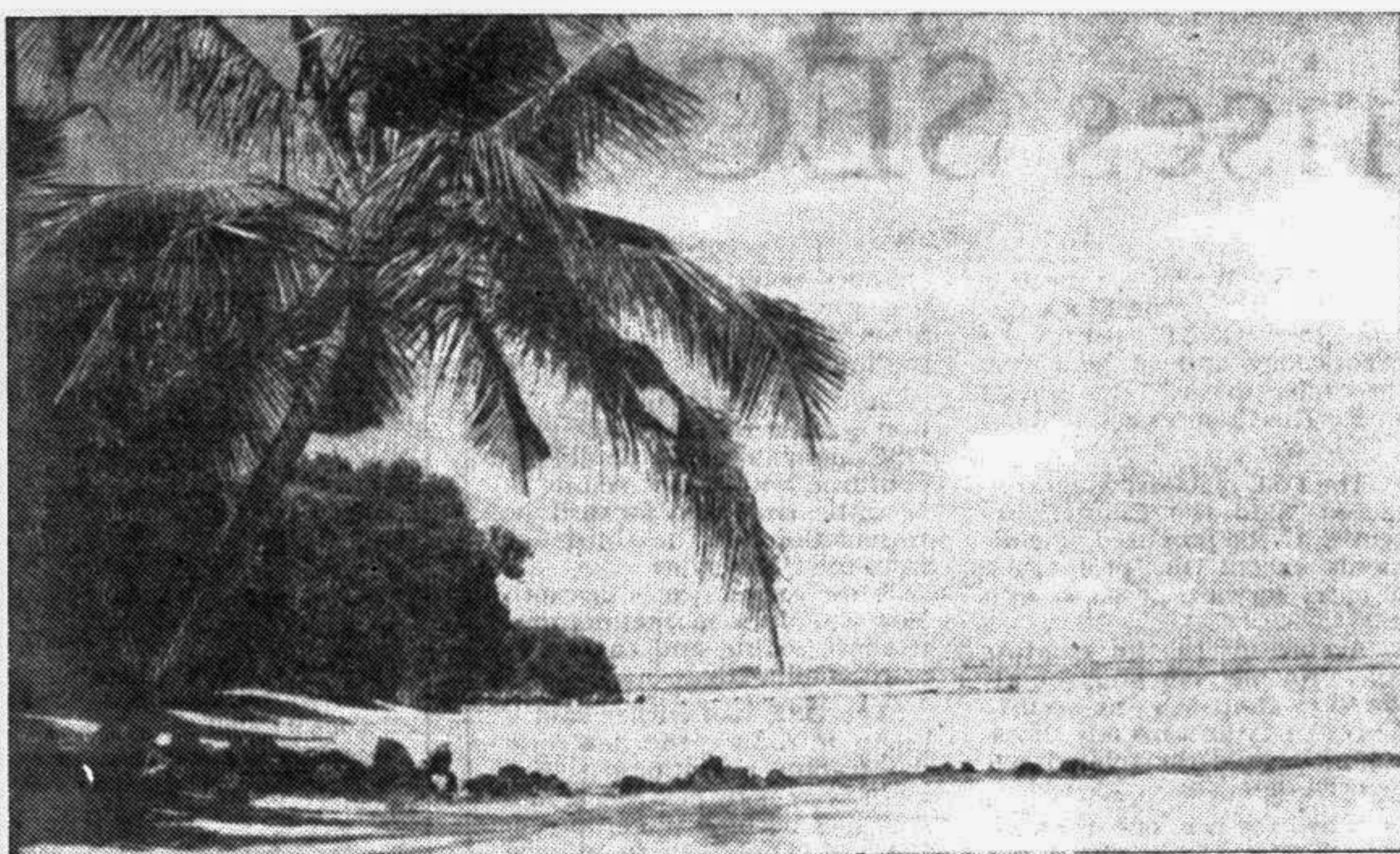


ENVIRONMENT

Threatened Coastline: Challenges of 21st Century

by Quamrul Islam Chowdhry

Given the vulnerability of our coastline and millions of coastal people, Bangladesh must rediscover elements of its traditional way of life, unique culture and avoid repeating the mistakes made and should learn from the experiences of others for a sustainable livelihood in the coastal areas.



river flow, tide and wind actions, leading to accretion and erosion in the coastal area. The coastal morphology of Bangladesh is characterised by: a) a vast network of rivers, b) an enormous discharge of river water heavily laden with sediments, both suspended and bed load, c) a large number of islands in between the channels, d) the swatch of No Ground [a submarine canyon] running NE-SE partially across the continental shelf about 24 km south of Bangladesh coast, e) a funnel-shaped and shallow northern Bay of Bengal, to the north of which the coastal area of the country is located, f) strong tidal and wind actions, and g) tropical cyclones and their associated storm surges.

**Eastern Coastal Region:** The eastern coastline extending from the mouth of Feni river to the southern tip of the mainland along Chittagong is regular and unbroken and is protected along the sea by mud flats and submerged sands. The famous Cox's Bazar sand beach which is about 75 km long is part of this coastline. The region includes wetlands like Chakaria Sunderbans, Teknaf Peninsula and the Naaf Estuary of international importance under Ramsar convention.

**Central Coastal Region:** The central region runs East from the Tetulia river to Feni river estuary and includes the mouth of the combined GBM rivers. As a result, the region is

characterized by heavy sediment input, formation of chars (new lands) and bank erosion. The general flow of water in this part of the Bay is westward, heading towards the swatch of No Ground.

Consequently, the islands in this region are subject to erosion on their eastern sides and sedimentation on their western sides. Available maps for different periods suggest massive changes in the coastline of this region over the past 200 years due to sediments carried by the GBM system and the action of tides. The net result of these and other factors is an approximate yearly net accretion of 35.6 sq km of land. New land has been formed in the south of Hatiya, Manpura and Bhola islands as well as near Char Clark, Char Baitua and Urrir Char on the Noakhali coast.

On the other hand, erosion is taking place mostly in the expensive and fertile northeastern part of Bhola, the northern part of Hatiya and the northwestern part of Sandwip.

**Western Coastal Region:** The western region covers the portion of the Bangladesh coastline westward from the Tetulia river to the international border located at Hariabhangra river. This region can be termed 'Atlantic type' in which the coastline in general is transverse to the structure of the continental margin.

This is a stable region and is mostly covered with the largest mangroves, Sundarbans, which lessen bank erosion so that scouring action is confined to the river channels, which are in general deeper than those in other regions. Accretion does not occur much in this region, being mostly concentrated at a few points.

**Coastal Afforestation amid Onslaught of Deforestation:** It is a practice that as soon as a new formation rises and ecological succession starts with grass coming up as the first coloniser, the new land is taken over by people and cattle start grazing thereby retarding the ecological succession. If there had not been this retardation, grass would eventually be replaced by shrubs and trees. Shallow-rooted grasses when replaced in succession by deeper-rooted shrubs and trees would have consolidated the newly formed land. Without the development of deep-rooted vegetation, new formations remain unstable and surface erosion is a continuous phenomenon.

These new formations can't rise much above the surface of water and stabilise, but are subjected to total surface wash during storm surges or monsoon high tides. Afforestation and protection in certain areas of new coastal formations have been attempted and stable formations are fast appearing around the nucleus forest plantations. Realizing the importance of coastal afforestation to act as nucleus for stable formation, the Forest Department has undertaken extensive afforestation projects in the coastal zone. Ministry of Environment and Forest has started a multi-million dollar Coastal Greenbelt project after the devastating cyclone and tidal surge of April 1991.

**Conflicts Revolving Brackish Water Shrimp Farming:** What two great famines and death of his wife could not do to Abdus Sabur in his 60 years of life, invading shrimp farmers did in a single night. By digging through an embankment in Khulna, southwest coastal dis-

trict, they swamped a vast tract of ricefield including his own land with sea water.

"I dropped to my knees and broke down in tears," Sabur recalls with moist eyes. "I could not believe they could do this to me. I cried to Allah, seeking punishment for the men who had flooded my rice field and made me beggar overnight".

It's a story that echoes through the lives of thousands of farmers along Bangladesh's coast. As shrimp exports became big business in the '80s, unscrupulous shrimp farmers grabbed other people's plots, illegally breaching protective embankment to flood ricefields with saline sea-water in which to raise shrimp.

Coastal embankments have adversely affected the natural life cycle of many fish and prawns inhabiting the sea and estuaries. However, opening of a lucrative export market for shrimps in the 1970s led to resumption of brackish water aquaculture within and outside the polders. Conflicts over land tenure and use rights and competition over localized changes in salinity regime arose. Some of these conflicts have been resolved under the compulsive interest of export earning, but clashes still occur over social and individual conflicts.

Shrimp farming in Cox's Bazar commenced in the '70s when large area of mangrove forest had been converted into shrimp farms. This became a concern to environmentalists due to changing coastal environment and ecology. Use of mangroves area for shrimp farming has since been prohibited.

Given the vulnerability of our coastline and millions of coastal people, Bangladesh must rediscover elements of its traditional way of life, unique culture and avoid repeating the mistakes made and should learn from the experiences of others for a sustainable livelihood in the coastal areas.

We have to identify animal species in the natural mangrove forests. In the newly accreted coastal lands mangrove species need to be planted for improving coastal afforestation. We have to develop saline-tolerant crops as well as introduce other suitable crops. Measures have to be taken to combat natural disasters like cyclones, tidal surges, floods and erosions.

Appropriate measures should be taken to arrest deterioration of ecological balance of the Sundarbans and preserve and environment congenial for the balanced growth of the existing flora and fauna in the area. Measures should be taken to stop disposal of chemical fertilizer, insecticides, industrial effluents into the water which is now polluting coastal and marine environment.

The writer is the chairman of the Forum of Environmental Journalists of Bangladesh. This write-up is based on the paper presented at the workshop on 'Threats to the Coastline' organised by FEJ, April 13-19, in Kerala.

SAARC Information Ministers' Moot Much Bruit, Little Fruit

by Mansoor Mamoon

THE first ever SAARC Information Ministers' conference concluded in Dhaka. The glare and glare of the media centring it are fast fading out. The euphoria in the official circle still lingers, albeit the fallout is diminishing gradually. It is probably time to assess and evaluate what the moot has really achieved? Does the 18-point Action Plan so vociferously adopted by the SAARC Information Ministers' Conference signify anything concrete and tangible? Or are they merely a bundle of rhetorics and merely cosmetic, befitting such regional moot by way of diplomatic niceties as a routine matter? Will these plans in any way contribute towards integrating the South Asia region flow of information catapulting it to face the realities and challenges of the 21st century. So as to be in a position to alleviate all-pervading poverty and degradation that continually stalk the region? Has the much-publicised conference spelt out trust and confidence-building approaches or provided inputs for transforming inter-State relations through what has been vouchsafed as free flow of information.

These are the pertinent questions the replies of which should be sought in the Dhaka Communiqué issued on conclusion of the conference. Unfortunately, the much-trumpeted communiqué was largely peripheral, stereo-typed and strait jacket having little or no sense of the region's real requirements and what the time really demands.

The very nomenclature 'Information Minister' is a non-entity in countries which practices free flow of information. There is no such minister as that of information in countries like UK and USA. In this

age of globalisation and free market economy privatization has made many things redundant and obsolete such as information ministry. What for is the information ministry when viewed against the backdrop of revolution in the technology of dissemination of news. Privatization which enunciates competition is more than enough to direct and coordinate media because information has long become a precious commodity and product. It is appropriately said that the business of government will be to do no business at all including the business in media. When the government directs media it tantamounts to controlling the media and under such circumstances there cannot be free flow of information. The South Asian countries are more or less in this vortex. The resolve should, therefore, have been unchaining or lifting of all control, overt and covert from the media. The media in South Asia are matured enough to take care of themselves.

If the South Asian Information Ministers really meant business they should have looked for concrete and realistic strategies without unnecessarily delving into mundane ordinary textbook like details and intricacies. As policy formulators they should have gone for more meaningful interactive plan of action incorporating creation of SAARC Newspool in the fashion of Non-Aligned Newspool, setting up of SAARC Electronic Media Institute like the AIBD (Asian Pacific Institute of Broadcasting Development) in Kuala Lumpur, promoting posting of media correspondents in one another's capital cities. These are the basic structural approaches for effecting regional cooperation and cohesion as evidenced from the ex-

periences of EC and ASEAN countries.

But what is of utmost importance is to unchain the media and help it go regional. Exchange and interaction will then take place automatically. Mr Aga Shahi of Pakistan once succinctly said "The People of South Asia are aroused and impatient to be delivered from the degradation and despair of mass poverty which has been their lot for centuries but which they are no longer prepared to endure." The problem of South Asia is that the leadership, by and large, is not entirely qualified to lead the people. They try to "understand and resolve the problems of free people with the solutions of enslaver. Communalism, at an unprecedented level, is possible as compromise is snuffed out fearing loss of political power. Natural resources are not shared equitably because there is no vision of prosperity beyond territorial boundaries. Conflicts are sustained and supported in another land because foreign policies are discussed in terms of hostility and not in complementarity of growth. "In South Asia what is very unfortunate is that the people stand at one end but without any power."

The conference has, however, not boiled down into mere talking sessions. One positive aspect is the decision to meet biennially. When there will be more meetings, more concern and pragmatic approaches will definitely emerge. But this will call for brain-storming with professional skill and zeal directly involving the media people concerned free from bureaucratic tentacles.

The writer is a SAARC Gold Medalist and former Research Scholar on ASEAN and its relevance to SAARC at the Institute of South Asian Studies, Singapore.

**Garfield** by Jim Davis

**Obituary**  
By Staff Correspondent

Major (ret'd) **MT Hossain** died of old age ailment on Sunday last at the Combined Military Hospital (CMH), Dhaka.

Hossain was a renowned sportsman of the subcontinent. His *qukhwani* will be held tomorrow at his 45/1, Purana Paltan residence after Asr prayers.

**Qulkhwani**  
Qulkhwani of Abdul Malek, father of Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Abdul Matin Khasru, will be held at the minister's Minto Road official residence after Asr prayers tomorrow, reports BSS.

**Workshop on electoral process May 12**

Electoral Training Institute will hold a day-long workshop on strengthening the electoral process at BIAM auditorium at New Ekaton on May 12, reports UNB.

The workshop aimed at finding out strategy for holding the future elections in a free and fair manner in the light of obstacles and their remedies during the 1997 Union Parishad elections.

Chief Election Commissioner Mohammad Abu Hena will inaugurate the workshop at 8:30 am.

Government officials, observers and journalists associated with elections and contesting candidates will participate.

**Display centres for benarasi to be set up**

The government has decided to set up permanent design training and display centres to revive the lost glory of the country's age old *benarasi*, reports UNB.

State Minister for Textiles AKM Jahangir Hossain made the disclosure while addressing a gathering of weavers at Mirpur yesterday.

He said the government has undertaken a massive programme, including small credit scheme, for marketing *benarasi* sarees at home and abroad.

Emphasising the need for improvement of quality and low cost production, the minister urged the weavers to put in their best efforts to regain the glory of *benarasi*.

**WFW recommendations for checking women repression**

By Staff Correspondent

Women For Women (WFW), a research and study group on women rights, has made 21 recommendations to check the increasing incidents of repression on women and children.

In a press conference at the National Press Club yesterday, WFW presented the recommendations, adopted at a workshop organised by WFW on March 22.

Referring to the anomalies in the present laws on women and child repression, WFW urged the government and the legislators to pass the proposed law on 'Women and Child Repression' taking into account the recommendations already set forth by women rights organisations. "We urge the government not to incorporate the clauses on terrorism and extortion into the proposed Women and Child Repression Act 1998," Mahmuda Islam, general secretary of WFW told the press conference.

WFW demanded a ban on pornographic films, referring to a study conducted in a western country that incidents of rape increase with the rise in sale of such films.

The WFW recommendations include strict implementation of the Women and Child Repression Act after reform, completion of rape trials within 90 days, quick examination of rape victims, provision for action against the police or other officials for refusing to accept rape cases and formation of a neutral investigation committee to look into the investigations of rape cases.

Among others, WFW president Salma Khan, executive members Shaokat Ara Hossain, Dr Hamida Akhter Begum, Prof Jahanara Haq, Meherunnesa Islam and Dr Khaleda Salauddin were present at the conference.

They urged the government and socio-cultural and political organisations to come forward in implementing the suggestions.

**Special tribunals for trying war criminals urged**

Prof Kabir Chowdhury yesterday said that those responsible for war crimes during the Liberation War should be tried by constituting special tribunals as it was not possible to try them as per law of the land, reports BSS.

"We cannot call ourselves a civilized nation unless the war criminals are tried," he said.

Prof Chowdhury was speaking at a function, organised by Ekattorer Ghatok Dalal Nirmla Committee marking the 69th birth anniversary of late Jahanara Imam and third founding anniversary of its Dhaka city unit, at Bishwa Sahitya Kendra in the city.

**Govt urged to refrain from 'anti-national' measures**

By Staff Correspondent

The Shoto Nagorik Committee (hundred citizens' committee), grouping intellectuals and professionals, in a statement yesterday expressed concern over, what they said, the unprecedented anarchy in the educational institutions and blamed the government for the situation.

Signed by 128 eminent citizens, the statement urged the government to refrain from taking 'anti-national steps', and take measures on the basis of national consensus in the backdrop of 'price hikes, deterioration in law and order, repression on women and children surpassing all bounds of normal social life.'

The committee further said that the passage of the CHT district council bills by "keeping the main opposition out of Parliament," would "threaten the regional integrity and sovereignty of Bangladesh."

**Cigarettes seized in Ctg**  
CHITTAGONG, May 5: A team of Chittagong CID police seized 220 mini cartons of cigarette worth about Taka 150,000 from a private car at Halishahar yesterday, reports BSS.

**Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority**  
141-143, Motijheel, Dhaka

**Re-Tender Notice**

Sealed tenders in prescribed form are re-invited from the enlisted contractors of Engineering Division of Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority for the undermentioned works. Tender should be submitted in the tender box kept at the office of the Superintending Engineer, Dhaka Circle (7th floor), BIWTA Bhaban; 141-143, Motijheel C/A, Dhaka; Executive Engineer's Office, BIWTC, Narayanganj & Aricha by 1500 hours of 13-5-98, which will be opened on the same day at 15-15 hours in presence (if any) of the tenderers. Tender schedule & related papers will be available every day during office hours (except on the date of opening tender). Earnest money mentioned against work should be enclosed with tender in the form of Bank Draft/Pay Order from any scheduled bank in favour of 'BIWTA'. Schedule should be collected on depositing Tk 400/= (four hundred) only (non-refundable) as price of schedule per work at the Authority's Accounts Office, Dhaka/Narayanganj/Aricha.

The Authority reserves the right to accept or reject any tender without assigning any reason.

Sl No	Name of work	Estimated cost	Earnest money	Time limit for completion of work
1.	Construction of semi-pucca restaurant at Paturia Ferry Terminal under Shibhalaya Thana of Manikganj District	5,30,000/=	13,000/=	45 (forty-five) days
2.	Construction of a semi-pucca CI sheet shed police barrack at Paturia Ferry Terminal under Shibhalaya thana of Manikganj District.	4,53,500/=	11,500/=	-Do-

PR-32/98  
DFP-9391-29/4  
G-936

**Hasan Mahmud**  
Superintending Engineer  
BIWTA Dhaka Circle, Dhaka.

**Weather**

**Thundershowers likely**

Rain or thundershowers accompanied by temporary gusty or squally wind is likely at many places over Khulna, Dhaka, Barisal and Sylhet divisions and at a few places over Rajshahi and Chittagong divisions in the next 12 hours till 6 pm today, reports UNB.

Day temperature may fall slightly over the country during the period, according to the Met Office.

The sun sets today at 6:30 pm and rises tomorrow at 5:21 am.

**What's on today . . .**

**Seminar:** A day-long seminar on 'NGOs in development,' organised by NGOs and Development Study Group, will be held. Venue: National Museum Children auditorium. Time: 2 pm.

**Prize-giving ceremony:** The prize-giving ceremony of the Jatiya Shishu Puroskar Protijogita (national children-prize competition) organised by Bangladesh Shishu Academy will be held. Venue: Academy premises. Time: 3 pm.

**Club meeting:** The weekly meeting of Rotary Club of Dhaka Buriganga will be held. Venue: Sonargaon Hotel. Time: 5:30 pm.

**RHD Tender Invitation Notice**

1. Tender Notice No : 23/MWD/1997-98  
2. Name of work : As per the following chart of Group list.

Group No	Name of work	Estimated cost	Amount of earnest money	Time limit for completion of work (from the date of issuing work order)	Eligibility of contractor
A	Repairing of different broken parts including flaps & painting the whole pontoon No. 16 of Bhangra Ferryghat under Mymensingh (R&H) Road Division during 1997-98 financial year.	As per schedule	2% of estimated cost	25 (twenty-five) days	R&H Directorate enlisted general class contractors as per financial & zonal eligibility.
B	Repairing of different broken parts including painting the whole modified pontoon of Bhangra Ferryghat under Mymensingh Road Division during 1997-98 financial year.	As per schedule	2% of estimated cost	25 (twenty-five) days	-Do-

3. Offices where tender can be purchased : Executive Engineer (R&H), Workshop Division, Mymensingh/Dhaka/Feni & Sub-Divisional Engineer (R&H), Workshop Sub-Division, Mymensingh.

4. Name of officer & office to receive the tender : 1) Superintending Engineer (R&H), Workshop Circle, Tejgaon, Dhaka, 2) Executive Engineer (R&H), Workshop Division, Mymensingh/Dhaka/ Feni.

5. Last date of selling tender : 13-05-98 (during office hours).

6. Last date & time of receiving sealed tender : 14-05-98 up to 12-00 Noon.

7. Date & time of opening sealed tender box : 18-05-98 at 11-00 AM.

8. Date of lottery (if applicable) : 18-05-98 at 11-30 AM.

DFP-9133-27/4  
G-935

**Paresh Chandra Nag**  
Executive Engineer (R&H)  
Workshop Division  
Mymensingh