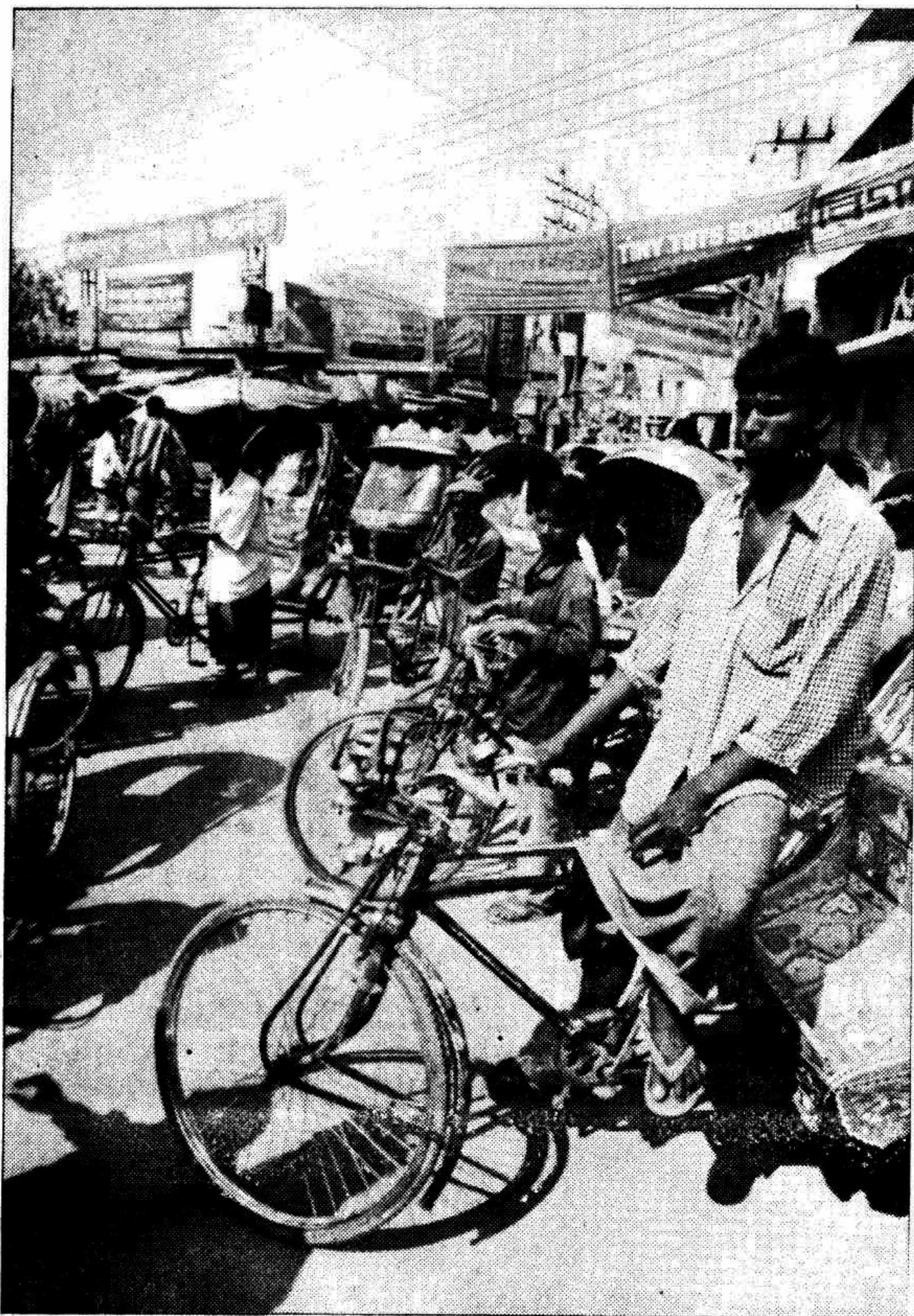
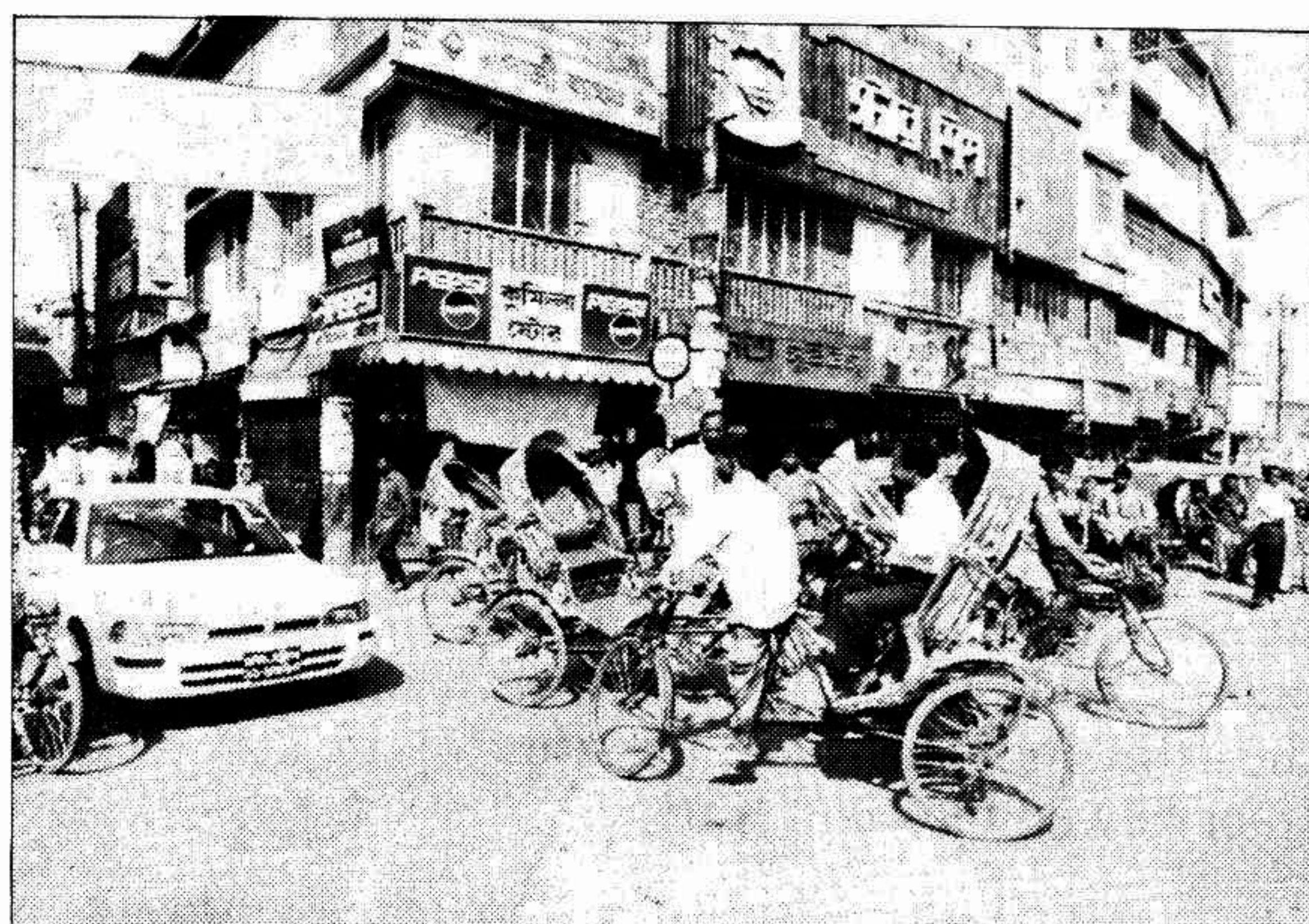


# Blocking Access to the Road

A photo feature by Zahedul I Khan



While the main roads of the city are perennially in a state of chaos, one of the main reasons for the jams is the blockade of feeder roads. Rickshaws have an uncanny habit of parking at the mouth of roads, blocking exit from and entry to those roads. In more recent times, large inter-district coaches have begun to use the main roads and side streets as their terminals. These coaches have taken to use even roads of residential areas for parking, and embarkation and disembarkation of passengers. Traffic police either are not bothered, or they are not even aware of the rules, or ...



## Where the Rivers Flow No More

From Monojit K Das

**M**AGURA: Unplanned construction of embankment, dams and roads has virtually condemned the rivers and their tributaries in the greater Jessore and Kushtia districts to death. Added to the negative impact of the Farakka Barrage on the Padma, the whole scenario tells of an imminent ecological disaster.

Gorai, Madhumoti, Kumar, Kaliganga, Naboganga, Hanu, Fatki, Bhairab and many others criss-cross at different areas of Magura, Jhenidah, Narail, Jessore, Kushtia, Chuadanga and Meherpur districts. These are integral parts of ecosystem. Embankments, dams and roads, constructed in an unplanned way, have seriously disrupted and, in many cases, stifled the natural flow of these rivers. Tributaries like Kaliganga, Hanu, Kumar, Bhairab and Fatki have all dried up, compounding plight of the local people.

Gorai, the main branch of the Padma, originates from near Talbaria village, north of Kushtia town. It bifurcates and re-joins several times as it flows south-east to Muhamadpur thana of Magura. There it is known as Madhumoti.

Kaliganga, offshoot of the Gorai joins the Kumar near Saikupa thana in Jhenidah. It has been completely cut off by one of the main canals of the Ganges Kobadak Project (GKP), south of Kushtia town. Its lower half has become almost a dry bed. Hanu, another tributary of the Gorai, originates from Mathbaria village point in Sirpur thana of Magura. About 60 to 65 years back the entry point of the Hanu became silted up disturbing its flow. Moreover, the embankment of the GKP, constructed in the early 60s, crossed the tributaries at its origin. This disconnected the tributary with the Gorai. Mathabanga is one of the tributaries of the Padma. It flows through Chuadanga. It has four channels, Churni, Chitra, Naboganga and Kumar, flowing through the greater Kushtia and Jessore districts. These channels are now fully dried.

The Naboganga is navigable in the rainy season only up to Magura town. The Kumar flows sixteen kilometres from Alamdanga town to the south-east to eight kilometres north of Magura town. Most parts of the Kumar are now almost dry. Farmers on both sides of the river are cultivating crops like boro paddy on its bed during the dry season.

According to local farmers, a multi-billion taka project was undertaken to build regulators on the Naboganga near Magura town to supply water to the Kumar for multifarious purposes like irrigation, fisheries and transportation. But the project was shelved due to unknown causes, they alleged.

The Bhairab is another river which flows through Jessore and its adjoining areas. At present the main stream is not navigable beyond Bagarpara thana of Jessore. A major section of the river is dry and full of hyacinths and weeds. Farmers are cultivating crops on the bed.

Similar is the scenario in other tributaries like Fatki and

Begbati, and other waterways. According to environmental experts, over-all human development, normal growth of plants, animals and fish have been seriously disturbed due to

'killing' of these rivers, tributaries and water bodies. Boatmen, fishermen, potters and others, for whom these rivers were source of living, are forced to look for alternatives. Fishing, which created employment for people living on both sides of the river, have now taken up odd jobs for sustenance.

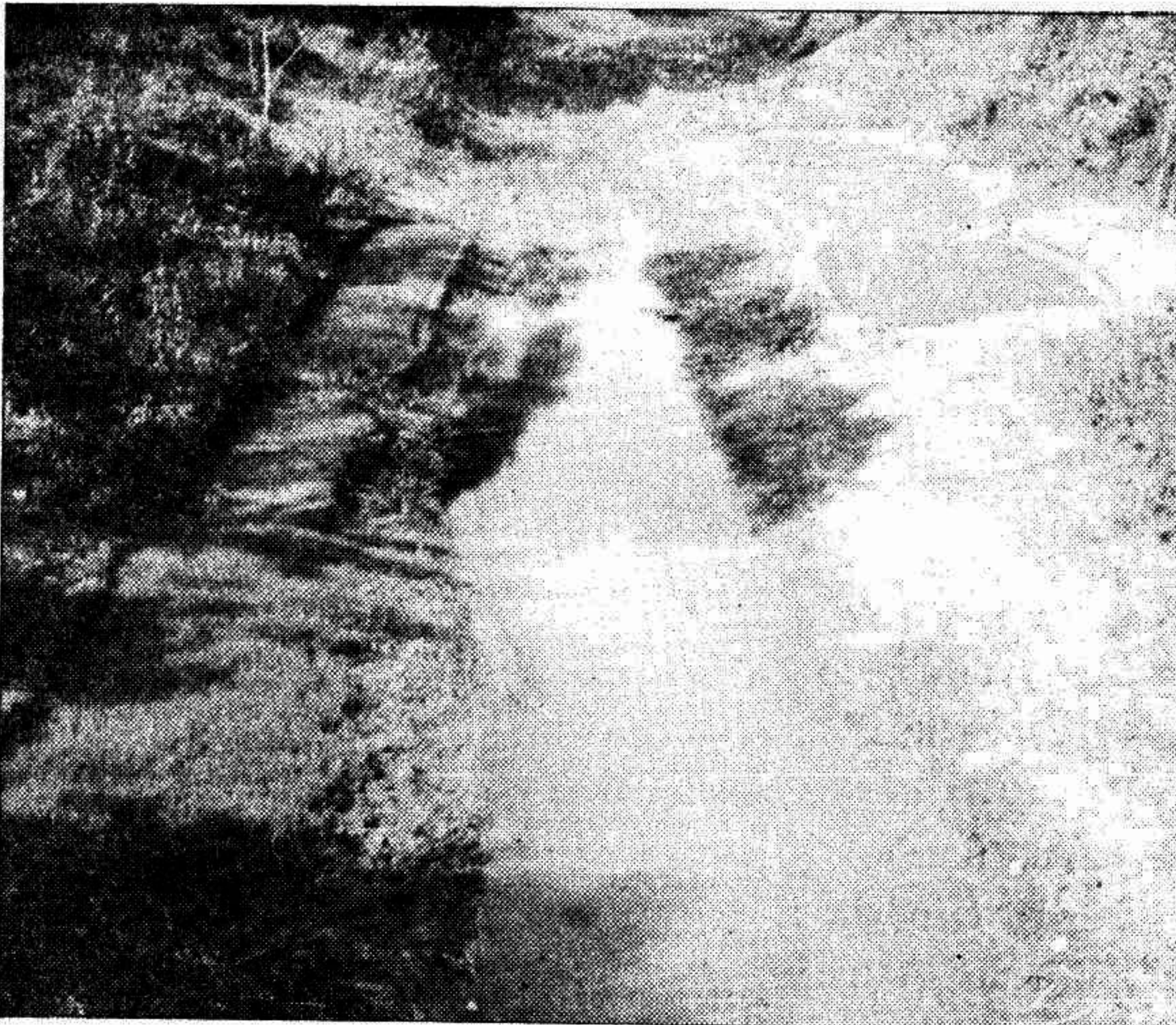
Many beels and haors — Basakusterbeel, Borobila, Magrarbeel, Ganeshpurerbeel, Shimakhali and Arparabeel, Hajipur, Barialarbeel, Padmabeel — connected to these rivers and tributaries, are drying up, too, as a consequence.

Mohammad Kased Ali, a 65-year-old farmer who lives on the bank of the Hanu, told this correspondent that these beels were full of different types of fish like koi, magur, shing, garjar, shol, ruhi, katla, puti, sharputi, boal, chital, pangas, khaira, takli, baim, chanda, etc. Dead are these rivers and their tributaries and gone are the fishes. Traditional 'Palo Nama' (traditional fishing trap) for catching fish from the beels and haors during the month of Magh and Phalgoun are no longer held.

Traders, who deal in jute, molasses, stationers in Magura, told this correspondent that 70 to 75 per cent essential commodities including agriculture produces were carried by traditional boats. Due to full closure of riverine route of about 700km, thousands of traders, farmers and general people are compelled to depend on road communications. However, there are not enough roads in the area to facilitate communications. For example, thousands of people from both sides of the river Gorai from Kushtia town to Langalbandi, an established business centre of the greater Jessore district, have been suffering due to lack of riverine route as well as road communication. The government has not taken up any programme to construct roads in this area. The river has been unnavigable for months together.

According to official sources at the Public Health Engineering Department (PHED), ground water on the both sides of these rivers have also gone down. Besides, due to lack of surface water from natural water bodies for irrigation purposes, a huge number of shallow tube wells (STWs) have been set up in recent times. All these might lead to serious crisis in ground water management in near future, a group of environmental experts said.

More important though is immediate intervention of the authorities to avert an ecological disaster in this region. Revival of these rivers and their tributaries means restoration of ecological balance. Conscious section of the society hopes this very simple truth will dawn on the people who matter.



The Gorai (above) and the Kumar (bottom) flow no more. Gone are the days when the rivers meandered through the greater Jessore and Kushtia districts. Now farmers produce crops where once there was plenty of water. — Star photo by Monojit K Das



## Remembrance of War

From Kamran Reza Chowdhury

**R**AJSHAHI UNIVERSITY: Parts of a skeleton dug up on the western side of Juberi Bhaban, a Rajshahi University which was used by the Pakistani occupation forces during the War of Liberation in 1971, have generated curiosity among local residents.

Many feel that the skull and a few bones, found during excavation for construction of an extension building for the guest house, are Professor Habibur Rahman's. The professor of mathematics was killed by the Pak army in 1971 and his dead body was not found.

According to experts, the skull was of an adult human being. They believe he or she was killed during the war.

The skull was buried two and a half feet under ground. Labourers working at the site found as their spades hit it. It was broken.

During the war, the Pakistani army, stationed in Rajshahi University, used Juberi Bhaban and Zoha Hall as prison for people involved, directly or indirectly, in the struggle for independence. They invaded the campus on April 13, 1971.

Mohammad Abdul Kader Molla, a peon at the Shaheed Habibur Rahman Hall who witnessed the brutality of the occupation force and its local allies, believe the skull and the bones are of Shaheed Professor Rahman.

Professor Rahman, an active proponent of independence, was whisked away by the Pakistani soldiers from his Pas-

huni Para residence on April 14 was imprisoned in the guest house. No one has seen him since then.

"Kader, do not come here so frequently. The Pak army will kill you. They have arrested your sir. I do not know how he is," the peon recalled the words of his sir's wife. He would go to the professor's place almost everyday.

Kader remembers being told by her that the professor had been taken to the guest house. Other witnesses confirmed that

he had been.

There was no mass grave near the guest house. Many believe that Pakistani army killed Professor Rahman and dumped his dead body somewhere on the campus to keep the killing a secret.

Meanwhile, Professor Sayedur Rahman Khan, pro-vice chancellor of the university, visited the site and later handed over the skeleton to the Shaheed Smriti Shangrahashala for further examination and proper preservation.



Parts of a skeleton dug up near Juberi Bhaban, a Rajshahi University guest house. Many feel they are of Shaheed Professor Habibur Rahman, who was killed by the Pakistani soldiers in 1971. — Star photo by Kamran R Chowdhury

## Terrorists on Marauding in South

From Atiur Rahman

**J**ESSORE: A total of 127 murders, 30 kidnappings, dozen of rifle lootings, 22 motor cycle hijackings, 30 rapes were committed in ports areas of 10 districts in the country's south-western region in the past three months, starting from December 1.

According to reports, 55 people were murdered in December, 54 in January and the rest in February.

Eleven outlawed party activists were killed in an armed clash between two rival factions in Jessore on December 12.

Two CBA leaders Serajul Haque and Manik Mia of Khulna People's Jute Mills were beaten to death by workers of the mill on January 1. Four Jubo League and Chhatra League activists were gunned down in Khulna as a sequel to internecine conflicts.

Eight people including a Jubo League leader, Soleman Churamankati in Kotwali Sadar, met similar fate on January 30.

During this month, 18 other people including eight from the Khulna city were killed.

According to another report, 12 people were killed at different places in Jessore from February 1 to February 10.

Nepal Rai, who was contesting as Ward Commissioner from Jessore Pourashava in the recently-held election, has been shot dead by miscreants on February 19.

Senior Vice-President of Chowgacha thana BNP in Jessore, Makbul Hossain, was chopped to death allegedly by Awami League cadres on February 20.

JSD leader Kazi Aref along with four others were shot dead during a public meeting at Daulatpur in Kushtia on February 19.

On investigation, it was found that most of the murders were committed by an organised group of armed terrorists. Besides, kidnapping, raping and hijackings are also on the rise.

According to sources, Koyra thana in Khulna top the list of kidnapping incidences. Ten

cases of kidnappings were committed during the period under review.

According to police, 12 rifles were looted from Akiz Jute Mills in Nowapara on January 19 by terrorists. The lost guns are yet to be recovered for reasons unknown.

It is further learnt that 22 motor cycles throughout this zone have been hijacked. It included the motor cycle of a Jessore Kotwali SI of police and that of an SI of Sathkira thana.

Sources in Jessore, Chuadanga, Meherpur, Kushtia, Jhenidah and Khulna say that security of life and property in rural areas of this zone is at stake. Many well-to-do people have left their villages and taken shelter in town to avoid attacks from the terrorists.

Dramatic deterioration in law and order situation in these areas has sparked panic and apprehension among people from all walks of life.

Failure of law-enforcing agencies has led to this situation, alleged a number of local leaders and public representatives.