

Erosion displaced 5 lakh families in 30 years in 16 N districts

PABNA, Aug 12: It sounds ideal when the government urges the people to face natural calamities with courage. But the poor people who have long been fighting a losing battle with riverbank erosion in northern region have little patience for such suggestion, reports UNB.

According to official statistics, country's four major rivers Padma, Teesta, Jamuna and Brahmaputra devoured over 500 villages in 70 upazilas of 16 northern districts in last 30 years, displacing over five lakh families.

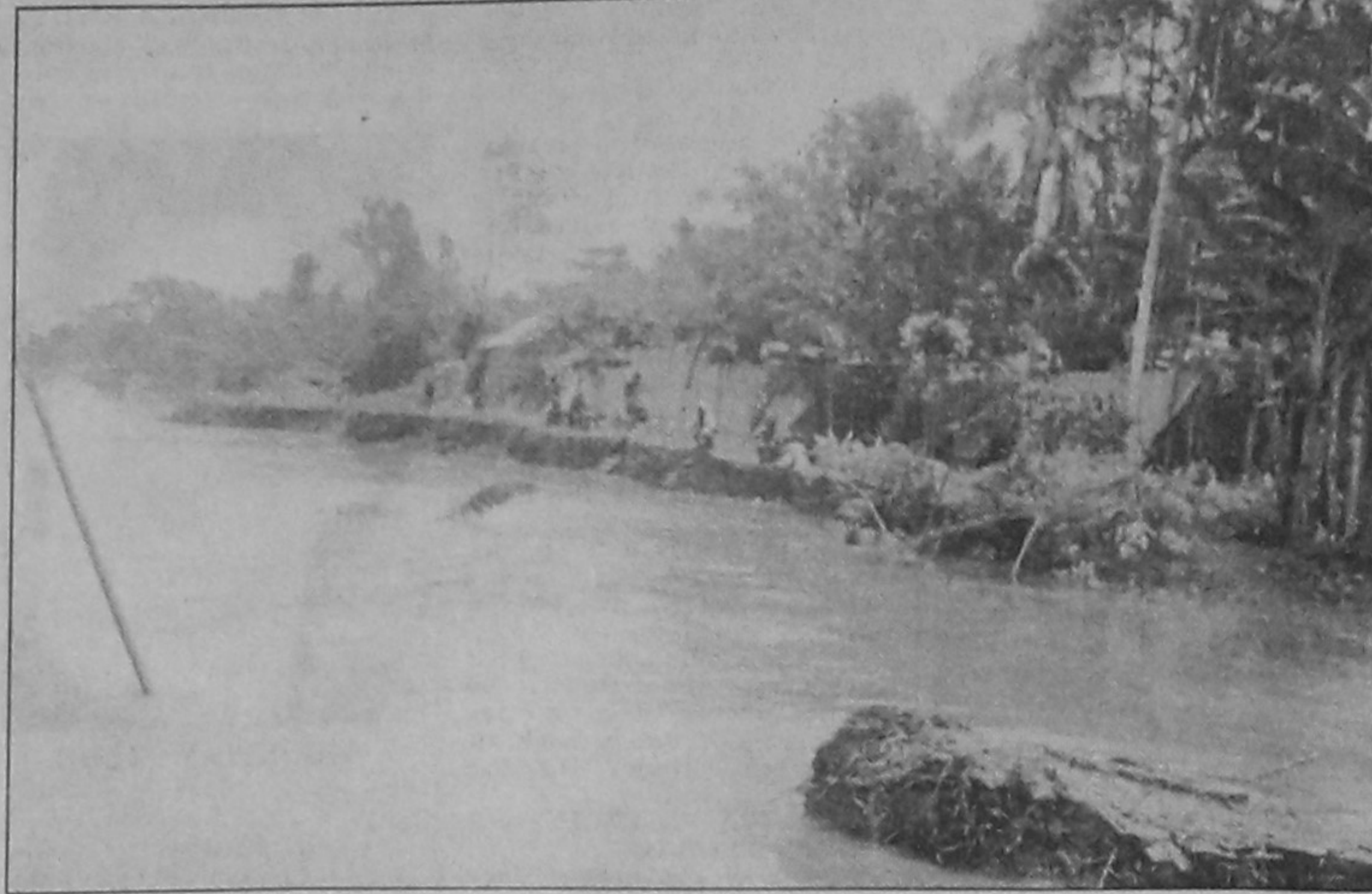
Official records showed that government had taken up various programmes on various occasions to rehabilitate erosion-hit people of the region. But many of the programmes could not be implemented for reasons unknown, forcing one-fifth of the northerners to lead a subhuman life.

In an attempt to help rehabilitate the erosion-hit people, the government had taken up a massive programme in 1975. Under the plan, the erosion-affected people were supposed to be provided with boats and fishing nets.

But the ambitious programme was shelved after the 1975 political changeover. During the last 18 years since 1980, no government took any initiatives to rehabilitate the erosion-hit people.

Sources at Water Development Board (WDB) said 500 villages of 70 upazilas in Pabna, Sirajganj, Bogra, Gaibandha, Rangpur, Kurigram, Chapainawabganj, Rajshahi and Natore districts went into the gorges of the four rivers and their tributaries during the period.

The worst affected upazilas are Sadar, Bera, Sujanagar and Ishwardi in Pabna, Sadar, Belkuchi, Shahjadpur, Chouhali and Kaziupur in Sirajganj, Sarikandi in Bogra, Chilmari, Bhurungamari, Roumari and Uliupur in Kurigram, Sundarganj, Fulci, Sauri, Saghata and Sadar in Gaibandha, Kaunia and Gangachhara in Rangpur, Sadar and Godagarhi in Rajshahi, Lalpur in Natore and Sadar



Erosion by the Jamuna river has taken serious turn at Gopalpur upazila in Tangail district. At least 3000 people were rendered homeless in the upazila in the last one month. —Star photo

upazila in Chapainawabganj districts.

Riverbank erosion in the region is nothing new. But its havoc, according to experts, grew worse after the country's independence.

According to a survey conducted by River Research Institute in 1999, 204 points of the country's 12 major rivers were hit hardest by erosion during the 1997-1999 period. Some 420, 484 meters of land in the areas, including 2.91 lakh meters in the northern region alone, eroded away during the period.

Another survey revealed that the lengths of the rivers Padma, Teesta, Jamuna and Brahmaputra are 2,061 kilometers and the rivers are devouring lands on their vicinities for nearly 280 years.

It also showed that the rivers have been losing their navigability since 1930. As a result, the rivers burst their banks with

moderate rainfall triggering erosion.

Of the five lakh families, who lost their homesteads in the last 30 years in riverbank erosion, 95 per cent are farmers while the rest are business and working people, according to the survey.

The mighty Jamuna devoured Nakalia River Port in Pabna in 1998. The upazila bhabs of Kaziupur and Belkuchi in Sirajganj and 50 per cent of the Sirajganj town have disappeared in the river.

The town protection embankment in Rajshahi, which was constructed spending crores of taka, is also under threat of erosion by the Padma.

This year the riverbank erosion in the region appeared in rather worse manner, rendering some 1,000 families living on the vicinities of the Padma, Teesta, Jamuna and Brahmaputra homeless last month.

Some two lakh families in the

16 northern districts lost their homesteads in the devastating flood of 1998.

BSS from Mymensingh says: With the sudden rise in the water level of the River Padma, erosion has started playing havoc with vast tracts of homestead and farmlands along the riverbank. Seventy-one families in Hasail-Banari and Dighirpar unions under Tangbari upazila have already shifted to safer places since Monday last.

According to official sources, the district administration has so far sanctioned a grant of Taka 20 thousand for immediate distribution among the erosion victims of the affected areas.

Meanwhile the abnormal rise of the water level has submerged the low-lying areas of the six upazilas. The river Padma at Bhagyakul is flowing 76 cm above the danger level, according to the Water Development Board.

Failure of TLM: Probe demanded

From Our Correspondent

SIRAJGANJ, Aug 12: A high powered probe body has been demanded to investigate into the alleged corruption, irregularities and mismanagement in the Total Literacy Movement (TLM) programme named Prodipto Sirajganj here.

Speakers demanded this at a meeting held at Bhasani Auditorium here recently. They deeply regretted for total failure of the programme.

Abdul Latif Mirja MP, and Chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee of the Manpower Ministry who was the chief guest in the meeting expressed his anger for total flop of the programme.

The meeting was presided over by A F M Saiful Islam, Deputy Commissioner (DC) of Sirajganj. It was addressed, among others, by Md Shahabuddin, Commissioner of Rajshahi division as special guest, Md Mostafizur Rahman SP, Sirajganj, Chairman of

Sirajganj Municipality and Upazila Nirbahi Officer of Rajganj.

They alleged that an amount of Taka 18 crore 90 lakh was sanctioned in six months for implementation of the programme for making six lakh people literate while in reality less than one lakh people became literate. They alleged that the concerned officials and three so-called journalists had been involved in the corruption. The corrupt officials allegedly purchased inferior quality of materials like duster, khata, black board, umbrella, sign board and lamp. They allegedly submitted fake Travelling Allowance (TA) and Dearness Allowance (DA) without showing necessary papers for the purpose.

However, when this correspondent contacted with Abdul Mannan, ADC (General) about his comments regarding the corruption, he flatly denied all the allegations.

Sale of non-iodised salt goes on unabated in Kushtia

From Our Correspondent

KUSHTIA, Aug 12: Defying government ban a section of unscrupulous traders are selling non-iodised salt in markets in the district.

Ignorant people are buying the banned salt due to cheaper prices. According to market sources, one kg of iodised salt is being sold between Tk 10 and Tk 12, while the non-iodised salt sells Tk 8 and 9 a kg.

Meanwhile, there is allegation that unscrupulous traders are selling non-iodised salt labelling those as iodised salt.

Production, storage and sale of non-iodised salt were banned in 1989. But most of the factories are not producing iodised salt, local people alleged.

Meanwhile, a recent survey by a non-government organisation

engaged in the health sector reveals that 17 per cent people in Khulna and Barisal divisions, including greater Kushtia district, are carrying symptoms of goitre disease.

Taking iodised salt, which is not available in the rural markets of these areas, the survey said could prevent the disease.

The survey also says about 68 per cent people of 15 districts of these two divisions do not take iodised salt and, resulting in spread of the disease.

According to the survey, 20 per cent children, 19 per cent youths and 13 per cent old people of these areas carry the symptoms of goitre.

For lack of awareness most of the people do not take iodised salt, the survey said.

Bio-gas becomes popular

SHARIATPUR, Aug 12: Use of bio-gas in household works has increased considerably in the district, reports BSS.

So far a total of 33 bio-gas plants have been installed in different upazilas of the district.

Consumers have been saving their hard earned money by using bio-gas. The bio-gas plants not only produce cooking fuel, but also produce fertiliser. It is also helpful in keeping the environment free from pollution.

According to official source, the government allocated Taka 65 thousand to support installation of bio-gas plants in the district. The total cost of installation of a bio-gas plant is estimated at Taka 11 thousand.

People of the rural areas demanded an increase in the

government allocation so that they can easily install a plant.

They also demanded installation of bio-gas plant in each and every union parishad here.

Installation of bio-gas plant started in Shariatpur district in 1997. The project was first built at the house of M Mohsin Khan, a school teacher of village Palong in the Sadar upazila.

The sub-assistant engineer of the bio-gas project said that the production capacity of this bio-gas plant was 150 cft. An amount of Taka 5 thousand was granted to M Mohsin Khan by the government. The rest of the amount was borne by him. His family members have been using bio-gas from this plant for two and a half years.

Unguarded border in CHT, Satkhira worries BDR DG

From Abdul Monayem Khan

COX'S BAZAR, Aug 12: Director General (DG) of Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) Maj Gen Fazlur Rahman said that special measures have been taken to check smuggling, specially drug smuggling in the border areas of the country.

The DG was talking to local journalists at 16 Rifle Battalion Headquarters here recently. He also said that, plans are underway to double the strength of BDR and add a helicopter fleet to it to step up border vigilance, curb smuggling and check inflow of arms and narcotics.

Its strength is likely to be increased to around 70,000 in 61 battalions from the present 37,000 in 41 battalions, adding some 20 battalions.

He also declared that 10 per cent of money after selling the smuggled goods would be distributed among the BDR jawans.

He asked the BDR jawans to check border smuggling, especially drugs and phensidyl smuggling with iron hand with a view to saving our youths.

The BDR chief expressed concern over 559 km unprotected borders of Chittagong Hill Tracts and Satkhira. It was necessary to set up BDR camps on every 20 km of the unprotected CHT border and at least 4 helpads in the region.

He said 449 km border of Chittagong Hill Tracts remained unprotected following signing of peace accord with PCJSS on December 2, 1997. The government has withdrawn all BDR and Army camps from 379 km border with India and 100 km border with Myanmar in Chittagong Hill Tracts, he added.

He expressed concern that armed rebels and international drug traffickers might intrude into the deep jungles of CHT through the unprotected borders and set up camps there.

Of the western border, the DG said 80 km border from Kalkhali in Satkhira district to north Talpatti remained unprotected. Nobody will be aware if any foreign ship intruded into Bangladesh territory through the Sundarbans.

Maj Gen Rahman felt the urgency of raising the strength of BDR to at least 70,000 to man the borders. He said BDR needed 10 gun-boats with one battalion to patrol the river border of Satkhira.

The BDR chief viewed that curbing cross border smuggling by task force was not possible. Explaining he said it was found impossible to bring together customs officials, magistrate and police for taking on the spot decision against the smugglers.

According to him, it is not necessary to prove wrongdoing of an identified smuggler. Citing an example he said smuggling by notorious smuggler of Teknaf Ezhar Company could not be stopped even after setting up of a Customs office in his residence.

There is a plan to open three new BDR sectors in the three hill districts to expand surveillance in the unprotected border areas and check entry of insurgency groups, smuggling and drug plantation in deep forests, he said.

The BDR chief said, there is a proposal to reframe the table of organisation of BDR to make it more 'command effective'. He said that a Major or a Captain would command a Company, which is now commanded by a JCO.

Making a strong plea for increasing the strength of BDR to protect the country's frontiers, curb smuggling and check drug and narcotics trafficking, Maj Gen Fazlur Rahman said, 'considering the increasing role of BDR, its strength should be raised to around 70,000. The strength of Bangladesh Army is around 1,30,000 and that of police 1,12,000 now,' he said.

BDR Sector Commander of Chittagong Colonel Md Waliullah and Commanding Officer of 16 Rifles Battalion at Cox's Bazar Lieutenant Colonel Rafiqur Rahman Bhuiyan were present in the press conference.

Maj Gen Fazlur Rahman also planted a sapling in the Battalion headquarters of 16 Rifles Battalion area during his visit.

News snaps

Another electrocuted

NAOAGAN, Aug 12: One person was electrocuted at Nazirpur in Patnaila Upazila recently, reports BSS.

The ill-fated person, Rafiqul Islam, 22, was a carpenter. He was working at his shop when he was electrocuted.

Robbery

COMILLA, Aug 12: An organised gang of muggers looted over 100 tolas of gold from a jewelry shop in Daulatganj bazar here on Friday night, reports UNB.

Police said four to five hoodlums boarded at the residential hotel 'Lakshmi Plaza' in the bazaar in Lakshmi upazila registering fake names. The criminals came to the 'Amin Jewelers' on the ground floor of the hotel and looted the gold by making the manager of the shop and the guard senseless after tactfully feeding them poisonous food. A case was filed.

Separate incidents claim 2

MADARIPUR, Aug 12: Two people including little a boy died in separate incidents on Friday, reports UNB.

Police and witnesses said Morshed Ali, 55, of Karnapara village in Kalkini upazila was run over by a speeding Faridpur bound bus on Faridpur-Barisal highway. The victim met the tragic end while crossing the road. The body was sent hospital morgue for autopsy and a case was filed with the police. In another incident a little boy drowned at Chargoindia village in Sadar upazila. Family sources said the victim Saiful Islam, 6, son of Yunus Madbar drowned in a nearby pond while he was bathing alone. Later his floating body was recovered from the pond.

Criminal convicted

MUNSIKAN, Aug 12: A young man was convicted and awarded 10 years rigorous imprisonment by a court here on Monday in an arms case, reports UNB.

The convict was identified as Kazi Farhan Ahmed, son of Kazi Muniruzzaman of Narayanganj town. The prosecution, in brief, was that police arrested him along with four others from Dakshinpara Government Primary School polling center in Sirajdikhan upazila while casting fake votes in favour of a chairman candidate in the 1997 union Parishad elections. Police also recovered a foreign 32-bore revolver from his possession and filed an arms case against him. After examining the witnesses and records District and Sessions Judge and Judge of the Special Tribunal Court M Golan Moulaw awarded the punishment.

Spurious cement seized

BAGERHAT, Aug 12: Police seized 30 bags of spurious cement from two shops on Madrasa Road in the town on Thursday, reports UNB.

Acting on a tip-off, police raided Bhai Bhai Store and Al Amin Enterprise and seized the adulterated cement. None was arrested in this regard. A section of dishonest traders have long been selling King brand cement of Meghna Cement Factory at Mongla after mixing with soil, police said.

Arms looted

KHULNA, Aug 12: A gang of terrorists looted arms and other valuables from the house of a shrimp farm owner at Hadiabad in Bataghata upazila on Tuesday night, reports UNB.

The gang entered into the house of Mohor Ali at dead of night and poured poison mixed milk into his mouth, leaving him unconscious. The terrorists then took a gun, 55 rounds of bullet, gold ornaments and cash Tk 5,000 and left the place safely. A case was filed with Bataghata police.

Two killers get life term

KISHOREGANJ, Aug 12: A court here on Wednesday found two siblings guilty of murder and sentenced them to life term in jail, reports UNB.

The court also fined the convicts, Kala Mia and Jinnah of Astagram upazila, Tk 5,000 each with a provision to suffer one year more RI in default. According to prosecution, Kala Mia and Jinnah of South Abdulhappur village killed SI Abul Kashem when he along with his force went to arrest Kala Mia on March 2, 1990. After examining the records and witnesses, the Additional Sessions Judge (acting), S M Helal Uddin, handed down the verdict. The court, however, acquitted 44 other accused of the case while four others died during the trial.

Govt official's eyes gouged out

MYMENSINGH, Aug 12: Having failed to catch his son, an identified group of terrorists gouged out one of the eyes of a retired government official in Gouripur upazila on Thursday, reports UNB.

Witnesses and hospital sources said the miscreants, looking for their rival Mustafa, burst into Mustafa's house and gouged out an eye of his father Abul Kashem after being failed to reach him. Earlier on Wednesday, they said, Mustafa had a quarrel with them over a cricket match in Jugapur area. Kashem was admitted to Mymensingh Medical College Hospital.

Rehabilitation programme

RANGAMATI, Aug 12: CHT Refugee Rehabilitation Taskforce has taken up a massive programme to rehabilitate over 1.36 lakh internal refugees in three hill districts, reports UNB.

Officials the taskforce has already sent a requisition of Tk 192 crore to Hill Tracts Affairs Ministry in this regard. Of the internal refugees, 90,208 are tribal and 46,107 Bangalis, they said.

NIP concludes

COMILLA, Aug 12: The second round of National Immunisation Programme (NIP) to eliminate tetanus and polio from the country concluded here on Friday, reports UNB.

The five-day vaccination programme in 40 vulnerable unions and 24 slums of the municipality started on Monday.

Municipality Chairman Kamaluddin Chowdhury inaugurated the campaign by administering polio vaccines to babies at Baludhum slum in the town. During the drive, all under-five children were given polio vaccines while women of 15-49 age group given TT vaccines through 24 centres in each union.

Forest official suspended

BAGERHAT, Aug 12: A forest official has been suspended here for his alleged involvement in smuggling of timbers from the Sundarbans, reports UNB.

Khulna Divisional Forest Officer suspended forest officer Sibani Ranjan Das of Daser Dharani Camp of Sharanakhol range of the forest on Thursday. His suspension followed a series of complaints by locals against him.

Afforestation campaign

COMILLA, Aug 12: Rotaract and Interact Club has launched a campaign here to make people aware about the necessity of planting increased number of saplings to protect the environment, reports UNB.

As part of its programme, the club officials planted different varieties of saplings in the premises of Yusuf Multipurpose High School in the town on Monday. Students and teachers of the schools, office bearers of the two clubs and local elite were present on the occasion.



Bangladesh Rifles DG Major General Fazlur Rahman (1st from L) exchanging views with local journalists at 16 battalion headquarters during his visit to Cox's Bazar recently. —Star photo

Chandpur steamer ghat in bad shape

From Our Correspondent

CHANDPUR, Aug 12: Chandpur steamer ghat, situated on the bank of the River Meghna near Chandpur launch terminal is beset with manifold problems causing inconveniences to thousands of passengers.

It may be mentioned that the present steamer ghat was constructed during the British period. A condemned barge was placed in the ghat to anchor the steamer. A wooden bridge was constructed in the ghat to connect the barge. The bridge is in dilapidated condition.

Passengers face problems to cross the bridge safely. Accident occur often on the bridge. The

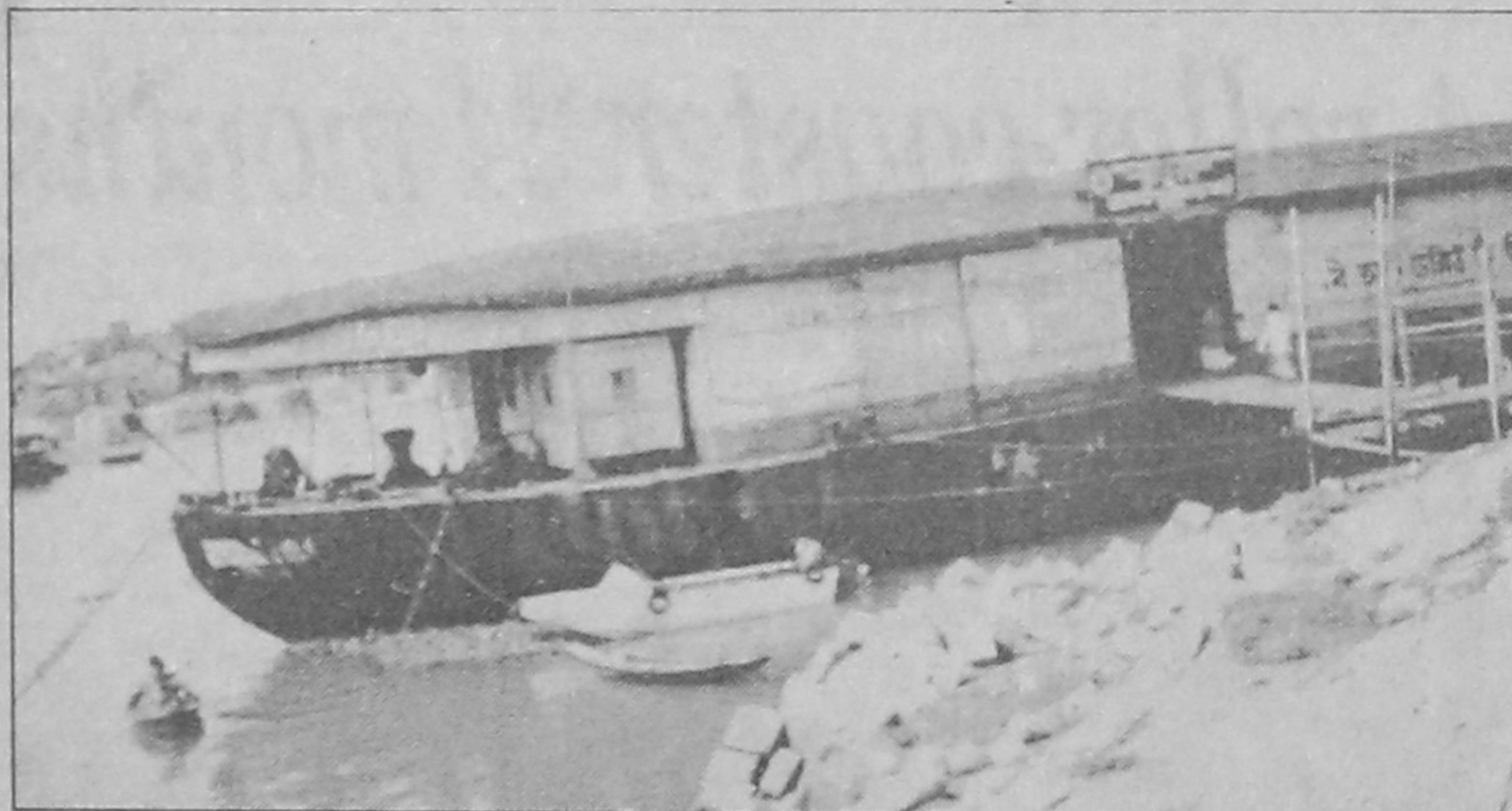
bridge is very narrow. Passengers cannot pass through the bridge when there is rush of passengers. The condition of the barge is deteriorating day by day. Many cracks and holes have developed on the barge.

During the rainy season water comes through the holes of the roof. There is no waiting room in the barge for the passengers. Passengers of the steamers are to wait in railway and launch terminal waiting rooms. Due to lack of toilets women passengers are suffering. Ticket counter of the steamer ghat is situated outside the barge causing suffering to the passengers.

Passengers of the steamer alleged that they are often harassed by the 'coolies' in the ghat.

Coolies of the steamer ghat cannot cross railway and launch terminal yard. Coolies of railway and launch ghat obstruct the steamer passengers. As a result the passengers are to pay both the coolies of steamer and railway yard. There is no chart of fees for the coolies.

The authority have no control over the coolies. Local people has urged the authorities concern to take immediate steps to construct a new steamer terminal.



Chandpur steamer ghat.

—Star photo

Irregularities in Shariatpur telephone offices

SHARIATPUR, Aug 12: Telephone subscribers here have been facing problems owing to alleged irregularities, mismanagement and malpractice by a section of T and T officials and employees, reports UNB.

Sources said some telephone operators have secret dealing with a section of dishonest subscribers who get their local and overseas phone connections easily.

The general subscribers do not get their connection after several reminders. Operators give lame excuse for the non-availability of the connection.

Subscribers booking emergency calls are not given connection after repeated reminders while the linked persons get service quickly and easily.

A link-man who does not want to be identified told the news agency that he is given connection easily for which he has to pay the operators every month.

Bhedganj thana OC complained that telephone of the thana remained dead for most of the time and he failed to collect information of the activities of underground party and other outlaws.

The thana, he said, filed 10 GD cases against the Telephone department but no action has yet been taken.

A telephone subscriber at Palong Uttarabazar in Sadar

upazila alleged that his telephone line remained inoperative for months. The linesmen do not come to restore the line unless extra money is paid to them.

Some local traders are also engaged in operating illegal phone booths in connivance with telephone employees. They charge Tk 400 to Tk 550 for every overseas call, local traders said.

The telephone operators are depriving government of huge amount of revenue every year due to the alleged corruption.

The 80-line digital telephone exchange was installed at the district headquarters on August 28, 1999, but the local T and T officials claimed, it remained inoperative for about 20 hours every day.

According to them the problems include faulty and old machinery, over loaded old underground cable and lack of necessary repair works.

New office bldg

MAGURA, Aug 12: A new office building for Sirpur police station will be constructed at a cost of Tk 63.96 lakh this fiscal, reports UNB.

Public Works Department has allocated the fund under Annual Development Programme, officials said. The two-storied building will have a barracks, an armoury and a storehouse.

Teacher shortage in pry schools

KISHOREGANJ, Aug 12: Despite government efforts to eliminate illiteracy, primary education is being hampered in the district for various reasons, including shortage of teachers, reports UNB.

Sources at local Primary Education Office said 60 posts of headmaster and 223 of assistant teachers have long been lying vacant in 530 primary schools of the district.

Of the schools, 405 are registered and 125 unregistered. Over one lakh students are now studying in various classes of the schools.

They said most of the schools have no adequate benches, chairs, black boards and other necessary educational materials. Besides, irregular payment of salaries has made the school-teachers reluctant to their duties.

According to them, one post of headmaster remain vacant in Austagram, two in sadar, three each in Bajitpur, Tarail and Nikli, four in Hossainpur, five each in Pakundia, Karimganj and Katadi, six each in Kullachar and Mitamain, seven in Itna and 10 in Bhairab.

Upazila-wise breakup of the vacant posts of assistant teacher: Sadar-5, Pakundia-26, Karimganj-24, Bajitpur-27, Katadi-16, Bhairab-10, Kullachar-19, Hossainpur-17, Tarail-21, Austagram-11, Itna-18, Nikli-15 and Mitamain-14.

BKB disbursed Tk 20 cr in Feni last fiscal

From Our Correspondent

FENI, Aug 12: Bangladesh Krishi Bank (BKB) disbursed Taka 20.37 crore farm loan among 12,363 people in the district last fiscal.

BKB sources said the bank through its 15 branches disbursed about Tk 10.25 crore as crop loan among 7,586 farmers and about 5.45 crore among 3,502 people for undertaking income generating small projects for self-employment.

The bank also distributed about Tk 4.65 crore among 1,275 people for buying bullocks, poultry and fish farming and cattle rearing.

During the period, the bank recovered outstanding loan amounting to Tk 20.97 crore. The recovery rate is 123 per cent.

Man killed during robbery

From Our Correspondent

RAJSHAH, Aug 12: A man was killed during a robbery at Meher Chandi Chakpara in the city on Tuesday night.

A group of robbers stormed the house of Lal Mia. But neighbours encircled the house and while fleeing one of robbers stabbed Lal Mia. The man died on the spot.

Neighbours, however, caught two robbers identified as Anwar and Manju. They were handed over to police.

A case was filed in this connection with Matbar police station.

7 hurt in police action in Rajshahi

From Our correspondent

RAJSHAH, Aug 12: At least seven people were injured when police resorted to baton charge to disperse a procession brought out by Jamaat-e-Islami at Laxminipur in the city on Tuesday during country