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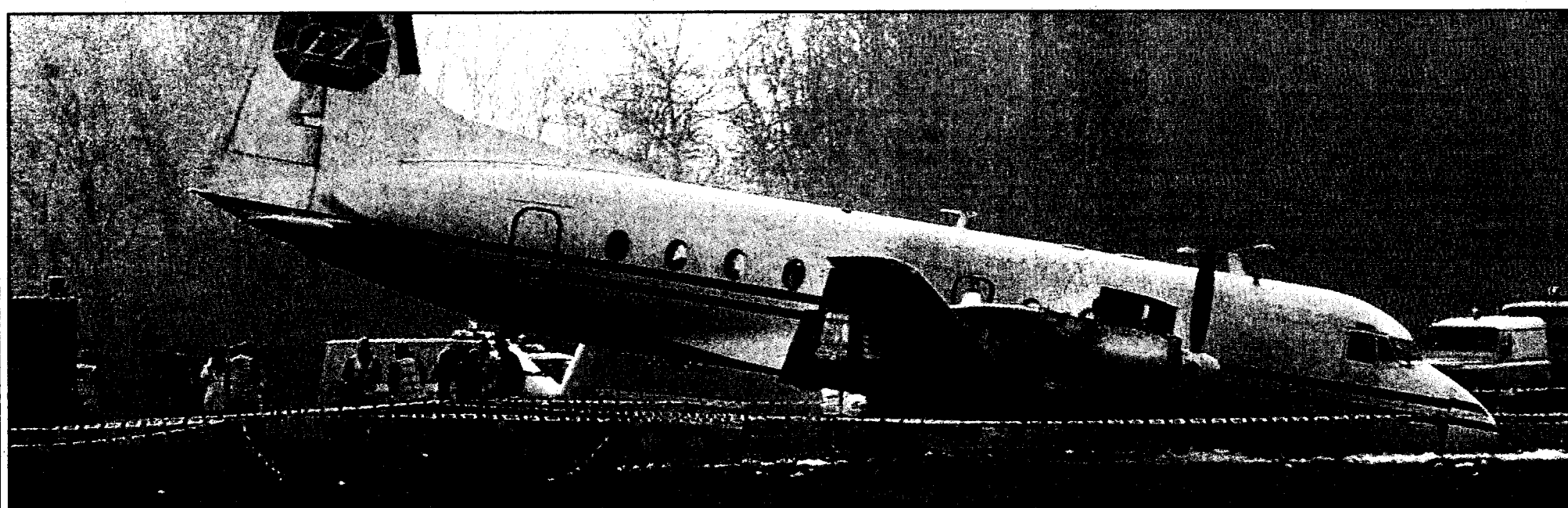
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Hero pilot saves football stars in crash emergency



The stricken plane which had been carrying the Leeds United team lies off the runway at Stansted Airport, while the team's assistant manager David O'Leary, who was injured in the crash, arrives back in Leeds today.



By Nathaniel Bane

THE PILOT of an aircraft that crash-landed this morning with million-pound Leeds United football stars on board has been hailed as a hero.

Shocked players and other passengers arriving in Yorkshire by coach have spoken about their terrifying ordeal and heaped praise on Captain John Hackett (61) for bringing the plane down safely.

Shortly after taking off, at 12.20am from Stansted airport, flames and fuel started pouring from the right-hand engine of the Premier League club's charter flight, forcing Captain Hackett to make a sudden emergency landing.

The aircraft came to rest on its nose, off the end of the runway, and the 40 passengers and four crew amazingly were able to walk away from the crash.

Ex-Republic of Ireland defender David O'Leary, Leeds' assistant manager, said: "The pilot did a brilliant job. He had to take a very quick decision and he made exactly the right choice. We were very, very lucky and thank God everyone got out okay."

A spokesman for Emerald Air said Mr Hackett lived in the Liverpool area and the other crew members were First Officer Gary Lucas and stewardesses Helen Dutton and Nicola Mee.

"Captain Hackett is pretty shaken about the whole thing. All of the crew are shaken," the spokesman said.

Mr O'Leary was also praised for his quick-thinking actions in shouldering open an emergency door and getting passengers off the crashed plane.

A tired-looking Mr O'Leary (40), still dressed in shirt and tie, said at his Harrogate home this morning: "I just regard myself and everyone as very lucky."

After arriving at Eiland Road by coach this morning, player Gunner Hallé said: "Just after we took off we heard a big bang and saw the flames from the engine on the right-hand side."

"We were just off the ground. There was a little bit of shouting and I couldn't believe it."

Businessman John Kennedy, who was a corporate guest at the match and was flying back with the team, said: "The whole incident lasted about 12 seconds but it was hair-raising."

See page 6 and back page

EXCLUSIVE POLL ON ULSTER PEACE DEAL

77% SAY YES

NORTHERN Ireland's voters would overwhelmingly back a peace deal supported by a majority of political parties, a survey reveals today.

Seventy-seven per cent of people polled said they would vote 'yes' in a referendum on a settlement backed by most political leaders.

By Paul Connolly
 Political Correspondent

But the number falls to 50% when people were asked if they would support a deal if the political party they support opposed such an agreement.

The survey results were published as it emerged today that the framework for a political settlement could be put before the parties by the end of the week.

According to sources, chairman George Mitchell is likely to place a paper on the negotiating table by Friday, outlining his best

assessment for political agreement.

Today's poll, independently funded by the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, indicates the chances of securing a 'yes' vote over the heads of all the political parties would be difficult.

But it also reveals that a deal supported by the main centre parties — the Ulster Unionists, Alliance and SDLP —

would have a good chance of a positive outcome.

The survey outlined the bones of a likely settlement based on a regional assembly, north-south bodies, a council of the isles, constitutional reform, a bill of rights and policing reform.

People were then asked: "If a majority of the political parties elected to take part in the Stormont talks agreed to this settlement would you vote to accept it in a referendum?"

Seventy-seven per cent replied 'yes', ranging from a high of 96% for Alliance voters to a low of 50% for DUP supporters.

Significantly Sinn Féin supporters voted 'yes' by 61% and UUP voters said 'yes' by 83%.

Respondents were then asked: "If you said 'yes', would you still accept these terms for a settlement even if the political party you supported was opposed to them?"

This time the 'yes' vote fell to 50%, ranging from a high of 87% for Alliance voters to a low of 22% for Sinn Féin voters.

The poll results were welcomed by Women's Coalition representative Monica McWilliams, who said: "All along we have argued that the public are desperate for some kind of resolution to this conflict. Now it is up to the politicians to listen to our people and deliver what is asked of us."

The poll also revealed that a regional assembly gains widespread support, with only 11% of Protestants and 15% of Catholics considering it 'unacceptable'.

The survey also reveals constitutional reform gets strong backing from both communities: only 7% of Protestants and 9% of Catholics regard this as 'unacceptable'.

Reform of the RUC is a more divisive issue, the poll shows. This is regarded as 'essential' for 40% of Catholics and 'unacceptable' for 48% of Protestants.

Bertie Ahern's border poll proposal could, if accepted, throw up some surprising results, the survey reveals.

Asked 'Do you want Northern Ireland to be part of the United Kingdom?', 97% of Protestants and 33% of Catholics said 'Yes'.

Survey results: Page 11

PM ups peace push

TONY Blair today embarked on key discussions after the warning by Taoiseach Bertie Ahern that time was running out for a political deal.

Mr Blair was meeting SDLP leader John Hume this afternoon, just 48 hours after his Chequers discussions with UUP leader David Trimble.

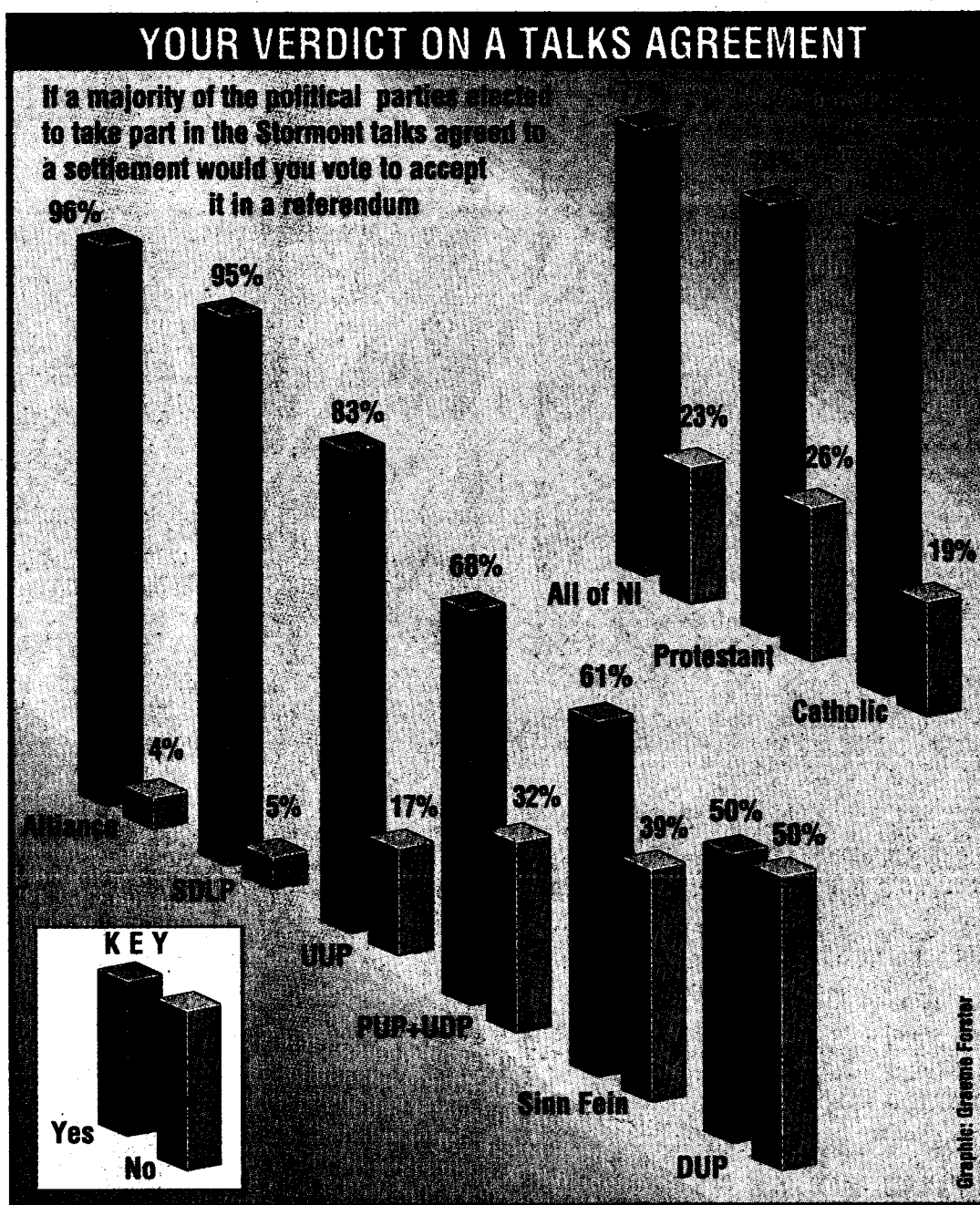
And, as the momentum increased, it was disclosed that Mr Blair and Mr Hume will meet tomorrow night to consider problems threatening to thwart

final agreement on a package. Government sources indicated that the discussions with Mr Hume and Mr Ahern will be a critical element in the search for a successful outcome.

Downing Street made clear that Mr Blair was devoting increased time and energy to the discussions about a possible deal as the April 9 deadline nears.

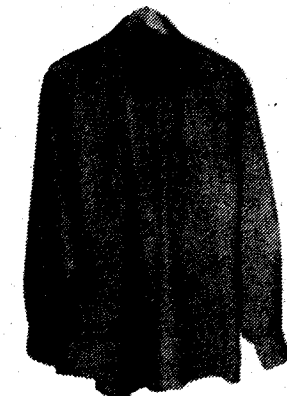
The Government is also preparing to release a further document on security issues linked to the prospective deal.

- Wide support for regional assembly
- Backing for constitutional reform
- Communities split on RUC reform
- 33% of Catholics want to stay in UK
- 97% of Protestants want to stay in UK
- 61% of SF voters back agreed deal



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TV AND RADIO P33; FINANCE P8; LETTERS P10; CROSSWORD P10; HOROSCOPES P13; SPORT P31.32. & 34

Weather Outlook

GREATER BELFAST AREA: It will be a dry night and it will start with a mix of clear spells and banks of cloud. However, thickening cloud will spread from the south during the early hours, although it will stay dry. A freshening southeasterly wind. Min temp 5-7C. SEE BACK PAGE

