

Polls fever grips five municipalities

From Anwar Ali

NATORE, Sept 16: A total of 29 candidates are vying for chairman posts while 222 candidates for the ward commissioner posts, in the upcoming elections to the five newly formed municipalities in Rajshahi division.

The election to the newly formed municipalities at Gopalpur of Natore district, Bagha of Rajshahi district, Nazipur of Naogaon district and Sariakandi and Dupchanchia of Bogra district are scheduled to be held on September 26.

In Gopalpur Municipality of Natore, five persons are contesting for the chairman post while 38 persons for the nine ward commissioner posts and 12 persons for three reserved seats for women. The number of the voters here is 10,248.

In Nazipur Municipality in Naogaon, nine persons are vying for the chairman post while 42 persons for nine ward commissioner posts and 13 women for three reserved seats. There are 7,125 voters in Nazipur.

In Bagha Municipality of Rajshahi, 11,704 voters are likely to choose their chairman out of five candidates, nine ward commissioners out of 32 candidates and three women for the reserved seats out of 12 female contestants.

In Dupchanchia and Sariakandi municipalities respectively seven and three persons are vying for the chairman posts while 32 and 34 persons for the commissioner posts and 13 and nine women for the reserved seats respectively.

Election fever has already gripped the municipal constituencies with candidates from both the ruling and opposition parties campaigning vigorously for the voting on September 26.

Behind the scenes, the political leaders are busy campaigning for their nominees.

The streets of the towns are vibrating with jubilant people, dancing and prancing while campaigning for their candidates in the afternoons. Colourful processions by men, women and even children bearing the candidate's portrait and carrying replicas of election symbols, are seen marching through the streets.

People of all strata appeared enthusiastic about the polls and were ready to vote for the candidates of their choice. Door-to-door night campaign has become an everyday affair.

Males flee houses at Dalar Char

From Our Correspondent

SIRAJGANJ, Sept 16: Most of males at Dalar Char village have fled their houses following the September 11 incident fearing police raid.

A sub-inspector of police and an outlaw were killed on the spot and 15 others shot during a gunfight between police and outlaws at the village under Bera upazila of Pabna district. Later

Two more outlaws succumbed to their injuries.

Police said Dalar Char is a safe haven for outlaws, terrorists, toll collectors and muggers of Kushiya, Jhenidah and Pabna districts.

However, panic gripped innocent people in the area. Many said some innocent people may be harassed.

Duration of Kazal's detention extended

From Our Correspondent

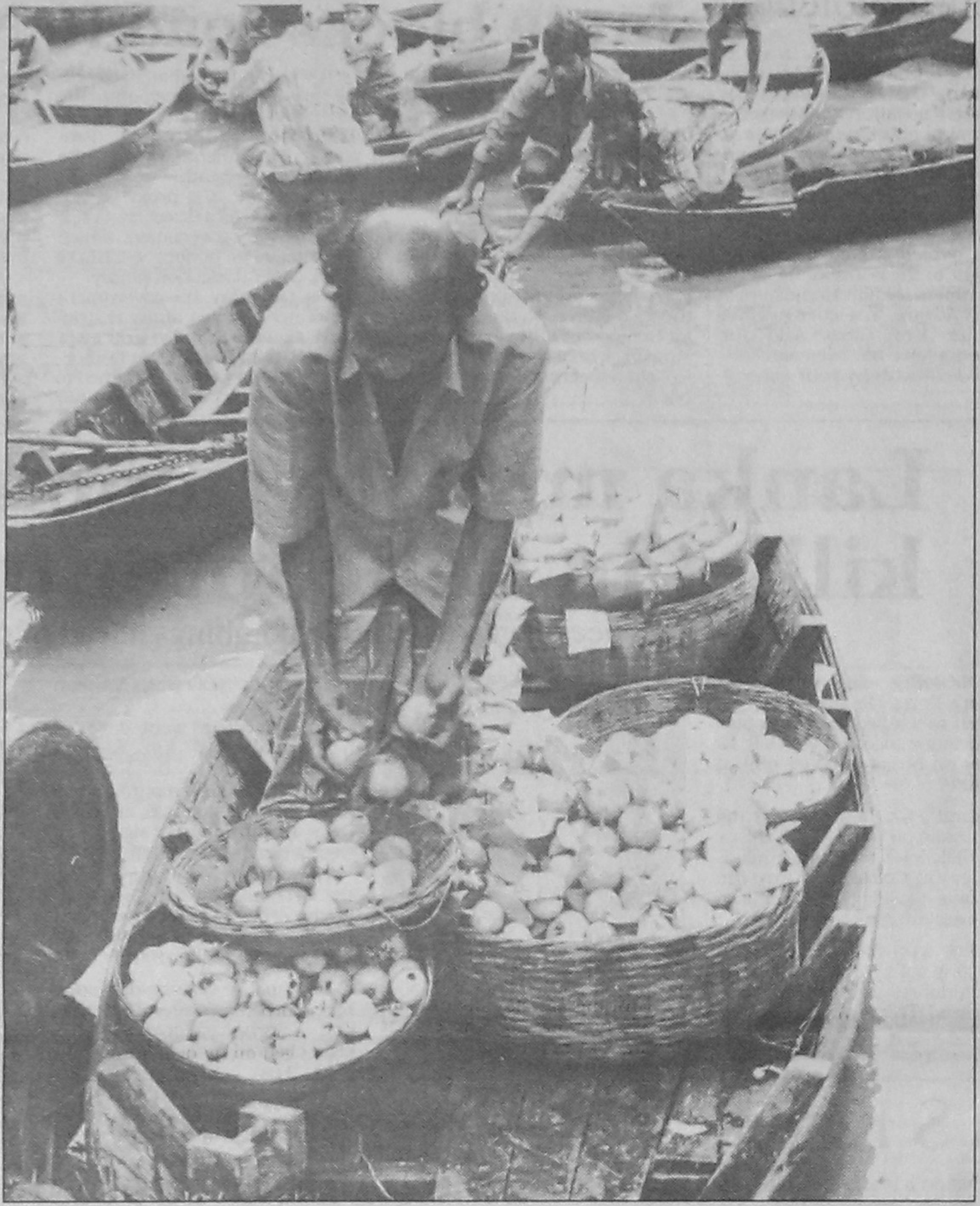
JHENIDAH, Sept 16: Duration of detention of Farooque Ahmed Kazal, the much talked about hundi trader, was extended for another two months.

Kazal, who skimmed crores of Taka through his so-called Kotchandpur Syndicate Bank, was awarded four months detention earlier. He is now staying in Jhenidah district prison.

Farooque Ahmed Kazal collected about Taka twelve hundred crore from investors. The investors were assured to be provided with ten per cent to twelve per cent monthly interests. Kazal was doing the illegal business for the last eight years.

On May 8 this year police arrested Kazal from his house.

A committee was formed to collect the money from Kazal and his agents. The committee will return the money to genuine investors.



Apple of Bangladesh: Now is the peak season of guava, rich in Vitamin C and other nutrients. It is specially good for lactating mothers and teething babies. Once Swarupkati, Banaripara, Inderhat and Mirerhat of Pirojpur district were famous for guava, but gradually production of the valuable fruit is declining. Now guava which is also called the apple of Bangladesh is available abundantly only at Kuriana of Swarupkati upazila. This is due to lack of patronisation on the part of government and other non-governmental organisations for expansion of its production and marketing facilities. Photo shows local workers are engaged in sorting guavas on boats.

--Star photo by AKM Mohsin

Media workshop told

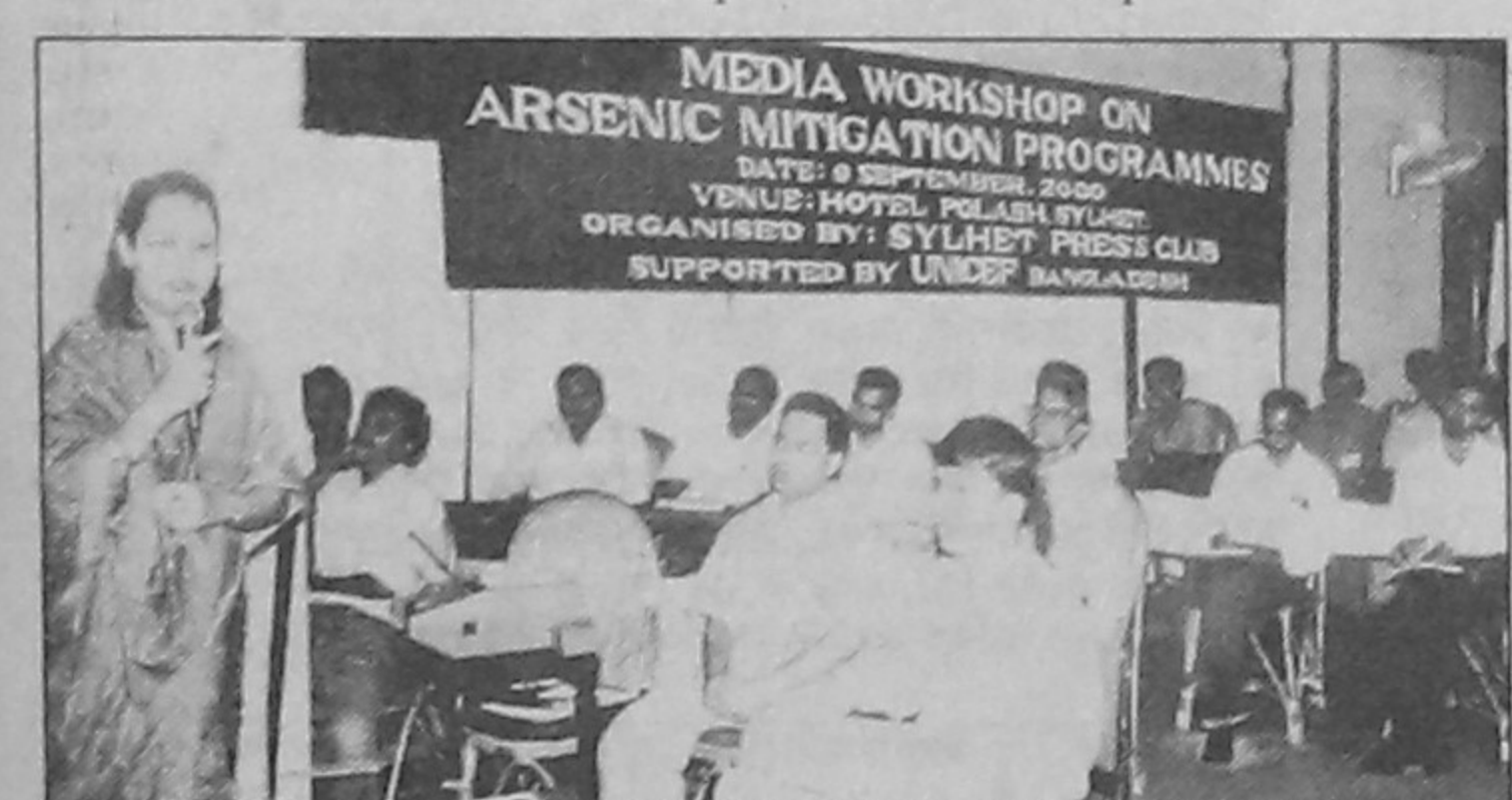
24 m people at risk of arsenic contamination

From Our Correspondent

SYLHET, Sept 16: About 24 million people in the country are at the risk of arsenic contamination.

People's awareness is vital to face the risk of the disease. The journalists have a very important role to play for creating the mass awareness in a country like ours, this was viewed at a day long workshop held at a hotel in Sylhet on Saturday.

The division-level media workshop organised by Sylhet Press Club with the assistance of United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) was participated by 45 participants from four districts of Sylhet division. Reporters of national dailies, news agencies, regional dailies, weeklies as well as from radio and TV took part in the workshop.



Shirin Hossain of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) speaking at a media workshop on arsenic mitigation programme in Sylhet recently.

--Star photo

Those who took part in the discussion include the team leader of Arsenic Mitigation Programme, UNICEF, Dhaka, Shafiqul Islam, Communication Officer, Water, Environment and Sanitation section, Shirin Hossain, Communication Officer, Information and Advisory Section, Chinmoy Mutsuddy and Anish Barua, Executive Director of Communica, Dhaka.

The speakers said that arsenic is a kind of substance which is a common part of many minerals and rocks. It occurs naturally in the environment. Arsenic can not be seen, tested or even smelled when it is in water. Symptoms of arsenicosis can range from the development of dark spots on the skin to hardening of the skin into nodules, often on the palms and soles. The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that these early symptoms develop after five to 10 years of continued exposure to arsenic and can become more pronounced and in time can develop into cancerous lesions. There is no clear understanding of the impact of small amounts of arsenic on the human body. Some members of a family may be affected while others are not. It is not yet known what the other factors, such as nutrition and prior infection, are significant, the speakers said. There is no known cure for arsenic poisoning, although in its early stages it is a reversible process, especially once the consumption of arsenic contaminated water ceases. Early symptoms, such as skin hardening can also be relieved with simple skin oint-

ments. The government and many other agencies are now doing tests to find out how much arsenic is in tube-well water. The effects of arsenic poisoning includes discolouration of skin (lightening and darkening), hardening of palms of hands and soles of feet, ulcers, gangrene and cancer. In the prevailing situation, the potential sources of safe water includes treated ground water, treated surface water and rain water, they said.

With reference to the expansion of arsenic contamination in the country, the speakers said that, over 51,000 tube-wells had so far been tested by the Department of Public Health Engineering with the assistance of UNICEF. About 29 per cent of tested tube-wells were found contaminated with arsenic above acceptable limit. About 24 million people in the country are potentially at the risk of developing arsenicosis, with 7,500 cases identified. It showed that, the middle region of the country is affected with the contamination. The greater Sylhet region is also in the affected area, they added. The survey conducted jointly by UNICEF and DPHE gave a picture indicating an expanding situation. The British Geological Survey also says the same situation, they added. Due to the arsenic contamination, the availability of safe water came down to 80 per cent in place of 97 per cent, they informed.

They also informed that UNICEF has been supporting the testing of the tube-wells, provision of alternative water resources, health management, care, and a communication campaign spotting the dangers of arsenic contamination and steps to counter the same. It is also working in a co-ordinated manner with the inter-ministerial committee on Arsenic Mitigation and the Bangladesh Arsenic Mitigation and Water Supply Project (BAMWSP), supported by World Bank.

Our Netrakona Correspondent reports: People of Netrakona district have become panicky due to increasing arsenic contamination in ground water.

Grabbing the opportunity some NGOs are doing brisk business in the name of examining arsenic contamination in 10 upazilas here.

Unskilled field workers of these NGOs are going house to house and examining water sample from tubewells. They take 50 to 60 taka per tubewell for examining arsenic contamination.

The NGOs are also doing propaganda saying that it is possible to contain arsenic by using medicine.

The NGOs are taking Taka 300 to 400 per tubewell in the name of containing arsenic.

A Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) is doing work to control arsenic in Kalmakanda upazila by their unskilled field workers, but their examining proved to be wrong most of the time.

Sandha Rani Hajong, a field worker said they took training about controlling arsenic using one kind of medicine.

But the Department of Public Health and Engineering (DPHE), Netrakona sources said, it is impossible to control arsenic by using medicine.

Executive Engineer of Netrakona DPHE told this correspondent that those NGOs are not allowed to test arsenic contamination by the government. He added that they would take necessary action against these so-called NGOs who are cheating public in the name of arsenic testing.

Bumper Aus expected

From Abdul Wadood

RAJSHAHI, Sept 16: A bumper production of Aus paddy is expected here during the current season.

District office of Agriculture Extension Department (AED) of Bangladesh Agriculture Development Corporation (BADC) sources said, an additional amount of at least 10,100 metric tonnes of Aus paddy will be harvested during this season.

Cultivation of Aus paddy in additional amount of lands beyond the target, favourable weather and availability of fertilisers and pesticides at justified prices are mainly contributing to the good harvest, AED experts said.

AED fixed a target to bring 25,640 hectares of lands under Aus paddy cultivation programme during the current season. But actually 34,840 hectares of land have been cultivated for the variety of paddy which is more by 8,840 hectares than the targeted lands.

AED officials said that frequent heavy rains and attentive sunny days had made it possible. It had begun to rain during the season from the third week of the Bangla month Chaitra that had favoured early (Agor) cultivation of Aus paddy. "It had rained frequently throughout the months of Chaitra and Baishakh that had enabled the farmers cultivate additional lands for the paddy upto the last hours of the sowing period," said Reswanul Islam Mukul, an official of AED working in Paba upazila.

Masum Mondal, 45, a farmer of Shyampur village in Hariar union of Paba upazila said that they had almost abandoned Aus paddy cultivation. "But this season seemed favourable for Aus cultivation from the very beginning of the season. That is why we cultivated Aus in more lands comparable to other years in the recent past," he said and added that their expectation was going to be true.

Out of the total, high-yielding

varieties of Aus paddy were cultivated on 21,080 hectares of land against the target of 12,740, where as. The conventional varieties of the paddy were cultivated on 13,400 hectares of land against the target of 12,900 hectares of land.

Meanwhile, cutting of Aus paddy has already been started and is now going on in full swing. "About 50 per cent of the paddy has already been harvested," AED sources said.

The harvest of high-yielding varieties of Aus paddy is recording at a rate of about 2.80 metric tonnes per hectare. On the other hand the conventional varieties are being harvested at a rate of about 1.20 metric tonnes per hectare this season.

Production rates of the high-yielding varieties and the conventional varieties were 2.43 metric tonnes per hectare and 1.10 metric tonnes per hectare respectively in last year.

AED sources are expecting that a total of 75,064 metric tonnes of Aus paddy, 59,024 metric tonnes of high-yielding varieties and 16,040 metric tonnes of conventional varieties, would be produced in Rajshahi district during the current season.

This amount is 10,100 metric tonnes more than the last year's production. A total of 65,964 metric tonnes of Aus paddy was harvested last year in the district.

AED sources said that pest attacks on Aus paddy had been very minimum due to favourable weather. Supply of fertilisers were also sufficient at the justified prices during the season, they said.

The farmers will be benefited from Aus paddy this year as production cost will be minimum.

Masum Mondal and some other farmers also opined in the same way, but at the same time apprehended that fall of price of paddy might affect the expected profit.

No bumper this year

PANCHAGARH, Sept 16: Failure to control the massive pest attack on Aman paddy-fields in five upazilas of the district is likely to squander the chances of another bumper output, reports UNB.

"The longer the pest attack stays, the larger its impact on the harvest. The authorities need to take immediate steps to reverse the situation," said an official at local agriculture office.

He said the seedlings were growing well until the pest attack, as there was adequate rain when farmers of the district embarked on cultivation.

'Mazra' pests are destroying Aman crops on thousands of acres of land in the district, but the farmers cannot eliminate those with the pesticides now available in the market.

Talking to the news agency, a good number of farmers in Atowari and Boda upazilas said they had expected another bountiful production this season, but mazra dashed their hopes.

The farmers include Shafiqullah, Shahadat and Daimul Atoari, and Lablu, Matin, Achinta, Mozharul of Boda upazilas.

They said the pest played havoc mainly with BR 11 Shawna, and red and white pizam and it cannot be eliminated with the pesticides.

They further alleged that local markets have been swamped with substandard Indian pesticides. The Indian pesticides, according to them, work little in eradicating pests.

When contacted Deputy Director of the Agriculture Extension Department said they were trying their best to destroy pests and asked the block supervisors to advise the farmers in this regard.

The department fixed a target to produce 1.95 lakh mts of paddy from 1.5 hectares of land in the district this season.

Of the total land, 'Ufsi' variety was cultivated on 51 hectares and local varieties on 54 hectares.

BSS from Barisal says: About 1.50 lakh tones more Boro paddy were produced this year in comparison to the previous year in 11 southern districts under Barisal Agriculture Extension Zone (BAEZ).

According to an official source, a total of 15,10,272 tons of Boro paddy were produced on 2,48,640 hectares in 11 southern districts during 1999-2000 fiscal year.

On the other hand, 13,81,387 tons of Boro paddy were produced on 2,40,348 hectares in these districts in 1998-99 fiscal year.

The cultivable land was increased to 8,292 hectares this year compared to the previous year, the source added.

The districts covered by the BAEZ are Barisal, Jhalakati, Pirojpur, Patuakhali, Bhola, Barguna, Faridpur, Madaripur, Gopalganj, Rajbari and Shariatpur.

The Additional Director of Barisal Agriculture Extension Zone said the production was increased in this region due to bringing of all the targeted land under cultivation this year. Besides, the farmers are now very much conscious in cultivation than the previous years as they can apply scientific methods in all respects, he added.

On the other hand, the favourable weather in time also helped Boro productions in this region this year, the officials said.

The highest quantity of Boro was produced in Gopalganj district while lowest quantity in Barisal district.

Barisal and Faridpur secured the second and third positions respectively in production this year in the region, the sources added.

Voters increase in Jhenidah

From Delwar Kabir

JHENIDAH, Sept 16: Enlistment of voters were completed in Jhenidah district recently. Over 17 per cent voters were included in the new voter list, according to a source related to concerned offices.

In the 1995 census the number of voters in the district was 831,492 which stood 974,811 in the current year. A total of 143,319 new voters were included in the list.

The thana-wise break-up of the voters in 1995 census was 206,353 in Jhenidah sadar upazila, 191,958 in Salkupa, 93,635 in Harinakundu thana, 129,745 in

Kaliganj, 62,191 in Kotchandpur and 147,610 in Mohespur upazila.

The figure in current year increased to 243,083 in Jhenidah Sadar, 246,620 in Salkupa, 113,184 in Harinakundu, 154,361 in Kaliganj, 75,672 in Kotchandpur and 171,729 in Mohespur upazila.

Over 17 per cent new voters were enlisted to exercise their franchise in the coming elections.

Regarding allegation in enlisting minor-aged people as voters, the sources said that they had met up the irregularities with the help of local administration.

Convictions

JESSORE, Sept 16: Five people were convicted and awarded different jail terms in three separate judgements here on various charges, reports UNB.

Additional District and Sessions Judge Belayet Hossain convicted four youths identified as Shahjahan and Rafiqul to life term and Rashed and Rahman to seven years rigorous imprisonment on August 31 in an arms case.

According to the prosecution story, in brief, police arrested the convicts with a pipe gun, a shutter gun, two live bullets, a Chinese axe and a knife on June 26, 1999.

In another verdict, Additional

District and Sessions Judge Motazedur Rahman convicted a woman for smuggling and sentenced her to seven years rigorous imprisonment on the same day.

The court also fined her Tk 1,000, in default, the suffer three months RI more.

The case, in brief, was that police arrested Anwara Begum Anu, wife of Jahangir member of Chankathi village in Sadar upazila, with 80 bottles of phensidyl on April 24, 1998.

Police filed a case and later submitted charge sheet against her. The judge after examining the records and witnesses pronounced the verdict.

News snaps



Vice-Chancellor of Agri-varsity, Mymensingh Prof Md Anwarul Islam inaugurating a modern tractor made in Britain purchased at a cost of Taka Seven lakhs 50 thousand at the dairy farm of the university.

Crimes down

From A Correspondent

TANGAIL, Sept 16: Previously Tangail was known as a zone of terrorists. But now a days a healthy climate is prevailing here. The general people and businessmen here heaved a sigh of relief due to considerable improvement in law and order situation in the area.

Incidents of terrorism and extortion have come down to a great extent. The man behind improvement in law and order situation is Police Super (SP) of Tangail Nur Mohammad. Since his taking over the charge of SP here in September last year he cracked down on criminals with tough hand. Besides this, many terrorists fled away from the district now. Not only that, the Police Super also takes prompt action against dishonest police men who are involved in illegal affairs. For this reason police men in the district remain ever vigilant to contain crimes. The town dwellers and traders told this correspondent that a healthy climate of trade and commerce has been prevailing in Tangail town now.

Help sought to contain baby boom

RANGPUR, Sept 16: State Minister for Health Prof Amanullah today praised the grassroots level family planning workers to help boost the image of the country through successful implementation of birth control programmes, reports BSS.

Addressing a meeting at the Sadar Hospital, he asked the field staff to work hard to achieve the targeted population control level. The state minister said the family planning personnel should design and set their programmes to face the anticipated population boom, which is feared to reach 170 million by 2020. District and upazila level health and family planning officers and staff attended the meeting.

10 injured by gunmen

COX'S BAZAR, Sept 16: Ten people, including five women, were injured as gunmen sprayed bullets on them at their house in Bilchhara village of Chakoria upazila here on Friday, reports UNB.

Local people said the gunmen numbering 15/16 attacked the house of Fakir Mohammad as a sequel to previous enmity in the afternoon, fired shots on them and decamped with valuables. The injured were admitted to Chakoria Health Complex. Of them, condition of Fakir Mohammad, 60, Ahmad, 40, Renu, 36, Anwara, 50 Barkat Ali, 65, and Jamila 35, were stated critical.

Boy hurt in road mishap

GOPALGANJ, Sept 16: A schoolboy was critically injured in an accident near Water Development Board at Pachuria here on Friday, reports UNB.

The victim was identified as Mafizur Rahman of Kazulia village in Sadar upazila and a class IX student of Gopalganj Vocational School. Police and witnesses said the accident occurred at about 8:30 am when a truck bound for Dhaka hit the bicycle on which he was travelling. Mofiz was first rushed to Gopalganj Sadar Hospital and later shifted to Khulna 250-bed Hospital. Meanwhile, police arrested truck driver Mostafa with the vehicle.

Workshop

MYMENSINGH, Sept 16: A four-day Annual Research Review of Bangladesh Institute of Nuclear Agriculture (BINA) begins at its auditorium here on Sunday, reports UNB.

More than 100 scientists of various research organisations, universities, NGOs and agencies will attend the workshop where research activities of eight departments of BINA will be reviewed. Vice Chancellor of Bangladesh Agricultural University Prof Dr Mohammad Anwarul Islam will inaugurate the workshop. Executive President of Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council Dr Zahurul Karim and Director General of Agriculture Extension Department Mohammad Enamul Haq will be present as special guests.

Feni newsman dead

FENI, Sept 16: Mahbub-ul-Haq, a renowned journalist, sports organiser and social worker, died of heart failure at his residence on Wednesday morning. He was 73, reports UNB.

Late Haq was survived by his six sons, three daughters and a host of relatives. He was buried at his family graveyard after namaj-e-janaza at Mizan maidan. Late Mahmood was the President of Journalist Association and general secretary of local sports association.

He worked as Feni correspondent of The Daily Ittefaq during his 40 years of career.

Fake notes flood bazaar

BANDARBAN, Sept 16: Taking the advantage of the simplicity of tribal people, a section of unscrupulous traders are using forged notes while trading with them at remote Baghmara Bazaar here, reports UNB.

The traders have been exchanging the forged notes of different denomination while purchasing various commodities from the tribes during the Jhum season. Army sources said a drive has already underway to find out the culprits involved in circulation of the forged notes. They said every year these people exchange the notes from July to November when selling of Jhum produces is going on in full swing in the remote hilly areas. These people bring the produces to the different parts of the country cheating the tribal people. Meanwhile, members of Baghmara Seven East Bengal Regiment recovered a Tk 100 forged note from a tribal woman on Tuesday. Besides, a man was arrested from a local hotel with such notes.



Overloading is one of the main reasons of highway accidents. But there is none to check this unhealthy trend. This type of scene is a common one on Brahmanbaria-Ashuganj, Brahmanbaria-Kasba and Brahmanbaria-Madhah highway.

--Star photo by Sk Md Shahidul Islam