

Tories split on Euro force

By Hasan Suroor

WMO
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LONDON, NOV. 25. Serious differences have erupted at the top of the Tory leadership over the new European Rapid Reaction Force just when it looked that the party had finally found a potentially strong issue to put the Government on the defensive.

In an embarrassing development, two senior Conservative leaders, Mr. Michael Heseltine and Mr. Kenneth Clarke, have backed the Blair Government's decision to commit British troops to the new force, and questioned their party chief, Mr. William Hague's criticism. They have, in fact, pointed out that the Euro force was the culmination of a process which began under the Conservative regime and with its support.

Mr. Heseltine, a former Defence Secretary, said the force made "absolute sense" and contrary to Mr. Hague's contention that it was not a threat to NATO. Nor were the Americans opposed to it, he told *The Times*. He said it had been "welcomed by the American President and is consistent with what the Americans have been advising us for decades."

Mr. Heseltine opposed Mr. Hague's pledge to withdraw Britain from the force if Tories came to power. He said it would be a tragedy for Britain to have its influence on European defence reduced. Speaking in the Commons, Mr. Clarke, a former Chancellor of the Exchequer, reminded Mr. Hague and the former Prime Minister, Mr. John Major, that the Euro force was the product of the Conservative policy. "The last Government... embarked on a process of evolving NATO towards a different shape that also involved strengthening the European element",

he said adding that "we always in my opinion... were contemplating producing something of this kind."

Mr. Hague has also been attacked by Mr. Chris Patten, one of Britain's Commissioners to E.U. He called Mr. Hague's criticism of the Euro force "crazy" and contested his charge that it was a first towards creating a European army. "It is crazy to suggest that this is the creation of a European army or an attempt to kick the Americans out of Europe. Nothing could be further from the truth", he said.

The rift in the Tories has pleased the Government which in the past few days took some hard knocks from Euro-sceptics with Mrs. Margaret Thatcher, in a rare public intervention, calling it a "monumental folly" and Mr. Tony Blair returning the compliment with his famous remark that the Thatcher era was over. Mr. Blair also had had a running battle with newspapers some of whom he accused of being "fundamentally dishonest" in the way they reported Europe.

The public criticism of Mr. Hague by his own senior party leaders comes at a time when he thought that the party had finally got an issue to put the Government on the defensive in the run-up to the general elections. In the event, it seems that many in the party are opposed to the idea of fighting the elections on a "one-issue" campaign.

The fact that the Labour party made a clean sweep of Thursday's parliamentary byelections despite the anti-Labour hype over Europe is seen as a clear indication that the Tories would need to reorient their election strategy; and that Labour-bashing on one issue alone would not do.

THE HINDU

26 NOV 2000

MULTI-ETHNIC FUTURE OF BRITAIN

By WILLIAM FRANKEL in LONDON

45-6
2/10

UNTIL the middle of the last century, Britain could be described as a homogeneous society. There always was some immigration but the numbers were small and the newcomers were, without too much difficulty, integrated into the existing society. Hostility by some who objected to immigration erupted from time to time but, by and large, it was not a seriously disruptive issue.

That changed after World War II when a substantial immigration from the West Indies, from other former British colonies and then from Asia made a very visible impact and that brought a reaction. Some opponents of immigration pointed to the high rate of crime in the urban areas populated by the Caribbeans, others saw the immigrants as constituting a threat to the British way of life and there were also open and unthinking racists.

Immigration has since developed into a hot political issue, which the main political parties cannot ignore and in both the Conservative and Labour parties, important elements have urged the imposition of restrictions on new arrivals. In 1968, the late Enoch Powell, a scholar and Conservative M.P. made a notorious speech in which he forecast "rivers of blood" if mass immigration continued. Mr Edward Heath, then the leader of the party, dismissed him from the shadow cabinet but Mr Powell received no fewer than 100,000 letters of support. Eleven years later, Mrs Thatcher, in her successful election campaign, expressed fears of the country being "swamped" by immigrants.

Since then, the immigration issue has been a permanent feature of the political landscape, sometimes beneath the surface, sometimes erupting. Six months ago, the publication of figures showing a surge in the number of claimants for asylum rang alarm bells. They showed that last year there had been 70,000 such applicants, a huge increase on previous years, of which, according to the present Home Secretary, only 20 to 30 per cent had a well-founded case.

Media reports continually highlighted the burdens that the nation was bearing in housing and maintaining these immigrants. From time to time, harrowing news emerged of the deprivations and fatalities suffered by unfortunates from all over the world who wished to enter this country only to be allowed to work for a better life.

"RACE CARD"

After the 1997 election, Mr William Hague, the new Tory leader, took up the issue, pledging to stop "organised asylum racketeers who are flooding our country with bogus asylum seekers". The U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees reproved him for exploiting a racial issue and Labour spokesmen accused him of playing the 'race card' - but they were saying much the same thing themselves.

Mr Tony Blair, the Prime Minister, had in the House of Commons condemned "bogus asylum seekers"

they had "enabled bogus asylum seekers to come, claim benefit, work and carry on ripping off the system".

Both parties are anxious not to be seen as soft on illegal immigration for that would lose them votes. On the other hand, there was a risk of appearing racist which neither of them wanted. An indication that Labour had gone too far, even for some of its supporters, came six months ago. Mr Bill Morris, who is black and the respected leader of the transport union, the second largest in the country, described Labour's language on asylum seekers as having "given life to the racists".

OFFENSIVE

Two weeks ago, the Labour government was again in the firing line as a result of the publication of a report of the Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain. This is a body set up by the Runnymede Trust, a non-governmental think tank on issues of race equality, which is supported by charitable foundations. The Commission consisted of 28 members, many of them identified with New Labour. The Chairman of the Commission is Lord Parekh, a Labour peer of Indian origin. He is the Emeritus Professor of Political Theory at the University of Hull and was the Deputy Chairman of the government Commission for Racial Equality.

The new 400-page report asserts that racism is still endemic in Britain and that Labour has failed to root it out. It makes more than a hundred recommendations to bring about racial equality, the one receiving most attention being that Britishness has racial connotations and that Britain should declare itself to be a multi-cultural society whose history needs to be "revised, rethought or jettisoned".

Mr Jack Straw had personally launched and blessed the newly appointed Commission three years ago and, when the report was published last week, the Home Office welcomed it as "a timely report which adds much to the current debate on multi-ethnic Britain". But that was, it now appears, before it had been read and the government seemed to be endorsing a view of Britain which many citizens would find offensive.

The papers were full of it, British patriotism was at stake and, recognising its damaging potential, both the Prime Minister and Mr Straw rapidly dissociated themselves from this conclusion. The Home Secretary welcomed the contribution the report had made, but felt that it was "grudging" in its recognition of what had been achieved and, in particular, he "strongly parted company" with its views on Britishness.

It had not been a good week for Labour on the race issue and the Tories have been content to sit back and watch their opponents' embarrassment.

The hostility to illegal immigrants, some of whom claim to be asylum seekers, remains widespread and the Tories are likely to gain

Devolution in the U.K.

By Mukund Padmanabhan

ACCORDING TO one school of political thought, devolution of power is like unsticking glue. Devolution defers dissolution — it keeps nations threatened by separation together. What might appear as a prescription to induce purging, actually binds. Look at Switzerland, urge proponents of this view. A country which, through its complex system of communes and cantons, has knitted four linguistic nationalities into a unique and seamless Swiss-mess. Or consider Quebec and Canada. For that matter, there are many other examples served up to support the devolution-as-glue theory. To show that while you give, you actually get to keep.

No other country, in recent times, has embarked on a process of devolution as radical as Britain. The ambitious programme of constitutional reform launched by Mr. Tony Blair's regime has been sold as a measure to make the Government of the United Kingdom not only more representative but also more efficient. It has also been defended, in the face of criticism that Mr. Blair may have inadvertently sowed the seeds of separation, as a step towards keeping Britain together. In a way, the deeper purpose of New Labour's radicalism was no different from what the unitarists seek: the continuity of the union.

Devolving power in the United Kingdom, however, has stemmed from varied compulsions. In Northern Ireland, the setting up of self-government was part of a long and painful process of negotiated change, one that was influenced greatly by the ethnic conflict.

In Scotland, ideas of Home Rule had begun to be floated since the late 19th Century, but it wasn't until the 1970s that an attempt was made to put something into place. A referendum for self-government reflected popular support but failed to muster the required percentage for success. Eventually, it was the rising support for independence, reflected by the growing electoral strength of the Scottish National Party (SNP), which persuaded the Labour Party to address the Scottish question.

In Wales, the demand for self-govern

ment, irrespective of the position staked out by the nationalist Plaid Cymru, was hardly strong. It may not be wholly inaccurate to suggest that devolution here was handed down rather than earned wholly as a result of mobilising political opinion around this issue. The referendum held in September 1979 to decide whether a system of devolved government should be established was settled by the narrowest of majorities: 50.3 per cent in favour. In contrast, over 70 per cent of Scotland voted in favour of setting

it will be difficult to put them back together again. But the arrangement does reflect that devolution has not really denied the unitary nature of the state.

The creation of a Northern Ireland Assembly was one of the important results that flowed out of the Belfast or Good Friday agreement between the U.K. and the Republic of Ireland. Unlike Scotland and Wales, the process of devolution had an 'external' dimension, which is reflected in the very structure of it. The constitutions of both the U.K. and the Republic of Ireland were amended to incorporate this structure which, among other things, includes the establishment of a cross-border institution such as the North-South Ministerial Council (NSMC).

Devolution could mark the beginning of political pulls and pressures that Britain will find hard to ignore.

The political turmoil in Northern Ireland has resulted in sensitive matters such as policing, prisons and the criminal justice system remaining with the Secretary of State. Another difference is that the process depends on the fulfilment of various (only partially fulfilled) commitments. In February this year, the Blair Government unhappy with the Irish Republican Army's reluctance to decommission its arms, signed an order suspending the Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive. Following many rounds of talks, the Blair Government restored the Assembly a few months later. In May, but the decommissioning issue continues to

threaten both the peace and the devolution process.

Devolution is roughly between a year to a year and a half old in the United Kingdom. Following elections, powers were formally devolved on the administrations in Scotland and Wales on July 1, 1999. As for Northern Ireland, this took place a little later in the year, on December 2.

This is probably not a long enough time to ask the inevitable question: does it work? However, the experience over the last year has been revealing and instructive. One of the questions that is being raised is: where does it go from here? In other words, is it something that is regarded as a more or less permanent event or only a first step in a process? In both Scotland and Wales, parties such as the SNP and Plaid Cymru regard devolution as a process, as a little towards a lot more.

In the light of this, it is worth considering the impact of devolution on nationalist sentiment: has it been stoked or damped? Another question which could become important in the days to come is the impact of devolution on England. Some voices in the Conservative party have begun to complain that a system which allows Scottish MPs to have a say in English affairs but does not permit the reverse is blatantly unfair. A separate Parliament or Assembly for England is one of the suggestions that has been mooted to redress this 'imbalance'. However, whether attempts to tap a sense of English nationalism will be politically successful remains to be seen.

In his book "After Britain", Mr. Tom Nairn, who predicts that Britain is in its twilight and is inexorably on the path to breaking up, suggests that devolution is the beginning of eventual dissolution. Mr. Nairn, who is admired by many members of the pro-independence SNP, is far from unhappy over this prospect. But even if he is wrong, it would seem fair to believe that devolution could mark the beginning of political pulls and pressures that Britain will find hard to ignore.

THE HINDU

23 NOV 2001

40-12 Devolution in the U.K. — II

2A/11 By Mukund Padmanabhan

ASTONE'S throw from Queen Elizabeth's Holyrood Palace in Edinburgh, a large vacant site sits with construction activity. Here, against the stunning backdrop of the Salisbury Crags, is where Scotland's new Parliament building, a daringly designed neo-modern structure inspired by the shape of leaves, will be situated. Some politicians in Scotland say that it is a symbol of the "new politics" that the devolution programme in Britain was designed to engender. But what about the people themselves? Has devolution made a difference to their lives? If opinion polls truly reflect popular opinion, then the answer in both Scotland and Wales would be a clear no. One poll held five months ago in Scotland concluded that 80 per cent of the people felt that nothing, or at least very little, had changed. However, this may reflect frustration with the limitations of the new order; one opinion poll, for instance, revealed most Scots believe that their Parliament's powers should be expanded for greater effectiveness.

The pro-independence Scottish Nationalist Party (SNP), now the principal Opposition in Parliament, of course wants much more. One crucial question relates to the impact of devolution on separatist sentiment and the answer is not altogether clear. The fear that devolution would raise the political debate between the unionists and the nationalists to a feverish and unpleasant pitch has not materialised. Scotland's political discourse and the SNP's immediate concern in many ways relates to the manner in which Scotland should be governed. The SNP seems keen on projecting itself as the Government-in-waiting and not merely the party of independence.

At the same time, it is pretty apparent that there is not much political purchase in toeing an uncompromisingly unionist line. In the May 1999 Scottish parliamentary elections, the Conservatives failed to win a single first-past-the-post seat (all the 18 seats they got were on the basis of proportional representation). In contrast, the SNP polled almost 50 per cent of the vote, considerably more than the

22 per cent it polled for the election to Westminster two years earlier. One of the major reasons which framed up the Labour Party's resolve to devolve power in Scotland was the rising levels of support for independence and self-determination in the region.

Like the SNP, Plaid Cymru in Wales regards devolution not as a final event but the beginning of a process of political change. Its aim is to secure self-government (and not independence) but the

its support growing among the youth. A similar phenomenon exists in Scotland, where the SNP is popular with young voters. In both places, British identity is stronger among the elderly — the constituency where the Conservative Party draws its insubstantial and seemingly dwindling support. The party opposed devolution in both the regions but is now committed to working within the new system. One of the challenges before the party is to reach out to younger voters.

One crucial question relates to the impact of devolution on separatist sentiment and the answer is not altogether clear.

degree of autonomy the party demands does, the Plaid wants to be a part of the European Union and become a member of the United Nations. Says the presiding officer of the Welsh Assembly, Lord Dafydd Elis Thomas: "I would prefer a federal U.K. within a federal Europe".

As a first step, the party is in favour of greater devolution — at least on a par with Scotland. This demand has more support among other political parties than appears on the face of it. There is only so much an Assembly without the powers to make primary legislation can do. And the limitation of a role, which is largely confined to managing funds that are made available from the Treasury, is found wanting in many quarters.

Those in the Labour-Liberal coalition which runs the Assembly do not openly support greater devolution. But given the tensions in the existing set-up — some of which arises from the lack of clarity about the exact powers enjoyed by the Assembly — there is some general sympathy for the view that Wales could use a Scottish-type Parliament. Ms. Elin Jones, a Plaid Cymru Assembly member, thinks that the Labour Party will endorse a Welsh Parliament in the next few years.

Plaid Cymru now has four members in the House of Commons and 17 in the Welsh Assembly, where it is the official Opposition. In recent years, it has found

is going on in Scotland and Wales. Northern Ireland, where the re-emergence of violence and terrorism is always a threat, continues to grab headlines and occupy most of the attention. However, the so-called West Lothian question could become a subject for political debate. Namely, why should Scottish MPs have a say in English affairs when voting in Westminster when English MPs do not have a similar say in Scottish affairs? (The question is irrelevant as far as Wales is concerned because the Welsh Assembly deals only in secondary legislation).

A few days ago, the question was pitched into national focus with the Conservative leader, Mr. William Hague, describing the existing system as "unfair" and calling for a situation where the English decide on English affairs. Some of Hague's partymen have demanded a English Parliament on the lines of Scotland to level the political playing field.

The suggestion is not regarded favourably by the Labour Party, which argues that such a system would be lopsided. In other words, that England with a population of some 50 million cannot be compared with Scotland (about 5 million) or Wales (3 million). The Labour Party's objection probably has a practical dimension — a separate English Parliament would be inevitably ruled by Conservatives.

There are other issues that could become a factor in the politics of the south. To cite one example, Scotland does pretty well from the formula by which its share of the budgetary revenue is parceled out. As a result, the per capita expenditure of more than one public service is higher than England. In the area of health, 40 per cent more is spent per capita on those living in Scotland.

In short, devolution has set off a diverse set of reactions and it is likely that these will play a role in the further transformation of the United Kingdom. How this transformation takes shape and how it will be precipitated are not easy to predict. But the betting is that if Blair's Britain has changed, then it is likely to change much more.

(Continued)

410-17

19/11

Scoring brownie points



Britain's Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair, applauds the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Gordon Brown... populist gestures.

November 14 "march on London" turned out to be a non-event, thanks to Mr. Brown's widely-distributed concessions. It was a smart strategy which saw the Government buy peace with its traditional supporters without giving the impression of surrendering to the protestors.

Mr. Blair can claim that he stuck to his theme that while the Government would "listen" to the genuine grievances of the people it would not give in to threats or be intimidated by those who "shout the loudest". His critics of course maintain that this is not true: they point out that the pensioners' lobby within the Labour Party had nearly revolted and in fact a day before Mr. Brown announced his proposals a number of pensioners protested in London making it clear that if the Government did not listen to them it could not count on their continued support. Similarly, concessions on fuel duty are seen as a response to the September protest, and no one even in the Government is

pretending that Mr. Brown would have chosen to be so generous if there was no public pressure — and if elections were not around the corner.

For all the brave spin which is being attempted, the message that has gone out is clear: the Government will not listen unless you protest. Already, the trade unions of nurses and other Government employees have begun to flex their muscles and a senior union leader, threatening industrial action, said that "the only thing Gordon understands is force". The Government is reported to be considering announcing an early pay raise for "key professionals" such as nursing staff to head off what a newspaper called a possible winter of discontent — the last winter before the next elections, it may have added. In the event, a Government led by an avowedly "people's party" has exposed itself to the charge of electoral opportunism, and what must be most galling for it is to be accused by the Tories of being "out of touch with the public mood" — a charge which Mr. Blair downwards cannot entirely shrug off. They have to simply see the TV replay of their speeches and comments in the initial stages of the September protest to realise that they acted with a touch of arrogance that surprised their own supporters. It was not until the opinion polls started showing a steady decline in the Labour's popularity — at one stage it was overtaken by the Conservatives and even the Lib Dems were beginning to dream of a better future — that the leadership woke up to the seriousness of the situation.

The "Brown package" is a response to a wake up call which the Government could have ignored only at its own peril. In the event, the £5 billion is well spent.

THE SUREST sign of impending elections in any country is when the Government starts "listening" to the people, the Prime Minister suddenly becomes "responsive" to the public mood, and the Finance Minister begins to hand out goodies, particularly to those sections which, if alienated, can do irreparable damage to the ruling party's electoral prospects. So, when Britain's Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Gordon Brown, rose in the House of Commons on November 8 to unveil a package of wide-ranging concession and reliefs it became "official" that only an expected dramatic decline in the Labour Party's fortunes could now come in the way of mid-term elections next May.

The Opposition, of course, was quick to call it the "great pre-election splurge", but even the normally pro-Labour commentators thought that Mr. Brown had succumbed to the compulsions of an election year. The package, which would cost nearly £5 billion, came after months of tough talking by Mr. Brown on the virtues of "economic prudence" and the danger of the policy of "boom and bust" practised by the Tories when they were in power — and which ultimately proved to be their undoing. Clearly, intimations of electoral mortality had something to do with it, and as *The Times* remarked: "But for all his talk of rigour, his principles wax and wane in uncanny harmony with British electoral cycles".

The fact that the Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair, put off a potentially high-profile visit to Russia to help his Chancellor with the package did not go unnoticed. Clearly Mr. Brown had not acted of his own. It had been a command performance and Mr. Blair made sure that the beneficiaries of

The 'Brown package' is a response to a wake-up call the Blair Government could have ignored only at its own peril. HASAN SUROOR on the pre-poll largesse in Britain.

the Christmas "gift" knew whom they should thank for it. Mr. Blair's highly publicised decision to be around while Mr. Brown presented his pre-Budget proposals was a symbolic act of putting his own signature on the largesse: it was his way of telling the electorate that he had gone the extra mile to intervene on their behalf. With the Labour's traditional supporters — pensioners, farmers, lorry drivers — up in arms barely six months before the elections, the Prime Minister had few options but to humour them in the only way they were willing to be humoured — by giving them what they wanted.

So, the "Brown package" had something for everyone: increased pension, freeze on fuel duty, cut in road tax for farmers, reduction in duty on "green" petrol (pleasing motorists as well as the environmental lobby) and concessions for single parents, among others. Where Mr. Brown did draw the line was the fuel protestors' demand for a 26 p-a-litre cut in petrol prices, and he could afford to be tough with them because he had already bought peace with many of the groups which had formed part of the crippling September protest. What was left now was only a rump lobby with few teeth, as subsequent events proved. The threatened

THE HINDU

19 NOV 2000

HD-12

15/12

Blair adopts pro-E.U. line

By Hasan Suroor

LONDON, NOV. 14. The British Government has decided to go on the offensive on the thorny issue of the country's integration with Europe, and in an explosive demonstration of its new aggressive line, the Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair, and the Foreign Secretary, Mr. Robin Cook, have come out unequivocally in favour of Britain playing a more active role in Europe while negotiating "toughly" to protect its national interests.

The strong pro-Europe line emerged even as serious differences were reported between Mr. Blair and the French President, Mr. Jacques Chirac, over some key issues that are likely to come up at next month's European Summit in Nice.

France, which holds the E.U. presidency, remains firmly opposed to Britain's insistence on a national veto on policies relating to tax and social security. Britain, on the other hand, is resisting attempts to foist common pan-European taxation and social security measures on all member countries, and the Nice summit is likely to see some tough posturing on both sides, judging from the reportedly frosty tone of the Blair-Chirac telephone conversation on Monday.

This did not, however, affect Mr. Blair's passionate advocacy of the European cause and in what was seen as an orchestrated performance Mr. Cook threw his full weight behind his Prime Minister. Speaking on separate occasions on Monday but using what sounded like the same songsheet, the two led a sharp attack on the critics of the Government's Europe policy.

"If we want to stand up for Britain then we have to be in Europe, active, constructive, involved all the time. We have to negotiate toughly and get our way, not stand aside and let other European countries make the decisions that matter to us", Mr Blair said.

Mr. Cook was particularly critical of the way the national media had been reporting the issue and



The British Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair, at the annual Lord Mayor's Banquet in London on Monday. — AP

said it was failing in its mission to inform the public.

"From now on, the Government will be rebutting all such stories vigorously and promptly. You will be hearing the catchphrase "facts, not myths" until that is the way the E.U. is reported", he warned.

Mr. Blair, speaking at a high-profile banquet at the Lord Mayor's Mansion House, described his Government's Europe policy as one of "enlightened patriotism" which envisaged an active "engagement" with Europe but on its own terms. "Be at the centre of events, not a spectator. In particular be a leading player, not a bit player", he said.

This was the true way of standing up for Britain as it strove to become a bridge between Europe and the Atlantic.

The Blair-Cook offensive is by far the strongest mounted one by the Government in the face of growing Euro-scepticism across the country, and with the Conservatives determined to make it an election issue next summer.

It is seen both as a warning to the Europhobics within the Labour Party to get the message straight, and to the Tories that they would not be allowed to hijack the issue.

THE HINDU

15 NOV 2000

Missile attack at British MI6 Hqs

London, September 21

A "SMALL missile" caused the explosion at the headquarters of MI6, Britain's foreign intelligence agency in Central London, yesterday, said the Head of Scotland Yard's anti-terrorist branch, Alan Fry.

Fry said there was "minimal" damage to the outside of the building on the south bank of the river Thames, less than a mile from the Houses of Parliament and Downing Street.

He refused to speculate on the type of weapon used, but said it was unlikely it had been mortar, which would have caused more damage. Fry, addressing journalists outside the MI6 headquarters today, said police investigating the attack were "keeping in mind" dissident Irish Republican groups but were not ruling out other possible perpetrators.

The work of the intelligence service had not been disrupted by the blast, which witnesses said had been immediately followed by a second explosion.

Emergency services were called

to an explosion near to the Central London headquarters of MI6, police said.

A spokesman for the London ambulance service said last night there was no report of any casualties, but emergency services had sealed off the area around the site of the explosion.

Sky News television reported that army bomb disposal officers were at the scene checking that there were no unexploded devices. The headquarters of MI5, the domestic intelligence service, are situated directly opposite the MI6 headquarters, on the other side of the river.

A spokesman of the foreign office, which supervises MI6, said: "We are aware of the incident, but we don't know any details as yet."

Alex Frank, an eyewitness quoted by Sky News who lives near the scene, claimed that he had heard two separate explosions. "There were definitely two explosions, they were loud enough to shake the building where I was living," he was quoted as saying. (AFP)

THE INDUSTRIAL TALK

Blair admits mistakes, but seeks second term

Vijay Dutt
London, September 27

HT-14 28/9
GUSHING WITH sweat and trying to sound sincere in his penitence and promises, British Prime Minister Tony Blair appealed to voters to give him a second term, during his 55-minute speech at the Labour annual party conference being held in Brighton.

Perspiring profusely despite the sea-chilled air, Blair oscillated between contrition and defiance. He admitted that he had made mistakes, particularly over the Millennium Dome and pension rate, and then went on to promise to listen to the people.

This was something which he had never said in his earlier speeches. Apparently, Blair was a much chastened man and the delegates liked the change in his attitude. He moved his delegates and won many in the media.

He was applauded when he said, "And there are things we have done that have made people angry and we should be open enough to admit it," and added that he owed public an explanation.

His stress on making Britain a country of equal opportunities to every individual whatever be his or

her religion, culture and ethnicity, would definitely help Labour secure the sympathy of over three million ethnic community voters.

This was apparent when he got the delegates cheering wildly his promise to take Britain on a journey the end of which would be "a Britain where every child born in this millennium, whatever their background, race or creed, wherever they live, whoever their parents, is able to make the most of the God-given abilities they bring into this world".

"That journey is worth making, a fight worth fighting. A fight we must win." This brought the delegates on their feet. So did his scathingly worded attacks on William Hague.

"He is always leaping aboard every passing bandwagon. Opportunism always knocks for William Hague. You want tax cuts? Have them. Spending rises? Have them too."

Everyone, the ministers, delegates and commentators agreed that this Blair speech was his best ever. And it had its desired effect. His party men are willing to forget the fact that he has been aloof and authoritarian. They are glad that he has admitted his mistakes.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

28 SEP 2000

Britain resumes limited arms sale to Pak.

By Thomas Abraham

LONDON JULY 6. British defence sales to the military regime in Pakistan have resumed recently, the British government has revealed. Even though Britain had condemned the coup, it has maintained a policy of engaging with the Musharraf Government, and has now begun to clear licences for a selected range of defence equipment.

The Foreign Office Minister, Mr Peter Hain, in response to a parliamentary question, had said that 20 licences had been granted for naval spares, bomb disposal equipment and goods for civil end users, while 26 other licence applications had been rejected.

Because of the strong stand Britain had initially adopted against the coup in Pakistan, it had been widely assumed that there was a ban on arms sale to the military government. In fact there had been no such ban, though Britain had gone slow on clearing various pending applications for export licences. As a Foreign Office spokesperson said, "We have never accepted, or suggested that there has been an embargo" on defence sales to Pakistan.

After the military coup, and af-

ter the Kargil incursion, Britain froze decisions on a number of pending export licences. Now, more than a year later, Britain has clearly decided to resume limited defence sales. "We were better able to assess the record and intentions of Musharraf," a Foreign Office spokeswoman said. "This does not mean we are entirely content with the Government, but we have made a fair judgment of the kind of licences which should be granted."

Mr. Hain, told the British Parliament that export licences had been given for "a narrow and well-defined range of equipment" after taking time to consider "the situation in Pakistan and the wider region following the coup in October 1999." Britain remained "concerned about defence exports to Pakistan, in the light of last year's incursion at the Kargil sector of the Line of Control in Kashmir, the military coup, the possibility of diversion to undesirable end-users and continued regional tensions."

"We have refused licences for certain military equipment to Pakistan because we do not judge that they meet our criteria," he added.

THE HINDU

67 JUL 21M

British troops back in Belfast

BELFAST, JULY 6. British troops who were rushed onto Belfast's streets for the first time in two years helped quell a fourth night of Protestant hardline violence in Northern Ireland, officials said today.

A huge show of force overnight by troops and police in the British province's troublespots reduced the violence of previous nights, triggered by a ban on a Protestant march through a Roman Catholic enclave. The army announced last night it was deploying troops on Belfast's streets shortly after the Royal Ulster Constabulary chief, Sir Ronnie Flanagan warned that Protestant hardliners planned bomb and gun attacks.

Sir Ronnie said extreme loyalists were planning further attacks following Tuesday's exchange of gunfire in north Belfast between the RUC and Loyalist terrorists. The shots came from a housing estate where the Ulster Freedom Fighters leader Johnny Adair holds sway. The RUC chief said the threat came from "the extreme fringe of loyalism in terms of what they intend to do, in terms of the attacks that they intend to carry out against my officers up to and including the use of blast bombs and firearms."

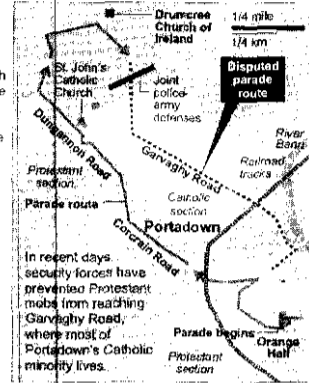
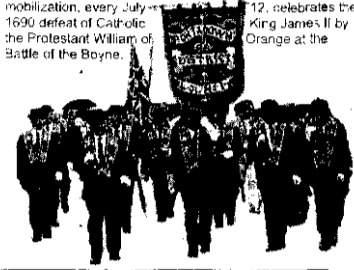
The violence has rocked the province's fragile peace process, which appeared to be making headway recently with the re-establishment of a power-sharing government representing the Protestant majority and Catholic minority. Last night's violence was largely confined to Belfast where witnesses reported a petrol bomb attack on police, the hijacking of vehicles which were then set on fire as barricades and sporadic outbreaks of stone-throwing. Riot police in armoured vehicles drove back 60 masked stone-throwing youths in a Protestant stronghold near Belfast's city centre after they hijacked a bus. Police figures showed that 29 officers had been injured in the

Troubled march through Portadown

Officials in Northern Ireland are appealing for Protestant hardliners to call off street protests that have caused rioting, fear and destruction across the region. The protests and attacks are to force British authorities to cancel the ban on a traditional Protestant parade through a Catholic neighborhood.

The Orange Order

- Largest Protestant organization in Northern Ireland with about 80,000 active members.
- Formed in 1795 after a clash between Protestants and Catholics in the Battle of the Diamond near Portadown.
- The Orange Order stages more than 2,000 marches each summer to commemorate a variety of historical events. The annual Portadown march, every first or second Sunday in July, recalls Protestant losses in World War I. Its biggest mobilization, every July 12, celebrates the 1690 defeat of Catholic the Protestant William of Orange at the Battle of the Boyne.



four nights of violence. The army said in a statement there had been more public disorder incidents in the Northern Ireland capital in the 24 hours up to last night than in the whole of last year.

"Before long, if this goes on, there will be deaths," the church of Ireland primate Robin Eames said in a radio interview. British army engineers erected a wall of steel and razor wire at a bridge in Drumcree, a hamlet that has become the centre of a growing storm over this year's "marching season" by the pro-British Protestant Orange Order.

Last night, trouble was limited to Protestant hardliners throwing fireworks at security forces and setting fire to tyres at the base of the steel wall.

General Sir Mike Jackson, one of Britain's top military leaders, spoke to soldiers installing the fortifications. An army spokesman said Gen. Jackson, who commanded the NATO-led peacekeeping force that entered Kosovo in June 1999, was on a "pre-planned routine visit" to the province. Troops and police are

enforcing an order barring next Sunday's Orange Order parade from marching from Drumcree into the Garvaghy Road, a Catholic enclave in the nearby town of Portadown. "The security forces will respond accordingly. They have the resources and they have my full support," said Britain's Northern Ireland Secretary, Mr. Peter Mandelson.

The Orange Order stages the marches to mark centuries-old battlefield victories against Catholics. The organization's ruling body, the Grand Orange Lodge, distanced itself from the violence. "The Grand Orange Lodge totally abhors and condemns the violence of the past days. Grand Lodge calls for restraint from those who wish to support the Orange Order. We should not stoop to the ways of our enemies," it said in a statement. The Order says it has a treasured right "to walk the queen's highway", but Catholics brand the parades as triumphalist. Britain has sent 2,000 extra troops to Northern Ireland in the run-up to province-wide marches on July 12. — Reuters

THE HINDU

27 JUL 2000

19-16 Blair... beware

9/7

FEW POLITICIANS could have had a worse week. On Wednesday, the British Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair, received a drubbing in Parliament from the Conservative Leader of the Opposition, Mr. William Hague. Mr. Hague hauled the Prime Minister over the coals for a proposal Mr. Blair had made to cut down on public drunkenness and disorderly behaviour by giving the police powers to impose on-the-spot fines. Senior police officers had dismissed the scheme as impractical, deeply embarrassing the Prime Minister. Mr. Hague rubbed salt in the wound by taunting Mr. Blair in Parliament over his differences of opinion with the police.

As the Prime Minister went home that day to lick his wounds, there was worse news to come. The police had found his 16-year-old son, Ian, late at night at Leicester Square, a popular centre of entertainment in London, sitting by the side of the road in a drunken state after having celebrated the end of his school leaving GCSE exams a little too spiritedly. While there was likelihood of the Opposition making political capital of an incident that could have happened to any parent of teenagers, the media reported the incident widely, and few could escape the irony of the Prime Minister's son being found drunk the day after his father had proposed tough fines to discourage drunkenness in public. As Mr. Blair put it later, "Being a Prime Minister can be a tough job, being a parent is sometimes tougher, and you don't always succeed."

Though being a Prime Minister is undoubtedly tough at the best of times, over the past month, Mr. Blair has been finding it tougher than usual. Nothing seems to be going well for him, and the media has been carrying little political news other than the series of embarrassments that have dogged Mr. Blair. One of his close supporters, the millionaire novelist, Mr. Ken Follet, launched a scathing public attack on Mr. Blair's style of governance, which he said was characterised by gossiping and backstabbing. A few weeks earlier, the Women's Institute, a normally mild group of middle-aged women, had heckled him during a speech. To compound his problems,



Tony Blair... a beleaguered Prime Minister.

With a general election expected next year, the British Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair, and his aides will be desperately seeking to stem the tide of bad news, says THOMAS ABRAHAM.

reports of divisions within his Government dominated news headlines, confirming the impression in the public mind of a Prime Minister who was losing his grip.

To an extent, it is inevitable that any Government, even one as popular as this Labour Ministry was when it was elected three years ago, will suffer reverses. But Mr. Blair's fall from grace appears to be starker because it also clearly marks the end of his long honeymoon with the British media. The rash of adverse headlines and news stories

marked the failure of a strategy that Mr. Blair had successfully followed since his days in the Opposition — using the media to project himself and his party/Government in a positive light.

Both as Leader of the Opposition and as Prime Minister, Mr. Blair has been acutely aware how important it is to have a constant stream of positive headlines and news stories to help consolidate his party's and Government's position. Until a few months ago, Mr. Blair appeared to be succeeding supremely. It was

rare to see stories unfavourable to the Government on the front pages of the British press.

Except for the staunchly Conservative *Daily Telegraph* and the *Daily Mail*, Mr. Blair and his advisers had succeeded in winning over most of the other major British newspapers. A key aide who has implemented Mr. Blair's media strategy, has been his press secretary, Mr. Alistair Campbell. A former tabloid journalist, Mr. Campbell has combined a shrewd understanding of how to mould the news agenda with a combative personal style which has allowed him to ensure a flow of positive stories about the Government. But Mr. Campbell, after facing increasing criticism for his "spin doctoring" of the media, has retreated to the background, and is clearly playing a less active role in day-to-day press management. This has clearly had an impact on the Government.

The lack of an active press management strategy has led to a string of disastrous headlines, and the impression is growing of a Government which is increasingly ineffectual and at odds with itself. Earlier, the occasional bit of bad news would be drowned out by some skillfully planted news about some new Government initiative or the other. This no longer seems to happen, and the result has been a series of disasters for Mr. Blair.

Normally, the lack of a media strategy is not a fatal flaw in a Government. But Mr. Blair's "new Labour" project has based the success of its political strategy on its media strategy more than most other political parties. Britain is a naturally Conservative country, and the Blairite strategy has been to use the media to win over a public which is instinctively anti-Labour. The media was also to be used to win enough time for the Government to push through deep political and economic reforms, which over the long term would make Labour the natural party of Government in Britain.

The seeming breakdown of the Government's media strategy, if unchecked, could be a serious setback for Mr. Blair's ambitions for a second term in Government. With a general election expected next year, the Prime Minister and his aides will be desperately seeking to stem the tide of bad news.

THE HINDU

Workers' draft charter puts Blair govt in a fix

MARTIN FLETCHER
THE TIMES, LONDON

LONDON, June 1. — Workers would have the right to demand shorter hours and time off with their families under a draft European charter of rights that has been drawn up in Brussels.

The draft, obtained by *The Times*, promises European citizens 50 basic rights relating to employment, family life, discrimination, liberty and medical advances.

They include an employee's right to join a union, to strike and to be protected against "unjustified" dismissal; a ban on cloning human beings; and the outlawing of capital punishment and the extradition of criminals to countries including America where they might be executed or tortured. Children would have the right to be treated as equals and consulted on matters relating to them.

The European Parliament, Commission and several EU members, including Germany,

want the final version incorporated into European law, meaning it would override national law. European integrationists describe it as a "building block for a European constitution," and predict that Tony Blair will find himself isolated if he seeks to veto it. But critics denounced the draft, saying it would lead inexorably to a European superstate and hobble business with workers' entitlements that are seen as a direct challenge to Britain's free market philosophy and trade union reforms.

"If the draft charter ever became law it would be deeply damaging for Britain," Francis Maude, the shadow foreign secretary, said. "It threatens to impose significant costs on businesses and the real agenda here is not to protect peoples' rights which we would strongly support but to create a European constitution leading to a European superstate. The British people emphatically do not want this."

The so-called Charter of

Fundamental Rights was commissioned last June to "make their (the rights') overriding importance and relevance more visible to the Union's citizens." The draft has been drawn up over six months by a 62-strong convention of MEPs, national parliamentarians and representatives of the 15 heads of governments. The final version will be presented to the heads of government before December's Nice summit, which must decide whether it should be legally binding. The British government says it should merely pull together rights enshrined in existing documents, rather than create new ones. It should be a "showcase, not a launchpad," Keith Vaz, the Europe minister said. And the foreign office said the government was confident it would not have to exercise its veto.

Andrew Duff, a Liberal Democrat MEP involved in the drafting process, said he believed Britain would be isolated if it sought to prevent the charter acquiring legal status. People

were fed up with grand declaratory statements from Brussels, he said. The Prime Minister should welcome an attempt to strengthen citizens' rights and protect them from abuses of power in Brussels.

The draft charter prescribed a "reformed European social model," not an old-style statist French or German model. It was written "on the presumption that it will be mandatory," and was certainly a "building block for a European constitution."

Most of the charter is, in fact, based on existing entitlements, with the the articles dealing with economic and social rights the most contentious. Besides having the right to join unions and strike, workers would also be able demand a limit on their working hours, and to enjoy "the right to reconcile their family and professional lives" through measures such as parental leave. The draft also says member states must provide enough social assistance to guarantee their citizens a "decent existence".

THE STATESMAN

- 2 JUN 2000

HD 20

Now Blair's labour starts

THE SATIRICAL magazine *Private Eye* said it all with an illustration on its cover the week before the British Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair's new son was born. It showed Mr. Blair walking with his expectant wife, Mrs. Cherie Blair, urging her to move faster with the words: "Hurry up dear, we need to get to the hospital before it gets shut down". Mrs. Blair did get to the hospital on time, and luckily for her, it was a flagship hospital in the Government-funded National Health Service, and so in no danger of being shut down. But the magazine cover effectively made the point that for many in Britain, the state of the crumbling, underfunded health service is a more urgent issue than the birth of Leo Blair.

But despite this, the birth of baby Leo, the first child to be born to a serving Prime Minister since the time of the Liberal Prime Minister, Lord John Russell, 150 years ago, has clearly had some small impact on Mr. Blair's fortunes. The front pages of newspapers and radio and TV news bulletins were full of the new arrival, and the Blairs were flooded with messages of congratulation from all over the country. For a few days at least, it diverted attention from the flood of bad news that had hit the seemingly infallible Mr. Blair. He had faced the humiliation of seeing his hand-picked candidate for the post of Mayor of London trounced by a rebel candidate, Mr. Ken Livingstone, and had seen his party do dismally in local government elections.

Opinion polls also indicated the party's standing was falling, while the opposition conservatives were slowly creeping up. A poll in the *Guardian* newspaper in mid-May showed a pronounced anti-Government mood among voters, with Labour down to a seven-point lead over the conservatives, its lowest since the last general election in May 1997. Asked how they would vote if there was an immediate general election, 41 per cent said they would vote for Labour, compared to 34 per cent for the conservatives. Labour support had fallen four per cent over the previous month the poll showed, while the conservative support had risen by two per cent.

This fall in support for the Government has worried the Labour Party, because Mr. Blair plans to call a general election either in the spring or the autumn, even though his term does not end till May 2001. Labour Party strategists and political analysts blame the Government's falling popularity on the disenchantment that its traditional supporters feel.

This grassroots unhappiness flows from two reasons. The first is due to the direction in which that Mr. Blair has taken the party since he became its leader five years ago. The Labour Party under Mr. Blair is far more to the centre of the political spectrum than it has ever been. The party has abandoned many of its traditional policies on issues such as taxation, public ownership of industries, and the role the Government should play in the economy. Mr. Blair's pro-business, *laissez faire* policy helped to attract millions of middle class voters who would normally have voted for the conservatives, and this helped the Labour Party to its landslide victory in 1997. But in the process, many traditional Labour supporters, who kept the party alive during its 17 years in the wilderness when the conservatives were in power, have been alienated. There is a wide-

Given the level of unhappiness within the Labour Party, it is clearly going to take more than the birth of a baby to reconnect Mr. Tony Blair with his grassroots supporters, writes THOMAS ABRAHAM.

spread feeling among party traditionalists that Mr. Blair has abandoned the core values of the party, and this in turn has led to apathy. Grassroots party workers no longer seem to be motivated enough to go out and campaign for their candidates, or even to vote on election day, as the experience of the local government elections, and the European parliamentary elections before that demonstrated.

A second factor causing grassroots unhappiness is the alienation that many party workers and backbench MPs feel from the leadership. Mr. Blair runs an extremely centralised party organisation, with power concentrated in the hands of a few trusted advisers. Dissent and debate is rarely tolerated. This has given the

party a disciplined image, but it has also led to disenchantment among its core supporters.

The party leadership clearly realises the problem it faces, and has started trying to win back the support of the grassroots. Some of the moves it has taken have been clearly populist. The Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Gordon Brown, for example, launched a broadside against Oxford University, often seen as a symbol of elitist privilege, accusing it of discriminating in its admissions policy against students from Government schools from the poorer parts of the country.

Other Government initiatives promise to be more substantial. Mr. Blair has for example made it clear that the reform of the National Health Service through the injection of fresh funds is going to be one of his priorities. The state of the health service is a major concern not only for traditional Labour voters, but for the public at large, and will be a vote winner. Similarly, pensioners, who form a sizeable chunk of both the voting population as well as Labour supporters and have felt particularly neglected by the Government, can expect pension increases and other benefits. Given the level of unhappiness within the Labour Party, it is clearly going to take more than the birth of a baby to reconnect Mr. Blair with his grassroots supporters.



The British Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair, cradles his newborn son, Leo... the least of his worries?

THE HINDU

4 JUN 2000

UK military attache in Athens killed

■ Cops suspect Nov 17 terrorist group in attack by 2 gunmen on motorbikes

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE
ATHENS, JUNE 8

TWO gunmen on a motorcycle shot and killed the military attache at Britain's embassy in Athens on Thursday in an attack police said bore the hallmarks of the November 17 terrorist group.

Brigadier Stephen Saunders was shot four times in the abdomen by gunmen on a motorcycle as he drove between Athens and a northern suburb, the hospital said. Saunders, aged about 50, was married and the father of two daughters, the embassy said.

Speaking before the announcement of Saunders' death, British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook condemned the attack as "pointless". "We are all shocked by this brutal, totally pointless attack. We feel very deeply for the defence attache and our thoughts must at this time be with his relatives,"



Stephen Saunders

Cook told the BBC, speaking from Freetown, the Sierra Leonean capital, where he is visiting British troops.

Police said the gunmen opened fire on Saunders with a 45 mm pistol around 8 am as the British official drove a white Rover belonging to the embassy along a major boulevard linking central Athens with the city's upscale northern

suburbs. The gunmen fled and there was no immediate claim of responsibility for the attack.

But police said they strongly suspected that the terrorist group known as November 17 was behind the shooting. "The method used, the weapon used, lead us to believe that the assailants belong to November 17, that is the direction we are looking in," said Dimitris Efsthathiadis, a senior official in the ministry for public order.

Police said they found four spent cartridges at the scene from a 45 mm pistol, the weapon used by November 17 in about 20 assassinations attributed to the group since 1975. The group, none of whose members has ever been arrested, has killed more than 20 people over the past 25 years, including US officers, Turks and Greek figures.

Considered by Washington to be one of the most dangerous terrorist organizations in the world,

November 17 appeared for the first time in December 1975, when the head of the US Central Intelligence Agency's Athens bureau was murdered. November 17 also claimed responsibility for the May 1999 rocket attack on the Athens residence of German Ambassador Carl Heinz Kunha, as well as a rocket attack in April on the Athens headquarters of the Socialist Party. The group's name is taken from the student revolt against Greece's 1967-1974 military dictatorship, which ended in bloodshed on November 17, 1973.

The US State Department sharply criticized the Athens' government handling of the terrorist problem in a report issued last month. The report drew an angry denial from Greece.

"This is a big issue in our relationship," one US official said at the time, pointing to the unsolved assassinations of US diplomats in Greece.

INDIAN EXPRESS

- 9 JUN 2000

Britain invites Musharraf for arms fair

By Our Special Correspondent

London, June 11: Human rights campaigners have accused the Tony Blair government of hypocrisy after it emerged that Britain has invited the leaders of many autocratic regimes, including Pakistan's General Pervez Musharraf, to a big arms fair being held here next month.

Invitations to the Farnborough Air Show have gone out to a number of countries with poor human rights records, including Indonesia and Saudi Arabia.

reported the *Observer* on Sunday. Britain's foreign office has often condemned the role of the armed forces in these countries. Critics are claiming that the arms fair invitations have made a "mockery" of the government's promise to adhere to an "ethical foreign policy".

International sanctions were imposed on Islamabad after last year's Army coup. Britain led the chorus of demand for an early restoration of democracy and suspended all assistance to Pakistan. But last week, a senior Cabinet minister announced the

resumption of developmental assistance to Pakistan.

Confirming that an invitation for the arms fair had been received, a Pakistan high commission spokesperson here stated that a senior Pakistani Air Force officer would be representing the country's military regime at the trade fair.

"Stows like this are the shop window of the repression trade. Given the countries invited, there are grave concerns that the equipment will be used for internal repression," said a spokesperson for Amnesty International.

Exhibitors at the fair will include, among others, manufacturers of fighter jets, military helicopters and makers of cluster bombs and teargas equipment.

"It is perfectly normal to offer hospitality at a major international defence exhibition," a defence ministry spokesperson told the *Observer*, adding: "But any contracts signed or exports agreed will be subject to regulations on defence exports. The invitation list is being drawn up taking account of current marketing campaigns, longer-term prospects for business... political

issues, arms embargoes and international relations.

An international arms embargo was imposed on Indonesia after its Army's involvement in the atrocities in East Timor last year.

While Britain lifted its embargo in January, the United States still refuses to sell weapons to Jakarta until those guilty of committing war crimes are punished.

British Aerospace, suppliers of the Hawk jets used by Indonesia to quell rebellion in East Timor, will be one of the major exhibitors at next month's fair in Farnborough.

THE ASIAN AGE

21 JUN 2000

Deaths in a container

First admit that demand for labour exists

THE manner in which 58 people of Chinese origin, trying to sneak into Britain, died on the way is horrifying. From the reports, it looks like they were asphyxiated to death when the ventilation system in the refrigerated container in which they were travelling failed. The incident is a pointer to the extent to which illegal immigrants from Third World countries risk their lives in their search for greener pastures. There may not be much public sympathy for these people, given the fact that they were circumventing the immigration laws of Britain. But, then, there is another flipside to the macabre story. Had the mishap not occurred and the customs authorities not checked the container, they would have reached Britain and would have found some jobs. It's only because there is demand for workers of certain kind that the underworld is able to trade in human misery. Otherwise, the hapless victims would not have paid enormous sums of money to the racketeers concerned for a place in that refrigerated container. The tragedy may induce the British customs authorities to check every container that passes through Dover, the main port of entry to Britain. Political leaders may also use it to highlight the problems illegal immigration causes to the country. But all this amounts to treating the symptoms rather than the disease.

At the root of the problem is the demand that exists for certain kinds of workers in European countries. Thanks to improvement in the standards of living, unemployment doles available and negative population growth, there are not enough people to provide certain services and do certain jobs. In the farming sector, for instance, there is acute shortage

of hands all over Western Europe. That's why illegal immigrants are lapped up by the farmers in these countries. Similarly, the younger generation in the developed countries are not attracted to certain jobs, which they consider tedious or less-paying. But for the immigrants, who are prepared to work harder in an alien country than they would have done in their own native land, such jobs are a godsend to improve their lot. Unfortunately, the governments of these countries do not realise the need for such labourers and political parties are not comfortable, either, in demanding legalised immigration.

Nonetheless, there are attempts, however feeble they may be, to tackle the problem. The German government's decision to grant visas to 20,000 computer professionals, a majority of whom will be from India, is one such attempt. While it is admitted that the shortage of computer experts reflects the drawbacks of the German education system, it is often forgotten that the average German youth gets bored sitting in front of a computer watching the monitor all day long. The Germans, who depended heavily on the Turks for reconstructing their country after the Second World War, are naturally enough more realistic in this regard. They have in place a work permit system, whereby foreigners are given work permits, which enable them to work in the country without the rights and privileges of a citizen. There have been suggestions that India, too, should introduce a work-permit system to effectively monitor the movement of illegal immigrants from, say Bangladesh. In any case, the first step to tackle a problem is to recognise it.

INDIAN EXPRESS

JUN 2 1988

Britain vows to wage a war against 'human trafficking'

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE
DOVER, JUNE 20

BRITAIN promised on Monday to wage war on the "evil" traffic in human beings after the corpses of 58 stowaways from the Far East were discovered aboard a truck trying to enter the country.

Police, meanwhile, were still trying to determine out they 54 men and four women got in there, when, and who was behind the smuggling operation. Al-

though their nationality has not been confirmed officially, the BBC was reporting that they were of Chinese origin. However, the Chinese embassy said earlier it had not been contacted in relation to the incident.

Key to the mystery are two men who were discovered alive among the corpses in the truck, which arrived in the English port of Dover just before midnight on Sunday from the Belgian Port of Zeebrugge.

An interpreter who was taken to a local hospital to find out the condition of the survivors told hospital staff they were distressed and traumatised. The interpreter said they were badly dehydrated and barely able to

21/6
speak, but indicated they had tried to get out of the container without success. Medically, they were "stable and comfortable," police said. The driver of the Dutch-registered lorry was arrested and questioned.

Although the lorry's refrigeration unit was not switched on, the container was hermetically-sealed. "The 58 who perished must have died the most terrible death," British Home Secretary Jack Straw told

IMMIGRANTS' DEATH

Parliament in a statement.

Police said suffocation or intoxication from carbon dioxide fumes were the likeliest causes of death, but the results of post mortems were not expected until the morning.

EU leaders meeting for a summit in Feira, Portugal, voiced "shock" at the deaths of the foreigners and pledged "intensified cooperation" to defeat such human trafficking. They said Europe must take sanctions against "this serious and despicable crime." British Prime Minister Tony Blair said the gruesome discovery only served to highlight the need "to try and stamp out what is an evil trade in bringing people into this country."

INDIAN EXPRESS

21 JUN 2000

EVIL OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING

THE DEEP SHOCK over the discovery that nearly 60 men and women of Chinese origin have perished while attempting to illegally smuggle themselves into Britain will only be matched by the revulsion felt for the criminal racketeers in human trafficking who are behind such recurring tragedies. An international search has been started to locate the gang that packed them into a container lorry and sent them to their death. A manhunt will be launched to trace the route that these Chinese took so that the authorities can plug loopholes in customs and immigration procedures in western Europe, which has proved to be a fertile ground for international criminal networks to operate. The chaos of the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the communist regimes in eastern Europe opened the floodgates to would-be immigrants and attracted criminal operatives who moved in with their willing cargo of humans. From container lorries to cargo holds in ships to death boats, all modes of transport have been put to use for this clandestine operation. For much of the populations of Asia, Africa and Latin America, no risk has been too high, no danger avoidable. The prosperity in the West is an irresistible lure.

There are already calls for tightening immigration laws in the West to check the flow of these refugees of poverty. The British Home Secretary, Mr. Jack Straw, while condemning illegal trafficking, has described the latest tragedy as a "stark warning" to other would-be immigrants, and spokesmen of the opposition Conservative party have blamed official laxity at ports. The human cargo would have passed the gates at Dover without so much as a check but

for the suspicion aroused by the action of the lorry driver. But Britain and the European Union have legislative measures that are certainly draconian enough and are enforced in the most ruthless manner. If these measures and others that seek to raise a wall have not deterred men and women, mostly innocent, from placing their fate in the hands of the human traffickers, the remedy must lie elsewhere.

What lures these humans to undertake often hazardous journeys from their homes is the opportunity for economic betterment that they see in the wealthy West. No barriers can seem insurmountable, or be an effective counter to stifle the flow. Precisely because this pertains to the fundamental question of degrading poverty, such man-made tragedies will continue to take place, defying rules and regulations as long as economic inequities persist. Men and women will continue to let themselves be sealed in airtight containers and be ready to suffer suffocation and death for half a chance to cross the poverty barrier. India witnessed such tragedies with sickening regularity in the earlier decades and has found it impossible to stem the flight of refugees: since the beginning of this year 141 Indians have been found trying to get into Britain at Dover against 198 Chinese. There have been as many Sri Lankan and Pakistani illegal immigrants. Such tragedies are waiting to happen, said a member in the Commons, in remarks that required no extraordinary prescience to make. It is a fact of life that the unspeakable horror of the deaths at Dover will soon be forgotten and gangs of human traffickers will continue with their lucrative job.

THE HINDU

22 JUN 2000

PROMISED LAND

Death ride to Britain

29/6
BRITAIN's worst tragedy involving illegal immigrants occurred a couple of days ago when 58 bodies of men and women were found crammed into a vegetable truck at Dover. The Chinese stowaways died of suffocation. This is not the first time that the British authorities have spotted illegal immigrants. Individual asylum-seekers have also been known to die on their journey or while trying to escape detection. Britain and the United States are the most popular destinations for people from China, the Indian sub-continent and more recently eastern Europe. While one cannot condone their methods, it is possible to sympathise with asylum-seekers who are fleeing persecution, ethnic strife, war or miserable living conditions. The West symbolises freedom and wealth, and the promise of a better life for which they are willing to go to any lengths, even courting death.

Unfortunately illegal immigration and the trafficking of people across international borders has become a lucrative business with huge sums changing hands. Potential immigrants are more often than not poor and uneducated, unable to get visas legally but with a desperate wish to extricate themselves from their present situation. Agents, middlemen prey upon these dreams, promising easy entry into the country of their choice in exchange for huge sums of money. Some sell all they own to pay the agents, and there have been many cases when agents dupe clients and run away with the money without so much as the sniff of a visa. Hopefuls are left high and dry. Having lost everything, they cannot even take recourse to the law as the whole deal is illegal.

In the host countries, illegal immigrants equal cheap labour. Immigrant businessmen pay agents to bring in others from their home countries, who pay off the agent's fees by working for free in their host's factories and restaurants. Apart from statutory deportation of illegal immigrants caught during raids, the British government has introduced fines for people caught trying to smuggle in asylum-seekers in a bid to stamp out the lucrative practice. This may be a step in the right direction but what is required is a concerted effort to catch the agents and middlemen who deal in illegal trade of human lives. They are the real culprits who benefit the most and have nothing to lose.

THE STATESMAN

21 JUN 2000

DAMNED if you do, damned if you don't. In a world of hard choices, cynics seem the only winners. Had British foreign secretary Robin Cook announced this week that he was sending 5,000 battle-hardened soldiers (including 500 helicopters, *helicopter* *wielding* Gurkhas) over to sort out the rebels in Sierra Leone, the scene would have been set for newspaper cartoons of a mad-eyed Tony Blair astride a rocket. The 1,000 paramilitary personnel deployed with the ostensible purpose of merely organising an evacuation led to caricatures depicting a pathetic Mr Blair with a peashooter.

But few with the exception of Fleet Street newspapers are utterly consistent about intervention. There is a right wing isolationism that states that Britain should intervene only when its own narrowly defined national interests are threatened directly. Then there is its liberal counterpart on the left, which believes the British are imperialistic themselves that any military action the country opts for will, by its very nature, be wrong. Except in East Timor, of course, where even Britain could not be worse than the Indonesians.

The national newspapers in Britain supporting the Labour government went gaga over the perception of a "moral duty" to save the day for UN armed forces, who were knee-deep in shame after their failure to combat the rebel forces in Sierra Leone. However, the result of the moral duty proved correct in the battlefield where the British army has made UN forces come back with a bang.

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, desperate to make a success of intervention, earlier damned his peace-keeping force as "badly trained and badly equipped". The criticism added to a growing sense of confusion at UN headquarters where a debate erupted whether the mandate should be toughened. But some of the countries involved, such as India, were reluctant, concerned about the safety of their troops. The UN force of almost 9,000 soldiers has suffered a series of humiliations in Sierra Leone over the last fortnight. About 500 of its troops are being detained by rebel forces. The Jordanians, Indians and Bangladeshis are regarded as serious soldiers by Western diplomats who are privately scathing about the standards of training and equipment of the Zambians, Guineans and other nationalities involved with the UN force.

Earlier, Mr Annan even told the Security Council: "Let us not send Sierra Leone. Let us not let Africa. This time, in this crisis, let us back words with deeds and mandates with the will to see that work."

It was a shimmer of hope that faded with the arrival of British forces in Sierra Leone. This, complete with a naval armada, is the biggest deployment since the Kosovo conflict. Britain's formidable presence includes forces battle-hardened in Kosovo and East Timor. As well as paratroopers, there are special forces, marines and Gurkhas.

This contingent has added strength to the UN force commander, Indian General Vijay K. Malhotra, who was highly decorated for service in high-altitude warfare in Kashmir. British forces are expected to provide crucial support with strategy and logistics, although they will, officially at least, be clear of direct combat.

Through the deployment of the British army has helped uplift the declining standards of warfare among UN forces, Britain's decision to intervene in this

Begging a broader question

In essence, the debate surrounding the decision of the British government to send forces to Sierra Leone is growing murkier day by day, writes AYANJIT SEN



British Army paratroopers manning a UN military checkpoint turn away well-armed Sierra Leonean "Kamajor" militia members loyal to the current government, at a checkpoint on a bridge separating most of the capital Freetown from the highly-secured tip of Aberdeen peninsula, where the current British contingent is based. — AP/PTI.

conflict is vehemently debated. The intervention followed stated Labour policy, as set out last January by Mr Cook: "When faced with an overwhelming humanitarian catastrophe and a government that has demonstrated itself unwilling or unable to prevent it, the international community should act."

The London dailies said the army deployment served Britain's national interest in upholding the authority of the UN and democratic values. "It (the deployment) fulfils Britain's responsibility as a former colonial power, largest aid donor, and joint mediator of last year's Sierra Leone peace accord. Most of all, the intervention is the duty owed by a wealthy and powerful nation to, in this case, one of the world's poorest countries" — read a editorial of one newspaper.

Another article said: "In an ideal world, Sierra Leone would have been able to sort out its problems by itself. But in nine years of war, it has become the archetypal failed state." The phrase that is almost always used is "mission creep".

Shadow foreign secretary Francis Maude raised its spectre in the House last week after the announcement that, although most of the evacuation was over, the paramilitary forces were staying on. "You," he said to the government, "have committed the UK to something that is more than an evacuation but less than a fullscale military intervention. As a consequence, we risk being sucked into Sierra Leone."

"a Leone is

trolled by nuclear-armed states which also have UN security council vetoes, like Russia and China, brute political and military reality trumps any amount of humanitarian concern.

Intervention, both in theory and practice, is plainly an imperfect science. But progress is discernible. The self-serving opposition of Moscow and Beijing to any infringement of sovereign borders gives solace to a few undemocratic, renegade regimes, such as Siberia and Iraq. Increasingly, however, the principle of UN intervention is accepted, as shown by Mr Kofi Annan's speech to the UN General Assembly last autumn and, for example, positions taken by the last Organisation of African Unity summit. But if the end is largely agreed, the means remain controversial and fiendishly difficult.

Is there any easy solution to Sierra Leone? If any, not only Sierra Leone but also the Congo and Angola issues would have been long settled. Cut off the supply of weapons, some say. Yet there are self-financing wars in which the warring parties use diamonds and other resources from areas they control to buy arms. And in the arms trade, willing buyers invariably find willing sellers. It has also to be remembered that intervention by the West African Ecomog group did not bring lasting peace in Sierra Leone. In the Congo, for example, it is the country's very neighbours who are feasting on the carcass. Yet in diplomacy, also, we are addicted to the quick fix, the notion that resolving conflicts must be as simple as broadcasting their horrors on our television screens.

But history's lesson, to paraphrase Bismarck, holds that more countries are born from blood and iron than from speeches and artificially set borders. When the United Nations intervenes, it should either nurture a true peace or impose one by overwhelming strength.

In essence, the debate surrounding the decision of the British government to send forces to Sierra Leone is growing murkier day by day — the manifestations of which have been highlighted. In the long run, only Africans can end African wars. Not so long ago Mozambique was embroiled in a murderous civil war of its own. Then the country put its house in order and struggled free of its crippling debts, only to be devastated by the recent floods. Yet about a fortnight ago — long after the television cameras had departed to cover fresh African disasters in Ethiopia, Zimbabwe and now Sierra Leone — Western donors actually oversubscribed a \$450-million request from the country for reconstruction aid. The trouble is that for every Mozambique, there seems to be a dozen Sierra Leones.

(The author is on the staff of The Statesman and is currently in Wales on a scholarship.)

not whether Mr Cook is personally enhanced or diminished by a particular course of action, but whether he takes the right action. In 1993, the Sandline case was discussed in Britain as though it was a minor scandal akin to the Mandelson mortgage, rather than a question of how best to save a people facing the kind of crisis that few Britons could ever imagine in their worst nightmare. Such attitudes create cynicism, and cynicism kills.

Britain's action yet again begs a much broader question now — about the principle of intervention in the affairs of another state and "global governance" through the agency of the UN. These issues pose a problem for the political left with its visceral dislike of big, rich countries apparently telling smaller, weaker ones what to do. In Africa, this dilemma is exacerbated by the legacy of European colonisation and misrule. On the political right, UN intervention is opposed for ideological reasons. This tendency has gathered fullest expression most recently in the USA where a conservative Congress and a President who lacks strong convictions have often been combined, as now, to give a distinctly disengaged flavour to American foreign policy.

Interventions like that in West Africa also raise issues of consistency which trouble people right across the political spectrum. If in Sierra Leone, then why not in Sri Lanka, another former British colony, where an appalling civil war rages unchecked? Or Chechnya or Tibet? In the case of Sri Lanka, there is no satisfactory answer. When it comes to territory con-

Blair, Putin meet, differ on Chechnya

Demonstrators angry about military action in Chechnya

London, April 17: British Prime Minister Tony Blair said on Monday he had raised his concerns over Russia's tough policy on Chechnya with President-elect Vladimir Putin but stressed that he did not want to isolate Moscow on the issue.

Mr Putin, however, made clear that Russian political and public opinion was very different from that in Britain. "We certainly have very different positions," Mr Putin said.

Mr Blair said he welcomed Mr Putin's commitment in a statement last week that all reports of human rights violations in Chechnya would be investigated.

"Some say that because of our concerns about Chechnya we should keep some distance from Moscow," Mr Blair told a joint news conference with Mr Putin. "I have to tell you that while I share those concerns, I believe that the best way to register those concerns and to get results is by engaging with Russia and not isolating Russia."

Some 50-60 protesters upset by Russia's tough military campaign

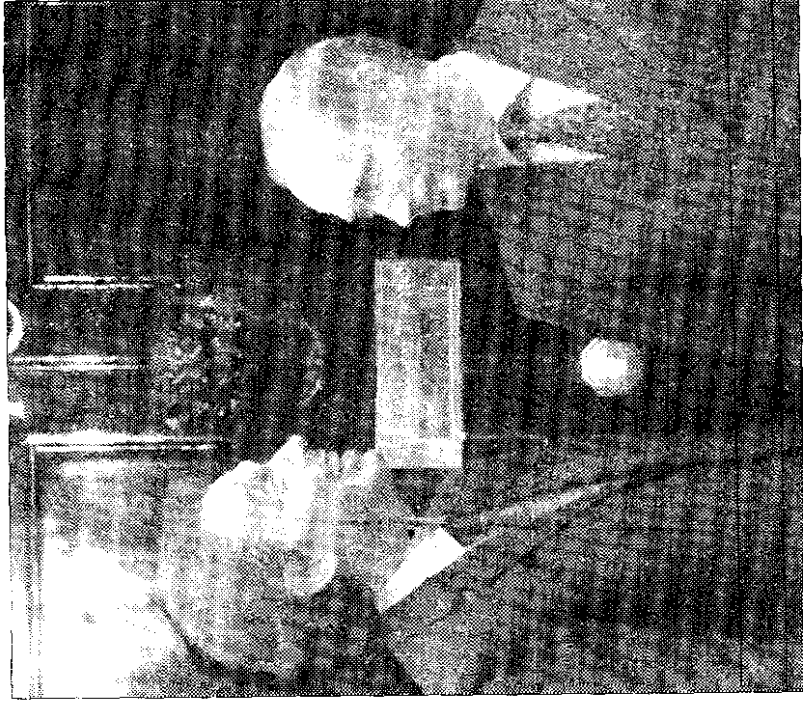
against separatists in Chechnya turned up outside Downing Street. They were shouting and waving banners demanding "Stop the torture in Chechnya".

Mr Putin and Mr Blair ignored the demonstrators as they shook hands and exchanged greetings, then went inside for talks and lunch. In a touch reminiscent of Cold War summits, Mr Putin was followed by two naval officers carrying what is said to be Russia's nuclear briefcase.

Russian officials say Mr Putin wants to use his trip to Britain as a bridge-builder with the United States. But much of the media coverage ahead of the visit focused on his crushing of Chechen opposition.

Mr Blair, who visited Mr Putin in Russia last month, said last week he would raise Britain's concerns over Chechnya "clearly and frankly" but made clear he did not favour isolating Russia.

"The Prime Minister is not going to apologise for developing a good relationship with a new world leader," spokesman Alastair Campbell said. (Reuters)



Far left: Russian President-elect Vladimir Putin stands on the steps of No. 10, Downing Street with British Prime Minister Tony Blair on Monday. (Reuters)

Putin tries to build bridges on London visit

London, April 17: Russian President-elect Vladimir Putin met British Prime Minister Tony Blair on Monday, hoping to turn his first visit to the West into a bridge builder with the United States.

East-West tensions have been stoked by Russia's get-tough military campaign against separatists in Chechnya. But Mr Blair has been keen to show Western counterparts that Mr Putin is a man they can do business with politically and economically.

Some British commentators say Mr Blair sees himself playing the same sort of role as Britain's "Iron Lady" Margaret Thatcher did when she struck up a rapport with Mikhail Gorbachev in the Cold War days of the 1980s.

Some British politicians, including a left-wing parliamentarian in Mr Blair's Labour Party, have opposed Mr Putin's visit.

The Muslim Council of Britain said Mr Putin had "blood on his hands" in Chechnya. This did not stop Mr Blair laying on a military guard of honour for Mr Putin when he arrived at London's Heathrow airport on Sunday night and ensuring his guest gets an audience with Queen Elizabeth and a meeting with top British business leaders.

The Prime Minister's chief spokesman, Alastair Campbell, said it was hoped Monday's talks would lead to a better working relationship between Russia and the European Union. "The EU is Russia's largest trading partner and we are increasingly interdependent. It is in our interest that we cooperate more on issues such as drugs, crime, terrorism, weapons of destruction and the Balkans," Mr Campbell told the BBC.

Mr Putin, a 47-year-old former KGB spy, is clearly keen to make the most of Mr Blair's close friendship with US President Bill Clinton. "London is the stepping stone to Washington," said one Kremlin source. Mr Blair said last week he would raise Britain's concerns over Chechnya "clearly and frankly" but made clear he did not favour isolating Russia. (Reuters)

Chechnya to see polls in 2 years: Putin

London, April 17: Russian President-elect, Mr Vladimir Putin has announced here that a Presidential election would be held in Chechnya within two years, the Russian Interfax news agency reported.

"A Presidential election will be held in Chechnya in a year and a half, two years at the latest," Mr Putin told Russian journalists yesterday shortly after his arrival here for an official visit.

His announcement echoes that of a Russian representative in Chechnya, Mr Nikolai Kochman, who said on March 31 that Presidential and legislative elections in the rebel republic would be held within two years as long as the situation there remained stable.

Moscow has declared current Chechen separatist President Aslan Maskhadov to be in power illegally. Mr Putin said he would be "delighted". (AP/F)

Putin leaves wife behind

Moscow, April 17: Russian President-elect Vladimir Putin sent a clear message that his foreign debut in London was strictly a professional affair by leaving his wife, Lyudmila, back home.

Raising many eyebrows in Russia and abroad, Mr Putin arrived at London's Heathrow airport late on Sunday for his first Western trip since being elected President on March 26 flanked by a deputy foreign minister rather than his spouse.

Mr Putin's one-day trip to Britain was to include talks with Mr Tony Blair. (Reuters)

Wk (1) HD-12 30/4

It's the English now

The Blair Government's devolution of power to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland is producing a slow backlash of English nationalism, says **THOMAS ABRAHAM.**

IT'S A phenomenon most often seen at matches involving the English football team: English fans waving the white and red flag of St. George, England's almost unknown flag, their faces painted with red stripes, yelling their lungs out for England. Often, this upsurge of emotion erupts into the violence, so much so that the words English, football and hooligan have become almost inextricably linked.

Until now, English nationalism has been largely confined to the football field. While the other nationalities that make up the United Kingdom — the Welsh, the Scots and the people of Northern Ireland — have strong political and cultural identities, the English, who make up the majority of the population do not. Except for the efforts of the extreme right-wing outfits such as the British National Party, political parties have rarely used English nationalism to whip up support — patriotism and nationalism have tended to be British rather than English.

But the Blair Government's devolution of power to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland is producing a slow backlash of English nationalism. With parliaments and assemblies established in the other constituent parts of the U. K., voices in England too are beginning to demand more explicit political rights.

This growth in English nationalism has alarmed politicians — no one seems to be in any doubt that it will be an ugly phenomenon.

A senior Labour minister, Mr. Jack Straw, stirred a hornet's nest when he warned in a BBC radio programme that the English were "potentially very aggressive, very violent". Mr. Straw drove home his point by saying that the English had in the past violently subjugated Ireland, Wales and Scotland, and warned that after the devolution of power to Scotland and Wales, the English would "increasingly articulate their Englishness".

In a rare example of cross party unity, the Conservative party leader, Mr. William Hague, agreed with Mr. Straw. He too felt that devolution would be the spark that would ignite the

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One of the posters for the new "hooligan hotline" launched in London... fears of growing unrest.

fire of English nationalism. "English nationalism is the most dangerous form of nationalism of all that can arise within the United Kingdom, because England is five-sixths of the population of the U.K.," he said.

He also warned of the potential of English nationalism to destroy the U.K. "Once a part of the united country or kingdom that is so predominant in size becomes nationalistic, then really the whole thing is under threat," he said.

Despite all these warnings, there has been little visible upsurge in English nationalism, and the phenomenon still appears largely confined to football stadiums.

This is partly because no one seems to be quite clear about what the English national identity is. The former English Prime Minister, Mr. John Major,

once famously described England as being about cricket on the village green, warm beer, and old ladies cycling to church. He was quite rightly derided for this picture postcard image of an idealised England which, if it had ever existed, was several decades out of date. But though no one took Mr. Major's definition seriously, no one has been able to come up with a better one either.

This seeming emptiness at the heart of English nationalism is because it has always been identified with British nationalism, an identity which was forged during Britain's imperial past. But with the empire gone, and the Scots, the Welsh and the Irish increasingly going their own way, the concept of Britain appears to be coming apart at the seams. This leaves the English very little to

identify with, or describe as the core of their nationhood. This confusion over national identity has led to attempts to define Englishness in terms of essential values, rather than particular symbols, or national characteristics.

Mr. Bill Firth, chairman of the Royal Society of St. George, an organisation devoted to all things English, described Englishness as being "proud, confident and comfortable with who you are." This is a neat definition, but suffers from the deficiency of being applicable to people the world over regardless of whether or not they are English.

Despite the fuzziness that seems to lie at the heart of the English identity, the loosening of the ties that bind England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland is creating an as yet nascent English nationalism.

This has led to political demands to create one or more English regional assemblies, on the pattern of the Welsh Assembly and the Scottish Parliament. A newly-formed campaign has demanded devolution of power to the English regions in order to assuage resentment at the power that was being given to other parts of the U.K.

In a policy statement, it warned that the current constitutional arrangement was "unstable with a growth in tension between the English regions and the rest". Without such devolution, there would be "bitter resentment" among the English, leading to "narrow and xenophobic English nationalism".

This vision of the ugly, sleeping giant of English nationalism slowly stirring awake under the impulse of Scottish and Welsh nationalism is a little difficult to square with reality — there is as yet no serious political movement demanding greater devolution, nor is there any marked rise in xenophobia among the English.

The English identity still seems overwhelmingly linked to the larger British identity. But there is clearly a danger that if the British identity gets weakened through devolution, then a phenomenon that has till now been confined to football might well spill out on to the streets.

THE FINIAN

30 APR 2000

Bush sweeps through three States

By Sridhar Krishnaswami

WASHINGTON, MARCH 1. In what must be seen as a shot in the arm for the Texas Governor a week ahead of the Super Tuesday primaries of March 7, Mr. George W. Bush has scored convincing wins in all the three States that went to the polls yesterday. He won Virginia comfortably and seems to have done the job in a creditable fashion in North Dakota and Washington. The Arizona Senator, Mr. John McCain, knows the stakes next week but is not yet throwing in the towel.

For the Democrats, the real bad news is for Mr. Bill Bradley. After having pitched so much in the "beauty contest" in Washington where no delegates were up for grabs, the former New Jersey Senator was trounced by the Vice-President, Mr. Albert Gore, by a two to one margin. With Super Tuesday around the corner and 13 States staging their events that day, the thinking is that Mr. Bradley will finally fold his campaign without even winning a single State in his fight for the nomination.

The attention, again, was not on the beauty contest of the Democrats. It was on the Grand Old Party which is seeing some heightened rhetoric and a bitter campaign between the "front runner" Mr. Bush and his closest rival, Mr. McCain. One day after his blistering attack on the religious right saying basically that leaders like Mr. Pat Robertson and Mr. Jerry Falwell are not good for the Republican Party, conservatives and the political right turned out in extra strength in Virginia to deliver the goods for Mr. Bush.

The idea of the Arizona politician attacking the religious leaders and that too on their very doorstep obviously did not go down well, analysts maintain. More than this, the primaries in Virginia, North Dakota and Washington proved once again that Mr. Bush

turns out the Conservative Republicans within the GOP, and that too in record numbers. Mr. McCain is still attracting the independents and the Democrats, something that is unlikely to be attractive within the Party or in facing a Democratic rival this November.

Mr. McCain may be winning the popular vote match ups, and may even be seen as the candidate to beat Mr. Gore, if latest opinion polls are to go by. But the uphill task for the Arizona Senator is in the delegate count next week for most of the States having their primaries in the East, South and the West are open to only registered Republicans. More than 600 delegates are at stake for the Super Tuesday, or more than one half of the total number of delegates needed to win the Republican Party nomination. As of now, Mr. Bush has about 170 delegates and Mr. McCain a little over 100. It takes 1034 delegates to clinch the GOP nomination.

The contest in the Democratic Party seems to be a foregone conclusion now with Mr. Bradley in the final stages of his campaign. Many are seeing the beginning of the end of the Bradley campaign and media reports have it that the candidate is being told by his top advisors to get out of the Super Tuesday contest to avoid an embarrassment which is in store. But, officially, the Bradley campaign is maintaining that the candidate will go on.

The larger issue for the Republican Party in the aftermath of the next Super Tuesday and another big event of March 14 is to close ranks and repair some of the damage that has already been brought about as a result of the intense and at times vicious environment. Whether the top candidates would be able to sink their differences and sort out some of the personal ill-will after seeing the writing on the wall remains to be seen.

100 years of Labour

The party that Keir Hardie and his colleagues started to represent the trade unions in Parliament has distanced itself from the unions and remade itself as a party that represents the British middle classes.

THOMAS ABRAHAM
traces the evolution of the Labour Party.

ONE HUNDRED years ago, on February 27, 1900, an eclectic group of trade unionists, socialists and working class representatives gathered at the Methodist Memorial Hall in Faringdon, central London, and formed an organisation to get more working class people elected to the British Parliament. The Labour Representation Committee, as this forerunner of the modern Labour Party was known, achieved an early success in the general election that followed six months later with the election of Keir Hardie, a Scottish miner, as its first MP.

A century after its founding, the present Labour leader, Mr. Tony Blair, heads a party that would be unrecognisable to Hardie and Labour's other founding members. For one thing, the party's single seat in 1900 has been transformed into a parliamentary majority of almost two thirds. Mr. Blair also seems set to take his party into a second term of office: if he succeeds it could become the first time a Labour Government will complete two full terms of office. This would no doubt please Hardie, as would the fact that Mr. Blair's Government has realised one of the historical goals of the Labour Party by introducing a minimum wage in Britain for the first time.

But there are many things that Labour's first MP would find unrecognisable in the modern Labour Party. The movement Hardie started was a party for the working classes and the trade unions. The doughty Scottish miner would be hard pressed to find more than a handful of union men or working class representatives in today's parliamentary Labour Party. Instead he would find large numbers of bright, middle class university educated young men and women, a far cry from the miners, industrial workers and a handful of middle class intellectuals who were the early Labour members of Parliament. Hardie would also be puzzled about many of Mr. Blair's policies. The party that Hardie and his colleagues started to represent the trade unions in Parliament has distanced itself from



The British Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair... changing the face of the Labour Party.

the unions, and remade itself as a party that represents the British middle classes. Its policies tend to favour businesses as much as workers, and instead of nationalisation and state ownership, the emphasis is on getting the private sector to take over areas of the economy that were once a state monopoly. While the Blair Government has introduced a minimum wage, it has also cut business taxes to their lowest level.

Labour traditionalists would argue that these changes represent a betrayal of the party's founding values. But Mr. Blair and his fellow modernisers would argue that the party's core value of social justice — "its great and universal goal" as he described it — has not changed. All that have changed has been the methods used to achieve this goal. In a speech to commemorate the party's centenary, Mr Blair set out what he saw as the Labour's historic mission: harnessing collective power to recognise the equal worth of all, and to

develop the potential of each individual. This aim of using the collective power of society to help each individual is perhaps as good a definition of modern day social democracy as one can get, though it is still arguable whether the founders of the Labour Party would have recognised it as their creed. One hundred years ago, the Labour Party was a working class party, and its policy was focussed on creating better conditions for the working classes. Its aim was to harness the power of the state not to help every individual, but explicitly the poor and the exploited.

Whether Labour will in fact be Britain's dominant party in the coming century is impossible to predict. Given the way history tends to work, it is more likely that some small recently-formed party will grow to become a major political force as the century progresses, in much the same way as the newly-born Labour Party grew to become a major force in the last century.

THE HINDU
- 5 MAR 2000

Blair visit a good omen: Putin

BY DOMINIC EVANS

St. Petersburg, March 12: Russia's acting President Vladimir Putin yielded little ground over his military campaign in Chechnya on Saturday but won a display of bonhomie from visiting British Prime Minister Tony Blair.

"I'd like to say how much I enjoyed the dialogue, which was a very good omen for the future," Mr Blair told reporters, a statement that appeared to accept as a foregone conclusion Mr Putin's victory in a presidential election in two weeks.

Mr Blair became the first Western leader to meet Mr Putin since the former KGB spy took office in the Kremlin at the New Year, holding talks at the baroque seaside Petrodvorets Palace outside Russia's imperial capital St. Petersburg. Later the two held lengthy head-to-head dis-

cussions in the Hermitage Museum and attended the premiere of a new production of the opera *War and Peace* — which provided an apt conclusion to a day of talks mainly focusing on Chechnya.

The West says Russia is using disproportionate force and killing civilians in its five-month-old campaign against Chechen separatists. But Western leaders have been careful to temper their criticism to avoid alienating the new Russian leader.

"I explained the concerns of Great Britain and other parts of the international community that any response be proportionate and that allegations of human rights violations be properly investigated," Mr Blair said.

Mr Putin, who has easily side-stepped such criticism in the past, said he would take steps to increase access to the war zone for internation-

al organisations, but gave no ground on the issue of holding peace talks with Chechen rebels.

Kremlin aide Sergei Prikladko was quoted by RIA news agency as saying Mr Putin had told Mr Blair he believed the West "often lacks the necessary and due information" on the war in Chechnya. But he said Mr Putin's recent interview with British television had helped people "to understand better."

He also stressed Russia's continuing differences with the West over Kosovo. Russia strongly opposed Nato's airstrikes on Yugoslavia last year.

Although Russian troops now patrol Kosovo alongside those of the Western alliance, the Moscow government says the West has failed to guarantee the rights of Serbs in the province. (Reuters)

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Queen gets a welcome and tough questions

BOURKE (NEW SOUTH WALES), MARCH 23. Queen Elizabeth went to the back of beyond on Wednesday and met the residents of what is believed to be Australia's most royalist community.

Having spent the first four days of her royal tour in cities, she went to the opposite extreme on Wednesday — a trip to Bourke. When Australians want to describe somewhere as remote, they say it is "back o' Bourke". Known as the gateway to the outback — if an outback can have a gateway — Bourke is a very long way from anywhere. And it had never enjoyed a royal tour before. So the entire population of 3,600, along with some adjacent communities, turned out to see the queen and the Duke of Edinburgh.

The neighbouring town of Coolabah, a mere 100 miles away, was virtually empty. At last November's referendum it had 50 voters, of whom 46 voted to retain the monarchy. Now all 46 had chartered a bus for the trip to Bourke, the local metropolis. The four republican voters stayed at home. "They're down the pub," gloated the royalist leader Colin Watson. On Thursday, the tiny town will celebrate the royal encounter in traditional style — with a goat race. The queen was evidently aware of the Coolabah contingent. "We're from the town with the highest vote for the monarchy," pensioner Marie Norris told her during a walkabout. "Yes, I know," said the queen, diplomatically.

Bourke itself was rather less united on the issue, but the queen was given a euphoric welcome by all,

bar one Aboriginal protester. The problems of Australia's indigenous people had brought the monarch to Bourke in the first place. One-third aboriginal to two-thirds white, the town has often suffered from racial unrest. But equality is filtering through. The queen visited a local radio station that broadcasts programmes aimed specifically at an aboriginal audience. As she arrived in the studio, the lunchtime show, *The Power Hour*, was in full flow under the auspices of leading local disc jockey, Tara McKellar, a veteran broadcaster of five years' standing at the grand old age of 13.

At the real back of Bourke is its primary school which has made great strides in improving the academic standards of aboriginal children: they now achieve the same results as white children. The pupils also achieved something that Fleet Street's finest have never managed — an interview with the queen. "Have you brought your crown with you?" asked Warren Turnbull, nine. "No I didn't," the queen replied. "I can't get it out of the Tower of London. It lives there." Another child asked if it was heavy. "Very — extremely heavy."

The really tricky one came from Zukdekea Kerr, seven: "How many rooms are there at Buckingham Palace?" The queen looked unsure before answering: "Some people say 600. I don't know how true that is." — ©Telegraph Group Limited, London, 2000

THE HINDU
24 MAR 2000

Ulster peace process back to nought?

By Thomas Abraham

LONDON, FEB. 3. The British and Irish Prime Ministers held emergency talks today to devise a plan to rescue the Northern Ireland peace process. The two Premiers are anxious to avoid the return of Westminster rule and the suspension of all political institutions created by the Good Friday agreement.

According to the BBC, the Northern Ireland Secretary, Mr. Peter Mandelson, will make a statement to the House of Commons and could introduce legislation suspending the fledgling Northern Ireland Assembly and reimpose direct rule from London within days. Mr. Blair told Parliament yesterday that there had been "insufficient progress" by the Irish Republican Army (IRA) on decommissioning and said, "Unless there is substantial progress there is serious difficulty." Both Britain and Ireland are trying to persuade the IRA to make some gesture that will assure the Unionists of its commitment to decommissioning but have made little headway.

The Taoiseach, Mr. Bertie Ahern, who met the Sinn Fein leader, Mr. Gerry Adams yesterday, asked

the IRA to give "an indication that decommissioning is going to be dealt with in some ordered way." Mr. Adams has indicated that he was trying to persuade the IRA to make some gesture. "We are in intensive discussion with all sides to try and avert disaster," he wrote in *Irish News*. He added that he believed that "the whole issue of arms can be satisfactorily resolved" but warned that dissolving the Northern Ireland Assembly was not the right way to bring this about.

Sinn Fein is for all practical purposes the political wing of the IRA but maintains that it cannot speak or act for the IRA. Mr. Adams and Mr. Martin McGuinness are believed to be trying to get the IRA to move towards disarmament but have apparently been met with resistance from hardliners.

Technically, the peace agreement has set May 22, 2000 as the deadline for all paramilitary groups to disarm. But the Protestant Ulster Unionists wanted to see the first steps towards decommissioning before that and the First Minister, Mr. David Trimble had threatened to quit in the event of no progress by January 31.

THE HINDU

- 4 FEB 2000

Britain prepares for protracted talks with Afghan plane hijackers

STANSTED: British authorities negotiating with hijackers holding at least 150 hostages on an Afghan airliner at an airport outside London prepared for protracted negotiations. They warned that the standoff could last "for days."

"Negotiations remain our favourite option," Joe Edwards, an assistant chief constable of the Essex Police, said on Monday. "I will say it could be a very protracted technique. It could go on for days."

However, what exactly the hijackers were negotiating for, is unclear. But a diplomat familiar with earlier negotiations when the plane landed at Moscow, said that those holding the plane sought to free a prisoner held in the Afghan city of Kandahar.

Afghan media speculated that the hijackers were dissidents who want the release of Ismail Khan, a former regional governor who has been held since 1997 by Afghanistan's ruling Taliban movement. Khan is a member of Afghanistan's opposition alliance, which still rules roughly 10 per cent of the war-shattered country.

Mr Edwards said that police were in contact with the plane throughout the night and that both the hostages and the hijackers remained calm. "The people we are

talking to are remarkably calm and that's really important," he said. "The atmosphere is one of control, people behaving rationally. That's going to help an awful lot."

"The fact that people haven't been hurt, that there isn't a sense of panic on board the plane ...," Mr Edwards said, "these are really important points that allow us to press ahead with the negotiation option with some confidence."

According to some of the 31 passengers they have so far let go, the hijackers include eight young men, armed with pistols, grenades and daggers. They are believed to be still holding 157 hostages of unknown nationality.

"They were all young — around 25-30 years old, dressed in traditional Afghan costume — and to begin with they were threatening," Mohammad Bashir Mahal, one of the 10 passengers set free in Moscow, said at a news conference on Monday.

"But slowly, their aggression subsided and they treated us quite well. No one was beaten or insulted. Relations were good," he said. The hijackers appeared to be Afghan because of their language and clothes, he said. Another released hostage said that 20 minutes after taking off from the Afghan capital Kabul, ear-

ly on Sunday morning, the hijackers calmly asked passengers to put their hands on their heads.

John Broughton, another assistant chief constable of the Essex Police, said that eight captives released Monday at Stansted Airport told officials: "They were very well-treated while they were onboard".

Since they landed at Stansted, 25 miles north of London, the hijackers have requested only food, water, unspecified medical supplies and that the lavatories on the Afghan state-run Ariana Airlines plane be emptied, police said. They freed eight hostages on Monday.

Meanwhile, the brother of Afghan opposition leader Ahmad Shah Masood, on Tuesday denied allegations by the ruling Taliban militia that the opposition was behind the hijacking of an Afghan Airliner to Britain.

"We have never committed such things before, we will never commit them in the future," Wali Masood told BBC Radio. "That's clear for everybody except for the Taliban, who are just blaming others for what they are doing themselves." The Taliban had accused Masood of having at least indirectly organised the hijacking in a bid to secure the release of charismatic leader Ismail Khan. (Agencies)

THE TIMES OF INDIA

- 9 FEB 2000

Britain will restore direct rule if IRA declines to disarm

LONDON: The Irish Republican Army (IRA) is expected to issue a new statement shortly but it is unlikely to signal any start to the guerrilla group disarming, the BBC reported on Wednesday. Britain was poised to pass legislation to restore direct rule over Northern Ireland as early as Friday unless the IRA began disarming.

British prime minister Tony Blair was reported to be ready to meet Irish Republic prime minister Bertie Ahern in a final attempt to progress on disarmament — for long, a make-or-break issue in the Northern Ireland peace process. No immediate comment was available from Blair's office on the reports.

With the clock ticking and all sides still far apart, Republican leader Gerry Adams threatened to walk away from the troubled peace process. "I don't intend to spend the rest of my life trying to shore up a process that is going to be in perpetual crisis," Mr Adams told BBC Radio on Tuesday, adding he felt like "a messenger who continuously gets shot".

Politicians from Northern Ireland's Protestant majority argue that Mr Adams, leader of

the Irish Republican Army's political ally Sinn Fein, has the influence to persuade the guerrilla group to begin disarming.

The failure of the IRA to disarm has brought the British province's peace process to the brink of collapse, and Protestant politicians have threatened to resign on Saturday from a fledgling home-rule government with Roman Catholics.

Britain's house of Commons passed the direct rule legislation by 326 votes to seven, leaving only the unelected house of Lords to vote. Northern Ireland secretary Peter Mandelson said the direct rule powers would come into force unless the IRA start-



Sinn Fein president Gerry Adams makes his way from Downing Street in his car along with a Union Jack on the side after holding crisis talks with Prime Minister Tony Blair in London on Tuesday.

ed disarming within days.

"I still hope it will prove unnecessary to implement it," Mr Mandelson said. "But that

depends on changes, developments which have not yet taken place, but which would need to take place speedily and certainly over the next two or three days."

An aide to Mr Mandelson said direct rule, suspending a power-sharing executive which the province's feuding parties joined just eight weeks ago, could be in place by Friday. Britain is faced with demands by Protestant politicians to press the IRA to start disarming in line with the 1998 Good Friday Peace Accord for Northern Ireland under which the power-sharing executive was set up.

Mr Adams condemned the direct rule legislation, saying it was the greatest threat yet to the peace process. "Suspending the institutions will not resolve the arms issue," he said after talks in London with Tony Blair. Mr Adams and other politicians from the Roman Catholic minority say the power-sharing executive is vital to building trust across the sectarian divide.

The IRA called a ceasefire in 1997 in its 30-year war against British rule. IRA guerrillas say they accept disarmament as part of a genuine peace but will not be bound by a dead-

UK suspends Northern Ireland govt

REUTERS

BELFAST, FEB. 11. — Britain has suspended today Northern Ireland's power-sharing government of the Catholics and the Protestants for the IRA's failure to start disarming.

"We have decided to suspend the executive and the institutions," Northern Ireland secretary, Mr Peter Mandelson, said in an announcement. With this Northern Ireland returns to direct rule from Britain.

The move after two weeks of political turmoil which saw the Protestant first minister, Mr David Trimble, threatening to resign over the guerillas' refusal to scrap their arsenals, was the worst setback yet to the landmark Good Friday peace accord.

The agreement ended 30 years of sectarian bloodshed in which more than 3,000 people died.

"We have got to clear up this issue of decommissioning (dis-

armament) once and for all. It has dogged the process throughout. It has sapped the confidence of the institutions," Mr Mandelson declared.

Just minutes before his announcement, the Sinn Fein chief, Mr Gerry Adams, said there had been a "major breakthrough" on the disarmament issue after exhaustive talks with the British and Irish governments, political parties and the Irish Republican Army.

THE STATESMAN

12 FEB 2000

Britain suspends Belfast cabinet

IRA's refusal to disarm behind harsh move

Belfast, February 12 (AP) — BRITAIN HAS stripped authority from Northern Ireland's joint Protestant-Catholic administration, the power-sharing institution that was supposed to draw a line under the province's bloody past.

But within hours of that desperate measure yesterday, the British and Irish governments jointly announced that the Irish Republican Army had softened its position on disarmament, the issue threatening the cabinet's survival. They called the move "a development of real significance" that could allow power to return to Belfast.

Following an agonising week of behind-the-scenes negotiations, Northern Ireland secretary Peter Mandelson resumed direct British control just 72 days after the four-party coalition — intended cornerstone of the province's 1998 peace accord — received substantial powers.

Mandelson argued that the

reversal, while "deeply disappointing", was necessary to prevent a cabinet collapse because of the outlawed IRA's refusal to disarm, a Protestant condition for its formation.

But hours later, the British and Irish governments announced that the IRA had expressed new-found flexibility during the past week's secret discussions with an independent disarmament commission, whose work is central to the current crisis.

The two governments published a brand-new report by the commission that said the IRA's latest position "holds out the real prospect of an agreement".

This report said the IRA representative to the commission "indicated to us today the context in which the IRA will initiate a comprehensive process to put arms beyond use, in a manner as to ensure maximum public confidence".

This hopeful turn of events followed an angry last-minute plea to Mandelson from Gerry Adams,

leader of the IRA-linked Sinn Fein party, not to suspend powers because the IRA had just offered "a new and significant proposition to resolve the arms issue".

Adams wouldn't say whether this meant the IRA now accepted it was supposed to disarm by May under terms of the Good Friday peace accord.

Mandelson said the latest Sinn Fein-IRA offering came too late to avert resumption of "direct rule".

But he emphasised that powers could be transferred back to Belfast "as quickly as they were taken away" once two key questions "are clearly answered: is there going to be weapons decommissioning by the IRA, and if so, when? If there's been real progress in the last 24 hours, let's build on that", Mandelson said, noting a new round of negotiations could begin next week.

His resumption of authority took pressure off the coalition's major Protestant party, the Ulster Unionists, which has scheduled a party conference today. (AP)



Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams addresses the media at the Parliament Buildings, Stormont, on Friday after Northern Ireland Secretary Peter Mandelson suspended the province's government. Photo: AP

Talks to break Ulster deadlock fail

By Thomas Abraham

LONDON, FEB. 17. After a day of tense meetings, the British and Irish Governments failed to find a way out of the latest deadlock in the Northern Ireland peace process.

The rift between Sinn Fein, the political wing of the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and the British Government was evident when the Sinn Fein leader, Mr. Gerry Adams, left a meeting with the British Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair and the Taoiseach, Mr. Bertie Ahern, declaring that "the Good Friday agreement has been torn up" after the British Government suspended the Northern Ireland Government and the other institutions set up under the Good Friday peace agreement. The British Government had hoped to get all the parties to sit down to a review of the implementation of the agreement. But Sinn Fein made it clear it had no intention of doing so.

Differences were also apparent between the British and Irish Governments over what should be done. Mr. Ahern let it be known that he favoured a speedy restoration of the Northern Ireland Assembly and the other institutions. He told a press conference that both the work of the devolved Assembly and Government and other institutions should proceed along with the laying down of paramilitary weapons.

The current crisis stemmed from a difference of opinion between the Ulster Unionists, the main Protestant



The British Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair (centre), the Irish Prime Minister, Mr. Bertie Ahern (right), and Britain's Minister for Northern Ireland, Mr. Peter Mandelson, addressing newsmen at No. 10 Downing Street, in London on Wednesday following further peace agreement talks. — AP

party and Sinn Fein on when the IRA should begin decommissioning. The Ulster Unionists had wanted the IRA to begin disarming by January 31 and its leader, Mr. David Trimble had threatened to resign as First Minister if this did not happen. With the IRA showing no sign of agreeing to the Unionists' demand, the British Government suspended the Northern Ireland Assembly and Government to forestall Mr. Trimble's resignation. This pacified the Unionists but infuriated Sinn Fein. The IRA retaliated by

pulling out of talks with the international body set up to oversee paramilitary decommissioning and also withdrew the proposals it had made to the commission.

Mr. Adams said British pressure on the IRA was not going to work. "Any notion that cajoling or coaxing or pressuring people like us to try and get the IRA to do something only to have it rejected is just nonsense." He also indicated that he had gone as far as he could to try and bring about a compromise.

THE HINDU
18 FEB 2000

Britain to deliver blunt message to Pakistan

By Thomas Abraham

LONDON, JAN. 9. Britain is to deliver a blunt message to Pakistan that its support for terrorism in Kashmir and the recent hijacking of the Indian Airlines aircraft are unacceptable. The British Foreign Office Minister, Mr. Peter Hain, told the BBC that the British Chief of Defence Staff, Gen. Sir Charles Guthrie, was being sent to Islamabad next week to deliver "the blunt message that the (Pakistan) coup was unacceptable and that Pakistani toleration and acceptance of cross-border terrorism in Kashmir or incidents such as the Indian aeroplane hijacking was totally unacceptable."

Mr. Hain denied that there was any shift in British opposition to the coup, but said that London was ready to help Pakistan reform its institutions and return to democracy. Sir Charles Guthrie would also pass on the message that "if Pakistan embarks upon a course, as there are signs that it is doing, of ridding the country of corruption which has been so corrosive, or economic modernisation or democratic rebuilding, that is to say a new voter registration system and so on, then we will help."

Mr. Hain said that Britain wanted to test whether Pakistan's military ruler, Gen. Musharraf, was committed to restoring democracy, and see "that he pursues that path irreversibly."

Gen. Sir Charles Guthrie is the first official visit to Islamabad by a senior British leader, leading to speculation that Britain was preparing to return to business as usual with the military regime. The British Chief of Defence Staff is being sent to Islamabad because he knows Gen. Musharraf from various earlier contacts.

Mr. Hain said that Pakistan faced a dim future unless democracy was restored. "The future for Pakistan is very bleak otherwise. Continued military rule, accompanied by massive regional instability over Kashmir, the activities of the Taliban which Pakistan has supported in terrorist activities in Afghanistan, incidents like the Indian Airlines hijacking and the fact that India and Pakistan have a nuclear capability."

Britain was not exporting any arms to Pakistan at present, but did not rule out future arms sales. "We will consider any licences that we have in for arms exports on their merits as we have done in the past but we will not support anything which is used for external aggression or internal oppression, not least over Pakistan's activities in Kashmir," he said.

Saeed Sheikh may face action in U.K.

LONDON, JAN. 9. Britain has indicated that Ahmad Omar Saeed Sheikh, a Pakistan-born British national and one of the three mil-

itants released by India in return for the hostages of the hijacked Indian Airlines plane, may be tried under the Indo-British Extradition Treaty or under the Anti-Terrorists Act, according to official sources.

The British Government also said it had no desire to show any "favourable treatment" to Sheikh, and will allow relatives of one of his victims to file a case against the militant in Britain, the sources said.

Britain, which earlier offered consular assistance to Sheikh, told the Indian Acting High Commissioner, Mr. Hardeep Puri, that it was not aware of the fact that Sheikh, arrested in 1994 for offences relating to the kidnapping of three British and one U.S. nationals from a hotel in Delhi, was convicted.

Sheikh was sentenced by a Sessions Judge in an Indian court to three years rigorous imprisonment and Rs. 5,000 fine under Section 332 of IPC and also two years RI and fine under Section 427 of IPC. The judgment was delivered on November 19, 1998.

While the other two freed Pakistani militants Maulana Masood Azhar and Mushtaq Ahmed Zargar made their presence in Karachi and Muzaffarabad, the whereabouts of Sheikh, who carries a British passport, is not yet known. — PTI

Diplomats slug it out: Page 14

THE HINDU
10 JAN 2000

Join efforts to eradicate terrorism, UK tells Pak

Islamabad, January 14

BRITAIN HAS made clear to Pakistan its "deep concern" on developments in Kashmir and asked Islamabad to join the international efforts to eradicate terrorism in all its forms.

Britain's position was made clear by its visiting Chief of Defence Staff Sir Charles Guthrie during his meeting with Pakistan's military ruler Gen. Pervez Musharraf here yesterday. The British general said he also discussed the recent hijacking of the Indian Airlines aircraft with Gen. Musharraf.

"I made clear our deeply felt concerns on Kashmir and emphasised the urgency

for Pakistan to join the international efforts to eradicate international terrorism in all its forms," Gen. Guthrie told a select group of journalists after the meeting. He is the first foreign dignitary to visit Islamabad after military took over

power last October.

He said they were of the view that "terrorism is a scourge in the world" and agreed on the need to bring "the perpetrators of terrorism to justice," according to Pakistan's official news agency APP.

bilaterally the issue that divides them.

Replying to a question, he said he was "deeply worried over the situation in Kashmir which sometimes assumes dangerous proportions."

"We think the situation became more dangerous following the nuclear tests in 1998 by both India and Pakistan," he added.

Gen. Guthrie described the purpose of his visit to ask Gen. Musharraf to take Pakistan down the path of democracy and peace. Stating that London would not turn its back on Islamabad, he said. Britain like United States, European Union and Commonwealth wanted restoration of full-fledged democracy in Pakistan at the earliest.

"Turning our back on Pakistan is not enough," APP quoted him as saying. He also declared that there was no British arms embargo on Pakistan. (PTI)

'No Pak ban on Azhar's tirade'

PAKISTAN HAS not imposed any restrictions on the anti-US and anti-India diatribes of freed terrorist Maulana Masood Azhar, district magistrate of Bhawalpur (Punjab), Javed Akhtar said. Mr Akhtar told English daily, The Dawn, "that Azhar was moving freely. At an Id congregation in Bhawalpur he gave a call for "jihad" against India, and the paper said 500 men had volunteered to join his call of "jihad."

UNI, Islamabad

Expressing disappointment over the continued stalemate over the resumption of dialogue between India and Pakistan, Gen. Guthrie hoped that the two countries would find ways to revive the Lahore Declaration and address

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

15 JAN 2001

Trainers in the Lords

Reforming the English upper house by expelling most hereditary peers is part of New Labour's modernizing binge

Hereditary peers introduced a maverick character as they had not bent over backwards to get into the Lords

Towards the end of last year, 659 hereditary peers were expelled from the House of Lords, the upper chamber of parliament at Westminster. The abolition of hereditary rights in the Lords was mooted many times during the 20th century. But the question that always bedevilled the attempts to reform the chamber and to abandon the hereditary element was, how to replace it? Or rather, who would replace these august representatives of a bygone age who had, in the popular imagination, got there by the guile or the gumption of their ancestors? To do so would be to decide who precisely the British had become, a question the British have difficulty addressing.

Most countries elect both their first and second chambers. British governments have successively avoided electing the latter because prime ministers find it convenient not to be overruled by a modernized second chamber which, once elected, would have as much legitimacy in the eyes of the public as the Commons. The irony was that no government was prepared to reform the Lords because that would lend it legitimacy and give it influence. The hereditary element kept it weak, just as it keeps the monarchy weak.

Lloyd George had passed the Parliament Act as long ago as 1911 which prevented the Lords from being able to block government legislation initiated in the Commons. As a result the Commons held full sway, the authority of the prime minister was the stronger and radical legislation could be easily steered through parliament.

But increasingly, the view gained ground that it was unacceptable for an old guard of landed nobles, as they were caricatured, to be having any say on government legislation. Much was made of the dawn of the 21st century and how this made it imperative to modernize. The reform became a key plank of New Labour's modernizing binge.

Tony Blair eventually took the gamble and abolished the "hereditaries" in November 1999. Because Blair has had less to do in terms of reorganizing the economy, being in many respects a reconstructed Thatcherite, he has performed a number of token measures to assuage the left wing of his party, in order to make them still feel left-wing. The bill to ban fox-hunting, the arrest of general Pinochet and the reform of the

House of Lords were all "designer" policies. Blair has been generally keen to take action which, in his own words, "is not merely fair, but which is seen to be fair". (It is sometimes said that he emphasises the latter over the former.)

But the government has so far got round the problem of how to replace the hereditaries by *not* deciding how to replace them. They have banished the hereditaries but kept on the so-called "life peers", a category begun in the 1950s which ennobled you for your life but did not allow you to pass the title on to your descendants — a kind of non-contagious ennoblement.

The current arrangements are what the government calls a "transitional house". In a bizarre move, 92 hereditary peers were allowed to stay on for the transitional stage partly as a compromise with the Conservatives: the 92 were elected by the 750 former hereditaries. A royal commission has been appointed to sort out how the upper chamber might look.

Some wryly comment that the transitional house will stay put because no one will agree on how the House of Lords should be composed. For the time being, the lords are left with the odd conundrum that the only elected peers are the hereditaries. That gives them kudos.

The life peers — the "day boys" as they were dubbed by the hereditaries — were allowed to continue since they had supposedly got there on their own merit. But life peers are all appointed by the prime ministers of their day. They range from the law lords and the bishops to former cabinet ministers and politicians, writers, academics and others at the top of their professions from hospital administrators to military officials. They are hand-picked from amongst the friends, and the friends of friends of the prime minister.

The dominance of these people in the upper chamber means that it is now merely an appointed chamber. There are many admirable people amongst them. But there are also placemen chosen through the unedifying channels of political patronage. As the *Sun* puts it, they are "Tony's cronies".

The paradox about the hereditaries was that they were the antithesis of the ambitious social climber prepared to do anything to get ahead on the slippery slope to political advancement. They were often independent-minded; some were highly intelligent; others were thoroughly stupid. They came from diverse backgrounds: they were certainly not all landed, nor necessarily nobbish or snobbish. They were a mixed bag. A lottery even. Ironically enough they introduced an independent strain and a maverick character to the parliamentary process because they had not bent over backwards to get there.

A greater paradox is that Blair appointed Baroness Jay to steer the controversial bill through the Lords itself. Baroness Jay herself is a fine example of the survival of the hereditary principle. Though a life peer, she is the daughter of the former prime minister, James Callaghan, and was ennobled by Tony Blair. There can be little doubt that she got to her position using the influence of

her father. The inconsistency was not lost on the opposition who often mockingly drew attention to Jay's parentage.

Others complained that the way the hereditaries were dispensed with was done with a shocking lack of graciousness. The Labour front bench in the Lords, headed by Jay, were rude and blunt. Perhaps this was explained by their sheer determination to push the bill through parliament, in view of the impasse that other attempts had met with.

At all events, the tall, blond Baroness Jay became known as the "wicked witch" for her cold, supercilious manner; she sloped around the corridors of the Lords at a measured pace striking fear into the Conservative ranks. The impeccably cordial atmosphere at the House — famously contrasting with the raucous House of Commons — was disrupted, and a mood of distrust and animosity settled on the place.

New Labour has now appointed more life peers in the first two and a half years of its rule than any other government in the 20th century. The place is now heaving with new peers who are bewildered by the rituals which still prevail in the gilded halls. Many were seen to snigger during solemn moments.

Others occasionally wear training shoes into the chamber — and get away with it. But the elaborate manners of the doormen in their unchanged uniforms and breeches insist on certain elements of continuity. And the ceremonies of the place are famously enthralling — and contagiously so.

Those who start off cynical become proud of the place very quickly. There were many Labour peeresses in tiaras at the opening of parliament, and Baroness Jay was seen conversing merrily with the arch hereditary, the Duke of Norfolk, and seemed mesmerised by the flummery of the Yeomen of the Guard.

The new peers, the majority of whom are Labour, are a very different breed to the old. There are television presenters, like Lord Bragg (who presents the South Bank show on ITV), and Lord Birt (the former director of the BBC) as well as representatives of trades unions and non-governmental organizations. Although the government insists this is a transitional house, they do, in some ways, befit the New Britain of New Labour. The writer Anthony Sampson wrote recently that the British establishment has changed fundamentally since he wrote his famous analysis of the ruling elite in Britain back in the 1960s.

Writing in the *Independent*, he said that "the TV networks have taken over from the country houses as the centre of communications and social ambition". It is only a short distance to the celebrity politics of the United States. The Baronesses Spice (of the Spice Girls) are waiting in the wings. It is now the Conservative peers who are pressing for a more fully elected House of Lords.

THE TELEGRAPH

17 JAN 2000