

News snaps

99 BSCIC staffers deprived of salary

FENI, Mar 2: A total of 99 officials and employees of Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation (BSCIC) in the country including Feni are not getting their salaries for the last eight months, reports UNB.

The officials and employees are passing their days in great hardships for non-payment of their salaries. Concerned official sources said, the duration of project of 20 industrial units, out of 21, has ended on June 30, 1998, taken up under the Small and Cottage Industry Infrastructure development scheme across the country. As a result, the decision to give salary from development sector to officials and employees has been stopped during the time as the duration of the scheme expired, it said. According to the Project Profile (PP), the scheme was to shift to revenue sector after its expiry, but it has not been done due to administrative complexities. The process to transition to revenue sector from development one is yet to be completed in the last eight months.

Relief for 16,110 distressed women

COMILLA, Mar 2: About 16,110 distressed women of 12 thanas were given Tk 100 each as relief from the Prime Minister's Relief Fund, reports UNB.

District Administrations received the money from the fund and distributed the same among the distressed widows and husband abandoned women of 1,611 wards of 179 unions. Meanwhile, local Rotary Club distributed biscuits, dry food, soap and tooth powder among the women prisoners and their babies staying with them. The club distributed the goods through the Rehabilitation Society and Social Welfare Department of the district.

22 BNP leaders, workers expelled

HABIGANJ, Mar 2: Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) local unit expelled its 22 leaders and workers on charges of violating party discipline and participating in the municipality polls, reports UNB.

The decision was taken in a meeting of the district unit of the party held on Monday. The expelled leaders and workers are Abdur Shahid Golap, Mohammad Shahidul Haque, Mohammad Golap Khan, Junab Ali, Syed Olur Rahman, Mohammad Sher Ali, ATM Nurul Islam Khejuri, Mohammad Joyntal Mia, Mohammad Habibur Ahmed, Sri Bijoy Gope, Mohammad Ismail Chowdhury, Abdus Salam, Abdul Aziz, Ruhul Amin, Saleh Ahmed, Madan Shil, Mohammad Siddik Mia, Mohammad Rafu Mia, Abdul Majid, Abdul Ali, Syed Tanvir and Mohammad Sajedur Rahman. All of them filed nomination papers for contesting in the elections of four municipalities here.

Medical college bldg set on fire

FENI, Mar 2: Terrorists torched Feni Medical College building in the town Sunday night, police said, reports APB.

The unidentified terrorists ransacked furniture, damaged the laboratory and torched the building in the evening. When fire fighters approached, they fired shots and compelled them to go back, police said. At about midnight, the terrorists came again and set fire to the building materials piled up on the campus. While returning, they also fired shots at the residence of its principal, Dr Mojibul Huq, at Pachgachia.

Jubo League leader strangled

BOGRA, Mar 2: A Jubo League activist, Shaheen, 30, was strangled by some unidentified assailants in the town on Sunday night, reports APB.

Police recovered the body from Titukur along Bogra-Natore highway near the town and sent it to Bogra hospital morgue for autopsy. Police told that some unidentified persons strangled Shaheen of Latifpur Colony and left the body at Titukur. Shaheen was the son of one Alsar Ali. This is the fourth killing in Bogra Sadar thana area in the last six days.

Dist judges yet to be appointed

BANDARBAN, Mar 2: The district and Sessions Judges are yet to be appointed in three Hill districts despite the official directive a year back, reports UNB.

The decision to appoint Judges here was taken in a meeting chaired by Law Secretary on Feb 18 last year. Judicial activities are seriously being hampered here for lack of Judges though district and Session court is operating their function in 61 other districts. It may be mentioned here that court buildings and residences of Judges costing Tk five crore were constructed five years back here. At present, the buildings and residences are lying in abandoned condition. But the official order to appoint Judges has not yet been fulfilled for reasons unknown.

Man killed in road accident

COMILLA, Mar 2: A man was killed and another critically injured in separate road accidents here on Wednesday and Thursday, reports UNB.

Witnesses said Amir Ali, 60, was knocked down at Shaktala in the town by a police patrol truck on its way to Paduar Bazar. Amir was rushed to Comilla General Hospital and succumbed while being shifted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital. In another accident, one auto-rickshaw driver was critically injured when a bus rammed his vehicle at Gouripur in Daudkandi thana on Thursday. Taxi driver Doulat Mia, 25, was rushed to Daudkandi Thana Health Complex in a critical condition.

25 hurt in Jhenidah road mishap

JHENIDAH, Mar 2: At least 25 people, including 10 women were injured, three seriously in an accident on Jhenidah-Jessore road at Bisohkhal in sadar thana on Friday, reports UNB.

Police and witnesses said the accident occurred when a passenger bus carrying students of Jhenidah Cadet College lost control over steering and dashed with a roadside tree. The injured were admitted to Khulna and Jhenidah Sadar Hospitals. Three of the injured were identified as Monwara Begum, 18, Mahmuda Khatun, 60, and Chayan, 11. Police seized the vehicle, but its driver managed to flee the scene.

25 sustain burn injuries

COMILLA, Mar 2: A devastating fire raged through some 60 houses at a colony here in the early hours of Friday that let 25 people injured, reports APB.

Locals said the flame originating from an unknown source engulfed Dhangar Colony at about 2 am, creating panic. Fire fighters rushed the spot and put out the blaze after several hours. The extent of damage was primarily assessed over Tk 5 lakh. Twenty-five people sustained injuries while fighting the fire. Seriously injured Monir, 25, was admitted to Comilla General Hospital.

61 uplift schemes progressing

NATORE, Mar 2: Some 61 uplift schemes in six thanas here at a cost of Tk 4.63 crore and 393 mts of wheat have been taken up for implementation, reports UNB.

The schemes under the Annual Rural Infrastructure Maintenance Programme-2 of Local Government Engineering Department are progressing fast. About 80 per cent work of the schemes has already been completed. Construction and maintenance of 29 rural roads, bridges, culverts and educational institutions involving Tk 1.41 crore under LGED's General Maintenance Programme and reconstruction of two roads costing Tk 12 lakh under Emergency Post-Flood Rehabilitation Programme is also going on.

Work on Paksey Bridge begins soon

PABNA, Mar 2: Work on construction of Paksey Bridge near Harding bridge on the Padma will begin soon, official sources said, reports APB.

Soil tests and survey have been completed by two teams from China Road and Bridge Corporation and Shimizu Corporation of Japan. Acquisition of 126 hectares of land on both sides of the river is nearing completion. The bridge will cost 500.55 crore taka and the funds have been arranged, they added. The bridge will facilitate direct road communication between the northern and southern regions of the country.

36 uplift projects at Dhanbari

TANGAIL, Mar 2: Dhanbari Pourasabha has taken up 36 projects under its annual development programme at a cost of Taka 39,29,789 in this financial year, reports BSS.

The programme includes construction and reconstruction of 23 roads, four open markets, one culvert and six drains. Few dustbins will also be set-up and boundary wall of the pourasabha will be constructed. According to official sources, the work is expected to be completed within two months.

2 boys killed in road accident

PIROJPUR, Mar 2: Two students were crushed under the speeding wheels of a bus at Tushkhal in Mathbaria thana here on Wednesday, reports APB.

The victims were identified as Nayeem, 13, and Hira, 12, of Tushkhal High School in the thana. Police said they died on the spot when the Pirojpur-bound bus from Mathbaria hit the schoolboys on the road adjacent to their school as they were returning home.

RAKUB's 'irregularities' in distribution of agri-loan

From Anwar Ali

NATORE, Mar 2: Alleged irregularities in distribution of agricultural loan have been detected at Halsa union branch of Rajshahi Krishi Unnayan Bank (RAKUB) in sadar thana here.

Farmers of the union have raised the allegations of bribery against the bank officials in sanctioning loans.

Despite government directives to ensure quick disbursement of corruption-free agricultural loan, the bank officials in connivance with brokers, middlemen and tahasildars, force farmers to bribe five to 10 per cent of incentive for a loan, the farmers alleged. Those who do not offer bribes the officials are put off even for months", said Union Parishad (UP) member Md Shamsul Haq.

"If they are 'greased', loans are available in a day or three, if not, the officials say 'there is no budget' or take other pleas for harassing the farmers, said Nagen Chandra Roy, a farmer leader in Halsa union.

Roy also alleged that some middlemen, who have "close dealings" with the bank manager, had been exploiting the loan-seekers. He said, generally, the amount of bribery remains between Taka. 100 and Taka 500 for a loan.

Israfeel of Nolkhola village, Joyntal Abedin of Chirakola and Akhtar Hossain of Matikopa village in Halsa union alleged that they had to

bribe the bank officials for loans. Three other farmers from Bagrom, Fulser and Sultanpur villages, unwilling to be quoted told this correspondent that they got their loans after 20 days to one month of filing the applications at the intervention of the UP chairman.

Farmers further alleged that brokers were also extracting money from loan-seekers to manage loans. They also identified some brokers as Md Alauddin of Fulser village, Surug Ali of Bagrom, Akkas Ali of Nishchintapur villages and many others. While visiting Halsa union recently this correspondent found the two brokers at RAKUB office premises and persuading their clients. When asked they refused to talk to this correspondent and later fled from the scene.

When contacted, UP chairman Abdul Basit Mia told that the farmers of the locality had always been complaining him about bribery by the bank manager while many of the farmers were yet to get any loan even at the mid-period of Boro paddy cultivation.

The 52-year-old chairman said, "I have asked the manager thrice to stop the practise, but he did not show any respect to my words."

He also alleged that, in many cases, loans were not going to the right persons. A school teacher of Halsa questioned the responsibility of the field su-

pervisors of the bank in this respect. He said, many people were doing business or other things with the money which they took as agricultural loan from the bank.

Abu Bakkar of Sultanpur took Taka. 50,000 as agri-loan for banana cultivation, but he has not any banana orchard. There are such more instances like Habibur Rahman of Bagrom village, Safiq Uddin Mia of Sultanpur and Soharab of Fulser village.

A tahsildar informed this correspondent that the bank officials had developed links with some dishonest tahsildars to earn money illegally.

Md Hafizur Rahman, Manager of RAKUB at Halsa union however, claimed that the loan disbursement process was fair and ruled out the allegations of corruption. But the manager kept silent when asked about the UP Chairman's open request to stop bribery.

BAM Shafiqul Islam, the Regional Manager (RM) of RAKUB, Natore region, when contacted, virtually admitted the allegations. He said, "I have heard of the allegations of Halsa and Chowgram union in Shingra thana in the, but no one has come forward to me with a complaint."

However, the RM said, tough action will be taken against the persons concerned if such allegations are proved.

Train passengers' woes multiply along Chandpur-Chittagong route

From Our Correspondent

CHANDPUR, Mar 2: The train passengers of Chandpur-Laksham, Chandpur-Chittagong, Chandpur-Sylhet, Chandpur-Hajigonj sections are facing immense sufferings due to irregular train services, unhealthy conditions of railway stations and negligence of railway staffers.

Most of the trains run in these routes irregularly. According to passengers, the number of trains as well as compartments are inadequate. Small number of compartments in each train can not cope with heavy rush of passengers. Sometimes trains run without first and second class compartments creating great inconvenience to upper class passengers.

The number of passengers travelling without tickets has increased recently. It has been causing sufferings to the genuine

passengers. Scores of beggars and toll collectors have been creating problems to the passengers.

Most of the compartments are not kept clean. Sometimes water and light are not available in the toilets. Doors of many toilets are found broken. Sometimes compartments have no electricity and fans. In most railway stations there is no waiting room for upper class passengers. Toilets in the stations are dirty. Those are not cleaned regularly. Waiting rooms in most of the stations have not proper sitting arrangements. Sometimes waiting rooms are found locked.

The trains do not maintain time table. The arrival and departure of trains are often late by two to three hours. As a result the passengers particularly those who attend schools, colleges and offices are worst suf-

ferers. It is alleged that some corrupt railway employees are allowing passengers to travel without tickets.

It is also alleged, booking counters start functioning just a few minutes before the arrival of trains. As a result many passengers fail to purchase tickets on time. The inter-city train service between Chandpur and Chittagong runs with heavy crowd everyday. Passengers even cannot purchase tickets two or three days earlier. Tickets are sold in black market.

Many railway lands in Kalibari Court Stations and many other stations are being grabbed by unauthorised persons. It is alleged many railway lands are leased out illegally. Many shops, hotels and restaurants are being constructed in railway stations causing inconvenience to passengers.



MAGURA: Potter families here facing very bad days now due to lack of government patronisation, high price of raw materials, non-availability of bank loan and problems of marketing. Photo shows potters waiting for customers with their products at a rural market. — Star photo

Takerhat Port plagued with manifold problems

MADARIPUR, Mar 2: Takerhat Port of Rajoir thana here and an entrance to country's southern region is plagued with manifold problems, reports UNB.

Scarcity of pure water, poor drainage system, inadequate public toilet, illegal occupation of khas lands and establishment of shops there in the unplanned way are among the existing problems.

Deterioration of the port's condition was however mentioned by the locals saying that no significant development activities were taken up since the independence of the country.

A good number of mills and factories including a jute mill, milk vika factory, rice mill, Guernsey mill, pulse mill, saw mill and many other small industries were set up by this time here which enhanced importance of the port.

"But, it is really unfortunate that there is no development of the main market despite establishing a number of mills and factories," said a local businessman.

Unplanned construction of shops in and around the bandar areas has made the road leading to the bazar risky for vehicular

movement.

Besides, absence of any rickshaw and rickshaw stand in the bandar road (Dhaka-Barisal highway) forced the pullers of the three wheelers to strand their vehicles on the road for passengers or carrying goods creating traffic congestions.

Despite being a large and famous port, it has shortage of public toilet. People respond to their natural call here and there, polluting the environment.

People also dump the garbage here and there for lack of dustbin. Lanes and by lanes get filled up with knee deep water during the rainy season in absence of drainage system.

Acute shortage of drinking water is prevailing due to shortage of tubewells. Besides, two tubewells of the bandar remained inoperative for long.

In the regular hat days, Saturday and Wednesday, the number of shops here becomes double (from 2,000 to 4,000).

Traffic jam on Dhaka-Barisal highway in the weekly hat days is a common feature as most of the temporary shops sit on the highway for shortage of place.

The super market built up in 1964 by the government patronisation is yet to be started in full swing as the work of the market could not be completed.

Establishment of unauthorised shops is rampant on the khas lands also.

Crimes up in 10 S-W dists

JESSORE, Mar 2: Law and order situation in 10 south-western districts is deteriorating in recent days with the alarming rise of criminal activities like murder, kidnap, rape and dacoity, reports UNB.

A total of 128 murders, 30 kidnaping, hijacking of 22 motor vehicles, 25 rape incidents were occurred during last three months from last December.

According to police records and newspaper reports, 55 people were killed in December 1998, 54 in January and the rest 19 in February this year.

Giving details of the murders, the sources said 11 activists of outlawed parties were among the victims who were killed in intra-party armed clashes in Kotwara and Bagerpara thanas on December 12.

Two CBA Leaders Sirajul Haq and Manik Mia of Khulna people's Jute Mills were beaten to death by the workers of the mills on January 1.

Of the other victims, four Jubo League and Chattra League activists were killed in Khulna due to intra-party rivalry during the period.

Among 12 murders occurred in Jessore in February, Nepal Roy, a contesting ward commissioner, was murdered by his rival group four days ahead of the pourasava election.

Senior Vice President of BNP Chowgachha thana unit Mokbul Hossain was chopped to death on February 20 and JSD leader Kazi Aref along with five others were killed on February 16.

Police said kidnappings are also going on parallel to the murders in these districts particularly in Koyra thana of Khulna district.

Twelve rifles that were looted from Akiz Jute Mills in Noapara in Ahobynagar thana on January 19 have yet to be recovered.

Besides, the hoodlums hijacked 22 motor cycles from different places here.

In Gaibandha 3 chairman candidates want repolling

From Our Correspondent

GAIBANDHA, Mar 2: Three contesting poura chairman candidates demanded fresh election in Gaibandha Pourashava. They have alleged vote rigging, terrorism and snatching of ballot papers in February 25 elections. The three chairman candidates are Shahadat Hossain, Suja (Independent) Ferdous Ahmed and Abdul Mannan Sarkar, both of them from JP. They arranged a joint press conference at the local Public Library hall on February 27. They alleged that the winner Awami League candidate Anowarul Hasan Sabur bagged maximum votes through terrorism and by snatching ballot papers in Purbu Kamalan Primary School, Quami Madrasa, and Purbopara Primary School centres.

Besides, mass irregularities and favouritism were evident in many polling centres in favour of Anowarul Hasan Sabur. They demanded fresh polls here cancelling the present results.

Ekushey book fair held at Narsingdi

From A Correspondent

NARSINGDI, Mar 2: A day-long book fair was arranged by Ekota Chiro Sabuj Sangha, a social welfare organisation, at its premises at Kamrabo here recently.

The fair was organised in observance of Ekushey February.

Local Union Parishad Chairman Mojibur Rahman Sarkar inaugurated the fair which was attended by hundreds of people.

Former Director of Bangladesh Sugar and Food Industries Corporation (BFIC) Musleh Uddin Bhuiyan, who is also the chief patron of the Sangha presided over a discussion meeting.

Professor of the Institute of Forestry of Chittagong University Kalim Uddin Bhuiyan, Headmaster of Ekota Primary School Kamal Hossain, Chairman of Nari Jagorani Sangstha Afroza Akhter, UP member Nurul Islam, patron of the Sangha Rafiq Uddin Bhuiyan, Vice President Zahirul Islam and General Secretary Ahid Uddin Bhuiyan took part in the discussion.

Exhibition of handicrafts, competitions of debate and general knowledge and recitation from self-composed poems were other attractions of the book fair. Books worth Taka 10,000 were sold at three stalls in the fair.

477 maunds of rice looted from trawler

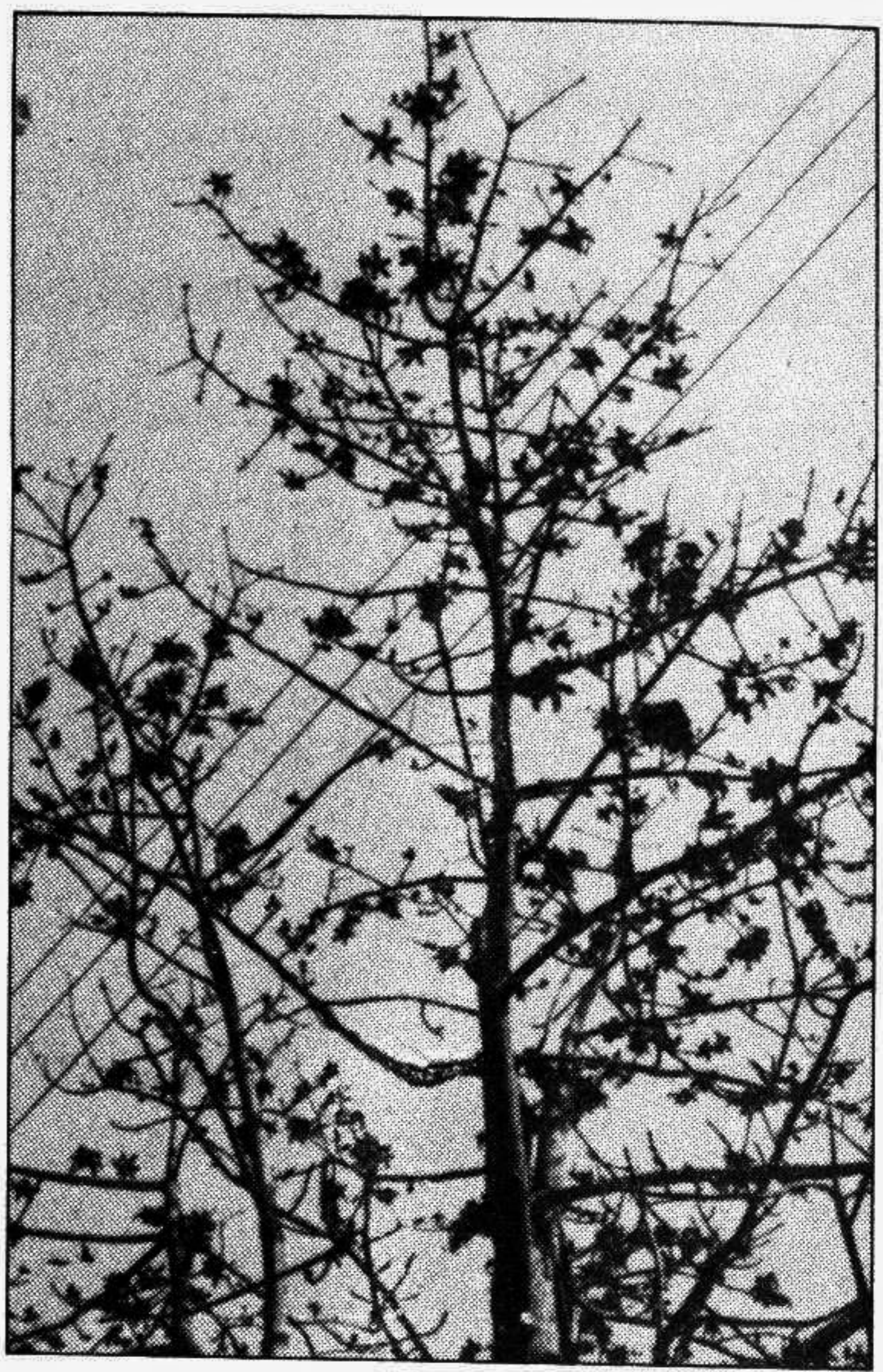
From Staff Correspondent

BARISAL, Mar 2: A gang of armed dacoits looted away 477 maunds of rice from a trawler in a river near Golachipa in Patuakhali district recently.

Dacoits also took away the trawler. A rice trader Nurul Haq Munshi of Kalapara informed that when the trawler reached Kalagachia in Galachipa thana, it came under attack by a gang of armed dacoits.

The dacoits on gun point made Sahidul Islam, the driver of the trawler hostage and forced to go according to their directives.

After a day, the dacoits freed Sahidul Islam and two other of his assistants Aminul and Faruq at Nilkalam in Charfaision thana of Bhoala.



Shimul flowers in full bloom in this ongoing spring season at village Kabirpur in Jhenidah district. — Star photo

Shimul trees vanishing fast

From Delwar Kabir

JHENIDAH, Mar 2: Shimul, a traditional tree of Bangladesh, which supplies cotton, has been declining day by day.

A few years back each and every well-to-do farmers had at least two shimul trees in their houses. The trees could meet their family's annual demand of cotton for making quilt, pillow, mattress and other belongings. The red or light orange colour flowers of shimul appears between the Bengali month of Magh and Falgoun. Shimul flowers in Falgoun declare the advent of spring.

In the early morning children in the rural areas usually leave their beds to collect shimul flowers. Varieties of birds can be visible on Shimul trees. The environment becomes lively at this time. Just after the fall of ripe flowers, the seeds of Shimul become mature between the Bangla months of late Falgoun and early Chaitra. Then white cotton can be available from these Shimul trees.

When the owners of Shimul trees collect cotton from their trees, many villagers

especially poor children rush their and collect cotton to meet up the needs during the winter season.

But we are missing such scenes now in the remote villages. Shimul trees have been declining very fast. The farmers are cutting down these trees indiscriminately for the purpose of IRRI-Boro farming. Moreover, the jungles of rural areas are being vanished very fast for construction work and other purposes. Everyday a number of Shimul trees are being cut down as these are used as raw materials in match factories, fuel woods in brickfields and for many other domestic purposes.

In the remote villages Shimul trees are being fallen rampantly due to its cheaper price.

As a result people, especially the poorer section of the society are being deprived of cheaper cotton. It has become a threat to environment also. Department of Agriculture (DAE) sources said,

Government should take the initiative to save Shimul trees from extinction, responsible citizens opined.

Siltation in 5 rivers of 2 dists hampering ferry movement

MADARIPUR, Mar 2: Heavy silt in the rivers across the district and in neighbouring Shariatpur have seriously been hampering the movement of vessels, reports UNB.

Sources said the situation this year was particularly critical after the prolonged flood last year as the river beds were raised substantially by the silt carried with the flood water.

Innumerable shoals are emerging in the rivers Padma, Aryal Khan, Kumar, Kirtinasha, and Palardi causing serious difficulties in the plying of launches, steamers and trawlers. At some points, even the country boats are facing problem due to the sharp fall in water level.

The affected river routes include Madaripur-Dhaka, Madaripur-Chandpur and Madaripur-Shariatpur.

With the drying up of the mouths of Pajkhal and Tal-tala canals, the launches from here to Dhaka have to ply via Chandpur which add 50 extra miles to the journey.

"The passengers as well as the transport owners have to spend more money for the journey," said the source adding that it took five more hours to reach the capital from the district headquarters.

Ferry movement at Maoa, Sheikhpur and Kazirtek ferry ghats is also being hampered due to this reason, said the sources adding that sometimes the vehicles wait for the high tide for crossing the river.

The sources feared that the routes might be closed if necessary measures including dredging could not be taken on emergency basis.

The river routes play a very important role in the trade and business of the region and the silt in the rivers might adversely affect agriculture, in-

dustrial growth and trade of the two districts.

The business activities at the important river port of Char-muguria have reduced substantially due to accumulation of silt in the river Aryal Khan. A similar situation has been prevailing at Rajoir and Takerhat ports.

Human habitation is growing on the shoals in different parts of the district.

The sources said that the concerned authorities were not taking any measure for necessary dredging of the rivers and the situation this year was particularly bad following the flood.

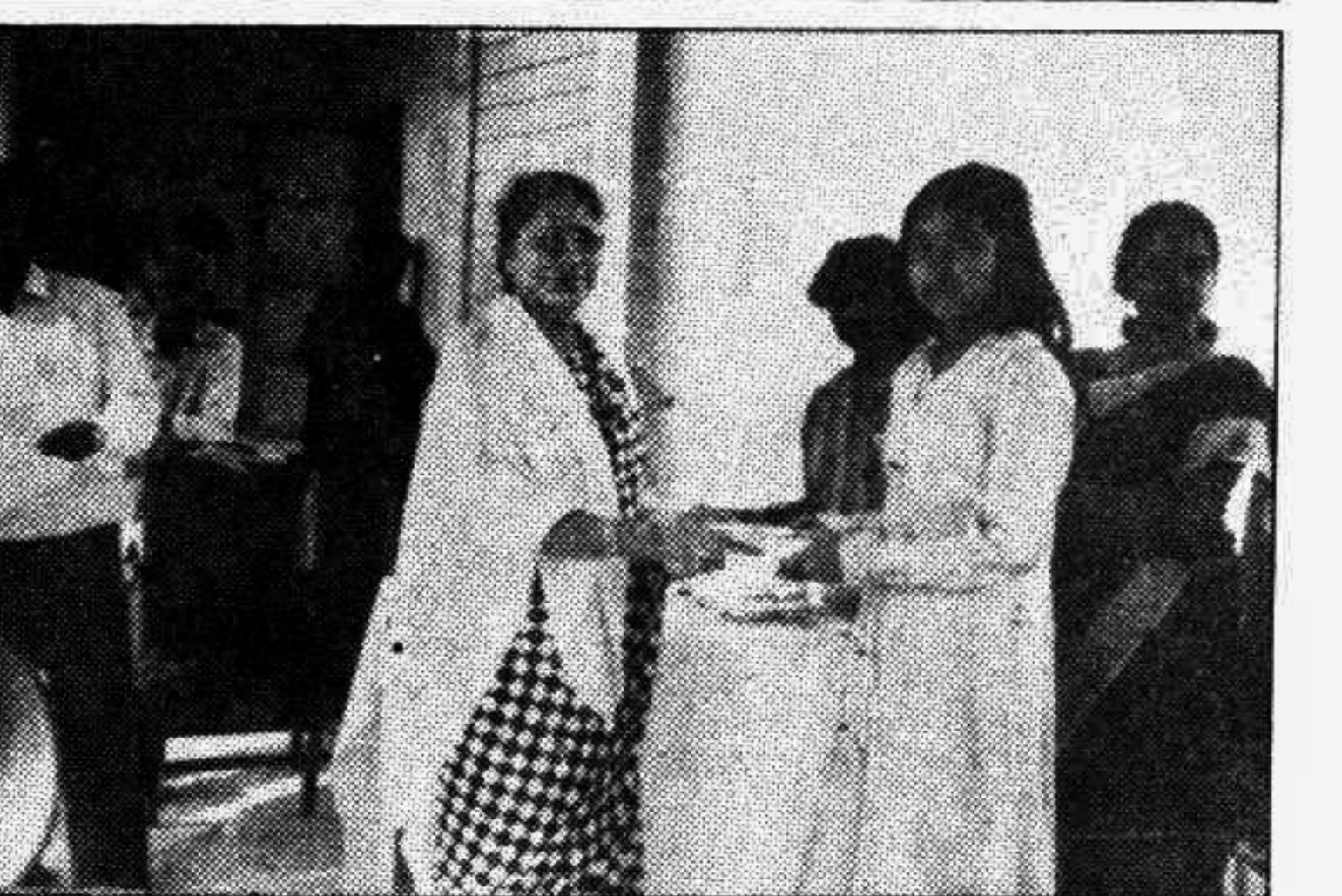
A BWTG source said that the river Padma is the source of almost all the rivers in the two districts and accumulation of silt at the mouths has been hampering the flow particularly during the dry season. The small rivers are being turned into shoal lands as there is no dredging at these points for long.

Man killed in road accident in Kishoreganj

From Our Correspondent

KISHOREGANJ, Mar 2: A 40-year-old man was crushed to death under the wheels of a speeding bus at Ujanchar bus stand in Katiadi thana on Kishoreganj-Bhairab road recently. The victim was identified as Sundar Ali of village Dumurmara in Monohardi thana of Narisndi district.

Police sources said, the accident occurred when the victim tried to get down from the bus. He died on the spot. Police could neither trace the bus nor arrest the driver.



RAJSHAHI UNIVERSITY: Rasheda Khaleque, President of RU Ladies Club distributing prizes to a winner of Hand Writing Competition which was held at Shaheed Smriti Sangrahasala here on Shaheed Day. — Star photo

MAGURA: Subsidiary canal of Ganges Kobadak Project at Joka village has dried up. This photo has been taken recently. — Star photo