

EUROPE'S NIGHTMARE

OTHER NEWS

Roh to be impeached

South Korea descended into political chaos on Friday after the opposition-controlled National Assembly voted to impeach President Roh Moo-hyun for alleged interference in a parliamentary election campaign. President Roh will be suspended from his post until a constitutional court rules on the breach, a decision which could take as long as six months. The development rattled financial markets, with Korea's stock index, the Kospi, initially dropping nearly 5 per cent in a plunge which included big falls for Korean icons like electronics giant Samsung and steel maker POSCO. Prime Minister Goh Kun, a former mayor of Seoul, will take over as interim leader while the court hearing takes place. The conservative Grand National Party and the left-of-centre Millennium Democratic Party combined in the impeachment motion which passed by 193-2 in the 271-seat assembly. Members of the Uri Party, a splinter party made up mostly of former MDP politicians loyal to Mr Roh, formally boycotted the vote after being physically removed from the parliament for trying to prevent the vote from taking place. The impeachment motion marks a new low point for Mr Roh who has endured a tumultuous term in office since his election in February last year. Critics have attacked his handling of relations with the US, especially the sometimes sharp differences between his administration and Washington over North Korea. **Brendan Pearson**

Worries over US spending

Higher spending on motor cars and in department stores pushed US retail sales higher last month, but questions remain over the strength of consumer spending, the most important part of economic growth in the country. Retail sales rose by 0.6 per cent to \$US327.2 billion (\$440 billion) in February, and January sales were revised upwards, according to the Commerce Department. Automobile sales in January rose 2.7 per cent and department store purchases were 1.2 per cent higher. But excluding the surge in car sales, spending was flat. **Sean Aylmer**

Greenspan upbeat on jobs

The chairman of the US Federal Reserve, Alan Greenspan, told Congress that he was "fairly well convinced" that employment would pick up "reasonably quickly". Dr Greenspan told the House committee on education and the work force that in response to anxiety over the migration of jobs to Latin America and Asia and outsourcing of jobs to India and China, "a new round of protectionist steps is being proposed. These alleged cures would make matters worse rather than better. They would do little to create jobs; and if foreigners were to retaliate, we would surely lose jobs".

The Wall Street Journal

Ford to pay bonuses again

In a sign that finances are improving at the world's No. 2 car maker, Ford Motor Co said it would resume paying bonuses to middle- and upper-management employees, and reinstate pension plans for its US salaried workers. This would be the first time in three years that Ford has paid executive bonuses. Ford suspended such bonuses in 2002 as part of a broad cost-cutting program rolled out after it reported a \$US5.47 billion net loss for 2001. **The Wall Street Journal**

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Another front in war on terrorism

Comment Tony Walker

Politicians being politicians, they will be calculating the implications of the Madrid bombings for a particularly active year politically. This is an election year in three of four founder member countries of US President George Bush's Coalition of the Willing against Iraq – the US itself, Spain (at the weekend), and Australia.

Only Britain among the four bed-rock members of the Coalition is not required to go to the polls this year; although it remains open to Prime Minister Tony Blair to go early if he chooses.

Conventional wisdom has it that perilous times benefit incumbency: Bush's poll numbers, for example, were at their zenith immediately after the September 11, 2001, attacks on the World Trade Centre.

Prime Minister John Howard's ratings firmed after the Bali bomb-

ings. Spain's ruling party might expect to draw greater support in these terrible moments.

In the US, polls indicate that people's preoccupations have swung back to jobs and health care: terrorism ranks down the list, but that would change dramatically if there was a terrorist attack of any magnitude on US soil.

Bush leads his challenger, Massachusetts Senator John Kerry on national security, but the controversial war in Iraq with its steady build-up of casualties complicates the picture.

While the Bush administration can argue that the world is a safer place – it is certainly a better place – with Saddam Hussein in custody, it faces a much more difficult task making the connection between its global war on terror and the invasion of Iraq.

In fact, it has not yet delivered proof that there was a link between the Iraqi regime and al-Qaeda,

despite efforts by administration figures including Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld to make the case.

In the US election, which promises to be particularly vexed, debate about Iraq and its link in the fight against al-Qaeda will be thoroughly canvassed.

The administration will be obliged to defend its decision to broaden its counter-terrorism war to include Iraq, thus diminishing the focus on al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and around the world.

What the Madrid bombings demonstrate is that al-Qaeda or its extremist surrogates – al-Qaeda is as much a brand these days as an organisation in and of itself – retain the capacity to strike, and to strike hard.

The Americans claim to have either killed or captured 70 per cent of al-Qaeda's operatives and to have severely weakened the organisation. That claim seems dubious in light of what has happened.

The Spanish authorities initially blamed the Basque separatist group, ETA, but the Madrid violence has all the hallmarks of Middle East-inspired terror.

Spain's membership of the Coalition of the Willing made it a target, and a soft one since its geographic location adjacent to North Africa makes it the most vulnerable European state.

It is not stretching a point to refer to Spain as Europe's soft underbelly in the war against terror.

The Madrid attack will be terribly worrying for the organisers of the Athens Olympics, for it underscores the capacity of terrorist groups in the European theatre.

A terrorist war has, in effect, been declared on European soil, just weeks from the beginning of the Games.

Countering the al-Qaeda menace requires resources, determination, and focus. Pity about the Iraq distraction.

'Whoever did this is not a human being'

Revenge hangs heavy in the air over Madrid after the bombings, as **Anne Hyland** writes from the scene of the attacks.

'Death to the terrorists!' comes the ear-splitting scream of Carmen Garcia-Perez. Her 56-year-old body shakes angrily as she spits out the words. "Death to the terrorists," she cries again.

Tears fall down her face and those of many of the thousands who stand near the site of the massacre – the Atocha railway station, a hub for subway, commuter and long-distance trains in the Spanish capital.

Garcia-Perez thrusts her hands above her head as she seeks a biblical retribution: an eye for an eye. Her screams hush people beside her at the scene of the bombing. The grey clouds in the Madrid sky now mirror the mood of Spain.

Across the city, Hector Fernandez says the bombs have changed his life. Before Thursday, he did not believe in the death penalty but now his sentiments match those of Garcia-Perez.

Fernandez, 30, was one of the first to arrive at El Pozo station. Just before 8am he had heard the two blasts that ripped open a commuter train and had raced to the station. He and his neighbours tore up park benches to use as stretchers while they waited for emergency services to arrive.

"People were split open down

the middle and there were many with broken bones," he said.

"Everywhere people were dead and those still alive felt cold. We didn't want to touch them in case we injured them more but we had to do something, people were screaming. Many were trapped in the twisted metal.

"Whoever did this is not a human being."

El Pozo station is 20 minutes east of Atocha in the heart of one of the poorest areas of Madrid. Red-brick housing estates, thick with graffiti, shoulder each side of the station and beyond.

Young hoodlums hang around the station, carrying kitsch gold walking sticks crowned with golf balls. Many are pilfering the police security tape and taking photos of the red, white and blackened train with their mobile phones.

Other people hang the Spanish flag from their windows, with a black sash attached. Nearby, election posters have already been covered with posters promoting marches against terrorism.

Having caused the highest one-day death toll since the end of the civil war 65 years ago, the bombings are being spoken of as Spain's September 11.

But with an election on Sunday, the terrorist attacks will fuel fear and support for the conservative



Firefighters search the shattered train near Atocha station. Photo Reuters

People's Party that has taken a hard line against the militant group ETA, which wants the north-western Basque region to become a free state.

ETA has a record of telephoning before bombs are detonated and this time there was no warning.

If these bombs were the handiwork of ETA it would point to a resurrection of a terror campaign that began on Christmas Eve when authorities foiled a plot

to blow up a train at a Madrid station.

Basque regional president Juan Jose Ibarretxe has insisted ETA does not represent the Basque people. "When ETA attacks, the Basque heart breaks into a thousand pieces," he says.

On March 11, Spain's heart broke and for some commuters stopped beating altogether.

► **Perspective world, page 31**

Australian buses and trains at risk, warns expert

Report Marcus Priest

The Madrid bombings have sparked a call for tighter security on Australian buses and trains.

Director of terrorism studies at the Australian National University, Clive Williams, said if the Spanish attacks were by al-Qaeda or a group connected with al-Qaeda, then Australia would also be a potential target because of its military involvement in Iraq.

"Spain has 1300 soldiers in Iraq [but] we had a higher profile in the

offensive in Iraq and we still have more than 1000 people in Iraq," Mr Williams said.

He said he was concerned about the security of trains and buses when they were stored overnight, as there was only limited safeguards taken by transport authorities to protect them against graffiti attacks.

Both the federal government and Labor Party were reluctant to make any link between the bombing in Spain and Australia's involvement in the "war on terror".

Prime Minister John Howard said

the attack drove home the need to strengthen Australian intelligence agencies.

"This country cannot be complacent about terrorism irrespective of who's to blame for what's happened in Madrid and we just all have to understand that we are all potential targets," Mr Howard told a Melbourne radio station.

"No matter who you are or what you've done or what stance you've taken on certain political and international issues in the past, if you are a Western country, indeed, if

you are a free society, you are vulnerable."

Labor foreign affairs spokesman Kevin Rudd said it was irresponsible to draw any conclusions about who caused the attack.

Meanwhile, former Labor frontbencher Peter Cook confirmed a media report that his daughter had had a relationship in 2000 with a Briton recently released from detention at Guantanamo Bay.

He said his daughter had cooperated with authorities and was "not a person of interest".