

National

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 Sankhali in Nilphamari at different times.

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

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.

Bhedarganj *hat*, Damuda *hat*, Mollar *hat*, Bhojeshwar *hat*, Kazir *hat*, Anguria Bazar and Plongbazar market are in a very pitiable condition, although the markets are the sources of substantial revenue for the local administration.

Shortage of space, lack of proper maintenance, filthy stagnant water, heaps of garbage, emitting bad smell are common phenomenon in every bazaar of the district.

Due to shortage of sheds most of the traders spread their commodities under the open sky and buying and selling are done under the scorching heat of the sun and sometimes in rain.

Humayun Kabir, a cloth trader of Bhojeshwar Bazar, complains absence of drainage facility in the market.

The situation has worsened in the rainy season. Filth and garbage are left here and there and remain there for days together, emitting putrid smell is polluting the surroundings.

Besides, there are narrow passages in these markets hampering easy movement of the buyers.

Acute scarcity of drinking water is also prevailing in the markets. Absence of public toilets poses threat to public health. Those who have taken lease of the bazaars never visit the areas to see the condition or for taking measures for its improvement.

Another report from Feni adds: Most of the bazaars of the district are beset with various problems, causing immense trouble to the buyers and sellers.

Highway robberies on rise in N region

NATORE, June 18: At least 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, microbuses and private cars on Natore-Nagarbari, Pabna-Iswardi, Kashinathpur-Thanpur-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 Ataikula on Natore-Nagarbari 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 districts.

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 Pro-

gramme (PDP), a non-government 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.

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.

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



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.

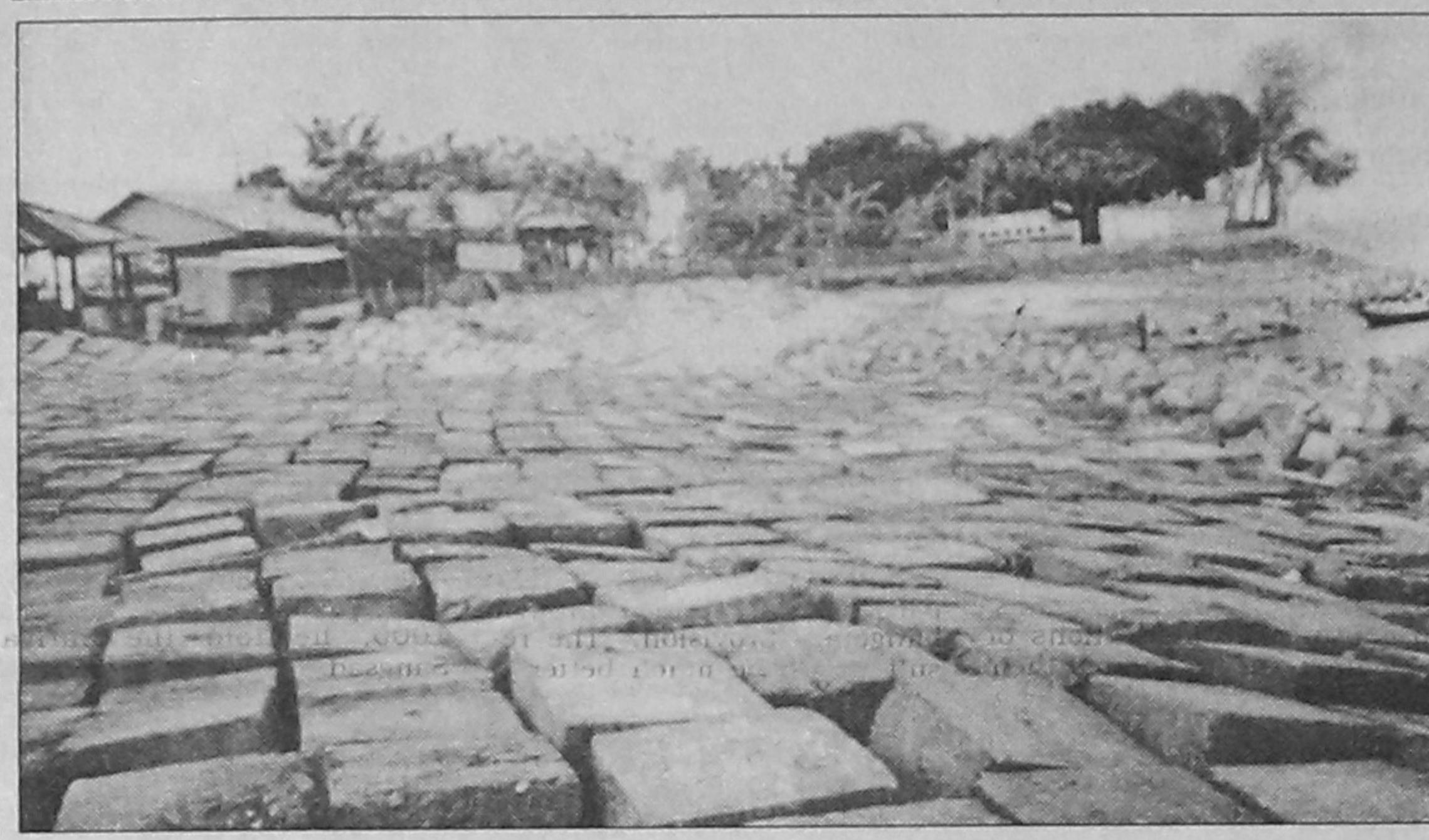
Even valid cards are being rejected by some machines as those are out of order.

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 Puranbazaar 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 Matla-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 Ekhelashpur 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 Ekhelashpur to Shatnal. Many

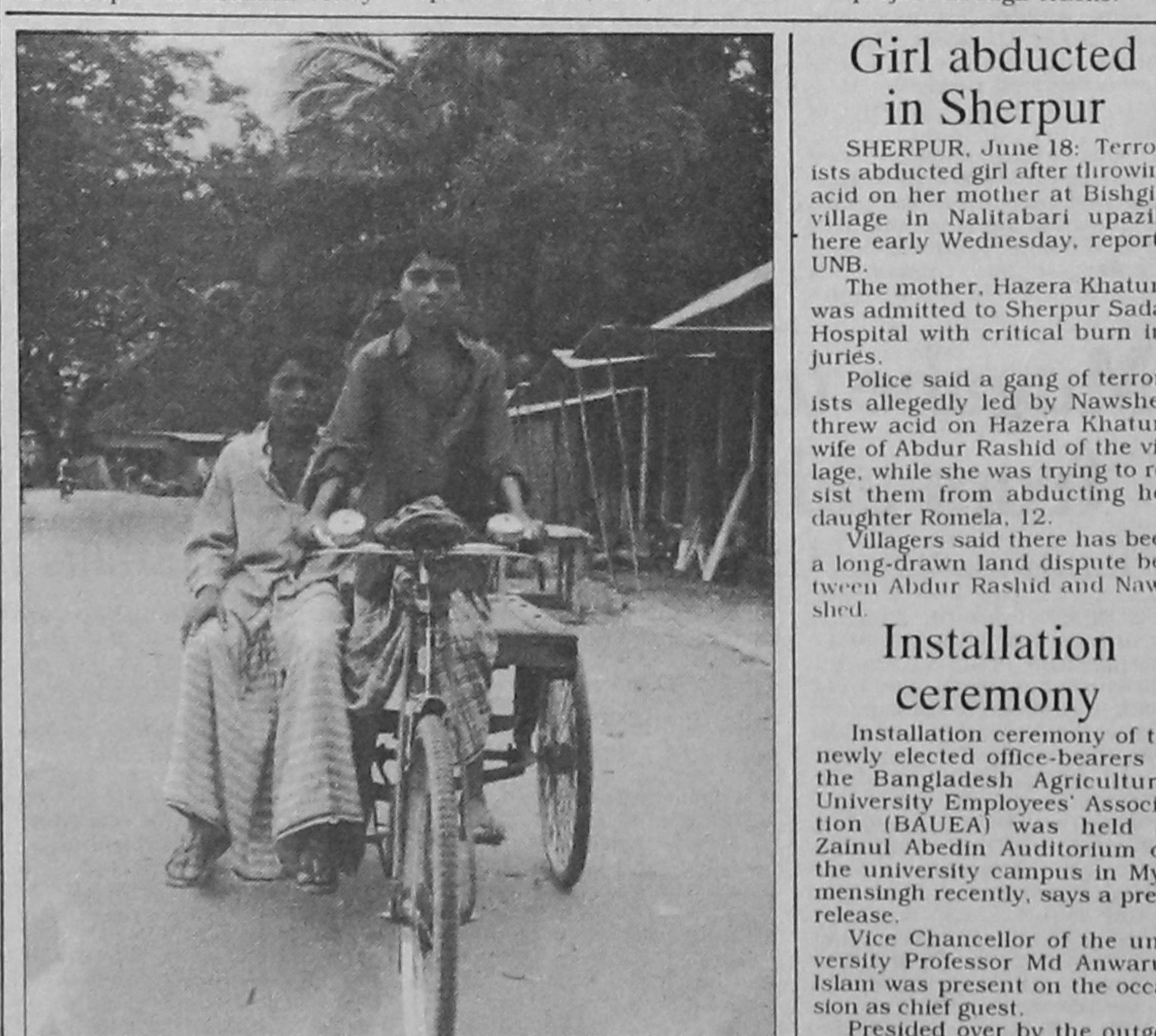
cracks have been developed in different areas of the embankment. If the embankment breaks down the entire project will be inundated.

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 Matla 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 with 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

Girl abducted in Sherpur

SHERPUR, June 18: Terrorists abducted girl after throwing acid on her mother at Bishiguri village in Natilabari upazila here early Wednesday, reports UNB.

The mother, Hazera Khatun, was admitted to Sherpur Sadar Hospital with critical burn injuries.

Police said a gang of terrorists allegedly led by Nawshed threw acid on Hazera Khatun wife of Abdur Rashid of the village, while she was trying to resist them from abducting her daughter Romela, 12.

Villagers said there had been a long-drawn land dispute between Abdur Rashid and Nawshed.

Installation ceremony

Installation ceremony of the newly elected office-bearers of the Bangladesh Agricultural University Employees' Association (BAUEA) was held at Zainul Abedin Auditorium on the university campus in Mymensingh recently, says a press release.

Vice Chancellor of the university Professor Md Anwarul Islam was present on the occasion as chief guest.

Presided over by the outgoing president of BAUEA Md Lilaqat Ali, the function was attended, among others, by Professor Ahmadulah Sarkar, Badruzzaman Badsha and Md Shahidul Khan.

Newly elected BAUEA president Md Idris Ali and general secretary Md Lilaqat Ali also spoke on the occasion.

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 seek 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 Birla Heart Centre in front of Birla 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 1,500 passengers collided with Barguna's Antalibazar-bound 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.

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 with the project through cracks.

Police said a gang of terrorists allegedly led by Nawshed threw acid on Hazera Khatun wife of Abdur Rashid of the village, while she was trying to resist them from abducting her daughter Romela, 12.

Villagers said there had been a long-drawn land dispute between Abdur Rashid and Nawshed.

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.

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