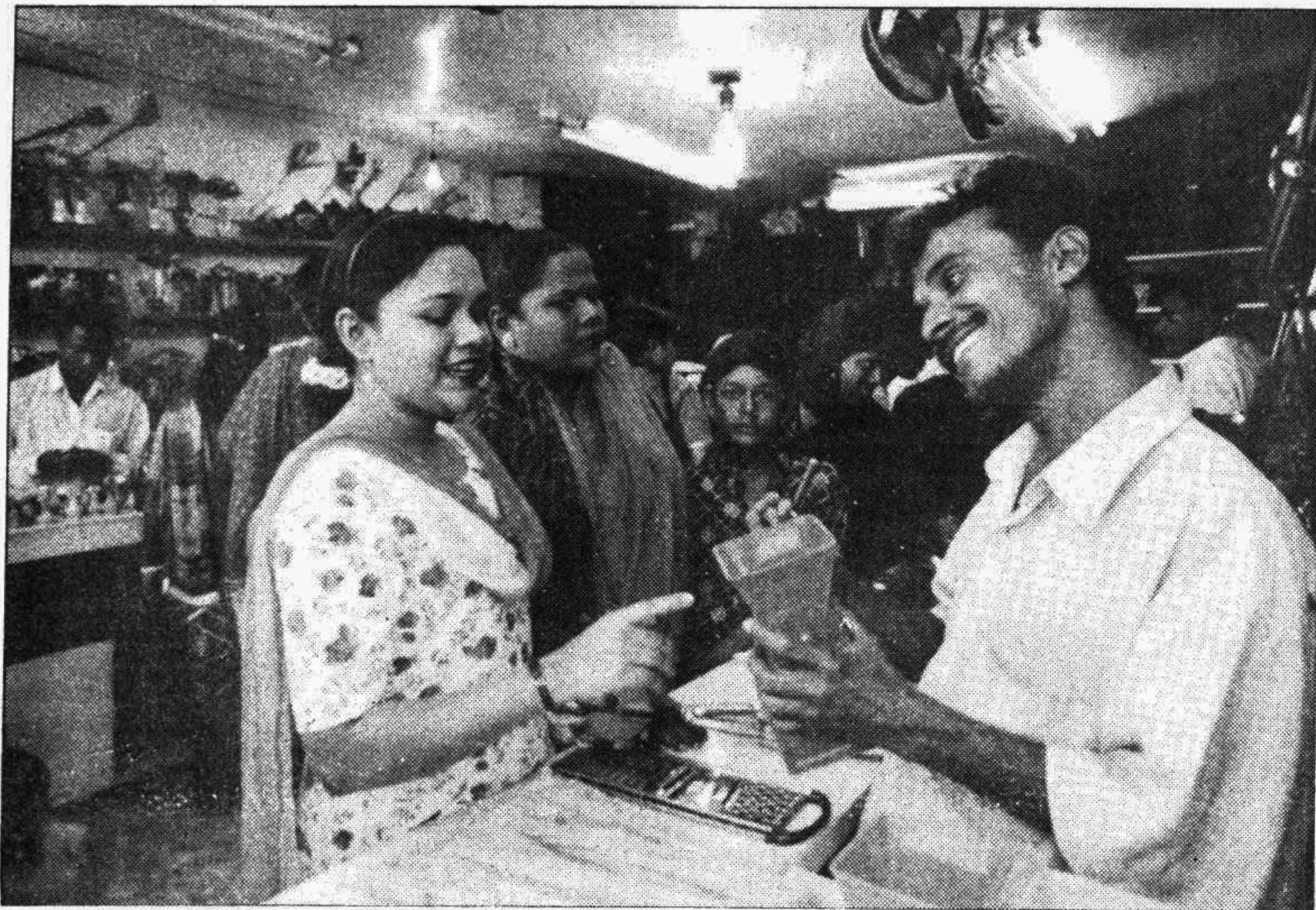


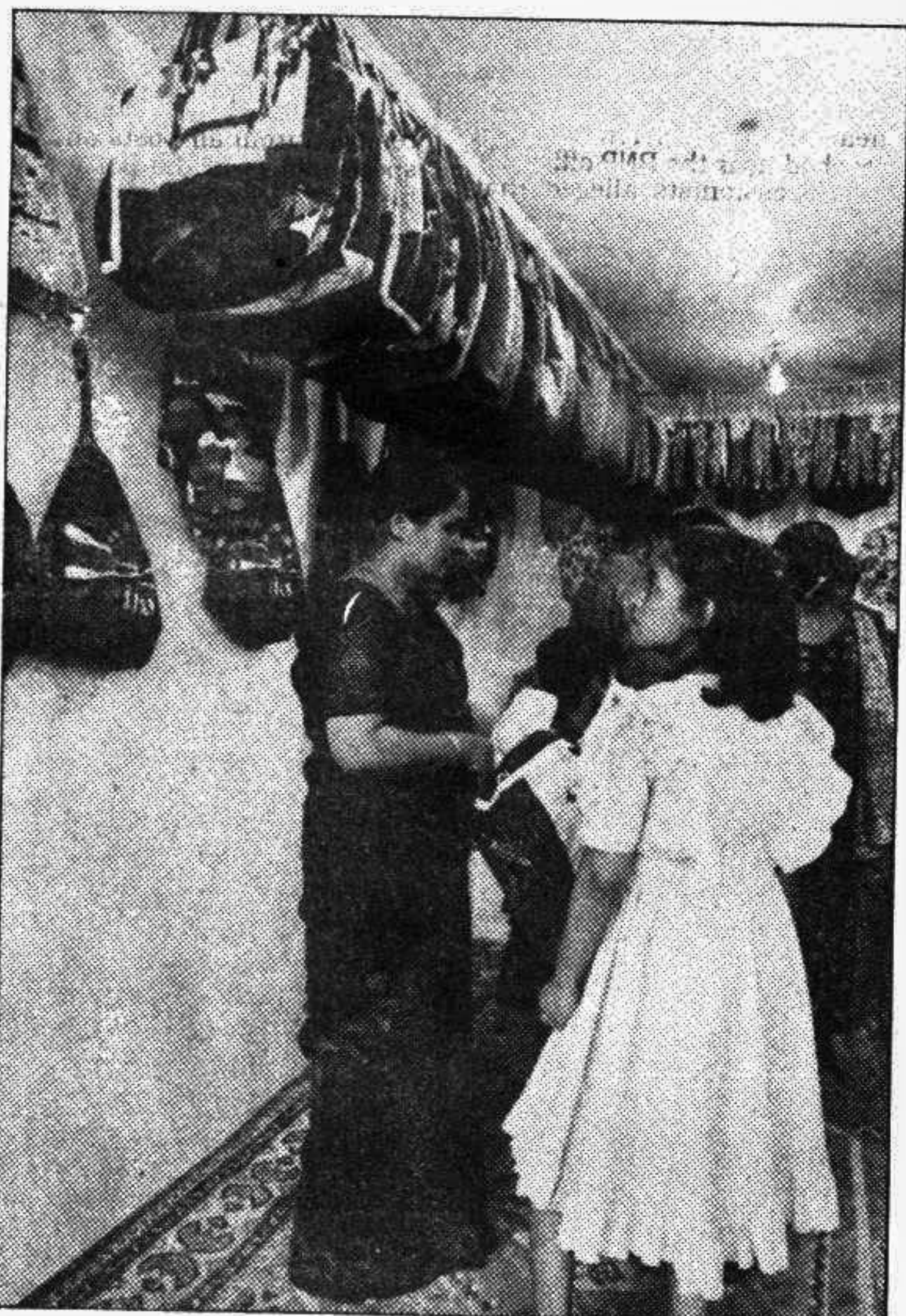
# All the Fun at the Fair



Service with a smile: Stall assistants are only too pleased to help shoppers make up their mind

A photo feature by Zahedul I Khan

While the 66-hour hartal seemingly brought the city to a standstill, the Dhaka International Trade Fair continued to throb with life. The stalls stayed open in defiance of the hartal and thousands of people passed through the turnstiles. It was fun all the way ...



If only ... : Girl eyes a prized something



Bargain time: Melamine means long life



Good time: Plastics can be fun



# Banking on Boro to Offset Aman Debacle

From Monojit K Das

MAGURA: Farmers have taken up massive programme for cultivating transplanted boro paddy in four thanas of the district in the current season to make up for the loss incurred in the previous harvesting season due to prolonged rain, flood and severe pest attack.

According to the Agriculture Extension Department (AED), 19,875 hectares of land have been included in the transplanted boro paddy production package in Sadar, Shalikhia, Mohmmadpur and Sripur thanas. Farmers expect expansion of production area in the next season.

A large number of farmers in different areas of the district including the marginal and the landless have come forward to cultivate transplanted boro paddy in the current season. Shallow tubewells are being installed to provide irrigation water.

Sanat Biswas, a farmer under the Ganges Kobodak Project (GKP) at Masalia village, told this correspondent that they were forced to install shallow tubewells as due to refusal from the GKP authorities to supply irrigation water for transplanted boro paddy cultivation. He installed one in his land a couple of weeks back, so did many farmers in Goolbari, Sabinagar, Masalia, Ghakdak, Ichhapur, Badanpur, Sundarpur, Chaturia and other villages under the GKP.

Last season, production of aman paddy failed as well below the target because of massive pest attack. Most of the farmers are forced to purchase rice from the market for their families. According to a group

of marginal farmers, acute crisis of seeds and saplings will hit hard production of onion, one of the cash crops, in the current season. As an alternative, farmers have taken to cultivation of boro paddy.

A large number of shallow tubewells have already been installed in different villages of Sripur thana and in Shaikupa thana of Jhenidah, although the areas are under the Ganges-Kobodak irrigation project.

Boro paddy will be cultivated in Arpara, Singra, Talkari, Dhanshargati, Sonakulu, Baula, Thaipara, Lakshimpur, villages of Shalikhia thana in

the boro season. Setback in onion and wheat cultivation and bad harvest of aman paddy have led the farmers to take up boro cultivation this year.

According to AED sources, 994 hectares of land in the district have been targeted as boro seed beds.

However, farmers complained that they were finding it hard to collect HYV boro seeds for the seed beds. For those who are trying out boro for the first time the problem is even more acute. HYV boro seeds are not available even in the offices of the Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation

(BADC). This year BADC has supplied three per cent of the total supply of boro seeds, two to four per cent lower than usual. Moreover, the farmers are not getting the varieties they are looking for. HYV BR-32, BR-33 are not available in local markets and, as a result, farmers are forced to buy smuggled Indian seeds — IR-15, MC, Fatna, Swaha, etc. — at higher rates, ranging from Tk 600 to 700 per maund.

Experts believe, if farmers are able to prepare saplings smoothly, production of boro paddy in four thanas of the district will exceed the target.



Star photo by Delwar Islam

# One Foot into A Glorious Past

Our RU Correspondent

NAOGAON: The history of Naogaon will definitely be incomplete without a chapter dedicated to the valiant role of As-tan Mollah, the great peasant leader who fought against injustice, inequality and repression throughout his life. Born in the Bengali calendar year of 1250, Mollah was a strong voice against the tyrannical regime of King Harendranath Roy in Dubolhati.

In the days of the British Raj, notable personalities were conferred upon the title King for philanthropic activities. The recognition by the British rulers coupled with Lord Cornwallis's Permanent Settlement Act of 1793, in effect, gave the kings the right to rule the common mass, subsequently leading to tyrannical regimes like that of King Roy.

King Roy ruthlessly exploited the farmers of his land, imposing taxes whenever he wished. Even expenses of royal ceremonies were met by increased tax on the poor. The king aside, his maybes also exploited and harassed the common people. They nullified barga deals in exchange of bribes and shifting the burden on those who were not on good

terms with them.

Mollah, born in a poor family, engineered resistance to such repression. So courageous he was that once he forced a royal guest off his carriage, citing that use of mares to pull the cart was against the law of the land. Just days before, the king had decreed against use of female species of any animal in hard work. His audacious action was actually designed to send a stern warning to the ruler — the law of the land was for everybody, irrespective of

their religion, caste and social status.

However, not always was Mollah militant; he had respect for the law. On several occasions, he lodged cases against the king's tyrannical treatment of the people, which led to investigation from the high authority. In each case, the verdict went in favour of the plaintiff.

Mollah's strength rested on his love for the distressed humanity and respect for the law of the land. He was very popular among the common people. His

popularity became a thorn in the flesh for the royal family. The king and his men tried to kill Mollah on several occasions but failed.

Mollah had the innate ability to lead. Poet Anandashankar Roy in his *Juktabanger Smriti* referred to an incident, in which Mollah gathered sixty thousand farmers to clean up water hyacinth in the area that hampered cultivation. The poet portrayed him as an uncompromising leader.

Astan Mollah died at the Naogaon Sadar Hospital in the Bengali calendar year of 1340 at the age of 90.

There has not been much of an effort to revive his memory. A great name, who fought throughout his life for justice, is fast fading into oblivion. Now, few people know who Astan Mollah was. Even his successors no near to nothing about the role he played in unifying the poor farmers against the tyranny of King Roy.

In recognition to the contribution Mollah had made to the society, a college has been set up at the heart of the district. That is, however, not enough. His role in the context of his time should be arrested in history books, so the generations to come realise they have a glorious past to take inspiration from.



Tribute to a great peasant leader

# Pirates Unleash Reign of Terror in South

By Aroop Talukdar

BARISAL: Pirates have unleashed a reign of terror in different rivers in the country's southern districts of Barisal, Patuakhali, Bhola, Jhalakati, Pirojpur and Barguna in recent times. Piracy in the Bay of Bengal has been a regular feature for years together. It seems now that the pirates are including the big rivers in the southern region in their network.

According to sources in the Patharghata and Khepupara fishing trawler owners' associations, so many times have there been attacks on their trawlers that fishermen now days do not even think of deep sea fishing. As a result fishermen in the vast coastal are bracing themselves for a bleak future.

Armed pirates frequently attack fishing trawlers in deep sea. Not only do they take away fish, fishing nets, engines and money but, if resisted, the pirates physically assault fishermen on board and leave them severely injured. At times, they

tie up the fishermen and throw them into the sea.

According to victims, these pirates use high-powered trawlers equipped with modern electronic gadgets. They are very ruthless and possess sophisticated weaponry.

During the fishing season, from March to November, the pirates, some of them from Myanmar, India and Thailand, let loose a reign of terror on several thousands of Bangladeshi fishermen. Sometimes fishermen are kidnapped with their trawlers. In most cases, they are let free a few days later.

Most of the pirates are from Mathbaria in Pirojpur, Morelganj, Bagerhat and Sundarbans areas, according to sources. It is believed that they have hideouts in remote jungles where they keep their arms and ammunition, and, of course, the looted goods.

At the end of January this year, a gang of armed dacoits attacked on three trawlers — FB Nahar, FB Gouse Far and FB Dunia — at the estuary of the

Haringhata river along the Sundarbans and looted away fish and other goods worth of half a million taka.

Three fishermen — Sagir, Saheed and Tipu — were abducted from the Salua forest camp areas and kept as hostage. The dacoits demanded ten to thirty thousand taka as ransom.

Four more trawlers, FB Nupur, FB Maer Doa, FB Bhal Bhal-4 and FB Sahajahan, were attacked some 50 kilometres away from the Kuakata beach. The heavily armed pirates, on high-powered engine boats, took away goods worth more than half a million taka.

During the attack Sunil, Rahul, Moslem, Kalu, Jafar and Jail were beaten mercilessly. They were later admitted to the Patharghata Thana Health Complex (THC).

These incidents triggered off panic among fishermen in the coastal areas.

Earlier in December last year a gang of armed dacoits swooped on a cargo vessel loaded with wheat in the Sandhya river on its way to Patu-

akhali from Khulna. Dacoits looted 350 metric tonnes of wheat and left two crew injured.

Boats and cargo vessels loaded with merchandise goods on the Sandhya, Sugandha, Lohalia, Arial Khan and Tetulia rivers in the southern areas are the prime target of the pirates.

Several passenger launches were attacked in the last five years, and at least ten people were killed and more than two hundred seriously injured. Besides, some local people have been collecting tolls in different rivers from the fishermen almost regularly. They also collect tolls from boats and cargo vessels, stopping them in the mid streams of different rivers in the southern districts, it is alleged.

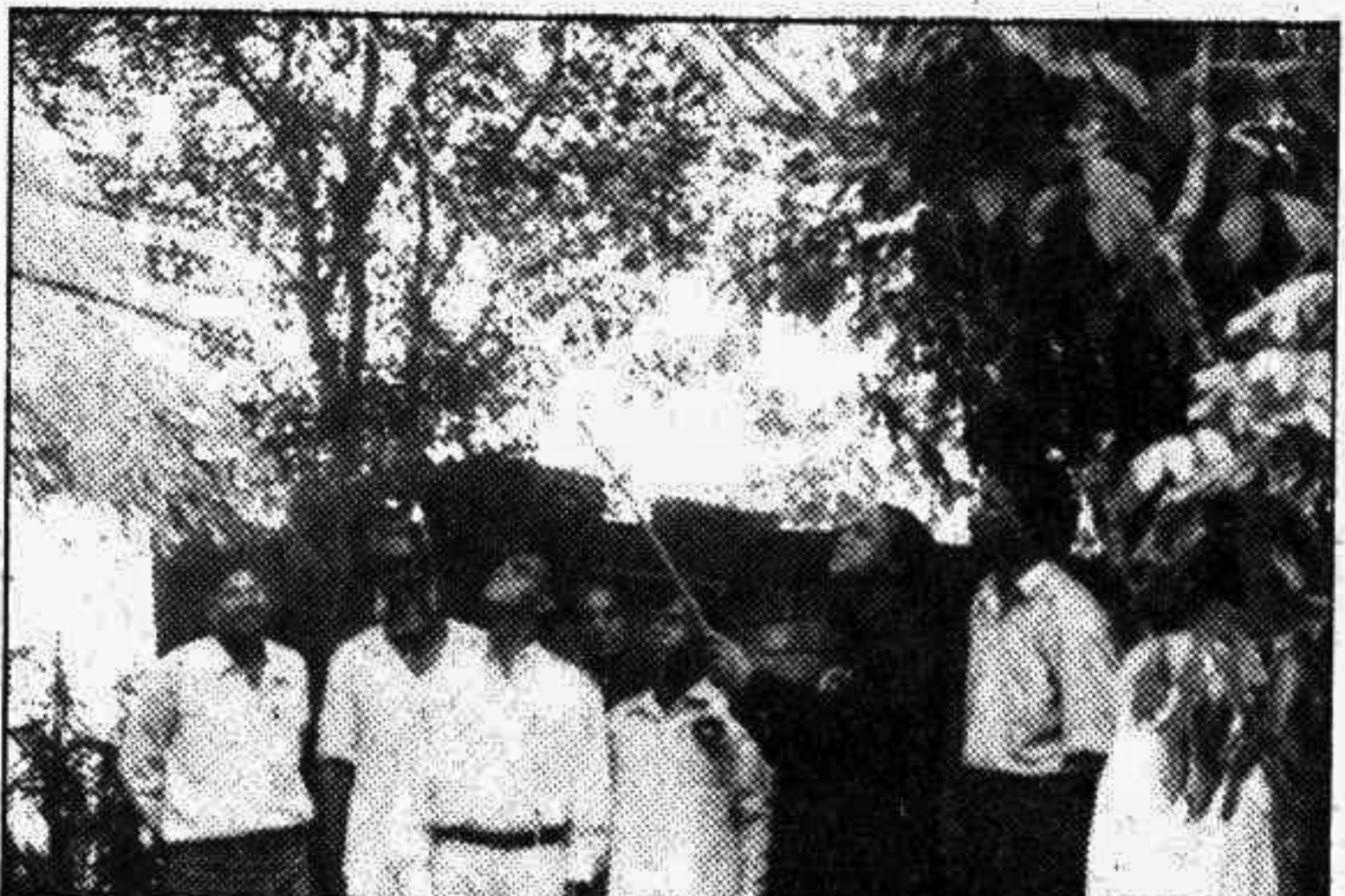
The coast guard units, formed some years back to protect some 710 kilometres of coastal areas, have so far been, to say the least, not up to the task. In the absence of any protection from the law-enforcers, the fishermen and the passengers are at the mercy of the marauding pirates.

# Setting Trend in Orange Plantation

Our Own Correspondent

MAGURA: Shahidul Islam, a horticulturist of Khamarpara village in Sripur thana, by growing sweet oranges in his yard, has proved that orange plantation is possible in the bele-doash soil of the bank of river Kumar.

Islam has been trying to grow specific species of fruits on an experimental basis in his back yard for quite sometime. He intended to grow juicy, sweet oranges like that which were grown there one and a half decades back. He collected seeds of high quality oranges from the local market in 1989. He planted some orange saplings in those parts of his yard where sufficient sun and water were



available. While talking to Shahidul Islam at his Khamarpara residence, he told this correspondent that a small number of flowers bloomed in 1995 and very few oranges grew the first time. The yield of the oranges started to grow after that. About a thousand big sized oranges grew during the current season. The taste and flavour of the oranges were fine, delicious and sweet, he added.

Mohammad Nuruzzaman Khan, deputy commissioner (DC), Magura and other officials of the district and thana administration including Agriculture Department visited Islam's Residence to observe his achievement recently and welcomed his initiatives.