**Environmental Action** 

Plan Being Finalized

Government-NGO Cooperation

HE Government of

Bangladesh through the

Ministry of Environm-

ent and Forest has started a

process of people's consultati-

ons for developing a compre-

hensive National Environment

Management Action Plan

(NEMAP) together with NGO

community through the

Association of Development

Agencies of Bangladesh (ADAB)

and the Coalition of Environ-

mental NGOs (CEN). The

process of consultation will

consist of a number of

elements, including a series of

twentythree grassroot level

workshops around the country,

five regional, eight professional

and national workshops for

different sectors such as gov-

ernment agencies, members of

parliament, NGOs media,

women, etc. a media campaign

including advertisements and

special programmes on radio

and television, and distribution

of leaflets/questionnaires

around the country to let ordi-

**Organizers** 

out in partnership between the

Ministry of Environment and

the NGOs both of whom are

making substantial contribu-

tions in terms of manpower

and resources with additional

financial assistance from

providing inputs into the pro-

cess including trained facilita-

tors for the workshops, facili-

workshops and report prepa-

ration, the Forum for Environ-

mental Journalists (FEJB) are

arranging media coverage, a

team of local consultants and

resource persons and

rapporteurs are pulling the

whole process together to

prepare the draft synthesis re-

port which will be presented

and discussed at the national

workshops to be held in June

1994. The entire process is

being coordinated by a review

committee chaired by the

Joint Secretary of the Ministry

of Environment, Fazlul Haq.

and consisting of representa-

Grassroots workshops

February, March and April.

A large number of NGOs are

for holding grassroot

UNDP

The effort is being carried

nary citizens give their views.

### CONSEQUENCES OF FARAKKA BARRAGE

## An Irreversible Human and Environmental

**HUKUR** Mamud was anxiously looking at his small boat and at an unsurfaced road that ended far from the bank of the Ganges near Pakshi in Rajshahi district.

There were seven other ferrymen with their small dinghles moored on the bank. Mamud, 43, had three passen gers already on board and he could sail if another arrived.

With four passengers on board, he would start crossing the Ganges through a maze of shoals and sandbars that had

emerged during winter. As a ferryman, he must earn at least Taka 50 (Appx, US dollar 1.25) a day to maintain his six-member family - just to buy their three daily meals of rice, lentils and a little fish (if possible).

But the chance of another passenger was bleak as people during winter preferred sandy roads to cross the Ganges known as the Padma inside

Bangladesh. Besides, there was tough competition with other boat men in the same profession.

Shukur Mamud of Raita village in Kushtia district of Bangladesh is one many who have become victims of a dam that has 'controlled' the

"That is India." Mamud said pointing towards the horizon in the west, "I hear they have built some kind of wall on our Padma," he said. The west was an ocean of sand with thin stripes of blue water.

"What a mighty river she was," the boatman recalled with a sigh, "Once, be it in summer or in winter. I had to think twice before crossing the great river.

And now in early July, people no longer needed boats to cross the Padma but preferred horse-drawn carriage or bullock-cart," Mamud said.

Down the river, the metallic structure of the imposing Hardinge railway bridge was only a silhouette. Caravan of earts, people on foot or on bicycle crossed the sandy trails.

"It is a bad time for us," said another boatman Khairul, "Our life is linked to the Padma's water... no water means no works, no food.

Summer in Bangladesh starts from March and continues until May. The monsoon lasts from June through October while the winter begins from November until February.

Not far from the Britishmade Hardinge bridge. Bangladesh's largest Ganges-Kabodak (G-K) Irrigation Project at Bheramara, Kushtia has collapsed due to shortage of water in the Ganges.

The irrigation project earlier, poured water into 1,20,000 acres of dry cropland in four Bangladesh districts. A major river, Gorai, has al-

ready begun giving its dying hiccups because it no longer gets waters from its source. As a distributory of the Ganges, the Gorai nourishes eight south-west districts with fresh water.

A newsprint factory and a power plant in the coastal Khulna district now bring fresh water from the up-country as salinity rise in the river has made it difficult to keep the plants operative.

The Sundarbans, world's largest estuarian swamp, is threatened by high level of salinity with tops of its trees dying. The Sundarbans is the home of the world famous Royal Bengal tigers and some other exclusive animals on the wild. All these are happening because of a Farakka Barrage across the Ganges in the Indian State of West Bengal, the people accuse.

Bangladesh's environmentalists and water engineers say that due to the Farakka, the northern part of the country is slowly being desertified while the south-western region is getting more and more salinised.

water means no works, no food."

They warn fresh water di-

version by the Farakka Barrage.

only 19 kilometers from the

Indo-Bangladesh border, would

deteriorate the agricultural ca-

pacity of 11 south-western dis-

eco-migration in the region

where in the country of about

environmentalists of this

agrarian country are now cry-

ing hoarse against the envi-

ronmental impacts of Farakka

Barrage and pushing the gov-

ernment to raise the issue on

ing public outcry, Bangladesh

government has worked out a

278 million-dollar 'bill' to de-

mand as compensation from

assessing damage on six sec-

tors - agriculture, fisheries.

industries, navigation and

dredging - caused by Farakka

Barrage since 1976 until 1992.

damage is now with the

Bangladesh Foreign Minister,

which is considering its legal

Bangladesh might file a dam-

age suit in the International

Court of Justice linking

Farakka Barrage to the worsen-

ing environmental situation in

Bangladesh, top Irrigation

drinking water from the near-

est available sources has be-

come a way of life for the peo-

ple living in the region of

Satkhira, Bagerhat and Khulna

these areas have either be-

come salinised or inoperative

Most of the tubewells in

Daily Morrting trek for fresh

Ministry officials said.

An elaborate report on the

completed

The figure came out while

In response to the increas-

the international forum.

India, officials said.

When

districts.

Peasants, politicians and

forcing people to move else-

110 million people, they say.

It may also kick off a major

tricts.

by Masud Hasan Khan

due to low ground water level. Water shortage or high salinity is a recent phenomenon, the villagers said adding that even 10 years back fresh water was abundant in these areas.

"This is incredible," said Nagen Das, a resident of Baithaghata of Khulna, "Water shortage is absent in the other coastal districts." "Gorai, Rupsha and Passur

are like umbilical chords to our areas," explained Das. These rivers supply drinking and irrigation water, besides keeping the local wetlands alive, he said.

The sea-bound rivers also flush out the brackish water which is always trying to seep into the land, said Nagen Das,

a share-cropper. The people of Khulna. Satkhira and Bagerhat attribute lean-flow in the rivers as a result of diversion by the Farakka Barrage as the main reason for

inland during the last ten years threatening industries and the availability of drinking water. According to Ainun Nishat

of Water Management Department of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET), the only solution to the problem lies in the augmenting flow of the Gorai with at least 10,000 cusec of water.

A Flood Action Plan (FAP) study on the south-west of Bangladesh also pointed out the need for augmenting the Gorai flow.

The present flow of Gorai is less than 150 cusec during the dry season (March through

Due to the high salinity in the river Bhairab, the 48,000 tons production-capacity Khulna Newsprint Mills (KNM) has to spend about taka two crore (Appx US dollar 500,000) every year for bringing fresh water from 30 miles

keep the plant operative.

Open water fishing has also been affected in Khulna areas because of lean-flow in the Bhairab, Passur and the Gorai,

Fishing season, has squeezed from the previous May to February period to the current May to December period, said officials of the Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council (BARC).

with high salinity has threatened the 6000 square-kilometer Sundarbans, located at the south-west corner of Bangladesh. Due to salinity rise in the

Water shortage coupled

soil, the tops of the Sundari trees (Heritiera paludosa) are now dying, according to the Forest Department officials. About 17 per cent of the to-

tal sundari trees in the aquatic forest have already fallen victim to the 'top-dying' syndrome, the officials said.

According to a recent study jointly conducted by the Forest Department of Bangladesh and

Bangladesh, is lost, Fifteen piers of the Hardinge bridge now stand on sand as people and vehicles cross the river by land during the four months.

The total water-width of the Padma near the bridge has reduced to a mere 0.6 kilometers from 1.6 kilometers during winter, the BWDB officials

People of Kushtia, Jhenidah and Magura also talk about fall of ground water due to the upstream diversion by the Farakka Barrage.

The shallow irrigation units

and tubewells in these districts no longer pump adequate waters these days, they Irrigation Ministry officials

in Dhaka explained, due to the decreasing surface water, the ground water was flowing to the rivers.

Loss of ground water and lean river flow has caused a slow desertification in the districts located on both sides of the Ganges' entry into for People's Consultation ensured. Although the groups of people, strictly speaking, are not exactly from grassroots and are quite mixed from the point of educational and socioeconomic backgrounds an effort has been made to ensure that every participant has an opportunity to present his or her views. For this reason the workshops are being held over two days to ensure maximum opportunity to interact and the plenary sessions are being kept to a minimum in order to allow discussions to be held in small groups where the composition will be kept as homogeneous as possible (for example illiterate and literate people will not be mixed into the same group in order that not one feels intimidated). Each group will have a trained facilitator and rapporteur to record the discussions which will then be presented in the plenary session by the group's

> chosen representative. Media campaign The media campaign will be

carried out using the print media as well as television and radio. The newspapers have already started to cover the grassroot workshops and will continue to do so. There will also be some advertisements in leading newspapers informing the public about NEMAP and soliciting their inputs and

The television coverage will consist of a specially made short drama/advertisement to be shown repeatedly over the coming months to show the importance of people's participation in addressing environmental issues.

Leaflets/ questionnaires In addition to the workshops and media campaigns the Ministry of Environment is also publishing over 100,000 leaflets/questionnaires which will be distributed all over the country through local govern-

ments, BRDB groups, schools and colleges, NGOs, Boy Scouts, trade unions and others. They will encourage people to give their views as to what are the important environmental issues and also what they feel should be done about them. The leaflets/questionnaires will also be published in several mass circulation newspapers to allow the maximum number of people an

out participatory and consultative planning which can bein a meeting with the governcarry out the consultative pro-

News Letter

#### "It is a bad time for us," said another boatman Khairul, "Our life is linked to the Padma's water... no water shortage. Unplanned shrimp culture and erratic levees along the coast have only worsened the situation, they added.

Health officials at Khulna district said the people of Bathiaghata, Dakop and Paikgacha areas have developed acute diarrhoea because of regular saline water con-

Salinised water is a safe haven for the diarrheal germs, the officials pointed out.

However, ground water level is comparatively higher in the northern region of 35.742square-kilometer Khulna Division where water is available within 200 feet under the

The highest tolerance level of salinity for drinking water in the Khulna region is 500 micre-mhos and 2000 micromhos per centimeter for agri-

With the dwindling discharge of fresh water by the Farakka Barrage, there has been a successive build-up of salinity in the south-western coastal districts over the last ten years.

Latest figures available from the Irrigation Ministry show that with increasing diversion of water at Farakka, the salinity level has far crossed the limit in all the 16 districts under Khulna Division.

During 1778 and 1982 the maximum salinity in the region was recorded at 1300 micromhos and 14,000 micro-mhos

per centimeter. The salinity level in these areas reached its peak with 28,000 micro-mhos in 1989 and 25,000 micro-mhos in

Irrigation Ministry officials said the salinity belt has moved about 200 kilometers further

The mightiest of all rivers which once flowed under the Hardinge Bridge is now only a thing the past Bangladesh, they said.

Carrying of water by barges costs the mills taka 125 (US\$ 3.12) for every tons of newsprint it produces.

The Mills requires about 400 tons of water a day, KNM officials said

They said the salinity in the river has reached a level of the factory by a wide range. The maximum tolerance level for the Khulna Newsprint Mills is only 40 Particles Per Million (PPM).

The salinity reached an alarming 3600 PPM on March 21. 1992. KNM officials pointed out. Other than the cost of carrying water, the salinity is also causing serious damage to the plant machin-

If damage to the machinery is included, the production cost of each ton of newsprint sums up to taka 1000 (US\$ 25), according to the state-run Bangladesh Chemical Industries Corporation.

Fresh water is also brought for the Goalpara Power Station from the northern areas to

the United Kingdom's Agricultural production Overseas Development Agency have also gone down signifi-(ODA), the sundari trees are cantly due to the loss of soil now being replaced by 'Gewa moisture, BARC officials in (Excoecaria agallocha) + trees

and water salinities. Any change in the brackish littoral forest would destroy the ecological balance as well as habitat of the Sundarbans animals, said Forest Department officials.

more tolerant of higher soil

Lack of food would also turn the Royal Bengal tigers to man eaters, they said adding that the mammals would die while sharks and reptiles would infest under the changed environmental situation.

Due to the dehydrational impact of the Farakka Barrage, an estimated 120 thousand farm families, beneficiaries to the Ganges-Kabodak Irrigation Project, could not grow high yielding variety Aus rice seedlings in the current cropping season, said Irrigation Ministry officials.

The purpose of the Hardinge railway bridge, linking south to the north of

Dhaka said. Early morning chill and an unprecedented dry wind in Meherpur, Chuadanga and Kushtia districts were nothing

but signs of the desertification in action, they pointed out. Irfan Ali, a peasant of Chatmohar in Pabna district, said his 120 decimal rice plot needed more water and fertil-

izer\_than before. Ali, 59, has no irrigation pump of his own. He pays Taka 100 (USD 2.5) to a deep-tubewell owner to get his plot irri-

"Earlier we used to get adequate water from the rivers. Now, small rivers and canals of the locality go dry. The Padma gets dry too," said a lamenting Irfan Ali, "Who knows when will be free from this curse.

The feature was prepared by the writer under a PANOS fellowship.

In an attempt at diplomacy the Caribbean Conservation Association has suggested that the islands focus efforts on whale-watching. Dominica offers whale-watching as a tourist attraction, and Grenada is making an appraisal of the

whale-watching locations. Sean Whyte, who was recently in Grenada to promote whale-watching, says more than four million tourists a year pay to watch whales in nearly 30 countries.

says London-based Greenpeace campaigner John Frizell.

workshops in Comilla. Mymensingh and Chittagong were held one after the other so that all the facilitators and resource persons could attend together, share their experience and refine the methodology of conducting the workshops. Thereafter the workshops would be held simultaneously in different regions because of the time constraints and the facilitators and refeasibility of establishing source persons would split up in order to cover all the work-

> Each workshop will bring together local people from all walks of life including farmers, fishermen, small traders as well as NGO workers, local elected representatives and government officials.

At least fifty percent women's participation will be

tives of the Government. NGOs, media and donor agencies with a NEMAP secretariat within the Ministry. The grassroot workshop are being organised by ADAB/CEN with each individual workshop being the responsibility of a local opportunity to give inputs. Experience so far ADAB chapter and local NGOs. Although the process of consultations have only begun There will be twentythree grassroot workshops in differthe experience so far has been ent parts of the country during The overall organisation is the responsibility of ADAB/CEN who have already carried out a training of 20 facilitators who were provided from different NGOs at their own expense. The first three

very positive. The Minister for Environment and Forest, Akbar Hossain, has termed this as an example of how to carry come a model for national level planning. It is also being seen as a model for cooperation between the government and the NGOs as was evident by the response from both the chairperson of ADAB, Khushi Kabir, and the chairperson of CEN. Kazi Farooque Ahmed, who have publicly committed the NGO community towards this effort. The resident representative of UNDP, Eimi Watanabe, ment chaired by the Secretary, ERD, Lutfullahil Majid, congratulated the ministry of Environment on its efforts to cess and on the speed with which it was able to do so. The ERD Secretary noted that it was the first time a government ministry had received such an accolade from a donor agency.

Bangladesh Environmental

#### Save the Whales or Lose Tourists, Caribbean countries voted with

OUR Caribbean island states are furious with threats by "save the campaigners to organise an international boycott of their tourist industries if they support Japan at the forthcoming International Whaling Commission (IWC)

meeting. The islands in turn are accused by pressure group activists of voting alongside Japan in favour of commercial whaling as a result of promises of aid and other financial in-

ducements from Tokyo. Japan has provided significant aid to fishing industries in

## Islanders Warned

by Nancy McGuire

Organisation. Dan Morast, president of

the US-based International Wildlife Coalition, accuses Grenada, St Vincent, St Lucia and Dominica, which together make up the Windward Islands, of "blatant collaboration" with Japan at previous IWC meetings.

He claims delegates from the four states had to hold "special hallway meetings

Four small Caribbean islands have been warned that they may face a tourist boycott if

they support Japanese efforts to lift the ban on commercial whaling. Gemini News

Service watches commercial fishermen and environmentalists fight it out.

Swimming against the tide

Fin:Down to 25,000 from 500,000 at turn of century

special creatures." Accusations of selling out the whales - the world's largest mammals - have been flying across the Atlantic Ocean since the IWC meetings in Japan last May and in Australia in February.

At issue are Japan's efforts to have the internationally agreed moratorium on com-

Blue: Largest animal ever recorded.

Now close to extinction

top post in the World Health "irresponsible and fanatical people who feel it is wrong to kill whales because they're

Some species have lost more than 90 per cent of their original populations. The blue whale has lost 99 per cent and shows no sign of recovery even

If the whaling moratorium is overturned and Coalition threats are carried out, however, it will not only be the whales which are the losers. but the Windwards' tourism earnings.

And ships to by pass certain islands

Grenada's Tourism Minister Senator Tilman Thomas has dismissed the threat as contemptuous. He said that if the Coalition wanted to take issue with Japan, then punitive action should be taken against Tokyo rather than against small island nations.

Said Thomas: "I think they are trying to take advantage of small countries. If they are serious, the firs thing they had to do was to organise a boycott against Japanese cars in the

Association opposes the proposed boycott and defends whaling in St. Vincent and

Dominica as part of the cul-

Senator Nanton also defends St. Vincent's whale harvest: "We defend the right of our people to continue to whale, so long as it is done on the basis of regulation, conservation and scientific advice. and that is why we attend the meetings of the IWC."

He says that no non-government organisation has the right to shut down an industry "which our people have every cultural right to continue." But that is not the issue.

Environmentalists accept that traditional whaling communities should be allowed to continue with their small-scale activities. "It is commercial whaling which we oppose,"

#### - GEMINI NEWS NANCY McGUIRE is a freelance journalist living in Grenada.

# The Biggest Victims of Poverty

MONG the worst affected victims of the poverty-environ ment cycle have been the African elephant, poached in A numbers that were inconceivable 30 years ago. From a population of about 1.2 million in 1981 there were approximately 610,000 left by 1989, a disproportionate number of them females, as the males bad been hunted for their tusks. The poaching was driven by high world prices for ivory during the late 1970s and 1980s, although this is now a thing of the past, as the price of ivory collapsed after international trade in ivory was banned at the 1989 Lausanne meeting of the parties to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)

But poaching has continued, albeit on a reduced scale, for many of the poachers were, and still are, driven not by the quest for big money from ivory sales, but by a quest for any money at all. Faced with animals that tramped through their crops, local people made an obvious choice to cash in on such a lucrative nuisance. But this was not simple opportunism. Cut off from the cash economy and much of their traditional land, and surrounded by rapid human population growth, the poachers often felt they had few choices. Most of those out in the field, of course, did not make big money from their labours; they were desperate and would accept modest sums for the tusks, forcing them back to kill yet more elephants.

But, since the ivory trade was banned and poaching slowed down, efforts have been made to recognize the needs of people who live near elephants and who still see these animals as a nuisance - but now a less valuable one. At a meeting held at UNEP's Nairobi headquarters in January 1992, African countries with elephant populations met donor countries. Detailed conservation plans were prepared for 33 of the 35 countries with elephant populations, including calculations of the costs of implementing the plans. While a lot of the money pledged at the conference included protection measures, such as radios, trucks and other equipment, for wildlife protection staff, promotion of elephant-based tourism for the benefit of local people



was also a significant part of the most of the plans.

Kenyan wildlife expert Dr Perez Olindo, in an interview during the meeting, argued that, 'Elephants are good workers, because, through tourism, they attract money into the respective countries. ....Once those communities see that elephants positively affect their development expectations, they are going to set aside a portion of their land for elephants.

Since that meeting, there has been an increased effort made to channel the financial benefits from elephant conservation directly to the people who might once have poached them. But breaking out of the poverty trap into which the elephants

have fallen will take not only money, according to Olindo. The issue of human numbers must also be addressed. The question relating to human population cannot be solved by money; it is going to be resolved by a change of attitude and also the intensification of government policies on national population.

— UNEP

## **eWorldwide** moratorium on commercial OFrance proposes an whaling now in force; Norway refuses to Antarctic whale sanctuary to supplement existing Indian Ocean sarictuary Humpback:

the region through fish processing plants, boats and port development. The row echoes whispered corridor allegations levelled at

Tokyo last year when it was

accused of bribing countries

to support its candidate for the

Umost exterminate

allegation, and refers to

direction on how to vote (and) receive briefings on what the Japanese wanted them to say." Senator Stuart Nanton of St. Vincent strongly dismisses the

Coalition campaigners as

with the Japanese to receive mercial whaling lifted and its opposition to a French proposal for a whale sanctuary in Antarctica on the lines of an existing sanctuary in the Indian Ocean.

Amid allegations of taking money from Tokyo, the four

Japan at both meetings. Japan is now trying to gather enough support to get the ban lifted and the sanctuary proposal vetoed when the two topics come up for discussion at the next IWC meeting in Mexico in

Environmentalists say that commercial whaling has devastated the whales of the Southern Ocean. The first Antarctic whaling station was established in 1904. Since then, says the environmental organisation Greenpeace, more than 1.5 million whales have

been killed in those waters. after a 30-year ban on hunting.

Sean Whyte, executive director of the London-based Dolphin Conservation Society, warns governments in the region not to take the possibility of a boycott lightly. The Coalition, he says, could target cruise

United States." The Caribbean Conservation