

# Keep an Eye on the Distressed 'Pockets'

by Atiur Rahman

### We got to rethink our conventional development strategy and focus more sharply on the people who may have been passing through difficult time in the post-flood Bangladesh.

BANGLADESH has been experiencing yet another disaster of catastrophic dimension. After the longest flooding Bangladesh is now busy in resettling and rebuilding. This is almost like a post-war struggle for rehabilitation. More than three-fourths of Bangladesh was literally submerged under floodwaters for about two months. Never in the history of this part of the world there was such a devastating and long flooding. This was indeed a crippling flood. As a result the damages to have been colossal. Besides loss of production in the agricultural sector, this time the small and medium size industries suffered heavy loss. The self-employed sector was also badly hit. Two major crops have been gone. Also gone are the stocks of the commercial units and industries. Some of the vital machines have become inoperative. The running capital has been consumed during those difficult days. The initial capital mobilised through savings and micro-credit from NGOs has also been eaten up by most borrowers. The roads, bridges and culverts have been badly damaged. The livestock have been seriously affected. The health system has been particularly under pressure. The economy was literally in 'stand still' position for more than two months. Nothing moved in or out.

the onus falls on the government to rehabilitate the affected people. The NGOs too take up some responsibilities. But the spontaneous response of the individuals and social organisations is not that visible during this phase. But people have been showing tremendous resilience and steadfastness during the post-flood coping period.

But even then the government has to remain vigilant about not only the prompt rehabilitation activities but also about unexpected mishaps in some distressed pockets which may not be so easily reachable. We may, therefore alert the government to remain vigilant about some of the following 'likely pitfalls' which can surely be avoided:

- #### The Pockets are Vulnerable
- There are a number of pockets along the Brahmaputra basin which are normally erosion prone and backward. The roads are underdeveloped, the administration is weak, the NGO coverage is small. These are the pockets which again have been badly affected by this year's flood (see the chart for a glimpse at these affected pockets).
  - A few hundred families have already fallen victim to the river bank erosion and they are now living on high roads. These areas have been experiencing:
    - acute shortage of work opportunities
    - acute malnutrition and food shortage
    - acute shortage of capital for restarting business and rebuilding houses.

tionally shy in giving credit to the river bank erosion-affected people. So there is a need for special focus on these pockets. In fact there are the pockets where public action is needed the most. Don't leave them to the conventional rehabilitation efforts normally carried out by the administration. We are not doubting their sincerity. But the problem is too vast to be addressed by the officials' only. There has to be another kind of special mobilization at least for these pockets.

Indeed a special task force/squad may have to be dispatched to look after these traditionally famine prone pockets. So the administration should be doubly cautious about what is going on in there. The newspaper reporters, researchers, monitoring agencies should better visit these pockets to get firsthand feeling of the magnitude of deprivation therein.

A number of thanas e.g. Akhaura, Burchang, Chandina, Sharasti, Bakhshiganj, Motherganj, Mymensingh Sadar, Fulpur, Ghatail etc have been experiencing higher price of coarse rice. Something should be done now to stabilise this price.

OMS can at least be initiated in those areas where there may have been the rising trend of price of coarse rice. The NGOs too can complement these efforts of the government. The work for cash, test relief and food for works should immediately be initiated so that lack of work opportunities does not further complicate the situation in areas where coarse rice is being sold at a higher price.

disaster. So let us do two things:

- expedite the housing programme at least in these pockets
- alert NGOs, social organisations and individuals to collect winter clothes so that they can be distributed to the poor families living in these pockets.

Winter normally hits hard the people of these pockets. This year the onslaught may be even stronger. The knitwear factories may also be requested to share their 'rejects' with the poor. Almost all middle class and rich families can share at least one set of winter clothes with the poor families. This campaign should be initiated immediately. Here the NGOs, social and philanthropic organisations can take the lead. Identify some spots where people can donate the winter clothes and then some credible organisation can pick them up for distribution.

Alert organisations to start preparing quilts, which may cost only about Tk 200 to 300, to be distributed among the probable cold victims. These can

**List of Affected Areas**

District	Thana	Union	Villages	
Kuiogram	Rourhari Chimeri	Ali	Khanpara	
		Not Sadar Rama	Bhangapara	
		Nayerhat.	Kawerchar	
		Ashmirchar	Fulerchar Kurirchar	
		Mohanganj	Tapurchar	
Gaubandha	Fulchari	Ulipur	Jatia	
		Rajpur	(All)	
		Fulchari	Erandabari	
Jalapur	Shaghata Gaubandha Sadar	Shadullapur	Char Gelabari	
		Dewanganj	Kulubullah Char	
		Islampur	Char Nandanerpara	
		Motherganj	Bir Nandanerpara	
		Bakhshiganj		
		Sanshan		
		Melandotha		
			Satpowa	
			Jhagurara	
			Tupkarchar	
			Mahmudpur	
			Chineyola	
	Sudhbari			
	Hanpur			

NB This is not a complete list. There may be a few other such pockets as well.

# A Tribute To Amartya Sen

by M. M. Akash

"Amartya Sen has made several key contributions to the research on fundamental problems in welfare economics. His contributions range from axiomatic theory of social choice, over definitions of welfare and poverty indexes, to empirical studies of famine. They are tied closely together by a general interest in distributional issues and a particular interest in the most impoverished members of society"

WE all in Bangladesh specially rejoice in the winning of Nobel prize by Amartya Sen. It is like getting an award long overdue and long awaited for. Last year the Nobel prize in economics went to the two financial specialists Messrs Metrons and Scholes for their contributions to the theory of options pricing. But it was not above controversy. Many people thought that such technical discoveries in a narrow field of money market is too narrow to deserve a Nobel prize. Even the pro-business Wall Street Journal had to recognise that such a crisis has really 'tarnished' the image of the Nobel prize. So this is the background of the current year's Nobel prize in Economics.

editor of the wall street journal got so infuriated by Sen's success that he could not but write that since Sen is an economist who does not like to tread the middle path and rather leans to the side of left so it would have been more correct for the Nobel prize committee to "refuse to give an award rather than default to someone of such a debatable merit." But this type of remark only shows how strong is Sen in his commitment. Another good point of Sen is his



commitment to his own country and nation. Sen had till now not given up his citizenship of India and always proclaims proudly "I am an Indian and a Bengali". Sen's English is extremely lucid and he has the finest ability to make hard technical economics popular, easy and lucid, retaining the substance and depth as well. Perhaps more lucid is his Bengali. Anybody who has gone through his "Jibonjatra" or "Arthaniti" will be amazed at his ability to invent new Bengali terms and categories in the field of Economics.

In the citation paper of this year's Nobel award in the field of Economics it was rightly stated:

"Amartya Sen has made several key contributions to the research on fundamental problems in welfare economics. His contributions range from axiomatic theory of social choice, over definitions of welfare and poverty indexes, to empirical studies of famine. They are tied closely together by a general interest in distributional issues and a particular interest in the most impoverished members of society" (from the Web page of Nobel Foundation)

Actually the most well-known work of Sen is specifically concerned with famine and its causes. He through his incisive detail analysis of a few cases of famines in India, Bangladesh and Saharan countries has proved that famines

can occur in a region even when the available food-stock is equal to that of any normal previous year's stock. In other words famines in these cases do not arise basically due to problems in the distribution of the available stock of food. Sometimes the hungry people did not have the purchasing power to buy food and sometimes the bad managers could not reach out the famine areas in time or sometimes the managers even took the wrong decision to export the available food! Thus it was an old story retold by Sen but in a very rigorous manner so that it could capture the mind-set of the western authorities.

We Bengalis are proud of Sen's achievement. We are not a materially rich nation but in terms of intellectual capability we always produced and perhaps will continue to produce from amongst ourselves men like Satyen Bose, Rabindranath Tagore and A.K. Sen. Actually Bangladeshis all over the world immediately became jubilant at the news since Sen's original home was in Manikganj, a district in Bangladesh and he is also the nephew of the famous Bengali progressive writer Satyen Sen. Although Sen himself does not think in the same way and has asked everybody to try hard to solve their worldly problems before taking pride in intellectual feats. Perhaps Sen is more interested to change the world than just to interpret it.

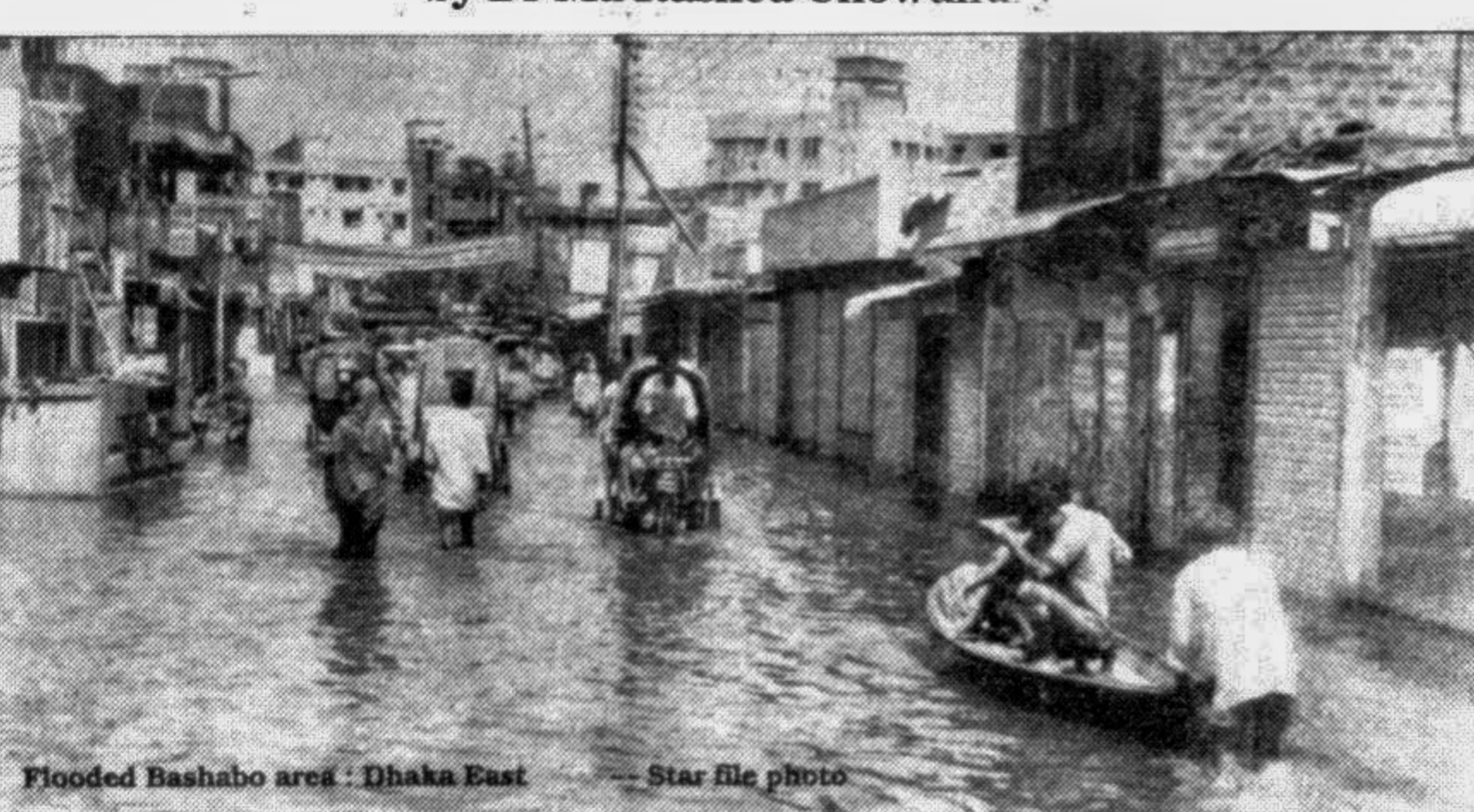
Sen in his personal life is a very affectionate father and a teacher as certified by his wife the famous Bengali writer Nabonita Devi Sen. A.K. Sen is also a very handsome and attractive personality. There are many anecdotes about Sen's colourful student life. We can end this tribute by mentioning only one of them.

During his study at Cambridge in the late fifties Sen had colleagues who had later become as famous as he is now. One of them was Late Mahubul-Ul-Huq from Pakistan and who was also the chief editor of the famous "Human Development Report" published annually from the UNDP. During their student days it is reported that once upon a time the two friends had a heart to heart talk between themselves. At one stage Huq had remarked that he did not believe that traditional economics really can solve the problems of mankind. At that stage Sen asked him then why he was reading economics. Huq replied that in today's world to get your message heard you will have to be an economist! From then on the two friends cooperated with each other to build a non-conventional economics. And Sen at last won the Nobel prize in "economics".

# Factors Affecting Floodplain Encroachment

## Experience from Dhaka-East

by Dr Md Rashed Chowdhury



SUBURBAN floodplain encroachment, which proceeded unquestioned for many years in Dhaka, more recently, has been a concern because of its effect on farming. Most research on this subject regard residential expansion as fundamentally hostile to farming. Despite considerable interest in this phenomenon, there are very few research that shows what factors play significant role in residential expansion in the suburban floodplains. Both micro and macro factors may have influenced the residential expansion process. The macro factors which influence the pace and character of private land development are important in the land conversion process. However, it is the micro factors that determine why some parcels of land are developed and others are not. The macro factors are represented by public policy changes during a certain time period, e.g. legislative actions and resulting shifts in the roles of various government agencies are in this category. The micro factors describe the land units about which decisions are made, and characteristics of landowners, individuals, community officials and others whose actions and beliefs affect floodplain management decisions.

embankments provide safety against perceived flooding. As a result, land use in the proposed embankment areas have undergone rapid changes indicating an increase in residential and decrease in agricultural land uses. Experience from Dhaka-East shows that flood embankments lead to interventions in the existing drainage channels resulting in the formation of stagnant ponds inside the embankments and, therefore, some portion of lands became unusable for agricultural purposes. Role of flood embankments may, therefore, have two ways of influences on floodplain encroachment e.g. safety against flooding and vacant lands not usable for agricultural purposes. This is the most important decision-making variable that influences simultaneously all the residents. While it seems reasonable to believe that people would care more to live far away from the embankments, findings of this study revealed that rate of encroachment increased near the embankments.

**Recent trend in land price:** It is an important component that influences significantly the floodplain encroachment process. As compared to the urban area, comparatively disadvantaged floodplains offer a relatively cheaper land price which is said to have attracted many potential new-comers. Further land price hikes attract many buyers for procurement of more lands. Recent studies suggested that the land prices have appreciated to a greater extent due to the proposed flood embankments. Despite an increasing trend in land price two reasons are directly responsible for increasing encroachment. These are: a) some of the agricultural lands are becoming unusable for drainage congestion, so, agriculture is becoming less profitable; b) rent as well as demand for low-cost Sempucca housing is increasing, so, many farmers constructed or rented these houses to other people which provided them a major source of monthly income. Besides, an indirect reason responsible for expansion of these houses is: farming in Bangladesh is mostly a family

business and this problem is aggravated if their children work in the non-agricultural sector. Farmers, therefore, have less incentives to continue farming and switch over to low-cost housing.

**Physical characteristics of parcels:** One factor that must be considered in analyzing why an idle parcel of land is developed is the physical characteristics of the site itself. The size and shape of a parcel can influence its development potential by limiting the construction activities suitable for it. Land located in low lying areas may not be physically suitable for constructing a permanent Pucca house while a low-cost Sempucca house can be constructed without much difficulty and, therefore, residential construction tended to expand towards the high agricultural lands mixed with residential lands.

**Conclusion:** Findings provided an important basis for preliminary evaluation of the landowner reaction to the proposed flood embankments in the eastern perimeter of Dhaka city. It involves not only the perceptions and motivations of the landowners, but particularly, an insight into the capacity and mechanism by which landowners are influenced by the proposed Greater Dhaka Flood Protection Project (GDFPP). Locational and accessibility factors, the traditional focus of geographic research in explaining urban growth and expansion, seem to have influence on the landowners' decision-making. Statistical results confirmed the role of various hypothesized factors, some variables were consistently dominant whereas some others offered subordinate or even marginal roles. Among others, distance to the proposed flood

embankments' has been found to have influenced most significantly the residents in their decision making for residential expansion in the floodplains of Dhaka-East.

The writer is an official of the Flood Forecasting and Warning Centre of the Bangladesh Water Development Board. The above article has been prepared on the basis of a study conducted by the writer in 1997.

# Blair Leads a Very British Revolution

As the British House of Commons starts its second full session under the control of the Blair government, Labour Party circles talk of a "continuing revolution." Traditional Labour ideology is giving way to traditional Tory pragmatism. And the changes under way have huge implications for Britain's future.

Derek Ingram writes from London



Knocking Britain's institutions for six

SLOWLY, but ever so slowly, the medieval trappings that surround the British ruling establishment are disappearing into history. A gentleman holding the title of Silver Stick in Waiting, who attends on the Queen every year at the opening of parliament, will not appear this time. His superior, Gold Stick, remains on parade.

The Lord Chancellor, Lord Irvine — the man who controls the British legal system — will no longer walk backwards in front of the Queen. But others, known as the Great Officers of State, will do so; not because the Queen wants them to, but because they do. Meanwhile, the "dignitaries" in the procession have been cut from 54 to 40.

The members of parliament who have to stand outside the House of Lords, the upper house largely populated by hereditary nobles even today, will have less time to wait before three ceremonial knocks on a slammed door lead to its opening.

All this is part of what is in British terms a revolution. Slow, peaceful change has been the British way for more than 350 years.

What is the British way? The Conservative (Tory) Party is desperately trying to find out. Until recently it ruled so mightily under Margaret Thatcher, but now it has become so invisible to the British public that few even remember the name of its thirty-something leader, William Hague.

Mind you, the Labour Party under Prime Minister Tony Blair now claims to know. Or at least it has been ahead of the game.

At this year's Conservative Party conference, Hague used the phrase "the British way" more than 20 times in his rallying speech.

Critics quickly pointed out that Labour ministers had already used the phrase almost to extinction in speeches over the previous year, and that many of Hague's best lines were copycat quotes from Blair.

Labour won their great 1997 election victory by pinching the Tories' trousers. The Tories are now trying to pinch them back, although for the moment it seems a feeble effort.

In a breathtakingly crass piece of public relations, Thatcher and Edward Heath — two Conservative prime ministers who have not spoken to

upper house in a country which has long claimed to be the Mother of Parliaments.

Moving to an elected upper chamber is fraught with complications, for its members not only comprise people chosen by government but also the Prince of Wales, Prince Philip and other royal dukes, as well as 15 bishops from the Church of England.

Reform will deeply affect the monarchy, sitting at the top of this establishment pyramid, and the continuation of an established church in a now multi-religious society.

The regional parliaments could lead to an independent Scotland, or at least a federal system. Not for long can 71 Scottish MPs sit in London as well as in a new assembly in Edinburgh. Northern Ireland's newly-constituted assembly, too, will have to be rethought if peace takes permanent root there.

Installing mayors in London and the other big cities will lead to wholesale reform of local government nationwide. There is talk of introducing compulsory voting in national and local elections, which might boost the woefully low level of popular participation in local affairs.

All this is a daunting programme for any government. So according to the Blair government, they must be pragmatic if they are to stay in office and see it all through.

Each reform alone, if carried forward, would transform the constitutional face of Britain. But, as always, nothing will happen quickly. The end of the first-born noblemen in the Lords is only one stage to the ultimate goal of reforming the institution — a totally unselected

Wales will get separate parliaments.

And there's more. The Bank of England has been loosed from government control. New local government will start with a mayor for London. A commission will shortly propose elections should switch to proportional representation.

At present, British uses a first-past-the-post system where the electorate is divided into constituencies, each represented by the person who wins the most votes in the constituency. As a result, most governments achieve an absolute majority of seats on less than 45 per cent of the vote.

The key to the conference season was not the reforming of old enmities on the Tory conference platform. It was the way Blair and what he and his cabinet now routinely referred to as "new Labour" have entrenched themselves by launching what in Mao-like terms they dub "a continuous revolution."

Certainly, as parliament reopens, they can record 18 breathtaking months.

In right-wing disguise they have launched a raft of fundamental changes. Political parties' funding will be shaken up. Hereditary peers will depart the House of Lords. Scotland and

### Correction

The Daily Star on October 20, 1998 published an article titled "The Making and Maintaining of the Female Divorcee Destitute" by Lubna Mariam. Who was identified as a member of Ain O Salish Kendra (ASK). Ms Mariam is neither a member of ASK.