

## Dhaka Day by Day

## A Floating Mission

by Raffat Binte Rashid

Friends! She has many and Yves Marre, a Frenchman, is yet another one, on her list. Bangladesh with her helplessness and her charming beauty, attracts many philanthropist like Marre.

Few years ago the French government decided to destroy all their barges, which were simply an economic liability to it. Moreover, these huge flat bottom 10 ft in length and 16 ft in breadth barges, still in good state and could be used for another 10 years or more, were not needed in European countries any more.

I thought that it was a shame, without thinking of other poor countries such destruction was simply unnecessary. I knew that countries like South America, Rain forest in Amazon, places of Africa with rivers, Bangladesh all could be benefitted with these barges, says Marre starting to chalk out ways in which things could proceed.

He had once flown over Bangladesh in the monsoon season, to him the entire country appeared like mirror. "I had set my mind I would try to bring those barges to Bangladesh. Moreover this place was geographically suitable for the flat bottom vessels," thus he formed the rough idea in his mind.

He would set up floating hospitals here. He met many NGOs to fund such a project, almost all were interested but Rotary Club's Alim Khan was very keen. "With the help of the Rotary club, we thought of setting the floating dispensary," he explains.

Now he had to start things at the other end — France. There a NGO hospital 'Hospital Sans Frontiere,' hospital without border, had agreed to be a part of this team and project. "I've brought people together but now the problem lay with the administration there. After a lot of political lobbying I managed one barge for a symbolic one Franc and there would be more," Marre explains enthusiastically.

Hungry for adventure he continues saying that these barges sailed on rivers and channels but never on seas and there were no way other than paying huge freight charges, to bring it to Dhaka. The sea was the only route. The most optimistic said that the barge would turn turtle and fall into pieces not being able to take the pressure.

The government set up a survey vessel to keep an eye on the barge so that it does not sail. The entire mission came to a stand still. "I am not a sailor by profession, it is my hobby. I have sailed across the Atlantic Ocean alone on a 15ft yacht, and so I have some experience. But then again I had to convince people," he says quite frustrated going back to those days.

For an entire year he transformed the barge into a flat and lived there on the river Seine in Paris. "But I was missing the open sea. I studied the flat bottom vessels on sea and just for the sake of fun and adventure sailed to Miami from Paris. Maybe, I was the first in the world to venture on such a mission," he says. Thanks to this experiment, he succeeded in convincing the people that this barge can sail from Paris to Bangladesh. This impressed everyone even donors except of course the administration. They refused to sign any authorization.

Then the only solution to the problem was to change the registration of the boat. "It was difficult to find a country that would give the flag to such an adventure. We tried in Panama, Gibraltar, West Indies and finally an island in Africa Sao Tome gave us their flag and we are still under that flag," he explains his trials at every step.

But it was not all. Before setting the sails, they needed the help of the meteorological forecasts. "Toulouse, a city in South of France was the centre of meteorological forecast, we contacted for help. Each morning they were to inform them our position and also the climate report," Marre says with that help, which gave them five days' forecast without error, they sailed in January, the worst time in the seas.

Near Sicily they stopped for four days because of a storm, nine days in Crete, three days in Suez and that's how their journey continued, when the sea was already bad.

They had only two crew on board one took the wheel, and the other was on the engine, who was also trying to sleep and cook at the same time. A third man joined them from Suez though, to ease things out. "We took diesel from Egypt that was polluted with bacteria. So in the Red Sea our engine failed several times, we had to wash and filter. Even take shelter behind islands for the fear of pirates or the storm. They stopped at Djibouti for 19 days.

Between winds of winter and the opposite monsoon winds, they had to find a gap to sail across the India Ocean. "Within 21 days we reached Cape Comorin in India. Now began clashes with Indian administration. Between Sri Lanka and Indian Ocean, we reached a port which said 'Golden Ship is better than a silver ship but nothing is better than friendship.' This made our way. Our association's name was friendship and that's how we got our authorization," he explains. After paying the civilians there, their normal fees of 4,000 (which was another story), they set out for Bangladesh.

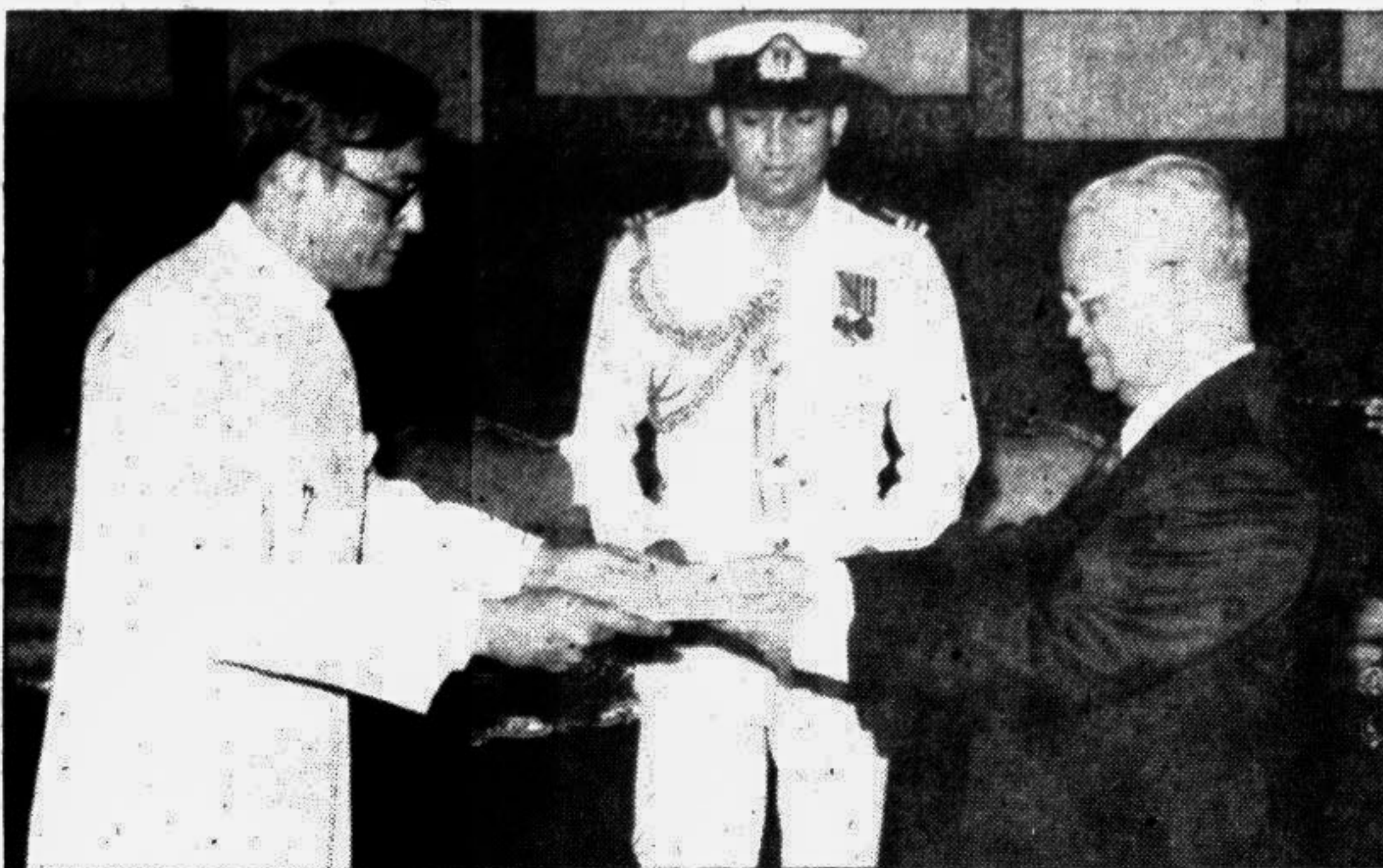
"We had only dollars and no bank or person changed dollars there. We went to an Indian Protestant missionary and the school headmaster there, paid two-thirds of his salary to us. His generous help gave us the moral support as well."

When they arrived in the Bay of Bengal around May it was the worst time. There was 70 per cent chance of cyclone and they could face not a single one of them then. Wornout and exhausted they decided to go to Mongla. "When we arrived at the Mongla Port we were robbed of our valuables, tickets, dollars. It took us three and a half months to complete the tiring journey and this was our welcome here," he expresses his shock.

The barge is in Narayanganj port and is under transformation. There will be two steps of transformation.

On April 16, 1995, the ongoing NID (National Immunization Day) programme will also be held on the deck of this barge, where tents are being set up for the purpose. On the following April 20 this floating hospital would be formally inaugurated by Mother Teresa.

And with it Yves Marre's dream will come true.



The newly-appointed High Commissioner of India to Bangladesh, Deb Mukharji presented his credentials to President Abdur Rahman Biswas at Bangabhaban yesterday. — PID photo

## New Indian HC presents credentials

President Abdur Rahman Biswas called for immediate resolution of Farakka problem that caused adverse affects on the economy and environment of Bangladesh through mutual discussions and understanding, reports UNB.

He made the call when High Commissioner designate of India to Bangladesh Deb Mukharji presented his credentials at Bangabhaban yesterday morning.

Welcoming the new high commissioner, President Biswas said, government of Bangladesh has attached highest importance in maintaining friendly and cordial relations with India and have been making sincere efforts to promote this.

## Obituary

Alhaj Ashfaqul Haider Chowdhury, a businessman and social worker, died of cardiac arrest at his Dhanmondi residence Friday night. He was 60, says a press release.

Ashfaqul Haider Chowdhury was the eldest son of late Khan Bahadur Razzaqul Haider Chowdhury, a former provincial minister of erstwhile Pakistan.

His namaz-e-janaza was held at Sobhanbagh mosque after Jolr prayers yesterday and he was buried at the personal graveyard of Dhaka's nawabbari at Begum Bazar.

He left behind wife, two sons, a daughter and a host of relatives and friends to mourn his death.



## Rare distinction for Bangladeshi playwright

Staff Correspondent

The life sketch of Sayeed Ahmad, a noted playwright of the country, has been included in the recently published Encyclopaedia of Post-colonial Literature in English.

Ahmad has the rare distinction of being included in the prestigious encyclopaedia which, in over 1600 entries from the English-speaking world, has explored the effect of the colonial and post-colonial experience and is "an essential addition to the library of any serious student of the literature of the twentieth century."

The 20-volume encyclopaedia, brought out from Canada by Routledge in 1994, has been edited by Eugene Benson and L. W. Connolly.

Ahmad, a former senior bureaucrat, introduced absurdism in Bengali drama in the early Sixties in his much provocative work *The Thing* (1961) and followed it up with two more unique creations — *The Milepost* (1969), based on the horrendous 1943 famine in Bengal, and *Survival* (1967), first staged in Lahore, having at its centre a powerful metaphor of the exploitation of the masses.

After the liberation of Bangladesh Ahmad, now 64, has created another two thought-provoking plays — *Ek Din Protidin*, based on the freedom struggle, and *The Last King*, which is an attempt to remake the image of Nawab Sirajuddaula.

In 1976, for his contribution in theatre, a row of seats has been named after him at the celebrated Arena Stage in Washington DC.

## Commitment's call

By Staff Correspondent

President of the Commitment, a voluntary organisation, Abul Kalam Azad has urged President Abdur Rahman Biswas, Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia and Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina to put the Farakka issue over to US First Lady Hillary Clinton during latter's visit to Bangladesh.

The Commitment president in a statement yesterday welcomed the US First Lady in Bangladesh.

## Additional assignment

The government has accredited Tufail K Haider, the present ambassador of Bangladesh to Cairo, as the new ambassador to Sudan, reports UNB.

An official handout yesterday said Haider will hold the new responsibilities concurrently with his present assignment.

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## CU exams shifted

CHITTAGONG, Apr 1: Master degree final examinations under the University of Chittagong scheduled for April 10, 20, 30 and May 4, 1995 will now be held on April 13, 23 and May 2 and 7, 1995 due to unavoidable circumstances, reports BSS.

## Death condoled

The Impact Foundation Bangladesh condoled the death of Carl Fredric Lindstrom, says a press release.

Late Lindstrom played an outstanding role for the well-being of disabled in Bangladesh, Cuba, Pakistan, Zambia and his country, Norway.

He died of cancer on March 28 in Norway.

বাংলাদেশ শিল্পকলা একাডেমী  
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জাতীয় যাত্রা উৎসব ১৯৯৪-৯৫

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নিউ গণেশ অপেরা  
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নং-সসস/পরি/এস.এস.আর./৫/৮৮/৩৬১৭

তারিখঃ ২৫/০৮/৯৫

## নিয়োগ বিজ্ঞপ্তি

"সামাজিক বিজ্ঞান পরিবেশা পরিষদের সচিবতা বৃত্তিকরণ ও উন্নয়ন অধিদপ্তর একটি ডকুমেন্টেশন সেন্টার প্রতিষ্ঠা" শীর্ষক উন্নয়ন সচিবের অধীনে সম্পন্ন অস্থায়ী ভিত্তিতে নিম্নলিখিত পদে নিয়োগের জন্য মহাপ্রাচীর আহবান করা যাইতেছে:

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ক)	প্রোগ্রামার সহকারী	২ (দুই)	১৪৭৫-০,১৪০/-	১) হাতক ডিগ্রীসহ লাইব্রেরী সাইন্সে ডিপ্লোমা এবং ১ কনসেপ্টের বাস্তব অভিজ্ঞতা। অথবা ২) লাইব্রেরী সাইন্সে হাতক ডিগ্রী। ৩) কম্পিউটার জ্ঞান অতিরিক্ত যোগ্যতা হিসাবে বিবেচনা করা যাইতে পারে।
খ)	কাউন্সিলার	১ (এক)	১২০০-২,০০০/-	১) উচ্চ মাধ্যমিক সার্টিফিকেটসহ লাইব্রেরী সাইন্সে ডিপ্লোমা সার্টিফিকেট। অথবা ২) উচ্চ মাধ্যমিক সার্টিফিকেটসহ কাউন্সিলার হিসাবে ২ কনসেপ্টের অভিজ্ঞতা। ৩) কম্পিউটার জ্ঞান অতিরিক্ত যোগ্যতা হিসাবে বিবেচনা করা যাইতে পারে।
গ)	এস.এস.এস.এস.	১ (এক)	৯০০-১,৪০০/-	১) ৮-ম শ্রেণী পাস।

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