

ITALY MOURNS AS DEATH TOLL HITS 25

ANDRIA: Relatives of victims of one of Italy's worst rail accidents gathered yesterday to identify their dead, as rescuers searched for missing bodies from the wreckage of a head-on collision that claimed at least 25 lives. As the country grieved, investigators were trying to establish the cause of the high-speed crash between two busy passenger trains in the Puglia region of southern Italy. Shell-shocked families at the Policlinico hospital morgue in Bari were being called in turns to search among the coffins for their loved ones after Tuesday's tragedy.

The civil protection agency said 25 bodies had been recovered, two people were missing and 50 people had been injured. Red Cross workers asked for details to help identify the most badly mutilated bodies, from tattoos to scars and clothing color. One girl was reportedly identified by her engagement ring. "We can't rule out finding other people in the wreck. It's slow work," said Luca Cari, spokesman for the firefighter department, as emergency services used a crane and diggers to clear crumpled carriages from the track near the town of Andria. Sniffer dogs were being used to search through the wreckage.

Black box recovered

Officials said they had recovered the black box from one of the trains which investigators hope will throw light on the collision, which happened on a stretch of single track in open countryside, slinging some carriages into bordering olive groves. One of the drivers was confirmed dead, with rescue workers recovering a hand and a leg from the mangled mess of his cabin. Prime Minister Matteo Renzi visited the site late Tuesday, saying it was "a time to cry, be close to the families, show

humanity in our pain," and vowing to "throw light on what happened and who is responsible". Investigators said at least one of the trains had been travelling very fast, and it was possible the collision was caused by human error.

One of the four-carriage trains was supposed to have waited at a station to let the other train through, before heading down the track between the towns of Corato and Andria. The go-ahead to proceed is given by the station managers by telephone. According to La Stampa, the line dates to 1965. It said a call for tenders to modernize the security system and lay a second track had been scheduled to open later this month. About 55 percent of the rail network in Italy is single track. A pot of 150 million euros allocated by the European Regional Development Fund in the 2007-2013 budget to add second tracks went largely unused, the newspaper said.

Naming the dead

Transport Minister Graziano Delrio is expected to address parliament Wednesday about the incident. Only five of the victims had identity documents on their person, the rest presumably in wallets or bags sent flying across carriages on impact, making it more difficult for authorities to name the dead. University students, farm workers and office employees were on the trains, as well as grandparents and children. The bodies of a mother and child were pulled from the wreckage, while a trapped six-year old boy was found alive, next to his dead grandmother.

The trains were operated by private railway company Ferrovie dello Stato, just one of the 30 or so private compa-



PUGLIA: Remains of the train crash site lie on the ground near Corato, in the southern Italian region of Puglia as rescuers searched for missing bodies from the wreckage of a head-on collision that claimed at least 25 lives. — AFP

nies which run on small lines criss-crossing Italy in areas not covered by national operator Trenitalia. Ferrovie dello Stato said it was not possible to say how many people had been on board, as many passengers had

season tickets. The last major rail disaster in Italy was in 2009, when a freight train carrying liquid petroleum gas derailed and exploded, killing 29 people at the station in the town of Viareggio. — AFP

MAY, MERKEL DRAW BATTLE LINES FOR THE BREXIT CLASH

CRUNCH TALKS LOOM OVER MARKET ACCESS, IMMIGRATION

BERLIN: Both are pastors' daughters who rose to the top of their conservative parties. Now Theresa May and Angela Merkel, equally firm but pragmatic, will go head to head to determine Britain's future relationship with Europe. Two years the German chancellor's junior, May is highly regarded among European officials who largely welcomed news that she will become British prime minister after David Cameron bows out.

"Very disciplined" is how one senior German official who has worked closely with May described the Oxford University-educated daughter of a Church of England vicar. She has "excellent" relations with French Interior Minister Bernard Cazeneuve, a source in Paris said. Described by one veteran British conservative as a "bloody difficult woman", 59-year-old May will need to muster all the goodwill she can in Europe. Her task is to deal with the negotiating clout and stamina of Merkel, who in 10 years as chancellor has regularly outlasted other European Union leaders at late night Brussels meetings.

Under the Lisbon Treaty, a deal on Britain's departure from the EU must be concluded with the European Council, which groups leaders of the 27 other member states. Merkel's role, however, is crucial. After Britons voted for Brexit on June 23, she met the leaders of France and Italy to plan the way ahead for the EU, showing that its biggest member states - rather than its institutions - want to determine this. Both women, who have been married for decades, saw off male challengers on their way to the top.

Merkel defeated her more flamboyant predecessor, the Social Democrat Gerhard Schroeder, at the ballot box in 2005. May, who has been British interior minister for the past six years, will become prime minister simply because Conservative members of parliament elected her leader of the ruling party. But the woman who has declared "I'm not a showy politician", is also replacing a less cautious politician in the pro-EU Cameron, whose gamble in calling the referendum failed. Merkel and May agree on one thing: in the Briton's words "Brexit means Brexit". Merkel has insisted the result of what was officially an advisory referendum must be respected.

Beyond that, battle lines are already being drawn. May says Britain will not rush to trigger the formal divorce proceedings under the Lisbon Treaty. Merkel, however, wants Britain to make its intentions clear more quickly. On Tuesday, Merkel put the ball in May's court. "We must now wait until Britain says



This combo photo shows Britain's Home Secretary Theresa May (left) and German Chancellor Angela Merkel speaking at an EU summit in Brussels. Political observers in Germany and Britain see a lot of similarities between Britain's new leader, Theresa May, and Germany's pragmatic chancellor, Angela Merkel. — AP

what relationship it envisages with the European Union and then we will lead, in our interests, the best negotiations for our citizens in the 27 member states," she said. The chancellor wants to retain strong links with Britain, Germany's fifth-biggest trading partner for goods, but her bigger priority is to hold together the remaining EU members.

Very persistent

British diplomats who have worked with May in Brussels rate her highly, saying she is one of the best prepared and best informed ministers to negotiate with their EU partners. Their European counterparts agree. "She knows Brussels well, she knows the people and how things work here," said one EU official who deals with justice and home affairs. "She has always been prepared for the meetings, active in intervening, she knows the file."

Another senior EU official familiar with negotiations in which May has taken part described her as "very professional, very well respected". All the indications are May will prove a tough negotiator. "She

won't be an easy partner for the EU," said the senior EU official, adding that May does not change her tune easily. "She's been extremely consistent, very persistent." A quiet "remain" campaigner, May must now get the best terms she can. Her biggest task is to retain British access to the EU's single market while restricting immigration from the bloc.

EU leaders say market access can come only with a commitment to the free movement of people - just what British voters rejected. Yet May has a record of negotiating compromises with the EU in such apparently black or white situations. As interior minister, she opted back into a European arrest warrant system and cross-border information sharing despite Britain's 'opt out' on EU justice and home affairs policy. In brokering those 'opt-ins', the senior EU official said: "She took a great part in the negotiations herself, she didn't rely on officials ... She has very obvious negotiating skills." Those skills will be put to the test by Merkel, who said on Monday: "We will have difficult negotiations with Britain, it will not be easy." — Reuters

THERESA MAY'S INBOX - UNITING BRITAIN, UNCOUPLING FROM EU

LONDON: From negotiating Britain's exit from the EU and shoring up the economy, to mending the divisions corroding her party and country, incoming Prime Minister Theresa May faces a daunting to-do list. The Interior Minister, who took over from David Cameron less than three weeks after Britain's shock decision to quit the EU, has vowed to clinch the best possible divorce settlement from Brussels. She has also promised a more compassionate brand of conservatism that "works not for a privileged few" but for all Britons. Following is a list of the most pressing tasks at hand.

Form a government

May's first task is to form a new cabinet, including a minister in charge of Brexit. Women are tipped to take a number of top jobs, in a team expected to mix experienced hands, like foreign minister Philip Hammond, with some who supported the "Leave" campaign, like May's campaign manager Chris Grayling.

Serve divorce papers

May, who was an unenthusiastic Remain supporter, has insisted that "Brexit means Brexit". She has said she does not plan on triggering Article 50 - which starts a two-year clock on the country's exit from the bloc - before the end of the year. However, that was before the Conservative leadership contest, which was due to last until September, was cut short by the withdrawal of her only rival, giving May the keys to Downing Street two months early.

EU leaders have called on the government to accelerate the exit process, saying they will not discuss the contours of a new relationship with London until it has formally filed for divorce. Within Britain, May is also under pressure from Brexit supporters within her Conservative party and the UK Independence Party (UKIP) to implement the referendum result. Analysts said she will come under increased pressure from the autumn, when EU leaders meet in Brussels, to bite the bullet.

Trade/migration trade-off

May says that Brexit means an end to the free movement of labor across Britain's borders but promised to pursue the "the best deal for Britain" with the EU. EU leaders, including German Chancellor Angela Merkel, insist that the holy grail-continued tariff-free access to the EU cherished by British companies is contingent on unfettered access to Britain for EU workers. May's challenge will be to negotiate a

compromise that protects the bulk of Britain's trade with Europe while cutting mass migration, which had been a key issue in the referendum debate.

Safeguarding economy

With the pound see-sawing dangerously against the dollar, the Bank of England warned last week that some of the fears for the economy post-Brexit had "begun to crystallize". While the low pound has boosted exports, several property funds have suspended trading for fear of a capital flight. Banks had warned before the vote that a Brexit might force them to move some operations out of the country. May's task will be to reassure investors that Britain has set a course on how to untangle from the EU that minimizes the fallout for trade, jobs and the cost of living. She has also taken onboard anger over rampant inequality, vowing to give workers more of a say in executive pay.

Uniting Conservatives

May inherits a Conservative Party split between those who supported the government's campaign to remain in the EU, like herself, and dissidents like Boris Johnson, Michael Gove and Andrea Leadsom. Gove and Leadsom both ran against May for the leadership but crashed out mid-race, while Johnson, who was the hot favorite to succeed Cameron, caused surprise by abstaining. The trio has publicly now rowed in behind May, but with a slim majority in parliament May faces a delicate balancing act to keep all party factions on board.

Uniting the kingdom

May also finds herself surveying a kingdom threatened with collapse after Scotland, which voted overwhelmingly to stay in the EU, threatened to organize a new referendum on exiting the UK. May has listed defending the union as a "major priority".

Nuclear weapons

One of the first tests of May's leadership comes on July 18, when MPs are asked to vote on the government's proposal to renew Britain's "Trident" nuclear weapons system. Cameron, who scheduled the vote as one of his last acts as premier, has called it an "essential deterrent". Opposition Labor leader, anti-war campaigner Jeremy Corbyn, wants the system scrapped. — AFP

EU COURT SPLIT ON HEADSCARF BANS

LUXEMBOURG: The EU's top court faced a dilemma yesterday after a top legal officer said it was discriminatory for a firm to tell an employee to remove a Muslim headscarf, contradicting an earlier opinion in a separate case. The latest case concerns a woman, Asma Bougnaoui, who was dismissed from her job as an IT consultant in France after clients complained about her wearing a headscarf. The European Court of Justice said one of its advocates general, Eleanor Sharpston, "considers that a company policy requiring an employee to remove her Islamic headscarf when in contact with clients constitutes unlawful direct discrimination."

The senior lawyer, whose opinion must be considered by the court when it makes a final ruling at a later date, found "nothing to suggest that Ms Bougnaoui was unable to perform her duties as a design engineer because she wore an Islamic headscarf." "Indeed, (her employer's) letter terminating her employment had expressly referred to her professional competence," it added. But the view by the advocate general contradicts a separate opinion on a similar case in May in which a woman was fired by a Belgian security firm after she insist-

ed on being allowed to go to work in a headscarf.

The advocate general in that case said companies may ban Muslim headscarves if they are enforcing a general prohibition on religious symbols in the workplace. The EU court will now examine the two cases and may give its judgment in a joint decision by the end of the year, a legal source said. Opinions expressed by the EU court's advocates general are only initial views and not binding rulings, but usually the court follows the senior lawyer's advice when eventually giving its judgment.

The court could decide to give a general clarification on headscarf bans in Europe and how they may work while still obeying EU law. The wearing of headscarves and full-face veils has been an increasingly contentious debate in Europe between the forces of secularism and sections of the continent's Muslim minority. France brought in a ban on full-face veils in 2010, despite claims that the ban was discriminatory and violates freedom of expression and religion. Belgium and some parts of Switzerland have followed France's lead and similar bans have been considered in other European countries. — AFP

FRANCE SHUTS ITS EMBASSY IN TURKEY FOR SECURITY REASONS

ANKARA: France yesterday said it had closed its embassy in the Turkish capital Ankara and its consulate in Istanbul until further notice for security reasons, after cancelling events to mark the July 14 Bastille Day holiday. "The Embassy of France in

Ankara, as well as the Consulate General in Istanbul will be closed from yesterday July 13, 1:00 pm, until further notice," the embassy said in a statement after scrapping the July 14 receptions at the missions on security grounds.

It did not give any further details on how the closure would be implemented. France's consulate in Istanbul, its embassy in Ankara and its mission in the Aegean city of Izmir were all to have held celebrations marking the July 14 Bastille Day. French consul to Istanbul Muriel Domenach wrote on Twitter the events in all three cities had been cancelled "for security reasons" and France was in touch with the Turkish authorities.

Earlier, the Istanbul consulate had sent an email message to French citizens in Turkey saying there had been "concurring information of a serious threat against the organization of the July 14 celebrations in Turkey". It said the decision had been taken in coordination with the Turkish authorities. Turkey is on a high security alert following the June 28 attack on Istanbul's main airport which was blamed on Islamic State (IS) jihadists and killed 47 people. Thirty-seven suspects have been placed under arrest over suspicion of involvement in the attacks. Of these, 15 are Turks and 22 foreigners, according to official media.

Authorities have said a number of citizens of ex-Soviet republics are among the suspects, raising concerns over the threat to Turkey from Islamist militancy in the Central Asia and the Northern Caucasus. But of seven suspects arrested earlier this week, three are Algerian, two Tunisian and two Egyptian, the state-run Anadolu Agency said. The bombing at Ataturk International Airport in Istanbul followed a spate of attacks across the country this year blamed on IS jihadists and Kurdish militants. Several foreign missions in Turkey, including the embassies and consulates of Germany and the United States, have closed for short periods this year due to a security threat. — AFP



ISTANBUL: People walk past the French Consulate in Istanbul yesterday. France said it had closed its embassy in the Turkish capital Ankara and its consulate in Istanbul until further notice for security reasons. — AFP