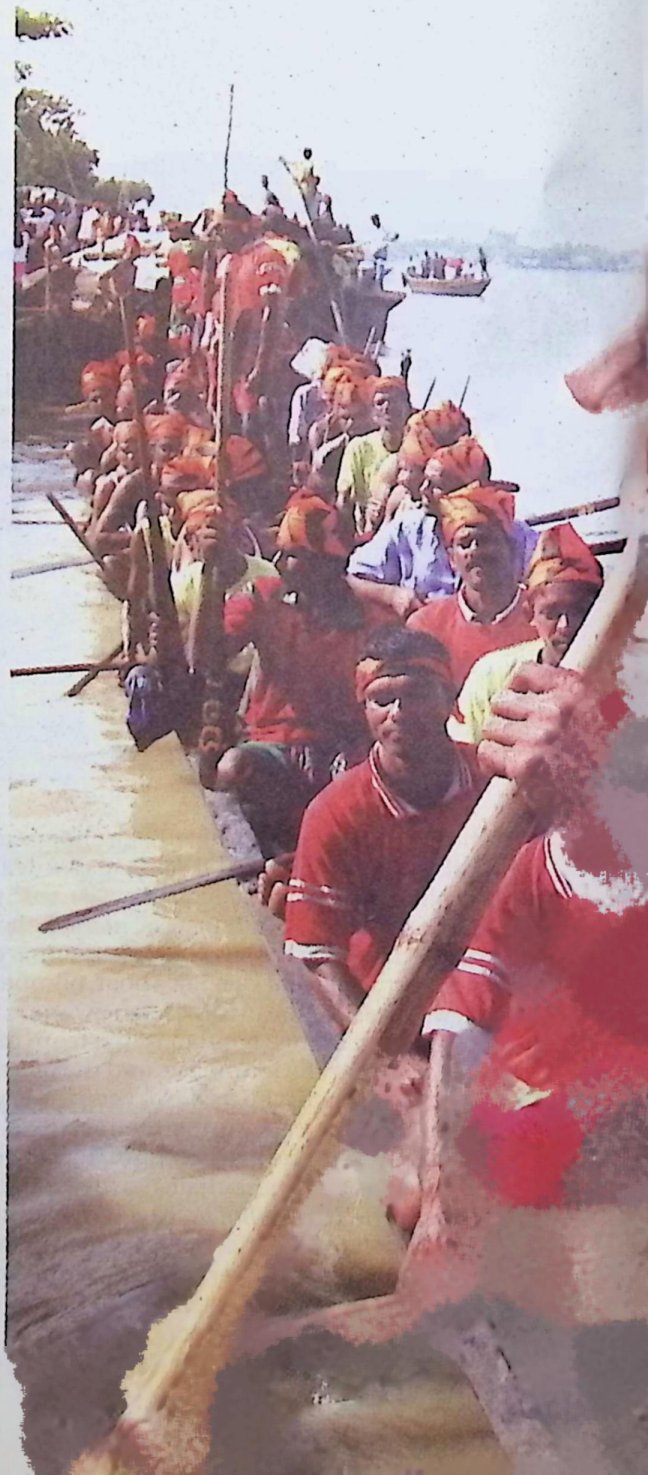
Even though, these yearly boat races have now lost a little bit of their popularity and also the thousands of spectators who would crowd up the riversides to watch the event, boat races are still happening in many parts of the country.

fishermen, carpenters and many more from nearby villages for a thrilling contest that would eventually bring about the year's winning team. These boat races were not only a major source of yearly entertainment for the villagers, but also a way to prove one's superiority in terms of strength and sense of navigation, especially for long-time winning villages. Even though, these yearly boat races have now lost a little bit of their popularity and also the thousands of spectators who would crowd up the riversides to watch the event, boat races are still happening in many parts of the country.

For many years, the *nouka baich* by the famous river Rupsha would be organised by local organisations. For the last two years, however, Banglalink has been sponsoring this event, making it all the more colourful and attracting a lot of people even outside the participating villages. According to Mohammad Amin, a fisherman who has been living by the Rupsha his whole life, these races have been taking place for as long as he can remember. "This river is a very important source of livelihood for the nearby villages," he says. "Therefore, boat races have always been extremely important events in these parts. A boatman's technique and skill in giving his boat the maximum speed is demonstrated in these races. Each boat is manned by many, starting from 7 to 100, depending on the size of the boat." The boats at these races are very narrow in shape and are as long as 150 to 200 feet or more, with their front and the back parts straight. They are usually made with timber of local *shal, shil, karai* and *chambul* trees. Traditionally, boat races are usually held during the Bangla months of *Bhadra* and *Ashwin*.

This year, on the Rupsha, the six racing boats were to complete three rounds of rowing to the Rupsha Bridge with tremendous speed. The best of the three rounds of rowing would be awarded an amount of Tk 10,000. According to one of the rowers, most of the boatmen and contestants were farmers living in the nearby villages of Shukto, Narail, Jessore and Khulna. "We work in the fields during the day," says the boatman. "When there is a contest close by, we practice in the evenings, right before and after sunset, while there is still enough light to see."



The race-boats are very narrow in shape and are as long as 150 to 200 feet or more, carrying more than 70-75 participants from a single team.