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"Humiliated" Italian state recalls Bologna bombing

By Gideon Long

ROME, Aug 2 (Reuters) - Italy marked the 20th anniversary on Wednesday of the Bologna bombing - the most shocking terrorist atrocity in the country's history and one of the final gruesome chapters of the urban guerrilla warfare of the 1970s.

Some 5,000 people observed a minute's silence at the train station where 85 people were killed and 200 injured when the blast ripped through a crowded waiting room on August 2, 1980.

Prime Minister Giuliano Amato told the crowd at the station he felt "humiliated" by the Italian state's complicity with the crimes committed during the period known in Italy as the "years of lead" and by its failure to punish those responsible.

Paolo Bolognesi, head of the Association of Families of the victims of the Bologna Bomb, hit out at Francesco Cossiga - Italian prime minister at the time - saying he had shirked his duty to the nation.

The Bologna bombing was the bloodiest act of terrorism in post-war Europe and served as a wake-up call to Italians who had grown accustomed to the killings carried out by both far-left and far-right guerrilla groups during the late 1960s and 1970s.

Mystery still surrounds many of those crimes such as the 1969 bombing at a bank in Milan's Piazza Fontana, now at its eighth trial, known as the first of a series of unsolved bombings dubbed in Italy as "state slaughters".

The Bologna device was planted by far-right extremists at the height of the tourist season in one of Italy's busiest and then most radically leftwing cities. Almost all Italians knew someone who "could have been there" - even if they were not.

While some say the scale of the massacre forced authorities belatedly to address terrorist violence, many claim state operatives had a hand in this and other atrocities.

"I am here to represent the state and for me it is humiliating to have to admit that so many times in the past those on the inside have been guilty of complicity, lies, deceit and support (for terrorist violence)," Amato said on Wednesday.

Bolognesi said: "No one, politically, has paid for the deaths of those 85 innocents".

"No one in parliament, in the 20 years since then, has mentioned the political responsibility of Cossiga, who was prime minister on August 2, 1980, and was therefore responsible for the security of the country.

"The vows of politicians disappear like snow in the sun within days of the official ceremonies."

The bullet cartridges found on streets and the oppressive atmosphere in Italian cities and university campuses ensured the years leading up to the bombing were known as "the years of lead".

The Milan bank bombing killed 16 people, and in 1974 12 people died and 100 were injured when a train was sabotaged. In 1978 Red Brigade terrorists kidnapped and murdered former Prime Minister Aldo Moro.

But nothing compared in scale to Bologna.

Four neo-fascists were jailed in 1998 for the attack and although their convictions were overturned on appeal in 1990 they were handed definitive life sentences in 1995.

Two of them, Valerio Fioravanti and his wife Francesca Mambro, say they are innocent and have claimed Libyan terrorists carried out the attack in reprisal for Italy's decision to sign a defence pact with Malta.

"We made a lot of mistakes, serious mistakes, and we are paying for them," Mambro, co-founder with Fioravanti of the extreme right Nuclei Armati Rivoluzionari, told Italian state television RAI.

"But we don't want to also commit the mistake of leaving this story to fall into silence without justice being done - justice for those who died but also those who survived."

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