

News snaps

Good prospect of IRRI-Boro crops

BARISAL, Apr 9: Agriculture officials see good prospects of IRRI-Boro crops in Barisal Division so far this season but farmers say they are worried because of no rain, reports APB. Over 2.35,000 hectares of land have been brought under IRRI-Boro cultivation in the division with a production target of six lakh tonnes of paddy. Of these, 42,500 hectares are in Barisal, 15,350 in Patuakhali, 325 in Barguna, 11,500 in Pirojpur, 4,900 in Jhalakathi, 20,000 in Bhola, 30,250 in Faridpur, 29,000 in Madaripur, 21,500 in Rajbari, 21,000 in Shariatpur and 40,200 hectares in Gopalganj.

Six shops gutted

FENI, Apr 9: Miscreants blasted crackers and set fire to six shops at Chowdhury Bazaar and four houses nearby in Parsuram thana on Tuesday night, reports APB. Property worth about five lakh taka were gutted in the fire, police said. Local people claimed that the incident was a sequel to a recent clash between two local factions of Chhatra League, student wing of ruling Awami League. Fire fighters from Feni extinguished the fire. The ASP of Feni visited the spot.

Work on sanitary latrines progressing

MAGURA, Apr 9: Work on construction of 162 sanitary latrines in 81 schools here is progressing fast, reports UNB. Facilities Department of Education Ministry is implementing the project at a cost of Tk 44 lakh. Executive Engineer of the Facility Department told that 56 latrines would be constructed in 28 schools of Sadar thana, 22 in 12 schools in Sreepur thana, 46 in 23 schools in Mohammadpur thana and 38 in 19 schools in Shalikhah thana. The works will be completed by June next.

Regional Children's Awards meet

RANGAMATI, Apr 9: The two-day long regional children's awards competition concluded here on Thursday, reports UNB. Local parliament member Dipankar Talukder distributed the awards on sports, literature and music at a function at the local town hall. Participants from six districts - Chittagong, Feni, Cox's Bazar, Rangamati, Bandarban and Khagrachhari - took part in 62 events.

Disaster Preparedness Day observed

HABIGANJ, Apr 9: National Disaster Preparedness Day '99 was observed in Habiganj on Tuesday, reports BSS. A discussion-meeting organised by the district administration, was held at local town hall in the morning. MAN Siddik, ADC (Gen) Habiganj, presided over the meeting. Ahmed Fazur Rashid, Deputy Commissioner, Habiganj was present in the meeting as the chief guest while Shahid Chowdhury, Chairman, Habiganj Pourashabha was the special guest. The meeting was addressed, among others, by Abdul Kadir of Bangladesh Water Development Board, Habiganj, Enamul Haque, TNO, Habiganj sadar and others.

Wheat allocated under TR programme

SIRAJGANJ, Apr 9: The government, under its Test Relief (TR) programme has allocated over 975 tonnes of wheat for nine thanas and three pourasavas of Sirajganj district in the current fiscal year, reports BSS. According to official sources, the wheat will be used for implementing 594 schemes to repair roads, culverts and earth filling in the premises of educational institutions and play grounds which were badly affected by the last year's worst floods.

Current nets seized

CHANDPUR, Apr 9: Ninety-five current nets of large sizes, worth about Taka one crore have been seized by police from the fishermen who were fishing hilsha fries in the river Meghna and Padma last month, reports BSS. Mobile courts, headed by a magistrate, have been operating in different areas of the Meghna and the Padma from Nilkamal to Shatnal. Police also arrested six fishermen in this connection. The seized current nets were set on fire on the spot in front of public.

Fire service station to be set up

NETRAKONA, Apr 9: A fire service station will be constructed at Mahaganj thana sadar in Netrakona district under the supervision of Netrakona Public Works Department, reports BSS. An official source said, the Ministry of Home Affairs sanctioned Taka 68 lakhs for the construction of the fire service station in the current financial year. The fire station will have boundary wall, quarter of station officer, office-cum-barrack of firemen and building for fire fighting automobiles. A total of 80 decimal land have been brought under acquisition for construction of the station.

Phensidyl recovered

SIRAJGANJ, Apr 9: Police recovered 60 bottles of Indian phensidyl and 90 litres of country liquor from sadar and Tarash thanas on Monday and Tuesday, reports BSS. Detective branch of police, after challenging a rickshaw passenger, recovered the phensidyl when he was going to Kamarkhand thana on Tuesday night. Police arrested the passenger Ahmed Anwar Hossain of Haidarpur village of Kamarkhand thana. He was coming from Bogra with the contraband. Earlier, on Monday night police also raided the houses of Teben Boshak and Meser Ali at Madhainagar village in Tarash thana and recovered the country liquor.

Oath taking ceremony held

NETRAKONA, Apr 9: The oath taking ceremony of newly elected chairman and commissioners of Netrakona Pourashabha was held at its conference room on April 1, reports BSS. Officiating Deputy Commissioner of Netrakona Amir Hussain administered the oath. District level officers, political leaders, local elite and journalists were present at the oath taking ceremony. The newly elected pourashabha chairman Matur Rahman Khan exchanged views with the newsmen after oath taking on different local problems and civic amenity and urged them to extend him their co-operation in solving the problems.

Withdrawal of case demanded

RAJSHAHI, Apr 9: Some 20 officials and employees of Barendra Project in its Mohanpur Zone are on strike since Tuesday demanding withdrawal of a case against one of the officials and their security, reports APB. Irrigation on about 15,000 acres of IRRI-Boro land in the area is stopped since then, officials of Mohanpur thana administration said. The striking employees have also locked the zonal office of the project and handed over the keys to the Thana Nirbahi Officer (TNO). A deep tubewell driver of the project was electrocuted on March 28 while allegedly giving an illegal connection, they said.

Agri-fair concludes

SIRAJGANJ, Apr 9: A seven-day agriculture fair concluded at Betil High School of Belkuchi thana on April 7, reports BSS. A total of 42 stalls were set up where agricultural products, seeds and fertiliser were exhibited. District Agriculture Extension Department organised the fair. Local MP Abdul Latif Biswas inaugurated the fair. Additional Director of Agriculture Extension Department Bazlur Rahman and Deputy Director Abul Hossain Mollah spoke on the occasion.

2,90,349 couples adopt FP methods

RANGPUR, Apr 9: A total of 2,90,349 fertile couples out of 4,19,322 have been brought under family planning (FP) programme till the last February in all the thanas, reports UNB. Official sources said of the total 1,61,278 couples used birth control pills, 13,178 used condoms, 49,606 received injections while 9,880 were given copper T and 5410 norplant during the period. Besides, 13,420 men and 36,577 women adopted permanent family planning methods through sterilization.

Efforts on to improve people's lot

KACHUA (Chandpur), Apr 9: State Minister for Planning Dr Mahiuddin Khan Alamgir on Saturday said the present government was implementing various development programmes to ensure overall improvement in the socio-economic life of the common man, reports BSS. Addressing separate rallies in connection with various development works, he said the present government has proved its sincerity by bringing welfare for people during last 33 months in office. The state minister addressed the rallies after inaugurating earth work of an LGED sponsored road and laying the foundation stones of two bridges.

Crop loan disbursed

NARSINGDI, Apr 9: The Bangladesh Rural Development Board (BRDB) has, so far, disbursed Tk 1,25,57,000 as crop loan and poverty alleviation loan out of the total target of Tk 1,67,00,000 in six thanas of Narsingdi district till March 4, in the current fiscal year, reports BSS. BRDB disbursed Tk 54,58,000 as crop loan and Tk 80,99,000 as poverty alleviation loan among 2,475 members of 126 farmers, cooperatives societies of the district. The achievement of loan distribution is 81 per cent. Moreover, BRDB at the same time realised arrear loan of Taka 67,86,000 from the members of farmers' co-operative societies of the district.



GAIBANDHA: Erosion by the river Brahmaputra has taken a serious turn at Bhutchchara in the sadar thana. The river has been devouring a vast tract of land here every day. —Star photo

Unscrupulous dealers create artificial crisis Prices of fertilisers shoot up in 3 dists

By Staff Correspondent

Prices of chemical fertilisers have shot up in three districts hindering cultivation of Boro crop adversely. Our Sathkira Correspondent reports: Price of chemical fertilisers have shot up in the markets of seven thanas here. Farmers have alleged that some dishonest businessmen created the artificial crisis of fertilisers to earn windfall profit. Farmers of different areas here are buying a 50 kg bag of urea at Taka 350 against the normal rate of Taka 294. The government appointed dealers received 1634 metric tons of urea by two turns as per the government allotment this year. Dealers and traders hoarded the fertilisers and have created artificial crisis. They are selling those at exorbitant rate in the black markets violating the government rule. A large number of farmers of Tala, Kalaroa, Debhata, Assasuni, Kaligonj, Shyamnagar and sadar thana complained that they were not getting TSP fertiliser in the markets for more than two weeks. As a result, they could not use it in their fields. The alleged that most of the traders were selling banned Indian SSP fertiliser to the innocent farmers at an exorbitant price. SSP fertilisers is less effective than TSP. Deputy Director of Agriculture Extension Department is in-charge of monitoring the distribution of fertiliser locally, but he has been found to be indifferent of the prevailing crisis of fertilisers for unknown reasons. According to a reliable source, most of the dealers are selling fertilisers in the black markets.

The dealers in cooperation with dishonest officials are hoarding fertilisers for creating artificial crisis in the markets. Farmers urged the government to ensure smooth supply of fertilisers at fair prices and called for stringent action against the persons responsible for creating artificial scarcity. A report from Kushtia says: Prices of chemical fertilisers have shot up sharply in the district. Some dishonest traders who have created an artificial crisis of fertilisers in the markets are reaping the benefit. Farmers are buying every 50 kg bag of Urea fertiliser at the rates between Tk 320 and Tk 350. The price is higher than the normal rate. A large number of farmers in Sadar, Kumarkhali, Eheramara, Mirpur, Daulatpur and Khoksa thanas alleged that they were not getting the most essential TSP fertiliser for top dressing potato crops during the last one month. If available in the black market, the price is more than Tk 750 per bag containing 50 kgs of fertiliser. They also alleged, most of the dealers and fertiliser sellers are selling banned Indian SSP fertiliser to the innocent farmers at exorbitant prices. Each bag of Indian SSP is being sold at Tk 255 only. But the traders are selling this fertiliser between Tk 400 and Tk 600. This SSP fertiliser is less effective than that of TSP, said an official of the Agriculture Department. There are more than 50 fertiliser dealers in the district. Most of the dealers are selling their quotas of Urea and other fertilisers at the 'Mill gate' area instead of bringing the allotted quota to their areas. The dealers in connivance with the officials of the concerned departments are allegedly stockpiling Urea fertilisers at secret places and at some selected houses of 'so called farmers'.

They are creating artificial crisis of chemical fertilisers to make brisk business during the incoming Boro season. UNB from Chuadanga says: Growers said, per bag urea is being sold between Tk 310 and Tk 320 in the rural areas for the last one month. Though they have completed the planting of Boro seedlings, sudden price hike has shattered the prospect of cultivation. Moreover, adulterated chemical fertiliser has flooded the market causing growing concern among the farmers. At present per 50 kg bag of Potash is being sold at Tk 500, Triple Super Phosphate (American) at Tk 700 and Gypsum at Tk 400 which is beyond the purchasing capacity of the flood affected farmers. Several fertiliser traders of rural areas said they are to purchase per bag urea between Tk 300 and Tk 310 from the dealers.

According to the Deputy Director of the local Agriculture Extension Department, there is no deficit of urea. A total of 3,000 tons of urea were allocated to 76 dealers in January, but they took the delivery of only 1,230 tons, he added. Against an allocation of 5,200 tons of urea for February, the dealers took the delivery of only 3,700 tons up to Feb 28. Besides, special allocation of 30 tons of urea per dealer was also given during the month of February to meet the growing demand. Another 5,600 tons of urea was sanctioned to 70 dealers for the month of March, he said.

Some dishonest fertiliser dealers created the artificial crisis by stockpiling it with a view to gain a windfall profit, said a source. It has also been learnt that urea is being smuggled out to India by some dishonest traders and dealers. UNB from Rajshahi reports: Cheap and adulterated Zinc and Indian urea fertilisers have flooded the markets in the country's northern region including Rajshahi from the very beginning of the current Boro season. Local farmers alleged that a section of unscrupulous traders prepare the adulterated and fake fertilisers themselves and sale these to the growers at a cheaper rate to earn a windfall profit. Zinc fertiliser is being marketed after mixing with the ashes of brick fields, coal, burned battery, salt, soda and lime, they said adding that these elements cause serious harm to land fertility and the body of the users. The growers said the Indian smuggled urea fertilisers have been affecting the crop production adversely.

APB from Patuakhali reports: A 3,000-ton fertiliser godown at Barguna Sadar thana has been lying unused for at least 15 years but its staff are drawing Tk 20,000 as salaries per month for no work. The godown was constructed at a cost of Tk 1.27 crore to help dealers of Amtali, Betagi, Patharghata, Mirzaganj, Kalapara, Mathbaria and Barguna Sadar thanas to store fertiliser. The godown is in an abandoned condition now in absence of maintenance and repair, they said.

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MAGURA: Sunflower cultivation has become very popular among the local farmers. Photo shows a field of sunflower in full bloom at village Uluberia here. —Star photo

Landless of Sathkira blame admin for failure in realising PM's pledge

From Our Correspondent

SATHKHIRA, Apr 9: Blood of landless housewife Zaheda must not go in vain and the movement of landless people for fulfilment of their 8-point demands will also go on. Speakers at a big rally of landless people observed this at Natta Bazaar in Kaligonj thana on April 3. They demanded fulfilment of Prime Minister's commitment of distributing eight khas land plots of Debhata and Kaligonj thanas among the landless people. Arranged by Bhumihin Uchched Protirodh Sangram Samannoy Committee, the landless gathering was presided over by Abdul Wahab. It was also addressed by Advocate Abdur Rahim, Prof Abu Ahmed, Abul Kalam Azad, Saifullah Laskar, Abul Hossain, Dolly Sultana and others. Speakers blamed the local administration for failure to implement the commitment of Prime Minister. The Prime Minister declared in a mammoth landless gathering held at Devshahar football ground on August 18, 1998 that the khas

land of eight plots would be distributed among the landless people. Other demands will be solved step by step, she assured. The speakers urged her to take action against them who are showing indifferent attitude in fulfilling her commitment. Speakers also urged the landless to remain vigilant against the conspirators who have become active again to foil their ongoing movement. Mentionable that landless housewife Zaheda Khatun, 35, wife of Abdul Hamid of Baburabad in Kaligonj thana was shot dead on July 27, 1998. On the day local influential were trying forcefully to evacuate 1200 landless families from eight plots of khas land in Kaligonj and Debhata thanas. At that time Zaheda felt victim while the landless were resisting the evacuations.

Ctg BNP holds rally in support of Apr 11 hartal

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, Apr 9: Chittagong city BNP held a rally at Lalidighi Maidan this afternoon to drum up support for a half-day hartal here on April 11. BNP called the hartal to protest incidents of crime including murder, illegal toll collection, price hike of essentials and loadshedding.

2 activists of outlawed parties killed

From Our Correspondent

JHENIDAH, Apr 9: Two activists of outlawed parties were slaughtered to death reportedly by their rivals in Harinakundu thana on Sunday night, according to police sources. Kamaluddin, 25, an activist of outlawed Purbabangla Communist Party was allegedly caught by some unknown armedmen on that night. He was returning his home as village Arshinagar. He was slaughtered in a field at village Sripur in the same thana. Rival activists of outlawed Sonabangla might kill him, police suspected. Another person Alfauzuddin, 35, of village Bhultia in Chuadanga thana was slaughtered to death in presence of his family members at village Kulbaria in Harinakundu thana on the same night. Police said, Alfaz was living at his father-in-law's house for the last few years at Kulbaria. Earlier, he joined Srarnajibi Mukti Andolan leaving Purbabangla Communist Party. Activists of Purbabangla Communist Party might kill him. It may be noted that six persons had been killed in a week in Jhenidah district.

Sundarbans now a safe haven of illegal arms traders

From Staff Correspondent

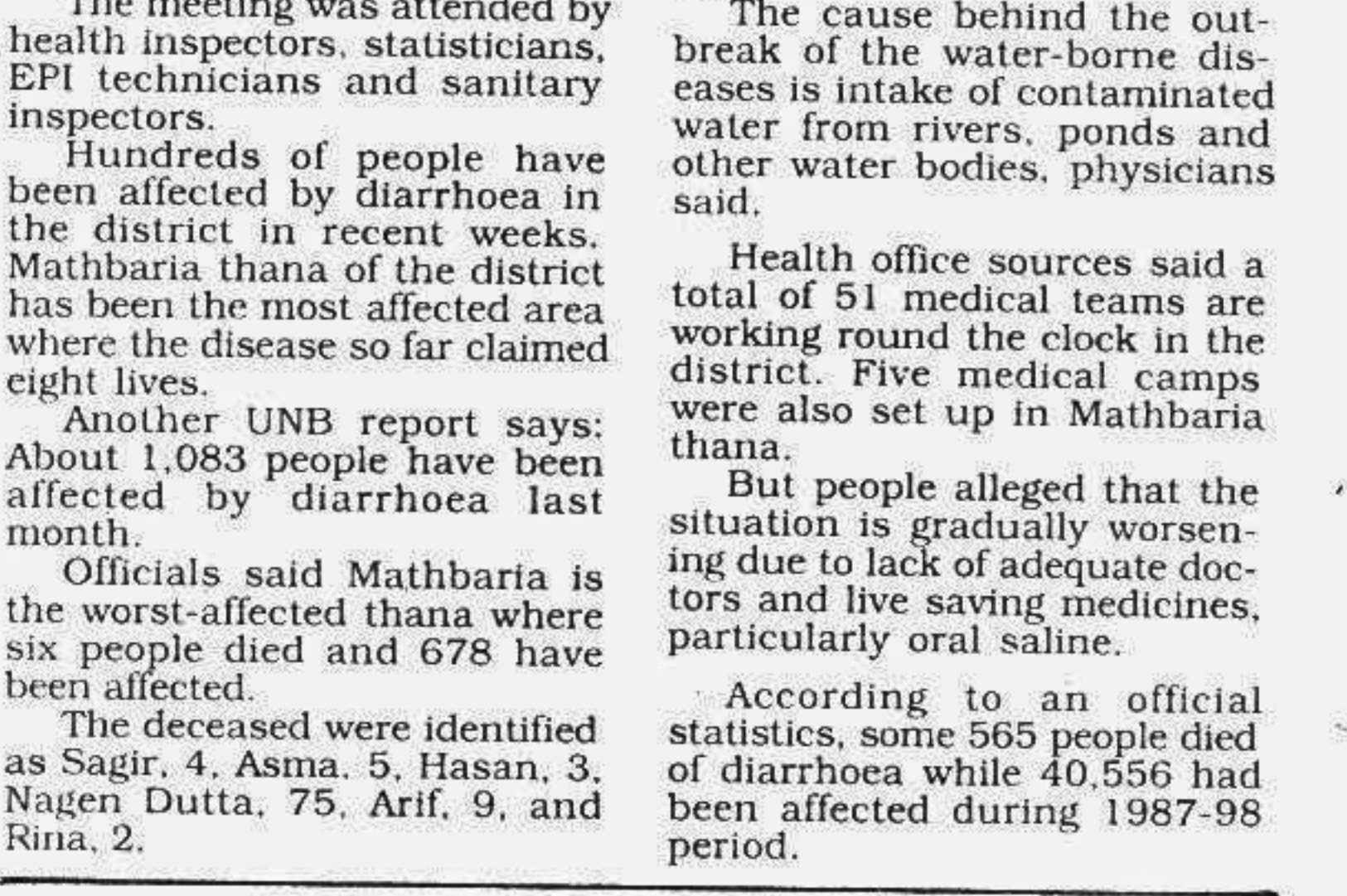
KHULNA, Apr 9: The Sundarbans became a safe haven of illegal arms traders, reports UNB. Dacots and pirates are the main buyers who maintain close links with the sellers. The sellers have several strongholds in the forest. Their network is also strong right from the Sundarbans to Dhaka via Bagerhat and Khulna. A section of corrupt officials of the Forest Department are allegedly involved in the illegal arms trade. Sources said that 61 illegal firearms were recovered from the Sundarbans during the last six months. Sources further said Badal Bahini was arrested from the forest on June 10 of 1997. He gave some thrilling information to police during interrogation about the source of illegal firearms and ammunition. He disclosed to police that some forest officials used to supply ammunition to him on payment. The price per bullet was Taka 50. Badal did not deny the charge that some student leaders of Dhaka University are also involved in selling rifles and ammunition to ring leaders of different gangs of criminals of the Sundarbans. On November 30 last year, police recovered six firearms from Akram, ring leader of 'Akram Bahini'.

Akram confessed to police that he had purchased the firearms from some terrorists of Khulna metropolitan city who are holding important positions in the ruling party. It may be mentioned here that members of the law enforcing agencies do not show keen interest in digging into the sources from where illegal firearms and ammunition are being supplied to criminals. When contacted, Lutful Kabir, DIG of Khulna range told that effective measures were underway to stop illegal arms trading.

UNB from Bagerhat reports: New plantations at the Sundarbans are being hampered by salinity and disease. Diseases are spreading in the area and the quality of timber is decreasing. All the branches and offshoots of rivers flowing through the mangrove have been filled up with silt. Sea water enters into the forest and fill the branches of canal with the silt. According to a statistics, the degree of salinity in the forest and its adjoining areas is increasing day by day creating concern among the environmentalists.

Diarrhoea claims 8 lives in Pirojpur

PIROJPUR, Apr 9: An emergency meeting on controlling diarrhoea was held at the office of civil surgeon of Pirojpur on Tuesday, reports APB. The meeting was attended by health inspectors, statisticians, EPI technicians and sanitary inspectors. Hundreds of people have been affected by diarrhoea in the district in recent weeks. Mathbaria thana of the district has been the most affected area where the disease so far claimed eight lives. Another UNB report says: About 1,083 people have been affected by diarrhoea last month. Officials said Mathbaria is the worst-affected thana where six people died and 678 have been affected. The deceased were identified as Sagir, 4, Asma, 5, Hasan, 3, Nagen Dutta, 75, Arif, 9, and Rina, 2. A local MP, however, told that the number of casualty and affected people is much higher than that of the official statistics. The cause behind the outbreak of the water-borne diseases is intake of contaminated water from rivers, ponds and other water bodies, physicians said. Health office sources said a total of 51 medical teams are working round the clock in the district. Five medical camps were also set up in Mathbaria thana. But people alleged that the situation is gradually worsening due to lack of adequate doctors and live saving medicines, particularly oral saline. According to an official statistics, some 565 people died of diarrhoea while 40,556 had been affected during 1987-98 period.



CHANDPUR: Children playing on Puranbazaar ferry ghat as it has been silted up now affecting loading and unloading of goods. —Star photo

Old woman roasted alive

From Our Correspondent

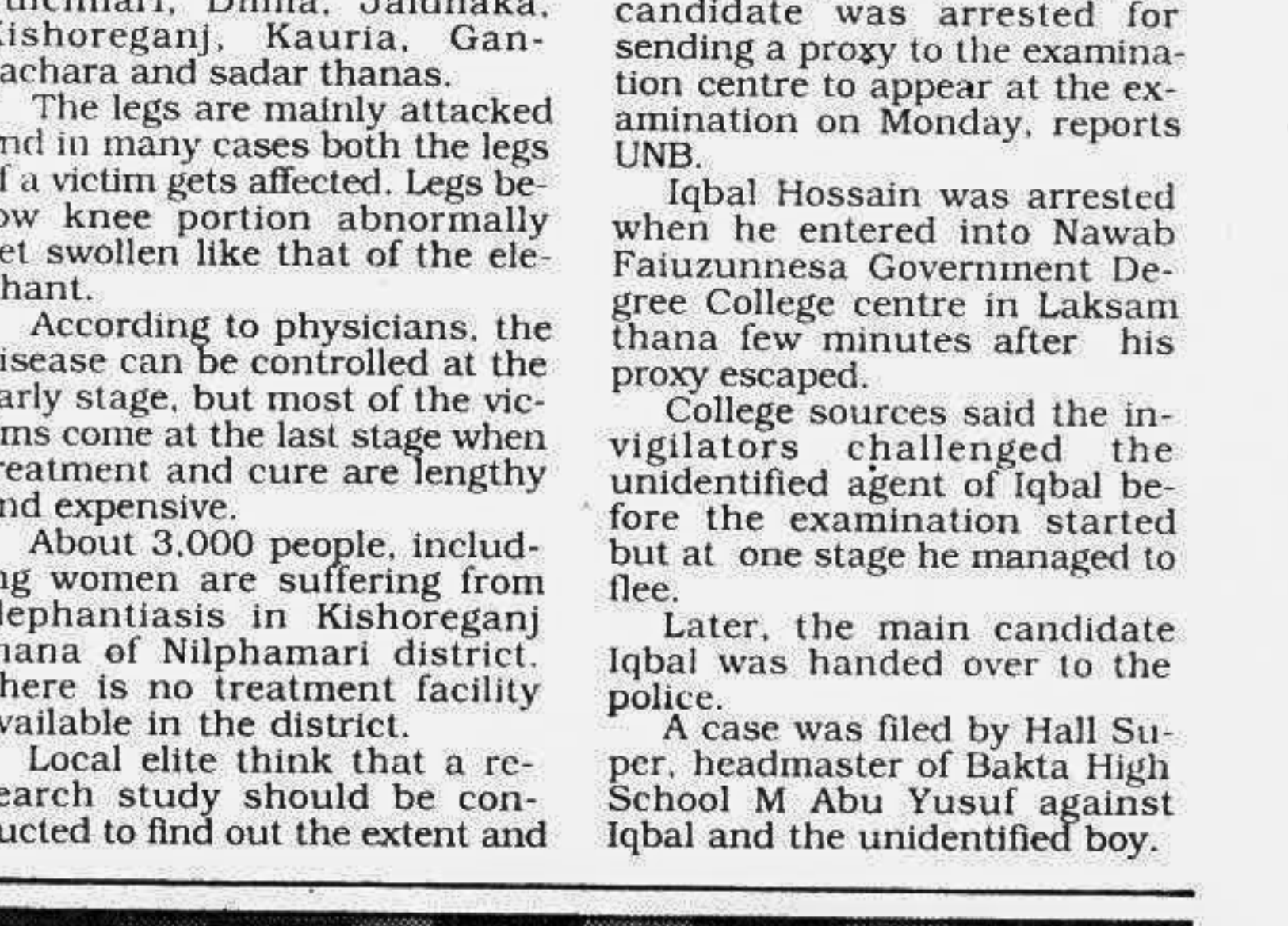
RAJSHAHI, Apr 9: An old woman was roasted alive to death and her son was seriously injured when a fire broke out in their house at Kanpara village in Godagari thana on Tuesday night. Fire caught Amena Khatun, 60, when she was pouring diesel oil into their shallow machine with a open candle in hand. The fire spread rapidly and engulfed the entire house. Her son Abdul Khaleque, 36, was burnt when he rushed to save his mother. Local people rescued them and sent to the local Thana Health Complex where Amena Khatun succumbed to her injuries. Abdul Khaleque was transferred to Rajshahi Medical College Hospital (RMCH). His condition was stated to be critical.

Elephantiasis spreads in Rangpur dist

RANGPUR, Apr 9: A disease known as Elephantiasis (swollen legs) has been spreading in greater Rangpur district affecting a large number of people, reports UNB. Thousands of villagers particularly women, suffering from the disease, are getting socially outcast and resorting to begging for survival. The worst-hit areas are Aditmari, Hatibandha, Kaligonj, Chilmari, Roumari, Fulchhari, Dtmila, Jaldhaka, Kishoreganj, Kauria, Ganga-chara and sadar thanas. The legs are mainly attacked and in many cases both the legs of a victim gets affected. Legs below knee portion abnormally get swollen like that of the elephant. According to physicians, the disease can be controlled at the early stage, but most of the victims come at the last stage when treatment and cure are lengthy and expensive. About 3,000 people, including women are suffering from elephantiasis in Kishoreganj thana of Niphamari district. There is no treatment facility available in the district. Local elite think that a research study should be conducted to find out the extent and reason of its outbreak in the greater Rangpur district and a mass awareness programme should be launched to make the people conscious about the disease.

SSC examinee arrested from Laksam

COMILLA, Apr 9: An SSC candidate was arrested for sending a proxy to the examination centre to appear at the examination on Monday, reports UNB. Iqbal Hossain was arrested when he entered into Nawab Fauzunnisa Government Degree College centre in Laksam thana a few minutes after his proxy escaped. College sources said the invigilators challenged the unidentified agent of Iqbal before the examination started but at one stage he managed to flee. Later, the main candidate Iqbal was handed over to the police. A case was filed by Hall Super, headmaster of Bakta High School M Abu Yusuf against Iqbal and the unidentified boy.



MYMENSINGH: Prof Muhammad Hossain, Vice-Chancellor of Bangladesh Agricultural University presenting a crest of the university to Post and Telecommunications Minister Muhammad Nasim on the occasion of the installation ceremony of Bangladesh Agricultural University Central Students Union which was held recently at Shilpacharya Joyrul Abedin auditorium. —Star photo