

HD-17 23/12

A law strikes terror

THE "UGLY" foreigner became a reality in Britain this week after the Government assumed extraordinary powers to lock up without trial — and for an indefinite period — foreign nationals suspected of terrorism. The first arrests have already been made, typically in a pre-dawn swoop, and triggered an angry reaction with civil rights groups planning to challenge the new Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act.

In the meantime, the only hope for detenus is a right to appeal, grudgingly agreed by the Government under strong Opposition pressure,

While the need for tough measures to fight terrorism is widely acknowledged, the question is how 'tough' is 'tough'. Hasan Suroor on the heat generated by Britain's new anti-terrorism law.

but the scope of the appeal is likely to be extremely limited and would be decided in secret. Even this is seen as a "concession" to an angry Opposition which refused to hand over blanket powers of detention to the Government. Under the original proposal, there was to be no appeal and, as one commentator put it, if it was allowed to go through it would have created a system that "Stalin's secret police chief, Beria, would have felt pretty comfortable with".

That, of course, is an exaggeration but critics remain unconvinced that the new detention regime will not be misused. They fear it would make asylum seekers particularly vulnerable in the prevailing climate of xenophobia, and make their life more difficult than it already is.

The new anti-terrorism law, rushed through Parliament amid an uproar, has been denounced by human rights activists as a "draconian" measure and an attack on civil liberties. They said the Government was assuming powers which bore no relation to the actual threat from terrorism, a concern which the Home Secretary, Mr. David Blunkett, dismissed as an invention of "airy-fairy" civil rights campaigners. He claimed that Britain would become a "safer" place to live in as a result of his new law which, he insisted, struck a balance between "respecting our civil liberties and ensuring that they are not exploited by those who would destroy them."

The ruling party's own backbenchers, however, had strong reservations, though in the end they were forced to fall in line. The row over it coincided with a sharp

criticism of creeping "authoritarianism" in the ruling party as one dissident MP, Mr. Paul Marsden, defected to the Liberal Democratic Party protesting alleged attempts to gag dissent, and a Labour Peer, Lord (Nazir) Ahmed, accused the Government of tapping his phone because of his opposition to the war in Afghanistan.

The Government's detractors attacked it for "control freakery" which, they argued, was also reflected in its anti-terrorism law.

Its passage was preceded by a huge controversy with the Lords inflicting a series of humiliating defeats on a raft of proposals which, they contended, were completely unwarranted; and at one stage it seemed the Government might not be able to meet its Christmas

extreme proposals. "It is a scandalous way to pass a legislation but given the circumstances the bill is hugely less dangerous than it was two weeks ago," the Liberal Democrat Home Affairs spokesman, Mr. Simon Hughes, said after the Government had been forced to climb down on a number of issues to get the bill passed.

Mr. Blunkett, who had a difficult time in both Houses, sought to make light of his retreat saying: "Coming from Sheffield, I am familiar with the old nursery rhyme about the Grand Old Duke of York: I have marched myself to the top of the hill and I'm about to march myself back again." But, he also warned that people would "never forgive us if we were engaged at this stage in party political wrangles." The immediate

has enacted a separate, harsher, law to deal with rogue foreigners. Even as the furries are about to be let loose at suspected foreigners, a British Muslim has just returned from Pakistan openly boasting that he went there to recruit fighters for the Taliban. The Government is not clear under which law to book him while he is reported to be going around hawking his story to tabloids.

The Government has also come under attack for trying to acquire powers to snoop on people's private communications such as telephone calls and e-mails as part of its anti-terrorism campaign. It has been forced to dilute some of the more excessive features of the original proposal after the Opposition strongly resisted what it said had all the trappings of a "fishing



deadline for putting the law on the statute book. In the end, it bought peace with a number of concessions which included dropping a controversial proposal to make incitement of religious hatred a criminal offence, a measure which had been demanded by Muslims following the anti-Muslim backlash in the wake of the September 11 attacks. The move was opposed in both the Houses of Parliament on the plea that it was likely to curb even harmless satire on religion and was an attack on free speech. Mr. Blunkett agreed to drop it reluctantly when it seemed that his entire package could be in danger. But rather ill-humouredly, he said it was "not a matter for anyone to rejoice." Several other proposals, including the one relating to detention of foreigners, were diluted before Parliament agreed to pass the bill.

Passions ran so high that in the House of Lords, the Liberal Democrats joined hands with the Tories to oppose some of the more

target is about a dozen alleged extremists who are wanted by other countries for alleged terrorist activities but cannot be deported under the Human Rights Act which bars extradition to countries where they might face death penalty or persecution. The Government says that after the September 11 outrage such people cannot be allowed to move around freely and it would be best to lock them up until their cases are decided. Some of the high-profile suspects include Abu Qatada, convicted in Jordan, in absentia, for allegedly funding a bombing campaign; and the rabble-rousing cleric Sheikh Omar Bakri Muhammed, head of al-Muhajiroun which claims to recruit British Muslim youth for "holy wars".

It is pointed out that the law deepens the divide between "us" and "them", with foreigners being exposed to the worst end of the stick — echoing the shoulder-to-shoulder solidarity with America where the President, Mr. George W. Bush, too

expedition" and, safeguards have been promised to protect the privacy of ordinary people. But fears over how exactly this power would be exercised remain.

While the need for tough measures to fight terrorism is widely acknowledged, the question is: how "tough" is "tough". There is a view even among the gung-ho Tory frontbenchers that Mr. Blunkett's shopping list is too ambitious, and loaded with stuff that is not necessarily needed to deter terrorists. Mr. Blunkett, whose iron-fisted approach has drawn flak within his own party, is seen to be using the post-September 11 panic to stretch the tentacles of the state to dangerous limits. Eventually, Parliament may have approved his measures but he has not emerged from it entirely unscathed. The new law remains deeply unpopular, as for "evidence" there is *The Times* cartoon in which a character is wishing for a "new Home Sec" as a Christmas gift.

THE HINDU

DEC 10 2001

UK approves anti-terror law

FROM DOMINIC EVANS

London, Dec. 14 (Reuters): Britain's parliament approved emergency anti-terror law early today to give police tough new powers to detain and monitor suspects and counter threats such as the September 11 attacks in the US.

In a last-minute compromise, Prime Minister Tony Blair's Labour government dropped a controversial clause that would have made incitement to religious hatred a criminal offence.

The shift allowed the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Bill to pass, handing sweeping powers to Blair as he arrived at a European Union summit in Belgium where leaders were to review plans to counter terrorist threats.

The bill gives police and authorities many more powers to tackle terrorist suspects and sweeps aside a centuries-old principle of the right to trial by allowing police to detain foreigners only on suspicion they are involved in terrorism.

"We now have some of the toughest anti-terrorist legislation in the world, and as a result the authorities now have the powers to tackle the serious terrorist threat that we face," Blair's official spokesman said.

15/12
He said the Prime Minister was delighted to have the bill on the statute book. "It is a major breakthrough in the fight against terrorism," he told reporters. The US passed a similar bill in October. The US Patriot Act boosts authorities' powers to detain immigrants, bug communications and stop money laundering.

Both measures have prompted protests from civil liberties groups who fear the emergency powers will infringe basic human rights and may encourage anti-foreigner sentiment.

Liberty, a leading human rights group, said the British bill undermined "basic principles of justice and freedom". The US measure drew fire from the European Parliament.

"(Parliament) considers that the US Patriot Act, which discriminates against non-US citizens... (is) contrary to the principles (of human rights)," it said this week.

Officials say the detention without trial powers are aimed at a handful of people in Britain seen as a security threat but who cannot be sent home because they could face the death penalty in their own countries.

The government was determined to have the legislation in place by the end of 2001.

THE TELEGRAPH

15 DEC 2001

U.S., U.K. rift widens

By Hasan Suroor

LONDON, DEC. 11. The British-U.S. "solidarity" showed some more chinks, observers noted today, as Britain's Defence Chief, Sir Michael Boyce, strongly opposed American moves to broaden the war against terrorism beyond Afghanistan saying "we cannot be all-singing, all dancing", and London must lay down clear "red lines" beyond which it would not go.

His remarks, in a speech to the Royal United Services Institute on Monday, came amid reports that U.S. was preparing to target Somalia as part of a "plan" to extend its military campaign to other countries which it suspects of harbouring terrorists. "We will have to decide soon whether we make a commitment to the broader campaign—in other words, widening the war or make longer commitment to Afghanistan," he said intensifying speculation that despite official denials there were differences between London and Washington over the limits of the present campaign.

British leaders, from the Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair downwards, have consistently maintained that the current military action, prompted by the September 11 outrage, is limited to Afghanistan and the

coalition has no mandate to widen its scope. There is concern here that increasingly hardliners in Pentagon are reported to be pressing the President, Mr. George Bush, to have a go at other "rogue" States as well while the iron is still hot.

The resentment at America's "Big Brother" attitude was also reflected in the reaction to the way Britain's offer to lead a multinational peacekeeping force in Afghanistan was announced today. In what was seen as the most public demonstration yet of who really is the boss in the coalition, the announcement was made by the U.S. Secretary of State, Mr. Colin Powell, during a visit here, and not by the British Government.

Mr. Powell, who arrived here this morning for talks with Mr. Blair, said he was "pleased" that Britain was willing to lead the force. Mr. Blair later joined him in a sombre ceremony at 10, Downing Street to mark three months of the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington. Anything upto 3,000 British troops are expected to join the multinational "stabilisation" force even as, despite Sir Michael's warning, speculation continued over Britain's response to any U.S. request for its assistance to go beyond Afghanistan.

THE HINDU

12 DEC 2001

Anti-terror legislation **UK govt draws flak**

REUTERS

27/11/01
LONDON, Nov. 26. - The British government today faced fierce opposition to its plans for new anti-terror legislation that will sweep aside the centuries-old principle of the right to a trial.

Drawn up in response to the 11 September attacks in the USA, the legislation - which was to be voted on in the House of Commons later in the day - has sparked bitter criticism from human rights groups and prompted a rebellion by the government's own members of Parliament.

The Bill will allow the home secretary (interior minister), Mr David Blunkett, to order foreigners suspected of involvement in terrorism to be detained without trial, which civil rights groups say would undermine the basic principles of justice and freedom.

The Prime Minister, Mr Tony Blair, commands a massive 167-seat majority in the 659-seat House of Commons, meaning Mr Blunkett is likely to be able to push the Bill through anyway.

But in a signal of the strength of feeling against the Bill, 32 of Mr Blair's own Labour MPs rebelled and voted against key parts of the legislation last Wednesday.

Three of the rebels were former Labour ministers and the revolt was the biggest since Mr Blair's Labour Party won re-election in June.

Both the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives say their members in the House of Lords will raise serious objections to the Bill when it reaches the upper chamber for final approval. But while they could cause some delay, they would be unable to prevent it becoming law.

Under the proposals the government could invoke a clause in European law that allows parts of the European Convention on Human rights - to which Britain is a signatory - to be set aside in times of public emergency.

Mr Blunkett says the 11 September attacks and their consequences amount to such an emergency.

THE STATESMAN

27 NOV 2001

Blair Govt. in a fix over anti-terror law

By Hasan Suroor

LONDON, NOV. 24. The British Government is facing contradictory pressures in its fight against terror with the hawks pressing for tougher action against suspected terrorists, and the moderates, including many within its own ranks, accusing it of using terrorism as a pretext to assume repressive powers.

The hardliners stepped up their campaign today after *The Times* claimed that it had unearthed the "most damning" evidence so far linking three U.K.-based alleged associates of Osama bin Laden with the 1998 bombings of U.S. Embassies in Tanzania and Kenya. The men — one Saudi and two Egyptians — are wanted in America for their alleged involvement in the bombings but because of Britain's complicated extradition procedure they have managed to escape deportation. They are beneficiaries of the same law that allowed the Chilean dictator, Gen. Augusto Pinochet, to escape extradition to Spain for his alleged crimes against that country.

In a front-page splash, *The Times* claimed that the new "evidence" showed that Ibrahim Eidarous, Adel Abdelbarry and Khalid al-Fawwaz were part of Bin Laden's British cell, masquerading as the London-based Advice and Reformation Committee (ARC). "The most damning document is a fax claiming responsibility for the (1998) atrocities," it said alleging that the fax was sent to Eidarous and Abdelbarry a few hours before the bombs exploded and bore fingerprints of the two men. The newspaper reproduced what it claimed was a copy of the fax, written in Arabic. It also published a resolution "signed" by Bin Laden appointing Khalid al-Fawwaz director of ARC, and argued that the documents strengthened the case against the three men whose appeal against extradition is to be decided by the House of Lords shortly.

The "revelation" came amid reports that the Government might put off its new extradition legislation until the next year and even when enacted might not apply retrospectively to cover cases such as those of Eidarous, Abde-

barry and Khalid al-Fawwaz. The Shadow Home Secretary, Mr. Oliver Letwin, insisted that the proposed legislation be speeded up and made "retrospective to cover suspects already being held". Hardliners accused the Government of buckling under pressure from its own MPs and "backtracking" on its promise to make extradition of suspected terrorists easier. They quoted the Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair statement after the September 11 outrage declaring that: "We cannot have a situation in which it takes years to extradite people."

The Home Secretary, Mr. David Blunkett, who is facing flak from party backbenchers for "steam-rolling" civil liberties in the name of fighting terrorism, was today confronted with the classical dilemma of "damned if you do, and damned if you don't" as he came under pressure to stick to the Government's original proposals on fast-track extradition. "If Mr. Blunkett will not act, Mr. Blair must. Politicians cannot abdicate to judges decisions that a foreigner's presence 'is not conducive to national interest'. Sanity must re-

turn to the extradition law," *The Times* said in a screaming editorial.

Meanwhile, more Labour dissidents joined the rebellion against the proposal to detain without trial foreign nationals suspected of terrorist activity. Reports quoted unnamed "Ministers" as saying that the Government was "over-reaching" itself, and assuming powers which had nothing to do with fighting terrorism. "Chunks of this Bill make me deeply uneasy. They amount to dramatic extensions of police powers to intrude into the privacy of individuals and they have nothing to do with the war against terrorism," *The Daily Telegraph* quoted a Minister as saying.

Thirty-two Labour MPs have already voted against some of the proposals during the initial reading of the Bill in the Commons in what has been described as the "biggest" backbenchers' revolt. Mr. Blunkett's bid to buy peace by announcing some concessions has not satisfied the bulk of the rebels, and more "bloodletting" on the issue is expected.

THE HINDU

25 NOV 2001

25 NOV 2001

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Jack Straw, Musharraf discuss new Afghan set-up

By B. Muralidhar Reddy 2A | 11

ISLAMABAD, NOV. 23 The British Foreign Secretary, Mr. Jack Straw, said today that the coalition forces in Afghanistan understood "the potential humanitarian disaster that is possible in Kunduz." He said this during a press conference here after meeting the Pakistan President, Gen. Pervez Musharraf, in response to a question about the possible massacre of 7,000 persons holed up in Kunduz province.

The Pakistan Foreign Minister, Mr. Abdul Sattar, who was present, said that when several of the Northern Alliance commanders who had once sided with the former Soviet Union could be forgiven, the same yardstick could be applied to generals previously associated with the Taliban militia.

Mr. Sattar emphasised that Pakistan's use of the word 'moderate Taliban' had been misunderstood. He said Islamabad only wanted was accommodation of all the Afghan elements willing to support the U.N. resolutions.

The position of the U.S.-led coalition is that even if the present and former pro-Taliban fighters are willing to surrender, they should not be given a safe passage pending a detailed investigation about their antecedents. The coalition spokesman has been maintaining in the last two days that the fighters should surrender to the Alliance forces. The idea is to take them into custody and hold the investigations about their antecedents.

Pakistan seems to be worried over the prospect of detention of those willing to surrender as a significant number of them are believed to be Pakistanis. If it turns out to be true, it could cause serious embarrassment to Islamabad besides posing problems on the domestic front.

Mr. Straw, to a question on the opposition by the Alliance to the presence of British troops inside Afghanistan, said he discussed the subject with the Alliance Foreign Minister, Mr. Abdullah Abdullah, in Teheran on Thursday. "He told me they have no objection in principle to the presence of our troops in Afghanistan but they wish to be consulted before we take a decision on the subject."

Mr. Straw arrived here on Thursday night from

Iran on the second leg of a diplomatic mission to promote a broad-based Government in Afghanistan. He also met the U.N. envoy to Afghanistan, Mr. Francesc Vendrell. During his talks with Gen. Musharraf and others, Mr. Straw also discussed the coming conference of Afghan factions in Bonn, Germany, aimed at paving the way for a new Government in Afghanistan. He was hopeful that the process could be completed soon.

To a question on the list of Afghans taking part in the Bonn conference, Mr. Sattar said that "new forces are rising. We hope and pray the conference would be a success. May be at a future date there could be revisions and additions to the list. The idea should be to promote a truly representative Government in Afghanistan".

Later, Mr. Sattar told presspersons at the U.S. coalition information centre, Mr. Straw was all praise for the Alliance and hoped for the emergence of national unity among various Afghan factions at Bonn. He said he was impressed with the meetings of some of the key representatives in the region.

"My conclusion is that there is wide consensus of genuine commitment to a political process that begins in Bonn under U.N. auspices next week. I have been profoundly impressed by the determination of all those who may represent to do their best to sink their differences in the wider interest of stability and the security of the whole region," he said.

To a question he said the Pashtuns' participation in the future Afghan Government may be 35 to 50 per cent.

Meet postponed by a day

UNITED NATIONS, NOV. 23. The Bonn meeting of Afghan factions, convened by the U.N. to start a political process, would begin on Tuesday instead of Monday. This would give time to participants for bilateral discussions on Monday.

The U.N. said it is too early to give the number or names of participants but they should be available over the weekend. — PTI

24 NOV 2001

THE HINDU

Our fate lies with Europe: Blair

PHILIP WEBSTER, ROGER BOYES, LEA PATERSON & ANDREW PIERCE
THE TIMES, LONDON

LONDON, Nov. 21. — Mr Tony Blair fuelled government debate over the euro yesterday by declaring that Britain's destiny lay as a full partner in a more closely integrated Europe.

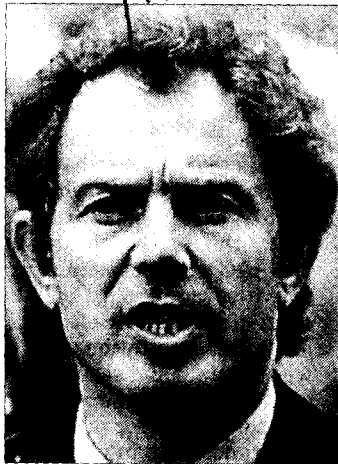
In remarks that again underlined his enthusiasm for euro membership, the Prime Minister said that for Britain to commit to Europe aroused deep passions, but the difficulties had to be overcome and it would be "backward and self-defeating" for Britain to isolate itself.

After renewed claims of tension between Mr Blair and Mr Gordon Brown over the issue, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development provided valuable ammunition to those such as the chancellor who are urging caution. The OECD predicted that the UK would outperform almost every euro-zone country this year and next, and warned that the prospects of imminent recovery in

Germany were slim.

Growth in Britain is set to be 2.3 per cent this year and 1.7 per cent next, the OECD said, compared with an average for the euro-zone of 1.6 per cent in 2001 and 1.4 per cent in 2002. Mr Blair and Mr Brown have denied any rift on the euro and the Prime Minister, during his speech to the German Social Democratic Party conference, stuck to the line that entry would happen only if the economic tests were met. But in recent speeches, expected to be repeated in Birmingham on Friday, he has shown keenness to join if the terms are right, despite polls suggesting that public enthusiasm continues to wane.

Poll data to be published today found that only 22 per cent of the public wants to join the single currency, with 61 per cent opposed. More alarming for Mr Blair is the fall in support for monetary union among Labour Party voters; the survey, for the No Campaign, found that the number who wanted to stay in the EU and keep the pound had



Mr Tony Blair

risen from 50 to 56 per cent over 12 months.

Mr Blair told the Labour conference that the government had to be brave enough to go for a referendum in this Parliament if the conditions were met. In Nuremberg yesterday, he said: "Britain under new Labour leadership wants to be a full partner with Germany and others in the development of

the European Union. This is our true destiny." He went further than before on political union, saying the EU's political dimension had been a difficult issue for British governments "until Labour was elected in 1997".

He said the party "has no hesitation in viewing the development of European co-operation and integration as having major political benefits".

Mr Blair restated his support for the development of the European rapid reaction force for peacekeeping activities, denounced by critics as an embryonic Euro-army. He said: "We need more than ever a meaningful European security and defence identity, fully compatible with Nato, but able to act where the Americans decide not to be involved, but where Europe has a clear responsibility."

Mr Blair used the Nuremberg trip to support Mr Gerhard Schroeder in his attempt to persuade Germany's nervous Social Democrats to play a mili-

tary part in the Afghan campaign. "Gerhard is leading Germany where Germany has to go," Mr Blair told the Nuremberg party congress.

Before he arrived, 120 out of some 500 delegates backed a resolution calling for an end to the use of cluster bombs or carpet bombing. The revolt against the war was not serious enough to force a change of policy on the Chancellor — who has just won a confidence vote in Parliament — but it reminded him, nonetheless, that the popular and party mood could turn against him.

At the weekend the Greens, the Chancellor's junior coalition partner, are expected to express themselves even more fiercely against the continuation of the Afghan campaign. Riding to the rescue yesterday, Mr Blair emphasised the need to rebuild Afghanistan — a point taken by delegates who had just heard of plans to stage a power-broking conference with UN and Afghan politicians in Berlin.

THE STATESMA

22 NOV 2001

U.K. Minister attacks 'hawks' in Pentagon

By Hasan Suroor

LONDON, NOV. 22. The British Government was today trying to put a lid on the growing tensions between London and Washington over Afghanistan after a senior Cabinet Minister attacked the U.S. for neglecting the humanitarian crisis in the region, and held the "hawks" in the Pentagon responsible for the delay in deploying ground forces which would have helped with aid efforts.

Six thousand British troops, part of a "stabilisation" force, have been on a stand-by for days and even as Britain is keen that they go in immediately, the U.S. is reported to be more focussed on its military objectives in Afghanistan. It is stated that they cannot go until the U.S. Commander, Gen. Tommy Franks, gives the go-ahead, but he is reported to be in no hurry.

Meanwhile, here what started off as hush-hush criticism of Washington has erupted into a public row with Ms Clare Short, the Secretary of State for International Development and a mem-

ber of the Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair's "War Cabinet", angrily wagging her finger at America. "As everyone knows, we and the French were ready to go, and others to be there briefly while order is established and the new government is established and there has been a delay and that is regrettable," she said on BBC Radio 4 on Wednesday agreeing that there were "hawks" in Washington whose priorities in Afghanistan were different from those of Britain. She warned of "terrible" suffering if there was a "lot of disorder" and a big delay in sending troops.

Ms Short, the first senior Minister to break ranks with the Government on the issue, followed up her radio outburst with an angry statement in the Commons later. Dismissing the food packets air-dropped by Americans as measly "jam and crackers and peanut butter", she said: "We need troops on the ground to have order so that the new government can take over and so that humanitarian effort can go on."

This was the second time in two

days that she publicly attacked the U.S. approach and although Downing Street sought to play down her remarks, commentators noted that there was tacit acknowledgement of the burden of her argument. "Significantly, there was no attempt to deny the overall thrust of her comments that Britain was anxious to see the deployment of a stabilisation force as quickly as possible in support of humanitarian relief," *The Daily Telegraph* pointed out.

There was speculation that this could well have been a "command performance" by the outspoken Ms Short, given the fact that the Government is known to be extremely frustrated with the slow pace of "nation-building" efforts.

The Guardian found it noteworthy that there was "little attempt to slap her down" even as Mr Blair denied a rift with Washington and insisted that the two countries were in "complete agreement" over their aims in Afghanistan. The U.S. ambassador in London, Mr. William Farrish, held discussions at Downing

Street amid suggestions that the "strains in the trans-Atlantic alliance would have featured on the agenda", *The Independent* said.

The row has been brewing for a week, starting with objections from Northern Alliance to the deployment of foreign troops in Afghanistan.

Increasingly, however, it seems that Americans are quietly going along with the Alliance on the issue because, as *The Guardian* put it, the "U.S. does not want any distractions from the action against bin Laden in southern Afghanistan...It also does not want to irritate the Northern Alliance" by opposing it publicly.

Reports suggest that some in the British defence establishment are also lukewarm to the idea of rushing in troops to the war theatre until conditions become safe for relief operations. It is believed that the British contingent on stand-by might form part of a multinational force which would hold the fort until the U.N. is able to put together an all-Muslim peace-keeping operation.

Emergency Bill creates a furore

18711 By Hasan Suroor WK

LONDON, NOV. 12. The British Government today prepared to assume extraordinary powers to detain suspected foreign terrorists indefinitely without trial, but the move provoked fury as Labour Party's own MPs joined civil rights groups to attack it.

This is the first time since the September 11 outrage that an anti-terrorism measure has come under such sharp attack with legal opinion uncertain if the proposed "emergency" law would survive a challenge in court.

The veteran Labour leader, Mr. Tony Benn, accused the Government of using terrorism as an "excuse" to impose "authoritarian" laws, while another party MP and former Minister, Mr. Mark Fisher, questioned the need for such a draconian measure saying the public would need "a great deal of convincing". He expected cross-party opposition to the move, when it is debated in the Commons next week.

The Liberal Democrat leader, Mr. Charles Kennedy, who has consistently supported the crack-down on terrorism, was furious that the Government was exceeding its brief. He said his party would resist any attempt to curtail civil liberties in the name of fighting terror. The Government, he alleged, was using the anti-terror campaign as a "cover" to introduce repressive laws. Even the Tory leader, Mr. Ian Duncan Smith, whose aggressive defence of the Government's anti-terrorism campaign has often made him seem like a member of the Treasury, was cautious saying he supported it "in principle". In the long-term, he suggested, Britain should get over the legal hurdle which prevents it from deporting suspected terrorists to America because of the death penalty in some American States.

Civil rights groups threatened to challenge the proposed law denouncing it as a "violation" of fundamental rights. "The situation in the U.K. does not warrant such an extreme attack on a historic core principle of British justice," said Mr. John Wadham, director of Liberty, a leading human rights body. A prominent legal expert, who has represented

the Government in the past, was quoted as saying it was "open to considerable doubt" whether Britain was facing an emergency situation to warrant such a law.

The Home Secretary, Mr. David Blunkett, who unveiled the new detention plans in the Commons today, was unfazed and dismissed his critics as "airy fairy" libertarians. "We could live in a world which is airy fairy, libertarian where everybody does precisely what they like and we believe the best of everybody and then they destroy us. That isn't the world, regrettably, we live in," he told a TV interviewer. About fears that a large number of innocent people might end up in jail, he retorted: "I don't give a damn whether it's one, a dozen or 20 — the important thing is that they don't put our lives at risk or enable others to put people's lives at risk elsewhere." He pointed out that civil liberties must be balanced against the need to protect human lives from terrorism.

Mr. Blunkett introduced an order seeking Parliament's approval for the Government's move to opt out of Article 5 of the European Convention on Human Rights which bars detention without trial. This would pave the way for the Emergency (Anti-Terror) Bill which, among other things, empowers the Government to detain without trial for up to six months any foreign national suspected of terrorist activity. However, they would have a right to appeal. The Government's argument is that Britain faces an "emergency threatening the life of the nation" and hence the need to lock up people who are seen to pose a threat, but cannot be deported to their own countries.

"The law will be used against people who claim asylum knowing that they cannot be deported because they come from a country where they would be killed or tortured if returned," *The Daily Telegraph* said. A number of prominent Muslim leaders, otherwise supportive of the crackdown on terrorists, have given a memorandum to Mr. Blunkett expressing concern that the new powers might be used to harass innocent Muslims because of the prevailing anti-Islamic backlash.

BRITAIN

UK seeks emergency powers

REUTERS

LONDON, Nov. 11. - The British government will tomorrow seek emergency powers permitting the indefinite detention of foreigners suspected of terrorism, in its latest move to tighten security after the September 11 WTC attacks.

The controversial plan, which involves opting out of part of the European Human Rights Convention, was immediately criticised by a leading human rights advocate.

Interior Minister Mr David Blunkett will put an order before Parliament tomorrow saying that events following the September 11 attacks are threatening the life of the nation, a Interior Ministry spokesman said today.

By effectively declaring a state of emergency, he can invoke a clause in European law that allows Britain to opt out of parts of the European Convention on Human Rights - in this case a clause covering the deportation of foreign terrorist suspects. The order in Parliament is the first stage of a process that will give Britain the opt-out power within weeks, the spokesman said.

Mr John Wadham, a prominent human rights advocate, condemned the plan as a violation of the rule of law and the rights of Britons.

"The government is bringing



Thai women prepare for a prayer in Bangkok on Sunday. Some 20,000 held a mass prayer for peace after their leaders demanded an end to bombing in Afghanistan during Ramzan. - AP/PTI

back internment", he told the BBC, adding that "no government should be abandoning the Convention, even in these circumstances." Internment without trial was used against suspected IRA activists fighting against British rule in Northern Ireland, but this will be the first time Britain will be using it since signing the European Human Rights Convention.

Article 15 of the convention

says: "In time of war or other public emergency threatening the life of the nation, any High Contracting Party may take measures derogating from its obligations under this Convention." The spokesman said the order being put before Parliament on Monday will "seek approval for a limited derogation from article 5 of the European Convention on Human Rights."

Britain's Terrorism Act allows

suspects to be held without charge for a maximum of seven days. Clearly, Mr Blunkett wants powers of indefinite detention of foreigners suspected of involvement in terrorism.

At present, human rights laws mean that foreigners suspected of crimes abroad cannot be detained in Britain if there is no immediate prospect of their being sent back to their country of origin.

More anthrax traces in US Senate building

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE

WASHINGTON, Nov. 11. - Traces of anthrax have been found in the offices of three US senators who share an office building with Senate Democratic Majority Leader Mr Thomas Daschle, who received an anthrax-laced letter last month, authorities have said.

Environmental sampling in the Hart Senate Office Building revealed traces of anthrax in the offices of California Senator Mr Dianne Feinstein, Idaho Senator Mr Larry Craig and Florida Senator Mr Bob Graham, a police officer said yesterday.

More sampling was underway late yesterday, along the path which the anthrax-contaminated letter might have taken in the building, he said. But an earlier plan to use chlorine dioxide gas to disinfect the building and reopen it on Tuesday has been abandoned, he said.

Mr Daschle's office received an anthrax-laced letter on 15 October, leading to hundreds of workers getting tested for the bacteria.

WJW
H9-14

Blair talks tough, off to U.S.

By Hasan Suroor 8/11

LONDON, NOV. 7. The British Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair, left for Washington on Wednesday, talking tough but acknowledging concerns in the Arab world over the continued bombing in Afghanistan.

Mr. Blair, who would have his second meeting with the U.S. President, Mr. George W. Bush, since the start of the military action, ruled out any compromise with the Taliban saying: "You don't negotiate with that kind. You just defeat them."

His remarks, in an interview to CNN's "Larry King Live", in which he said the Taliban had "virtually merged" with Osama bin Laden's Al-Qaeda network and the only way to deal with it was to "eliminate it" were described as his toughest so far in relation to the Taliban. Observers noted that Mr Blair's attack came a day before his meeting with the Pakistani President, Gen. Pervez Musharraf, who believes that there are "moderates" among the Taliban and favours a role for them in a future government in Kabul.

Even as Mr Blair insisted that there were no quick fixes, three Labour peers including a former Defence Secretary, Lord Healey, called for a pause in bombing and warned that there was risk to the stability of the present regimes in Islamabad, Riyadh and Cairo from the growing anti-war sentiment in Pakistan and the Arab region. They urged him to persuade Mr. Bush to stop the bombing.

Mr. Blair wanted critics to be more patient saying: "People want very quick results. And people are obviously concerned because there is no easy way of fighting a war. ...I think we've just got to explain patiently to the people: Yes, it can take time, but it's necessary to do so."

Commentators said he was keen to dispel the view that it was essentially America's war



Tony Blair

in which Britain had got itself bogged down. He said he was under no illusion that the issues at stake involved "all of us", and claimed that the coalition remained "remarkably strong." He also praised Mr. Bush's "magnificent" handling of the crisis.

The concerns in the Arab world were likely to dominate his discussions with Mr. Bush. Analysts pointed out that his recent diplomatic missions to West Asia had left him in no doubt that the Arab world would continue to be suspicious of Western motives unless the U.S. was seen to be even-handed in its approach to the Palestinian issue. Mr. Blair admitted in his CNN interview that the West needed to "recast" its relations with some of the Arab and Muslim world. "We have also got to address issues like the Middle East peace process which is the context for the way the Arab world views this campaign," he said.

Mr. Blair was expected to impress upon Mr. Bush the urgency for a new peace initiative in

West Asia. Another issue, likely to figure in the talks, included the growing concern over the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan. Several European emissaries who have just returned from the region are believed to have warned that a rise in civilian casualties and a worsening food situation could affect the level of public support in Europe for the war. Mr. Blair was expected to convey to Mr. Bush the views of European allies who attended a "mini summit" at Downing Street on Sunday.

Meanwhile, Britain's non-stop diplomacy to defend the military action in Afghanistan and assure the Muslim world that it is not a war on Islam was joined by the Queen. In her first public comment on the war, she said it was "not a conflict between Islam and the West, but rather between decent people of all faiths and terrorism..." She justified the campaign by quoting Edmund Burke that the "only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing."

Speaking at a banquet for King Abdullah of Jordan, she sought to woo Muslim opinion by underlining the "contribution" of the Muslim community to Britain and condemning the racist tendencies in the country.

King Abdullah, who would meet Mr. Blair tomorrow after the latter returns from Washington, promised his country's "full part" in countering terrorism and praised Britain for so emphatically decrying attempts to portray it as a "battle between Islam and the West".

Commentators contrasted his declaration of apparently unqualified support for the U.S.-led coalition with the widespread restlessness in the Arab world over the Anglo-American tactics in Afghanistan. The King, however, did stick with fellow Arab rulers in stressing his country's concern over the Palestinian issue and called for a fair and just settlement.

110-16
M
11

BLAIR IN WEST ASIA / SHARON REITERATES STAND ON VIOLENCE

British PM calls for ceasefire wk (w)

By Kesava Menon

MANAMA (BAHRAIN), NOV. 1. The British Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair, continuing on his West Asia shuttle, met his Israeli counterpart, Mr. Ariel Sharon, today and was scheduled to meet the Palestinian Authority President, Mr. Yasser Arafat later. Mr. Blair, who has repeatedly spoken of the "Two-State solution" to the Palestine-Israel dispute in recent days, has stressed on the need for a ceasefire at this juncture. An enduring ceasefire, however, appears elusive with Israel continuing its policy of assassinating Palestinian militants and Mr. Sharon setting near impossible standards for the Palestinians to meet.

The British Prime Minister has visited Syria, Saudi Arabia and Jordan in the course of this tour. At every stop, he has been lectured on the need to arrive at a just solution to the Palestine-Israel problem if global terrorism is to be uprooted. The Arab leaders also told Mr. Blair, who is seen in West Asia as little more than a special envoy of the U.S. President, that the West must realise that there is a distinction between terrorism and militancy in favour of the Palestinian cause. Today in Jerusalem, Mr. Blair was confronted with the other side of the story wherein Israel sought to convince him that the offer of any concessions to the Palestinians before the violence was ended would be tantamount to a surrender before terrorism.

Mr. Blair has been trying to square off the equation by talking of the basic points on which a solution to the dispute must be fixed. For any solution to be just and lasting it is necessary that Israel's security be assured but at the same time it is also necessary that the Palestinians be assured of just and equal treatment and that they have a State of their own. At a joint press conference with Mr. Sharon today, Mr. Blair pointed out that even if the two sides continued to fight each other for many more years they would eventually have to revert to the same fixed positions if they were to have a lasting solution. But before the



THE GAP REMAINS?: The British Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair, (Left) is greeted by Saudi Arabia Crown Prince Abdullah in Riyadh on Wednesday. — AFP

substantial issues can be taken up, Mr. Blair pointed out, there was a need to end the current circle of violence through the implementation of the Mitchell and Tenet plans.

Mr. Sharon too reiterated a line he has adopted of late that he is prepared to make even "painful concessions" if the Palestinians put a complete end to violence. However, he has refused to give any pledge on the time-frame within which Israel is likely to withdraw from four West Bank towns which its army has re-invaded, let alone mention the future status of the Jewish settlements. Although the Palestinian Authority has issued orders that fire is not to be directed at Israelis even when the

Israeli side shoots first, it is very unlikely that the Palestinian militant groups will remain quiet under conditions of occupation.

However, Mr. Sharon wants even more. He wants the PA to quell all forms of incitement as well. His demand is understandable if it was confined to anti-Israel propaganda aired over the Authority-owned radio and TV, or even media controlled by Palestinian opposition groups. But Israel has often spoken in the past of the incitement contained in school textbooks which cannot obviously be changed in a hurry. Unless Israel clarifies what it means by incitement this looks like an open-ended excuse not to talk to the Palestinians.

THE HINDU

2 NOV 2001

Blair praises Musharraf for support

By Hasan Suroor

*WKA
10-18*

LONDON, NOV. 8. The Pakistani President, Gen. Parvez Musharraf, swept in and out of Downing Street this evening after a breezy but reportedly positive meeting with the British Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair — their second since the start of military action in Afghanistan.

Gen. Musharraf, who arrived here from Paris on his way to New York to attend the U.N. General Assembly, was concerned over the non-stop bombing and was believed to have underlined the political risks that a protracted conflict, resulting in a large number of civilian casualties, posed for him. While Britain is sympathetic to his and other Muslim leaders' demand for a pause during Ramadan, Washington has taken a hardline stance though one report today indicated that a "symbolic pause" at the start of Ramadan was "likely".

As during their previous meeting when Gen. Musharraf played host to Mr. Blair in Islamabad, the talks today focussed on Pakistan's role as a "frontline" State in the U.S.-led coalition's offensive against the Taliban. Details were not disclosed but both sides took care to ensure that no discordant notes were struck, even as observers noted that the West wanted a greater degree of "military and logistical support" from Islamabad than, presumably, has been forthcoming.

The discussions were held amid divergent perceptions in Islamabad and London — as indeed in Washington — of Pakistan's role in a post-Taliban situation. Bri-

tain has made it clear that Pakistan cannot assume the role of a kingmaker in Kabul, and the message he got here was that like a good ally he should go along with the coalition's "vision" of a broad-based government comprising the Northern Alliance.

Mr. Blair is believed to have expressed his appreciation of Gen. Musharraf's support for the coalition in the face of the enormous domestic pressures on him not to align himself with what is seen by many Pakistanis as a "war" on Islam. The British Government acknowledges Gen. Musharraf's "bold" decision to support the action against Afghanistan but there is pressure on him to do more in terms of curbing the Taliban propaganda and providing intelligence.

Gen. Musharraf's decision to leave the country at a time of political turmoil has been widely commented upon here and considerable media build-up awaited him when he arrived here. *The Times* said it was a "bold signal" to his opponents at home and pointed out that no one could accuse him of "lacking courage". *The Independent* noted that his foreign tour at the height of a domestic backlash was an "impressive display of confidence". Observers also pointed out that his visit preceded the Indian Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee's meeting with Mr. Blair next week. This, they suggested, gave him a chance to "pre-empt" what Mr. Vajpayee might to have say with regard to Pakistan's role in sponsoring cross-border terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir.

THE HINDU

9 NOV 2001

Blair seeks to scoop secrets out of Syria

By Rashmee Z. Ahmed
Times News Network

LONDON: Leaving the Americans to fight the real war in Afghanistan, Britain has gone behind the enemy lines in Syria to gather crucial intelligence about Osama bin Laden's Al Qaida network.

Tony Blair's visit to Damascus on Wednesday, the first by a British Prime Minister in 30 years, is thought to be the first real attempt by the allies to gather vital intelligence from an Arab source that is traditionally unfriendly to the West.

In an apparent admission of the thirst for credible information on Bin Laden and key Al Qaida men four weeks into the military campaign, Mr Blair's spokesman has been quoted as offering a blunt quid pro quo, "Damascus has a source of intelligence. The whole point of these meetings is to see how we can help each other."

Syria, which is on the American list of states sponsoring terrorism, plays host to nearly a dozen militant groups, some of which have been banned by Mr Blair's government. But commentators say that this is why Mr Blair considers it important to make visible overtures to Syria, especially as some of

the groups, including (Palestinian) Islamic Jihad or Shaqaqi, are based in Damascus and known to be close to both Al Qaida and Syrian intelligence sources.

British "help", according to officials, will be mainly in the form of support to the Palestinians in their struggle for a "viable state", even as it insists on Israel's right to live in security.

The publicly-stated aim of Mr Blair's ongoing visit to West Asia, which is expected to include Saudi Arabia, Israel, Gaza and Jordan, is to urge negotiation in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and shore up Arab and Muslim support for the U.S.-led war on terror.

Interestingly, Mr Blair's one-to-one chat with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad comes within weeks of the apparently rather more futile visit to Damascus of a senior CIA official, who is thought to have been engaged in the same mission.

Observers say the British attempt is likely to be more persuasive, not least because the CIA officials visit was followed up by the hostile remarks of American deputy secretary of state Richard Armitage, who said that Syria could be the next target in America's war because it threatened American interests.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

2007

End terror before J&K talks, UK ^{HT-2} minister tells Pak ^{1/11}

HT Correspondent
Pune, October 31 ^W

THE UK has supported India's policy on Kashmir and said cross border terrorism in the State should stop before a meaningful dialogue between the two countries.

"Pakistan should be under no illusion that we support cross-border terrorism in Kashmir. The terrorism must stop before initiating any peaceful dialogue between the two neighbours in the subcontinent," British Minister of State for e-commerce and Competitiveness Douglas Alexander said.

The British Minister was in Pune yesterday to set up the third British Business Group (BBG) in India. He will also meet the BBGs in Delhi and Mumbai during his stay in India. The British Deputy High Commission will organise an "outreach" event in Pune next year.

In the first leg of his visit to India, Douglas came to Pune — the first ever visit by a UK Minister to the city — and met with business heads including Mahindra British Telecom P&O NedLloyd and the University of Pune. Alexander will meet Information Technology Minister Pramod Mahajan in Delhi today.

"India's strength in the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) sector is well known the world over. It has got all the attributes to make it a super power in the 21st century. As a minister I have to see for myself what those strengths are. I am looking forward to my meet-

SOS TO CENTRE FOR JAIL SECURITY

AMID INTELLIGENCE reports of possible attacks on prisons by Pakistan-based militants in Jammu and Kashmir, the State Government has asked the Centre to provide an additional assistance of Rs 20 crore to strengthen the security of the jails.

In a note to the Centre, the State Government expressed fears that the militants might attempt to break into the high-security prisons in the capital and release hundreds of Afghans, Pakistanis and other foreign mercenaries, officials said. *PTI, New Delhi*

ing with Pramod Mahajan," he said.

Indian companies should take advantage of the simplified trade regime in UK where a work permit can be acquired in two weeks.

One can also switch firms with the same work permit, British Deputy High Commissioner Rob Young said. Over 60 per cent of the work permits in the UK have been issued to Indian companies.

He said Britain and India were working anew on bilateral relations after the September 11 attacks. "I am here to strengthen the partnership after September 11. We're determined to take it forward by exploring newer opportunities," Alexander said.

He will also address a CII meeting in Delhi.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

1 NOV 2001

70-12 U.K. defence chief sceptical of NMD

By Hasan Suroor 29/7

LONDON, JULY 28. In comments which are not likely to amuse the Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair, Britain's Chief of Defence Staff Admiral Sir Michael Boyce has expressed serious reservations about the controversial U.S. plans for a nuclear defence shield which it wants Europe to support. He has come out against the project on two grounds: lack of information about its technological efficacy, and its cost to Britain if it were to buy into the system.

Sir Michael's remarks in an interview to *The Guardian* today came less than a week after the U.S. President, Mr. George W. Bush's came here to seek Britain's backing for a programme which has aroused hostility in much of Europe, besides Russia and China. Mr. Blair has endorsed it in principle but the official line is: we'll cross the bridge

when we come to it. There is however considerable opposition to the project within the Labour party and the Government, and public opinion in Britain is clearly against it. Analysts said the defence chief's remarks would add to the pressure on Mr. Blair to hasten slowly.

Sir Michael said that the country's existing defence budget would not be able to absorb the programme's cost without compromising the army's own plans for improvement and expansion. Spending billions of pounds on the U.S. project would "impoverish" the British defence forces at a time when they were already stretched for resources. "There's no point completely impoverishing ourselves in order to provide ourselves with a defence against one particular system and not being able to do anything else", he argued.

Sir Michael, whom *The Guard-*

ian described as someone who chooses his words carefully, underlined the debilitating cost of the U.S. project saying: "As far as I'm concerned there is no way I'm in the position to suggest we can pay for any missile defence technology from within the existing defence budget and carry on doing what we are doing at the moment."

He was also not sure if the project was technologically viable. "So far we have no hard evidence from the Americans as to what they think is in the art of the technology...I have seen nothing yet to give me a technical description of what has been proposed." Sir Michael also seemed to question the rationale behind the "Son of Star Wars" programme—the threat from the so-called "rogue" states. He advocated the "art of the possible" in dealing with such States rather than resorting to a military solu-

tion. "It would be irresponsible for us not to explore what is the art of the possible in dealing with them", he said while acknowledging the "probability of countries being able to achieve a ballistic missile system that could be fired at us."

The interviewer, paraphrasing Sir Michael's remarks, said he wanted Britain to engage in talks with the "rogue" States which allegedly posed a threat. He was quoted as saying that the West must try to engage even with Iraq. He also wanted Russia and China to be included in negotiations on any new international strategic framework. "We must make sure we don't leave out the Russians or indeed the Chinese", he said. The U.S. has said it would press ahead with the programme irrespective of whether there is an agreement with Russia on amending the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty.

THE H...

US, UK freeze Jaish assets

S Rajagopalan & PTI
Washington, October 12

IN A coordinated financial crackdown on Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM), the US and Britain tonight froze all the assets of the Pakistan-based militant outfit.

All sources of funds of the JeM, that had claimed responsibility for the car bomb attack in Srinagar last week, will be blocked with immediate effect.

Though the JeM has not been banned as such, sources say that today's action is "as good as a ban". India has been seeking the blacklisting of both JeM and the Lashkar-e-Tayyeba.

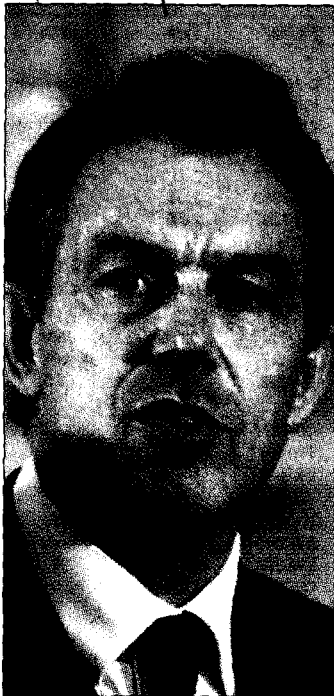
India welcomed the crackdown on Jaish. "This is a welcome step and I hope this would address India's concerns about other terrorist outfits as well," Minister of State for External Affairs Omar Abdullah told PTI.

Britain, according to agency reports, was quick to follow the US action on JeM and 38 other organisations and individuals notified by the Department of Treasury.

All these organisations and individuals are closely linked with Osama bin Laden's al-Qaida network and the Taliban regime. The list features a Pakistan-based Afghan doctor, Amin al-Haq, said to be bin Laden's security coordinator.

The action against JeM comes ahead of Secretary of State Colin Powell's visit to New Delhi and Islamabad.

New Delhi in the past two days has mounted intense pressure on the US to ban the outfit. After the Srinagar outrage, Prime Minis-



TONY BLAIR

ter A B Vajpayee wrote a strongly worded letter to President George W Bush, which also contained a warning to Pakistan.

After today's order, the US would expect Pakistan to get cracking on JeM. Anticipating the US clampdown, the JeM has already renamed itself as Tehrik-al-Furqan, according to a report from Karachi.

"We are determined to deny terrorists the resources to carry out their acts of evil," Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill said while announcing the new list of terrorist outfits to be proceeded

against. More names are to be added the list in the coming days.

Today's list predominantly features businesses and charitable organisations funnelling money to the al-Qaida network. All the 22 persons figuring on the FBI's "most wanted terrorists" have been included in the list.

The list is an effort of intelligence sharing and coordination between the UK and the US, British treasury chief Gordon Brown said in London. Besides JeM, Britain and the US have frozen the assets another Pakistan-based organisation Rabita Trust of Lahore.

"We will continue to work with our allies, and take a leading role internationally, to cut off the ready supply of finance which is the life-blood of modern terrorism."

"If any of those named today hold assets in the UK they will be frozen immediately. Just as there can be no safe haven for terrorists we are taking decisive action to ensure there is no safe hiding place for their assets," Brown said.

The measures are part of detailed proposals being formulated to expose, isolate and incapacitate funds being used for terrorist activities, he said.

So far, assets worth \$ 24 million, belonging to Osama's network and the Taliban militia, have reportedly been frozen in worldwide operations over the past fortnight. Of these, the

US has blocked \$ 4 million. US sources estimates bin Laden's personal fortunes at over \$ 300 million.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

13 OCT 2001

Fatwa on Blair

FROM SHRABANI BASU
AND AMIT ROY

London, Oct 10: A UK-based fundamentalist group has issued a fatwa against Tony Blair, but the British Prime Minister shrugged off the threat even as security agencies reacted by tightening their ring of steel around him.

The call was issued by al Muhajiroun, which has a London base. Abdul Rehman Saleem, a spokesman for the group, yesterday called on the faithful to assassinate the British Prime Minister, saying that any Muslim, British or foreign, who "wants to get rid of him" would not be punished under Islamic law, but praised.

"Because the allies, the British and the Americans have started bombing the Muslims of Afghanistan, for those people over there, the government buildings here, the military installations, including 10 Downing Street, become legitimate targets. That includes the Cabinet and it includes the Prime Ministers as well," Saleem said by phone from Lahore.

But Sheikh Omar Bakri Mo-

ammed, the leader of al Muhajiroun, who is in trouble for issuing a fatwa against President Pervez Musharraf, distanced himself from Saleem's remarks. "It is not allowed for any Muslim living in this country to get involved in action like this," he said.

He confirmed that Saleem was a member of his organisation but insisted that he spoke for the organisation in Pakistan, and not for British Muslims.

Blair, however, maintained a studied indifference. The British Prime Minister, who has been travelling the globe in an effort to keep Islamic countries within the anti-Taliban coalition, was today in Oman where he enjoyed an informal curry lunch with British troops who may be used in a ground offensive in Afghanistan.

Blair queued up like the others to get his tray and let slip that one of his sons was considering a possible career in the armed forces.

Asked about the threat, Blair replied: "The people who are actually going into action are in far greater danger than me, and my first thoughts are with them."

He added he would not lose any sleep because of the increased danger to his life. "No, I'm afraid it comes with the job," he said.

But British security agencies are taking no chances, despite Blair's outward show of nonchalance. A home office spokesman said: "A view will have to be taken on whether any action will be taken in the light of this individual's latest comments."

THE TELEGRAPH

11 OCT 2001

Atal thrusts, Blair parries on Pak

FROM PRANAY SHARMA

New Delhi, Oct. 6: Papering over perceived contradictions and reinforcing Pakistan's newfangled status as a frontline state in the war on terrorism, British Prime Minister Tony Blair today made it clear the West cannot afford to arm-twist Islamabad now.

But Blair cushioned the hard-nosed message with a strong condemnation of the recent suicide strike on the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly.

If at all any action is expected against Pakistan — now a frontline state for the US campaign against terrorism — it will come after the completion of the first phase: the destruction of Osama bin Laden's al Qaida network and

the possible toppling of the Taliban regime.

Be patient and trust the West — that was the gist of the conversation Blair had with Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee in the morning.

But Vajpayee squeezed in a subtle reference to Pakistan during a joint press conference, saying: "Even while extending our wholehearted support to the pursuit of the guilty terrorists of September 11, we should not let countries pursue their own terrorist agenda under cover of this action."

Referring to the Kashmir attack, Vajpayee said terrorism must be tackled globally and added: "Condoning a terrorist act in one place may lay the foundation for a far more virulent act elsewhere."

Blair voiced India's concern

when he agreed with Vajpayee that terrorism in "all its forms" should be fought by the international coalition. Conveying his "deepest sympathies" for the victims of the Kashmir attack, Blair said: "Such outrages have no place in any civilised society and those who perpetrate them should be brought to justice."

By implication, Blair's comment may be viewed as one directed at Islamabad. But the fact that the British Prime Minister studiously avoided naming Pakistan indicated that London, like others in the West, are not willing to turn the heat on Musharraf now.

Fresh from a brief visit to Islamabad, Blair was evasive in his reply to a pointed question on Pakistan and gave a vague response on what specific role India could play in the coalition against terror.

Indian officials said there was "neither any surprise nor any disappointment at this morning's meeting." The hectic diplomatic engagements notwithstanding, India is aware that being a frontline state, Pakistan will continue to enjoy the focus of the international community for a while.

But Delhi is drawing solace from the fact that Blair did not ignore India completely. During his interaction with the Indian leadership, the British Prime Minister said he had told Musharraf that the international community would not accept terrorism as part of Pakistan's foreign policy.

This may have assured India that the fight against terrorism does not stop with bin Laden, but the second part of the message was more explicit: do not expect intense pressure on Musharraf at

this juncture. "We do not expect them to twist his arm, especially when they expect the arm to fire the gun for them," an official said.

India took the opportunity to tell Blair that Delhi, too, has a stake in any future regime in Afghanistan. Delhi stressed that it was in favour of a "broadbased and representative" government in a post-Taliban Afghanistan. Musharraf had also agreed with Blair yesterday on the need for a "broadbased" government but India fears that given a chance, Islamabad could foist another Taliban on Afghanistan.

Blair and Vajpayee met for nearly an hour-and-a-half in the morning. Before leaving, Blair had a breakfast of *idlis* and *dosas*. He also met home minister L.K. Advani and foreign minister Jaswant Singh.



Tony Blair with AB Vajpayee in New Delhi. Picture by Rajesh Kumar

BRITAIN / BLAIR STARTS ANOTHER DIPLOMATIC JOURNEY

Govt. presents evidence of Osama link to attacks

H9-16
S/10

By Hasan Suroor

LONDON, OCT. 4. The British Government today answered its critics by presenting to Parliament what it described as "incontrovertible" evidence linking Osama Bin Laden with the September 11 terrorist attacks in the U.S. The move came as the Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair embarked on yet another diplomatic journey — the second in two weeks — amid indications that support for military action against Afghanistan was waning in some countries, particularly in the Muslim world.

Soon after presenting the "evidence" to a special session of the Commons, Mr. Blair left for Moscow for talks with the Russian President, Mr. Vladimir Putin. At home, the decision to share the evidence with political leaders appeared to have paid off. The leader of the Opposition, Mr. Ian Duncan Smith said after seeing the evidence he was "convinced" that Bin Laden stood as "charged", but more importantly even prominent sceptics like the Liberal Democratic Party leader, Mr. Charles Kennedy acknowledged that the proof shown to them was "indeed persuasive".

While Mr. Blair personally briefed Opposition leaders, a dossier of declassified intelligence on Bin Laden's role in the attacks was placed in the Parliament li-



The British Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair, addresses an emergency session of the House of Commons in London on Thursday. — AP

brary. Mr. Blair told MPs that there was "absolutely no doubt" that Bin Laden was behind the atrocities and it had been firmly established that at least three of the 19 suicide hijackers belonged to Bin Laden's network. There was also firm evidence that shortly before the September 11 outrage Bin Laden was preparing a major operation against America. Mr. Blair reiterated plans to "eliminate" the threat from Bin Laden, and if necessary, to topple

the Taliban regime in Afghanistan if it came in the way of flushing out the terrorist network in the country.

The Foreign Secretary, Mr. Jack Straw said it was not the primary aim to overthrow the Taliban regime but if it did not co-operate it must be prepared for consequences. Both he and Mr. Blair made a reference to terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir while stressing the need to meet head on the threat from terrorists.

Meanwhile, the former British Prime Minister, Ms. Margaret Thatcher triggered a row saying that there had not been enough condemnation of the September 11 attacks from Muslims. "The people who brought down those towers were Muslims, and Muslims must stand up and say that is not the way of Islam...they must say that it was disgraceful. I have not heard enough condemnation from Muslim priests," she told *The Times*.

Her remarks provoked a sharp reaction from Muslim organisations. They said, barring a few fanatics whom they had publicly denounced, the Muslim community had strongly and consistently condemned what happened in America.

They blamed the media for creating a misleading image of Muslims and said Lady Thatcher's remarks were based on "misinformation". She was described as "out of touch" with the developments. Her comments, it was feared, could fuel the anti-Islam backlash and embarrass the Tory leadership which has echoed the government view that the current campaign against terrorism is not aimed at Islam. Lady Thatcher could find herself on the wrong side of the proposed law against incitement of religious hatred, if she were to make similar statements in future.

INDU

001 2000

Time running out for Taliban: Blair

HO1
By Hasan Suroor (g wlt@)

LONDON, OCT. 2. Even as Washington continued to tread cautiously, there was feverish speculation here that military action against Afghanistan was imminent after the British Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair, said today that the deadline for the Taliban Government to hand over Osama bin Laden, wanted for his role in the September 11 attacks in the U.S., was fast approaching and it should now brace itself for the consequences.

In his most explicit remarks yet, widely interpreted as a declaration of "war," he said that "no compromise," "no diplomacy" or "meeting of minds" was possible with an undemocratic and barbaric regime and the choice was stark: "Defeat or be defeated; and defeat we must." The option before the Taliban Government, he warned, was to surrender Osama or surrender power. Declaring that action to "eliminate" the Taliban hardware and cut off its sources of money and support was inevitable, he insisted that "we are not over-reacting." The proposed action was not borne out of a sense of revenge but was intended to bring to justice those responsible for the savagery of September 11.

Mr. Blair, who was speaking at the Labour Party's annual confer-

ence in Brighton, said the offensive would be proportionate and "targeted" and whatever was "humanly possible" would be done to avoid civilian casualties. He was at

pains to stress that it was not a fight against Islam, and said Osama by his action had done as much damage to the tenets of Islam as the Crusaders had done to

Christianity. At the same time, he called upon both the Islamic world and the West to try and understand each other better.

Although Mr. Blair has been warning the Taliban almost on a daily basis, observers noted that his tone today was far more "stark" and assumed significance in the context of his statement two days ago that he had seen "powerful and incontrovertible" evidence of Osama's involvement in the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington.

The funds trail

A UNI report from Islamabad, quoting a claim by the CNN, said Pakistan's involvement in the September 11 attacks had surfaced after it was found that the Egyptian hijacker, Mohammad Atta, received \$100,000 through a wire in the past year from the country.

The News, quoting the CNN sources, said today that it was known at this stage exactly where the funds may have originated.

The TV channel claimed that the wire transfers from Pakistan were sent to Atta through two banks in Florida. Atta allegedly then obtained money orders — a few thousand dollars at a time — to distribute to others involved in the plot in the months before the hijackings.

Share proof, Pak. tells U.S.

By B. Muralidhar Reddy

ISLAMABAD, OCT. 2. The U.S. Ambassador to Pakistan, Ms. Wendy J. Chamberlin, today called on the Pakistan President, Gen. Pervez Musharraf, and discussed a whole range of issues, including evidence against Osama in the September 11 incidents.

The Pakistan Foreign Office spokesman, Mr. Riaz Mohammad Khan, told newsmen that the U.S. envoy exchanged views on the "latest situation" and said Islamabad hoped that Washington would share evidence about the involvement of Osama and his associates in the September 11 attacks. "Once they have some kind of conclusive evidence, we hope it will be shared with us," he said.

On the reported NATO announcement that the U.S. had furnished necessary proof that the Al-Qaeda, led by Osama bin Laden, was behind the attacks, Mr. Khan said Pakistan had yet to receive any details on the probe. "So far we have not received any detailed information relating to evidence. NATO may have very special relations with the U.S., after all the U.S. is part of NATO, we are not. We hope that if... there is conclusive evidence, that will be shared with us, but not only us, internationally," Mr. Khan said.

An AP report from Brussels today said the U.S. had given its NATO allies clear evidence that "conclusively" linked Osama bin Laden and his Al-Qaeda network to the Sept. 11 terror attacks.

The NATO Secretary-General, Lord Robertson, said that in response, the alliance dropped the only condition on invoking Article 5 of its Charter, which stated that an attack on one member was an attack on all.

THE HINDU

3 10 2002

U.K. plans tougher security measures

By Hasan Suroor

LONDON, OCT. 1. Shrugging off opposition from civil rights groups, the Blair Government has decided on a series of "emergency" measures to rid Britain of its image as a haven for terrorists. These are in addition to the action it has already taken specifically to target Osama bin Laden's network, and the Taliban regime whose U.K. assets amounting to £60 million have been frozen, it was announced today.

The Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair, who has emerged as the most hawkish of European leaders in the U.S.-led international coalition against terrorism, overrode fears that the proposed measures might be used to curtail individual freedom and said "Our first duty must be to protect our citizens". Asylum-seekers, already a target of suspicion and abuse, would be affected most by a clutch of tough laws expected to be passed by Parliament over the next few weeks. Notwithstanding the official line that genuine refugees have nothing to fear, there is considerable anxiety that the new powers which the Government proposes to acquire to detain, deport or extradite suspects may end up as a source of harassment.

"Thousands of Britons are going to disappear for long periods of time because it is easier to issue a warrant than to make sure you have decent evidence...the civil liberties implications of that are appalling," according to Mr. Stephen Jakobi of the Fair Trials Abroad. Civil rights activists also expressed concern over reports that the Human Rights Act might have to be diluted in the larger fight against terrorism.

The proposals, being considered by the Government, include speeding up extradition, tightening asylum rules with provision for indefinite detention of illegal

immigrants, monitoring bank accounts of suspects and introduction of identity cards. For the first time, bureaux de change, described as a major source of money laundering, are to be targeted. One newspaper quoted government sources as saying that nearly £4 billion left Britain every year through these private foreign currency exchanges with 65 per cent coming from illegal sources. The squeeze on money changers is intended to smash what *The Times* called the "soft underbelly of organised crime financing".

The proposal, which has evoked widespread criticism, relates to identity cards and some of the most strident voices have come from within the ruling party. A former Home Office Minister, Mr. Mike O'Brien, who is supporting a cross-party campaign against ID cards, said their introduction would mean a "victory for terrorism".

Mr. Blair has defended his Government's plans saying: "We cannot have a situation in which people come in and abuse our asylum procedures and are then allowed to remain, claiming asylum. And we cannot have a situation where, if we know, someone is a suspected terrorist, we do not have the legal power to detain them indefinitely until we find a country to deport them." On ID cards, he admitted that it was a "very big step" and stressed, while speaking on BBC's "Breakfast with Frost" programme that "we must get it right".

Meanwhile, the Labour Party's annual conference began Brighton on Sunday amid a large but peaceful protest by anti-globalisation activists. In his first formal speech to the party tomorrow since the September 11 crisis, Mr. Blair is expected to explain why it is necessary to stand "shoulder to shoulder" with the U.S. in its "war" against terrorism.

THE HINDU

2 OCT 2001

Fugitive terrorist issue to figure in talks

By Hasan Suroor

LONDON, SEPT. 24. The whereabouts of Imad Mughniyeh, suspected to be an ally of Osama bin Laden and a key figure behind the hijacking of an Indian Airlines plane to Kandahar in 1999, are likely to figure in the British Foreign Secretary, Mr. Jack Straw's talks with Iranian leaders during his visit to Teheran which began today.

Mughniyeh, who is wanted for his alleged role in a number of hijackings and attacks on Western targets, is believed to be hiding in Iran, according to the British media, and Mr. Straw is expected to raise the issue with the Iranian President, Mr. Mohammad Khatami.

A Foreign Office spokesman told *The Hindu* that the British Government was co-operating with a number of governments in tracking down the criminals behind the terrorist attacks in America but he declined to comment on details of individual investigations.

Reports stressed that there was no suggestion that the Iranian Government had any links with Mughniyeh or that indeed it was even aware of his movements.

"President Khatami is not thought to have sufficient influence with those sheltering Mughniyeh to persuade them to hand him over, presuming that he has not already left," *The Times* said. It said he was believed to have met some "key lieutenants" of Bin Laden in recent months, and quoted intelligence sources as saying that the use of pocket knives and scissors by the hijackers of American planes on September 11 seemed to suggest Mughniyeh's involvement.

"The evidence shows that Mughniyeh has been involved in hijackings since the early Eighties. What we want to know now is how many of those he used in these operations could have been employed again (for the September 11 atrocities in New York and Washington)," a source told *The Times*.

Officially, however, the issue was not being talked up and Mr. Straw in his remarks, before leaving for Teheran, chose to emphasise Iran's "contribution" to the current U.S.-led international campaign against terrorism.

As the first British Foreign Secretary to visit Iran in more than 20 years, he was careful not to say anything that could be misconstrued by his hosts.

Britain, which has emerged as a key player in Washington's bid to forge a worldwide coalition against terrorists, regards Iran's willingness to come on board as a significant development at a time when there is considerable scepticism in the Muslim world about Western aims.

Mr. Straw emphasised that Iran's most "important contribution" was that by coming out publicly against the Taliban for sheltering Bin Laden it had demonstrated "very vocally that this is not a fight with Islam".

Many Muslim countries, he said, had been victims of the Taliban's excesses and Iran was one of them.

Iran has ruled out permitting its airspace or bases to be used for strikes against Afghanistan but its willingness to support the political objectives of the U.S.-driven coalition is seen here as a triumph for British diplomacy.

Washington does not have diplomatic relations with Iran and much of the groundwork for softening Teheran was done by London with the Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair taking the initiative to call up Mr. Khatami.

There was speculation on how far Mr. Straw would go in pursuing the Mughniyeh issue, or indeed in what form he would do it.

There were suggestions that the matter might come up in the course of Mr. Straw briefing Mr. Khatami on British intelligence "suspicions" about Mughniyeh. Observers were confident that the issue would not "sour" the visit.

Meanwhile, the Liberal Democrats today opposed giving blanket support to American retaliation plans.

The party leader, Mr. Charles Kennedy, speaking at the opening of his party's annual conference in Bournemouth, said while terrorism had got to be brought to a "halt" it did not mean "you start giving out blank cheques".

He also objected to the "war rhetoric" saying: "War is not the word; nor is crusade."

Blair prepares UK for war

PHILIP WEBSTER, ROLAND WATSON &
RICHARD BEESTON
THE TIMES, LONDON

NEW YORK/ WASHINGTON, Sept. 21. - Mr Tony Blair prepared Britain for conflict last night with his strongest signal yet that he is on the brink of ordering British forces into action against Osama bin Laden and other terrorist groups in Afghanistan.

Flying to New York for a service of remembrance for the 5,000 killed in last week's outrages, the British Prime Minister spoke gravely of the "heavy and huge" responsibility upon himself and other leaders as they considered asking their armed forces to go into battle.

A Royal Navy task force of 24 surface ships, the largest assembled since the Falklands War, is already in West Asia and heading for the Gulf.

The talk of war and the military build-up on the ground, followed America's and Britain's rejection of an offer from Taliban clerics, who have been sheltering bin Laden.

Meeting in Kabul, they issued an saying that bin Laden should be "persuaded to leave whenever possible".

Washington dismissed the proposal out of hand.

"It's time for action, not words," the White House spokesman said. "This is about much more than one man being allowed to leave voluntarily, presumably, from one safe harbour to another safe harbour."

In London, a senior foreign office source described the move as a "good wheeze". "One person is very important in all this, but it's not about one person by any means," the source said. "It's about a large organisation."

Mr Blair said that there was "no option but to act" because last week's atrocities had shown that there were no boundaries or limits to the form of terrorism now being waged against the West. The terrorists would use nuclear, chemical and biological weapons if they could get access to them and they therefore had to be stopped and their "entire apparatus" shut down.

He said that he and other leaders were in agreement that there could be "no flinching". For the first time Mr Blair



Blair: 'Heavy and huge' responsibility

personally called bin Laden the prime suspect but he suggested that even if the fugitive Saudi terrorist was caught that would not be enough and that other groups operating out of Afghanistan

are helping or harbouring the people who did this are responsible too. Nobody should doubt our determination to bring the people who are responsible to account."

As Mr Blair flew to America - he was moving on later to talks with Mr Bush in Washington, and to join the US President as he spoke to Congress - he appeared to have secured a diplomatic advance by bringing Iran on board the international coalition against terrorism.

He made a prearranged satellite telephone call from his British Airways Boeing 777 to the Iranian President, Mr Khatami. He told reporters that it had been a remarkable conversation. Mr Khatami voiced his solidarity over the outrage and condemned terrorism and added that "out of this we should try to build a new relationship between our two countries as well".

Mr Blair said that there was a strong sense in which the world of Islam wanted to join the West in the fight against terrorism. It recognised that all faiths were victims of terrorism. He suggested details of the case being drawn up against bin Laden would be presented to leaders of the countries likely to be engaged in military action.

and causing mayhem around the world would also have to be dealt with.

Mr Blair, who appeared pre-occupied and serious, declared: "It is a huge and heavy responsibility for political leaders to get these decisions right and carry them through in the appropriate way."

But it was even more difficult for the forces who had to carry that action through on the ground. In another hint that action was imminent, he added: "We are extremely lucky to have in Britain some of the finest Armed Forces in the world. It is important that we get this decision right and make sure the action we take is effective."

"We have identified the prime suspects. Those who

THE STATESMAN

22 SEP 2001

2001

U.K. to play full part in strikes

By Hasan Suroor

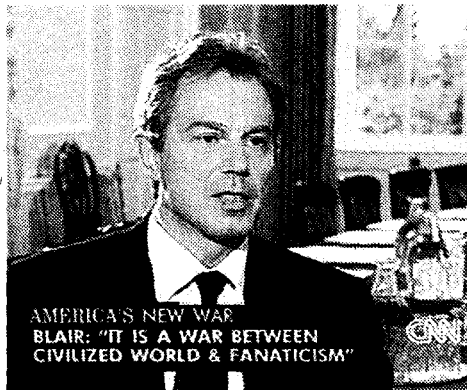
LONDON, SEPT 16. The British Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair, has pledged Britain's full support to any U.S. action to hunt down the terrorists behind Tuesday's attacks in New York and Washington.

His comments in an interview to the U.S. TV network CNN came even as domestic opinion remained opposed to giving Washington a "blank cheque". Mr. Blair reiterated that what happened on Tuesday was not an attack just on America but on the entire civilised world. The British casualties were the highest in any terrorist attack so far, he said, declaring that his country was very much at war with terrorism. "Yes. Whatever the technical or legal issues about a declaration of war, the fact is we are at war with terrorism," he declared.

Mr. Blair, who has been criticised for committing Britain's "blind" support to U.S. retaliation, praised Mr. George W. Bush's handling of the crisis. He was confident of a worldwide coalition to track down the perpetrators of the outrage and further action to dismantle international terrorism, including its finances. About efforts to build support for possible military strikes, Mr. Blair said: "This is something obviously we discussed with the American President. I am very pleased at the way the American administration has gone out of its way to consult its allies, to keep us informed. There has to be a response to bring those terrorists who committed this attack to account and we will play our full part in that."

Meanwhile, the Blair Government has come under pressure to crack down on extremist groups within Britain which, despite a new tough anti-terrorism law, remains a haven for political and religious fanatics from around the world.

Sympathisers of Osama bin Laden are be-



AMERICA'S NEW WAR
BLAIR: "IT IS A WAR BETWEEN
CIVILIZED WORLD & FANATICISM"

A FRIEND IN DEED: Tony Blair

lieved to be still active despite a ban on his flagship terrorist organisation, Al-Qaeda, and British intelligence agencies are reported to be looking closely at his network for any possible links with the U.S. events. They are said to be shadowy figures not directly linked to any organisation, but quietly pursuing Osama's aims, and under the existing laws they cannot be hauled up until they commit a terrorist act on British soil.

Mr. Blair has indicated a review of these laws to make it easier to identify terrorists and facilitate their extradition to their own countries where they are wanted. At present, British laws don't permit extradition if it is feared that they are likely to face political persecution or torture in their home countries.

The most publicised case is that of Khalid al-Fawwaz, a Saudi citizen and an Osama supporter, who is wanted by the U.S. Government in connection with the bombing of its embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998. He was arrested and is in a British jail, fighting extradition with official legal aid which is estimated to

have cost the British taxpayers nearly £1 million so far. There is widespread criticism that the ban on 21 terrorist organisations earlier this year under the new anti-terrorism has not affected their activities and their supporters continue to be engaged in feeding subversive actions against countries with which Britain has friendly relations.

"Britain has not yet managed to stop the abuse of this country's good communications, international links and financial expertise to support networks planning evil overseas. At least nine foreign governments have asked for the extradition of people wanted on charges of terrorism; several countries are now warning the Government that the new laws have made very little practical difference or stopped exiles using their safety here to plan strikes at friendly governments overseas," *The Times* commented. *The Independent on Sunday* quoted an intelligence source as saying that the terrorists were very much "in place" in Britain and there was "very little to stop them" from mounting a terrorist operation. "There is no reason why what happened in America couldn't happen in Britain or any European country," he said.

Mr. Blair told Parliament that there was need to take a fresh look at extradition laws in the wake of Tuesday's events in America. And the Home Secretary, Mr. David Blunkett, in a radio interview, hinted at introduction of identity cards to make identification of extremists easier.

The British media, meanwhile, is awash with "exclusive" stories on Osama and his worldwide terrorist network with estimates of his "fortunes" which, according to one newspaper, is "no more than a few million dollars rather than the \$ 300 million fortune of legend". There are, however, no two opinions about his awesome influence on terrorists.

UK debates extent of backing to U.S.

By Rashmee Z. Ahmed
Times News Network

LONDON: The British government has begun to prepare its citizens for the news of the full extent of Britain's real and direct engagement with Tuesday's terrorist attack on the U.S., as ministers confirmed that British casualties could run into the middle hundreds or possibly more.

But the grim news comes amidst an intensifying debate that the British government should not offer a virtual blank cheque in support of American reprisals. Prime Minister Tony Blair has warned that the rising British toll would touch every community here.

News of the rising British toll, mainly on account of the deep financial linkages between companies in New York and London,



Tony Blair

comes just a day before the British Parliament assembles in a crisis-situation early recall. On Friday, Britain, along with the other European Union members, observed a three-minute silence as mark of respect to those who died in the attacks on New York and Washington.

The parliamentary debate, which is expected to give Mr Blair a chance to spell out urgent anti-terrorist measures, will also offer the first indications of just how far Britain will go in supporting American reprisals against the perpetrators of the attacks.

On Thursday morning, British foreign secretary Jack Straw rejected the prospect of a dramatic response by the U.S. and its NATO allies, including Britain. He said it should be a determined response — a response that was based on judgments, and of course on evidence. Mr Straw said the British intelligence agencies, MI5 and MI6, were intensifying their work

with their American counterparts.

But in an apparent attempt to ward off criticism of Britain, which has in the past been considered the prime European haven for disaffected rebels from around the world, Mr Straw warned that it would never be possible to gather intelligence on every evil group in the world.

Mr Blair has been leading the effort to cobble together a coordinated international response. But commentators opined that his pro-active stance might be severely tested by growing concern that British moral, intelligence, military and physical support to a hasty and misguided American response could leave Britain exposed as a target for further terrorist attacks.

On Wednesday, Mr Blair pledged unswerving and unstinting British support for American actions, but members of his Labour Party have urged caution.

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Blair told not to offer blind support to U.S.

14/9

By Hasan Suroor

LONDON, SEPT. 13. The British Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair's offer of blanket support to any U.S. retaliatory action against suspected terrorists has caused widespread unease and he is being urged not to commit Britain to a course of action that might not be in its long-term national interests. There is also a strong view that rather than tagging along with anything that Washington might choose to do to hunt down the perpetrators of Tuesday's carnage, Britain should play a restraining role.

Mr. Blair's own party MPs have expressed serious concern saying Britain runs the risk of getting sucked into unknown territory by giving a "blank cheque" to the U.S. President, Mr. George W Bush to retaliate without being able to influence his actions. Any British support, according to them, must take into account the nature and extent of the U.S. response and its implications for Britain's own interests. While two Labour MPs, known for their close links with the Arab world and their strong views on U.S. policies in West Asia, have publicly criticised a "carte blanche" approach, there is be-

lieved to be considerable silent opposition in the party to an overtly emotional response. A debate in Parliament tomorrow is expected to be marked by dissenting views and calls for restraint.

The two Labour MPs who have gone public with their views are Mr. George Galloway who has been campaigning for lifting the economic sanctions against Iraq; and Mr. Tam Dalyell, who has influential friends in the Arab world. Mr. Galloway believes that any disproportionate U.S. response would further fuel the strong anti-American sentiment in much of the Arab world and be counter-productive. Britain, by associating itself with such a response, would make itself vulnerable. Mr. Dalyell said he had been "pleading" for restraint. "When I hear President Bush and others saying we must attack those harbouring terrorists, the collateral consequences are really unimaginable again," he said, adding that he would support retaliation only if "you make sure you hit the right people".

There were concerns that Mr. Blair's "blind" endorsement of U.S. retaliation could bring it into conflict with some its European al-

lies who have been traditionally wary of tying themselves too closely with Washington. His offer to stand should-to-shoulder with the U.S., it was stated, did not mean that Mr. Blair should automatically agree to whatever Mr. Bush might order. "We must stand, as he said shoulder to shoulder with America in outrage at Tuesday's events. But to stand shoulder to shoulder with whatever America does next is contrary both to their interests and to ours," *The Guardian* said. It pointed out that some of Mr. Blair's comments over the past two days were "potentially very unhelpful in crafting a good international policy response to what has happened".

Meanwhile, there were fears that "hundreds" of British citizens might have been killed in Tuesday's terrorist attacks and Mr. Blair said this meant that "in a very direct and real sense, the interests of our countries (Britain and U.S.) are engaged". Mr. Blair spoke to Mr. Bush on Wednesday amid reports of attempts by Western nations to form a grand coalition to fight terrorism. Experts warned against immediate reprisals of the sort the U.S. resorted to in the wake of earlier attacks on U.S. interests.

THE NEW

14 SEP 2001

Blair under security shield



Armed police patrol London's Heathrow Airport on Wednesday. All flights leaving North America were cancelled following Tuesday's terrorist attacks in the US and security has been beefed up in the UK.

Vijay Dutt
London, September 12

UK BRACES itself against terrorists as the British Prime Minister's official residence, 10, Downing Street, has been evacuated and most buildings in the city are under close security.

The security in the Whitehall area is extremely tight and Mr Blair and other senior ministers, HT learns, are being driven in bullet-proof cars followed by security vehicles. The city has been put on high alert and all potential targets like the Canary Wharf which has a large number of high-rise buildings were evacuated within hours of the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington. Many executives pouring out of their offices in the city said they were worried about their friends who worked at the World Trade Centre.

It is reported that groups suspected to have close links with Osama bin Laden's outfit are under watch. But, despite these measures nervousness of the people was apparent in tubes, pubs and major stores. Most felt that Britain, regarded as the closest ally of the US in fighting fundamentalism, would be targeted by the terrorists. Tony Blair, who rushed back from the Trade Union Conference in Brighton to preside over an emergency meeting of the cabinet committee

called Cobra, vowed last night to stand "shoulder to shoulder" with the Americans in the hunt of terrorists who were responsible for the carnage in the United States. "Their barbarism will stand as their shame for all eternity," said a very tired and sad looking Blair. "This mass terrorism is the new evil in our world today. It is perpetrated by fanatics."

A large number of security measures are in place now. Instructions have been issued to allow no flights from British airports unless there is a guaranteed security at their destinations. All private flights, into or out of the country have been banned. No private airliner is being allowed to fly over London. "This is not a battle between the United States and terrorism but between the free and democratic world and terrorism," said Blair. "We therefore here in Britain stand shoulder to shoulder with our American friends in this hour of tragedy, and we like them, will not rest until this evil is driven from the world."

It is learnt by *Hindustan Times* that a more comprehensive intelligence assessment is still on. The greater worry is about the British forces, considered more vulnerable because they are involved in joint operations with American forces, in the Gulf, Macedonia, Kosovo and Bosnia.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

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UK immigrants run into language barrier

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Vijay Dutt
London, August 18

THE HOME Office Minister, Lord Rooker, in charge of Immigration and Asylum, has plunged the Labour Government into chaotic confusion by suggesting that immigrants could be required to learn English as a pre-condition to becoming UK citizens. Earlier another ruling party MP had demanded refusal of entry to those who did not know English.

Lord Rooker revealed that though new language bars were being considered by the Home Office, most MPs are appalled at the suggestion coming from a member of the Government, which is committed to liberalising immigration laws and for helping ethnic minority members move easily into mainstream society and get jobs.

It also has echoes of the controversial statement made by the Left-winger Labour MP Ann Cryer, which made Pakistani Mirpuris and Bangladeshis particularly livid.

Last month Cryer had said that those who did not know English should be refused entry into this country. She hinted that racial violence and other race-related problems were due to the inability of immigrants to speak English.

Many believed she was particularly hinting at Bangladeshis

and Mirpuri Pakistanis when she said that poverty was being imported by admitting those who could not get jobs here. She did say that comparatively Indians were doing far better because they were more educated.

Lord Rooker has not made things easy for himself by confirming that he backed Cryer's views. "There is a real problem she has identified," the minister added. His constituency of Birmingham Perry Barr is home to a large Asian community like that of Cryer's.

Apparently they have not made such statements without due care. Cryer admitted she would be in the firing line. Yet, Lord Rooker also hinted at communities referred to by Cryer when he added that making English mandatory for those seeking citizenship would ensure that ethnic minority women would not be denied their civil rights by their own menfolk.

"There are situations ... where some people are not encouraged to learn English by their own family. The men say they (women) don't need it." He took care to say that people must maintain their culture and religion but his statement is bound to raise tempers in Bradford and adjoining areas populated by Mirpuris and Bangladeshis. Their women are demanding freedom to take up jobs.

The Home Office officials are in a spin and are now desperately trying to play down the minister's remark. They claim that his reference to "requiring" immigrants to speak or learn English was "unfortunate" and misleading. They also claimed that the legislation requiring immigrants to learn was a "non-starter". It could be challenged under the Human Rights Act, which ensures freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

But the fact is that Lord Rooker's statement has come with reports that Home secretary David Blunkett plans to present a new package for asylum-seekers at this October's annual Labour Party conference.

It is believed that the new rules would head off protests from MPs and Trade Unionists against the payment of benefits to asylum-seekers in vouchers rather than cash. In fact Lord Rooker is on record that Blunkett would be looking "at everything".

The ethnic community leaders are suspicious that plans are on the anvil for tougher immigration laws and such statements are just test balloons.

One community leader recalled attempts by the last Labour Government to "extract" £10,000 bonds from visa-seekers from the sub-continent.

Britain restores direct rule over N Ireland

AFP & THE TIMES, LONDON, Aug. 11. — BELFAST/LONDON, Aug. 11. — London has restored direct rule over Northern Ireland following the suspension of the province's power-sharing government. The restoration came at 4:30 IST today.

The British government suspended the Northern Ireland Assembly and government for a "very short period" to give its Protestant and Catholic leaders a chance to salvage its peace process.

The move, announced by Northern Ireland secretary, Mr John Reid, yesterday, is a technical measure, which buys time for political leaders in the province to find a way out of the impasse caused by the Irish Republican Army's refusal to disarm.

The suspension sparked a furious reaction from the IRA's political wing, Sinn Fein, which accused Mr

Reid of making "a deal" with the Protestant Unionists. Its leader, Mr Gerry Adams, denounced the move as a "body blow" that would "anger and frustrate" Catholics.

Mr Reid said the suspension would be "open-ended," but it is expected it would last the weekend only.

He said he would meet Irish foreign minister, Mr Brian Cowen, today to discuss the issue. This indicates that power-sharing could be restored by tomorrow, a move which would provide six weeks to the parties in Northern Ireland to reach an agreement.

The British Prime Minister last night interrupted his holiday in Mexico, to say: "I believe that all sides have made significant steps and I hope that we can make more progress. When we have come so far I think that most people agree with both governments that we should

allow the parties more time."

Mr Reid rejected the alternatives of launching new elections or introducing an indefinite suspension, as was ordered by his predecessor, Mr Peter Mandelson, last year.

The failure of talks is due to Unionist complaints about the IRA's failure to decommission and the failure of the three main pro-agreement parties in Belfast to endorse British and Irish proposals on demilitarisation, decommissioning and future policing arrangements.

Mr Reid said that a further period of negotiations would begin after the temporary suspension of the Stormont institutions is lifted. He said that for legal reasons he could not say exactly how long the suspension would last, but it would be "very short".

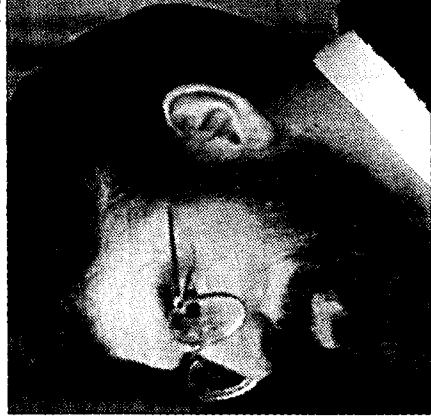
Beside infuriating Sinn Fein and placing a question mark over continued IRA cooperation with General John de Chastelain's nationalist SDLP, which risked disarmament commission — IRA contacts were withdrawn in protest

against the earlier suspension — Mr Reid's move also angered headline Unionists.

Mr Peter Robinson, deputy leader of Ian Paisley's Democratic Unionist Party, accused the British minister of "wantonly abusing the law" and of attempting to avoid an election which he knew would see more gains for the anti-agreement DUP.

Mr David Burnside, South Antrim MP for Mr David Trimble's UUP, also attacked the move, saying that the government was going from "stumble to stumble" and should instead have introduced an indefinite suspension.

Mr Trimble had, however, indicated his support for the temporary suspension, which was also backed by the moderate nationalist SDLP, which risked losing more ground to Sinn Fein had the elections option been chosen.



Mr Gerry Adams

allow the parties more time."

Mr Reid rejected the alternatives of launching new elections or introducing an indefinite suspension, as was ordered by his

THE STAFF

Sanctuary no more



'Stop the second holocaust' reads this sign held up by Romany gypsies outside the Czech Embassy in London.

TWENTYTWO-YEAR-old ¹¹⁹⁻¹⁶ Firsat Yildiz, a Kurd, arrived in Britain over a year ago to claim political asylum and like hundreds of other refugees braved various forms of humiliation as he awaited a decision on his application. Last Sunday, he was murdered in a racist attack while on his way to his bleak tenement in a grim and hostile housing estate in Glasgow.

On Tuesday in Hull, hundreds of miles away from Glasgow, another young Kurd refugee had his throat slit by a group of white youths, though fortunately he lived to tell his tale. Next day, an Iranian asylum seeker was stabbed — again in Glasgow, home to some 2,000 refugees, mostly from the Balkans, Africa and Afghanistan.

Meanwhile, it has been reported that more than a thousand asylum seekers are languishing in British jails — many in high-security prisons meant for hardened criminals — while their claims are processed. Allegations of torture and abuse have not been denied and the weak explanation offered for forcing innocent people to serve prison sentences is that there is no other place to put them up as detention centres for refugees are full.

The message is clear: for people in search of a safe haven to escape from real or imaginary hardships at home, Britain is the wrong place to come looking for it. First

there are tough immigration rules which openly discriminate against certain nationalities — Kurds, Iraqis, Tamils, Somalis, Afghans and a host of others identified as the most common source of illegal immigration.

Gypsies from eastern Europe are so unwelcome that British immigration officials recently parked themselves at Prague airport to prevent U.K.-bound gypsies from taking off. While the arrangement was made with the cooperation of Czech authorities, there was out-

The message is clear, says Hasan Suroor. For people in search of a safe haven, Britain is the wrong place.

rage when the media exposed it as a breach of human rights and this week Britain was forced to abandon the scheme.

The extent of the British Government's paranoia over asylum is evident from the way it refused visas to a Sierra Leone drama troupe to stage a play at the ongoing Edinburgh festival on the plea that its members might end up claiming political asylum once they arrive in Britain! Despite a personal guarantee by the troupe's director that he would ensure that no one

stayed back in Britain after the play was staged the British High Commission in Freetown refused to relent.

Lately, immigration officials have been given vast discretionary powers overriding the new British Race Relations (Amendment) Act claimed to be the most enlightened human rights legislation in Britain. Getting past the czars and czarinas of immigration control is usually more than half the battle; and then begins the "war" that can even end the way Firsat Yildiz's did. Though the cold-blooded murder of refugees is rare, their harassment and humiliation are not. The 1,000-odd refugee "prisoners" are a living proof of it.

Yet, the flow of refugees remains unabated. Poor and often illiterate asylum seekers, unable to speak or understand English and with no idea of the life ahead, continue to pour into Britain — having begged and borrowed to pay criminal gangs to smuggle them in as stowaways. Many die, and many others are routinely deported but the lure of a "better life" is too strong to deter them. Britain is said to be the most popular asylum destination in Europe and according to official figures, 23,000 applications were waiting to be cleared at the last count but the actual number is believed to be higher.

The Tories made it a major issue in the general elections promising a crackdown on asylum seekers in

what was seen as a bid to whip up xenophobia. Remarks of leading Tory figures on asylum and Europe were seen to play on the fear of the foreigner. The race riots in Oldham and Bradford may not have been directly related to the anti-asylum campaign but they happened in a racially surcharged climate built up in the run-up to the election.

Asylum is very much a race issue. A Tory candidate who unsuccessfully contested the general elections says that at every doorstep he came across concerns over "race, immigration and asylum". "I heard it whatever the race of the person" and the refrain, he says, was invariably prefaced with the remark: "I am not a racist but all these people are coming over here..." etc., etc. Writing in *The Times*, Mr. Daniel Finkelstein, who contested Harrow West, warns that Britain has a "very serious race relations problem" and asylum is "one of the most visible components of immigration". "We complacently assume that this country is so stable and tolerant that we don't need to get too excited about such things. It is isn't."

Yet, as *The Times* editorially commented, the murder of Firsat Yildiz must "deepen national disquiet about the failures of officialdom to deal efficiently with the tides of human hope and misery rolling up Britain's shores".

U.K.'s asylum policy comes under scrutiny

By Rashmee Z. Ahmed
Times News Network

LONDON: Britain is just as bad as Iran, a country where political freedom leaves a lot to be desired, according to the latest victim of the spiralling violence directed against asylum-seekers in the Scottish city of Glasgow. The remarks of Davoud Rasul Naseri, a 22-year-old Iranian who was stabbed in the back outside his front door by white youths shouting racist taunts, come within days of the murder of a Turkish refugee in Glasgow.

The killing of the Turk has sparked hostility between asylum-seekers and the host community, which has forced the British government to call a halt to its plans of housing more refugees in the area.

Meanwhile, asylum-seekers have formed a loose pseudo-political alliance to articulate their rights. The developments coincide with reports that several cities across northern England and Scotland have refused to house more asylum-seekers as part of the government's controversial "dispersal" policy, which aims to spread asylum-applicants throughout the UK in order to ensure better management and less ethnic trouble.

The reports say that the government has already, without explanation, postponed the resettlement of

refugees in the troubled northern cities of Burnley and Bradford, where racial violence erupted earlier this year. The government decision is thought to illustrate the perceived links between racial trouble and hostility to Britain's growing population of political refugees. Many asylum-seekers say they are often blamed by the host community for receiving too many economic benefits from the government.

Commentators say the sequence of events epitomises the growing contradictions between the UK's open-door asylum policy and the extent to which it is able or willing to take in political refugees. Asylum is an increasingly sensitive issue in Britain, which received nearly 80,000 asylum applications last year. Politicians say Britain is now Europe's foremost destination for asylum-seekers, many of whom are accused of being "bogus" claimants.

The case of the murdered Turkish asylum-seeker, denounced by the Turkish embassy in London as "an economic migrant" is also seen to illustrate Britain's problems in operating a fair policy that has traditionally allowed free entry to victims of political persecution. But British politicians say it is important the country is not seen as a "soft touch" for economic migrants from the developing world.

N. Ireland Assembly likely to be suspended

By Hasan Suroor

LONDON, AUG. 8. With no compromise in sight, the British Government was today faced with the hard choice of suspending the Northern Ireland Assembly at Stormont to buy more time for the peace process which went into a tailspin last month when the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) pulled out of the power-sharing arrangement demanding immediate decommissioning by IRA.

The Government has until Saturday to make a decision but with neither the Unionists nor the Republicans inclined to make concessions the time is running out and the Sinn Fein leader, Mr. Gerry Adams, today warned that the institutions created under the Good Friday Agreement were on the verge of collapse. He

blamed the Unionists for it as a bitter war of words broke out between the two sides after the Unionists rejected the IRA's tantalisingly vague offer of decommissioning saying it does not go far enough for them to think of returning to the provincial government.

The UUP chief, Mr. David Trimble, resigned as head of the Government on July 1 to force decommissioning and the constitutional deadline of six weeks for the election of a successor ends on August 12. A successor cannot be elected unless the Unionists review their decision to stay out of the Government in which they share power with Sinn Fein, the political wing of IRA. They have made clear that they are no longer willing to work with Sinn Fein so long as IRA continues to hold on to its weapons.

The IRA's latest offer to put its arms "completely and verifiably beyond use" has not satisfied Unionists who want to see actual decommissioning start before they agree to return to the Government.

The Republicans said Mr. Trimble was making a blunder by rejecting the offer and Mr. Adams warned that the crisis would deepen further. He said: "I don't think any of us should underestimate the intensity of the crisis which is opening up. The reality is that the institutions (set up under the Good Friday agreement) are going to collapse in a very short time, given the management of the process at this point."

Commentators saw his remarks as effectively ending hopes that IRA might be willing to improve upon its decommissioning offer.

THE HINDU

9 AUG 2001

Insecurity grips asylum seekers in Britain

By Hasan Suroor

LONDON, AUG 7. Insecurity has gripped asylum seekers across Britain after the murder of a young Kurdish refugee in Glasgow two days ago and a racist attack on another Kurd in Hull today, prompting demands for police protection and a more humane Government policy.

Refugees have blamed the tension on the policy of settling so many of them in areas of high deprivation where unemployment is already high, and housing is bad. Stones were thrown at asylum seekers as they held a protest march in Glasgow on Monday over the growing race-related attacks on them since they arrived on the Sighthill housing estate — a bleak and rundown neighbourhood on the outskirts of the city — about 18 months ago. The unprovoked murder of 22-year-old Firsat Yildiz, in what police suspect was a racist incident, has created panic among Sighthill's 2,000 refugees, mostly Turks, Kurds, Bosnians and Iraqis. The original white residents, most of whom are themselves poor and uneducated, resent the presence of such a large number of foreigners in the area and feelings run so high that they held a counter-demonstration on Monday alleging that refugees were being pampered.

Police had a difficult time separating the two groups — one demanding protection against racists, and the other protesting that their city had been turned into a "dumping" ground for foreigners. "We are sick of these refugees getting more than we do. I am sitting in a rundown flat... and these refugees get everything given to them on a plate", a young white woman told journalists.

Asylum seekers said they had had been telling the authorities that someone might get killed in the prevailing climate of hate but nothing was done. "We must make sure that no one else is allowed to die like Yaldiz... People are scared to go out. This cannot continue. Only yesterday someone was hit by a bottle and had to go to hospital", a spokesman for refugees said.

Yildiz, a Turkish Kurd who arrived in Britain a year ago, was killed on Sunday night after he was returning home after a meal. His murder shocked fellow refugees as

they marched through Glasgow on Monday they were taunted by white youths and abused. An official of the Scottish Refugee Council admitted that xenophobia ran high and blamed it on the fact that a large number of vulnerable people had been settled in an area of extreme deprivation.

This morning, a Kurdish youth had his throat slit in a racist attack in Hull, Yorkshire, where there is a large concentration of refugees. He was stopped by a group of white youths and one of them cut his throat with a blade. Passerby rushed him to hospital where he was reported to be progressing. Police said they were treating it as a "serious" incident. Mr. Guy Cheverton of the Hull Asylum Seekers' Support Group said: "It seemed that the situation had calmed down after a number of problems last year but this attack has obviously scared many asylum seekers. They have fled persecution in their homelands only confronted with more abuse and attacks in Britain. The fear is that this attack could start a new wave of problems."

The Government today warned racists that it would not let them dictate its asylum policy. The Home Office Minister, Mr. Jeff

Rooker, claimed that the controversial "dispersal" policy, under which refugees are dispersed across the U.K. rather than be housed in one area, had been "successful" and would not be stopped. "The dispersal policy will continue", he told the BBC adding, "We will not pull out of areas simply because people say it's an area where there could be racists. Only on police advice would we not use a particular area. Otherwise, our policies would be run by the racists in this country and we're not going to have that."

However, there has yet been no credible official explanation why hundreds of asylum seekers have been locked up in high security prisons with hardened criminals, as revealed by a British newspaper two days ago.

The locations used were primarily dictated by the availability of housing, he explained.

"There are some 700,000 empty homes in this country. The vast majority of them, unfortunately, tend to be in the Midlands or the north. There's not too many in the sunny commuter belt otherwise we would be dispersing there."



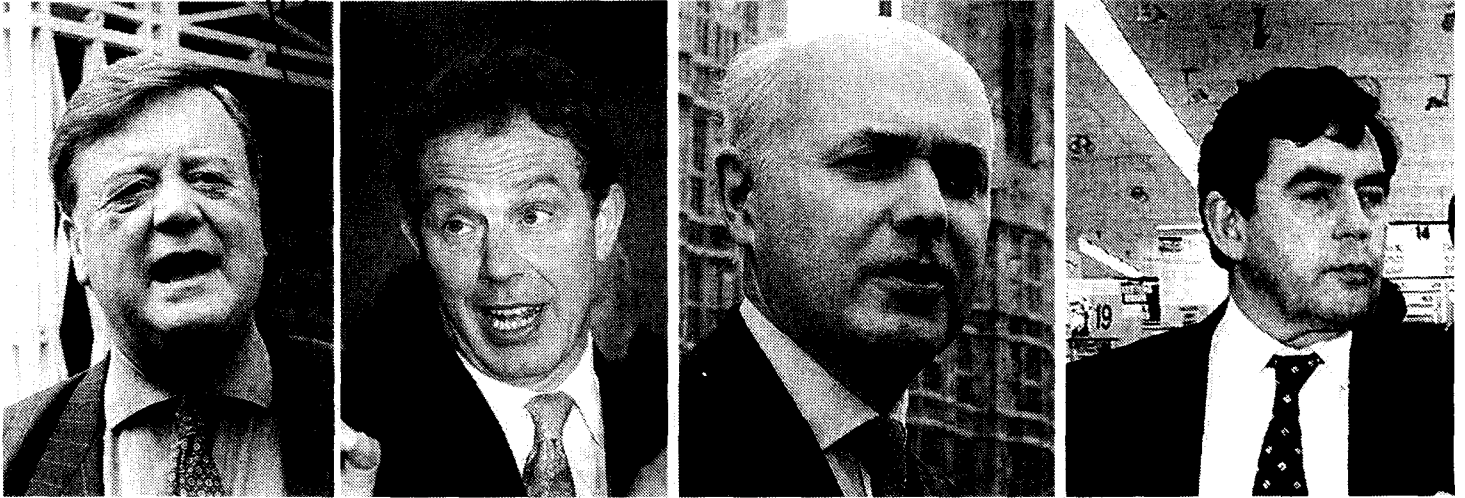
Asylum seekers stage a protest in George Square on Tuesday after a 22-year-old Turkish man was killed in the Sighthill area of Glasgow. Firsat Yildiz was stabbed on Sunday. — Reuters

THE HINDU

- 8 AUG 2001

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5/8

Divided they stand



Kenneth Clarke and Tony Blair are unabashed europhiles while Ian Duncan-Smith and Gordon Brown are in the opposite camp.

FEW ISSUES divide British politics more than the debate over Britain's entry into euro and neither Labour nor the Tory Party is entirely comfortable with the positions they have publicly taken.

With four months left before euro is officially launched as the common currency in 12 E.U. countries, the pressure on Britain to make up its mind is mounting and as the debate hots up the differences between the europhiles and eurosceptics in both parties are becoming more obvious.

The gloves have been off for some time, but now one can even detect an occasional dagger and attempts to hide it are not succeeding. Last week, the tension between the Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair, and his Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Gordon Brown, erupted into a very public row over the timing of a referendum on euro.

Mr. Brown who was in New York, softpedalling euro, reportedly threw a fit over a *Financial Times* report, widely believed to be inspired by Downing Street, suggesting that he and Mr. Blair had agreed on a timetable for a referendum which could be as early as next year.

Mr. Brown who has consistently argued against rushing into a single currency without first ensuring Britain's economic interests on the basis of a five-point economic test he has devised was reported to be furious and his aides angrily denounced the report as "fantasy and garbage".

The Prime Minister's "camp" let the controversy rest there

but the point it wanted to make had been made — that a referendum on euro in his second term remained very much on Mr. Blair's agenda. In his election campaign, Mr. Blair promised a referendum "within two years" of his second term and the message wrapped up in the *FT* story was that he meant to stick to his self-imposed deadline.

Commentators pointed out that unlike Mr. Brown, a strong believer in economic determinism, Mr. Blair perceived single currency as "fundamentally" a political

project. "It has long been Tony Blair's deep conviction that Britain will not find its proper place in Europe until he has led us into the single currency, and he will not have secured his plinth high in the pantheon of Prime Ministers", said Mr. Andrew Rawnsley, a leading commentator and writer of "Servants of the People", an incisive critique of New Labour.

The differences between europhiles and eurosceptics in both parties in Britain are becoming more obvious. Hasan Suroor reports.

Mr. Brown is not the only influential Labour figure who does not share Mr. Blair's enthusiasm for euro. Even the Foreign Secretary, Mr. Jack Straw, has publicly supported a more cautious approach. His first advice to the media after he took over as Foreign Secretary was to "cool it".

There is even more confusion in Tory ranks despite the party's unambiguous anti-euro official line. Tories contested

the June general election on a high-pitched save-the-pound campaign telling voters that a Labour victory would mean the beginning of the end of the pound. But when the party ended up with another humiliating defeat doubts began to emerge if so much stress on euro was really such a good idea — and now there is a real possibility of a known europhile, the former Chancellor, Mr. Kenneth Clarke, being elected its leader.

Although Mr. Clarke has declared that in the event of a referendum he would vote

"yes" in contradiction of his party's official line, few would be surprised if he defeats his europhobic rival, Mr. Ian Duncan Smith, widely seen to represent the traditional Tory "values" more strongly than Mr. Clarke. Tories are deeply divided as they set out to decide whether to choose a leader who despite his strong pro-euro position is more likely to succeed in making the party electable again or opt for a "true blue" Tory who has even less charisma than the unlamented Mr. William Hague.

Having lost two successive elections, Tories who regard themselves as the "natural" party of governance clearly are not in the mind to lose a third and there is a growing temptation to dump the pound for a possible return to power under Mr. Clarke.

Mr. Clarke of course has made clear that he will not tamper with the official position and, when there is a referendum, Tories will be free to vote the way they wish. However, there is no glossing over the contradiction inherent in a situation where the party chief votes against the official line on a key issue.

Even Mr. Clarke's supporters are conscious of the Alice-in-Wonderland scenario which would see the Tory boss endorsing Labour on euro every time the issue comes up in Parliament while his party colleagues take the opposite line.

The confusion at the political level is also reflected in public opinion. It is believed that people are overwhelmingly against Britain's entry into euro but in the general election they had no hesitation rejecting the only anti-euro party. One view is that the popular anti-euro sentiment will assert itself on the day of the referendum, unless Labour launches an intensive campaign to "educate" the people. Much of course will also depend on how well the euro launch, scheduled for January 2002, goes.

"If it goes without a hitch then next summer will see millions of British holidaymakers in Greece, Spain, Italy, France and Portugal having to get used to handling euros themselves. It would psychologically prepare them for a changeover at home..." according to *The Observer*. But if the launch does not go well, Mr. Blair could find his historic mission falling around his ears.

LONDON BLAST / SHADOW OVER NEGOTIATIONS

Real IRA behind sabotage?

By Hasan Suroor

LONDON, AUG 3. Suspected Irish republican terrorists, opposed to the Northern Ireland peace process, struck in London on Thursday night as a powerful car bomb ripped through the western suburb of Ealing Broadway at midnight when pubs, restaurants and night-clubs in the area, close to the tube station, were crowded with late night revellers.

An immediate political reaction was that it was intended to sabotage the latest efforts to revive the Good Friday agreement but the British Government said it should strengthen the resolve to go ahead with the dialogue. The explosion, the impact of which was felt nearly a kilometre away, caused panic as people, many inebriated and screaming with fright, poured out into the street and the police warned of a possible second blast which, fortunately, did not happen. Seven persons, hit by flying glass, were injured and eyewitnesses described the scene as one of "sheer chaos". Police denounced it as a "calculated and evil act aimed at killing and maiming" people.

The bomb — a home-made device packed with military explosives — was placed in a Saab saloon parked close to a Burger King restaurant teeming with customers. A pub, close to the scene of the explosion, was packed with guests attending a musical event. The bomb exploded minutes after the police received a warning and were trying to get the people out of the area. Police said the location given in the warning was misleading which added to the confusion. They said it was a miracle that there had been no casualties.

The car was blown into bits, and buildings in the area had their windows shattered. The main road was flooded after a water main burst because of the impact of the explosion which one eyewitness said was like a "jumbo jet exploding". Thick clouds of smoke enveloped the neighbourhood as the "bomb car" went up in flames engulfing other vehicles in their path. "I felt a huge shock wave then literally saw a roll of flame coming towards us. All the shop windows were smashed," one eyewitness said. A young couple who had just moved into the neighbourhood said their flat "shook", the windows came crashing down and they heard people "screaming". "We were terrified," they said.

This is the second such explosion in less than six months. In March, a powerful bomb had exploded outside the BBC headquarters in West London — and that too had happened just about midnight indicating similarities in tactics. But last night's explosive



The remains of a car bomb which ripped through a busy area of west London on Friday. — Reuters

was believed to be twice as deadly as the one that went off at the BBC. While no particular group had been identified until Friday afternoon, the blast was widely believed to be the work of the Real IRA. Experts said it had been the Real IRA's tactic to step up violence and divert attention whenever there was a chance of a breakthrough in the stalled peace process. The blast came two days after a bomb was found in a car park outside the Belfast international airport and follows reports that republican terrorists were likely to step up their campaign of violence in order to take advantage of the political vacuum created by the resignation of Mr. David Trimble as head of the provincial government.

The explosion triggered speculation about its impact on current negotiations whose success depends mainly on whether the IRA is willing to disarm. Some analysts believed that the blast was intended to warn the IRA against giving into the Unionist demand for disarmament. The Real IRA consists of extremists who broke away from the Provincial IRA after the latter joined the Good Friday Agreement. The renegade group has been trying to paint the IRA as a "traitor" to the Republican cause, saying that the Good Friday Agreement has not benefited Republicans.

Observers said that though the Real IRA, for all its muscle-flexing, was a "marginal" force its actions could have a "psychological" effect and slow down the momentum of the ongoing normalisation talks. The Sinn Fein, which began a meeting today to discuss the British and Irish governments' peace package, condemned the incident, and a Downing Street spokesman said the Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair believed "the way forward for Northern Ireland can only be through dialogue and that is why the Government has put forward its proposals."

The Northern Ireland Secretary, Dr. John Reid described such acts of violence as pointless saying: "Far from deflecting us, last night's barbaric attack should strengthen our resolve to reach agreement. No one will understand if we allow the solution that is within our grasp to slip away." A senior Sinn Fein leader, Mr. Gerry Kelly said the blast was aimed at undermining "all our efforts to move the situation forward". Another Sinn Fein leader put it more sharply. "What it tells us is that we have a major responsibility on ourselves, all of us, including the Government, to implement the Good Friday Agreement which is what people in very high numbers voted for — that's what we've got to do," he said.

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THE
AUG 3 1998

U.K., Argentina turn a new leaf

412-17
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PUERTO IGUAZU (ARGENTINA), AUG. 2. Mr. Tony Blair embraced the Argentinean President on Wednesday in a historic first visit by a British Prime Minister to a country that was until recently a sworn enemy.

He held talks about "our future as friends" in what the President, Mr. Fernando de la Rúa, described as the "tranquil setting" of the waterfalls at Puerto Iguazu, near the border with Brazil.

Mr. Blair said he wanted to offer help to Argentina, a country in the grip of a severe economic recession. Its debts of £ 90 billions are currently rising by £ 1 billion a month; unemployment is 20 per cent and people are experiencing the seventh general strike in the past 18 months. An economic col-

lapse threatens the Latin American economy, particularly Brazil's, with repercussions in developing markets around the world.

British officials described Mr. Blair's three-hour visit to Argentina as part of the process of "normalisation" of relations between the two countries after the 1982 Falklands conflict, which claimed 255 British and 652 Argentine lives.

As Mr. Blair crossed the border from Brazil, one of the first things he saw was a metal road sign stating, "Las Malvinas son Argentinas" (the Falkland Islands are Argentinian).

British officials said sovereignty of the South Atlantic islands would not be on the agenda. — ©Telegraph Group Limited, London, 2001



The British Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair (left), and the Argentinian President, Mr. Fernando de la Rúa, chat in front of the Iguazu Falls, in northern Argentina, on Wednesday. — Reuters

THE HINDU

RIOTS CAUSED BY SEGREGATION

By WILLIAM FRANKEL in LONDON

WTF
5/16

TWENTY years ago Britain was anxiously reflecting on the causes of the serious rioting that was taking place in London and dozens of towns all over the country. The more recent street violence, though it was limited to a small number of northern towns and not as intense as its 1981 predecessor, was like it in that it was racially based. Then it was the West Indians, the 2001 version involved Asians, mainly Pakistanis.

The 1981 riots constituted the most serious outbreak of civil disorder for at least a century. Beginning in the West Indian enclave of Brixton in London, it was followed by what was then described as "copy-cat" turmoil in the great cities of Birmingham, Manchester and Liverpool as well as in many normally tranquil smaller towns.

Some claim that the current rioting in which hundreds of young Pakistanis were involved is a consequence of the same social problem which gave rise to the West Indian problem twenty years ago. But even the most superficial study of the facts suggests that this is not the case.

Twenty years ago, Britain was in the midst of a slump with unemployment close to three million — it is less than one million today. It was a time when violence was rife in many parts of the world, while in Britain the assault on the trade unions had become explosive. In that year, Mr Rupert Murdoch, with the help of the then Prime Minister Mrs Margaret Thatcher, had confronted the printing trade unions. The clashes between the police and union pickets at *The Times* new Wapping headquarters were so violent that they were frequently described as street warfare.

SEGREGATION

In the intervening years things had become more placid. More sensitive policing was introduced, the Race Relations Act was promulgated to bar racial discrimination while bodies like the Commission for Racial Equality were improving the atmosphere. But the recent spate of rioting, which has caused damage estimated at £25 million, was less due to economic circumstances than the divisions between communities in a multicultural city.

Segregation begins in the schools with nearly all Pakistani children attending Muslim, schools, which are state funded, and continues with physical separation in housing. Immigrant groups in the past tended to live close together initially but then dispersed as they integrated into the general community.

Not so the Pakistanis. This was one of the findings of a study of race relations situation in Bradford which had been undertaken before the current disturbances in that city. Commissioned by Bradford's city council, the study was conducted by Lord Ouse-

ley, a former chairman of the Commission for Racial Equality, who is himself of West Indian origin.

Based on hundreds of interviews in the city the report, which was published last week, asserts that Bradford had been "in the grip of fear" before the riots because of the division between the White and Pakistani communities. That division had primarily come about through the "polarisation" of young people along ethnic and religious lines.

The city school system was one of "virtual apartheid" and, wrote Ouseley, "there is limited or non-existent interaction between schools of different communities". The segregated status quo had been maintained by "self-styled community leaders...through fear, ignorance and threats."

MISREADING

This, the report implies, is the core of the problem. However, it concludes that "the reality of all-white and all-Asian schools cannot be wished away". The best that can be expected is that the Asian schools curriculum should place emphasis on preparation for citizenship in Britain.

Lord Ouseley criticises the practice in many Asian households of taking their children out of formal education at critical periods for lengthy stays in Pakistan thus damaging their academic development.

The police came in for some critical comment. It is often alleged that the police are unnecessarily harsh towards minorities and intolerant of ethnic differences. The report does not endorse this view but, quite the reverse, suggests that police on the beat are not as forceful as they might be for fear of being called racist and thus damaging their career prospects.

Though welcoming the report in general, a spokesman for the West Yorkshire police has denied that its officers are afraid to tackle criminality in the Asian community. No formal comment on the report has yet been made on behalf of the government but the Prime Minister, Mr Tony Blair, appears to regard the violence as a law and order issue rather than one of race. He has condemned the riots as no more than simple "thuggery".

The Home Secretary, Mr David Blunkett, agrees. He believes that those who attacked the police in Bradford and elsewhere were overwhelmingly driven by the sheer nihilistic delight in thuggery and criminality.

Because the police came so near to being overwhelmed in Bradford, he has authorised them to use teargas and water-cannon in case of future rioting. But a columnist in the liberal newspaper, *The Guardian*, is unconvinced that this is the answer.

"These Asian youths, he wrote, do not need water-cannon or teargas. They need hope."

Coloured by prejudice

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THIS HAS been a difficult summer for race relations in Britain and many believe that it is not entirely unconnected with the rather aggressively divisive rhetoric which some Tories and their supporters deployed in the run-up to the general election. The campaign on asylum, suggesting that Britain has become a "soft touch" for illegal immigrants, is widely seen to have reinforced latent xenophobia among the less enlightened sections whose number might be small but who matter because most of them happen to live in deprived "mixed" neighbourhoods, already prone to tension.

Critics say the remarks of some Tory leaders contributed to a climate which is highly volatile. "There is little doubt that the popularising of racism in the asylum context has spilled over into settled Asian and black communities. With asylum seekers vilified in the press, the countdown to the election was a horrible affair, with the Conservatives continually upping the ante so that the Government tried to match the rhetoric of national alarm," two civil rights activists wrote to *The Guardian* after this week's riots in Bradford.

Significantly, the season's first outbreak of racial violence — in Oldham — happened during the election campaign when some Tory extremists were warning against the danger of Britain becoming a "mongrel" race and immigrants were being portrayed as a threat to Anglo-Saxon culture. Even the sober Tory leaders, including the party chief, Mr. William Hague, often spoke in terms that evoked images of a Britain in danger of being overrun by "foreigners", inadvertently handing ammunition to the racist lobby.

It is not difficult to see the connection, however remote, between some of the inflammatory language used in the campaign, the riots in Oldham and the unexpectedly impressive performance of the ultra-right British National Party (BNP), which contested two Oldham seats on a "Rights for Whites" platform. The party which stands for racial segregation and "voluntary" repatriation of immigrants got 11 per cent of the vote — its best-ever performance in an election, and that too in a town which has traditionally been a Labour stronghold.

The BNP's most authoritative voice and its best known face, Mr. Nick Griffin, who was a candidate in Oldham, openly claimed that if the voting had taken place prior to the riots his party might not have done as well, acknowledging the role riots played in raising his and the BNP's profile. Though it lost both the seats, its share of votes was respectable enough for it to declare itself the "voice of Oldham". The party did similarly well in another riot-prone constituency, Burnley, where violence broke out after the elections. Burnley again has been a Labour backyard — as indeed are Leeds and Bradford.



Police nab a troublemaker in Bradford.

To treat the racial violence in Britain simply as a law and order problem, ignoring the underlying causes, would be a mistake, says Hasan Suroor.

Labour apologists have trotted out statistics to suggest that the BNP's performance has been overrated and to caution against being taken in by its bark; and one Labour MP writing, of all places, in the pro-Tory *Telegraph* has accused "revolutionary Trotskyists" of giving too much importance to far right groups saying everything would be all right if everyone simply looked the other way. "The only way the revolutionary Trotskyists can get a response is to go into Asian communities and frighten people into the spectre of neo-Nazism. And in so doing the Trotskyists — deliberately and for their own purposes — give the fascists a credibility they don't deserve," according to Mr. Sion

Simon, Labour MP for Birmingham Erdington.

An Indian Left-wing academic said the theory that certain inconvenient tendencies would "blow along the gutter" if you simply ignore them, as Mr. Simon suggests, is of a piece with the sentiment that indirectly helped the BJP increase its strength in Parliament from two to 100-plus, and form a government. "Whether or not they are involved in the riots is a different issue, but you cannot ignore that groups such as the National Front and the BNP have become more visible and that the BNP has increased its acceptability. Who is responsible for this is something we can debate until the cows come home but there is no point wishing these groups away," he said.

In the Commons, the Labour MP from Bradford north, Mr. Terry Rooney, pointedly drew attention to the provocative presence of the National Front and the BNP on the streets of vulnerable neighbourhoods. "...we see the similarities between Bradford, Oldham and Burnley. The common thread there is the presence on the street of the far right groups of the National Front and the British National Party,"

he said demanding a ban on groups.

There have been four major flare-ups since May — Oldham, Burnley and Bradford — and in these places right extremists were in place, a common refrain is that in a democracy cannot stop people from carrying out legitimate activities such as fighting elections, or holding meetings. But how about reining them in when a complaint is made against a person, than vice-versa; and that of a violent confrontation it non-whites who are more likely arrested. This is the grievance of those who do not hold a brief for ruly Asian youths and who have demned their mindless violence particularly in Bradford.

"The people of Bradford condone violence and think it is disgusting, police officers to be targets. But police fail to implement laws designed to protect the community they will lose the confidence of the public," a local resident of Bradford said all that the police did not arrest "thugs" even though they openly led racist abuse. The counterforce, however, is that this still does not justify the mayhem that followed and the Prime Minister. Mr. Tony Blair the Home Secretary, Mr. David Keating, made it clear that no amount of provocation justified people taking law into their own hands. That "whether blacks, Asians or whites would be dealt with firmly in future been the message repeatedly put by Government spokesmen.

There are no two opinions in the violence wreaked by Pakistani/Bangladeshi youth, particularly in Bradford was mindless and, as a local MP said, vastly disproportionate to the provocation. There is also a consensus those involved in it should be given a quarter and "thuggery" — the of buzzword — should not be tolerated. But to treat it simply as a law and order problem, ignoring the underlying causes of this "thuggery", would be a mistake. A report by a former chairman of the Commission for Racial Equality, Lord Ouseley, released a few days ago highlights racial segregation in schools, widespread unemployment, drug dealing and a complete breakdown in communication between ethnic groups and their white peers as among some the major problems in Bradford. It also indicts the local leadership for developing a stake in the status quo in order to perpetuate its hold on the community. Much of what is true in Bradford is also true of Oldham, Burnley and other racially sensitive towns and "thuggery" is simply a manifestation. Beheading the "thugs" will help unless the climate that produces them is changed.

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'Self-segregation being practised in Bradford'

By Hasan Suroor

LONDON, JULY 12. "Self-segregation" has been identified as a major cause of alienation between white and ethnic communities in Bradford, where widespread racial violence took place last weekend. A virtual self-imposed "apartheid" is said to exist here with almost no communication between Asians — mostly Pakistanis and Bangladeshis — and whites.

The former chairman of the Commission for Racial Equality, Lord Herman Ouseley, author of a new report on race relations in Bradford, voiced concern today over the near absence of any social interaction between the city's whites and non-whites. Bradford, as he saw it, looked like two cities: one in which only whites lived; and the other inhabited by ethnic groups. The two communities sent their children to their "own" schools and, in turn, these schools did little to promote understanding about other communities. The result was: mistrust and prejudice arising out of ignorance and lack of awareness about each other.

Lord Ouseley, whose report was "leaked" two days ago but officially

released today, pleaded with the people of Bradford to get out of self-appointed "no go" areas and lead more integrated lives. He disagreed with the view that forcing people to send their children to integrated schools or live in mixed neighbourhoods interfered with their choice. "Shouldn't people be free to live where they want to live and send their children to the schools of their choice?" asked one resident.

Lord Ouseley said people were free to make their choices but these should be "more inclusive", and the tendency to "move away from other communities" did not help in building bridges with others. "Moving away from others creates suspicion", he pointed out. In his report he has pointedly underlined the damaging effect of self-segregation, with different communities seeking to "protect their identities and cultures by discouraging and avoiding contact with other communities and institutions." This led to a communication gap and reinforced mutual prejudice — the view among whites for instance that immigrants were being pampered. The widespread "Islampho-

bia" was a direct result of Muslims leading an insular existence, cut off from the mainstream.

He said his report, commissioned by Bradford Vision and the local council and written well before the recent riots, was not intended to offer "instant solutions"; and its findings were not a "knee-jerk reaction" to an event. Most importantly the report was based on the views of the local people and its findings reflected the concerns on the ground. Its aim was to take a long hard look at both the positive and negative aspects of Bradford and offer a lasting perspective.

He emphasised that not everything about Bradford was "negative" and its achievements should not be allowed to be undermined by recent events. "Bradford is a district which can celebrate some of its achievements," he said.

Lord Ouseley identified the need for integrated education as a precondition for better communal understanding, and suggested a review of school curriculum to make them more inclusive.

He also wanted more young people to take over leadership roles.

Bradford riots symbol of a larger malaise

By Hasan Suroor

LONDON, JULY 10. With minor clashes continuing to mar the fragile peace in Bradford, there were divergent views on what led to the riots in this city inhabited predominantly by Pakistanis.

While the Government was inclined to treat it largely as a law and order problem, a report commissioned by the local council blamed it on years of racial segregation which, it said, had fuelled divisions along communal lines.

The report by a former head of the Commission for Racial Equality, Lord (Herman) Ouseley, leaked to the media two days before its official release, described Bradford as the "ultimate challenge in race relations in Britain" and highlighted the near-total breakdown of communication between different communities in the region.

Though written before the outbreak of violence last weekend, it echoed the concerns of the more sober community leaders who have consistently maintained that prejudices arising out of a ghetto mentality were behind mutual intolerance.

Lord Ouseley's findings, based on extensive interviews with a cross-section of local communities, were in contrast with the official emphasis on law and order as the police spent yet another night battling with stone-pelting youths, this time mostly white.

The Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair, called the rioting an act of "thuggery" with protesters "destroying their own community", presumed to be a reference to the extensive destruction of property by violent Pakistani youths in the first flush of rioting on Saturday.

"There may initially have been an element of provocation from the far-Right at some point during Saturday. But first evidence suggests that this is simple thuggery and local people bent on having a go at police and, in the process, of doing that destroying their own community", his official spokesman was quoted as saying.

Commentators underlined Downing Street's perception which they thought was "at odds" with the Ouseley report's focus on the underlying social causes of tension.

They said while Saturday's eruption did indeed seem like "thuggery" it could not be dismissed entirely as an isolated incident and there was need to address the issues raised by the Ouseley inquiry.

The breakdown of family discipline among ethnic groups was said to be a factor behind the growing aggression in Asian youth.

HP-16
"It seems to be fraying at the edges and be already gone among these young people", said Mr. Marsha Singh, the Labour MP from Bradford West as even as he agreed that what happened on Saturday was "senseless criminality".

A Muslim parent, echoing the Ouseley report, said the policy of educational segregation which meant separate schools for white and non-white children had done incalculable damage.

"I tried to send my child to an integrated school but was turned down", Mr. Mohammed Afzal told BBC's Newsnight. Children brought up in a segregated climate inevitably grew up knowing nothing about others and developed an insular mentality.

Mr. Sajawal Hussain, a local councillor, said the efforts started after the riots in 1995 to promote integration had not been pursued, resulting in a dangerous communication gap.

The Ouseley report, which prominently featured in the media today, voiced concern that

communal relations in Bradford were "deteriorating" amid signs that communities were "fragmenting along racial, cultural and faith

lines". "Segregation in school is one indicator of this trend. Rather than seeing the emergence of a confident, multicultural district where people are respectful, people's attitudes appear to be hardening and intolerance is growing", it said.

The report spoke of "fear" among the local people of talking "honestly" about their problems. Misinformation or simply lack of information bred cynicism and prejudice.

In a sharp indictment of local leadership it says: "So-called community leaders are self-styled, in cahoots with the establishment, and maintain the status quo of control and segregation through fear, ignorance and threats."

Meanwhile, a number of youths from both sides have been arrested and the police are out in full strength to prevent further trouble.



Burnt out BMW cars lying strewn on the forecourt of a dealer where a large group of Asian youths set light to the garage and destroyed over 30 new cars in Bradford on Monday. — AFP

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BRITAIN'S TROUBLED RECORD 110-12 ✓

THERE IS SOMETHING hauntingly familiar about the way the Tony Blair Government has responded to the recent outbursts of racial rioting in Britain. The decision to order a thoroughgoing inquiry into the state of race relations follows the violence that erupted on the eve of last month's general election in some predominantly Asian towns, the country continuing to experience the aftershocks. The response, which capped a series of shocking revelations of racial discrimination across a wide spectrum of activity, certainly falls short as is evident from the serious acts of rioting during the weekend. And judging by the outcome of earlier reviews of race relations, the inquiry is unlikely to do anything more than hold up a mirror to the society, reflecting the ugly sores that dot the multiracial mosaic. In the absence of a political consensus, and a readiness to acknowledge that race hatred is about more than electioneering, the malaise will continue to take an increasingly heavy toll.

Admittedly, Britain has been much less susceptible to racist politics than elsewhere on the continent where the far right has succeeded in garnering more and more public support. But the country's image as a liberal, multiracial society, underscored among other instances by the rise of an Asian to the captaincy of the prestigious national cricket team, has been receiving one knock after another in recent months. The Law Society, which represents nearly a hundred thousand solicitors, is the latest institution to be found guilty of bias based on race (and gender, in the present instance). It joins Britain's National Health Service, the police and the civil service where the prevalence of such discrimination has been acknowledged and documented by Government commissions and independent probes. The medical field has been the most conspicuous. Asian and black doctors and paramedical personnel have long been at the receiving end of this dis-

crimination, of being treated by the NHS as less than equal to their white colleagues. The poison, it has been apparent for some years now, is spreading. The Government-ordered inquiry will specifically look into the role of public and private sectors in contributing to the sense of unfairness among the ethnic groups. Immigrant communities which have contributed substantially to the national wealth continue to find it difficult to pull themselves up from the bottom of the heap. Unemployment among immigrants, for instance, is officially said to be twice as high as among the whites.

If the emergence of an underclass of jobless youngsters in the immigrant community, ready to stake their claim, causes concern today, more worrisome in the long run should be the readiness of political parties to exploit the race divide. The wakeup call came during the election campaign last month from Oldham, the deprived Asian-dominated town and stomping ground of the racist British National Party which secured a disturbingly sizeable increase in voter support in the constituency. In the runup to the election, the Conservative leadership had deliberately raised the anti-immigrant rhetoric by exploiting the asylum issue, with a spokesman shamelessly questioning the qualifications of foreign doctors. It was a throwback to the late 1960s when Enoch Powell of the Conservative far right thrilled his partymen with a hateful "rivers of blood" speech in which he opposed a race relations bill. Today, after playing the race card with disastrous results, the Conservatives are ready to support Government action to extend legislation on racial equality that imposes new duties on public authorities to actively promote equality. What Britain needs is the political will to fight racist groups that thrive on the fringes of society. It is time the liberal core asserted itself strongly.

THE HINDU

THE HINDU

UK mulls riot remedy

London, July 9

THE HOME secretary, David Blunkett, is considering the use of water cannon and tear gas to help police tackle riots such as those that have erupted in a string of northern towns since Easter.

Blunkett was speaking after pitched battles in Bradford at the weekend in which hundreds of police officers fought for nine hours to disperse a hard core of 200 rioters, most of them young Asian men, from the city centre and the Manningham district, the scene of riots in 1995.

Police in riot gear faced an onslaught of bricks, bottles, petrol bombs and fireworks, and 120 officers were injured in some of the worst disturbances seen in Britain in 20 years. Two men were stabbed, and 36 people - 23 white and 13 Asian - were arrested.

The Bradford riots are the latest in a sequence that began in the city at Easter and have spread through Oldham, in Greater Manchester, Burnley, in Lancashire, and back to Yorkshire. There have been more than 150 arrests.

Blunkett's uncompromisingly tough comments suggest that ministers are running out of patience with youths who hurl missiles and firebombs at police in response to activities by the National Front and the British National Party, which picked up significant support in the general election.

He said the cautious approach of British police left them at a disadvantage. "We don't in these



Police and local youth in the Manningham area of Bradford, northern England, on Sunday. Racial violence in Bradford earlier injured 120 policemen and led to 36 arrests.

instances use water cannon," he said. But that approach resulted in prolonged confrontations rather than "shorter and sharper" conflicts seen elsewhere in Europe.

"I am not keen on upping the ante," he added. "I am very keen on the way our police force operates as far as possible at the lowest level to maintain order. "But I am keen to examine any suggestions that are put forward in circumstances where people believe they can go on the streets, threaten others including the police and believe they can get away with it." Later he said, "All history shows, and I mean all history, that if you allow disorder to take over from democracy, then fascism can win. I am in favour of light

touch policing, rather than a more draconian policy, but have no doubt we will act decisively if we have to."

Blunkett said he recognised that it would mark a break from the tradition of British policing, but he could not allow the police to be challenged. It is understood that the pressure to use water cannon has come mainly from the Bradford community, including local councillors and MPs, rather than from the police.

Ministers are concerned at the prolonged nature of the rioting and the inability of the police to contain the trouble, despite drafting in so many reinforcements. Senior West Yorkshire police officers said the riots in Bradford had been

fomented by the NF, which had been banned from marching in the city, with feelings hyped up by the Anti-Nazi League which held a rally there on Saturday afternoon.

Marsha Singh, Labour MP for Bradford West, last night supported calls for Anti-Nazi League rallies to be banned, saying "the price is too high".

Police had to call for reinforcements from eight other forces and almost 1,000 officers, many in riot gear, were needed to restore order. Greg Wilkinson, assistant chief constable of West Yorkshire police, conceded that tactics designed to stop crime and disorder and to disperse the crowds had not worked.

"The strategy was not successful but we did the best we could," he said. "There were times when I didn't feel we were completely on top of the situation and there were times when we were extremely stretched."

Last night, there was a heavy police presence in the city centre and officers urged people to stay off the streets.

In Manningham, where pubs and a club were torched, shop windows were smashed and a BMW garage and its cars were wrecked, one young rioter said the action was a message to the NF. "It says that if they come to Manningham, this is what they will get," he said.

A spokesman for Bradford Royal Infirmary said 82 people, 63 of them police officers, needed hospital treatment following the riot.

The Guardian

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

BRITAIN / POLICE, PAK. YOUTHS FIGHT NIGHT-LONG BATTLE

Now, Bradford erupts in violence

By Hasan Suroor

LONDON, JULY 8. As Britain's scorching summer of racial violence continues, vicious rioting erupted in Bradford on Saturday following street protests against the far-right National Front's attempt to march through the city centre defying an official ban. Pakistani youths, retaliating against racial abuse by NF activists, fought pitched battles with the police all of Saturday evening and until the early hours of Sunday in what was described as Bradford's most violent night in years.

An uneasy calm prevailed on Sunday but the authorities were keeping their fingers crossed as tension remained high and the police came under fire from ethnic groups who accused them of using "heavy-handed tactics."

The Home Secretary, Mr. David Blunkett dismissed the criticism as an attempt to find scapegoats, and urged people to take a "deep breath" and "stop passing the blame".

The trouble, in which two persons were stabbed and 80 police officers injured, was concentrated in the largely Asian Manningham district lined with properties owned mostly by Pakistanis.

Ironically, a number of vehicles set on fire by angry immigrants belonged to their own communities and many local residents were angry at what they termed as "self-destructive" violence, echoing Mr. Blunkett who in a TV interview told the immigrant youth to ponder that they were destroying their own properties. They must try to be a "part of the solution" rather than become a part of the problem, he said.

"These hooligans have been stealing cars and then setting them alight, but these cars belong to Asian people and they are just hurting their own. The trouble tonight is senseless and it will take us years to recover", a Muslim youth told journalists. People complained that many of the rioters were outsiders, brought in by immigrant militants to take on the white fascist groups. In the end, it turned into a confrontation between Pakistani youth and the police with the National Front simply melting away after providing the spark.

"There's no logic to this. Where is the protest? Where are the National Front?" asked a bewildered local councillor, Mr. Mohammed Riaz, as he watched cars and shops go up in flames. He found it hard to believe that this was happening in a "city in England".

This is the fifth north England town to erupt in recent months after Oldham, Leeds, Burnley and Accrington, raising fears of more "copycat" riots. Though generically described as "Asians", the immigrants involved in these riots, both as victims and perpetrators, have



Youths fight in the Sunbridge Road in the centre of Bradford during ethnic riots on Saturday. — AFP

been mainly Pakistanis and Bangladeshis and Indians are tending to resent the catch-all "Asian" label and prefer to be called British Indians to distinguish themselves from their more volatile subcontinental neighbours.

A Left-wing Indian academic said the "cycle of violence" would continue so long as "Pakistani and Bangladeshi youth remain frustrated because of their low level of education and high unemployment." He said they were "sitting ducks" for racist organisations such as the National Front and the British National Party who portrayed them as parasites. He suggested they learn from Indians — invest in education, integrate themselves locally and get on with their lives in a manner that would not make them stick out as undesirable aliens.

Tension in Bradford had been simmering for over a week following the NF's plans to go ahead with its march despite a ban.

There are different versions of how the trouble on Saturday erupted. One is that it started when a gang of white youths marched through the centre of the city chanting racist abuse. According to another version, the provocation came from a group of NF supporters who had gathered in a pub. They hurled abuse at Asian youths who were attending a meeting of the anti-Nazi League in the city's Centenary Square.

While it was widely acknowledged that the provocation came from white gangs, the scale of retaliation by Pakistani youth took people

by surprise indicating an element of preparedness. After the first round of clashes during which a white youth was stabbed, police cleared the city centre and things looked like quietening down. But a little later, the local non-white youths regrouped in another part of the city and that's when the clashes with the police began.

As in previous riots, protesters used all sorts of missiles — petrol bombs, stones, bottles, street signs, hammers, burning torches and whatever they could lay their hands on. Cars and properties, including a pub and club were set on fire as police on horses tried to beat them back. Attempts by community leaders failed to calm passions, with the cat-and-mouse game between the rioters and police continuing until early on Sunday.

Authorities have been criticised for not being sufficiently tough with NF activists. Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe, Labour MP from Bradford south, said: "Police knew where the (far right groups) were coming. I am not convinced we did all that we could to stop them getting into the city centre."

There were calls for the Government to send out a strong message to racist groups, even as ethnic communities were reminded of the need for restraint from their side. The fact that all the five towns where racial violence has taken place recently are Labour constituencies was not seen as a good advertisement for Labour.

Five for a crown of thorns

FOR THE second time in four years, the Tories find themselves wringing their hands in despair as they look for someone who can win them an election again. And, suprisingly for a party which went through what looked like a collective suicide pact in the recent general election in Britain, there seems to be no dearth of "leaders" who think they can manage the feat.

Five such brave men have already joined the race for the party leadership to succeed the unlamented Mr. William Hague who resigned taking moral responsibility for the Tories' humiliating electoral defeat. The line-up of the contenders is a mix of pragmatic conservatism and various shades of modernising tendencies.

This reflects, at one level, the sharp divisions in the party and, at another, a confusion which can easily overwhelm any organisation which has lost two successive elections and whose traditional platform has been hijacked by others — in this case Mr. Tony Blair's New Labour.

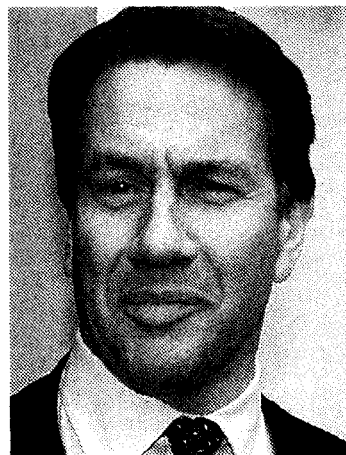
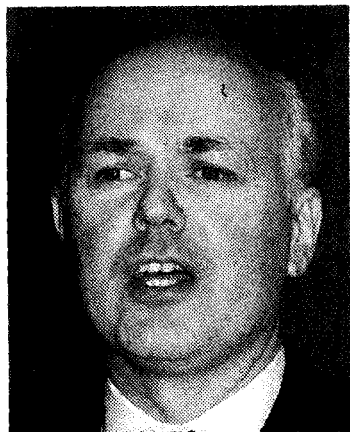
The Tories are divided between those, mostly the old guard such as the former Deputy Prime Minister, Mr. Michael Heseltine, who believe that nothing short of a radical ideological overhaul would do and those who think that basically the party has got its heart in the right place and all it needs is some fine-tuning. As the competition for the leadership intensifies the differences are likely to sharpen and become more public.

With no meeting ground among the five contenders, except the desire to "serve" the party, no one has any illusion that whoever is elected will be condemned to preside over a divided organisation at a time when what it needs is not only internal cohesion but, equally importantly, a public image of unity.

An idea of the awesome task that awaits the new leader has been rather bluntly outlined by Mr. John Maples, a former Shadow Foreign Secretary, who despite his own euroscepticism has thrown his weight behind the party's only unabashedly europhile contender, Mr. Kenneth Clarke.

Writing in *The Times*, he called for fundamental and

Five brave men have joined the race to be leader of the Tories, says Hasan Suroor.



THE MEN WHO WOULD BE KING: (Clockwise from bottom left) Mr. Michael Ancram, Mr. David Davis, Mr. Iain Duncan Smith, Mr. Kenneth Clarke and Mr. Michael Portillo.

extensive changes in the party's outlook and said the Tories needed a leader who would "change our agenda, stop us talking to ourselves and start talking to the public, soften our tone, develop ideas about public services, turn Tory principles into policies for the new century, cure our self-destructive obsession with Europe and unite us in the battle with Labour for the centre ground which is where elections are won and lost".

It is a tall order and besides

Mr. Clarke others who believe they are up to the task include the Shadow Chancellor, Mr. Michael Portillo, a charismatic but controversial figure whose conversion from hard Thatcherism to soft social liberalism seems too pat to many; the Shadow Defence Secretary, Mr. Iain Duncan Smith, a Thatcher protege termed a "normal family man" by those who carp about Mr. Portillo's "childless" family and his gay past; Mr. Michael Ancram, a softspoken aristocrat who resigned the largely ceremonial post of party chairman to offer himself as a "continuity" candidate; and last but not the least Mr. David Davis, a former Europe Minister who thinks the media is unfairly obsessed with his rather "un-Toryish" background — son of a single mother, brought up on a council estate.

The fact is that among the

right-wing contenders — Messrs Smith and Ancram — he is the brightest horse to back. He is articulate, has firm views on the role of the state in running public services and is refreshingly young.

The bookies' favourite until Mr. Clarke appeared on the scene was Mr. Portillo and though the balance has since tilted somewhat, the conventional wisdom is that both would get through in the first round when party MPs shortlist two candidates for the mass of party workers, numbering over 300,000 across the country. The final say is theirs and which of the two is able to impress them more remains a moot point.

Both have their plus points — Mr. Portillo's euro-scepticism is more in line with the sentiment of the party's rank and file, but what gives Mr. Clarke an edge is the consistency of his convictions and his refusal to make compromises to make himself more acceptable. In the 1997 leadership election, he was, in fact, the favourite of the grassroots workers.

Mr. Portillo's biggest disadvantage in a party which, for all its "modernising" pretensions and alleged respect for individual freedom, is still deeply conservative in its social behaviour is his gay past. A Clarke victory would create an unusual situation where the party chief's views on Europe would be in conflict with the official line. Despite his attempts to play down its implications, it is not going to be easy to reconcile his own "euro-enthusiasm" with the euro-phobia which is so deeply ingrained in the party.

Mr. Smith, for instance, has already declared that there is no question of a compromise on the issue.

How Mr. Clarke handles such senior euro-sceptic figures without letting the differences affect party's unity will be interesting to watch.

Yet, barring Mr. Portillo and Mr. Clarke, none of the contenders has an eclectic enough outlook to break the party's insular mould and make it more in tune with the demands of a modern society. And, as Mr. Heseltine warned, unless that happens, the Tories can write themselves off for good.

Prince Philip vetoes royal reforms

London

THE DUKE of Edinburgh has won his battle against Prince Charles and the Princess Royal, vetoing proposals for tough new guidelines to ban the minor royals from running their own businesses, according to Whitehall sources.

Prince Philip has forced the Lord Chamberlain, Lord Luce, who has drawn up the guidelines, to water down restrictions which would have prevented the Earl and Countess of Wessex from continuing their film production and public relations businesses while remaining working members of the royal family.

The guidelines — due to be announced next week — are understood to be similar to the existing rules, suggesting the whole exercise has been little more than window dressing. Downing Street, which had been very keen on ending the links

between royals representing the government and running their own commercial businesses, is furious at the Duke of Edinburgh's victory. Officially, Downing Street says that it is a matter for the palace rather than the government, but a spokesman did not deny that Number 10 had been consulted.

Sources say the royals have been divided over whether to clamp down on the business activities of minor members, ever since the row over the Countess of Wessex's indiscreet comments about the Windsors and leading politicians to a *News of the World* reporter posing as an Arab sheikh. She was reported as comparing William Hague to a puppet and talked of her royal connections as an "unspoken benefit" of hiring her firm, RJ-H Public Relations.

The fallout — and revelations about her business partner Murray Harkin's drug-taking and

homosexuality — forced Sophie, Countess of Wessex, to resign as chairman of RJ-H. Her husband Prince Edward also faced criticism for using taxpayer-funded trips abroad to drum up business for his TV production company.

The guidelines are expected to emphasise the need to be very careful about the choice of business partners by any of the minor royals to ensure that they are both seen to be, and are, squeaky clean. They are also expected to lay down strict rules about gossiping with clients about the royal family and demand a much higher level of discretion.

One source said: "They basically must avoid being taken in by fake sheikhs and not be associated with people running gay parties for favoured clients." It is understood that the Duke of Edinburgh was insistent that proposed guidelines which went so far as banning the royals from



running their own businesses were scrapped. He is said to have made it clear that Prince Edward, who has little chance of ever succeeding to the throne, should be allowed to continue earning cash from the commercial sector. He also thought that Sophie should continue in business to help pay for the upkeep of Bagshot Park, their Victorian

mansion in Surrey, which costs £250,000 a year to run.

He overruled objections from Prince Charles and the Princess Royal that their brother should in future devote his main energies to charity work and insist that his new wife sever all her connections in public relations.

Prince Charles has already let it be known that he believes being a member of the royal family is incompatible with having a prominent role in running a commercial business. He has told Lord Luce that if members of the royal family wish to pursue commercial careers, they should give up the benefits they receive from the government — such as access to British embassies abroad and the protection of Buckingham Palace press officers.

The Duke of Edinburgh's veto is the strongest rearguard action yet from members of the royal family who object to moves

towards a slimmed down institution with no income for members from their own commercial businesses. The Prince has always been opposed to big reforms of the monarchy and is said to have decided to draw a line over the plans to end business links.

Downing Street has been a strong supporter of modernising the monarchy to meet the needs of the 21st century. Tony Blair is known to have been in favour of an efficient, cost-effective and slimmed down royal family and is particularly keen to ensure that the government is not embarrassed by indiscreet comments from minor royals or unwise business dealings.

The Duke of Edinburgh's victory will be seen as a huge blow — going against all the work to improve the image of the royals with the public and to avoid any future scandals that could be exploited by the tabloid press.

The Guardian

The UK Indian gets a new logo

LONDON: It's official: The British Indian is not the British Asian so beloved of the tabloids and TV news bulletins. Or at least he is not the lumpen, poorly educated, unemployable goon who gets into the papers on the strength of headline-hitting arguments with far-right groups like the British National Party (BNP) in Bradford, Oldham, Leeds and Burnley.

Nick Griffin, the neo-Nazi BNP's urbane and personable leader, who is sometimes described with more exoticism than truth as a watered-down version of Austria's permanently sun-tanned, Hitler-quoting politician, Joerg Haider, has been putting his expensive Cambridge education to good use by rationalising the cowboys and Indians divide. The BNP, says Griffin, who has long espoused repatriating anyone who does not automatically need sunscreen lotion, is not anti-Asian and certainly not anti-Indian. They are merely anti-Muslim.

Unsurprisingly, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad's European functionaries have seized on this evidence of the BNP's perspicacity as a sign of better times just ahead. The campaign to rename the sociological space variously inhabited by Swaraj Paul, Perween Warsi and Meera Syal and the million or so decent, law-abiding, wealth-creating Patels and Shahs has gone on for years. Indeed, British Indians need nothing so much as a new logo, a trademarked identity, to fend off comparisons with the sub-continental chaff.

Perhaps, this too may come to pass. The British prime minister, it seems, has discovered the salient truth that Asians are a disparate lot and some are more disparate than others. This week, Tony Blair will unveil plans for a massive inquiry into why Indians are not 'Asian' enough to share basic characteristics with Pakistanis and Bangladeshis. David Owen, the academic Welshman who did Blair's basic research for him last year, tells us this is shorthand for the following unedifying record clocked up by British South Asians from anywhere outside India: pitiful scholastic grades, paltry adult national learning percentages and unemployment rates twice as high as those of the white majority, Indians and Chinese.

So Indians are on a roll. The only trouble is, they seem to have impressed hardly anyone but the British far-right. The Germans, for instance, are hardly falling over themselves to welcome those credited with giving the world the *swastika*.

Consider this. Last week, the German government

found it needed at least 50,000 preferably highly-skilled immigrants every year if Deutschland is still to be 'uber Alles', which translates into 'Germany above all'. It is not a matter of choice or fashionably multicultural aspirations. Germany cannot pay its social security bills and maintain its greying population in the style to which it is accustomed unless it looks beyond the Aryan gene bank.

No one is using the 'I' word too often, fearing the potent import into the political debate of dual unmentionables - Indians and immigration. It is hard to forget what happened last year, when the German chancellor controversially managed to introduce US-style green cards mainly for Indian techies. Schroeder's hard-sell was not enough to prevent an opposition campaign that told a Germany dedicated to the concept of racial-cohesiveness to breed computer programmers instead of importing them from India.

The bottom line of the German "Kinder statt Inder" (children instead of Indians) campaign should be required reading for the VHP in Britain. Re-branding and logo-definition is all very well, but out on the streets, the British Indian is still a mere 'Paki', the grossest form of racist abuse.

Everyone, including the Slovaks and Slovenes, is trying to metamorphose into model Europeans and find a place in the enlarged European Union family, but one clan that just won't make the effort is Britain's royal Windsors.

Urgent consultations about a slimmed-down, Europeanised, bicycling monarchy, with a clear dividing line between public service and commercial breaks, have, it seems, come up with a glorious no-change formula. The review of the monarchy's business links was brought on by Sophie's indiscretions, or indeed the rather porky Countess of Wessex's experiments with truth and a tabloid reporter posing as an Arab sheikh.

Poor Sophie's chief sin was to be a fast-talking entrepreneur stuck in a family that thinks it's a rather good wheeze getting the public to pay for the chance to see the old silver. But the review offered stark choices: Real work or the alternative therapy of a life devoted to cutting ribbons. In doing both, they make royal capital out of a family firm that is uneasily looking over its shoulder at the novel Bulgarian solution - turn king into king-maker by voting his party into office.

EUROVISION RASHMEE Z AHMED



Tony Blair

THE TIMES OF 1997

1997

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Serious security lapse at RAF base

By Hasan Suroor

LONDON, JULY 4. Questions have been raised about the security at one of Britain's most sensitive surveillance centres — the RAF base at Menwith Hill in north Yorkshire —, after a group of Greenpeace activists stormed it on Tuesday, meeting with little resistance as they literally walked through its front gate. For as long as it would have taken real saboteurs to wreak havoc, the peace-niks had a free run of the place — cutting wirefences, climbing up a watertank, roaming around the "secure" complex and even greeting the unsuspecting GIs, out on their morning jog.

The demonstrators, dressed up as missiles and carrying banners and humming the tunes from "Star Wars" and "Mission Impossible", were protesting U.S. plans to use the base for its "Son of Star Wars" programme.

The RAF Menwith Hill, equipped with some of the world's most sophisticated communication facilities, is one of the two British spy bases which the U.S. might use as a "listening post" for its nuclear missile defence shield project. The Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair, is under pressure from his own Ministers and MPs not to let Americans use the British bases for a programme which, it is widely believed, would accelerate the arms race.

Protesters told newspapers that they were surprised how easy it had been to gain entry into the high-security zone, with only two sleepy men and a dog guarding its entrance. The incident had exposed its vulnerability and made

a mockery of its so-called invincibility. "The fact that we were able to get over 100 volunteers into the base shows how easy it would be to take out U.S. defences. There is no way that the most sophisticated electronic surveillance can guard against attacks by suitcase bombers", said Mr. Steven Tindale, head of Greenpeace U.K.

It took the base security nearly the whole day to evict the protesters, but some were still holding out until this morning. One report said a group had "broken back" into the complex.

In a surreal account of the incident, Mr. John Vidal of *The Guardian* wrote that "not a dog barked or siren wailed" as the protesters breezed past the laid-back securityguard and spread themselves out. One group got on to the water tower and "waved their flags and waited. And waited. Nothing happened."

Meanwhile, another group managed to reach as far as the "last line of defence" just before the area where surveillance is believed to take place. Critics said if anyone could come that close to the real thing, it raised serious questions about the nature of security. By all accounts, it was a security lapse, even if the protesters were guilty of breach of security. "It was very funny and it does raise questions about the kind of security they have here", a Greenpeace spokesperson told *The Independent*.

More protests are planned to highlight the "dangers" from the Star Wars programme ahead of the U.S. President, Mr. George W. Bush's talks with Mr. Blair later this month.

British MPs under fire for race riots

London

BRITISH POLITICIANS are stoking racial hatred with inflammatory comments on asylum and immigration, according to an independent report to be put to the United Nations tomorrow.

As new trouble flared in the north of England yesterday, with an Asian family of seven fleeing their house which was petrol-bombed as they slept, Amnesty International and other human rights groups said comments by Labour and Tory politicians had led to violence against asylum-seekers.

In a damning report to the UN Human Rights Committee, 11 organisations, led by Liberty, the civil rights group, and including the Law Society and the Bar Human Rights Committee, say 'politicians and media alike have been encouraging racist hostility in their public attitudes towards asylum-seekers'.

They say: "Such negative presentation of asylum-seekers has not only led to direct attacks on asylum-seekers, but also an underlying greater hostility towards all those from ethnic minority communities, and heightened racial tensions. In our view, the recent race riots in Oldham and Bradford are to an extent directly linked to the above."

Jagdish Patel, of the Monitoring Group, which supports victims of racial harassment,

last night backed the findings: "There is a marked increase in reports to our helpline of attacks when politicians make speeches on race where they blame asylum-seekers for problems."

But as towns across the North braced for more violence between Asian and white gangs, Lord Tebbit, the former Tory chairman, said he did not believe the rhetoric from the main parties had been excessive.

"I am convinced that the race relations industry is the main recruiting ground for the British National Party," he said. "There is a danger that, if the debate on asylum is suppressed, it will be continued only on the far fringes of politics."

Tensions rose after racists fire-bombed the home of the Asian family in the Lancashire town of Accrington.

The family, the youngest of whom is aged seven, were asleep above the former newsagent's shop when a covering over a front window was forced open and petrol was poured through and set alight. The alarm was only raised when the eldest son was awoken by the smell of smoke.

He rushed through the house to alert his family, which will be re-housed because of the extensive damage to their home.

Police said it was luck that no one was killed.

The arson attack early yesterday followed four petrol

bombings in Accrington on Friday evening against two white-owned businesses, a school and a car.

Two Asian youths were spotted running away from the blazing car, police said.

Police and community leaders have appealed for calm in the town, where Muslim tombstones were vandalised a week ago.

Council leaders are considering a ban on marches and demonstrations in Accrington, similar to those in place in Burnley and Oldham.

Nick Griffin, leader of the far-right BNP, blamed the tensions on 'Asian thugs'. His comments are certain to stoke anger in the town, where more than 4,000 voted for the BNP in the general election. "Asian thugs for some years now, in places like Burnley, have been winding this up by attacking innocent white people," he said.

But the report to the United Nations committee will underline fears that the disturbances in the North are but a symptom of the state of race relations in Britain.

Citing evidence of widespread discrimination against black and Asian Britons, the authors also express 'deep concern' about the continuing rise in deaths in prison and the high proportion of black people who have died in police custody since 1997.

The Observer

THE HINDUSTAN

199-16 U.K. RACE RIOTS / WHITE YOUTHS BATTLE POLICE IN OLDHAM

Blair blames right wingers for violence

By Hasan Suroor

LONDON, MAY 29. In his first comment on the racial violence in Oldham, the Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair, today blamed it on white extremists but defended the police which has been accused of being "heavy-handed" with Asians.

While he did not name any extremist organisations, the reference was believed to be to the supporters of the far-Right National Front (NF) and the British National Party (BNP) who have been running a hate campaign in Oldham ever since a white war veteran was mugged by Asian youths last month.

The BNP is also contesting two parliamentary seats from the area, allegedly with a view to exploiting racial tensions. Mr. Blair, in an interview with *The Guardian*, said whatever be the underlying reasons for tensions in Oldham, "the most obvious reason is that there are people who always want to exploit any circumstances or difficulty."

He said while problems would always be there, what was condemnable was their exploitation for "bad and regressive motives". However, he cautioned against generalisations saying the Oldham riots should not be seen as "symptomatic of race relations in Britain". About the police who have taken a lot of flak from Asians in Oldham, Mr. Blair said the fact was that the police had got a "good record on race relations". In what was seen as a pep talk addressed to the ethnic com-



Asian residents of the Goldwixk neighbourhood run away from the burning Greenhill Mill School in the north English town of Oldham on Monday after rioters threw petrol bombs on the school. — AFP

munities, he said: "You cannot excuse (the violence) in any shape or form."

Meanwhile, violence erupted again in Oldham on Monday night as white youths, defying heavy police presence, took to the streets and hurled petrol bombs. They wanted to march into Asian-majority areas, but the riot police effectively blocked the main road leading to Asian homes and after a tense stand-off, the rioters were forced to disperse.

This was Oldham's third successive night of disturbance after yet another day of deceptive calm during which there was even a cultural event in the town centre. So far, 48 people — both whites and Asians — have been arrested, and police

warned they were determined to deal firmly with trouble-makers, irrespective of their colour. Senior police officers denied they had been more harsh with Asians than with whites. They insisted they had been "balanced" in their approach, and that police presence in Asian areas had been increased to protect ethnic groups.

There was resentment that nothing had been done to prevent the entry of extremists into Oldham even after the police admitted that their presence was a source of tension. The National Front, it was stated, had been able to get round a ban on its members marching through the town. They had been turning up at weekends as football fans to watch local matches, and it was they who

were suspected to be behind last Saturday's attack on Asian properties which triggered the rioting. NF supporters were also said to be campaigning for BNP candidates, and distributing allegedly provocative leaflets.

Police, however, said they could not stop legitimate political activity and that they had not found anything objectionable in the leaflets.

The BNP chairman, Mr. Nick Griffin, who is contesting one of the seats, confirmed his party's divisive agenda saying it wanted Oldham to be divided on ethnic lines. *The Times* reported him as saying that he favoured "Northern Ireland-style walls to keep warring communities apart" and called for a "peaceful exchange of people from both sides."

The NF also declared its intentions to set up a "strong local base" in Oldham after the elections.

The issue, meanwhile, got inevitably involved with the election campaign with the Liberal Democrats coming under fire from Tories for saying that the Tory propaganda on asylum and immigration had contributed to a divisive climate.

The Tories have accused Liberal Democrats of "gutter politics" and demanded an apology. The Labour too was quick to distance itself from the Liberal Democrats' remarks though the Home Secretary, Mr. Jack Straw, agreed that politicians should avoid intemperate language.

RACIAL VIOLENCE / RETALIATORY ATTACKS SPREAD FEAR

Burnley, Oldham not linked: police

11 119-14

By Hasan Suroor

LONDON, JUNE 25. Police and community leaders were today trying to calm passions in Burnley, Lancashire, after a second consecutive night of racial violence amid fears of "copy cat" riots spreading to other areas.

Shops and vehicles were burnt in retaliatory attacks by gangs of Asian and white youths with each side matching the other measure for measure in what was described as a replay, though on a smaller scale, of the clashes in neighbouring Oldham a few weeks ago. While a white mob burned down an Asian newsagent's shop, immigrant youths, mostly Pakistanis and Bangladeshis, attacked a pub which they alleged was a meeting point for racist elements and set fire to a leisure shop.

Contrary to initial reports, the trouble appears to have been sparked by an argument after an Asian family asked their white neighbour who was having a weekend party late on Saturday night to stop playing loud music. "Some whites allegedly responded with threats saying: we will sort you out," according to a newspaper version. It said within minutes, a van which the Asians alleged had been used by the far-right British National Party (BNP) during the recent elections arrived carrying a group of white youths. Soon skirmishes began and stones were thrown at an Asian taxi driver. As he came out of the vehicle, he was hit with a hammer breaking his cheekbone, triggering a wave of anger which the Asian youths first directed at the police and then at white properties.

Asians complained that the police were slow to respond and took nearly 30 minutes to reach the scene of the attack on the driver. Mr. Rafique Malik, Deputy Mayor of Burnley, criticised the police saying: "If the police took half an hour to arrive after the taxi driver was attacked, what faith do we have that they will protect our people." Sober elements in both communities sounded distressed repeatedly



28/6

The burned out Duke of York pub damaged after a night of riots in Burnley, England, on Monday. — AP

saying that "Burnley is not Oldham" and that the town had a good record on race relations. Ms. Marie Coulston, whose pub windows were smashed, said she never had trouble before and Mr. Malik, testifying to the tolerant image of the area, declared: "It would be a shame for Burnley to be tagged as another Oldham because it is not. I have been a councillor here for 30 years and the majority of voters are white and they have always supported me."

Police also sought to rule out a link with Oldham but suspicions remained because of the presence of alleged BNP activists. As in Oldham, here too the BNP contested the general election and got 4,000 votes indicating its creeping strength in mixed areas of north England. "There is a feeling here that a domino effect may be at work," a BBC reporter said from Burnley. Nearly 6,000 of the town's over

90,000 population comprises Asian immigrants who claim that the area has no history of racial tension. They were surprised that the BNP managed to get over 11 per cent votes and blamed "outsiders" for stirring up trouble. One Asian told a newspaper that his fiancée was white and there had never been any trouble.

This is the third outbreak of racial violence in recent weeks and coincides with the increased visibility of extremist groups such as the National Front and BNP. Authorities, however, argue that they cannot be prevented from engaging in legitimate political activity such as fighting elections. In Oldham even as Asians complained that the NF and BNP were distributing inflammatory pamphlets, police maintained that they found nothing objectionable.

THE MAIL

28 JUN 2001

Asian traders attacked in fresh UK race riots

London, June 25

AT LEAST three businesses including an Asian-owned news agent's shop, a sex shop and a pub were fire bombed and cars set alight last night in fresh racial clashes in the Lancashire town of Burnley, northwest of England, police said today.

Scores of police in riot gear tried to keep the rioting Asian and white youths apart into the early hours of this morning in the predominantly Asian Stoneyholme area of the town. A police helicopter hovered over the area keeping a strict vigil.

A spokesman of the Lancashire police headquarters said that efforts were on to bring together leaders of the two communities to ensure that there is no recurrence of the rioting.

It was the second night of violence between whites and Asians. Trouble first broke out on Saturday morning when a taxi driver was the target of a racially motivated attack.

The trouble follows the Oldham riots earlier this month

when police blamed the British National Party for stoking up racial tensions in the town.

Burnley's Asian community leaders said the skirmishes were spontaneous and sparked by a dispute over loud music being played. An Asian family asked white partygoers next door to turn music down. Some whites allegedly responded with threats, saying, "we will sort you out." That was followed by an attack on an Asian taxi driver by a gang of whites. He suffered a broken cheekbone. Police were treating both attacks as being racially motivated.

The town, with a six per cent ethnic minority community of mainly Pakistanis and Bangladeshis, has no history of racial tension. But the right extremist British National Party gained a surprise 11.2 per cent of the vote in the June 7 election fuelling the tension and community leaders warned that violence could continue if outside forces actively came to the area to stir tension.

Shahid Malik, son of the town's deputy mayor and a senior

member of the commission for racial equality, said there was added racial sensitivity in the town after the British National Party gained more than one in ten votes in the general election.

"Sadly, it seems some of the young men heard about Asian businesses being attacked and they felt the right course of action was to attack white businesses. There is no justification for that, but people must understand that they have been taunted by white racists."

Rafique Malik, the deputy mayor said, "it would be a shame for Burnley to be tagged as another Oldham because it is not. The white community is not racist, only a few individuals."

Rafique Malik said Asians were angry the police had taken half an hour to reach the scene of the attack on the taxi driver. "People were very angry. If the police took half an hour to arrive after the taxi driver was attacked what faith do we have that they will protect our people? This is not another Oldham.

PTI

Burnley hit-and-run attack racial: Police

FROM KAREN MATUSIC

London, June 27 (Reuters): British police said today they were treating as racially motivated a hit-and-run incident in the northern English town of Burnley, the scene of three days of violent clashes between Asian and White youths.

Lancashire police said they were looking for the Asian driver of the car which hit a White man while he was walking with a friend in the town last night. The man suffered a broken leg.

Burnley is the third northern English town to be hit by rioting involving ethnic minorities in recent weeks. Ten people were arrested overnight, police said, most for possessing offensive weapons or for public order offences.

But they noted that calm was returning to the industrial town following clashes between more than 200 Asian and White youths on Saturday and Sunday nights.

Of Burnley's 92,000 population, 4,000 are Pakistani and 2,000 are of Bangladeshi descent. Most arrived in Britain in the 1970s to work in the textile mills and factories. Burnley deputy mayor Rafiq Malik said that high unemployment and the rundown conditions of the gritty town filled with boarded-up vacant buildings and cramped housing stoked the unrest. "There is a feeling of desperation. Unemployment is a big problem — the rate is more than double for young Asians than for Whites — and it breeds resentment," Malik said.

Home secretary (interior minister) David Blunkett said the fact that the far-right British National Party, which proposes a ban on non-White immigration to Britain, enjoyed its second-best showing in this month's general election in Burnley was ominous.

Burnley is 30 km from Oldham, the scene last month of Britain's worst racial riots in

more than a decade. A police spokesman said last night's incident followed an alleged verbal exchange of a racist nature. The vehicle, carrying four Asian men, was driven towards the White men. One jumped out of the way but the other was run over. "This was a very dangerous incident and the victim suffered a broken leg, but he could have been much more seriously injured or even killed," detective superintendent Paul Buschini said.

During the weekend street battles, 22 people were arrested as gangs clashed with each other and the police. Cars, a pub and an Indian restaurant were burned and shops looted. Most of those arrested — a mixture of Whites and Asians — were facing public order or racial incitement charges. Around five per cent of Britain's 57 million people are from ethnic minorities, mainly from the Caribbean, the Indian sub-continent, Africa and China.

17/6

More labour in Britain 10-16

NOW THAT the predictable has happened with Labour back in office after a record-breaking performance in elections and the Tories in disarray, what's next? The first week after the general election in Britain has been eventful both for Labour and the Tories — one trying to strike the right note in the face of awesome expectations from it in its second term in office, and the other struggling for political survival following a second debacle in four years.

The Tories, who should have been engaged in a post-mortem and "quiet reflection", as a senior leader suggested, are instead caught up in a bitter leadership struggle following Mr. William Hague's resignation within hours of the party's defeat. That a man who — to quote the charismatic Tory veteran, Mr. Michael Hesel-

For Labour, the most daunting task is to deliver on its promises... As for the Tories, they need to get a new wardrobe. Hasan Suroor on the post-poll scene in Britain.

— could not distinguish between a "bandwagon and hearse" should have gone is entirely appropriate but will his departure make a difference? By all accounts, what the party needs is a brutal shake-up, and a radical conceptual shift to make itself compatible with the demands of an increasingly complex and culturally diverse Britain. Is it capable of re-inventing itself?

For Labour, the most daunting task is to deliver on its promises, most of which are a hangover from the first term. The Blair Government is widely seen to have frittered away the first term as public services deteriorated, crime rose and the more vulnerable sections such as pensioners felt cheated. During the election campaign, the Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair, got an earful from voters who, in the end, still voted Labour simply because it was the lesser of the evils. The Tories were clearly unelectable, and the Liberal Democrats too raw for comfort.

Mr. Blair admits that his Government could not do as much in the first term as it should have, but says it was saddled with a crippling Tory legacy which needed to be got out of the way first. Having cleared the cobwebs left behind by the Tories, and laid the "foundations" of a strong economy, La-

bour it is now ready to come good on its promises, Mr. Blair told voters. His campaign theme was: give me another term, and see the difference.

Now that he has got what he wanted, expectations are high — and he is conscious of it. In his very first public statement, Mr. Blair said the mandate was an "instruction to deliver" and the composition of his new Government is seen to suggest that he does mean business. In what has been described as the most savage reshuf-

fle since Harold Macmillan's famous "night of the long knives" when he sacked one-third of his Cabinet, Mr. Blair has brought in people perceived by observers as "doers". It has been called a "Blairite Cabinet in his own image", reflecting his new authority.

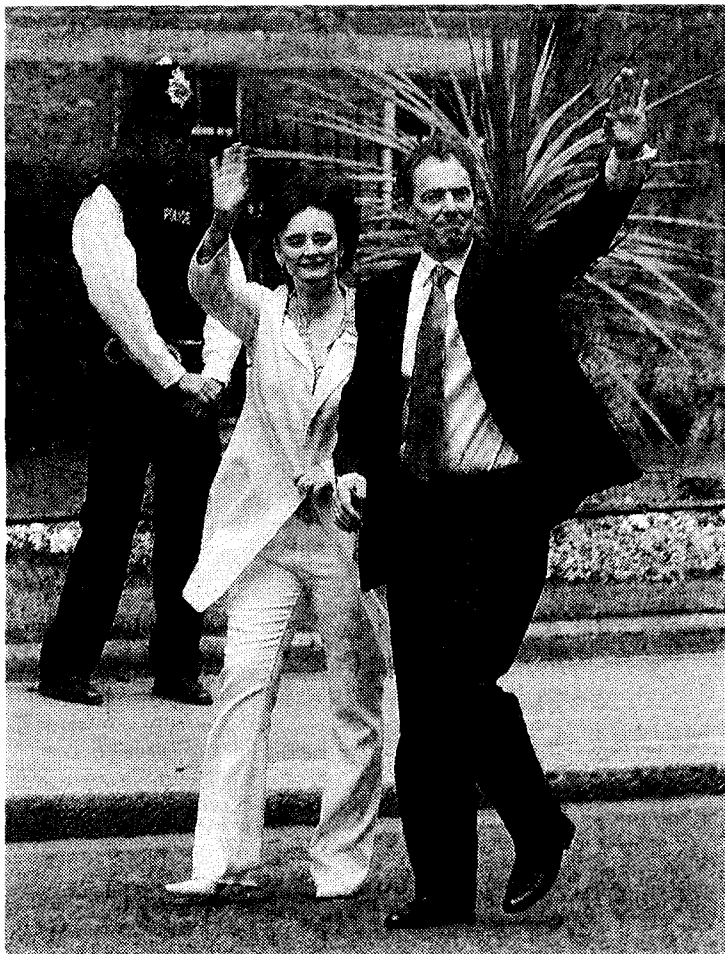
The inclusion of a record number of women in key departments is a response to the charge that he ran an old boys' network. By shifting Mr. Robin Cook out of the Foreign Office and bringing a euro-sceptic Mr. Jack Straw in his

place, Mr. Blair has sent out a signal that on Europe he is working to a plan. To reinforce the image of a Government determined to make up for lost time, he has set up a "delivery" unit presided over by the Deputy Prime Minister, Mr. John Prescott. But, as *The Times* warned, the presence of a fresh and "intelligent set of faces does not by itself mean that policy will be more imaginative or better implemented". The important thing, it said, was to press ahead with his "domestic agenda more vigorously". *The Guardian* called for "less nonsense and more honesty" saying that Labour must trust the voters more than in the past.

Meanwhile, the Tories are passing through yet another bruising phase — a result of pursuing an agenda which, according to Mr. Heseltine, is completely out of tune with modern Britain. The Tory campaign, it is widely acknowledged even within the party, was divorced from real issues. While Mr. Hague and his team harped on Europe, asylum and taxes, people wanted to hear about bread-and-butter problems — education, health and transport. It was seen as a party of xenophobes caught up in a time warp, and sorely out of touch with the changed social attitudes.

"The real problems which confront the Conservatives now are that they have few detailed policies on the public services and are perceived as both abnormal and out of touch by most of the population," *The Times* said pointing out that it needed to revamp its style, philosophy and policies. The message repeatedly hammered in this past week is that the party needs to broaden its appeal by taking a more relaxed view of new social and cultural attitudes, particularly on issues such as single parenthood, homosexuality and multiculturalism.

The leadership battle has thrown up deep divisions between the hard Europhobic right-wing Tories represented by the Shadow Home Secretary, Ms. Ann Widdecombe, and the Left identified with the Shadow Chancellor, Mr. Michael Portillo, the former Chancellor, Mr. Kenneth Clarke, and Mr. Heseltine, among others. So far, only Mr. Portillo has formally announced his candidature while Ms. Widdecombe, Mr. Clarke and Mr. Ian Duncan Smith, a Thatcher protégé, are weighing their options. In the end, however, a mere leadership change will make little difference and whether the party becomes electable again will depend on whether it is willing to make a radical break with the past. It needs to get itself a spanking new wardrobe now that New Labour has stolen its clothes so brilliantly.



AFTER THE CONTEST: The triumphant Blairs and (below) the crestfallen Hagues.



Vaz resigned on health grounds: Govt.

WAF
20-16
By Hasan Suroor 1376

LONDON, JUNE 12. Mr. Keith Vaz was not sacked from the Government but resigned on health grounds, it was officially stated in what was seen as an attempt to put a gloss on the controversial Minister's exit.

The manner of his departure was in line with what the commentators had been saying — that the official line would be to refute the suggestion that it had anything to do with the embarrassing political controversies that have dogged him for months. Downing Street said Mr. Vaz, who was Minister for Europe, wrote to the Prime Minister Mr. Tony Blair on Sunday wishing to step down but it was not explained why the announcement was held back to coincide with Monday's reshuffle in which as many as 18 junior Ministers lost their jobs. The confusion whether Mr. Vaz quit of his own accord or was removed could have been avoided if his "resignation" had been announced earlier in the day when speculation was rife that he was to be dropped.

The Prime Minister's office released a letter in which Mr. Blair appreciated Mr. Vaz's reasons for "standing down" and thanked him for his "hard work" as Minister. "You have been put under intolerable pressure recently which can only have aggravated your illness. I hope you will now have the chance for a proper rest," the letter said. However, long before Mr. Vaz's departure was announced, the BBC had declared him "politically dead" saying that "not a soul" in Whitehall expected him to stay on.

Mr. Vaz, who was admitted to hospital on



Keith Vaz

Sunday following an infection, was discharged on Monday afternoon, shortly before the reshuffle was announced. He was replaced by Mr. Peter Hain, a former Foreign Office Minister who had been moved to the Department of Trade and Industry a few months ago. Observers maintained that Mr. Vaz would have been sacked if he had not resigned. It was also suggested that he had perhaps been persuaded to resign to save himself the embarrassment of being dropped and to make it appear that the Prime Minister continued to have trust in him. His exit did not, however, end speculation and while one newspaper quoted his "friends in the Indian community" as advising him not to

"prematurely attempt a comeback" another said the controversy over his conduct as M.P. would continue as he faced a fresh inquiry into allegations relating to his properties.

For months, Mr. Vaz has been at the centre of a series of embarrassing episodes largely relating to his business links and the parliamentary standards commissioner, Ms. Elizabeth Filkin's charge that he did not co-operate with her in her inquiry into his affairs. Though he was cleared for his role in the Hinduja's passport affair, there have been other "disclosures" regarding his business deals. The latest allegation is over the properties he owns. Mr. Vaz has denied the charges, and the Prime Minister consistently backed him describing him as a victim of a media witchhunt.

Another Minister who was involved in the Hinduja's passport row and is now out of the Government is Mr. Mike O'Brien. He was sacked on Monday in what *The Times* described as the most "savage" reshuffle since 1962 when Harold Macmillan got rid of one-third of his Cabinet on the "night of the long knives". Mr. O'Brien was a Home Office Minister when Mr. Peter Mandelson and Mr. Vaz spoke to him about Mr. S. P. Hinduja's passport application.

Even as he wielded the axe, the Prime Minister also handed out a pay rise to his Ministers and raised his own salary by £47,000 a year provoking a sharp reaction with unions accusing him of following double standards. "It is obviously one rule for politicians and another for teachers and nurses," the spokesman of a teachers' union said.

THE HINDU

JUN 13 1998

Blair replaces Vaz with Hain

FROM MIKE PEACOCK

London, June 11 (Reuters): British Prime Minister Tony Blair removed his scandal-tainted minister for Europe Keith Vaz today and replaced him with former anti-apartheid firebrand Peter Hain, a government official announced.

Hain has already served at the foreign office but was last an industry minister dealing with "competitiveness in Europe".

The African-born Hain came to Britain as a teenager after his parents were forced out of white-ruled South Africa for opposing apartheid.

He helped sabotage a 1969 South African rugby tour of Britain and joined protests which led to a cricket series being cancelled the following year.

In his foreign office job, he won a reputation for being a straight talker with Africa's leaders. Last year he accused Zimbabwe's President Robert Mugabe of giving a "green light" to the murder of Opposition supporters as Mugabe's

government failed to act against the violent occupation of white-owned farms.

Vaz, dogged for months by allegations about his financial affairs, was sacked in favour of Hain who is promoted as part of a government reshuffle at the start of Blair's second term in office.

He was one of the ministers for the middle and junior ranks of government announced today. Blair, whose Labour Party was re-elected last Thursday by a landslide, reshuffled the top jobs last Friday, including new foreign secretary Jack Straw.

The minister for Europe is based in the foreign office and will play an important role in Blair's assessment of whether Britain should enter the European single currency. Vaz departs government after months of allegations of impropriety in his financial and political activities.

He denied wrongdoing and Blair steadfastly defended him, but his circumstances have been a constant headache for the Prime Minister.

British media steps up anti-Vaz campaign

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
LONDON, JUNE 10

DESPITE his ill-health and limited campaigning, Keith Vaz, the sole Asian representative in the Blair cabinet, was re-elected to the House of Commons in the recent general elections, but the media campaign against him revived today saying "he will be sacked this week as Tony Blair puts the finishing touches to his reshuffle."

"The Prime Minister has decided finally to remove Vaz, who has clung on to his job for months despite a series of allegations about his financial affairs," the *Sunday Telegraph* said in its report.

Blair was at his country retreat

at Chequers yesterday working on his reshuffle of middle and junior-ranking ministers but is not expected to make any formal announcement of changes until tomorrow.

In a lead story with the headline stating "tainted" Vaz to be sacked in reshuffle, the *Sunday Times*, claimed Vaz would be sacked by Blair this week, ending a 15-month period during which "the Prime Minister clung to his controversial Minister for Europe in the face of mounting allegations of misconduct."

Blair has repeatedly defended Vaz, saying that no accusations against him have been proven, and that he will not submit to "media pressure". Last week

BBC reported that Vaz had failed to declare in the Commons register two out of five properties in which he had a stake. Vaz insisted he had done nothing wrong.

Before that, his links to the NRI Hinduja brothers had been investigated as part of the government appointed Hammond "Passports for Favours" inquiry, which found no evidence of wrong doing.

The brothers, Srichand and Gopichand, flew back to Britain last week and voted in the election close to their central London home. The foundation paid the money to the company, Mapesbury Communications, for its help to organise a lecture by a Hindu religious leader at the House of Commons.

Blair moves Cook, euro hit

REUTERS
LONDON, JUNE 9

BRITAIN'S political landscape on Saturday was "Blair Country", with the Opposition Conservative Party leaderless, a new Cabinet in place and euro membership the next big issue.

Prime Minister Tony Blair, his leadership reaffirmed after Thursday's sweeping election victory, followed up the success with the biggest Cabinet reshuffle of recent times. The main surprise was the replacement of europhile Foreign Secretary Robin Cook, which sent a mixed signal on whether the pro-Europe Blair planned swift action on joining the euro.

Money markets had marked down sterling, believing Blair's victory made a rapid move towards its replacement by the joint European currency more likely. But Cook's demotion in favour of former Home Minister Jack Straw, seen by newspapers as a euro-sceptic, stopped such speculation in its tracks.

Sources said Straw's appointment was to ensure a steady pair of hands in charge of foreign affairs, not connected with the debate over the euro. Blair, the first Labour Prime Minister to win successive full terms in power after his 1997 landslide, acknowledged that his "historic mandate" came with a demand from voters for fast action.

Whatever Blair's real motivation in replacing Cook with Straw



Robin Cook arriving at 10, Downing Street, before the Cabinet reshuffle. He was replaced with Jack Straw in the foreign office -- Reuters

at the Foreign Office, British newspapers saw it as a step away from the euro. "The extraordinary move was seen as a clear signal to Brussels from Blair that he will not bounce Britain into ditching the pound," the tabloid *Sun* said.

The conservative *Daily Telegraph* said the action weakened the Cabinet's pro-Europe wing because Straw was one of its most sceptical members. "His move will be seen as an indication that Blair does not plan any rushed move into the euro or to bounce the public into holding a referendum on abol-

ishing the pound," it said.

Blair's oft-stated position on the euro is that economic conditions favouring Britain must first be met and a final decision will be taken by the public in a referendum. Opposition leader William Hague was seen as having blundered in making euro rather than social issues the central theme of his campaign. But ironically, it is now set to become top of the political agenda for Blair's first months in power. The Conservative Party was locked by Hague into not joining the euro for at least the

next five years. But as he has now stepped down with the unenviable distinction of being the first Tory leader since the 1920s not to become Prime minister, the issue is once again open for party debate.

Chris Patten, Britain's last governor of Hong Kong and now a European Commissioner, said the Tories could only move forward when pro-Europe leaders were welcomed back to the fold.

"I was attacked recently by one anti-European for having lost the plot," said Patten who backs euro membership.

N Ireland poll results hinder peace process

REUTERS
BELFAST, JUNE 9

NORTHERN Ireland's main Protestant leader David Trimble barely managed to retain his seat in British elections on Friday that left the province's peace process badly wounded. Trimble, Chief Minister of the British province's uneasy home rule government of Protestants and Roman Catholics, won after a recount but with a greatly reduced majority.

He also saw his Ulster Unionist Party lose ground to both hardline Protestants and the main Catholic party Sinn Fein. Gerry Adams, whose Sinn Fein party is the IRA's political ally, was buoyant when he was re-elected to his West Belfast seat with nearly a 20,000 majority over the moderate SDLP group.

"This is a resounding vote by the people of West Belfast for a national republic, for an end to the Union (with Britain), for an end to partition and a new future for all the people of this small island of Ireland," Adams told jubilant supporters. Despite the setbacks, Trimble vowed to promote the agreement. At the end of counting for 18 seats, Trimble's party had lost three of the nine seats it held. Sinn Fein had increased its tally to four from two.

INDIAN EXPRESS

TWO TIME TONY

15/9 'The greatest Tory ever sold' 10/6

IN a London play that opened as the British election campaign was getting from cold to tepid (it never became hot), Tony Blair was savagely satirised as a control-obsessed, spin-doctoring, truth-economising political con. The show received rave reviews and drew big crowds. Given only this information about the run up to the British elections, a pollster from Mars may have concluded that the brutally caricatured Prime Minister was in serious trouble. The Martian psephologist would therefore have been appalled upon hearing the results which returned Blair and Labour with a second successive crushing mandate. Like all pollsters he would have pleaded incomplete information. But unlike most of them, he would have been right — nobody told him about William Hague, or the Conservative Party. Such was the opposition that British voters ignored Labour's patchy to poor record on schools and hospitals and the shocking, by Western standards, state of the railway system. Labour has also not been called to account for the modest (compared to the US and Western Europe) rise in incomes coupled with higher taxes, the absence of any extraordinary initiative bar the early granting of independence to the Bank of England and constitutional reforms. Blair personally has got away with scandals and manipulative behaviour — Formula One sponsorship, the Millennium Dome, its backers the Hinduja's, their quickie passports and the passport-fixer Peter Mandelson, the London mayoral elections and more of the same, may well have scarred another Prime Minister.

Blair owes a debt of gratitude to the Conservatives who were stripped naked after he stole their clothes to dress up New Labour in 1997. Hague was supposed to find a new suit. For most of Blair's first term, he couldn't. And the fig leaf Tories had — euro-scepticism — was forever being torn to bits by the party's rival factions, which Hague was unable to control. But perhaps the Tory leader's biggest mistake was to dust out the old clothes of British xenophobia. Hard right rhetoric on asylum seeking immigrants, garnished by some American-style tough talk on crime, was supposed to get British whites rallying to the flag, and put "multiculturalist" Labour in an unenviable situation of choosing between political pulse and political correctness. In the event, the British mainstream proved more indifferent than excited at Hague's jingoism. Indeed, the riots in Oldham and Leeds, where Bangladeshi and Pakistani second generation immigrants clashed with whites and the police, and where the British far right gained thousands of extra votes, showed how dangerous Hague's rhetoric could be. Having veered to the right during the campaign, he was denied the compassionate conservative tag, which like in the US, could have proved useful. It is not that British voters wanted an old style leftist. Rather, like last time, they judged Blair — once memorably described as the greatest Tory ever sold — a better conservative. Blair-baiting plays will still get laughs in Britain. But the joke, for quite some time, will be on his opposition.

THE STATESMAN

15 11 2001

Straw is new U.K. Foreign Secy.

KD-1
By Hasan Suroor

LONDON, JUNE 9. Mr. Robin Cook has been shifted out of the Foreign Office and replaced by Mr. Jack Straw, who is Britain's new Foreign Secretary. Mr. David Blunkett, who was Education Secretary, succeeds Mr. Straw as Home Secretary.

A sweeping post-election Cabinet reshuffle, reflecting the Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair's new authority, saw Mr. Cook appointed Leader of the Commons, widely perceived as a demotion. Mr. Cook was reported to have been so shocked that his first instinct, it is stated, was to decline the new assignment. But he quickly recovered to put on a brave face saying he was "delighted to come back home to Parliament" after four years of jet-diplomacy and that he hoped to play a "central" role in piloting major bills.

Downing Street too softened the blow clarifying that it was not a demotion. "The Prime Minister thinks there is an opportunity to use his considerable talents in another way. Parliament matters and it is important there is a political heavyweight in this important role," a spokesman said.

Speculation, however, continued to flourish and one of the reasons for his "fall" was said to be his disagreement with the powerful Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Gordon Brown, over Europe, particularly the single currency. Mr. Brown, who favours a cau-



10/6
tious approach, did not apparently like Mr. Cook's more enthusiastic stance. Mr. Straw, on the other hand, is a Eurosceptic and more in line with Mr. Brown's thinking.

'Abrasive' style

Mr. Cook is also said to have ruffled too many feathers in the Foreign Office with what is described as his "abrasive" style. His controversial remarks on Kashmir when he accompanied the Queen to India were recalled by observers today to underline his tendency to shoot off his mouth, though even his critics acknowledged that lately he had become more restrained.

Mr. Straw is not a stranger to India either, having worked closely with North Block on issues such as international terrorism. Britain's decision to ban a number of anti-India terrorist outfits followed extensive discussions between Mr. Straw and the Home Minister, Mr. L. K. Advani.

Royal members told to speak only to panel

KATHMANDU, JUNE 9. Nepal's royal palace today tried to stop witnesses going public with the accounts of last week's massacre as officials said one royal family member could be reprimanded for his version of the slaughter.

Officials said they wanted the witnesses to speak only to the investigators to prevent a repeat of the riots that broke out as people struggled to come to terms with an official explanation of the killings as an accident.

The widely circulated *Kathmandu Post* newspaper today said the witnesses had been asked to "maintain silence" over the killings.

Mr. Lila Mani Pokhrel, an opposition member of Parliament and the general secretary, the United People's Front, told a mass gathering that the Government was trying to cover up the matter. "I don't believe the Crown Prince is the murderer. There is a conspiracy at work," he said.

A former palace staff also said he did not subscribe to the official version. Speaking to a television channel in New Delhi, Mr. Sanu Bhai Dangal, who had worked in the palace for over 35 years said, "I don't think that Dipendra did it. He was of a gentle nature."

Meanwhile, the two-man high-powered commission probing the massacre continued for the second day its fact-finding mission. — Reuters, PTI

Shah disappears: Page 8

THE HINDU

10 10 2001

Blair savours quiet victory as Hague bows out



(From left) Jubilant Liberal Democrat leader Charles Kennedy (C) arrives at the party headquarters in Westminster, London, on Friday. Tony Blair kisses his son Leo as wife Cherie looks on at the step to No. 10 Downing Street. William Hague announces his resignation to the media outside the Conservative Party central office in London.

Liberal Democrat leader hails 'historic night'

Ananova, June 8

LIBERAL DEMOCRAT leader Charles Kennedy has hailed what could be his party's best ever election night.

Calling it a "historic night", Kennedy said the Liberal Democrats were the "party of the future" in British politics. The Liberal Democrats swept past their record of 47 MPs gained in 1997.

The Lib Dems gained Cheadle, Guildford and Mid Dorset and Poole North from the Tories and held the key marginal area of Torbay.

Meanwhile, Tony Blair hailed a second "historic" Labour term in office and said he relished the challenge.

In many seats, the turnout was below 50 percent and appeared overall to be heading for a record low.

But in seats where Labour and the Lib Dems needed their supporters badly, it seemed they had managed to get them to the polling stations.

Labour held seats where it had courted controversy. In Hartlepool where some had predicted a backlash against ex-Cabinet Minister Peter Mandelson, the former Ulster and Trade Secretary won easily. And Tory defector Shaun Woodward retained St Helens South despite the local activists' anger that he was selected at the last minute after sitting MP Gerry Bermingham abruptly quit.

The likely scale of Labour's victory, with the party heading for a majority at least equal to its 1997 record of 179, means speculation is bound to surround William Hague's future as Tory leader.

The Guardian

Prime Minister takes victory in his stride

London, June 8

FOR A man perched atop an electoral landslide, Prime Minister Tony Blair kept remarkably cool on Friday. Blair is poised to make history as the first Labour leader to serve two consecutive full terms, and will take the credit for changing Britain's political landscape.

He beamed as supporters cheered and then kissed his wife, Cherie, at the counting hall in his home constituency in Sedgfield, northeastern England. But his restrained tone through the night of vote-tallying seemed oddly out-of-sync with the enormous scale of the Labour Party victory.

"Four years ago we were elected as a Government amid some

euphoria after 18 years of a Conservative Government," he said. "Tonight we have been re-elected... The judgement may be a more sober one, the mood is different, but I believe it is a more reasoned one as well, because it is based on a record in office."

Basking in a virtual re-run of his crushing 1997 win, he said: "It's what we've always worked for and we've worked for it not simply to be in office, but because we always knew that in order to complete what we began it would take more than one term of office."

He said the British people had shown that they "agree with the direction in which we are taking this country but they want us to get on with the journey. That's a

challenge I relish."

His serious demeanour was more suited to the weathered, slightly bruised head of Government he is now than the triumphant Opposition leader he was four years ago.

Blair entered No 10 shortly before 6 am, with wife, Cherie. Minutes earlier he had told a crowd of cheering, flag-waving supporters outside Labour's Millbank HQ: "This is a night of history for our party. The one thing we have to remember is that now is the time when the people of this country want us to serve them, and want us to do the things we promised to do. Our mandate is to carry on the work that we started."

He said that would build on the

foundations of economic stability created by "brilliant" Chancellor Gordon Brown, who also coordinated Labour's election campaign. With fewer than 30 seats still to be counted, the latest predictions gave Labour a probable Commons majority of more than 160 — similar to its 1997 majority of 179. Blair is expected to move swiftly to re-shuffle his Cabinet, switching several key ministers and re-shaping Whitehall.

But the personal challenge Blair, 48, faces as he embarks on another four years in power is to dispel persistent doubts about the substance behind his considerable style.

With all but a few dozen of the 659 House of Commons seats declared, Labour was set for a

majority of 167 seats, slightly down on its 179 in the outgoing parliament.

The landslide was testament to Blair's deft running of the economy, talent for presentation, ruthless control of his party and the broad appeal of his own brand of Centrist politics.

It was as much a personal victory for Blair as he has dragged Labour kicking and screaming into the centre ground after years of Left-wing excess consigned it to the wilderness. Blair, whose party came to power in 1997 after 18 years of conservative rule, is the perfect politician for the television age: youthful, sharp, telegenic, with a young family and a strong Christian faith.

AP/AFP

Number two man Portillo may get Hague's job

London, June 8

WILLIAM HAGUE today resigned as leader of the Conservative party after leading the Tories to their second successive landslide defeat.

Speaking outside Conservative central office in London, Hague said it was important for his party to elect a new leader before its conference in October.

"It is vital that the party be given the chance to choose a leader who can build on my work and also take new initiatives," he said. He will stand down when the party has elected a successor. Speaking outside 10 Downing Street today, Tony Blair praised Hague's "stoicism" and "resilience". "I wish him well," he added. "I wish him the very best of luck in the future."

Political watchers believe Portillo was positioning himself for a job that was nearly his four year ago.

All through the Conservatives' month-long march toward electoral humiliation, the divided party's No. 2 man, Michael Portillo, pledged loyalty to leader William Hague.

Cynics can't help remembering that Portillo made similar professions of fealty to then-Prime Minister John Major in 1995, even as political scuttlebutt had his supporters preparing for a possible leadership challenge.

Portillo never made that run, but despite denying interest this time around, he was considered the odds-on favourite after a crushing defeat in Thursday's general polls weakened Hague's

hold on the leadership spot.

As the scale of the Tory defeat became clear, Portillo seemed to hint that a shake-up might be in the offing, saying the loss should prompt a "period of reflection" in the party. But he praised Hague's campaign and sought to quiet speculation about a battle for the party's leadership.

"I would very much hope that whatever happens (Hague) will continue as leader," Portillo said.

But Hague announced his resignation just a few hours later, telling reporters gathered at Conservative headquarters that the party needed a leader who could "hopefully command a larger personal following in the country."

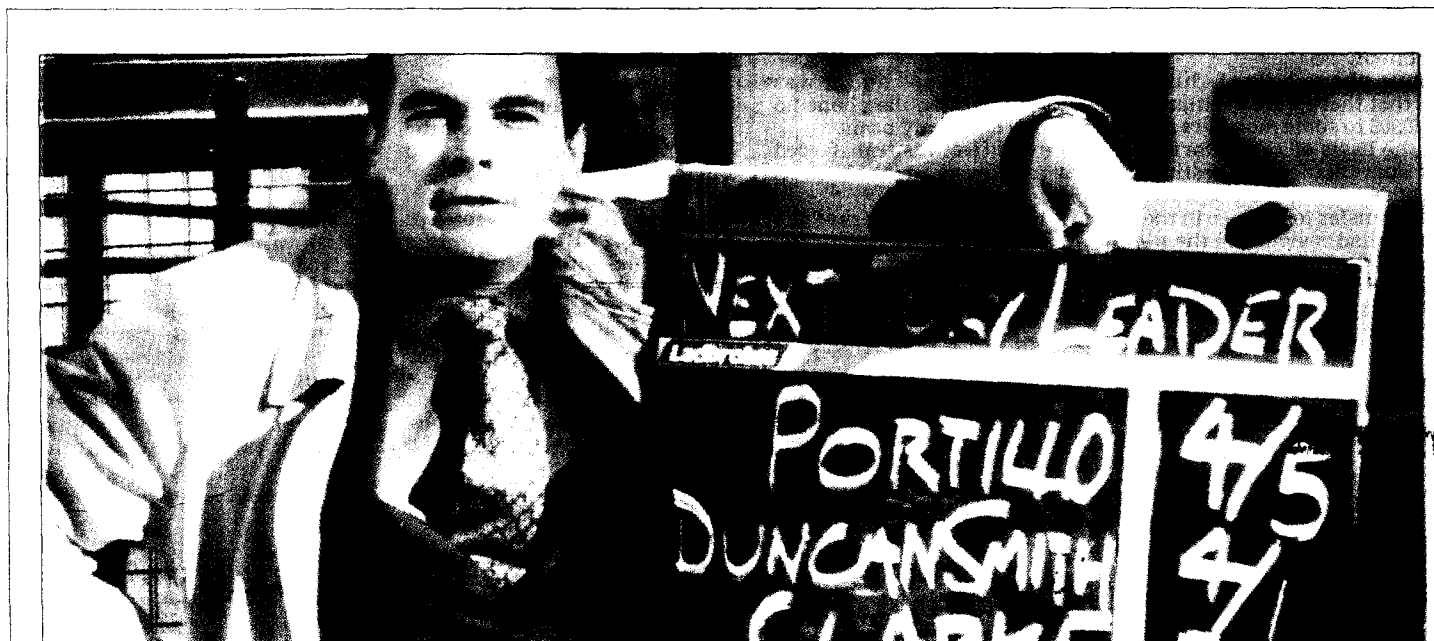
Squinting into the morning sun, Hague said he'd stay on for a few months while the party decided on a successor.

It's a job Portillo was widely expected to win after Prime Minister Tony Blair's Labour Party knocked the Conservatives out of government in a 1997 landslide. But to fellow Tories' shock and Labour's glee, he lost his seat in Parliament to a young Labor challenger, and was thus ineligible to serve as party leader.

But he made good use of his time out of office, charting a political shift that brought him from the Conservatives' hard right toward the centre.

The married Portillo, who once voted against lowering the gay age of consent to 16, reclaimed his place in Parliament in a 1999 by-election, winning a seat representing Chelsea and Kensington.

AP



A representative from bookmakers Ladbrokes stands next to a board with odds offered on the next Tory leader outside Conservative Central Office in London on Friday.

Three injured in N Ireland poll violence

AN UNIDENTIFIED gunman opened fire outside a rural polling station, wounding two policemen and a woman as Northern Ireland cast ballots in a tense election, seen as a key test for the province's peace accord.

The bloodshed underscored deep tensions as Protestants and Catholics elected their 18 representatives to British Parliament. The election was mainly viewed as a referendum on the Northern Ireland Peace Accord of 1998, which called for a joint Catholic-Protestant administration for the province.

In the shooting, police said one officer was wounded in the shoulder and the other in the arm outside a polling station in Draperstown, a mostly Catholic village 100 km west of Belfast. A young woman was hit in the leg.

No arrests were made and no group claimed responsibility.

AP, Belfast

Conservatives in disarray

By Hasan Suroor

LONDON, JUNE 8. The Conservatives were in disarray today after their devastating election defeat, as re-priming broke out over the way the campaign was run. Fin- gers were pointed at the party chief, Mr. William Hague, who was criticised for concentrating too much on Europe and asylum even after it became clear that people were more interested in bread-and-butter issues.

The attacks became more unin- hibited after Mr. Hague an- nounced his decision to resign taking responsibility for the debacle. Mr. Alan Duncan, a shadow spokesman and one-time confi- dante of Mr. Hague, said the cam- paign failed to strike the "right notes" by focussing on issues in which voters were not interested. A "rehashed Thatcherite agenda" would not do, he warned saying that the party needed to reinvent itself in order to respond to changed social attitudes. The par- ty must get over the "identity cri- sis" and come up with a modern agenda, he said.

There was also criticism in some quarters over getting Mrs. Margaret Thatcher to campaign. One Tory leader was quoted as saying that Mrs. Thatcher dam- aged the party by her strident anti- Europe remarks which turned it into a one-issue campaign. Even Mr. Michael Portillo, who had defended the campaign yes- terday, was less certain today as he called for reflection. Mr. Portil- lo is among the front-runners for



A dejected Conservative Party leader, Mr. William Hague, is watched by Mrs. Ffion Hague as he makes his acceptance speech after keeping his seat in Richmond, North Yorkshire, early on Friday. Mr. Hague later said he would step down as leader of the party following Labour's landslide victory in the general elections. In the picture on the right is Mr. Michael Portillo, a leading contender for the leadership of the Conservative Party. — AFP

the party leadership to replace Mr. Hague. Others include the shadow Home Secretary, Ms. Ann Widdecombe, the Left-wing pro- European veteran, Mr. Kenneth Clarke, and Mr. Duncan Smith, shadow Defence Secretary.

Surprisingly Mr. Clarke was an immediate favourite to take over the reins of the party, according to a snap opinion poll. Mr. Portil- lo came a close second, but ob- servers said it was too early to speculate. Mr. Hague in his state- ment spoke of a change over the "coming months" rather than days and there was some specula- tion that he might be persuaded

to stay on if a leadership election threatened party unity. Mr. Hague said he passionately be- lieved in what he had been preaching but it was "vital for leaders to listen" (to the people) and therefore he was stepping down to allow the party to choose a leader with a "larger personal following" in the country.

This was a reference to the per- sistent talk that Mr. Hague was not acceptable to a large number of even those voters who would have liked to vote Tory. His per- sonal ratings were consistently low and he was described as a ha- bility to the party. And the

blame-game, there were manda- tory tributes to Mr. Hague with even his known critics describing him as an "honest and straight- forward" person whom the party would miss. The Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair, said while he pro- foundly disagreed with some of his ideas, he respected him for his resilience and wished him well.

The scale of the defeat left the Tories dazed and there were calls for serious self-introspection as why a "party of natural govern- ance" had come to such a pass. A lot of bloodletting seemed immi- nent.

BNP bares its fangs

By Hasan Suroor

LONDON, JUNE 8. If the impressive Labour victory was hailed as good news by liberals, there was also some bad news for them, as for the first time the far-right British National Party (BNP) made its presence felt in the heart of La- bour territory by whipping up ra- cial tension.

The party which contested two seats in Oldham, a racially sensi- tive town in Greater Manchester hit by riots two weeks ago, man- aged to get enough votes to be able to declare that it was the "voice of Oldham". "White people have lodged their protest against racist attacks through the ballot box," claimed Mr. Nick Griffin, Cambridge-educated vice-chair- man of BNP who contested the Oldham West seat against a La- bour Minister, Mr. Michael Meacher.

The local Asian community was reported to be shocked that Mr. Griffin, who stands for racial seg-regation, got over 6,000 votes on a highly divisive agenda. And Mr. Griffin acknowledged that the race riots during the election campaign contributed to his "success." He was reported to have said that a few weeks ago — before the riots took place — he would have per- haps lost his security deposit.

The BNP was accused of being behind the riots during which both sides attacked rival propert- ies and traded abuses. Another BNP candidate, Mr. Mick Treacy, a mini cab driver, who contested Oldham East picked up over 5,000 votes — enough to save his depos- it. The seat was won by Labour which blamed the Tories for the rise of extremism.

This was stated to be the BNP's what had been a traditional La- bour territory.



Nick Griffin

first "respectable" showing in a general election and Mr. Griffin had no doubt that it was a "great result". "This is only the start for BNP in Oldham," he declared ominously claiming that his part appealed to the "ordinary" peo- ple. In what *The Times* called a "defiant gesture," Mr. Griffin wore a T-shirt with the legend-ary "Gagged for telling the truth," to protest against the ban on public speeches by local authorities fear- ing tension.

Mr. Meacher said the BNP fought the election after "deliber- ately stirring up violence, intimid- ation and hatred over the last month or so." The Liberal Demo- crat leader, Mr. Charles Kennedy, said the rise of racist elements was a threat to Britain's multicultural- ism and appealed to all parties to come together to fight such forces. Observers wondered how the BNP had been able to establish itself in what had been a traditional La- bour territory.

Tony Blair makes Labour history

REUTERS

LONDON, June 8. - The British Prime Minister, Mr Tony Blair, swept to his second landslide win today, prompting beaten eurosceptic Opposition leader, Mr William Hague, to quit and intensifying speculation that Britain would soon join the euro.

While the Centre-Left Labour Party feted Mr Blair as its most successful leader, Mr Hague's routed Conservative Party faced a bruising leadership battle after a campaign focused on keeping Britain out of the 15-nation EU's single currency.

The victory put Mr Blair on a pedestal as his party's first Prime Minister in its 100-year history to secure what promises to be a second successive full term.

With all British mainland seats declared and first results

Mr Tony Blair today replaced Mr Robin Cook as foreign secretary with Mr Jack Straw but left his powerful finance minister, Mr Gordon Brown, in place.

Mr Cook, the most europhile member of Mr Blair's team, will move to become the minister in charge of parliament and parliamentary business, Mr Blair's official spokesman said.

in from the 18 in Northern Ireland, Blair embarked on his new five-year term with a majority of 167 in the 659-seat House of Commons.

The poll gave Labour 413 seats, the Conservatives 166 and the Liberal Democrats 52. Other parties took the rest.

But turnout at about 60 per cent meant nearly 18 million of 45 million eligible voters stayed at home. It was the lowest figure since 1918 and compared with



CLOSE YOUR EYES, HAVE NO FEAR: Mr Tony Blair, watched by his wife Cherie, kisses son Leo outside 10 Downing Street after his victory in British polls. In London on Friday. - AP/PTI

71.6 per cent in 1997.

As the Northern Ireland results trickled in, Sinn Fein leaders Mr Gerry Adams and Mr Martin McGuinness won resounding victories. But counting was slow in some key constituencies.

"It is a remarkable and historic victory for my party," Mr Blair told reporters outside his 10 Downing Street residence.

"It is a mandate for reform and for investment in the future and it is also very clearly an instruction to deliver." Mr Blair wasted no time in getting down to work, calling in a steady flow of ministers and officials including Deputy Prime Minister Mr John Prescott, Chancellor of the Exchequer Mr Gordon Brown and education secretary Mr David Blunkett.

Mr Brown, who pledged no change in Labour policy on the euro, is expected to retain his post in the new government.

But within minutes of Mr Hague's resignation, sterling fell more than half a cent to 15-year-lows against the dollar for the third day in a row on the belief that Britain would soon

join the European single currency, and at a lower rate.

Mr Blair, who favours the euro in principle, has promised to put the issue to a referendum but must first convince the 70 per cent of the public who tell pollsters they are against it.

"We need to make changes so that we are engaged, exerting influence, having the self-belief not to turn our back on the world or retreat into isolationism," he said in Downing Street.

It was a different story in the Conservative camp. "I believe it is vital that the party be given the chance to choose a leader who can build on my work. I have therefore decided to step down as leader of the Conservative Party when a successor can be elected in the coming months," Mr Hague said.

The BBC estimated that Labour had won 45.7 per cent of the vote, the Conservatives 29.6 per cent and the Liberal Democrats 17.6.

Mr Blair's trump card was his running of the economy.

■ More reports on page 9

SATURDAY, JUNE 9, 2001

LABOUR'S HISTORIC WIN

9/6
THE GENERAL ELECTION verdict in Britain is both an endorsement of the policies of Mr. Tony Blair's New Labour Government and a rejection, in unambiguous terms, of the opposition Conservatives' catastrophic attempt to try and capture power by taking extremist stances. There were several reasons why the Labour tide had proved unstoppable, the party of the left being returned to power for a second term for the first time in history. The most striking of these reasons must be the failure of the Tory opposition to focus on the issues that mattered most to the voter — issues of health, education and public services — rather than, as it did, on the twin issue of the single European currency and sovereignty. A campaign that never really took off, or generated heat save on the last few days when racist prejudices were sought to be stirred up, has been capped by the lowest recorded voter turnout, a voter apathy that seems to be afflicting all democracies around the world. In the case of Britain, this apathy was understandable because the country is just recovering from the two disasters of unprecedented floods and the foot and mouth disease which has laid to waste large swathes of the countryside.

Four years ago, Mr. Blair steered his party away from left wing radicalism, grabbed the vacant political centre ground and rode to victory with an impressive majority, ending 18 long years of Conservative domination. Promising to continue on the path — the party is believed by many to have failed to live up to the expectations roused by the euphoria then — the Prime Minister stuck to the campaign theme of moderation, seeking a vote to go on with the job. The party's campaign exploited the incumbency advantage and concentrated on the Government's not inconsiderable achievements in the areas of health and education. The Tories coun-

W10
H9-10
tered by plunging farther to the right. This has proved a fatal mistake. Their agenda was too narrowly, certainly too divisively focussed. The party under the non-charismatic Mr. William Hague made a strategic misjudgment by deciding to play on British fears of a strong federal Europe that could one day swallow everything British and attempted to revive the ghost of Enoch Powell by playing on fears that Britain is about to be drowned in a tidal wave of immigrants. The party leadership, reinforced at later stages by the redoubtable Lady Thatcher, refused to accept that elections are not won on foreign or constitutional issues, that the euro, the common European currency which Britain will ultimately adopt, and asylum were low on the voters' priority. The Thatcherite stridency and aggression were ill suited to the times and went poorly with the man leading the party. The most enduring image of the campaign, in fact, is that of a Labour poster that depicts Mr. Hague topped by Baroness Thatcher's hair.

A liberal Government in Britain can be a powerful voice for peace in a time of rapid global changes. The second landslide for New Labour can herald a period of progressive rule in Europe and comes with the decisive defeat of the Conservatives, who had dominated the political scene during much of the last century. As the Tories reinvent themselves, Mr. Hague and company must share the responsibility for enabling the far right British National Party to secure a shockingly large number of votes in the two Oldham constituencies which were the scene of race riots last week. Among the lessons the Tories can learn from the election is that the world has had enough of the cancer of xenophobia, that whipping up anti-immigrant rhetoric may buy some votes but can cause great national damage and that the immigrant brings into the country as much good as he gets.

THE HINDU

Labour all set to retain power

By Hasan Suroor

LONDON, JUNE 7. The Labour was this evening set to retain power as a reluctant Britain faced with the TINA factor dragged itself to vote in a general election which nobody except the politicians and the media wanted.

Polling across the country, including Northern Ireland, began at 7 a.m. and until 5 p.m. (GMT) there was no indication of the level of turnout except that it had been predictably low. But with five more hours of polling left — the booths would close at 10 p.m. local time — it was expected to pick up.

The general expectation was that the turnout might not exceed 60 to 65 per cent as against a little over 73 per cent in 1997 when Labour romped home with 417 seats in a House of 659 — a majority of 179 — crushing Tories to one of their most humiliating defeats. But, according to an opinion poll this morning, even with a 65 per cent turnout Labour was expected to repeat its 1997 performance and could even improve upon it depending on regional fluctuations. While the Tory strength in Parliament was expected to fall, Liberal Democrats — the most underrated party when the campaign began — were likely to increase their existing tally of 46.

Over 3,000 candidates are contesting amid signs of widespread apathy among the 44.5 million voters, particularly the youth and women. The Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair, and the Tory chief, Mr. William Hague, were among the early voters — both voted in their constituencies, Sedgfield and Richmond respectively. Mr. Blair went to the polling booth with wife and children, while Mr. Hague was accompanied by wife, Ms. Ffion, who famously uttered just three words during the month-long campaign. The Liberal Democrats leader, Mr. Charles Kennedy, taking no chances, had



Britain's Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair, leaves the Trimdon Colliery polling station on Thursday, after voting in the general election. — AP

already sent his vote through postal ballot but he did turn up at his local polling booth to pose for television cameras suggesting with gestures that the election could go either way.

While the outcome in mainland Britain was more or less taken for granted, there was much interest in Northern Ireland which would return four MPs to Westminster. The result would have a significant bearing on the future of the peace process and with the moderate Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) appearing to struggle against the Democratic Unionist Party, which is opposed to the Good Friday agreement, there was some anxiety here over the fate of the pact in the event of a bad result for the UUP. The results from Northern Ire-

land are not expected until Saturday.

Today's polling was preceded by one of Britain's longest and tedious election campaigns marred by personal attacks — the most enduring image being that of the Deputy Prime Minister, Mr. John Prescott, punching a protestor for throwing an egg at him. The three main leaders — Mr. Blair, Mr. Hague and Mr. Kennedy — together travelled over 30,000 miles with Mr. Kennedy alone accounting for more than 15,000 miles. Yet none looked any the worse for it, as they wound up the campaign on Wednesday with smiles on their faces.

Contrary to the forecast, the weather was largely good and observers recalled that a sunny polling day in May 1997 had contributed considerably to a large turnout which helped Labour. There was a palpable lack of enthusiasm with most polling booths looking forlorn and deserted until late in the afternoon. The media was in overdrive as it prepared for a long night of "news and analysis". First results are expected to start coming in at 11 p.m. (local time) and by early Friday, Britain would know who gets to keep the key to No. 10.

AFP reports:

Queen Elizabeth II was one of many who decided not to cross a ballot paper, the Buckingham Palace said. The Queen decided against visiting the local polling booth in Westminster in order to remain politically neutral, the palace said.

"Although there is no law specifically prohibiting the Queen from voting, it is considered unconstitutional for the sovereign and his or her heir to do so," a palace spokeswoman said. Those close to the monarch, the Queen's husband, Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh, and the Queen Mother also decided against voting, the spokeswoman said, citing the same reasons.

More reports on Pages 13 & 16

U.K. POLL / SLIGHT RISE IN TORY RATINGS

Hague may keep his mantle after all

By Hasan Suroor

LONDON, JUNE 6. A slight surge in Tory fortunes was reported today as political parties gave a last-minute push to their campaigns for tomorrow's general election amid predictions of an unprecedented low turnout and bad weather.

The turnout, it was stated, could be the lowest since 1918 — a fitting denouement to one of Britain's most tortuous election campaigns dogged more by personal attacks than issues. Although the outcome remained overwhelmingly poised in favour of Labour, the Tories were expected to avert a complete "melt-down" as a new opinion poll this morning showed a four-point improvement in their popularity ratings even as Labour lost four

points in the past week. This is the first time since the campaign began that Tories improved their position and though it came a little too late in the day, observers said it was a welcome "face saving" for the party — and, more importantly, for Mr. William Hague who could now expect to avoid a challenge to his leadership.

In fact, the last day before the party's rout was Mr. Hague's best as his own popularity looked up, reversing a consistent trend of declining ratings. Conservative supporters found him far more acceptable than his two perceived rivals in the party — Mr. Michael Portillo and Ms. Anne Widdecombe. "If Mr. Hague's controversial campaign produces a better result than most polls have been suggesting, his position will be stronger," *The Guardian* said.

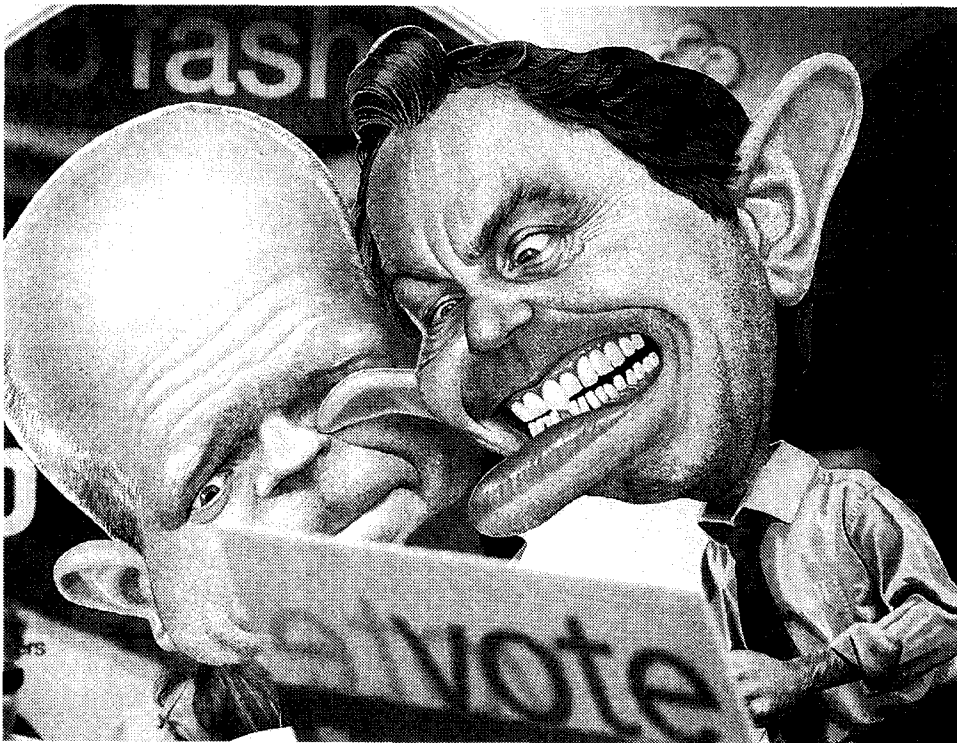
The "consolation" recovery for Tories came days after they switched to a negative campaign warning voters against a Labour landslide in what the Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair denounced as a cynical ploy to discourage people from voting. There was some speculation today if the improvement in Tory ratings was a result of its new strategy. Commentators said despite the predictability of a Labour victory, the Tories and the Liberal Democrats had still a lot to "play for." "There are huge number of voters who have still not made up their mind," one analyst said.

Mr. Blair, himself worried by the prospects of a low turnout, asked people today to "forget" the pollsters and "pundits" and get out tomorrow and vote. The outcome of the elections was in their hands, he said echoing his party's fear that poor polling could be damaging for Labour. He warned that the Conservatives under Mr. Hague were "more extreme" than even in the Thatcher era. "If you analyse their policies, it is a more extreme version than anything they have offered before," he said.

Even Mr. Hague in what a newspaper called his "last hurrah" declared that the forces of conservatism, denounced by Mr. Blair, were "still on the march". He claimed that Mr. Blair was "seriously rattled" by a Tory revival. Liberal Democrats, who have done surprisingly well in this campaign, expected to emerge as an effective force in the next Parliament. "It is not the expectation of a last-minute surge in Tory support but the growing strength of the Liberal Democrats that is unsettling some in the Labour camp," *The Daily Telegraph* said.

Meanwhile, fresh allegations against the Europe Minister, Mr. Keith Vaz that he did not disclose the full truth about the number of properties he owns were shrugged off by Labour as an election-eve bid to embarrass the party. An irritated Mr. Blair said: "I find it quite extraordinary, just two days out of a general election you return to this subject. I have no comment to make about it because I have no idea about these allegations."

The Tories, however, maintained that the allegations made Mr. Vaz unfit to contest the elections. "He should certainly be booted out of his ministerial office today and Tony Blair must also withdraw his support for him as a Labour candidate," the Shadow Foreign Secretary, Mr. Francis Maude said.



Caricatures of the British Conservative leader, Mr. William Hague (left) and the Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair, at a Conservative rally in Winchester, Hampshire, on Wednesday. — AFP

Race issue roars as UK goes to polls today

FROM AMIT ROY

Oldham, June 6: Race is going to be one of the big issues which Tony Blair will have to tackle if he gets back, as widely predicted, to 10, Downing Street tomorrow. Another will be what to do with Keith Vaz, the foreign office minister.

Indians, especially the well off business community which was moving towards the Tories under Margaret Thatcher and her successor, John Major, are fearful of the new Conservative Party under William Hague and his headline shadow home secretary, Anne Widlicombe.

Whether Labour is victorious with as big a majority as the 179 it enjoyed in the last parliament will be one of the main issues when Britain goes to the hustings tomorrow. If Labour wins, it will be because Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown has demonstrated that the British economy is in reasonable shape with low inflation, low mortgages and the lowest unemployment figures for decades.

In the Asian areas of Britain, such as Southall in west London and Oldham, Lancashire, the general election has been fought with real feeling and violence. In Oldham, unfortunately, the racial tension exploded in riots involving a relatively new phenomenon — brick and bottle throwing Asian youths.

What to do about disaffected

Asian youth, mainly though not exclusively of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin, is a troublesome issue that Blair will ignore at his peril.

Last night in Leeds there was fighting between Asian youths and police, just as there has been in Oldham throughout the election campaign.

The point about Oldham is that this town is perhaps the face of the new urban Britain.

The issues of immigration and asylum, widely seen as Tory code words to whip up feeling against non-whites, are not strictly relevant in Oldham. It has 14,000 people of Pakistani origin. There are also 9,000 Bangladeshis who emigrated from what was East Pakistan.

Half of the young people are unemployed. Together, the ethnic minorities make up 11 per cent of Oldham's population, and this proportion is expected to rise to 17 per cent in another 10 years.

The Asians came because they were "invited" to work the unsocial night shifts in Oldham's cotton mills. Sadly, not one of Oldham's 150 cotton mills survives now.

The older Asians, discarded and socially displaced, have no other skills to speak of, other than perhaps driving mini-cabs.

That, too, is not risk free, as is illustrated by a fresh poster outside a grocery store in Glodwick, one of Oldham's heavily Asian

wards. The advice offered to cab-drivers does seem to back up their claims that they are subject to a fair amount of racist intimidation — "What precaution are you taking for your safety? Have you experienced any racial or abusive situation at work? Do you know where to report any racial or abusive incidents?" and so on.

The younger Asian men go for close-cropped hairstyles. Not for them Islamic beards. An inordinate amount of energy is expended on keeping the hubs of old sports cars gleaming.

The young also act very differently from their traditionally-dressed first generation parents and grandparents. Being "British" has meant they have not inherited the charm and good manners of their elders.

The National Front, which believes in repatriating "coloured" people to their countries of origin (even though, at least half in this category, are now UK-born) have tried to hold rallies in Oldham. Another extreme Right-wing party, the British National Party, put up its national leader, Nick Griffin, in one of two Oldham seats, both Labour held. Much has been made of the fact he is Cambridge educated.

Michael Meacher, the environment secretary, won Oldham West & Royton in 1997 with a majority of 16,201, a large majority in British terms. Phil Woolas, his Labour colleague next door in

Oldham East & Saddleworth, had a modest majority of 3,389.

"Nightmare!" responded Woolas when asked what he thought about the BNP's intervention. "The BNP's strategy is to gain credibility and respectability."

"They say: 'If you are opposed to violence against white people, you must agree with our policy — repatriation.'"

This town has enough problems without people trying to cause violence. Electorally, they won't get any support.

It is a big mistake, though, to lump all Asians together. The areas with Asian concentrations include Westwood, which, as the Pakistanis are the first to point out, is mainly Bangladeshi.

This is where Walter Chamberlain, a 76-year-old white pensioner, was beaten up last month by a group of Asian youths. A 15-year-old boy has been charged with the offence.

This one incident, widely condemned in the community, has had a ripple effect on the other Asian areas, among them Cop-pice, Glodwick and Werneth, which are mainly Pakistani.

"The big issue is to cool things down," says Riaz Ahmed, 48, who has lived in Oldham since he came from Pakistan 26 years ago. "We mustn't rise to the BNP's bait."

He is one of Oldham's eight Asian councillors, six Labour and two Lib Dem. Ahmed, who is also deputy mayor, will become mayor

in a year. "It will be a challenging job," he admitted. "But I will be mayor of all the people of Oldham."

The response of the racists has been to firebomb his home at night, when Ahmed, his wife and their four children were asleep. They escaped with their lives but damage was extensive.

In Werneth, another Asian *mohalla* which is supposed to be a "no go" area for whites, the National Front has managed to sneak in at night and dab Swastika graffiti on a couple of doors. The real no go areas, as explained by Rev. Howard Sutcliffe, an Anglican priest who has lived in the ward all his life, operate in subtler ways.

The Pakistani boys, who love playing cricket in the street, have mostly not managed to circumvent the high walls of Werneth Cricket Club, an oasis of manicured beauty on the edge of an otherwise rundown Asian area. Apart from the odd Afro-Caribbean, all the players out on the field on a recent Saturday were white.

There was a time a few years ago when the club wanted new blood but kept out three promising Pakistani boys. It feared that if entry was purely on the basis of talent, "the place would be swamped."

Pakistan's defeat of England at Old Trafford, which adjoins Oldham, was seen as sweet revenge.



British photographers place their cameras on the ground as they go on a temporary strike in Yardley near Birmingham as the Labour Party did not provide access for photographers to the Prime Minister's last day of campaigning. (Reuters)

Hindujas' shadow dogs U.K. poll campaign

By Hasan Suroor
LONDON, JUNE 5. Questions over the Labour Government's links with the Hinduja brothers and the conduct of the Europe Minister, Mr. Keith Vaz, resurfaced today as the campaign for Thursday's general elections entered its last phase.

There were fresh allegations that Mr. Vaz did not tell the full truth about his assets during an inquiry by a parliamentary committee, and in what was seen as by far the clearest indication that his ministerial career could be at an end, the Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair, referred to him in the past tense. The Tories questioned the propriety of Mr. Vaz contesting the elections while facing charges of improper conduct.

Mr. Blair had a difficult time defending his Government's relations with the Hinduja brothers in a BBC newsmight interview as Mr. Jeremy Praxman, in his famously "cruel" interviewing style, insisted that he explain if it was proper to take money from people who were under a "cloud".

Mr. Blair denied that his party ever took money from the controversial Indian industrialists and claimed that no favours were

shown in granting British citizenship to Mr. S.P. Hinduja and Mr. G.P. Hinduja. Nothing "improper" was done, he said pointing out that the Hammond inquiry into the Hinduja passport affair had found no irregularity. Asked if he was "comfortable" dealing with the Hinduja brothers even as they were being investigated in India (Mr. Praxman read out a letter to one of the brothers in which Mr. Blair signed himself as "Tony"), Mr. Blair said "yes", adding that the investigation to which the interviewer was referring was "20 years out of date".

The Prime Minister justified the Hinduja's £1 million donation to the Millennium Dome saying it came from the Hinduja Foundation which gave money to all kinds of things. Would his party be comfortable taking money from the Hinduja's in future? Mr. Blair said he believed it would not be proper to take money from anyone except "in circumstances which are right".

The questions were asked against the backdrop of a lingering controversy over allegations linking the donation to the Dome with the subsequent grant of British passport to Mr. S.P. Hinduja in "record" time.

About Mr. Vaz, who has been in the centre of a political row over his business links, the Prime Minister said he "has been an excellent Minister". Asked why he was using a past tense, Mr. Blair said he ceased to be a Minister when Parliament was dissolved for elections. Commentators were surprised saying it was elementary parliamentary knowledge that only MPs ceased to be MPs when Parliament was dissolved, but Ministers continued to be Ministers until after the new Government took over.

Evidence against Vaz?

Meanwhile, the BBC claimed today it had evidence that Mr. Vaz had suppressed information about the properties he owned. Last October he told the parliamentary standards committee that he had three homes, whereas "documents prove" that he actually had four. The Tory shadow Foreign Secretary, Mr. Francis Maude, said it was "intolerable" that an MP facing charge of improper conduct, should be seeking re-election. "What is Mr. Tony Blair going to do about this? Is he going to accept that it is all right for a Labour candidate to apparently tell a deliberate lie to the au-

thorities," he said. A Labour Minister, however, described the charge as "extraordinary". Mr. Vaz, who was advised rest after he collapsed during a TV interview in March, has had a number of "run-ins" with the media during the campaign and at one stage the BBC advised its reporters to leave him alone after he complained that they were harassing him. For all the negative media coverage, he looks set to be re-elected from Leicester East, but few think he would be a Minister again.

Britain allows Canada to prosecute AI bombing suspect

VANCOUVER, JUNE 5. The British Home Secretary, Mr. Jack Straw, has given permission to Canada to prosecute Mr. Inderjit Singh Reyat as a suspect in the 1985 bombing of Air India flight 182, which killed 329 passengers, a Canadian official said.

"The British granted us consent to prosecute Mr. Reyat for certain offenses," Mr. Geoffrey Gaul, a spokesperson for the British Columbia Attorney-General's office, said on Monday. — PTI

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Prick the Blair 'bubble', Tories tell voters

By Hasan Suroor

LONDON, JUNE 4. Three days before Britain goes to the polls, Tories were today struggling to contain the size of a widely predicted Labour victory which, according to opinion polls, could be bigger than even its 1997 triumph.

In a new campaign, the party asked voters to prick the Blair "bubble" and avert a Labour landslide which, it warned, would be disastrous for the country.

The Tory chief, Mr. William Hague, taking a cue from Lady Margaret Thatcher, cautioned that a big victory for Labour would produce the "most arrogant, aggressive and intimidatory government in modern history". A numerically bloated Labour Government would "marginalise Parliament, manipulate the

media and seek to suppress all dissent or disagreement with them," he said. His statement, climaxing a weekend of Tory focus on the danger of a large Labour majority, came amid increasingly grim news for the party's own prospects with three different opinion polls predicting its rout. Newspapers left little room for imagination with headlines such as "It really is all over now" and "You're a loser, baby" — the latter accompanied by a photograph of Mr. Hague and his wife Ffion who appears to be heading in an opposite direction.

The switch to negative campaigning came about as the party reconciled itself to a defeat but believed that it was still not too late to "wipe the smile off Blair's face", as *The Sunday Telegraph* put it.

A similar Opposition campaign in Queen-

sland, Australia, in 1995 had produced a dramatic outcome with the ruling Labour party which was seen to have the election in the bag came close to losing it.

It is called the "Queensland effect" and though it is unlikely to work in Britain, the Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair and his team have been trying hard to counter it, calling it a "last throw of the dice" by the Tories, and a desperate attempt to create apathy.

"It is a calculated attempt either to stop people voting at all, or to ask them to vote Conservative not for any positive reason but simply to sneak in by the backdoor", he said.

The so-called Labour landslide, he argued, was a "pie in the sky" and people must get out on June 7 and vote in order to make it a reality.

The Chancellor, Mr. Gordon Brown, who is in charge of the Labour campaign, said Tories were not even asking people to vote for them — "but simply to vote against Labour, vote against politics or even not vote at all."

The risk of being lulled by opinion polls and take victory for granted highlighted by another senior Minister, Ms. Margaret Beckett who recalled how Mr. John Major won the 1992 election despite a Labour lead in opinion polls. Observers also recalled Sir Edward Heath defying polls to defeat Labour many years ago.

Much of the weekend saw the strange spectacle of the Tories talking about a Labour landslide and Labour trying to play it down — a strange reversal of a "normal" campaign in which both sides claim to be winning. The Liberal Democrat leader, Mr. Charles Kennedy whose party expects to improve upon its 1997 performance, said there was talk of Tories calling for a "boycott" of the elections. This was "extraordinary", coming from the party of Winston Churchill, he said.

Mr. Hague, meanwhile, said he would accept personal responsibility for his party's defeat but refused to say if he would resign in the event of a debacle. "I take my responsibility for whatever the outcome, but I've no plans to do anything other than continue doing the job I'm doing," he told BBC's Breakfast with Frost amid speculation over a challenge to his leadership after the election.



The Conservative Party leader, Mr. William Hague, and Mrs. Ffion Hague meet the people of Cheltenham after a campaign rally on Monday before moving on to Wirral South and Perth, Scotland. — AP

THE

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Labour heading for landslide win: opinion polls

LONDON: With just four days left to Britain's general election, the opposition Tories face political disaster after a flurry of new polls on Sunday showed the ruling Labour Party heading for another landslide win.

With three surveys predicting Labour would boost its majority on Thursday, the Tories were set to launch a controversial poster which newspapers said showed many Conservatives now privately conceded defeat and only hoped to limit the damage.

The poster shows a grinning Tony Blair inside a bubble with a hand reaching towards it with a pin, underneath the slogan: "Go on, burst his bubble."

It was interpreted by newspapers as an appeal not to allow the buoyant Prime Minister to win by too much.

A *Sunday Telegraph*-Mori poll predicted a massive 253-seat margin for Labour, while a *Sunday Times*-NOP poll pointed to a 217-seat majority. An ICM survey in the popular *Sunday's News of the World* put the majority at 197. The tabloid came out in support of Labour, but warned that it had to deliver better schools, hospitals and care for the elderly sick. An *Observer*-ICM poll was alone in suggesting a reduced 170-seat majority.

Over the last few days Tory leader William Hague has appeared to shift tactics to woo centrists back to a party seen as having veered too far to the right.

He said he wanted Britain to embrace all ethnic minorities while the Tories' priority was im-

proving the country's ailing public services — a far cry from his earlier hardline stance on immigration and a campaign focused on warning against the euro while pledging tax cuts.

However, Tory Foreign Affairs spokesman Francis Maude denied the Conservatives had switched tactics or were facing annihilation.



Britain's Liberal Democrat Party leader Charles Kennedy helps putting election leaflets into envelopes with a party worker at the office of a local candidate in southeast London on Sunday. Britons go to the polls on Thursday.

Labour reacted to the latest polls by urging its supporters to make sure they turned out to vote on June 7. The party, clearly alarmed that some people may take the result for granted and not

bother with the ballot box despite some of the new polls showing the Labour lead narrowing, said it was determined to get out every vote.

Mr Blair earlier warned that there was a deliberate Conservative strategy to talk up the prospect of a landslide to depress Labour support.

Chancellor Gordon Brown, already looking beyond Labour's expected victory Thursday, told *The Observer* that health, schools and tackling poverty as well as championing economic competence would be at the heart of the next government's "radical" programme.

Meanwhile, the Liberal Democrats, the third largest party, were cheered by their continued support while 45 percent of those polled by *The Observer* said they wanted the party to supplant the Conservatives as the official opposition.

That is a line leader Charles Kennedy has already begun taking and is certain to hammer home in the final four days of campaigning.

The Independent on Sunday said that Liberal Democrat supporters had drawn up secret tactical voting pacts, a "killer touch" which threatened to aggravate the Tories' expected defeat.

Liberal Democrats were holding back from campaigning in 15 seats where Labour could lose if the left-of-centre vote was split, while Labour supporters in Lewes, southeast England, had defied the party leadership by backing the Lib Dem candidate who was facing a stiff challenge from a Tory, the paper said. (AFP)

Vaz steps up efforts to restore his credibility

By CHRIS KELSEY

London, June 2: For Britain's best known Asian politician the election of 2001 has been a particular trial.

Mr Keith Vaz, minister for Europe and Leicester East MP, has had a truly awful year, fighting off a series of sleaze allegations before collapsing in a TV studio and withdrawing from the public eye.

The man who likes to style himself a representative of the entire Asian community, not just his constituents, is now relying on the voters of Leicester to restore his political credibility.

His short-term ministerial prospects may be dim, but if he holds on to his 18,400 majority on Thursday a comeback in the future may not be out of the question.

Mr Vaz's opponents in Leicester, while being tactful about his illness (details of which he refuses to discuss in public), have asked why he has kept such a low profile during the campaign.

Mr Vaz's election agent, Mr Keith Bennett, refutes the suggestion that his candidate has been hiding from the press.

"Mr Vaz has been doing more than one interview a day," he

told *The Asian Age*. "A general election is a chance for candidates to meet with voters and constituents and that's what he's been concentrating on. He's still not well and still under doctor's orders to rest." "I find it disingenuous of other candidates to criticise him for not doing enough," he added.

"I've never known candidates from other parties to call on an opponent to do more, especially when he's defending a very large majority."

This Friday Mr Vaz was due to oblige his critics by taking

part in a phone-in with the other candidates on the local radio station Sabras.

If the voters do desert Mr Vaz the person most likely to benefit is Conservative candidate John Muggleston, a local man who is a veteran of 35 years in politics.

Mr Muggleston that discontent with Mr Vaz's perceived lack of candour will translate into Tory votes.

"The thing people say to me most often on the doorstep is 'We're not voting for that Vaz, there's no smoke without fire.'

Until he comes out into the open and confirms or denies these allegations the people of Leicester are entitled to draw their own convenient conclusions."

Disenchantment with Mr Vaz within the Asian community may help the Liberal Democrat candidate Harpinder Athwal, whose predecessor came in third in 1997.

"My predecessor was a paper candidate with a limited campaign targeted at certain sections," she said.

This time, she added, her party was setting out to win. "There's no point doing anything by half measures," she said.

Ms Athwal said the people of Leicester were ready for a change. "I don't think it's to do with what's been in the press about Keith," she said. "Generally people have felt he hasn't done much for them over the past four years."

Mr Bennett remains confident that his candidate will triumph on election day. "Mr Vaz's vote has gone up at each election he's contested since 1987," he said.

"What happens on June 7 is up to the voters, not the media or other candidates. The majority of real people who vote don't live in Westminster or the media village."



THE ASIAN AGE

Keith Vaz: Left out in the cold

ANJALI MODY

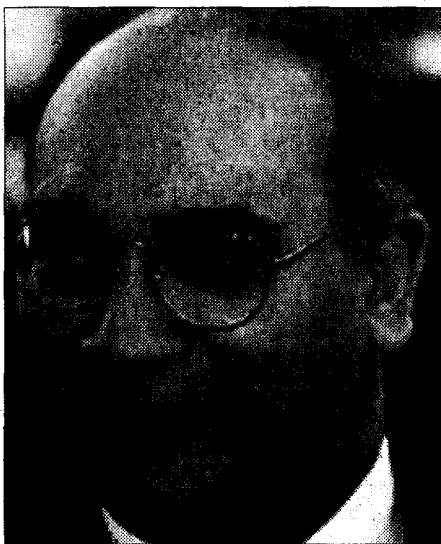
95-2 14/6
KEITH Vaz, the first and only Asian minister in a British government, returns to the House of Commons having been dumped on the backbenches. The 45-year-old Vaz, who was a Minister (of State) in the Foreign Office during the last parliament has been kept out of Tony Blair's new government. Widely seen as a 'sacking', this move comes as no surprise given the sleaze surrounding the MP who represents the Gujarati-dominated constituency of Leicester East.

Vaz, who became the first British Asian to enter the House of Commons in 1987, received high praise from a man whom Tony Blair considers his mentor. He was described as 'utterly brilliant' by Lord Irvine the Lord Chancellor, whose parliamentary private secretary he was before becoming minister. Irvine also said that this father of two was "the most incredible networker" he had ever met. This celebrated skill may have played a part in his fall. Vaz was brought down by allegations of corruption. His transgressions may not be significant by the standards of political corruption in India, but, it was his unwillingness to cooperate with an inquiry into his affairs by the parliamentary watchdog that put him beyond the pale. Vaz, who routinely refers to himself royally as "we", simply refused to furnish the documents needed to conduct a proper inquiry. He survived in office despite this, possibly because of the fear that the government could be accused of racism for kicking the first Asian minister out of office on unproven allegations of corruption; even if they remained unproven only because he had actively hampered the inquiry.

Vaz was accused of advising and supporting the Hinduja brothers in their (successful) quest for British passports while he was minister (a more significant political player, Peter Mandelson, resigned on this very issue). He received donations from the Hinduja through a company, Mapesbury Communications, run by his wife, Maria Fernandes. Vaz also nominated an Indian-born lawyer, Sarosh

Zaiwalla, for a state honour while concealing that he had received some pounds 2000 from him.

According to a newspaper investigation, he played a role in blocking the extradition of a London-based Iraqi businessman, Nadhmi Auchi, who is wanted in France in connection with its biggest kickbacks scandal. Vaz met Auchi through the Hinduja and for five months before he became minister was a director of one of his companies. Another me-



dia investigation, by the BBC, found that Vaz had lied about the property (worth pounds 600,000) he owned, in violation of the parliamentary code of conduct which requires all MPs to make a declaration of their assets and interests.

Vaz, who has a reputation as something of a bruiser in his dealings with the press, tried to brazen it out. He had done nothing wrong. As an Asian MP, he represented the interests of Asians in general and the Hinduja were leading members of the community. The money received by his wife was for services her company offers and had nothing to do with him. The houses were owned by his mother. He

had never had an 'official' meeting with Auchi.

This "economy with the actualite" has called halt to the career of an ambitious politician and the only one in the trickle of Asians in the House of Commons, with a CV that could open the doors of high office. Vaz, whose father was a *Times of India* correspondent in Aden, moved to Britain when he was nine. From private school in London, he went to Cambridge where he secured a first class in Law. Among his contemporaries there was Blair's spin doctor, Alistair Campbell. Vaz practiced as a solicitor and, after 1991, as a barrister.

This was the perfect package for an Asian with political ambitions, especially combined with political opportunism — at which Vaz excelled — changing his stance to suit his political needs, changing sides with a change in political mood. He was an advocate of the 'black sections' movement in the Labour Party — a demand for a guaranteed number of parliamentary candidates from ethnic minorities — until he won his first election, and then simply became a proponent for open selection. He was a defender of freedom of expression, particularly of ethnic minorities, but he was also a vocal proponent of a ban on Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*. A Euro-sceptic aligned with the left in the Labour party; he transformed himself into a pro-Europe man as he slithered closer to a ministerial job.

There has always been something of a stink around Vaz and his political conduct. Seven years ago, while in opposition, an internal Labour Party inquiry into the running of his constituency Labour Party ended the way of the parliamentary watchdog's inquiry. Vaz's conduct then was described as "contemptuous and intimidatory". He was accused of hounding those critical of his style of functioning out of the constituency level party and intimidating members into supporting his mother, Marilyn Lobo's candidacy for the local council.

Those who have watched his rise and rise over the last five years must have wondered when this articulate barrister, and very desi politician, would fall into a mess of his own making.

INDIAN EXPRESS

14 JUN 2001

The far Left attempts a comeback in Britain

By Hasan Suroor

LONDON, MAY 25. The "new" Britain may be unabashedly devoid of ideology, but the traditional Left — old-fashioned, almost past its "use-by" date — has not given up completely and occasionally it can even overcome its fatally self-destructive differences in order to be heard above the din of "mainstream" politics.

There are nearly a dozen Left groups in Britain and many of them have come together on a common platform of "Socialist Alliance" to fight next month's general election, as an alternative to Labour and the Tories — the British version of a "third force". The Alliance, comprising the Communist Party of Great Britain, the Socialist Party, the Revolutionary Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist) and the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, among others, is contesting some 100 seats in England and Wales projecting itself as a platform for the

"millions and not the millionaires" — a jibe at Labour for its proximity to the rich and the beautiful. Its manifesto, "People before Profit", promises nationalisation of more than 100 companies, re-nationalisation of key public services, and sharp increases in the minimum wage and pension.

The Alliance chairman is a former Labour M.P., Mr. Dave Nellist who was expelled from the party for his extreme Left views. He has no pretensions about the electoral prospects of the Alliance but believes that it is important for the far-Left to register its presence. It is significant, he thinks, that so many groups which have been historically opposed to each other have decided to come together despite the fact that differences persist. "...now we can talk about it over a pint," he told a newspaper suggesting that it was more important to rescue Left from New Labour than quibbling about what happened in the Soviet Union in the Seventies. And it is perhaps because of its

anti-Labour posturing that the Alliance is being noticed in the Right-wing press. After all, the story of the conservative Left pitted against the modernising Left has always made good copy. The Alliance, however, is up against a number of other Left groups which are fighting on their own, dismissing it as a ragbag of Trotskyites with no clear sense of direction. Its most implacable foe is Mr. Arthur Scargill, the former miners' leader and described as the most influential voice on the far-Left in the past 30 years. His Socialist Labour Party has fielded 114 candidates, 35 of whom are fighting the Socialist Alliance nominees — and as *The Telegraph* pointed out — on a "platform so similar as to be indistinguishable."

The Communist Party of Britain and the Socialist Party of Great Britain have put up their own stalls — all of which may give a strong ideological flavour to the election campaign but would only end up dividing the few Left votes that Britain still has. But

then who would be interested in a story of the Left not divided against itself?

Meanwhile, Labour has been accused of moving further towards the Right after the Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair announced plans to give private sector a bigger role in running public services such as hospitals and schools. Trade unions have warned of a backlash amid fears that the move could lead to job losses and a poll today indicated that four out of five voters were opposed to the plan. "The same hostility has been picked up by Labour's private polls and grass roots party workers have warned that some voters might switch to Liberal Democrats," said *The Independent*. The Government's assurance that people would not have to pay extra for the services contracted out to the private sector and that workers' interests would be protected has not convinced many. The Socialist Alliance is expected to seize on it to attack Labour for "betraying" its socialist origins.

THE HINDU

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UK 2001: Labour's lard wins

OF
CABBAGES
AND
KINGS

FARRUKH DHONDY

*Love don't live here anymore
...Didn't even leave a forwarding address
From Dhokey Key Shlokey
by Bachchoo*

Tony Blair and William Hague need hold their breaths no longer. I am about to declare why and for whom Asian peoples in the United Kingdom should cast their vote on June 7 in the general election. I have taken into account the fact that one of these good gentlemen will be sorely disappointed by my decisive intervention and the other may see fit to reward my labour as I have rewarded his (Labour? Get it?). The Asians number a good one and half to two million in this country and are often seen as the cream of the immigrant crop, people whom the West Indians, Africans, Romanian and assorted others would love to emulate in their fast rise through the corner newsagentocracy to the heights of the House of Lords. And of course, tea and *masala dosas* with Cherie Blair, dressed demurely in a fundo Muslim veil (All faiths and shades of opinion welcome here! If she can wear a shalvar, can a full burkha be far behind?) thrown in. That's showbiz!

Out of a population of nearly 60 million, this 1.5 doesn't seem a great many people, but amongst our number we can count the opinion leaders, the movers and shakers, who may not be the salt of the earth but are certainly the turmeric in the leavening. We number amongst us Harry Khan, who before he went to jail for heroine smuggling, was the deputy leader of the Chamber of Commerce of Needleton. And need one mention K.K.K. Singh who, before his conviction for wife beating, contributed a great deal to the various party coffers and was the head of the Women's Equality Monitoring Board of Dandafoord? And what of Mullah Willeddenwalla whose "Stone-an-author-Kill-a-Brit" breakfast programme is the top voted community radio show of "decentralised" BBC?

The acknowledgement of our prowess and cultural contribution has been heartfelt and generous from the British. Very recently Robin Cookji, the foreign secretary praised us for inventing chicken tikka masala and bringing it to Britain, thus enlivening many a British life on a Friday night and colouring many a British pavement in the early hours of Saturday. As foreign secretary, briefed as he is by the best brains of Britain, he should know that this is akin to praising Jiang Zemin for their wonderful export of Chop Suey or complimenting George Bush on the great job that Colonel Sanders has universally done. Eye on the ball, these ministers.

But down to my king-making remarks. At the end of them, I will of course name the party for which the vote is to be cast. I expect no favour for this great



POLL BELLS: British Prime Minister Tony Blair addresses a gathering at Kettering, England early this month (AP)

service that I now undertake. That my word in this paper will sway the Asian vote one way or the other, that thousands of marginals in Bradford and Southall, will be decided on my say-so, that the election will, with all the vaunted cultural importance that Asians have in Britain,

It is a fact that Asians, Blacks and Jews are the only people who refer to themselves as 'British.' The rest of our countrymen call themselves English, Welsh, Scottish, or Geordies. When Europe forms the 'ever closer union' and the disparate and despairing nations come politically and culturally together, the significance of being Scottish, Welsh will fade; and when someone says 'will the real Brits stand up,' we blacks and browns shall be able to do it without looking around for the support of an Irish friend. The foreigners of Europe won't know the difference. Lose a grain of sand in the desert. When everyone's a minority, everyone's language and accent is funny, everyone's food smells, we shall be 'empowered'

hang on the delicate and well-honed knife-edge of my judgement, need not in the least influence Tony to promise me an immediate peerage or fix up for me to marry a Duchess once the election is done and dusted. My judgement will not be swayed by any such vain consideration of advancement, though some who know me may feel that I have long wanted to be a Lord, just so that I can kick a servant

or two with impunity and order the forelocks of every subservient varlet in my lands to be cut off by Vidal Sassoon trainees, in order that they cannot touch them when my four-by-four drives by. After all, I'm a lifelong socialist.

There are, make no apathetic mistake, important issues being settled in this election. First of all Europe. It is a fact that Asians, Blacks and Jews are the only people who refer to themselves as "British". The rest of our countrymen, or co-passport holders, call themselves English, Welsh, Scottish, Irish, Cornish or even Geordies and other such specificities — a deliberate tactic and universal conspiracy to put us out of the territorial game. This leaves us at a disadvantage, always identifiable as the black sheep when we proudly stick out our Union-Jack emblazoned T-shirts and call ourselves British, keeping a firm hold on the lion-and-unicorn passport in the left hand pocket in case some copper comes and takes it away. When Europe forms the "ever closer union" that the Treaty of Rome specifies, and the disparate and despairing nations come politically and culturally together, the significance of being Scottish, Welsh etc. will fade; and when someone says "will the real Brits stand up," we blacks and browns shall be able to do it without looking around for the support of an Irish friend. The foreigners of Europe won't know the damned difference and we'll melt in nicely as we've secretly always wanted to do. Lose a grain of sand in the desert. When everyone's a minority, everyone's language and accent is funny, everyone's food smells, we shall be "empowered" — as my less articulate friends say.

Then there's the question of asylum seekers. It must be acknowledged that those of us who come from Sri Lanka or Afghanistan may now or in the near future have relatives amongst the asylum seekers. The way Pakistan and some parts of India are going there will soon be added, to the "economic migrants" the "aesthetic migrants". Under some political dispensations proposed in the current manifestos, they will all be locked up. Travelling to Harmondsworth or other, newer, even further-flung detention

centres to see one's relatives, is a drag. Talking to people through barbed wire can be very uncomfortable and hazardous and will in the end cost the NHS a great deal in stitched arms, lips and cheeks that dare to kiss. It would be so much better to release these hapless and clue-

I move on to culture. In the last few decades the right wing has adopted a strict position towards the arts. Magazines like *The Spectator* champion people like Naipaul rather than the happening-people who might get picked up by some youth arts show. They pour derision on women who film their sanitary pads and call it art. The *Guardian* on the other hand has a conscience... Now which is better? To be derided by the right-wingers for debasing the standards of Western culture, or to be welcomed with new criteria of excellence? Under one dispensation, the gravy train would get derailed; under the other, it would be loaded with critical lard. I know which side my *chappati* is *ghied!*

less relatives "into the community" where they can be claimed by Asian relatives and used as cheap labour and unpaid babysitters in the home, with no drain at all on the national exchequer, till their time is up. In the detention centre they have to be fed meat and two veg twice a day, fruit juice, serials, organic milk and eggs, as you like them, once; whereas at home a bowl of *daal*, last

night's *chappatis* and an occasional slap, suffice. This is a Gross Domestic Product argument.

On the police. My advice is to go for the party that keeps police figures low. This is because knowing human nature, one realises that the more police there are the greater will be the demand for desk jobs, computerised detection etc. Those who think that more bobbies will mean more pavements bashed, are living the past. The modern cop would rather not wrestle with muggers on the street or walk around in the cold waiting for burglars to strike. They'll gather together in graduate-led teams to crash down hard on tax fraud, political hanky-panky, financial under-the-table deals, organised importation and sale of drugs and other such cooperative enterprise crimes which are best detected by computer surveillance and intelligence. And which section of the community, I ask, will that hurt the most? The Welsh? Scottish council estate dispute-wallahs? Jamaican Yardies or Asian Sharpies? I shall say no more for fear of antagonising Alastair to the point of cancelling my peerage nomination for letting cats out of bags.

I instead. I will move on to culture. It would be very clear to any reader or viewer that in the last few decades the right wing has adopted a very strict position towards the arts. Magazines like *The Spectator* expect books to be well written, to say something instructive, to be identifiable as the inventive developments or deviations from a tradition. They champion people like V.S. Naipaul, people in the real Nobel prize category rather than the happening-people who might get picked up by some youth arts show. They pour derision on women who film their sanitary pads and call it art. The *Guardian* on the other hand has a conscience and a sense of fun that includes poets like Benjamin Zephaniah and installation artists who do wild and provocative things. It gives them space, scope, respectability and even writes a few thousand words about their "work". Ethnic is holy, crap is examinable, are their slogans. Now which is better for us second rate writers, painters, playwrights and poets? To be derided by the right-wingers for debasing the standards of Western culture, or to be welcomed with new criteria of excellence by multicultural apologists of the *critique liberale*? Under one dispensation, the gravy train would get derailed; under the other, it would be loaded with critical lard. I know which side my *chappati* is *ghied*, Chris (Smith)! Yow! Gimme five!

"Ring out a slowly dying cause,
And ancient forms of party strife;
Ring in the nobler modes of life,
With sweeter manners, purer laws"

That's Alfred Lord Tennyson. I still don't know whether his mum called him "Lord" as a second name or whether Victoria made him her peer.

Vote Labour! Aitz! And One Love!

FARRUKH DHONDY is a writer and columnist. Write to him at farrukhdhondy@aol.com

Thatcher hits out at 'socialist' Blair

London, May 22

BRITAIN'S "IRON Lady" Margaret Thatcher launched a savage attack on Prime Minister Tony Blair on Tuesday, accusing him of being soft on Europe and declaring he was a socialist at heart.

The former Conservative Prime Minister, who won three terms of power, went into battle for the June 7 general election as opinion polls suggested Blair's Labour Party would triumph by a landslide and that the Conservatives faced a second battering in four years.

"If you have a very powerful Labour Government, a very large majority, it will be a socialist victory," Thatcher told the *Daily Mail* in an interview. She accused Blair of having stolen many of her policies to win

power in 1997 but said he had reversed them since then by stealth. "There's a residue of socialism in him, that somehow he believes that Government knows best... it's perhaps in his bloodstream," Thatcher said.

Warmly backing Conservative leader William Hague in his uphill struggle to overturn Blair's huge opinion poll leads of around 20 points, Thatcher lashed out at Labour on Europe and euro. She denounced Blair's policy toward Europe as "devastating" and said, "The thought that we might be absorbed into Europe is to me utterly repugnant, and I'll fight against it as long as I have the breath to do so."

Blair favors greater engagement with the European Union and says he supports entry into the euro and will put the issue to

a referendum if he is satisfied it is in Britain's economic interests. Hague has ruled out membership of the euro for at least five years.

Thatcher, dubbed the "Iron Lady" during the Cold War years, signaled she remained implacably opposed to the European single currency. "If you have a single currency you give up your independence. You give up your sovereignty. That we must never do," she said.

Her intervention promised to put some much-needed spark into a two-week-old campaign that has had few highlights — apart from endless television replays of Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott punching an egg-throwing protester last week.

It also gave Hague a welcome fillip as he prepared to step up

his own assaults on Blair over the euro.

Hague told the Guardian on Tuesday that the pound's entry into the euro zone could wreck the single currency project as well as being bad for Britain.

Citing differences between the British and EU economies, Hague said: "When continental politicians ask, 'Is Britain going to join the euro?' I say, 'Are you sure you want the pound to join the euro?' because the elephant gets into the rowing boat when the pound gets in there."

Many analysts have warned that the lackluster campaign and Labour's sky-high opinion poll ratings could prompt large numbers of Britons not to bother voting on June 7 and result in the lowest turnout at a general election since World War I.

Reuters

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

23 MAY 2001

Prescott Punch saves the day for Blair

By Hasan Suroor

LONDON, MAY 18. The day after the "Prescott punch" couldn't have been just yet another day. And it wasn't.

At country pubs people were asking for "Prescott's Punch with lots of raw eggs"; Mr. Peter Mandelson, a former Cabinet colleague of Mr. John Prescott, was keen to explain that the gash on his right cheek wasn't the result of a jab from the Deputy Prime Minister ("No, I haven't been fighting with John," he insisted); eggs and punches suddenly gained new currency displacing the debate on euro at least for one day; and sociologists and editorial writers were deconstructing the egg- and-punch story to establish if it signified a decline in public and political standards.

Britain on Thursday did little else but talk about the previous day's incident in which Mr. Prescott, who trained as a boxer and was no mean jabber in his time, punched a protestor for throwing an egg at him.

It put life back into a flagging election campaign and as the initial shock subsided, even Downing Street sounded relaxed.

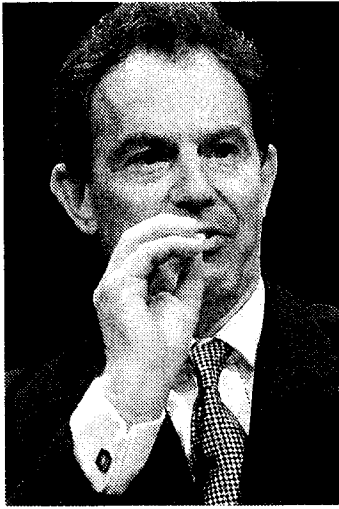
Reports suggested that Labour strategists, in fact, greeted the Prescott row as a blessing which helped to distract attention from the Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair's own embarrassing experience with a protestor at a hospital, and the hostility faced by the Home Secretary, Mr. Jack Straw at a police officers' conference.

All that was overshadowed by "the Prescott thing", as a BBC journalist said.

No wonder, Mr. Blair made light of it saying "John is John" — an indirect reference to his deputy's knack for getting into controversies — and as for Mr. Prescott he looked hugely relieved after he was told on good legal advice that he was unlikely to be prosecuted.

He was back on the campaign trail — looking none the worse for the previous evening's experience. He kissed babies and turned the other cheek when a toddler pinched him in one. Was he contrite? Did he think what he did on Wednesday was right? "Of course I regret the incident. Who would want to be in that," he asked, though old Prescott-watchers were not so sure and recalled an interview in which he had famously said: "I don't pursue vendettas or punch people on the nose."

There was surprisingly widespread support for him with over 60 per cent people, polled by a T.V. channel, saying



Tony Blair

what he did was right.

Most said they would have reacted the same way under provocation. People had no business going about throwing eggs at other people, and if they did they deserved to be "thumped".

"He should have hit him harder," an elderly woman told *The Times*. "That fellow had it coming to him," was another reaction. A common view was that Mr. Prescott's was a human reaction, not many were impressed with the argument that politicians, especially those in responsible positions, were expected to behave differently. Politicians were human, too, they said.

The other man at the centre of the controversy — 29-year-old Craig Evans, a farmer — was described by his neighbours as a "gentle giant" who never harmed anyone. They said he had a bad winter, and had perhaps reacted in the heat of the moment.

Evans, who was questioned by the police, declined to speak to the press, just shaking his head when asked if he regretted throwing the egg at Mr. Prescott.

Tabloids were reported to be wooing him with "tens of thousands" of pounds to tell them his story.

Commentators, meanwhile, wondered if the incident reflected growing public anger against politicians. *The Times* said it signified a "decline of civility in British election campaigns" and regretted the growing climate of aggression to which the media too had contributed with interviews "which rely too much on heat, not light, for their energy." *The Guardian* too pointed a finger at the media for contributing to a mood of confrontation, but argued that "politicians also need to listen to the protests with a humility that they have too often lacked recently."

THE HINDU

19 MAY 2001

Prescott returns egg with punch

Ananova, May 17

JOHN PRESCOTT has described his brawl with a protester as "frightening and regrettable".

The Deputy Prime Minister said two women aides were knocked to the ground after an egg was thrown at him in Rhyl, North Wales.

Prescott said he felt a blow to the side of his head and did not know what it was. He said he "responded to defend myself".

He said, "As I got off the bus I could see it was a potentially dangerous situation. I walked through the crowd, following the police through a very narrow pathway, and suddenly felt a blow to the side of

my head - I did not know what it was.

"I responded to defend myself in this melee and I tried to get away as soon as possible from the incident."

"I hope that we can get back to campaigning on the real issues in this election, with proper and open political debate with people, without any violence or intimidation."

A man arrested following the confrontation has been released on police bail pending further inquiries. The 29-year-old, from Denbigh, north Wales, was arrested on suspicion of assault.

Television pictures showed him turning to his left and apparently punching a man on

the chin.

The man then lunged towards the deputy prime minister, trapping him against a wall.

The ugly fracas capped a day in which the high-profile launch of Labour's manifesto was overshadowed by a series of episodes in which senior politicians from all parties faced public abuse and hostility.

Prime minister Tony Blair later said Prescott "regrets the whole incident ever happened".

"He felt a blow to the side of the head and reacted instinctively," he told Labour Party's regular morning press conference, pleading for return to the "real and serious issues".

Blair, Tory leader William

Hague and Home Secretary Jack Straw all felt the anger of voters. Their ordeals were verbal, but the election campaign for the June 7 poll turned violent last evening with the ambush of Prescott as he arrived to address a Labour rally.

Blair was harangued by a woman about the National Health Service (NHS) at the Queen Elizabeth hospital in Edgbaston, and Straw was heckled and jeered as he addressed the police federation annual conference in Blackpool.

Opposition Tory leader William Hague and his wife Fion also encountered angry hecklers in Wolverhampton.

PTI/The Guardian

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

18 MAY 2001

The British Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair, speaks at the launch of the "Ambitions for Britain" manifesto in Birmingham on Wednesday. Among other things, the manifesto included a promise not to raise direct tax rates if Labour wins a second term in power. — Reuters

U.K. poll campaign plagued by rows

By Hasan Suroor

LONDON, MAY 16. A controversy a day may not be everyone's idea of a grown-up debate, but it makes for good television and, as political parties here are discovering, there is no surer way of getting on to the front pages in the midst of an election campaign than by being at the centre of a blazing row.

Even negative publicity helps, as both Labour and Tories have learnt in the past week since the campaign began on a famously disastrous note for the Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair.

Mr. Blair was all over the front pages next day — thanks to the row over his choice of a girls' school to launch his campaign in what was seen as a case of "spin" taken too far even by Downing Street standards. But it guaranteed the headlines; and in the end that's what counts. Tories have not been far too behind with their share of headline-grabbing controversies either.

How many people had even heard of Mr. Oliver Letwin before he triggered a row by telling *The Financial Times* of a secret Tory plan on tax cuts. Today, anyone who watches the Ten O'clock News knows that Mr. Letwin is the shadow Treasury Secretary, and a bit of an egghead at that. No doubt, his party was embarrassed, but it was more than compensated by the amount of media attention that senior Tory leaders from Mr. William Hague downwards got that evening — hopping from one TV studio to another to explain their party's "true" position on tax cuts.

In fact, Tories have thrived on

tax-related rows in the past week even if they are widely seen to have faked their sums in a desperate attempt to woo the voters. They may not have got their sums rights — as Labour and Liberal Democrats alleged — but they got themselves a spot exactly where they wanted — on prime time news.

The latest row is over Europe and though both Labour and Tories seem to have been caught on the hop, neither is looking worried. If anything, it has given them an unexpected opportunity to hawk their respective lines on Europe. The controversy is over an anti-Europe campaign, to which a number of Tory and Labour MPs have signed up giving their support to the demand for a referendum on whether Britain should stay on in Europe or pull out.

Both parties are committed to staying on in Europe — with Labour in fact pushing for closer integration including a single currency — and their MPs have clearly breached party discipline by signing the memorandum prompting demand for disciplinary action against them. But both parties have gone into an evasive mode, and instead of responding to the demand, they have spent the past 24 hours trading charges on the issue.

Meanwhile, Mr. Blair launched his party's manifesto today, making economic stability the centre of his Government's priorities during its second term in office — and within minutes the Tories were out, offering soundbites attacking Labour's economic agenda. And another row looked imminent.

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31 MAY 2001

Blair cautious on euro before election

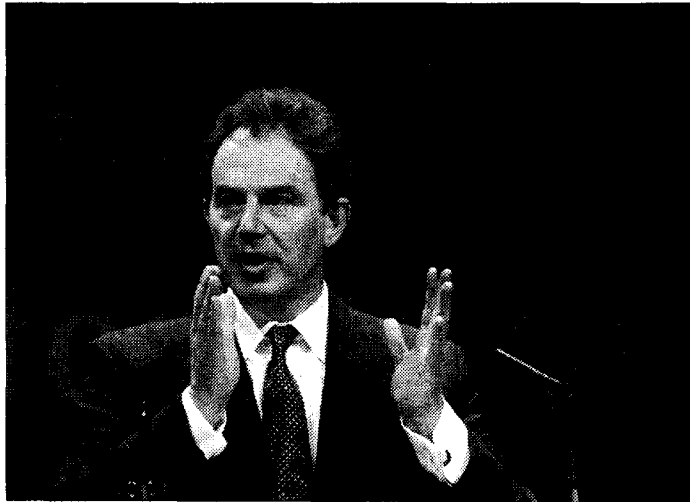
REUTERS

LONDON, May 16. — Mr Tony Blair launched his poll manifesto today, including a pledge not to raise direct tax rates, but left bigger questions such as adoption of the euro currency unanswered.

A senior Labour Party source said the blueprint for the Prime Minister's re-election bid on 7 June would offer nothing new on his wait-and-see policy over joining Europe's single currency. Nor would there be anything specific in its foreign policy section on how to approach controversial US plans for a missile defence system.

Mr Blair will unveil his second-term manifesto, "Ambitions for Britain", in Birmingham.

The ICM poll in the *Guardian* today put Labour 15 points ahead of the Conservatives. Labour were on 46 per cent, the Conservatives on 31 per cent and the Liberal Democrats on 16 per cent.



Britain's Prime Minister Tony Blair speaks during the launch of the Labour party's election manifesto in Birmingham, England, on Wednesday. — AP/PTI

Other polls have pitched Mr Blair's lead as high as 20 points, a sign that he could improve on his 179-seat parliamentary majority in the 1997 election.

The Labour source said there would be no change to the policy on euro entry — that the government liked the idea in prin-

ciple but would do so only if it judged the economics to be right and if the British public agreed in a referendum.

On the US President's National Missile Defence programme, which could protect the US and its allies from missile attacks, there would be nothing new, the source added.

The plan may eventually require changes to US radar stations in northern England, but Britain says US officials have not yet requested any upgradation of facilities.

Mr Blair said he hadn't decided whether to back the project and had urged Mr George W Bush to consult. But his spokesman recently signalled broad support for the plans.

A pledge not to raise personal tax rates will be included in the manifesto, as will a commitment not to jeopardise the economic stability that has been a feature of Labour's four years in power.

Mr William Hague's Conservatives have tried to claim the low tax mantle by promising to spend £ eight billion less than Labour on key services and cut taxes with savings.

Mr Blair has promised billions of pounds of government money for schools, hospitals, police and transport and he is bound to accuse Conservatives of planning to cut those services.

27 MAY 2001

Fresh spin to Blair poll pitch

London, May 14

BRITAIN'S PRIME Minister Tony Blair sought to put his re-election campaign on a new footing on Monday after pundits said he lost the style contest to his main opponents in a heavily-scripted first week.

Blair is still far ahead of the opposition Conservatives in the polls despite heavy media criticism of his campaign since he called the June 7 election last Tuesday with a saccharine-sweet event in a girls' school.

He said on Monday he wanted to concentrate on substance, not "spin", tacitly conceding a point made by his old ally Peter Mandelson that he should rely less on presentation to get Labour's vision across. "On spin and presentation, I agree," Blair told BBC radio. "The thing that matters for us is substance."

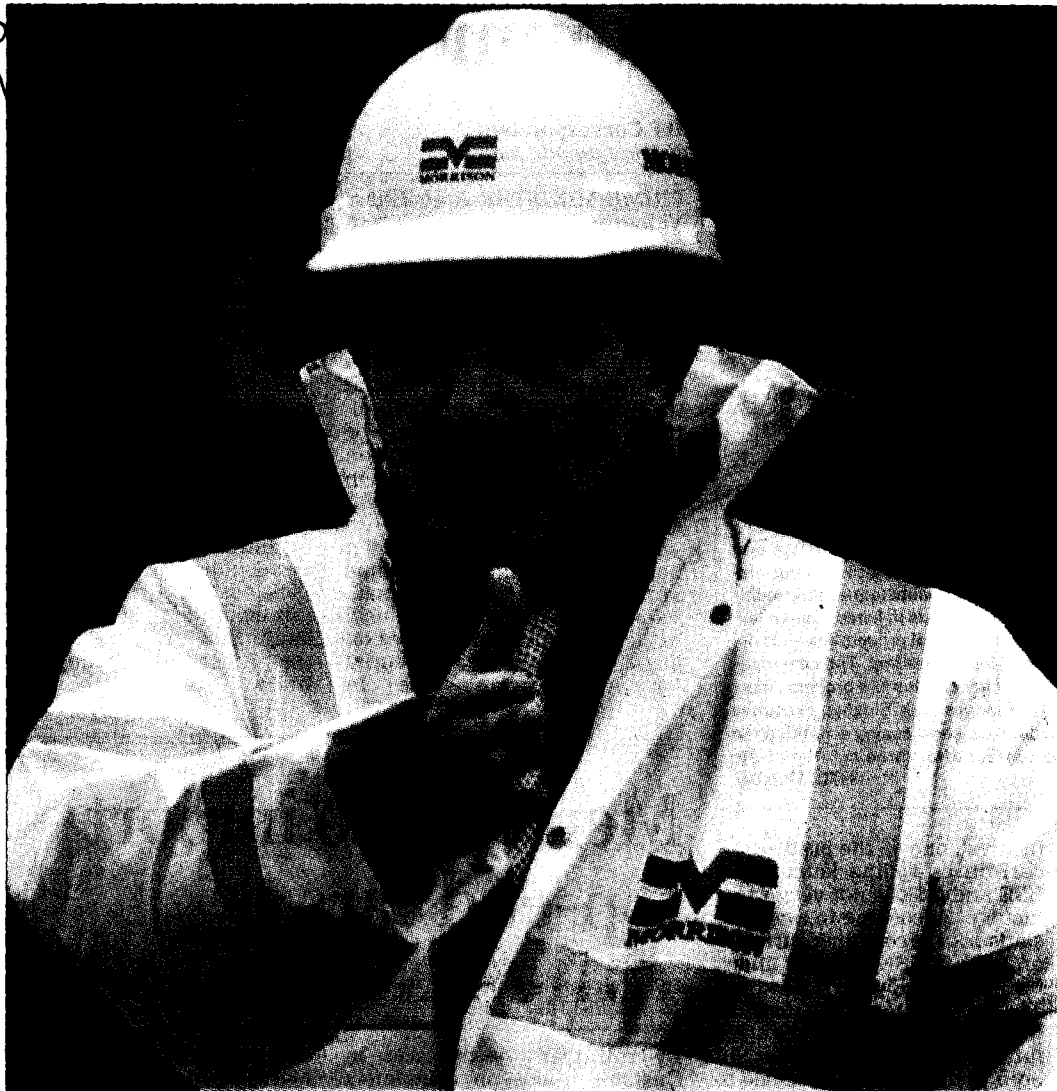
"I think it would be a good idea if people concentrated occasionally on the substance of what I say, rather than all the trimmings and trappings," he added.

Blair was basking in the endorsement of major British businessmen on Monday. But Mandelson joined critics who have found scarcely an unchoreographed moment in Blair's campaign, from the much-derided girls' school event to meetings with voters who parroted Labour policies.

It was only when Blair's wife, Cherie, joined the campaign at the weekend that a little spontaneity emerged, as she mischievously autographed the naked chest of a teenaged boy and sang along with residents of a retirement home.

Her husband, clutching a coffee mug, refused to sing. Whatever his style, Blair would seem to have few worries about the outcome of this election.

The latest survey of political experts by Kalends, a Reuters future events service, forecast that Blair's Labour party would repeat its 1997 victory over the Conservatives and Liberal



REUTERS PHOTO

Tony Blair all dressed up to visit a building site in Inverness on Monday.

Democrats, but with a parliamentary majority cut by 56 seats to 123.

Labour has been scoring around 50 percentage points in the polls, with the Tories lagging some 20 points behind and the Liberal Democrats at about 13 percent. The Tories on Monday focused again on taxes, which they are seeking to make the

central issue of the campaign, saying Labour would sign up to a European plan to harmonise petrol taxes. "Labour would lock Britain into a Europe-wide regime of high fuel taxes," Conservative foreign affairs spokesman Francis Maude said.

Blair acknowledged the Government's tax "take" had gone up under Labour, but said one

reason this happened was because of "the strength of the economy and the number of people in work."

Blair's Labour Party meanwhile continued its romance with business as a group of 58 heads of British companies sent a letter to *The Times* saying business should back Labour.

Reuters

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

15 MAY 2001

BRITAIN / TENSION SPREADS TO MULTI-RACIAL AREAS

Asians take exception to police role

By Hasan Suroor

LONDON, MAY 28. As Oldham lived through a second consecutive night of sporadic racial violence on Sunday and tension was reported from other multi-racial areas, there was sharp criticism of the police even by those who acknowledged that it had a difficult task maintaining peace in an area often described as a " tinder box " waiting to explode.

Even as it was confirmed that 'outsiders' brought into town by the racist National Front (NF) and the British National Party (BNP) were behind Saturday's incident which led to retaliatory rioting by Asians, there was no move to ban the entry of such elements into Oldham. Police said they had taken legal advice and it was not possible under the law. Ostensibly, a lot of people had come into town to join the BNP's election campaign which was regarded as 'legitimate' political activity. If some people used this as a cover for other purposes it was the price you paid for democracy, a police officer said.

The main criticism of the police was that while it tended to be "heavy handed" with ethnic groups, the white racist elements were allowed to get away. Much of the recent tension in Oldham, it was stated, could have been avoided if the police had been more firm with the NF and BNP both of whom have been running a "Rights for Whites" campaign. Asians complained that the police ignored the racist "skin heads" who came from outside and roamed the streets looking for trouble. Police were accused of not acting even on specific reports of harassment and abuse "NF members come into Oldham town centre every weekend and cause problems. They form large groups in pubs, abusing our women, shouting out obscenities", a Muslim shopkeeper told reporters.



Police officers arrest a protester in the streets of Oldham, near Manchester, after riots with Asian youths on Sunday night. — Reuters

The "Live and Let Live" pub, which was repeatedly targeted by rampaging Asian youths on Saturday night, was said to be a popular meeting point for NF and BNP activists. Bricks and petrol bombs were thrown at it — after word spread that some of the NF supporters who had been involved in racist attacks on Asian families earlier in the evening were drinking there.

A spokesman for the Bangladesh Youth Association said in recent weeks NF activists had attacked a number of Asian properties and got away with it.

They held meetings in pubs and played "cat and mouse" with Asian youths with the result that in any trouble pubs became a

target, he said. There had been calls by BNP for a boycott of Asian shops heightening the racial divide in a town where race relations — even the police admit — have progressively deteriorated in the past few years.

It has now emerged that Saturday's violence was sparked by a relatively innocuous argument between two teenagers — a white and an Asian outside a fish-and-chip shop. The matter might have ended there, but for a telephone call by the mother of the white child.

She was seen talking on her mobile phone and soon a group of white youths in two cars arrived — and started attacking Asian properties including the home where

there was a pregnant woman Mrs. Farida Azan.

Mrs. Azan said the front window of her council house was smashed, and she feared for her life as people outside hurled abuses.

Similar attacks were simultaneously reported from other parts of the neighbourhood, and then the retaliation began. It continued until early Sunday morning, and after a day-long lull violence erupted again on Sunday night with rioters throwing petrol bombs anything in sight. But this time the police were better prepared, and things were quickly brought under control.

Police today declared a policy of "zero tolerance" saying they were determined to ensure that the trouble did not spread. They denied the charge of discrimination pointing out that of the 12 people arrested, seven were whites, and five Asians.

While the police and political parties played down the danger of "copy cat" riots, there were reports of clashes in Aylesbury, which was the scene of a minor riot last month. On Sunday, a house was attacked allegedly by Asian youths who suspected that NF activists were hiding there, but there were conflicting versions — one suggesting that it was provoked by pro-NF slogans. Tension was also reported from Luton.

The weekend riots are seen as a result of decades of frustration and anger among Asian over being discriminated and abused. Widespread illiteracy and unemployment in this predominantly Bangladeshi area are said to be a major factor behind racial tension particularly as the second and third generation of immigrant youths are less inclined to take it on the chin — as their parents did. Yet, the sheer ferocity of retaliation has surprised people, including those who acknowledge the sensitivities of a generation which is rootless, has no future and is the target of racial abuse.

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BRITAIN / ATTACK BY WHITE YOUTHS TRIGGERS VIOLENCE

Asians, police fight pitched battles

By Hasan Suroor

LONDON, MAY 27. Weeks of simmering tension in the racially-sensitive town of Oldham in Greater Manchester erupted into violence on Saturday night after a gang of white youths attacked Asian homes, provoking retaliation from angry Asians who set fire to cars, smashed shopfronts, and threw petrol bombs at white properties.

The incident came in the midst of an election campaign marked by some very ugly race rhetoric, especially from the Tories. The rioting, in which more than 20 people including policemen were injured, continued throughout the night and until the early hours of Sunday. Police said nearly 500 Asian youths went on the rampage, throwing bricks and petrol bombs and a neighbourhood pub, ironically called "Live and Let Live" was repeatedly attacked.

Rioters fought pitched battles with the police and torched a police van. "It was frightening. I have lived here for 25 years but I never saw anything like this before", one eyewitness said. He said he was surprised that people were so well armed with bricks, and petrol bombs as though they had been waiting for something like this to happen.

It was not clear how exactly the trouble started except that the provocation came from white youths. Asian residents blamed the xenophobic National Front whose supporters, they alleged, attacked their homes. One version was that their first target was a shop owned by an Asian. Later, they threw bricks at homes, smashing windows, and also allegedly attacked a family including a pregnant woman. But details were not confirmed.

Mr. Mohammad Dad, a local community worker, said the



The scene outside the Live and Let Live pub in the Glodwick area of Oldham on Sunday.

Asians retaliated in "self-defence". "You got to defend yourself when they attack you at your doorstep", he said. Police blamed it on rivalry between white and Asian youths. Asian residents were angry with the police, accusing it of harassment. It seems that when the police first arrived on the scene, they started picking up Asian youths instead of those who had provoked the trouble. A senior police officer, interviewed on TV, said he was "very angry" over the attack on his men.

"Of course, I am very angry. My men have been injured", he said. Though the area had been tense for weeks, apparently the police were caught offguard. A few weeks ago, an elderly white man was attacked by an Asian in what

the police had called a racist incident. The National Front had strongly protested the incident, and last night's attack by its supporters was seen as a reaction.

Oldham is a deprived area with a large Bangladeshi community which claims that it has been a victim of racism over the years.

There are also tensions within the Asian community in the area. Widespread illiteracy and unemployment among Asian youth in this region have contributed to frustration and anger.

Unlike their more docile parents who put up with real or perceived racism, their children — born and brought up in Britain — are more aggressive and not prepared to put up with "provocations".

The political reaction was swift. The Liberal Democrats said the Tories' "intemperate" language on asylum was responsible for inflaming passions — a charge which the Tories dismissed as "disgraceful".

The Tory chief, Mr. William Hague, said it was not a party issue and appealed for calm. The Home Secretary, Mr. Jack Straw, said while he did not agree with the Liberal Democrats' charge against Tories, people should, of course, avoid intemperate language. He said Britain had a proud record on race, and hoped that such incidents would not happen again. Calm was returning to Oldham this afternoon, but the damage to race relations would take time to mend.

THE HINDU

28 MAY 2001

Economy, Europe main issues in U.K. poll

By Hasan Suroor

LONDON, MAY 10. As the British election campaign picked up momentum, economy and Europe were emerging as the key issues and the Tories, though fighting an impossible task of turning the tide of public opinion in their favour, looked surprisingly aggressive on both.

In comparison, Labour, despite its galloping lead which today stood at an unprecedented 54 per cent, seemed to be struggling to find the right pitch.

Tories were the first to come out with their election manifesto, and releasing it here on Thursday morning, the party chief, Mr. William Hague, ridiculed the idea that there was no alternative to Labour — an idea better known in India as the TINA factor — and declared that his party did offer a clear choice to the voters. The choice, he said, was between a party which wanted to “surrender” Britain to a European “superstate” and one which cherished national sovereignty and was committed to keeping the pound.

His remarks came a day after he caused the Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair, some tense moments in the House of Commons reminding him of an old statement in which he had spoken of his emotional attachment to the pound. How, he asked, did that square with his new enthusiasm to give up the pound in favour of euro? Mr. Blair justified it saying that thousands of British jobs were dependent on Britain's entry into Europe, and said in any case, a decision on whether or not to join the single currency would be taken by the British people in a referendum. Nothing was being imposed on them.

Labour has indicated that it is



The Conservative Party leader, Mr. William Hague's shadow falls on the Union Jack as he addresses the media and party colleagues during the launch of the party manifesto in London on Thursday. — Reuters

willing to take the fight on Europe right onto the Conservatives' turf and expose the deep divisions among the Tories on the issue.

The Tory veteran, Sir Edward Heath, in his farewell speech in the Commons on Wednesday, publicly snubbed his party for its

anti-Europe agenda indicating that in the event of a referendum he would vote for a single currency. Mr. Hague today sought to make light of it saying such differences of opinion were all in a day's work. But he emphasised that his party's stand on the pound reflected the opinion of the 70 per cent people of the country.

On economy, the Tory manifesto was widely seen to be highly populist as it promised tax cuts amounting to a whopping £ 8 billions, and a reduction in petrol tax by six pence a litre. Mr. Blair was quick to dismiss it as a policy of boom-and-bust which had wrecked the British economy under the Tory rule in the eighties. He wondered how the Tories proposed to reconcile such massive tax cuts with their promise to spend more on public services.

The Tory agenda, he said, pointed to either deep cuts in public services or plunging Britain into huge debts. The Liberal Democratic leader, Mr. Charles Kennedy, whose party is the lowest on the voters' pecking order, but is seen as more consistent and credible in its policy pronouncements, was equally dismissive of the Tories' economic agenda. "The sums just don't add up", he said calling the Tories' promise of tax cuts and improved public services as a political "stunt".

Labour which came out with a "pledge card", ahead of its manifesto, made no promises on reducing tax but pledged to dramatically turn around the public services by hiring more teachers, more policemen and more doctors and nurses. Education, health and transport are to be the focus of Labour's second term in which Mr. Blair has promised to build on the "foundations" laid in the first term.

THE HINDU

British PM blares out poll issues

PHILIP WEBSTER & ROLAND WATSON
THE TIMES, LONDON

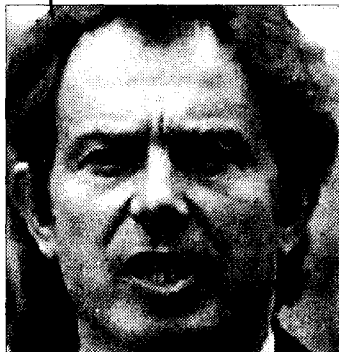
LONDON, May 9. - The Prime Minister tried to turn Europe into a winning issue for Labour yesterday as he made Britain's leadership role one of his key planks to win a second term on 7 June.

Mr Tony Blair, expecting Mr William Hague to focus much of his campaign on his pledge to keep the pound, is to fight fire with fire by highlighting the risks of isolationism and loss of influence that.

After asking the Queen for Parliament to be dissolved, Mr Blair used his first speech of the campaign to declare that the differences between the two main parties were wider than at any time since

1983.

"This election is about which party can be trusted with the economy, which party will invest more in the public services, which party is capable of leading Britain into the future," he said. He was seeking a mandate to make Britain stronger because of its engagement with Europe and the wider world. Britain was still not the leading nation in Europe "that our weight, prosperity and history demand," he said.



Mr Tony Blair

Though he made no explicit mention of the Euro, many ministers believe that Mr Blair is eager to hold a referendum next autumn and will regard adoption of the single currency as the key to increase influence.

At the same time Robin Cook told a conference of European socialist leaders in Berlin that a Labour victory would keep Britain in the mainstream of Europe, a partner committed to making a success of Europe.

Victory would keep out of power the party of the right "who increasingly sound as if they are committed to making a failure of Europe and to reducing Britain to the sidelines".

Labour sources said that if the Conservatives wanted to devote several days of campaigning to Europe, as has been hinted, Labour would engage with them, hoping that the Tory divisions that dominated the last election campaign would resurface.

However, Europe is one of the Conservatives' stronger issues, according to the polls, and yesterday Mr Hague moved swiftly on to the attack, telling supporters: "We will give you back your country."

THE STATESMAN

BRITAIN / LABOUR WIN APPEARS CERTAIN

Poll date set for June 7

By Hasan Suroor

LONDON, MAY 8. Britain today embarked on a hectic four-week election campaign after the Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair met the Queen and advised her to dissolve Parliament to set the ball rolling for a general election on June 7.

This put an end to weeks of speculation, and brought a sense of realism to unofficial electioneering or what *The Times* called the "phoney campaign" which had been going on since almost the start of this year. From tomorrow, the "Thunderer" is expected to discontinue its "Phoney Election" column and get into formal campaign mode. Labour start as favourites to win the election with the Tories, according to all indications, headed for a rout. A solid 20-point lead in opinion polls and with odds favouring it 20-1, Labour is assured of a second term in office and the best the Tories can do is to cut their losses though even that looks an uphill task, judging from opinion polls.

Despite considerable disillusionment with the Blair Government's performance, particularly its handling of the foot- and-mouth crisis, the odds are that Labour may actually improve on its 1997 performance ending up with even a bigger majority in next Parliament. Mr. Blair, however, is not taking chances, and told his Cabinet colleagues on Monday not to be lulled into complacency and instead fight the election as though it were on a "knife's edge." His main worry is widespread voter apathy which if translated into a low turnout on the polling day could affect his party's majority. For unlike the Tories who have a commit-



The British Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair, back in Downing Street after a brief meeting with the Queen on Tuesday. — Reuters

ted vote bank, Labour depends hugely on floating voters, many of whom may not necessarily turn up at the polling booth thinking that the party is winning in any case and that their vote is not crucial. It is the flipside of a victory taken-for-granted that is worrying the Labour leadership.

In a pep talk which sounded unusually strong, coming from a Prime Minister who vir-

tually has the election in his bag, Mr. Blair warned his Ministers that "this is going to be a much tougher fight than people imagine." He told them to "forget the polls and commentators" and instead seek every vote with a "real grown-up" and sustained campaign. According to one newspaper, Mr. Blair's tough talk was prompted by fear that the "talk of another Labour landslide was part of a Conservative strategy to engender more apathy."

Ironically, it was the Tories who sounded more gung-ho clearly in a bid to put up a brave face and boost the morale of their dwindling supporters. The party chief, Mr. William Hague said a Tory victory was still possible, and believed it was "very arrogant" for people to think that they knew the outcome of the election even before a single vote had been cast. "We are planning for victory. We are ready to win," he declared, launching a tirade against Labour which he called a "national and local disgrace."

The Liberal Democrats had no pretensions of winning the election but expected to increase their tally in Parliament. Their leader, Mr. Charles Kennedy, fighting his first serious electoral battle, was off on the campaign even as the big boys in the Labour and Tory party were still holed up in their London offices. The campaign is expected to be viciously personality-oriented, though the Tories plan to force a debate on issues such as asylum and Europe — the two areas in which they think they have a better rapport with the grass roots voter than Labour. Labour is expected to focus on the theme of improving public services and creating a more equitable society.

THE HINDU

9 MAY 2001

Mandelson in frontline to ^{UKC} help Blair win ^{HFI}

Vijay Dutt
London, May 7

THE LABOUR Government, in its second term, would aim for a "seismic change in British politics" for inaugurating a "new age of ambition", says Peter Mandelson.

A sudden policy statement from him has, in effect, signalled his return to the frontline to help Tony Blair win a second term.

The main architect of the New Labour concept that gave a massive victory to Blair in 1997, Mandelson has, as if on cue from Blair, indicated that the aim in 1997 to prepare Britain for the new millennium having been fulfilled by competent governance, Labour would now pursue a New Deal for the country.

Writing in the Observer, Man-



delson says, "Ambition must be compass for the second term" for upward mobility, for earning more so that the country climbs higher on the "social ladder." He has said that a New Labour administration with a range of coherent policies and programmes rather than patchwork initiatives would tackle the worst social and economic problems.

"Every individual and families" would be given the "chance to get on and realise their ambition...for material affluence and better relationships, stronger family" and a society with diversity in culture and more tolerance.

This is in effect an outline for a multi-cultural and ethnic society as opposed to the Tories' fears of immigration and dilution of 'Britishness'.

Mandelson has cleverly given a new look to his New Labour concept so as to appeal to the new generation and a wider cross-section of the electorate.

It is evident that his friend Blair still trusts Mandelson to deliver votes through fresher ideas and promises beyond those of 1997. This signals a future possible role for Mandelson, who quit the cabinet and the poll campaign committee following an outcry over his closeness to the Hinduja.

Blair has also dampened the Tories by announcing pledges to cut tax rates and match pound for pound poorer families' savings.

THE STATESMAN

- 8 MAY 2001

UK welcomes Bush's missile defence plan

By RASHMEE Z. AHMED

LONDON: Tony Blair's Britain has given President Bush's plans for a versatile, multi-layered missile defence shield a swift public welcome, but there is no disguising the private worries. London is finding it hard to reconcile its docile acceptance of Washington's perceived unilateralism, with European scepticism and divisive domestic views on a new arms race.

The governing Labour party itself is unenthusiastic about the high-tech Son of Star Wars scheme. The plan would effectively spell the end of the 30-year-old Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty and disregards opposition from Moscow and Beijing. The anti-nuclear lobby, meanwhile, is gearing itself for a re-run of past battles, by pointing out, as the *Guardian* put it, "that others such as India will feel obliged to respond (to Bush) in kind by expanding their land-based nuclear arsenals".

But British foreign secretary Robin Cook has stressed his appreciation of "early consultations," by which he meant the 12-minute telephone sales pitch Mr Bush used with Mr Blair on Tuesday night. Mr Bush also spoke to Vladimir Putin, Gerhard Schroeder, Jacques Chirac, Canada's Jean Chretien and NATO secretary-general Lord

Robertson.

Mr Cook also welcomed the prospect of further consultations in London with senior American officials soon. The optimism may be a trifle overdone, especially as his views are hardly universal with some prominent Labour MPs on the parliamentary foreign policy committee calling the proposals "profoundly destabilising". The committee chairman, another Labour MP, Donald Anderson, called Mr Bush's missile defence plans the "moment of truth" for Britain, Mr Blair and the doomed attempts at building bridges between the US and the European Union.

Mr Blair is seen to face hard choices, partly because London holds at least some of the cards if Mr Bush's grand design is to work. The proposed missile defence shield would need upgraded early warning systems at two northern England radar stations.

Senior Labour members privately hope Britain will never have to make the choice because Mr Bush's cherished project might run smack into technical hurdles and a cost spiral. But the main opposition Conservative party is urging Mr Blair to "get off the fence" and lead European support for the missile shield.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

MAY 2001

91-10 Cook's Tikka © 315

The UK's foreign secretary Robin Cook acknowledged the other day that British society was a melting pot of diverse races. Media reports say that, in an address to the Centre for the Open Society in London, Shri Cook hailed chicken tikka masala as Britain's national dish, citing it as an example of the way the UK absorbed and adapted external influences by taking an Indian dish and adding to it masala sauce to satisfy the British desire to have their meat served in gravy. Curry, he added, had become his country's most popular dish, replacing traditional favourites like roast beef. Taking off from there, Cook maintained that the strength of British society was that it was multi-cultural. The British, he added, were not a race but a gathering of diverse races, the majority of them not indigenous. He described as "fantasy" the idea that Britain was a pure Anglo-Saxon society before the arrival of immigrants from the Caribbean, Asia and Africa. The glowing references to chicken tikka masala are seen in some sections as Cook's way of buttering up Asian voters and owners of ethnic minority restaurants in the wake of rumours that the government had blamed Chinese food for the foot-and-mouth epidemic. However, anonymous officials in the British foreign office have been quoted as saying that their chief's ode to chicken tikka masala was meant to counter the racial overtones in comments by the likes of Lord Tebbit on "the cricket test" for establishing the commitment of ethnic minorities when the national team played India, Pakistan or the West Indies. The cricket test is old hat. Some 18 years ago, a BBC commentator quipped that India had the advantage of playing before its home crowd when it beat England in the semi-finals of the 1983 World Cup at Old Trafford. Cook's culinary intervention could be seen in the context of the ongoing debate in the UK on asylum-seekers with Tory MP Christopher Gill attacking the rationale for a multi-ethnic society and terming those seeking asylum as "rats in a bucket". Vote-seeking compulsions have made Labour's Cook put the chicken tikka masala first, before the scrambled egg. As and when elections are called and campaigning picks up, more than one Asian dish could become the flavour of the season. It is only the British broth which is spoilt by too many cooks.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

3 MAY 2001

London launches drive to clean up May Day damage

London, May 2: Authorities in London have started a massive clean-up operation following Tuesday's May Day protests in which cars and shops were damaged by thousands of anti-capitalist protesters.

Although most of the demonstrations were peaceful, rioters smashed shop fronts in central London and targeted leading firms, including banks and food stores. Masked activists stormed one supermarket and unsuccessful attempts were made to smash into two leading shops on Oxford Street.

The police arrested around 92 people, including eight foreign nationals from Denmark, Poland, Belgium and the US. Police on Tuesday night claimed success in containing the protests, but the demonstrations are still believed to have cost London's businesses up to 20 million pounds in lost revenue with additional high repair and policing costs. "The entire city of Westminster will feel the ramifications of these protests," said Joe Duckworth, Westminster Council's director of environment and leisure. "In one day, it is estimated that businesses have suffered a loss in revenue of £20 million due to early closing of retail stores, reduced trade and dam-

age to commercial property."

More than 6,000 police officers were drafted in for the day, around 500 more than last year, costing around one million pounds. Mr Duckworth says the protest also cost Westminster Council 100,000 pounds, with money spent removing rubbish bins, street furniture and road works before the demonstrators arrived, and bringing in extra staff to clean-up after they left.

London's Metropolitan Police Authority chairman Lord Harris praised the police tactics, saying, "I believe they struck the right balance between facilitating peaceful demonstrations and deterring violent disorder." "The police tactic of containment in and around the flash point of Oxford Street to avoid serious injuries to innocent people and damage to property proved to be the right one," Lord Harris added. London Mayor condemning the attacks said, "This appalling vandalism shows the decision to contain the protesters was right."

"The immediate turn to violence on dispersal indicates that this was the core objective of the organisers," he said. (*India Abroad News Service*)

MAY DAY

THE ASIAN AGE

3 MAY 2001

A muted show in London 25

By Hasan Suroor

LONDON, MAY 1. In the end, it boiled down to a contest between the brute state power and old-fashioned idealism and there is no point pretending who won this unequal contest. The police, of course.

The much-hyped anti-capitalism May Day protest in London bore no resemblance to the scary scenario which the police had been peddling for weeks leading to stories like the one in *The Times* this morning which warned of plans to "provoke London's most violent May 1 anti-capitalist demonstration."

What had been billed as "May Day mayhem", however, ended up as nothing more than a day out for hundreds of flag-waving protesters who poured into the city to highlight a host of causes such as environment, disarmament, animal welfare, Third World poverty, anti-globalisation and anti-capitalism. They did disrupt normal life as they bicycled through Central London, bringing traffic to a standstill in many parts; and, yes, they made a lot of noise as they raised slogans, whistled at the cops and jeered at their "enemies" but mostly they remained peaceful — for which, of course, the police claimed credit saying that they had been able to "deter" the "anarchists".

If this was anarchy, Londoners wouldn't mind having more of it occasionally — especially on a wet and gloomy day such as it was today when any distraction would do. There were a few scary moments, particularly in the Oxford Circus area — London's busiest shopping centre and the tourists' favourite destination — where the protesters and the police came close to a rather nasty confrontation.

Protesters threw a couple of bottles and cans when the police tried to contain the crowd, and the police retaliated with baton charge. Tension in the area built up around 3 p.m. and the stand-off continued for sometime. The police had anticipated trouble at Oxford Circus because it is here that some of the world's biggest monopolies — Nike, Gap, the Benetton — have their retail stores and offices. A heavy police force, however, managed to keep the situation under control.

Another flashpoint was West End — internationally famous for its theatres — but for protesters the point of interest was the World Bank building at the neighbouring Haymarket. A large group, carrying placards, outside the World Bank offices and raised slogans against its policies.

Animal welfare groups had their sights set on a fur shop in the area while others had their own targets which they regarded as symbols of globalisation and world capitalism. A scuffle between demonstrators and the police was reported, but mostly the "confrontation" remained good-natured.

Central London today looked like a garrison town with 6,000 policemen and women out in their best combative gear, but for all the macho rhetoric of the past few days, they showed marked restraint even as they took no chances.

Almost every protester was thoroughly checked and frisked, and over a dozen people were arrested. The reason for the extraordinary police presence and hype was the fact that last year on May 1, they had been taken completely by surprise as protesters ran amuck vandalising statues, and destroying property. Stung by criticism, the police mounted a huge operation this time inviting the charge of "over-reacting".

The Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair, was criticised by civil rights groups for dismissing the protest as a "spurious cause". Until 4.30 p.m. (9 p.m. IST), it looked that the show of force had paid off but with sundown still a couple of hours away, the police were keeping their fingers crossed.

World-wide protests

LONDON, MAY 1. German police turned water cannon on leftists in May Day street battles, activists targeted Australia's stock exchanges and in London massed ranks of cyclists brought chaos to rush-hour traffic on Tuesday.

About 20,000 workers faced 15,000 riot police on the streets of the South Korean capital Seoul to protest against Government-initiated economic restructuring and a police crackdown on Daewoo Motor workers in April.

In Taiwan, thousands of unemployed workers and union activists marched through Taipei demanding jobs and the resignation of top Government officials. In eastern Russia, demonstrators turned out in their thousands to demand better wages and price controls.

Berlin police turned water cannon on thousands of leftist protesters after being pelted by bottles and stones in what has become an annual ritual of May Day street battles in the city. Over 6,000 leftists and anarchists built barricades overnight in two eastern Berlin suburbs, setting some alight.

In Australia, protests were ushered in by demonstrators who sought to shut down stock exchanges in Sydney and Melbourne and scuffled with police.

— Reuters

THE HINDU

2 MAY 2001

Leaked papers warn against cuts in U.K. defences

LONDON, MAY 1. Sweeping cuts in army numbers and equipment expected within weeks of the election will have a "highly damaging impact" on Britain's defences, say leaked Ministry of Defence documents. They will put soldiers' lives at much greater risk, the papers say.

The cuts of at least £1.2 billion have been forced by the Treasury because of the rising cost of the Royal Navy's two new aircraft carriers and their aircraft, defence sources said. At present that bill stands at £8 billion. The documents contradict claims last week by Mr. John Spellar, the Armed Forces Minister, that there had been no discussion or even "theoretical paperwork" at the MoD about army cuts. Mr. Spellar was responding to a report in *The Daily Telegraph* that up to 10 of the army's front-line units were to be axed, with not even the Household Cavalry and the Guards regiments safe.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith, the Shadow Defence Secretary, said: "It is clear that they have accepted plans to make vicious and deep cuts to our armed Forces. We cannot believe their denials." The documents discuss extensive cuts to armoured regiments and the cancellation of a number of "high priority" equipment contracts. Defence sources said on Monday that there were also plans to reduce the Territorial Army by 15,000 soldiers and wipe out many historic regimental names for ever.

The cuts follow the end of 12 years of army control over the forces. Adm. Sir Michael Boyce, the new Chief of Defence Staff, is a fervent advocate of the aircraft carriers. He told *The Daily Telegraph* last week that they were "essential" and at the heart of defence policy. The army has been told to find the cuts but not to put anything in writing to Ministers until after the election because of Labour's pledge that there would be no cuts on top of those in the 1998 strategic defence review.

"Ministers want to keep it as deniable as possible, so no final decision will be taken until after the election," a senior

army officer said. If Labour returned to power, the plans would go to Ministers within weeks, he added. The cuts will then be sold as the result of a reduction in tension in Northern Ireland and an inevitable result of the inability of the army to push its numbers up to the target figure of 108,000. One of the leaked documents, entitled Short Term Plan (STP)/Equipment Plan (EP) 2001 says: "We propose to reduce the cost of the planned equipment programme by some £1.2 billion over the four-year period 2001/2 to 2004/5.

"Inevitably, the deferrals, reductions in planned numbers and in some cases cancellations needed to effect this will have a highly damaging impact on our previously planned improvements to capability." It concludes by saying that the recommended programme "makes only limited progress towards the rectification of some important capability gaps.

"In some cases, where the threat from potential enemies is increasing, this could result in future operations carrying a higher level of risk than current ones." The Ministry claims that such studies are made all the time. But the document, marked Confidential U.K. Eyes Only, makes clear that the army has no choice but to implement radical cuts. It says: "In view of our circumstances, we have considered whether a more radical examination of the force structure would offer savings."

The document, written in February, states that while "no force structure is immutable, it would be premature and potentially counter-productive to make changes at this stage". But within weeks the Army Board had been forced to think the unthinkable and cut the number of front-line units to match the levels of manpower it could hope to meet, defence sources said. This would mean axeing up to 10 armoured and infantry battalions. As most front-line regiments have only a single regular battalion, 10 regiments could go. —

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2001.

THE HINDU

2 MAY 2001

Tory M.P. threatens to quit over race issue

By Hasan Suroor

LONDON, APRIL 30. The Tory party was today headed for more trouble on the race issue as its most prominent black member, Lord Taylor threatened to quit protesting the leadership's "soft" line on racism.

Lord Taylor insisted that he could not afford to stay on in a party which harboured racist elements and accused the Tory chief, Mr. William Hague of being "too frightened" to take action against such members. If he does leave in the run-up to the general election in June and join Labour, as appears likely, it would be a blow to the party's bid to broaden its electoral appeal beyond its traditional white support base.

Lord Taylor, who has been demanding action against a fellow party M.P., Mr. John Townend for making racist remarks which have included a warning that unchecked immigration would turn Britain into a "mongrel race", was not mollified by the party's warning to Mr. Townend to shut up or face expulsion. He dismissed it as a "pathetic" response and an attempt to "bury" the row. He warned Mr. Hague that the race issue would "end up burying his leadership" if racism within the party was not put down with a heavy hand.

He was infuriated that while Mr. Townend was being allowed to get away with his racist posturing, he had been summoned by the party's chief whip in the House of Lords fol-



Lord Taylor

lowing his criticism of Mr. Hague. He had also been advised to stop criticising the party leadership.

Lord Taylor's ultimatum brought to a head the crisis in the Tory party over its policy on immigration and asylum — the only two issues on which it believes it has struck a chord among grass roots voters, many of whom are genuinely concerned that the country is being swamped by too many outsiders.

Mr. Townend has claimed that his warnings over unchecked immigration and asylum have gone "down like a bomb in Yorkshire", his parliamentary constituency and a random survey by the unabashedly pro-Tory newspa-

per, *The Sunday Telegraph*, reflected the unease on the issue.

The party is caught up between the electoral compulsions of broadening its constituency and its instinctive insularity — and hence the dilemma over how to deal with people like Mr. Townend and Mr. Christopher Gill, another M.P., who has caused outrage with his openly racist statements. A view in the party seems to be that by throwing out activists who are seen to represent grass roots sentiment it risks alienating its traditional supporters without gaining new voters.

The Times reported today that senior M.P.s who favoured decisive action against Mr. Townend were "rebuffed because Conservative central office had received dozens of calls supporting Mr. Townend's views." The Tory leadership looked clearly split with "liberals" such as the party vice-chairman, Mr. Steven Norris pressing for a policy of zero tolerance on race whereas the hardliners favoured a more cautious approach lest it should provoke a white backlash. Mr. Hague himself is widely seen to be a liberal who has allowed himself to be stampeded by his right-wing advisers, resulting in speeches of the kind in which he accused Labour of turning Britain into a "foreign land". Lord Taylor, writing in *The Times* today, said: "Mr. Hague even at this desperately late stage needs to exercise real leadership... (and) must change direction and tone on race relations."

1 MAY 2001

ANTI-CAPITALIST PROTESTERS FACE POLICE IRON-FIST

London braces for May Day mayhem

FROM PAUL MAJENDIE

London, April 29 (Reuters): London Mayor Ken Livingstone pledged today to crack down hard on anarchists bent on violence in May Day anti-capitalist protests in the British capital.

Police promising "zero tolerance" towards rioters are staging one of the biggest security operations ever seen in London, with 5,000 officers out on the streets and all leave cancelled.

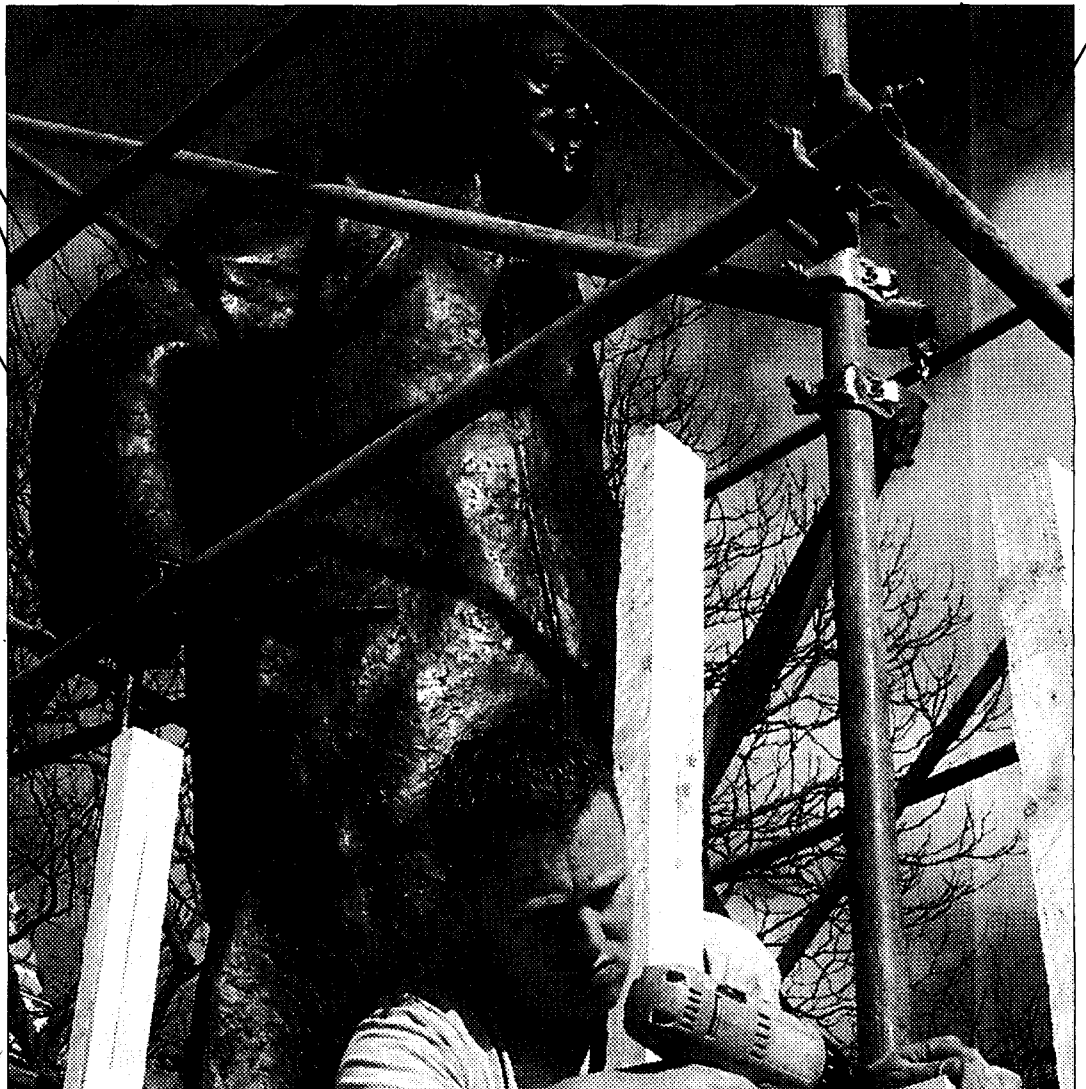
Protesters have vowed to target Oxford Street, the shopping heart of London, on Tuesday. The day could bring tumult to the capital because the protesters may also make a string of hoax bomb calls to provoke even more chaos.

Police are taking a much tougher line than last year, when they were accused of doing too little too late while vandals daubed the city's Cenotaph war memorial with graffiti and dug up the grass on Parliament Square.

The statue of wartime leader Winston Churchill (Reuters picture on right) has already been boarded up to ensure it is not attacked again.

Roundly condemning the motives of the anarchist protesters, Livingstone said: "For them the objectives are scenes of mayhem like we saw last year when a lot of innocent people got caught up."

Asked by BBC Television what his message was to the ringleaders, Livingstone said: "If you really believe in cancelling Third World debt and saving the environment then beating the hell out of a police officer or smashing in a shop window is really going to alienate public opinion. You will actu-



ally damage the causes you serve."

He warned that "at the slightest sign of violence, people will be arrested." There would be a lot of innocent people around on Tuesday, the mayor said, and "if someone throws something through a plate glass window you can get those shards of glass that blind or kill".

"The complaints last year were more that the police didn't crack down harder. Last year I think we were all caught a bit by surprise by the scale of the violence that had been planned," he said.

Livingstone, urging Londoners to stay away from the demon-

strations, said: "They all got away, the ringleaders, last year. This year we are hoping that the crowd numbers will be well down and that will enable police to try and identify the people we are still looking for from last year's crimes.

"If we get them they will do time for last year as well as for what they are doing this year," he warned.

The mayor's remarks were echoed by home secretary Jack Straw, who said he was confident the police could handle the situation. Straw also recalled that he and Livingstone had joined street

demonstrations in their youth.

"When we were taking part in a demonstration we were demonstrating for a cause," Straw said.

The demonstrators plan to use the British version of the board game Monopoly as a template, occupying streets such as Park Lane and Mayfair.

Police said the protesters had chosen the world famous game because they associated it with capitalist ideals.

Organisers have been publicising the protests on the Internet and posting stickers on underground trains explaining the rules of the protests to fellow activists.

THE TELEGRAPH

30 APR 2001

Hague attacked by own M.P. on race issue

By Hasan Suroor

LONDON, APRIL 28. From sniping from within to being jostled on the streets, nothing seems to be going right for the Tory chief, Mr. William Hague as the race row begins to bite his party. In the first hint of a backlash, Mr. Hague came under attack from one of his own senior black colleagues for being soft on racist elements in the party and was jostled and heckled by protesters in a parliamentary constituency, near Leeds.

Protesters, wearing "Hague masks", mocked him when he stopped to buy flowers. "Are those for Mr (John) Townend?" they asked referring to the controversial Tory M.P. whose incendiary statements on race have prompted calls for his expulsion from the party. The protest came a day after Mr. Townend caused outrage by accusing Labour of

turning Britain into a "mongrel race" and telling immigrants to abandon their roots if they wanted to live in Britain.

Mr. Hague, who has consistently refused to discipline Mr. Townend arguing that it would be an "empty gesture" as the M.P. was not contesting the coming general election anyway, was accused of "lack of leadership" by the black Tory peer, Lord Taylor. In what was seen as the sign of an open revolt against Mr. Hague's leadership, Lord Taylor said: "Mr. Hague is very proud of his macho image. He has a chance now to show real macho leadership by acting (against Mr. Townend). He accused Mr. Hague of 'saying one thing one day and another thing the next day,' which made people, particularly ethnic minorities, uncertain about his stand on race.

Lord Taylor became the first se-

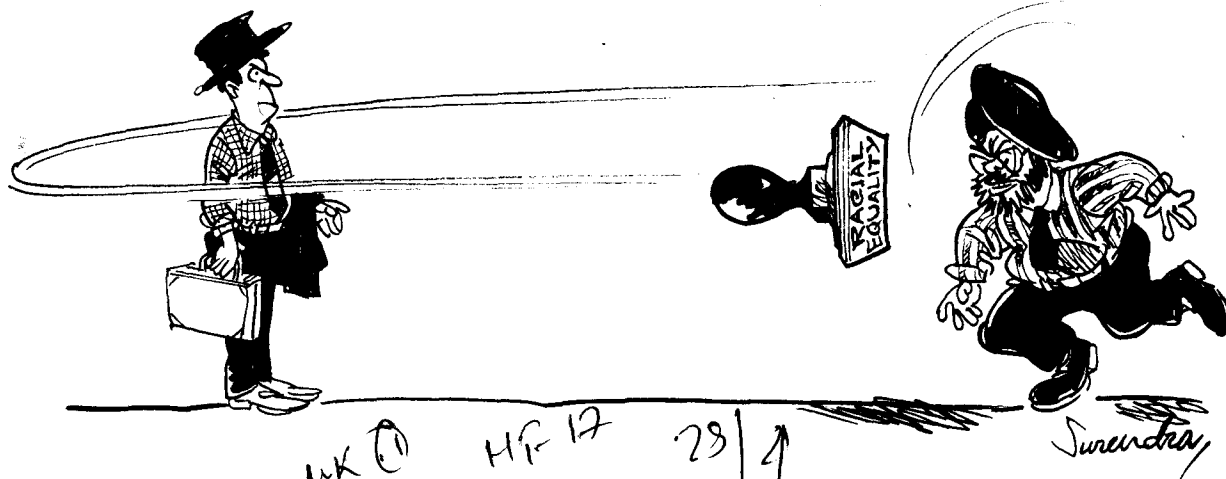
nior Tory member to join the cross-party chorus for action against Mr. Townend as Mr. Hague's popular ratings plummeted further, heightening speculation over his future after the general election in June which his party is set to lose. Dismissing Mr. Hague's argument for not disciplining Mr. Townend as a "cop-out", Lord Taylor said the retiring M.P. had caused offence not only to ethnic minorities but to "decent" people all over the country who believed in a multicultural and multiracial Britain.

The tension in the party between the "liberals" and the "conservatives" came to the fore amid reports that while one section — apparently led by the Shadow Chancellor, Mr. Michael Portillo — wanted the party to be more "inclusive", the right-wing believed to be represented by the Shadow Home Secretary, Ms. Ann

Widdecombe was trying to cling on to an "outdated" platform removed from the demands of a modern society.

Personally, Mr. Hague is seen to have his heart in the right place, but in crunch situations he has invariably tended to strike a rightist posture and his "foreign land" speech accusing the Labour Government of turning Britain into a foreign country because of its soft immigration and asylum policy is seen to have encouraged people like Mr. Townend. That is a speech which he will take a long time to live down, and as he faced further flak on the issue Mr. Bill Morris, a prominent trade union leader, today retorted: "It is indeed a foreign land. A foreign land where ordinary black British families wake up almost every morning to listen on the radio to descriptions of themselves — they do not recognise."

Problems with a pledge



THE SIMMERING race row, in which even the humble Indian chicken tikka masala has featured in a guest role, threatens to explode into a major campaign issue in the upcoming general election in Britain though everyone is pretending that it is not on their agenda. Storm signals are already up and it would require extraordinary restraint on all sides to quieten things down. Even as one writes this, a slanging match is on as to who is more racist — the Tories some of whom have refused to sign an anti-racism pledge prescribed by the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) or those whose aggressive political correctness has provoked a racially coded backlash?

For a detached view it is important to see how the mudslinging, which in the past two weeks has dominated the headlines, started in the first place. Much of the acrimony and the tension it has generated could have been avoided if the Commission had been less demonstrative in pushing its good intentions, and been more subtle in handling a sensitive issue which, even at the best of times, is simply waiting to erupt. The Commission, headed by Mr. Gurbux Singh, who also happens to be a Labour activist and a Home Office adviser, provoked a needless row when it insisted that all MPs and prospective candidates sign a pledge not to play the race card in the elections even after their respective leaders — Mr. Tony Blair, Mr. William Hague and Mr. Charles Kennedy — had already signed it on their behalf. While Labour and Liberal Democratic Party candidates promptly obliged, several Tory MPs put their foot down arguing that once Mr. Hague had already endorsed the pledge on behalf of his party it made no sense to get individual candidates to do it all over again.

The row might have ended there leaving people to draw their own conclusions about such MPs'

attitude, but instead the Commission ended up playing into their hands by choosing to publish on its website names of candidates who had refused to sign the pledge. The suggestion, notwithstanding the Commission's protestations, was that by not signing the document they were exposing themselves to the charge of racism. This "naming and shaming" provoked even the liberal Tories who accused the Commission of a "witchhunt" and of resorting to "MacCarthyism". And when the shadow chancellor, Mr. Michael Portillo, stepped into the row on behalf of his recalcitrant party candidates, what was until then a fringe show turned into a full-blown controversy with the Tories alleging

The row over the anti-racism pledge has cast a dark shadow over the elections in Britain. Hasan Suroor reports.

that the Commission was acting as a political tool of Labour Party, and that there was a "conspiracy" to embarrass them.

Mr. Portillo refused to sign the pledge saying that as someone who was so publicly committed to multiculturalism it was insulting to be told to give an undertaking that he would not run a racist campaign. "I don't think there are many people who have been quite as outspoken as I have been about the need for inclusiveness and equality of esteem. I think that speaks volumes, much more than signing bits of paper," he said, echoing a view shared by the liberal opinion across the political divide.

Lord Swraj Paul, a staunch Labour loyalist, agreed with the view that getting people to sign pledges was not necessarily the most effective way to police racism. "This whole business of signing, not signing;

naming, shaming; it is a farce. Either we are multiracial and multicultural or we are not... I don't think in this way (signing the pledge) you are going to make Britain more multicultural", he said.

The dominant perception even in Labour Party is that the Commission exceeded its brief and in the process not only made a mess of its otherwise honourable intentions but, more significantly, ended up creating a situation in which the real issue was lost. Suddenly, the focus shifted from the growing concern over the racist remarks of a number of Tories to the Commission's excessive political correctness. As one newspaper put it, here was a textbook case of hitting a "self-goal". *The Independent on Sunday*, in an editorial, described it as a "clumsy attempt to root out racism" and said the Commission might have handed over "ammunition to genuine racists who will be delighted at the criticisms that its actions are provoking." *The Sunday Times* said much the same thing arguing that the Commission had "exceeded its role which is to promote racial harmony, not to inflame party politics."

This is the second time in recent months that a gung-ho approach to racial equality has backfired. Last autumn, a panel headed by the reputed academic and the Labour peer, Mr. Bhikhu Parekh, provoked an outrage when it suggested that the term "Britishness" had racial connotations and should be dropped. Opinion across the political spectrum was offended, and a senior Labour Cabinet Minister publicly distanced the Government from the Parekh report.

A number of non-White Britons joined the protest forcing the panel to clarify that its observation was misinterpreted and taken out of context. But by then the damage had been done; and as in the present case the real issue was clouded by an unnecessary controversy. So, what price political correctness?

Swraj Paul breaks ranks, criticises anti-race pledge

HD-16

28/2

By Hasan Suroor

LONDON, APRIL 22. As the slanging match over race worsened over the weekend generating more bad temper across the political divide, the Tories got support from an unexpected quarter as for the first time an important Asian and pro-Labour voice echoed their criticism of the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE).

Lord Swraj Paul, India-born industrialist and a Labour peer, broke ranks with the party to ridicule the Commission's anti-race pledge, which requires all parties and MPs to promise not to play the race card in the coming general election.

He called it a "farce", arguing that forcing people to sign pledges was no way to promote multi-

culturalism — an argument used by several Tories to justify their refusal to put their name on the pledge.

"This whole business of signing, not signing; naming, shamming, it is a farce," he told *The Sunday Times*, criticising the Commission for putting on its website the names of MPs who had not signed the pledge.

"It is something that if you want to do, fine, if you don't want to, stuff it," he added.

This is exactly the line which the shadow chancellor, Mr. Michael Portillo, took on Friday when he refused to sign the pledge, saying that his outspoken commitment to multi-culturalism "speaks much more than signing bits of paper".

The Tories have accused the Commission of "blackmailing" MPs into endorsing the pledge, pointing out that there was no need for individual MPs to sign it once their party leaders had signed it.

Commentators said that the re-

marks of Lord Paul, whom *The Sunday Times* described as an "unofficial government envoy to the Indian subcontinent", were likely to intensify the debate over race, already turning into a major election issue.

The Commission also drew flak from a former commissioner, Dr. Raj Chandran, who was quoted in *The Sunday Telegraph* as saying that it had become a political arm of the Labour Party.

"Labour members dominate the organisation and have close connections with inner sanctum of the government... It cannot be a coincidence that (the Foreign Secretary) Robin Cook made his silly chicken tikka masala speech and two days later the CRE releases the names of Tories refusing to sign the race pledge," he said.

Mr. Cook's speech, attacking the Tories for stoking racism, has not gone down well even with Labour supporters and his celebration of the chicken tikka masala as a symbol of Britain's multi-culturalism has struck them as trivialising an important issue.

Sir Herman Ouseley, a former CRE chairman and currently a member of a Home Office panel, thought his speech was "de-meaning some of the issues in the way in which he addressed them."

It was also criticised by the mother of Stephen Lawrence, the black teenager whose murder by racists has become a reference point for the anti-racist campaign by Labour.

"It (the popularity of chicken tikka masala) doesn't really mean anything. A racist can sit down and have a pint and a curry and go outside and start slagging off and calling people 'Paki'.

They don't seem to see the link between what they are eating and their behaviour... They enjoy a curry but they do not relate the two together," Mrs. Doreen Lawrence said in arguably the most incisive comment on Mr. Cook's tinted view of chicken tikka's multi-cultural magic.

THE HINDU

23 APR 2001

Tories

woo ethnic minorities

By Hasan Suroor

LONDON, APRIL 19. One day Britain could have an Asian or a black Prime Minister and he would be a Tory — just as the first Jewish and the first woman Prime Ministers were Tories, the Conservative party boasted on Tuesday even as it emerged that it planned to field only 14 non-white candidates in the coming general elections, mostly in “unwinnable” seats.

Only two ethnic minority candidates — Mr. Mohammed Riaz and Mr. Shailesh Vara — have a chance of winning and if wishes were horses one of them could well ride into Downing Street one “fine” morning, which itself is a rare occurrence in this part of the world. Both are being groomed to project a multicultural image of the party as it tries to broaden its appeal. While Mr. Riaz, who is a businessman, has been appointed adviser to the Tory chief, Mr. William Hague on race issues, Mr. Vara — a Ugandan Asian solicitor — got top billing at the last party conference where he spoke in defence of its stand on

asylum seekers. The boast about a future Tory Asian Prime Minister comes even as the party is under increased pressure to stop “pandering” to racial prejudice amid reports that Tory activists in some areas were distributing “racist” literature in the run-up to the elections. Despite the central leadership’s warning to Tory candidates not to use racially provocative language in their election campaign, local party activists were reported to be persisting with hardline rhetoric on immigration and asylum — the two issues on which Tories claim to be more in tune with the public mood than their liberal critics.

However, Tory leaders sought to dismiss this as a local phenomenon saying grass roots activists of all parties tended to pander to neighbourhood sensitivities. They insisted that the controversial leaflets were not authorised by the central leadership which remained committed to a multiracial agenda that could one day produce a non-white Tory Premier. “In the same way that the Conservative Party was the first party to have a Prime

Minister of Jewish background, the first party to have a woman, we’re quite likely to be the first to have a prominent black or Asian politician as our Prime Minister,” a Tory M.P., Mr. Peter Bottomley said.

The Opposition, however, was not impressed arguing that similar talk by Mr. Hague in the past did not prevent him from making his infamous “foreign land” speech in which he accused the Labour of turning Britain into a foreign country because of its “soft” approach to immigration and asylum. “His critics point out that he is willing to do anything to steal Labour working class votes,” a commentator said. Labour and Liberal Democrats have taken exception to a Tory pamphlet which accuses Labour of being soft on the “floods of bogus asylum seekers” and “importing foreign nurses with HIV” to meet local shortages. Central leaders dissociated themselves from the pamphlet saying it was written by an “inexperienced” activist who had since been told not to distribute it. The jury is still out on it.

Press row over Earl of Wessex envelopes Queen

Matt Wells, Stephen Bates and Steven Morris London

THE PRESS Complaints Commission has severed relations with the Queen's most senior media adviser as the row over the Earl of Wessex and his wife Sophie's alleged exploitation of their royal connections for business purposes threatened to spin further out of control.

The PCC will in future deal directly with Sir Robin Janvrin, the Queen's private secretary, bypassing Simon Walker, the public relations executive seconded from British Airways to update the royal family's public image. Lord Wakeham, the PCC chairman,

was furious that palace sources suggested he came up with the idea of a News of the World interview with Sophie, granted in exchange for the paper's tapes of her indiscreet comments.

The strategy backfired when the countess's unguarded comments on political leaders and members of the royal family appeared in other papers. The interview with the News of the World was also a disaster: in it, she insisted that her husband was not gay and that she was able to have children.

Amid mounting exasperation, a senior palace official described her conduct as "naive at best".

Officials are bracing themselves for further damaging revelations about the

business practices of Prince Edward and his wife this weekend. It is understood that the News of the World has three to four hours of tapes still in its possession, and revelations are expected to focus on Sophie's business partner, Murray Harkin.

Sir Robin was meeting Prince Edward and Sophie following their return from an official visit to the Gulf yesterday, ostensibly to talk about security arrangements at their Surrey mansion, Bagshot Park, but undoubtedly also to raise mounting concerns about the crisis.

The palace has been desperately promoting a "business as usual" approach, playing down anxieties about what has become the most disastrous week for

the royal family in years.

The "firm" has watched as its carefully constructed media strategy to recast the royals as a modern institution was blown apart by a ferocious media hunt.

There are fears that new revelations throwing more light on the couple's exploitation of their royal connections for commercial purposes will bring the whole family into renewed disrepute.

Although outwardly supportive, the countess was privately being censured by officials for allowing herself to be trapped into making disparaging comments by the News of the World's investigative reporter disguised as a sheikh, supposedly anxious to do lucrative business with her public relations

company RJH.

The countess, 36, who married the Queen's youngest son two years ago and who was supposed to instill a new business and media acumen into the royal family, found herself trapped into making disparaging comments about Tony and Cherie Blair, William Hague, the Queen and Queen Mother.

Stephen Byers, the trade and industry secretary, told BBC viewers sardonically: "If a sheikh came to me with a glass of champagne, I would make my excuses and leave."

The future of Mr Harkin was in doubt last night as he came under the spotlight. He was allegedly the original target for the Sunday paper's investigation after an RJH employee, Kishan

Athulathmudali, raised his concerns about how the company was playing on its royal connections to attract possible clients.

The potential for further revelations this weekend is strong with reports of a second taped interview, this time between Mr Harkin and the reporter Mazher Mahmood. The News of the World's editor, Rebekah Wade, is reconsidering the paper's decision last week not to publish the countess's comments.

It is feared that the newspaper may publish the full transcripts and that revelations about Mr Harkin's business and personal life will inevitably bring the countess's judgment further into question.

The Guat

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

10 21 2011

Sophie sting pits royals against Govt

London

THE ROYAL family faced a major breakdown in its relations with the Government last night after taped conversations revealed Sophie Rhys-Jones, the wife of the monarch's youngest son, Prince Edward, express scorn for Tony and Cherie Blair whom she describes as "ignorant".

The countess was taped making the comments in a sting executed by *The News of the World*.

She thought she was talking to a potentially wealthy Arab client who was in fact an undercover reporter dressed as a sheikh. Early editions of *The News of the World* tabloid newspaper contained 10 pages of transcripts of the conversations.

Sophie Wessex's remarkably indiscreet comments to a virtual stranger about the Blairs, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and whole raft of Government policy, includ-

ing the Budget and Labour attitudes to the countryside, has set the Windsors directly against Downing Street.

In exchange for the tapes of meetings at a London hotel not being published initially, Rhys-Jones gave an exclusive interview to *The News of the World* in which she compared herself to the late Princess Diana.

The newspaper apparently breached the agreement and published the contents of the entire interview on Sunday.

A spokesman for Buckingham Palace said no comment would be made until Sunday morning.

Of Blair, she says: "He's ignorant of the countryside. His wife is even worse. She hates the countryside. We call him president Blair because that's what he thinks he is."

Turning to the Budget, she says it was "all pap", and she predicts that "Labour will lose seats" at

the next election.

"Since Labour came to power, the man in the street is paying something like an additional 40 per cent in tax. They have snuck so much through the back door," she says.

The countess also reveals she is totally opposed to the hunting ban, thinks Blair is anti-rural and that William Hague, the leader of the Opposition, "sounds like a puppet". Later, however, she praises Hague as "very intelligent" and a man of vision.

Prince Charles and Camilla Parker Bowles, according to her were "number one on the top 10 unpopular people. People don't want Camilla to be Queen," she says.

Potentially more damaging than her own remarks are comments made by her business partner and friend Murray Harkin, who purportedly said he enjoyed cocaine and would intro-

duce company clients to young gay men.

He is quoted as saying on the tape: "The odd line of coke I quite like."

British newspapers on Sunday were unanimous in their calls for Rhys-Jones to quit her job as head of R-J H Communications to prevent further accusations that she is using her status to further her career.

The conversations reveal how she and her business partner, Murray Harkin, short-circuit her promises not to be a "rent-a-royal" and use her role as Prince Edward's wife to boost the company.

The countess says: "If anybody ever gets some kind of profile or benefit involved with us because of our association, that's an unsporting thing to do. It's not something that we promise, it's something that occurs."

Downing Street is furious at the way she has used her position to disparage leading members of the Government. A senior No 10 aide said he was "astonished" at the way the countess had acted, particularly as it was an article of faith in Government circles that members of the royal family do not comment on directly political matters.

Although Blair has officially said he fully supports all members of the royal family and yesterday distanced himself from the criticism by Kim Howells, the Consumer Affairs Minister—behind the scenes, highly placed sources were expressing surprise that the count-

Sophiegate: Labour Party bares its Republican heart

By Rashmee Z. Ahmed
The Times of India News Service

LONDON: The buried Republican soul of Britain's governing Labour Party has come startlingly back to life as the row over the Sophie tapes continues. A stream of Labour MPs have followed two ministers in making frank public statements on the newest controversy over the monarchy's place in 21st-century Britain.

The MPs have variously called upon the government to set up a commission to review the future of the monarchy. They are in favour of a Scandinavian-style bicycling monarchy or an elected head of state once the current Queen dies. One of Labour's best-known Republicans, veteran parliamentarian Tony Benn suggested that the Queen could continue to live at Buckingham Palace, complete with the changing of the guard every hour, so long as the bills were picked up by tourists and the holiday board.

Mr Benn, who earlier introduced parliamentary bills calling for an elected head of state, dismissed the Sophie sting as irrelevant and a distraction from the more serious task of reforming the monarchy. The issue assumes great significance as Britons have repeatedly revealed their bewilderingly love-hate relationship with the royal family in various public surveys. The public still seems to love the pomp and pageantry associated with royalty,

but has a barely-concealed contempt for individual members of its first family. Monday's lively and often unerringly-perceptive tabloids headlined the row, "Off with her (Sophie's) head" and a columnist in even the sedate and monarchist *Daily Telegraph* advised the Countess to "ditch the title, along with dropping her job".

Labour has traditionally espoused the Republican cause, but the prime minister's office, in a bid to preempt a constitutional debate ahead of the expected June general election, is stressing that Tony Blair is a "confirmed monarchist." Mr Blair is opposed to the idea of abolition of the monarchy although he favours a slimmed-down model of it. He in fact assisted in the rehabilitation of the royal family by casting its star member, Diana, as the "people's princess" at a time when the Queen and her relatives were drawing a frighteningly hostile press and public reaction.

But Mr Blair's Labour Party is still smarting under the biting comments made by Sophie, Countess of Wessex, to an undercover reporter posing as a sheikh with a lucrative contract for her public relations firm. The Countess described Prime Minister Blair as "presidential" and ignorant of the countryside and its innocent pursuits like hunting. Revealing middle-class prejudices and soundly conservative instincts, she derided the "frightening" tax rises under the Labour government.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

31 APR 2001

BRITAIN / LOBBYING BY CABINET MINISTERS FAILS

Blair puts off elections by a month

By Hasan Suroor

LONDON, APRIL 1. Weeks of uncertainty over the timing of the British general election ended today as the Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair, defying his Cabinet colleagues, decided to put it off by a month to give himself more time to cope with the foot-and-mouth crisis and, more importantly, to head of the charge that he is insensitive to public opinion.

The election, which was widely expected on May 3, would now be held on June 7 and a formal announcement is expected on Monday when Mr. Blair returns from his weekend retreat at Chequers.

The Prime Minister's decision is believed to have annoyed his Cabinet colleagues and party MPs, most of whom were opposed to a delay. It caught the Culture Secretary, Mr. Chris Smith, on the hop as he went on Radio Morning strongly opposing a postponement unaware that a decision had already been taken. "An embarrassed (Mr) Smith later conferred with Mr. Blair's team and then insisted he was opposed to any 'substantial delay', *The Sunday Times* said.

Almost the entire Cabinet, including heavyweights such as the Deputy Prime Minister, Mr. John Prescott, the Chancellor, Mr. Gordon

Brown, the Foreign Secretary, Mr. Robin Cook, and the Home Secretary, Mr. Jack Straw, favoured an early election on the plea that a delay would send out a wrong message overseas and that it would be seized by the Tories to claim victory for their campaign against a May election.

They also feared that since the foot-and-mouth was not likely to be under control in a few weeks, the government could come under pressure to delay the election further. There were already demands today that it should be put off until autumn.

A senior Tory leader, Mr. Michael Portillo, accused Mr. Blair of "dithering" and said this was no time to think of elections.

As newspapers widely reported the rift in the Cabinet and the Labour Party, senior figures were quick to close ranks. Mr. Robin Cook denied that there was split, and the chairman of Labour Parliamentary Party, Mr. Clive Soley, said though he still favoured an early election, he found no fault with the decision. Last week, Mr. Soley had taken an in-house party poll and reported to Mr. Blair that over 70 per cent Labour MPs favoured May 3.

A spokesman for the powerful Labour trade union maintained that a delay was bad news

for tourism as it would reinforce the impression abroad that Britain was closed to business.

Mr. Blair's decision is believed to have been influenced by a new opinion poll which showed that two-thirds of the people favoured a delay, but even before the poll he had begun to have second thoughts about a May poll. After his visit to some of the foot-and-mouth afflicted areas, he sensed the public mood that early election would expose his government to the charge of putting the party above the country.

The Prime Minister's spokesman, Mr. Alistair Campbell, stressed that the Prime Minister would do what was "right for the country as a whole."

"The ministers were told that Mr. Blair wanted a month's delay to preserve his image as 'one-nation' Prime Minister sensitive to rural concerns", one newspaper said.

The non-Tory media, which had put its money on an early election, was clearly disappointed with *The Independent* declaring that "on balance he has made the wrong choice."

THE INDEPENDENT

2 APR 2001

Labour keen on May 3 poll

By Hasan Suroor

LONDON, MARCH 26. As the process of killing and burying nearly half a million cattle in a mass grave in Cumbria over the next three days began today in a massive army-assisted operation to control the foot-and-mouth epidemic, there were reports that general elections may be put off by a month. But the overwhelming opinion within Labour was said to be in favour of sticking to the May 3 timetable.

The chairman of the Labour parliamentary party, Mr. Clive Soley, said it would be an "error of judgment" to postpone the democratic process and send out a wrong message. He argued that Britain had held elections in abnormal circumstances before and there was no justification for delaying them now. Far from helping the farmers, a delay could do "immense damage to the reputation of the country and to certain sections of industry, notably tourism," he said.

Mr. Soley, who had extensive discussions with Labour MPs, claimed that 70 per cent wanted elections to go ahead on May 3. "Everyone is of the view that we must not appear arrogant or fail to listen to what people are saying. The overwhelming feeling is that putting them off would not in any way help the farmers," he pointed out. The Deputy Prime Minister, Mr. John Prescott, was quoted as saying that though the opinion was divided, his own view was that a delay would create an impression that Britain was in deep crisis. He echoed the Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair's line that the outside world should not get the idea that Britain was "closed for business".

Critics said that talk of "pressure" on Mr. Blair from within the party against a delay had been orchestrated by his spin doctors, and maintained that holding elections in the midst of a national crisis would be in poor taste. *The Independent* reported that even as Ministers would be publicly mak-

ing out a case for elections on May 3, contingency plans were being drawn up for a "month-long pause" and June 7 was the most likely new date. The Government was not in favour of putting them off until autumn fearing that unforeseen circumstances could jeopardise its prospects. "With America heading towards a recession, they fear that Britain's economic position might look very different by the autumn and delaying the poll until then could upset Labour's entire re-election strategy," it said.

Downing Street was reported to be trying hard to ensure that Mr. Blair's carefully crafted election timetable did not become a casualty of foot-and-mouth. His decision to take direct control of the crisis was seen as an attempt to deliver some progress over the next few days and make out a case that the Government had got a grip of the situation and therefore elections could be held on May 3

THE HINDU

27 MAR 2001

HD-12 25/3

Blair rushes back to U.K. WK

By Hasan Suroor

LONDON, MARCH 24. The British Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair, cut short his stay at the European Union summit in Stockholm and returned home today as the foot and mouth epidemic worsened.

The Tory leader, Mr. William Hague, called for a "crisis Cabinet" to be set up and experts indicated that nearly half of the country's livestock may have to be killed to control the disease. A question mark continued to hang over the election timetable with Mr. Blair saying that he still has 10 days to take a decision. He faced an embarrassing moment at Stockholm when — unknown to him — he was filmed disclosing his self-imposed 10-day deadline to the E.U. Commission President, Mr. Romano Prodi. The remark was seized by his critics here to accuse him of continuing to entertain the idea of May 3 election despite growing political and public opposition to it.

Meanwhile, amid a sense of national panic, a counter-view is emerging which believes that the crisis has been blown out of proportion and that there is more hype to it than substance. The loss estimates are said to be a gross exaggeration and the farmers seen to be protesting too much. "This is no underprivi-

leged minority struggling to find a voice in the metropolis. Barely a day goes by that a horny-handed son of the soil doesn't wipe his feet on the doormat inside No. 10," said a commentator in *The Times* alluding to the numerous farmers' delegations which have visited Downing Street recently.

Critics say that a certain romanticism about the British countryside coupled with a media-feeding frenzy have turned a provincial tragedy into a full-blown national emergency. The personal suffering in this case is nowhere on the same scale as that of the 6,000 steel workers who lost their jobs recently or hundreds of people laid off by a car manufacturing company with nobody to record their trauma or lobby for them in Downing Street. "Those were one-day news stories, with no camera-grabbing fires to mark the moment. Unpaid mortgages and the silent drop from decent pay to a minimum wage is not telegenic", argued Ms Polly Toynbee in *The Guardian* wondering if a "mad reporter's disease" had broken out among the media, particularly the TV channels revelling in "live" images of burning carcasses and weeping farmers.

The picture of a countryside devoured by foot and mouth is said to be a myth built up by

the media fed by an urban romantic notion of rural England — and the fear of losing it. The fear that the foot and mouth would deprive the people of rolling green fields "dotted with ancient trees, sheltering gentle cows flicking horseflies with their tails" has unleashed an emotional response which has no relation to the facts on the ground. The result, as Ms Alice Miles in *The Times* wrote, is that "our great, metropolitan newspapers have turned out to be riddled with rural opinion... (and) to hear these voices of rural England speak, we townies are in danger of losing for ever the joys of the countryside, the happiness of farmland, the carefree trapeze around the fields and airs of Suffolk."

The hard reality, according to analysts, is that farming accounts for less than one per cent of the country's GDP and the total workforce in agriculture is barely two per cent and declining. The total farm subsidy last year was £ 3 billions which is said to be more than the subsidy for all other industries put together.

While it is acknowledged that there are poor and struggling farmers, critics say that the situation is no different from that in the cities where there are "poor corner shopkeepers alongside rich supermarkets."

THE HINDU

25 MAR 2001

Meat disease hit UK weeks ago

London, February 24

BRITAIN SAID Friday a paralyzing foot-and-mouth crisis in its meat industry had possibly spread to near Scotland and had been loose for weeks longer than feared.

Officials are scrambling to contain the disease, which can be spread by the wind, on the wheels of vehicles and on human clothing, to stop it decimating Britain's livestock industry and spreading to other countries in Europe.

Agriculture Minister Nick Brown announced a seven-day ban on moving livestock because a farm in northern England had been found to be harboring the disease unnoticed for two or three weeks before it was first revealed at another location last Tuesday.

"Foot-and-mouth has been present in the UK for a longer period of time than the initial outbreak in Essex would have led us to believe," Brown said. He said Britain was introducing a "complete standstill for the next seven days on move-

ment of livestock in Great Britain," covering pigs, cattle, sheep and goats but not poultry, horses or milk.

The disease was first found Tuesday among 28 pigs at a slaughterhouse in Essex near London, prompting a worldwide ban on exports of Britain's livestock and animals products. It plunged the farming sector into a new crisis, just as it was emerging from a long struggle against mad cow disease. Foot-and-mouth, which is characterised by the development of blisters in the mouths and on the feet of cloven-hoofed animals, poses little or no risk to humans, but can be fatal for younger cattle, sheep, goats and pigs.

It can spread quickly through livestock populations, making it difficult for dairy cows to produce milk and prompting weight loss in other animals.

The disease is very painful for animals, and in some cases fatal, but experts say it poses little risk to humans.

Reuters

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

25 FEB 2001

Experts trace source of British meat disease

London, February 23

AGRICULTURE AUTHORITIES confirmed two sites of foot-and-mouth disease Friday, and said they may have identified the source of the infection which has shut British meat out of international markets.

The disease was identified on a farm at Heddon-on-the-Wall in northern England, which supplied pigs to the slaughterhouse in Essex county, near London, where the disease was first confirmed on Tuesday, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and

Food said.

The second site was in the parish of Canunton in Essex. "The disease appears to have been present on the farm for some time. It is feasible that this may be the source of the infection at the abattoir in Essex," the ministry said.

A five-mile exclusion zone was imposed around the farm, as has been done at four other sites where the disease has been confirmed.

Britain voluntarily suspended exports of live animals, meat and dairy products on Wednesday.

and the United States, Russia and the European Union have also imposed import restrictions. Hungary announced a similar ban Friday.

Foot-and-mouth disease affects cloven-footed animals, including sheep, goats and cows. Causing blisters on the mouth and feet, fever and loss of appetite, it is not usually fatal in itself, but animals are slaughtered to stop its spread.

Transmission to humans is extremely rare, but possible if a person is in close contact with an infected animal, the Food Stan-

dards Agency said.

The Scottish Executive said on Friday it had discovered a possible case of foot and mouth disease on a pig farm in Aberdeenshire, raising fears the highly contagious disease had spread throughout Britain.

"A possible case of foot and mouth disease is being investigated by the state veterinary service on a pig farm in Fyvie in Aberdeenshire," the executive said in a statement. "Movement restrictions have been applied to the farm and a standstill order in effect for an eight kilometre

radius around farm."

The executive said the restriction would halt the movement of all livestock in and out of, as well as within, the exclusion zone. The statement added that samples had been taken to a laboratory for diagnosis and results were expected this evening.

Parlier, Britain's Ministry of Agriculture confirmed its fifth case of foot-and-mouth on a pig farm in northern England, saying the farm could also be the source of the country's first out-

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

24 FEB 2001

Global ban on British meat after pig scare

London, Feb. 22 (AP): An outbreak of highly infectious foot-and-mouth disease in British pigs has prompted a government ban on exports of meat, milk and livestock and caused nations around the world to move against British imports.

The European Union yesterday quickly announced a ban on British exports to other member countries until March 1. The US and Canada followed suit as did Australia and Singapore today.

The disease, which is not regarded as a threat to humans, affects cloven-footed animals, including sheep, goats and cows. It is not usually fatal to the animal but can cause weight loss and reduced dairy production in cattle. It is airborne and can spread very quickly.

"This outbreak has potentially catastrophic implications for the whole of the British livestock industry," said Ben Gill, president of the National Farmers' Union. Last summer's outbreaks of swine fever, and the long-running mad cow crisis have badly hurt farmers in Britain.

The government Food Standards Agency said transmission of foot-and-mouth disease to humans is extremely rare, but may be possible if they are in close contact with an infected animal.

"These measures are not an issue of human health but are designed to prevent the spread of the virus in livestock," agriculture minister Nick Brown said. "The government will not allow anything which is dangerous to be fed to people."

The EU said it would review its ban at a meeting of the Standing Veterinary Committee on February 27. The US, which halted its imports of British pork and pork products, bought just 4,000 tons in 1999 and "substantially less" in 2000, said an agriculture department spokesman. Canada banned meat, milk and livestock imports from Britain, and Australia suspended imports of British livestock products.

The last foot-and-mouth outbreak in Britain occurred in 1981. An outbreak in 1967 led to the slaughter of more than 400,000 animals. The disease was discovered on Monday in 27 pigs at an abattoir at Little Warley in Essex county, northeast of London. The ministry said it had

spread to farm near the abattoir.

Veterinary officials were trying to determine the source, which could take several weeks. The ministry said it had imposed five-mile exclusion zones around the abattoir and two farms that delivered pigs to the slaughterhouse on Friday. Officials were investigating reports of an outbreak on a fourth farm. The carcasses of more than 1,000 pigs slaughtered at the abattoir since Monday would be destroyed, abattoir director Paul Cheale said.

The Babe theory

Was Babe the Pig responsible for Britain's latest farming crisis? Or a smuggler? Or a tourist? British agricultural au-

thorities searching against time for the source of a foot-and-mouth disease outbreak refused to rule out any theory.

The search for the cause of Britain's first outbreak of the disease in 20 years takes in homes in the Essex commuter belt near London where families keep pet pigs. "It was really quite a shock to a number of people that there were quite so many pet pig keepers in the area," a spokesman for the National Pig Association said. "One owner might have had an animal that became infected and not noticed. It's not necessarily a fatal condition and animals can recover from it and remain carriers for a period of time. It could have spread from there — it's a possibility."

THE TELEGRAPH

23 FEB 2001

Vaz intervened 18 times for Indians: UK foreign office

BY NABANITA SIRCAR

AA-3
19/3

London, March 18: Britain's foreign office minister Keith Vaz intervened 18 times to overturn decisions by the British high commission in India not to allow Indian nationals to enter the UK.

The disclosure came from the British foreign office in an answer to a parliamentary question made by Liberal Democrat MP David Rendel. In another revelation, it is reported that Mr Vaz, since taking charge of overseeing visas to Britain in October 1999, has overturned immigration decisions 50 times.

Ministers have "extremely rarely" overturned decisions by embassies and high commissions around the world. Mr Vaz is again coming under pressure to disclose details of the cases he has been involved in and give an explanation to why he rejected immigration officials' advice. British MPs are demanding to know if the cases involved individuals who were Labour donors or Mr Vaz's business associates.

The fresh allegation is also leading to claims that there is a conflict of interest because Mr Vaz's wife Maria Fernandes is an immigration lawyer specialising in visa issues.

She has also written a book aimed at guiding applicants to obtain visas to Britain.

This, nevertheless, does, in no way indicate any improper conduct on her part.

Although the foreign office, has, until now refused to disclose any details on the grounds of breaching confidentiality rules but a parliamentary answer confirmed that Mr Vaz's involvement in 18 Indian cases.

It is also claimed that officials at the high commission in Mumbai have expressed concern at Mr Vaz's intervention. The foreign office denies there is anything improper about Mr Vaz's overrulings. A spokesman said, "Almost two million visas are applied for a year and fewer than 150,000 are rejected. The fact that the minister turned down 50 decision means we are talking a minute percentage."

However, Tory MP Liam Fox who was minister for visas in the John Major government said, "Ministers need exceptional reasons to overturn their (immigration officers') decisions and I can only recall three times this happened when I was in office. It calls into question Robin Cook's judgment in giving him the job in the first place," he said.

THE ASIAN AGE

1 MAR 2001

Parliamentary probe exonerates Keith Vaz

By Rashmee Z Ahmed
The Times of India News Service

LONDON: For the second time in four days, Keith Vaz, Britain's first elected Asian minister, can pronounce himself vindicated more or less, perhaps rather more than less.



Keith Vaz

A parliamentary inquiry into the way Mr Vaz does business and politics in his Asian-dominated Leicester East constituency, has cleared him of all but one charge of receiving favours in cash and kind from Asian businessmen. It was alleged that he subsequently failed to declare the payments in the parliamentary register.

The inquiry is published just days after Mr Vaz was cleared by another official investigation into his links with the Hinduja. It exonerates him of a range of complaints such as accepting as little as eight pounds a month from one businessman, to using a car provided by a Leicester jeweller during the 1997 election.

But the inquiry, set up more than a year ago to investigate the allegations, upheld one charge in Mr Vaz's dealings with a London solicitor Sarosh Zaiwalla, whom he recommended for an honour without declaring his business links with him. Robert Sheldon, Labour MP and head of Parliament's Standards and Privileges Committee, said the matter was now a closed chapter even though he admitted the in-

quiry had been unable to obtain all the relevant information on all the complaints from Mr Vaz.

Mr Sheldon pointed out the inquiry had established that Mr Vaz "had taken two modest payments of 200 and 250 pounds from Zaiwalla for a calendar advertisement but Vaz had told the inquiry about it when asked."

Mr Vaz, who has survived in office after an extraordinarily grueling six weeks in the spotlight of the Hinduja cash-for-passports row that claimed one ministerial casualty, said he was delighted with the inquiry's findings. However, he dismissed the rationale for setting up the investigation in the first place as "too much latitude to the purveyors of lies and malice".

But the opposition Conservative Party says it is dissatisfied with the disdain with which Mr Vaz dealt with the inquiry, deciding at one point to stop cooperating with it. They question Mr Vaz's ability to represent Britain abroad, especially as minister for Europe.

It is unclear whether Mr Vaz will challenge the opposition criticism as a witch-hunt with racist overtones. Last month, at the height of the Hinduja affair, Mr Vaz's campaign to clear his name received an unexpected boost when 11 Black and Asian peers and other leading coloured people expressed public support for him. In an open letter to newspapers, they criticised the barrage of criticism as "an implied slur on all Asians and Black people in the UK" and said they "feared its long-term impact on young Asians and Black people who wish to go into public life".

THE TIMES OF INDIA

14 MAR 2001

Keith Vaz's difficulties deepen

HO-17

By Hasan Suroor

LONDON, MARCH 16. In what looked ominously like a replay of the moments before Mr. Peter Mandelson was forced out of office over the Hinduja's case, the pressure today mounted on the Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair, to sack Mr. Keith Vaz, a junior minister in the Foreign Office, for 'obstructing' a parliamentary investigation into his business affairs.

Mr. Vaz acknowledged the gravity of his situation in a radio interview saying that it would have been "mortally damaging" if he had been a Cabinet minister. Asked if his conduct would not have been mortally damaging for a Cabinet Minister, he said: "Well, it would be but I'm not in the Cabinet."

This was seized by the Opposition to claim that Mr. Vaz had admitted wrongdoing and must go. "He should now get on with it and resign," said the shadow foreign

secretary, Mr. Francis Maude, calling his conduct 'unbecoming' of a Minister. A Liberal Democrat member of the parliamentary watchdog committee which investigated Mr. Vaz said he "should go or be removed".

In a show of temper during another interview, Mr. Vaz threatened to walk out if the introduction which he thought was critical of him was not changed.

His outburst during a BBC's Radio 4 interview, though not broadcast, was heard by the entire BBC staff on the internal system bringing him more negative publicity on a day when the media seemed determined to chase him out of the Government — a la Mandelson. *The Sun* which last week announced that it was backing Labour for another term called upon "Tony" — the tabloid's preferred mode of addressing the Prime Minister in its headlines — to get rid of Mr. Vaz and played up

the story of the Minister's 'bust-up at the Beebs'.

Mr. Vaz's difficulties deepened as the watchdog committee released the correspondence between him, his solicitors and the chairperson of the committee, Ms. Elizabeth Filkin, showing how he 'obstructed' her investigation forcing her to abandon eight of the 18 allegations against him. Ms. Filkin, in her report earlier this week, described it as a "particularly unusual case" of non-cooperation from an MP and said: "The climate of suspicion and mistrust of motives which I have encountered in pursuing my investigation has added to my difficulty in obtaining information. Thus many of my letters have not been answered the first time or else my questions have been so narrowly interpreted as to require one or more follow-up letters in order to elicit a full reply."

Though Mr. Vaz was cleared of most charges, the committee found him in breach of MPs code

for not declaring that he had received small donations from a lawyer whom he recommended for an honour. The most damaging charge against him however is that he did not cooperate with Ms. Filkin and effectively sabotaged the inquiry. Mr. Vaz on Thursday maintained that he had been cleared by the committee and was not guilty of any wrongdoing.

In his first comment since the controversy erupted he told BBC Radio, Cambridgeshire, he said: "I was cleared by the privileges committee, I was cleared by Ms. Filkin and no action is to be taken. The simple reason is that those who put forward maliciously false complaints have had their evidence turned over by Ms. Filkin." He defended his decision to stop answering questions from Ms. Filkin saying he wanted to bring the inquiry to an end to quash allegations that he did not want it to be completed.

THE END

Blair to hold talks on Ulster again

By Hasan Suroor

LONDON, MARCH 6. The British Prime Minister Mr. Tony Blair and his Irish counterpart, Mr. Bertie Ahern are to make yet another attempt to revive the Northern Ireland peace process which has gone into a tailspin after dissident Irish terrorists' bomb attack at the BBC's television centre in the heart of London on Sunday.

The two leaders will hold a roundtable conference with the leaders of the three main pro-peace parties later this week amid deep pessimism over its outcome as attitudes on all sides have hardened lately and any fresh violence as widely feared could make things even more difficult.

The Prime Minister's official spokesman, Mr. Alastair Campbell said Mr. Blair believed it was important to get the stalled peace process moving.

"The Prime Minister is taking the view that the peace process is in a difficult state and the leadership has to be found to try to move forward," he said.

Though the Prime Minister's office said the talks were planned before Sunday's

outrage, observers were in no doubt that it would cast a shadow on the bargaining strategy of the three main parties -- the Ulster Unionist party, Sinn Fein and SDLP.

The focus will be on the three principal sticking points -- arms decommissioning by IRA, demilitarisation and further police reforms to make the revamped Royal Ulster Constabulary more widely acceptable.

The pressure on Sinn Fein to get its armed wing, the IRA, to start the process of decommissioning is likely to grow as there is a view that some of the weaponry being used by the extremist Real IRA could have come from the IRA's arms dumps.

In return, the Government is expected to reiterate its willingness to discuss the Sinn Fein's demand for demilitarisation -- a scaling down of British security in the Republican dominated areas -- and police reforms.

A compromise package already exists and the effort will be to see how it can be improved further to make it more acceptable without diluting its basic premise that

the process of arms decommissioning must start with Sinn Fein re-establishing contact with the decommissioning body.

Media reports indicated that with a general election ahead, the prospect of an early breakthrough seemed remote.

"The general perception is that in the event of a May general election only a very small window of opportunity remains before electioneering rules out any real prospect of a far-reaching deal," the *Independent* said while *The Guardian* hinted at a "formal review" of the "political process". But it did not elaborate what such a review would entail.

Meanwhile, the police continued their hunt for the person who may have planted the taxi bomb outside the BBC.

They maintained that it was the work of the Real IRA and warned against a renewed campaign of violence.

Police vans went round London on Monday displaying a huge board asking people to be vigilant, and motorists in sensitive areas had to put with security checks.

THE HINDU

- 7 MAR 2001

Queen to lose grip on Westminster Abbey

RUTH GLEDHILL
THE TIMES, LONDON

LONDON, March 6. - Westminster Abbey is going to be removed from the direct control of the Queen under proposals outlined yesterday.

A standing commission will be set up to which the Queen would delegate her role as 'visitor' to the Abbey.

The proposal is part of a review of the Royal Peculiar - Anglican bodies that fall outside Church of England control and under the Queen's direct jurisdiction.

St George's Chapel, Windsor, and the three Chapels Royal at St James's Palace, Hampton Court and the Tower of London will also be reformed.

The report, presented to the Queen through the Lord Chancellor, Lord Irvine of Lairg, says that it is anomalous that great institutions such as Westminster Abbey should remain exempt from the same degree of scrutiny and accountability as cathedrals.

The review, chaired by Professor Averil Camer-

on, a historian and warden of Keble College, Oxford, recommends that the independence of the Royal Peculiar from the structures of the Church of England should be preserved. It also

recommends, however, that a standing commission be set up, to which the Queen and the Lord Chancellor would delegate visitorial functions.

Most of the reforms would not require legislation, merely a Royal Warrant or letters patent.

In her preface, Prof Cameron admits that part of the impetus for review came after a 'difficult period' in the history of Westminster Abbey. There was widespread negative publicity after the 1998 sacking of

Dr Neary, the Abbey organist, decorated by the Queen for his role in the music at the funeral of Diana, Princess of Wales. He appealed directly to the

Queen, who referred that appeal to the Lord Chancellor. Although a judicial inquiry exonerated the Abbey over the sacking, and also cleared Dr Neary of any dishonesty, hostile comment continued.



Queen Elizabeth II

THE STATESMAN

- 7 MAR 2001

LONDON BLAST / WARNING OF MORE ATTACKS

Britain placed on high alert

By Hasan Suroor

LONDON, MARCH 5. Britain was placed on high security alert today amid fears of more terrorist violence by Irish Republican dissidents after Sunday's bomb explosion at the BBC television centre in West London which was widely seen as an attempt to sabotage the peace process in Northern Ireland.

The Scotland Yard warned of "more attacks in the coming days" and the head of its anti-terrorist branch, Mr. Alan Fry said: "We are dealing with ruthless terrorists who are prepared to use ruthless tactics without any care for the consequences of their actions." Downing Street, denouncing the attack as a "cowardly act", said there were forces outside the peace agreement who wanted to "turn the clock back to the days before the Good Friday agreement." The Ulster Unionist chief and the First Minister of Northern Ireland, Mr. David Trimble called it an attempt to "destabilise" the peace process which has been deadlocked for several months over the Sinn Fein's reluctance to order its armed wing, the Irish Republican Army (IRA), to put its arms dumps beyond use.

Though no arrest was made until this morning, the police were convinced that the Real IRA — the renegade IRA faction opposed to the Good Friday Agreement — was behind the incident and were looking for a tall man with a Northern Irish accent who bought a red taxi in which the bomb was planted. The Real IRA consists of highly motivated men who broke off from the mainstream IRA after it signed the Good Friday Agreement in 1998 and in recent months they have stepped up their violent campaign in a bid to emerge as the real inheritors of the Irish Republican legacy. They are also recruiting those in the mainstream IRA who are disillusioned with the peace process and experts think that the speed with which the Real IRA has been able to accumulate arms suggests some form of cooperation with hardliners in the mainstream IRA.

The arrest of a mainstream IRA activist last week while moving around in suspicious circumstances near an army barracks in Essex has reinforced this assessment. The police are looking for an accomplice, again a mainstream IRA youth released from jail as part of the Good Friday Agreement. "We don't exactly

what they were up to. It looks as if it was some kind of a reconnaissance...preparation for something", a police "source" told *The Guardian*.

Yesterday's bomb blast coincides with the 20th anniversary of "martyrdom" of 10 Republicans who died after a hunger strike and both the Real IRA and the mainstream group are keen to claim the legacy of what is regarded as a landmark event in the Republican struggle. With the Real IRA growing in strength, the hardliners in the mainstream IRA have started asserting themselves and a few days ago a senior leader declared that the "war is not over". "The anniversary (of hunger strike) is seen by dissident IRA leaders as the perfect opportunity to emphasise what they regard as the 'treachery' of the decision by the provisional IRA to support the Good Friday Agreement and halt its campaign of violence

against British targets," one commentator said. The fact that the dissidents were able to target a high-profile building in the heart of London was seen as an indication of their growing confidence and observers said unless the Government, the Unionists and the Sinn Fein moved quickly to kickstart the stalled peace process there was a danger of the initiative slipping from their hands. A compromise package envisaging the start of arms decommissioning by IRA in exchange for reduced British security in the province and finetuning of the proposed police reforms is already on the table and efforts are being made to push it. "In the end whether or not the peace process can proceed depends largely on whether Sinn Fein is willing to risk a split in its ranks by engaging in some form of decommissioning," *The Times* commented editorially echoing a widespread view.



A youngster walks past New Real Irish Republican Army graffiti on the walls of West Belfast, Northern Ireland, on Sunday. The dissident Republican terrorist group the Real IRA is thought to have been responsible for a car bomb attack on the BBC in London early on Sunday. — AP

THE HINDU

- 6 MAR 2001

UK terror list names Lashkar, Harkat

BY NABANITA SIRCAR

London, March 1: Five organisations connected with terrorism in India are among the 21 recommended for proscription under Britain's new Terrorism Act, 2000, which came into effect on February 19.

The Harkat-ul Mujahideen, Lashkar-e-Tayyaba, Jaish-e-Mohammed, Babbar Khalsa International and International Sikh Youth Federation are listed in a draft order laid before the British Parliament on Wednesday by home secretary Jack Straw.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and Al-Qa'ida are also included in the list of proscribed organisations in Schedule 2 to the act, which earlier had 14 Irish organisations.

The five organisations affecting India have been raising considerable funds and recruiting volunteers from Britain for militant activities. India's deputy

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PAGE 4

- British ban will hamper peace, says LTTE
- Pakistan's Harkat rejects British terrorist label

THE ASIAN AGE

- 5 MAR 2001

IRA ghost raises head, blast near BBC office

AGENCIES

LONDON, MARCH 4

LONDONERS woke up on Sunday to the chilling news that the dissident group behind Northern Ireland's worst guerrilla bombing atrocity appeared to be back on the streets of the English capital.

Police suspect the Real IRA guerrilla group was behind a powerful explosion outside one of the main offices of British state broadcaster BBC in the early hours of Sunday.

Only one man was slightly injured after police were tipped off about the threat of a car bomb, giving the BBC time to evacuate employees from the building. A bomb disposal unit was attempting a controlled explosion of the device, hidden in a taxi, when it went off.

But while major casualties were avoided, the huge fireball set off by the explosives and caught dramatically on film will send a powerful signal to the public and politicians alike that threats from the Northern Irish conflict has not gone away.

While the main Irish Republi-



A taxi explodes outside BBC television studios in west London on Saturday - Reuters

can Army (IRA) has maintained a ceasefire in its campaign for independence for the province following a landmark 1998 Good Friday peace accord with the British authorities, the Real IRA has not.

The group of breakaway dissidents, which was formed in 1997, has opposed that ceasefire all along and police in mainstream Britain and Northern Ireland have been bracing themselves for further outbreaks of violence.

The Real IRA's name was indelibly seared on the public consciousness in 1998 when it claimed responsibility for a car bomb attack that killed 29 civilians in the Northern Irish town of Omagh, the troubled province's worst-ever guerrilla bombing.

It is since said to have been involved in violent skirmishes with the mainstream IRA movement.

But it has also proved effective on the mainland.

INDIAN EXPRESS

5 MAR 2001

Britain burns pigs, cows to curb foot-and-mouth spread

London, February 25

BRITAIN PREPARED on Sunday to burn hundreds of pigs and cows in a bid to curb an outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease that has brought the country's livestock industry to a standstill.

But as the animals were being slaughtered on Saturday, there were cautious hopes that the spread of the disease had been arrested when no further outbreaks were reported.

The Government has banned all transport of livestock throughout the country in an attempt to stop the spread of the highly contagious disease, which affects pigs, cows, sheep and goats but is harmless to humans.

"We would expect to be receiving further reports from farmers now if it had spread," Agriculture

Minister Nick Brown said. "So far there are no further confirmed cases."

Brown hinted that the latest outbreak of foot-and-mouth may prove far smaller than the major crisis in 1967 which saw the mass slaughter of nearly half a million animals. But he warned that farmers and veterinary inspectors would have to be vigilant over the key weekend period. "We know that events can develop very quickly and that this is the crucial time," Brown said. The first appearance for decades of the disease has dealt a bitter blow to the British meat industry, only just recovering from the effects of mad cow disease.

At Burnside Farm in north-east England, thought to be the source of the latest outbreak, mechanical diggers constructed

huge pyres out of wood and straw to incinerate pigs and cows.

Foot-and-mouth was first identified early in the week among 28 pigs at an abattoir in Essex near London, prompting a European ban on exports of British animals, fresh meat and milk.

Many experts believe the current outbreak of the disease is Asian in origin, with the infection entering Britain in contaminated meat that was later fed to pigs. The army has suspended non-essential military training, countryside walkers were told to keep away from animals and fox-hunters up and down the country agreed to suspend their sport. One race meeting at Newcastle was canceled. Brown urged the public not to panic buy meat.

Reuters

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

26 FEB 2001

U.K. stands isolated in Europe

By Hasan Suroor

LONDON, FEB. 18. Britain finds itself completely isolated in Europe over its participation in the U.S.-led airstrikes against Iraq with none of its European allies happy about the decision and France openly joining the protest by two other permanent members of the U.N. Security Council, Russia and China.

Britain's enthusiastic backing of the U.S. decision is seen as a total disregard of European sensitivities and an 'opportunistic' attempt to humour the new White House on the eve of the Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair's meeting with the U.S. President, Mr. George W. Bush, next weekend. While it is not likely to have any serious impact on Anglo-European relations, London's 'solo' performance is expected to heighten Europe's latent distrust of Britain when it comes to dealing with Washington.

Britain's ambivalent stand on the U.S. plans for a nuclear missile defence shield as against Europe's opposition to it has already ruffled European feathers as indeed on the question of sanctions against Iraq.

Some analysts suggested that after Britain's supporting role in the bombing of Baghdad, Europe could legitimately conclude that if pressed to choose between U.S. and Europe,

Britain would be inclined to plump for U.S. There were fears that in its bid to cultivate the new administration in Washington, Britain could end up losing the confidence of its European allies who have strong reservations about Mr. Bush's foreign policy and the attack on Baghdad has reinforced these reservations.

At home, Mr. Blair came under attack from within his own party with MPs expressing concern that Britain should allow itself to be seen pursuing American agenda. The view was that while Mr. Bush had his own reasons to take on Mr. Saddam Hussein — basically resuming where Bush Senior left it — Britain had no obvious interest in stoking the fire. "Obviously George Bush is getting his own agenda from his father's previous failures in Iraq and Blair is wanting to cement the U.K. relationship with him. I don't think that is justified," said Mr. John McAllion, a Labour MP, while the Chairman of the Labour parliamentary party, Mr. Clive Soley, felt there was an "uncomfortable feeling that Saddam and Bush are reliving the Gulf War". Mr. Blair however remained defiant and said Britain was prepared to take the "steps necessary to protect our forces and to prevent Saddam from once again wreaking havoc, suffering and death".

Strong winds delay landing of space shuttle

CAPE CANAVERAL (FLORIDA), FEB 18. The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) waved off the first landing opportunity for space shuttle, Atlantis, because of strong winds at the Kennedy Space Centre landing site in Florida.

The U.S. space agency was hoping the knot winds would ease by the time Atlantis had completed another 90-minute orbit of earth. The spacecraft was on the final day of 11-day mission to the international space station.

Mission control told the Atlantis Commander, Ken Cockrell, of the decision to delay 10 minutes before he was to fire the shuttle thrusters in a braking manoeuvre that would bring the shuttle out of orbit.

The winds were "staying just above the limits," said an astronaut, Scott Altman, manning the communications console at the mission control in Houston. "We are no-go for the orbit burn." The new time for landing was 2 p.m. EST. If Atlantis cannot make it down Sunday, the weather at both Cape Canaveral and the back up landing site in Edwards, California, looks bad for Monday. That might keep the crew in orbit until Tuesday. — Reuters

THE HINDU

19 FEB 2001

Keith Vaz faces another charge

By Hasan Suroor

14/2
LONDON, FEB 13. For the Foreign Office Minister, Mr. Keith Vaz, under enormous pressure to resign for his role in the Hinduja's passport affair, there seems to be no respite from controversies and the latest 'revelation' relates to his wife, Ms. Maria Fernandez.

She is alleged to have given legal advice to an Asian restaurant owner, Mr. Amin Ali, on arranging work permits for staff from India at a time when Mr. Vaz was responsible for overseeing work permits for Commonwealth citizens.

Though technically he has not broken any rule, the Opposition has charged that he is in breach of the ministerial code of conduct.

A Tory shadow minister, Mr. Andrew Lansley, has written to the Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair, saying there was a potential conflict of interest in Mr. Vaz allowing his wife to tender advice on a matter which was his ministerial responsibility.

He also recalled that Mr. Vaz had helped Mr. Ali sort out an insurance claim with Norwich

Union in his Foreign Office suite, whereas Ministers are not supposed to use their offices for private meetings.

Over the past several weeks, Mr. Vaz has faced a host of allegations relating to his business links and election campaign donations to his constituency party fund. Fearing a media ballast, he has put off his visit to India though officially it is stated that the visa centres he was to inspect are not complete.

Meanwhile, Mr. Peter Mandelson, who was forced to resign from the Cabinet for allegedly lobbying for Mr. Srichand Hinduja's passport application, appeared from the Hammond inquiry on Monday.

He is reported to have submitted 'evidence' intended to clear his name but details were not known. Mr. Mandelson maintains that he was unjustly sacked on the basis of incomplete evidence and that he is determined to prove his innocence. Mr. Vaz is also expected to depose before the inquiry which is expected to be completed by the end of this month.

THE HINDU

14 FEB 2001

Stop hounding Vaz, Cook tells media

By Hasan Suroor

LONDON, FEB. 5. After weeks of battering over his business links, particularly with the Hinduja, the Foreign Office Minister, Mr. Keith Vaz, was today defended by the Foreign Secretary, Mr. Robin Cook, even as Mr. Peter Mandelson — the other player in the passport affair — returned home from a foreign holiday, vowing to clear his name.

In an interview to *The Times*, Mr. Cook said Mr. Vaz was being "hounded" by the right-wing media for his pro-Europe views and pointed out that there was no evidence of wrongdoing against him.

The media attacks were based on "innuendoes," he said, making a distinction between his case and that of Mr. Mandelson, who was forced to resign after he accepted that he made contradictory statements while recalling a telephone conversation with a Home Office Minister over Mr. Srichand Hinduja's passport.

Asking the media to bring the curtain down on "this incessant hounding" of Mr. Vaz, Mr. Cook said: "Not a single fact has been produced which suggests that Keith has behaved improperly as a Minister or broken the ministerial code." He urged the media to leave it to the Hammond inquiry to establish facts relating to the passport controversy.

The inquiry, headed by Sir Anthony Hammond QC, will examine the role of Mr. Mandelson and Mr. Vaz in the row and is expected to give its report by the end of this month, though questions have been raised about its credibility in view of the fact that Sir Anthony is a former Home Department official.

There is speculation on whether he would be sufficiently detached while inquiring into the conduct of his former colleagues in the Home Office in granting passports to the two Hinduja brothers — Srichand and Gopichand.

In an interview to the BBC Ra-

dio, Mr. Cook praised Mr. Vaz's work as Minister for Europe saying he had done an excellent job and that was why the anti-Europe press was "out to get him."

Mr. Vaz also got a breather on the controversy over three donations of £ 5,000 each made to him in the last elections, which, it was alleged by *The Sunday Telegraph*, never reached the Leicester East Labour party fund. One of donors, Mr. Charles Riachy, clarified that he made out the cheque to the local party unit and not to Mr. Vaz personally.

He called Mr. Vaz a victim of a "smear campaign" while Mr. Vaz's agent in the last election said the donation was put in another account.

'Resignation not justified'

Mr. Mandelson, meanwhile, has caused ripples in Government circles by declaring that he was unjustly forced to resign on incomplete evidence. A note, leaked to the media, shows that the Home Minister, Mr. Mike O'Brien, to whom Mr. Mandelson made the famous call on behalf of Mr. Srichand Hinduja, does not clearly remember the content of the conversation. This dramatically changes the situation as this crucial conversation was used to "hang" Mr. Mandelson.

There is anxiety that a fightback by Mr. Mandelson, so close to the elections, could damage the party, though he emphasised on Sunday that he would not do anything to harm the party. He was seeking justice, not revenge.

As the furore over the Hinduja's "networking" continued, a senior Cambridge University academic suggested a "hard look" at whether the university should accept any more money from the Hinduja who fund the Hinduja Cambridge Trust and the Dharam Hinduja Institute of Indic Research. "We need to take a very hard look at whether we should take any more money from them," said Dr. Gillian Evans, former member of the university's governing council.

THE HINDU

11 FEB 2001

- 6 FEB 2001

Crackdown on asylum seekers

By Vaiju Naravane

PARIS, FEB. 10. Britain and France agreed to take steps to curb asylum seekers crossing into Britain using the Euro Star train service linking the two countries.

Immigration officials will be posted at the Paris Gare du Nord station, from where Euro Star trains leave for Britain.

Similar facilities will be extended to French officials at the international terminal of London's Waterloo station.

The checks will become operational by next summer and are expected to significantly reduce the number of mainly Asian immigrants who seek to enter Britain as asylum seekers.

An estimated 400 persons demand asylum every month at the Waterloo terminal. Britain has long accused France of being lax towards them.

France gave its support to the agreement at the just-concluded annual Franco-British summit held in the south-western French town of Cahors.

The British Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair, said he was "delighted" at the way talks had proceeded while the French President, Mr. Jacques Chirac, said the problem of illegal immigration had "to be tackled jointly".

Mr. Chirac will now have to consult the Cabinet and Parliament to translate his promises into law. He promised he would take "swift measures" for this to happen. The British Government has stepped up its offensive against the U.N. Convention on asylum rights, first with the European Union and now in bilateral talks with France.

Britain has described the Convention as obsolete and dated and called for its revision.



The British Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair (left), and the French President, Mr. Jacques Chirac, at a press conference during the 23rd Franco-British Summit in Cahors on Friday. — Reuters

The U.N. convention signed by Commissioner, Ms. Mary Robinson, 137 countries is 50 years old this year. The U.N. Human Rights that the convention be changed.

THE HINDU

11 FEB 2001



Dome to doom

BRITAIN'S LABOUR Government, in power for barely four years, is not new to controversies. But the Hinduja's affair is by far the most damaging not only because it has erupted so close to a general election but for its impact on the equations within the party and the Government.

The buzz is now centred on the implications of Mr. Peter Mandelson's departure from the Government. As one of the principal architects of New Labour and a member of the Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair's "kitchen" cabinet, his exit is seen even by his critics, who are legion, as politically devastating for Mr. Blair. As a former Blair aide put it, in deciding to remove him, he has "amputated" and that begs the question: then why did he do it?

But first a word about the Hinduja's affair. The allegation is that Mr. Srichand Hinduja, who is being investigated for his alleged involvement in the Bofors kickback scandal, was given British citizenship in 1999 as a favour for his £1 million donation to the Millenium Dome and that Mr. Mandelson who was then the Minister in-charge of the Dome lobbied his case with the Home Office. Another lobbyist was Mr. Keith Vaz, then a mere MP, and now the Foreign Office Minister and under enormous pressure to resign. Mr. Mandelson was forced to quit last month for concealing his role in facilitating Mr. Hinduja's citizenship, and for "lying" that he did not make a telephone call

to the then Home Office Minister, Mr. Mike O'Brien, in connection with Mr. Hinduja's application. This was Mr. Hinduja's second attempt at getting British citizenship and its successful outcome is seen to be linked to his "networking" with New Labour.

Barely two days after *The Observer* broke the "passports-for-favours scandal" on January 21, Mr. Mandelson who had by then become the highly successful Secretary of State for Northern Ireland was summoned to 10, Downing Street and when he emerged two hours later he announced to the waiting reporters that he had decided to resign; a decision which, he claimed later, was forced on him by a "kangaroo" court. Mr. Mandelson has few friends either in his own party or in the media and the initial reaction was one of smug satisfaction.

One of his former aides said Mr. Mandelson had brought it upon himself and paid the price for hobnobbing with big business and social climbers. But as events unfolded, it began to appear that he had been done in by his own colleagues — among them Mr. Blair's powerful chief

of staff Mr. Jonathan Powell, the spokesman, Mr. Alastair Campbell, the Home Secretary, Mr. Jack Straw, the Cabinet Secretary, Sir Richard Wilson, and the Lord Chancellor Lord Irvine.

With elections looming, he was expected to play a decisive role in devising the campaign strategy overshadowing such powerful rivals as the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Gordon Brown, and the Deputy Prime Minister, Mr. John Prescott. There were also fears that after the elections he might expect to be rewarded with a more important portfolio — and the one he was said to coveting was Mr. Robin Cook's job in the foreign office. Besides, the euro-sceptics in the Government were upset over his strongly pro-Europe views and wanted him cut down to size. In a way almost everyone, barring Mr. Blair, had a motive to wish him away, and the Hinduja's row came as a god-send; something they would have wished to invent if it had not happened.

Significantly this is in sharp contrast to their strong defence of Mr. Vaz whose links with the Hinduja's go much deeper and who is at the centre of far more

serious allegations relating to his business dealings than an unconfirmed telephone call. Mr. Campbell, asked by reporters why Mr. Vaz was not being asked to resign, snapped that the media seemed by saying that "you shouldn't sack Ministers where they admitted wrongdoing but you should sack Ministers where there is nothing proven".

In one stroke what the Hinduja's-Mandelson controversy has done is to hurt New Labour where it hurts the most. A party — its architects grandly call it a "project", the New Labour Project — which took pride in being united, transparent and above sleaze suddenly finds itself vulnerable on all these counts with the high moral ground that it sought to occupy vis-a-vis the Tories slipping away from under its feet. A new poll has shown that Labour is now perceived to be even more sleazy than the Tories, and as for unity of purpose a cartoon in *The Times* showing leading Labour lights standing with knives to each other's backs.

Meanwhile, skeletons from Mr. Vaz's cabinet continue to tumble and even if his continuance does not affect the party's electoral prospects it certainly reinforces the image of a party which has begun to stink of sleaze. Mr. Blair is lucky that the Leader of the Opposition is so uncharismatic, or he would have had reason to be seriously worried in the build-up to the May elections. Wonder what politicians in power would do without the TINA factor.

The 'Hinduja affair' is damaging for Labour not only because it erupted so close to a general election but more for its impact on the equations within the party and the Government, writes HASAN SUROOR.

Tony Blair appoints official UK e-envoy

Sarah Left in London

TONY BLAIR on Thursday officially appointed Andrew Pinder as e-envoy, giving him four years to ensure universal access to the internet and to put all government services online. Mr Pinder said he will be dealing with "an industrial revolution in the civil service and the wider economy" as the UK tries to establish itself as an internet heavyweight.

A former civil servant, Mr Pinder will concentrate on moving the government itself into the internet age.

He said: "We want to be customer focused, it's not just about putting a

farm online, it's about changing the business practices that lie behind that form." He admits the transformation is still in the early stages, but defended the government's record up to now.

On Friday, the Cabinet office launched a secure online transaction system, Government Gate-way, a project that he pointed out had come in on time and under budget. The gateway will



form the basis for future online transactions between businesses, members of the public and government.

Mr Pinder spent 18 years in the Inland Revenue before moving to the private sector as the director of operations and technology at Prudential Corporation. He also worked as European head of operations and technology at Citibank investment bank.

Since 1999, he has been a partner in both an internet startup, *Willregister.com*, and a small venture capital firm.

His experience within the turbulent internet startup culture has made him sensitive to the needs of small business-

es, he said, and he hopes to make it easier for small companies to communicate with government. He also hopes the civil service will be able to learn from the internet economy. "We will see some slow changes in the civil service. It will take a long time, but then to turn around a big company like IBM or Ford takes a long time.

Welcoming Mr Pinder's decision to take on the job fulltime, Mr Blair said: "We are determined to meet the goals of our UK Online campaign, putting this country at the forefront of the knowledge economy. Andrew can play a leading role in achieving that."

Guardian News Service

Lockerbie: still many questions

By Hasan Suroor

LONDON, FEB. 1. Families of the British victims of the Lockerbie crash today demanded an independent inquiry into the tragedy saying that many questions had remained unanswered, even as the British Government stepped up pressure on Libya to pay compensation and accept responsibility as set down in the 1992 U.N. Security Council resolution through which sanctions were imposed against Tripoli.

"Libyan leaders need to take every opportunity to prove to the international community that they have definitely renounced terrorism and they will abide by international law," said the Foreign Secretary, Mr. Robin Cook, amid reports that Britain was inclined to favour lifting of sanctions as part of its policy of 'engagement' with the so-called 'rogue' states. This was said to be in contrast with the hard stand taken by the Bush administration.

Relatives of the victims who have formed a group 'UK Families Flight 103', named after the number of the ill-fated Pan Am flight, said that so far the British Government had resisted calls for an independent inquiry on the plea that it could prejudice the criminal trial but now that it was over they would expect the Government to accept their demand.

Mr. Cook was non-committal but did not rule it out completely. He expressed satisfaction with the outcome of the trial saying that

"nothing can repair the loss of those who were murdered that night or remove the grief of their relatives but today at last those relatives know that in a fair trial justice has been done".

The families however were not less certain; and clearly Mr. Jim Swire, the most public face of the families' campaign, was the least convinced that justice had been done. Mr. Swire who lost his young daughter Flora in the crash was so stressed up yesterday that he collapsed in the courtroom when

the verdict was announced. He said he would continue to press the demand for a public inquiry and 'hold' the Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair, to the promise he apparently gave him when he met him. "I have done everything in my power to ensure that she (Flora) and the other victims are not forgotten," he said.

Meanwhile, even as there is unanimity that the trial has not answered all the questions satisfactorily — the most important being: who ordered the Lockerbie operation and whether there were other links in the chain — opinion on the need for another inquiry is divided. *The Guardian* supported the demand saying: "A public inquiry held in Scotland with a wide mandate and unrestricted access to records.....would shed some much-needed light into the dark, pragmatical alleyways of international geo-politics that provide both Lockerbie's and its key."

THE HINDU

Libyan's acquittal triggers fury

112
By Hasan Suroor 49-16

LONDON, JAN. 31. One of the longest and diplomatically most contentious mass murder trials in British legal history ended today when one of the two Libyans charged with bombing a Pan Am flight 12 years ago, killing 270 people, was found guilty while the other was acquitted amid scenes of anger, disappointment and sheer emotional exhaustion.

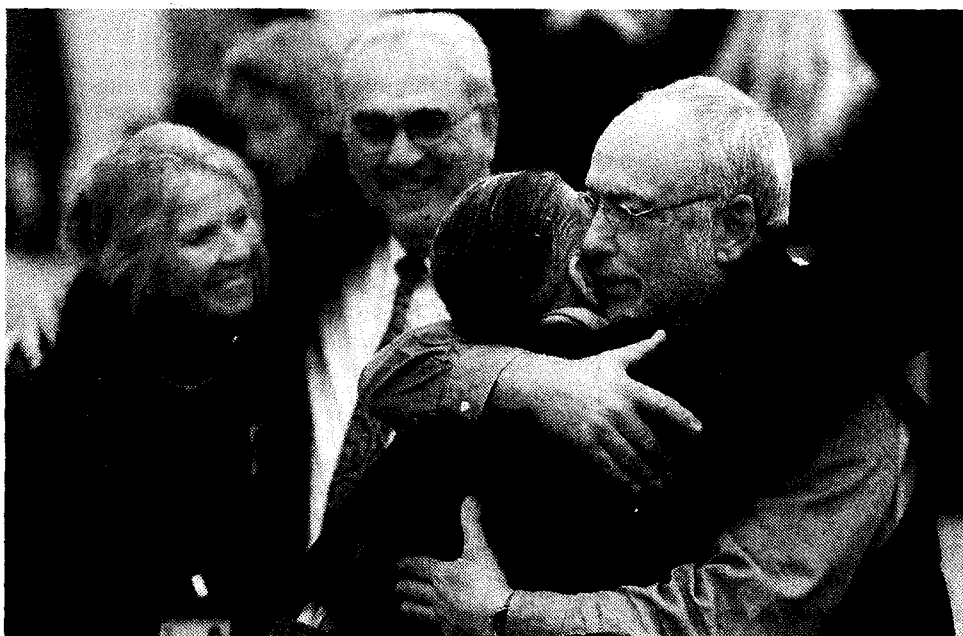
Abdul Baset Ali-al Megrahi (49), believed to be a former Libyan intelligence man, was sentenced to 20 years' imprisonment for his role in planting a time bomb on the plane which crashed over Lockerbie, in Scotland, minutes after it took off from Heathrow in London at 7 p.m. on December 21, 1988. His co-accused, Al Amin Khalifa Fhimah, was acquitted, and was free to go home.

The verdict was delivered by three Scottish judges in the Netherlands where the trial took place as a measure of political neutrality following Libyan fears that a trial in either Britain or the U.S. may not be fair. The 82-page judgment awarded life imprisonment to Megrahi in view of the "horrendous nature of the crime", and the judges later pronounced that given his age, he would be required to serve 20 years.

Megrahi, who has two children and is described by his family members as a "gentleman", would be moved to a prison in Scotland, and is likely to appeal against the verdict. His family members, who had indicated their satisfaction with the way the trial had gone and were expecting an acquittal, were hugely disappointed, though Megrahi himself did not show any overt emotions.

Fhimah, of course, was overjoyed. Those present at the court said there was a "collective gasp" when the verdict was announced and one of Britain's leading campaigners for the families of the air crash victims, Dr. Jim Swire, collapsed and was helped out of the court.

A number of relatives of the victims had travelled to the Netherlands, while some had been present throughout the trial which took



American relatives of victims of the Lockerbie air crash hug each other outside the court at Camp Zeist in the Netherlands on Wednesday after hearing the verdict of the long-running Lockerbie trial. — AP

place at a former American airbase, Zeist camp.

Nearly 15,000 witnesses deposed and 180,000 pieces of evidence from 20 countries were examined during what has been described as the longest and costliest trials costing £ 60 millions. But the judges took only 12 days to reach a verdict.

This morning, only the verdict was announced at first and the sentence was pronounced later in the afternoon.

The British families said they would demand an independent inquiry as they thought that the two accused were simply "fall guys" in what they believe was a state-sponsored act of terrorism.

At Lockerbie, there was little reaction with people generally heaving a sigh of relief that a

lingering and tragic saga was finally behind them.

Not the end: Libya

AP reports from Tripoli:

A senior Libyan official played down the conviction of Megrahi, saying Wednesday's verdict was "not the end of the story or the end of the world."

Mr. Al-Siddiq al-Shibani, the senior official, told state television that he was certain Scottish authorities would ensure the "comfort and protection" of Megrahi while he pursues an appeal.

"The verdict against the Libyan citizen does not mean the end of the story or the end of the world," said Mr. Al-Shibani, who is in charge of legal affairs in the Foreign Ministry.

THE HINDU

1 FEB 2001

Labour popularity takes a dip after Hinduja affair

LONDON: An opinion poll conducted in the wake of Northern Ireland secretary Peter Mandelson's resignation over the Hinduja passport issue has revealed that the ruling Labour Party is now seen as more "sleazy" than the opposition Tories. The survey may raise concern within the leadership as the party's image has been damaged by the row over ministers' roles in the application for British citizenship by Srichand Hinduja, chairman of the Hinduja group, who gave one million pounds for the construction of the Millennium Dome.



Tony Blair

Prime Minister Tony Blair on Tuesday sought to end the affair by asking his cabinet at a pre-election meeting to put the resignation "media frenzy" behind them. But a national opinion poll undertaken for independent television network's 'Powerhouse Programme' showed that

the ruling party had been badly hit by its controversial links with the wealthy, dating back to the row in 1997 over a one million pound donation from Bernie Ecclestone, the Formula-1 racing boss.

According to the poll which was conducted over the weekend, 49 per cent thought that Labour had given the impression of being "very sleazy and disreputable". In March, 1997, two months before the last election, only 19 per cent of voters held that view.

The Conservatives, whose collective image was so tainted by sleaze allegations in the run-up to the last election, have improved their standing significantly. In 1997, 63 per cent thought the party to be sleazy. That figure has dropped to 47, two points below Labour.

At Tuesday's two-and-a-half-hour council of war, Mr Blair said Labour would have to put forward a strong platform of policies to secure a second term. He said the party would stand for investment in better public services and raising

living standards.

Meanwhile, a report in the *Times* said the Prime Minister must be urged to tighten the ministerial code of conduct in the wake of the Hinduja affair. The Neill committee on standards in public life is to carry out an inquiry into the hazards thrown up by the government's links with business, highlighted by the one million pound donation from the Hinduja group for the Millennium Dome.

The select committee on public administration will call for ministers to keep clearer records of their contacts with those promoting outside interests, the report said.

The committee will also call for a permanent body to be set up at Whitehall, the seat of the government, to inquire into the claims of ministerial impropriety.

Such a system could have prevented Peter Mandelson's precipitate resignation, establishing the facts of his case to its satisfaction before he was required to act. (PTI)

THE TIMES OF INDIA

1 FEB 2001

Blair, Mandelson cross swords

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

LONDON, Jan. 28. — Differences between Prime Minister Mr Tony Blair and ousted Northern Ireland secretary Mr Peter Mandelson have surfaced as the passport-for-favour scandal threatens to plunge the government into chaos months before the general election.

The Prime Minister's officials and his former close confidant traded bitter attacks as the recriminations intensified following Mr Mandelson's sacking last week for failing to come clean about his role in NRI businessman Mr SP Hinduja's passport application.

Mr Peter Mandelson claimed that he was "forced" to resign from his Cabinet job on the basis of incomplete evidence and that he never lied during the passports-for-favours affair.

"A small mistake turned into a monumental disaster", Mr Mandelson wrote in The Sunday Times. He is determined to fight back to reverse that error and the inquiry ordered by Mr Blair would find him innocent, the article said.

Mr Mandelson maintained he still has no recollection of a telephone conversation with a home office minister, an alleged discussion which was at the heart of his removal from office. He said a former civil servant at the Cabinet office spoke to him on Friday, saying that a colleague who handled the matter in 1998 did not remember Mr Mandelson speaking to the minister, Mr Mike O'Brien.

Mr Mandelson said he has asked to see Sir Anthony Hammond, the investigator appointed by Mr Blair to examine the Hinduja brothers' inquiries about a passport application in 1998.

Giving his side of the Downing street meeting that led to him leaving the cabinet, Mr Mandelson described the "horrible drama" which allowed him "briefly to be persuaded that his recollection (of what happened when one of the Hinduja brothers asked him for advice about getting a British passport) was wrong".

He was persuaded to resign, Mr Mandelson claimed, on the basis of a "summary exploration" of the few facts available, which he would now challenge with his own account from civil service sources that he believed would exonerate him.

"I am not a liar. I didn't lie," he said. Support from civil servants casting doubt on the official version of events had encouraged him, The Sunday Times reported.

THE STATESMAN

29 JAN 2001

Mandelson springs 'small-mistake' defence



Peter Mandelson. (AFP)

FROM NICHOLAS KOTICH

London, Jan. 28 (Reuters): Former British government minister Peter Mandelson complained today that he was forced to resign last week when "a small mistake" was blown out of proportion by the media.

Mandelson's first detailed account of his role in an Indian tycoon's passport application coincided with reports in today's newspapers that Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair was ruthlessly distancing himself from the friend who was his closest adviser. "Number 10 puts knife into 'de-

tached' Mandelson," *The Independent* today headlined its report about what it called an "extraordinary" briefing for journalists by Blair's official spokesman, Alastair Campbell.

Number 10 Downing Street is the Prime Minister's official residence in central London. "There are things he (Mandelson) cannot explain to himself. He has been slightly detached. It is absolutely tragic because his career is in tatters," the *Independent* quoted Campbell as saying. Other newspapers carried similar reports about a briefing described by *The Observer* as "a ruthless demon-

stration of how Number 10 deals with errant former allies".

Mandelson, Northern Ireland Secretary and a key architect of Labour's 1997 election landslide, stepped down on Wednesday because of calls he made in 1998 involving a British passport application by Indian Srichand Hinduja.

But in his *Sunday Times* article about what he termed a long and terrible week in which the media were "judge, jury and executioner", Mandelson said he was pressured to quit despite having nothing to be ashamed of.

"For the first time, and I hope the last time in my life, the fight

suddenly went out of me. I felt isolated.

A small mistake — a failure to focus on a small matter — had turned into a monumental disaster," Mandelson wrote, insisting that he had not used his influence to get special treatment for Hinduja.

The tycoon, one of four hugely wealthy brothers, had a previous application rejected in 1990 but obtained his British passport in 1998.

A Downing Street spokesman did not deny that Campbell had called Mandelson "detached" but said it would be a "grotesque misrepresentation" to

suggest the description applied to anything other than the Hinduja issue.

Hinduja denies report

Srichand Hinduja, who is in the centre of passport controversy, today denied reports that he influenced the promotion of another minister, Keith Vaz. He said he had always called for more representation of ethnic minorities but denied any explicit support for Vaz. "I am not the person to decide anybody's cabinet position. At no time have I written or have I said (anything) specially for Keith Vaz — that is totally false."

THE TELEGRAPH

29 JAN 2001

Hinduja passport costs British Minister his job

MIKE PEACOCK
LONDON, JAN 24

PRIME Minister Tony Blair's closest political ally and Britain's Northern Ireland Secretary, Peter Mandelson, announced his resignation from the British Government on Wednesday.

Mandelson was forced to resign from the government after he became involved in a passport application by Srichand Hinduja, who is now in India for interrogation by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) in the Bofors case. This is Mandelson's second resignation in three years.

Mandelson is perceived to be the architect of Blair's landslide election victory in 1997. His resignation on Wednesday will be seen as a heavy blow to Blair as he faces his next national election, expected to be called in May.

"I have said to the Prime Minister that I wish to leave the government, and he has accepted that," Mandelson said

outside Prime Minister Tony Blair's Downing Street office.

Mandelson insisted he had done nothing wrong with the request by Srichand Hinduja, merely passing it on to the right department. But opponents and the media said he had proved himself unfit

for government.

"I acted in an entirely proper way," he said. "I did not intercede on behalf of any member of the Hinduja family."

Hinduja, and his brothers Gopichand and Prakash, are now in India for questioning in the Bofors kickbacks case.

In 1998, Srichand Hinduja met Mandelson at a party and asked about citizenship. He later paid one million pounds (\$1.4 million) to the Millennium Dome, for which Mandelson had been responsible.

Mandelson denied there was any appearance of corruption. "I don't accept that claim. An innocent inquiry was made in a two-minute phone conversation facilitated by civil servants and monitored by them. That is the beginning and end of this story."

But opponents leapt on the fact that in his first version, he had said the whole affair was handled by his officials. Only on Tuesday did he admit he had personally spoken to

P P Hinduja quizzed

NEW DELHI: Geneva-based P P Hinduja was today interrogated by the CBI in connection with his alleged role in the Bofors payoff scandal and blocking of transfer of documents from Swiss authority to India. CBI spokesman S M Khan told reporters that his interrogation would continue by the Special Investigation Group of CBI tomorrow.

Prakash Hinduja spent over three hours in two sessions at the CBI's headquarters here with the agency's investigators, whose questioning focused on the payment the Hinduja's have admitted to have received from the Bofors

company

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

from the front page

Hinduja passport costs UK Minister his job

Home Office Minister Mike O'Brien about the process of passport requests.

Srichand Hinduja received British citizenship, having previously been turned down.

Blair's spokesman said Mandelson had merely passed inquiries on to the relevant department.

But he was forced to admit that the government's line earlier in the week — that Mandelson had been asked to get involved but had not — was inaccurate.

Newspapers accused Mandelson of failing to tell the truth after first denying he personally con-

tacted another minister over the passport application and then admitting that he had.

"He must go," the Daily Express said in a frontpage headline. "He fights for political life," said The Mirror. "How many more lies?" asked the Daily Mail.

He quit in 1998 after it was discovered he had borrowed a large sum from ex-minister and millionaire Geoffrey Robinson to buy a house. His department was investigating Robinson's business affairs at the time. Blair brought him back within a year.

— Reuter

INDIAN EXPRESS

25 JAN 2001

War Crimes Tribunal may launch probe

By Hasan Suroor

LONDON, JAN. 15. As more evidence surfaced indicating that the British Government is not telling the whole truth in the depleted uranium (DU) controversy and pressure mounted on the Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair, in Parliament to come out with full facts, the chief prosecutor of the U.N. War Crimes Tribunal was reported as saying the tribunal was not ruling out a criminal investigation.

Ms. Carla Del Ponte said the tribunal was awaiting the results of the inquiries which were already going on and if "sufficient evidence" linking the use of DU with health risks emerged, "we will be obliged to investigate." She said "new facts" had come out which could lead the tribunal to "investigate the issue again."

Her statement came amid revelations that the British Government was warned by its own nuclear safety advisers in 1991 that the DU shells used in the Gulf War posed serious health risks to British troops, and could lead to "political problems". The report by the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority, which can be found in the library of the House of Commons, warned of "significant" radioactivity from DU shells and said: "The problem will not go away and should be tackled before it becomes a political problem created by the environmental lobby."

This is the latest in a series of documents clearly showing that successive British Governments were aware of the DU-related health risks and yet nothing was done to stop their use. They were

extensively used by NATO troops in the Balkans.

The Tories, who were in power during the Gulf War and in the initial phase of the Balkans operations, are being asked to admit their responsibility in what is turning out to be a conspiracy of silence, according to observers. "The disclosure that the first warning... came under the previous Government may explain why the Tories have not sought to make political capital out of the issue", *The Times* commented, taking note of the Tories' unusually low profile over the controversy.

Over the weekend, British newspapers have carried reports from Bosnia based on interviews with ordinary people exposed to DU radioactivity and are suffering from its effects. It is said hundreds of people, who came into contact with the empty shells left behind by the troops, are ill with cancer-related symptoms. Children who innocently played with the shells have been the worst affected.

Mr. Shaun Rusling, chairman of the National Gulf Veterans' and Families' Association, said over 500 "veterans" had died since the Gulf War and some 5,000 were suffering from various illnesses including leukaemia.

The Defence Secretary, Mr. Geoff Hoon, however, continued to stonewall the allegations and maintained that there was only a "limited risk" from DU. "There is no scientific evidence to support claims that the use of radioactive material caused illness...", he said, adding that if a clear evidence was found, the Government would take "appropriate decision."

THE HINDU

16 JAN 2001