



Waiting for the Boat to Salvation ...

When the boat comes in: The street children of the inland port at Sadarghat on the Buriganga wait by the quayside for the launches. Carrying the passengers' luggage ashore is their ticket to a square meal.



Laughter is the best tonic: The days are tough and nights are worse, but these children still find a reason to laugh to their hearts' content. The children have nowhere to go, nowhere to sleep, but life still holds its lighter moments for them.



A photo essay by A K M Mohsin

A chance to play: Picking garbage from the streets or carrying luggage at the jetty may be their only means of staying alive, but the street children of Sadarghat are not "all work and no play". They gather and reclaim a small piece of their childhood.



Old Banyan Facing Mortal Threat

By Delwar Kabir

Jhenidah

THE grand old banyan tree in Suitala, Mallikpur village of Kaliganj thana is part of the folklore and natural heritage of the region. But this impressive gift of nature is facing ruination, thanks to neglect of Man.

Countless legends give the tree an aura of mysticism. According to local people, the tree had about 650 hanging roots, but these have decreased alarmingly over the years. The main tree has gradually declined, as Man's greed got the better of acetic seeds. Not any intruder or trader from far off, but the tree has been assaulted and mutilated by a section of local influential people.

The banyan tree stands about 200 feet high, and its branches spread over a wide area, estimated to be about 20 bighas. There are many opinions about the tree. Some say it is about 300 years old. Others differ and suggest that the tree would be aged about 800 years.

There are many legends surrounding the name of the tree, which is popularly known as Suitalar bat gachi. Local people presume that the hanging roots of the tree were so sharp that they resembled needles (in Bengali *sooch* or *sul* means needle). For sharpness of the hanging roots, the banyan tree was named 'Suitalar bat gachi'.

and the village, adjacent to Mallikpur, itself took its name 'Suitala' from the tree.

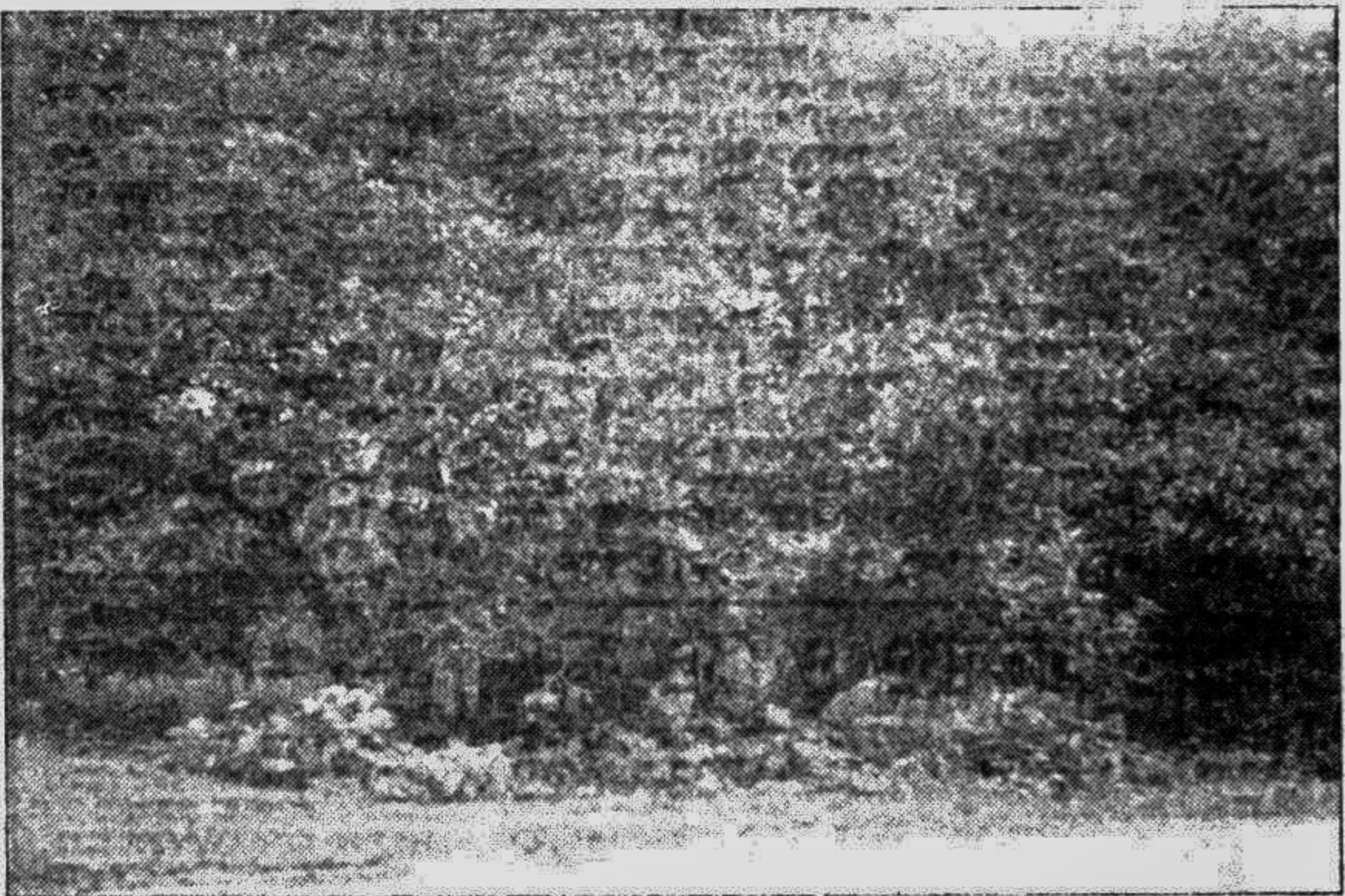
In 1982, a broadcast by the BBC from London claimed that the banyan tree at village Mallikpur in Jhenidah was the largest banyan tree in Asia. This telecast by BBC saved the name and fame of the grand old

banyan tree of Jhenidah far and wide.

Earlier, a banyan tree at the botanical garden at Howrah in Calcutta was recognised as the largest banyan tree of Asia.

Some local people believe that there are fairies on the tree. They say the fairies of the local people are linked to

the tree. To protect the villagers from the evil slap of the fairies, local people arrange various prayers and leave sweetmeats, foodgrains, money under the tree frequently. The practice of appeasing the fairy of the banyan tree is more popular with the people of the Hindu community.



Victim of man's endless greed

Acid Burnt Tohura Awaits Painful Death

By Delwar Kabir

Jhenidah

TWO years ago, Tohura Khatun was a happily married woman. Or so she had thought.

Today, she counts her days in agony. Her body severely burned by the acid thrown by her husband, Tohura is almost resigned to an early, painful death.

She faces permanent damage to parts of her anatomy burned by the acid, including her genitals, but her poor family cannot afford to pay for the treatment.

Doctors at the local thana health complex at Moheshpur have done all they can, but drugs necessary for treatment are simply not available locally.

To this day, no development organisation nor any other person has come forward to help her with treatment.

Tohura says that she married Nur Islam who was her neighbour at Kultala village in Moheshpur thana of Jhenidah the second time about two years back. As Nur Islam had two other wives and unable to bear Tohura's expenses, she divorced him about four months ago.

When Nur Islam received the divorce notice, he was livid with rage, and threatened to teach her a lesson. Tohura recalls the fateful morning of Sept 29 with horror.

"As usual that morning, I went to the toilet in a bush near our house. My husband was waiting for me outside. As I was using the toilet, unaware of his presence, my husband threw the

acid on me", Tohura says.

Her chest, hands, genital organs and other parts were burnt severely. She was rushed to Moheshpur thana health complex with the help of her relatives.

M A Jalil, sub-inspector of police of Moheshpur thana and the investigation officer (IO) of the case said that Nur Islam was a notorious thief in the locality. Marriage was another hobby for him, the IO said.

Nur Islam was caught by local people the day after the incident. Dr Kazi Forhadul Haq,

medical officer (MO) at Moheshpur thana health complex said that Tohura's genitals were badly affected and her treatment had been hampered due to lack of proper drugs.

Tohura's brother said that they were very poor in the locality and had no ability to arrange money for the treatment of his sister.

The MO of Moheshpur thana health complex feared that Tohura's genitals might be damaged permanently whether immediate treatment was ensured or not.



Deceived, deserted, but not yet defeated

Health is All the Rage

By K M Rezau Hoque

Gaibandha

THE residents of Baromtail, a small village under Shaghat thana, has set a glittering example for the people of Gaibandha to follow.

All the families in the village use sanitary latrine whereas the percentage in the district is only 40, according to a survey conducted by local NGOs.

Consciousness among the villagers, mostly fishermen, about health and hygiene is, however, not so old a phenomenon. Only three years back in 1995, there were only two sanitary latrines for 171 families in the village. The villagers then used open space, bamboo groves or crop fields, consequently polluting the environment. Intestinal diseases were widespread. Many people died of diarrhoea and dysentery.

Besides, since they were not aware of the danger in drinking water from well, pond and canal, they fell easy prey to water-borne diseases, and every

year a good number of people including children, died.

The entire scenario changed in 1995 when Samaj Kalyan Sangstha, a local NGO, started the programme of generating awareness among the villagers about health and hygiene. Later, the NGO Forum extended a helping hand. The forum selected Baromtail as a model village and started implementation of its programmes.

The NGOs arranged discussion and view-exchanging session on sanitation and primary health care. As the concept of primary health care became clear to them, the villagers started realising the need of drinking water from tube-wells and using sanitary latrines. But there was another problem. Most of the families in the village were poor and could not afford tube-wells or sanitary latrines of their own. The NGOs came up with the solution. It extended short-term loan against low-cost sanitary ware and soon every family had a sanitary latrine of their own.

Over the last three years, the number of families in Baromtail rose to 190 and population to 980. Now, there are 28 hand-operated deep tube-wells,

Barind Bouncing Back from the Floods

By Abdul Wadood

Rajshahi

THE government has allocated Tk 7.37 crore to repair the damages caused by the recent flood to different development projects under the Barind Multipurpose Development Authority (BMDA), sources said.

The BMDA, which covers all the 25 thanas of Rajshahi, Natore, Naogaon and Chapainawabganj districts, was formed with a view to initiating all-out development, especially in agriculture, fisheries and infrastructure like roads, electric supply, and maintaining ecological balance in the region.

The prolonged flood, which had the entire region under water from July to September, has left signs of destruction in its wake. Deep tube-wells, pump houses, electric poles, transformers and lines, roads and trees under BMDA projects and total damage has been estimated at nearly ten crore taka.

Narco Menace Hits Magura Town Youth

By Monojit Kumar Das

Magura

ADDICTION to drugs and other narcotics is on the rise in the district, especially among youths.

Ganja, phensidyl, country-made liquor and rectified spirit are available in towns, and even in the established bazaars of many villages of the district.

According to sources in the Narcotics Department, there is only one licensed agent of wine at the Magura town of the district. The department has launched special operations to do away with the narcotics business in the district, but in vain. The shop-keepers, who sell banned substances, seem to have a warning mechanism operating for them. Every time there is a raid, they somehow manage to smuggle ganja, phensidyl out of their shops and hide them in a safe place. Students, jobless people and

even the children of solvent families are main consumers of ganja, phensidyl and country-made liquor.

Huge quantity of ganja is smuggled into the district everyday. Bidi and cigarettes, stuffed with ganja, are sold for four to five taka per stick at the established bazaars in towns and villages.

According to official sources at the Narcotics Department, ban on ganja and its trade was imposed in 1987. Cultivation of ganja and hashish is, nevertheless, in a full swing at different parts of the country. On the other hand, phensidyl, a banned medicine, is being smuggled into the district from India in the district.

Despite the efforts of the Narcotics Department, there is a boom in the business of ganja, phensidyl and country-made liquors. Hundreds of people, especially the teenagers, are taken to addiction every year. As the concern of the conscious section of the society increased, so does the number of addicts.

From Our Correspondent

Mymensingh

THE number of abduction and rape cases have marked a sharp rise over the last few months.

Sixty-five abductions and three rape incidents were reported last month.

Lipi Rani Das, a student of class seven, was kidnapped from the Kalbari area in Muktagacha on October 2. Three days later, Nurjahan, 22, a third year student at the Rangpur Medical College (RMC), was also abducted.

Ruma Sarker, a 14-year-old student of class ten at the Mohakhali Girls High School, was kidnapped on her way back home on October 8. Police are yet to rescue her.

Four days later, a microbus driver foiled the bid to kidnap Sultana Aktar, a student of class seven at the Muktagacha N N Girls High School, by a group of miscreants. The microbus was rented by the goons.

Tanjima Latzu, 16, was abducted from Lakshikola area of Muktagacha thana on October 8. Latzu is a student of Hazl Kashem All Women's College.

Smriti Rangdi, a tribal housewife of Dakshin Matpara Tangal area under Dubaura thana, was allegedly raped by a young man named Hazrat Ali on October 3. Two days later, Juleka Akter, daughter of Kashem Ali of Bikhura area under Haluaghat thana, was raped by one Nazrul Islam.

Meanwhile, kotwali thana police of the district recovered the body of an unidentified woman from a paddy field in

Charpara on October 7. There were several marks of injury on the dead body.

Police also recovered the hanging body of a housewife from the house of a senior staff nurse in the district town on October 8. The woman was reported to have committed suicide, although autopsy report indicated otherwise.

Bhaluka thana police recovered the body of an unidentified woman from Dhamasur village on October 12 which bore several injury marks.

One Sakila Begum, 22, a house wife, was allegedly killed by her husband Abdul Khaleque at the Phulpur bus stand area under Phulpur thana on October 19.

Besides, seven incidents of suicide have also been reported last month at different thanas of the district.