

Pedestrians in Peril

Photo feature by Zahedul I Khan

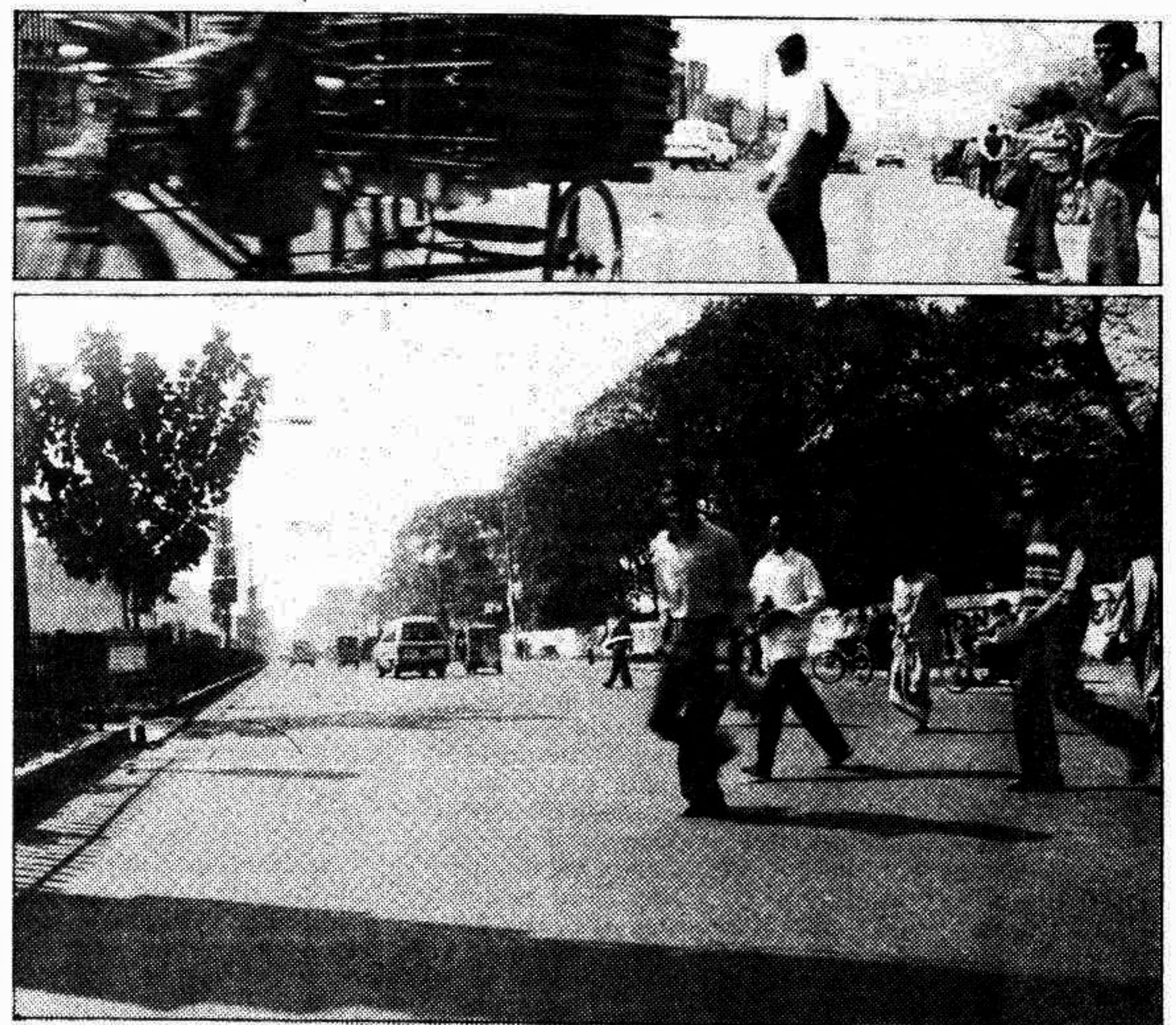


While much is said and little done about traffic congestion in Dhaka, little is said about the plight of pedestrians. Although estimates show that 60 per cent of Dhaka commuters go from here to there on foot, there is absolutely no logical, let alone safe, system for pedestrians to cross major roads.

In most places, there are no Zebra Crossings; even where such crossings are marked, they can't use them because vehicles usually park on them under the noses of traffic police. The police are rarely around to help pedestrians, even school children, cross the road safely.

Pedestrians themselves are no angels. Even where there are over-bridges to provide an alternative to the dangerous roads, it is often seen that they prefer to risk their lives than use the bridges.

Overall, pedestrians remain the most neglected part of an already-neglected road design and management system.



Flood-hit Families Facing Food Crisis

From Ratan Chowdhury

SHERPUR: Thousands of people in the district are facing acute food shortages and are being forced to sell-off their household belongings in order to survive.

According to local public representatives, at least 50 per cent out of about 21,000 families in Charpukkhimaria, Charsherpur, Charmucharia and Bolayerchar unions in Sadar thana do not have sufficient food for survival. More than 7,000 of those families are taking food once a day, they said.

People of the area said they were compelled to sell their household articles and belongings to buy rice or wheat. They said that they have not been provided with any assistance like test relief.

"I have already sold by house for 4,500 taka because I had no money to buy food for my family," Mohammad Suruj Mia of

Shahabdirchar village in Kamarerchar union told this correspondent.

District administration sources said all the test relief works have already been done with the close consultation with the local member of parliament Sadar Mohammad Atiur Rahman Atique. But residents of the area denied the claim.

"Last year's floods devastated thousands of families in this area, but we have not seen any test relief work here to provide people with employment and food," a local resident told this correspondent.

Chairman of Charpukkhimaria union, Mohammad Eusuddin said more than 3,000 out of about 7,000 families of his union can afford only one meal a day. Chairman of Kamarerchar union Mohammad Noyab Ali said thousands of people in his union are passing

days without food.

"The floods destroyed much of the crops in the area, and the farmers have no employment at the moment. This has turned the situation grave," Noyab Ali told this correspondent.

Mohammad Hamid, a former member of Kamarerchar union, told the Daily Star that in some markets, very poor quality rice, mixed with stone chips is being sold at Taka 14.50 per kg. A little better quality rice is being sold at Taka 16 to Taka 18 per kg.

The high price of rice and lack of household income is forcing many families to sell their land and other belongings. But they are finding few buyers.

Aktar Rahman Akand of Funapara in Charmucharia union said that he came to Sherpur market to sell his goat

and buy some rice for his family members.

Many rice mill owners said that, due to shortage of paddy, some mills have already stopped working. At present, paddy is being sold at Taka 410 to Taka 430 per mound in various markets in five thanas of the district.

District food controller officials said no OMS centre has yet been started in the area. They are in close consultation with relevant authorities but no approval has yet been received. District administration is trying to solve the problems.

The crisis has hit business hard, with Eid market recording low returns.

The income crisis generated by the loss of aman crops and jute during the floods has been deepened by higher prices of seeds. Many farmers could not even cultivate *rabi* crops.

Farming of IRRRI-Boro crops

will start very soon. But the farmers have not been able to arrange the minimum cost of cultivation. Consequently, the farm labourers have no work at present as the cultivation of IRRRI-Boro is yet to start. This problem has been compounded by lack of development works like test relief.

However, Bellal Hossain, proprietor of Bellal Cloth Store located at Shahid Harnu Road told this correspondent that he did not do well this year, particularly as the Eid season also saw very dull business.

Cold Wave

On top of the food crunch, a sudden cold wave has turned poor villagers' lives from bad to worse. One Haider Ali of Digarpur village has already died due to exposure, while normal life has been paralysed.

The cold spell from the Hi-

malayas has intensified further during last two weeks. It has been estimated that in some places of the district temperature came down to as low as five to six degree Celsius.

In such a situation, the poor and rootless people of the town and village areas are the worst affected. They spend their nights in a miserable condition. They need blankets and warm clothes immediately. Otherwise the situation may worsen further, local residents said.

District Relief and Rehabilitation Officer Siddique Hossain told the Daily Star that 1,700 blankets and huge quantity of other clothes for women have already been allotted by the government for Sherpur district. He said these clothings have been given to thana administration for distribution among the poor.

CHT Board's Rubber Plan Going Slow

From Shuvra Jyoti Chakma

KHAGRACHHARI: Rubber production under the 2nd phase of a grand government scheme is lagging far behind schedule despite expenditure of crores of taka. Although production had started six years earlier, the Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Board has not been able to achieve its target till today, gardeners and Board sources said.

The Board was established in 1976 for economic development of tribal peoples as the then president Ziaur Rahman thought that the problem of CHT was an economic one. Three thousand tribal families were selected for rehabilitation in two phases in three hill districts under this Board. Of those, 2,000 families were selected for 1st phase and rest of the families for second phase.

Four acres of rubber garden in high land were planted by the government with financial support of ADB (Asian Development Bank) for each family in 1985 for the 1st phase, board sources said. At the same time, houses were built by the government for each family.

The gardeners were also trained in health, sanitation etc. Six primary schools were established in project areas.

Sudibya Kanti Khisa, project manager (PM) of the board said 52 crore taka were spent to implement the first phase project which is giving production now.

He said, the second phase of rubber plantation was started from 95 when first phase came to an end. Twenty seven crore taka has been spent for the implementation of 2nd phase till today, he added.

He also said diversified cropping rubber plants were planted in 2nd phase for good result.

During a visit to the field, Thoyaisa Marna (55), gardener of 3 No rubber project of Khagrachhari sadar, told this correspondent that there are 180 rubber trees in his garden instead of 1,200 trees. He gets 900 taka per month after buying rubber juice. One Lura Marna also said that he gets 1100 taka per month.

Jagadish Chakma, 35, said he gets 1600 taka per month. There are 500 rubber trees in his garden, he said.

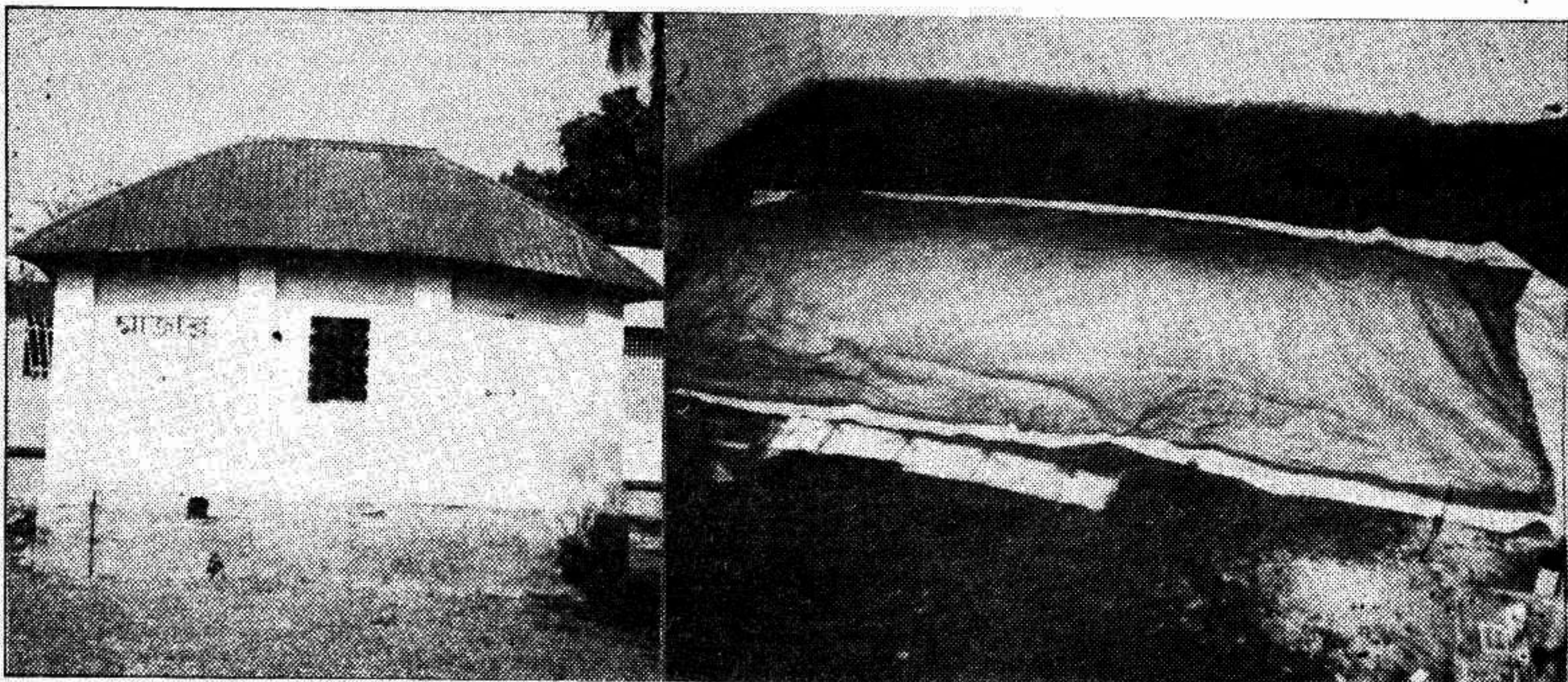
Development board sources said gardeners are given Tk 13 for one kg rubber juice. Collected rubber juice is also bought by the board. After a month they settle gardeners' claims.

The amount the gardeners earn depends entirely on the amount of juice they produce and collect. But gardeners said they can not depend on sale of rubber juice alone.

"Most of the trees in the gardens die anyway, so rubber juice is not available all the time," one gardener said.

Saintly Shrine Stands Neglected

From Monojit Kumar Das



MAGURA: The centuries old Mazar of Gorib Shah Dewan, a great saint of ancient times, still stands at village Nohata in Sripur thana of the district.

There are many legends about the great saint, Gorib Shah Dewan in the area, but no historian has ever bothered to write his biography. As a result, it is not possible to collect actual facts of his life.

It is, however, learnt that he was born in 1757 in Nohata village on the bank of river Hanu in Sripur thana in a poor family. In his boyhood he was called 'Gobre'.

Of his own village, The name of his teacher was Gorjan Munshi. The boy Gobre lived at his teacher's house as *Jaigir* (lodger).

According to the legend, he began to show supernatural powers when he lived at the house of Gorjan Munshi. One night his teacher observed him crossing the river Hanu on foot wearing wooden *kharams* (slippers). Munshi was astonished to see this incident that night.

Gorjan Munshi usually took water for purification before prayers from him. He refused to take water from Gobre after he had observed that miracle incident.

Gobre then performed so

many miracles that the news of his supernatural powers spread everywhere. A group of people was attracted to him at that time and they became his disciples. Then they gave him the name Gorib Shah Dewan. Gobre then devoted his life for Islam.

Talking to Nagir Dewan, caretaker of the mazar, it was learnt that Kutubuddin Shah, Pareshulla Shah, Jumbal Shah, Khakir Shah and Bulu Shah were the noted disciples of Gorib Shah Dewan. A large number of disciples of Gorib Shah Dewan are spread across the country.

It is learnt that on the last day of the month of *Aswin*, a large number of disciples including local people gather at

his mazar to pay their respect to him. Besides, many devotees come to his mazar all around the year.

The caretaker alleged that this spiritual man's mazar is lying dilapidated for a long time due to lack of care of the concerned authorities. A pucca room and waiting shed have already been damaged. The caretaker has no fund to rebuild the waiting shed and others run-down structures.

Now there is only a small pucca room in the mazar premises. Concerned authorities have not taken any initiative to preserve this historical and spiritual mazar, the local people alleged.

Warm Clothes Bring Cold Comfort for Poor

From Delwar Kabir

JHENIDAH: Price of used winter cloths has increased in the markets of the district much to the dismay of the poor, especially the day-labourers and the rickshaw-pullers.

At different markets in Saikupa, Jhenidah sadar, Harinakundu, Kaliganj, Kotchandpur and Mohepur thanas, old sweaters, for both adults and children, are being sold at a much higher price than that of last year. This year, one has to pay 80 taka, at times even 150, for an old sweater for a baby, which was available for 60 taka last year.

Price for a sweater for the grown-ups, on the other hand, is 50 to 110 taka more than what it was last year. A full sweater for an adult is being sold at between Taka 150 and 210, compared to Taka 100 last year.

Prices of other old warm cloths have also risen in the markets.

Ali Ahmed, 32, said that the sellers are demanding an abnormally high price from the customers. The shops are charging at least 50 per cent more than last year for the same items. Ali Ahmed informed this correspondent.

When asked, Mohammed Alam, 41, a seller of old warm cloths, said that the supply of warm clothes have been much less this year than last year. In Dhaka or Chittagong markets, the prices were high and they were compelled to buy the warm clothes at a higher rate. This has caused prices to rise in Jhenidah, he said.

Anu Mia, 30, another warm clothes seller, informed the Daily Star that the warm clothes were sent to flood affected areas as relief, as almost all the clothings of the flood affected people were badly damaged during recent deluge. He also said that usually cold prevails in northern areas of the country. As a result, the wholesale traders of northern parts purchase the old warm clothes at a higher rate.

Seeds of a New Food Crisis

From Quazi Amanullah

KHULNA: Three districts of greater Khulna are in the grip of an acute seed crisis.

It is alleged that boro seeds are being sold in the blackmarket at a higher price. It is learnt that a bag (containing 10 kgs) of seed is being sold at Tk 300 in the blackmarket while its official price is Tk 140 per bag.

Most of the farmers and BADC dealers are unable to get the seeds from sale centres. Even farmers do not have much seeds to spare for cultivation.

As a result, boro paddy cultivation during the current season is facing serious setback, as learnt from farmers of south Khulna who are crowding sale centres everyday to procure seeds.

A total of 21,66,313 kgs or 21,166.31 metric tonnes of seeds are required to reach the cultivation target (58,549 hectares) in greater Khulna.

Rakhains Face Struggle to Survive in the South

by Aroop Talukdar

The Rakhain community living in the southern region of the country is now on the verge of extinction for different reasons.

Nearly two hundred years ago Rakhain people fled from their homes in Arakan and took refuge in different places of Bangladesh. This tribal community of south-west Burma were virtually driven out of their homelands by Burmese invaders, tortured and haunted by Muang pirates, and compelled to set sail towards this land on boats crossing the north-eastern Bay of Bengal.

They gradually built up shelters in south-eastern parts of Bangladesh, particularly at Ramu, Teknaf, Cox's Bazar and in different places of the southern coastal areas of Patuakhali and Barguna districts. They are usually known as 'Magh' to the local Bengalees.

They continued to live peacefully here on weaving and fishing until the native Bengalees started claiming share of the land cultivated by the

Rakhains. The Rakhain community is now seriously facing setback in all sectors and almost extinction gradually.

As a result now the Rakhain population has come down to only 4,000 shrinking from more than 40,000 earlier.

They helplessly observe that still today the main-landers are garbing their inherited land, gardens and other properties leaving them almost beggars.

According to sources, several thousands Rakhain people were killed in the coastal areas in the cyclonic storm and tidal surges of 1960, '61, '64, '65 and '70.

They allege that the administrations both central and local remain almost blind to provide them necessary help in any sector. They are even being deprived of justice too.

But the present government has however, allocated nearly Tk 3.50 crore from the Prime Minister's Special Affairs Division for development projects to benefit the tribals.