

News snaps

Training for farmers

JHALAKATI, Jan 11: A three-day training course for farmers was held at the local agriculture office here recently, reports UNB.

Agriculture Extension Department under its southern agriculture development scheme organised the training course. A total of 90 farmers from two thanas — Sadar and Nalchhitu — took part in the course. The participants were imparted training on nutrition ingredients of soil and its management, importance of organic fertiliser and preparation of natural fertiliser.

Man held for killing child

THAKURGAON, Jan 11: Police arrested a man recently on charge of killing his child in Balladangi thana, reports UNB.

Local people and police said Lutfar Rahman of Ratnaki-Kashibari village had an illicit relation with Fatema Begum who gave birth a baby. Lutfar, however, married her following village arbitration. But he used to torture his wife and minor daughter Marina. Subsequently Marina died. Police arrested Lutfar after his wife Fatema lodged a case with the police.

Sapaher Press Club polls

NAOGAON, Jan 11: The election of Sapaher Press Club under Sapaher thana of the district was held here recently, reports BSS.

Mohammad Taslim Uddin and Mohammad Menarul Islam Jiban were elected president and general secretary respectively.

Workshop for physicians

JHALAKATHI, Jan 11: A two-day, workshop for local physicians concluded at the Civil Surgeon's office here recently, reports UNB.

A total of 22 doctors from Sadar, Nalchhitu, Rajapur and Kathalia thanas took part in the workshop organised by Health Directorate in collaboration with UNICEF. The workshop focussed on reaction of arsenic in human body, identification of arsenic affected people and management of arsenic patients.

Scheme for orphans

RAJBARI, Jan 11: A scheme has been taken up to turn the local Shishu Sadan into Shishu Paribar with a view to bringing welfare to the poor orphans in the district, reports UNB.

An amount of Tk 69 lakh has been sanctioned under the annual development programme at the first phase for implementation of the scheme, which will be supervised by the Public Works department. The preliminary works including earth filling and construction of boundary wall will be completed by the current fiscal year, official sources said.

Donation for medical treatment

RANGAMATI, Jan 11: In response to the call to extend financial assistance to the ailing official of the PIB, Rafiqul Islam Nasim, Rangamati Press Club and a local Bangla daily donated Takā ten thousand for the transplantation of his kidneys, reports BSS.

President of Rangamati Press Club and Editor-Publisher of the daily 'Giridarpan', AKM Maksud Ahmed recently sent two bank drafts amounting to Takā five thousand each to Nasim. Both the kidneys of Nasim have been damaged. Doctors advised him immediate transplantation of a kidney for his survival.

Two bridges to be built

RANGPUR, Jan 11: Roads and Highways Department has undertaken a programme to construct two bridges over rivers Gaghot and Manash in Gangachhara thana spending Tk 5.55 crore, reports UNB.

Officials said the department would construct a 306-feet long and 26-feet wide bridge over the Gaghot at a cost of Tk 4.10 crore while a 150-feet long bridge over the Manash costing Tk 1.45 crore. Communications Minister Anwar Hossain Manju laid the foundation stones of the two bridges. Upon completion of the bridges, road communication with remote unions of the thana and the district headquarters will be much easier, the officials said.

Two deer hunters held

SATKHIRA, Jan 11: Officials of the Burigolaini Forests Office under Shyamnagar thana arrested two deer hunters from Sunderban, area and recovered some deer hunting equipment from their possession recently, reports BSS.

The arrested were identified as Jamat Ali Ga. 1, 28, of village Datnekhali and Rafiqul Islam, 20, of village J. dabpur under Shyamnagar thana. The arrested persons were handed over to Shyamnagar thana police. A case was filed with Shyamnagar thana in this connection.

Eye camp

TANGAIL, Jan 11: A total of 90 eye patients were operated upon in a free eye camp which concluded on Pakutiā High School campus under Ghatail thana of the district recently, reports BSS.

The camp was jointly sponsored by Augenliche of Germany and Lions Club of Dhaka. It was reported that the patients were provided free food, medicine and lodging. Dr. Liakat Ali of Lions Hospital, Dhaka led the operation team. Earlier, Lutfar Rahman Khan, MP inaugurated the camp.

Habiganj Press Club polls

HABIGANJ, Jan 11: The election of the Habiganj Press Club was held here recently, reports UNB.

Monsuruddin Ahmed Iqbal (Ittefaq) and Mohammad Fazlur Rahman (Inqilab) were elected president and general secretary respectively of the club for a two-year term (2000-2001). The other office-bearers are: Vice-Presidents-Hafez Siddique Ahmed and Shamim Ahsan, Joint Secretary-Harunur Rashid Chowdhury, Treasurer-Mohammed Nahiz, Cultural Secretary — Shoab Chowdhury, sports Secretary-Tipu Chowdhury, Office Secretary — Narmal Bhattacharja Rinku, and members — Abdul Mannaf, Adv Rahat Chowdhury, Selim Azad, Moulana Nurul Amin, Abdul Barik Laskar and Syed Abdul Mannan.

Social Welfare Day observed

COMILLA, Jan 11: 'Social Welfare Day' was observed in Comilla through different programmes on 2 January, reports BSS.

Inaugurated by A T M Shamsul Haque, Chairman of Public Administration Reforms Commission, the function included a colourful procession and discussion. A colourful procession brought out from Modern Auditorium. A discussion was held in town hall which was presided over by Rokeya Begum, Deputy Director of Social Welfare Department, Mesbaul Alam, Additional Deputy commissioner, was the chief guest. Dr Zobaida Hanna, Assistant Director, Idris Mia, Dr AKM Sallim Abul Hasanat Babul also spoke on the occasion.

Rice, wheat for distressed

DAGERHAT, Jan 11: Government has allocated some 351 mts of rice and the same quantity of wheat for the distressed people ahead of Eid-ul-Fitr, reports UNB.

Distribution of foodgrains among 70,200 distressed families in nine thanas and 702 wards in three pourashabhas of the district began on Friday under special VGF card programme. Each family is receiving 5kg of rice and 5kg of wheat on the occasion of Eid.

Tk 2.96 lakh looted

KHULNA, Jan 11: Burglars broke into a printing press in the city's Iqbal Road and looted Tk 2.96 lakh from its locker on Friday night, reports UNB.

Owner of the firm, Jahan Printing Press located just opposite to the local police station, filed a case.

Woman body recovered

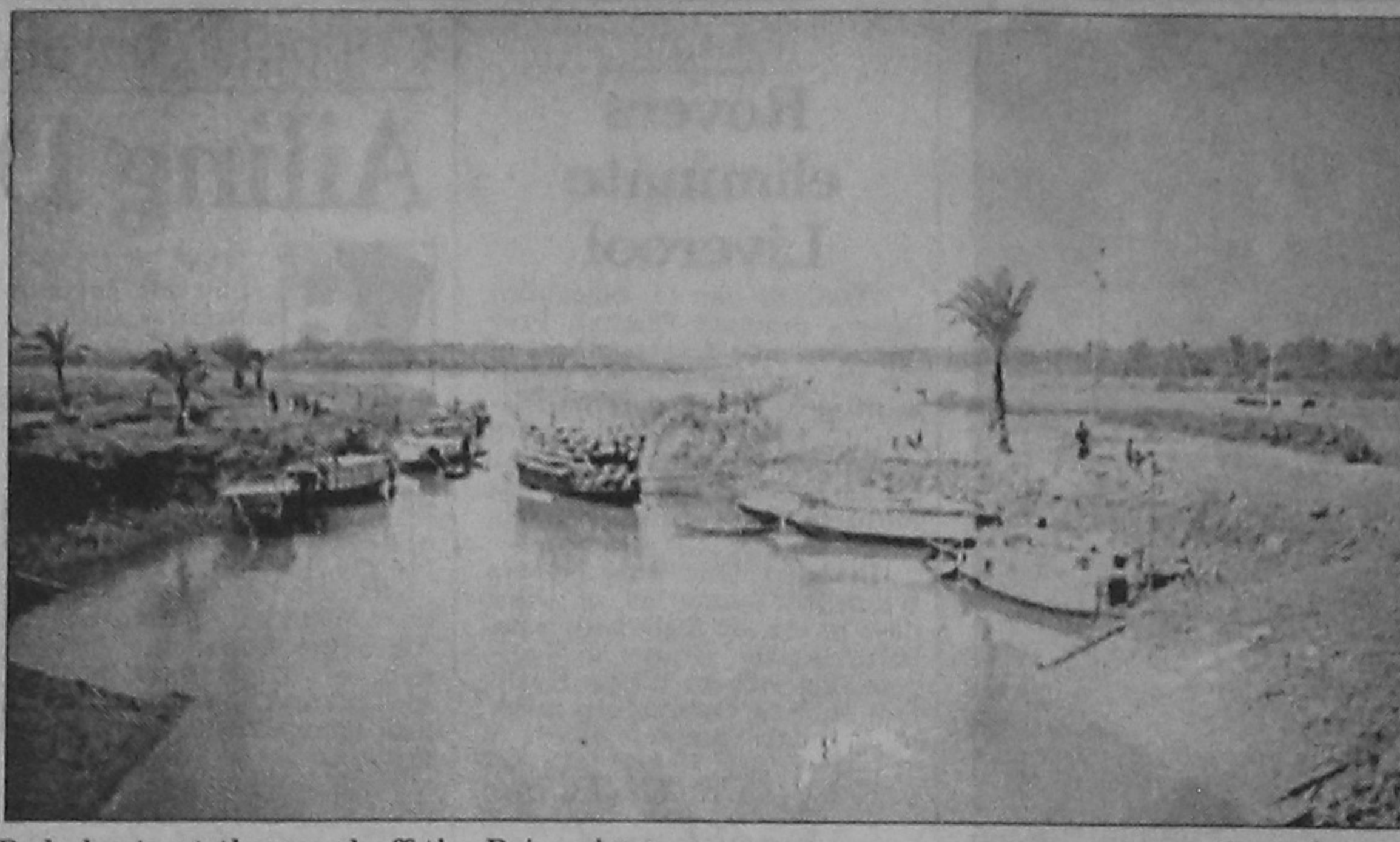
BHERAMARA, Jan 11: Police recovered the body of an unidentified youngwoman aged 22 from the bank of the River Gorai under Kumarkhali thana recently, reports BSS.

The body bore several injury marks. Police sent the body to the Kushthi Sadar Hospital for autopsy and a case was filed with Kumarkhali thana in this connection.

BRCS AGM held

BARISAL, Jan 11: The Annual General Meeting (AGM) of Barisal district unit of Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BRCS) was held here at the unit office premises recently, reports BSS.

Unit Secretary AHM Saleh presented the key note paper. A ten-member unit of BRCS was formed with Mahiuddin Ahmed and Manirul Hasan Khan as president and general secretary respectively. The other committee members: AHM Saleh, Mafizul Islam Jhantu, Syed Anisur Rahman, Talukder, Mohammad Yunus, Sheikh Mobarak Hossain, Abdul Bari, Anisuddin Ahmed Shahin and Shaful Huq Ferdous. It was addressed, among others, by Hemaet Uddin Ahmed and Manirul Hasan Khan.



Bede boats at the canal off the Paira river.

— Star photo

Bedes charm through winter in the south

By Morshed Ali Khan back from Barguna

A thick fog blanketed the picturesque Paira river and the nearby Bandra village few kilometres away from Amtoli thana under Barguna district. Bitter cold of the December morning kept most of the villagers inside their abodes. Many lit fires and sat around it. The morning sun looked like a worthless white bowl shedding a faint light on the nature.

In a small canal near the Paira, 17 well decorated boats anchored in the peaceful surrounding. Some of their occupants sat on the bank and concentrated on repairing fishing nets and traps. The colourful boats represented only a tiny group of the 11,8000 bedes (gypsies) living in boats and trading on snakes) in the country.

Mohammad Legat Ali, the headman of the group, kept busy repairing a fishing net. A tall thin man in his late fifties Legat had caught thousands of venomous snakes in his lifetime from the rural areas and the Sundarbans. Like his forefathers he lived in his boat with

his family that was equipped with a colour television, a VCR and a radio set.

"Our biggest problem is the schooling of the children," Legat complained.

Thousands of bede children cannot avail schooling because nobody has cared for their education," he said.

Legat said some bedes in Dhaka region were given assistance by foreigners to set up a school in a separate boat where teachers respecting the bedes' lifestyle were given employment. The project has worked well but it was yet to reach most of these floating population.

The bedes have a different marriage system. Marriages are held within the community and the man has to pay the bride's parents as per the working ability of the girl in snake charming and selling herbal cures. A good working bride could fetch as much as Tk 30,000 for her parents.

"Why wouldn't the man pay for a wife who could earn up to Tk 500 a day?" asked Legat.

During the peak season

which starts at the end of winter, the bedes are particularly busy catching venomous snakes from different parts of the country. Every 100 venomous snakes they catch, earn the bedes as much as Tk 45,000 from a farm at Savar near Dhaka.

Legat and other bedes of his group never use any trap for catching snakes. They said every place where snakes tread, bear a host of traces. It's the skill and experience of a bede in catching the reptiles that brings him respect among his community. The most ferocious of all the venomous snakes is the one known as *eyeraj*. The bedes said they have to use an umbrella while catching the *eyeraj*, for with the slightest provocation the reptile gets so angry that it almost stands on its tail and pounces on the attacker.

Most of the bedes sell their catches through licensed snake charmers based in the capital or its surrounding areas. During off-season the bedes earn their living by snake charming and selling herbal cures in the villages of Bangladesh.



The headman Legat Ali poses for the photo on top of his floating home that is equipped with a TV, a VCR and a radio set.

— Star photo



A vendor displays winter vegetables at a bazaar in Jamalpur recently. Vegetables start arriving in markets in the month of December, but the prices are abnormally high this year.

— Star photo

Substandard cement floods markets in Natore

NATORE, Jan 11: As substandard cement has flooded markets, consumers here are being deprived of quality cement, reports UNB.

A sample survey of cement bags collected from some traders in district headquarters showed that most of the cement bags contained on an average 47 kg instead of 50 kg.

The low quality brands included Eagle Star, 7-ring, Chinese Eagle, Blue-Star and Chinese Tiger sold at a lower price. It was revealed that the difference of quality cement and substandard cement stands at Tk 35 per bag.

As most of the consumers are not aware of the matter, they buy adulterated and 47-kg cement bags from open markets.

The Weight Department under the Supply and Inspection

Directorate has not been able to stop this malpractice because of "practical pressure."

Generally, the traders are allowed to import cement conforming to BS 12/1978 standard specification set by the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET). The specification, recognised internationally, has also been approved by the BSTI.

Violating the rules, a section dishonest traders bring in substandard cement from India by trains and trucks in collaboration with corrupt Customs personnel showing fake declaration of weight and quality, it was learned.

Though the Customs men test the imported cement with the help of appropriate authorities before clearing consignments at the transit point or port, the adulterated cement

can make its way into the country.

Besides, a section of unscrupulous traders is replacing sub-standard cement in counterfeit bags in a clandestine manner, sources said.

They said the law enforcing agencies are unable to detect the malpractice instantly unless the consumers challenge it.

However, a source of the Department of Public Health and Engineering (DPHE) said laboratory tests allows import and sale of cement up to 23 MPA. Most of the cement being imported and sold in markets remains below this level.

Experts suggested that the government set up a committee at district level to devise ways and means for stopping sale of sub-standard cement to protect to-be-built buildings from certain collapse in future.

State Minister for Communications meets locals

RANGPUR, Jan 11: State Minister for Communications Mohammad Anisul Huq Chowdhury on January 6 separately met the local leaders of Awami League and its front organisations and district level officials here, reports BSS.

He called upon them to help to build a "Sonar Bangla" as dreamt by Bangabandhu.

Leaders of the district Chhatra League, central leader of Chhatra League Shahidur Rahman Dolai and thana Awami League leaders were present on the occasion.

Besides, Bangladesh Medical Association, Rangpur branch, teachers of Carmichael University College and Badarganj Pourashava Implementation Committee have separately congratulated the newly-appointed state minister.

Later, the state minister visited the mazar of Moulana Keramat Ali of Rangpur.

Nat'l Miniature Irrigation Project faces closure

BARISAL, Jan 11: Despite achieving success, the National Miniature Irrigation Development Project is on the verge of closure due to pressure from a vested interest group, sources said, reports UNB.

Agriculture Ministry had undertaken the region-based project in 1991 with the financial assistance from World Bank, CEC and the Bangladesh Government.

Initially, work on the project began by using surface water for the southwest region and underground water for north-east region to provide irrigation facilities.

The project started in 1994 on an experiment basis in the southwest region covering Barisal, Madaripur, Gopalganj, Jhalakathi, Patuakhali and Narail districts.

After June 1998, the government continued to carry out the project with its own fund observing the success of the project.

A total of 62 canals have been re-excavated and 10,604 acres of land have been facilitated by irrigation from 1994 to current fiscal under the project.

But, an influential quarter is trying to close the project to gain self-interest, alleged a source close to the project.

Two murdered in Manikganj

MANIKGANJ, Jan 11: Two people, one of them a woman, were killed in separate incidents in the district recently, reports UNB.

The victims were identified as Afroza, 30, of village Sairia in Singair thana and Modhu Mia, 70, of Haturia village in Daulatpur thana.

Afroza, wife of one Afzal Hossain, was hacked to death allegedly by her brother-in-law in her house following a family feud.

Modhu Mia was beaten to death by his rivals over land dispute.

Another report from Barguna adds: An old woman was strangled by unknown assailants at village Uttar Tiakhali in Amtali thana.

Family sources said Fatema Begum, 60, wife of Anuddin, was killed as she came out of their house to go to the outdoor toilet.

Schoolboys waste time in video game shops

KISHOREGANJ, Jan 11: The mushroom growth of video game shops has become a constant concern for the guardians of school going children in the district, reports UNB.

A large number of schoolboys waste their time and parent's money in the video game shops to the detriment of their education.

More than 15 such shops are being run in this tiny town illegally and most of these shops are located in the vicinity of the educational institutions to allure the schoolboys.

Loan disbursement scheme in districts

MAGURA, Jan 11: Social Welfare Department disbursed over Tk 5.0 lakh interest free loan among 161 distressed people of Sadar thana during the month of December 1999, reports UNB.

Deputy Commissioner of the district formally inaugurated the loan disbursement programme at the thana parishad auditorium on December 25.

The loan recipients will undertake income-generating projects like poultry farming, cattle rearing, small trading and sewing, officials said.

Another report from Netrakona says: Local Youth Development Department has distributed soft-term loan totaling Tk 1.08 crore among unemployed but trained youths of the district.

Officials said 2,855 youths, including girls, from 10 thanas of the district received the loan. The thana-wise breakup of the borrowers: Sadar 349, Barhatta 250, Mohesganj 275, Purbadhala 315, Alpara 230,

Madan 305, Durgapur 219, Kendua 315, Kalmakanda 225 and Khaliazuri 150.

Of the loan recipients, 875 were imparted a three-month training on tailoring.

An official of the department said they also have a plan to impart training to another 3,500 jobless youths in the current fiscal.

Another report from Rajbari says: Bangladesh Rural Development Board (BRDB) under its income generating scheme disbursed a loan of Tk 2.61 crore in the district during the last five months.

Some 4,438 members in four thanas were given the credit to take up income generating schemes like crop farming, small trade, pisciculture, poultry and cattle rearing, food processing, rural transport, cottage industry and pottery.

BRDB has set a target to disburse loan over Tk 7 crore in the district during the current fiscal year.

Events of districts in picture



Rajshahi city mayor Mijanur Rahman addressing the regional assembly of Barebdra Rotaract Club held recently at a community centre in Rajshahi.

—Star photo



Deputy Commissioner of Mymensingh Rafiqul Islam along with other district officials visiting a stall at 'Bijoy Mela' in local Town Hall premises recently.

—Star photo



Prof Banosri Mohathero, author of Human Rights published on the occasion of World Human Rights Day, handing over the book to Salimul Huq Khan, president of Chittagong unit of Bangladesh Society for the Enforcement of Human Rights (BSEHR), at a seminar in Chittagong recently.

—Courtesy: BSEHR



Artistes including renowned singer Mita Huq rendering Tagore songs at Gaibandha Nupur Hall arranged recently by Gaibandha unit of Rabindra Sangeet Parisad.

—Star photo