

# News snaps

## Highway robbers arrested

**NATORE, Apr 12:** Gurudaspur and Boraigram Police have jointly arrested seven highway robbers during their flight after they held up a bus heading for Gurudaspur at night recently, reports APB.

After blocking the road with a fallen tree, nine men stopped the bus, boarded. One of them took control of the steering wheel. Rest of the gang seized Tk 50,000 in cash, wristwatches and other valuables. The robbers left the bus with their loot at 4 am near Ikor, after which the bus driver sped to Gurudaspur Police Station. Boraigram Police Station was informed, and the joint police force succeeded in apprehending seven of the highway robbers.

## Work progressing

**BARISAL, Apr 12:** The construction work of two crime investigating centres are progressing fast here, reports UNB.

According to the police administration, one centre is being constructed at Sharsh in Bakerganj thana while the other at Labansara in Banaripara thana costing Tk 2.14 crore. With the completion of the centres, the investigation of the crimes committed in the thanas will be completed within a short time and law and order situation will be improved to a great extent, hope officials.

## Workshop on mass literacy

**TANGAIL, Apr 12:** A ten-day workshop for master trainers on mass literacy programme sponsored by district administration and education department concluded at Deputy Commissioner's conference room recently, reports BSS.

Thirty-one participants including college, school, madrasa teachers and NGO representatives took part in the workshop. These master trainers will give training to thana level trainers. M. Abdus Sattar, Deputy Commissioner, Tangail distributed certificates among the participants.

## Massive IRRI-Boro farming

**CHAPAINAWABGANJ, Apr 12:** Extensive IRRI-Boro cultivation programme has been taken-up in the district in the current season, reports BSS.

According to the Agriculture Extensive Department (AED) sources, 30,000 hectares have been brought under IRRI-Boro cultivation scheme in the current season. Farmers and agronomists are expecting a bumper production of the crops if the weather remains favourable. Most of the farmers of the district have sown seedlings. Some farmers said that proper power supply, fair prices of diesel, fertilisers and pesticides would help them achieve a bumper production of the crops this year. About 70 per cent shallow and deep tubewells are being operated by electricity. Farmers are very much satisfied as they are getting fertilisers at the rate of normal price in the local market.

## Tele-exchange in bad shape

**MADARIPUR, Apr 12:** The telephone exchanges at Kalkini and Takerhat thanas are in a near collapse situation due to lack of maintenance and overhauling for long, reports APB.

The exchanges having 100 lines each were established during the Pakistani period considering the commercial importance of the two thanas. Those were then called 'entry points' to the southern region of the country. The trunk line from Takerhat to Gopalganj sadar and Faridpur have been lying inoperative for more than five years only due to lack of repair, subscribers alleged. Even if connection is available, the voice is inaudible. The Kalkini thana exchange remains inoperative most of the time due to its dilapidated condition. The lineman mostly remains absent, subscribers alleged.

## Indian phensidyl seized

**MADARIPUR, Apr 12:** Madaripur thana police seized 500 bottles of Indian phensidyl from different places of Madaripur town on March 10, reports BSS.

Acting on a tip-off police recovered 500 bottles of phensidyl from Amirabad area in Madaripur town. Police also arrested one inter-district dacoit from Eterpol bazaar in Madaripur town recently. Arrested person was identified as Shamsur Rahman, 30, of village Mostafapur of Madaripur sadar thana.

## Harvesting of cotton

**CHUADANGA, Apr 12:** The harvesting of cotton of the current season in Chuadanga zone of Bangladesh Cotton Development Board is nearing completion, reports BSS.

In the current cotton cultivation season at total of 8,600 hectares were brought under cultivation in the Chuadanga zone of Bangladesh Cotton Development Board, (BCDB), of which cotton on 2,600 hectares were damaged due to last years flood. The net standing cotton in the zone were on 6,000 hectares in the current season. During the current season a total of 225 thousand maunds of cotton will be produced in the Chuadanga zone of BCDB.

## Unabated logging

**RANGAMATI, Apr 12:** As logging in deep forests of the district continued to go unabated, forest officials cracked down on authorised timber traders recovering timbers worth about Tk 4 crore in last two years, reports UNB.

Official sources said they seized some 1,01,600 cubic feet of timbers used in making furniture and 9,000 cubic feet of firewood since early 1997 to December 1998. They also filed 717 departmental cases during the period, and seized 55 engine boats, 14 buses and 12 trucks on charge of carrying unauthorised timbers. The vehicles were later returned to the owners after realising fine.

## Road mishap kills old man

**ISWARDI, Apr 12:** An old man, Shukur Ali, 85, was killed under the wheels of a truck at Baharpur on the Iswardi-Pabna highway recently, reports APB.

Local people seized the truck at Paksey ferry terminal, but the driver and the helper managed to escape.

## Property gutted

**MANIKGANJ, Apr 12:** At least five dwelling houses were gutted in a fire at Dauli village in Sadar thana recently, reports APB.

Villagers said, the fire originating from a burning cigarette, damaged property worth about one lakh taka.

## Udichi mourning ends

**MANIKGANJ, Apr 12:** A seven day mourning programme of Udichi, Manikganj district unit concluded here on Sunday protesting the killing of 10 people including seven members of Udichi of bomb-blast in Jessore town recently, reports BSS.

The seven-day programme included protest rally, token mass hunger strike, submission of memorandum to the Deputy Commissioner, seminar, mourning procession and meeting. The speaker in the rallies strongly condemned the killings and injuring of the innocent members of Udichi. They demanded exemplary punishment to the persons involved in this brutal act.

Among others, Abul Islam Sikdar and Prodig Hor President and Secretary respectively of Udichi, Manikganj district unit, Awami League leader Gazi Kamrul Huda Selim and Laxmi Chatterjee spoke in the meeting.

## Pry dropouts up

**PATUAKHALI, Apr 12:** The number of students in primary schools in the district has declined as distribution of wheat under the Food for Education Programme remained suspended for the last five months, reports APB.

Students belonging to 21,641 families in six thanas of the district have been affected by non-distribution of wheat under the programme, sources in the Directorate for Primary Education here said. Distribution of wheat was suspended without any reason, they said. Local people said that poor families are feeling discouraged in sending their children to schools, which may hamper the Universal Primary Education programme in the district.

## Obsolete tele-exchange

**SUNAMGANJ, Apr 12:** As the local telephone exchange still operating with obsolete machines, NWD telephone subscribers have long been facing serious trouble due to fault in T&T microwave system, reports UNB.

Subscribers alleged that it is impossible to get a NWD connection as telephone line goes dead with dialing. Besides, one will hear different kinds of noise even the exchange of words in T&T switch-room, if he picks up the receiver. To get rid of these rubbish thing had repeatedly contacted the local T&T authorities, but appeals fell on the deaf ears, said subscribers.

# Medicare services too poor for 1,000 patients at RMCH

From Abdul Wadood

**RAJSHAHI, Apr 12:** All kinds of services sanctioned for 530 patients are distributed among at least 1,000 patients in Rajshahi Medical College Hospital (RMCH).

It is seriously hampering treatment of patients and management of the hospital.

The services are very poor and backdated compared to available modern facilities. On the other hand, some improved devices brought very recently cannot be used properly. In the 530-bed hospital constructed in the mid '60s, and average number of 1,000 patients are now accommodated and managed though the facilities in terms of physician, nurse, employee, medicine and instruments have remained the same.

No additional money and manpower is allocated for managing the huge number of extra patients. This makes immense sufferings to the patients, as well as to the doctors, nurses, employees and the hospital authorities.

In the fiscal year of 1997-98, only Taka 90 lakh was allocated for medicines and Taka 71 lakh for food against the sanctioned 530 beds. To distribute the allotments among 1,000 patients, one each was given only Taka 2.74 for medicine and Taka 1.95 for food.

"No, no, the situation is not so bad as we added something to it cutting some amount from other sectors," said Col. Mong Ten Win, Director of Rajshahi Medical College Hospital. Still then the amount is too little, he admitted.

The RMCH authorities also buy medicines and food from outside on credit. The amount of credit for buying food stood at about Taka 36 lakh in the last fiscal year. It was not paid till now as the government is yet to approve it.

RMCH authorities have been persisting for many years tirelessly for allocating budget to buy food for at least 1,000 patients. It has been learnt that the proposal has now been at the final stage and waiting for the approval of the Minister for Health and Family Planning. RMCH authorities are expecting the desired budget from the next fiscal year.

According to RMCH sources, another burning problem in the hospital is shortage of man-

power, especially fourth class employees.

There are 431 sanctioned posts of fourth class employees for the 530-bed hospital. The number was not raised in the last three decades though the demand has been doubled. Moreover, 99 posts have remained vacant for years together. An additional number of at least 20 employees remain absent on leave.

Out of the total sanctioned 223 and 138 posts of MLSS and sweeper, 50 and 21 posts are lying vacant respectively. Other vacancies are — five sardars out of 11, two janadars out of eight, six guars out of 17, 12 cooks/masalchis out of 27 and three ward boys/ayas out of seven posts. Retirement, death and disease increase the number of vacancies every year, but these are not replaced through new recruitments.

Due to shortage of fourth class employees the hospital wards cannot be cleaned regularly and properly, patients cannot be served properly, security and healthy environment cannot be maintained in the hospital premises and wastes cannot be disposed off in time. Cows, dogs and cats enter in to the hospital campus, even in the wards, every now and then making the hospital dirty and infectious, a junior doctor-on-duty said.

A huge number of attendants, hawkers and mustans wander about in the ward making the hospital overcrowded and noisy like a village market.

Untoward incidents happen very frequently over various issues among the doctors, nurses, employees, attendants and mustans.

"We have to remain always extremely perturbed that hampers service," said some doctors and nurses.

Col Mong Ten Win, Director of RMCH said, "We have to allow attendants because the patients need them for nursing, buying medicines from outside as we cannot serve them with all necessities for shortage of manpower and logistics."

RMCH authorities have propagated some rules regarding the matter, but people seldom care it.

Witnesses said, the director himself is often seen busy with chasing hawkers and managing attendants and mustans.

More than 23 posts of doctors have remained vacant now. Besides, there are some vacancies of Professor, Associate Professor and Assistant Professor. However, this is a concern of Rajshahi Medical College authorities.

According to RMCH sources, the most miserable condition has been prevailing in the Surgery department. There are five wards under three units of General surgery and one ward each under Paediatric surgery and Neuro-surgery, but there is only one General Operation Theatre (GOT).

According to the statistics of RMCH, 4,527 operations were done in 1998 against 3,790 in 1997 in the GOT. About 15 operations were done every day. The daily demand of operation, however, was at least three times more than that had been done. A patient has to wait in the hospital for at least 15 days for operation at GOT. A patient has to wait for at least three months to get admission as there is a long waiting list.

To cope with the increasing demand, at least three more GOTs are required at this moment. Number of OTs for Gynaecology and Obstetrics and Orthopaedic surgery, one for each, should also be doubled. 2,500 gynaecological and obstetrical and 1,049 orthopaedic operations were done in 1998.

RMCH authorities have written to the higher authorities concerned for building at least three new Operationally on the existing ones. Meanwhile, number and quality of surgical instruments and equipments are inadequate. Only for a sucker machine, operations of prostate and common bile duct have remained suspended for the last eight months, said a senior surgeon on condition of anonymity. Shortage of logistics in the hospital is a very common problem, he informed.

X-ray machines are another examples that go out of order every now and then. Some instruments and equipments have crossed the service-age. Most of these have been kept somehow operable by repeated repairing and some have gone permanently out of order.

There are allegations that some unscrupulous technicians willingly make faults with the instruments and equipments to push the hospital patients to the privately-owned investiga-

tion centres. But the allegations often are not investigated in fear of trade unions.

Pilferage of medicines, chemical and clothes, can also not be stopped for the same reason.

There is only one ambulance operable which often lies idle for want of fuel. Two other ambulances have gone out of order for ever.

According to the sources, Taka 20,000 had been allocated for maintenance of vehicles during the last fiscal year against the demand of Taka 2.50 lakh, but actual expenditure was Taka 70,000. The demand for fuel was Taka 4.00 lakh, but Taka 2.50 lakh was allocated and Taka 4.21 lakh was spent.

The age-old four baby incubator machines have been lying unusable for many years in the children wards. An incubator machine has been repaired very recently that is not doing well and many go out of order at any time. It is apprehended. Conditions of the phototherapy machines are also the same. At least 10 to 15 immature and low birth weight babies remain every day in the three children wards.

Another dangerous matter in the RMCH lacks a safe system for disposal of hospital wastes. Some garbages are simply dumped into the ground and the rest are openly burnt. Rajshahi City Corporation has made an Incineration House about two years ago in the hospital premises which has not been handed over to the RMCH authorities for some technical reasons.

Meanwhile, RMCH has experienced some development during the last few years. Three new wards have been built and works on construction of three more wards are going on. These new wards will lessen the accommodation problem to some extent. "But maintenance of the wards and management of the patients will be too difficult if new employees and budget are not sanctioned", said the director.

Meanwhile, a laparoscopy machine, and echocardiogram, and ultrasonography machine, and automatic computerised telephone PABX, a lift machine and some small equipments and instruments have been installed recently in the hospital.



**JHENIDAH:** Piled up garbages near Saikupa Cooperative Office are common scenes. But the Saikupa Pura authorities seem to be indifferent to clean up those timely.

# Town dwellers deprived of basic amenities

By Staff Correspondent

The residents of two pourasabhas are being deprived of basic civic amenities for a long time.

**Our Brahmanbaria correspondent reports:** Although the population of Brahmanbaria poura area has increased manifold, the respective authorities have failed to provide basic civic amenities to them.

Brahmanbaria Pourasabha was established in 1868. At present, the pourasabha covers an area of seven square miles and its population is about 1,25,000. Now the pourasabha has been declared a first class one. It was upgraded from 'B' grade to 'A' grade in 1994. But the facilities of a first class pourasabha are not present.

Absence of proper drainage system, deplorable conditions of roads, inadequate street light, lack of proper sanitary arrangement, frequent traffic jams and absence of recreational facilities are common phenomenon here.

Absence of proper drainage system is a big problem here. The town dwellers suffer a lot due to stagnation of water in drains. Most of the drains are filled with filth and garbages. Those are not cleaned properly. In many areas there are no drains. During the rainy season the drains are accumulated with dirt and filth. It causes a serious health hazards.

Due to absence of proper maintenance and repair, most of the roads here are in deplorable condition. The damaged roads area: Jail road, Paikpara road, Medda Bazaar road, Kazipara road, Gokara and Sarkarpara roads. Cracks and potholes have developed at many points of the roads. The workers of Titas Gas Company has created some holes and potholes on the roads which are not repaired in due time. Due to the last flood, the number of damaged roads has increased.

Meanwhile, Sarkarpara road is in very bad shape. Cracks and potholes have developed at all points of the road. Some big holes has been developed on the northern side of Sarkarpara mosque which has been turned into a death trap for years together.

Tufayel Azam road (TA road) is the main road of the town, but the pedestrians can not even walk easily. The footpaths are generally occupied with makeshift shops.

Two rickshaws cannot ply at a time along Kazipara road. After a slight rainfall some of the roads become muddy and slippery. Rain water remains stagnant on the roads causing sufferings to the passers-by and vehicular movement.

Violation of traffic rules has become a normal affair. It creates a serious traffic jam in different points of the town. The Super Market premises, Madda Bazaar road, Paikpara Tempo stand, Tan Bazaar road, Mosque road, Cinema Hall road, TA road, Station road and Kalibari Crossing point are seriously affected by traffic jams.

It is alleged that because of increasing number of rickshaws traffic jam has become a regular problem here. Dirty water, bodies, drains and stack of garbages are mosquitoes' breeding grounds.

Condition of the main road in the town is pitiable. The road was constructed with below standard materials. It has been damaged long ago and has become unfit for movement.

All the roads are submerged even after a slight rainfall. Sometimes, overflowed water of drains creates a lot of troubles. When contacted the chairman of Saikupa Pourasabha said that the problems would be removed gradually.

come a serious threat in the town.

According to Brahmanbaria pourasabha sources, there are 4,000 licenced rickshaws on the roads, but about 10,000 rickshaws are plying on the roads.

Street lights are inadequate. Buils of maximum street light posts are broken for a long time. Most of the roads and residential areas go under darkness just after sunset.

Sanitary arrangement of the town is not satisfactory. A few dustbins are set up in the town which always remain unclean. Garbages of the drains are removed at day time creating obnoxious odour. Floating people respond to the call of nature beside the roads and drains causing inconvenience to the common people. Consequently the environment is polluted.

Besides, some dwellers here are using kutcha latrines.

**Our Jhenidah correspondent says:** No dustbin has been installed at any place of Saikupa poura area for dumping garbages even after five years of its establishment.

People throw garbages here and there. The garbages are not removed regularly. Many people have broken their legs because of scattered banana peels here and there.

Narrow drains have been constructed in this pourasabha with below standard materials. As a result the drains have been damaged very fast. At many places the drains have been blocked which can not flow smoothly. The authorities concerned allegedly do not take initiatives to keep the drains clean. The garbages are being thrown threatening the public health.

There is no slaughtering house here. As a result, the butchers kill their cattles by the roadsides, at the playground of Saikupa High School and at other places. Their wastes are not allegedly removed.

When contacted some butchers alleged that the poura authorities collect tolls from them regularly and assured them that a big slaughtering house would be constructed soon. But actually they did not take any step to construct the house.

Street lights are almost absent in the light posts. Cent per cent of the street lights were fused long ago but the authority did not show eagerness to replace the fused ones after repeated requests to them, alleged the town dwellers.

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A traditional way of stocking salt in the field at Moheshkhali island in Cox's Bazar district. — Star photo by AKM Mohsin

# Smuggling ruins local salt industry

By Shehab Ahmed with Abdul Monayem Khan, back from Moheshkhali

Lal Miah, 46, was quickening his pace, dressing his salt bed as sunlight was fading over the Bay of Bengal, turning into a ball of fire on Moheshkhali island. Not many salt farmers were working, most beds were either abandoned or being prepared for the next harvest.

The farmers like Lal Miah feel discouraged to grow salt as he cannot sell his produce for more than Tk 40 when his cost of production is Tk 60-70 per maund.

Zapped by uneven competition from the smuggled salt from Myanmar farmers like Lal Miah see the business getting ruined and hectares of land turning into wasteland eventually.

Lal Miah blames the smugglers who bring their cargo aboard powerful engine boats which appears no different than the fishing boats that dot the entire coast along the southeastern Bangladesh.

He had been hit hard by the storm in late November and rains that followed the high winds. When the current season began in mid-December the farmer could not sit idle and went on work.

Despite the uneven competition thousands of salt farmers in five thanas of Cox's Bazar and one thana in Banshkhali in Chittagong have gone into production.

They produce the entire national output. Officials say, 875,000 tonnes of salt have been targeted to be produced during the current fiscal.

They said in Cox's Bazar sadar 6,349 acres, in Maheshkhali 15,819 acres, Kutubdia 5,407 acres, Chakoria 14,647 acres, Teknaf 1,302 acres and Banshkhali 5,684 acres have been brought under the salt production programme.

Officials expect fair weather is likely to achieve the target. About 55,000 tonnes have already been produced until January 27, they added.

But farmers like Lal Miah

who mostly work as share croppers are not likely to get their returns or pay back credits to the investors.

The salt from Myanmar look better and clear. But Lal Miah's produce have some amount of soil as he cannot refine them, making it unattractive to buyers.

Officials say the farmers are trying to compete with the smuggled salts, cleaning them white.

But lack of supervision from the law enforcing agencies is hindering their efforts as the refined salt is expensive.

Unless the law keepers take initiative to prevent the smugglers the fate of Lal Miah's hangs in balance as the money lenders and rich farmers may feel discouraged to pump in more credit during the next season, one official preferring anonymity said.



**KUSHITIA:** Banana cultivation has been gaining popularity here gradually. Farmers here earning a lot of money by marketing it to other parts of the country. — Star photo

# 'Shimul' trees disappearing

By Staff Correspondent

Random felling of 'Shimul' trees in district towns and rural areas have raised a great concern among the conscious section of the society in these days.

**Our Mymensingh correspondent reports:** People of the rural areas in the district are being deprived of using 'Shimul' cotton due to fast declining of 'Shimul' trees.

Once the rural people used such cheaper cotton in a large scale as it was easily available for making quilts, pillows, mattresses and other belongings.

But now the rural people can not use such cheaper cotton according to their demand. This is because of fast declining of such traditional trees of Bangladesh. Red or light orange coloured flowers of 'Shimul' trees herald the advent of spring. The environment becomes very delightful.

But such scenes are not easily visible now in the villages. The farmers are cutting down 'Shimul' trees indiscriminately for various reasons including IRRI-Boro farming and acute fuel crisis. 'Shimul' trees are also being used as raw materials in match factories, fuel wood and other domestic purposes due to low price.

Following indiscriminate felling of Shimul trees people are being deprived of cheaper quality cotton.

**Our Faridpur correspondent says:** people are not interested in growing and preserving 'Shimul' trees though most useful for them.

for carrying medicines and other light goods are very essential. Besides, Shimul wood is indispensable for making match sticks. Moreover, they provide humnia being with cotton without which pillows and other essential articles of human beings cannot be made.

These useful trees used to grow at every homestead in natural way for preserving their species.

But these trees are indiscriminately being sold out because of poverty of the rural people and they are being used in brick-fields, match and box manufacturing factories. Now, these useful trees are rarely found in rural areas, not to speak of urban areas. People across the country have recently developed a tendency to plant different varieties of trees that offer timber and fruits, but they do not think of planting Shimul plants on their spare lands.

The Forest Department are not seemingly aware of the usefulness of Shimul trees which is apparent from the fact that they neither grow sapling of Shimul trees in their nurseries nor do they encourage people to plant Shimul plants. In near future people will face great crisis in making pillows and match sticks for want of Shimul wood.

So, the concerned authorities should encourage people in all walks of life to plant Shimul trees at their respective homesteads. The Forest Department also should take a programme to plant Shimul trees by road sides along with other trees in view of their usefulness.

Shimul trees that afford men with wood to make boxes