



A cassia leaf plantation at Phultala village in Panchagarh Sadar upazila.

Cassia leaf farming on rise in Panchagarh

Good profit, suitable soil attract more farmers to cultivate the spice

QUAMRUL ISLAM RUBAIYAT, Thakurgaon

Commercial cultivation of cassia-leaf (locally known as tejmeta) is gaining popularity in Panchagarh district in recent years as the item, used as spice for adding to flavour and taste of dishes, gives good profit compared to several traditional vegetables and fruits.

The cultivation of cassia leaf is easy and the trees continue yielding for decades.

The growers have cultivated cassia leaf trees on 222 acres of land which was only 106 acres a year ago, said sources of the Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) in Panchagarh.

During a recent visit to different villages in Panchagarh Sadar, Boda and

Atwary upazilas of the district, this correspondent saw many people grow cassia trees in their homestead.

A good number of them made big plantations too.

Besides, the high land areas that usually remain barren or are less suitable for cultivating other traditional crops or fruits is fit for cassia leaf cultivation.

The leaves of a tree sell twice a year in summer and winter seasons.

"I planted 1200 cassia leaf plants on three acres of my high land in June 2013 spending Tk 2.5 lakh. After one year I sold the leaves from there at Tk 80 thousand," said Anisur Rahman, 39, of Phultala village in Panchagarh Sadar upazila.

In October 2015 he sold the leaves of the same field for Tk 5 lakh. He has already

sold the leaves for winter season in advance for Tk 1.5 lakh and the trader will collect leaves within next March.

Tk 1 lakh is enough to nurture the plantation throughout the year, Anisur said.

Abul Baten, 58, of Shikarpur village in Boda upazila, said he planted cassia leaf saplings on three acres of land about five years ago.

This year he got Tk 6 lakh from selling leaves from his plantation and Tk 1 lakh more from selling saplings.

Depending on age, Barisali, Singapuri and local varieties are selling for Tk 100-150, Tk 70-100 and Tk 30-50 per piece.

Abdur Rahim, 35, a cassia leaf trader of Bademuskur village in Kaunia upazila of

Rangpur district, told this correspondent over cell phone that he bought the leaves of Anisur's plantation for Tk 5 lakh in October last and got profit of Tk 1.5 lakh from selling it.

The demand of cassia leaf of Panchagarh is high in different places including capital Dhaka as it has good flavour and larger size.

SM Ashraf Ali, deputy director of the DAE in Panchagarh, said the sandy-loamy soil of Panchagarh is ideal for cassia leaf cultivation.

"Farmers have become interested in its cultivation as they are getting good return with low production and labour cost. The optimum plantation period is June-July and it is better to plant it with a gap 10-12 feet," he said.

PHOTO: STAR

Education and self-reliance, a blind student's dream

BY EAM ASADUZZAMAN with ANDREW EAGLE

For Zakaria Hossain, 24, of Dakkhin Sonakhuli village in Nilphamari's Dimla upazila, the path to higher education wasn't smooth. Like many he faced the financial struggle of belonging to an ultra poor family. Nor is he alone in having lost a father at a young age. But in 2007, in the final days of preparation for his Higher School Certificate exams, Hossain was suddenly confronted by an unexpected, seemingly insurmountable new hurdle: he lost his eyesight.

Fate would have it that the capable student, who had achieved an A-plus result in his Secondary School Certificate, was hit in the eyes by a stray cricket ball.

At first there was hope that with surgery in India's Chennai, Hossain's eyesight might be restored. Thanks to his elderly mother's efforts the accident was reported in the Bangla Daily Prothom Alo, and many people generously offered support to facilitate the surgery that the family otherwise could not have afforded. Unfortunately, despite the treatment Hossain's eyesight could not be saved.

Yet the keen student did not lose his thirst for knowledge. When neighbouring Jaldhaka upazila press club president, Golam Mostofa, currently a ruling party lawmaker, offered to help Hossain access the services of a rehabilitation centre for the blind run by the non-government organisation

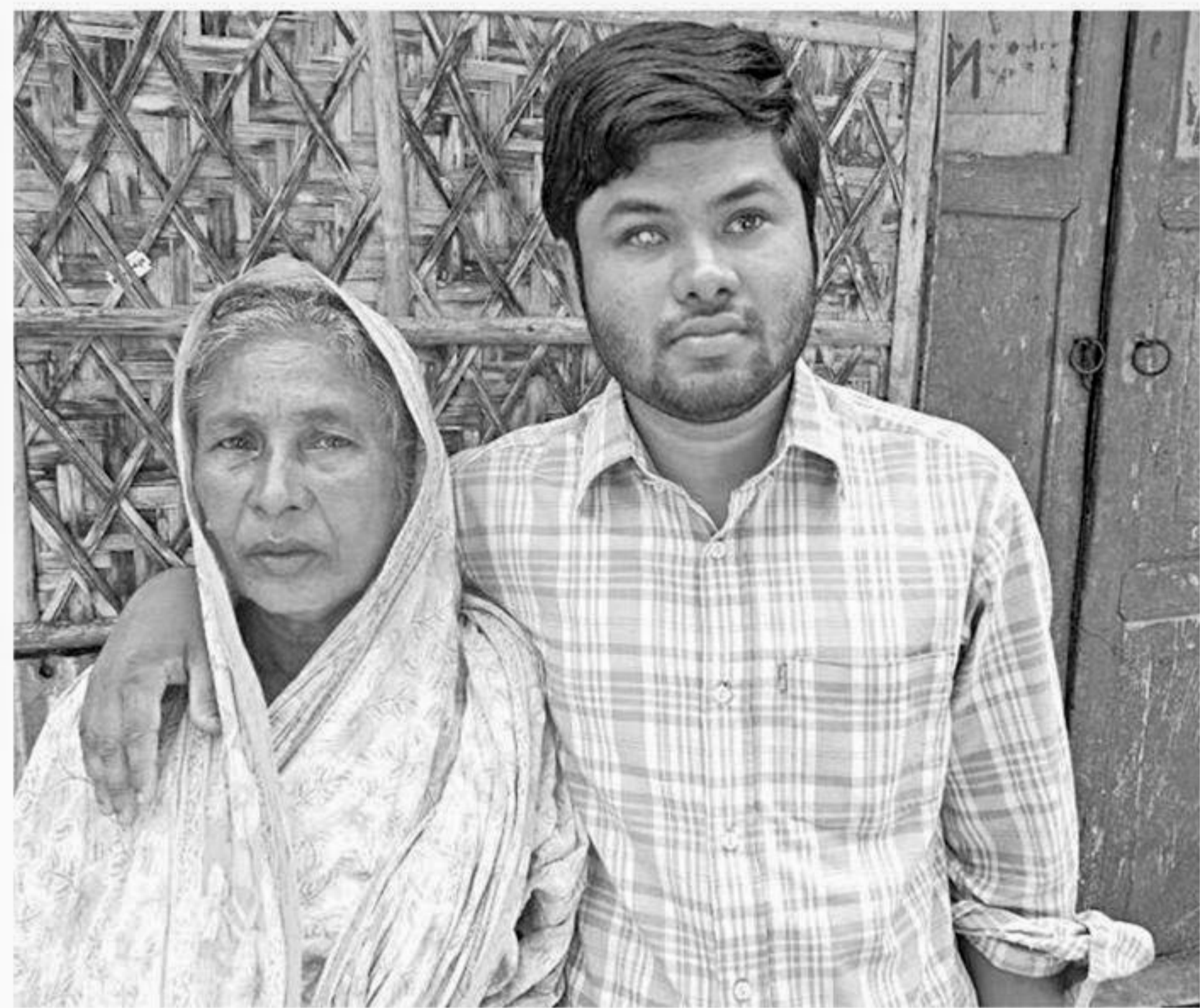


PHOTO: STAR

Visually impaired Zakaria Hossain, who achieved first class in this year's BSS degree (pass) examinations through perseverance and determination, poses with his mother at their Dakkhin Sonakhuli village home in Dimla upazila under Nilphamari district.

RDRS, Hossain readily agreed. He was determined to pass his HSC even if it meant learning first to read Braille.

It took him three years but through perseverance and conscientious study at Lalmonirhat Government College, Hossain prevailed. In 2010, with HSC in hand, he decided to enrol in a BSS degree course at the same institution.

Prothom Alo meanwhile, recognising Hossain's talent as a student and inspired by his determination, started contributing 2,500 taka per month to help his family cover the cost of his studies.

Just last month Hossain graduated with first class results, a rare distinction.

"He might be visually impaired," says Lalmonirhat Government College teacher Ashraf Alam about Hossain, "but as a student he has proved himself really talented. He can go a long way in life with a little support from society."

Characteristically, Hossain like his teacher is thinking less about where has been and more where he will go. "I want to enrol in a Master's programme at Dhaka University," he says, "but I'm unsure how to manage the expenses." At the current time the family's

main income comes from the meagre earnings of his elder brother who works as a day labourer.

"It's not that I want financial help," says always ambitious Hossain, "I'd really like a part-time job to earn the cost of my education for myself."

In the longer term Hossain hopes help other blind students to gain job skills and life skills and, most importantly of all, to be able to complete their education.

"Society often looks at the blind with pity," he says, "I want to make them confident and, as much as possible, independent."

Mayor aspirant dies taking 'excessive liquor'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Awami League nominated mayor aspirant of Arani municipality in the district died after having 'excessive liquor' yesterday.

The deceased was identified as Babul Hossain, 46, vice-president of Arani upazila unit of AL.

He died at Rajshahi Medical College Hospital (RMCH) around 3:00pm, said Brig Gen AFM Rafiqul Islam, director of RMCH.

Babul was taken to Bagha Upazila Health Complex in the morning as he felt severe chest pain following alcohol consumption last night, said family members.

As his condition deteriorated, he was later shifted to RMCH where he died in the afternoon, said a doctor.

"Babul drank liquor regularly," said his wife Dipali Begum Rumi.

Last year, a mobile court sentenced Babul to six months' imprisonment for drinking alcohol openly, said local sources.

Girl 'raped in confinement' for 2 months

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

A 14-year-old girl was reportedly confined for two months and raped by a youth who had promised to marry her.

The youth is Rathindra Namashudra, 21, of Jayda village in Jagannathpur upazila of Sunamganj district.

Victim's brother said Rathindra, who worked as a domestic help at a house in Hemu Namashudrapara in Jaintapur upazila of Sylhet district, allegedly enticed the girl with offer of marriage and fled with her.

Rathindra kept the girl confined to different places in the area and raped her for the last two months.

The victim somehow managed to flee and returned to her house on Tuesday night, Ananta added.

On Wednesday evening, victim's brother filed a case with Jaintapur Police Station, accusing Rathindra.

Shafiq Kabir, officer-in-charge of Jaintapur Police Station, confirmed the matter.

2 workers die as cement sacks fall on them

UNB, Kishoreganj

Two workers were killed and five others injured as some sacks of cement fell on them in a warehouse at Old Meghna Ferry Ghat area of Bhairab upazila on Wednesday.

The deceased are Milon Miah, 30, of Chandpur village in the upazila, and Moslem Miah, 40, of Ramnagar village in Raipura upazila of Narsingdi district.

Witnesses said 36 workers were working at a cement warehouse of Dulal Chandra Saha at about 4:00 pm. Suddenly, some sacks of cement fell on eight workers, leaving Milon and Moslem Miah dead on the spot and five others injured.

Three Jamaat men held

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

Law enforcers arrested three leaders and activists of Jamaat-e-Islami in Poyari area under Muktagachha upazila of the district early yesterday.

The arrestees are Maulana Mozammel Haque, assistant secretary of the district unit of Jamaat, its upazila unit president Maulana Badrul Alam and activist Mehedi Hasan.

They were arrested on charge of planning subversive activities, said police.

Saline water affects farmlands as sluice gate collapses

SOHRAB HOSSAIN, Patuakhali

Saline water is entering vast agricultural lands at Fashipara village in Kalapara upazila under the district following collapse of a sluice gate on Fashipara canal near Alipur Bazar, much to the worry of the local farmers.

The 10-km-long Fashipara canal connecting Shibbaria River with Kochchopkhali lake carries water for several villages including Alipur, Noioripara and Khajura and local people have been using its water for household works and

agricultural purposes for long.

Now saline water from the Shibbaria River enters the canal and eventually affects the agricultural lands as the sluice gate collapsed, said Md Abu Bakar, a farmer of Alipur village.

Due to the situation, thousands of local farmers are worried over their cultivation, especially of paddy and watermelon, he said.

"Water Development Board (WDB) built the sluice gate in 60s to protect the farmlands from saline water. But recently

the gate along with its guide wall collapsed as the road over it caved in under the heavy pressure of goods-laden trucks and other vehicles crossing over it," said Md Sayeed Fakir, acting chairman for local Latachapli union parishad.

"We informed the WDB and upazila parishad of the matter several times but to no effect yet," he said.

Md Abul Khayer, executive engineer of WDB in Kalapara Circle, said they have already taken a plan to repair the sluice gate and hopefully the work will start soon.

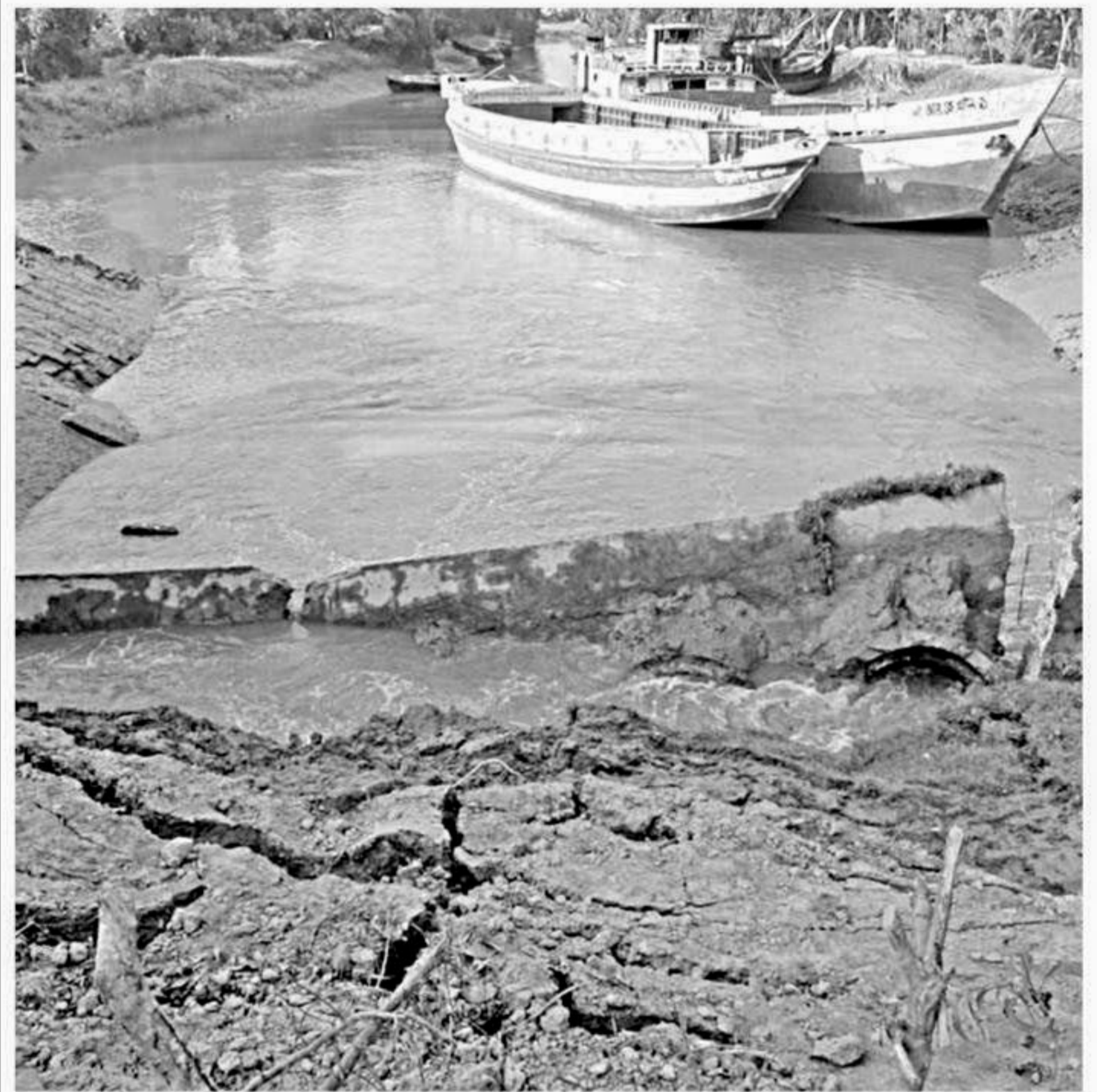


PHOTO: STAR

This sluice gate over Fashipara canal near Alipur Bazar in Kalapara upazila under Patuakhali district collapsed, letting entrance of saline water to the agricultural lands from the Shibbaria River.

2 more held in Netrakona schoolteacher murder case

UNB, Netrakona

Police on Wednesday night arrested two more people, suspecting their involvement in the killing of primary schoolteacher Arjun Chandra Sinha at Manash village in Barhatta upazila of the district.

The arrestees are Kala Chan, 32, and Hira, 25. They hail from Choigaon village in the upazila.

Salimuzzaman, officer-in-charge of Barhatta Police Station, said law enforcers conducted separate drives in different areas of the upazila and arrested the duo.

Earlier on the day, police

arrested another person named Babul in connection with the killing.

Arjun Chandra Sinha, 42, headmaster of Manash Government Primary School, was stabbed to death by an unidentified gang while he was going to the school at around 10:00am on Wednesday.

Arjun Chandra had an enmity with Abul Kashem, a member of Asma Union Parishad, over formation of the school managing committee, the OC said.

On information, police recovered the body and sent it to Sadar Hospital morgue for autopsy. A

case was filed with Barhatta Police Station the same day.

Police are trying to unearth the motive behind the murder and arrest the real culprits, OC Salimuzzaman added.

Man commits suicide

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bogra

A man committed suicide by hanging himself following a family feud at Madanpur village in Sherpur upazila of the district yesterday.

The deceased is Asadul Islam, 30, son of Khalilur Rahman of the village.



PHOTO: STAR

Thengamara Mohila Sabuj Sangha brings out a procession on Bogra-Rangpur highway yesterday, marking International Day of Persons with Disabilities and National Disability Day-2015.