

Sylhet Division starts functioning

A dream finally comes true

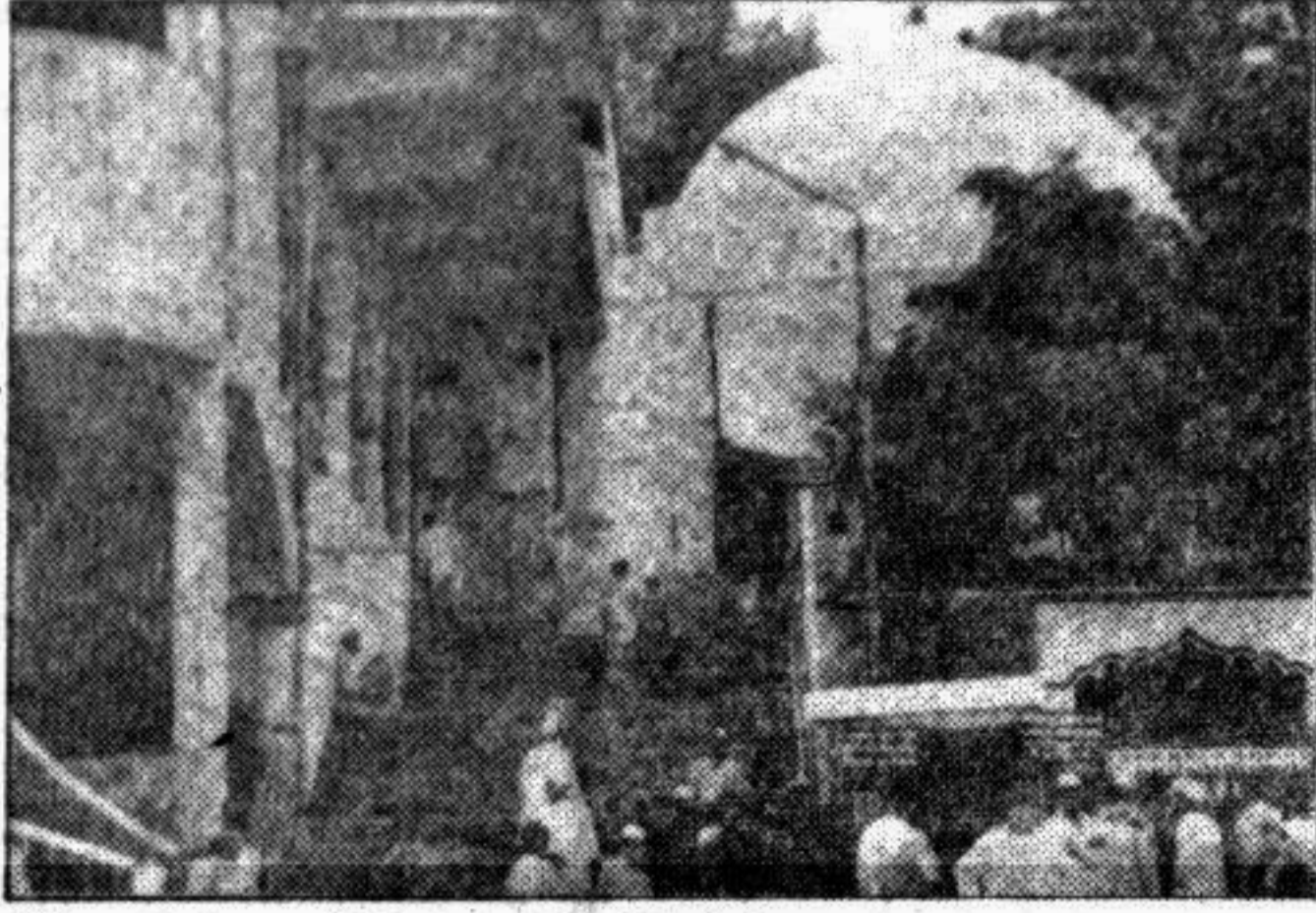
From Iqbal Siddiquee

SYLHET, Aug 1: The long-felt demand of about one crore people of four districts in greater Sylhet region have been finally fulfilled. The day August 1 was a red lettered day in the history of the north-eastern part of the country.

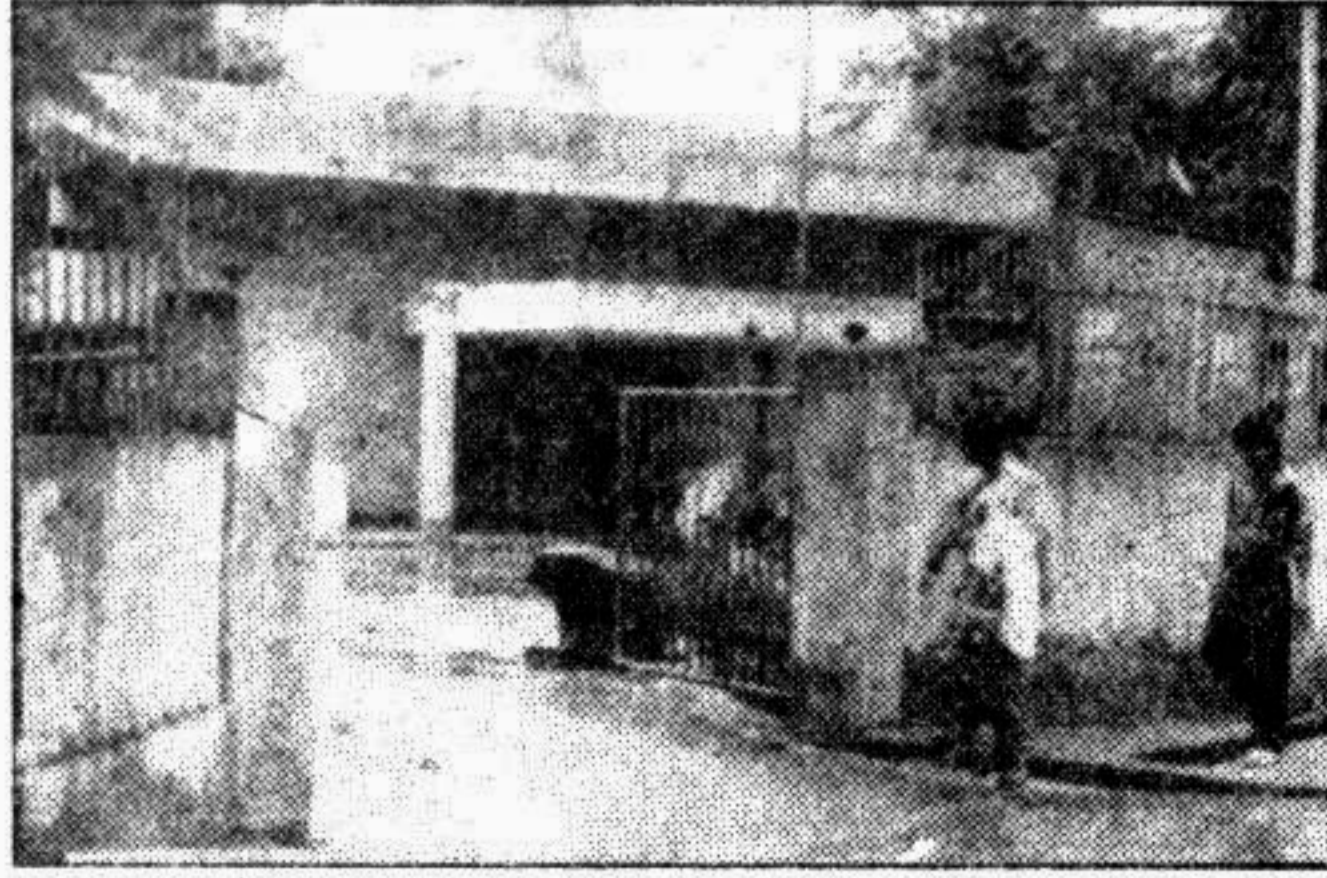
The demand for creating an administrative division with headquarters in Sylhet is not a new one. A demand was raised to create Jalalabad province during the Pakistan regime. A number of meetings were held, memorandums were placed before the authorities. But the Pakistani rulers never gave any importance to the demand. Even in 1947, the people of Sylhet dreamt of a better future: they voted for joining with Pakistan in the historic Referendum. But all in vain. Different central leaders promised several times, but none took any effective initiative.

Much earlier, Sylhet enjoyed a separate entity from the administrative point of view, according to the historians. A stone plate of the 10th century also states that, the region was termed as 'Srihatta Mandal' during the regime of Maharaja Sri Chandra. The stone was found at village Pashchim-bhag of Rajnagar thana under Moulvibazar district in the year 1961. During the regime of Akbar, Sylhet was considered as one of the 19 'Sarkars'.

Sylhet region was under Dhaka division till the year 1874. The British government formed the Assam province. But the then government found that the revenue earnings from the proposed would not meet the



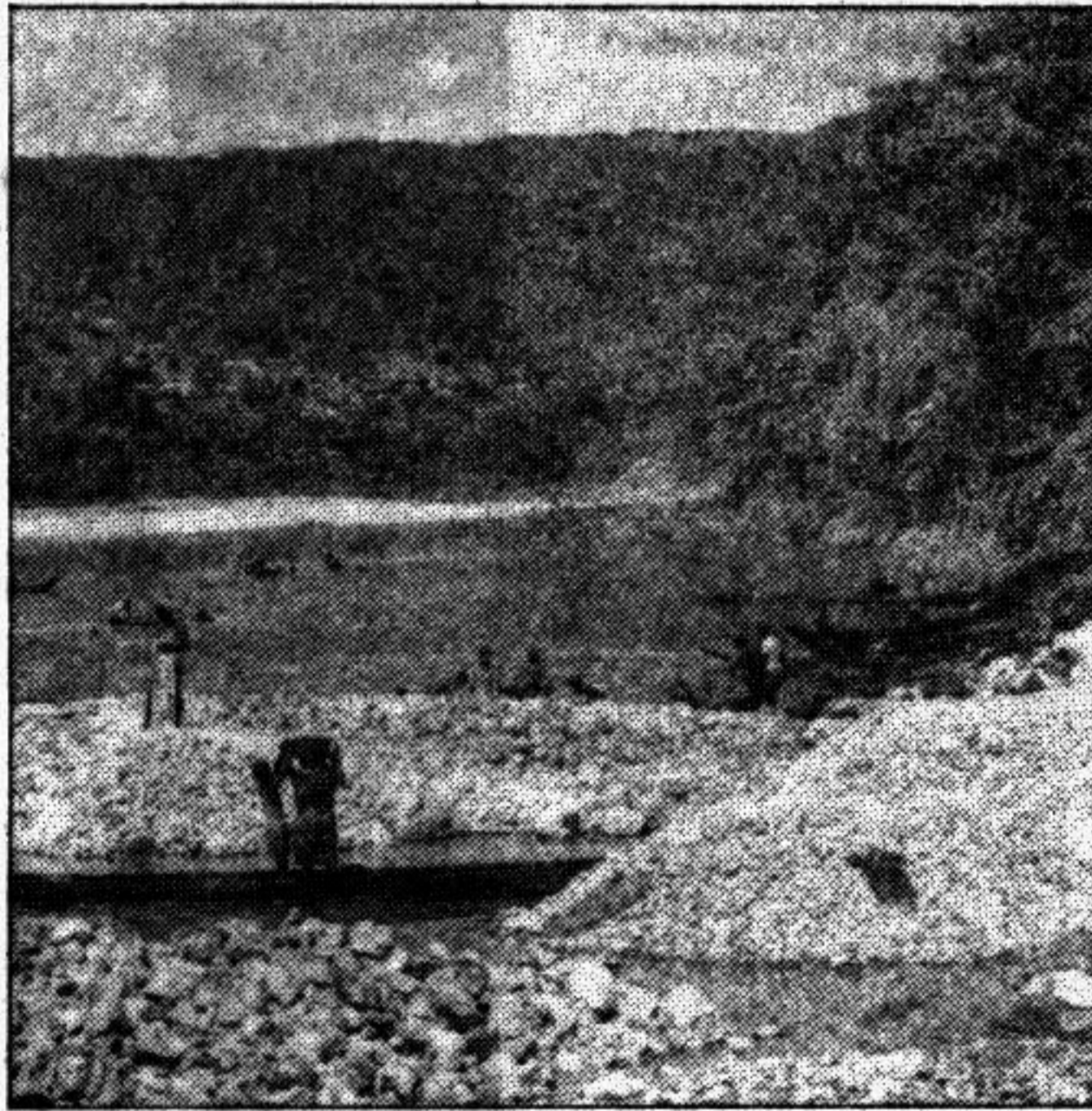
The shrine of Hazrat Shahjalal in the heart of Sylhet town. Thousands of people from across the country as well as abroad come to visit the place. — Star photo



The former zilla parishad hall where the offices of the newly appointed Divisional Commissioner and Deputy Inspector General of Police would be temporarily housed. — Star photo

expenditures. Besides there was an acute shortage of qualified people to run the different affairs in Assam, as it was one of the backward regions. The British government, to solve the crisis, then decided to include the Sylhet region with Assam province. The proposal faced a strong resistance in the greater Sylhet region. With a view to assessing the situation the then Governor-General North Brook came to Sylhet. The leading people then met him and expressed their resentment. North Brook then said in writing, "There will certainly be no change whatever in the system of law and judicial procedure under which the inhabitants of Sylhet have hitherto lived, nor in the principles which supply throughout Bengal to the settlement and collection of land revenue." Accordingly, Sylhet was attached with the Assam province.

The people of the region



A popular tourist spot at Jaflong in Sylhet district — some 50 km from Sylhet town near the Indian border. — Star photo

have been maintaining a distinct identity and culture for long. The demand for a separate entity was raised several times of administrative reforms. Even after the liberation the demand got a high pitch. But it was always ignored.

The demand for setting up of new administrative division in Sylhet had been considered as a must since the sub-divisions were made districts in 1984. But, it got a fresh momentum when the government created a new division with headquarters in Barisal in 1992. After a long drawn movement, the government formed a 5-member committee with the Additional Secretary, Cabinet Division, Mahfuzul Islam as Convenor to explore the possibilities of formation of the new division.

Accordingly, the high-level committee submitted a report in favour. By this time,

almost all the political parties and local welfare organisations began an all-out movement to further press the demands. The movement even spread to other countries where expatriates from the Sylhet region were in good number.

At last, Prime Minister

Khaleda Zia declared the formation of Sylhet division comprising the four districts in the region at a big public meeting held at the Sylhet Government Alia Madrasah Maidan on September 24 last year.

The National Committee for Administrative Reforms in its meeting on June 28 last approved immediate resumption of functions at the divisional headquarters. A gazette notification in this regard was published on June 29. Following that the division gets birth of itself on August 1.

The division comprises of four districts with a total area of 12,596 sq kilometres. It includes Habiganj with 8 thanas over an area of 2637 sq kilometres, Sylhet with 11 thanas 3490 sq kilometres, Sunamganj with 10 thanas over 3670 sq kilometres and Moulvibazar with 6 thanas comprising over 2799 sq kilometres. The total number of thanas is 35.



The Medhabkunda water-fall in Moulvibazar district — an attractive tourist spot. — Star photo



SYLHET: M Alauddin, Vice-President, Bangladesh Caters Association, UK speaking at an open discussion meeting at Sylhet Press Club auditorium recently. It was also addressed by Sharfuddin Khashru MP, Abu Taher Khan, DC; Khurshid Anwar Khan Regional Controller (News) Radio Bangladesh, Sylhet, Emily Thornbury and Philip Maxwell councillors of Tower Hamlet, UK, A F M Kamal, ex-chairman, Sylhet pourashava while Muktabis-um-Noor, President, Sylhet Press Club president. — Star photo

Successful implementation of NEP in Brahmanbaria

From Md Shahidul Islam

BRAHMANBARIA, Aug 1: Under the Mass Education Programme of the government, Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) introduced the Non-formal Education Programme (NEP) in 87 places of Brahmanbaria sadar thana of the district.

So far BRAC has established 87 Non-formal Education Centres (NECs) for NEP in the villages of sadar thana. The NECs have now started to earn the confidence of the people of the locality.

The NECs of BRAC are of two kinds. One is for children between 8 to 10 age group and the other for those above age 10. The children are to attend the NECs for a period of two to three years. An official said, one can get admission in class three or class four of general primary schools after completing the courses under the NEP of BRAC.

On the other hand 22 NEC of BRAC were established for the boys and girls of 11 to 16 and above age group.

BRAC is providing all the materials and the necessary equipment needed for the smooth functioning of the programme. In this connection, BRAC in Brahmanbaria unit received financial assistance from UNICEF, government of Bangladesh and of course from BRAC central office.

To educate the participants in the Non-formal Education Centres, BRAC has appointed teachers. The teachers are given proper training for a certain period.

Generally, lessons in Bengali, English, Religious studies and Mathematics are taught at the classes of NECs. The number of interested people and the participants of the education programme are increasing every session.

The participation of girl students are increasing ev-

eryday. The class room attendance of the girl students are quite satisfactory. In every NEC the ratio of the male to female students is about 1:2.

NECs of BRAC have literated 1350 students last year. 2,850 students are studying in the NECs of BRAC this year. The number of students in the BRAC run schools may increase in the current year, as well.

Md Nurul Islam, Thana Education Officer (TEO) of Brahmanbaria sadar thana said that although there is a provision not to establish any Non-formal Education Centre within half a km range of any primary school, BRAC has established some Non-formal Education Centres at some areas including Paton, Machhahata and Natal south villages violating the rule. He also said that BRAC also enrolled some students who have earlier got admission in primary schools.



A tea garden in Sylhet district. Processed tea worth crores of taka are exported every year from the region. — Star photo

Three get life term for killing

From Our Correspondent

JHENIDAH, Aug 1: Abdul Aziz Khalifa, Assistant Session Judge of Jhenidah awarded three persons life term and penalised Tk 1,000 each in default to suffer another one month in jail in connection with killing a motor garage owner at Kaliganj town of the district recently.

The case in brief is that on April 25, 1993 Golam Sarwar a motor garage owner of Kaliganj town was sleeping in his garage. The three accused, Mukul, Manir and Farooq allegedly spread petrol on him and set fire. Local people came to help Sarwar hearing his hue and cry and sent him to Kaliganj thana health complex.



JHENIDAH: Construction work of a baily bridge on river Kumar in Saikupa thana is nearing completion. The project is implemented at a cost of Tk one crore. — Star photo

"Only credit can not change one's life"

From Delwar Kabir

JHENIDAH Aug 1: For overall development including socio-economic condition of the people, some non-government organisations playing key role. Several lakhs of people have benefitted from the development activities of some non-government organisations. Due to proper and timely programmes, life style of some distressed women was totally changed.

The women who a few year back lost confidence, gained the courage and determination to lead a modest life. Saptagram Nari Swanirvar Parishad (SNSP), a non-government organisation have achieved considerable success in this regard. The SNSP shows earnest dedication to establish the ideology of Professor Rokeya Rahman Kabir, the founder of SNSP. It was she who first saw the dream to bring the ever neglected women into the light, informed some of the group members.

Now I can afford three meals a day and earning at least Taka 60 each day through a small business. But a few years back while my husband left me I had to pass my days without even one meal a day, says Sukiron Khatun, 35, a divorced woman of village Kulchara in Saikupa thana of the district. Sukiron runs a grocery shop at her house and sells rice as well.

Menoka Khatun, 34, a mother, of three children told that earlier she had to pass her days in hardship as her husband could not support

the family due to poverty. Now for last few years she alongwith her husband is cultivating vegetables and betel leaf on their eight decimals of land and earns at least Tk 3000 excluding their family expenses. She is expecting Taka 20 thousand from her betel leaf farm which is locally known as 'boraj' this year, added Menoka Khatun. She also added that her life style has changed due to financial and technical assistance of Saptagram Nari Swanirvar Parishad (SNSP), Jhenidah centre.

Majeda Begum, 30, who is a mother of two children of the same village informed that she was a destitute woman as her disabled husband Jobed Ali was not in a position to earn their living. The SNSP authorities sanctioned a treadle pump and an individual loan of Taka 4000 to cultivate vegetables on her 2.5 decimal land. With the credit she built a tinshed house instead of straw hut. She saved at least Tk 7000 from last year. Her daughter goes to Kishore School run by Saptagram Nari Swanirvar Parishad regularly. To keep the family small Majeda accepted a permanent method of family planning, she also informed.

Another housewife of the same village Phooljuri Khatun, 30, informed that about two years back she received a credit of Taka 2000 for vegetable farming from SNSP and repaid the money intine. She cultivated veg-

etables under home gardening programme of SNSP and earned about Taka 10,000 last year. She purchased two cows at a cost of Taka 5,540 five months back which might give her a minimum net profit Taka 8,000 she hoped. Her husband who is a day labourer now cares for her but earlier they were at daggers end, she added.

Sabera Begum Jharna, Centre In-Charge, SNSP Jhenidah told that they have formed 304 group societies with 5,458 members under Jhenidah centre. Jharna said, they have been running their activities abreast to other government and non-government organisations. They

want to develop overall socio-economic condition of the people specially women in rural areas instead of only poverty alleviation programme. She said only financial help can not make a woman complete except food, education, medicare and other basic needs.

The Centre in-Charge (CIC) also informed that they are engaged in motivating the village people about sanitation, drinking water, nutrition and other income generating activities (IGAs).

While visiting, this correspondent saw most of the small houses of village Kulchara are neat and clean. Home-gardening is an unavoidable part of the

dwelling. At least 70 per cent people use sanitary latrines and drinks tubewell water.

NN Nasreen, Administrative Officer (AO), Jhenidah Zone, SNSP informed that they had taken the programme in 66 villages of Jhenidah centre and about 5000 families have been benefitted from their programmes.

This correspondent while visiting also saw a good number of SNSP members to nurse silkworms under sericulture programmes taken by them.

Talking to Khondokar Azizul Hoque Moni, zonal coordinator SNSP Jhenidah it was learned that the system of their organisation is something different than other non-government organisations. Loan or credit facilities is not the main project as SNSP authorities want to grow consciousness among the people and they had taken massive education programme like adult education, adolsen education and child education for those who are deprived of proper and basic academic qualification.

According to SNSP sources of Jhenidah they distributed 537 sanitary latrines, 85 tubewells to remove drinking water problems, 20 ponds were reexcavated for seasonal fish farming and has established three poultry farms in the district.



JHENIDAH: Group members of different societies are advised about use of sanitary latrines. — Star photo

RHDLGC Chairman's speed boat attacked, sunk

From CHT Correspondent

BAGHAICHHARI (Rangamati), Aug 1: The militant activists of Pahari Chhatra Parishad (PCP) allegedly attacked the speed boat of the chairman of Rangamati Hill District Local Government Council on Thursday.

The attack left the driver of the speed boat injured. The speed boat was sunk in the Kachalong valley between New Khagrachhari and Khirarchor of Baghaichhari thana in the district, police said.

The speed boat driver, Janibar Rahman, 35, who received serious injuries from bricks and stones throw at the boat was admitted in the Rabita Al Alam Al Islam Hospital at Mainiomukh in Langadu thana of the district, 25 kilometre north-east of the place of incident, sources said.

After sinking of the boat, Parizat Kusham Chakma, Chairman of Rangamati Hill District Local Government Council (RHDLGC) and his entourage including Uday Rabi Chakma, a councillor Arunenda Tripura, Public Relation Officer of RHDLGC and other officials accompanying managed to escape the attackers and swam to the

bank of the river. Sources from RHDLGC said, chairman Parizat was resisted from distribution of sewing machines and certificate among the destitute, tribals at Dorchhari of Baghaichhari thana by the activists of PCP and Hill Women's Federation (HWF).

But their interference, for the time-being was resolved through negotiation by the Thana Nirbahi Officer of Baghaichhari thana.

After completing the programme, when Parizat was returning to Rangamati through Kachalong valley by river, the activists of the PCP and HWF taking position surrounding the hill-tops and under bushes allegedly attacked by pelting stones and bricks as well as throwing catapult on the speed boat of the chairman.

A case was lodged with Baghaichhari police in this connection, police said.

Meanwhile, the people from all walks of life including political and social leaders condemned the attacks by the activists of PCP and HWF and demanded their punishment for their bid to jeopardise harmony of the region.