

National

Influx of illegal arms thru' frontier dists

From Our Correspondent

NATORE, Oct 18: Sixteen northern districts of the country, especially the frontier ones are flooded with illegal arms and ammunition, posing a threat to law and order situation.

These arms are mostly possessed by political activists, outlawed extremists, terrorists, extortionists and miscreants.

The illegal arms include both foreign and local sten gun, SMG, sawed-off rifle, SLR, revolver and pipegun.

Most of the firearms are in the hands of activists of 'three political parties' who have separate hide-outs in different places in this region including frontiers of Natore, Rajshahi, Chapainawabganj, Naogaon and Dinajpur districts and various beel areas in Natore, Pabna, Sirajganj and Bogra districts.

Some local leaders of the three main political parties allegedly finance purchase of illegal arms by their activists. These were procured from some international criminal groups in India in connivance with their local counterparts engaged in carrying smuggled goods.

During last 15 months up to September 2000, police recovered a number of illegal firearms including more than 350 foreign arms. Police also arrested more than 60,000 criminals including absconding accused persons during the period while they conducted several specially organised crackdowns on terrorists in addition to their normal anti-crime campaigns.

The rate of cases filed under sections related to firearms, ammunition, explosives and smuggling has gone up by about seven per cent in this region in recent months.

In the wake of the rising rate of crimes which include terrorism, murders, dacoity, highway robbery and snatching, police launched another special anti-crime drive in these districts from October 14.

This operation will continue up to November 14.

Lists of terrorist gang leaders, smugglers, druglords, illegal armsholders and absconding accused persons in various dacoity and murder cases have been prepared for the anti-crime drive. The number of the listed criminals would cross several thousands, police sources said. Meanwhile, repeated crackdowns on the terrorists have virtually failed to make any impact in the northern region.

Activities of outlawed extremists are flourishing in the border belts and chalan beel areas. Influx of illegal arms through different borders is reported to be unabated. Criminals are moving freely despite cases of murder, terrorism and extortion filed against most of them.

Taking advantage of the weak police drive, identified criminals here continue their criminal and anti-social activities.

Many criminals caught by police get release on bail dramatically and rejoin in crimes with renewed energy. Several such release of terrorist leaders whose names were on the lists of the Home Ministry and local police authorities, panicked local people and also created concern among police personnel.

Senior police officials said that they were now trying to prepare fresh records against those terrorist leaders to round them up again through this recently launched anti-crime campaign up to November 14.

The officials also said that in line with the new drive, efforts were being made for execution of both fresh and pending warrants under all police stations in the 16 districts.

Police could hardly obtain confession from the gang leaders, arrested in previous drives. So the arms possessed by them could not be recovered.

'Political god fathers' are allegedly sheltering those terrorists to use them in political violence and in polls.

In many such cases, police had nothing to do but to remain blind and dumb.

However, a senior police official told The Daily Star that another list of terrorists was being prepared following fear of violence prior to next parliamentary elections.

Sources in police said, electioneering has already started in the northern region. Taking this opportunity many absconding accuseds of dacoity, murder and terrorism cases are seeking shelter under different political party banners. Police is reported to have a close eye on these criminals.

Meanwhile, our Sirajganj correspondent reports: At least 489 'listed people' were arrested and four firearms recovered on Sunday midnight from 16 northern districts by police in a crackdown on criminals named 'Tiger move' aimed at improving the law and order situation before the next parliamentary election next year.

The drive started on Sunday midnight which will continue till November 14. According to instructions of the Home Ministry, Superintendents of Police (SPs) and Officers-in-Charge in the 16 districts of Rajshahi, Natore, Naogaon, Chapainawabganj, Pabna, Sirajganj, Bogra, Joypurhat, Rangpur, Nilphamari, Gaibandha, Lalmonirhat, Kurigram, Dinajpur, Thakurgaon and Panchagarh were alerted.

Recovered firearms include two pistols and two knives.

District-wise break-up of arrested persons is as follows:

Rajshahi-32, Natore -23, Naogaon- 30, Chapainawabganj -24, Sirajganj- 54, Pabna-104, Joypurhat- 12, Bogra-49, Nilphamari -14, Rangpur -17, Gaibandha-24, Lalmonirhat- 32, Thakurgaon-25, Kurigram-27, Panchagarh-14 and Dinajpur-8.

An earlier report says: At least three persons were stabbed and about one lakh taka were snatched away in Sirajganj town during the last week.

Witnesses said a gang of snatchers allegedly led by Sumon and Murad of Masumpur area in the town

were engaged in such activities. This gang also attacked some innocent people who here came from the remote areas of the town in front of local Mousumi cinema hall and in front of the house of Abdul Latif Mirza, a Member of Parliament (MP). They looted valuables including money at arms point.

Kamal Hossain, a leader of Sirajganj Truck Workers' Union told this correspondent that he was stabbed by the same group who looted his money. Masum of village Kamarkhand complained to this correspondent that on October 2 the same gang attacked his rickshaw and stabbed him following snatching his money amounting to Taka 4,500 in front of the aforementioned MP's house.

Another truck driver who wanted not to be named said that the same gang of snatchers snatched away Taka 300 from him in front of Mousumi cinema hall last week.

At least 15 snatching incidents occurred in the town within a week, it is alleged. Some local inhabitants also echoed in similar tone when asked by this correspondent.

This correspondent asked the Sadar thana second officer regarding Sumon group's activities. He replied that Sumon being an activist of the ruling party, police could not take any action against them.

However, the district general secretary of Awami League Abu Yusuf Surjo informed this correspondent that Sumon was never a ruling party activist.

Another report says: Sirajganj and Bogra have become a stronghold of drug traffickers and the drugs are being carried through Bangabandhu Jamuna Bridge. Top terrorists in the areas collect tolls from the traffickers in the name of a political party.

Meanwhile, it has been revealed that snake poison is also being smuggled along with drugs.

News snaps

Blockade on highway removed

From Staff Correspondent

SYLHET, Oct 18: The barricade put up on the Sylhet-Sunamganj Highway by agitated villagers after the tragic road mishap on Monday afternoon, was removed by the police after 19 hours at 1 pm on Tuesday. The barricade was removed following a meeting between Sunamganj district police officials, office-bearers of transport owners association and local elite at Chhatrak thana building in the afternoon.

Meanwhile, several police raids failed to arrest the driver and helper of the vehicle, police said in the meeting adding, measures would be taken immediately to arrest them. The driver was drunk before sitting on the steering. With the death of two more persons at the Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital, early hours Tuesday and in the afternoon, the total death toll rose to 10, officials and sources said. Of the two, one had been identified as Motosir Ali, 60, of village Srirampur in Sylhet Sadar upazila, but another one remained unidentified. Police and other sources contradicted the death figures published in a section of newspapers on Tuesday. Meanwhile, two other bodies were identified at the Sunamganj Sadar Hospital on Tuesday. They are Md Tajuddin, 28, of village Dighli Rampur, Chhatrak and Razon Miah, 45, Kotwali in Sylhet. With this the total number of identified bodies stood at 6. Bodies of four others could not be identified yet, police and hospital sources said on Tuesday evening. However, post mortem on eight bodies were done at the Sunamganj Sadar Hospital while two others at the Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College hospital. The identified bodies were handed over to the relatives on Tuesday while police has arranged burial of the rest 4.

Students go on rampage

From Staff Correspondent

BARISAL, Oct 18: At least eight people were injured when students of Babuganj Degree College on Monday went on the rampage protesting cancellation of Degree examination centre in the college.

Police and witnesses said the agitating students brought out a procession on the campus at about 11 am. The teachers tried to control them but failed. The angry students confined the teachers in the teachers' room and ransacked the classrooms and the office of the college. Babuganj police rushed to the spot and tried to control the situation. At one stage police resorted to baton charge to disperse them. Lemon, a student, Omar Faruk, a teacher and accountant Jamal of the college and four others were injured during the incident. Earlier, the students put up a barricade on Dhaka-Barisal highway to press their demand.



Prof Md Habibur Rahman, vice-chancellor of Shahjalal University of Science and Technology speaking recently as the chief guest at the 10th founding anniversary of Kewapara Samaj Kalyan Samity. It was also addressed by the chairman of Sylhet Municipality Badruddin Kamran, Pradip Bhattacharya, ward commissioner, Muktabis-un-Noor, president of Sylhet Press Club and Iqbal Siddique, general secretary of Sylhet Press Club. MN Anwar, president of the organisation chaired the function.

-Star photo

Schoolboy killed in accident

From Our Correspondent

NARAYANGANJ, Oct 18: One schoolboy was killed and five others were injured when a Dhaka-bound truck collided with a local train at Pagla crossing on Monday noon.

The dead was identified as Ali Hossain, 10, student of class VIII of Pagla High School. Ali succumbed to his injuries on way to hospital. Kamal, 15, student of class IX and helper of the truck Khokhon, 23, were admitted to Narayanganj Hospital in critical condition. The accident occurred at 2.30 pm when a Dhaka-bound local train collided with a truck at Pagla rail crossing, police said. The truck overturned and hit a nearby tea stall. Police arrested truck driver Iqbal, 25. A case was lodged with Fatullah police station in this connection.

Hundi agents kidnapped

From Our Correspondent

JHENIDAH, Oct 18: Unidentified youths abducted two hundi agents of the much-talked-about Kotchandpur Syndicate Bank from the district town on Sunday night.

They were identified as Jahangir Hossain, 40, of Daspur village and Shahjahan Ali, 32, of Sabdalpur village in Kotchandpur upazila. Police said the gang numbering about six, called Jahangir from his house in the early hours of Sunday. They forcibly dragged him into a microbus and then left for an unknown destination. In another incident, miscreants abducted Shahjahan at gunpoint while he was on his way home at Kotchandpur station road on the same night. They snatched the motor bike and cellular phone from Shahjahan, police said. Separate cases were filed with the Kotchandpur police. Three more agents had earlier been killed by some unknown investors.

Urs

Annual urs of Khaja Mainuddin Chishty has been held at Bhatatala in Sylhet town, says a press release.

A six-day programme from September 30 to October 5 was organised on the occasion at Khaja Kutir, the residence of Khaja Pir Jamir Uddin Chishty. The programme includes *mulad mahfil*, *zikr* and discussion on life and works of Khaja Mainuddin Chishty. On the concluding day, former MP Inamul Huq Chowdhury, Maman Mia, Abdul Mannan, Abdul Ahad, M Shabbir Ali, Haris Mohammad, Ehsan Mahmud Hasan, Ataur Rahman (Chand Mia), Shah Alam, Nizam Uddin, Anwar Hossain Anai, Ferdous Ahmed, Nunu Bax, M Harun, Abu Sufian Chishty and Abul Hasnat Chishty, among others, took part in discussion. The discussion was followed by a musical programme. Abdul Hamid, Md Wasim and Rawshan rendered *kawali* songs.

Clash over land: 10 hurt

BOGRA, Oct 18: At least 10 people were injured in an attack over land at Betgati village in Shibganj upazila on Saturday, reports UNB.

Witnesses said that about 50 supporters of Ratan group attacked 10 houses of the rival Shaiful group. They also looted valuables including the villagers. Of them, Jobeda, Monwara, Shima, Ashraf Ali and Moidesur were admitted at the upazila health complex. A tense situation was prevailing in the area. A case was filed.

21 hurt in road mishap

NOAKHALI, Oct 18: At least 21 people were injured in a road accident at Madharghar on Noakhali-Laxmipur road on Monday, reports UNB.

Witnesses said the accident took place when a pickup crashed into a Roypur-bound bus in the area. Five of the injured, Nurul Haq, 28, Shudhir Bishwas, 47, Nurulila, 11, Rahima, 9, and Samsunnahar, 35, were admitted to a local hospital.

Wheat allocated

PIROJPUR, Oct 18: Relief and Rehabilitation Department has allocated 536 mts wheat under rural infrastructure maintenance programmes here in the current fiscal year, reports UNB.

Of the total, 79 mts in Mathbaria, 89 mts in Nazirpur, 93 mts in Sadar, 97 mts in Nesarbad upazila. Besides, 10 mts of wheat have been allocated in Pirojpur Municipality while seven mts in Mathbaria Municipality. The uplift schemes included repair and reconstruction of roads, earth filling and construction of embankments.

Vegetable prices increase

By Staff Correspondent

Acute scarcity of vegetables has been prevailing in kitchen markets in Faridpur, Gopalganj and Chapainawabganj, causing concern among people.

Our Faridpur correspondent says: Traders in local markets have attributed the decline in supply to the flood in greater Jessore and Satkhira districts. During a visit to Hajj Sharhat Ullah Market last week some grocers told this correspondent that the unprecedented flood has totally damaged the vegetables, resulting in dearth in supply.

They also said the sharp prices of vegetables will not come down until winter vegetables are harvested.

The prices of vegetables have shot up in recent days.

Now brinjal sells at Tk 25 per kg against the usual price of Tk 10, karala at Tk 32 against Tk 16, patal at Tk 20 against Tk 10, pulshak at 15 against Tk 8, lalshak at 15 against Tk 8, ladies finger at Tk 20 against Tk 8, kachur lat at Tk 12 against Tk 6, kachur mukhi at Tk 10 against

Tk 6, green chilli at Tk 60 against Tk 25, papaya at Tk 6 against Tk 3 and kakrol at Tk 16 against Tk 8.

Besides, the prices of kacha kala have gone up from Tk 4 to Tk 10 (per four). A medium size pumpkin is selling at Tk 60 against Tk 30 a week ago. A medium size gourd is being sold here at Tk 20 against Tk 10 a few days ago and potato is selling at Tk 12 against Tk 8 three days ago.

Our Gopalganj correspondent says: Prices of bean, parable, radish, brinjal, onion, garlic, green chilli, have shot up abnormally high.

According to market sources, now one kilogram bean is being sold from Taka 17 to Tk 18, parable from Tk 15 to Tk 16, radish from Tk 15 to Tk 16, brinjal from Tk 14 to Tk 15, karala from Tk 26 to Tk 28, potato from Tk 12 to Tk 14, onion from Tk 18 to Tk 20, garlic from Tk 60 to Tk 65, tomato from Tk 50 to Tk 55 and green chilli from Tk 55 to Tk 60.

When contacted vegetable traders said the prices have

increased due to shortage of supply.

On the other hand, prices of rice have also shot up.

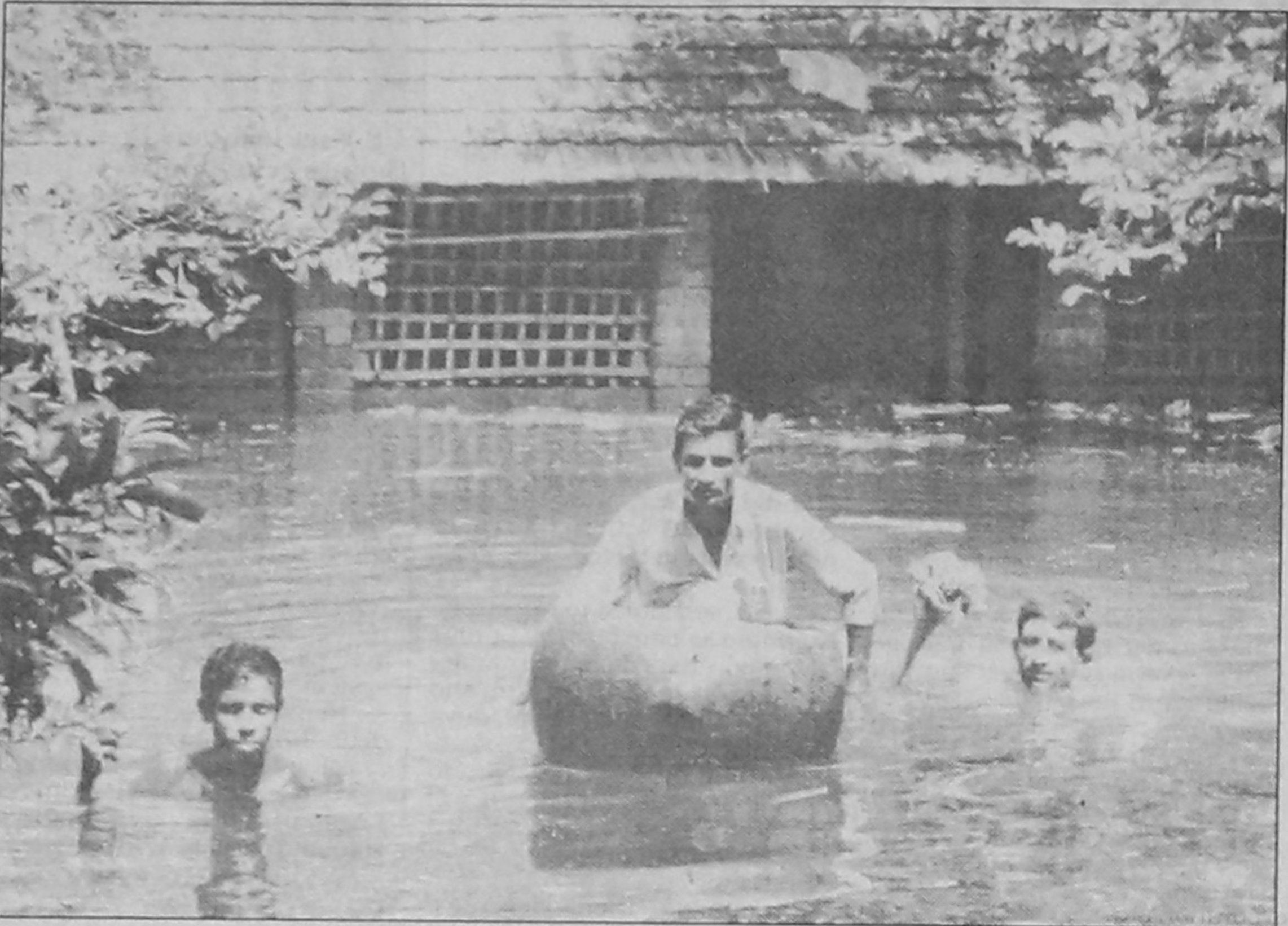
UNB from Chapainawabganj adds: Prices of vegetables have shot up in the local markets abnormally as its supply has fallen sharply due to the flash flood.

Local vegetable traders said that the bulk supply of vegetables here come from Kushtia district which was badly affected by the current deluge.

Meanwhile, the most of the vegetable fields of the district were damaged due to the incessant rain and flood.

A kilogram of brinjal is selling in the market at Tk 20, tomato at Tk 40, parable at Tk 18, radish at Tk 12, green chilli at Tk 36, and onion at Tk 18.

Traders said the prices of vegetables would increase further in the next week as it would take at least two to three weeks to produce vegetable afresh.



Floodwater in Satkhira district will remain stagnant for a few weeks more despite significant improvement in the overall situation recently. Photo shows a flood victim moving by a small dinghy while two others wade through water.

-Star photo by A KM Mohsin

Huge amount of ferryghat lease money unrealised

From Our Correspondent

RAJSHAHI, Oct 18: Rajshahi Zila Parishad (RZP) authorities cannot realise the lease money of its four ferryghats.

A total of about Taka 45.00 lakhs of lease money have remained outstanding for a long time official sources said.

Political influence of the lease holders and negligence and corruption of some of the RZP officials are the main reasons behind the prevailing crisis.

According to RZP officials sources, there are four ferryghats at four places in the River Padma. These are Gabtoli ferryghat, Premtoli ferryghat, Bidirpur ferryghat and Alatul ferryghat all in Godagari upazila. These ferryghats are supposed to be used for plying of boats in between the mainland and the shoal lands situated in the River Padma. In addition to it, these ferryghats are being used for bringing a huge number of cattle from India that are legalised by paying customs charges in the customs and excise land corridors. Besides, a huge amount of contrabands are also allegedly smuggled from the neighbouring country through these ferryghats. All these factors have made the ferryghats commercially important and profitable. RZB earns a handsome amount of money from these ferryghats every years. The lease-holders earn much more from the ferryghats using both the legal and illegal means.

RZB offered lease of the ferryghats at a total of Tk 82.00 lakhs this year. But the lease-

holders have paid only about Taka 37 lakhs so far.

Gabtoli ferryghat was leased at about Taka 9.50 lakhs. Modasser Ali, chairman of Bangladesh Juddhahata Muktiyoddha-O-Shahid Paribar Kalyan Bahumukhi Samabai Samity, an organised based in Dhaka got the lease. The party paid about Taka 3.50 lakhs in three installments. RZB authorities could not say whether the organisation was actually existing or had any branch in Rajshahi. Repeated warnings are being sent to the party for paying the rest of the lease-money. RZB sources said.

Bhagabantapur-Petao-Alatul ferryghat was leased at Taka 49 lakhs. The lease-holder paid Taka 22.75 lakhs so far. The lease-holder was enjoying blessings of an influential leader of the party-in-power. He always uses political power whenever he is asked to pay the rest of the money.

Bidirpur ferryghat was leased at Taka 15.00 lakhs out of which about Taka 8 lakhs were paid till then.

According to RZB sources, this lease-holder is also a powerful party enjoying backings from some leaders of the ruling party. When asked for paying the due money, the party even threatened the RZB officials, it is alleged.

Premtoli ferryghat was leased at Taka 9 lakhs. The lease-holder paid so far an amount of only Taka 3.00 lakhs.

According to the rules, the lease money should be paid completely within seven days after the

date of official allotment. But none of the lease-holders followed the rule. RZB authorities reserves the power to cancel the lease-order in case of the party's failure to oblige the rule and give lease again to another person.

"We are warning the lease holders repeatedly of actions against them if they do not pay the due money immediately, but they are not caring our warnings," said an RZB official on condition of anonymity. He added that the outstanding money could not be realised mainly due to political pressures. "Whenever we pressurise them, they counter it by stronger pressure. They often threat us of transfer and harassment," he said.

However, a section of RZB officials were also responsible for the deadlock situation. They maintain unfair relationships with the lease-holders, the source alleged.

Meanwhile, the ferryghats have allegedly become safe routes of smuggling.

As the common people always go to and come from the shoal lands with necessary goods, crops and valuables, smugglers have got opportunity to easily conduct their misdeeds almost without any doubt in case of small amount of contrabands.

The smugglers and the ghat-owners conduct smuggling managing the concerned personnel of the law-enforcing agencies.

RZB authorities said in this regards that they were not supposed to look into the matter of smuggling.

Good Aman production likely in Mymensingh

From Our Correspondent

MYMENSINGH, Oct 18: Good production of Aman paddy is expected in the district, thanks to favourable weather condition.

Farmers have attributed the proportionate rain between September and first part of October to the bright prospect of production. Besides, pest attack was comparatively less this season.

The cultivation target was achieved this season.

Officials of local Agriculture Extension Department (AED) adequate quantity of pesticide and fertiliser were also available during cultivation.

AED sources said a total of 2,66,000 hectares of land were brought under Aman cultivation in 12 upazilas of the district with a production target of 5,12,140 metric tons of paddy.

Of the total land, 1,42,000 hectares were under High Yielding Variety (HYV) while 1,24,000 hectares under local variety.

21,400 hectares of land were brought under the cultivation in Sadar upazila with a production target of 40,826 mt of paddy, 21,200 hectares with a production target of 40,736 mt in

Muktachchha, 22,200 hectares in Phulbaria with a production target of 40,508 mt, 17,400 hectares in Trishal with a production target of 31,112 mt, 20,100 hectares in Bhiluka with a production target of 39,030 mt, 21,500 hectares in Gafarganj with a production target of 41,152 mt, 22,100 hectares in Nandail with a production target of 43,018 mt, 22,600 hectares in Ishwardi with a production target of 40,392 mt and 20,600 hectares in Gouripur with a production target of 43,989 mt.



Children are the worst sufferers in flood. Photo shows some children who took shelter in a flood camp in Chuadanga district crave for food which was supplied recently by a local non-governmental organisation Impact International.

-Star photo

Jamindarbari Ashrayan Project: 4,000 erosion victims to get houses

LALMONIRHAT, Sept 18: Losing home in erosion by the turbulent Teesta river, Abul Kashem had thought 'home' for him ceased to exist. But the 40-year-old farmer was proved wrong when he got a home of his own.

Father of six, Kashem once had a beautiful house, two acres of croplands and a small poultry farm in Aditmari upazila. But the river devoured everything he had in 1990, just making him pauper.

Since then, Kashem had been living a destitute life with his family members until the government-sponsored 'Jamindarbari Ashrayan Project' provided him with a home.

Eighty barracks are being constructed under the country's second largest Ashrayan project on 100 acres of khas land in Bhotmari union of Kaliganj

upazila at a cost of Tk 5 crore.

Some 800 families left homeless like Kashem by the Teesta will be rehabilitated in the Jamindarbari Ashrayan Project.

Country's largest Ashrayan Project, with 91 barracks, was set up in Laxmipur district. Meanwhile, 90 per cent works on the Jamindarbari project has been completed while the rest is likely to be finished by this month. Three units of Bangladesh Army are working on it.

While visiting the areas a few years back, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina saw a large number of erosion-hit families living a sub-human life on embankments, highlands and open spaces. She directed the authorities concerned to take immediate steps to rehabilitate them by constructing bar-

racks under the Ashrayan Project.

As per her directive, rehabilitation centres were set up at Barakhata, Goddimari, Sindhumra, Patkapara and Dowabari unions in Hatibanda upazila and some 4,500 families were rehabilitated there under the first phase of the programme.

The authorities then embarked on the country's second largest project, Jamindarbari Ashrayan Project, aiming to rehabilitate 4,000 people of 12 villages on the vicinity of the Teesta.

According to another source, construction work on the barracks was scheduled to be completed by September this year, but it took time due to unfavourable weather.

Local administration, meanwhile, has prepared a list of 800 homeless families for rehabilitation there

by November next.

Under the project, eight ponds have been dug where the beneficiaries will cultivate fish on cooperative basis.

Of the 100 acres of land, the 80 barracks are being constructed on 60 acres while two mosques, two primary schools, eight community centres, four roads, 80 sanitary latrines and one embankment on the remaining 40 acres.

Some 80 tubewells will also be installed there. There will be four latrines, two bathrooms and one tubewell for each 10 families.

The embankment is being constructed to protect the barracks from river erosion. Water Development Board also has a plan to construct another embankment from Parulla to Dawabari.

- UNB Feature