

# Benapole Customs warehouse overcrowded with imported goods

From Our Correspondent

JESSORE, Feb 19: There are allegations of corruption, mismanagement, pilferage, negligence, and supervision problem of local Port Authority, against Benapole Customs warehouse, causing losses to importers and national revenue earnings, said sources.

According to reports, huge quantity of valuable goods, imported from India against hard earned foreign exchange worth Taka hundred crore are rot-

ted. Allegations also said that pilferage of goods from the warehouse were rampant, particularly from store no 12. The store keeper in connivance with security guards of Port Authority was allegedly engaged in carrying out pilferage of goods including yarn, cotton, electronics and other valuable portable goods.

A group of CP (Clearing and Forwarding) Agents and Im-

ported from India in 1975 but later, it was reportedly removed from the warehouse.

When the team of journalists met the Assistant Traffic Manager, ATM, Delwar Hossain to find out whether and how far the alleged reports of pilferage were correct, he told that nothing was known to him as he joined the station only six months ago.

But one of his colleagues,

Port Authority to explain position in this respect on priority basis.

It was also reported that there is a port for Deputy Traffic Manager (DTM), Mongla, Shaikh Hasan Ali DTM, Mongla Port, is currently holding the additional charge of this office.

Benapole Land Port, bigger than Mongla Port in revenue earnings and cargo handlings, is controlled by Mongla Port Authority (MPA) since inception. CP Agents and importers also informed that Benapole Port office was no better than post office. All sorts of disputes, objections and complicated matter, were referred to MPA from here for decision and necessary action, they contained. Normally in such cases decision takes more than a month to come from MPA.

Another source told that activities of this port are not fully governed by MPA, rather orders and instructions are issued from Dhaka to run this port.

It was also learnt during the visit that over 5000 tons of cargo were lying in the warehouse occupying space for the last 3 to 4 years. C&F Agents or importers were not showing interest to clear the cargo. This has been major cause to create space crisis in the warehouse.

It was also learnt, that rate of warehouse rent and demurrage charges at Benapole port is lower than that of Dhaka or anywhere in the country. That's why the importers consume time to clear the cargo.

However a decision has been taken by customs to dispose of all cargo within 45 days of their entry into the warehouse.

Port Authority has been asked to send least of such defaulters. This will help solve space crisis, a source said.

Sources informed that cargo handling capacity of Benapole Port is 16,600 tons while in recent days 50,000 tons of cargo are being handled here with limited handling equipment.



JESSORE: Inside view of the Benapole Customs warehouse where imported goods are lying dumped for months. —Star photo

ting uncared in the ware house of Benapole Customs for years.

During recent visit inside the warehouse, a team of journalists from Jessore, found that many consignments containing machineries, motor parts, chemical GI tripes were lying dumped and scattered under open sky across the warehouse being exposed to sun. Allegations received from different agents during the visit, say that the goods were being damaged. Some materials were already damaged, they

porters lodged complaints with local traffic officer against the store keeper for pilferage of their imported items from the warehouse. But in vain. There has been no action nor reportedly in change of his practice. The case of pilferage of the powerful generator from the warehouse was subsequently ignored reportedly by the former Joint Commissioner, Benapole Customs, He-lal Uddin after his pointed attention was drawn to the matter. The generator was im-

ported from India in 1975 but later, it was reportedly removed from the warehouse.

When the team of journalists met the Assistant Traffic Manager, ATM, Delwar Hossain to find out whether and how far the alleged reports of pilferage were correct, he told that nothing was known to him as he joined the station only six months ago.

But one of his colleagues,

Port Authority to explain position in this respect on priority basis.

It was also reported that there is a port for Deputy Traffic Manager (DTM), Mongla, Shaikh Hasan Ali DTM, Mongla Port, is currently holding the additional charge of this office.

Benapole Land Port, bigger than Mongla Port in revenue earnings and cargo handlings, is controlled by Mongla Port Authority (MPA) since inception. CP Agents and importers also informed that Benapole Port office was no better than post office. All sorts of disputes, objections and complicated matter, were referred to MPA from here for decision and necessary action, they contained. Normally in such cases decision takes more than a month to come from MPA.

Another source told that activities of this port are not fully governed by MPA, rather orders and instructions are issued from Dhaka to run this port.

It was also learnt during the visit that over 5000 tons of cargo were lying in the warehouse occupying space for the last 3 to 4 years. C&F Agents or importers were not showing interest to clear the cargo. This has been major cause to create space crisis in the warehouse.

It was also learnt, that rate of warehouse rent and demurrage charges at Benapole port is lower than that of Dhaka or anywhere in the country. That's why the importers consume time to clear the cargo.

However a decision has been taken by customs to dispose of all cargo within 45 days of their entry into the warehouse.

Port Authority has been asked to send least of such defaulters. This will help solve space crisis, a source said.

Sources informed that cargo handling capacity of Benapole Port is 16,600 tons while in recent days 50,000 tons of cargo are being handled here with limited handling equipment.



TETULIA (Panchagarh): Plenty of pineapple fruits are grown in the area but lion's share of the produce is locally consumed because of lack of transportation facilities in the region. — Star photo

# "The return I get after all that hard work is not satisfactory"

by Amran Hossain back from Panchagarh

TETULIA (Panchagarh) Feb 19: The country's northern most point, Tetulia in Panchagarh district, having a population of about 90,000 people almost all of whom heavily depend on farming, has comparatively very fertile land. The entire area is more or less sandy region containing high content of mineral contents in the soil. Sadly, the huge quantity of produce grown in the region do not fetch the expected price, according to local farmers.

Although it discourages the farmers, there is no alternative. The entire region's econ-

omy is largely dominated by agriculture. The farmers rather seem to be happy with whatever they fetch. "I have been growing crops since last 22 years. The return I get after all that hard work is not very satisfactory but this is the way it has been," said Alimullah of Ramachundi, an old man from Rangpur settled in Panchagarh.

Agriculture in the northern region always faced hardship with growing natural calamities in addition to drop in underground water level every year. Irrigation has had a major draw-back in the entire region due to this reason.

"Irrigation is very expensive here in Tetulia. To get water from an acre of crop land one has to pay as much as between Tk 1,500 and 2,000 for the whole season. Cost of other inputs like fertiliser, seeds, and others can at times be a huge burden compared to what we actually get in return," said Matjur Rahman, a fellow colleague farmer of Alimullah from Demaganj.

"Profit from selling the produce is very marginal," said Golam Faruque a broker who buys vegetables in the winter seasons and sells in the local markets. "We can not offer the

farmers big profit because of risk of the produce being decomposed on way to shipment. Marketing system, on the other hand, is very poor, he added saying, there is no cold storage to preserve the vegetables.

At a local market in Shalaban this correspondent asked prices of a few winter vegetables. A kilogram of brinjal cost Tk one. The quality of the crop is very high indeed. Sadly traders hardly find customers buying more than two to three kilograms. A kilogram of potato and tomato cost Tk 3 each.

February 19: Idris Ali, with a family of five, leads a happy life in his new home at Bhe-lanagar in Narsingdi. Before moving into this home four years ago, he and his wife, two sons and a daughter lived a miserable life. He now works as a night guard at a local Family Planning office in the town and makes Tk 1,800 a month. His eldest son, a private car driver, also contributes a part of his earnings to the family.

Idris looks happy at being able to give shelter to both his married sons. A few years back he could hardly afford two meals a day for the family. Now he has a saving of about Tk 1,600. Of course, that is solely meant for maintaining the cows he owns. He also makes profit out of selling milk.

# Home for the have-nots

by Naimul Haq back from Narsingdi

There are a total of 20 semi-kutcha houses in Bhe-lanagar constructed by the Ministry of Land under the project called 'Adarsha Gram' initiated as 'Guchha Gram' by the Ershad government. The project aims at providing homes for the totally assetless people. The size of the land, however, may vary depending on total land acquired. There are, however, certain conditions a recipient has to fulfil before receiving the document giving him or her title to the parcel of land.

Through public announcements all the landless people are informed of interviews by a committee headed by Thana Nirbahi Officer in each thana. The committee members are responsible for identifying and selecting genuine recipients. This way the genuine needies are selected.

"It is a difficult task," said M Shawkat, TNO of Bhe-lanagar. "Sometimes they fool us by providing false documents to prove they are genuine candidates. They often show us papers from the office of their respective union parishads with their photos attested trying to convince us to consider his or her case," he said adding, hundreds turn up asking us to consider cases. All are interviewed but only a few are selected. In some cases we have to select less than the number we could cater to. This also happens when disputes arise.

When families move into their new homes, NGOs are assigned by the Promotion Planning Monitoring Unit (PPMU), a cell (under the Ministry of Land) responsible for monitoring all activities of the project, to look after the socio-economic needs of the settlers. They provide credit facilities and all the basic needs of a family that include education, water supply, sanitation, family planning, food and nutrition, banking, tree planting, medicare and, of course, knowledge of income generating activities.

The land title is given in the name of both husband and wife. If, however, the husband divorces his wife or vice-versa the concerned thana committee members will then decide and find out who is actually responsible for the separation and why. The one who is found innocent gets the ownership of the land. Normally women have more power. This has been formulated to avoid discrimination against women.

Sufiya Begum, 20, a candidate in the just-ended degree exams, has volunteered to be a supervisor of the Bhe-lanagar community. She is paid a small sum as honorarium by the NGO. "I teach the children as well as the adults how to read and write. I give lessons from 10 am to 12 noon four days a week. I also collect weekly instalments from the borrowers. From time to time I advise them to save money and make future plans. Community members here are quite conscious about their life. Most have savings. Progress of the education programme is quite good. Children show better results than the adults. On an average each family has three children which is a better record than most other neighbourhoods," Sufiya said.

The country has now 845 such ideal villages or 'Adarsha Grams'. There is a plan to expand this popular project. We have a scheme to establish 1,104 more 'Adarsha Grams' this year (up to June), said a senior official of the PPMU. There are, however, hurdles. Acquiring land is a major problem. Wherever there is khas or government-owned land available works of the project run smoothly but there are

cases where local people have taken hold of the khas land. Disputes in such cases continue for a long time.

The project, started in 1988, is jointly financed by the European Union and Government of Bangladesh. Taka 76 crore has been placed to run the project. So far 33,121 families have been settled. The project has a target to settle 45,847 families by June this year.

"The project is only a model for other villages. We are trying our best to set examples for other villages," said an high official of PPMU.



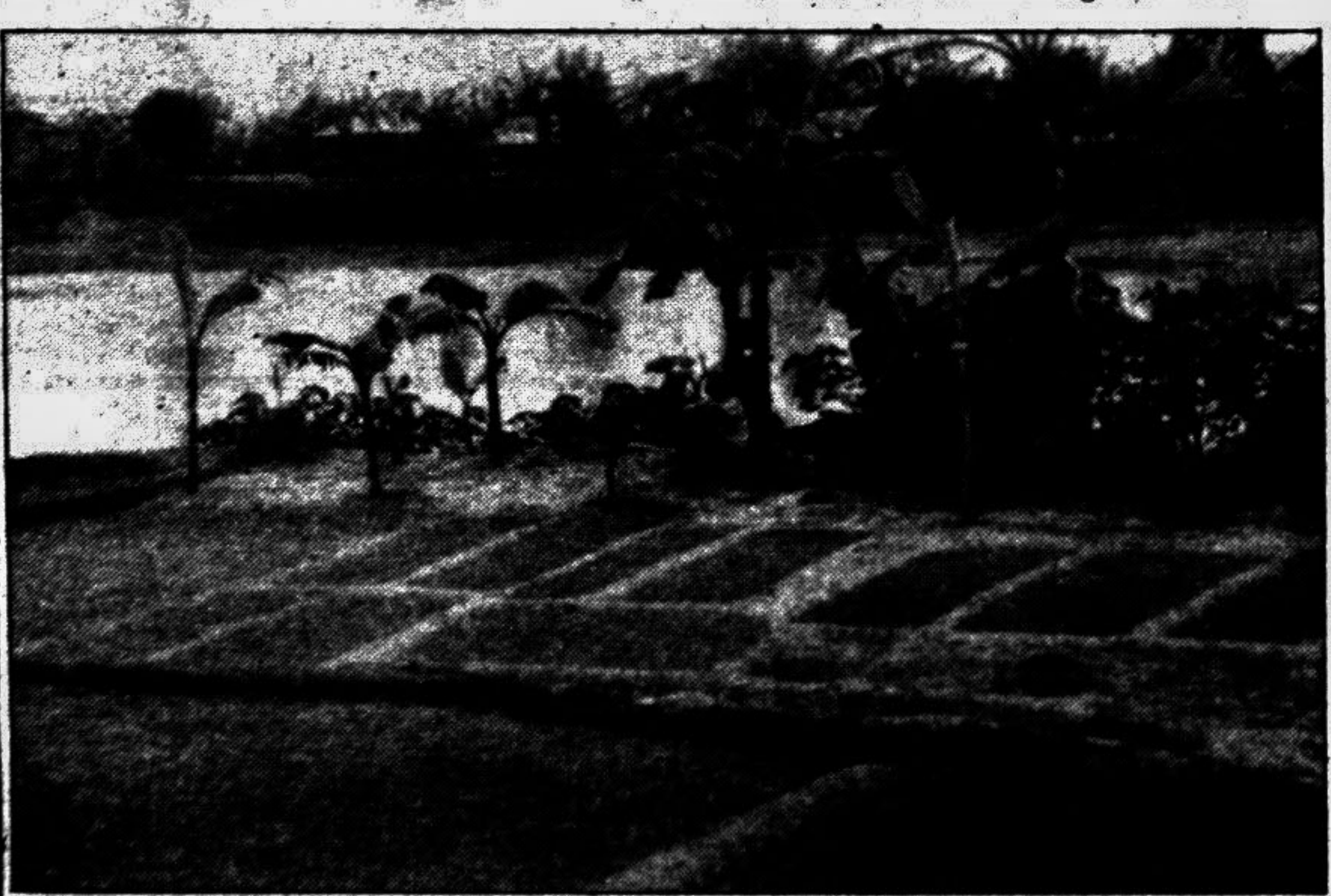
A woman in Prayaganj Adarsha Gram in Deduar thana of Tangail district making cane stool as part of income generating scheme. — Star photo



Sufiya Begum



Children attending a lesson in school in Bhajondanga Adarsha Gram in Fariapur district. — Star photo



A scene of agriculture scheme taken up by an NGO for the settlers of Adarsha Gram in char Bhuts in Bhola district. — Star photo

# The centuries old Garib Shah Mazar left uncared

From Our Correspondent

MAGURA, Feb 19: For long two centuries old Gorib Shah Mazar still stands as a historical symbol at village Nohata in Sripur thana of Magura district.

Gorib Shah was a great saint of eighteenth century. His biography was not kept by the historians. As a result, it is not possible to collect actual fact of his life.

It is, however, learnt that he was born in 1757 at village Nohata in Sripur thana. His family was known as Jakir, (poor) family. The economical condition of his family was not so good. In his boyhood he was called 'Gorbe'. He did not receive higher education, though there was no such institution in that time. He learnt Arabic from a teacher of his own village. The name of his teacher was Gorjan Munshi. Gorib Shah lived at his teacher's house.

He began to show supernatural power when he lived at the house of Gorjan Munshi. One night his teacher, Gorjan Munshi saw him crossing a river on foot wearing slippers. How teachers Munshi was astonished to see this in that night.

The teacher usually took water for 'oh' (purification) from him. He refused to take water from Gorib Shah after he

had observed that miracle incident.

He then showed so many spiritual activities that the news of super power spread every where. A group of people were attracted by him at that time and they became disciples. Then they called him 'Gorib Shah Dewan'.

Due to lack of care for long time this spiritual man's 'Mazar' is lying at Nohata totally neglected.

It was learnt that the last day of the month of Aswin a large number of disciples gathered at his 'Mazar' to devote their respect to him. Besides, many devotees come at his 'Mazar' all around the year.

Talking to the caretaker of the 'Mazar' it is learnt that a small pucca room and waiting shed had already been damaged. The caretaker had no fund to rebuild the waiting shed and 'Mazar'. Now there is only a small pucca room on the 'Mazar' site.

Concerned authority of the government has not taken initiative to preserve this historical 'Mazar', it was alleged by the local people.

It is also learnt that there are a few more 'Mazar's of Gorib Shah in different places of the country.

# Gopalganj Pourashava spends Tk 5 cr for development in 1994-95

From Our Correspondent

GOPALGANJ, Feb 19: An amount of Tk five crore seventy-five lakh has been spent towards the development of Gopalganj Pourashava under the mid town infrastructural development project during last five financial years. It was gathered from official sources.

Spending the said amount, 35 pucca roads having of 3.32 km 15 pucca drains having a total length of 13,102 were constructed installation of water supply pipe-line having a length of 8.72 km construction of 1000 sanitary latrines and clusters and construction of 15 culverts and cross-drains have been completed.

Of them during the financial year 1994-95, as many as 12 bituminous carpeting roads having a total length of 1.50 kilometres. Ten pucca drains with a total length of 8.32 kilometres, 8 RCC roads having a total length of 6.00 kilometres, 200 sanitary latrines and clusters were constructed at a total expenditure of Tk 2 crore.

Besides during the financial year 1993-94 five asphaltd roads with a total length of 3.32 km, three RCC roads with

a total length of 7.00 kilometres. Six pucca drains having a total lengths of 3.571 kilometres and 300 sanitary latrines and clusters were taken up for construction and completed duty.

Moreover, 4 box culverts of a total length of 2,253 metres. Light cross drains two herring-bone-bond road with a length 1.25 kilometres. Markets were also constructed at a total cost of Tk 30 lakh.

During the year 1992-93 an amount of Tk 50 lakh was spent towards the construction of 8 asphalted roads having a total lengths of 2.917 kilometres. Three water-supply pipe-lines having a total length of 1.576 kilometres.

During the year 1991-92 as many as 8 bituminous carpeting roads having a total length of 2.12 kilometres. One water supply pipe line with a length of 8 kilometres, 15 pucca dustbins, 13 twin pit latrines and other works were completed at a total cost of Tk 53 lakh.

Various other development works were still being carried on within the Gopalganj pourashava under the said project being financed by the World Bank.