

News snaps

Foodgrains sanctioned for uplift work

MADARIPUR, Jan 16: The government has sanctioned 1,280 tonnes of foodgrains for the implementation of 111 uplift schemes here under the Food for Works Programme, reports BSS.

Of the total 310 tonnes have been sanctioned for 27 schemes in Sadar, 288 tonnes for 25 schemes in Kalkini, 277 tonnes for 24 schemes in Rajpur and 405 tonnes for 35 schemes in Shibchar thana. The schemes include construction and re-construction of roads, earth-filling, development of playgrounds, excavation and re-excavation of canals. With the implementation of the schemes communication network and basic infrastructural facilities will be improved in four thanas to a great extent.

Fund shortage hampers uplift work

MADARIPUR, Jan 16: Development works of Kalkini Pourashava remained suspended for the last six months for lack of necessary funds, reports UNB.

"Properties worth about Taka five crore of the pourashava were destroyed by the recent flood, but no allocation has been made for its rehabilitation and infrastructure development," said Pourashava chairman Abul Kalam Azad. Meanwhile, the municipality authorities have submitted a budget of about Taka one crore to the concerned ministry for its development works.



JHENIDAH: Wreathes being placed at Kabirpur Central Shaheed Minar by the people of all walks of life on the Victory Day. — Star photo

Tk 23 cr disbursed as agri-loan

MADARIPUR, Jan 16: A total of Tk 23 crore has been disbursed here as agri-loan under the post-flood rehabilitation programme, during last four months, reports BSS.

Official sources said, the loans have been disbursed for cultivation of various crops, irrigation, poultry, fish farming and poverty alleviation schemes during the period. Bangladesh Krishi Bank, Sonali Bank, Janata Bank and Agrani Banks disbursed the loan.

Work of five roads begins

SYLHET, Jan 16: Reconstruction works of five roads in the town, involving Tk 63.31,000 have begun under the Middle Town Infrastructure Development Project, reports UNB.

Sources said Tk 18.80 lakh will be spent for construction of Shahi Eidgah-MC College Road, Tk 10 lakh for Chouhatta-Kumarpura Road, Tk 5.71 lakh for Purbia Kajirbazar Road, Tk 18.80 lakh for Jamarullah Road and Tk 10 lakh for Rikabi Bazaar Sheikhghat Road. Sylhet Pourashava chairman Mohammad Badar Uddin Ahmed Kamran formally inaugurated the works of the project. The reconstruction works are expected to be completed by January. Similar works to develop the roads in other parts of the town will begin soon.

Seminars on cultivation of pulses

JHALAKATI, Jan 16: Two seminars on nitric cultivation of pulses were held in Sadar and Rajapur thanas on Wednesday, reports UNB.

Agriculture Extension Department organised the seminars under its pilot project to be implemented with the financial assistance of Asian Vegetable Research and Development Centre and US aid. A total of 100 farmers along with 10 bloc supervisors took part in the seminars. The seminars focused on techniques of high yielding seed and land selection, fighting pest attack, harvest and preservation of pulses. Among others, Project Manager of Agricultural Research Institute Dr. Abu Bakar, Deputy Project Manager Ali Afzal and AED Deputy Director Anwarul Alam were present at the seminars.

FP programme hampered

BANDARBAN, Jan 16: Family planning (FP) programmes are being hampered in seven thanas of the district due mainly to shortage of manpower, reports UNB.

Official sources said the activities of Family Planning Department and its centres are being hampered as 43 posts of officers and employees of the department have been lying vacant for a long time. A total of 25 posts of officers and employees in different thanas remained vacant since last 17 years hampering enormously the family planning activities. Of them, eight each are Medical Officers and Family Welfare Inspectors, Family planning inspectors and five are Family Welfare Assistants. Family planning activities of 18 family welfare centres damaged by tornado and flood respectively in 1991 and 1997 have been hampering badly due to lack of repair.

BRAC loan distributed

JHALAKATI, Jan 16: Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) has disbursed Tk 181.15 lakh loan among 7,982 people in the district during the last one year under its various loan programme, reports UNB.

The loans were distributed through its 160 samities, said a local manager. The official said Tk 18 lakh was disbursed among 322 people for vegetable farming and nursery, Tk 40 lakh among 850 for fish culture, Tk five lakh among 150 for rearing cattle, Tk four lakh among 35 people for poultry farming, Tk 50,000 among 50 people for constructing sanitary toilet, Tk 2.5 lakh among 250 for pure water and Tk 92 lakh among 4,885 people for the purpose of small business. Besides, massive programmes have been undertaken by the organisation in different parts of the district for alleviation of poverty in the rural areas.

Transport problem at SSTU

SYLHET, Jan 16: Transport problem of the students of Shahjalal Science and Technology University (SSTU) has turned acute due to shortage of varsity transports, reports UNB.

There are a total of 2,510 students in the varsity. Of them, 2,157 are male and the rest are female. The varsity has two residential halls, one for 450 male and another for 172 female students and the rest are living in the town in mess or rented houses. But the varsity has only three buses for transportation of the students which is too inadequate. No effective steps to remove the transport and residential problems have yet been taken even after four years of establishment of the varsity. The Vice Chancellor also assured the students of necessary measures for solving the transport problem when the learners observed a 7-hour sit-in demonstration recently.

18 lakh children deprived of edn

CHAPAINAWABGANJ, Jan 16: Some 18 lakh children in 16 northern districts of the country are being deprived of elementary education due to various reasons including poverty, lack of schools and awareness among the guardians, reports UNB.

Official sources said the total number of school-age children in the region is about 63 lakh. Of them, only 45 lakh have been attending the schools and the percentage of enrollment of boys is 72 per cent while the girls is 71. They said there is no primary school in about 10,731 villages of the region depriving the children of the basic right to education. These include 587 villages in Chapainawabganj, 1,110 in Rajshahi, 875 in Natore, 1,760 in Naogaon, 1,475 in Bogra, 620 in Joypurhat, 600 in Rangpur, 247 in Gaibandha, 200 in Nilphamari, 185 in Kurigram, 73 in Lalmonirhat, 1,031 in Dinajpur, 85 in Thakurgaon, 421 in Panchagarh, 660 in Pabna and 812 in Sirajganj.

Timber recovered

COX'S BAZAR, Jan 16: Cox's Bazar forest division has recovered 4,87,397 sft illegal timber worth about Taka 10 crore during last five years, reports BSS.

According to forest division sources, during the period 1994-1995 to November 1998, 3,30,382 sft valuable timber and 1,57,015 sft firewood have been recovered. Besides, 22,075 pieces of log (balli) have been seized during the same period. A total of 1,064 persons have been arrested and 4,636 cases have been filed in connection with illegal timber extraction and trading. Sources informed during last five years 236 forest officers and forest guards have been attacked and wounded by the illegal timber traffickers. Of them two persons have become invalid for life.

50,000 attacked with arsenic related diseases in Chandpur

From Shirin Akhter

CHANDPUR, Jan 16: Arsenic contents in tubewells water has created a great panic in all the seven thanas of the district.

About 50,000 people are attacked with arsenic related diseases. This was revealed by the Executive Engineer of Chandpur Public Health Engineering Department (PHED). According to him, tubewell waters of the entire Chandpur district are arsenic contaminated.

PHED has already started testing the proportion of arsenic pollution in tubewells water. Arsenic contamination has been spreading fast in Fardgonj, Hajigonj, Matlab, Shaharasti, Kachua, Haimchar and Chandpur sadar. In these places a large number of people have been suffering from arsenic related diseases. So far PHED has examined water of about 500 tubewells from different villages. The department has found arsenic contents in most of the tubewells. About 200 tubewells have already been sealed off with warning sign board. Besides, other tubewells are likely to be sealed off very soon. According to the opinion of PHED, the dangerous level of arsenic contents in water is .05 mg.

However, during examination of water sample from other tubewells arsenic contents were found below the danger level which is up to .02 mg in some areas.

While talking to A K M Mohtuddin, Executive Engineer of local PHED told this correspondent that steps are being taken to examine different tubewells

water in all seven thanas gradually. People here have been suffering from various arsenic related diseases. The department has already informed the concerned ministry about the widespread arsenic contamination. Many people are drinking boiled water. The residents of Chandpur town are also exposed to arsenic pollution. Many tubewells in the district town are already contaminated by arsenic.

Arsenic elements have also been found in three other municipal areas of Matlab, Chencharghar and Hajigonj. Its posing a threat to public health.

Despite sealing off of arsenic contaminated tubewells, many people are found to use water of these tubewells for drinking purpose. It may be pointed out here that no alternative arrangements have been made for drinking water in the affected villages till filing of this report.

According to PHED experts surface water, rain water, water of rivers and ponds are free from arsenic contamination. Water of deep tubewells under 500 feet are also free from arsenic. The local PHED has undertaken a comprehensive scheme to install 721 deep tubewells at a cost of Taka Two crore 88 lakhs. The work has already been started. About 50 deep tubewells have already been installed in different villages which are completely arsenic free.

According to official sources, there are 22,500 gov-

ernment tubewells in the district and 40,000 tubewells in public sector. According to public health experts about 80 per cent tubewells are affected by arsenic contamination.

People have urged the government to take appropriate measures immediately to save the people from arsenic related diseases.

UNB from Khulna reports: Public Health Engineering Department (PHED) has identified 687 tubewells in 10 districts of the division with high arsenic contamination.

During a survey conducted by the department, water of 2,205 tubewells across the division was tested, said the officials.

They said that at least 0.10 mg arsenic was found in one litre of water of the identified tubewells.

Of the total high-contaminated tubewells, 113 are in Khulna district, 77 in Bagerhat, 135 in Satkhira, 147 in Jessore, 34 in Narail, 18 in Jhenidah, 31 in Magura, 54 in Kushtia, 56 in Chuadanga and 22 in Meherpur. The sources said that less than .01 mg arsenic in one litre of water was found in 672 tubewells while .01-.05 mg in 495 tubewells and .06-.10 mg in 351 tubewells.

The highest number of tubewells identified as high arsenic contamination were in Khulna, Satkhira and Jessore districts.

DPHE officials feared that many other tubewells in the division might be found highly contaminated with arsenic.



FARIDPUR: Traffic jam at Mujib Sarak in Goalchamot area of the town has become a regular feature causing much inconvenience to all. — Star photo

Clashes over harvesting in shoal areas

Two killed, 150 injured in Barisal division so far

From Aroop Talukdar

BARISAL, Jan 16: Musclemen backed by landlords, politically influential people and local group leaders in different villages and disputed shoal lands along the district border areas are still engaged in armed clashes with innocent villagers.

At least 20 incidents of clashes took place in different areas of six southern districts in Barisal division during the last few months. The clashes left two people killed, more than 150 injured, 50 dwelling houses burnt and over 50 cows lifted. Four women were also raped.

Almost everyday in this harvesting time in the southern districts reports of armed clashes are pouring in. The clashes usually occur between innocent helpless farmers and armed musclemen and hoodlums backed by unscrupulous village land grabbers and landlords.

It may be mentioned here, despite different steps taken by the district administrations with the help of police forces, bloody clashes are going on unabated.

Meanwhile, more than 20 new police camps were set up in different border areas along the border areas of Patuakhali, Bhola, Laxmipur, Pirojpur and Barguna districts deputing police force and a magistrate in each of the camps. But some times, situations go beyond their control when big groups of

musclemen swooped on the helpless farmers at dead of night. Then they let loose a reign of terror, killing, injuring a lot of people, burning dwelling houses. In some places the hoodlums also gangraped women during the atrocities.

Most of the clashes occur in the village areas when groups of people go to reap paddy from any disputed land.

Musclemen are virtually active at disputed shoalands. On December 4 last, at least 30 people including four women were injured in four separate clashes over harvesting paddy from the disputed croplands in Kalapara thana of Patuakhali. On December 7-12 persons were injured in three incidents in the same thana area. Police arrested seven persons from the spot.

On December 8 armed musclemen of Laxmipur district swooped on the farmers of Char Naldugi Baikanthapur of Bhola district border line where 100 musclemen burnt 25 dwelling houses, looted away valuables including cows injuring at least 50 farmers.

Earlier, the musclemen abducted two constables and an on-duty magistrate from a police camp. Later they were rescued from the Ramgati thana area of Laxmipur district. After some time a 'flag meeting' among the district officials of the concerned districts were held, the meetings did not yield positive

result.

On December 16, 50 people were injured in clashes between two armed groups over harvesting of paddy at Dhankhali village of Kalapara thana of Patuakhali. 16 persons were later admitted to hospital.

Armed musclemen also set ablaze at least 19 dwelling houses and left at least 34 injured at Char Monohar along the Bhola-Patuakhali border area. They also looted away paddy of more than 250 acres of land there. A total of 30 dwelling houses were set on fire and wealth of 20 dwelling houses were looted away by the mob over reaping of paddy from a disputed land at char Biswas of Patuakhali on December 23 last.

Yusuf Gazi, 50, was killed on the spot and 18 people were injured in another armed clash between two rival groups over harvesting of paddy at Putiakhali village in Rajapur thana of Jhalakati district recently.

Rashid Howlader, 46, was killed and 20 others including three women were injured in an armed clash between rival groups at Ramnagar village under Baufal thana of Patuakhali on December 24.

So far farmers of 12 shoal lands of Patuakhali are passing sleepless nights. Similar situations are also prevailing in some villages of Barguna district.

Five murdered in Mymensingh in a week

From Aminul Islam

MYMENSINGH, Jan 16: Five persons were murdered in separate incidents here in a week. Sahajuddin, 29, an employee of a shop near a brothel was killed by some miscreants on December 6.

Sova Rani of the brothel filed a case with Kotwali thana in this regard.

Hasan Ali, 50, was killed by the rival group in a clash over a disputed land at vilage Haripur in Gouripur thana on December 13.

Police recovered the body of an unidentified woman with several injury marks from Yu-ulbarga area in Gouripur thana in the same day.

Moharab Hossain, 32, of vilage Badradi in Phulpur thana was killed in a clash over disputed land on December 16.

Idris Ali, 36, an Awami League leader was killed by some assailants near Gouripur Railway Station on December 19.

Most students of RU want revival of British Council library

From Kamran Reza

RAJSHAHI UNIVERSITY, Jan 16: Most of the students of Rajshahi University (RU) and other higher institutions including BIT, RMC and Rajshahi Medical College (RMC) want the reopening of British Council Library in the city.

This was revealed in a survey conducted by some students of the university recently.

About 90 per cent students of the university, BIT, RMC and Rajshahi College want its immediate revival.

It was also learnt that the students of Science faculty including the departments of Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Bio-Chemistry, Zoology, Medical, Engineering and Pharmacy were immensely benefitted by the library about five years back. Students of English literature, History, Sociology, Social Welfare, Library and Information Science were also benefitted from the library.

Panic of forged notes in N-dists

PABNA, Jan 16: A panic regarding circulation of forged currency notes has gripped the northern districts of the country, reports APB.

People are reluctant to accept currency notes of Tk 100 and Tk 500 denominations.

Local people say, a large number of people have been duped with forged currency notes. They say that an organised gang of criminals was behind circulation of these forged notes.

Knowledgeable sources said that there was a network working in Pabna, Bogra, Rajshahi, Naogaon, Joypurhat and Dinajpur districts. 'Positives' of 100 and 500 taka notes are prepared with the help of computers and 'vertical cameras', they claimed.

Detective Branch of police recovered Tk 300,000 worth of forged 100 and 500 taka notes from different places at Bogra town and its suburbs recently, police said.

DB police also recovered machinery and a vertical camera from the dens of the culprits and arrested 10 people on charges of involvement in the forgery.

Illegal occupants about to grab 67 acres of khas land

LAXMIPUR, Jan 16: Illegal occupants are about to grab some 67 acres of khas land here worth Taka 20 crore as the authorities are not taking measures for proper lease or sell out of these land, reports UNB.

The government issued an order on March 7, 1996 to sell out the non-arable lands which are not fit for lease. But the district administration here is yet to take any step in this regard ever after four years of issuing the order.

Many people built up establishments on these lands and many are reportedly trying to grab the land with forged documents.

Some influential people even grabbed the land by simply using force, complained local people.

These lands are located at different bazars including Dalal Bazar, Duttapara and Chandraganj Bazar in Sadar thana, Rajpur and Haiderganj Bazar in Rajpur thana, Char Alexander, Char Lawrence, Jamindar Hat, Bibir Hat and Ramgati Hat in Ramgati thana.

Three kidnapped boys rescued in Jessore

From Atiur Rahman

JESSORE, Jan 16: The students of the local Teachers' Training College rescued three boys from the tyrant master's clutch at Dubler Char during their field trip to Herone Point recently.

The poor boys were picked up by a group of students under order of their team leader.

When contacted with Prof Amirul Alam Khan who was the team leader, he told The Daily Star, they stopped their launch at Dubler Char on way to Herone Point in the morning on December 17 last and landed there to see the natural sights.

Suddenly, he saw three boys half fed and half clad in wilder look and seeking help and assistance.

He called them at once. When they came closer all the them

served with insufficient wet rice locally known as 'panta'. At night also their menu was the same.

They were tortured in case of fault. Their nature of work was unloading fish from trawlers coming from the Bay, drying those under open sky after sorting, storing in the proprietor's godown and then again loading in trawlers for marketing in Chittagong.

Thus they were kept engaged in work round the clock.

It was also learnt from them that their two other co-workers Badal of Moheshkhali and Alamgir of Jessore were left behind as they were in the project site during their departure. There were thousands of such poor boys who were working in a number of fisheries project in



JESSORE: Three rescued boys (L-R) Matiar Rahman, Kamal Hossain and Kalam. — Star photo

burst into tears and disclosed their miserable tales of life. He felt pity and took them with him in the launch and set for their destination in a hurry.

He produced all of them before a group of local journalists for interview. They were Kamal Hossain, 14, son of Ayub Ali of Kheralia in Motlab thana of Chandpur, Kalam, 15, son of Nazir Ahmed of Himehari in Cox's Bazar and Matiar Rahman, son of Moshir Rahman of Kachupura under Moheshpur thana in Jhenidah. Both Kamal and Alam were kidnapped from Bakhkhali under the months ago. They were sold to Nanna Mia, who took them to Dubler Char and handed over to a proprietor of the fishery project. The tale of Matiar was same. He was taken away from Dhaka at the same time.

They were kept confined to the project area and had to work round the clock. They were never allowed to move out. They were given food twice a day once in the morning and once in the evening. In the morning they were

this shoal and groaning in agony.

Prof Amirul Alam Khan disclosed that there are a total of 96 registered fisheries projects in Dubler Char at present. Dubler Char is situated in Saran Khola thana of Bagerhat district. He drew the attention of the Human Rights Commission to come forward and take steps immediately to save the victims from human rights abuses immediately.

Jumatul Wida observed in Madaripur

MADARIPUR, Jan 16: The holy Jumatul Wida was observed in different parts of the district with due religious fervour, reports BSS.

A big Jumma congregation was held at the Zila Sadar Jame Masjid in the district head-quarters.

A large number of Musallis also offered their prayers at Pourasabha Masjid and Shah Madar Dargah Masjid.

Soil, weather of Panchagarh suitable for orange farming

PANCHAGARH, Jan 16: Panchagarh and Thakurgaon districts have turned out to be suitable for orange plantation, reports APB.

An experimental orange plantation on six acres of land at Majhipara beside the Panchagarh-Tetulia road has yielded very encouraging results.

Kanpuri, Darjeeling and Sylheti varieties were cultivated and the orange grown was sweet and flavoury. The plantation was raised by Akbar Hossain, Executive Engineer of local LGED.

Talking to APB he said there is no doubt that Panchagarh is ideally suited for orange cultivation.

Some horticulturists opined that Panchagarh and Thakur-

gaon may turn out to be better suited for orange cultivation than even Darjeeling.

They pointed out that the soil and weather conditions in the two districts are almost the same as that in Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri and Purnia which are famous for orange in India.

Some people who planted orange trees in these two districts told that they had got good yields in spite of being ignorant about its cultivation.

They said that the orange is sweet and delicious. The yield varies from 150 to 400 fruits per tree. The yield would have been much more had they knew the technique, they said.

The Agricultural Extension Department is now encouraging local farmers to take to orange cultivation.

Drinking water crisis in Jessore dist

JESSORE, Jan 16: Drinking water has become scarce in rural areas of the district as ponds and canals are drying up and tubewell water is contaminated with arsenic in most areas, reports APB.

To ease the crisis, the Public Health Engineering Department has started sinking shallow and deep tubewells and Tara pumps with UNICEF assistance in rural and municipal areas. But their number is too inadequate to meet the demand.

Sources in the local PHED told that thousands of shallow tubewells are needed in rural areas to meet the requirement. Deep tubewells and Tara

pump sets are needed because upper level of the groundwater in most areas of the district has become contaminated with arsenic.

At least 22 people died so far and hundreds are suffering from various diseases in Sarsa, Abhaynagar, Monirampur and Keshabpur thanas due to arsenic contamination of groundwater.

The PHED had a plan to sink 187 shallow tubewells, 75 deep tubewells and 68 Tara pumps and repair 132 shallow tubewells in eight thanas of the district during the current financial year but it has been stopped by the Chief Engineer, the sources said.

Complaint of an applicant of Joypurhat Nursing Instt

JOYPURHAT, Jan 16: An applicant of the Nursing Training Institute here has complained to the higher authorities about massive irregularities in the admission process of the institute, reports UNB.

Mafia Begum, daughter of Abdul Moteleb Mandal of Belamla village in Sadar thana, submitted a written complaint to the Director General of Health Directorate saying that her application was refused as she did not agree to give money to the authorities of the institute.

She said an instructor of the institute told her that the important factor was the expected 'Donation' of Tk 20,000 not the admission test.

Mafia said she sent copies of her written complaint to the Health Minister, Health secretary and district Anti-corruption

Bureau also.

When contacted, the Civil Surgeon said the authorities rejected the application of Mafia as the addresses mentioned in her application form did not corroborate with that given in her nationality certificate.

But on re-scrutiny later, Mafia's application was found in order. The authorities assured that her application would be considered in the next year.

Mafia complained that many students with one or more disqualification get themselves admitted in the institute.

Some local leaders said malpractice in the matter of admission in the Institute was an 'open secret'. They congratulated Mafia for her bold step of exposing the corruption.



JHENIDAH: A young girl donating blood on the occasion of a voluntary blood donation campaign which was held recently at the conference room of the local civil surgeon. — Star photo