

News snaps

Problems grip Shilpakala Academy

RANGPUR, Apr 4: Shilpakala Academy here has been beset with many problems including lack of instructors and necessary amenities, reports UNB.

Special agri-loan disbursed

NARSINGDI, Apr 4: The four nationalised banks including BRDB, Narsingdi has so far disbursed Taka 25,90,91,000, as special agricultural loan out of the total target 27,42,01,000, in six thanas of the district till February 28 in the current fiscal year under the post-flood rehabilitation programme, reports BSS.

Uplift works progressing

KISHOREGANJ, Apr 4: Implementation of 249 development schemes under Food for Works Programme is progressing fast in all the 13 thanas of the district, reports UNB.

Prices of vegetables down

MADARIPUR, Apr 4: Prices of vegetables have registered a sharp fall in various hat-bazars of the four thanas in the district, reports UNB.

Market sources said the prices of rice remained static and course rice is being sold at Tk 16 per kg. But the prices of potato, brinjal, tomato, green chilli, onion, bottle-gourd, pumpkin and other vegetables have come down as these are coming in large quantity from Jessore, Barq Bazar, Bogra and Bethagatha wholesale markets everyday, said the local traders.

Prospect of IRRI-Boro farming bright

JESSORE, Apr 4: The prospect of IRRI-boro, cultivated in large areas in the district this year, is bright if irrigation waters are available timely to farmers, reports UNB.

Agriculture Extension Department officials said farmers failed to harvest good crop last year. But they have cultivated IRRI-boro on extended areas this season, including 1.45 lakh bighas in Monirampur. The farmers are happy that they have not yet suffered from irrigation problem as in other parts of the country. They expect a bumper harvest with favourable weather and timely supply of irrigation water.

Low cost houses distributed

CHAPAINAWABGANJ, Apr 4: Association for Community Development (ACD), and NGO, distributed low cost houses among the 34 selected poor women of Shibganj thana as part of its post-flood rehabilitation programme, reports UNB.

Divisional Commissioner, Rajshahi, Khan Shahab Uddin was present as chief guest at a function organised on the occasion at Binodpur village of the thana on Mar 27. Deputy Commissioner Nazrul Islam, Director ACD Salina Sarwar, Shibganj Thana Nirbahi Officer Golam Mustafa, Monakasha UP chairman Mirza Shariar Kamal, Binodpur UP chairman Delwar Hossain among others, addressed the function presided over by Binodpur UP chairman Delwar Hossain.

Navigability of rivers hampered

SYLHET, Apr 4: Navigability on the river Surma and other rivers in Kanaighat thana is being hampered as huge shoals emerged with the beginning of lean period, reports UNB.

Official sources said shoals have been emerged due to accumulation of huge silts creating obstacles in communication between the thana and other parts of the district. Lova, Singar, Ichhaba, Dona, Noon, Noga and Mukar rivers in the thana have also been silted up by the sands driven out with rainwater from the border area. On the other hand, floodwaters engulf the cropland during the rainy season. The source also said water level of the canals, beels and other water bodies went down hampering irrigation adversely.

Complaints of ghost bills

BARISAL, Apr 4: It was proved wrong again that digital system of telecommunication network failed to save the telephone subscribers from ghost bills, reports UNB.

At least 20 subscribers of the town were billed for unbelievable inflated amount for the month of January. One of them was given a bill of Tk 17,49,188 for the month when he, along with family, was outside the country for treatment. Another subscriber complained that he was billed Tk 20 lakh. Divisional Engineer of T&T admitting the fact said it happened due to errors in reading in computer. Lot of complaints of ghost bills were lying with T&T without remedies.

Metalling work of roads begins

NATORE, Apr 4: State Minister for Women and Children Affairs Prof Zinatunnesa Talukder said the government of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has been implementing a balanced development programme to improve the socio-economic condition of the people across the county, reports BSS.

She was addressing separate meetings marking the inauguration of metalling work of three different roads under the sadar thana here at an estimated cost of Taka 40 lakh by the Local Government Engineering Department.

S-W borders routes of smuggling

NARAIL, Apr 4: The south-western borders are reported to have become the most commonly used routes for smuggling heroin into the country, reports APB.

Informed sources say that heroin worth crores of taka is first stocked in Bangaon in India and then smuggled through Benapole. Subsequently the drug is carried to Dhaka mostly by night coaches, usually through the Benapole and Satkhira routes and distributed to various dens in rivers and canals through Syedabad, Gabtali, Mahakhali and Gulistan terminals. The heroin is usually sold to the addicts by young boys and women living in slums.

Menace of pye-dogs up

JESSORE, Apr 4: The pye-dog menace has allegedly increased in an alarming proportion in Jessore pourashava and every day one or more people are bitten by stray dogs. The dogs move around in packs and terrorise and bite people, especially children, locals complained, reports APB.

Some of these dogs are believed to be infected with diseases. But due to shortage of ARV vaccines the people they bite cannot be given proper treatment. The municipalities have a dog killing season, usually the months of Asswin and Kartik of the Bengali calendar. But no such programme was taken up by Jessore Municipality in the last five or six years. The number of pye-dogs has consequently increased by leaps and bounds.

Arsenic in water in Bhairab

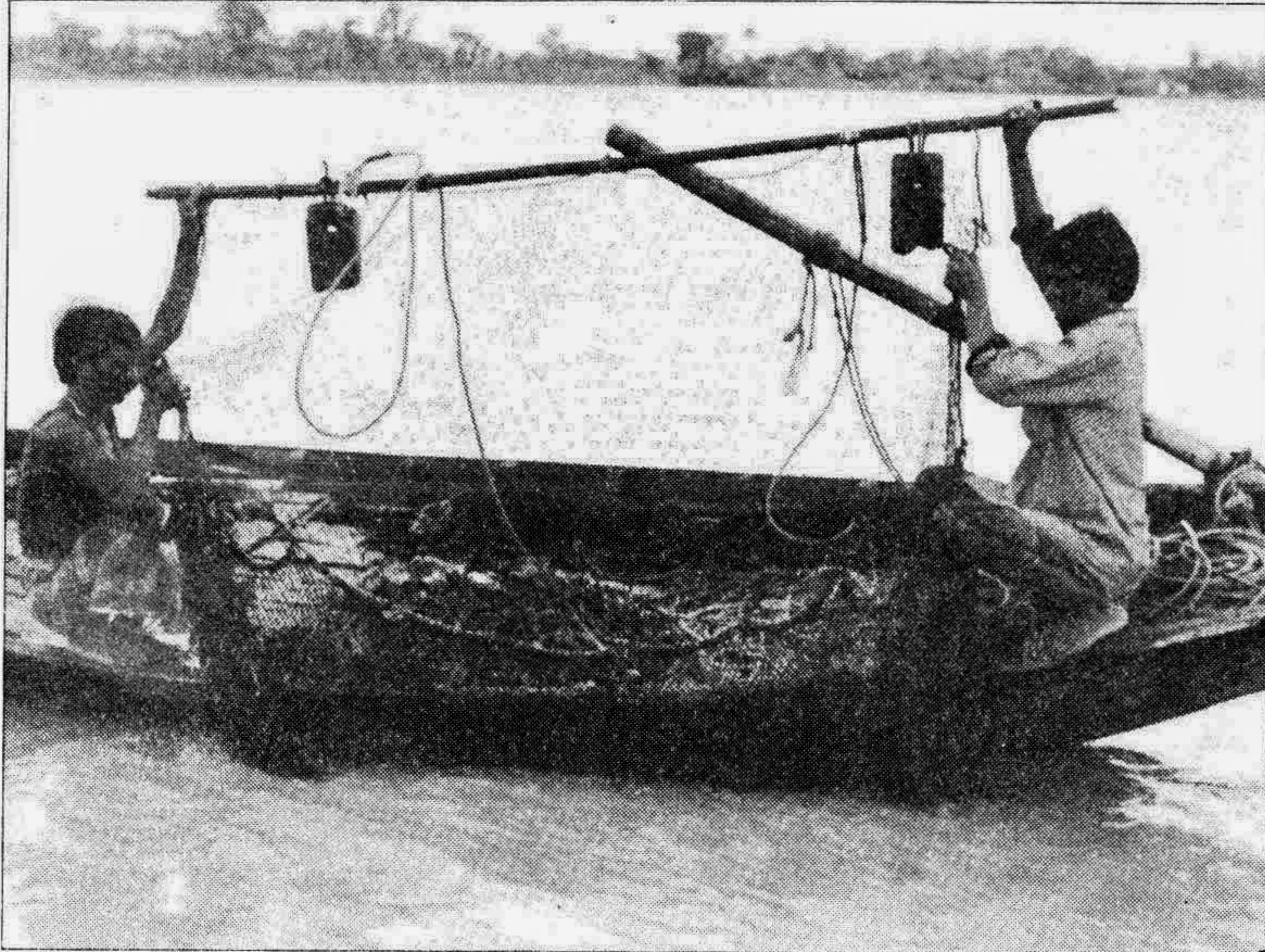
KISHOREGANJ, Apr 4: The presence of arsenic beyond the normal limit has been detected in tubewell water of different villages in Bhairab thana, including Jabbar Jute Mills area which created panic among the people, reports UNB.

It has been revealed that the contamination is more in the tubewell waters of the urban areas than that of the rural areas. Many people of Bhairab thana, including some 14 employees of the mill have been attacked so far by arsenic related diseases. Waters of all the 12 tubewells in the mill area had been sent to NIPSOM laboratory in Mohakhali for test when some employees fell ill. Later, after the tubewells of the mill were sealed off on the basis of the report of NIPSOM laboratory.

Indiscriminate use of timber

PABNA, Apr 4: Indiscriminate and illegal use of timber as fuel for brickfields is reported to be causing denudation of trees in 16 northern districts, reports APB.

If trees are cut down at the present rate, the region is likely to be stripped bare and shall have to bear unwelcome environmental consequences, maintain informed sources. According to a survey carried out by the Ministry of Forest and Environment, there are at present 2,781 licenced and 1,434 unlicenced brickfields in 16 northern districts, the total being about 4,215.



Collecting coal in the style of fishing.

Many people earn their livelihood by collecting coal from the Pashur river bed at Khulna river port by fishing nets. Previously there was a coal depot here for supplying fuel to coal driven steamers and steam engines. At that time a huge quantity of coal was deposited in the river bed during the time of loading and unloading of coal. Now steamers and railway engines are driven by diesel, not by coal. But this place has become a rich source of income as many families are living on the earnings from such deposited coal ash for the last 40 years. — Star photo by A K M Mohsin

Fire incidents on rise in dists

By Staff Correspondent

The incidents of fire are on rise in different districts in this ongoing summer season.

Our Mymensingh Correspondent reports: A girl child was burnt alive and her pregnant mother was injured critically at village Kumargata Madhapara in Muktagacha thana recently.

According to police and family sources, a fire broke out from a kerosine lamp when Jorina Begum, mother of the victim named Asma, 4, was taking kerosine from a container at about 9 pm on the night of the incident. At one stage the flame caught the Kerosine container and started burning and after a few minutes it burst.

When the pregnant Jorina tried to put off the flames, it caught her wearing sarce injuring her critically.

The mother saved herself, but her four-year-old daughter Asma roasted live. The mother was admitted to Mymensingh Medical College Hospital (MMC) in a very critical condition. Dulal Mian, husband of Jorina was not at home during the incident.

Property worth about Taka 400 lakh was gutted in this fire incident.

Our Faridpur correspondent says: A total of 50 tin-shed houses and the belongings worth Taka one crore were gutted in a fire that broke out at Shasha village in Nagarkanda thana recently.

According to local source, the fire originating from the kitchen of one Habibur Rahman Master of the same village engulfed the neighbourhood. Four bullocks, three goats and a goat number of poultry birds were also roasted alive. Gold ornaments and Taka 50 thousand in cash were burnt.

An earlier report of Gaibandha correspondent says: A devastating fire broke out at village Madnuyar in Sadullapur thana in which three families lost all their belongings. Property worth about Taka five lakh was gutted. The incident took place at dead of night recently.

The fire originated from the

cow-shed of one Anser Ali and soon the flame spread to the adjacent houses. Four tin-shed houses and nine thatched huts with all the belongings reduced to ashes. During the incident two cows, three goats and over 100 poultry birds roasted alive. Fire also damaged two rickshaws.

Our Kishoreganj correspondent reports: A total of 12 shops were reduced to ashes in a fire incident that broke out at Naimatpur bazaar in Karimganj thana recently.

The fire originated from a grocery shop and soon engulfed the neighbouring areas. People of the bazaar extinguished the fire after a frantic effort. The total loss caused by the fire was estimated at about Taka 10 lakh.

On getting information through a messenger, the Fire Brigade personnel rushed to the spot, but they could do nothing as the pump machine went out of order. Police rescued the fire fighters after agitated people laid a siege.

UNB from Narsingdhi reports: A devastating fire at Hossain Market in the town here gutted 12 shops recently.

Fire Brigade sources said the fire originating from an electric short circuit gutted the shops entirely. According to a preliminary estimate goods worth about Tk 15 lakh were reduced to ashes.

The fire service men with the help of the local people brought the fire under control after one hour of frantic efforts.

Our Rangpur Correspondent reports: At least 25 dwelling houses were completely gutted and a number of cattle were burnt alive when a devastating fire broke out at Sardar Para village in Badarganj thana recently.

The fire originated from a kitchen at night and immediately engulfed the entire locality causing colossal damages to property worth over Taka five lakh rendering 25 families homeless. Badarganj Thana Nirbahi Officer and other officials visited the spot and distributed some relief goods among the fire victim families.

UNB from Rajshahi reports: Agriculture Extension Department sources said that they were expecting a surplus production, which would exceed the target by about 1.15 metric tons.

A total of 24,330 hectares of land were brought under its cultivation during the season. The growers were expected to produce about 4.20 lakh metric tons of potato.

The farmers cultivated on 18,000 hectares of land for potato last year and the production was 3.6 lakh MT.

Officials said that the accumulation of alluvial deposit on the lands during the flood has increased the soil fertility to a great extent and helped better production of potato.

APB from Pabna reports: There has been a bumper production of potato in the district this year but its price is low.

Agricultural Extension Department (AED) officials here said that the production was

distributed some relief goods among the fire victim families. UNB from Bandarban reports: At least 23 fire incidents took place in the district in last one year.

Valuables worth about Tk one crore were gutted in the fire. This was informed at a meeting of Fire Service and Civil Defence here recently.

APB from Jhalakati says: A fire gutted some shops and an engineering workshop at Nalchhiti thana headquarters recently.

The shop owners claimed that property worth over Taka 15 lakh have been gutted by the fire originating from the kitchen of a nearby hotel.

Local people extinguished the blaze before fire brigade teams came from Jhalakati and Barisal.

There is no fire brigade station at Nalchhiti.

An earlier report from Narsingdhi says: At least five workers received burn injuries and valuables worth about Tk 90 lakh were gutted in a devastating fire at a cloth printing and processing mill at Ghordadia here.

Witnesses said the fire originated from the electric circuit breaker of the panel board of Al Amin Printing and Processing Mill recently. Soon it charred the entire mill burning clothes, dye, chemical and machinery.

The mill owner claimed that valuables worth Tk 90 lakh were destroyed in the fire.

BSS from Tangail reports: At least 50 fire incidents were occurred in Tangail district during last year.

Fire Service Department sources said that property worth about Taka 26,74,300 were damaged in the fire incidents.

Of the fire incidents, 17 incidents of fire were originated from cooker, 12 from electricity problem, five from cigarette fragments, three from open lamp, three from ash and fuel, five from unknown sources, three from friction of machinery parts, one from ejection of fire particles from chimney and rest one from crackers.

BSS from Chandpur reports: Ten shops were gutted by a devastating fire at Algi Bazar in Haimchar thana recently.

The fire originated from a petrol container shop. Two fire fighters from Chandpur town rushed to the spot and it took about two hours to extinguish the fire.

Six people were injured in controlling the fire. There is no fire station at Haimchar Bazar. Two more fire accidents occurred within a month.

UNB from Rangpur says: A total of 299 fire incidents took place at different areas of the district in last 14 months till February this year.

Fire Brigade and Civil Defence sources said at least three people were burnt to death and valuables worth about Tk 1.45 crore were gutted during this period.

UNB from Habiganj says: A devastating fire burnt down shops at Nabinagar Bazar inflicting financial losses to the tune of Tk two crore of the traders recently.

Details about the blaze were not known immediately.

Finance Minister Shah A M S Kibria was grieved to learn about the losses in the fire at Nabinagar Bazar. He expressed sympathies for those affected.

APB from Jhalakati reports: A Fire Service and Civil Defence Week concluded here recently to create public awareness about fire incidents and precautions.

Programmes of the week include discussion meetings, display of fire fighting techniques and processions with fire fighting vehicles and equipment.

Meanwhile, construction works of the two stations of Fire Brigade at Gauranadi and Banaripara thanas of Barisal district are nearing completion.

The stations, being constructed at a total cost of Tk 1.42 crore, will be completed within the next two months, official sources said.

The thana headquarters are located about 40 kilometres away on average from the district town.

17 dists in grip of drought

NATORE, Apr 4: Severe power crisis and prevailing drought in 16 northern districts, including Natore, are seriously hampering Irri-Boro cultivation, reports UNB.

Some 15,000 deep and 5,000 shallow tube-wells of the region, including 1050 shallow and 173 deep tube-wells of Natore are being operated by power, local farmers said.

"But due to the erratic power supply and load-shedding most of the tube-wells have been rendered inoperative," they added.

Regular power requirement during peak hours in the drought-stricken northern districts is about 185 megawatts while only 75 to 85 megawatts are supplied through the Rural Electrification Board (Palli Bidut Samity), said a PDB official of Rajshahi zone.

As a result, 450 power pumps and most of the tube-wells do not get power supply and remain inoperative hampering irrigation on over 1.5 lakh hectares of Irri-Boro lands.

The severe drought in the region is also hampering the cultivation.

"We need either rainfall or regular power supply for lifting ground water and water from the rivers and canals," farmers said adding "but, we are getting neither rainfall nor power supply which are hampering the cultivation adversely."

Hence, the farmers are apprehending crop-failure this year.

About eight lakh hectares of land have been brought under Irri-Boro cultivation in 16 northern districts, including 60,000 hectares in Natore this year. Agriculture Extension Department (AED) officials said.

They have cultivated Boro paddy in more lands exceeding

the target to recoup their colossal losses incurred by last year's devastating flood.

Almost all the rivers, beels, canals and water bodies have been dried up due to the unilateral withdrawal of the Ganges water at Farakka by India in one hand and lack of much expected rainfall, on the other.

AED officials apprehended that if the situation continues till the middle of the current month, the farmers will have to face a severe production short-fall.

The Muslim devotees have started performing special prayers, including *Esteskar Namaj* in different parts of the region praying to the Almighty for rain.

UNB from Manikganj says: Farmers here have been facing serious problems in cultivating their land due to lack of rain for the last five months.

IRRI, Boro, Aus paddy, jute and other crops were sown in the Bangla month of Poush. But the plants are now drying up due to the prevailing drought, said the cultivators.

They said most of the deep tube-wells and power pumps went out of order due to fall in ground water level and continued load-shedding and erratic power supply in the district.

Meanwhile, the price of diesel has also shot up in the market.

Crops on thousands of acres of land in different thanas are being dried up in absence of rain, they said.

Meanwhile, the dealers are in great problem as their fertilisers remained stockpiled in their godown in absence of buyers. If the situation continues for some more days, they fear that the entire stock will be damaged in the godown.

Mystery shrouds over death of undertrial at M'bazar jail

From Our Correspondent

MOULVIBAZAR, Apr 4: Mystery has shrouded over the death of undertrial at Moulvibazar district jail on March 29.

On condition of anonymity various sources said, the undertrial named Ramananda Nath, 28, was murdered inside the jail custody. They saw marks of serious injuries on the body of the victim. Marks of blow was visible on his head, arms, thigh and his backside, they said. His penis was also damaged, they further said. During autopsy spots of blood was observed on his ear, face and nose, the sources added.

The sources elaborated that on March 29 which was an Eid Day, special food was served in the jail. As the undertrial refused to take special food, some people inside the jail attacked him. They allegedly beat him mercilessly. As a consequence the victim died on way to hospital.

However, the Moulvibazar district jail authority said, the

undertrial fell ill at the jail custody on the fatelul day. He was immediately rushed to Moulvibazar Sadar Hospital where the on-duty physicians declared him dead.

Ramananda was arrested one year ago on charge of smuggling from the border area of Kulaura thana here. He was the son of Ananda Mohan Nath of village Harinchara in Churibari thana of Tripura state in India.

Following his death his autopsy was done at Moulvibazar morgue. Afterwards he was carried to Moulvibazar Poursabha on April 1.

When this correspondent on Friday contacted with the physician who performed his autopsy, he replied that he was yet to submit his report.

An unnatural death (UD) case was filed with Moulvibazar Police in this connection.

Local elite have demanded proper investigation into the matter immediately.

Water level in Dakatia falls sharply

From Our Correspondent

CHANDPUR, Apr 4: Irrigation and cultivation are seriously affected due to rapid fall in water level in the river Dakatia.

The river Dakatia flows from the Rovananda hills of Tripura state of India and falls to the mighty river Meghna through Comilla and Chandpur districts. The river connects several important commercial centres including Bagmara, Lakshmi, Monohurganj, Chitoshi, Haziganj, Chandpur, Raipur and Laxmipur.

So the river plays an important role in the economic development in the area, but it is now on the wane. The river Dakatia flows through the heart of Chandpur town dividing it into two parts. The northern part is called Natun bazaar where all educational institutions and offices are located. The other part Puran bazaar, an important commercial centre.

Due to heavy siltation during the last flood the water level in the river has fallen down sharply and the cargo vessels can not reach Puran bazaar ghat during the dry season. So the businessmen sustain heavy loss in loading and unloading goods. Chandpur W Rahman Jute Mills and Star Akkad Jute Mills and other jute godowns situated on the bank of Dakatia are also affected due to siltation.

At present cargo vessels can not reach the jetty of the jute mills causing problems in loading and unloading of jute products.

There are many hats and bazaars on both the banks of the river. Communication is also hampered due to fall in the river water.

Due to siltation in the river, cargo goods cannot be easily transported and irrigation on

agricultural land can not be properly operated.

According to Agriculture Extension Office sources, irrigation pumps can not be operated for want of sufficient water in the dry season in the river.

Due to fall in water many shoals have appeared in many places in the river. During the dry season water level goes down to 90 feet from 190 feet of the rainy season.

About 10 to 15 feet layer of siltation have appeared in the river beds of Dakatia.

Due to abnormal fall in water level the movement of launch and steamer is hampered. The BIWTA terminal and the rocket-steamers ghats are situated on the bank of the Dakatia.

A big shoal has emerged just opposite to the terminals causing serious problems for barthing of launches and steamers.

Launches and steamers to and from Chandpur terminals are badly affected by siltation. Immediate re-excavation of the river Dakatia has become a necessity to control flood water, irrigation and navigation.

The river has become almost dead due to construction of Chandpur irrigation project in the river Dakatia.

As a result the Dakatia has become narrow and it becomes almost dry during the dry season causing untold sufferings to the people.

Fishermen cannot fish in the river due to siltation and emergence of shoals.

The farmers living on both sides of the bank cannot cultivate due to insufficient water in the river.

It has also created hindrance for easy communication by country boats during dry season.

Bumper production of potato in 8 dists

By Staff Correspondent

A bumper production of potato has been reported from seven northern districts including Comilla during the current season.

Our Gaibandha correspondent reports: A bumper production of potato has been reported from here and other districts namely Bogra, Kurigram, Rangpur, Natore, Thakurgaon and Nilphamari.

But the peasants are now in great difficulties with their huge production. As such price of potato has decreased sharply in the markets.

Moreover, the farmers could not preserve their produce for a long time due to poor capacity of cold storage in the northern region.

This year a total of four lakh 75 thousand hectares of land have been brought under potato cultivation in the northern region. The production target of potato was fixed at 11,72,000 metric tons, but the production is expected to be nearly 53 lakh tons.

Potato traders are facing difficulty with its increasing supply position. As such its price has been decreasing sharply. Medium size potatoes are being sold at Taka 2 to Taka 3 per kg. But last year during harvesting potato was sold at Taka 5 per kg as its lowest price.

The farmers are, however, anxious with their produce which may be damaged if they fail to preserve it in cold storages timely.

UNB from Rajshahi reports: Agriculture Extension Department sources said that they were expecting a surplus production, which would exceed the target by about 1.15 metric tons.

A total of 24,330 hectares of land were brought under its cultivation during the season. The growers were expected to produce about 4.20 lakh metric tons of potato.

The farmers cultivated on 18,000 hectares of land for potato last year and the production was 3.6 lakh MT.

Officials said that the accumulation of alluvial deposit on the lands during the flood has increased the soil fertility to a great extent and helped better production of potato.

APB from Pabna reports: There has been a bumper production of potato in the district this year but its price is low.

Agricultural Extension Department (AED) officials here said that the production was

beyond expectation". Potato was grown on about 23,000 hectares of land in Pabna Sadar, Athgharia, Iswardi, Chatmohor, Bhangura, Bera and Sujanagar thanas and the production is estimated at 30,000 tons, they said.

Farmers said they can not preserve their produce because of inadequate number of cold storages and irregular power supply. Unless measures are taken to ensure preservation of potato, there may be a crisis in the next season, they said.

APB from Comilla adds: Production of potato in the district this year exceeded the government-fixed target and capacity of cold storages.

Agricultural Extension Department officials and farmers said average per acre production is 250 to 300 maunds against last year's 150 to 200 maunds.

But price of the item this year is low and *Farias* and middlemen are taking advantage of the situation.

In rural retail markets, potato is being sold at Tk four per kilogram or even less. The price is less than production cost.

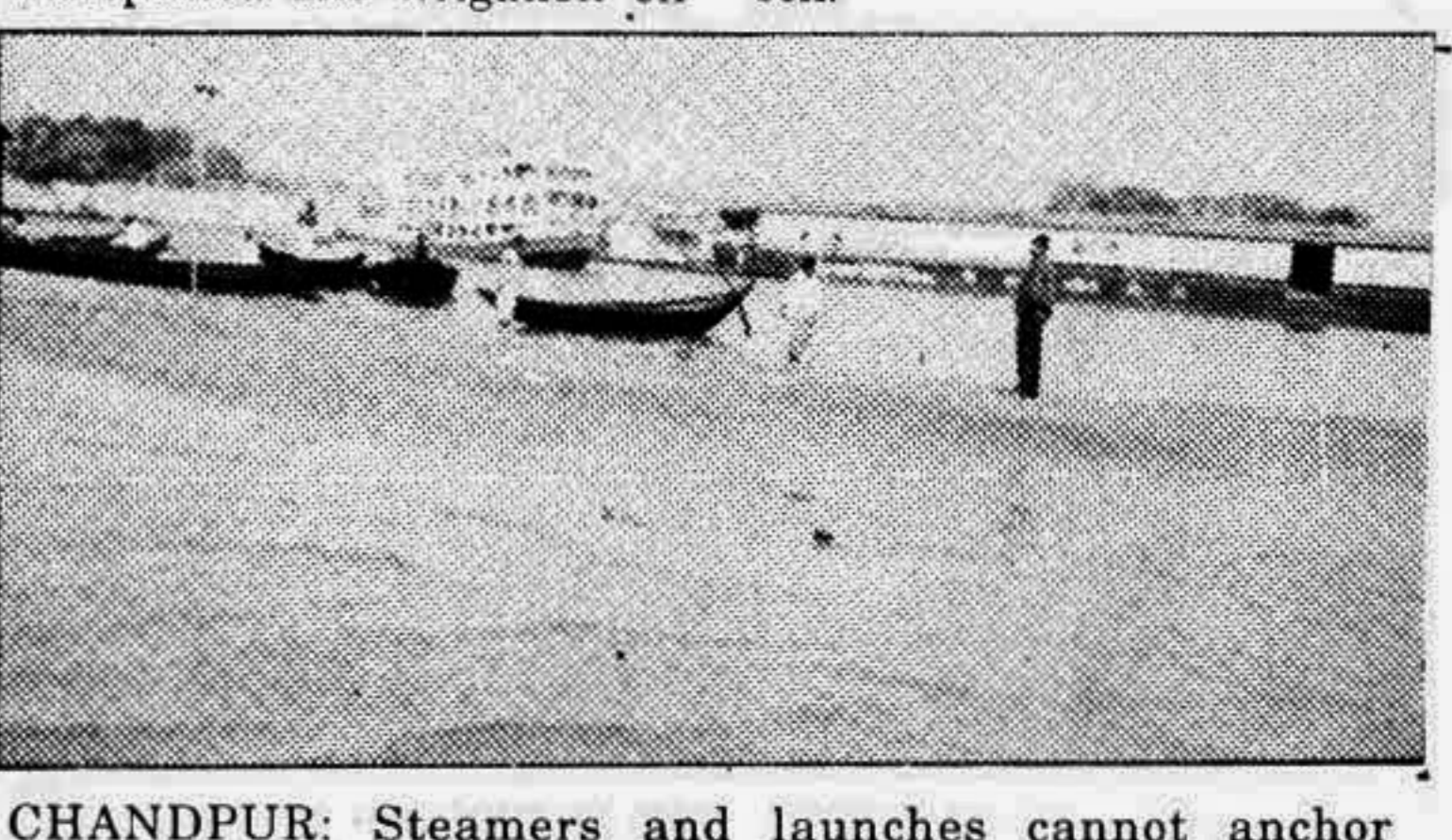
Smaller and poorer peasants are not in a position to transport and store potato in cold storages.

Growers also feel discouraged to keep potato in cold storage because of frequent power failure and load shedding.

Some farmers suggested that the government should procure potato like rice.



GAIBANDHA: Rural women are emerging as a new labour force in the northern region due to abject poverty and other reasons. Photo shows some woman labourers working at Kamardani in the sadar thana under Food for Works Programme. — Star photo



CHANDPUR: Steamers and launches cannot anchor smoothly at Chandpur steamer ghat due to its narrowness caused by recent siltation. — Star photo