tees and other financial sup-

The Paily Star

Dhaka, Tuesday, January 21, 1992

Don't Bungle the Gas and Oil Chance

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia on Saturday laid the foundation of the gas dehydration, fractionation and liquefaction complex, the pivot of the Second Gas Development Project, at Kailashtila, Golapganj. If everything goes well with the project, this has the promise of becoming a turning point in the nation's economy.

The Prime Minister, speaking on the occasion, has assured a public meeting of broadbasing the gas network and making available in the next few years 50 per cent more gas than at present for inland consumption. This would of course go a long way in meeting the energy demands, specially in the households, of the nation. And this will, by the same token, cut on in commensurate measure, the destruction of our green life wealth by way of the ovens and kilns. This, however, is not going to be an unmixed blessing altogether. First, supplying more gas to meterless ovens is going to end up in colossal wastage of the most precious of our gifts of nature. This we can hardly afford — and there is no sign of domestic gas supply being metered at the consumer's end. It will simply be foolish to go for more connections before we can put the meters in the homes.

And then burning gas in the kitchen oven is possibly the most uneconomic use of it. Even if we sell a part of what we mine, it would bring in. in terms of foreign cash, many times worth what we burn in our kitchens. India has long been in the line for buying as much as we can spare and build the pipelines necessary for taking the supply which is well worth exploring. There is an eager demand for liquefied Bangladesh gas in many industrialised nations, topped possibly by Japan which again presents a very rewarding prospect. Our economists can do a good work of how much to sell and how much to burn ourselves to the best interest of our national economy. Care should be taken that, unlike the practices of the autocratic times, considerations of personal gain and kickbacks - to high-perched ones do not override national interest.

We have managed to mismanage our first oil strike. A lot of controversy now shrouds Haripur oil and no one seems to know the best way out of it. The Kafco thing has yet to physically touch our gas — be it for the good or bad of our nation. Who doesn't know the best use for gas would be to go for the petro-chemicals? Bangladesh should have been by this time trying seriously for exploring and mobilising the financial and technical wherewithals needed to build as large a series of petro-chemical complexes as an economic exploitation of our gas reserves would permit. We are sorry to note that no noticeable headway has so far been made in this area.

Bangladesh was once supposed to be a poor ungifted land condemned to be tied to making the mat of its yearly alluvial deposits. Now the situation has changed. We have one of the purest natural gases in all world — and a lot of it. And we have oil too. There are all the chances that we will be hitting more oil spots in the near future. Building a happy and true Sonar Bangla will depend much on the judicious handling of these. Let us not bungle this.

Chancellor Ustinov

Peter Ustinov, the one and only, has been chosen the Chancellor of the prestigious Durham University from a field of 60 nominees. Durham is a toddler compared to the venerable ones situated further south on two fairy-tale rivers. But it is enough old to have been the alma mater to Peter's great-grand parents only if they were not Russians and if only they could afford to go into high education. Peter, incidentally, didn't or couldn't make it.

University honours for those who haven't gone far into the academies should, for the Bengalees, recall the hullabaloo created at the time of Calcutta University inviting Rabindranath Tagore to give a series of lectures. That Tagore was not even a matriculate was held to have disqualified him for the job. At the Dhaka University too there was much hoichot when, in the absence of a VC, its treasurer came to fill in the gap, perfectly according to rules. Incidentally the treasurer, Khwaja Shahabuddin to wit, was not known to have ever been a university man - and many a one, jealous of the lettered man's rights and sensitivities, rose against DU having the Khwaja as VC. But gone are those days of academics forming a hermetic world of elitism all of their own.

Ustinov's coming to head a university cannot but remind one of the tradition of the academic world's taboo of the performing artist. No performing artist came to occupy a high social perch other than in the cocoon of his own art. Which was never the case with lawyers and scientists, educationists and other eggheads who are often enough named to preside over sessions of music or to inaugurate art shows or be chiefs of set-ups of painters and dancers and musicians. Padevewski, the Polish premier between the two world wars and the greatest pianist of his time, was but an exception.

However, in the subcontinent there is all kinds of freak things happening all the time. Here matinee idols of the order of NTR and MGR become hard-to-dislodge chief ministers, perhaps in the tradition of Baj Bahadur of Malwa and Raja Man Singh and Queen Mriganayani of Gwalior—the Dhrupad stalwarts who were rulers of their realms. Or Sultan Ibrahim Adil Shah Nauras of

These barrier-making taboos were all razed to nothing in the revolutionary Soviets of Lenin. Shining records in formal education could then never beat down true merit and quality of the ones grooming themselves through other means. And our great poet Tagore bulldozed these barriers and taboos as no one has done before or since. He acted and danced even as he joined issue with Mahatma Gandhi or renounced his knighthood.

Peter is a great actor and a dear dear character.

How we wish we had a like of him to head one omore of our own universities!

Collapse of Shamir Government Creates Peace Opportunity

question both sides had to make some compromises. Palestinians succeeded in having established a separate subcommittee of the Palestinian delegation with the token presence of two Jordanians. which will negotiate separately. This seems to be the first step towards having separate or even independent Palestinian delegation at some stage of the negotiations. One may see it as a procedural matter but actually the effort leads to establishing some form of separate identity for the Palestinians, Israel did not give in totally, it succeeded in having some link with the Jordanians thus still keeping the character of a combined delegation. This only shows how difficult and sensitive the talks are: only time and patience may yield some positive results. The signs are encouraging as Shamir government has collapsed. Let there be new alignments.

Palestinian Self-rule

The Palestinians have put forward their proposals on self-rule in the occupied territories. The salient features as reported are: (i) 180-member Palestinian Assembly to be elected under the UN supervision. (ii) Executive Council. (iii) Israeli army to withdraw to an agreed area along the border. (iv) establishment of internal Palestinian forces for law and order purposes: (v) freeze on Israeli settlement etc. The proposals fall short of

an independent Palestinian state. Any way, this seems to be the Palestinians' negotiating

Autonomy issue: Crisis in Israel

Palestinian autonomy as per 1978 Camp David provisions has not been made public. Israel, however, indicated that it was prepared to discuss the autonomy issue with the Palestinian delegation. Undou-

than half a dozen elected parliament members, which kept Shamir's Likud Party with 59 seats in power points to a major flaw in the parliamentary democratic process. The question arises how far democracy is effective - how far people's views are réflected in running a country in such a situation. Indeed, these two parties with barely six seats used to control much of politics in Israel; the last budget crisis in Israel in which Shamir had to succumb to ul-

TELE ELICION DO THELLICOE

Muslehuddin Ahmad

bredly, the Israeli proposal would be something like garbage collection autonomy as Israel would not agree to discuss the question of Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories which is the main demand of the Palestinians However, the very news that Israel would discuss Palestinian autonomy in the peace talk created serious polittical crisis in Israel. The two ultra-rightist parties have withdrawn their parliamentary support for Shamir's government leading to its collapse. Prime Minister Shamir said even as a caretaker government he would pursue the peace talk.

The present political crisis in Israel due to the actions of two small parties with less tra-rightists' pressure is a

Chance for Israelis to give verdict

The political crisis in Israel and the fall of Shamir government leading to an early election - may be in May June would enable the Israeli people to give their verdict on the question of peace with their Arab neighbours and particularly with Palestinians. This time they will have to sertously address this issue - the issue on which will depend their future - the future of Palestinian people and the Arab world and indeed the peace in the region.

Obviously both the major parties Likud and Labour will

two major issues - (i) temporary peace with limited autonomy to the Palestinians and (ii) the permanent peace through exchange of occupied land. As it seems, the Labour Party would go for exchange of land for peace basing the argument that permanent peace with Arabs will bring not only recognition of Israel but also collaboration in the economic field giving Israel access to the water and other resources. But the Likud Party may go for limited autonomy as per Camp David provisions which may seem attractive to many Israelis, It is, however, not sure whether Likud would put the item, freeze on settlement, in the occupied territories in the election manifesto. Unless there is positive movement on this, peace talk would stail. Much would depend on whether Labour and Peace Now Movement in Israel could put their election efforts together and make the Israelis prepared for permanent peace which can not be achieved without exchange of occupied land. Thus the fall of Shamir government has created an opportunity for the peace in the region.

have to go to the people with

The role of the US

The US will have to play a very positive role in shaping the future political course in Israel. It should now openly declare its firmness on achieving permanent peace in the region and state clearly that there will be no loan guaran-

port unless Israel agrees on immediate freeze on settlement. Here Russia and other, states of the old Soviet Union can play positive role by threatening to impose restrictions on Jewish immigration unless there is definite announcement on freeze on settlement. The US should continue to insist on exchange of land for peace and persuade both the major political parties to put "exchange of land for peace" in their election manifesto. It will be no interference in the internal polities of Israel as the US is committed to peace and "exchange of land" is their open policy and only this can lead to peace in the region. This is a big chance for the US to push Israel towards peace the field is now open. This will be an opportunity for the other countries friendly to Israel and particularly the EC to exert influence on the Israeli politicians to go for peace commitment and obtain verdict from the Israeli people. Now Israeli people are likely to be more interested in peace than their

Let the UN play its role : With the change in the global power balance it has become essential to involve the major powers and particularly the EC directly into the peace process with the ultimate aim of having the final peace settlement under the auspices of the UN. While a war is fought under the auspices of the UN, all big powers talk of strengthening the UN and indeed a summit is being organised for the purpose, it seems ridiculous to keep the UN out of such an important peace talk which is indeed taking place under the UN resolutions 242 and 338.

Mexico Finally Recognises the Catholic Church

John Ross writes from Mexico City

N directions from President Carlos Salinas, Mexico has discarded two constitutional underpinnings of its eight-decade old revolution: agrarian reform and official ostracism of the Roman Catholic Church.

FTER a delay of nearly

a week the M-East

peace talks started on

January 14, 1992 in

Washington. The Palestinians

scored their first success as

the UN Security Council

unanimously condemned the

expulsion order by the Israeli

government on 14 Palestinian

activists in the occupied terri-

tories. The US remained firm

on the issue which encouraged

the Palestinians to rejoin the

peace talk in Washington

Israel, after having expressed

its dissatisfaction over

Washington's handling of the

case in the Security Council.

decided to move ahead with

the talk as it rightly thought

that any further bitterness

with Washington will only risk

its loan guarantee issue which

is likely to come up soon for

consideration of the Congress.

Washington did well by re-

maining firm on Israel as

otherwise peace talk would

have been in jeopardy.

Similarly on the loan guarantee

too Washington should firmly

link it with freeze on Israeli

settlement in the occupied

territories, which it always felt

was an "obstacle to peace."

Even if Israel gives commit-

ment not to use loan guaran-

teed fund for settlement pur-

pose, Washington should not

fall into the trap as the past

records show that such funds

were diverted directly or indi-

rectly for settlement purposes

and more easily the loan funds

releases domestic resources

for building settlements.

Settlement issue will be the

main topic in the next round

third round has not only

sorted out the procedural

problems with the Palestinians

but also indicated positive

movement towards some sub-

stantive issues. On procedure

Despite initial set-back the

of talks.

By a lopsided vote, the legislature, which is dominated 3-to-1 by the long-ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), finally passed radical measures altering the regulation of rural production units (ejidos) and providing for privatisation of the nation's farmland.

Six days later, Congress overwhelmingly approved constitutional recognition of the Roman Catholic Church, to which 91 per cent of all Mexicans belong. The Church has been relegated to outlaw status since enactment of a 1917 revolutionary constitution, which included five articles punishing the hierarchy for longstanding intimacies with the overthrown oligarchy.

For seven decades the Church has had no legal standing. Its clergy have been denied all political rights, a hangover from a previous constitutional effort, which declared priests to be citizens of the Vatican.

One immediate result of the constitutional change will be resumption of diplomatic relations with the Vatican. They were broken off in the bloody aftermath of the revolution.

Recognition of the Church is a dramatic turnaround for Mexico's federal government, whose troops defeated a Catholic resistance during a five-year post-revolutionary guerrilla war waged from 1924 to 1929. The conflict was ignited by the assassination by radical Catholics of President Alvaro Obregon. Churches were burnt and violence raged

Mexico has ended decades of official animosity towards the Roman Catholic Church, to which 91 per cent of its citizens belong. The move is an about-face by the government party and could boost the main opposition parties, based mainly in the south. Nevertheless, at least one churchman believes conflict over peasants' right may still pit some priests against state authorities.

Worldwide: 1-5bn (32 % of world population) † Catholics: 884m (59% of Christian total) † Protestants: 293m (19-5%) † Orthodox: 131m (8-7%) **Source: World Christian Encyclopaedia* **The Christian world The Christian Section (3-3%) **The Christian world The Christian Encyclopaedia* **The Christian World The Christian World The Christian Encyclopaedia* **The Christian World

throughout central Mexico. Historians calculate that 30,000 died.

The 460-to-22 vote on December 18 in favour of recognising the Church represents a long-expected rapprochement between the Catholic hierarchy and a state managed for 62 years by the PRI

In a rare consensus, the right-of-centre National Action

Party (PAN) and the left-ofcentre Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) joined PRI deputies in approving the revi-

Nonetheless, a score of anti-clerical deputies known as Jacobins rushed the podium during the vote in the lower house, chanting the name of Benito Juarez, who had at one time declared all priests to be citizens of the Vatican. A

PRI senator stalked out on the vote in the upper chamber.

Also reported disaffected by the amendments were Protestant churches which felt the measures were designed to win Roman Catholic support for the government at their expense. Many mainline and evangelical Protestant churches first gained leverage in Mexico as a government-promoted counterbalance to Catholic dominance, particularly in rural areas.

Salinas' constitutional revisions were first presented to an assembly of Catholic bishops at Los Pinos, the presidential residence, on December 11 the eve of the celebration of the miracle of the Virgin of Guadalupe, an important Mexican religious holiday. One amendment designates

One amendment designates the Church as a "religious association" with full property rights, while keeping colonial church structures confiscated after the revolution in government hands.

Another allows Catholics and all other religious groups to workshop publicly. Prohibitions on public worship have rarely been enforced. The government has twice welcomed the Pope to Mexico and encouraged him to lead massive outdoor religious rallies.

Another unenforced prohibition ended by the amendments is a restriction on religious-run education. Mexico's elite have been educated in Spanish colonial days, and the revolution was ineffective in closing them. Indeed, many senior officials, including Salinas predecessor Miguel de la Madrid, are graduates of Catholic schools.

The reforms also give the clergy the right to vote and even to run for public office — provided they retire from their religious functions five years

Priests and nuns are numerically insignificant — the nation has fewer than 20,000 — but opposition parties could benefit by endorsement from prominent clergymen. The PAN is thought to have strong support among bishops in Mexico's north, where Church has long confronted the PRI over voter fraud.

In the impoverished south, where left-leaning liberation theologists have influence, the PRD will probably make gains. Militant priests such as Joel Padron, recently released from jail after being charged with directing peasants to occupy lands, are reported to have embraced the party.

The amendments free the church to express political opinions without fear of retaliation, although the Catholic hierarchy has been an increasingly vocal force in recent electoral squabbles anyway.

In August mid-term elections, bishops repeatedly urged voters to take part, warned of fraud, and were prompt to denounce irregularities in disputed gubernatorial
elections in Guanajuato and
San Luis Potosi states. The revisions give the Church access
to free radio and television
time, greatly helping the bishops to deliver political messages.

It has been suggested that recognition of the Church by the Mexican state would allow a not always sympathetic Council of Bishops to discipline revolutionary-minded clergy in southern states.

But initial reactions from liberation theologists have been mixed. Sergio Mendez Arceo, the 82-year-old "Red" Bishop Emeritus of Cuernavaca, who attended the Los Pinos meeting, wrote in the critical weekly Proceso that he was reminded of a similar occasion in 1929, when Benito Mussolini wined and dined the Italian hierarchy as enticement for their political support. The bishop also rued breaking bread with a President who had won office through a tainted vote.

Still. Mendez Arceo called the revision "the beginning of a new era," recalling that he himself had fought for an endto constitutional prohibitions.

In the southern city of San Cristobal de las Casas, embattled Bishop Samuel Ruiz also saluted the new arrangement between church and state but was preoccupied by difficulties with the state.

Having just won the release

Having just won the release of Padron, Ruiz said the governor was threatening to lock up other activist clergy. He wrote in his Christmas message: "There are new trials ahead for us in the coming year."

- GEMINI NEWS

JOHN ROSS is an American journalist and poet based in Mexico City.

linghe believe.

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.

Medical University

Sir. In a news item in your paper dated January 15 it was stated that the Health and Family Welfare Minister Chowdhury Kamal Ibne Yusuf, while inaugurating the Third National Conference and Ibrahim Memorial Lecture of the Association of Physicians of Bangladesh on January 14 announced that the Government would soon set up a Medical University in the country. In this connection a few submissions are made for kind considered.

We are presently finding it difficult to provide adequate number of experienced teachers in the institutions such as Rangpur and Barisal Medical Colleges. The facility for the treatment of cancer patients in the country is meagre. Those facilities that were available in the late sixties in the then West Pakistan is not available here even now. At that time there was already a full-fledged Cancer Institute in Karachi apart from the facilities that

sideration of the Government.

were available in all the Medical Colleges there. We do have a 'Pangu' Hospital, but we are yet to have an Institute of Physiotherapy for manning the different hospitals in the coun-

In this connection the four Bangladesh Institutes of Technology may be mentioned. The idea at the time was to have highly developed institutes like those as the I.I.T in India, and M.I.T/Cal Tech in the USA. But we are yet to see basic improvements in these Institutes in terms of staffing, laboratory and library facilities, etc.

the human resources that will be required for the future Medical University. It is suggested that we may first train a large number of doctors who would be competent to man the Medical Colleges of the country as well as the Medical University. The Medical University as proposed is a high visibility project and would not be of much benefit

Before we embark on a uni-

to the country and its people. We may first of all strengthen and consolidate the existing Medical Colleges and the Post Graduate Medical Institute. Before embarking on the opening of more Medical Colleges we should first have the required number of highly qualified teachers.

The country's 'basic need' in the health sector is a 'top priority' necessity, keeping in view the target of 'health for all' by the year 2000.

Shahabuddin Mahtab Honorary Director, Bangladesh Institute of Law and International Affairs, Dhaka.

Chaos and Vandalism

Sir. The relatively small incident, in which some transport workers beat up a press photographer of The Daily Star and the frank confession of the district police chief of his limitations, have given my conscience a big jolt, and I have decided to resume occasional writing, which I had suspended several months ago out of sheer exasperation.

Although I have been reading with great pleasure The Daily Star regularly from the very first day of its birth, and admiring its objective and nonnartisan reporting as well as its high journalistic standard. this is my first letter to you for publication. In the total chaos and vandalism which have gripped the entire nation, and due to the nonchalant line or least resistance of those in authority, no one - excluding, ofcourse, those with armed guards — has the slightest sense of security of life, honour or property, whether inside the house or out in the streets. in private or public transports or anywhere. Where is the end to this unprecedented insecu-

Do we have to believe that the political government voted to power by the people after so much of sacrifice over so long a time, is so incompetent that it cannot give even the guidelines for bringing back some semblance of normalcy in the day-to-day life of the people? Do we have to believe that the permanent administration, which did not fail to suppress by means fair or foul, the people's uprising against a despotic rule for such a long time, has become so helpless, so gutless, so spineless, under a government of the people in power?

We do not want to believe any of these presumptions. We would rather believe that the political party in power can still reverse the decaying process by demonstrating a strong and sincere political wi! to of life. Once such a strong and sincere political will is manifest beyond any shadow of doubt, the reversal of the decaying process will not be too difficult. If guidelines and techniques of action are wanting, there are surely some people with proven experience of innovative and perfectly lawful techniques for preventing a total disaster. And such service should be available voluntarily, without position, power or remuneration.

M A Haque Tikatooly, Dhaka.

Retirement age

paper I read news of retirement of Central Secretaries in different Ministries, Ambassadors, High Commissioners and high officials in corporations and major autonomous bodies. It is reported that these officers have retired on reaching the age of 57 years.

We all know that there is a dearth of able and efficient officers in the country. All these officers who are being retired everyday on reaching the age of 57 are members of erstwhile Civil Service of Pakistan, Foreign Service of Pakistan and other Senior Services who had received the best training in Civil Service Academy and qualified from well known uni-

specialised schools abroad. It is said that when the age of retirement in other countries is around 65, we have to retire these officers automatically on reaching the age of 57 when we know fully well that we do not have sufficient good officers of the same calibre today.

Personally I strongly feel that we should reconsider utilising the services of these persons in the interest of the nation and treat each case on merit rather than automatically retiring them. After all the government with limited resources had spent a lot of money on their career, and so why not utilize their knowledge and services to the advantage of the country when they are still in good health. sound mind and can work for a more number of years.

still do not foresee a good academy to train and bring out good officers who can serve the country best in different areas of the government. May I, therefore, appeal to the highest authority in the country to reconsider the issue and to treat each case on merit and utilize the services of the few good and efficient officers that we have in the country until such time we have good replacements.

The country is short of effi-

cient and good officers and we

Ras 1 Nizam