



Who has the edge in

Comfort?

The Nation

BANGKOK celebrating 222 years

FRIDAY March 12, 2004

56 PAGES, 3 SECTIONS, VOLUME 29, No 50361

www.nationmultimedia.com

THAILAND'S INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPER

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EXPLOSIONS ON TRAINS

173 killed in Spanish blasts

Six hundred wounded as Spain blames ETA not Islamic militants for attacks

■ Reuters
MADRID

SIMULTANEOUS blasts ripped through three packed Madrid trains yesterday killing at least 173 people and injuring 600, according to Spanish authorities.

The government blamed the Basque separatist group ETA for the blasts.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the attacks across the Spanish capital three days before a national election, but Spain insisted the Basque separatist group ETA was to blame.

The Spanish government brushed aside suggestions that Muslim militants angry at Spain's support for the US-led war in Iraq were behind the attacks.

Ten rush-hour blasts at three railway stations tore up people, including a baby, and left pools of blood in the wreckage of trains, tracks and buildings.

"It is absolutely clear that the terrorist organisation ETA was seeking an attack with wide repercussions," Interior Minister Angel Acebes told a hastily called news conference, dismissing speculation that any other group could be involved.

Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar swore the government would arrest the "criminals" behind the blasts, which ripped open commuter trains like tuna cans.

The government said 173 people died in the explosions, which rocked the central Madrid station of Atocha, the southern Madrid station of El Pozo and a third at Santa Eugenia.

ETA (Euskadi ta Askatasuna) has killed about 850 people since 1968 in its fight for a separate Basque homeland in northwest Spain and southwest France, and has been branded a terrorist group by the US and the European Union.

If the Basque carried out the bombings, it would be its deadliest attack, exceeding the 21 people it killed in a blast in Barcelona in 1987.

The Spanish government convened an emergency Cabinet meeting and the ruling Popular Party suspended its election campaign.

European stock markets fell sharply on fears the attack was the work of Islamic extremists.

US President George W Bush joined other leaders in condemning the bombings, which European Parliament President Pat Cox called the "worst act of terror in memory in any European Union state."

Last month, ETA declared a cease-fire but made clear it would pursue the armed struggle in the rest of the country.

In October, two audio tapes purportedly from al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden said the group had the "right to respond at any suitable time and place" against those countries with forces in Iraq. Spain was among the countries listed.



BODIES of victims are taken away after a massive explosion on a train near the Atocha station in Madrid yesterday. More photos, 9A

ON PAGE 9A: ■ 'This is our September 11' ■ Basque group seeks freedom ■ World leaders condemn Europe's deadliest attack

New poultry cull ordered as avian flu strikes again

■ Supitcha Jantapa, Saowalak Pumyaem
THE NATION

DEPUTY AGRICULTURE Minister Newin Chidchob yesterday admitted that he had ordered the slaughter of poultry in areas with confirmed new outbreaks of avian flu.

The bird-flu reports would not likely cause Japan to reconsider its decision to resume purchases of heat-treated Thai chicken, he said.

"Things should have been settled now. We have already ordered the culling and livestock officials are closely monitoring the situation," Newin said.

Bird flu may have reappeared in Nakhon Ratchasima and Maha Sarakham, and has been verified as reappearing in Chiang Rai.

Yesterday, a farmer in Chiang Mai's Muang district reported the deaths of 200 chickens and ducks at his farm.

Livestock officials took samples of the birds to determine the cause of death. "We should know the results next week," provincial livestock chief Thira Anantiworapanya said.

The farmer's remaining flock was culled.

Thailand declared itself free of bird flu on Monday, saying no active cases had been reported in poultry since February 25.

Agriculture Minister Somsak Thepsuthin said the government has already paid more than Bt37.6 million to farmers who had to destroy their fowl.

About 6,200 farmers in Chiang Rai, Angthong, Nakhon Ratchasima, Sing Buri, Ratchaburi and Phetchaburi have already been compensated. They will also receive assistance to restock their coops.

"Compensation will reach more farmers in other provinces soon," he said.

Photo ■ 6A

Now, catfood recalled

First it was Pedigree dog food. Now Effem Foods is recalling its Whiskas cat food sold in 10

Asian nations over concerns it could be linked to kidney disease.

Details ■ 6A



It's musical chairs for PM's ministers

■ The Nation

THREE YEARS, 55 ministerial appointments, and still counting.

Deputy Democrat leader Anek Laothamatas is not the only one confused by the revolving door at the Thaksin Cabinet, which this week was reshuffled for an incredible eighth time.

Bemused Nation readers have also mailed or called in saying they have lost track of what's going on.

Painstaking research by our editorial staff yesterday might give

readers a little perspective on what has been dubbed the "musical-chairs" cabinet:

Since Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra came to office in early 2001, only Foreign Minister Surakiart Sathirathai and Public Health Minister Sudarat Keyuraphan have kept their original posts. Thaksin himself has moved around, since he appointed himself education minister as well and prime minister.

The Education Ministry has had five leadership changes - the high-

est number of alterations. (Imagine having to put up with five bosses in three years.)

The first minister, Kasem Wattanachai, served for only four months before bowing out because he "could not stand politics."

Thaksin took over the job, but quit after less than four months, leaving education reform in limbo.

Suwit Khunkitti, then a deputy prime minister, was named Thaksin's replacement, only to be removed in late 2002.

Pongpol Adireksarn reluctantly

took the torch and, after serving for the longest period - 13 months - was dropped from the Cabinet on the ironic ground that "he had not worked enough."

He was replaced by then-Commerce Minister Adisai Bodhararak, the incumbent.

Somkid Jatusripitak has been the most portable. Starting off as Finance Minister, he was made to serve concurrently as a deputy prime minister in an early shake-up.

See Cabinet [6A]

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- Chavalit to oversee Finance Ministry.
- Wan Noor move 'will help South'.

Business 1B

- Reshuffle good news for nervous investors

Charles to suit up for Thai polo team

■ Suratchada Sawangnate
THE NATION

BRITAIN'S PRINCE CHARLES has agreed to play for a Thai polo team in a charity match at the Ham Polo Club in London on May 26, the head of the Thai Polo Equestrian Association said yesterday.

Vichai Raksriakorn said the Royal Household Bureau of England had confirmed the prince's participation.

The heir to the English throne and world No 1 Adolfo Cambiasso of Argentina will represent King Power of Thailand, which also features King Power CEO Vichai and his son Iyawat Raksriakorn.

"The Royal Household Bureau of England confirmed his participation on Monday. It is a great honour for us to play side by side with him," Vichai said.

"However, the bureau did not confirm whether Charles' two sons, Prince William and Prince Harry, will join the event," he said.



CHARLES DURING a polo game last year in Tetbury, England.

Thailand to play in a charity match next year.

"We've heard that Prince Charles may retire from polo next year. So we have invited him and his two sons to join the charity match in Thailand and we are waiting for a reply," he said.

"I hope this charity match will add colour to the local polo scene and attract many people from our country," he added.

Meanwhile, Vichai said that after considerable discussions with three SEA Games members - Singapore, Malaysia and the Philippines - there was a chance that polo would be included in the 24th SEA Games in 2008.

"The SEA Games plan has been under discussion for a long time with three SEA Games members, Singapore, Malaysia and the Philippines. I always try to push polo into major events. Now there's a good chance polo will feature in the 2008 Games, which might come to Thailand," he said.

The Thai team's opponent has yet to be named.

The tournament has been organised to raise money for Charles' charity foundation.

Vichai said there was also a strong possibility that the prince would come to

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