

Padma has dried up near Hardinge Bridge at Paksey

From Ranesh Maitra

PABNA Feb 14 The mighty river Padma, known as 'Kirtinasha Padma', has now completely dried up near the Hardinge Bridge of Paksey within Pabna district. A kutcha embankment, which can be called as an earthen road has been constructed with bamboo fencing on both sides, from Paksey ferry ghat on the one end and Bheramara ferry ghat on the other. Buses, trucks, jeeps, micro-vehicles and all other such vehicles have been passing through this road and crossing the big mighty river day and night. No ferry-service is there.

The situation is such just near the Hardinge Bridge and it is a strange phenomenon that this correspondent noticed on Sunday when he, along with another senior journalist of Pabna, Anwarul Haque of The Daily Ittefaq, went to Paksey to visit the situation.

The above development has only brought one effect that the ferry services are being no longer required, no fuel consumption is being necessary for crossing the mighty river and thus it is helping saving a huge expenditure from the government exchequer. No traffic jam is also being created.

Thus, it was noticed that the road communication between the northern and southern zones of Bangladesh, covering over 30 districts, became free from the jam-hazards. Not only the passengers from those districts running in thousands every day over coaches and other vehicles are being able to cross the river Padma without any hindrance but also huge quantities of various goods and commodities are being carried through trucks from the Chalna Port in the southern-most Khulna district to the northern-most Tetulia — one over the Bay of Bengal and the other just below the Himalayas.

This situation, according to the local people, continues up to the end of April or the beginning of May when rainy or flood season will come. The road was constructed two months back, i.e. in December (middle) and so this situation

will continue for, about six months of the year and thereafter, ferry services between the two ferry ghats between Paksey in Pabna and Bheramara in Kushtia districts would have to be resumed.

Vast shoals have been created within the river Padma where sands have appeared, having no scope of cultivation. It was also noticed that just below the Hardinge Bridge, once the biggest bridge in the undivided India, crops — specially IRR1 paddy — has been grown and the river Padma, too narrow in its breadth, having some water, was found as if watering the IRR1 fields cultivated on the river beds. Water-level is too low and nobody knows when they will dry up completely.

The famous hilsa fish of the Padma is no more as there is no flow, no current at all in the river. The stronger the current, the greater the availability of hilsa

fish and hence, hilsa of the Padma, which had a unique taste even during the Pakistani days, is entirely a forgotten tale of our past history.

This phenomenon was the creation of the construction of the Farakka Barrage in the upstream of Paksey, that made vast areas of land in Rajshahi, Chapainawabganj, Pabna, Kushtia and several other southern districts completely barren.

River communication has also turned into a matter of the past. No river-vessels, even boats of big size can ply in vast surrounding areas of Paksey and this phenomenon became the root cause of throwing thousands of boatmen into complete jobless position as it has occurred in case of thousands of fishermen who made their catches day and night on all the 365 days of the year. The sorrow plight of the fishermen and boatmen, whose number would be around two lakh, with their 12,000 dependants go out of job for six months of the year. Some of them have, however, taken up alternative profession of cart-driver, rickshaw and rickshaw-van puller, small restaurant and other shop owner etc. A large section of the remaining portion of the fishermen and boatmen have opted for India which is just few miles (below 10 miles) from Paksey.

It comes to the memory that even during the long nine months of the Liberation War, our trained guerrillas in thousands used boats from 'Jalangi' in Murshidabad ghats almost every night, carried arms and ammunition and entered into Bangladesh (then under siege by the occupation forces of Pakistan). Thousands of families (refugees who were forced by Pak army and their henchmen like the so-called peace-committee members, Rajakars and Al-Badrs and also a large section of the non-Bengalees in the area) also left the country temporarily on boats through the river Padma which was still a big river in those eventful days.

Now things have changed altogether. In vast areas of so many districts, as a consequence of the Farakka Bar-

rage, not only the Padma has gone dry, sands have accumulated over vast chars that have appeared innumerable over the river bed, but the underground water-level has gone abnormally low hindering cultivation severely.

Moreover, the giant Ganges-Kobadak (GK) project near Bheramara, North Bengal Paper Mills of Paksey, Goalpara Power Generation Centre, Khulna Newsprint Mill and a number of jute mills in the Khulna zone have been suffering acutely as the sweet water they require for running the mills are not being available.

The authorities of North Bengal Paper Mills of Paksey, since 1992, have been compelled to arrange on their own dredging of the river just near their mill only for making the water they need available, thus the production cost of paper in this mill has increased by about one crore taka annually.

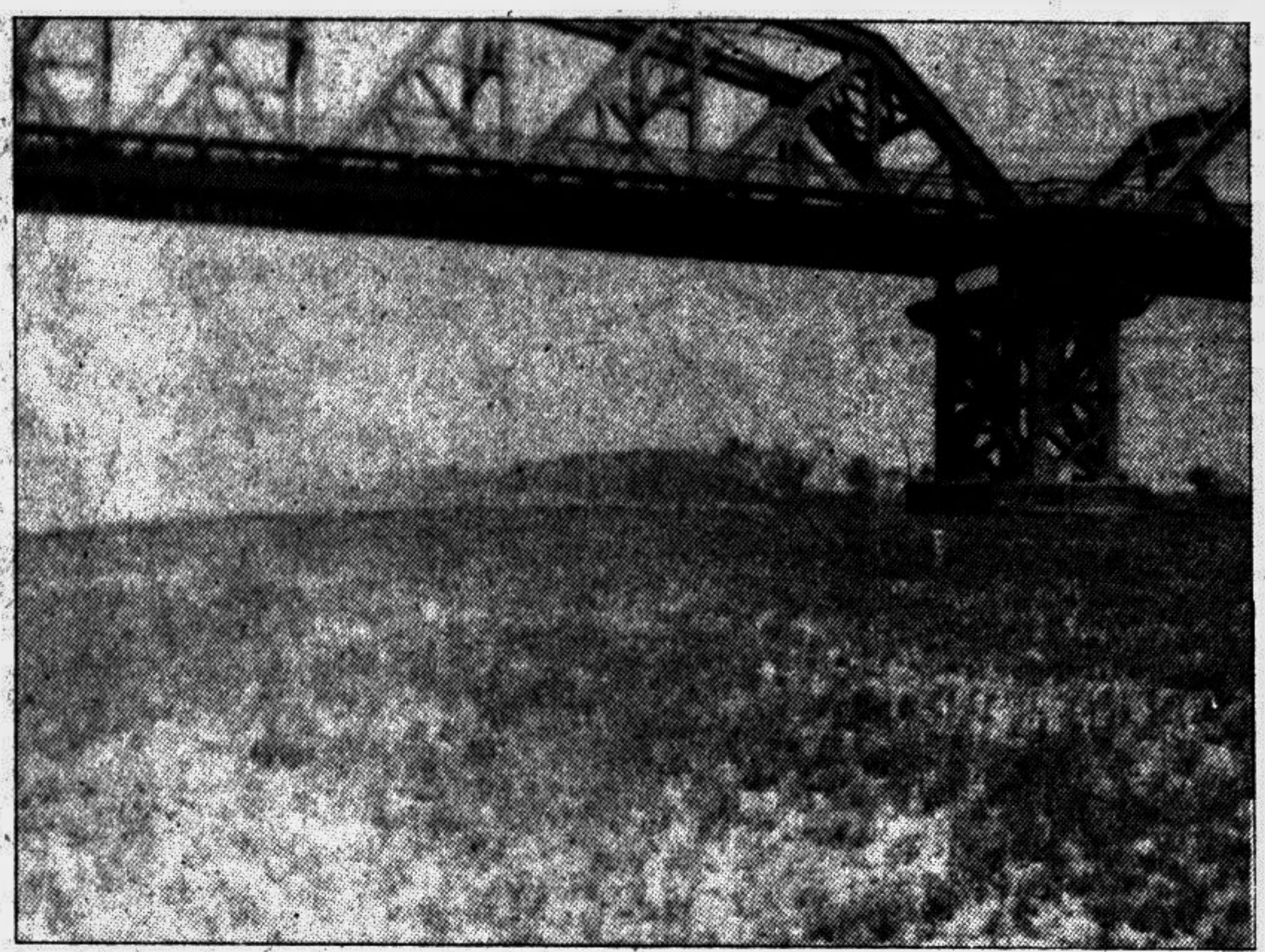
Thousands of shallow tubewells in the affected areas have been rendered un-serviceable due to abnormal fall in the underground water-level. No surface water is also available and hence the problems of agricultural production on the one hand and drinking water problem on the other hand have grown extremely acute.

Environmental damage is also heavy and unaccountable. Tree plantation has also been rendered difficult due to extreme shortage of underground water availability in the dry season which causes untimely death to many trees and plants.

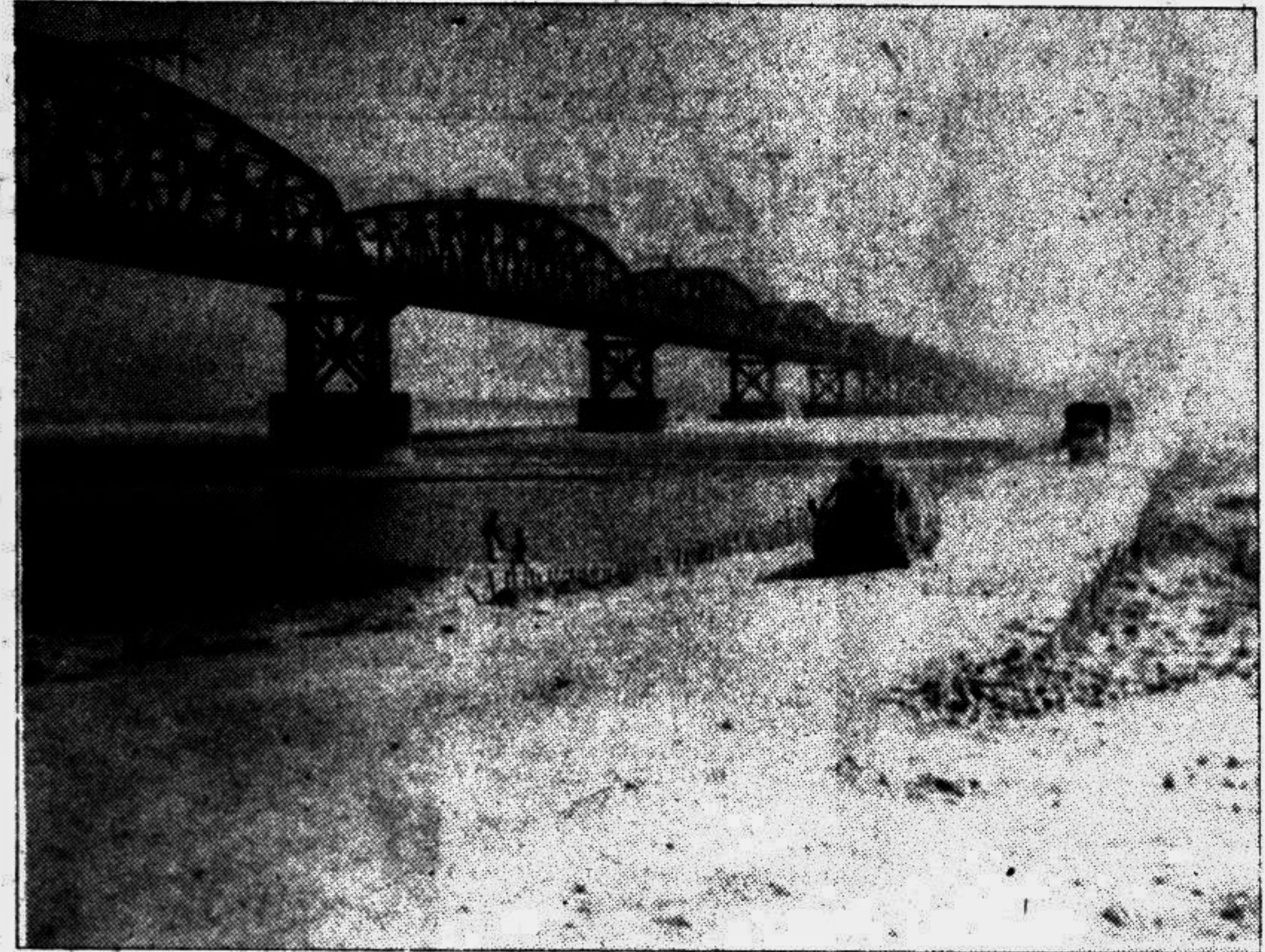
Besides Farakka, another problem is also very much acute and has been rendering much harm to the problem. The depth of the river has almost disappeared and even if sufficient flow of water is made available after reaching any successful argument between Bangladesh and India, the river bed has got no capacity to hold the water which will then cause artificial flood and create new problem of preservation of the water. So, immediate arrangements for deepening the river-bed should be taken up as this correspondent felt deeply after seeing and studying the spot.

It is, however, not known what the specialists have been thinking about the problem.

People of the locality told that if the depth of the river could be increased, much quantum of water (excess) available during the flood season could be stored.



PABNA: Look, IRR1 has been planted within the river Padma just below the Hardinge Bridge of Paksey. The photo was taken on February 4. — Star photo by Ranesh Maitra



PABNA: Alas, this the road constructed within the mighty river "Kirtinasha Padma" between Paksey and Bheramara, connecting both ends of the river and vehicles have been passing without the help of any ferry. — Star photo by Ranesh Maitra



PABNA: Believe it or not, this is the vast char that has been formed within the river Padma with sand and silt alone near Paksey as photographed on February 4. — Star photo by Ranesh Maitra

Bhabanipur Temple left uncared

From Our Correspondent

Burbak Shah in Delhi and Mir Jumla in Bengal, the Temple was established on 1.62 acres of land at Bhabanipur. According to the Hindu mythology, there are 52 holy places known as 'Pithastan' where prices of the body of 'Safi' were dropped at the period of King 'Dakkha'. Since then, the places were religiously famous and other than Bhabanipur, Chaitrahati in Rajganj thana under Sirajganj district, Bharatkhal in greater Rangpur and Chandranath Dham in Chittagong are also famous as the 'Pithastan' of Bangladesh.

Long ago, the Temple of Bhabanipur was maintained by the Zamindari of Rani Bhabani of Natore. At present the government of Bangladesh has sanctioned an amount of Tk 5,742 per year to maintain the recurring expenses of the Temple of Bhabanipur which is paid by the Revenue Department of Natore district administration.

The caretaker of Bhabanipur Temple, Amulya Kumar Chakrabarty who is also an Assistant Teacher of Bhabanipur High School told that the yearly sanction remains unrealised for about five years. Only Tk 11,42 is sanctioned for daily worship.

During different festivals the government sanctions money which include Tk 50 for Durga Puja, Tk 25 for Dwipawita, Tk 50 for Basanti Puja and Tk 10 for Nabanna. The amounts are so

negligible that could not be used in any purpose. Time passes commodity prices have shot up but the amount of money sanctioned long ago were not enhanced.

Besides, the caretaker gets a monthly honorarium at the rate of Tk 85, the priest Tk 42, cook Tk 40, servant Tk 30 and female servant Tk 20 which are not also paid for about three years.

When contacted, on February 4, during visit of this correspondent at Bhabanipur on the occasion of 'Maghi Purnima', Kalyan Sen of Sherpur and Utshab Bhowmik of Bogra, President and Secretary respectively of the Temple committee, told that brass-made face of 'Durga' deity is worshipped in Bhabanipur Temple and black stone face of 'Kali' deity is worshipped in Chaitrahati Temple. The Debtwar estate of Natore is responsible for looking after the Temple on behalf of the government. During Ershad and present regimes, the Temples of Bhabanipur were repaired and a new Temple of 'Sib' deity is reconstructed. The boundary walls of 1.62 acres Temple area have collapsed in many parts which need early repair. During the Liberation War, the doors, windows and furniture of the Temple were looted but the brass deity remained untouched. During Babri Mosque incident in India, the Temple was unhurt. The committee members have appealed to the authorities of Hindu Welfare Trust to sanction adequate fund for reconstructing the boundary wall and to re-excavate the holy pond where thousands of devotees take holy bath on different occasions.

It is widely felt that communication of Bhabanipur which is 12 kilometres away from Sherpur and five kilometres from Chonka on Nagarbari-Dinaipur highway should be developed. During festivals, minibuses from Sherpur in Bogra district are used to carry passengers toward Bhabanipur which is also a union headquarters of Sherpur thana. The kutcha roads from Sherpur and Chonka turn dusty during dry seasons and muddy in the rainy seasons. Construction of asphalted roads may decrease the sufferings of the devotees.

Local people have appealed to the authorities to enhance allowances for the Temple, honorarium of the inmates, regular payment of sanctioned money and construction of roads from Sherpur and Chonka to ease arrival of devotees and tourists at the age old and historically important Bhabanipur Temple in Sherpur thana under Bogra district.



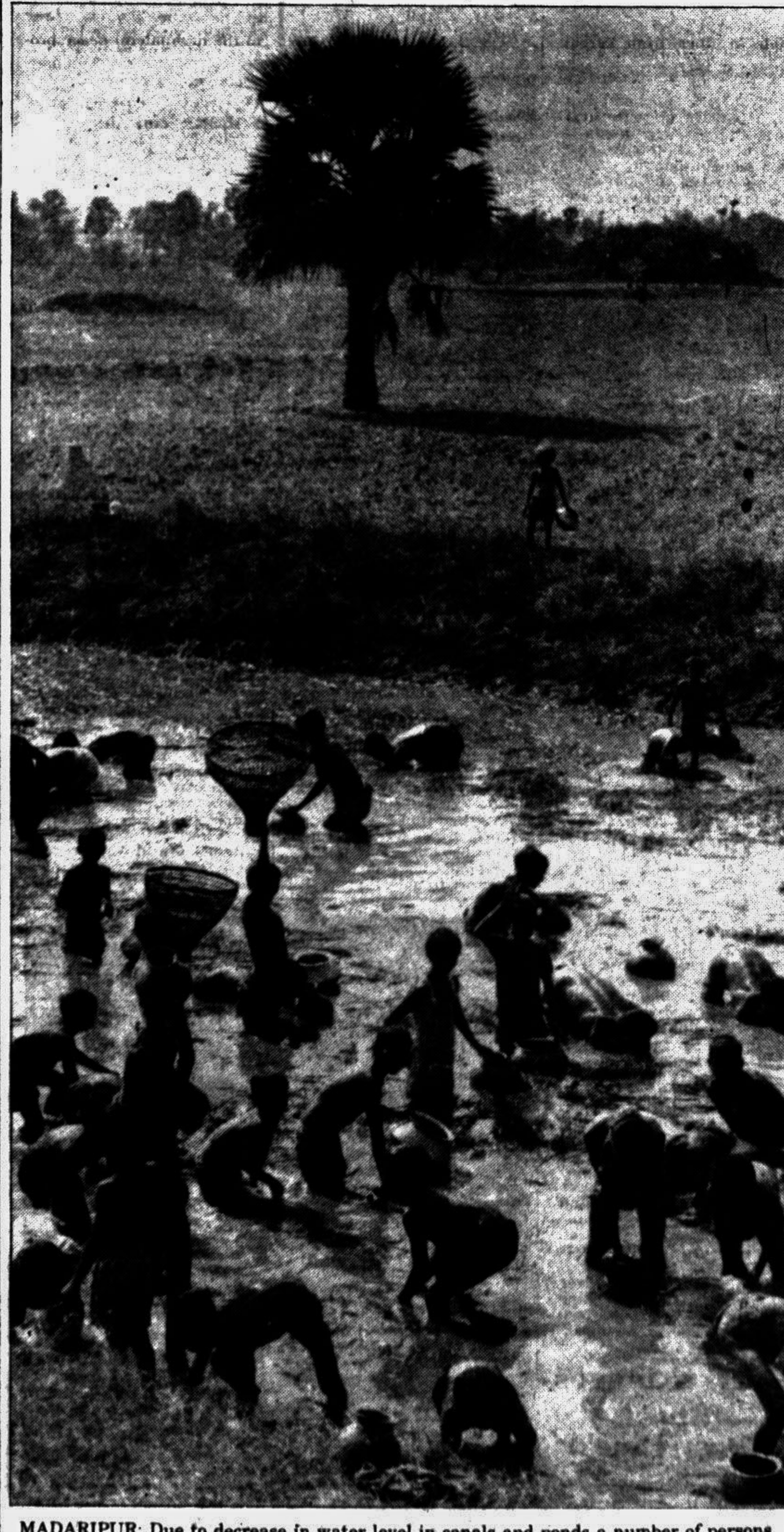
SIRAJGANJ: Black stone deity of Chaitrahati Temple in Raiganj thana of Sirajganj district. — Star photo

SIRAJGANJ, Feb 14: Bhabanipur Temple in Sherpur thana under Bogra district has turned to a holy bathing place for the Hindus on every 'Maghi Purnima'. A 3-day fair is organised every year on the occasion and thousands of devotees from all over the country come on the 'Maghi Purnima' to take holy bath here.

It was learnt from different sources that during the regime of Pathan Emperor



SIRAJGANJ: A view of Bhabanipur temple in Sherpur thana of Bogra district. — Star photo



MADARIPUR: Due to decrease in water level in canals and ponds a number of persons are now catching fishes in such water bodies with bamboo made fish trap. The photo shows a number of persons carrying out the act in the district. — Star photo

AED distributed seeds, fertilizers in B'baria

From Our Correspondent

BRAHMANBARIA, Feb 14: Brahmanbaria District Agricultural Extension Department (AED) distributed 24,09,208.2 kg of varieties seeds and 832,6484 metric tons (mts) of fertilizer at the cost of Tk 1,16,800.00 among the 23,675 farmers of all seven thanas of the district under Agricultural Rehabilitation Programme 1995-96 to bring 878,36 acres of lands for Robi crops cultivation here.

The rehabilitated thanas are: Nasirganj, Sarail, Akwara, Kasba, Nobnagar, Bancharampur and Brahmanbaria Sadar Thana of the district.

According to AED office sources, of total 41,400 kgs of boro-paddy seeds and 421.82 mts of fertilizer were distributed among the 7,680 farmers to bring 2,760 acres of lands under boro paddy cultivation. 1,96,850 kgs of wheat and 114,375 mts of fertilizer were distributed among the 10,350 farmers to bring 3,937 acres of land under wheat cultivation. 4,300 kgs maize and 65.6 mts of fertilizer were distributed among the 1060 farmer to cultivate 400 acres of lands. 5,150 kgs of oil seed and 130.67 mts of fertilizer were distributed among the 2680 farmers to bring 1,120 acres of lands under mas-

tered and other oil-seed cultivation. 1300 kgs of pulse and 6,2619 mts of fertilizer were distributed among the 240 farmers to bring 8660 acres of lands under pulses cultivation and also 208.2 kgs of vegetables seed and 93,9215 mts of fertilizer were distributed among 1,665 farmers of the district to bring 480 acres of lands under vegetable cultivation during rabi season here.

It was alleged that most of the farmers of Shahzadapur union, a flood affected areas, did not get any agricultural relief for cultivation.

A poor farmer Jaru Mia of Shahzadapur village said that they did not know when the agricultural relief came and was distributed.

In this connection, a farmer Sheikh Muhammad Nurul Islam of village Shahzadapur said that Shahzadapur was a hundred per cent flood affected area where the farmer had no means to till their lands due to shortage of money and necessary agricultural inputs. Yet, most of the farmers of the village did not get any agricultural aid or relief during the current season. He also said that the farmers of the said village were more suffers and illfated as frequent flood and natural calamities had broken their backbone. They did get even any bank loan.

It was also alleged that some dishonest dealers are allegedly selling adulterated and impure fertilizer, pesticide and seeds in the market while pure and perfect fertilizers are being sold at high rate.

According to sources, most of the dealers sold their urea fertilizer at Ashuganj Ferry Ghat market at the prices up to Tk 255.00 per bag of 50 kg against the official fixed price of Tk 186.50 while Triple Sulphur Phosphate (TSP) fertilizer was sold at the price of Tk 565.00 and Miruat Potas (MP) fertilizer was sold at the price of Tk 355.00 at the same Brahmanbaria Ashuganj Ferry Ghat market near Zia Fertilizer Company.

In the rural market, the same fertilizers are being sold at very high rate which is beyond the purchasing capacity of poor and middle class farmers.

Besides, the farmer are also being deceived as the dishonest traders are selling SSP fertilizer in the name of TSP fertilizer.

The farmers have urged the authorities to ensure the supply of pure High Yield Varieties (HYV) seeds, insecticides and pure fertilizer for better cultivation and to take necessary steps against the such dishonest dealers and traders.

Yungman killed in road mishap

From Our Correspondent

KISHOREGANJ, Feb 14: A youngman aged about 18 was killed when he was run over by a passenger bus at Pirjip bus stand in Bajitpur thana on February 9 last.

Deceased Manik Chandra Saha of village Salua in Kularchar thana was riding a bicycle when a Hossainpur bound passenger bus hit him from behind and ran over him. He died on the spot.

The driver with the bus fled the scene immediately after the accident. A case was registered with Bajitpur police station in this connection.

Young man arrested

RAJBARI, Feb 14: A young man was arrested from Daulatdia ghat with 26 bottles of Indian phensidyl syrup on February 5 last, reports UNB. Mohor Ali, 22, of Kaliganj was arrested by the police of the ghat outpost while he was going to Savar carrying the bottles secretly.

A case was filed in this connection.