

News snaps

Degree course introduced

From Our Correspondent  
 MOULVIBAZAR, Apr 17: Degree pass course have been introduced in Tainbunessa Khanam Academy, a girls college at Juri in Kulara thana from 1998-99 academic session.

Principal of the Academy said, National University has given the affiliation to this college for BA and BSS (Pass) courses.

This college was established only a few years ago by local initiative. With introduction of the degree course, a long felt demand of the local people has been fulfilled.

Disaster Preparedness Day

From Our Correspondent  
 FARIDPUR, Apr 17: National Disaster Preparedness Day under the auspices of the district administration was observed here in a befitting manner.

The theme of the day's campaign was "flood, the main obstacle to economic growth and development." Government officials and local elite brought out a procession on the day. Processionists paraded the main streets of the town carrying placards.

Hostel for girls

From Our Correspondent  
 CHUADANGA, Apr 17: A 75-bed non-government hostel for the girl students was formally opened here recently.

Harisuddin, Additional Deputy Commissioner (Revenue) of Chuadanga opened the hostel. One Waliul Islam Joarder of the town has constructed the hostel in the name of his alive wife Motahera Wali. Its name is 'Motahera Wali Girls Hostel.'

Oath taking ceremony

From Our Correspondent  
 RANGPUR, Apr 17: The oath taking ceremony of the newly elected Rangpur Poursabha chairman and commissioners was held on April 7 at the poursabha auditorium in a simple function.

Kazi Mohammad Junnun, newly elected chairman and 15 ward commissioners and five female commissioners took oath at the ceremony. Moazzem Hossain, Deputy Commissioner, Rangpur conducted the ceremony. A large number elite of the town were present at the function.

Popular sunflower farming

From Our Correspondent  
 KUSHTIA, Apr 17: Cultivation of sunflower has gained popularity in Kushtia and the adjoining districts as farmers of this region are getting huge benefit from this cash crop.

About six hundred hectares of land were brought under sunflower cultivation in 10 south western districts of the country this season to meet the demand of cooking oil. The districts are Jhenidah, Jessore, Magura, Narail, Khulna, Bagerhat, Satkhira, Kushtia, Chuadanga and Meherpur. According to Agricultural Extension Department (AED) 7 hundred 14 demonstration plots have been readied and concerned farmers were given training for cultivation of the crop.

451 expelled from Pabna

From Our Correspondent  
 PABNA, Apr 17: Out of the total number of SSC examinees who appeared in the just concluded SSC examination held under the Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education, Rajshahi from different centres of Pabna district, a record number of 451 candidates, both male and female, were expelled for adopting unfair means.

The only exception was the centre of Pabna Cadet College from where no examinee was expelled.

Gamblers arrested

MYMENSINGH, Apr 17: The Detective Branch (DB) of police of the district arrested six gamblers from a residential hotel here recently.

Acting on information DB police raided the hotel namely Progoti Guest House and arrested Habibur Rahman, Subhash, Jahangir Masud, Sujoy Sarker, Ahmed Ali and Kabir Ahmed when they were gambling. Police also arrested Irin Begum, 21, a gay girl from the hotel in the raid.

Chairman's house attacked

JHALAKATI, Apr 17: A gang of terrorists attacked the residence of the Poursava chairman on Tuesday, reports APB.

The attackers fired shots, blasted crackers and torched the drawing room of the residence of Belayet Hossain, also acting president of the district Awami League. They retreated following resistance by neighbours.

Belayet, at a press conference at the Poursava auditorium in the evening, said that the armed hoodlums swooped on his house at about 3:30 am as he obstructed their terrorist activities.

Hartal observed

LALMONIRHAT, Apr 17: Local people packed by an opposition political party enforced a 12 hour shutdown at a big rural bazaar in sadar thana Wednesday demanding "illegal leasing" of the weekly fair (market), reports APB.

The strike was described as the first of a 'Year-long weekly shutdown' at the market spearheaded by former leaseholder and district BNP leader Asadul Habib Dulu. People of the locality spent the first day of the Bangla new year amid tension centering the "hartal".

Protesters brought out processions, held rallies and put barricades on roads during the hartal hours. More than a thousand women led by Barobari UP member Julekha Begum held a protest rally in Barobari Bazar area.

One beaten to death

BHERAMARA, Apr 17: One old woman was allegedly beaten to death by some miscreants at Radhanagar under Kumarkhali thana on Saturday last. The victim was identified as Shakhina Begum, 70, reports BSS.

The body was sent to Kushtia sadar hospital for autopsy. A case was lodged with Kumarkhali police station in this connection. No arrest has, so far, been made.

Pahela Baishakh observed

KISHOREGANJ, Apr 17: Bangla new year was observed here in a befitting manner in the district as elsewhere in the country, reports BSS.

Baishakhi Mela was held at different places of the district. The biggest mela was held at village Kurigaon under Katladi thana.

Earthen products and products of bamboo, cane and iron, kinds of sweets were displayed and sold in the mela. The main attraction was circus, Besides, dolls' dance, oxen fight, bullocks race, lathi khela and ha-du-du were also arranged. Different socio-cultural organisations arranged elaborate programmes to observe the day. The programmes included jatra, jarigan and drama in the open field. Businessmen observed 'Hal-Khata' programme.

Review meeting

KISHOREGANJ, Apr 17: The monthly review meeting of Kishoreganj district administration for the month of March was held at the conference room of the Deputy Commissioner recently, reports BSS.

The meeting was presided over by the Deputy Commissioner AMM Farhad.

Matters relating to law and order in the district were discussed in the meeting.

Bumper crop expected

MADARIPUR, Apr 17: The Agriculture Extension Department (AED) Madaripur district has taken up a special programme for IRI-Boro cultivation in the current season to recoup the losses incurred in the last transplanted Aman crops, reports BSS.

A total of 24,000 hectares in addition to previous 36,740 hectares have been brought under IRI-Boro cultivation under the programme.

Three public sector-AED, PDB and PBS have provided their support to the growers for cultivation under the programme, with their institutional support. The growers are expecting a bumper crop this season to recoup the losses incurred in the last Aman crop.

Visits renovation works

RANGAMATI, Apr 17: Minister for Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs Kalparanjan Chakma visited the renovation work of the temporary office the Chittagong Hill Tracts Regional Council here, reports BSS.

He also visited the repair works of the residence of the chairman of the council.



MYMENSINGH: A pitiable condition of the river 'Khiru' in Bhaluka thana here. The river has been turned into a farm land now. — Star photo

Siltation hampers navigation in Mymensingh

From Our Correspondent  
 MYMENSINGH, Apr 17: Navigation is being hampered seriously due to abnormal fall in water level of the river Old Brahmaputra and other rivers of the district.

Siltation in the river Old Brahmaputra and other rivers here have created immense sufferings to the people who travel by riverine transports. As navigation along different river routes has been hampered along various river routes, many small businessmen have already closed down their business establishments and many ferry ghat labourers are out of job now.

The travelling cost of common people have increased sharply due to massive siltation in river beds.

People are suffering a lot who travel from Bhaluka thana to Trishal thana through river Khiru. Now they can not travel at many palces the river as those are dried up totally turning the river bed into 'Boro' paddy fields.

Md Kala Mia, a passenger of a particular river route told this correspondent at Kachari Ferry Ghat that due to siltation the movement of small ferry boats have stopped. Many boatmen are now leading a sub-human life due to siltation, he said.

As there is no dredging activities for a long time, silts which have been dumped in river beds have created shoals at many places along the river Brahmaputra river.



GAIBANDHA: Train journey has become hazardous along Santahar-Lalmonirhat section now. Photo shows a local train being run overloaded with passengers and goods in this section. — Star photo

Salinity in water increases in S-region

From Aroop Talukdar  
 BARISAL, Apr 17: The vast coastal region in the southern districts is facing a serious environmental degradation for the last few years.

Salinity in water has increased by about 20 per cent during the period.

As a result several thousand acres of croplands are losing fertility in this region.

The environmental degradation is visible in a huge area inside the mainland. Even the normal tides in the major rivers have changed its speed causing emergence of numerous shoals in this region.

According to Abdul Aziz, Senior Scientific Officer, Soil Resource Development Institute (SRDI), salinity in water has increased alarmingly now in some major rivers than the previous years.

According to the survey report of SRDI, ratio of presence of salinity in the river water is much higher in comparison to the previous years. At Bhola ferryghat point salinity was 0.65 DS in 1998. Now salinity has been increased to 3.25 DS (Decimans per metre of water).

This electric conductivity (EC) rate of salinity, according to them, is alarming for the soil of cropland.

Salinity below 0.75 DS is safe, they said, while more than 0.75 to 3.00 DS (480-1920 PPM) is unsafe and above 3.00 DS is most unsafe and harmful for soil.

The survey report of the recent time categorically stated that salinity seemed to be much higher at the Meghna estuary than before due to absence of rainfall in the upstreams for the last four months. This situation may bring long term fertility problems on the cropland. The recent survey report of SRDI also feared that Boro production may be seriously hampered if rainfall is delayed for more than two weeks. The environmental experts also considered the drought situation in six districts under Barisal division including five districts in greater Faridpur region as alarming.

A Forest Department source said, the present drought situation is being aggravated. Such a situation poses a serious threat to the coastal greenbelt programmes in the vast coastal region.

A BRRI official here said, production of 12 varieties of rice will be hampered greatly due to the drought. Boro production may decline from 20 to 30 per cent while the output of Rabi crops may decline by 50 per cent if this situation prevails for more than two weeks more.

23 more police outposts in Jhenidah soon

From Our Correspondent  
 JHENIDAH, Apr 17: To improve the law and order situation of the district, the government will establish 23 more outposts of police in all the six thanas here.

Preparations have been made to establish the outposts. According to police sources, the outposts will be constructed at Dakbanga, Bazar Gopalpur, Narikelbaria, Chandipur and Katlamari in Jhenidah sadar thana. Seikhpara, Char malithia and Hatfajilpur in Saikupa thana. Chharpura, Rishkhali, Bhaina and Bhabanipur in Harinakundu thana. Kola, Tattipur, Subarnasara and Barobazar in Kaliganj thana. Suddapur, Talsa and Gurpara in Kotchandpur thana and Gurdah, Dattanagar and Bhairaba in Mohespur thana of the district.

A highly placed police officer told this correspondent that in each outpost there will be one Sub-Inspector (SI), one Assistant Sub-Inspector (ASI) and 30 constables.

Superintendent of Police (SP) of Jhenidah said that arrangements have been made to select the sites. The existing number of outposts here is four. SP said.

Anniversary of birth of Rabidas

From A Correspondent  
 GAZIPUR, Apr 17: The Rabidas community observed the 108th anniversary of birth of Dr B R Ambedkar on April 14 in a befitting manner.

A meeting was held on the occasion which was presided over by Ashpuran Rabidas, Director of Rabidas Mission was attended, among others, by Kanailal Rabidas Mohanta, Director General of Bangladesh Guru Rabidas Mission as the chief guest. The speakers dwelt at length on the life and achievements of Dr Ambedkar and urged the members of the community to follow the ideals of the great leader. They stressed the need for education of every individual for a better future of the community itself as well as the nation at large.

Dr Ambedkar belonged to the Rabidas community of the Indian sub-continent. The greater Hindu community was ridden with caste system. Rabidas belonging to the lower caste were oppressed by the upper class.

Police constable killed in B'baria road accident

From Our Correspondent  
 BRAHMANBARIA, Apr 17: One police constable was killed and eight others including Officer-in-Charge (OC) of Sadar thana Md Mostafa Kamal and the ASP, Abdul Kashem, were injured in a road accident when their police van turned turtle near Kuttapara bus stand on Dhaka-Sylhet highway in Saroil thana at around 1:30 am on Sunday.

According to police sources, the van was on way to Brahmanbaria sadar thana when a speeding truck was coming.

The driver of the van, in order to save themselves, left the carpeted road swiftly. As a result the van turned turtle leaving one person killed and eight others injured.

The dead body was identified as police constable Abul Hashem-405 and the injured persons were constable Fazlul Haq-600, constable Dawlat-708, constable Abul Kasem-268, constable Abul Khair-809, driver of the van, constable Nazrul Islam-813, constable Fazlul Haq-483, ASP Circle Abul Kasem Bepary and OC Mustafa Kamal, and Sheras-595 constable.

Brick-kilns polluting environment in Natore

NATORE, Apr 17: Destruction of soil fertility and damaging of environment continue unabated by sprawling brick-fields in the country's northern region, reports UNB.

Informed sources said at least five lakh acres of land in this region have already become completely barren and another 10 lakh are in the process because of these brick-fields.

On average, every kiln requires three to five acres of lands which needs to be shifted after two to three years leaving the land unusable.

According to an unofficial source, there are at least 3,500 brick-kilns in 16 districts of the region, most of which have been set up ignoring relevant rules of the Department of Environment (DOE). The owners are using firewood in these kilns unabated.

Due to absence of specific rule, the brick traders are setting up brick-kilns wherever they like, thus damaging the environment.

Agriculture Extension Department informed that normal growth of any plant is stunted in the areas dominated by brick kilns even 15 to 20 years after the closure of the kilns.

A DOE official told that the brickfields are being set up in the northern region without clearance from them as required by the law.

Smoke emitting from these brickfields caused serious air pollution particularly in the dry season, he said confessing that the department had a little control over the operation of the brickfields.

The owners and managers of these kilns come to them only if the Deputy Commissioner, the licensing authority, ask them to obtain clearance from DOE, he said preferring anonymity.

The official further said that the compliance of the owners and operators with the environmental guidelines depends on the Deputy Commissioners.

DOE official source said although there is a specific order to stop issuing license and renewing those in case of brick-fields which fail to take environmental clearance from DOE, the government directive is not being implemented properly.

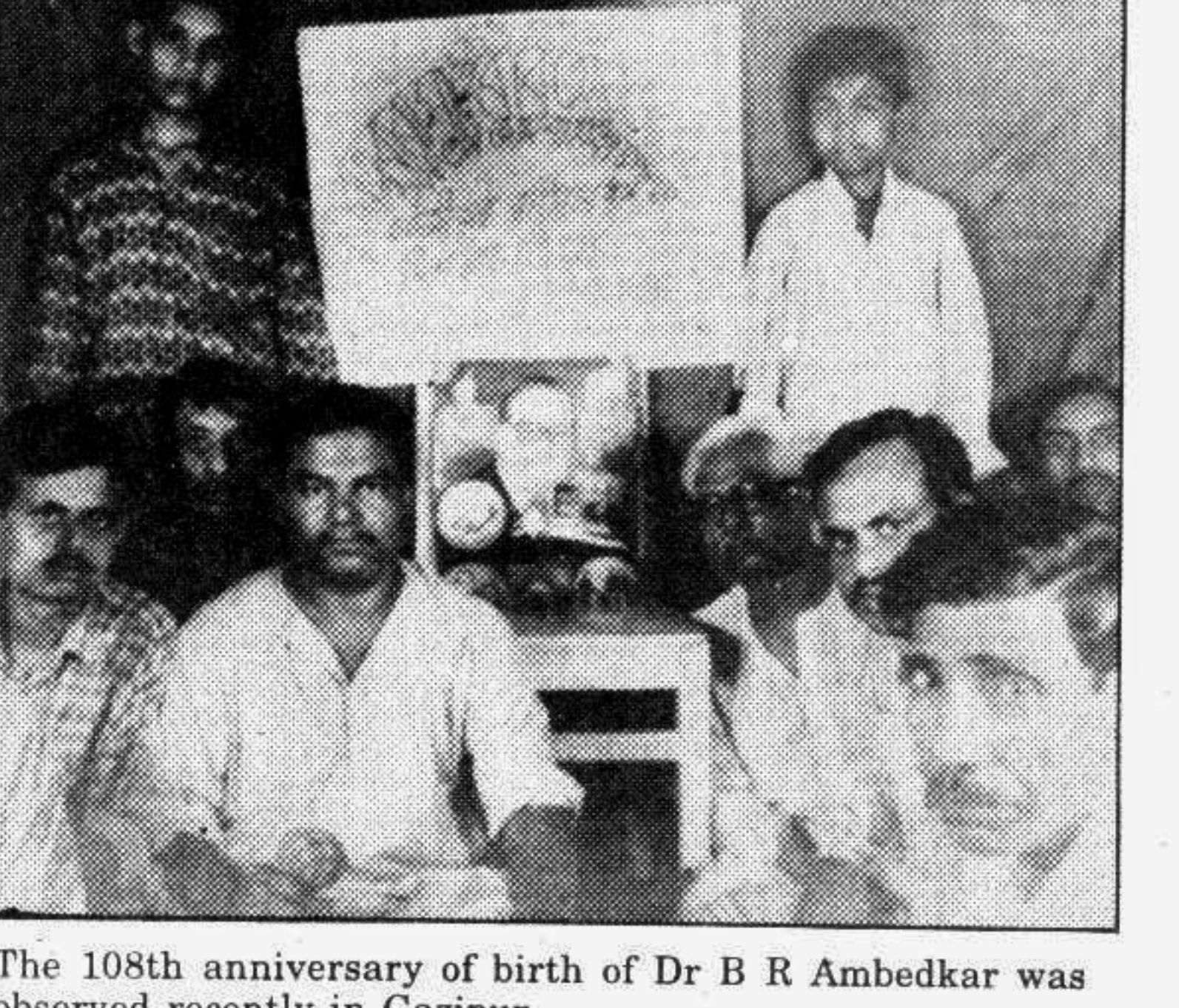
Last year, prolonged floods and rains have affected the production of brick. So the price of bricks is high in the market during the current season increasing the trend of setting up new brickfields.

One thousand first class brick is being sold at Tk 2,300 to 2,500 compared to Tk 2,000 to 2,200 last year.

Golum Sarwar, a prominent brick businessman in Natore, said almost all the brickfields of this region use coal and wood.

He said environmental degradation might be reduced if the fields use gas instead of coal and wood. But gas supply has not been given in the region so far.

Experts said people living in the areas adjacent to the brickfields suffer respiratory problems, heart diseases and eye-sore. These problems could be avoided by setting up these factories at marshy lands and deserted areas, they observed.



The 108th anniversary of birth of Dr B R Ambedkar was observed recently in Gazipur. — Star photo

Abductions rampant in coastal areas of 2 dists

KHULNA, Apr 17: The people in the coastal areas of Satkhira and Khulna districts across the Sundarbans have been passing their days under constant threat of being abducted at any time, reports UNB.

Indian muggers as well as local miscreants kidnapped at least 100 people at gunpoint from their boats and trawlers during the months of March only, said the local sources.

The criminals even picked up people from their houses in coastal villages for ransom.

Last week, a renowned Chairman of Burigoini union of Shyamnagar thana, Shohrab Hossain, was abducted from his house by an organised gang demanding Tk six lakh from him. Wife of another UP Chairman Entaj Ali was kidnapped from the house demanding Tk four lakh.

Every night, pirates pick up the shrimp fry collectors from the rivers and tributaries inside the Sundarbans for ransom.

About one lakh people, including many females, directly live on catching shrimp fry from canals and rivers of the Sundarbans. They have been passing their days under constant fear of being picked up by the gangs.

A shrimp catcher in Koikhal of Shyamnagar thana, Abdul Kader alleged that some local criminals in connivance with Indian nationals kidnap the catchers and release them after forcibly grabbing handsome amount from them or from their relatives.

If somebody failed to meet their demand, they were left dead or tortured brutally, he said.

In the first week of the month, two people — Abdul Azia and Sukur Ali of Taranjpur village in Shyamnagar thana — were killed by the abductors swooping at their trawler in the river Mamunda in the Sundarbans. Four people suffered bullet injuries during the incident.

The abductors also picked up four other people from the boat during the attack. These people are still missing.

The body of unidentified young girl was recovered from Horinagar Bazar, located on the bank of the river Mota on April 8.

Witnesses said a group of assalants boarding on a micro bus left the body near a temple adjoining to the bazar. Brutal marks of sharp weapons were inflicted on the body. Police suspected that she was gang raped and later chopped to death.

A source preferring anonymity said he rescued some people by paying ransom to Litu, a top terror of Khulna city and the supporter of local Awami League.

Like other groups, Litu group kidnap people and releases them in lieu of money, the source said.

Valuables worth Tk 20 lakh gutted

From Staff Correspondent  
 SYLHET, Apr 17: A devastating fire caused damage to valuables worth Taka 20 lakh at the Govindaganj bazaar, an important commercial centre of Chhatak thana in Sunamganj on Wednesday morning.

The fire originated from a grocery shop at the bazar which spread to the adjoining shops sharply. But, the loss was lesser due to a storm and rains. Local people informed, Fire brigade team from Sylhet reached the spot within an hour and brought it under control.

The incident might have been caused by short circuit of electric line, local people said.

However, Selim Uddin, owner of Renu Furniture House through a written petition demanded for an enquiry into the incident and alleged that a group of miscreants set his shop on fire as a sequel to a previous enmity.

The leaders of Greater Sylhet Ganadabi Parishad have demanded compensation for the victims.



SYLHET: British MP Oona King speaking recently at a reception at Bangladesh Overseas Centre here. Syeda Zubunnissa Haque MP, also spoke on the occasion. The British MP was on a two-day tour here. — Star photo

Renovation of Queen Bhawani's palace sought

From Anwar Ali  
 NATORE, Apr 17: The Princess of the Royal family of Natore has urged the local administration as well as the government to renovate the palace of Queen Bhawani immediately.

The Princess who visited the palace on April 11 also urged to utilise the relics of history for the welfare of people.

She told, the palace should be restored as it was three centuries ago and a library or a research museum can be built here.

King or queens are short lived, but their works remain alive.

The Princess is Shuvasree Bagchi.

The 70-year old pretty Shuvasree is one of the two living figures among the seventh generation of Queen Bhawani who ruled half of the then Bengal for 54 years between 1748 and 1802 AD.

She was also the grand daughter of the Zamindar of Natore and friend of poet Rabindranath Tagore, Moharaja Jagadinadra Nath Roy and daughter of the last zamindar of Natore Jogindranath Roy.

Jogindranath and his wife Indramati Devi had two sons—Joyanamat and Indrajit and two daughters—Shuvasree and Joyasree.

The two sons are now dead while Shuvasree and Joyasree have been residing at 'Natore House' situated at 6 Sarat Bose Road in Calcutta.

Shuvasree came here to visit Bangladesh.

She was accompanied by her friend Pushpa Nangpal with whom the princess had 50-year old friendship.

Shuvasree was accorded a warm reception by the people of Natore. Hundreds of people from all walks of life rushed to have a glance of the daughter of Maharaja TN Roy of Natore.

Hindu women, in particular paid respect to her by bowing down at her feet.

During her full day long programme in Natore, Shuvasree visited Joy Kali temple at Lalabazar area in the town, the palace of Queen Bhawani, Moharaja Jagadinadranath High School, Shamundar temple and Uttara Ganobhavan.

When Shuvasree, reached at the Queen Bhawani palace at the outskirts of the town, she told The Daily Star that she had been happy and feeling comfortable with the people of Natore after 58 years. She said that she could not even imagine of so many people who came to see her.

She first prayed for welfare of the people of Natore at Shamundar Kali Temple which was housed inside the palace. Then she walked around the huge palace built 300 years back on 50.42 acres of land. Many people along with the local people mostly the older ones followed her from behind.

Shuvasree was looking on some buildings and narrating the special events from her memory. All who accompanied her appreciated her memory. At the age of 12 years, she first visited the palace.

Smiling Shuvasree looked very concerned when she was visited the Queen Bhawani's palace. This in now lying uncared.

Later on at night when she was exchanging views with the local press, shuvasree Bagchi said, "It was much painful for me to see the palace of my ancestors which turned into ruins."

Earlier in the evening, Shuvasree attended a meeting at Joy Kali temple to condole the death of Natore Chhotu Tara's Son Tara Devi who died on March 23 in Calcutta at the age of 96.

Shuvasree and her friend Puspa left Natore on April 12 for Calcutta via Dhaka.



Shuvasree Bagchi, granddaughter of Queen Bhawani, in front of Queen Bhawani palace. — Star photo