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Captured ETA suspects were very active - government

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MADRID (Reuters) - Three suspected members of ETA arrested on Saturday night in France were likely to have been part of the armed separatist group's military command, Spanish Interior Minister Alfredo Perez Rubalcaba said on Sunday.

"The three presumably formed part of ETA's military command. We know they were one of the most active groups ETA had at this time, if not the most active," Rubalcaba told a news conference.

The arrests in the southwestern French town of Pau were the fourth such swoop against ETA in the past 22 days, in which 18 of its alleged members have been captured.

Those arrested on Saturday were Asier Borrero, Iurgi Garitagoitia and Itziar Plaza, who had been on the run for between about six months and a year and a half.

Rubalcaba said Plaza was accused of being a party to 20 armed attacks, Garitagoitia of playing a part in shooting dead a city councillor last year and Borrero of bombing a police barracks, among other acts.

Rubalcaba noted that all three were aged less than 30.

"It is not that people are joining up younger, but are getting arrested sooner," he said.

The most recent killing blamed on ETA was on June 19, when a police inspector died in a booby-trapped car in the northern city of Bilbao.

ETA are held responsible for killing more than 800 people in the past 40 years in a campaign to carve out an independent Basque homeland in northern Spain and southern France.

In April, police arrested its suspected top commander Jurdan Martitegi, bringing to four the number of commanders caught in less than a year.

Analysts say ETA is losing support for its violent methods, although polls show a majority of Basques may still want independence from Spain.

Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero's Socialist government broke off peace talks with ETA after the rebels killed two people with a car bomb at Madrid airport.

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