

Tina 30/10/00

# Submarine protest mars Blair's Spanish summit

From Melissa Kite and Giles Tremlett in Madrid

TONY BLAIR was caught in a storm of protest in Madrid yesterday as Spanish politicians demanded that he take immediate action to remove a dam-

aged British nuclear submarine stranded off Gibraltar.

Anger over the *HMS Tireless* intensified after it emerged that the vessel, which has been stranded for five months, will not be moved until next March at the earliest. The incident overshadowed

Mr Blair's annual two-day summit with his Spanish counterpart, José Maria Aznar, which was meant to be focused on speeding European economic reform.

Mr Blair faced calls to allow Spanish inspectors on board the submarine or have it towed away. Mayors from seven towns around Gibraltar protested outside Mr Aznar's residence.

Mr Blair insisted that there was no safety risk from the submarine, which has a design fault suspected of afflicting 11 other British vessels. "We have taken every possible sensible measure and will keep the Spanish Government informed," he said.

Iain Duncan Smith, the Shadow Defence Secretary, complained about Spanish interference. "Gibraltar is still sovereign territory. These concerns are political," he said.