

Blast kills 7 in Pak border town

PESHAWAR, Mar 28: A powerful bomb ripped through a crowded market on the border with Afghanistan today, killing seven people, including six children, said a government official, reports AP.

Another 16 people were wounded, many of them seriously, when a bomb destroyed a congested market in Torkham on the Pakistani border with Afghanistan, said Iftikhar Khan. The bomb was hidden in a shop where a 50-year-old man and six young children were seated, he said.

No one has taken responsibility for the bombing in Torkham, located in Pakistan's tribal region and a centre for the illegal trade in homemade and smuggled weapons.

Although a part of Pakistan, the tribal belt is largely governed by tribal councils who convict and sentence the guilty, usually according to laws they enact.

Torkham sits smack on the border with Afghanistan, ravaged by a bitter and bloody civil war.



Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad (R) escorts Pakistan military ruler General Pervez Musharraf upon his arrival at the Prime Minister's department in Putrajaya yesterday. Musharraf is in Malaysia on a three-day official visit. — AFP photo

Malaysia urges Musharraf to return to democracy

PUTRAJAYA, Malaysia. Mar 28: Malaysia urged Pakistan's visiting military ruler General Pervez Musharraf today to return to democracy, saying it could not accept a coup "no matter how valid the justification," reports AFP.

Musharraf, on the first full day of a tour which will also include Singapore, Brunei and Indonesia, met Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad at the country's administrative capital.

Foreign Minister Syed Hamid Albar, who has stressed Musharraf's working visit does not imply approval of last October's coup, told AFP the Pakistani ruler explained to Mahathir why he ousted Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, but he did not elaborate.

"He says he's not interested to stay forever. He wants to return to civilian rule and that he's a soldier. The only thing he can't do is to give an exact time-frame (for restoration of democracy)," Syed Hamid said after the meeting.

He said Musharraf told Mahathir he wanted to revive the economy, eradicate corruption, bring in more transparency and accountability and restore stability before moving to democracy.

"The prime minister told him that while he may have justification for doing what he has done, ultimately he has to go back to civilian rule and democracy," Syed Hamid said.

"Even with its shortcomings that system must be adopted. There is no way in the long run that you can justify the military government."

The foreign minister called the 90-minute discussion between Mahathir and Musharraf "productive" and added: "As far as we are concerned it's for them to come up with a time-frame (to return to democracy)."

Pakistan's suspension from the Commonwealth following the coup will also be on the agenda for talks here. Musa Hitam, Malaysia's envoy to the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group which

will recommend whether to lift the suspension, was due to hold talks with Musharraf later Tuesday.

"I think that it is the principle of the Commonwealth that there must be democracy and civilian rule," Syed Hamid told AFP.

"We do not generally recognise the replacement of a democratic elected government by a military coup no matter how valid the justification."

The Pakistani Foreign Office has said the tour is part of a "Look-East policy" to improve economic relations.

It said Musharraf would also seek support for Pakistan to become a dialogue partner of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and to join the ASEAN Regional Forum on security issues.

The military ruler will discuss the need for an early solution to his country's dispute with India over Kashmir, the Pakistani foreign office said.

Ugandan police recover 73 bodies from cult site

RUGAZI, Uganda, Mar 28: Ugandan authorities exhumed up to 73 bodies, including those of at least 20 children, from a mass grave at a third doomsday cult site in southwestern Uganda on Monday, reports AFP.

Prisoners worked barefoot throughout the day to pull out the corpses, which were piled on top of one another in a makeshift grave in Rugazi, on land formerly owned by one of the four top leaders of the Restoration of the Ten Commandments of God cult, Dominic Kataribabo.

An official body count of 66 was confirmed by the police officer in charge of the macabre operation, James Bangirima, head of criminal investigation in the neighbouring district of Bushenyi.

But AFP has seen a document compiled by other police officers which lists the number of bodies as "26 A.F (or adult female), 23 A.M. (adult male), 10 Y.F (young female), 12 Y.M. (2 unidentified) -- a total of 73 victims."

Some of the corpses had stab wounds while others had pieces of rolled and knitted cloth tied around their necks, a doctor on the scene said.

Police had brought prisoners to the site on Monday after the discovery of a first corpse late Saturday during an ongoing probe into the cult, blamed for the mass murder of well over 480 people, at least 330 of them burned to death in a church fire and more than 150 found in another mass grave.

Explosion in US chemical plant: One killed

PASADENA, Mar 28: An explosion rocked a Phillips Petroleum chemical plant near the Houston Ship Channel, killing one worker and injuring at least 71 people, reports AP.

The blast on Monday sparked a fire that sent thick smoke over the area.

"I was in the main shop area when I heard a loud explosion," said Tim Williams, a plant worker who estimated he was more than 182 meters from the scene. "My ears hurt, and I took off running. I looked back and saw flames, and kept going."

Search crews discovered the body of a missing employee some five hours after the early afternoon blast. Plant general manager Jim Ross said 32 employees and 39 contract employees were taken to hospitals with injuries that included burns, smoke inhalation and anxiety-related disorders.

BRIEFLY

Obuchi willing to visit Russia:

Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi is ready to meet informally with Russian President Vladimir Putin, but any official state visit will have to take place in Japan, officials said Tuesday, AP reports from Tokyo.

Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi on Monday welcomed Putin's election over the weekend, calling the victory the "will of the Russian people." Obuchi is willing to visit Putin in Russia, but somewhere other than Moscow.

5 die in chopper crash in NZ:

Five people were killed Tuesday when a helicopter hit power lines and crashed near a lake in the south of New Zealand's south island, the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) said, AP reports from Wellington.

New Zealand Press Association reported that four of the dead were believed to be American tourists, but the helicopter company involved said it could not confirm the nationalities of the victims.

Annan greets Putin:

Secretary-General Kofi Annan sent his best wishes to Russian president-elect Vladimir Putin and said he was confident UN-Russian relations would strengthen under his leadership, AP reports United Nations.

"The secretary-general is very pleased for the Russian people on the successful conclusion of the electoral process," said a statement from Annan's spokesman, Fred Eckhard, on Monday.



German President Johannes Rau (R) and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat pose for photographers in Berlin on Monday. Arafat is currently on a four-day visit to Germany. — AFP photo

Taiwan to abolish national assembly

TAIPEI, Mar 28: Taiwan has further altered its rapidly changing political landscape by abolishing its national assembly to streamline the island's parliamentary system, reports AFP.

The pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), backers of president-elect Chen Shui-bian, has announced it will abolish the 50-year-old assembly.

The DPP struck a landmark deal late Monday with the Kuomintang (KMT), which lost its half-century grip on power in the recent presidential elections, to dissolve the 334-seat assembly whose major function is amending the constitution.

Under their plans, the right to amend the constitution will be referred to the Legislative Yuan, or parliament.

The move aims to streamline the political system to avoid doubling up on manpower and wasting resources on a series of elections.

In rapid-fire political changes in the 10 days since the election, Taiwan has approved direct trade, transport and postal links between its three frontline islands and China. The DPP is considering whether to drop its pro-independence policy, and outgoing president

Lee Teng-hui has been forced to quit as chairman of the KMT which has announced sweeping reforms to win back popular support.

"Abolishing the assembly is the consensus of the people," said DPP assembly caucus leader Chen Chin-teh. "We will try to accomplish this as soon as possible - before May 6" when new elections are due.

KMT caucus head Tsai Cheng-yuan said the fine-print for abolishing the assembly would now be prepared.

"Both the DPP and KMT have reached consensus on scrapping the assembly. The exact date and related measures will be discussed in bipartisan negotiations," Tsai said.

DPP officials (DPP) meanwhile made their first visit to the presidential office following Chen's victory to discuss the transfer of power.

"Hopefully the administration of power will be transferred in a peacefully and orderly manner," DPP parliamentarian Chang Chun-hsiung told reporters after the meeting.

Moves to abolish the assembly became more pressing after the Central Election Commission announced Monday that new assembly elections would be held on May 6 with the number of seats expanded to 339.

Second British secret service computer stolen

LONDON, Mar 28: A laptop computer belonging to a British secret service agent has been stolen, the second time this has happened this month, British officials said today, reports Reuters.

Officials said police had recovered the computer and denied a newspaper report that it contained the names of British spies working abroad.

Last week government officials said a secret service laptop containing sensitive material on Northern Ireland was snatched at London's Paddington railway station on March 4.

Today, a Foreign Office spokeswoman told Reuters the second laptop was stolen in south London on March 3 but had since been recovered.

"I can confirm that computer was taken on March 3. It was reported to police and recovered on March 16," she said. "There is no connection between the two events. It is only an unfortunate coincidence," she said.

The Sun tabloid reported today that the second stolen computer belonged to an agent from Britain's foreign security service MI6.

The intelligence service was so worried by the theft that it placed anonymous newspaper advertisements offering a "substantial reward" for the computer's return, the Sun said.

Clinton greets Putin, stresses democracy

WASHINGTON, Mar 28: US President Bill Clinton on Monday mixed congratulations to Russian President-elect Vladimir Putin with a strong nudge, urging him in a phone call to strengthen democracy and international ties, reports Reuters.

Sunday's vote was an important milestone in the development of a democratic Russia," Clinton said in a statement to congratulate Putin on winning Sunday's vote.

A White House official said Clinton and Putin had discussed a possible meeting but nothing was made final.

Clinton's praise was tempered with expressions reflecting the caution that has characterised the US view of Putin since the former KGB spy became acting president after Boris Yeltsin's resignation on New Year's Eve 1999.

"President-elect Putin has an opportunity to translate his electoral mandate into concrete steps to advance economic reform, to strengthen the rule of law, to intensify the fight against crime and corruption and to join with us on a broad common agenda of international security including arms control, nonproliferation and regional peace and stability," he said.

Clinton said he had emphasised his concerns about Russia's war against separatist rebels in Chechnya, although Putin, within hours of his victory, reaffirmed his backing for Russian troops fighting to finish the conflict.

"I stressed to president-elect Putin the importance of launching impartial and transparent investigations of reported human rights violations and providing prompt and full access for international organisations and the press," Clinton said.

State Department spokesman James Foley called Chechnya a "humanitarian black eye" and a "dead end for Russia" and urged Moscow to find negotiating partners in the region.

"We hope that the new Russian government will find its own way towards achieving a political solution in Chechnya. Until that happens, we have a serious and profound disagreement."

But Washington had "an enormous amount of work" it could do with Moscow in arms control and economic ties, he added.

Foley recalled that Putin had shown a willingness to discuss the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty. The United States wants to amend it to build a new defence system.

Parliamentary elections

Saddam's son wins 99.99 pc of vote: Report

BAGHDAD, Mar 28: Uday Saddam Hussein, eldest son of Iraq's president, has won a seat in parliament with 99.99 per cent of the vote, a newspaper said today, marking the start of the heir apparent's political career, reports AFP.

He was elected on the ruling Baath party ticket in Monday's parliamentary ballot, to represent Baghdad's fifth constituency where 289,066 people voted, Al-Itihad said.

The result was published before the announcement of official results of the election to the National Assembly of Saddam loyalists, which was expected later in the day.

Diplomats told AFP there was no doubt that Saddam was grooming his eldest son to take over in the long term.

Al-Itihad said the victory was "in line with the expectations of observers who thought that Uday would be the candidate to win most votes."

The 35-year-old even won "100 percent of the votes in most of the polling centres" in his constituency where nine other candidates were fighting for five seats, the newspaper said.

The editor of the paper, which presented the news as a

scoop, is known to be close to Uday, 35, who stood for the first time.

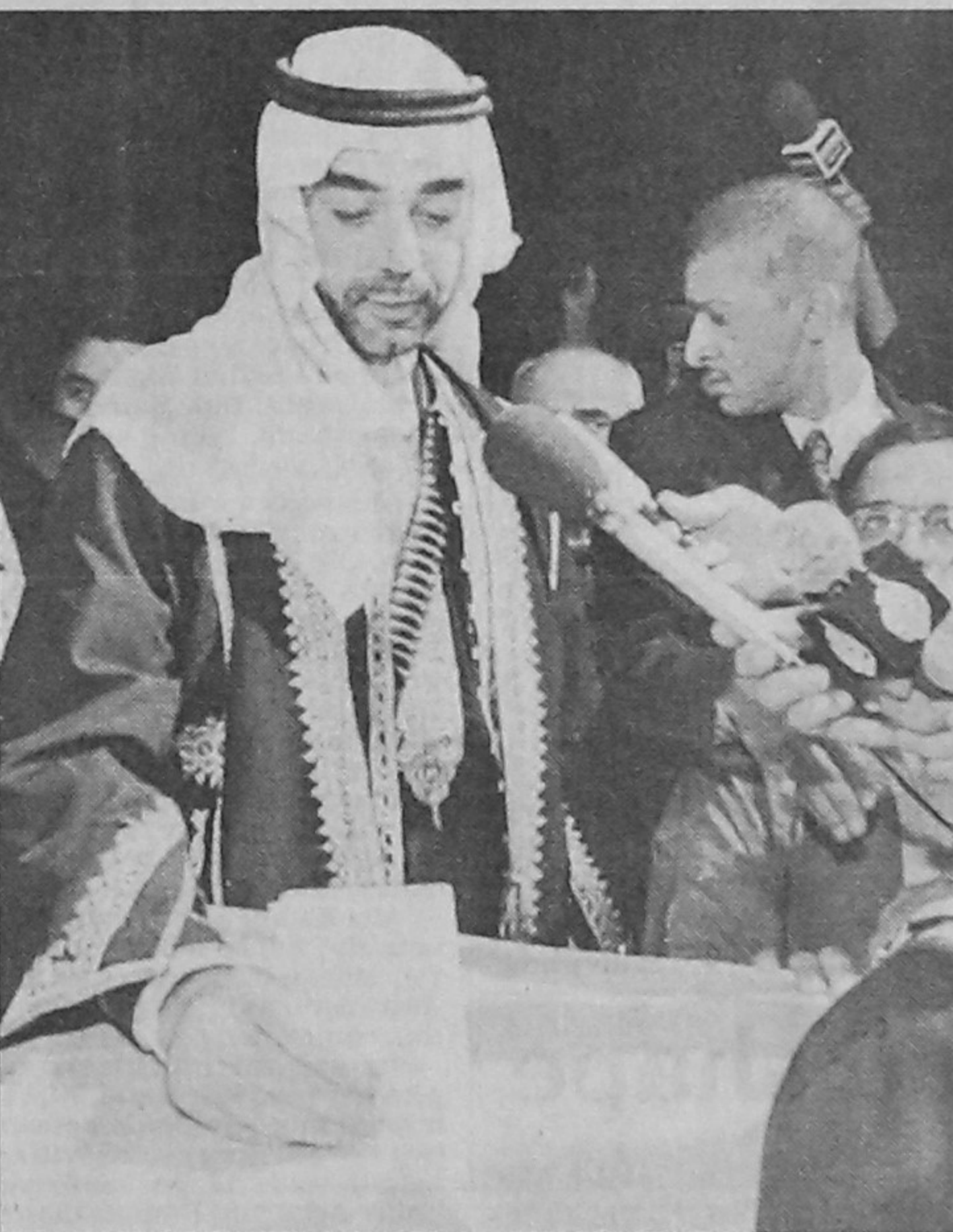
Uday made a rare public appearance when he voted Monday, revealing that he still carries a limp after a 1996 assassination attempt against him.

"We want the best possible for this great people, its brave men and glorious women," he told journalists.

Uday, who commands a powerful militia force, has accumulated numerous titles from chairman of the journalists' union, chairman of the board of seven weekly newspapers, publisher of the leading Iraqi daily Babel, head of TV and radio stations, head of Iraq's Olympic Committee as well as the country's football association and he even owns a nightclub.

The Baath party fielded 142 candidates for the 220 seats up for grabs, while Saddam, who has ruled ever since he took over as president in 1979, will name 30 Kurds to represent northern Iraq in the National Assembly.

Uday's will not be the only new face in parliament as more than 90 per cent of the candidates, including 25 women, ran for the first time.



Uday Hussein, eldest son of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, votes in parliamentary elections on Monday in Baghdad. — AFP photo

Clinton's hopes for promoting peace in S Asia on hold

WASHINGTON, Mar 28: After hitting brick wall after brick wall on his overseas tour, President Bill Clinton's hopes for promoting peace in South Asia and the Middle East are on hold, at best, and time is running out for him, reports AP.

Presidential aides have insisted Clinton's goal in meetings with Indian and Pakistani officials and with Syrian President Hafez Assad was to make peace, not to promote his legacy during the last of his eight years in the White House.

But the two basically go together. Even before Clinton set out for South Asia, his chances of persuading India and Pakistan to back down from their nuclear programmes was considered virtually nil. He didn't, and to Clinton's chagrin, Pakistan's military leaders refused even to promise restoration of democracy.

In India, despite lavishing praise on the world's largest democracy, spending more time

there than any of his predecessors and respectfully seeing the sights, Clinton heard from government leaders that nonproliferation of technology was not a realistic option for dealing with Pakistan.

Nor was there progress on Kashmir. That could be ominous.

India and Pakistan have fought two wars over the three-fifths of the Himalayan state that is under Indian control. The dispute is probably even more explosive now that they both have nuclear capability.

On the plus side, Clinton strengthened US relations with India, which have not always been warm. Considering India's growing importance, especially in technology, that was a plus.

In Shepherdstown, West Virginia in mid-January.

"The differences are significant and important, and obviously more work needs to be done to bridge them," White House spokesman Joe Lockhart said.

For Clinton to come away empty-handed indicates either miscalculation by the White House or that the dispute between Israel and Syria is intractable.

Neither is good news for a would-be peacemaker. Judith Kipper, director of the Middle East Forum for the Council on Foreign Relations, said the standoff between Clinton and Assad in Geneva was a disappointment but not a disaster.

"What is clear is that the Syrians are prepared to go a long way on what Israel requires, providing they get all of the territory they lost in the 1967 Mideast war," Kipper said in an interview. "Without that, there is no peace with Israel."

Her advice to Clinton was "to work on Prime Minister Barak to get the Israelis to come to terms with the land issue — for both the Syrians and the Palestinians. There is no peace without it."

Clinton's failure to achieve a breakthrough makes an early accord with Syria unlikely. And in Jerusalem, Israeli officials warned that a unilateral withdrawal from Lebanon could spark a conflict with Syria — and put Clinton on a hot spot.

The negotiators will return in a few weeks, he said. Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, who will meet Tuesday with Clinton, said before the Geneva meeting that Israel and Syria were close to an agreement.

His foreign minister, Amr Moussa, said the Egyptian president, indeed, was "very hopeful."

With a smile, the veteran diplomat quickly added: "Delete the very."

Office of the Executive Engineer

Feni PWD Division, Feni

Tender Notice

No.03 E/M of 1999-2000

- Sealed tenders are invited in BD Form No. 2911 for the undermentioned work as per terms & condition stated below:
- Name of work : Construction of 9 Zonal Co-operative Training Institute one at Feni. Sub-Head: Renewing, providing and installation of 50 KVA/1100 V/415V pole mounted step down transformer for LT connection with necessary overhead line in/c compound and gate light in the campus of Zonal Co-operative Training Institute at Feni during the year 1999-2000.
- Estimated cost : Tk 2,61,292/-
- Earnest money : Tk 5,230/-
- Time allowed for completion of the work from the date of issue of work order : 90 (ninety) days.
- Price of tender : (Non-refundable) Tk. 425/- (four hundred twenty-five) only.
- (a) Place of selling : All Executive Engineers under PWD Circle, Comilla & all Sub-Divisional Engineer E/M under Feni PWD Division.
- (b) Place of receiving and opening the tenders : Office of the undersigned and all Executive Engineers office under PWD Circle, Comilla.
- Last date of selling tender : During office hours up to 05-04-2000.
- Eligibility of contractor/firm to compete in the tender : (a) Category applicable as per financial limit of authorised enlisted contractor of PWD.
(b) The intending tenders must have VAT registration and TIN Certificate & ABC & BC Electrical Supervising Licence.
(c) Attested copy of VAT registration & TIN Certificate & ABC & BC Electrical Supervising Licence is to be enclosed along with the tender.
(d) Original money receipt of purchasing tender will have to be enclosed with the tender.
- Date of receiving & opening of tender : Up to 12:00 Noon of 06-04-2000 and will be opened on the same day at 12:15 PM.
- Lottery (applicable where necessary) : If more than one tenders are received having same rates & stand lowest, selection will be made by lottery to be held on 17-04-2000 at 12:30 PM in the office of the Executive Engineer, Feni PWD Division, Feni in presence of intending tenderers who may like to be present.
- The undersigned reserves the right to accept or reject any or all the tenders without assigning any reason.

DFP-6845-22/3 Nasir Uddin Mahmud Chowdhury
G-567 Executive Engineer

RHD, Notice Invited Quotation

Sealed quotations are hereby invited from intended persons/organisation for leasing out the following RHD ferry ghat.

- Quotation : 01/JRD of 1999-2000.
 - Name of work : Quotation of lease for toll collection from all kinds of eligible vehicular traffics at the rate fixed by the Government for crossing the Jamalpur-Sherpur RHD ferry ghat located at 2nd KM of Jamalpur-Sherpur-Bongaon Road on old Brahmaputra River under Jamalpur Road Division during the year 2000-2001.
 - Security : Tk 3:00 (three) lacs (refundable after expiry of lease period).
 - Lease period : From 01.07.2000 to 30.06.2001.
 - Name of : Divisional Commissioner, Dhaka Division, Dhaka/Executive Engineer, RHD, Road Division, Jamalpur/Mymensingh/Tangail/Kishoreganj/Netrakona/Planning Division-I, Dhaka/Planning & Design Division, Dhaka Zone, Dhaka/Bridge Design Division-I, (Eastern), Bridge Zone, Dhaka/Dhaka Road Division, Dhaka/Sub-Divisional Engineer, RHD, Road Sub-Division-I/II, Ist Line Workshop, Jamalpur.
 - Name of : Additional Chief Engineer, RHD, Dhaka Zone, Dhaka/Divisional Commissioner, Dhaka Division, Dhaka/Superintending Engineer, RHD, Mymensingh Road Circle, Mymensingh/Planning, Monitoring & Evaluation Circle, Dhaka Zone, Dhaka/Procurement & Monitoring Circle, Dhaka/Dhaka Road Circle, Dhaka/Executive Engineer, RHD, Road Division, Jamalpur/Mymensingh/Tangail/Kishoreganj/Netrakona/Sherpur.
 - Last date of : On 04.04.2000 (during office hours).
 - Last date of : On 05.04.2000 at 12:30 pm.
 - Date and time : On 06.04.2000 at 1:00 pm.
 - Date & time : On 12.04.2000 at 11:00 am.
- NB: All quotations will be opened in the office of the Executive Engineer, RHD, Road Division, Jamalpur on due date & time fixed for opening altogether after collecting the quotations (if any) from other quotation receiving offices in sealed condition.
- Md Asmatuddowla
Executive Engineer, RHD
Jamalpur Road Division
Jamalpur
- DFP-6778-22/3
G-566