

British far right sees new growth

BRITAIN'S main extreme rightwing party, linked to involvement in the country's worst race riots for years, says it is growing fast after shedding a skinhead image.

But British National Party (BNP) Chairman Nick Griffin said on Tuesday though the image may have changed the message of racial separation was the same.

"We haven't changed our principles," he told Reuters in an interview. "The multi-racial country is a bad idea."

Anti-racist opponents agree there has been no change in the BNP's pro-white message and say the BNP are still Nazis in disguise.

The image makeover has included a slick red, white and blue the colours of the Union Jack flag site. It has put forward 33 candidates for election to parliament, and it has dropped demands that black and Asian minorities be forcibly deported to their ancestral homelands.

"We used to have a policy of forced repatriation," Griffin said. "But we have acknowledged that is not practical and sellable."

Griffin said if he came to power, he would support an end to non-white immigration to Britain, voluntary racial separation, and voluntary repatriation of racial minorities. Griffin refuses to give membership numbers of the BNP but he called recent estimates "woefully low".

According to the anti-fascist magazine Searchlight, BNP's membership, buoyed by anti immigrant sentiment, has jumped 35 percent this year to 2,300 members.

The magazine said most members are poorly educated, white working-class men. About 150 people also belong to the far right activist National Front party, which has put forward four candidates for election.

"We are going to shock people," Griffin said. "We

have no illusions of winning seats. Our involvement in this election is all about getting us on the bottom rung."

"If we don't provide a political lead, people will turn to violence," he said. "People are going to be forced from their homes by racist mobs."

But Griffin added that some minorities should be allowed to stay to make Britain a more interesting place.

"It's a question of salt in the soup," he said. "Soup without salt is plain. But soup with too much salt is inedible."

Opponents to Griffin say his comments on racial separation show that while the party may have gotten a facelift, its character is the same.

"They're Nazis," said Tony Robson, a Searchlight researcher. "Anyone who joins the BNP is basically joining because they're a hard core bigot and racist."



Rising storm? European Nazis demonstrate their unmistakable allegiance as the far right in Britain sees a jump in fresh recruits and public support.

Aid workers brace for Indonesia humanitarian 'catastrophe'

WITH INDONESIA'S President Wahid fighting for his political life and supporters vowing to lay down their lives for him, aid agencies and others are preparing for a humanitarian crisis, Reuters reported last Thursday.

Jeremy Hobbs, executive director of Oxfam Community Aid Abroad, said the Australian charity came up in March with full contingency plans for a humanitarian catastrophe. "We are ramping up," Hobbs said, adding that the scale of any potential crisis was impossible to predict. "I think it's terribly important that official multilateral organisations and governments keep a very close brief on what's happening."

Security analysts say the danger of bloodshed spreading across the Indonesian archipelago, the world's fourth most populous nation, and sparking a huge outflow of refugees, spiralling piracy and economic chaos, remains remote but real.

U.S. forces in the Western Pacific, while viewing the prospect of widespread bloodshed as a worst-case scenario, are making sure that they are able to help the region cope with any flood of refugees.

Vice Admiral James Metzger, commander of the U.S. Seventh Fleet, told Reuters that preparations for

humanitarian relief were not focused on any one country.

An Australian defence spokesman insisted no special plans were being made for Indonesia. "The situation is quite normal over there," the spokesman said.

But Washington-based security specialists said Indonesia had been clearly identified by U.S. strategists as one of four potential theatres of operations in the Western Pacific, alongside Taiwan, the Korea and the Indian subcontinent.

Others with ties to the U.S. military said its commanders were pushing regional allies to inject "reality and realism" into their operational scenarios. "Indonesia has really struck an iceberg here and it's sinking," said analyst Carlyle Thayer of the Asia-Pacific Centre for Security Studies in Hawaii, a U.S. Defence institution.

Even United Nations-run East Timor, ransacked by Indonesian-backed militia after it voted to break free from Jakarta in 1999, is prepared to help. "We have urged our people that in case of a humanitarian crisis in Indonesia, and if there are refugees seeking protection in East Timor we must welcome them with open arms," East Timor foreign affairs spokesman Jose Ramos Horta said.

Neo-Nazis' secret silent support scheme

SET UP as a clandestine society to support Germany's wanted war criminals after World War II, Stille Hilfe Silent Help is now very much up to date.

Evidence is emerging that the organisation is protecting and educating a new generation of German Nazis, playing a key role in fostering the neo-Nazi scene, the BBC reported last week.

Joerg Fischer, a former member and key player in the organisation, says it has pen-

etrated high levels of German political and judicial society and wields enormous power.

"These are Nazis in pin-stripe suits, they're not the kind you might see running down the street after foreign immigrants," he says. "But they have real influence on the political scene in Germany."

And they work very powerfully in the wings, so that they're not easily recognised and for that reason they're just as dangerous as the Nazis in the street who do the

killings."

Joerg explains the levels of power Stille Hilfe's activists have attained and puts the endless delays and obstructions of several high-profile prosecutions against Nazi war criminals very firmly down to the group's activities. He says they are close to senior parliamentarians.

Bavaria is a particular stronghold of power. "It's no surprise, when you consider that the most radically right-wing and neo-Nazi publish-

ers and newspapers are based there, that that's where most far right demonstrations take place," he says. "When a neo-Nazi faces trial, he'll do his utmost to get before a Bavarian court, because that's where very many Stille Hilfe lawyers operate and where the whole legal system is likely to be much more lenient."

Now 32, Joerg was first recruited to the far-right cause when he was only 13. His social worker, a state employee suggested he come

along to meetings and join the "Brown Comrades" of the main neo-Nazi party, the NPD. By 18, he was regional deputy leader. He became a founder member of another far-right party. He was responsible for preparing leaflets, writing party literature and planning demonstrations.

Stille Hilfe assign-ed him a lawyer of its own to keep him and his projects out of obvious trouble. He was told his future as a far-right activist was a glowing one.

Although there are leading politicians in Germany who have condemned Stille Hilfe's activities as a national scandal, it is still not a story that gets talked about much in Berlin. And there are no plans whatsoever to ban Stille Hilfe in Germany. The state security service has officially described them as "harmless" and there has never been an open debate in parliament about them. Hardly the "national scandal" their opponents speak of.

Asylum seekers riot at Australian camp

More than 200 asylum seekers were involved in the violence at the Curtin detention centre in remote western Australia, the BBC reported last week.

Staff had to use teargas to disperse the rioters who smashed windows and destroyed fences and buildings.

A spokesman for Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock says the trouble broke out after a group of asylum seekers were told their applications to be granted refugee status had been denied.

The authorities detain all asylum seekers - often in the remote Australian out-

back while waiting for their claims to be processed, which can sometimes take years.

The riot was the latest in a string of violent outbursts at detention centres in Australia.

Last month, detainees at a remote refugee detention centre went on hunger strike in protest over a raid, in which, according to refugee groups, women and children were beaten and handcuffed.

Earlier last week, the Australian Government rejected claims by Amnesty International that it was no longer a leader in promoting human rights, which were at a record low in the country.

Amnesty said that Australia as well as other countries including Japan - was denying asylum seekers basic human rights.

It said the detention of at least 3,000 refugee applicants had triggered riots and mass breakouts.

In April, the Australian Government said it may significantly reduce the number of legal asylum seekers it accepted, in order to compensate for the large number of people who entered the country illegally.

Australia currently takes in about 12,000 asylum seekers a year through the legal system, according to official figures.

West keeps shaky Macedonia together

NATO and the European Union reaffirmed their support for Macedonia's young coalition government on Wednesday, but urged it to press ahead quickly with reforms aimed at healing deep inter-ethnic rivalries.

The multi-ethnic national unity government formed to tackle the five-month old insurgency came to the brink of collapse and was only rescued on Tuesday by crisis shuttle diplomacy from European Union foreign policy chief Javier Solana.

NATO and the EU called for an immediate end to violence and said the international community would not negotiate with extremists or their agents, Reuters reported.

When Macedonian Albanian political party leaders met the political chief of the

self-styled National Liberation Army last week and agreed a common platform, Western powers and Slav parties fell over themselves to condemn the initiative.

"The Macedonians will not be ready under any circumstances to talk to these people. And we support that," said a senior Western envoy in Skopje. The unity of Macedonia is at stake and the Slav elite is in no mood for talks with rebels.

The ethnic Albanian guerrillas have waged a five-month-long guerrilla campaign against the Skopje authorities, fighting to end what they say are violence and discrimination against the small southern Balkan republic's Albanian population. Macedonian security forces have responded by bombarding rebel bases in northern villages and the

clashes have threatened to degenerate into civil war.

"There can be no place at the table for those who have taken up arms against this democratic government," the joint NATO-EU statement said.

Western government officials and diplomats insist there are many reasons why the successful Presevo plan cannot be imported wholesale into Macedonia. They say that while Macedonian Albanians have some legitimate grievances, their country -- which has had multi-ethnic governments for years -- is not like Serbia under Milosevic so the rebels have no justification for their actions. "It would be unfair and wrong" to equate the two situations, NATO Secretary General George Robertson said.

NATO and the EU said they would help Skopje carry through ambitious reforms -- in education, language and policing -- that would help improve the rights of some 700,000 ethnic Albanians who make up around one third of Macedonia's population.

Diplomats and Western government officials insist the best way to deal with the Macedonian insurgency is to isolate its leaders politically, by making progress on inter-ethnic problems within the new government of national unity. Skopje has been asked for a progress report on these reforms for EU leaders at their summit in mid-June, or at least by the end of next month.

If that happens, however, many acknowledge that a way out will still have to be found for the guerrillas that

does not upset the ethnic Albanian community.

Meanwhile, An ethnic Albanian guerrilla insurgency in southern Serbia seems to be in its dying days after NATO brokered successful peace talks between government officials and the rebels' political representatives. They agreed to disband by the end of the month in return for an amnesty for their fighters and assurances from the West and Serbia's new reformist leaders that Milosevic-era discrimination against ethnic Albanians would be ended. But while NATO officials became frequent visitors to the Presevo guerrillas' headquarters in the rural village of Konculj, they vehemently reject any suggestion that the rebel group in Macedonia should be similarly involved in peace talks.

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Arafat offers truce as Israel plans retaliation

PALESTINIAN leader Yasser Arafat said Saturday that he was ready for an "immediate and unconditional cease-fire," the Associated Press reported. Arafat spoke a day after a suicide bomber blew himself up outside a Tel Aviv disco, killing 18 Israelis and wounding scores of others.

Speaking at his headquarters in the West Bank town of Ramallah, Arafat said he condemned the attack. "We are ready to make all possible efforts to stop the bloodshed of our people and the Israelis and to do everything necessary for an immediate and unconditional cease-fire," Arafat said after a meeting with German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer.

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon had announced two weeks ago that he would unilaterally observe a truce and urged the Palestinians to do the same. At the time, the Palestinians dismissed Sharon's gesture as a ploy, and said the violence only could end once Israel lifted its blockade of Palestinian areas and halted settlement expansion.

Arafat's announcement came as Israel's Cabinet was meeting in Tel Aviv to discuss a possible response to the suicide bombing, the

deadliest in five years.

The Palestinian leader, meanwhile, was confined to the West Bank town of Ramallah by Israel's tightened blockade of Palestinian areas. Israel barred him from using Gaza International Airport, thus blocking his return to his headquarters in the Gaza Strip. Israeli military checkpoints ringed West Bank towns, barring residents from leaving.

Palestinian Authority offices stood deserted Saturday after thousands of public servants and police officers were evacuated amid fears of an Israeli retaliation for a deadly suicide bombing in Tel Aviv.

Earlier in the day, the Palestinian Authority had ordered thousands of public servants and security officials to leave government buildings for fear they would be shelled by Israel.

In Ramallah, ambulances parked near the homes of senior Palestinian officials, as well as close to Arafat's headquarters. Residents of five homes close to the office of Palestinian intelligence chief Amin al-Hindi were told to leave.

Palestinian policemen manning checkpoints at the edges of Palestinian-con-

trolled territory pulled back several hundred meters under orders from their commanders.

In the West Bank town of Nablus, where 11 policemen were killed in an Israeli airstrike last month, residents were urged to stay indoors. At the town's An Najah University, students were evacuated, including a group that was in the middle of taking a chemistry exam.

In the West Bank town of Hebron, residents piled sand bags in front of their homes and shops. "We are expecting any Israeli attack at any time," said Omar Shahin, 27, at his cloth shop.

In the Gaza Strip, a convoy of cars carrying foreign staffers of the U.N. Relief and Works Agency left the agency's compound Saturday afternoon. The cars were loaded with luggage.

U.N. officials would not say whether the United Nations had ordered its foreign staffers to leave the Gaza Strip.

Meanwhile, tens of thousands of Palestinians marched through Jerusalem behind the coffin of Faisal al-Husseini on Friday, turning mourning for the late leader into an outpouring of defiance against Israeli rule, reported Reuters.