people feel rejected by society," Verdonk recognised, adding that integration of Muslims was difficult because they "don't speak the language, lack appropriate training or education and have little knowledge of society."

Societies such as the Netherlands, which appear to embrace diversity, often create false "aspirations of equality" among immigrants which can then turn to feelings of deep frustration when discrimination persists, says Martiniello. As a result, even "well-integrated young Muslims feel distanced from the host society, which can breed alienation and tensions," admits an EU official.

The increasingly emotional debate about Turkey's planned membership in the EU has also brought long-held prejudices, based on Europe's historical clashes with Islam, back to the fore. Some of the political discourse on Ankara's bid to join the EU is openly Islamophobic, with politicians, especially in France and Germany, warning against the dilution of Europe's Christian values. French Prime Minister Jean Pierre Raffarin cautioned recently against Turkish entry, saying it was dangerous to allow "the river of Islam to enter the river bed of European secularism."

There is a growing rift between a secular Europe, which espouses progressive values on issues like abortion and gay marriages, and a reli-

gious minority that holds a more conservative view of the world. While Muslim unease with Europe's secularism is often in the news, Christians are also anxious about the erosion of their values, says Meindert Fennema of the Institute of Migration and Ethnic Studies in Amsterdam.

Many politicians in the Netherlands and elsewhere are insisting that immigrants must "assimilate" into European societies, completely giving up their religious and cultural identity, says Martiniello. This has taken the focus away from the concept of "integration," which allows for diversity.

EU governments have few options, however. European leaders at a summit in early November admitted the need for legal migrants to compensate for domestic labour shortages and an aging population. An EU report published last year said the working age population in the 25-nation bloc was set to fall from 303 million to 297 million by 2020, and to 280 million by 2030. Immigrants are deemed essential to develop Europe's IT sector and to bolster overall economic development - advancements necessary for the EU to meet its ambitious goal of becoming the world's most competitive economy by 2010. "Immigration can help in filling current and future needs of EU labour markets," the report said.

The dilemma for EU leaders, however, is that while the economy needs immigrants, European society is not in the welcoming mode. Before they can recruit workers abroad, governments will have to put money, time, and energy into making sure that immigrants, especially Muslims, are able to become part of the economic, political and social mainstream. Allowing in more immigrants without ensuring the integration of those who are already in Europe will mean more clashes like those in Netherlands.

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ABELGIAN politician of Moroccan origin who has repeatedly criticised Islamic culture is under police protection after being threatened with "ritual killing".

Mimount Bousakla, a socialist senator in Antwerp, whose parents are Muslims from Morocco, reported the threat to the police, who took it seriously after the killing of the filmmaker Theo van Gogh in the streets of Amsterdam this month.

The case of Bousakla has strong parallels with that of Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a Somali refugee to the Netherlands and former Muslim who became an MP and is now in hiding after criticising the oppression of women in Islam.

The threats to Bousakla, thought to be from Islamic radicals, are also likely to inflame tensions in Antwerp, the power base of the far-right anti-immigrant Vlaams Blok party, which attracts a quarter of the vote in the multicultural city. The Vlaams Blok, which arose from Nazi collaborators during World War II, was last week banned by the Belgian supreme court for falling foul of anti-racism laws despite being the most popular party in the Flemish region.

Bousakla, who keeps her religious beliefs private but is believed to have all but lost her Islamic faith, had dismissed earlier death threats as inconsequential.

A Socialist party official said: "She again received threats and now has round-the-clock police protection and has gone into hiding." However, she is still working as normal inside the Flemish Parliament.

It is thought that the threats were prompted by her denunciation of Belgian Muslim groups for refusing to criticise the murder of van Gogh. Last week, Bousakla (32) criticised the Muslim Executive, the official umbrella organisation for Muslims in Belgium, for not condemning the killing.

"The Muslim executive should have protested in connection with Theo van Gogh's murder and called on the Muslims in Belgium to criticise the attack on a massive scale. However, it did nothing, and so better disappear," she said. Van Gogh, a former socialist who made a film

attacking domestic violence against Muslim women, was shot six times and nearly beheaded, and had a declaration of holy war impaled in his chest in broad daylight in Amsterdam on 2

Enemies of Islam?

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Mimount Bousakla

November. Many Muslims groups have been hesitant to condemn the murder because van Gogh, a TV celebrity in the Netherlands, was abusive about Muslim extremists and said that it was inevitable that someone would be provoked.

After van Gogh's murder, police uncovered a suspected network of Islamic radicals conspiring to murder leading "enemies of Islam".

In the past two weeks, half a dozen Dutch politicians have received death threats by letter, e-mail and telephone. Two went into hiding, including Hirsi Ali and Geert Wilders, an MP who is seen as the successor to the murdered anti-Islamic populist Pim Fortuyn and who was the subject of an Internet video promising 72 virgins for any Muslim who decapitated him.

Hirsi Ali, who describes herself as an ex-Muslim, wrote and presented the 10-minute film *Submission*, directed by van Gogh, which is thought to have prompted his killing. The film criticised domestic violence against Islamic women.

Bousakla has also been critical of conservative and radical elements of Islam. Two years ago, she wrote a book, *Couscous with Belgian Fries*, about the problems of being raised between the Moroccan and Belgian cultures, and criticising

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Europe Double Dutch

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anti-immigration after van Gogh's murder by a Muslim, a distance of 47 per cent feel less safe after the murder, the explosion

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to be known as a crowd with a very public to control their politicians in a mature under fire, says Claude LePape, a member of the European Parliament who has a group on anti-racism. "More thoughtful," says the right parties in the Netherlands is prompt. Political leaders fear the beginning of a new, relations with their own

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While tough measures are clearly needed to clamp down on Islamic extremist groups, terrorist organisations, and networks linked to Al-Qaida, crackdowns are further inflaming inter-community and inter-religious tensions, making the integration of Muslims even more difficult.

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Verdonk admitted recently. "Young people feel rejected by society," Verdonk recognised, adding that integration of Muslims was difficult because they "don't speak the language, lack appropriate training or education and have little knowledge of society."

Societies such as the Netherlands, which appear to embrace diversity, often create false "aspirations of equality" among immigrants which can then turn to feelings of deep frustration when discrimination persists, says Martiniello. As a result, even "well-integrated young Muslims feel distanced from the host society, which can breed alienation and tensions," admits an EU official.

The increasingly emotional debate about Turkey's planned membership in the EU has also brought long-held prejudices, based on Europe's historical clashes with Islam, back to the fore. Some of the political discourse on Ankara's bid to join the EU is openly Islamophobic, with politicians, especially in France and Germany, warning against the dilution of Europe's Christian values. French Prime Minister Jean Pierre Raffarin cautioned recently against Turkish entry, saying it was dangerous to allow "the river of Islam to enter the river bed of European secularism."

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Many politicians in the Netherlands and elsewhere are insisting that immigrants must "assimilate" into European societies, completely giving up their religious and cultural identity, says Martiniello. This has taken the focus away from the concept of "integration," which allows for diversity.

EU governments have few options, however. European leaders at a summit in early November admitted the need for legal migrants to compensate for domestic labour shortages and an aging population. An EU report published last year said the working age population in the 25-nation bloc was set to fall from 303 million to 297 million by 2020, and to 280 million by 2030. Immigrants are deemed essential to develop Europe's IT sector and to bolster overall economic development - advancements necessary for the EU to meet its ambitious goal of becoming the world's most competitive economy by 2010. "Immigration can help in filling current and future needs of EU labour markets," the report said.

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Enemies of Islam?

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After van Gogh's murder, police uncovered a suspected network of Islamic radicals conspiring to murder leading "enemies of Islam".

In the past two weeks, half a dozen Dutch politicians have received death threats by letter, e-mail and telephone. Two went into hiding, including Hirs Ali and Geert Wilders, an MP who is seen as the successor to the murdered anti-Islamic populist Pim Fortuyn and who was the subject of an Internet video promising 72 virgins for any Muslim who decapitated him.

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Bousakla has also been critical of conservative and radical elements of Islam. Two years ago, she wrote a book, *Couscous with Belgian Fries*, about the problems of being raised between the Moroccan and Belgian cultures, and criticising

forced marriages, the place of women in society and the role of men within the family. She has openly opposed fundamentalist influences in Belgian mosques. She has also attacked Dyab Abou Jahjah, the fiery Lebanese-born leader of the Arab European League, who has been dubbed the "Belgian Malcolm X".

Bousakla said last year: "He is just a guy from West Asia who wants to fight the conflict they have there in the streets of Antwerp."

About Jahjah recently announced that he intended to leave Antwerp because of the rapid rise of the far-right Vlaams Blok party, whose share of the vote has risen from 10 per cent in 1991 to 24 per cent now, putting it ahead of all other parties.

A Socialist party spokeswoman said that she expected the Vlaams Blok would use the threats to Bousakla to its own advantage. "The Vlaams Blok try and play on everything," she said.

Last week the Vlaams Blok, which has 10 members of the regional Parliament, was banned by Belgium's highest court for inciting racism. Its supporters and workers were threatened with imprisonment. It was immediately disbanded, and then reconstituted under the new name Vlaams Berlang, meaning "Flemish interest".

— The Times, London.

RUSSIA AND EUROPE

Methods Of Interaction Need To Change

By SERGEI KARAGANOV

59-8
25/10

One may get the impression that neither the European Union nor the continent's leading nations have a coherent policy with regard to Russia, while Russia has no such policy with regard to the EU either. And if a policy does exist, it is becoming increasingly negative.

In recent days, the European Union has even started talking about refusing to create common spaces in the sphere of culture, economy, security, etc.

Moreover, at the everyday level, there is tough bargaining on quotas and gas prices: by pressing for a steep rise in gas prices, the EU was either trying to neutralise Russia, or to deprive it of its natural competitive advantages. With its efforts to haggle for minor concessions, the EU was the chief opponent of Russia's accession to the WTO for four years.

Strategic ally

One of the latest episodes of this petty bargaining is an attempt to deprive Russia of long-term compensation payments for the use of the Trans-Siberian railway by European air carriers. It is another attempt to deprive Russia, which is not particularly rich, of its natural and historical advantages in favour of the far wealthier Europe.

The issue of the visa-free travel is advancing at a snail's pace. Only Germany and some other European countries have tried to use the remnants of their sovereignty to establish simplified visa procedures for some groups of Russians. However, visa-free travel is not a new idea for Europe, but a return to normality. Before World War I, all Europeans could travel freely around Europe, even though the continent was experiencing a number of problems at that time. All this cannot detract from the great achievement of the European and global civilisation — the creation of the European Union — the only prototype of a world government, the dream of the best and most humane, including Russian, minds of past centuries.

It would seem that against this background and against the backdrop of a rapidly deteriorating and destabilising international situation, Europe should choose Russia as a strategic ally. However, one gets the impression, even if it is partially erroneous, that the EU has been re-

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legating its relations with Russia to the background in the past 15 years, thereby, to some extent, fencing itself off from Russia. This was first seen during the Maastricht process before the EU seemed to change its policy at the 1999 Cologne summit where a course for EU-Russia rapprochement was proclaimed. Now, they are again drifting

pro-European lobby could not increase its influence in Russia. The inevitable post-revolutionary restoration, Russia's disappointment in Europe as an ally and its development goals pushed traditionalist sentiments and circles into the foreground.

We were criticised for failures of democracy and for Chechnya. But we were following the Euro-



apart.

Europeans have been quite friendly to Russia over the past decade, preferring not to interfere in Russia's affairs, but without trying to integrate it or launch any major projects featuring the country's participation. The EU confined itself to a dialogue and a ridiculously bureaucratic assistance programme. Neither a broad reciprocal education programme nor any youth exchanges have been established.

The current situation from the viewpoint of prospects for Russian-European rapprochement is more complicated than in the past. This is despite the fact that, after coming to power, Vladimir Putin was the first Russian leader in decades to proclaim a priority course towards rapprochement with Europe.

Stability

There are many explanations for this. Trivial ideas were expressed that Russia could never become a EU member because of its size, while Brussels complained that Russia did not want to accept European legislation. However, at the early stages of this Russian revolution nearly all the advisers on legislation were American and no Europeans were sent to Russia.

For these very reasons, the

pean road, even if it dated back to 50 or 100 years ago. Today, Russia's course is unclear. However, a departure from European democracy is obvious. Are Russia and Europe doomed to further, albeit temporary, estrangement that will inevitably be detrimental to both sides' global authority and ability to positively influence the turbulent course of history? The model of Russia-EU relations and methods of interaction must be changed if this cooperation is to help both sides geo-strategically and from the standpoint of their development models.

The EU must understand that a strong Russia will benefit Brussels, that it must stop bargaining over petty points and make no attempts to restrict Russia's influence in the former USSR. As a rule, this influence leads to greater stability, as rivalry will destabilise still further the extremely unstable situation in the countries on Russia's periphery.

Both sides should discard majestic mega-projects and concentrate on about 20 small specific projects with clear structures and timeframes for their implementation. The most obvious ones are mini-integration projects in the technological sphere where Russia still has some reserves. However, a political de-

cision is needed for such projects. Another project is the opening of several institutions in Moscow that will study how the new EU works. Branches of the European University have been opened in small countries that, even when they join the EU, are of minor importance for it in comparison with Russia (let these countries excuse me for saying this).

We need to be patient at the operational level, as Europe is not a very efficient partner. Russia should not make any concessions but propose new cooperation projects and create real mechanisms for influencing the EU and interacting with it. Until recently, we had none.

Breakthrough

There is no sense of doom. Russia and the EU will co-exist and cooperate. The question is whether this interaction will be effective for both sides. If Europe does not start even a partial integration with Russia and build a long-term alliance with the country, it will gradually lose its ability to protect its island of stability in the increasingly unstable world. Even a common foreign minister or a rapid deployment force with tens of thousands of troops will hardly help in this case.

If Russia starts departing from its cultural-historical and socio-economic orientation to Europe, this will increase its chances of degrading towards a classic, stagnant and corrupt Third World country, developing along the lines of Latin America, or even Nigeria.

In a few years, after we create several joint projects and become closer to each other in deeds, not just in words, some interesting things may transpire. For instance, that Europe is not developing in a Maastricht federative direction, but backwards towards the common market. It will be easier for Russia to join. European sentiments may also change. The Russian elite, after sobering up from its "oil intoxication" and focusing on modernising the country and society, may find its real place in Russia.

Then the question of Russia's integration with the European Union will be raised in a new way, and its huge benefits will be more obvious to Moscow, Brussels and other European capitals. Now that no breakthrough in our relations has been made, we must be patient and tolerant to prepare ourselves for this breakthrough when the time comes.

Europe
57-11 2/2/6

EU finally gets a constitution

ASSOCIATED PRESS

BRUSSELS, (Belgium), June 19. — European Union leaders agreed Friday on a first-ever constitution for their newly reunited continent, overcoming disputes about power-sharing, national sovereignty and even whether God deserved a mention.

"It is a great achievement for Europe. It is a great achievement for all Europeans," Irish Prime Minister Mr Bertie Ahern, the summit host, said at the end of two days of difficult negotiations with his 24 counterparts.

Leaders had been hoping for a success to boost the EU's credibility in the eyes of an increasingly skeptical public, a week after an electoral drubbing and six months after their last attempt collapsed in acrimony over voting rules and other issues.

"Better late than never," said French President Mr Jacques Chirac. "Thanks to this new treaty, we will have a more efficient Europe, a Europe that responds better to the needs of our citizens and a Europe that holds a greater weight in the world."

While they toasted their agreement with champagne and a standing ovation, officials said another difficult decision — who will be the new president for the EU's executive Commission — was put off be-

cause of continuing disagreement.

Nonetheless, EU officials called the constitution deal a "victory."

It comes just one-and-a-half months after the 15-nation EU took in 10 new members, mainly from the former communist east, and the negotiations themselves at times illustrated the feared gridlock that would have been expected without the new rules.

"For Europe to come to an agreement at 25 (members) on the new rules that should govern Europe for the future is indeed truly historic," said British Prime Minister Mr Tony Blair.

The constitution aims to streamline the EU's complex institutions and boost its image on the world stage by creating an EU foreign minister. Fearing the enlarged bloc would prove unwieldy, it also aims to curb areas where individual countries can veto decisions.

The final text resolved one of the most bitter disputes — the voting system — by requiring at least 15 countries representing 65 per cent of the EU's total 455-million population for a measure to pass.

At least four countries with 35 per cent of the population would be required to block — another safeguard to prevent the biggest countries from running roughshod over the rest.

European voters batter ruling parties over Iraq war

London: European voters punished leaders in Britain, the Netherlands, and to some degree Italy for getting involved in Iraq, but also turned their ire on German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder and French President Jacques Chirac, Europe's leading opponents of the war, vote tallies showed on Monday. Many governments had a hard time in the 25-nation vote for the European Parliament, which ended with 19 nations voting on Sunday.

Among the few that did well were Spain's socialists, who recently withdrew troops from Iraq. The socialists, surprise victors in the March elections days after a massive terrorist attack, won a new stamp of legitimacy by emerging on top in the European parliamentary vote as well. The massive democratic exercise, spread out over four days, came at a crucial time in the development of the European Union: it has just added 10 members, largely from eastern Europe, and leaders hope to agree on a new constitution later this month.

Across Europe, the outcome highlighted anxieties about the expanding union, with anti-EU parties doing well in Britain, Sweden, and even the Czech Republic, in the former communist nation's maiden outing in an EU-wide vote. Overall, centre-right parties won, taking 274 seats in the 732-member European Parliament. The centre-left group, which includes lawmakers from



Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE) candidate Josep Borrell (centre), Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero (right) and Socialist Party speaker Jose Blanco pose at PSOE headquarters after his victory in the European elections in Madrid on Sunday

British Prime Minister Tony Blair's Labour party and Schroeder's Social Democrats, finished second with 198 seats. The third-largest group in the European Union assembly was the Liberal Democrats with 64.

For some, the most remarkable outcome was the dismal level of participation: the 45.3 per cent turnout was the lowest ever in a European Parliament election, and just 28.7 per cent voted in the 10 newest states. Blair's Labour party performed weakly, coming in 5 percentage points behind the opposition Conservatives. Labour lost 6 per-

centage points from the last EU election to garner 22 per cent of the vote, while a fringe party that wants Britain to withdraw from EU came in third with 17 per cent.

Iraq was also an issue in the Netherlands, where the deployment of troops was a key issue in Thursday's vote. Preliminary results showed gains for leftist opposition parties; nonetheless, the government announced on Friday that it was extending the deployment for eight months.

A voter backlash on Iraq following the deadly train bombings in Madrid has already driven Aznar's party from power, and new socialist Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero hoped for a strong result to boost the impression that he won power on more than a protest vote. He got a narrow win, 43.3 per cent compared to 41.3 per cent for Aznar's popular party, with 99 per cent of votes counted. Berlusconi's Forza Italia Party, the country's largest, got 21 per cent of the vote, down from 25.2 per cent in the previous European election, with results in from 90 per cent of polling stations.

Portugal's main opposition Socialist Party, which attacked the government over its unpopular support for the Iraq war and its patchy economic record, got a clear victory with 43% to 47% of the vote, compared to a maximum of 36% for the government partners, the Social Democratic Party and Popular Party. AP

'Mohamed the Egyptian' among 17 arrested in coordinated raids across Europe

Brain behind Madrid blasts held

Milan, June 8 (Reuters): Italy arrested an Egyptian alleged to have plotted the Madrid train bombings and Belgium held 15 people for preparing a "terrorist attack" as police across Europe swooped on suspected Islamic militants.

Rabei Osman Sayed Ahmed, known as "Mohamed the Egyptian", was seized with a fellow suspect in Milan, officials said today. Italian interior minister Giuseppe Pisanu said the operation was aimed at a "dangerous group of terrorists close to al Qaeda" planning more attacks.

Belgian police, acting on information from Italy, arrested 15 people they said had been gearing up for an attack. Further raids took place in France and Spain. Spanish and Italian authorities hailed Ahmed's arrest as a major breakthrough in the investigation into the March bombings that blew up four commuter trains in the Spanish capital, killing 191 people.

"He is considered one of the masterminds of March 11," a Spanish interior ministry spokesman said. Italy's Pisanu said the 32-year-old Egyptian was one of the "principal executors" of the bombings. Spanish prosecutors immediately requested his extradition.

Those arrested in Belgium included Jordanians, Palestinians, Egyptians and Moroccans. "We know them to be part of a



A policeman shows undated file pictures of arrested militants Rabei Osman Sayed Ahmed (left), also known as "Mohammed the Egyptian", and Palestinian Yahia Payumi in Milan. (AFP)

terrorist group," said Glenn Audenaert, director of the federal police bureau of Brussels.

"About a fortnight ago, information came from the Italian authorities that people were becoming more active. We corroborated that intelligence and came to the conclusion that a group of

people were preparing a terrorist attack," he said.

"Whether that attack should take place on our territory or in another country, we don't know."

The EU's top counter-terrorism official said last week that all European countries were at risk of attack, regardless of

whether they supported the Iraq war. A Spanish judicial source said Ahmed was a former Egyptian army explosives expert who gave courses at al Qaeda training camps in Afghanistan.

He was detained late yesterday, hours after a Spanish judge issued a warrant for his arrest. The raid came after a three-month probe by intelligence and anti-terrorist units who traced him through phone calls, Italian officials said.

Investigating magistrate Maurizio Romanelli said the intercepted conversations contained "very significant references" to the Madrid attacks.

He said Ahmed was seized on the outskirts of Milan in one of six police raids in the city, along with an unidentified man who said he was a Palestinian. Prosecutors had feared they might be about to leave the country.

"They were highly mobile and we could not afford to wait," Romanelli told a news conference, adding that any attack would probably have been outside Italy. He said both Ahmed and the other man were accused of conspiracy to commit a terrorist act. Wiretapped conversations between the two included the repeated phrase: "Let's go, we are ready for martyrdom," an Italian investigative source said.

Spanish authorities have linked Ahmed to Serhane ben Abdelmajid Farkhet, known as "The Tunisian", whom they consider the ringleader of the Madrid bombings.

Farkhet, 35, was killed on April 3 when he and six other major suspects blew themselves up in a suburban Madrid apartment rather than surrender to police who had surrounded them. The dead militants "are my friends but I am sad because I cannot go to heaven with them," Ahmed said in one intercepted phone call.

American shot dead in Riyadh

Riyadh, June 8 (Reuters): Gunmen killed an American working for a US company in the Saudi capital Riyadh today, the fifth attack on westerners and other foreigners in the world's top oil exporter in five weeks.

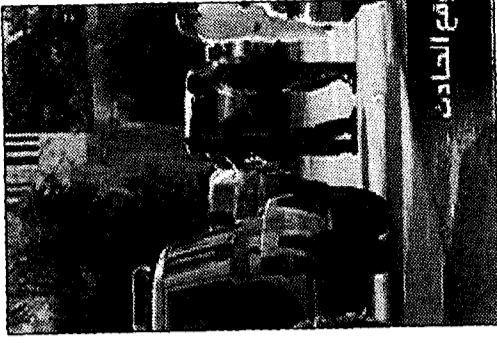
The latest killing in the kingdom, which has been battling to stamp out attacks by Osama bin Laden's al Qaeda for more than a year, was likely to heighten fears among tens of thousands of expatriates, many of whom work in the oil industry.

The American worked for US contracting firm Vinnell, a unit of Northrop Grumman Corp that trains the Saudi National Guard, an elite force protecting the pro-US monarchy.

Police said the American was killed when shots were fired at him outside his house in eastern Riyadh. Witnesses said the gunmen followed the American in a car when he left a clinic to go to his villa in the Rawda area and shot him when he got out of his vehicle. Dubai-based Al Arabiya television said the gunmen fired nine shots, two of which hit the American's head.

"We can confirm that an employee of Vinnell Arabia was shot and killed by an unknown assailant," Vinnell spokesman Jay McCaffrey said from the company's offices outside Washington. A US state department official said the man could not be identified until his next of kin had been notified.

On Sunday, suspected al



A TV grab shows policemen at the site where the American was killed in Riyadh. (AFP)

Qaida gunmen killed an Irish cameraman Simon Cumbers, 36, and critically wounded BBC security correspondent Frank Gardner, 42, in a Riyadh area known as a militant stronghold. Suspected al Qaeda militants killed 22 people, 19 of them expatriates, in a shooting and hostage-taking attack in Khobar last month.

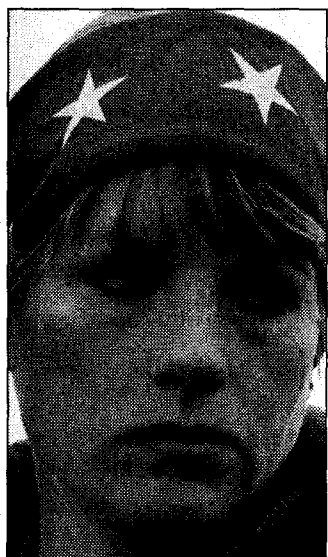
BBC bodyguards

The BBC said today it had changed policy to let armed bodyguards accompany reporters in areas of extreme danger. A spokesman said armed guards would be deployed only as an exceptional measure.

Europe warms up for party

Warsaw, April 30 (Reuters): Celebrations gathered pace today in the final countdown to the reunification of Europe 15 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall with the EU set to embrace 10 new mainly east European members at midnight.

Street parties, concerts and border festivities broke out across central and eastern Europe as political leaders hailed



A Slovenian girl wears an EU flag as a hat near Kranjska Gora, at the border with Italy and Austria, on Friday. (Reuters)

the final reversal of five decades of Soviet-dominated communist rule that followed World War Two.

Star-studded blue EU flags were to be hoisted and fireworks light the sky from the Baltic to the Mediterranean at midnight before leaders of the new 25-na-

tion bloc, representing 450 million citizens, hold a celebratory summit in Dublin.

In Poland, by far the biggest of newcomers, outgoing Prime Minister Leszek Miller raised the EU flag and toasted Poland's future in Europe at a televised ceremony with his cabinet, beating the official celebrations by eight hours. "Poland's entry into the European Union fulfils my dreams and lifetime work," Lech Walesa, whose Solidarity movement toppled communism in Poland in 1989, said.

For East Europeans, enlargement crowns 15 years of often painful economic reforms since the collapse of communist rule.

"For the generation that lived in the communist prison surrounded by barbed wire, the European Union is a dream come true. Fifteen years ago we would not even have dared dream this dream," Slovakian parliament speaker Pavol Hrusovsky said.

EU enlargement takes effect at 2200 GMT, though a still divided Cyprus and the former Soviet republics of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania will celebrate entry an hour earlier, since they lie in a time zone east of the bulk of continental Europe.

Other newcomers are former Warsaw Pact members Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, former Yugoslav republic of Slovenia and the tiny Mediterranean island of Malta, which will become the EU's smallest member with 400,000 people.

Ireland, a rags-to-riches model of the benefits of joining the EU, plans a "Day of Welcomes" for the newcomers tomorrow.

Colourful welcome greets Gaddafi on his EU visit

Reuters
Brussels, April 27

CHEERED ON by African drummers and dancing supporters, Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi took another big step toward international respectability on Tuesday when he visited European Union headquarters.

European Commission President Romano Prodi broke with protocol to welcome Gaddafi personally at Brussels' Zaventem airport, where the Libyan leader, dressed in a red fez hat and gray-green sweeping robe, descended the gangway followed by female guards in dappled blue camouflage uniforms.

Waving portraits of Gaddafi, more than 200 supporters gathered by an Arab-African Immigrant Child Support Committee, staged a pro-Libyan demonstration outside the EU building as the two leaders arrived in a white stretch Mercedes limousine. A smaller group of about 50 Libyan exiles staged a human rights protest outside EU headquarters. The police kept the two groups apart.

The landmark trip — Gaddafi's first to Europe in 15 years — was a reward for Libya's agreement to pay compensation for the Lockerbie and UTA airline bombings and its spectacular renunciation of weapons of



AP
Muammar Gaddafi shakes hands with EU Commission president Romano Prodi at the EU Commission HQ in Brussels on Tuesday.

mass destruction.

The Libyan leader was expected to submit an application to join the EU's Euro-Mediterranean partnership, a trade, aid and culture pact linking the wealthy European bloc with 11 southern and eastern Mediterranean neighbours, including Israel.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

28 APR 2004

Pullout won't harm ties with US, says Spain

Agencies
Madrid, April 19

SPAIN'S WITHDRAWAL of its troops from Iraq should not harm its long-term relations with the US, the new foreign minister said in remarks published on Monday, adding that his country will remain steadfast in the fight against terrorism.

Foreign Minister Miguel Moratinos also said the government of Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero will honour Spain's pledges at the recent Iraq Donor's Conference and help in Iraq's reconstruction and transition to democracy.

"We're not washing our hands" of the situation, Moratinos said in an interview Monday in the *El Pais* newspaper.

On Sunday, Zapatero ordered the 1,300 troops to return home as soon as possible, fulfilling a campaign pledge to a nation recovering from terrorist bombings that al-Qaida militants said were reprisal for Spain's support of the war.

"This decision should not affect bilateral relations between Spain and the United States," Moratinos said. He said aside from the issue of Iraq, Spain's agenda with the United States would be "wider and more attractive" under Zapatero.

Zapatero issued the abrupt recall just hours after his government was sworn in, saying there was no sign the United States would meet his demand for United Nations control of the postwar occupation — his ultimatum for keeping troops there.

Zapatero's Socialist party won the March 14 general election amid allegations that outgoing Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar, by backing the war in Iraq, had provoked commuter-train terrorist bombings that killed 191 people three



REUTERS
Spanish Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero in Madrid on Monday.

days before the vote.

Though Zapatero, a 43-year-old lawyer and career politician, had promised to remove Spanish troops, his immediate action was a bombshell, and a setback for the United States as Moratinos prepared to travel to Washington to discuss the dispute with Secretary of State Colin Powell. He was scheduled to leave on Tuesday.

In a five-minute address at the Moncloa Palace, Zapatero said he had ordered Defence Minister Jose Bono to "do what is necessary for the Spanish troops stationed in Iraq to return home in the shortest time possible."

Spain orders pullout from Iraq

Europe

Agencies
Madrid/Baghdad, April 18

SPAIN'S NEW Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero said on Sunday that he had given orders for Spain's 1,300 troops in Iraq to be brought home as soon as possible.

The announcement, made in a televised speech, came just one day after Zapatero was sworn in after the Socialists' upset victory in March 14 general elections.

He said he had given Defence Minister Jose Bono "the order to do what is necessary for the Spanish troops in Iraq to come home in the shortest time and in the greatest safety possible."

Zapatero had caused controversy with his election campaign pledge to bring home the Spanish troops if the United Nations did not take charge in Iraq by June 30.

President Bush has urged Spain and other allies in Iraq to stick with Washington.

"According to the information we have...it is not likely that a UN resolution will be adopted that will meet the conditions we



A US Marine from Alpha Company, 1st Battalion, 5th Marines Regiment, hits a door with a hammer during a raid for weapons in an industrial area of Fallujah on Sunday. AFP

Europe derides Osama's truce offer

10-18
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WASHINGTON/MADRID, APRIL 16. European governments have derided an apparent offer from Osama bin Laden to call a truce in the Al-Qaeda activity "north of the Mediterranean sea" if states pulled their troops out of Iraq and Afghanistan within three months.

The CIA said that the taped statement was likely to be the voice of the fugitive leader and that the message "appears to be intended to drive a wedge between Europe and the U.S. ... and it is a propaganda ploy to bolster the morale of its followers." The U.S. Secretary of State, Colin Powell, later confirmed that the tape did appear to come from Osama bin Laden.

Asked in an interview on Polish public television whether the voice on the tape was that of the Al-Qaeda leader, Mr. Powell replied: "Yes, the information I have is that it is the voice of Osama Bin Laden." In the recording, Osama goes out of his

way to distinguish Europeans from the "White House gang" which it accused of pursuing a war in the interests of war profiteers like the "Halliburton company, its sisters and daughters."

If the tape is authentic, Osama is alive — the statement refers to recent events — despite an intensifying U.S. manhunt. The statement described the March 11 Madrid bombing as a retaliation for Spanish participation in the U.S.-led military coalition. Similar threats in the past have been followed by attacks.

"(Osama) Bin Laden's words have consequences. It's not like it's a lot of rhetoric that nobody is paying attention to," said Peter Bergen, a terrorism expert who has written a book on Al-Qaeda, Holy War, Inc.

European politicians have unanimously dismissed any notion of negotiations with Al-Qaeda. The British Foreign Secretary,

Jack Straw, said: "One has to treat such proposals with the contempt they deserve. This is a murderous organisation which seeks impossible objectives by the most violent of means and has said...that whilst we love life they love death. It is yet another bare-faced attempt to divide the international community."

The French President, Jacques Chirac, ruled out any negotiations with terrorists as did the new socialist government of Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero. The Italian Foreign Minister, Franco Frattini, said a peace deal with Osama would be 'unthinkable'.

Germany also reacted with disdain. "There can be no negotiations with terrorists and serious criminals," a government spokesman said.

The ceasefire offer addressed Europeans as "our neighbours north of the Mediterranean" and was, the statement

claimed, "in response to the positive interaction shown by recent events and opinion polls, which indicate that most European peoples want peace."

"The door of reconciliation is open for three months from the date of announcing this statement," the taped broadcast said.

"For those who reject reconciliation and want war, we are ready."

The statement vowed vengeance for Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, proving it was made since March 22, when the Palestinian Hamas leader was killed by Israeli forces. It was Osama's eighth taped declaration since the Afghan invasion made him a fugitive.

A similarly threatening tape released last October, singled out U.S. allies, Britain, Italy, Spain, Japan, Poland and Australia, as targets. — ©Guardian Newspapers Limited 2004

Madrid suspects die fdayeen death

Agencies
Madrid, April 4

THE ALLEGED ringleader of last month's train bombings in Madrid was among four suspects who blew themselves up as the police raided their apartment, Spain's interior ministers said on Sunday.

The blast, on Saturday night, killed a special operations police officer and wounded 15 other policemen. Interior Minister Angel Acebes said one of the dead bombers was found with an explosives belt around his body and two or three suspects might have escaped before the explosion.

Sarhane Ben Abdelmajid Fakhel, a Tunisian accused of spearheading the March 11 attacks, was among those dead, Acebes said. An international warrant had been issued for the arrest of Fakhel and five others last week.

"The core of the group that carried out the attacks is either arrested or dead in Saturday's collective suicide, including the head of the operative commando (unit)", Acebes told a news conference.



AFP
Spanish PM Jose Maria Aznar, State Security Secretary Ignacio Astarloa Huarte-Mendioca, PM-elect Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero and the leader of Popular Party Mariano Rajoy attend the funeral of special forces policeman, Javier Tofftoner, in Guadalajara on Sunday.

Another man on that list - Abdennabi Koujja - a Moroccan, was identified as among the four who died on Saturday night. A third man - Asri Rifaat Anouar - was not on the list. The fourth suspect had not been identified, Acebes said.

The police also found 22 pounds of dynamite in the apartment where the four terrorists blew themselves up as police closed in, along a high-speed rail line, Acebes said.

Acebes said. "They were going to keep on attacking because some of the explosives were prepared, packed and connected to detonators", Acebes said.

The group set off the deadly explosion as police prepared to storm their apartment in Leganes south of Madrid. The police had approached the building about 7 pm to make arrests as part of an escalating manhunt for those responsible for the March 11 bombings.

The suspects spotted the police from a window and shot at them, shouting in Arabic, the Interior Ministry said.

Over the next two hours, police evacuated as many people as they could from the building and surrounding area and prepared for an assault on the apartment. No police officers were hurt by the gunfire.

As the terrorists shot at police from the apartment, "they shouted 'God is great' and Islamic verses", the newspaper, El Mundo, quoted a resident of the building as saying. It identified him only as Alberto M., who lived two floors up.

El Pais said the special Interior Ministry said.



Sarhane Ben Fakhel

forces preparing the assault managed to communicate with the terrorists and gave them a deadline to surrender. But the terrorists shouted back, "God is great. We are going to go out killing", the newspaper said, quoting the police.

The terrorists set off their bomb in a second-storey apartment after the police blasted open the ground-floor entrance, the Interior Ministry said.



Abdelkarim el Mejjati

Spain issues warrant for wealthy Moroccan

Madrid, March 31 (Reuters): The Spanish judge investigating the Madrid train bombings issued a worldwide arrest warrant today for a wealthy Moroccan man also sought in connection with bombings in Casablanca and Riyadh last year.

Judge Juan del Olmo issued five arrest warrants through the international police agency Interpol, and sources close to the investigation confirmed that one of them was for Abdelkarim el Mejjati. The other four suspects were not identified.

Mejjati, 36, the son of a Moroccan father and a French mother, is described by Moroccan investigators as an Islamic holy warrior who fought in Bosnia and Afghanistan and who was last seen in Morocco shortly before September 11, 2001.

The March 11 bombings of four Madrid commuter trains killed 191 people in the first attack in the West linked to Osama bin Laden's al Qaida network since the September 11 strikes on New York and Washington.

The attack was timed three days before Spain's general election and played a role in helping the Opposition Socialists to a surprise victory that will remove a strongly pro-American party from power.

The five Spanish warrants were issued a day after the Spanish government identified the Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group as the prime suspect in the Madrid blasts.

Some news reports have identified Mejjati as the head of that shadowy group, also suspected of being connected to the Casablanca attacks of last May, in which 12 suicide bombers and 33 others were killed. Mejjati is also wanted by Saudi authorities in connection with suicide attacks on housing compounds in Riyadh last year. Last September the FBI issued a worldwide alert for Mejjati and three other suspects, linking them to al Qaida and saying it had intelligence they might be planning attacks against the US.

In a separate development, Spanish authorities arrested two more people in connection to the Madrid blasts — raising the total held in the case to 20 — and searched another home. Judge Del Olmo was due to question two people under arrest, including one of the two Spanish suspects.

THE TELEGRAPH

1 APR 2004

Indians accused in Spain

Europe
2003



Moroccans Jamal Zougam (left) and Mohamed Bekkali

Madrid, March 19 (Reuters): Three Moroccan and two Indian men detained over the Madrid bombings were accused of terrorist crimes in court today, but denied any links to al Qaida and said they were asleep at the time of the attacks.

During a gruelling seven-hour overnight hearing at Madrid's High Court, the three Moroccans were accused of 190 murders and belonging to a terrorist group. The Indians were accused of cooperating with a terrorist group, court sources said.

Under the Spanish legal system, the accusations made against the five means the court considers there is a case to answer, providing grounds to keep them in custody. A decision on formal charges is taken later. One of the Moroccans considered a main suspect — Jamal Zougam — wept in court before returning to pray in his cell, the sources said. "The five detainees have denied any involvement... They have all said that when the attack took place on March 11 they were sleeping in their respective homes," a source said.

"They say they don't have any link with al Qaida or any terrorist organisation." All five were ordered held in custody after their initial appearance, which ended at 0300 GMT today morning. They were taken to Soto de Real jail, just north of Madrid.

Bombs exploded on four packed commuter trains in Madrid on March 11, killing 202 people. The attacks, the bloodiest since the Bali bombings in 2002, have been claimed by a militant Islamic group aligning itself to al Qaida.

There was no immediate explanation of why the men were accused of 190 murders. It could relate to the number of bodies formally identified. Investigators have said an unexploded bomb found on one of the trains, containing a mobile phone that would have been used to activate the bomb, provided valuable evidence.

As well as Zougam, the other two Moroccans have been named as his brother Mohamed Chaoui and Mohamed Bekkali. The three were all detained in a telephone shop run by Zougam in Madrid.

As well as cooperating with extremists, the two Indians, Suresh Kumar and Vinay Khohy, were accused of forging documents.

Sources said the five were being held in solitary confinement, though they can see a court-appointed lawyer.

Five more people — four North Africans and a Spaniard — were arrested on Thursday as part of the investigation. Judge Juan Del Olmo is expected to question them by next Tuesday.

The Spaniard, captured near Oviedo in northern Spain, is suspected of stealing the locally-made explosives used.

At 202, the Madrid death toll has matched that of the 2002 Bali attack, the worst of its kind since the September 11 attacks on Washington and New York. Some 1,816 people were wounded in the Madrid bombings.

Now, Poland joins Iraq WMD chorus

JOHN BURGESS
BERLIN, MARCH 19

POLAND, one of the closest US allies in the war in Iraq, was "misled" about the threat of deposed leader Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction, Poland's President said on Thursday.

President Aleksander Kwasniewski, speaking to a group of European journalists, reaffirmed his country's intention to keep its 2,400 troops in Iraq, but his description of the run-up to the war contained a rare tone of criticism of the US from high levels of the Polish government.

"Naturally, one may protest the reasons for the war action in Iraq. I personally think that today, Iraq without Saddam Hussein is a truly better Iraq than with Saddam Hussein," Kwasniewski said, according to the Associated Press. "But naturally I also feel uncomfortable due to the fact that we were misled with the information on weapons of mass destruction," he said. Claims that Iraq possessed stores of the weapons was the prime justification the United States gave for invading the country; none have been found to date. Edmund Wnuk-Lipinski, a professor of Political Sociology at the Polish Academy of Sciences, said the President's words were probably a "casual comment" that did not signal a fundamental change in Polish policy. Any such shift would be carefully pre-

Reporters snub Powell over scribes' death

LUKE BAKER
BAGHDAD, MARCH 19

IRAQI journalists walked out of a Baghdad news conference held by US Secretary of State Colin Powell on Friday protesting against the lack of security and the killing of two Iraqi journalists by US troops. "We declare our boycott of the conference because of the martyrs," Najim al-Rubaie of Iraq's *Dustur* newspaper said in a statement read at the start of the conference as Powell and Paul Bremer looked on. "We declare our condemnation of the incident which led to the killing of the two journalists...at the hands of the US forces."

More than 30 Iraqi journalists then stood up and walked out. Employees of Dubai-based satellite TV channel Al Arabiya say US soldiers opened fire on a car carrying an Al Arabiya crew on Thursday after another car ran through a checkpoint. cameraman Ali Abdelaziz was killed and correspondent Ali al-Khatib died in hospital on Friday.

pared and not dropped into an interview with foreign journalists, he said, adding, "He's too gifted politically to do such a thing."

Like many former communist



\$10.1 b plundered

WASHINGTON: Saddam Hussein pocketed more than \$10.1 billion in smuggled oil revenue and illicit proceeds from the UN oil-for-food programme between 1997 and 2002, according to testimony by the US General Accounting Office on Thursday.

Reprieve for ex-PM

HELSINKI: A Helsinki court on Friday acquitted Finland's first woman PM of charges related to the leaking of secret documents on Iraq, a scandal that forced her to step down a year ago. —Agencies

Meanwhile

injured Al Arabiya correspondent. All Khatib being taken for treatment on Friday after he was injured in a shooting incident at a checkpoint in Iraq. Khatib died later in hospital. Reuters

"But let's be clear who is responsible for this," he said. "Those individuals left over from the old regime do not want to see the Iraqi people live in peace. They do not want to see democracy take root."

Powell said he did not have the details of the Arabiya incident but he was certain that troops would not

have deliberately killed journalists. He said sometimes in the confusion after a guerrilla attack, "mistakes happen, tragedies occur". Iraqi journalists demanded an investigation. "We walked out because we need them to ensure that we are safe under the occupation and yet they have done nothing," Ahmed al-Samir, an Iraqi producer with the Qatar-based Al Jazeera satellite channel, said after the walkout.

"I saw these people killed. They were shot dead on purpose," he said. —Reuters

more independent course.

Polish troops lead a 10,000-member international peacekeeping division that patrols southern Iraq. The bombs that killed 202 people in

Madrid last week and subsequent claims that the strike was revenge for Spain's help to the US has provoked fear in Poland that it may be the next target. —LATWP

Power balance blown apart

By Simon Tisdall

SPAIN'S VOTERS have sent a series of dramatic messages that will resonate far beyond Spain, affecting relations within Europe, with the United States and in terms of the war on terror. They reminded the world that regime change is best achieved through the ballot box; and that violence must not be allowed to win. Sunday's high poll turnout, after the mass demonstrations last Friday, reflected participatory democracy at its best — courageous, robust and unintimidated.

They also served a warning that politicians who flout public opinion, as the outgoing Prime Minister, Jose Maria Aznar, did over Iraq, may pay a heavy price. The bombs were a brutal reminder of that unpopular war. Many in Spain and more widely, in Europe, saw them as the Islamist terrorists' long predicted payback — and a direct result of Mr. Aznar's stance. Voters also objected strongly to perceived attempts by the People's Party to manipulate or "spin" opinion over whether ETA, the Basque separatist organisation, or terrorists linked to Al-Qaeda were responsible for the bombings.

Such messages will send a quiet shiver through Tony Blair's office in Downing Street, London, and George W. Bush's White House. Both incumbents are facing elections in the not too distant future; both still struggle to justify their Iraq policy and the

conduct of the war on terror; and both lead people who now wonder, with suddenly focussed concern, whether their trains, planes, and citizens will be next.

The abrupt change of government in Spain will alter the balance of power within the European Union and between what the U.S. Defence Secretary, Donald Rumsfeld, described

increased if Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi's always problematic political position in Italy deteriorates.

The White House has put a brave face, with Mr. Bush making a congratulatory telephone call to Mr. Zapatero. But there can be no disguising the fact that the Prime Minister-designate's renewed vow to bring Spanish troops home from Iraq potentially

night, the U.S. relationship with Spain has gone from one of trusted intimacy to a slightly strained, slightly wary friendship.

This change could be of greater significance given the fact that, on the face of it, Spain's March 11 amounted to another dreadful intelligence failure. March 11 in Madrid has provided other lessons, too. Uncontrolled events have once again exposed the illusion that any number of officially imposed security measures — from plain-clothes police on the tube to sky marshals, draconian anti-terrorism laws and military campaigns — can stop a Madrid happening again, anywhere, any time.

Mr. Bush's boasts of success in the war on terror in his state of the union address in January now sound more alarming than reassuring and Mr. Blair's previous talk of "relentless" warfare, and his bellicose vow at Labour's spring conference to save humankind and defeat terrorist evil by any means, were discomfiting.

Mr. Blair's and Mr. Bush's determination is not in doubt. The questions after Madrid are whether they really know how to achieve their aims; whether their methods, already deeply divisive, can work; whether they can ultimately hold the U.S.-Europe anti-terror coalition together; or whether their tactics will progressively exacerbate a global confrontation.

— *Copyright: Guardian Newspapers Limited 2004*

The change of government in Spain will alter the balance of power within the European Union.

blows a gaping hole in the West's anti-terrorist front. If enacted, it will be seen in the Muslim world as a success for Islamist extremist violence.

Given the key importance afforded Iraq in the war on terror, Mr. Zapatero's declaration that "the Iraq war has been a disaster, the occupation continues to be a disaster" is profoundly dismaying for Washington and London.

Early in Mr. Bush's term, the U.S. agreed to provide Spain with intelligence assistance in combating the terrorist menace presented by ETA. There is no suggestion that Mr. Zapatero will in any way curtail such anti-terror cooperation. Indeed, he has made a point of stressing that the opposite would be the case.

But the close, personal relationship between Mr. Aznar and Mr. Bush will not easily be replaced. It is as if, over-

France gets attack threats

Paris, March 16 (Reuters): France has received threats of a possible attack against French interests from an Islamist group, the justice ministry said in a statement today.

The ministry said it had received a warning which spoke of possible attacks within France and against French interests abroad from a group called "Serivants of Allah the Powerful and Wise". "These are threats articulated in such a way that they are being taken very seriously," a judicial source said.

The ministry statement said the Paris prosecutor's office had immediately launched an inquiry. "It is obviously not yet possible to comment on the value of this document," the statement concluded.

Security experts say France is a target because of its cooperation with authorities fighting Islamic militants in its former North African colonies Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco.

Madrid, March 16 (Reuters): Spanish police today hunted Moroccan militants suspected of links to bombs that killed 201 people on Madrid trains and propelled the opposition Socialists into power at a general election. Local media said police were looking for five fugitive Moroccans, part of a group of eight main Moroccan suspects.

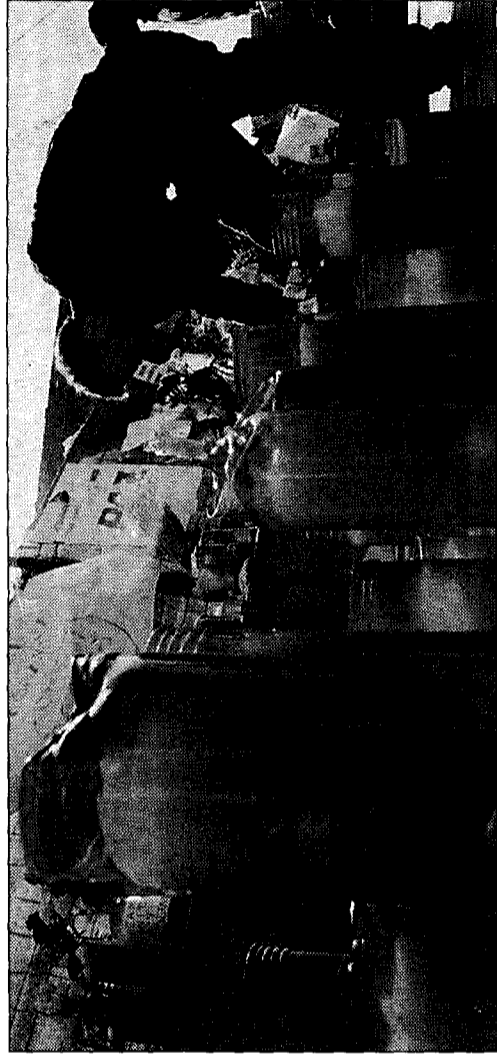
Three are already in custody in connection with Spain's worst attack and the first suspected al Qaeda-linked strike in the West since the September 11 strikes on the US.

But investigators cautioned against drawing any conclusions from the evidence gathered so far. The investigation "is in its infancy. We have a long way to go," one law enforcement official said.

Spanish police, experienced with Basque separatist attacks, are considered expert at bomb analysis but have sought foreign help for what has become a complex international investigation.

Police from across Europe are to convene in Madrid in com-

Spain seeks five Moroccans



A man pays tribute to the victims of the Madrid blasts at Atocha train station, Madrid. (AFP)

Muslim" who liked to wear good clothes.

Bush appeal

President George W. Bush today urged European allies to stick with the US in Iraq, and the White House said it may seek a new UN resolution to help persuade Spain not to withdraw its troops. "It's essential that we remain side-by-side with the Iraqi people," Bush said.

"Al Qaida understands the stakes. Al Qaida wants us out of Iraq as it wants to use Iraq as an example of defeating freedom and democracy," he said.

ing days to share information on the probe, and Spain and Morocco already have exchanged investigative teams.

Meanwhile US investigators are assisting Spain with fingerprint and background checks on suspects.

One of the three detained Moroccans has been named as Jamal Zougam. Police sources said bomb survivors had identified him from photographs as

having been at the crime scene but said they were treating witness reports cautiously.

Legal sources said the bombers are believed to have left the country.

However, police sources said no international arrest warrants had been issued.

Investigators were also examining the remains of one of the dead from Thursday's train blasts as a potential bomber.

The Moroccan line of investigation emerged at the weekend when police arrested five suspects — the three Moroccans and two Indians — in their first breakthrough.

El Pais newspaper said Zougam had connections with some of those arrested for last May's bombings in Casablanca that killed 45 people, including 12 suicide bombers. Friends described Zougam as a "modern

40-16 MADRID BLASTS / INDIANS RELEASED, SAYS NEWSPAPER

Police identify Moroccan suspects

1973
MADRID, MARCH 16. The Spanish police said on Tuesday they had detained an Algerian who allegedly talked about a terrorist attack in Madrid two months before it happened. The toll in the train bombings rose to 201.

Ali Amrous was picked up on Monday in the Basque city of San Sebastian to learn if he had advance knowledge of Thursday's terrorist attacks in Madrid, police told The Associated Press.

The police identified five new Moroccan suspects in the train bombings, the newspaper *El Pais* reported, and a French investigator told the AP he had found a direct link between the prime suspect, Jamal Zougam, and the spiritual leader of a clandestine extremist group believed involved in last May's deadly attacks in Casablanca, Morocco.

Since the attacks, investigators have focused on Zougam, a Moroccan immigrant who was arrested on Saturday with two other Moroccans and two Indians. The newspaper said the Indians were released, though the Government did not confirm that.

Amrous, an apparent indigent, was first arrested in January after a neighbourhood disturbance and made the threatening comments while being questioned by police, saying that "we will fill Madrid with the dead," authorities said. They added that they doubted he was connected at a high level with any terrorist group but may have known about the attacks in advance.

He was expected to be brought to Madrid for questioning. Police said they did not believe Amrous had any contacts



People light candles in memory of the victims of the blasts at the Atocha train station in Madrid on Tuesday. — AFP

with the armed Basque separatist group ETA, which the Spanish Government initially blamed for the attacks.

Zougam has already been identified by a Spanish judge as a follower of Imad Yarkas, the alleged leader of Spain's Al-Qaeda cell, who remains jailed on suspicion he helped plan the Sept. 11 attacks.

Police believe the five new Moroccan suspects took part in the bombings, *El Pais* reported Tuesday, without identifying them by name. An Interior Ministry spokesman said he could not confirm the report.

The paper also reported that the two Indians who are be-

lieved to have sold telephone cards to three arrested Moroccans were released. The spokesman said he could not confirm the report.

The bombs were triggered by cell phones, and investigators were able to find and arrest the three Moroccans and the two Indians on Saturday because a cell-phone card was found in an unexploded bomb and traced.

Investigators scrambled to learn the scope of the operation that carried out the Madrid attacks.

A possible link between them and Casablanca gained credibility on Tuesday after a French investigator, Jean-Charles Brisard,

said he had found a direct tie between Zougam and Mohamed Fizazi, a spiritual leader of Salafia Jihadia, which allegedly was behind the Casablanca attack and which has been linked to Osama bin Laden's Al-Qaeda terror network.

The suicide bombings in Casablanca killed 33 people and 12 bombers.

In a telephone call with Yarkas that Spanish police monitored in August 2001, Zougam said he had met Fizazi, who was among 87 people sentenced in Morocco last August in a trial that centred on the Casablanca attacks. Fizazi received a 30-year sentence. — AP

17 MAR 2004

14

Spain: a vote against support for Iraq war?

11216
(67)

By Batuk Gathani

Handwritten: K. Aznar, Barroso

BRUSSELS, MARCH 15. The defeat of the People's Party Government in Spain is widely regarded as a "protest vote" against the Prime Minister, Jose Maria Aznar, for his support to the American and British initiated war in Iraq.

The Popular Party leaders conceded defeat late last night though the Opposition Socialists have not won a working majority. Negotiations to cobble up a coalition may take a few days. Its leader, Jose Luis Rodrigus Zapatero (42), will become the Prime Minister. Though a "relatively inexperienced administrator", he is "a charming and popular politician". Mr. Zapatero was elected to Parliament as its youngest member at 27 and has spent all his political life in

Opposition. The exit of the Popular Party and Mr. Aznar from the political scene has been greeted with mixed feelings. As the voting took place immediately after the train blasts in Madrid which claimed more than 200 lives, it is suggested that Spaniards have made the general election "a referendum on terrorism". The Socialist Party's success is attributed to Mr. Zapatero's opposition to Spain's involvement in Iraq.

Many citizens blame the U.S.-ignited war on global terrorism for the blasts. According to recent opinion polls, over 90 per cent of Spaniards were opposed to the country's involvement in the Iraq war. However, the centre-right Popular Party might have returned to power following recent successes on the economic front. But the

blasts and the Popular Party's insistence that the secessionist movement ETA was responsible for the massacre have aroused much anger. Most Spanish citizens are convinced that Islamist terrorists have perpetrated the massacre though authorities are yet to come up with conclusive evidence.

Today, there is a marked urgency in Europe over tackling terrorism and Germany has called upon Ireland — which holds the six-monthly rotating presidency of the European Union — to summon a meeting of the Interior Ministers and senior security officials to discuss security.

The meeting will highlight Europe's new fight against terrorists and the message is "hunt them down but let us still keep our civil liberties".

THE HINDU 16 MAR 2004

TUESDAY, MARCH 16, 2004

MEANING OF THE SPANISH VERDICT

A WEEK AGO, outgoing Spanish Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar's Popular Party was certain it would coast to victory in Sunday's general elections. The economy was doing nicely. Mr. Aznar, who has been in office for eight years, and his designated successor, Mariano Rajoy, were strutting about as though they had everything under control, including Spain's involvement in the Bush administration's war of occupation in Iraq that had once brought a million protesters on the streets. Security and anti-terrorism were central planks of the conservative party's campaign and public opinion polls predicted the Popular Party would get a comfortable majority in the 350-member parliament. Last Thursday's horrific explosions in Madrid, the worst terrorist attack in Europe since the Lockerbie bombing of 1988, changed all that. The Socialist Party will be forming the new government in Spain with the support of some smaller parties.

What happened? The Spanish Government has paid the price for lying to its voters and manipulating public opinion — after apparently reaping the consequences of unrepentant engagement, with 1,300 troops, in the U.S.-led war of occupation in Iraq. Public opinion polls have revealed that 90 per cent of the Spanish people oppose the Aznar Government's participation in the war. The Popular Party is guilty of the sin of *lese majeste* and taking the electorate for fools. Within minutes of the calamitous terrorist explosions that claimed 200 lives and injured 1,400 and shattered the myth of European invincibility, the Government pointed an accusing finger at ETA, the Basque separatist organisation that has waged a 35-year-long campaign against Madrid. Prime Minister Aznar's personal hatred for ETA was well known. He himself narrowly escaped an assassination attempt in 1995 and has sworn to stamp out the irredentists. However, terrorism specialists warned that to rush to judgment that ETA was behind the latest explosions was irresponsible.

The sheer scale and magnitude of the operation, the simultaneous nature of the explosions, the type of explosives used, the fact that contrary to ETA's *modus operandi* no prior warning was issued, pointed away from rather than towards the Basque separatists. The Popular Party's pundits made a disastrous miscalculation: blaming the Basque separatists while diverting attention from the question of Spain's involvement in the Iraq war would be the surest way of winning votes.

However, this crisis management strategy went terribly awry. With the media scrutinising every scrap of evidence coming in, it became increasingly difficult for the Government to continue to deceive. The Interior Minister, Angel Acevedo, had to concede at a hastily convened midnight press conference that Islamist terrorism was the more likely perpetrator. With the national mood changing rapidly, it began to seem to a growing number of grieving Spaniards that the Government, having imposed a hated war on them, was taking the dishonourable course of covering up the horrific consequences of its actions. The high voter turnout signalled a strong protest vote that was simultaneously a poignant salute to those who had lost their lives on an irresponsible and dishonourable Government's account. Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero, the Socialist leader who will soon take over as Prime Minister, is a firm opponent of the Iraq war. In the election campaign, he charged that the Aznar regime had "gambled everything on its blind support for the United States, or rather the Bush administration, at the price of weakening the bond between Spain and Europe" and, more specifically, damaging the country's relationship with France and Germany. After the victory, Mr. Zapatero has confirmed his pre-election commitment to withdraw Spanish troops from Iraq by June-end unless a United Nations-led multilateral force took control from the occupation forces. The Spanish verdict is a big political setback to Washington.

THE HINDU 16 MAR 2004

Indian link to Spain blasts bolsters al-Qaida theory

HTC & Agencies
Madrid/Delhi, March 14

FOUR INDIANS have been linked to Thursday's Madrid blasts, striking a blow to the Spanish government's claims that Basque separatist group ETA and not the al-Qaida was behind the carnage.

Two of the Indians were arrested along with three Moroccans while the two others — both Spaniards of Indian origin — have only been summoned for questioning. Interior Minister Angel Acebes was hard put to explain what connection the Indians and Moroccans could have had with a Basque group. "We must not rule anything out," he said.

Spain has 'identified' the two arrested Indians as Vinay Kohly and Suresh Kumar, but New Delhi believes these names on their passports may be false and is trying to as-



A boy in Sydney protests against the Madrid blasts.

certain their identity. "Our embassy has asked the Spanish authorities to give us the names and passport numbers," a senior official said. The Indian embassy in Madrid is trying to gain consular access to the duo.

Hours after the arrests, the authorities found a videotape claiming the al-Qaida carried out the bombings in "response to your (Spain's) collabora-

tion (in the Iraq war) with the criminal Bush and his allies" and threatening more strikes.

The developments have jolted the ruling conservative Popular Party (PP), which was seeking a third term in Sunday's elections partly on the strength of its hardline stance against ETA. Many Spaniards believe that the government covered up clues pointing more to the involvement of the al-Qaida than the ETA.

Acebes said Saturday's arrests were made with clues provided by a cellphone found inside an explosives-packed gym bag discovered on one of the four bombed trains.

The two Indians were nabbed in a Madrid slum populated by hundreds of illegal immigrants. Madrid has nearly 9,000 Indians, mostly Sindhis and some from Punjab.

See also Page 11

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MADRID BLASTS / 'PUNISHMENT FOR SUPPORT TO IRAQ WAR'

Poll overshadowed by Al-Qaeda claim

MADRID, MARCH 14. Spaniards turned out in great numbers on Sunday to vote in general elections thrown wide open by an Al-Qaeda claim that it staged the Madrid terror attack to punish the Government for backing the U.S.-led war in Iraq.

Still reeling from the railway bombings which killed 200 people and injured 1,500, Spaniards entered voting booths grimaced and speaking in whispers.

"Spain has never voted in such a tragic situation. There's a feeling of anguish, sadness, horror," said Joaquin Leguina, a former President of Madrid's regional government.

Some voters expressed anger at the ruling Popular Party of the outgoing Prime Minister, Jose Maria Aznar, accusing him of making Spain a target for Islamic extremists because of his support for the Iraq war, which a vast majority Spaniards opposed. Mr. Aznar sent 1,300 Spanish troops to Iraq after the conflict and 11 have died.

Other voters expressed support for the ruling party because of its backing of the Iraq war and its crackdown on the armed Basque separatist group ETA, which the Government initially blamed for Thursday's attack.

Under brilliant skies after several days of rain, Spaniards flocked to the polls early. — AP

Speculation rife

Batuk Gathani reports from Brussels:

Speculation is rife in Spain on the identity of the perpetrators of the train blasts. On Friday, the authorities were pointing the finger at ETA — a secessionist terrorist movement based in



The Spanish Prime Minister, Jose Maria Aznar, shows his ID as his wife Ana Botella looks on at a polling station in Madrid on Sunday. — AFP

the Basque region, where a minority of extremists are seeking independence from Madrid.

The ETA has been supporting the secessionist movement for the last 39 years, periodically highlighted by terrorist acts and assassinations of members of the establishment.

The Prime Minister, Jose Maria Anza's Government has cracked down on the movement, and many Spaniards feel that pointing the finger at ETA might be a ploy to gain 'sympathy' votes in the election. Thou-

sands of Spanish citizens in Basque region gathered in a silent vigil to pay tribute to the victims.

Many demonstrated outside the Popular Party headquarters to protest against it making the incidents an "election issue". The secessionist movement has so far not attempted a major terrorist attack on the scale of the Madrid one.

An air of calm and deep sadness descended on Spain and the blasts are rated as the worst act of terror in Europe after a

terrorist bomb downed a Pan Am Flight 103 over Scotland in December 1988 killing 270 people.

All over Europe, people and authorities are in a deep quandary. If a link with the Islamic fundamentalists or Al-Qaeda movement is established, the issue will acquire a pan-European significance.

From Portugal to Poland, authorities are tightening security at train stations, airports and above all border posts.

THE HINDU
15 MAR 2004
15 MAR 2004

Grieving Spain prepares for polls

Associated Press
Madrid, March 13

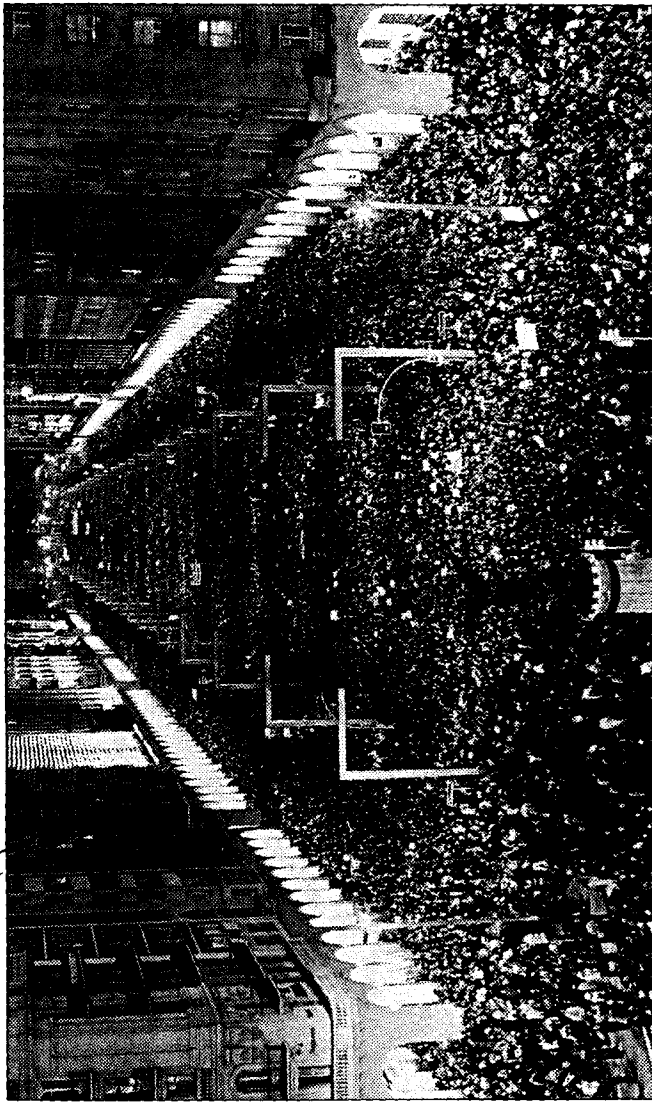
TRAUMATISED BY terrorism, Spaniards girded for general elections as a nation in grief, with the ruling party favored to win and insisting on Saturday that Basque separatists remain the prime suspect in the rail bombings that killed 199 people.

As a cold drizzle fell on Madrid, what would normally be a day of leisure and reflection before Sunday's voting instead brought more anguish and mourning. Families have started burying and cremating their dead, state radio said.

Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar blamed the armed group ETA, which has fought for decades for an independent Basque homeland, but there was concern that Islamic militants and perhaps the al-Qaida was involved.

The attack's lethal coordination and timing — 10 explosions within 15 minutes — suggested al-Qaida. But the compressed dynamite used in the backpack bombs is an explosive favoured by ETA. ETA denied responsibility, according to Gara, a Basque newspaper that the armed group uses to issue statements. Gara said a caller claiming to represent ETA phoned its newsroom to deny government allegations that the group was to blame. It was the first time ETA had issued such a denial.

Suspicious it was the al-Qaida gained weight after the police found a stolen van with seven deto-



Spanish protesters at a silent march through central Zaragoza on Friday. Millions poured out onto the streets even as Basque separatists denied responsibility for the Madrid bombings that killed nearly 200 people.

nators and an Arabic tape of Quiranic verses parked in a suburb near where the stricken trains originated. A London-based Arabic newspaper also received a message of responsibility in al-Qaida's name that called the attack "part of settling old accounts with Spain, the crusader, and America's ally in its war against Islam."

But Mariano Rajoy, the governing Popular Party's candidate for prime minister, said in an interview published by El

Mundo that the government still believed the culprit was ETA, rather than Islamic terrorists. "There are facts in my possession which make me believe it was ETA," Rajoy was quoted as saying. "And, beyond what I'm told, I have a moral conviction that it was them."

Debate on who is behind the attacks could sway voters in Sunday's election. If ETA is deemed responsible, that could boost support for Rajoy, Aznar's hand-

Rajoy is 3-5 percentage points ahead of Socialist candidate Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero in polls. No surveys have been released since the attacks.

Aznar, who has been in power since 1996, is honoring a pledge not to seek a third term, saying he wants renewal in government and his party Saturday would normally have been a so-called day of reflection, with campaigning banned. But parties abruptly ended the campaign after the blasts, which killed 199 and wounded nearly 1,500.

An estimated 2.3 million marchers in Madrid huddled against a steady rain, clogging the capital's squares and the area around the Atocha station, where two of the four trains blew up during Thursday morning's rush hour. "It isn't raining. Madrid is crying," said Jorge Mendez, a 20-year-old student.

Aznar, who was joined by other European leaders as he led one march, pledged on Friday to hunt down the terrorists whose bombs sparked new fears about Europe's vulnerability to attack.

In a chilling account of the bombings, Spanish radio station Cadena Ser broadcast a 12-second recording of an unidentified woman who had called a colleague's voice mail after an initial blast on a train at the Atocha station.

The woman, who survived, was in the process of fleeing as she frantically says: "I'm in Atocha. There's a bomb on the train! We had to —" and then two more blasts are heard amid her screams.

REUTERS

Spain in a state of shock as blasts toll mounts

1973
1973-1973

By Vajju Naravane

MADRID, MARCH 12. The Juan Carlos exhibition ground is where trade fairs are usually held. Today it has become a makeshift morgue for those killed in Thursday's horrific terrorist attacks that claimed nearly 200 lives.

About 50 unidentified bodies have been lined up for inspection by relatives. Some are horribly disfigured. Others are almost completely charred. Still others are with missing limbs or heads. It is difficult, if not impossible, for anyone to accept that their loved ones could be reduced to this — butchered flesh and charred bones.

"I have no news, no news at all. I went to the hospital, they told me to consult the website. I cannot find the faintest trace of my daughter," a distraught mother weeps.

People of 11 nationalities are among the victims, some of them illegal immigrants. The

Prime Minister, Jose Maria Aznar, said the latter would automatically receive Spanish citizenship. Many of the injured and dead belong to Spanish-speaking South American countries. Though Asians figure among the victims there is no one from India. "I have checked with the hospital authorities and the Indian community. There does not appear to be any Indian victim," Sajeeva Babu, India Embassy's press counselor told *The Hindu*.

"People come here steeling themselves for the worst. They have gone to the hospitals, consulted the Web sites and the lists. Their relatives are on none of those lists. What they see here is terrifying. Limbs separated from bodies. I had a mother who recognised her daughter from the engagement ring on her hand. The arm was all that was left of the daughter," a Red Cross worker said.

For many the grim search

was simply too much to bear. One woman emerged, her eyes red with weeping. Nearby, an old man overcome with emotion collapsed into the arms of a Red Cross volunteer. There were scenes of panic with people running from body to body, trying to locate their loved ones.

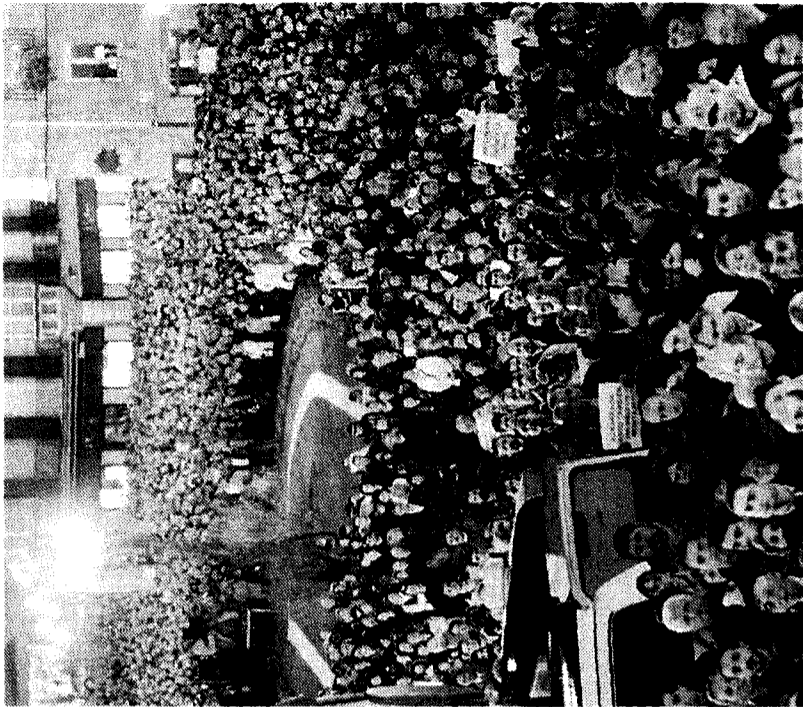
Over 408 people are still in hospital, with over 38 in a critical condition. Spain is in a state of shocked grief. But very quickly the numbness is giving way to anger. "Whatever happens, I shall demonstrate tonight," said Jorge, a 70-year-old gentleman who came here to identify the remains of his grandson. "We have to tell the terrorists that we shall not be cowed."

Millions of people are expected to join the mass demonstrations across Spain today. The Prime Ministers of Italy and France as well as other international figures including the E.U. Commission chief, Romano Prodi, will attend.

The police found a rucksack containing an explosive connected to the bomb attacks. The bag was found near one of the three railway stations hit in the blasts on Thursday, the sources said.

According to a local radio station, the bag contained 10 kg of explosive as well as a kg of shrapnel, a mobile phone and a timing device allowing the bomb to be set off by remote control. The bag, thought to belong to a victim was taken to a police station not far from the blasts in southeast Madrid. Its deadly contents were only discovered hours later. Bomb disposal experts made the device safe on Friday.

The radio described the explosives as Spanish-made "Special C" plastic and quoted anti-terrorist sources as saying that the material was not of a kind normally used by Basque separatists but by Islamic extremists.



Thousands take out a demonstration in Vitoria, capital of the autonomous Basque region, on Friday to protest against Thursday attacks on trains in Madrid. — AP

Spain hunts for bombers, toll 199

Associated Press

MADRID, March 12. — Businesses across Spain emptied at noon today as millions of Spaniards stood in the streets to observe several minutes of silence in memory of the 199 people killed in a string of train bombings the day before.

Authorities had requested a minute's silence, but many people in Madrid stood in the cool, wet weather for about 10 minutes. Afterward, many clapped — a Spanish way to show respect and say goodbye.

Prime Minister Mr Jose Maria Aznar pledged again to find those responsible for the worst terrorist attack in Spanish history. "We will bring the guilty to justice," he said. "No line of investigation is going to be ruled out."

Spanish officials initially blamed Basque separatists for yesterday's stunningly well coordinated string of 10 explosions hidden in backpacks on packed commuter trains, but they also were studying a claim of responsibility by a shadowy group in the name of Al-Qaida. Mr Aznar said no suspects have been ruled out.

The death toll rose overnight from 192 to 199, Deputy justice minister Mr Rafael Alcala said, adding that 84 bodies remain to be identified. Over 1,400 people were wounded as panicked commuters trampled on each other, abandoning their bags and shoes. Train cars were turned into twisted wrecks and platforms were strewn with corpses. Cell phones rang unanswered on the bodies of the dead as frantic relatives tried to call them.

Mr Aznar told a news conference that 14 foreigners were among the dead, including three Peruvians, two Hondurans, two Poles, and a person each from France, Chile, Cuba, Ecuador, Colombia, Morocco and Guinea-Bissau. He said they and their family members would be given Spanish citizenship if they asked for it.

Three days of mourning were declared and campaigning was called off for Spain's general election, but foreign minister Ms Ana Palacio pledged that the vote would be held on Sunday as planned.

As day broke today, television and radio described witness accounts of flaming bodies and other carnage on four morning rush hour trains full of workers and students. Passengers sobbed, lit candles and left flowers at Madrid's Atocha station, which was the first one hit in the at-



People observe a minute of silence as candles and flowers are placed at the Atocha railway station in memory of the victims one day after the blasts in Madrid on Friday. — AFP

tacks, and trains had to roll past wreckage left on the track. The government has called nationwide rallies for this evening, with Mr Aznar and other senior officials leading one in Madrid. Millions are expected to attend around the country.

The attack occurred exactly two-and-a-half years after the 9/11 attacks in the USA. It also was Europe's worst since the 1988 bombing of a Pan Am jetliner over Lockerbie, Scotland, that killed 270 people. "March 11 2004, now holds its place in the history of infamy," Mr Aznar said yesterday.

The e-mail claim of responsibility, signed by the shadowy Brigade of Abu Hafs al-Masri and received by the London-based Arabic newspaper *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, said the brigade's "death squad" had penetrated "one of the pillars of the crusade alliance, Spain."

Spain's government is studying the claim but still believes ETA is more likely responsible, a senior official in Mr Aznar's office said.

The USA believes Al-Masri sometimes falsely claims to be acting on behalf of Al-

Qaida. The group took credit for blackouts in the USA and London last year. But after police found a stolen van with seven detonators and the Arabic-language tape parked in a suburb near where the stricken trains originated, interior minister

Mr Angel Acebes said: "I have just given instructions to the security forces not to rule out any line of investigation."

A top Basque politician, Mr Arnold Otegi, denied ETA was behind the blasts and blamed "Arab resistance," noting Spain's

support for the Iraq War.

India condemns blasts: India today expressed outrage at yesterday's terrorist bombings in the Spanish capital and said it was time for the world to reject and put an end to attacks against innocent people, SNS adds from New Delhi.

Explosives found on train in Greece Greek police today said they had discovered a small quantity of explosives without a detonator on a cargo train earlier this week, but ruled out any link to a planned terror attack, AFP adds from Athens.

ETA behind blasts, says UN

Agencies

UNHQ, March 12. — The UN Security Council has "strongly" condemned yesterday's terrorist attacks and named the Basque separatist group ETA as perpetrator of the crime.

Despite hesitation of some members, it named the militant outfit as having a hand in the strikes at the urging of Spain, an act which some diplomats said was unusual as the Council does not name terrorist groups until their identity has been firmly established. Council diplomats said that initially, several members were opposed to identifying ETA as perpetrators of the crime till final determination was made but Spain lobbied hard to get the name included.

Secretary-general Mr Kofi Annan avoided naming ETA and simply reiterated his position that there is no justification for targeting civilians and that perpetrators must be held to account for the crimes.

In Australia, Prime Minister John Howard described the bombings, which also left 1,400 wounded, as "a dreadful atrocity without any kind of justification."

Indonesia said the blasts showed the need for international cooperation in fighting terrorism. China echoed the condemnation, in a message from Prime Minister Mr Wen Jiabao to Spanish Prime Minister Mr Jose Maria Aznar.

Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf of Pakistan offered his "heartfelt condolences" to the government and the people of Spain and to the bereaved families.

Philippine President Mrs Gloria Arroyo today called for heightened vigilance both here and abroad following the Madrid blasts, calling it a "dastardly, cowardly attack."

US homeland security secretary Mr Tom Ridge said today that the overnight train bombings in Madrid will only reinforce the international resolve in fighting terrorism. "The savagery and inhumanity of these attacks undoubtedly will strengthen the world's resolve in the fight against terrorism," Mr Ridge said in a speech to the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Thailand during a visit to this South-east Asian country.

12 MAR 2004

Arab shadow on ETA's Madrid massacre; 190 dead

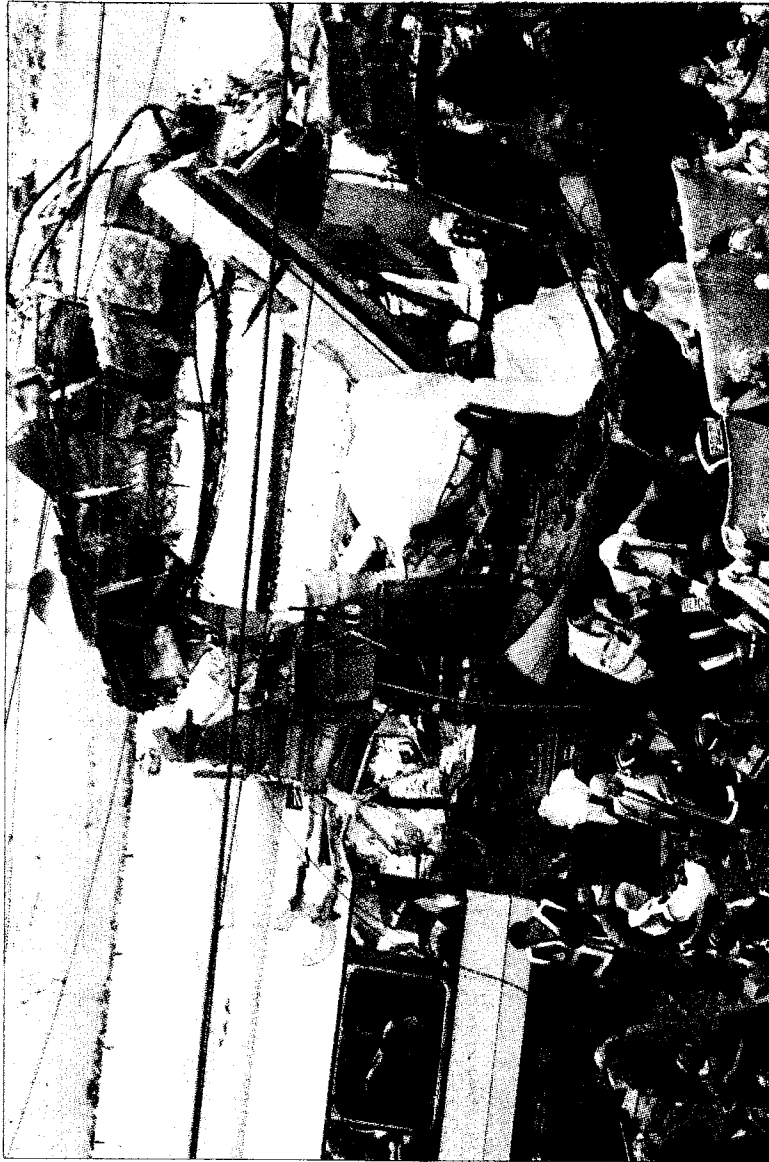
MADRID, March 11. — Powerful explosions rocked three Madrid railway stations today, just three days before Spain's general elections, killing 190 rush-hour commuters and wounding more than 1,200. "This is a massacre," government spokesman Eduardo Zaplana said.

Interior minister Angel Acebes said 13 bombs had been placed in stations and trains around Madrid, of which 10 had gone off within minutes of each other. Though no group claimed responsibility, the minister said the separatist Basque group ETA was behind the attack. But a leader of ETA's political wing, Arnaldo Otegi, denied the outfit's involvement in the blasts and blamed "the Arab resistance" instead. US officials haven't ruled out the possibility of Al-Qaida's involvement in the attack and an atrocity on this scale has never been perpetrated by ETA before.

Spain was one of the strongest supporters of the US-led invasion of Iraq last year and has been a staunch American ally post-9/11. Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar vowed to hunt down the attackers. The bombs exploded at 7.30 a.m. (1200 IST) in a commuter train arriving at Atocha, a bustling hub for subway, commuter and long-distance trains in Spain's capital. Blasts also rocked trains or platforms at two stations on a commuter line leading to Atocha. People in tears streamed away from the station as rescue workers carried bodies out. — AP&AFP



A relative of a blast victim at a Madrid hospital on Thursday. (Right) Rescue workers remove bodies from the train rocked by a blast at Atocha station in Madrid. — AFP



GREEK POLLS / SOCIALIST GOVERNMENT DEFEATED

Europe
080-19
9/3

Conservatives swept to power

By Batuk Gathani

BRUSSELS, MARCH 8. The conservative New Democracy Party of Greece, led by Costas Caramanlis, defeated the Socialists who have been in power for over two decades, in the national elections conducted on Sunday.

Mr. Caramanlis (47), who will become the youngest ever Prime Minister of Greece, is the scion of a well-known political family of the country. Speaking after his party's victory, Mr. Caramanlis promised a smaller government, less bureaucracy and lower taxes.

He also pledged more funds for education, social welfare and health and vowed to crack down on corruption, initiate wide-ranging economic and administrative reforms and boost the country's slow economic growth. Above all, the Greeks were promised an end to "the era of arrogant policies bred by over 25 years of Socialist hold on power".

One of the first tasks of Mr. Caramanlis will be to deal with the March 22 deadline to bring about a settlement between the warring Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities and pave the way for a united Cyprus's entry into the European Union on May 1. The Greek Government is closely involved in the United Nations-sponsored



**The Greek Prime Minister-elect,
Costas Caramanlis**

negotiations on the future of Cyprus.

The Socialist Party leader, George Papandreou, conceded defeat on Sunday night, as the New Democracy Party won a majority in the 300-seat Parliament. Mr. Papandreou is described as the "most popular" Greek politician, who took over the party leadership last March. Since then, the party has made some progress but has yet to establish sufficient credibility as its reputation has

been tainted by allegations of corruption and inefficiency.

Mr. Caramanlis, who has never held a Cabinet post, faces a formidable task in coping with administrative challenges. Greece ranks amongst the poorest E.U. countries, although its people are dynamic and entrepreneurial. Apart from the pressing economic issues and the Cyprus question, the top priority of the new Government will be the smooth conduct of the Olympic Games scheduled to be held in August. A two-week security exercise for the Olympics starts on Wednesday, involving several thousand soldiers and police.

Turkey's hope on talks

ANKARA, MARCH 8. The Turkish Prime Minister, Taysip Erdogan, said today he hoped Greece's new Government would strengthen the U.N.-backed peace talks on divided Cyprus and that he would visit Athens to seek Greek co-operation for a deal.

"Turkey had positive relations with Greece before the elections, whether it was with the ruling party or the Opposition," "We hope these elections will positively contribute to this (Cyprus peace) process."
— Reuters

THE HINDU 9 MAR 2004

The shattered European dream

By Vaiju Naravane

THE YEAR 2003 has been disastrous for the European Union, a true *annus horribilis*, in fact.

Talks on adopting a full-fledged Constitution for Europe ran aground in mid-December. Members failed to agree on several outstanding issues, but mainly over voting rights on how E.U. decisions are to be adopted.

The year laid the old continent bare to scrutiny as never before and what the world saw was far from edifying. The masks of unity and integration, of greater European cooperation were torn off to reveal an E.U. rife with fragmentation, infighting and personal rivalry where narrow national interests, and on occasion even personal interests, carried the day over statesman-like vision, sagacity and political will.

As usual, it was in the realm of foreign affairs that matters went badly askew. Far from adopting a long dreamed-of common foreign and security policy, Europe showed that there were as many takes on foreign affairs as there are member-states — or almost.

The year started off on a note that angered and frightened many smaller nations. On January 22, at celebrations to mark the 40th anniversary of the Elysee Contract — a treaty that sealed post-war Franco-German cooperation — Germany and France, the dominant duo that has fuelled European integration these past four decades, announced they would work for even greater cooperation with joint Cabinet meetings and presented a unified vision of how an enlarged E.U. should be run.

Over dinner in Paris, French President Jacques Chirac and German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder agreed to what amounted to a dual presidency for the E.U. They proposed that there should be two pow-

erful offices: the President of the European Commission and the President of the Council of Ministers. They also called for joint E.U. embassies around the world and stressed the need for an E.U. Foreign Minister.

All this took place against the background of sharp Franco-German differences with the United States over the invasion of Iraq. A week later, a full-scale split over the Iraq war appeared in Europe that was as much a

the new entrants and a loyal acolyte of the U.S., as an American Trojan Horse, manipulated at will by Washington, to torpedo greater European unity. It has played Poland, Spain, Britain and Italy against the French and the Germans saying only "coalition partners" will be given lucrative reconstruction contracts in Iraq.

The fallout has irreparably damaged the dynamic within Europe and the trickle-down message that

The year gone by saw the masks of unity and integration torn off to reveal an E.U. rife with fragmentation, infighting and personal rivalry.

result of seething resentment against the powerful Franco-German axis as a desire to keep on the right side of President George Bush. Leaders of eight European nations, including three new members, signed an open letter in support of Mr. Bush and the invasion of Iraq. A few weeks later, leaders of 10 Baltic and Balkan states signed a similar letter.

All the signatories to the letter had personal and national agendas. East Europeans are still grateful to America for helping them defeat communism, and joining NATO has been one of their dearest dreams. Spain's José Maria Aznar fighting the terror tactics of the Basque separatists at home will support any campaign described as anti-terrorist. Britain's Tony Blair, dubbed America's poodle by his own countrymen, approached the question of Iraq with near messianic zeal, while the reaction of Italy's self-made media tycoon, Silvio Berlusconi, was coloured by his ardent admiration of Mr. Bush and U.S. style capitalism.

America has exploited these divisions, pitting "new" against "old" Europe. Many see Poland, the largest of

populations at the 2002 Nice Treaty, refused to accept the more equitable double voting system suggested by the draft constitution. The six largest members of the E.U. ribbed by proposing a freeze on the E.U.'s budget. This will mean less money to cash-strapped nations such as new entrants from Eastern Europe as well as to major recipients like Spain. Not-so-veiled threats by Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer that Germany might withhold funding for E.U. regional aid — mainly benefiting Spain and Poland — have further stoked Warsaw's anger.

So what lies ahead for Europe? 2004 does not auger well for talks on the Constitution. For one, the European parliament is to hold elections in June, a month when one of the troublemakers, Spain too, holds a general election. To complicate matters further, the European Commission is to step down next October.

It is likely that the New Year will start on a note of acrimony and in a bad political climate. Besides working on the budget and continuing with the stalled constitution talks, Europe is looking at issues such as the reconstruction of Iraq and the future shape of NATO. Germany and France have threatened to form a core group partnership of countries keen on greater political integration triggering fears of a two-speed Europe. This will also mean that the E.U.'s aim of engaging its new neighbours, the so-called "Wider Europe" including the Balkans, Turkey, Russia, the Central Asian States and the Baltics will be placed on hold. Far from becoming stronger and more confident, the E.U. appears increasingly fragile. Perhaps the true danger of "decoupling" looms not between the United States and Europe but with the weakening of the European federalist dream.

5/17 Scotland to take in 8,000 migrants a year

Indo-Asian News Service 13

EDINBURGH, Feb. 29. — At a time when British tabloids are raising a scare about large-scale immigration from east Europe, Scotland has announced plans to welcome about 8,000 migrants a year to halt population decline.

Under a radical plan unveiled on Wednesday, Scotland touts itself as a new home for people from all over the world. It would encourage workers from countries due to join the European Union, including Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia and the Baltic states, to come to Scotland.

People as far off as the USA, South Africa, India and China too would be welcomed. Overseas students in Scotland will be encouraged to stay on and build a career here. As much as £500,000 a year will be spent on a new agency to advise foreigners on how to get visas and work permits.

Scotland's population is on course to go below five million by 2009 due to falling birth rates and emigration. That would cause a pensions crisis with just 2.9 million workers supporting 1.2 million pensioners by 2027.

The home office, which issues work permits, has agreed to back Scotland's "Fresh Talent" scheme.

First minister Mr Jack McConnell said: "We need to attract and welcome

new people. We need fresh talent, and a more diverse, more cosmopolitan country is good for Scots."

To keep Scotland's worker-pensioner balance at current levels, it needs 23,000 migrants this year alone, while the Home Office predicts 13,000 EU migrants entering Britain as a whole.

Scotland is losing young people rapidly — the number of under-16s will plunge by 18 per cent over the next 20 years and the pensioner headcount will soar by 17 per cent.

There are 13,000 fewer pupils in Scottish schools this year than last year. At this rate, Scotland will lose two-thirds of its schools within a lifetime.

In 10 weeks' time, any of the people living in the 10 east European states about to join the EU can enter Britain or Ireland and work anywhere they want. The race is now on to persuade them to consider Scotland.

London has a huge advantage over Scotland. Most buses and flights from eastern Europe arrive in the capital, and the story of migration is laced with people who take the first job they find when first arriving in the country, only to stay there for good.

London is booming, rich in job vacancies for those aspiring to the minimum wage and it is an ethnic hub where new workers are likely to find a distant relative to stay with for the first few months.