

Sydney police seize weapons on beaches

Australian
9577

JIM REGAN

1912

SYDNEY, DECEMBER 18

REUTERS

AUSTRALIAN Police seized petrol bombs, knives and iron bars around Sydney beaches on Sunday, along with mobile phones used to spread racist messages, in a huge security operation to prevent fresh inter-communal violence.

Police put an extra 500 police on the beaches of Australia's biggest city, taking the total cordon to about 2,000.

Officers patrolled on horseback and set up check points around some of Sydney's favourite summer playgrounds, including Bondi Beach, where a peaceful holiday mood was edged by fears of fresh violence between whites and ethnic Lebanese.

Police said they had found five people north of the mainly white beachside community of Cronulla on Sunday with a 25-litre drum of petrol in their car, as well as condoms for making fire bombs. They also found two men with bottles of petrol on a Bondi bus.

"We will continue this operation for as long as it takes," New South Wales State Police Commissioner Ken Moroney told reporters, adding that 60 arrests had been made since Friday.

"I don't think there will be any trouble today, not with 2,000 cops around," Louise Simpson, a young mother said at Cronulla beach, where the violence first erupted a week ago.

"But what's it going to be like in three or four weeks when the cops go away?" she added.

Rioting broke out in Cronulla on December 11 after surfers turned on ethnic Lebanese youths whom they blamed for a recent attack on beach lifeguards.

"The moment the cops go, the trouble will start," said Troy, 34, a jobless Cronulla surfer who supported the backlash.

The unrest revealed tensions between Sydney's territorial surfing sub-culture, united in surfing shorts and wrap-around sunglasses, and ethnic Lebanese youths from poorer western



Sydney who have become regular beachgoers.

"We got a text message from our boys to come down today, but we don't want any trouble," said a young ethnic Lebanese man, Ahmad.

From Punchbowl, an inland suburb of mainly Lebanese immigrants, Ahmad showed the text message: "All Arabs unite to let the Aussies know we can't be pushed around."

Overnight, four men hit a 32-year-old man with an iron bar near an east Sydney beach, police said. Text-message threats of racial violence also sparked seaside police patrols at opposite sides of the country, in the east-coast tourist mecca of the Gold Coast and on the west-coast beaches of Perth.

Police suspect the Sydney unrest has drawn in white supremacists from around Australia and say some of the men arrested for carrying weapons have driven to Sydney from other states.

In central Sydney, almost 2,000 people held a "United Against Racism" rally. Some blamed Australian involvement in the US-led invasion of Iraq for a growing divide between whites and Muslims.

—Reuters

1 9 050 2035

INDIAN EXPRESS

Keep Australia Ugly?

No way, argues SP SETH

The widely reported race riots in Sydney have, in some ways, shaken Australia. A large mob at the seaside suburb of Cronulla had gathered last Sunday to bash the "Lebs" (people of Lebanese/Arab descent) and "Wogs" (non-white migrants), following a text message doing the rounds. The message was given wide circulation, according to Press reports, by being read out on his program by a prominent radio personality, urging people to mobilise on the Cronulla beach to show their solidarity and anger at an earlier attack by some Lebanese youth on two life-savers at the beach.

The mob that gathered on the beach was thus in an ugly mood, further fuelled by the booze they had imbibed in generous quantity. Though they were all set to attack the so-called enemy, there weren't many "Lebs" around. The few they could spot, they went after like a lynch mob. The crowd of white males out to avenge long-simmering resentment and hostility against Arab youths visiting Cronulla beach from nearby suburbs, and allegedly misbehaving, probably thought that this would teach them a lesson. But it didn't. It simply proved counter-productive, as the Lebanese youths went on a retaliatory rampage attacking people and wrecking cars. There are even reports of arson attacks on some churches. How this will pan out eventually is anybody's guess.

The Muslims of Lebanese origin (there are more Christian Lebanese in Australia than Muslims, but they all look alike to the majority here) are a small minority, though they appear larger-than-life

because of their concentration in a few suburbs. The problem, however, tends to become magnified, when viewed by many Muslims here as part of the targeting of the people of their faith. The passing of Australia's new anti-terror legislation, and jailing of some suspected terrorists, has made the Muslim community even more jittery and defensive. They have had

Sydney that do their best to keep those of Middle Eastern origin, specifically Lebs, out." Recounting his own personal experience, he said: "It leaves a foul taste in your mouth. It is no wonder that people feel bitter, resentful and angry." He then goes on to quote a friend of his as saying - "We're dogs in this country." It is safe to assume that they are also discriminat-

incite people to further violence. It is reported that: "Text messages targeting ethnic groups are calling for people to start 'cracking skulls' at a beach demonstration on the Gold Coast," a popular holiday destination in Queensland. The violence in Sydney seems to be even energising Pauline Hanson, the discredited political queen of racism in Australia. She has reportedly condemned violence from all sides, but has maintained that some migrants fuelled tensions by refusing to adapt to "the Australian way of life". Some commentators seem to think that it is a case of chickens coming home to roost in the wake of Prime Minister John Howard's race politics. According to Father Roy J. O'Neill: "How can John Howard blatantly deny any responsibility for the emergence of racial tensions and riots in Sydney? He has provided the type of leadership that leads logically to this type of behaviour. His xenophobic policies on immigration and his racial profiling disguised as 'anti-terrorism' fed the emergence of this ugly aspect of extreme right-wing politics."



Members of the Islamic community in Sydney gather outside a church hall where a "suspicious" fire broke out recently. Racial tensions are on the rise across Australia. AFP

a terrible image problem, starting with the bombing of the New York Trade Centre, the Bali bombings and a host of other terrorist attacks. All these outrages are horrible crimes. The problem, though, is that the despicable acts of a few tend to tar entire communities and people of a race or religion as potential terrorists, thus creating a "them" and "us" dichotomy. As a *Sydney Morning Herald* journalist (a young man of Lebanese origin) has written: "It is well known that there are clubs and bars in

ed in jobs, and their socio-economic situation is not too good.

It is, therefore, a bigger problem of race, religion and socio-economic divide. The Cronulla beach incident and the subsequent retaliatory violence look more like symptoms of a deeper malady. One would hope that the violence unleashed in Sydney will not spread elsewhere in Australia. Already, there are reports of stray incidents of racial outbursts in other parts of the country, and text messages and e-mails are doing the rounds to

which he said that, "we" will determine who comes to "our" country and the manner in which they come. In his cartoon, Moir has depicted a frightening-looking male wrapped in an Australian flag mouthing the slogan: "We shall determine who comes to our suburb and the manner in which they come!" And his T-shirt bears the legend "Keep Australia Ugly".

One can only hope not.

(The author is a freelance contributor.)

18 DEC 2005

THE STATESMAN

BEACH CLASHES ■ White supremacists attack Middle Eastern-origin youths

Race violence erupts in Sydney

MICHAEL PERRY
SYDNEY, DECEMBER 12

AUSTRALIAN Prime Minister John Howard called for ethnic and religious tolerance on Monday after racial violence, spurred on by white supremacists, erupted in parts of Sydney.

Racial tension sparked violence on Cronulla Beach on Sunday when around 5,000 people, some yelling racist chants, attacked youths of Middle Eastern background, saying they were defending their beach after lifesavers were attacked there last week.

Violence then spread to a second beach, Maroubra, where scores of men armed with baseball bats smashed about 100 cars.

"Attacking people on the basis of race and ethnicity is totally unacceptable and should be repudiated by all Australians, irrespective of background and politics," Howard told a news conference on Monday, by which time the violence had subsided.

At Botany Bay, riot police confronted hundreds of youths and police said a man was stabbed in the back in a southern Sydney suburb in what media reports said appeared to be racial violence. New South Wales (NSW) police said a group of Neo-Nazis and white supremacists stirred on the drunken crowd at Cronulla.

"There appears to be an element of white supremacists and they really have no place in mainstream Australian soci-



Riot police beat back crowds at Sydney's Cronulla Beach. Reuters

ety. Those sort of characters are best placed in Berlin 1930s, not in Cronulla 2005," NSW Police Minister Carl Scully told reporters.

On Sunday, mobs of drunken and angry youths, some draped in Australian flags, shouted "No more Lebs (Lebanese)". The mobs chased and attacked Australians of Middle East appearance, rushing onto a train at one stage to fight. More than 20 people were injured and 12 arrested.

Arabic and Muslim leaders said the violence had been expected as Muslims had been subjected to racist taunts, especially since the Iraq war and bombings on the Indonesian island of Bali where many Australians were among the dead.

"Arab Australians have had to cope with vilification, racism, abuse and fear of a racial backlash for a number of years, but these riots will take that fear to a new level," said Australian Arabic Council chairman Roland Jabbour.

NSW state premier Morris Lemma

said the violence was the "ugly face of racism in Australia", but Howard said it did not reflect a deeper problem with Australia's multi-cultural society.

"It is important that we reaffirm our respect for freedom of religion in this country, but it is also important that we place greater emphasis on integration of people into the broader community and the avoidance of tribalism," he said.

Government politician Bruce Baird said tensions between the Anglo-Saxon and Muslim communities had simmered for years, with Cronulla locals angry after six women from the area were killed in the 2002 Bali bombings. Eighty eight Australians were among 202 people killed by the nightclub bombings. "Where this riot took place is actually the site of where we've got the Bali memorial for these women," Baird told local radio. Asked if the riots were revenge for Bali and September 11 in the US, Baird said: "I think so."

Muslim leaders accused politicians and media commentators of "fanning the flames of racial tension".

"Fear and scaremongering have long been targeted toward the Arab and Muslim communities, as politicians fueled by media sensationalism, justify support for draconian agendas and simplistic policies," said Arab council chairman Jabbour.

—Reuters

13 DEC 2005

INDIA

Helen Clark wins historic third term

WELLINGTON: New Zealand Prime Minister Helen Clark has won a historic third term but she now faces the difficult task of forging an alliance with smaller parties to form a government capable of serving its full term, said the Opposition leader on Saturday.

Ms. Clark's Labour Party holds 50

seats in the 121-seat Parliament after final results from the September 17 election were announced, with the main Opposition National Party on 48 seats.

"I think Helen Clark faces a difficult task forming government. I'm ready for the next campaign whenever it is," Na-

tional Party leader Don Brash said, suggesting it could be sooner than later. With promises of tax cuts, National nearly doubled its number of MPs from 27 to 48. Ms. Clark said she would begin talks with the smaller parties to secure the support of the 11 more seats necessary to form a working majority. — AFP

M10

HD-17

Aus Politik
New Zealand

Australia softens line on immigrants

Australia & New Zealand

Howard frees the refugee children from their razor wire cages

24/6 ~~24/6~~

Ben Sandilands

HO-17

CANBERRA: Less than a week before assuming total control of both houses of the Australian Parliament, Prime Minister John Howard has broken the harshest shackles that his administration had been imposing on illegal immigrants.

Those with children will no longer be kept behind the double-caged, razor-wire-topped detention centres that had become synonymous with the Australian Government's attempts to deter the smuggling of people without visas into the country.

Instead they will await determination of their refugee or immigration status in "community detention", meaning they will live normal lives in suburban homes until examination of their cases results in their being allowed to remain in Australia, or being deported.

However this change of heart by the avowedly conservative

Liberal Prime Minister, John Howard is being dissected more in terms of sudden change in the structure of Australian politics than the humanitarian benefits for at least 52 children and several hundred adults in detention centres.

A professor in history and politics at Curtin University, Dr. David Black, says: "John Howard's decision to soften his hard line on mandatory detention of suspected illegal immigrants may be a sign he is thinking about how history will judge him. He is also making concessions on Indigenous affairs and expressing more liberal or tolerant views in other areas. This is a sign he may have his eye on the big picture. He's very anxious about the place he's going to have in Australian history and having weighed up the situation, has decided he can adopt decisive changes that he can chalk up to his own credit."

John Howard is by title the

leader of the parliamentary Liberal Party of Australia, even though he has always described himself and his party as conservative.

Until a party room revolt by four progressive or liberal liberals led by backbencher Petro Georgiou disrupted the conservative agenda a month ago, all signs were that from 1 July this year the Howard administration would carry out the most comprehensive pro-business anti-union reforms seen in the 104 years since a collection of former British colonies were federated into a nation.

The first of July is when Senators elected to the upper house in the general election of last October take their seats, and give the Government of the day a majority in both houses of Parliament for the first time in 24 years. But the moderates, orchestrated by Mr. Georgiou, threatened Mr. Howard's grip on policy settings right on the eve of

gaining total control of Parliament by issuing a challenge involving the ethical foundations of the party in relation to human rights and those of children in particular.

They drew up a private members bill that would have totally dismantled the Government's punitive illegal immigration laws and received saturation media coverage for being rebels with a cause within the coalition ranks. Confronted by an Opposition he could not squash by having the numbers in both house of Parliament, because it existed within his own party's much swollen ranks, Mr. Howard did a deal. Mandatory detention would be turned into a process more than a punishment, with lots of safeguards, and family groups would be conditionally released into the community, and the Mr. Georgiou bill would be withdrawn. — ©Guardian Newspapers Limited 2005

JUN 2005

THE HINDU