

News snaps

Child, woman labourers up

BAGERHAT, Mar 20: The number of child and woman labourers is increasing day by day at an alarming rate in the town here, reports UNB.

According to an estimate, about 15,000 child labourers and 10,000 women are engaged in various odd jobs to maintain their livelihood. The women labourers are engaged in breaking brick, road construction and cooking at hotels and restaurants while the child labourers are working as helping hand to the rickshaw drivers, masons in welding factories and as hotel boys. Most of the child workers are engaged in hard works with nominal wages who are to work for 10 to 12 hours daily. They are passing their nights at footpath and veranda of office buildings. The social workers urged the authorities concerned to take necessary schemes to rehabilitate these destitute women and poor children without further delay.

Man allegedly killed by brother

JOYPOURHAT, Mar 20: A man was allegedly killed by his brother over cutting a bamboo at a village in Khetlal thana, police said here on Thursday, reports UNB.

According to witnesses, Mabud Ali Munshi, 35, of Hatshahar village was seriously injured when his younger brother hit his head with a stick during the quarrel for cutting the bamboo on Saturday. The victim was rushed to the hospital where he succumbed to his injury.

3 lakh acres under irrigation network

RANGAMATI, Mar 20: Some three lakh acres of land would be brought under irrigation network in the three hill districts of the country under a five-year plan, reports UNB.

The plan, still awaiting final approval of the government, would be implemented at a cost of Tk 10 crore and would help create employment of about 5,000 farmers. Agriculture official sources said the plan is the part of a massive initiative of restructuring the agriculture sector in the hill districts after signing of the CHT peace accord. They said that the plan would provide irrigation facilities to the farmers of all the 25 thanas of the three districts. The farmers under the command area of the project would have to pay an irrigation tax of Tk 100 per year along with another Tk 100 as the charge of preparing the field cultivation.

2 killed in Comilla road accident

COMILLA, Mar 20: Two people were killed and five others critically injured in separate road accidents on Dhaka-Chittagong highway in Daudkhandi thana Wednesday, reports UNB.

Police said a Dhaka-bound microbus tumbled into a road-side ditch at Shahaidnagar on Thursday noon, leaving a man dead and five others injured. The dead was identified as Monjur Ali, 35, son of Hateri Ali. The injured were admitted to the thana health complex in critical condition. In another mishap, an unidentified man, aged about 30, was killed when a Dhaka-bound truck overturned at Pozarbhanga in the evening.

Kishoreganj hospital being extended

KISHOREGANJ, Mar 20: The construction of the extension of Kishoreganj Sadar Hospital is nearing completion by Public Works Department, reports BSS.

According to official sources, the construction costs about Taka three crore. Work of 50-bed sadar hospital to 100 beds was taken in 1997-98 fiscal year.

Workshop on trade union rights

GAZIPUR, Mar 20: A two-day workshop was held on "trade union rights" at Tongi Railway Shishu Niketan, jointly organised by Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies and Jatia Samik League, Tongi unit recently, reports BSS.

Labour leader Ahsanullah Master MP was present in the workshop as chief guest. Shamsunnahar Begum presided over the workshop. Thirty labour leaders of different organisations in Tongi took part in the workshop.

Mosquito eradication programme begins

HABIGANJ, Mar 20: A month long mosquitoes eradication programme organised by Habiganj Pourasabha began here on March 8, reports BSS.

Shahid Chowdhury, Chairman, Habiganj Pourasabha inaugurated the programme in local RD Hall area. A discussion meeting presided over by pourasabha chairman Shahid Chowdhury was held at RD Hall premises in the morning. The meeting was addressed, among others, by Dr Mirza Wasi Parvez, Medical Officer, Habiganj Pourasabha, Ruhul Hasan Sharif, Abdul Musabbir Chowdhury, Dr Asst Ronjam Das, Fazlul Haque, Syed Md Helal, ex-poura commissioner, newly elected poura commissioner Enamul Muhiht Kajal, Mukul Acharya and commissioner Farid Miah.

Shortage of doctors

KISHOREGANJ, Mar 20: A total of 21 posts of doctors in sadar hospital and various health complexes and centres in 13 thanas have been lying vacant for long depriving the people of proper treatment facilities, reports UNB.

According to official sources, 107 doctors out of 128, in sadar Hospital, 12 thana health complexes, 17 union health centres, Civil Surgeon Office and the TB Clinic have been performing their duties. At present, according to an estimate, one physician is to look after 23,552 people here against the government's health policy of giving treatment to 6,000 people. An official source said as per the government policy the district needs a total of 420 doctors out of the present 128 to facilitate treatment to the district's 25 lakh people.

1.5 lakh acres out of irrigation network

PABNA, Mar 20: About 1.5 lakh acres of IRR-Boro land under the GK Project is out of irrigation network this year due to lean flow of water in the Ganges. Water Development Board officials said, reports APB.

Water level of the Ganges has fallen abnormally this year due to Farrakh effect, reducing the project's command area to about two lakh acres from 3.5 lakh acres, they said. Newly emerged shoals are also obstructing flow of water through the intake channel, they said. The three key pump houses can supply only 39 cusec water and another 12 auxiliary pumps can supply 15 cusec water daily now. They said about Tk 20 crore irrigation taxes are unrealised as most of the farmers can not pay the dues due to recurring crop failure for want of irrigation.

Drought in 3 northern dists

From Abdul Wadood

RAJSHAHI, Mar 20: People are offering 'Istisqa' prayer at different places in Rajshahi, Naogaon and Chapainawabganj districts.

'Istisqa' is a special prayer by which Muslims pray to Allah for rains when severe and continued drought prevails.

Special prayers are also being offered in the mosques. It has not rained since November 23 in the region. The weather has become hot and dry.

At the same time, water levels of the Padma and the Mohananda are rapidly falling down and their tributaries have already dried up. As a result, the level of ground water is falling down day by day.

Most of 'beels', canals and ponds have also dried up.

All these phenomena has created drought-like situation in Rajshahi, Chapainawabganj and Naogaon districts.

According to the Public Health Engineering Department, at least 60 per cent of hand driven tubewells have gone out of order as the ground water level has fallen down.

Water lifting capacity of motor and oil driven shallow and deep tubewells has been reduced

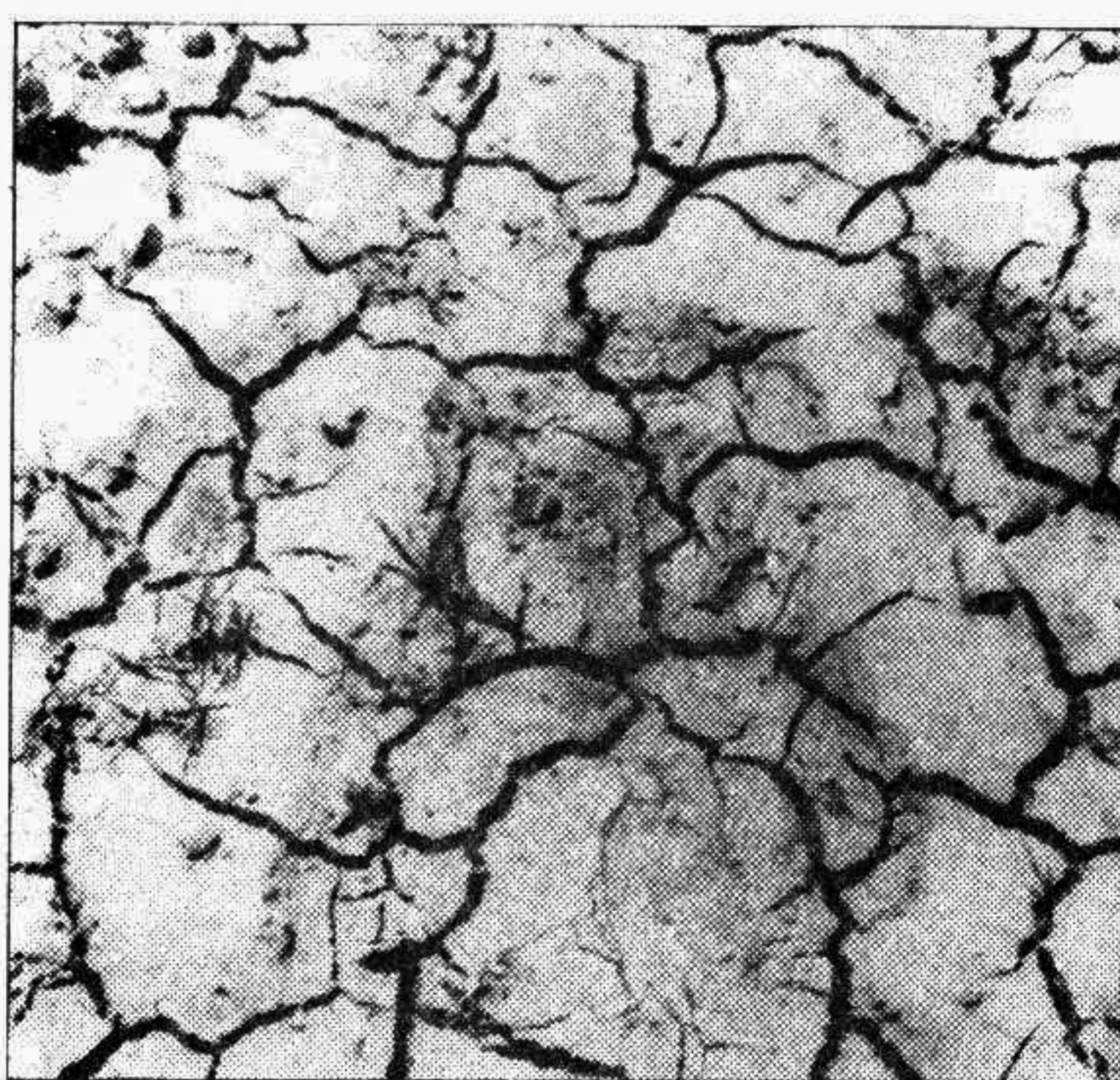
by about 30 per cent, Barendra Multipurpose Development Authority sources said.

Irrigation is being hampered badly in the area. Many IRR-Boro lands have dried up and developed cracks for want of water. Due to drought IRR-Boro lands demand additional amount of water. But the tubewells cannot supply even the minimum amount of water.

Solaiman Ali, 53, a farmer of Basudevpur village in Godagari thana of Rajshahi district said that he had to wait for at least eight days every time to get the serial of irrigation. But his lands got dried up in two days after an irrigation. An IRR-Boro land requires at least six inches deep water all the time for good production.

According to the Extension Department of Bangladesh Agriculture Development Board, the prevailing drought has already adversely affected production of wheat, lentil, mustard and potato.

IRR-Boro production is apprehended to be reduced severely. Mango production will also be badly affected, sources fear, if the drought continues.



RAJSHAHI: A field of IRR-Boro paddy here has been dried up completely. Cracks have been developed due to drought. The picture was taken from Basudevpur village in Godagari thana recently.

— Star photo

Diarrhoea claims 49 lives in Laxmipur

LAXMIPUR, Mar 20: Diarrhoea broke out in different shoal areas here in an epidemic form claiming 49 lives and affecting over 5,000 others in last one month, reports UNB.

Rangati, among the four thanas, is the worst affected area as some 37 people, most of them children, died of the water-borne disease during the period, according to an NGO Poor Development Programme.

They were identified as Shafia, 2, Roshna, 3, Munna, 4, Mujib, 5, Mintu, 2, Sultan, 3, Monaja, 5, Rahim, 4, Sujun, 6, Tinni, 2, Suraiya, 3, Salma, 3, Shanta, 2, Hajera, 50, Julmat Ali, 57, Khaja Ahmed, 59, Abu Mistri, 58, Munsur Ali, 56, and Asura, 54.

Besides, 12 people — six in Sadar, two in Rangati and four in Raipur thanas — died of the disease, the source said.

The affected areas are Char Gazaria, Char Bara, Char Pata, Char Alzal, Char Krisnapur, Char Basu, Char Selhej, Char Abdullah, Char Kalakopa, Char Pagla and Char Shamsuddin of Rangati thana and Char Ubi, Char Monsha, Char Kaurui, Shak Char, Jum Char, Kushi, Khali and Char Ruhitam of Sadar thana, South Char Ababil, North Char Ababil, Char Machna, North Char Bangshi and South Char Bangshi of Raipur thana.

Experts said shortage of drinking water, intake of adulterated foods are the main causes behind the outbreak of disease.

The district civil surgeon informed that steps have been taken to combat the menace.

Chicken pox breaks out in Magura

MAGURA, Mar 20: Chicken pox has broken out at different villages of four thanas in the district and its adjoining areas, medical and local report said.

A large number of people including children have been attacked with chicken pox due to fluctuating weather during the spring season. Mohammad Omar Ali at village Chatrabhanga in Saikupa thana near Magura district told the correspondent that most of the children have been attacked with chicken pox at the beginning of the spring. They have to depend on the village quacks for treatment of the disease.

A guardian of the SSC examinee at village Joka here said, the SSC examinees who are attacked with chicken pox are facing problems in attending the SSC examination. The chicken pox attacked examinees are compelled to take part the examination in ailing condition.

Abductions on gun point up in Kushtia

From Our Correspondent

KUSHTIA, Mar 20: Incidents of abduction on gun point by the armed terrorists are going on unabated in different thanas of the district.

People of Daulatpur, Mirpur and Bheramara thanas have become virtually hostages in the hands of armed terrorists and passing sleepless nights in fear of being abducted.

On January 28 at about 11 pm a group of armed terrorists abducted Bashir Ahmed, 18, son of Yasin Ali of village Kamardanga of Poradaha union in Mirpur thana on demand of ransom of Taka one lakh. Bashir has remained untraced till filing of this report although police informed about the abduction on time.

Meanwhile, children are

also being kidnapped. Rasel, 7, son of Babu of village Baradi has been missing from College Bazaar of Bheramara on January 29. Guardians said that about three children had been missing from Bheramara Board Government Primary School. Two of them escaped from the clutch of the kidnappers from Dhaka.

A gang of woman and child traffickers are engaged in kidnapping incidents, police and guardians said.

On February 9 armed terrorists abducted Anwar Hossain of Babupara and injured four persons by indiscriminate gun firing. One the same night, terrorists stormed the house of Siraj of village Chakpara of Poradaha union and abducted

Siraj and his son. They were later released after payment of heavy amount as ransom. On the same night the terrorists stormed the house of Shamsuddin of village Kalinathpur in Mirpur thana and demanded Taka 50 thousand as toll. The inmates expressed their inability and the terrorists attacked the inmates with sharp weapons.

Meanwhile, one of the inmates went out of the house and shouted for help for the villagers through the microphone of the mosque against the dacoits. The dacoits then resorted to firing and four persons were injured. The injured were Shamsuddin, 50, Wahab, 50, Monir, 8 and Tahmina, 6. They have been admitted in Kushtia General Hospital.



GAIBANDHA: Train journey has become hazardous now. Photo shows a train which was fully loaded with passengers carrying fodder on its rooftop and firewoods along its windows.

— Star photo

IRRI-Boro farming hampered

PABNA, Mar 20: IRR-Boro cultivation in the country's northern region is being hampered as the farmers of the region are facing acute financial constraints, reports APB.

Locals said most of the cultivators failed to prepare their lands for planting paddy saplings due to lack of capital. Besides, price hike of urea worsened the situation.

Agricultural Extension Department (AED) sources said about a million hectares of land has been brought under IRR-Boro cultivation in the region's 15 districts during the current season.

Out of which, HYV paddy will be grown on 9.32 lakh hectares while local variety on 12.101 hectares.

Production target has been fixed at about 25.10 lakh tonnes, of which 24.82 lakh is expected to be harvested from the HYV and 27 thousand tonnes from the local variety.

Locals apprehended that the target would not be achieved, because over 50 per cent of the land was yet to be cultivated.

Aman crops on two lakh hectares of land in the region were damaged by prolonged catclysmic deluge last year, which crippled the financial

backbone of the farmers.

As a result, they have to sell their domestic animals and household belongings at throw-away prices for IRR-Boro cultivation.

Per bag urea is being sold at Tk 400 instead of the government rate of Tk 240, which further compounded the situation.

Being unable to purchase fertiliser, the farmers are producing crude manure by burning hay, straw and branches of trees and are using these in their fields.

They are also being compelled to borrow on high interest rate from the moneylenders.

Unabated use of current nets in Meghna, Padma

From Our Correspondent

CHANDPUR, Mar 20: Indiscriminate use of current nets to fish fries are continuing unabated in different water areas of the river Meghna and Padma here.

Unauthorised use of current nets has become widespread in the river Meghna. Thousands of current nets are used everyday to fish Hilsha and other fish fries.

According to Fisheries Department of Chandpur, about 200 current nets worth about Taka 10 lakh were seized by mobile courts during the last two months. Mobile courts headed by the magistrates raided from Haimchar thana to Matlab thana on the river Meghna and Padma. Mobile courts are active in the areas for the last two months. Everyday a mobile court is conducted to check the fishing of fries. Mobile courts are also functioning in the hats and bazars here.

Everyday a huge quantity of current nets are seized and set on fire on the banks of the

river in front of public. Hilsha fries measuring 4 cm to 15 cm called 'Jatka' are available in the rivers Meghna and Padma during the current season.

According to Fisheries Department, two major nursery grounds of Hilsha fries have been detected between Haimchar and Shaital in the waters of the river Meghna. Jatka grazes in fresh water in the rivers Meghna and Padma from February to June. After the period they migrate to sea water. During the grazing period they are netted by unscrupulous fishermen in the above mentioned areas.

The average catch of total Jatka in the area is estimated to be about 4 thousand tons in a year. If 30 per cent of Jatka can be protected annually, an additional production of Hilsha worth about Taka 5 hundred crore can be obtained.

Despite government ban on fishing of 'Jatka' it is being continued in different water bodies in Chandpur district.

Rape, burn victim fighting for life at MMCH

From Aminul Islam

MYMENSINGH, Mar 20: A rape victim is now fighting for life at Mymensingh Medical College Hospital (MMCH).

A 35-year-old resident of village Balidia in Trishal thana was staying at her father's house with her only child. This is because she was deserted by her husband a few years back. On the night of the incident, when the victim was returning home from a neighbour's house recently, some youngmen waylaid her and took her to a lonely place where she was raped repeatedly by them.

As she identified three of the rapists, first they apologised for their crime, but when she refused to pardon, they beat her mercilessly and took her to a nearby water body (beel) in a bid to kill her. When the criminals thought that it would be difficult for them to cover up the murder story, then they brought back her to her solitary house and set ablaze her body pouring kerosene.

When the victim cried for help, the neighbouring people

rushed to the spot and rescued her with severe burn injuries. She was first admitted to Trishal Thana Health Complex and later shifted to MMCH as her condition deteriorated. She is now undergoing treatment at ward No 11 of MMCH.

Many parts of her body including both the hands and forehead sustained severe burn injuries.

When this correspondent visited the rape victim at MMCH, she told that her proper treatment is being hampered as she could not bear the expenses. A helpless rape victim also murmured, "Would I be able to lead a normal life in the society?"

Now she has been passing her day amid untold sufferings at MMCH. She made appeal to the affluent people of the society to come forward to save her life. None was arrested till filing of this report, the victim's family sources said. Meanwhile, a case was lodged with Trishal thana in this regard.

Patients deprived of medicare service in Kurigram Hospital

KURIGRAM, Mar 20: Lack of specialist physicians and medical officers, medicine and equipment coupled with irregularities have caused a debacle in the overall medical service here including the Sadar hospital, reports UNB.

There is a 50-bed modern hospital in the Sadar, eight health complexes, each with 31 beds, a 10-bed Rural Health Centre, 20 health sub-centres, one TB Clinic and a Nursing Training Institute here.

In these hospitals and health centres, there are only three X-ray machines, seven ambulances and four generators.

Four posts of specialist physicians, 57 medical officers, six sanitary inspectors, three health inspectors, 19 assistant health inspectors and 36 posts of health assistants are lying vacant in the district for long.

There was no initiative to fill up these vacant posts from the part of the authorities, said a local resident alleging that this has been causing immense sufferings for the patients.

The 50-bed modern hospital established in 1968 is now plagued with manifold problems. The posts of Senior Consultant (Surgery) and Junior Consultant (Child) are lying vacant for long. The post of Emergency Medical Officer is also lying vacant.

The only X-ray machine of the hospital is lying inoperative since 1994 and has already been declared condemned by the Central Medicine Store in Dhaka. Besides, one of the two ambulances is out of order.

Electricity and water supply in the hospital is inadequate. The only water pump remains inoperative most of the time.

Surgical operation in the hospital remained stopped for long due to the lack of necessary equipment.

Despite being a 50-bed hospital, the occupancy rate of a bed

here is 80 to 100. As a result, many patients have to stay on the corridor and floor and do not get medicine and satisfactory service from the staff members.

On average, 300 to 400 patients come to the hospital daily for treatment. But many of them are to go back frustrated without treatment, some outdoor patients told.

Patients have to buy medicines from outside at high rates due to insufficient supply in the hospital.

The annual allocation, including the cost of medicine, equipment, bandage, cotton, linen, furniture and transport for the hospital, is only Tk 9 lakh per year. The amount is too small against the demand, said the hospital sources.

Moreover, the hospital remains unclean and unhygienic almost all the time due to lack of care.

However, the patients, finding no other alternatives, prefer to go to Rangpur Medical College Hospital and to the private clinics in the district and in Rangpur.

The then Prime Minister committed in 1993 that the hospital would be elevated to 100 beds. But the commitment was never materialized.

Later, the present Prime Minister gave another assurance in 1997 in this regard. This commitment is yet to be materialized.

The conditions of the thana health complexes are also beyond description. Doctors and employees often found absent at the hospitals. The patients suffer from lack of care and adequate medicine.

All the health centres are also plagued with manifold problems, including inadequate medicine and equipment.

This year's total allocation was Tk 52 lakh that was too inadequate to meet huge demands in the hospitals, health complex and health centres.

Rajendra College office rooms ransacked by dacoits

From Abdul Matin Fakir

FARIDPUR, Mar 20: The office rooms situated at the original campus of Government Rajendra College were ransacked by a gang of dacoits on the night following March 11.

According to college sources, the dacoits numbering 10 to 15 equipped with fire arms tied up the night guard, broke into the office rooms, unlocked 17 heavy almirahs and iron safes, but found no cash or valuables. They searched in vain each drawer, as the money was deposited with the bank earlier.

On receipt of information, Principal of the college Prof Subhash Chandra Ghosh and high police officials visited the spot. No missing or damage to any important paper was reported.

Some armed dacoities and violence committed in the town in a couple of weeks bear testimony to the fact that there are huge illegal arms in hands of miscreants harboured by god fathers. The town dwellers are extremely terror-stricken now.

Malaria breaks out in Sylhet

SYLHET, Mar 20: Malaria has broken out in a large scale in at least 25 villages under five unions of Jaintapur thana, reports APB.

More than 100 people have been attacked by the killer disease in the last 15 days, health officials said.

Meantime, one Khatun Bibi, 55, of village Bichhanatek of Darbasta Union died of Malaria at the Jaintapur Thana Health Complex on March 10 last, according to Health Complex sources.

The villages where Malaria has broken out include Lalkhal in Charikhata Union, Afiana, Balidhara, Guori, Mohana, Gram and Fulbari in Nijpat union, Gorishankar, Goabari, Rupchanga, Jundhepur, Assampara, Kendri, Luxmipur, Biramara in Jaintapur union, Bichhanatek, Kajar, Telijuri, Chahniya, Chatka and Nurpur in Darbasta union, Kalipara, Hemu, Shyampur, Bagher Khal and Lama Shyampur in Fatehpur union.

Health officials said germ-carrying mosquitoes from the nearby forests and bushes have been spreading malaria in the area.

Constant loadshedding disrupts life in districts

By Staff Correspondent

Constant load shedding has been disrupting life in various districts in these days.

Our Barisal Correspondent Aroop Talukdar reports: Acute load shedding has already gripped the southern districts of Barisal, Patuakhali, Bhola, Bogura, Jhalakati, Pirojpur, Madaripur and greater Faridpur region.

Load shedding which is being continued for hours together in these districts has been paralysing life. Life has become almost unbearable with the advent of the sweating summer.

SSC examinees are hard-hit by the erratic power supply and loadshedding almost everywhere.

Power Development Board (PDB) sources here said, due to some unavoidable reasons power can not be supplied according to the requirements in different districts under Barisal PDB zone.

In 21 districts under Khulna and Barisal divisions including greater Faridpur region requirement of power is nearly 370 megawatts everyday. Nearly 60 megawatt power is necessary for Barisal, Barguna, Jhalakati, Pirojpur, Bhola, Patuakhali and a portion of

Madaripur. In such a case, against the 370 m requirement for 21 districts only 180 mw to 210 m w power is being supplied everyday as some power generation plants in different places have remained shut down due to various technical or other problems, said a PDB source preferring anonymity.

Power supply condition may be deteriorated in the mid summer season and the next two months, the source is apprehending.

In the Barisal region where power is needed nearly 60 mw, the electricity supply is varying in between 15 mw to 25 mw per day.

As a result, four to eight feeders out of 19 are suffering loadshedding for one to two hours alternately in Barisal district. Besides, in the other districts under Barisal division such as Jhalakati, Patuakhali and parts of Pirojpur loadshedding continues for hours together.

Still now, Barguna district and the coastal belt at the southern end near the Bay of Bengal are the worst suffering region regarding power supply. Power supply in those areas remained suspended for days together. As a result nearly 30

ice producing units could not produce necessary ice for the fishermen, particularly in fishing season starting from April-May.

According to fishermen there, several thousands fishermen face problems when they need huge quantity of ice after deep sea fishing for preservation of fish in their fishing trawlers. They send preserved fish to different destinations for marketing, failing which they will have to face losses amounting crores of taka.

Irregular, erratic power supply is also hitting the industrial production in the southern areas as most of the industrial units are suffering load shedding for hours together. The units have been remaining shut for a long time.

Before the forthcoming Eid-ul-Azha the shopkeepers have become worried in the town areas where frequent load shedding is continued unabated, particularly in the noon and evening shopping hours.

With the advent of the summer season, power supply in seven thanas of the district has become erratic seriously hampering education of the students and irrigation on the crop

fields. Most of the areas here plunge into darkness after sundown as the authorities are supplying only two-megawatt power against the demand of six MW in the peak hour.

Official sources said demand of electricity in the district is four MW during daytime, but it increases by two MW at night till 10pm.

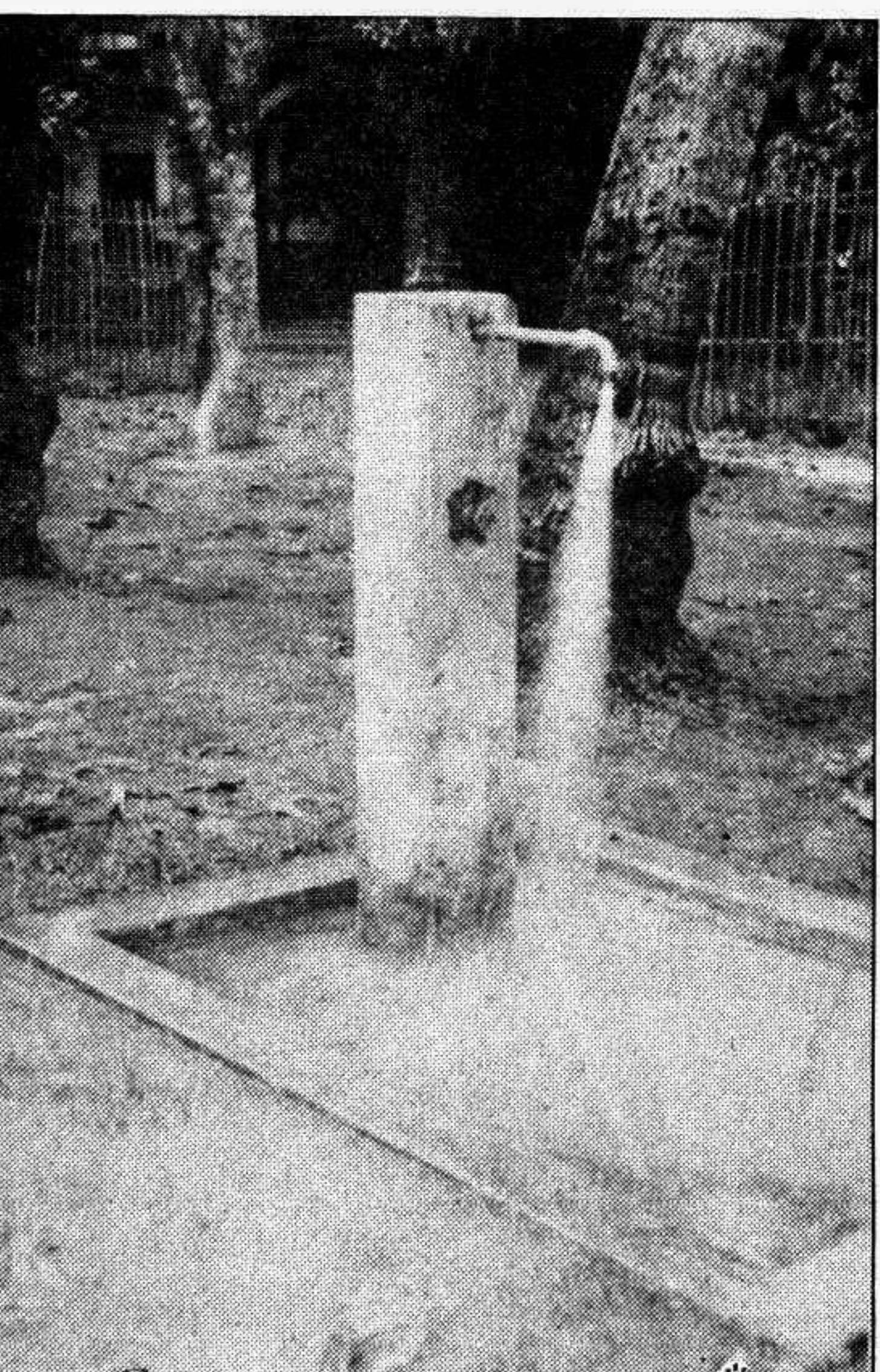
When contacted, an official of Palli Bidyut Samity said they are able to supply only 700 KW electricity through its two feeders against the daytime demand of four MW.

As a result, 65 shallow tube-wells, out of 132, a deep tubewell under PDB and 215 hand driven tube-wells under Palli Bidyut Samity remain inoperative most of the time.

Besides, some tube-wells went out of order due to erratic power supply and voltage fluctuations.

Local farmers have urged the authorities concerned to take necessary steps to ensure regular supply of electricity during the on going Boro season.

Such reports of continuous load shedding have been pouring in from other districts also.



JHENIDAH: Hundreds of gallons of water are being wasted daily in different places of Saikupa Pourasabha. But the poura authorities seem to be indifferent to check such wastage despite crisis of water. This picture was taken recently from Lalit Bhuiyanpara.

— Star photo