

Dhaka Day by Day

'It's Almost Like a Second Home'

by Aasha Mehreen Amin

As you approach the road in Baridhara named after the United Nations, the first structure that seems to dominate the scene is the huge imposing American fortress, its stance challenging, almost formidable. But just behind it is a whole new world elegance and tranquility. It is as if a piece of Nepal has somehow been transported here and where one would expect purple, snow-capped mountains. There is a stretch of green flat land surrounding the pagoda like structure that is no other than the Nepalese Embassy and Ambassadorial residence. But does one not detect a shadow of sadness, of isolation within the walls of this miniature palace? Perhaps this is because of the impending departure of its occupant — a serene unassuming man whose ready smile reflects the humility that is so characteristic of people as gentle and peace-loving as the Nepalese.

To this he replied, "We are passing through a very interesting phase of evaluation in our political history and here I mean both Nepal and Bangladesh. In the case of Nepal, this transition has been, on the whole, a peaceful one. No doubt that a few valuable lives have been lost during the movement but I think the media has exaggerated the number. We should also give credit to His Majesty, the King, for cooperating with the people to promulgate a new constitution that guarantees fundamental rights. After 30 years a multiparty system of parliamentary government has been restored that is accountable to the people. Overall, the atmosphere is very free and congenial. There is freedom of the press and there is no attempt to muzzle or gag the feelings of the people.

Having been so closely connected to SAARC activities Professor Lohani expressed his opti-



Dr. Mahan P. Lohani, the outgoing Nepalese Ambassador with the magnificent Embassy building and his residence in the backdrop. — Star photo

This unique structure was built in 1985 upon the decision of His Majesty King Virendra to build all foreign missions with Nepalese architectural framework. His Excellency Dr. Mahan P. Lohani had come to Dhaka at that time as a member of the Royal Entourage for the first SAARC summit and so was able to be present at the inaugural ceremony of the embassy buildings. Interestingly enough, the Nepalese King was curious to know whether the sloping tiled roofs of the buildings were suitable for the long monsoons of Bangladesh. In the ambassador's opinion the relentless winds and incessant rains of this country cause considerable damage to the tiles after blowing them away.

The structure, designed by a famous architect Ranjan Shaha, is reminiscent of the grand Government Secretariat — Singha Darbar in Kathmandu. Before 1973, when a large part of it was destroyed by fire, the 'darbar' had more than five hundred rooms and housed most of the ministries of Nepal.

In an interview with ambassador I was surprised to find out that apart from being a diplomat, he was also a University Professor of English Literature. When asked how he entered the diplomatic service he said that after he had returned from New York where he was attached to the Nepalese mission at the UN, he started to get involved in SAARC activities while he was teaching at the University of Nepal. It was at that time that Professor Lohani attended two non-alignment summits in New Delhi and Zimbabwe, after which he has attended all SAARC summits — in Dhaka, Bangalore, Kathmandu and Islamabad.

In the four years Professor Lohani has lived in this country with his wife and two daughters, he has done much to develop friendly relations between Nepal and Bangladesh. "The job that keeps me busy", he said, "is helping the Nepalese students who come to Bangladesh for higher studies. I am very grateful to the government of Bangladesh for providing educational facilities for our students." He further added that of the 200 to 250 Nepalese students studying in Bangladesh, many of them have come for under graduate and post graduate education in technical fields such as medicine and engineering. There are Nepalese students in Rajshahi, Sylhet, Khulna, Rangpur, Chittagong and of course, Dhaka. These students have to go outside Nepal to continue their education because, the ambassador said, the seats at the Nepalese universities were very limited.

While munching on delicious Nepalese cheese balls and cakes I asked His Excellency to comment on Nepal's transition from a monarchial to democratic form of government.

mism regarding the future of this organisation although it has been criticized as being ineffective in producing concrete results.

One of the most positive aspects of the annual meetings of SAARC he said, is that they give South Asian leaders the opportunity to meet informally in addition to discussing issues on a formal platform. Sometimes contentious bilateral problems that cannot be discussed under the SAARC Charter, can be brought up during the second day retreat of the three-day summit, which provides an excellent carefree atmosphere for such issues to be resolved. Moreover, new ideas come up during these informal exchanges. In the last ministerial meeting, for example, the general feeling was that it was high time that SAARC concentrated on substantive issues to improve the lot of the people in SAARC countries. There was also consensus on reducing formalities and making SAARC "a business like affair."

In the forthcoming SAARC summit, the ambassador said that the leaders will target their discussion on core areas such as trade, industry and the financial sector. According to Professor Lohani, this is an encouraging development since it will affect the life of the common man. In the future he thinks that SAARC should encourage contacts between people at all levels — between intellectuals, educationists, artists etc. This will reinforce a sense of South Asian identity and consciousness — an idea the Professor Lohani recognized, was originally a brain wave of the late president Ziaur Rahman.

As far as relations between the two countries are concerned, Professor Lohani said that politically they were very good although there was room for improvement in the economic front since so far Nepal has not been able to export anything substantial to Bangladesh.

In his free time the ambassador finds relaxation in reading, listening to classical music and spending time with his family.

When asked if he had any regrets as he prepared to leave this country he said that he had none, although he will definitely miss Bangladesh. "It is almost like a second home", he said, "I have so many friends from all sorts of professions — journalism, politics, business, education etc. Perhaps I shall have the opportunity to visit Bangladesh as a private citizen. This is all the more probable since his two daughters intend to continue their higher education in Bangladesh. Such a visit, I am sure, would be more than welcome for a warm hearted and charming person as His Excellency.

What's on today . . .

Seminar on drug abuse

A seminar titled 'Drug abuse is a threat to the world peace' will be held today (Saturday) at 4.30 at Hotel Purbani.

Organised by Bangladesh Inter-Religious Brotherhood Association the seminar is expected to be attended by Prof Badruddoza Choudhury as chief guest and the DG of the Department of Narcotics Control A K M Mahub-un-Nabi as the special guest.

Tamuddon-e-Majlish

Tamuddon-e-Majlish has arranged a discussion meeting to be followed by a cultural function at the National Book Centre auditorium in the city today (Saturday) at 4 pm in observance of the Eid-e-Miladun Nabi.

Principal Dewan Mohammad Azraf will chair the meeting while former Justice Abdur Rahman Choudhury will attend the function as chief guest. Among others to address the meeting are: Prof Shehed Ali, Dr Kazi Deen Mohammad, Akhter-ul-Alam, P A Nazir and Khandaker Habibur Rahman.

. . . and tomorrow

JP press conference

Jatiya Party Acting Chairman Mizanur Rahman, MP, has convened a press conference tomorrow (Sunday) at 4 pm at the party office at Gulshan.

The JP Acting Chairman will deliver his speech on the latest political situation of the country. Party Secretary General Shah Moazzem Hossain and Senior Vice-Chairman Moudud Ahmed will also attend the conference.

Buddhists' Madhu Purnima

Bangladesh Buddhists Federation has planned day-long programmes to be held at the International Buddha Bihar at Badda in the city tomorrow (Sunday) in observance of Madhu Purnima, one of the significant religious festivals of the Buddhist community.

The programmes are: Hoisting national and federation flags atop the Bihar building at 6 am, breakfast by the Bhikkhu Sangha at 7 am, Buddha Puja and 'Padhu Dan' at 10 am, a discussion meeting on significance of Madhu Purnima and the life of Gautam Buddha, the founder of the religion, at 4 pm, special payers at 6.30 pm and 'Buddha kirtan' at 7.30 pm.

Fulkunri Asar programme

Fulkunri Asar, a national organisation of the children and juvenile, has chalked out programmes to observe 'Eid-e-Miladun Nabi' tomorrow (Sunday) at the Shishu Academy premises in the city.

The programmes beginning at 2.30 pm, include presentation of haamd, naat, Islamic songs, poetry and hymns by the children and juvenile. Besides, an exhibition of books, flowers and attractive toys will also take place at the same venue.

Jatiya Sangsad Speaker Abdur Rahman Biswas will open the day's programmes as chief guest while noted scientist Prof S Inna Ali will distribute prizes among the winners of a recent contest on this occasion. The Dainik Janata Editor Saunallah Noori will chair the opening session.

HERE and THERE

Imam Khomeini Memorial Council

A meeting of Imam Khomeini Memorial Council on Thursday decided to observe the 90th birth anniversary of Imam Khomeini on September 24.

The meeting also extended the advisory and executive committee and included Dr Azhar Ali as member of advisory council and Prof Dr Mofaruz Sattar and Belactul Kabir as members of executive committee.

Salimullah Medical College students

The students of Sir Salimullah Medical College on Thursday in a meeting demanded the holding of the 3rd professional MBBS examination according to schedule.

The meeting urged all the students to remain alert against any propaganda and get prepared for the examination scheduled on September 29. Speakers at the meeting said that a certain quarter of students are now opting for delaying the examination. The meeting condemned the silence of the authority in facing the mis-doers.

Chhatra Union

Speakers at the Chhatra Union Demra (West) thana conference on Friday at Dolairpar demanded the reopening of all the closed educational institutions immediately.

The conference presided over by student leader Shibu Sarkar viewed that the closure of the institutions is making the lives of the students uncertain. The speakers demanded the materialisation of the 10-point demand of the students and elimination of terrorism from the campus.

Krishak Sramik Mukti Andolon

Speakers at an emergency meeting of Krishak Sramik Mukti Andolon on Friday said the flood situation in the northern part of the country has taken a serious turn due to lack of food, drinking water and medicine.

The meeting, presided over by the president of the party Md Sadek, said the government should immediately take steps to supply adequate food and other relief to the flood victims.

Paritosh takes oath

Paritosh Chakrabarty an MP-elect from Rangpur-2, took oath of office as a Member of Parliament at the Speaker's chamber in Sangsad Bhavan Thursday morning. Speaker Abdur Rahman Biswas administered the oath, said a press release. Paritosh was elected to the Jatiya Sangsad in by-elections on September 11.

Parties greet Khaleda Zia

By Staff Correspondent

Different political parties and organisations on Friday congratulated Begum Khaleda Zia on her assumption of the office of the Prime Minister.

The president of Bangladesh Muslim League, Muhammad Ayeuddin, congratulated the Prime Minister and hoped that her leadership would lead the country to prosperity.

The chairman of Janadal, Khandaker Mahatab Uddin and secretary general Md Shamshad in a statement congratulated Begum Khaleda Zia and the members of the new cabinet.

Justice Abdur Rahman Chowdhury, chairman of Liberty Forum, in a statement said democracy had taken an institutional shape after turbulent and hazardous journey to a long-cherished goal of freedom, democracy and rule of law.

The chairman of National Republican Party, Dr Md Zahir Khan in a statement congratulated the Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and hoped that her government would be sincere in materialising the aspirations of the people.

Rashed Khan Menon MP, General Secretary of Bangladesher Workers' Party, welcomed the people and hoped that the repeal of black laws and proper practice and development of democracy would be possible through parliamentary democracy according to the expectations of the people.

He hoped that the cabinet would be sincere to save the educational institutions from terrorism and indiscipline.

Comrade Dilip Barua, General Secretary of Bangladesh Samyabadi Dal, greeted Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia on her being the head of the parliamentary government and demanded that the commitment on the agriculture loan be fulfilled.

Noor Alam Ziku and Prof Humayun Kabir Hiru, President and General Secretary of Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) and Sheikh Asad, head of the Jatiya Janata Party, also congratulated the Prime Minister.

In a statement, the adviser, the president and the general secretary of Bangladesh Ex-soldiers Association Shamsul Haq Bhuiyan, M A Khaleq and Humayun Kabir welcomed the new head of the government Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia. The leaders also thanked

the people for giving 'yes' vote in last Sunday's referendum. The DUCSU vice-president and the general secretary Amanullah Aman and Khairul Kabir Khokan in a statement welcomed the country's switchover to parliamentary democracy and congratulated the new head of the government, Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia, and her Council of Ministers.

The DUCSU leaders urged the people of all walks of life to cooperate with the democratically elected government under the leadership of Begum Khaleda Zia. They hoped that the practice of democracy would continue in all strata of the state under the leadership of the democratic government and that the political parties would uphold the democratic values and norms through their activities.

In another statement the JUCSU VP and the GS Maniruzzaman Manir and Rashedul Hasan Mahmud and Jahangirnagar unit of JCD also welcomed the new head of the government, Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia, and hoped that under her leadership the

dream of Shaheed President, Ziaur Rahman would be implemented.

Bangladesh Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) Dhaka city unit president and the general secretary Abul-Khair Bhuiyan and Nasiruddin Pintu in a statement also welcomed the country's switchover to parliamentary democracy under the leadership of Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia.

Kotwali Thana unit of Bangladesh Nationalist Party welcomed Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia for taking oath as the head of government under parliamentary system of government.

A spontaneous meeting of the Kotwali Thana unit of BNP held at its office at English Road also welcomed the new Council of Ministers headed by Begum Zia.

Mohammad Mosharraf Hossain, president of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) Friday greeted Begum Khaleda Zia on her assumption of the office of the Prime Minister of the country.

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19 lucky for Khaleda!

Is number 19 bearing all the luck for Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia? "I will not say anything, because it is political", astrologer Mahajatak told UNB over telephone Thursday when he was asked to comment on it.

But it seems that the dates bearing number 19 have already proved auspicious for Khaleda Zia on a number of occasions.

Thursday, September 19, 1991, Khaleda Zia took oath as the de jure Prime Minister of the country.

The day she was declared the country's first woman Prime Minister was March 19, 1991. She was, however, sworn in a day later.

Her birthday is on August 19, 1945, according to official life-sketch released soon after she took over Prime Minister's office.

Mahajatak's earlier predictions on the fate of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi came true.

'Exaggerated, motivated news confuse readers'

Speaker of the Jatiya Sangsad Abdur Rahman Biswas said in Dhaka Friday that the survival of a newspaper depended on its quality and unprejudiced and objective journalism, reports BSS.

"The newspapers of any democratic country must have constructive outlook and provide proper guideline in any critical juncture of the nation," the Speaker said while addressing a function arranged to mark the 10th year of publication of the weekly 'Durbini' as the chief guest at the auditorium of the Press Institute of Bangladesh (PIB) in Dhaka.

Presided over by Shefayetullah Patwari, Editor of the Durbini, the function was also addressed, among others, by M K Khayer, Assistant Director of PIB, Lion Hazi Shahabuddin, Advisor of the weekly, Principal Saifiq Ahmed and Mustafa Jabbar.

Biswas said exaggerated and motivated news confused the

readers and did not bring any welfare to the nation.

He stressed the need for the country's mass education and said without raising the literacy rate, the member of newspaper readers would not rise appreciably.

He said after ousting the autocratic regime an accountable and sovereign parliamentary government had now been established in the country. The present government believed that the newspapers had every right to focus all injustices, wrong-doings and malpractices of the country through their mighty pens, he added.

The Speaker noted that the journalists would have to do it in a responsible and objective manner.

He expressed his firm optimism that the Weekly Durbini would be turned into a daily one after ten years, if it could continue its best efforts to fulfill its mission.