The Baily Star

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Dhaka Saturday, May 3, 1997

Labour's Triumphant Return

Labour is back with a bang. We heartily rejoice over the triumphant return of the party to power under the youthful leadership of Tony Blair after a lapse of 18 years. Proving the pre-polls prediction right as rain, the 43-year-old lawyer whose party has put paid to the Tory hopes of seeking a consecutive fifth term, is all set to become Britain's new Prime Minister. In fact, the electorate's verdict was so overwhelmingly tilted to Blair's 'new Labour' that the doom of John Major's conservative government was spelt much earlier before the results of all the 659 seats of the British parliament were announced.

Labour's dramatic resurgence has got a lot to do with the novelty in its approach and much of it has been injected by Mr Blair whose dynamism, understanding of the reality that, more often than not, calls for changes in party philosophy in order to accommodate the expectations of the people in a changing world. He epitomises modern leadership which among other things require a flair for waking up from the nightmares of history and if necessary, jettison quickly the trappings that were once deemed as the hallmarks of the party but have lost appeal and relevance in the course of time. Apparently. Mr Blair has succeeded in convincing the voters that the party has snapped out of its traditional socialist image. The Labour Party of 1997 described by many as centre right in its stance will almost certainly not be springing any surprise on policy issues. Why should it? Despite the impact of Black Wednesday, Mad Cow disease and the sleaze of some MPs. Mr Major is leaving behind a strong economy, perhaps the strongest in Europe at the moment. As some observers put it Mr Blair's policy will be Thatcherism with heart. This element of heart notwithstanding his alignment with the basics of conservative rule got sufficiently carried to the psyche of the British people through Mr Blair's electoral promises of opportunity and social justice.

We welcome Britain's new leadership with the hope that Mr Blair will meet the millennial challenges with a touch of novelty and pragmatism that will not only live upto the expectations of his own people but that of the rest of the world, specially the developing countries who have always benefited immensely from the glorious British tradition of commitment to progress.

Bride Trade

Getting young women ferried in herds for marriage to 'foreign' husbands, according to an agency news, is a thriving business in the border areas of the western part of the country. Though labelled as bride trade, this in essence is women trafficking. A section of brokers quick to cash in on the desperation arising from extreme poverty lure the marriageable young girls away from their families with promises of nuptial prospect in other countries. With the girls specially, those in the rural areas unable to think anything else than marriage as the only respectable option of life and their poor parents proving infinitely more susceptible to such temptations of being bailed out, the human smugglers are likely to have things their way rather easily.

Once transported across the border, in some cases beyond that in Pakistan and some countries in the ME, most of these so-called brides, to their horror, find themselves thrown in flesh trade or other degrading jobs. The few victims present at an awareness project participated by a touring US group recently gave forth a few tales up that street.

Those working with the project identified attitudinal slackness of the law enforcing agency as the main abetting factor in this inhuman commercial practice.

We do agree that by exercising tougher enforcement of laws related with repression of women, bride trade as a phenomenon can be scaled down but the root of the problem is poverty. Unless poverty is reduced, women would continue to fall

victims to similar vicious and immoral trades. Rural women in our country have already proved that given the scope, they can play a major role in improving the economic condition of their families. While tightening up the vigil in the border areas we also need to give more thoughts in exploring the scope for integrating women in economic activities. Once they shed their infamous status as disposable loads on their families, Bangladesh's share in the global tale of female repression will certainly go down.

No to Blanket Ban

We very strongly oppose the government's blanket ban on all private initiatives to bring artistes from abroad to enrich our cultural scene. Private initiative in the field of cultural exchange should be encouraged to cover all the facilities offered by the pacts between us and the rest of the world, especially the region of South Asia. Why should culture be a subject of government monopoly at a time when every other sector is being advocated to be delivered to the private sector? The government should be there only as a regulatory body ensuring that the bilateral scopes are not abused and the purpose of the pacts served. The permissions in point should be handled by truly knowledgeable people. And there can be an experts' committee to vet the working of the permission cell. The cell and the experts should welcome organisations reputed for dedicated work in the enrichment of our culture to make good use of cultural pact cushions. Less known bodies and persons may also be encouraged to invite foreign artistes in the much needed fields of serious music such as dhrupad, kheyal and classical instrumental recitals and dance.

Let there be well-enunciated policies, formulated on a true understanding of culture and, in this case, music — guiding the permissions to invite foreign artistes. An absence of this is government's own failure, it has no right to punish the nation for

Some Suggestions for the AL Council Meeting

The reason for our piece today is to try and convince the AL leaders, especially Sheikh Hasina, to introduce a strong DEVELOPMENT AGENDA into the party deliberations and subsequently into its workings.

T is for the first time in 21 years, and perhaps only for the second time in its long history, that Awami League(AL) will be holding its national council session as a ruling party, on 6 and 7 May '97. There is a qualitative difference between holding a meeting of this important policy making body as the ruling party and that as the opposition.

Throughout its nearly halfa-century of history. AL has mostly been an opposition party. Except for about 13 months of the coalition government of Suhrawardy at the centre in 1957, the government of Ataur Rahman in the province of East Pakistan(now Bangladesh) for a slightly longer period, and then for three-and-half years as the first government of the independent Bangladesh, Awami League has always been in the opposition. Born in 1949 - making for an impressive history of 48 years; only Jamaat and Communist

many of the distortions in our politics that we now have. One such distortion - and to us a critical one - is the fact that development issues ARE NOT on the centre stage of our parliamentary debates or in the public discourse. Think of how much time our leaders have spent in the last few parliamentary sessions on issues such as poverty alleviation, human resource development, education, health, population planning, industrial growth and expansion of trade, increasing foreign investment, and the like. Opposition's endless condemning of the government seldom, if ever,

cus on development issues. The bottom line is that if Bangladesh is to break out of the cycle of poverty and if it is to ensure a sustainable 7 to 8 per cent growth then our political parties will have to shift their traditional focus away from narrow party politics and divert it to development issues.

included the latter's lack of fo-

our lives. The task is straightforward. Party cadres must be made aware of the development issues and trained to do voluntary work.

To start with, local NGOs can be asked to train grassroots level workers on, say, how to launch literacy campaigns, how to impart health and sanitation-related information, how to ensure that schools run properly and assist teachers to ensure high attendance in schools. They can hold village level discussions on gender issues, virtues of small families and other related affairs. There has be a lot of awareness building in terms of making local government bodies work, which AL has promised to install through a new bill.

Last 26th March we devoted our independence day supplement to the theme "Need for a Change in our Political Culture". The above suggestion, i accepted by the ruling party, will contribute significantly in

changing most of political

workers and leaders "From

Talkers to Doers" and as such

have a profound impact on the

behaviour pattern of our politi-

cal parties. It is our view that if

the ruling party directs its party

workers to train themselves on

development issues and starts

doing voluntary work alongside

local NGOs then the opposition

party will have to follow suit

just to convince the people that

they are just as concerned about

people's welfare as the ruling

party is. This is bound to

change the way we do politics. I

the opposition does not re-

spond, then the ruling party

will have a field day gaining

public respect by doing devel-

ruling party use this important

occasion to bring DEVELOP-

MENT on to the centre stage of

its party and workers' agenda?

Will Sheikh Hasina realise that

she can do wonders with thou-

sands of her party followers

only if they are trained and

motivated to dirty their hands

in the fields and factories

alongside the people, rather

than doing what ruling party

workers usually do? It is our

ardent hope that the AL Chief

will seize this rare opportunity

to give a new and radically dif

ferent direction to her party.

The key question is, will the

opment work.

The Third View

by Mahfuz Anam

Party can claim longer history - AL has been in power for discontinued periods of maximum five plus years. For the rest 43 years, Awami League, first in Pakistan and then in Bangladesh, has been in the opposition facing all sorts of oppression from the state machinery of the day. Its self destructive step was the formation of BKSAL and its most traumatic period followed the brutal killing of Bangabandhu and that of the four national

It is not our intention to discuss AL's history, but only to focus on the fact that Awami League is a political party which is long on experience of agitation, and short on experience of administration. It is this fundamental fact about AL that, more than anyone else, the leaders of the party must remember. Awami League can legitimately claim to have been the party which has, along with other progressive forces, spearheaded almost all the democratic struggles during the Pakistan period, not to mention its leading role during the War of Liberation. However glorious and rich its agitational and anti-establishment legacy is: its record of running the country is a mixed bag, not above controversy and full of unexplained public concerns, to put t mildly.

It is such a party which is going for its council session on 6th of May. As we said earlier, it will be doing so as the ruling party. So will this council session be fundamentally different, or be a replica — perhaps with more grandeur and protocol than before - of the past council session, mainly focusing on party leadership issues, rather than on policies?

The reason for our piece today is to try and convince the AL leaders, especially Sheikh Hasina, to introduce a strong DEVELOPMENT AGENDA into the party deliberations and subsequently into its workings. We are aware that long speeches will be made by the big leaders saying how 'DETERMINED' the party is to do a thousand things Well, please see your own files and find out how many times you all have said the same thing and then compare that to what you have done.

We are not forgetting that AL has not been in power for 21 years and therefore it cannot be accused of being the cause of

Therefore we consider the Awami League council session we repeat, first time as the ruling party after 21 years, provides an excellent opportunity for Sheikh Hasina, and for the whole senior level leadership to introduce a high dose of development agenda, and begin a training and awareness building process of the party workers as to the serious economic, social, educational, gender health, nutritional, demographic, cultural, environmental and human rights issues that the country faces.

If we are making any sense to the decision makers of the ruling party, and if there is any genuine concern for development in them, then this is what they should do.

The first thing to realise is that mere preaching to the visiting councillors will not do the job. Factual presentations, in an easy to understand format, must be presented to the thousands of councillors who will converge to Dhaka on the occasion. Development issues are complex and interwoven. Therefore their presentation must be simple and factual. They must be supported by easy to grasp statistics, preferably presented in the form of pie charts and colourful graphs. The council should invite people like Prof. Yunus (micro credit and women as entrepreneurs), Fazle Hasan Abed (primary and non-formal education), Kazi Faruk (empowerment and natural fertiliser) and some others to speak on the subjects men tioned within brackets. There

permits. The national council session should then be followed by similar awareness building ef forts on development issues at district, thana and union level committees. All levels of party bodies, from the highest to the grassroots, should undertake

could be other speakers if time

As the ruling party Awami League must realise that GOV-ERNANCE IS FAR HARDER AND FAR MORE COMPLI-CATED THAN WINNING ELECTIONS. The AL must also realise that until and unless all workers of the party, at all levels, can be mobilised to selflessly work for overcoming the stranglehold of poverty in our society, it will not be able to bring any meaningful change in

Stock market news on

Sir, There are many investors across the country who eagerly waits to know the daily trading results of individual shares at the main bourse, namely the DSE. BTV can provide this information after the evening news for selected blue chip companies and other active traded shares, giving their closing rates with the +/-

BTV may also introduce a weekly programme on the capital market, say, on Friday, giving a roundup of the weekly trading and other happenings relating to the stock market. The programme may invite the market regulators, member brokers, company directors/officials, analysts and general investors, for an open and unrestricted discussions.

This will go a long way in ensuring transparency and credibility in the present scenario at the country's stock market.

Khurrum Malik 20 M M Ali Road Mehdibagh, Chittagong

Feni carnage

Sir, Recently, two activists of BNP have been killed - one brutally murdered and the other killed in a broad daylight by an attack when a political procession was in progress at Feni. The description of the gruesome incident as received from different national dailies will make one's hair stand at its end when he recollects the grisly tales of killing a man by making holes in the body with a drill machine.

It is strange that no words of sympathy condemning the incidents of two such tragic deaths in the area of the leader of the opposition came either from the prime minister or from the home minister. However, a senior cabinet colleague of the prime minister did not hesitate to call this murder as the outcome of intra-party conflict of BNP, as said very often We have been observing this type of readymade reply from the government every time for every such incident taking place involving victims from the opposition party.

It is the sacred duty of the party in power to safeguard the security of the people irrespective of their party allegiance The incident taking place in the last week of March, 1997 at Feni is going without any arrest in spite of deadline fixed by the leader of opposition. It would be a sad precedence if the authority lacks any interest to nab the culprits merely for the reasons that the victims belong to the party in opposition.

Almost at the same time Abdus Salam, an Awami League activist, was gunned down at Muradpur under Demra thana while he was taking tea in a local restaurant. We have come to know that two persons have already been arrested in this connection and to expedite further action, the CID has taken over the investigation of this killing. We warmly appreciate the quick action of the police in the matter and expect to see the same urgency and effective steps in respect of all such

killings. T Ahmed 12, Paikpara Dhaka-1207

Crisis of Confidence

By sweepingly spurning inter-state agreements born of Awami League initiatives, Begum Khaleda Zia is sending wrong signals to different audiences.

EGUM Zia must have drawn a degree of public sympathy from the disturbances that all but wrecked her public meeting at Gafargaon last week. Expectedly, her speech emitted fire and by and large she was entitled to it. given the tempestuous circumstances she found herself in.

Yet, her swearing by the words "no matter how many accords the government signs (with India) we shall not let these be implemented" cannot but be viewed with unvarnished trepidations. When as an opposition leader she has vowed to oppose tooth and nail interstate agreements obviously then she must be going all out to annul them on assumption of power, if and when that happens. In fact, she has said as much on an earlier occasion.

Material Position

In bottomline terms, her pointer is towards the South Asian Growth Quadrangle involving transit through Bangladesh, even though her party's passionate political preoccupation has been with the projection of the dark and suspi-

and water withdrawals at the upper reaches of the Ganges within the Indian territory. It is difficult to believe that any extra-ordinary variation in the dry season flow of the Ganges remained entirely unmapped in the formulation of the treaty writers.

As it is, a contingency JRC stock-staking has been provided for, let alone the first evaluation of the accord's operational aspects falling due at the end of the second year since its signing. Then, there is the significant provision for fiveyearly reviews which, for all practical purposes, should be construed to mean opportunities for renewal, improvement or reconsideration of the agreement, regardless of the succession of governments. This addresses the need for modifications or changes which may be called for due to any shift in the hydrological premises or in consideration of a regional consensus for cooperative water management. But if we should smell rat in what is basically so transparent and flexible in nature and has been signed in accord with standard inter-

pled government in deference to the continuity dictum. Elected democratic governments and oppositions are only expected to be more agreeable to implementing accords.

By sweepingly spurning inter-state agreements born of Awami League initiatives, Begum Khaleda Zia is sending wrong signals to different audiences. She is denying a legally constituted elected government its right to consummate any problem-solving accord courting a taste of the same medicine from the opposition when she goes to power. The people are getting the impression that she is at best half-hearted in getting Bangladesh's problems with India resolved, if not totally averse to it. The BNP even risks being seen to be deliberately keeping alive the issues with India. Should Begum Zia continue with her tirades against India with such intensity, she could end up burning her boats to even having working relations with India, if and when she comes to power again. Why should she prejudice her future dealings with that important neighbouring country even if one allows for her party's 'na-



cious side of the whole idea. Obviously, there are many supporters of her rigid partyline against India and Awami League and she is seeking not only to retain that vote-bank but also to add to it by trying to lend a folk touch to Indo-phobia. National ethos born of state sovereignty and independence attained at great cost cannot be as fragile as a glasshouse to be splintered by a growth quadrangle. In giving final configuration to this, of

SAARC. The Ganges water accord is a sore-point with the BNP. And the lean season flow of the water into Bangladesh falling below the level stipulated in the treaty has caused justified con-

course, we should welcome,

even consciously endeavour to

draw opposition inputs into the

exercise, both in term of prepar-

ing the people for it and helping

the cooperative association to

materialise without raising any

unnecessary hiccups in the

sternation among our people and the experts. Bangladesh officials did not seem to be satisfied with the explanation provided by the Indian side and are pursuing the matter with their counterparts with a focus around two par-

ametres — underground seepage

national practices, then we would be proving our smallminded ignorance of what is happening around the world by way of negotiated settlement of bilateral questions. We shall also risk being dubbed as antiprogress no-changers basking in a self-glorified innocence of international law or norms for the conduct of bilateral rela-

Normative Pressures

As it is, inter-state accords or treaties ratified by the parliaments of the contracting parties are legally and constitutionally binding on them for the stipulated period of their existence. They are also a part and parcel of the corpus of international law at a given time and, therefore, an applied manifestation of the principles of civilised conduct of international relations as enshrined in the UN charter. The fact that these have flexibility apertures make them even more morally and rationally implementable.

Even when a revolutionary government is formed in a country after a convulsive upheaval it is required to announce its abidance by interstate or international agreements entered upon by the top-

tionalist' fervour, which evidently needs to be kept within the limits of sophistry.

Was it not her husband who pioneered the SAARC idea and has it not been her government subsequently that signed the SAPTA agreement presaging the underpinnings of interstate transit? Just as the present government is bound to adhere to all the agreements made by the previous BNP government with different parties, donors and governments, so also the future governments will have to abide by those consummated by the Awami League government.

The donor community and multilateral financing agencies taking note of Bangladesh's better foothold on water management and regional infrastructure-building in the sequel to the water accord with India and talks on the growth quadrangle are getting into a helpful frame of mind to usher Bangladesh into the 21st century. They also look to the opposition as a sound-board, so that its leader has to make responsible and prudent utterances behoving her position as a former prime minister, head of the opposition and that of a shadow gov-

Dangerous Games?

HE exit of the Naval Chief forecast for some L time now, the PM's decision to remove a festering sore from further tarnishing the Navy's reputation was neither unexpected nor, for that matter, unpopular. Given that his continued existence as CNS was not only putting undue pressure on the Navy but the other Services as well, very surprisingly Admiral Haq had to be prompted to do the honourable thing and leave voluntarily. Even the youngest uniformed officer knows that "the glory and honour of the Regiment comes first, the welfare and contentment of your Command next, your own safety and comfort last !" The Admiral reversed the priorities till he ran out of options. Since it serves no purpose in kicking a person when he is down, so let it be with Haq!

For the record, the system did not fail, political manipulation of the system made it fail The former Naval Chief's contrived promotion in the face of more deserving officers was an exercise in nepotism, professional officers who had come up through an exhaustive process had to go into retirement. Subsequently, very deserving souls were cajoled or forced out of uniform for one pretext or the other to clear the deck for a particular Haq-favourite. Whether corruption charges stick or not, the fact remains that Adm. Haq should be tried for nepotism in destroying the service careers of a number of officers that he as the Head of the Navy was responsible not only to protect but be the prime sponsor of on merit. The net result was that the front runner today was a Haq-favourite with a comparable terrible reputation but having the support of a powerful Senator with the constant ear of the PM. Luckily another disaster has been averted by promoting a professional officer. Good for the government!

Whenever the time-tested selection and promotion process is tinkered with for political reasons, catastrophes are bound to happen. The system is not defective by itself, manipulation makes it defective to the detriment of the Service and the country. Chiefs of Service must be appointed for not only professional reasons, their character must be above reproach and their ambitions visibly in check. Any political association or lobbying by person, political or otherwise, should mean automatic disqualification.

A section of the Press is being fed with leaked rumours by vested interests to tar and leather the reputation of all the Services. This vilification seems to be an organised campaign emanating from experts

ASISEEIT Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

(spin masters) on disinformation. The PAF smuggling incident is a case in point. While it brought both the fair name of the PAF and the country into disrepute, this incident could have happened anywhere at any time. If we focus the onus of responsibility thereof onto the PAF Chief, by the same token, what about the responsibility travelling further up the ladder, to the PM and the President Do not such things take place in the US Air Force or the British Navy, not that because it happens there should make it acceptable here?

To take isolated incidents out of context and label the whole Service as bad is unfair to the majority of the men in uniform who serve under very trying conditions just above the subsistence level. We cannot afford to demoralise our rank and file. The campaign orchestrated by hidden hands seems to have gone into high gear with the exit of the Naval Chief, the "black" propaganda viciously undermining our defence establishment. The Services are unable to make an adequate enough defence in the print media, it is grossly unfair to them. Sanity must prevail to contain the damage that is being done to our fighting forces. At least the main-line journalists and responsible print media must not become party to the creeping destruction of the final bulwark of our indepen-

What is of greater concern is the common perception that except for lip-service the powersthat-be seem to be standing by and doing nothing about it. The ISPR alone cannot fight the media battle for the Services, it is the prime responsibility of the government-in-power in a democracy to ensure that criticism in the free press does not go out of hand. False allegations must not only denied forcefully but those guilty of spreading such calumnies brought to book, whoever they may be. The feeling must not became current that the government is not only turning a blind eye to what is happening but secretly endorsing it for their own political agenda

Having run a successful "operation" to emasculate the powers of the President, followed up by a comparatively vulnerable target in uniform, hawks from the ruling inner circle have declared open season on the PAF. It is rumoured that thereafter they will then either go for the

most sacred cow of all, the Pakistan Army, "to fulfil the historic mandate given by the people of the supremacy of civilian authority" and/or the Supreme Court which has shown remarkable independence and needs to "be brought under constitutional authority". The immediate gut reaction to such a rumour was that the PPP "dirty tricks" machine was up to its usual campaign of creating disinformation to cause confrontation and conflict between the pillars of the State based on the deliberately planted rumour, very much like the "Atta" crisis was blown into a fullfledged political disaster affecting the government's long-term credibility. A former professional intelligence operative, who having been frustrated in fulfilling his own ambitions in the military, is determined that both the man who won out from him and the delicate balance in the system comes to grief. Some inexperienced persons of the ruling inner circle may have fallen for this man's wiles and subterfuges, contributing enough grist for the rumour mills to function overtime.

On the one hand, those with frustrated ambitions and motivated interest may lead them into a trap. On the other hand, the Services are also being fed with contrary conclusions, that the inner circle is stoking the fires on which the continuing media trial is taking place. This situation is tailor-made for disaster, for reasons other than his own actions, the PM could conceivably and rapidly lose the confidence of the men who deeply respect him for his sincerity and patriotism. Not only are the Services being defamed, but they are being deliberately pushed into a set-piece collision course with the government, a two birds with one planted-rumour ploy. Having made a long and hard struggle in order to get to a position where he can serve the people, the PM must guard against the immaturity and inexperience of some of his gullible aides, who cannot differentiate friend from foe, it can land him very quickly into a no-win situation.

The government must move to exercise damage control, publicly disassociating from such a vile perception from proliferating. As much as cancer needs surgical intervention, the PM needs to physically boot out of his presence those responsible for such rumours to gain cur-

rency. This "dirty tricks" scenario has all the hallmark of the notorious person who failed in his own bid to be Chief of a Service and hates the present incumbent, the raison d'etre for

his frustrations. From a cadet to being the topmost officer in any of the three Services is a long, tiring ourney. As one goes up the ladder, the physical pressures are exchanged for colossal mental ones. Like most Pakistanis, no time in anyone's career is the career officer really free of financial and family worries, at east till he reaches three-star rank. His personal requirements increase commensurate to his professional commitments. Most of the time, he lives in a public cockpit in a straitjacket of restraint imposed upon by the Service. Others can criticise him or his actions freely, he has to exercise personal restraint. More than any other Service, he is held accountable even for motives which can be labelled well intentioned.

Both Maj Gens Tajammal Hussain and Zahirul Islam Abbasi were good officers with patriotic motives, unfortunately their methodology violated military discipline and they went to jail. Maj Gen Asif Riaz Bokhari made a mistake manymake-many times, his brilliant career was ruined and he went home when he was unlucky to be found out. To his credit, he did not flinch punishment. Even our much-maligned Adm. Haq has gone home in an exercise of accountability, how many of the 87 bureaucrats nowadays suspended with great fanfare will walk the plank? Maj Arshad Jamil, accused in the Tando Bhalwal case went to the gallows, the main civilian accused is still absconding under known patronage of the civil administration. To put it bluntly, the military has almost always held its personnel accountable, no known case in civilian spheres exists of comparable rank. If ever the uniformed man does get an opportunity to rise in his defence he cannot open up without revealing such confidences as must be confined to only a select few. At times, criticism may even be motivated by certain quarters to evoke such a response as would reveal national secrets. Most servicemen live only to

have the opportunity to die for their country if and when the country needs that sacrifice. There is a vast difference in their character formation and those who have a licence to criticise them with motivated reason. It is time to raise cudgels on behalf of "the great silent majority" who have to bear this unwarranted public exposure without any means of retaliation or recourse.