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Dail to debate motion condemning murders today

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STEPHEN COLLINS and FRANK MILLAR

SOUTHERN REACTION: TAOISEACH BRIAN Cowen and the British prime minister Gordon Brown spoke by phone last night to review the security situation on both sides of the Border.

Their conversation came in tandem with the meeting at Hillsborough Castle between Irish and British Ministers.

The Dáil will today debate an all-party motion condemning the murders. In a wording agreed last night, parties resolved to “remain steadfast in upholding the democratic will of the people to live together in peace”.

President Mary McAleese said the latest violence had been designed to “rock the peace process and to rubbish all that has been accomplished these past 40 years”.

Speaking at a reception at Áras an Uachtaráin commemorating the Northern Ireland civil rights campaign, Mrs McAleese said: “This week is one of the worst for violence in many years . . . It is an attack on the civil liberties of everyone who shares this island . . .”

There was also all-party condemnation of the murders in the Seanad but Senator Eoghan Harris said those who counselled against over-reaction should be ignored and the full emergency powers available to the State used.

“I have been through all this in my lifetime, with the bleeding heart stuff and the apologies . . . I will not use the ‘i’ word but I remind members that internment never failed in the Irish Republic,” said Senator Harris.

Former taoiseach Bertie Ahern said the murders would not derail the peace process. "Everything is positive except for these groups. These groups are not new. They have always been there and are just becoming more sophisticated," he said.

"To them, killing people is achieving something and that's why they're so dangerous." He said it was important they did not gain a stronger foothold.

Jonathan Powell, Downing Street chief of staff during Tony Blair's premiership, said the murders had "no political significance" and did not mark the rebirth of the Troubles.

However, he confessed the "worry" that the reaction to them "might make the deaths a turning point they do not need to be."

This article appears in the print edition of the Irish Times

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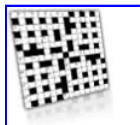
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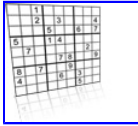
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