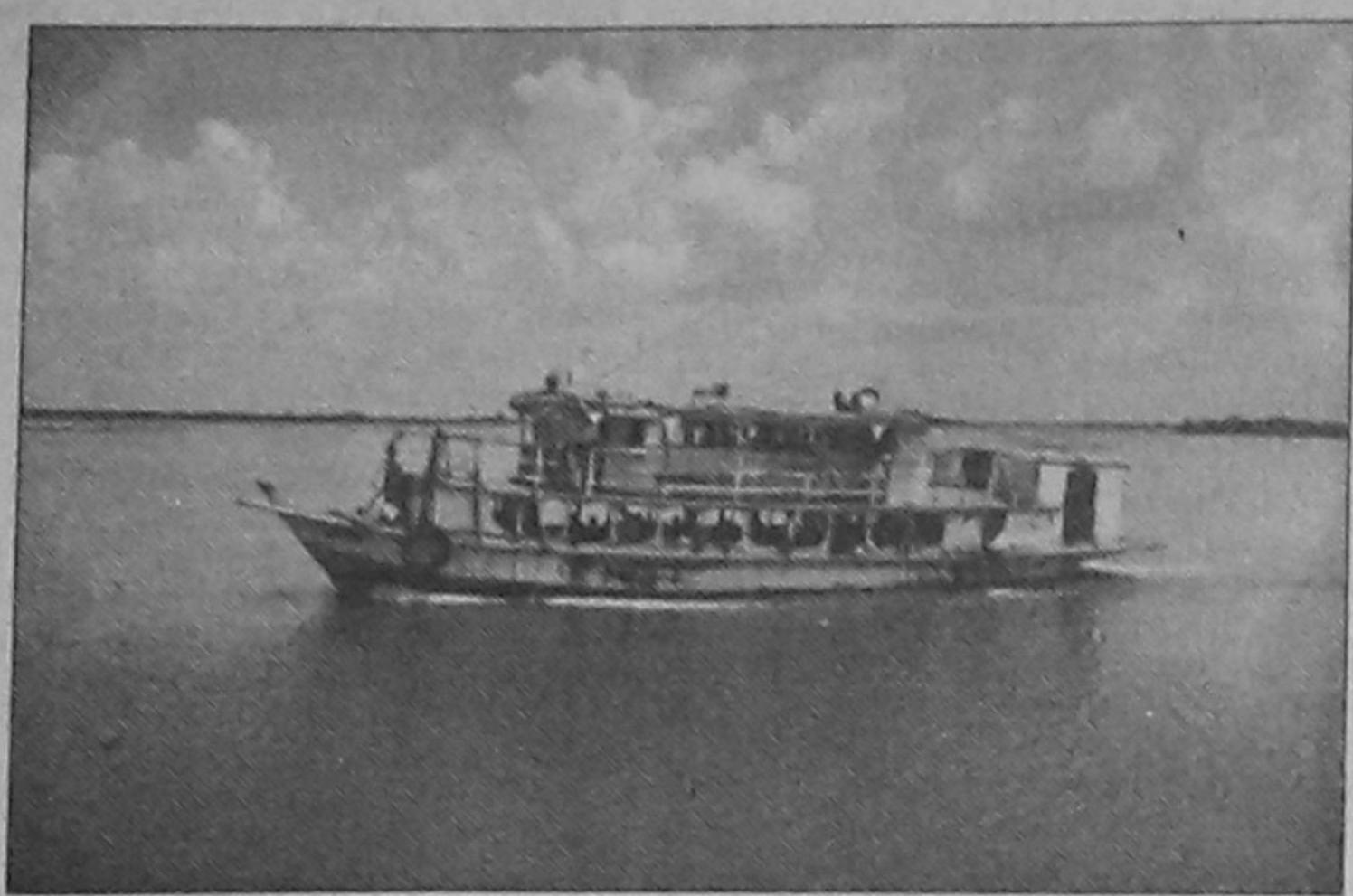


## Meghna tragedy

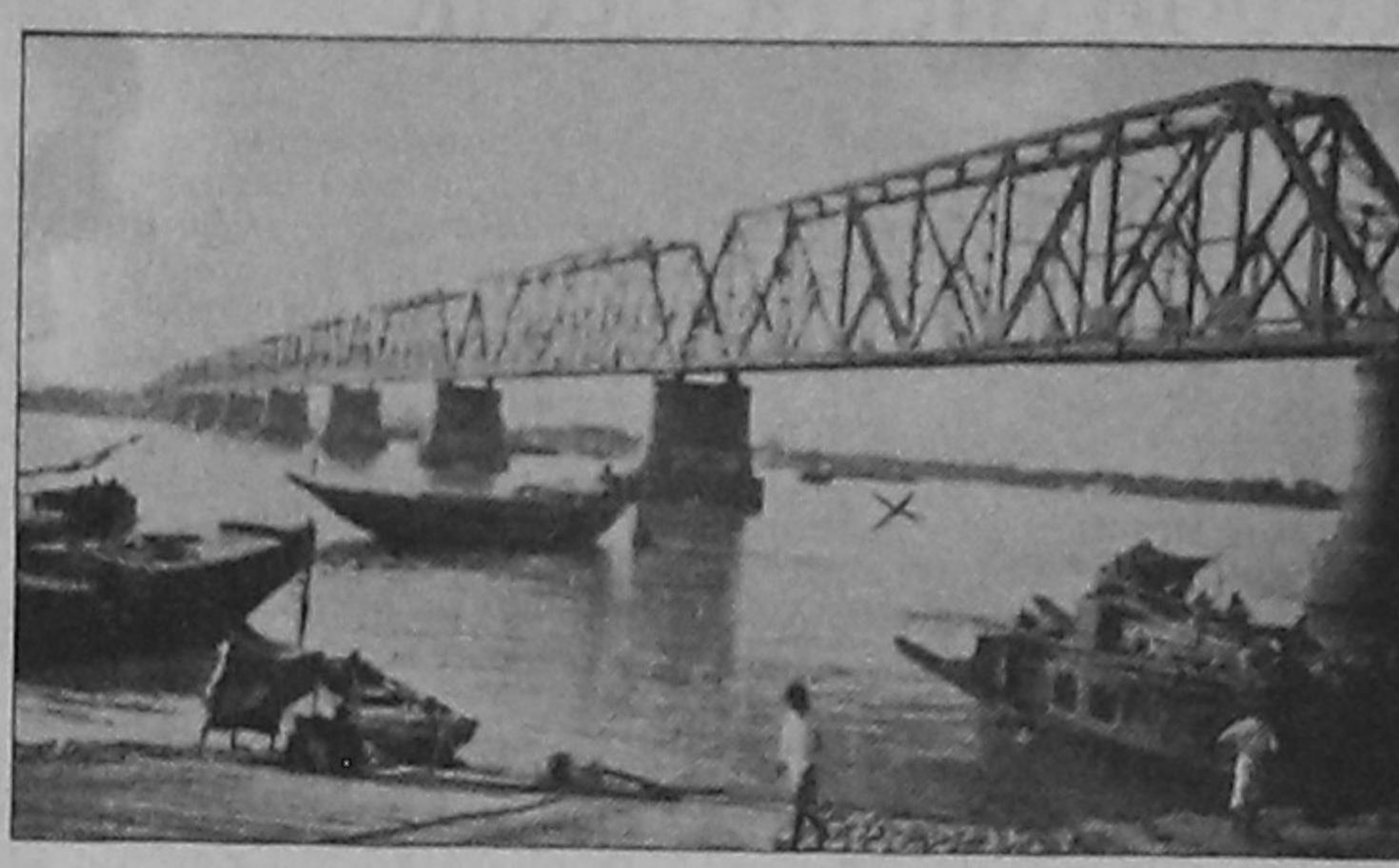
## Passengers lose interest in launch journey



A Nabinagar bound launch coming from Brahmanbaria with lesser passengers after the recent river disaster.



Passengers prefer a mechanised boat to any launch which they term as death trap while travelling from Ashuganj to elsewhere. This is a new phenomenon just after Meghna launch tragedy.



People demand a permanent relief barge or crane on the spot (cross marked) on the northern side of Bhairab Railway Bridge near Ashuganj ghat for quick rescue operation.

—Star photo

From Sk Md Shahidul Islam

BRAHMANBARIA, May 17: River vessel is the only mode of communication of maximum number of people of Nabinagar upazila due to lack of proper road communication system in the area.

But most river vessels operate without registration or efficient drivers in this area. So thousands of passengers have to travel every day risking their lives.

The latest worst launch disaster occurred at Lalpur and Mirzarchar claiming 128 people. Out of the dead victims, 15 unclaimed bodies of ML Dolphin were buried at nearby Charchatola here.

According to an unofficial report, about 170 people of adjacent districts drowned in the last four years in launch disasters and boat tragedies.

Most of these vessels plying along the route are of "Motor Launch" or ML category. As per the existing rule, these types of vessels must have masters and drivers of third grade in addition to 11 other staff. But few of their masters and drivers have the required certificates, giving rise to mishap.

Nabinagar is surrounded by the mighty Meghna, the Titas and some other small rivers situated on the western part of the district. This upazila is linked with the district headquarters with a 17-kilometre long kutch road. But due to frequent floodings and lack of initiatives for its

development the road remains unfit for vehicular movement. This is why, though the upazila headquarters is 17-kilometre away from the district headquarters, the people are compelled to travel through 56-kilometre area the road toward Brahmanbaria via Companjgonj of Comilla district. Such travel is so expensive for the poor and lower middle class people of Nabinagar upazila that they have to resort to launches and boats for movement to Brahmanbaria at a relatively cheaper cost.

There are three launch routes from Nabinagar to Brahmanbaria headquarters. These are: Nabinagar to Brahmanbaria, Nabinagar to Bhairab and Nabinagar to Narsingdi.

Although a road has been developed from Nabinagar to Companjgonj-Comilla, yet most people do not use the road. Usually launches are their easy mode of transport. But the plying launches are not well equipped and modern. The launches have no any life saving equipment. Visiting rule they usually ply their vessels over-loaded.

In most launch disasters, some washed away by the current of river to unknown destinations and some bodies remain unclaimed. Relatives of such unclaimed bodies eagerly wait for days together for their dear and near ones, but in vain. Their near ones never come back.

Engine boat owners are also doing brisk business by crossing passengers from Nabinagar to other places ignoring water traffic rules. As a result, boat mishap is also a regular feature in

the area. While contacted one launch passenger namely Alim Mia, informed that the launch staffers deceive the passengers. Even upper class passengers are not spared.

The members of law enforcing agencies overlook all kinds of ill practices.

When contacted, a launch staffer said that they only carry on the order of launch owners.

People alleged that police do not try to check the malpractices of the launches and they do not file any case against the launch owners and staffer.

While contacted, Pronob Kumar Roy Officer-in-Charge (OC) of Ashuganj Bondar said he informed there is another administrative authority for launch transportation and shipping corporation under Sea Transport Department. Police can not directly interfere, he says.

Still he has directed the police of Ashuganj and Nabinagar to take proper and every possible step to check any misdeed in launches or other water vessels.

It is alleged that there is no permanent relief barge for Ashuganj Nabinagar areas to save the victim boats and launches though Ashuganj is an important busy lunch ghat. As a result, relief barge Rostom came to the spot from Narayanganj the next day and recovered another one.

While contacted, Kees Jurg said that on receiving informations of the tragic disaster they rushed to the spot as there were no relief barges.

Though they are engaged Bhairab Bridge Project work what is going to be built on Dhaka-Sylhet highway, they took up the matter from the humanitarian point of view.

Besides the passengers of Nabinagar Bhairab route have allocated one unit launch Titas' recently after the worst launch mishap.

As a result launch service remained off for seven days. Some passengers have started travelling by engine boats now.

They have realised that unfit launches are death traps.

Suffering passengers of the areas have demanded that all launches plying through this route should be well-equipped and a permanent relief barge should be posted along this river route.

They have also urged the government to take an urgent step to develop the 17-kilometre long road from Nabinagar to Brahmanbaria immediately.

## Magura town now a den of narcotics traders

From Hossain Seraj

the customers.

When contacted Abul Kalam Azad, circle-inspector of local Narcotics Control Department, said the office has not recovered a single gram of heroin so far this year.

Local people have urged the authorities concerned to take immediate measures to control the illegal trading of drugs in the district, reported BSS.

The state minister was addressing a review meeting on development activities of the upazila in the auditorium of the Upazila Parishad recently.

Prof Quddus said development of fisheries sector is a must to ensure nutrition of the commoners and make the rural economy self-reliant.

The state minister visited Durgapur Health Complex, Bardhaman High School and Jhaluka High School. He also inaugurated the Palashbari Non-government Primary School.

Prof Quddus later addressed a public rally at Amagachi Saharbanu High School ground. He urged the people to join in the development endeavours initiated by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

Chairman of Jhaluka Union Parishad Mohammad Mozahar Hossain presided over the meeting. It was addressed, among others, by General Secretary of Rajshahi Zila Awami League Advocate Tajul Islam Mohammad Farook and chairperson of Mohila Awami League Begum Akhtar Jahan.

A report from Cox's Bazar says: Fish resources in the Bay of Bengal has come down to an alarming state with acute shortage of reserve while experts fear that the situation may turn worse if government fails to take effective measures to tackle it immediately.

Indiscriminate killing of fish during the breeding season, uncontrolled harvesting of shrimp fries, random uses of drag-net and "behind nets" and killing of all types of fish fries during harvesting of shrimp fries are to be blamed for reduction of fish reserve in the Bay. The fish reserve in the Bay was 14,000 metric tons in the sea bed during the year 1995. Aquaculturist M N Sarker said despite a government ban on uses of "behind nets" and drag-nets, the fishermen are using about 35,000 such nets as the members of the law enforcing agencies are indifferent in proper application of law.

Around 12,000 fishing boats have virtually become non-operative and remain anchored at the Cox's Bazar sea shore, the largest sea resort in the world, as the return from deep sea fishing is usually not always profitable. The costs for one such trip involves Taka 35,000 to 50,000 only for two-week fishing.

The Bay is in a state of virtual state of fishless for the last couple to months, Kabir Ahmed, President of Cox's Bazar Fishing Boat Owners' Association told recently. He said "Even last year fishermen used to come back with smiling faces. This year they are returning with empty hands." He also expressed his resentments over inaction of the concerned agencies in taking legal action against persons responsible for violation of the existing laws.

Fish exporters predict that they have to suffer losses this year and said the income of foreign exchange from exports might suffer due to 50 per cent fall in exports compared to last

year. "I have exported only 35 metric tonnes of processed fish this year which was 60 metric tonnes last year," Mohammad Shah Alam, Proprietor of one of 18 fish processing units here, said. He also pointed out that the fish processing units earned Taka 55 crore last year by exporting 1,500 metric tons of processed fish.

Meanwhile, prices of shrimp fries have gone down as the production is higher than that of demand in the local market.

Mustafizur Rahman of Niribili Hatchery Limited, a national award recipient said a total of 500 crore shrimp fries are being produced in different hatcheries in the county while there is market for only 320 crore.

The current price of each fry remains at Taka .25 while the production cost goes to Taka .35

official sources said. Meanwhile, the government has taken training programme

to create awareness among the fishermen. So far 450 persons have received training in this regard.

Meanwhile, UNB reports from Shariatpur: The sweet water fish in greater Faridpur district are on the verge of extinction due to various reasons including indiscriminate fishing of fries and drying up of water bodies.

Scarcity of fish is keenly felt by the people as it used to supply the meals with adequate protein and delicacy.

Besides, non-availability of fish affected the livelihood of about 2.5 lakh people engaged in fishing in five districts of the region.

A recent survey of the Fisheries Department revealed that fish production declined by 70 per cent in Faridpur, Madaripur, Shariatpur, Gopalganj and Rajbari districts.

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