

Outgoing French envoy calls on President

The outgoing ambassador of France to Bangladesh Mrs Renee Veyret made a farewell call on President Shahabuddin Ahmed at Bangabhaban yesterday, reports BSS.

President Shahabuddin said Bangladesh and France enjoyed excellent bilateral relations which had developed over the years.

He appreciated the valuable contribution of the ambassador in promoting bilateral relations, especially in the field of trade and culture.

He recalled with gratitude the support of the people of France during the liberation War of Bangladesh and said that Dhaka considered France as its important development and trade partner.

The President expressed the view that trade flows between the two countries had increased significantly.

He wished her good health and a happy life.

Mrs Veyret thanked the President for receiving her. She also thanked the President, the government and the people of Bangladesh for extending sincere cooperation in the discharge of her duties during her tenure.

She said that she was going home with sweet memories of the warm hospitality of the people of Bangladesh.

Man mugged of Tk one lakh at Narayanganj

By Staff Correspondent
Muggers snatched Tk one lakh in cash from a businessman at Chashara in Narayanganj yesterday.

The injured was identified as Anisur Rahman, 52, a resident of Chashara under Fatullah thana, hospital sources said. Anisur was admitted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital with stab wounds on his chest.

The incident took place while Anisur was returning home on foot from Chashara Bazar after drawing the cash from a bank at about 10:30 am, sources said.

Wielding knives the gang of four muggers intercepted Anisur and asked him to hand over the cash to them. Following refusal of the businessman the gang stabbed him on his chest and flee with the bag, sources said.

Mohakal Natya Sampradaya completes 16 years

Mohakal Natya Sampradaya, a theatre group, has celebrated the 16th anniversary of its foundation in the city in a befitting manner, a press release said, reports BSS.

A discussion and a cultural function were held at Dhaka University Central Student Union building on Wednesday marking the anniversary.

Presided over by Saiful Islam Mahmood, the meeting was addressed, among others, by Zahid Hasana Afzal Husain, Mahbubur Rahman, Lutfur Rahman, Nahid Hasan, Shahnewas and M A Azad.

Seminar on computers held at DU

By DU Correspondent

A seminar on 'Application and Influence of Computer: 21st Century' was held at the Shamshad Hall of Dhaka University yesterday afternoon.

Obaidul Kader, State Minister for Youth, Sports and Cultural Affairs was present at the programme as the chief guest and inaugurated computer training course at the hall.

Prof AK Azad Chowdhury, Vice Chancellor of the university and hall provost Sultana Shafee were present at the occasion as special guests.

Organised by the hall unit of Dhaka University Students' Computer Association (DUSCA), the programme was also addressed, among others, by Prof Md Lutfur Rahman, Dr Md Alamgir Hossain, Bahadur Bepari, Khairuzzaman Chowdhury, Uzzal Acharjee and Chandana Das.

Seminar on accountability of newspaper held

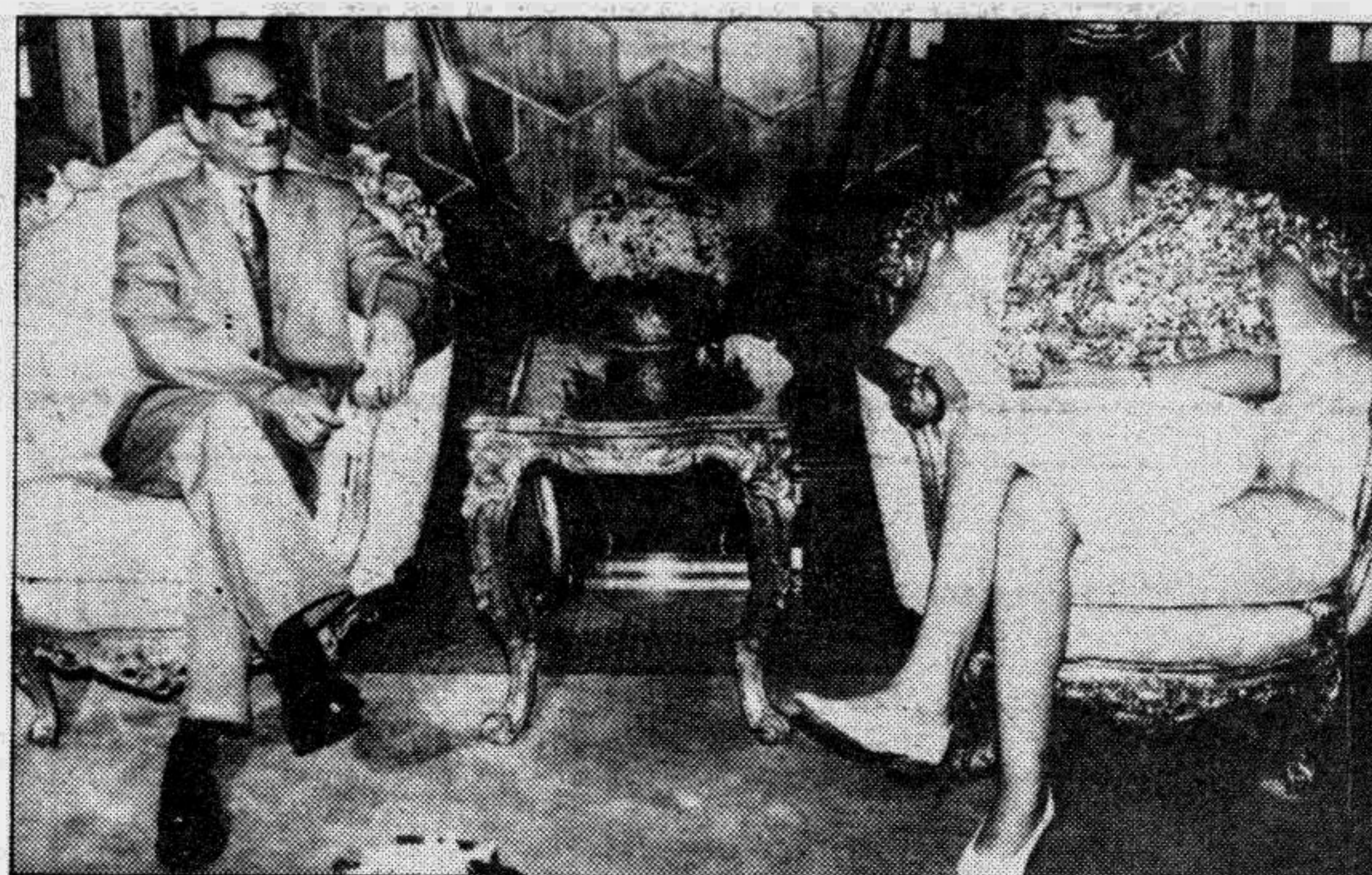
Speakers at a seminar on accountability of newspapers yesterday emphasised on the need for ensuring freedom of the press to protect the right to information of people and to institutionalise democracy in the country, reports BSS.

Presided over by the Chairman of Press Institute of Bangladesh (PIB) Advocate Gaziul Haque, it was also addressed by Dr Kamal Hossain, A B Musa, Rashid Khan Menon, Rahat Khan, AMM Mufazzel, Mohiuddin Ahmed, MR Akhter Mukul, Hasan Shahriar, Santosh Gupta, Motiur Rahman Chowdhury, Iqbal Sobhan Chowdhury, Kamal Lohani, Justice Habibur Rahman Khan and Justice K M Sobhan.

The key-note paper was presented by Dhaka Bureau Chief of Associated Press Farid Hossain and moderated by Muhammad Jahangir. PIB Director General Dr Sheikh Abdus Salam gave the address of welcome.

Dr Kamal said press should be free except during the wartime. He said crisis of enforcement of law is much deeper than the crisis of law and Sections 501, 502 and 503 of Bangladesh Penal Code should be repealed as those were being misused by the parties concerned.

ABM Musa said steps should be taken to stop the misuse of those sections.



Outgoing French Ambassador in Bangladesh Renee Veyret made a farewell call on President Shahabuddin Ahmed at the Bangabhaban yesterday. — PID photo

WFP launches VGD programme for 5 lakh poor women

State Minister for Women and Children Affairs Prof Zinnatun Nessa Talukder in the city yesterday formally made the launching ceremony of the new 18-month cycle of the Vulnerable Groups Development (VGD) programme saying it will help the poor women to come out of the vicious circle of extreme poverty, reports BSS.

She said the government has taken various steps to make the programme more development oriented. In this context, she also lauded the WFP for its food assistance provided to the government for implementation of various poverty alleviation programmes.

Dr Werner Kiene, Country Representative of WFP in his presentation explained the new concept of food assistance as a tool for 'enabling development' emerging in a world wide context.

He pointed out that the 30-million ultra-poor people in Bangladesh, who consume less than 1800 kilo-calorie a day, are not yet a part of the mainstream development process. They deserve support for them and for their children.

Referring to the role of food assistance, Dr Kiene noted that food assistance through the VGD programme enables these poor women to graduate to a level from where they can look for other development opportunities.

Sixty officials from different government agencies, NGOs, bilateral donors and WFP including ex-VGD beneficiaries, female Union Parishad members participated in the launching session of the VGD programme.

In a discussion session chaired by AKM Khairul Alam, Joint Chief of Economic Relations Department (ERD), a number of presentations were made focusing on new initiatives of the VGD programme. Those who made the presentations include Director General of the Department of Women Affairs, Director General of Directorate of Relief and Rehabilitation, Deputy Project Director of Bangladesh Integrated Nutrition Project, Deputy Executive Director of BRAC and Katrin Vonder Mosel, Head of VGD Section of WFP.

The VGD programme provides food assistance of 30 kg of wheat to the poor women over a period of 18 months. The beneficiaries will also receive training in income-generating activities, awareness raising on legal rights, health and nutrition issues and credit. After the 18-month food support period, women will become members of NGOs and thereby will get further support to improve their socio-economic condition in a sustainable way.

Started in 1975 as a relief intervention, the programme has shifted its focus over the course of the last years from relief to development. The launching ceremony highlighted its development orientation, its focus on support to the ultra-poor. A total of 8,336,000 poor women received food assistance since 1974 under this programme.

Employees in the Secretariat brought out a procession on the Secretariat premises in support of their various demands yesterday. — Star photo

Juveniles and youths speak up about their problems

Juveniles and youths between the age group of 12 and 20 yesterday spoke up about the challenges they face in everyday life. They also asked different sections of society as to why they were being deprived of their rights and wanted to know about steps taken by the government to solve the problems, reports UNB.

"Why does weddings of girls take place under the age group of 18 despite legal bar... why is dowry demanded at weddings?" asked a girl.

Salma Akhtar was among some 150 who, from different parts of the country, joined a daylong workshop at LGED Bhawan in the capital to tell and share their stories.

They raised questions regarding using of juveniles and youths for serving the interest of the politicians, opportunity for further education after class V, police action against street children, child rape and trafficking and standard differences between the schools in urban and rural areas.

Problems regarding the acceptability of illegitimate children also came up in the group-based discussion on 'What Challenges We Face'.

UNICEF organised the workshop to form a Youth Leadership Forum in Bangladesh aimed at facilitating the juveniles and the youths to give leadership in the fields of health, environmental and social affairs, child labour and other youth-related activities.

It is aimed at creating an alliance of the youth leaders to provide support to the national and international initiatives for them.

The participants came from scouts, girl guides, women's organisations like Naripakkha, drama groups, NGOs, media and civil-service groups.

Moderated by The Daily Star Editor Mahfuz Anam, Prof Mozaffar Ahmed of Dhaka University, Employers Union President Rokeya Rahman, chief of education in UNICEF James Jenny and acid survivor Bina Akhtar were among the general secretary, Arif Quadri, the joint secretary, ABM Taslim Uddin, as the treasurer, Musarrat H Khan, Public Relations Secretary, Lubna Yasim, cultural secretary and Nurul Amin Jewel as the games secretary. Seven other members of the committee are — Md Muqtadir Billah, Asirul Haque, Mujibur Rahman, Rawnaq Ara Ahmed, Sakawat Ahmed, Md Nasim Gawhar, Sazzad Hossain.

Dr Kamal Hossain speaking at a seminar on 'Accountability in Newspaper' organised by the Press Institute of Bangladesh (PIB) in the city yesterday. Also seen in the picture from (L to R) Advocate Gaziul Haq, Director General of PIB, Dr Sheikh Abdus Salam Farid Hossain and Muhammad Jahangir.

Dacoity at a city house

By Staff Correspondent

A gang of dacoits looted foreign currency, gold ornaments and other valuables worth about Tk six lakh from a house at Kathaltala of East Monipur in the city in the early hours yesterday, police said.

The gang numbering about ten entered the house of one Osman Gani by breaking open the door at around 3.45 am.

According to police, the gang wearing masks tied up the family members and took the key of almirah and looted US\$5000, 2.5 tolas of gold ornaments, Prize Bond worth Tk 70 thousand, Tk 20 thousand in cash and other valuables from the house.

Police quoting the FIR said that the landlady recognised one of the gang members when he opened his mask during the looting of valuables.

According to police the gang is said to be members of Jangia party, a party that commits crimes wearing only underwear.

BNP plans

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local issues.

Sources said Begum Zia advised the local leaders to take preparation for contesting the polls, form BNP committees at grassroots level and for polling centres, alongside gearing up party activities. She also suggested them to keep touch with central leaders and make success all political programmes of the party. She also urged them to remain alert against preparation of 'fake' voter list and ID cards.

Referring to alleged harassment, she said the government has resorted to 'unprecedented repressive measures' on opposition BNP throughout the country. 'Not a single BNP man is free from government's harassment. BNP is deep in politics under an adverse political situation created by the ruling party'.

She said BNP is an election-oriented party and always wants to participate in election. BNP will participate in the upazila and city corporation elections if the government fulfils its demands which include resignation of the Chief Election Commissioner, recasting of the Election Commission, introduction of voter ID card, release of all opposition leaders and workers and withdrawal of 'false' cases, she told the local leaders.

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Bold and decisive move

From Page 1

public eye. Was that the intention? We are forced to think yes.

The Rajuk's plot allotment case was so fundamentally flawed, so full of irregularities, so thoroughly devoid of ethics and norms, so blatantly partisan that the members of the public became outraged and totally disillusioned by the absolute lack of morality that this case exemplified. In the last few days since its surreptitious announcement in the paper owned by a ruling party MP a storm of anger and frustration swept through the public which had all but destroyed the credibility of the government. It stood out as the most blatant and shameless use of governmental power to serve selfish and partisan interest.

A disturbing element of this land scam is that there is ample evidence to suggest that the list was prepared by a coterie located in the Prime Minister's office with the active connivance of the works minister himself, who did not hesitate to serve himself first, and had the temerity to say that 'I got the plot as a freedom fighter and not as a minister', as if there was no warrier and deserving freedom fighter eligible for it.

Imagine what is likely to be the image of this government if all other ministers — like the works minister — started serving themselves first on the plea that they are freedom fighters. Didn't the works minister realise that holding a public office is like holding a public trust? Doesn't he know that a minimum adherence to ethical norms forbids a minister to pass an order that makes himself a beneficiary? He has humiliated the high office he holds and brought disrepute to the cabinet as a whole. If this is the level of his judgement and the standard of his ethics then can he ever expect to enjoy public confidence about his actions? The role of this coterie and that of the minister along with a few officials in the

works' ministry and Rajuk had created what could have become the biggest scandal of Sheikh Hasina's government.

Before the Prime Minister returned and scrapped the Rajuk decision yesterday the most prominent question in the public mind was whether or not the sole purpose of this government was to serve its members and supporters instead of the public? Here again a quote of the works' minister sounded ominous. When asked by the Prothom Alo correspondent about making a 'Awami League Pali (village)' by allotting two thirds of the plots to party people he replied 'I see nothing wrong in it. As Awami League is a party of the people so an Awami Pali will be a people's village.'

To our great relief and happiness Sheikh Hasina did what we had expected of her. However she must now follow through on her excellent first move and take the following actions:

1. Institute a judicial inquiry as to how this list was made and on what basis people were selected and also to set up a clear and transparent policy guideline for future actions of Rajuk;

2. Herself investigate as to what role was played by the works' minister and the officials involved in it;

3. Hold a special inquiry as to the activities of a small number of relatively junior officials at the Prime Minister's office, especially those who stood to benefit from this scam.

We consider the above actions to be the minimum she needs to do to restore some semblance of public confidence in her government, which she will be wise to believe, had been greatly affected by this whole sordid episode. The Prime Minister must recall Bangladesh's own statement in which he said in mid '74 'whichever way I look I see myself surrounded by chatter dal (self servers)'. Today we think a new 'chatter dal' is surrounding you.

These people have no interest other than their own in

ing over 1500 acres of crop land. A 50-60 feet long section of an embankment in the Fakirni river was damaged at Nurulabad union in Manda inundating 12 villages.

Some unidentified people cut the embankment of Atrai at Titpara area of Tetulia union leaving vast areas in three unions flooded.

The Atrai flowing 56 cm above the danger level at Mohadevpur while the water level of Chhoto Jamuna remained unchanged.

The rushing waters from the Chhoto Jamuna flooded parts of Naogaon town at Dal Patti, Kat Hatti, Bangabaria and the premises of the old court building.

In Rajshahi the erosion by the Padma continued unabated at Shreerampur, Shimlapark, Dargapara, Alupatti, Talaimari and Shahpur areas near the Rajshahi city protection embankment.

Comilla
BSS said that Law Minister Abdul Matin Khasru had expressed 'dissatisfaction' over the 'inefficient' management of the embankment on the Gumti. He directed officials, Wednesday night, to take immediate measures for repair of the major embankment and gear up rescue activities.

UNB said that troops from the army were reinforced at Korpai and Nimsar points at Dhaka-Chittagong highway where locals protested stacking of sandbags at the damaged Korpai culvert. They feared that if the flood water was not allowed a free flow it would submerge their homes.

A Bailey bridge was taken to Korpai to help the smooth flow of traffic on the highway. The floods so far claimed lives of four people and affected 468,000 people, damaged 4,474 homes fully and 17,310 houses partially. A 2.5 km section of the flood protection embankment had been fully damaged and 37 km of it was destroyed, partially. Four bridges and culverts were battered and 41 partly damaged.

Kushtia
Our correspondent said that water level of both the Ganges and Gorai continued to rise inundating fresh areas including crop land affecting over 100,000 people. Three unions of Bheramara and 8 unions of Daulatpur thana were badly affected by the rise in the Ganges.

Erosion
Erosion by the Teesta has taken a serious turn when it devoured some 300 homes in four unions of Gangachara thana of Rangpur leaving about 2,000 people homeless, UNB added.

BSS reported from Chandpur that the Meghna is threatening the Tk 100 crore Chandpur irrigation project with erosion at Haimchar, leaving a million people at risk. The river remained only 50 metres away from the project area as it cut through the area, devouring about 10 km stretch of land, destroying property worth crores of taka.

The government has sanctioned Tk six crore to protect the embankment, the agency said.

Dry fish
From Page 1

dry fish and packaging are yet to be available to the dryers. Nonetheless, the export is growing. From Tk 3 crore 5 lakhs and 47 thousand in 1995-96, it has risen to Tk 7 crore 92 lakhs and 48 thousand in 1996-97 fiscal.

Most of the dry fish went to the Hong Kong, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf sheikhdoms.

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