

THE AUSTRALIAN

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REVOLTING

FRANCE THROWS EUROPE INTO TURMOIL

Airport staff 'sn

Martin Chulov
Jonathan Porter

WORKERS at the nation's largest airport, including baggage handlers with high-level security clearances, have been involved in drug-smuggling and stealing from passengers, according to a classified Customs report that also suggests staff pose a terrorism threat.

A probe by investigators into airport workers from toilet cleaners to pilots has found evidence of alleged criminal conspiracies between groups

of employees with access to the most secure areas of Sydney airport.

The report, obtained by *The Australian*, details serious security breaches and illegal activity by baggage handlers, air crew, ramp and trolley workers, security screeners and cleaners.

It says baggage handlers have diverted bags containing large amounts of narcotics from incoming international flights to domestic baggage carousels, sometimes changing baggage tags, to avoid Customs examination.

"Baggage handlers are suspected of large-scale pillage

Secret Customs report

exposes criminal links

and may use the roof area to gain illegal entry to passenger baggage," the report says.

The roster system makes it easy for baggage handlers to get their "mates" working in the same gang, it says.

But the report, completed in September last year, provides no direct evidence to support convicted marijuana smuggler Schapelle Corby's defence

that drugs were planted in her luggage by corrupt baggage handlers between Brisbane and Sydney.

The Customs investigation found no evidence of domestic drug-smuggling between Australian airports.

It found Customs checks on aircrew were relatively rare despite evidence showing that they were "an extremely high

Uranium mining ready to expand

Katharine Murphy

THE Howard Government has foreshadowed a dramatic expansion of Australia's uranium mining industry, identifying Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam as future export markets as South East Asia becomes a player in nuclear energy.

Linking the nation's uranium exports to international strategies to combat global warming, the Foreign Affairs Minister, Alexander

I'll meet you half way,



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 HOW TO TAKE DIGITAL
 PHOTOS LIKE A PRO

nuggling drugs'

AIRPORT SECURITY RISKS

- International baggage diverted to domestic carousels
- Security screeners with criminal records
- Aircrews rarely checked by Customs
- Theft from baggage and aircraft duty-free trolleys
- Engineers with duplicate keys
- 'Black holes' not under surveillance

risk". "Intelligence from other law enforcement agencies suggests that some Asian-recruited Qantas crew may be

involved in the importation of narcotics and are current subjects of alerts," it says.

The report says 39 security screeners out of 500 employed at the airport have a serious criminal conviction, with a further 39 having been convicted of minor matters. It says 14 had questionable immigration status and two were referred to the Department of Immigration as illegal immigrants.

A well-placed Customs source told *The Australian* yesterday that investigators

continue to uncover numerous "black spots" in the maze of baggage tunnels beneath the airport, which cannot be captured by surveillance cameras.

The black spots were allegedly known to baggage handlers and other employees and used as dropping-off points for drug importations.

The two Customs operations, dubbed Tempest and Berlap, targeted two groups of baggage handlers, each working in a gang of six. Investigators dubbed one the "Anglo Saxons" and the other the "Swarthies" — a reference to their Mediterranean appearance.

The Customs source said

executives had been sent a copy of the report last September, but did not appear to have acted on it.

The source claimed senior Customs staff were furious about the report's findings and suggested that commercial considerations within the airport may be a reason for a delayed response.

"We have people that don't want to rock the boat and nothing upsets the running of an airport more than the outing of staff who have very strong unions behind them. If we took one person out there is

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Howard tells black leaders

Tony Koch

JOHN Howard yesterday pledged to "meet the indigenous people of this country more than halfway if necessary" to unite black and white Australia, and acknowledged that indigenous Australians were "the most disadvantaged people in the country".

Eight years after Aboriginal leaders turned their backs on the Prime Minister to protest against his refusal to apologise for past injustices and recognise the stolen generations, Mr Howard received a warm reception and enthusiastic applause at the Reconciliation Australia conference in Canberra yesterday.

Mr Howard gave a commitment that his Government would not "wind back or

most blemished chapter in the history of this country.

"We recognise that communal interest in, and spiritual attachment to, land is fundamental to indigenous culture."

Co-chair of Reconciliation Australia Jackie Huggins said the messages from Mr Howard were "very positive".

"The issues that struck a chord



Airport staff are 'smuggling drugs'

From Page 1

no way that could happen without disrupting the travel of 30,000 people."

One of the gangs is alleged by investigators to have been involved in the importation late last year of 10kg of cocaine, which was removed from the baggage processing system before it could be X-rayed.

The report claims that ramp workers and baggage handlers were linked to Eastern Suburbs drug smuggling syndicates.

Officials monitoring the gang became aware of the pending importation, which was due to arrive on Lan-Chile flight 801, on October 7. Only several of the alleged gang were rostered on. The remainder, according to officials, appeared noticeably excited.

However, the importation was delayed for 24 hours and eventually arrived on Aerolinas Argentinas flight 1881 on October 8, the same day Corby's baggage passed through Sydney airport en route to Bali.

One official said the scenario used during numerous earlier importations had been for the smuggler to check in last, meaning their bag was left outside the baggage crate stored in the plane's cargo hold.

The loose bag is typically removed first from the plane in Sydney and placed on a luggage trolley in between the secured crates carrying passenger luggage. It then begins a 600m journey through the airport basement corridors that lead to the baggage dispensing area.

The official, speaking on condition of anonymity, claimed the drugs are removed from the bag, in a process known as ridding, at one of three blind-spots along

the way. They are hidden there before later being removed from the airport.

The official said hours of footage had been recorded by surveillance cameras of lower-level criminality within secure areas of the airport, ranging from stealing valuables from suitcases, to using passenger bags to smuggle goods stolen abroad.

Since 1995, the Australian Federal Police has also run its own investigation, known as Operation Bareena, into alleged criminality at the airport.

Customs said it could not comment on its operations. A spokeswoman for Sydney Airport Corporation said it co-operated closely with Customs and law enforcement agencies, but had not heard of operations Tempest or Berlap.

The report notes the difficulties experienced by Customs offers in tracking much of the activity in the airport or identifying staff on duty.

It says baggage handlers rosters allow shift swapping and the use of airport personnel to perform overtime away from their usual work station.

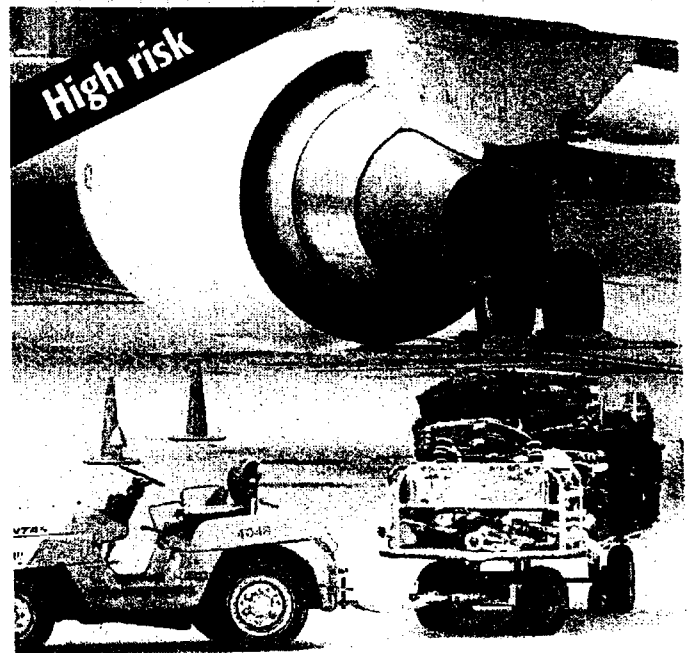
"The work practice of some airport employees to organise their own replacements has to be regarded as very dubious when seen under the guise of internal conspiracies," the report says.

"The rostering system, which groups work gangs together, facilitates the possibility of organised crime or internal conspiracies being operated."

Union activity often makes surveillance difficult, the report says.

"Very strong union presence on the tarmac area and the ever threatening intervention of union delegates... is always fraught with controversy," it says.

ACCESS ALL AREAS



Your lives in their hands: Baggage handlers load a flight at Sydney's international airport and several other occupations



Caterers



Cleaners

Security operat

Martin Chulov
Jonathan Porter

CUSTOMS investigators believe the nation's largest international airport has been stacked with staff from specific ethnic backgrounds, some of whom are known to police here and abroad.

The classified risk assessment of all Sydney airport employees with security clearances also showed that many private security workers were under trained.

It said an intelligence probe had revealed that about 10 per cent of the 500 security screeners had criminal convictions, half of them serious.

Security workers are primarily responsible for X-raying cabin baggage and clearing passengers through metal detectors.

The investigation revealed that the names of 14 employees raised concerns with the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, while a further 18 could

Secret talks for Hilali

Rid for... ..



...ey's international airport. Classified a high risk to security, along with couriers/security



Toilet truck operators



Engineers



Baggage conveyor loaders



Container loaders/operators

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not be found on any DIMIA database. The report, marked "Highly Protected", said jobs as airport security screeners were highly sought after "particularly by Muslim groups".

"It could be argued that racial if not ideological profiling is now an accepted part of risk assessment," it said.

"Investigations revealed that some security guards ... have been in Australia for relatively short periods of time yet have already been issued with security and firearms

licences despite their grasp of English being minimal."

The report said one security guard and his family were members of a "fanatical" religious group.

Among trolley distributors, the report says, "there is a predominance of Middle Eastern male employees in their early 20s".

"It was felt some of the men were under the influence of a particular supervisor who used his 'lieutenants' in the distribution of narcotics and

the systematic stealing from carpark and baggage.

"Some of these persons have affiliations with radical ... groups and are seen as a possible security liability. Some have associations with gangs predominantly in Sydney's southwest renowned for gang rapes, ram raids, theft, drive-bys and car-rebirthing.

"The vulnerability of Sydney airport ... should not be under-evaluated in terms of counter-terrorism or other criminal activity."

itinerants.

Four years after Lab shocked even itself by winning government in the territory for the first time, Martin is widely tipped to call the election for June.

But Ms Martin was concerned about the election date yesterday following the release of an independent inquiry that found territory petrol prices were consistently higher than the rest of the nation's due to the small size of the market.

The Chief Minister refused to increase the Government's 1.1c a litre subsidy, but vowed to refer to the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission any businesses that were unfairly inflating petrol prices.

This election will be the first time the Country Liberal Party has gone to the polls as the Opposition, having dominated territory politics for 27 years until its surprise defeat in 2001.

This will also be the first test for Labor's hold on all the states and territories since Geoff Gallop's Government was re-elected in Western Australia earlier this year.

The most bitter battle will be fought in Darwin's marginal northern suburbs where the party that wins most seats is usually the one that wins government. Labor holds 13 of the 25 seats in parliament.

Labor and the CLP will concentrate on economic development, small business operations and the ability of the Martin Labor Government to generate projects around the territory.

Law and order — particularly dealing with drunker Aboriginal itinerants — is also likely to be a major focus of the campaign, with both sides talking tough on "anti-social behaviour" and emphasising the need to protect the territory's unique lifestyle.



Martin



Burke