

18,000 acres of rly land grabbed

NATORE, June 18: Over 18,000 acres of land, owned by Bangladesh Railway's western zone, have been occupied by influential quarters, reports UNB.

According to a survey conducted by the Railway's Estate Division, in 1991-92, the zone once had 37,705 acres of land, which now reduced to 1,940 acres.

The present value of the railway's lost land was said to be Tk 1,500 crore.

The survey showed that railway's moveable property worth about Tk 2 crore were pilfered from its workshop at Sankhasil in Nilphamari at different times.

Besides, some 16,310 acres of land in Rajshahi, Iswardi, Chandra Bhabganj, Santahar, Parbatipur, Bogra and Lalmonirhat have been grabbed by local influential quarters.

The railway authorities also have some 705 acres of land, which have been occupied by various government and semi-government agencies.

Official sources said construction materials of a residential project taken up in 1983 on over 277.50 acres of land here were also stolen after the project was abandoned halfway for lack of fund.

The authorities of the zone, however, filed 292 cases with different courts to recover the occupied lands, but there has been no tangible progress in this regard due to reluctance of the railway's legal advisors.

According to another source, a good number of wagons, passenger coaches and railway engines are lying unused in Iswardi, Santahar, Bogra, Kurigram, Lalmonirhat, Saidpur, Parbatipur, Fakshey and Sirajganj.

Shariatpur, Feni village markets in bad shape

SHARIATPUR, June 18: Almost all the village markets, known as *hat*, in seven upazilas of the district are in a deplorable condition, causing serious inconvenience to the buyers and sellers, reports BSS.

The upazila-wise number of bazaar are: 30 in Sadar, 29 in Chhagalnaiya, 31 in Parshuram, 25 in Dhagonbhuiyan and 28 in Sonagazi upazilas.

According to official source, a sum of about Tk 40 lakhs has been collected as revenue from these markets.

A total of about one crore and 56 lakh Taka has been collected as revenue by leasing out these bazaars in the last 4 years.

There are many problems in these bazaars including shortage of space, lack of proper drainage, lack of latrine and acute shortage of drinking water.

All the bazaars are lying in uncarved position for a long period.

The local administration does not take care of any market but collects lease money every year.

Ammunition recovered

NAOGAON, June 18: An iron-box of ammunition was recovered from Khodrasbati village in Sapahar upazila of the district, reports BSS.

According to police, one Abdus Samad was catching fish with a net at his pond and suddenly he found one iron-box in the net. He informed police station about it.

Sapahar upazila police recovered ammunition from the box.

The recovered ammunition included 89 rifle bullets, 22-rifle bullets, 59 SLR bullets, 10 SLR bullet chargers and 4 SMG bullets.

Highway robberies on rise in N region

NATORE, June 18: At Ten robberies were committed on various highways in northern region during the last month, indicating that law and order situation in the country continues to deteriorate, reports UNB.

Police records showed that 15 passengers were injured and valuables including gold ornaments, worth about Tk 20 lakh looted in the robberies.

The robberies were committed in coaches, trucks, minibuses and private cars on Natore-Nagarbari, Pabna-Iswardi, Kashinathpur-Thampur-Bogra, Natore-Bogra and Natore-Rajshahi highways.

On May 2, armed robbers boarded a Naogaon-bound night coach in the guise of passengers and looted cash and valuables worth of Tk 2 lakh in Sherpur on Sirajganj-Bogra highway.

Seven people, including the

bus driver, were injured as the road pirates beat them up before making off with the booty.

Later on May 13, a band of bandits stabbed a passenger, Abdul Bari Mondal, in a Dhaka-bound night coach on Natore-Bogra highway and looted cash and valuables from the passengers at gunpoint.

On May 28, armed dacoits looted cash and valuables worth about Tk 15 lakh from two night coaches near Atakula on Natore-Nagorbhari highway.

Talking to the UNB correspondent, some bus drivers said that the number of police patrol teams on highways of the region is too adequate to combat the rising trend of road piracy.

They also alleged that a number of vulnerable points on the highways have been identified, but police have not yet taken any step to prevent robberies.

Khas lands under illegal occupation in Laxmipur, Gopalganj districts

NOAKHALI, June 18: Some 3,470 acres of khas land in four upazilas of Laxmipur district went under the grip of illegal occupants, depriving the government of huge revenue earnings, reports UNB.

There have been reports that a section of influential people and their musclemen grabbed vast tracts of khas land, owned by district council, BADC, upazila council and R&H department, in shoal areas of the district.

An official, speaking on condition of anonymity, also acknowledged that a section of senior officials and employees of the departments concerned also grabbed arable lands of the district council and R&H department.

Poor Development Programme (PDP), a non-governmental organisation, in a report said some 20,000 acres of khas land in five shoals of the district have not yet been enlisted, giving the influential quarters a chance to occupy those.

Allegations are also there that some landlords have illegally occupied 15,000 acres of khas land in Char Bagga, Char Baya and Char Gazaria taking

advantage of demarcation disputes with Noakhali and Bhola districts.

Another reports from Gopalganj adds: Land Ministry has distributed 40 per cent khas land of the district among landless people, leaving the remaining 60 per cent under the occupation of various influential quarters.

According to officials, there are some 5 lakh acres of khas land in the district which 25,642 acres, including 42,789 acres of croplands, have been distributed among 126 landless families up to December 1999.

Sources said the landlords in connivance with a section of dishonest officials have grabbed the khas lands for various purposes.

Many of them have already constructed buildings, stalls and shops on the khas lands and those are either being used by themselves or rented out.

The lands belong to various organisations and departments of the government, including R&H, Bangladesh Water Development Board, Public Works Department and Postal Department.



Traders keeping timbers in a haphazard manner near Shongacha Bazar intersection on Sirajganj-Kazipur road in Sirajganj sadar upazila. This situation has created obstacles in smooth plying of vehicles and in movement of passers-by. — Star photo

Most card phone booths in Cox's Bazar inoperative

From Abdul Monayem Khan

COX'S BAZAR, June 18: Most of the card phone booths have been lying inoperative from months together due to lack of maintenance.

Nine card phone booths were installed by the T and T Department in the town and different thana headquarters of Cox's Bazar in 1997 to provide better telephone service to the people.

Local users said, service of the booths was satisfactory at the beginning, but it deteriorated as the time passed due to negligence by the T and T men in maintaining the lines and

machines. They complained that the technicians responsible for maintenance of the card phone booths are not always available even after repeated reminders by the officials.

Some of the sets have turned into unit eating machines' they said adding that these are now eating up more units when they made call.

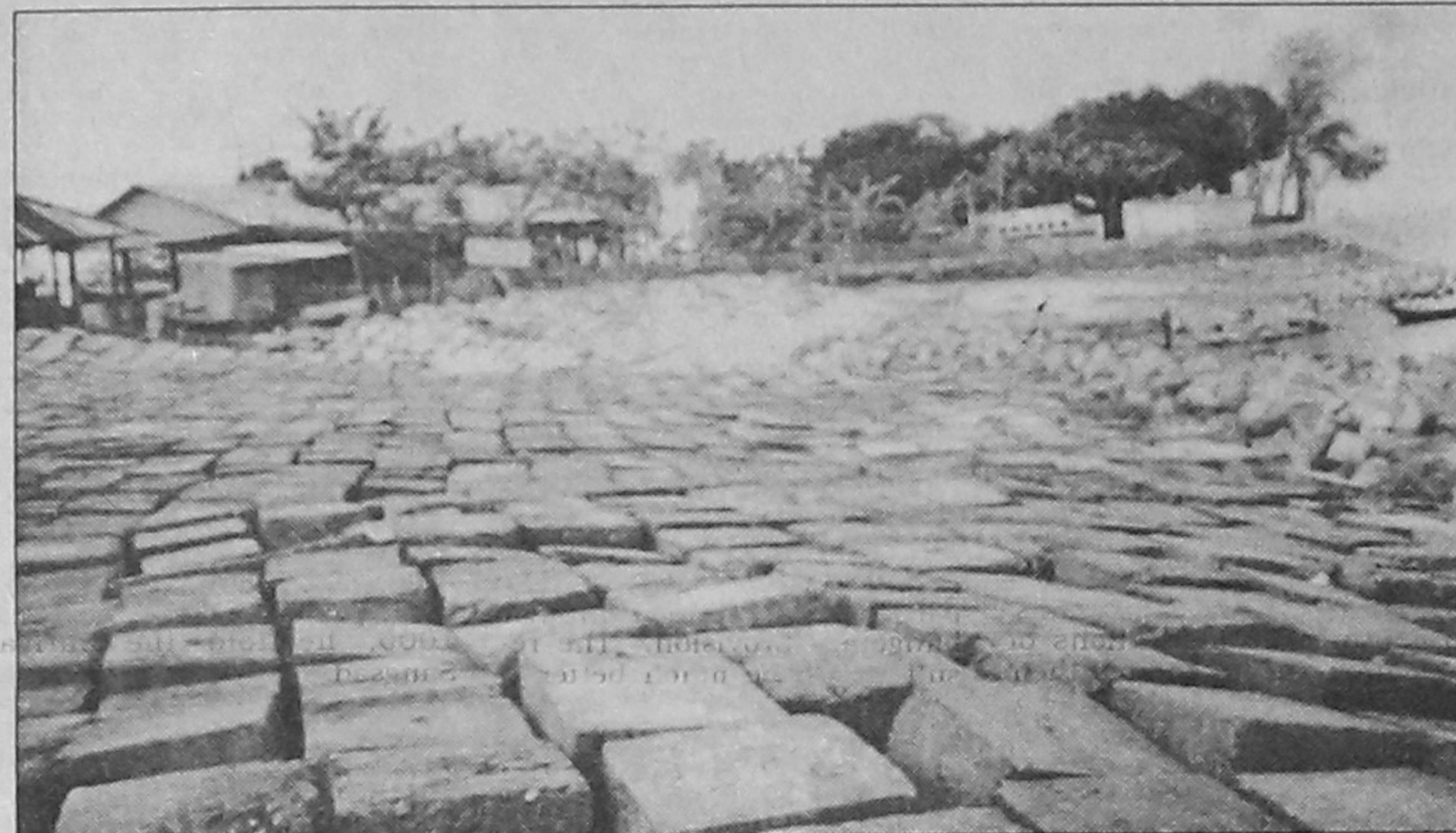
Even valid cards are being rejected by some machines as those are out of order.

Moreover, some machines eject the cards as soon as the respondent receives the call and

the card phone users here said T and T men have been showing reluctance in maintaining the booths as their 'illegal earning' decreased substantially with the introduction of the card phone system.

Besides, cards have become scarce in the post offices. But the users said, these are available in black market at a rate higher than the actual price.

Card phone users have urged the authorities to take measures to fix the phones and stop black marketing of the cards to ensure easy telephone services to the people.



Bid to halt river erosion. Blocks are placed along different erosion affected areas of Chandpur town including the Purnabazaar area to protect the district town from the onslaught of continuous river erosion. — Star photo

Erosion threatens Tk 175-crore Chandpur irrigation project

From Our Correspondent

CHANDPUR, June 18: Taka one hundred seventy-five crore Matlab-Meghna-Dhanagoda Irrigation Project is threatened by the erosion of the River Meghna which is situated on the western side of the project.

According to Chandpur-Meghna-Dhanagoda Irrigation Office sources, erosion of the River Meghna from Ekhlashpur to Shatnal situated on the western side of the project is continuing alarmingly from the very beginning of this month.

Erosion has been continuing along 5-kilometre area from Ekhlashpur to Shatnal. Many

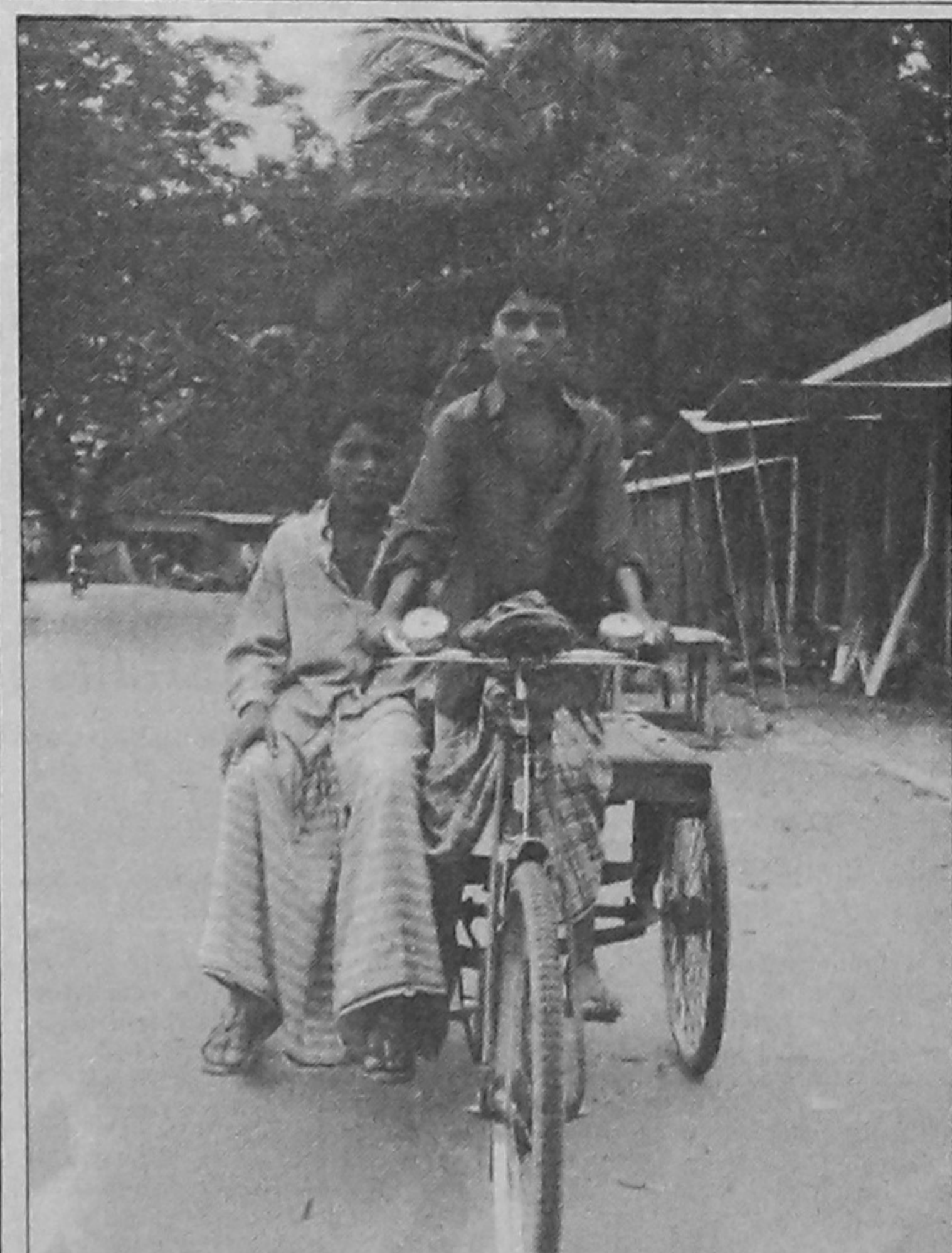
Cracks have been developed in different areas of the embankment. If the embankment breaks down the entire project will be inundated.

About five lakh people within the project area may be affected.

Chandpur Meghna-Dhanagoda Irrigation Project is one of the biggest irrigation project of Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB). The project was taken up in 1987 at a cost of Tk 175 crore with the financial assistance of Asian Development Bank (ADB). Fourteen

unions of Matlab thana were brought under the project. About 13,600 hectares of land will be benefited by the project. This year about 8,000 hectares of land have been brought under *Irri-Boro* cultivation programme.

BWDB officials are working round the clock to check the erosion. Blocks have been dumped in the erosion affected areas of the project. Continuous rain in the project area causes rise of water level. On the other hand water is entering within the project through cracks.



Many faces of child labour: Here is another unfortunate boy in Tangail where widespread child labour has raised a great concern among the enlightened circle. But neither the government nor any non-governmental organisation comes up with determination to wipe out this shameful vice once for all from the society. A correspondent from Tangail has taken this shot recently. — Star photo

Appeal for help

By Staff Correspondent
Md Ruhul Amin Ramzan, General Secretary of Chittagong Newspaper Hawkers' League is a chronic patient of heart ailments.

He had been attacked with heart ailments thrice in 1995, 1998 and 1999. On December 6 in 1999 he had undergone open heart surgery at BM Birla Heart Centre in India under the supervision of Dr Suva Dutta and Dr Ajoy Kar where he had spent an amount of Taka 2,35,000. He had collected the money by selling his property and through donations by his hawkers-colleagues. Just after six months in June this year again he felt chest pain. His health has been deteriorating very fast now. So he will have to set for Birla Heart Centre in India for another check-up by the end of the year. He needs at least an amount of Taka 50,000 for this purpose.

Therefore, he appealed to the generous people of the society to send donations for his treatment to Rafiqul Amin, Hales Road, 1st floor, in front of Baby Super Market, Gate no 2, East Nasirabad, Panchlaish, Chittagong.

Two spars on embankment collapse in Sirajganj

From Our Correspondent

SIRAJGANJ, June 18: A portion of the under-construction spars on the Meghal Flood Protection Embankment in Kazipur upazila here collapsed on Saturday due to pressure of rising water in the river Jamuna.

The river has so far devoured the spar no 1 and the spar no 3.

Officials of Water Development Board (WDB) rushed to the spot and tried to stop the erosion by dumping sandbags and concrete blocks.

Seven spars on the flood protection embankment in Sadar and Kazipur upazilas have been constructed at a cost of Tk 41 crore and 67 lakh to protect more than 100 villages from the erosion.

If the spars collapse totally vast areas in the two upazilas will be inundated, local people said.

Launch mishap

No more body recovered: Probe team visits spot

From Staff Correspondent

BARISAL, June 18: The three-member inquiry committee reached here on Saturday morning to investigate into the June 16 launch collision that claimed at least nine people. The committee also visited the spot of the accident.

Meanwhile, search for more bodies was on, but no body was recovered from the mishap spot on Saturday. Relatives of launch passengers were still crowding the spot.

Police and witnesses said the accident occurred when a Dhaka-bound launch, MV Dweepaj 2, from Barisal carrying 1500 passengers collided with Barguna's Amtalibound launch, ML Manasi 4, from Dhaka carrying 600 passengers near Badarpur channel in the river Meghna in the darkness. Manasi 4 was badly damaged.

The committee also recorded statements of leaders of Launch Owners' Association, BIWTA officials and owner of Manasi.

Barisal Launch Owners' Association demanded exemplary punishment to crew responsible for the accident.

Steps to check erosion in Feni

FENI, June 18: A total of Taka four crore fifty lakh has been sanctioned for protective measures, taken by the Water Development Board, against erosion by different rivers here, reports BSS.

Raid on flour mills manager, others: Attacker's bail petition rejected

From Akhteruzzaman Bablu

SIRAJGANJ, June 18: The bail petition of Alhaj Fazlur Rahman was rejected by the court who among 36 others were arrested for their alleged involvement in an armed attack on the manager and staffers of Ajmir Flour Mills here recently.

He was arrested following Home Minister's order to investigate into the incident.

Magistrate of the relevant court Atiqul Hoque rejected the bail prayer on the plea that the incident occurred at broad day light in the town.

The incident ensued over share of the mills.

Meanwhile, the complainant of the case submitted another petition to the court saying that he had filed the case in the respective police station under Public Safety Act (PSA), but police did not register the case under PSA. So he prayed to the court to turn the case under PSA.

However, the court took the prayer, but did not issue any order to turn the case under PSA.

Local elite also expressed the view that some influential quarters might be behind the scene who had been trying to divert the incident another channel. They are of the opinion that the case should be turned under PSA.

News snaps

Afforestation programme

RANGAMATI, June 18: Chittagong Hill Tracts South Forest Division (CHTSFD) has raised plantation on 1,300 acres of hilly land at its different forest ranges involving over 1,200 tribal families during the current year, reports BSS.

A total of 1,573,000 seedlings of different costly plants including teak, mahaguni, jarul, champaful, teskur, garjan and gamar were planted at the inaccessible hilly land of Alikhiong, Farua, Shuvalong and Saugrachhari ranges of the division covering an area of 1,300 acres associating local tribals, divisional forest officer of CHTEFD, Tapan Kumar Dey told. Over 1,200 tribal families who are engaged in raising plantation will also be employed for three years for nurturing and looking after the plantation, Dey said.

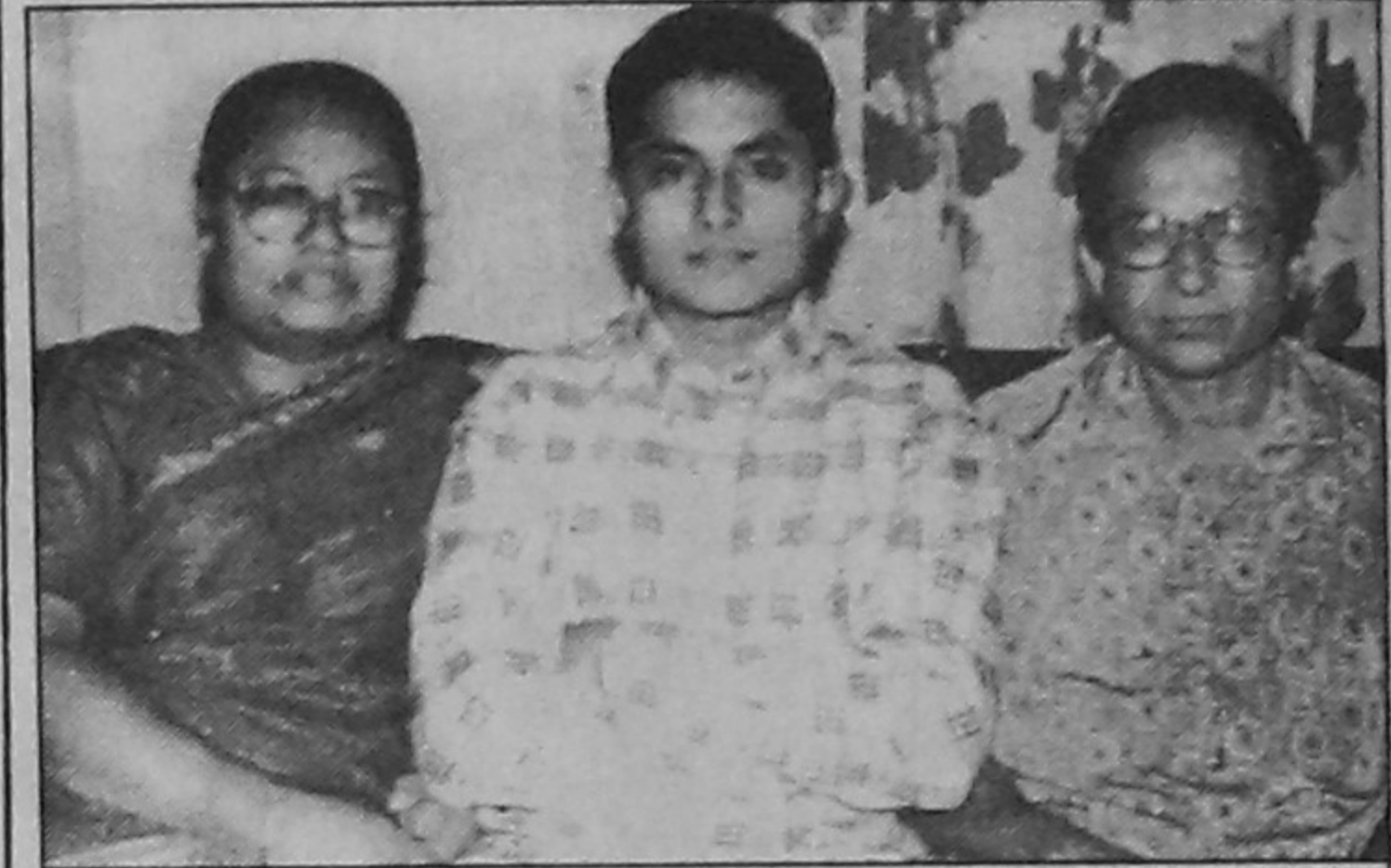


Kamal with his parents. — Star photo

Kamal will study Computer Engg

From Staff Correspondent

SYLHET, June 18: Syed Enamul Hassan Kamal, who stood 13th in the combined Merit list of the General Science Group in Comilla Board this year wishes to take higher study in Computer Engineering in future. A student of Sylhet Cadet College, Kamal got a total of 907 marks in total alongwith letter marks in seven subjects. Kamal is the third among six children of Syed Anif, a leading businessman of Rainagar Rajbari area of Sylhet town and Syeda Raoshan Ara.

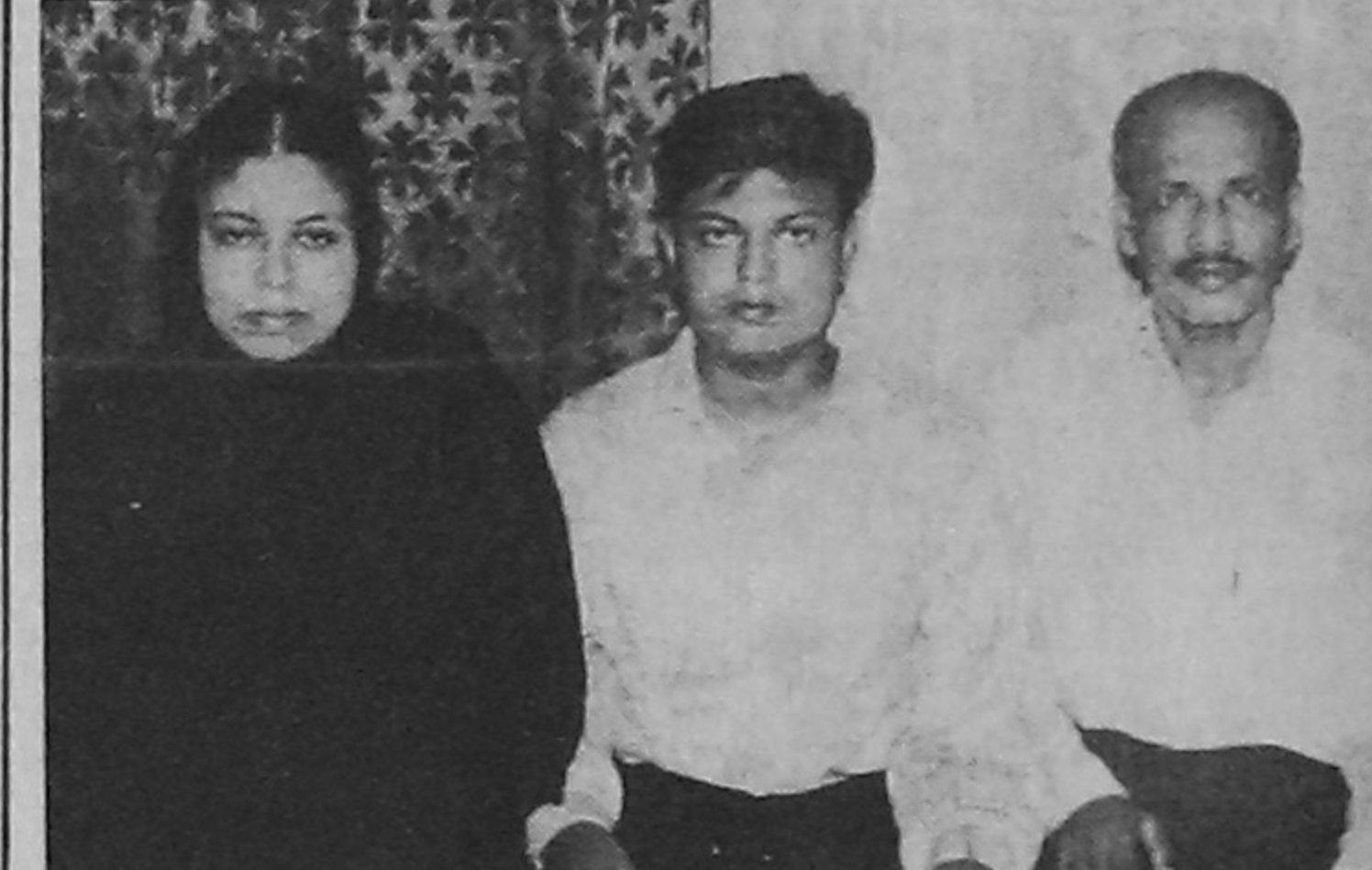


Sayem with his parents. — Star photo

Sayem 11th in Gen Sc group

From Staff Correspondent

SYLHET, June 18: AHM Sayem who stood 11th in the Combined Merit list of the General Science Group of SSC examination in Comilla Board intends to study Computer Science in future. A student of Elite Bird High School, Sayem is happy with his result. He got letter marks in seven subjects. He is against students politics. Sayem is the only child of NGO official Fazlul Haque and an official of the Social Welfare Department in Dhaka. His paternal home is in Sirajganj district.



Faiz with his parents. — Star photo

Faiz 2nd in Science group

From Our Correspondent

FENI, June 18: Three students secured second, ninth and 12th position in the merit list of Science, Humanities and Commerce group of SSC examination under Comilla Board from two schools here.

SM Faiz Akbar of Attaturk Model High School stood second position in the merit list of Science group. He secured 929 marks with 8 letters. Faiz is the son of Mohammad Abul Kalam, professor of Sonagazi Government College here and Maharin Nasa Begum Banu a housewife.

Rajib 2nd in Business Studies

From Our Correspondent

SIRAJGANJ, June 18: Md Moniruzzaman Sarkar secured the seventh place in merit list in Business Studies group in the SSC examination under Rajshahi Education Board.

He secured 827 marks with distinctions in five subjects. Rajib appeared in the examination from Enayetpur Islamia High School under Chowdhali thana.

He is the son of Md Abdul Mannan Sarkar, a businessman in Enayetpur and Begum Mannan. Rajib intends to study Business Administration. When the news of Rajib's brilliant result reached their village home at Enayetpur, all the members of his family, villagers, teachers and school students became overjoyed and expressed gratitude to Allah.

Child complex nearing completion

PANCHAGARH, June 18: The second phase work on the project to transform Panchagarh Government Child Orphanage into Child Family Complex is nearing completion, reports BSS.

Taka one crore and twenty lakh has been allotted to build this complex. Under the construction scheme dormitory, office, school, three training centres, residential house and boundary wall will be constructed. About one hundred orphans will be provided with opportunity of free lodging, vocational education for self-employment after completion of the construction work. According to the authority, the construction work will be completed by June next.

Seminar

NAOGAON, June 18: A seminar on Agriculture, Pisciculture and Livestock was held at sadar upazila auditorium recently, reports BSS.

Sadar Upazilla Livestock Officer Begum Saleha Khatun presided over the seminar. Upazilla Agriculture Officer Ghulam Sobhani, Field Expert Anwar Hossain, Sadar Upazilla Agriculture Officer A B M Mustafizur Rahman and Upazilla Fishery Officer Sayedur Rahman spoke in the seminar.