

News snaps

Two dacoities in Kaliganj Pourashava

SATKHIRA, Dec 23: Two daring dacoities were committed in Kaliganj pourashava and Sadar on Friday night in which cash and valuables worth about Tk 51 lakhs were looted, reports UNB. Police said a gang of dacoits numbering 10 to 12 entered into the house of Mizanur Rahman at Nilkanthapur para in Kaliganj pourashava and looted cash and ornaments worth Tk 50 lakh. In another incident, the robbers stormed the house of Panchu Gazi of village Jhiki in Sadar thana and decamped with cash and valuables worth about Tk one lakh.

PDB has Tk 5 cr dues with consumers

JHENIDAH, Dec 23: The Local Power Development Board (PDB) has Tk 5 crore dues with consumers, according to official sources, reports APB.

Of the amount, Tk 2 crore is due with consumers in Jhenidah Sadar thana, Tk 2 crore in Magura Sadar thana and Tk 1 crore in Kaliganj, Shailakupa, Moheshpur, Harinakunda and Kachandpur thanas. There are about 30,000 consumers under Jhenidah Sub-division of PDB. In Jhenidah Sadar thana, 70 per cent of the dues are with the PWD, Collectorate and other government departments.

Discussion on child rights

CHUADANGA, Dec 23: The Children Rights Week was observed in Chuadanga district through various programmes last week, reports BSS.

The local branch of Bangladesh Shishu Academy chalked out an elaborate programme to mark the occasion. The programme included recitation, musical soiree and painting competition. On the concluding day a discussion meeting, prize distribution ceremony and cultural function were held at the local Sree-Monto town hall. The concluding day's functions were presided over by Shahan Uddin, District Children Affairs Officer, Chuadanga. The Deputy Commissioner, of Chuadanga, M R Choudhury was present on the occasion.

Eye camp in Madaripur

MADARIPUR, Dec 23: A week-long eye camp organised by Seba Shram Samity concluded here at the samity premises recently reports BSS.

A discussion meeting was held in this connection at the Seba Shram Samity office with Farhad Rahman, Deputy Commissioner, Madaripur in the chair. A total of 67 men and 57 women patients were operated upon at the camp. Dr Abdul Bari, President BMA, Madaripur conducted the operation.

Certificates awarded

TANGAIL, Dec 23: The certificate awarding and the *dastar-bandi* ceremony of Barhaid Syed Ahmadia Yatim Khana was held at the campus recently, reports BSS.

Those inmates of the yatim khana who completed the hezf of the Holy Quran were awarded certificates on the occasion. Eminent ulemas explained verses from the Holy Quran and Hadis in the function. Ahaj Mulaia Mohammad Abdus Salam Razee, Secretary of the Yatim Khana presided over the function.

New Rly tracks to be laid

PABNA, Dec 23: The Bangladesh Railway will begin laying metre-gauge tracks along the 245 km Parbatipur-Jamtoil broad-gauge line next month, according to sources in the railway, reports APB.

This will be part of the second phase of a 1,155 crore taka plan to set up a railway link between the western and eastern parts of the country through the Bangabandhu Jamuna Bridge. Railway stations along the route will be renovated, old sleepers replaced and new boulders laid on tracks. The first phase of the plan includes laying of a 94 km dual-gauge track between Joydebpur and Jamtoil, setting up of nine new railway stations and construction of 2,814 metres of bridges and culverts.

'Establish rights of children'

RANGAMATI, Dec 23: Chairman of Rangamati Hill District Local government Council, Ching Kew Roaza has called upon all to work with dedication to establish the rights of the children to make a prosperous nation, reports BSS.

He was addressing the inaugural function of Children's Right Week '98 as the chief guest. The function was held at local Shishu Academy auditorium on recently with the Deputy Commissioner of the district, Shah Alam in the chair. The Rangamati Hill District unit of Bangladesh Shishu Academy chalked out an elaborate programme to observe the Children's Right Week '98 in a befitting manner. A large number of children participated in a series of items in the inaugural day.

'Rabi' crops on 2 lakh hectares damaged

PATUAKHALI, Dec 23: 'Rabi' and 'Aman' crops on about two lakh hectares of land in six thanas of the district were damaged by the recent cyclone, Agriculture Extension Department said, reports APB.

The worst-affected areas are Char Anda, Sonar Char, Char Bangla, Char Ganga, Kauner Char, Char Hadi, Char Borhanuddin, Char Raihan, Char Ragunathdi, Char Pakdal, Char Bashuderpasha, Natun Char and Char Shah Jalal in Galachipa, Kalapara, Dashmina, Bauphal and Mirzaganj thanas. About 28 shoals were inundated with 5 to 6 feet tidal water during the cyclone. About 14,000 villagers of Bauphal, Galachipa and Dashmina thanas survived as they took shelter in cyclone shelters.

65 km dam damaged by Netrakona flood

NETRAKONA, Dec 23: A total of 65 kilometres of flood control embankment in the district has been damaged by the recent devastating floods, reports APB.

The extent of damage has been estimated at two crore taka. Water Development Board (WDB) sources here said. The damaged sections of the embankment are: 22 kms along Baroar-Balughat in Durgapur thana, 8 kms along Thakurakona-Baroar in sadar thana and 14 kms along Dashdari-Sabadia in Barhatta thana.

The other sections include: 5.38 kms along Jaria-Dampara in Durgapur thana, 5 kms of Hajda Embankment Project in Mohanganj thana, 1.5 kms along Khallajuri-Naotana in Khallajuri thana, 6 kms along Madan-Balali-Kadamaree in Madan and 2.6 kms along Kalmakanda-Ubdakhali in Kalmakanda thana.

Erosion renders 25,000 families homeless

KUSHTIA, Dec 23: Nearly 25,000 families in six thanas of the district have become homeless due to erosion caused by the Ganges and the Gorai in the last 10 years, reports APB.

Vast tracts of fertile land along with houses, offices, schools, and markets have been washed away by their turbulent waters. The most severe damage was done in '88-89 when banks of both the rivers burst and water flooded the adjacent areas. Due to heavy siltation, caused by the unilateral withdrawal of water by India, the depth of the rivers got reduced causing the water to overflow. Besides, the rivers changed courses several times, causing extensive damage. Erosion has badly affected the intake channel of the GK project. The government has sanctioned Tk 10 crore for repair work, project authorities said.

Murderer couple arrested

COMILLA, Dec 23: Police arrested a couple from Thakurpara area of the town for murdering their maid servant, reports UNB.

Police said the victim Momena Begum, 55, was working at the residence of Aatur Rahman since long and on December 20 she was allegedly tortured to death by the house owner and his wife. Police recovered the body after being informed by a neighbour and sent it to the hospital for autopsy on December 21. Police upon a complaint arrested Aatur Rahman, son of a local 'Peer' of Azizia Darbar Sharif and his wife Razia Begum for their involvement in the murder. The court sent them to jail custody after rejecting their bail prayers.

Road repairing work progressing

TANGAIL, Dec 23: The Local Government Engineering Department has been repairing 17 roads in Tangail Pourashava at a total cost of Taka 42,52,972 in the current fiscal year, reports BSS.

Official sources said the work of the projects included repair and reconstruction of roads and lanes. The work will be completed by February 1999.

vegetables farming on 5,500 hectares

MANIKGANJ, Dec 23: A total of 5500 hectare have been brought under winter vegetables cultivation in seven thanas of the district in the current 'Rabi' season, reports BSS.

According to Agriculture Extension Department sources, thana-wise break-up of land is 1,000 hectares in Manikganj, 1,000 hectares in Singair, 1,000 hectares in Satura, 800 hectares in Ghior, 600 hectares in Daulatpur, 600 hectares in Shiblalaya and 500 hectares in Harirampur. The production target has been fixed at 82,500 tonnes. Agriculture Extension Department already distributed necessary vegetables seeds among the flood victim farmers in the district.

National

Journalists' investigation reveals

Murder of 11 outlawed partymen an outburst of people's anger

JESSORE, Dec 23: The sensational murder of eleven members of outlawed parties in Jessore on December 12 was the outburst of pent-up anger and hatred of people, reports APB.

This was gathered during an investigation by a group of local newsmen in the Sadar, Bagharpara, Abhaynagar and Monirampur thanas of the district.

Villagers in the areas said that they had been virtually hostage in the hands of various 'bahinis'.

Their life became unbearable due to unabated murder, loot, arson, kidnapping, extortion and other criminal activities.

Nobody dared to raise voice in protest, because the gangs of miscreants and sophisticated firearms. Nor did the police dared to take any action against them.

Local people alleged that the members of the Asad Bahini was the most dangerous among

all the groups active in the region.

At least 669 people were killed by these elements in three thanas since 1993. As many as 72 killings took place in 1993, 88 in 1994, 114 in 1995, 172 in 1996, 127 in 1997 and 96 till December 12 this year, police said.

No culprit was taken to book following these murders.

The Deputy Commissioner of Jessore had told a public meeting at Ghoshnagar in Bagharpara thana on December 13 that there were 26 cases against Asaduzzaman Mollah, alias Asad, the leader of the so-called Asad Bahini.

Asad was sentenced to 12 years' rigorous imprisonment (RI) in a murder case, but was granted bail by the High Court. Asad, he said, had escaped from captivity twice.

It is gathered that the Asad Bahini had killed at least 50 people over the last six years. They had kidnapped two trans-

port workers from Chararhita, which prompted transport workers to call a strike in the Jessore-Narail route for one week.

Zakir Hossain, who was killed by Asad Bahini men on December 12 at Ghunighat under Bagharpara thana was a deputy of Abdul Gafur, the leader of the 'Gafur Bahini', a faction of the Sarbohara Party. Gafur, incidentally, had also been murdered by Asad Bahini a year ago, when Zakir took over the leadership of his organisation.

Zakir, who was a dedicated worker of Sarbohara Party, had earned some popularity among the poor for his services, to them. This annoyed Asad, who decided to eliminate Zakir, local people said.

Asad and his armed party men had taken shelter at the house of Golam and Nowshar at village Ghoshnagar on the night before the murder took place. They were armed with sophisti-

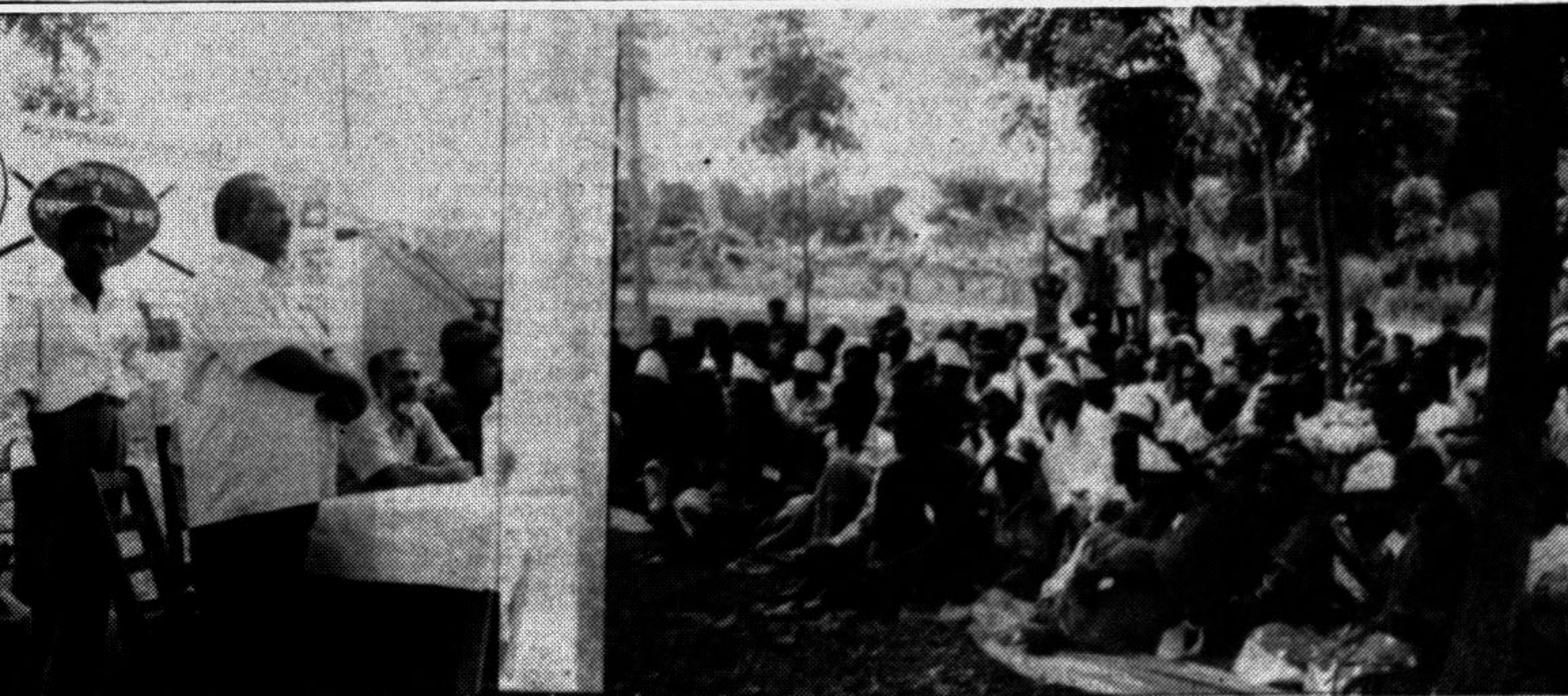
cated weapons. In the morning, Zakir was kidnapped from a local tea stall and shot dead. Local people chased the marauders up to a distance of 10 kilometres and encircled them at village Narendrapur.

Thousands of local people, in an unprecedented and resolute move, armed with spears, spears, iron rods and clubs, hauled up 10 of the miscreants and hacked them to death. Asad, the gang leader was killed in a brutal manner.

The DIG of Police, Khulna Range, has in the meantime, ordered for recovery of the sophisticated weapons 'at any cost'.

Police camps have been set up at Ghunighat and Narendrapur. The Officer-in-Charge of Bagharpara thana has been withdrawn and replaced by a senior officer.

Local people say they feel relieved now. But they do not know how long this 'peace' will last, some of them said.



FARIDPUR: Syed Imamul Azam, President, Faridpur Press Club speaking at a field day function held under Integrated Pest Management (IPM) programme organised by Agriculture Extension Department at village Mregi of the sadar thana recently. A large number of farmers attended the function.

Farmers' concern over lower paddy procurement price

BARGUNA, Dec 23: Harvesting of 'Aman' paddy has started in different parts of the southern region including the district, reports UNB.

Local farmers said the production this year is very much satisfactory despite the losses incurred due to the cyclone at the beginning of the season.

Farmers, however, expressed their concern over the price fixed by the government for official procurement drive. They said it was fixed much lower than the market price and feared that the drive might be hampered seriously affecting the poor farmers and only helping the middlemen and big money lenders to reap the benefit.

But the farmers and agriculture officials said, the loss due to the storm was not more than 10 per cent of the total production, which was within the tolerable limit.

With the new harvest, the supply of paddy in local markets has increased much but the producers are happy with the price.

They said they are selling a maund of paddy between Tk 320 and Tk 330 in the market though the price is Tk 20 to 30 less in remote villages.

We are happy with the harvest and the price. It seems that we would be able to overcome the losses of previous seasons," said Ali Hossain, a farmer of Lakuraila village in Sadar thana of the district, who came to sell his paddy at Barguna Bazar.

The price spiral is mainly due to crop loss in the northern parts of the country, said Shah Alam, a trader at a market here. Alam, a middleman, buy paddy from the farmers at an open space beside the road and sell the same to big merchants in the evening with a margin of Tk

10 to 15 per maund.

Agriculture Extension Department officials said the target of 'Aman' cultivation in the district this year was 97,523 hectares of land. But the target was exceeded and the farmers cultivated a total land of 1,02,144 hectares with the variety.

Of the total cultivation, 22,821 hectares were brought under high yielding variety while the rest 79,323 hectares under local variety.

The officials estimated that about 85,000 metric tons of paddy would be surplus in the region after meeting the local demand.

They also expressed their disapproval over the target of the drive this season and said it was fixed much lower than the surplus production. The procurement target was fixed at only 100 metric tons from the district, said official sources.

Kidnapping on rise in Magura

MAGURA, Dec 23: Panic gripped the people of Sreepur thana here due to the sudden rise of the incidents of kidnapping by miscreants and other terrorist activities, reports UNB.

Some six incidents of kidnapping were reported from different villages of the thana during the last three months. The villagers said the abductors demand a large sum of money as ransom from the relatives of the victims and threaten to kill the abducted men if their demands were not met.

A gang of miscreants kidnapped Babul Biswas (40) of Goadah village on December 10 and demanded a ransom of Tk one lakh. They also threatened to kill him if their demand was not met.

Local people said they never dared to inform the matter to the police or file cases for fear of life and for lack of security.

Blankets distributed among distressed

JAMALPUR, Dec 23: Civic Relief and Rehabilitation committee here has distributed 500 pieces of blankets among the distressed people of the district, reports UNB.

Total 300 pieces of blankets have been distributed among the poor families of Mahmudpur union in Melandaha thana, Laxmirchar union in sadar thana and Charpakerdaha union in Madarganj thana. Besides, 200 pieces of blankets have been distributed in different areas of Jamalpur pourashava.

The committee has also distributed a huge quantity of dry food, medicine, ore saline and gave medical support to the people affected during the recent flood here.

Besides, it has also distributed a number of RCC pillars under its post flood rehabilitation programme in the districts.

The members of the committee distributed these materials in the second week of the current month.

Wheat seeds crisis at C'nawabganj

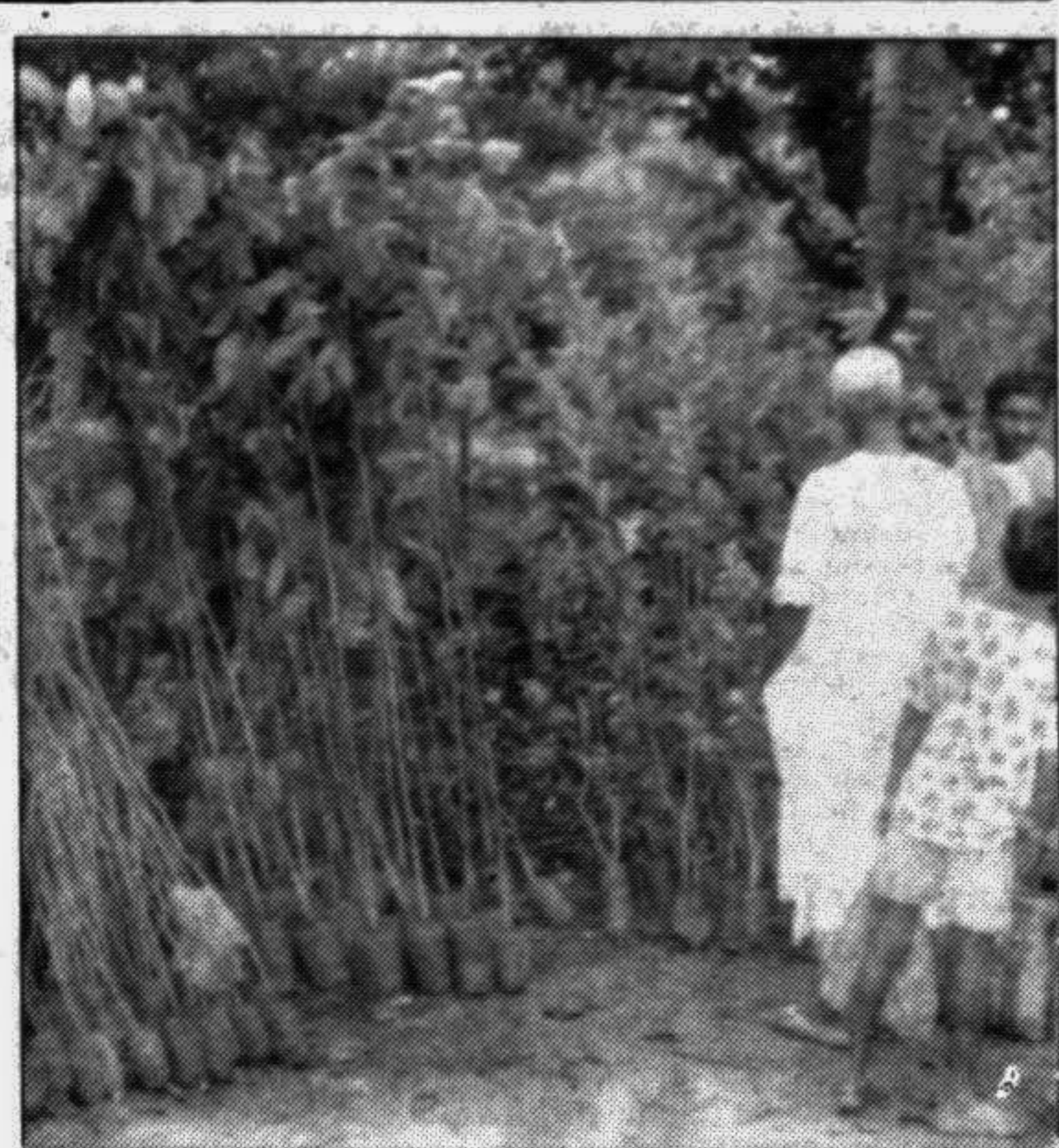
CHAPAINAWABGANJ, Dec 23: Scarcity of seed is likely to hamper seriously the cultivation of wheat in the district during the current season, reports UNB.

The target of the cultivation in the district was fixed at 15,930 hectares of land, according to the official sources. But the growers feared that this might be affected due to lack of adequate quantity of seed.

Officials said, the government through BADC used to supply five per cent of the seed required every year while growers themselves manage the rest.

But the seeds of wheat preserved by the farmers were exhausted this year as they consumed these up during the prolonged flood this year. Besides, some of the seeds were damaged due to lack of preservation facilities during the monsoon.

Besides the seed crisis was intensified further as the affected farmers are eager to cultivate wheat on more lands in order to overcome the losses they incurred due to the last flood.



MAGURA: Many jackfruit trees have been destroyed due to prolonged floods in the district. Saplings of various fruit bearing trees are on display for sale in the local markets, but customers are very few due to prevailing inclement weather here.

Survivor of Zoha Hall massacre in great distress

From Kamran Reza Chowdhury

RAJSHAHI UNIVERSITY, Dec 23: Rupchand Mondol, who was brutally tortured by the occupation Pak army and a survivor of the Zoha Hall massacre during the Liberation War in 1971, has been passing a very miserable life now.

Rupchand, an inhabitant of Kantakhal village near Rajshahi town was an active supporter of Awami League. Pak army collaborators caught him and later handed over him to the army in the middle of April 1971. But luckily survived a massacre committed by the Pak army near Zoha Hall.

He narrated the story of his survival to this correspondent in an exclusive interview while he came here to attend a reception ceremony arranged by the Muktijoddha Sanskritik command, RU unit.

"I was caught by the local Razakars four days after the arrival of Pak army on April 13, 1971. The Razakars kept me captive for one day in a room at Kantakhal village without food. Then they handed me over to Pak army the next day", he said.

"The army took me to the Zoha Hall concentration camp and started torturing ceaselessly for four to six hours every day", he said lamenting. They hung me binding my two legs up, he also said.

"They used to give me, and other captives, a meagre quantity of bread and pulse as food. They repeatedly questioned about the freedom loving people and wanted me to agree to their proposal to supply women for

them, but I always rejected their proposals", he said.

"At this they tied my hands, along with the other captives and took me to the northeastern side of Zoha Hall and kept by the side of a mass grave. Five army personnel started brush fire when one of our inmates tried to flee. All of us jumped into the ditch. They bursted indiscriminately into the ditch, left the place after about 15 minutes dumping earth and waste into the ditch."

"At one stage I could sense, though miraculous, that another person were alive in the massgrave. I could only hear an odd sound of bullet. Blood was flowing through my body. Some were silent and some were groaning around me. I brought my head out of the deads and fled to the north of the spot. I could not even believe I were alive", he said this in a gloomy mood.

"But even after passing a long period of 27 years after the independence I have no guarantee of food, cloth and shelter. I have been passing my days in great miseries. How do I fulfil my basic needs in my lifetime?" he questioned.

Meanwhile, Prof Abdul Khaleque, Vice-Chancellor of Rajshahi University, while addressing the reception ceremony of Rupchand, assured that he would try his best to rehabilitate Rupchand's family. The reception ceremony was addressed, among others, by Monsur Ali, Dr Abu Taher and Prof Nurullah.

2,500 blind destitutes need VGF cards in Gaibandha

From Our Correspondent

GAIBANDHA, Dec 23: Nearly 2,500 blinds who earn their livelihood by begging have been deprived of VGF cards despite repeated appeals to the respective public representatives.

According to survey conducted by Gaibandha Blind Association, there are blinds in different thanas as follows: Sunderganj 302, Fulchhari 179, Gobindaganj 466, Shaghata 343, Palashbari 291, Sadullapur 289 and Gaibandha sadar 485. There are a total of 2,355 blinds now in the district.

Narrating the miserable life of such destitutes, Secretary of the Association Ahmed Ali said, "No public representatives have considered them fit to get a VGD cards since they are pro-

fessional beggars. Whenever they appeared before the union parishad chairman or member they simply said, "You are already engaged in begging so you earn a lot. So what is the need of VGF cards?"

Most of the blinds maintain their livelihood by begging. Many of them have been expelled from family due to blindness. Due to last prolonged flood and crop damage common people of village areas cannot afford to offer alms. So it is hard time for beggars.

Secretary of the association further told that out of the total 2,355 blinds living in the district only 15 blinds got VGF card, but the remaining blinds are still deprived of the same.

Organised gangs looting forest resources

PABNA, Dec 23: Forest resources and valuable trees are being plundered by some organised gangs in the northern districts in connivance with a section of dishonest forest officials in absence of any forest court, reports APB.

More than 1,500 cases for unauthorised felling of trees are waiting disposal, according to sources in the local office of the Forest Department.

The forest ministry divided the country into six administrative circles. In order to dispose of pending cases, the ministry set up courts in all the circles except in Bogra. As a result the rate of deforestation is the highest in Bogra circle.

Local people told that the organised gangs not only loot the trees but also grab forest land with the cooperation of dishonest officials. They are often armed with latest weapons and are backed by influential local people and political bigwigs. So police leave them alone.

They said thousands of trees have been felled in the Mujib Dam area. Police say that even if they catch the criminals red-handed, it is difficult to hold them without necessary judicial apparatus.

Many cases have to be dropped in course of time because there is no court, they said.



PABNA: A discussion meeting was arranged here recently in observance of International Women Repression Resistance Day. Journalist Ranesh Maitra addressing the meeting as the chief guest at Pabna Press Club.

— Star photo

Special arrangement to ensure IRRI-Boro farming in 16 dists

NATORE, Dec 23: Special arrangements have been taken to ensure cultivation and production of IRRI-Boro paddy in 16 northern districts including Natore during the ensuing season, reports UNB.

The measures have jointly taken up by the Agriculture Extension Department (AED), Bangladesh Chemical Industries Corporation (BCIC), Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC) and Power Development Board (PDB).

The arrangements have been taken with a view to recouping huge losses incurred during the last 'Aman' season due to prolonged devastating flood and massive pest-attack in the re-

gion.

The Rajshahi AED sources said at least 15 lakh hectares of land would be brought under IRRI-Boro cultivation and new reservoirs at Baghabari, Rangpur and Parbotipur.

However, the PDB sources said it has taken special measures to ensure maximum possible power supply for irrigation purpose during the peak season in February to March.

Meanwhile, the local growers alleged that the imported China hybrid seeds are not available at reasonable prices in the market. They are in deep frustration apprehending acute scarcity and abnormal price-hike of seeds and seedlings of hybrid IRRI-Boro crops here.

The farmers have been provided with hybrid varieties of seeds during the current season. The farmers are expecting bumper production to overcome the losses.

The BCIC sources said it has increased its marketing of the supply and monitoring of fertilisers at reasonable prices to the farmers to avoid artificial crisis in the region.

The BPC and depot authori-