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Burning



MACHO MOB
Local men
coerce creature



SHAMEFUL Animal is
tormented as crowd
whoops in delight

Protesters try to stop carnival where animals are set ablaze

EXCLUSIVE

BY NICK SOMMERLAD
Investigations Editor, in Medinaceli



TERRIFIED, with flames burning its back and sparks showering its eyes, this bull was entertainment for 1,000 Spanish revellers on Saturday night.

Two huge balls of tar and pitch burned inches from its crazed eyes for an hour as local men took turns to taunt the animal into chasing them.

It was barely interested. Instead, as burning liquid rained on to its face and back, the helpless beast tried to shake itself free of its flaming head-dress.

This barbaric ritual has taken place at midnight in the village square of Medinaceli for centuries.

Locals are fiercely proud of their "Toro Jubilo", a tradition they claim celebrates the power of the bull.

But it is bitterly contested and this weekend saw protests erupt for the first time within the arena itself as animal rights activists made a spirited but futile attempt to stop the ritual.

The Mirror joined an excited procession up to the medieval hilltop village, 85 miles from Madrid, for its busiest night of the year. The bars and restaurants filled up in carnival

mood. By 11.30pm, the scene was set. Protesters chanted in one corner of the square, nearby a brass band attempted to drown them out, while a truck arrived with the unfortunate bull in the back.

Islero, a 450lb beast from a village 100 miles away, had a rope attached to its horns while local men braced themselves to drag him into the specially built arena. But Islero was to have a brief reprieve.

Dozens of activists had mingled with the crowd and the appearance of the rope was their signal. As one, they climbed the 6ft metal fence and vaulted into the arena. In a mad scramble, they dashed for the wooden post where Islero was to be lashed. Organisers, wearing red bandanas, tried to stop them and fights broke out. Punches



PUMPED UP Police ring protesters

of the bulls

Tories blow extra £25bn on benefits

CHANCELLOR George Osborne has overspent by £25billion on benefits since 2010, figures reveal today.

Housing support for workers has cost £1.4billion more than expected and an extra £8billion went on incapacity benefits, Commons library research commissioned by Labour shows.

Shadow Chancellor Ed Balls and Shadow Work and Pensions Secretary Rachel Reeves say the overspend is due to the Coalition's failure to deliver reforms.

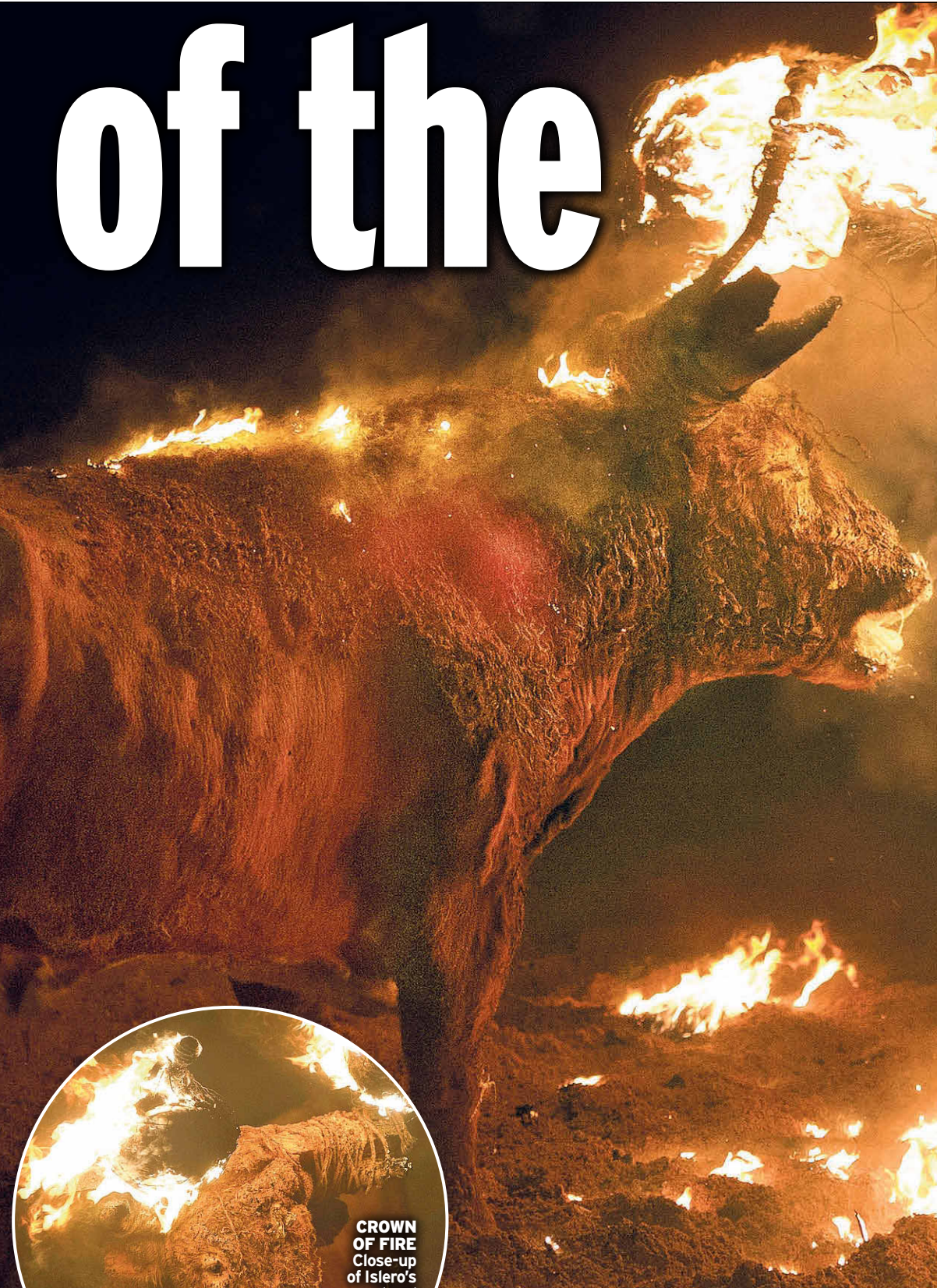
They say on website Politics Home: "George Osborne is talking about £12billion more cuts. He's overspent by twice this in this Parliament, casting doubt on his ability to make promised savings."

LOOK THE PARTE

A HAT worn by Napoleon Bonaparte and owned by Monaco's royal family has been sold at an auction near Paris for £1.5million.

HELLISH RITUAL
Fiery lumps from torches burn bull's back in Spanish gala

Pictures: ROWAN GRIFFITHS



CROWN OF FIRE
Close-up of Islero's head

were thrown and several protesters wrestled to the ground. But around 30 formed a tight huddle around the post. One man shoved his hand through a hole meant for the rope and handcuffed himself into position. Others chained themselves around him. The rest linked arms and began chanting.

Dozens of baton-wielding Guardia Civil stormed the arena. Some activists

were picked off and treated very roughly by furious locals and pumped-up police. I saw one young woman picked up by officers and thrown against the metal railings. Reinforcements arrived in riot gear, hailed as heroes by the impatient crowd, but it was 40 tense minutes before the last protester was dragged out of the square.

Minutes later, the bull charged in and 15 men hauled it to the post, where another 15 jumped on top to restrain it. A wooden post with two large torches attached was strapped across Islero's horns.

The crowd gasped as the animal tried to thrash free. Wet mud, meant to protect the eyes, was tipped on Islero's head, the rope was cut and the bull was loose.

Within seconds, it charged the wooden post. The petrified and confused animal also stumbled into one of the bonfires. But, mostly, it stood stock still, chest heaving, steam pumping from its nostrils.

To whoops, young men began sprinting past the bull, which scuffed the ground, throwing huge arcs of sand in the air. Islero charged back and

forth to the delight of the crowd but was it reacting in anger or fear?

The controversy around the Toro Jubilo has grown. Silvia Barquero, of animal rights group Pacma, claimed: "Spanish people want to stop it." But local Pilar Ortega said: "There are more important things to protest about."

EATEN

Resident Rodrigo Garcia admitted: "This is the most important day of the year for Medinaceli and these outsiders who don't understand won't stop it."

Opinions varied about the fate of the bull. It used to be killed and eaten during the festivities but no longer.

Garcia insisted: "We will eat bull next week as is the tradition but not this one. He goes to the field."

But outside Spain there was strong condemnation. Ben Williamson, of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, said: "The fiery balls burn the bulls' horns, eyes and other parts, causing huge stress. The agony they must suffer is unimaginable."

Libby Anderson, of charity OneKind, added: "Harming animals for sport is simply not in tune with 21st century morality and customs."

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