

News snaps

1,520 identified as genuine FFs

MADARIPUR, Feb 27: The District Muktiyuddha Selection Committee has identified 1,520 people of the district as genuine freedom fighters (FFs), reports UNB.

Muktiyuddha District Unit Commander Nasiruddin Zamaier said a total of 3,250 applications were submitted to the selection committee from four thanas. The thana-wise breakup of the genuine freedom fighters are: Sadar-420, Kalkini-380, Rajoir-270 and Shibchar-450.

Work on TV centre to begin soon

COX'S BAZAR, Feb 27: Work on a 13.67 crore taka project for setting up a relay centre of BTV in Ukhiya thana will begin soon, reports APB.

Official source here said that 3.75 acres of acquired land at Ghumdhumtala was handed over to the BTV authorities by the district administration on Monday. The relay centre is being built with French assistance.

Ring leader of terrorists arrested

PATUAKHALI, Feb 27: An alleged ring leader of terrorists, Shanu Khan, was arrested from his house at Gerabunia village recently, reports APB.

Police said Khan was involved in extortion, dacoity and kidnapping in Galachipa, Amtali and Sadar thana areas.

Narcotics supplier arrested

COX'S BAZAR, Feb 27: A member of a ring allegedly engaged in supplying narcotics to prisoners in Cox's Bazar jail was caught red-handed by security men on Tuesday, police said, reports APB.

The arrested person was identified as Mohammad Jalil, son of late Ameer Ali Hajj of Pahartali near the town. The jail security men recovered some hemp, phenisidyl syrup and unocine tranquilizer tablets from his possession and handed him to Cox's Bazar police. Jalil later confessed to police that he belonged to a gang engaged in the illegal business on narcotics for long. He was produced in court which placed him on remand.

Contraband goods seized

JESSORE, Feb 27: Contraband goods worth about Tk 85 lakh were seized by BDR from different border areas here last month, reports APB.

Of these, goods worth about Tk 82.5 lakh were seized while being smuggled into the country. The rest were seized while being smuggled out. BDR sources said. Six alleged smugglers were apprehended during the period and three more are absconding, they said. A total of 166 cases were lodged with different police stations. The contraband goods included saris, wrappers, sweaters, garments, bicycles and spare parts, sugar, salt, phenisidyl, liquor, fruits, cosmetics, copper and brass ware, computer spare parts, fire-crackers and stainless steel utensils.

Man killed in road accident

BANDARBAN, Feb 27: A man was killed and three people were critically injured in a road accident in Jouthakbar area on Bandarban-Chittagong road on Thursday, reports UNB.

Witnesses said the mishap took place at about 10 am when a jeep carrying some employees of the District Council fell into a roadside ditch. Abdul Latif, Chief Accounts Officer of the council, died on the spot. The injured — Abdul Motaleb, Mahub Alam and Mohammad Morshed — were rushed to Bandarban Sadar Hospital and later shifted to Chittagong Medical College Hospital. District Council Chairman Thoaing Cha Pru, Deputy Commissioner Mohsin Ali Sardar and other political leaders visited the injured in the hospital.

Agri-fair concludes

SIRAJGANJ, Feb 27: A five-day colourful agriculture fair concluded in the premises of the Agricultural Extension Department (AED) office here, reports APB.

Besides vegetables and other crops, more than 100 improved technologies and methods were on display at the fair, organised by the local AED. Those included pest control under IMP system, pisciculture in paddy field, preservation of cow-dung, improved methods of vegetable cultivation and integrated fishery and poultry.

3 alleged terrorists held

SATKHIRA, Feb 27: Public caught red-handed three alleged terrorists recovered one Indian-made revolver and one stolen motor-cycle from the possession of Rashimpur High School area in Tala thana recently, reports BSS.

Police sources said, three terrorists Mahabubur Rahman, 25, Rezaul Karim, 27, and Milon, 30, of Keshabpur thana of Jessore district were caught red-handed by local people from Kashimpur High School area when they were taking preparation for snatching. One Indian-made revolver and one stolen motor cycle were recovered from their possession. Later they were handed over to Tala police.

Prices of onion comes down

MANIKGANJ, Feb 27: The prices of onion has come down in different wholesale and retail markets here with the arrival of early harvested onion in the market, reports BSS.

The supply of onions are increasing day by day in the onion selling hats. Onion was sold at Tk 1,800 to 2,000 per mound during the Ramadan, but at present in the wholesale markets onions are being sold Tk 250 to Tk 350 per mound. A large number of onion traders collecting onion from big hats at Thitka, Barangal Uthuli and Ghior for supplying in the wholesale markets in Dhaka. According to onion traders, prices of onion may come down further with the arrival of more onion in the markets.

Construction of roads starts

JESSORE, Feb 27: Construction of 35 roads of eight thanas here has been started on the basis of preference under the rural road development project in the current fiscal year, reports BSS.

The project, costing Taka two crore fifty lakh is being materialised by the Local Government Engineering Department. The total work includes construction of five roads in Jessore sadar, two roads in Abhoyanagar, five roads in Chowgacha, six roads in Jhikargacha, five roads in Keshabpur, four roads in Monirampur, three roads in Sharsa and five roads in Bagarpara. The official sources informed that the work will be completed by next June.

Press confce on uplift advocacy

LALMONIRHAT, Feb 27: A press conference on development advocacy and democratisation was held at RDRS office, Lalmonirhat premises on February 20, reports BSS.

The conference was organised by RDRS-Bangladesh a NGO supported by Asia Foundation. Abul Hossain Bhuiya, Adviser, RDRS Bangladesh, summarised the programme of RDRS Bangladesh. He said, they are going for the development of poor people by organising union federations. Every union federation will be a development unit for poor people. Every federation will have an elected body to look after all function of group-members and have a community centre, education centre, foodgrain store and local banking facilities.

Library construction work in progress

TANGAIL, Feb 27: A three-storied building for Tangail Public Library is being constructed at a total cost Tk 59 lakh, reports BSS.

The library sources said that the construction cost will be borne from its own fund. With the construction of the building in its original place the accommodation problem will be solved soon, the sources added.

Flood damages crops

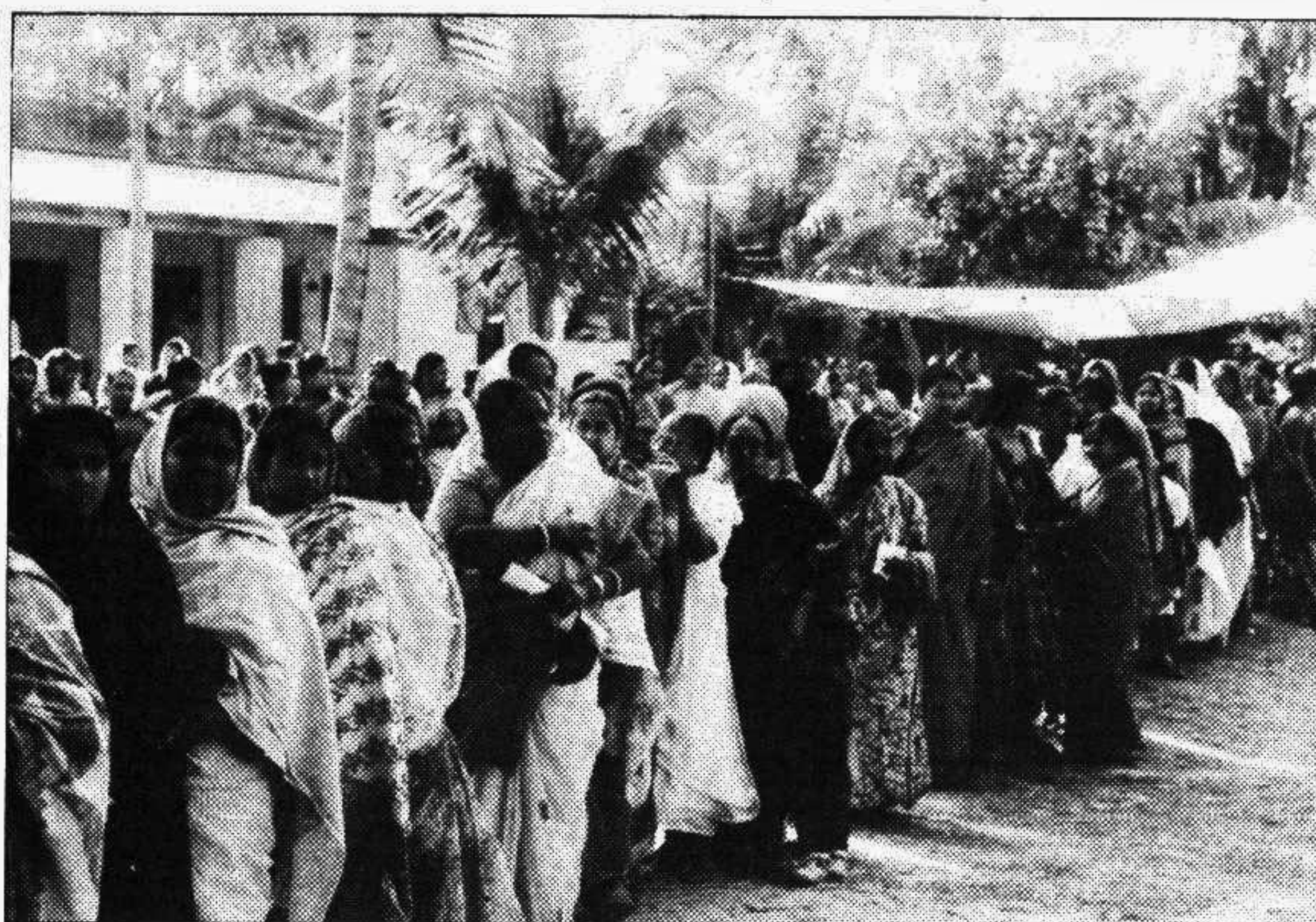
SUNAMGANJ, Feb 27: Crops worth crores of taka are damaged every year in the district due to flash flood and overflow of waters from the hilly areas, reports UNB.

According to the Agriculture Extension Department, crops worth over Tk 190.48 crore were damaged by natural calamities during the period from 1988 to 1991. But, unofficial sources here said on average crops valued at Tk 100 crore are damaged in the bordering district every year due to natural disasters, including drought and flooding. More than three lakh people in 2,889 villages depend mainly only on agriculture. Haor encircled almost all the farmlands and in the rainy season most of the haor protection embankments are destroyed due to onrush of waters. Proper and planned construction of haor protection embankments, re-excavation of canals and dredging of rivers to ensure irrigation water and water outlet can save the farmers from the recurring losses, local agri experts said.

Allocation for govt pry school

PATUAKHALI, Feb 27: An amount of Tk 10 lakh has been allocated for setting up of a government primary school at Baldya Pasha and development of three others in Mirzaganj thana in the current financial year, official sources said, reports APB.

Of the amount, Tk 8,10,000 has been sanctioned for setting up the new primary school and the rest will be spent to buy furniture for three registered primary schools.



NATORE: Woman voters waiting in long queue at Kanaikhali polling centre here during the last municipal poll. — Star photo

Peaceful elections in Natore

From Anwar Ali

NATORE, Feb 27: Elections in two municipalities there have been completed amid tight security.

Despite the oppositions' boycott and a 66-hour countrywide hartal, the polling was by and large peaceful.

While visiting the polling centres of Natore and Gurudaspur municipalities this correspondent found a large number of enthusiastic voters in the polling centres. Presence of women voters was remarkable.

The administration here took a security measures to check disturbance during elections. Police, ansars, VDP men and armed forces were deployed at the polling centres while military personnel patrolled the town streets.

In Natore Poursava, despite panic created by huge bomb-blasts by anti-election activists, the voting held at Natore Municipality on February 23, was virtually peaceful. Sporadic incidents, however, left three persons injured.

At around 9.30 am while

voters were busy in joining the queues at Nababidhan Girls' High School centre, a sudden blast of cocktail left Rabi Kundu, 35, a voter, seriously injured.

Polling centres at Shaheed Rejaunnabi High School and Mollikhati Government Primary School were sent on fire. However, no major damage was reported. Cocktail blast at Tebaria polling centre left two voter injured.

During visits to the municipality The Daily Star Correspondent found the polling was peaceful. The turnout of voters was also high. Some polling centres reported 50 to 60 per cent ballots cast by 2 pm.

Awami League leader advocate Quamrul Islam was elected as the chairman of Natore Poursava securing 11,911 votes. Quamrul's nearest contender was Chitta Ranjan Saha who got 3,611 vote. The voters' turnout was 49.91 per cent while total vote of the municipality is 33,292.

In Gurudaspur Municipality,

the elections were as festive as Eid or 'puja'.

Ashraf Hossain, a 56 years old farmer at Shaheed Shamsuzzoha College centre told this correspondent that he enjoyed this election as happily as the UP elections.

Khondoker Abu Taleb, Presiding Officer at Nizamuddin High School centre told that he had never seen "such fight and such participation" of voters in his life.

Local Election Office recorded an unprecedented voters' turnout. About 85 per cent ballots were cast out of 14,310 voters of the municipality. This was the second elections of Gurudaspur Poursava since its inception, that made the poura citizens very happy, commented a retired school teacher Sobhan Pramanik.

Awami League supported candidate Amjad Hossain was elected as the chairman. He got 6,126 votes. Amjad's nearest opponent Jatiya Party leader Aynal Haq secured 5,797 votes.

N'ganj-Narsingdi Agrani Irrigation Project becomes a bane for farmers

NARSINGDI, Feb 27: The Narayanganj-Narsingdi Agrani Irrigation Project, once a boon to farmers, has now become a bane for them, reports APB.

Most of the croplands in the project area now remain unproductive for lack of proper irrigation and drainage facilities and dumping of harmful industrial waste, farmers said.

The project's command area has come down to about 3,000 acres from 5,000, and most of that remains uncultivated either for water-logging or for lack of irrigation. Lands are becoming barren due to dumping of industrial waste, they told this correspondent during a visit.

Farmers said they complained to the Water Development Board to improve the irrigation and drainage system and to the Environment Ministry to stop disposal of industrial waste several times in the last few years, but to no affect.

Most of the canals in Block A/2 and Block-B which cover most of the area now under command have silted up and the irrigation system has become faulty and ineffective. Repeated complaints fell on the deaf ears of 'corrupt and indifferent' project officials, they alleged.

They are losing about 2,70,000 maunds of rice worth about Tk seven crore every year, they claimed.

The main canal of the project has become useless because an organised gang of earth-sellers has removed soil from a stretch of its bank and made another stretch a road for trucks.

This has stopped flow of water and vast low-lying areas remain submerged under one to two feet water during most of the year and the rest are deprived from irrigation, they said.

Six of the eight sluice-gates

and the 25 canals which were damaged by last year's prolonged floods need to be repaired. The main canal in Block A/1 can not distribute water as it is blocked by heaps of brickbats and debris left by an abandoned brickfield.

A WDB team visited the project area and identified necessary repair work but nothing has been done, they said.

The situation in Rupashi and Noapara, which are outside the coverage of the Agrani Irrigation Project, is completely different because they have remained waterlogged for over six months after recession of the prolonged flood of last year.

Indignant farmers allege that the irrigation authorities have a secret pact with owners of numerous sizing, pressing, printing and dyeing factories which have been set up in the area. They allow the factory owners to release harmful chemical waste into the canals.

Proper planning will turn Saidpur Railway Workshop into a modern one

From E A M Asaduzzaman

NILPHAMARI, Feb 27: Saidpur Railway Workshop, set up 125 years ago in the district is now facing manifold problems.

During British rule, it was the main workshop of Assam-Bengal Railway. From British rule upto Pakistan period, its activities were remarkable. Non-Bengalee people mainly from Uttar Pradesh (UP) and Bihar were its main technicians and workers at all levels of its set-up. They constituted the majority. After inception of Bangladesh in 1971, due to migration of skilled hands, a vacuum was created.

All the governments in Bangladesh took this workshop as a liability and none took any step for its modernisation and rehabilitation. As a result, 22 shops (sub-workshop) have been closed down until now. Works in remaining shops is also very slow. Main closed down shops are: Carriage Construction Shop, Locomotive Shop, Erecting Shop and Rail-

way Power House. Rail passenger carriages were manufactured in the Carriage Construction Shop which were once compared with world famous German carriages. But now by closing down this shop, carriages worth millions of foreign exchanges are being imported from abroad.

Import cost of one railway carriage from abroad in local currency is over Taka three crore, whereas production cost of the carriage in this workshop is not more than Taka 80 lakh at best.

The locomotive shop from this workshop has also been removed from here. The Divisional-in-Charge of Saidpur Railway Workshop, when contacted, informed that decision for removal of locomotive shop is from the highest level.

Its power house which used to generate power from coal as fuel, was also closed down in 1993 and all machines with spares, accessories were sold out to a local company at a

nominal price, who is contemplating to put it into commercial production by using coal from Boro Pukuria.

Had the Communication Ministry been little active, this powerhouse could have been turned into a modern one having capacity to produce 500 megawatt power. Unfortunately, instead plans are being taken at government level to set up new power stations. By spending millions of foreign exchanges our poor nation is now bearing such burden, which is the outcome of improper planning, lack of far sightedness and patriotism of a section of selfish bureaucrats. At one time, about 10,000 men and women in different categories were employed in this workshop, which has now been reduced to only 3,000. Particularly during the past regime in the name of "golden hand shake," a large number of employees were removed.

Such a frustrating situation has raised a question in the minds of local people whether Saidpur Railway Workshop is in the process of gradual closure, resulting in unemployment to existing work force.

Local conscious section of the people have raised a big question when North Bengal is far behind in development of industries from country's other regions, partial closure of Saidpur Railway Workshop is another stab in the back to deprive the people of this region from industrialisation.

It is the hope and aspiration of the people of Nilphamari district that through pragmatic plan, Saidpur workshop be turned into an ultramodern railway workshop through which needs of Bangladesh apart from essentials of Bangladesh Railways foreign exchanges can also be earned by exporting latest railway carriages to many countries within SAARC.

Hartal's impact Revenue earning at Benapole falls

JESSORE, Feb 27: Revenue earnings at Benapole and Darsana customs stations during the first six months of the current financial year was Tk 298.86 crore against the target of Tk 353.97 crore, reports APB.

Earnings during the corresponding period of the last financial years was Tk 309.51 crore against the target of Tk 357.89 crore.

Official sources told that earnings fell due to recurring hartals and other political programmes.

Revenue from imports was Tk 218.80 crore, Tk 194.7 crore of it at Benapole and Tk 24.73 at Darsana, against the target of Tk 279 crore.

Increased import of cement from Indonesia, Thailand and Malaysia drastically reduced the flow of the item from India, which affected revenue earnings under this head.

Tariff cut on certain items like cotton yarn and onion also affected revenue earning, they said.

Revenue from exports totalling Tk 80.06 crore during the period under review against the target of Tk 75.07 crore, they said.

Kushtia Polytechnic Instt students union poll held

KUSHTIA, Feb 27: Jatiyatatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) and Jatiya Chhatra Dal shared the posts of the students' union election of Kushtia Polytechnic Institute held on Monday, reports UNB.

College sources said the election was held peacefully and JCD bagged 10 posts including vice president while Jatiya Chhatra Dal got 10 posts including general secretary.

Yusuf elected VP having 294 votes and Ehsanul Karim elected GS securing 320 votes.

2 held while making bombs

SATKHIRA, Feb 27: Police arrested two youths red-handed while they were making bombs at Maskhola village under sadar thana on Sunday, reports BSS.

Bumper production of potato in 10 dists

JESSORE, Feb 27: There has been a bumper production of potato in the 10 districts under Khulna division this year, reports APB.

Officials of the Agricultural Extension Department (AED) estimated that the production would be over two lakh tonnes.

Some 13,200 hectares of land were brought under potato cultivation in the districts this year, officials said.

The areas were 4,000 hectares in Jessore, 1,300 in Jhenidah, 200 in Magura, 100 in Narail, 500 in Khulna, 400 in Bagerhat, 3,000 in Satkhira, 1,500 in Kushtia, 900 in Chuadanga and 1,300 hectares in Meherpur.

Meanwhile, farmers said they have to sell potato at prices below production cost due to lack of storage facilities. Potato now sells at Tk 74-100 per mound, they said.

The two cold stores of BADC and some private ones in the region have a total capacity of only 50,000 tonnes, according to officials.

Immediate implementation of NRIP demanded

NATORE, Feb 27: As the use of underground water in the drought-affected areas of the country's northern region started well ahead of the lean period, the thirsty Barind region is going to face acute crisis of water during the ongoing IRRI-Boro season, reports UNB.

Local experts, however, demanded for immediate implementation of the North Rajshahi Irrigation Project (NRIP) to save the Barind region from imminent disaster.

A group of enthusiastic people including environmentalists and other professional bodies have launched a movement in greater Rajshahi region to drum up support for implementation of the NRIP project.

To combat the looming desertification mainly due to the adverse effect of Farakka Barrage, the government took up a project, namely Barendra Multipurpose Development Project (BMDDP), in greater Rajshahi district in 1982.

The main objectives of the project were to bring back the ecological balance of the Barendra region using the underground water, tree plantation and excavation of derelict ponds and canals.

Following various steps taken under the project, the situation in many areas of the region showed a sign of improvement and the farmers could now reap three crops a year instead of only one crop. But the programmes of the project created some problem the other way, said the sources.

Operations of about 3,000 deep and shallow tubewells in

the project area drowed the level of underground water in the region and the water went 20 to 25 feet below the normal level during the lean period.

Experts said the average underground water level remained low despite its recharge during the monsoon. Heavy use of underground water was also drying up the ponds and other water bodies on the surface.

To solve the crisis of the Barind region and to stop the depletion of the underground water level, the Water Development Board (WDB) proposed the NRIP and a feasibility study of the project was conducted by Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) in 1988.

The board submitted the project to the government for approval in 1994.

Under the project, the utilisation of surface water instead of underground water has been suggested. The project will include 51,200 hectares of land in 15 thanas of greater Rajshahi district, with three pump houses near Kashba in the Padma river, near Baraipara in the Mahananda river and near Porsha in the Punarbhaba river.

The JICA report said that by spending Tk 450 crore for the project, additional foodgrains worth Tk 165 crore would be produced annually and after completion of the project 841 man-day of employment would be generated.

It also said the use of surface water would bring back the ecological balance in the region and remove the acidity of the land to make it fertile.



MAGURA: National immunisation campaign at a union health and family welfare centre here. — Star photo

Fresh polio vaccination programme in 3 dists

BENAPOLE, Feb 27: A fresh polio vaccination programme has been launched in eight thanas of Jessore, Satkhira and Khulna districts after it was detected that a six-year-old boy was attacked with polio even after taking vaccine last year. The two health experts visited the village on February 6.

Local health officials fear that the polio vaccine given earlier was ineffective.

The programme will cover the Sadar, Keshabpur, Monirampur, Sharsa and Jhikargacha thanas in Jessore, Kalaroa and Tala in Satkhira and Dumuria in Khulna.

The programme was launched after an on the spot investigation by an American

and a Bangladeshi doctor confirmed that Masudur Rahman, son of Kalilur Rahman of Parachakra village in Keshabpur thana was attacked with polio even after taking vaccine last year. The two health experts visited the village on February 6.

The boy's faces were first tested at Keshabpur Hospital in April last year and then in Dhaka and Delhi where it was detected that he was suffering from polio, health officials said.

The re-vaccination programme was finalised at a meeting of civil surgeons of Khulna and Jessore and health officials of the eight thanas.

Law and order worsens further in Dhamoirhat thana of Naogaon dist

NAOGAON, Feb 27: Law and order situation deteriorated further in the frontier Dhamoirhat thana here as terrorist activities including murder are on rise day by day, reports UNB.

Local people said the situation aggravated due to the increasing smuggling in the border areas and consequent rivalry over the sale proceeds of the contraband goods.

Sources aid, four murders were committed recently following the contest over the share of the smuggled goods. Of the victims, Abdus Salam and Harunur Rashid lost their lives at the hands of Indian ruffians.

Abdus Salam, who used to work as lineman of local border guards, along with a man went to Balurghat in India on January 23 illegally. Later men of an Indian trader allegedly shot him dead due to previous enmity. The victim was cremated there according to the ritual of Hindu religion to damage the evidence of killing.

In another incident, Indian

ruffians abducted one Harunur Rashid several months back. Later he managed to flee away from the captivity of miscreants.

A group of Indian armed terrorists intruded into the Bangladesh territory on January 31 and shot Harunur Rashid to death while he was working in a field.

Tension was prevailing in the frontier areas following such unwanted incidents.

Sources said a large number of villagers directly or indirectly are involved in smuggling in the frontier areas.

Besides, the Indian criminals raided the frontier rural areas of Bangladesh several times recently and forcibly snatched away valuables including the cattle of the farmers.

Local leaders blaming the law enforcing agency personnel for the deteriorating law and order situation in border areas called upon the authorities to take necessary steps in this regard.

Brick fields polluting environment in Sherpur

SHERPUR, Feb 27: Immense brick fields have been set up here almost overnight, which have been polluting the environment and using fuel wood indiscriminately, reports APB.

Local people alleged that many of these are unlicensed and the owners do not abide by the government rules.

Some of the brick fields have been set up in residential areas, threatening public health.

There are at least 40 brick fields in Nakla, Sribardi and Sherpur Sadar thana areas alone.

Local people alleged that bricks are being supplied to neighbouring districts from brick fields in Sherpur. After securing licence, it is

mandatory for a brick field to have a 225-feet kiln and at least a 50-feet high chimney. But none of the owners bother about these.

Burning of fuel wood in brick field is banned under an ordinance promulgated in 1989. During a visit this correspondent saw that some coal is kept as 'sample' to show officials, but fuel wood is burnt in most of the brick fields.

Allegations also have it that most of the brick field owners do not pay taxes and VAT, but the administration is that lipped about this.

Meantime, local people complain that air in the locality is thick with carbon dioxide, as a result of which people have been suffering from various diseases.



MYMENSINGH: A dress exhibition in progress at Bangladesh Agricultural University (BAU) Club building which was held recently here. — Star photo