

## News snaps

### Attack on houses in Mymensingh

MYMENSINGH, Jan 24: At least 10 people including a woman were injured in an attack by some miscreants near Trishal bus stand in the town on Saturday, reports UNB.

Witnesses said a group of armed miscreants attacked the residences of Hazara and Firoz in the area and looted valuables. The attackers also ransacked some other houses. Of the injured, Farooque, 30, and Shamim, 20, were rushed to Mymensingh Medical College Hospital in a critical condition. Local people caught an attacker, identified as Mozammel, along with a sharp weapon and handed him over to the police.

### Four muggers arrested in N'ganj

NARAYANGANJ, Jan 24: Four muggers were arrested after they snatched goods from two businessmen near Kashipur Eidgah in Fatullah thana on Sunday, reports UNB.

Police said four youths stopped Monir Hossain and Jahurul Islam when they were returning home by a rickshaw after Eid shopping at DIT market at 1 a.m. Local people caught three of them red-handed and handed over them to police. They were identified as Sirajul Islam, 22, Shamim, 21, and Humayun, 19. Later police arrested Raju, 19, on the basis of information of other snatchers.

### Sugarcane cultivation in Pabna

PABNA, Jan 24: A total of 34800 hectares of land have been brought under sugarcane cultivation in eight thanas of the district in the current season, fixing the production target at 132,890 mts, reports UNB.

Of the total lands, 730 hectares have been brought under the cultivation in Sujannagar thana with a target to produce 30,100 mts of sugarcane. Officials said 600 hectares of land had been brought under the cultivation in Atharishahi, 350 in Chhatmohor, 35 in Bhanganura, 600 in Bera, 700 in Sathia and 465 in Sadar thanas.

### Fire kills one in Madaripur

MADARIPUR, Jan 24: A young man was killed in a fire in Razoir thana while trying to save cattlehead in the early hours of January 15, reports APB.

The victim was identified as Bikash Bala, 28, of Satpur village in the thana. Six other people were also injured. Villagers said Bikash Bala received severe burn injuries when he tried to bring out cattlehead from the burning cowshed adjacent to his blazing homestead. He was rushed to Faridpur Medical College Hospital where he died soon after admission.

### One hacked to death

MAGURA, Jan 24: A middle-aged man was kidnapped and killed by unidentified assailants at village Harishpur in Shalikhah thana on Thursday night, reports UNB.

Police said the assassins took away Rajab Ali Mollah, 40, from the local UP office at midnight and hacked him to death. They also cut the tendons of both the legs of Rajab, leaving him dead on the spot. The motives behind the killing were not known immediately. A case was filed with Shalikhah thana.

### 109 post vacant at Collectorate

MADARIPUR, Jan 24: Nearly 109 posts including those of nine officers are vacant at the Collectorate here, hampering normal office work for long, reports APB.

Official sources told that the vacant posts include those of Assistant Commissioner and Assistant Director. Twenty posts of Tahsildar, eight posts of Senior Assistant, two posts of surveyors, one post of Chief Assistant and one post of overseer are also vacant for long. Collection of land development tax is being hampered as 20 posts of Tahsildar and 27 posts of Assistant Tahsildar are vacant. Last year, the target for collection of land development taxes could not be achieved.

### 10,000 children attacked with pneumonia

PABNA, Jan 24: At least 10,000 children have been attacked with pneumonia, dysentery and cold diarrhoea in the northern districts of the cold wave now sweeping in the area, reports APB.

In Pabna district, over 500 children have fallen victims to these diseases. A local child specialist told that the diseases are being caused by a virus and children attacked with this virus become weak with every passing day due to loose motion. It may cause death if appropriate treatment is not done in time, he said. In different hospitals, quite a large number of children are now receiving treatment for these diseases at hospitals. Physicians said that children suffering from malnutrition fall victims to these diseases easily. Some 300 children have also been admitted to different thana health complexes with cold-related diseases, and one of them died so far.



Female learners of the UNESCO Club's literacy centres taking part in its sewing training programme in Keraniganj.

### Crime on the rise in Pabna

PABNA, Jan 24: Crime is on the rise in the district with the deterioration of law and order situation, reports UNB.

According to police records, 60 people were murdered in different incidents during 1998. The number of murder in the district was 47 in 1997.

Besides the killings, official sources said, 39 women were raped in 1998. They also recorded 58 incidents of acid burn, 26 incidents of robbery and mugging, 81 clashes, and four incidents of child repression during the period.

Police registered 29 cases under Arms and Explosive Act, 107 cases in connection with drug abuse and smuggling, 91 road accidents and 621 other cases.



A seminar on 'Gender relation and development' was held at Sujannagar Thana Parishad auditorium in Pabna under the auspices of Samata, a non-government organisation, recently.

### Aman cultivation in GK project area

JHENIDAH, Jan 24: About 3,74,000 tonnes of Aman paddy, worth about Tk 300 crore, is expected to be produced in the Ganges-Kabodak (G-K) project area in the current season, reports UNB.

The GK project covers areas in 13 thanas of Jhenidah, Kustia, Magura, Rajshahi, Chuadanga and Meherpur districts.

An official source told APB that about 93,500 hectares of land have been brought under HYV Aman cultivation in the project area.

The Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation (BADC) supplied inputs like HYV seeds, fertiliser and pesticides and the Agricultural Extension Department provided technical assistance.

## Poverty alleviation projects not being implemented properly

SIRAJGANJ, Jan 24: Government's poverty alleviation projects for employment generation in the northern region of the country, including the district, have failed to achieve the desired goal of helping the poor, reports UNB.

Sources said wheat was sanctioned for implementation of many projects to create employment for the poor and the day-labourers. But the intended beneficiaries have been deprived in many cases due to corruption, allegedly resorted to by Union Parishad chairmen and members. Thousands of poor people are now passing their days in agony for lack of food.

Government has allocated nearly 16,000 metric tons of

wheat for completing the works of some 8,500 TR schemes in various places of 16 northern districts as part of the post-flood rehabilitation programme.

The sources said allocations were given for the repair of roads, educational institutions, mosques and temples.

But it was alleged that after lifting wheat during the period from November to December, the UP chairmen and members sold nearly the entire quantity in the black market. However, they are carrying out some works of the projects to show their existence in name only.

Government also sanctioned about 40,000 metric tons of wheat for implementing an-

other 1,700 "Kabikha" (food for work) projects at many places in the region.

In Sirajganj district, some 3,723 metric tons of wheat were sanctioned for implementation of 768 projects as part of the post-flood rehabilitation programme. But the future of many projects have become uncertain due to alleged malpractice and corruption.

When contacted, an official of the District Relief and Rehabilitation Office here told the news agency that 60 per cent work of the TR schemes and 30 per cent of "Kabikha" (food for work) have been completed.

The official, however, declined to say anything about the alleged corruption.



A reception has been accorded to poet and playwright Ovik Osman on his 44th birthday in Chittagong recently. Organised by the Chattagram Gunijan Sangbarhdhna Parishad, the function was presided over by Principal of Chittagong College Raushan Akhter.

## Smuggling of jute rampant

CHUADANGA, Jan 24: Smuggling of jute to India has become rampant as prices are more across the border than in local markets, reports APB.

Different varieties of raw jute are now being sold at Tk 290 to Tk 300 per maund in markets in Chuadanga and neighbouring districts. Their prices in India range from Rs. 400 to Rs. 420, traders said.

Sources told APB that more than 90 per cent of the total production of jute in the district is smuggled to India.

Last year, the total production in the district was about 4,56,000 maunds. The Adamjee Jute Mills and the Amin Jute Mills, which are the biggest buyers of raw jute in the area, bought 17,259 maunds last year at a price of Tk 331 per maund. The rest of the quantity, amounting to 4,38,741 maunds, was bought by hoarders and middlemen. The sources claimed that the entire quantity was smuggled to India.

In Chuadanga, there are 775 licensed jute buyers and five balers. One of them, who declined to be named, told APB that jute is being smuggled to India because the government rate is lower. "We do business to make profits, not to incur losses," he said.

Many of these hoarders and middlemen make advance payments to jute growers who desperately need capital during cultivation. The farmers are compelled to sell their products to the middlemen and hoarders at low prices.

UNB adds: Smuggling has become rampant in the border areas here particularly prior to the Eid festival, reports UNB.

Local markets are being flooded with different Indian goods including saree, sugar, salt, garments and toiletries, spices, drugs and liquors, cosmetics, warm cloths and spare parts of different machines. During the last few weeks, local people said, the border ar-

reas have become almost open for the smugglers to bring in their goods from India.

International smuggling rings are reportedly active in the region using the area as their transit for bringing in drugs and even arms.

A special police team on January 12 seized 11 revolvers along with two young men during their raids in Rajshahi and Nawabganj.

But, the inmates of border areas said the members of the law enforcement agencies are not active in curbing the smuggling, rather some of them were exporting money from the rings.

They said the smugglers are utilising the opportunity of open border situation in hoarding their goods for the next few months and some of these rings even hired godowns across the river Padma for this purpose.

They are using both the river routes and road links for transportation of the smuggled goods.

## Erosion renders 24000 families homeless in four years

MADARIPUR, Jan 24: Erosion by rivers has rendered about 23,800 families homeless and also devoured some 12,185 acres of agricultural lands in four thanas of the district in last four years, reports UNB.

During this period, 45 villages of 10 unions in Shibchar thana went under water due to erosion by rivers Padma and Arial Khan, local people said.

Besides, the erosion by rivers Arial Khan and Kumar has partially affected 18 villages of nine unions in Sadar thana of the district. At least 5,000 families were hit as some 500 acres of lands were grabbed by erosion.

Meanwhile, 13 villages of

five unions in Kalkini thana were partially washed away by the erosion of rivers Arial Khan and Palodi. The erosion ate up some 485 acres of lands, leaving 2,000 families homeless.

In Rajoir thana, nine villages of four unions were partially affected by erosion. Rivers Arial Khan and Kumar devoured about 200 acres of lands of 1200 families.

Thousands of people in the erosion-affected areas were being forced to give up farming after losing their agricultural lands and homesteads.

Meanwhile, work of the government-sponsored "Ashrayan" project is going on to rehabili-

tate 50 landless families in Thengamara area of Kalkini thana.

Many families rendered homeless by the erosion of river Kumar have taken shelter in the ideal village of Hridoymandi of Tekerhat in Rajoir thana.

But most of these people are suffering from various skin diseases due to arsenic-contaminated water. Of them, the condition of 11 people was said to be critical.

About 15,600 landless families of Shibchar thana, affected by erosion, have taken shelter on the Bhanga-Maowa road and on high grounds in the area for the last three years.

## Blacksmiths in Jhenidah hit hard

JHENIDAH, Jan 24: Blacksmiths of the district are suffering badly for want of running capital and shrinking market. As a result, the number of the blacksmiths is decreasing day by day.

The blacksmiths were the main source of all agricultural and domestic weapons and accessories of our country once upon a time. Agricultural accessories as daa, kachi, kastye, shabol, nirahi, plough, spade etc and domestic items like boti, khunti, knife etc are being produced by blacksmiths for centuries. Blacksmiths were like part and parcel of Bengali life.

But the life style of the Bengali's has been changing with times. Many alternatives of these metal accessories are now available in the market. As a result, the farmers' rush to the blacksmiths has been decreasing day by day.

Ram Prasad Karmakar, 48, of village Saikupa, says that the price of steel and iron sheets that are the main raw materials for their profession have been increasing. One maund of iron rod is being sold at Tk 640 to 680 instead of the older price of Tk 600. Steel sheets sold between Tk 35 and 40 per Kg instead of the older price Tk 28 to 30.

Another reason for the suffering of the blacksmiths, Ram Prasad cited, was that most of them were not well educated

From Delwar Kabir

which left them with little option to look for work elsewhere. As a result, they were stuck with the profession inherited from their forefathers.

This situation also means that this very traditional handiwork is gradually being wiped out from the society and therefore from our heritage.

Ananda Mohan Karmakar, 53, said that another factor limiting the blacksmiths from turning the tide in their favour is that they lack the financial resources to bring any prof-

itable changes and improvisations to their trade. No banks sanction loans without mortgage of land or other property, which prevents the poor blacksmiths from availing help from this sector.

A few non-government organisations that have been providing loans also charge high rates of interest, Ananda alleged. This leads to dealings like those with Mahajans.

He appealed for interest-free loans for the blacksmiths for their survival.



JHENIDAH: A blacksmith at work. — Star photo

## Robbery in textile mill

MYMENSINGH, Jan 24: Production in a textile industry here remained suspended since Friday following a robbery in the mill, reports UNB.

Police said a group of robbers numbering about 25 came to Dynamic Textile Mills, a Bangladesh-German joint-venture industry at Dhamsur in Bhaluka thana, by a microbus.

They entered into the mill compound taking hostage the security guards on gunpoint and looted equipment and raw materials.

The authorities filed a case with the local police.

Some 700 workers of the mill have become jobless following the suspension of its production and they are passing their days in uncertainty.

## Cold wave claims 3 in Rajshahi

RAJSHAHI, Jan 24: The cold wave that swept the district claimed at least three lives in the last week, reports UNB.

Of the dead, one was identified as Asaruddin, 70, of Pathanpara in the city. The old man died on Tuesday morning, said the local people.

The identity of the other victims could not be known. A body was recovered from beside the road in Ambagan area of Darikhabona and the other from Hetemkha area.

The cold spell that gripped the district caused significant fall in the night temperature and 7.6 degree Celsius was recorded on Monday night. Local Met office sources said it was one of the lowest temperature recorded in the district during the current season.

However, there was slight rise in temperature during the last two days.

## 36 killed in Feni last year

FENI, Jan 24: Some 36 people are murdered and 500 injured in connection with different incidents in the district during 1998, reports UNB.

Of the total murders, 10 were political, said police and local people. The victims include six leaders and activists of the ruling Awami League and its front organisations while the rest four are of the main opposition BNP.

They are Abdul Mannan, Rezaul Karim Razzak, Azizul Kabir Milan, Abul Kashem, Darul Alam and Mojib Hossain Shamim of Awami League and Abul Kashem Mosharraf Hossain Shihon, Nur Nabi and Yakub Ali Shabuj of BNP.

Political unrest and violence marked the year and official sources said the total number of crime is about 1,500 in all the six thanas during the period.

The crimes include 150 robbery, 200 mugging, 200 burglary, 50 riots, 22 abduction, and 12 rape.

Though the number of crimes is high, only 824 cases were filed with the police. Explaining the cause, a police official said in most of the cases the victims prefer not to come to the police due to various reasons like threats from the terrorists and become victims again.

## 12 injured in Rajshahi clashes

RAJSHAHI, Jan 24: At least 12 people were injured in two separate clashes in the city and in Poba thana of the district on Friday, reports UNB.

At least 10 people were injured when two groups of youth of Bahrampur and Daspukur areas in the city attacked each other at about 12 noon following an altercation.

Of the injured, Kamal, 14, was sent to Rajshahi Medical College Hospital in critical condition.

Witnesses said the other clash ensued at Sonakandi in Poba thana in the morning when two rival groups attacked each other. Two people were injured.

Mainul, 35, sustained serious injuries during the clash and was rushed to RMCH. His condition is said to be critical.

## Scarcity of 'Rabi' crop seeds

FENI, Jan 24: The production target of 'Rabi' crops is feared to be hampered due to scarcity of seeds, fertiliser and irrigation, reports UNB.

Local farmers alleged that a section of unscrupulous traders increased the prices of seed and fertiliser in the local markets due to absence of adequate government measures against them.

Market sources said a sack of TSP fertiliser (50 kg) is being sold at Tk 460 to 485 and the price of one kg urea is Tk 6.50 to 8.

Agriculture officials here said the production target in the district might not be achieved if there is supply shortage of necessary inputs.

Agriculture Extension Department (AED) sources said the cultivation target of 'Rabi' crops has been fixed at 77,148 hectares of lands with a production target of 1,48,982 metric tons.

Of these, 'Boro' would be cultivated on 27,470 hectares of lands with a production target of 68,675 metric tons, officials said.

The targets of other crops include wheat 653 hectares, potato 560 hectares, sweet potato 600 hectares, mustard 2,700 hectares, pea-nut 2,400 hectares, pulses 670 hectares and winter vegetables 35,000 hectares.

## LP gas crisis prevailing in Khulna for 4 months

KHULNA, Jan 24: Scarcity of Liquefied Petroleum (LP) Gas has been prevailing here following sharp rise of its price, affecting the subscribers, reports UNB.

Sources said the crisis has been continuing for the last four months and each cylinder of gas is being sold at Tk 600 to 700 instead of its fixed price of Tk 300.

The users said a section of dishonest traders were responsible for the price hike though the dealers claimed that the crisis was due to supply shortage from the depot.

Some housewives said that the supply of gas was irregular despite its spiralling price. They have to wait for long for the supply.

In the city, there are three LP gas depots of Padma, Meghna

and Jamuna oil companies. The total number of dealers is 228. Officials of the oil companies said the use of LP gas had increased much in the recent time but the supply was not increased proportionately. So there has been a crisis of supply at present.

Sources said only a few dealers were supplying gas to the subscribers regularly. Many other dealers were given only two to seven cylinders per week, they said.

They complained that some dealers also bribed the officials of the oil companies to get more supply than the stipulated quota.

Some of the stockpile the cylinders to create artificial crisis and supply these to outside Khulna, the sources added.

## Toll collection from vehicles on the rise

JESSORE, Jan 24: Travel by road in the district has become hazardous and expensive due to rampant toll collection by some self-styled labour leaders, reports APB.

They put up barricades at different points and forcibly collect tolls from buses, trucks, tempos, inter-district coaches and even private cars and jeeps.

Sources told APB that most of the people involved in extortion are unemployed youths and members of different transport workers unions.

These people have put up numerous barricades and checkpoints on Jessore-Khulna, Jessore-Benapole, Jessore-Satkhira and Jessore-Jhenidah highways.

Several unpleasant incidents have taken place and a good number of vehicles have been damaged by these extortionists when their owners or drivers refused to pay tolls.

In one such incident at Kaliganj on the Jessore-Jhenidah road recently, a photojournalist from Japan was detained for an hour when he refused to pay

toll. He reported the incident to the TNO of Kaliganj and the OC of Kaliganj thana but to no avail.

Some people alleged that tolls are extorted right under the nose of the police and the law-enforcing agencies.

## Businessman mugged in Ctg

From Staff Correspondent CHITTAGONG, Jan 24: Muggers took away Tk 7 lakh from a businessman at Terbazari in the city on Eid day (Tuesday), police said.

Police said, the businessman, Nurul Absar was mugged while he along with his three brothers was getting into an auto-rickshaw with the money kept inside a polythene bag.

The muggers fled the scene after exploding crackers, police added.

Later, police raided the neighbouring areas and arrested one person identified as Malu.



JHENIDAH: A drama was arranged on the occasion of Victory Day by Focus, a local cultural organisation here. — Star photo

## Narsingdi AL leader hacked to death

NARSINGDI, Jan 24: Local Awami League leader was hacked to death by a group of miscreants on Wednesday, reports APB.

Police said the hoodlums, numbering 10-12, waylaid Dr Abdus Salam, 48, and his son, Mithun, 15, at Shristigarh in Shibpur at about 6:30 pm and hit them with sharp weapons.

They were returning home from Narsingdi by a motor cycle.

Mithun was admitted to the sadar hospital in a critical condition.

Police said the attack was a sequel to previous enmity.

A case was filed with Shibpur police. None was arrested till filing of this report.

## 25 posts in Pirojpur Livestock Dept lying vacant

PIROJPUR, Jan 24: At least 25 posts of the Livestock Department in the district have been lying vacant for long, hampering its activities, reports UNB.

Official sources said treatment of cattle and poultry birds is seriously being hampered due to shortage of manpower.

They said only two veterinary doctors, out of the total seven, are now working in six thanas of the district.

Besides, the posts of Veterinary Officer, Additional District Livestock Officer, Assistant Livestock Officer, Veterinary Field Officer and Thana Livestock Officer remained vacant in the district headquarters as well as in Nesarabad, Kauhali and Mathbaria thanas.

Apart from this, there was no night guards to protect the offices of the department in six thanas.

## Fake police officer held

KISHOREGANJ, Jan 24: Police arrested a fake police officer from a shop in the town on Friday, reports UNB.

Acting on an information, police rushed to the grocery shop near the local stadium and held Amjad Hossain alias Limon, 25.

Witnesses said Amjad posing as an ASP entered the shop of Abdul Fakir in the name of ganja recovery and demanded Tk 10,000 accusing him of involving in illegal drug business. Another person identified as Razu was also with the fake police.

But local people informed the matter to police and caught Limon red-handed. Razu, however, escaped from the scene.

## Smuggled goods worth Tk 15 cr recovered last year

JESSORE, Jan 24: The 32nd Battalion of the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) recovered smuggled goods worth about Tk 14.52 crore from different border areas of Jessore district last year, reports APB.

According to official sources, goods worth Tk 11.87 crore were seized while being smuggled into the country. Goods worth about Tk 2.64 crore were seized while being smuggled out.

The goods smuggled in included sarees, shals and other items of clothing, phenidyl, liquor, cosmetics, utensils, motor parts, cycle parts, bicycles, fruits, sugar, medicines and jute seeds.

About 80 suspected smugglers were arrested during the period and 74 cases were filed, the sources said.

According to BDR sources, 953 men, 259 women and 116 children were caught while trying to enter Bangladesh. Most of them were reportedly 'pushed in' by the Indian Border Security Force (BSF), the sources said.

## AED training course for farmers

NATORE, Jan 24: The Agricultural Extension Department (AED) has launched a programme to train farmers in environment-friendly methods of cultivation by using organic fertiliser, reports APB.

The programme has been sponsored jointly by the UNDP and FAO.

The programme will cover Kamardia, Hajara Natore, Jathian, Harishpur, and Goal Bhanga and Dhalat villages in greater Harishpur union.

The programme has already been launched in Kamardia on January 5, in Hajara Natore on January 6, in Jathian on January 7, in Harishpur on January 11, in Goal Bhanga on January 12, and in Dhalat on January 13.

Special importance is being given on modern methods of rice cultivation and use of insecticides and organic pesticides. Classes are being held once a week at temporary 'field schools'. Twenty-five farmers have been selected for each course.

The AED officials are imparting the training.