

MYTH OF NO BORDERS GROUP IN 'JUNGLE'

CALAIS, France: They have become an influential presence behind the scenes in France's "Jungle" migrant camp in Calais, but the myth surrounding the shadowy No Borders activist group serves many agendas. As the demolition continued in the southern half of the camp, where thousands of migrants have gathered in the hope of smuggling their way to Britain, the French government has accused the "violent and extremist" No Borders group of spearheading resistance.

But distinguishing its members from the many volunteers and aid workers in the camp was often difficult. Were these mysterious radicals among the dozens of Europeans standing alongside Kurdish and Iranian refugees as they tried to block the bulldozers from destroying the Hashram Kitchen, one of the main food distribution centres? It was hard to tell. "If they're here, none of them will talk to the press, that's one of their key rules," said Maya, who works with the charity Auberge des Migrants.

She said they certainly had a more "revolutionary" air than the charities working in the camp, and were more willing to confront the police, but the image of

violent hooligans presented in some parts of the French and British press was greatly exaggerated. Anarchists, anti-globalists, agitators: these are only some of the words used to describe the group by politicians. Several thousand migrants are living in makeshift shelters on the outskirts of the northern French port city, hoping to sneak across the Channel and claim asylum in Britain. The camp has also attracted an ever-changing cast of volunteers from Britain, all trying to help, but often arriving with different ideas about how to protest the grim conditions in the Jungle.

'Done Lots of Good Things'

The most notorious are No Borders. But aid workers who know the inner workings of the Jungle agreed there were barely a dozen No Borders activists - a far cry from the hundreds sometimes reported by the press or authorities. "They've done lots of good things in Calais, like opening a squat for women. They are useful, talk a lot to the migrants, especially on political questions," said Maya. Around the Hashram Kitchen, the atmosphere was more "peace and love" than vio-

lent thuggery - most had the air of earnest students or ageing hippies, all dreadlocks and beanie hats. "They can be a real pain, too - doing things their own way. But their influence on the camp is minimal," Maya said.

Tom Radcliffe, a British volunteer who helped establish Help Refugees and has been living in one of the shacks cleared away this week, dismissed the idea that No Borders is a dangerous source of disorder as "absolute nonsense". "They are not sinister - they're kids," he said. "They sometimes do some rather foolish things, giving people inaccurate information. They can be immature because many of them are very young and haven't seen what happens when things go bad."

No Borders began in 1999, according to its website, and claims to fight against borders and immigration controls saying "we believe in freedom of movement for all". Calais is only one of their causes. The group says the idea that the Jungle residents cannot organize themselves and need white activists from No Borders is "profoundly racist". "There is a very strong movement which is entirely led by the migrants," they wrote on their website. For many, the biggest problem was the myth surrounding No Borders. — AFP

BELFAST BOMB INJURES OFFICER

BELFAST: A prison officer was injured by a bomb which exploded under his van in Belfast yesterday, police said, warning of a "severe" threat to security forces as the centenary approaches of the 1916 anti-British Easter Rising. Police said the bomb went off shortly after the man started driving away from his home. The 52-year-old was undergoing surgery in hospital but his injuries were not life-threatening. A 1998 peace deal largely ended three decades of violence in Northern Ireland between Protestants who want to remain under British rule and Catholics favouring unification with Ireland, but violence sporadically erupts.

More attacks were "highly likely" in the coming weeks, Assistant Chief Constable Stephen Martin told a news conference. "This could have been a fatality, the people who planned this wanted to kill a prison officer," Martin said, blaming the attack on nationalists opposed to British rule. "There are people within dissident republican groupings who want to mark this centenary by killing prison officers, police officers or soldiers," he added. "We believe the threat is extremely high, at the upper end of severe."

The rebellion 100 years ago, centred in Dublin, paved the way for the Irish republic to achieve independence, while the six counties of Northern Ireland remained in the United Kingdom. It will be marked by events on both sides of the Irish border this month. Martin said police had been stepping up patrols and would try to be "culturally sensitive" at events to mark the uprising, the most dramatic chapter of Ireland's independence struggle.

Politicians on both sides of the historical divide condemned yesterday's attack. Northern Ireland's First Minister Arlene Foster called it "disgraceful and despicable". Foster's father, a police officer, survived being shot by the Irish Republican Army (IRA) in the 1970s during the violent period known as the "troubles". Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness, a former commander in the IRA during the troubles and a senior member of the nationalist Sinn Fein party, also condemned what he called a "despicable and futile act".

In 2012, a Northern Irish prison officer was killed in a motorway shooting blamed on militant nationalists - the first such killing of a prison officer since 1993. The victim of Friday's attack worked in a training school rather than in a prison, Finlay Spratt, head of the Northern Irish Prison Officers Association, told Reuters. "This is just terrible. What can you say? We have been down this road before. These people have no justification for what they do," Spratt said. — Reuters

TREASON AT DINNER: TORY BREXIT RIFTS TURN NASTY

OLD RIVALRIES, GRIEVANCES COME TO THE FORE

LONDON: The plot was hatched over a slow-roasted shoulder of lamb: two Conservative heavyweights decided to defy Prime Minister David Cameron over Europe, igniting a feud that is creating a bitter rift in the party. The setting was the north London home of the city's charismatic mayor Boris Johnson - one of the schemers and a longtime rival of Cameron's with ambitions to replace him in Downing Street one day.

The other man was justice minister Michael Gove, an intellectual leading light of the Conservative party and friend of the prime minister who has harbored resentment against him over a high-profile demotion. Gove's wife Sarah Vine, a columnist for the Daily Mail, described the evening as "all a bit surreal", with the two MPs sitting side by side on a sofa in Johnson's "stylishly dishevelled drawing room".

It was a couple of days before Cameron went to Brussels last month for a European Union summit that has paved the way for an in-out membership referendum on June 23 that has divided Cameron's Conservatives. In the tight-knit world of Westminster and especially in Cameron's inner circle - where many members attended the same university, Oxford - old rivalries and personal grievances are coming to the fore.

'Spin, Smears and Threats'

is a high-risk, high stakes game from which there will be no going back, either for the prime minister or for his Tory opponents," Daily Telegraph columnist Allister Heath wrote this week. After Cameron returned from the summit and announced a date for the referendum, Gove and five other cabinet ministers broke with the prime minister's pro-EU line and joined the ranks of Brexit backers. They were quickly joined by a third of the party's MPs including Johnson, who went to Eton College with Cameron and was a member of the same exclusive dinner club when the two were at Oxford University. For an older generation of Conservatives, opposition to Europe is more an article of faith than a matter of policy - an explanation for the lev-



LONDON: This file photo taken on Feb 22, 2016 shows Mayor of London Boris Johnson as he leaves his home. — AFP

el of rancor. The reasoned arguments laid out in Gove's letter explaining his position quickly turned into name-calling and barbed comments from others, with parliamentary sketch writers picking up on a poisonous mood between Conservative cliques in the House of Commons. Welfare minister Iain Duncan Smith, one of the six rebels, wrote in the Daily Mail yesterday condemning "spin, smears and threats" from the pro-EU camp. "The acrimonious manner in which all this has been conducted is troubling and will I fear have consequences long beyond June 23," he said.

Foreign minister Philip Hammond has reportedly called leading eurosceptic Bill Cash a "total shit", while Johnson dismissed as "baloney" Cameron's attempt to make a positive case for staying in Europe.

Tim Bale, politics professor at Queen Mary, University of London, warned there was a risk that "a cumulative drip drip of a thousand petty cuts could turn a difficult situation into a crisis". In a fiery speech last week, Cameron launched a thinly-veiled and scathing attack on his old rival Johnson, dismissing his ideas as "for the birds" and mocking his barely concealed political ambition. Johnson hit back with an article in The Sun,

Britain's most popular newspaper, in which he mocked Cameron for "clutching the skirts of Brussels".

'All Guns Blazing'

"Both sides are trying to find their range at the moment. They're not engaging in close combat yet," James Forsyth, political editor at the Spectator magazine, which Johnson used to edit, told AFP. But Forsyth said the internecine conflict so far "is not anywhere near as vicious" as the 1990s when Conservative ministers openly feuded over whether Britain should adopt the Maastricht Treaty. That conflict ultimately led to the downfall of then Conservative prime minister John Major, a staunch pro-European.

The sparring over the referendum is important for Cameron's future too as he has committed to leaving office by the time of the next election in 2020 without saying when or who will replace him. Forsyth said Cameron faced a choice between a measured campaign that would allow him to unite the party afterwards or going in "all guns blazing". "I think he's temperamentally more inclined to the latter," he said, adding that the prime minister "isn't pulling his punches at the moment". — AFP