Dhaka, Thursday, March 21, 1991

Good Luck to the New PM

This newspaper joins the nation in felicitating Begum Khaleda Zia on her becoming the first elected woman Prime Minister of Bangladesh. It is a momentous occasion for her, her party and the nation as a whole. For her, it is a chance to make her husband's dreams come true and to prove herself to be the leader that people have come to believe that she is. For the party, returning to power after nine years — almost to the day - is a vindication of their long held view that Ershad was a usurper who, on 24 March 1982, illegally took over power from a popularly elected government. Now that people returned BNP to power on the very first occasion they got to vote freely, goes a long way in proving their claim. As for the nation, the occasion is a culmination of a long, arduous and traumaticstruggle for the establishment of a representative government. As Begum Zia took oath of office as the Prime Minister yesterday, it was not any prime minister taking oath, but the people's representative who took oath. It was to witness such an occasion that our people fought the autocratic regime of Ershad so virulently and over so long a period.

On this joyous occasion we remember with gratitude the sacrifice of all those who laid down their lives and others who suffered police brutalities and prison sentences to make democracy and representative government reality. It was their love for democracy and faith in people's power that made all this possible.

While Begum Zia took oath as the Prime Minister, the real power continues to be vested in the office of the Acting President. This brings us to the whole question of constitutional amendments to which both the major parties are committed. The BNP is committed to making whatever amendments the parliament approves. The AL on its part is more specific. They are committed to bringing about a parliamentary form of government.

Hanging over the issue of constitutional amendments is the joint declaration of the three alliances on the basis of which the anti-Ershad unity was formed. By now we are familiar with the divergent interpretations of what the joint declaration means. What the country needs at the moment is not debates on semantics but understanding on core issues. All parties want democracy and a representative government responsible to the will of the people. Let us concentrate on examining ways on how we can bring such a government about.

In this regard we appreciate the statement by AL leader Sheikh Hasina who has accepted that formation of a government now is constitutionally okay. Though it is politically not so according to her. We expect further understanding and cooperation from her in solving the other issues

facing the country. Formation of the government by Begum Zia is but the first step in the direction of restoring democracy. Many more steps need to be taken to ensure democracy to function properly. The more difficult task of getting the economy started in the right direction awaits the decisions of the new government. In vital areas of investment, trade, finance and foreign aid the nation eagerly awaits the pronouncements by the new Prime

Minister, which no doubt will come soon. Meanwhile we wish our new Prime Minister all the success in her effort to establish a democratic and a progressive Bangladesh.

Fuelling Ovens with Forests

Eucalyptus is decidedly a wonder tree. From native Australia, it has been taken to more than 100 countries by man in the last 150 years or so. Ipil-ipil, the Philippine competitor for the same berth of champion in fast growing, has done very poorly in matching eucalyptus popularity particu-

larly in afforestation programmes. Then the tree started attracting a very hostile press. It is matter of not more than a decade. The press had nothing against it - it was only reacting to resistance campaign in many countries against the eucalyptus. Nearer home, villagers in the sub-Himalayan region, had in the last twenty years become very sensitive to the well-being of green life - thanks to the 'chipko' movement started by a villager. As a spirited fall-out of that, green life activists in India launched a powerful resist campaign against extensive eucalyptus plantation. The same was repeated in China and Thailand and in some other countries in South America. Press everywhere has lately become environment-touchy - and in no time it spotted in the lanky tree with an usually silvern skin and a pungent odour — a regular villain. Some three years back in one of the fortnightly sessions of the local Bignyan Sanskriti Parishad someone extolled the virtues of eucalyptus in the context of our need to a quick and extensive reforestation coupled with afforestation on new grounds. Up came vociferous protests. Eucalyptus, the selfish giant, takes away all the subsoil water and nutrients in the soil for itself causing a famine for crops and grasses and other endeavours in horticulture and arboriculture. This results directly in loss of crop and of pastureland. It is becoming a tabooed tree all over the globe, so said the protesters. Only Dr Abdullah Al-Muti would not go as far and said we should wait for knowledge on the subject before acting against the poor beauty which grows up to 35 feet in about five years.

Now The Daily Star, on Wednesday, has published a very balanced piece on the subject in its environment page. Its writer Peyton Johnson quotes extensively the views of Y.S.Rao, a forestry expert of world stature. Rao very evidently talks sense when he advises not to go for eucalyptus plantations near any crop or pasture land. There is no problem in having plantations of these in the hills and the forest areas, says he. Exactly there is no match for eucalyptus if you want to go lor, to quote Rao, "supplies of wood at the fastest rate so that needs within the country can bet and export revenues earned"; and for "providing denuded and degraded sites with a tree cover" that will stay and at the same time yield unending

returns in harvest terms. What is our government doing with eucalyptus? We don't know. We have seen individual eucalyptuses standing here and there in a most lonely fashion. How much firewood Bangladesh burns in a year? The answer is an astronomical sum. All our forests our being put to the domestic oven. Can eucalyptus be made to take some of the pressure off?

OR the first time in the history of Bangladesh the The Time has Arrived to elections have been won by a political party headed by a woman. Although the female leaders of both the leading Give Women a Chance parties are the political heirs of assassinated male Heads of State, it is still a measure of the enlightened attitude of the majority of our people that at

by Nasrin Sobhan

beating and other types of violence against women are

leadership of the two ladies fairly frequent. because of their gender. It is imperative that the However, the election of new government with its women to political leadership female chief executive take is no accurate index of the drastic measures to right the overall position of women in a social imbalances particularly society: the economic and in the rural areas, not least social structure of Bangladesh because the oppressed is such that many of the condition of women has a antiquated prejudices typical direct bearing on the success of many Asian societies still or failure of the family prevail to a large extent, and planning programme. girls are regarded as economic Any government that wants and social burdens, to be brought up and disposed of as

no point during the political

campaign did anyone ever

question the validity of the

quickly as possible.

There is still a deep-rooted

belief in some segments of

society that women are

second-class citizens. A woman

derives her identity from her

relation to a man, as his

daughter or wife or sister. If

she is divorced or widowed

she becomes something

approximating to a non-

person. Because she lacks a

male protector she is often

exploited, receives less

respect, and is often harassed

in the numerous petty ways,

that people adopt towards

single women. She is

encouraged, and sometimes

even forced, to give up her

share of parental inheritance

to her brothers in exchange

for a roof over her head and a

little food. She has little access

to legal recourse if she is

rural areas, where old-

fashioned social attitudes

aggravated by poverty have

made women the victims of

much abuse. There are many

cases of abandon their wives

and children. leaving them

penniless and without shelter,

and remarry. Women are

dragged to family planning

clinics, forcibly ligated to take

being offered, and then

divorced by their husbands on

the grounds that they are

barren. Cases of rape, wife-

advantage of the incentives

This is especially true of the

deprived of her rights.

to make some headway in family-planning must attempt to break the stranglehold of male domination in village society. The family planning programmes rely for their effectiveness on the wishes of the men. The men often decide whether or not to practise birth control, if at all. If daughters are born, their wives are obliged to conceive again and again until they produce a son. If they fail, their husbands can use their failure as a pretext for abandonment or divorce. Until women are accepted as being equal to men, and their rights are enforceable by law, the old system of valuing boys over girls will continue and the

they are not, is simply male exploitation and tyranny. Life in the cities carries its

own hazards for women. Till quite recently, it was a common practice to throw acid at girls who had rejected the advances of local Lotharios, part of the notion that it is the God-given right of men to force their attentions on women however unwilling. The majority of urban men still have an elementary notion of the rights of women; consequently women are sometimes harassed on the streets. Sometimes the women are penalised for serious crimes which men have

committed against them. The high cost of living and the consequent need for two incomes in many families, the numerous new avenues of work now available to women, and the general exigencies of existence in the twentieth century have made a sheltered life for women a luxury that few people can afford. Women are now working side by side with men in all sectors of the working world. Under the circumstances, it becomes more important than ever to ensure that women have the

In a situation where women are considered equal when sharing burdens and labour they should also be eligible where legal rights and privileges are concerned.

birth rate will register no fall. The slogan of "one son one daughter" should be made invalid. It should be "two children" regardless of sex. Research has shown that in terms of work hours women contribute as much, if not more than the males in the family. In a situation where women are considered equal when sharing burdens and labour they should also be eligible where legal rights and privileges are concerned. That

ability to move around without fear of molestation, and receive the rights and respect they deserve as human beings, and as equal contributing members of society.

The general attitude of women towards offences against other women is passivity; a feeling that some social evils must be tolerated. In many cases women themselves support certain of the more traditional attitudes towards women. They favour

early marriage for their daughters instead of a good education. Having survived their periods as daughters-inlaw to become mothers, they oppress in their turn their sons' wives, and encourage male dominant attitudes in their menfolk.

The bias against women is apparent even in the affluent middle classes, where the women frequently voice a preference for sons. However, when a privileged woman of the middle classes says that she wants only sons, she should know better. By her attitude she belittles herself and betrays all women. She is saying in effect that she should care of him when he is sick. and remain constant throughout their lives.

Women are daughters, who bring laughter and joy to their fathers and are the mainstay and support of their mothers. When they marry and go away they leave a void in the house that nobody else can fill. When sons marry they often draw away from their families. The ties of a daughter to her parents are so strong that although she may not be able to support them financially, she will show a love and devotion that is worth more than money.

Throughout their lives women earn every penny of

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not have been born, and that she is not entitled to the gift of life and happiness: that fortunate as she is she has little value in the eyes of society and even perhaps in those of her husband and her children.

But we must not forget who women are. Women are mothers, the most revered human beings in the world in almost all cultures. Mothers tend you in sickness and in love unconditionally, and ask nothing in return. If there were no mothers there would be no males today to dominate society.

Other women are sisters, the loyal and loving playmates of every man's childhood. Still others are wives, who for the price of three meals a day and often less, look after a man's home, bear his children, cook' and clean for his family, take

their keep with dignity and fortitude. The real burden of society is not women but prejudice.

Middle-class women can play a very important part in bringing about social change. Many of them have the advantage of education. A significant number of them hold jobs, and have travelled. They need simply to use the weapons they already possess. Within the middle-class family, women generally exert considerable influence: they must affirm in positive terms that women have value by showing solidarity with other women and by treating them with respect. They must instil into their husbands and their sons a consideration for women, not only the ones in the house, but the ones they meet everyday in the course of their daily lives.

They must stop demanding journalist.

their sons like cattle to the highest bidder. They must not try to buy husbands for their daughters, but rather encourage their daughters to seek an education and a profession. A good education gives a girl self-respect. At the same time she becomes a more desirable marriage prospect: she carries her dowry with her, so to speak.

large dowries, and auctioning

Every woman possesses the ability to improve in some small way the conditions of her own life and those of the women around her. In so doing she contributes to the general effort to establish for all women, both urban and rural, a just place in society. It is only when we can greet the birth of an infant daughter with the same pride and rejoicing that we greet the birth of a son, that we shall know that we have arrived at true emancipation.

Islam is based on the premise that both men and women are noble beings and are special to God. Both men and women have social obligations to each other. Islam exhorts men to treat women with kindness, consideration and respect. If modesty is a requirement for women, it is equally so for men, who are told in addition to cast down their eyes. The laws of Islam must be followed in new ways to ensure the protection of women's rights and dignity while guaranteeing their freedom to function effectively in contemporary society.

The new Lady Chief Executive can demonstrate that there is indeed a place for women in all sectors of Bangladesht life. If one woman can lead the country, surely other women too can contribute to its government. There is no shortage of competent qualified women in Bangladesh. They should be appointed as Ambassadors, Cabinet Ministers and Senior Executives. For the first timethey may have the chance to show what they can do. Let us hope they are provided with the opportunity.

Nasrin Sobhan who lives in Beijing with her diplomat husband is a freelance

The Man who could Oust Kaunda at the Polls

REDERICK Chiluba, 48year-old trade union leader and son of a miner, is lined up to challenge Kenneth Kaunda as President of Zambia. He has become president of the new opposition Movement for Multi-Party Democracy (MMD), after fighting for years what he calls "the dictatorship of the one-party system."

Presidential and parliamentary elections are scheduled for October and Chiluba is favoured to win. Critics have advised the 67-year-old Kaunda to retire if he is to avoid humuliation at the hands of the man he once described as a "four feet" person who cannot stand against his own six-foot frame. So far Kaunda is still saying he will stand for re-

The MMD vows to revamp the ruined economy and infrastructure and restore the trunk roads, airports, hospitals and university which were so successfully developed in the first decade of independence

after 1964. Social services in Zambia have ground to a halt and more recently the country has been hit by a cholera epidemic.

Catalysts for change came last June with food riots and an aborted four-hour coup.

Chiluba, who is chairman of the Zambia Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU), won the poll for the MMD leadership with a majority of 63 per cent against three other candidates. More than 1,000 delegates from all over Zambia took part in the convention that elected him.

Former Finance Minister Arthur Wina charged at its opening: "We intend to radically change the system of government based on one-party, one-man rule.

"We are serving notice to all as governors, political secretaries, central committee members and others that their days are numbered." Chiluba won 683 votes. Wina

came second with 208. Humphrey Mulemba, former secretary-general of the ruling United National Independence Party (UNIP), got 168, and lawyer Edward Shamwana 24.

The elections have been described as the most democratic in 18 years of one-party rule. At the UNIP congress Kaunda, as president of the party as well as the country, usually compiles a list of names

Fred Chela writes from Lusaka

Witty and diminutive union leader Frederick Chiluba has been chosen to lead the major new opposition party in Zambia. He is a long-standing fierce political opponent of Kaunda and one-party rule. When elections are held in October he could well defeat Kaunda, who, after 27 years in power, is still saying he will stand for re-election.

and presents it to the delegates for endorsement.

A western diplomat said: "This is the first time that candidates of a political party have been subjected to public scrutiny without fear of intimidation.

Wina hugged Chiluba after Lusaka lawyer Bevin Wilombe announced the result. Wina said: "Chiluba won fairly and cleanly." Shamwana, who spent nine years in jail for taking part in a coup attempt, said: Although I am vanquished, the best candidate won and this should be respected by all of us if we have to wrest power from

Mulemba said the election had been "democracy at its best," adding that he no longer wanted to belong to a party

like UNIP "which hinders the freedom of expression and has failed to democratise itself because of its oppressive nature."

Chiluba, long a political enemy of Kaunda, said: "I have campaigned for many years against the dictatorship of the one-party system. Kaunda even detained me for my opposition views-the MMD will triumph at the polls to shame UNIP."

He warned that an MMD government would not tolerate salaries from the government "because these people do absolutely nothing, so why should they be lavishly paid?"

When the results were announced newspapers were snapped up. The Zambia Daily Mail gave them the banner lead. Kaunda told the Zambia Information Services not to

tion parties, but a High Court judge had ruled that a presidential directive that the Times and Mail should not give space to the MMD was "illegal, unconstitutional and discriminatory." Michael Sata, MMD cam-

provide public address systems

to the MMD and other opposi-

paigner and a member of parliament, says:"UNIP must accept that pluralism politics has come here to stay and should treat other parties as equals."

The MMD has elected a strong 38-member national executive of intellecturals. academics and professionals Among them are three white Zambians-Simon Zukas, Guv Scott and the Rev. Stan Kristofor.

The emergence of the MMD is reminiscent of the formation of UNIP in 1959 when Kaunda led young turks and intellectuals in a breakaway from the African National Congress led by Harry Nkumbula.

Chiluba is the father of nine and as well as trade union leader is credit controller of a Swedish firm called Atlas

Copco based in Ndola, on the copperbelt. He had only a short middle secondary education and acquired a humble general certificate of education, partly in Tanzania where he worked as a clerk in a sisal

He is agile and witty and a gifted orator. He calls himself a "bullfighter" and says that "at 48 I have reached the presidantial age."

Since multi-partyism became legal early this year five other opposition parties have formed. They include the National Democratic Alliance (NADA), headed by the Rev. Joshua Mumpanshya, a former UNIP diplomat and MP; the Democratic Party (DP), led by Emmanuel Mwamba, another former diplomat and now a businessman; and the Movement for Democratic Process (MPD), headed by Chama Chakomboka, onetime ally of Vice-President Simon Kapwepwc, now dead. None of the five parties has anything like the weight of the MMD. **GEMINI NEWS**

FRED CHELA is syndication editor for the Zambia News Agency (ZANA).

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

Bureaucrats and professionals

Sir, It has been observed in recent times, particularly since the start of the recent political surge in our country, that the government bureaucrats are having real good time justifiably or not! Especially when we see that the members of the civil service are promoted in large numbers while genuine demands of many others are ignored.

There are a number of organisations such as Bangladesh Biman, Parjatan Corporation, Agricultural Dev. Corporation, Civil Aviation, Power Dev. Board, Water Dev. Board, T&T Board, Handloom Board, other industrial and commercial enterprises, etc. where professional expertise is needed most in the decision making and that is why at least 50% of the members of the concerned management boards should

be from amongst the professionals. Otherwise performance of these sectors are bound to be adversely affected. But in practice bureau-

crats are being placed in those positions of such semi-government and autonomous organisations where a large number of highly qualified, experienced and efficient professionals are getting frustrated without having their due for long. They were deprived of their legitimate rights during the autocratic regime and are being deprived even now. Despite their sincere devotion should the experts continue to remain outsiders in their own domain while 'outsiders' continue to rule over them?

Noazesh Ali Banani, Dhaka.

Drivers beware

Sir, There has been a very interesting news item the press recently. A

gentleman narrated an incident he encountered while driving through a busy road.

Well, the story goes like this. The man was driving at a normal speed, when suddenly a boy seemed to roll in front of his car and scream as if in agony. Naturally thinking that the boy had been injured, the man stopped his car, but on inspection found that the act was deliberate. The boy, a teenager or perhaps little older, then demanded compensation from the driver-cum-owner of the car for damages. He claimed that one of his legs

had sustained injury. Perhaps this is another way of extracting money from the people. So all who move around the city in cars should be careful.

Shamsher Ahmed Fakirapool, Dhaka.

Family feuds

Sir, Eleven people are said to have been burnt to death in a village in Delhi. India. The cause behind it was said to be rivalry between two tribal families.

Age old family enmity has often been the reason for many unpleasant happenings in different societies and countries. It has

taken many lives in personal attacks and also at times, in the form of mob

attacks. Who doesn't know about the tragedy of Romeo and Juliet, that also sprang from the same source, i.e, family feud. It was because of this cause alone that it became impossible for two innocent souls to be united on earth.

This teaches us the lesson, that we should never stretch any difference so farther that it goes beyond control, at one point of

As long as humans, as individual beings, are there, there will be differences, but we as mortals, and also rational beings, will have to take everything in stride.

Rahman Khondokar Kathal Bagan, Dhaka.

Nouroz and HAS calendar

Sir, Celebration of the advent of new year is in vogue in every country. But about Nouroz (new day) it is known to almost all that it is beginning of the Iranians' new year retained in observance since long before they embraced Islam. This is a fact, but the calendar has been scientifically im-

proved and developed by many Iranian Muslim scholars due to necessity and requirement of the time and the improved calendar is followed because of some points of weakness still available in Hijri-Al-Qamari calendar which I'll point later.

It is known scientifically that the movement of earth around the sun is in the elliptical form and it is also known that axis of earth is not vertical but inclined to the axis of the sun which is vertical.

In one year two times the axis of sun and earth become exactly vertical and parallel to each other, once on the 21st of March (1st of Farvardin) and second time on 23rd September (1st of Mahr) and by considering that 21st of March is the beginning of spring in Iran and many other countries, they selected it as a beginning of the new year based on the Hijrat (migration) of Prophet

Mohammad (SM). There may arise a question that what is the cause of difference between the Hijri-Al-Shamsi (solar based) and Hijri-Al-Qamari (lunar based) calendars numerically i.e.1370 and 1411 — a difference of 41 years. It is known that

H.A.Q. calendar is almost 10 days shorter than H.A.S. calendar and by calculating the many centuries passed since Hijrat of our Prophet we now arrive at the numerical difference of 41 years.

However, the main advantage of H.A.S calendar over the Al-Qamari is that the times and seasons each year coincide with the dates and months.

The celebration of Nouroz festival includes reciting the Holy Quran. visiting relatives, buying new clothes and sweets. cooking a special food with rice and fish, offering gifts to each other — especially to children, going for a trip or picnic, planting trees and flower plants etc. On many an occasion at O.I.C. the Islamic meets Republic of Iran had suggested use of H.A.S calendar instead of English calendar, but so far of no ac-

In fine I would like to say proudly that H.A.S calendar is one of the correct and perfect calendars which can be used by Muslims all over the world without any hesitation.

Seyed Rahim Ashnakhah, An Iranian student at