

Dhaka Day by Day

The Castle on the Lake

by Aasha Mehreen Amin

While passing by Shatmasjid Road, it is hard not to notice the red-brick castle near old Road 13 overlooking Dhanmondi Lake. The huge majestic structure with its domes and pyramid-like protrusions reminds one of Disneyland's Magic Kingdom or a palace right out of The Arabian Nights. Mystery shrouds this extraordinary dwelling luring many curious visitors who may venture to take a closer look but seldom can get passed the ornate twin gates.

Who owns this red mansion out of Fantasy Land? Is there a beautiful princess locked up in the imposing tower waiting for a Prince to rescue her from the evil sorcerer? Speculation about the place is endless. Some say it belongs to a politician, some say it is going to be the new Iraq Embassy while others believe it is a

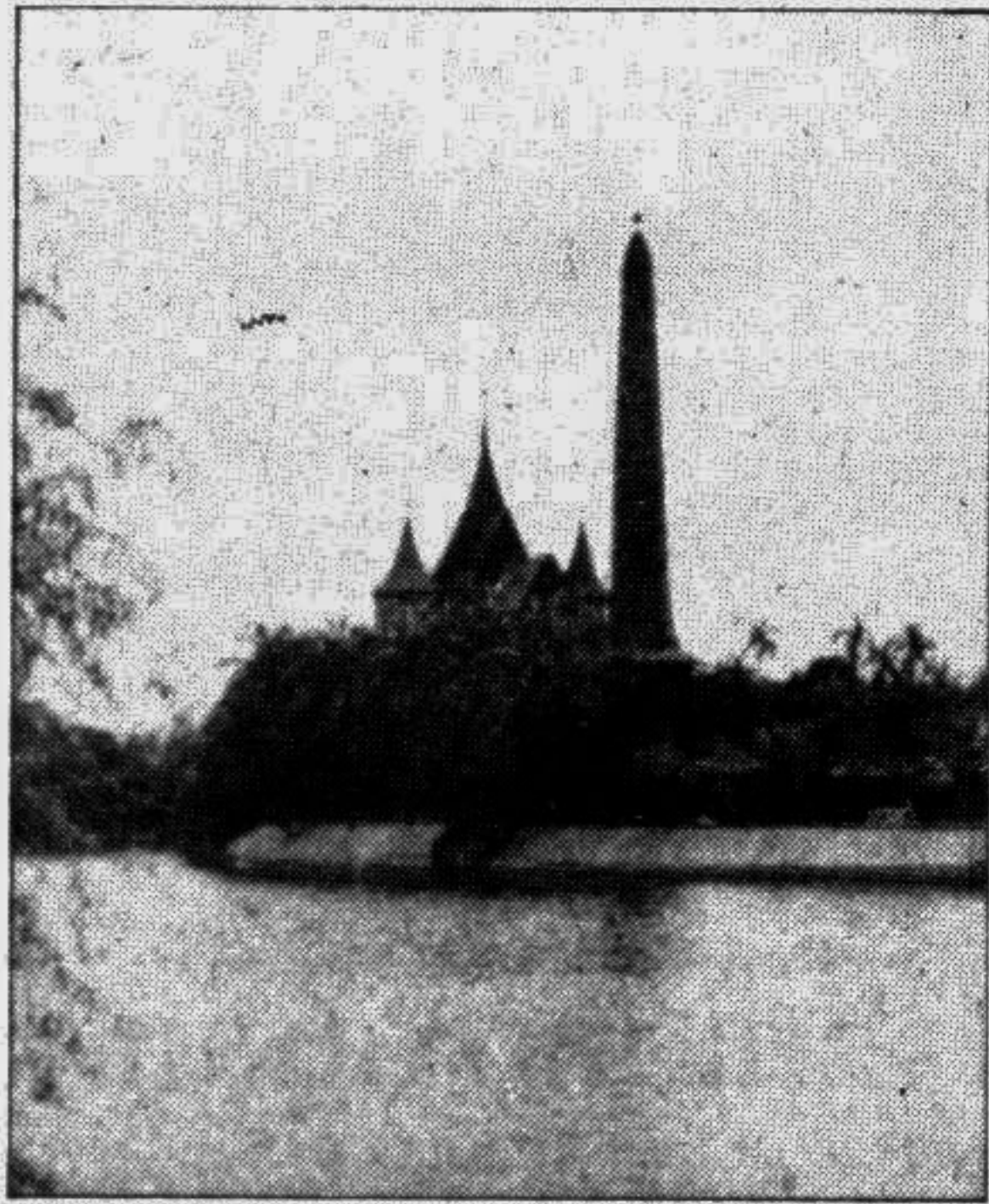
Buddhist temple.

The truth behind all this is intriguing enough. The structure, called Chistia Palace belongs to Sher-e-Khawja, a spiritual leader who called himself an 'asheque' of the great holy saint Hazrat Khawja Moynuddin Chishti (R). Clad in saffron garb, the fortyish Sher-e-Khawja reveals the strange circumstances behind the building of his enormous home that holds several religious symbols in its architectural form.

The overall structure, for example, outlines an 'Allahu' in Arabic letters with the tall tower as 'alf', and the two adjacent structures representing 'laam' and 'he'. The brass spires on the four main steeples, explains Sher-e-Khawja, have been consecrated in the name of his four family members, including himself, his wife, son and daughter. In total, there are 38 sparkling spires, all dedicated to the Holy Prophet.

The design and engineering of this palatial mansion, which has about 40 rooms, have been completed entirely by the owner himself who is originally, a student of Commerce with no formal background in architecture or engineering. It was while he was at the Khawja Baba's 'darbar' where he goes quite often, that Sher-e-Khawja was inspired to build his house in this way. He shows a pen sketch of the place drawn by him in a 1992 diary. The picture is almost identical to the present structure.

As a personality, Sher-e-Khawja is well-known for his predictions and hobnobbing with famous personalities. A photo album shows pictures of him with Rajiv Gandhi, Chand Shekhar, Narasimha Rao, Ziaul Huq, Margaret Thatcher and many others. Newspapers and magazines have described him as an



Chistia Palace — a retreat into tranquility.

ardent ashekan of the holy saint who 'never takes nazrana from anyone' and who has made many predictions that have come true. A popular weekly gives an account of his revelations: In April '91, it says, Sher-e-Khawja predicted an impending danger for Rajiv Gandhi which came true when the late prime minister of India was assassinated only 40 days later. He also correctly foretold, the journal continues, the fall of Ershad before December 15, 1990. On the western front, he has said in an interview with Khabar Kagoj (1992) that USA will one day be dismembered like former Soviet Union and Los Angeles and San Francisco will submerge into the sea due to earthquakes. For Bangladesh, he has advised both Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina to be especially

careful of their health. Although many people, including some media have referred to him as a 'peer', Sher-e-Khawja expresses his distaste for the title: 'I am not a 'peer', there is often a lot of deception in this 'peer' notion; I am just an ordinary person'.

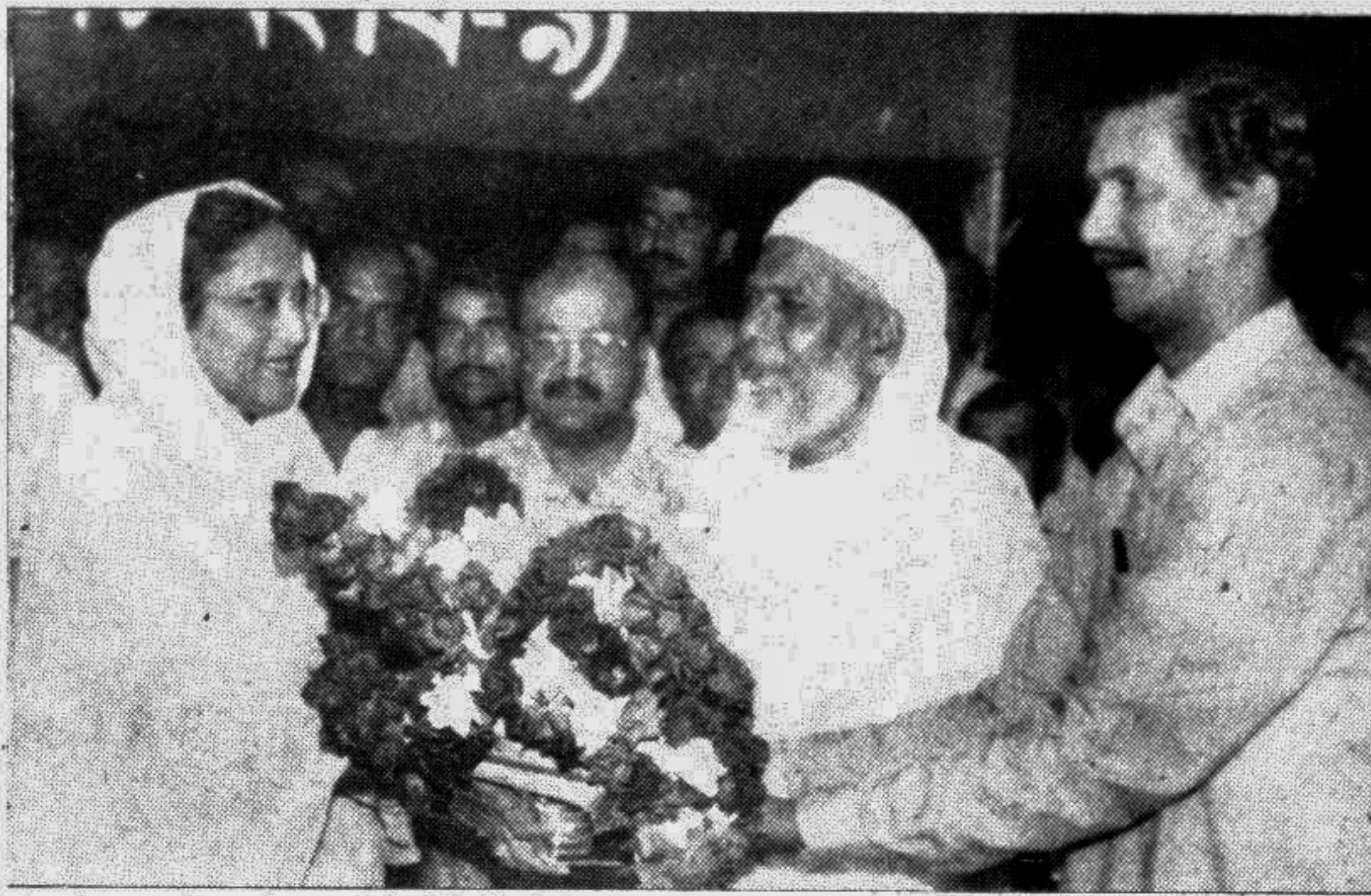
Sher-e-Khawja's other identity is that he is the Chairman of the Chistia Group of Industries with trading businesses in Bangladesh and Redding, England. His business includes garments, household goods and a construction consultancy. He is also a phil-

anthropist and has set up a free medical and aid centre in Dhanmondi for the underprivileged.

It is his red house on the lake, however, that seems to be attracting a lot of attention nowadays. On Fridays and public holidays many tourists come with their cameras to film this interesting looking house with its Gothic steeples, shining spires and intricate work on its gates and doors, some of it done by the owner himself. The back of the house has a circular patio with steps leading right into the lake. With trees surrounding it on all sides along with the tranquil water, it is a retreat that would have been perfect were it not for the odours from the growing pollution of the lake and the nearby tannery.

The inside is not as impressive as the exterior since work is still going on and the rooms are mostly bare. Except of course, for the deep indoor swimming pool with fountain, that opens into the patio.

In the future, Sher-e-Khawja plans to turn this red castle into a private Islamic Museum for children. Meanwhile, Chistia Palace stands proud and alone lending an aura of mystery to this otherwise ordinary neighbourhood.



Leaders and workers of the Dhaka Electricity Supply Authority Workers' Union presenting a bouquet to Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina at her Minto Road residence marking the joining of the party by some 500 employees yesterday. — Star photo

Impact of Farakka 37pc area of country face desertification

The entire south-west and north-west of Bangladesh, with 37 per cent of the country's area and 40 per cent population, face desertification due to India's unilateral withdrawal of water of the Ganges at Farakka, reports UNB.

This horrific stated in a speech picture of the consequences of the Indian barrage was by Mosharef Hossain Shahjahan, Minister of State for Irrigation, Water Development and Flood Control at a function in the city yesterday.

Shahjahan was not present at the function but his speech was read out by a ministry official.

The Sundarbans, the world's largest single tract mangrove forests, are also facing extinction due to rising salinity caused by upstream withdrawal at the Farakka, it said.

Expressing his dismay over the 'absence of any positive co-operation' from the upper riparian country (India) in resolving the water sharing problem, the minister in his speech said that Bangladesh should look for an 'Alternative solution'. He, however, did not elaborate.

He also appealed to the international community to resist a reported attempt by 'vested quarters' to amend the international river laws which prohibit any obstruction on common rivers.

The latest agreement on the Ganges water sharing with India expired in 1988 and the country has since been facing severe crisis over dry season flow. Last year, flow of the Ganges dwindled to its lowest

ever, threatening Bangladesh's ecology and the economy.

Bangladesh Unnayan Parishad (BUP), a development research organisation, arranged the function on occasion of the publication of a research study on 'Resource, Environment and Development in Bangladesh: With Particular Reference to the Ganges, Brahmaputra and Meghna basins'.

Academic Publishers published the study report carried out by a group of reputed scholars.

Eminent water expert Amjad Hossain Khan, former Secretary A S H K Sadique, former chairman of the Public Services Commission S M Al-Hussainy, resident representative of Ford Foundation Dr. Raymond C Offenheiser and BUP chairman Dr Q K Kholiqzaman Ahmad also spoke at the function.

Amjad Hossain Khan stressed on an urgent solution to the water sharing problem to avert further damage on the economy and ecology. 'We have miserably failed to resolve the problem... I, myself, also share the responsibility,' Khan, a former chairman of the Bangladesh Water Development Board, said.

A S H K Sadique, member, Advisory Council of Awami League spoke against a proposed mediation between Bangladesh and India by the World Bank to resolve the Farakka crisis.

'World Bank is a highly politicised institution... its accountability and transparency are also questionable,' he observed.

Gen Nasim visits Ctg Cantonment

CHITTAGONG, Sept 8: Chief of Army Staff Lieutenant General Abu Saleh Mohammad Nasim, Bir Bikram visited Chittagong Cantonment today, reports BSS.

General Nasim addressed the officers and troops of the area at a 'darbar', arranged on the occasion at the East Bengal Regimental Centre (EBRC).

The Chief of Army Staff then went to the 'Ajana Shaheed Samadhi' (Unknown Martyrs' Grave). General Nasim paid tributes to the members of the East Bengal Regiment who were massacred by West Pakistan forces on the fateful night of March 25, 1971 as well as other soldiers martyred during the War of Liberation.

He placed wreath at the memorial and prayed for the salvation of the departed souls of the shaheeds.

General Nasim later addressed all officers of the area at the EBRC conference hall.

Police rounded up 98 people, including 17 wanted criminals, from different parts of the city in last 24 hours, reports UNB.

The arrested also included seven charged with murder, two with dacoity, one held under the Arms Act, one under the Anti-Terrorism Act, and two accused of robbery and seven of stealing.

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The Chief Executive,
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Dhaka,
People's Republic of Bangladesh.



The Bangladesh chapter of the Convention for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) organised a workshop in the city yesterday. Roushan Ara Rahman attended as resource person. — Star photo

Friday BTB

Morning Session

- 8:10 News in Bangla
- 8:15 Children's programme on Islam: Alor Dishari
- 8:40 Documentary film for children
- 9:00 Documentary on Environment: Aye Prithibi
- 9:30 Film show: Batman
- 10:00 News in English
- 10:05 Retelecast of selected drama: Moner Mukure
- 11:15 Film show: Tarzan
- 11:40 Medical programme: Prescription
- 11:55 Folk songs: Marami
- 12:30 Closing

Evening Session

- 3:00 Opening
- 3:10 Triptika recitation
- 3:15 Cartoon Film: Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles
- 3:40 Movie of the week: Taraz
- 5:10 News in Bangla
- 5:25 Sports programme
- 7:00 Open University
- 7:25 Modern songs: Malancha
- 8:00 News in Bangla
- 8:30 Comedy show: Perfect Strangers
- 9:00 Magazine programme: Charupati
- 10:00 News in English
- 10:30 Drama series: Law and Order
- 11:30 Khabar/The News

Weather

Light rain likely

Temporary light to moderate rain or thundershower is likely at a few places over Chittagong and Barisal divisions, and at one or two places over Dhaka, Khulna and Rajshahi divisions during the next 24 hours till 6 pm today, reports UNB.

The Met office says no appreciable change in day temperature is expected across the country.

Meanwhile, Cox's Bazar experienced the highest 59 mm rain during the last 12 hours till 6 pm yesterday. Dhaka had 54 mm rain, Teknaf 52, Rajshahi 29, Dinajpur 26, Rangamati 15, Barisal 13, Jessore 8 mm and Tangail 5 mm shower during the period.

The country's highest temperature 36.6 degrees Celsius was recorded at Jessore and the lowest 25.2 degrees at Rangamati.

The sun sets today at 6:08 pm and rises tomorrow at 5:43 am.

Maximum and minimum temperatures and humidity recorded in some major cities and towns yesterday are given below:

City/Town	Temperature in Celsius		Humidity in percentage	
	Max	Min	Morning	Evening
Dhaka	34.3	27.3	88	94
Chittagong	32.5	25.8	78	89
Rajshahi	34.6	26.1	81	86
Khulna	35.5	28.0	86	92
Barisal	33.8	27.0	90	97
Sylhet	35.1	26.0	78	72
Cox's Bazar	29.0	25.4	92	89

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