

Collapse of Shamir Government Creates Peace Opportunity

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 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...

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...

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 Kacfo thing has yet to physically touch our gas — be it for the good or bad of our nation...

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...

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...

University honours for those who haven't gone far into the academics should, for the Bengalees, recall the hallelujah 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...

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...

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...

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...

Peter is a great actor and a dear dear character. How we wish we had a like of him to head one of more of our own universities!

AFTER 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 territories...

Washington did well by remaining 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...

Despite initial set-back the third round has not only sorted out the procedural problems with the Palestinians but also indicated positive movement towards some substantive issues. On procedure

question both sides had to make some compromises. Palestinians succeeded in having established a separate sub-committee 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...

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...

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

Israeli proposal on 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. Undoubtedly, 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...

SPOTLIGHT ON MIDDLE EAST Muslehuddin Ahmad

tra-rightists' pressure is a good example. 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...

have to go to the people with 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...

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-

tees and other financial support 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...

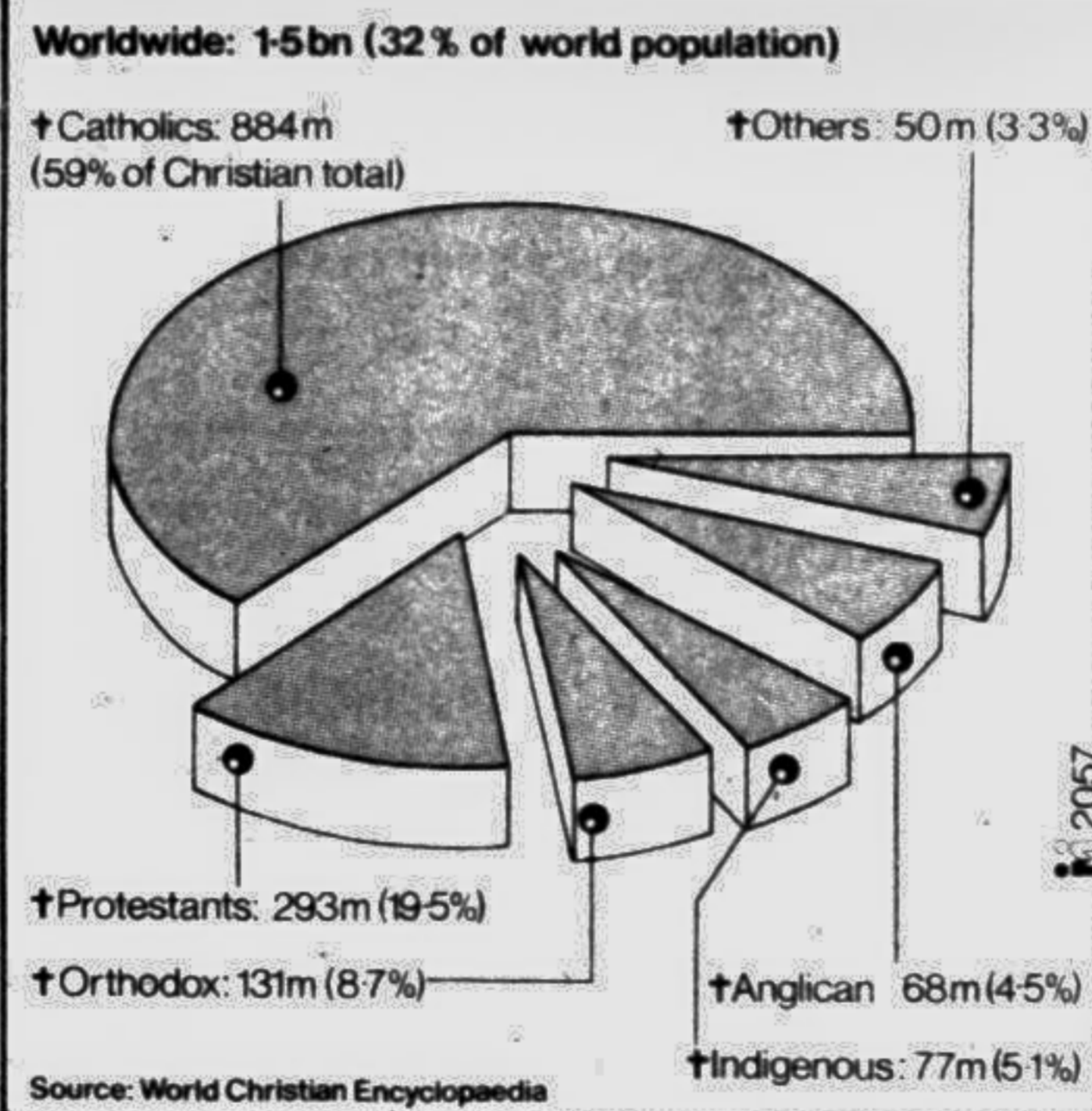
Let the UN play its role: With the change in the global power balance it has become essential to involve the major powers and particularly the EC directly into the peace process with the ultimate aim of having the final peace settlement under the auspices of the UN. While a war is fought under the auspices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

Mexico Finally Recognises the Catholic Church

John Ross writes from Mexico City

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.

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-awaited 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-of-centre Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) joined PRI deputies in approving the revisions. 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

prominent hardline Jacobin 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 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

church-run schools since 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 before nomination. 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 theologians have influenced, 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 theologians 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 raved 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 end to 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 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.'

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

To the Editor...

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 consideration of the Government. 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

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 country. 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 of 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. Before we embark on a university we may first develop 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

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 non-partisan 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, of course, 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 insecurity? 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? Do we 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 will to

of life. Once such a strong and sincere political will is manifested 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

Sir, Everyday in the newspaper 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 universities and professional institutions.

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. The country is short of efficient and good officers and we 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. Ras-i-Nizam Azeem Chittaranjan