

Fish farmers Tk 220 crore poorer for flood

SOHEL PARVEZ

A deluge of missed calls greeted me as I glanced over my phone in late afternoon on Saturday. They were all from the same unknown number.

Puzzled and perturbed, I called back the number only to be accosted by a muffled, indecipherable voice.

I cut off the line and before long, the phone began ringing. I answered and once again, the voice of the caller was not clear enough for me to understand a word he was uttering. I informed him about the problem and hung up.

But he kept calling for the next few minutes and I let the phone ring.

Five hours later, at about 9 pm, I got a call from a fish farmer, Md Kalu Mia from Bishwanath of northeast district Sylhet, with whom I had spoken to earlier in the day about the effect of the flood on his farm.

The 55-year-old called to inform that a modest fish farmer Azizur Rahman tried to contact me to share his nightmare, hoping I could offer him some help.

"He lost all his investment because of the flood," Mia said.

And that's when I could those incessant phone calls made sense to me: Rahman was desperate. Without further ado, I called back the 26-year-old farmer, who could not sound more crestfallen.

"All my savings have gone. I am totally penniless. It's all finished," said the broken voice.

Over the past three years, he saved up Tk 3 lakh, which he invested to rent five ponds in his locality to grow fingerlings from the spawn of carp fishes.

He would sell the juveniles to carp producers, a venture he hoped would change his fortunes for the better.



SHEIKH NASIR

A fish farm in Bishwambarpur upazila in Sunamganj is inundated with water thanks to flash flood. The aquaculture farmer could not save the fingerlings despite fencing the pond with net. The photo was taken recently.

When the torrent of water burst into his ponds, which were enclosed with nets, there were 10 lakh fingerlings. Now there are none.

"All my efforts and labour have now been washed away. I am a poor man and I now have nothing to start over with," said Rahman, one of the worst victims of the repeated flood that began hitting the country towards the end of last month.

The onrush of water from upstream for heavy rainfall has vanished the distinction between rivers, static wetlands and ponds in many areas in the north and central regions of the country, ruining hopes and aspirations of tens of thousands of farmers producing crops livestock and fish.

The agriculture ministry recently estimated that the first spell of flood destroyed Tk 350 crore crops of food producers.

And as of 26 July, the Department of Fisheries (DoF)

estimated Tk 220 crore of losses of freshwater aquaculture farmers, who provided 56 per cent of the total 43 lakh tonnes of fish produced in fiscal 2017-18.

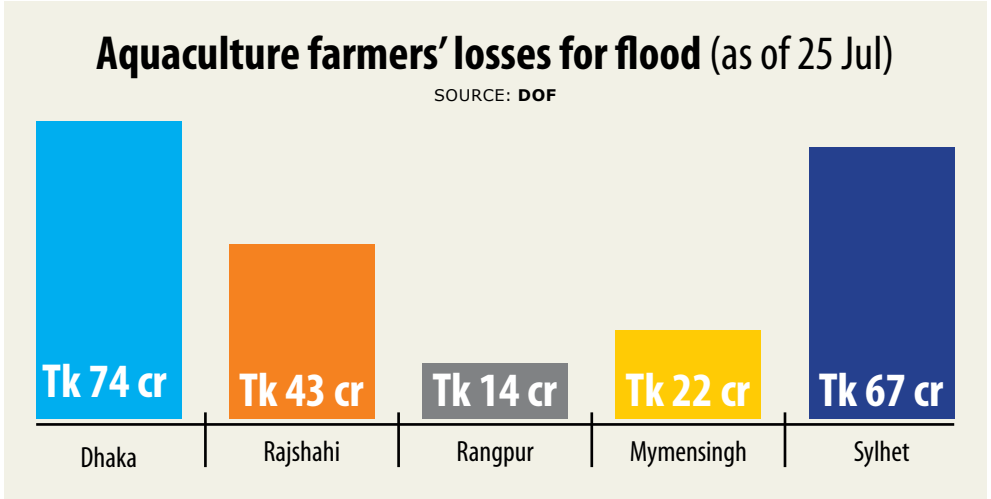
Over the last two decades, aquaculture expanded on a massive scale and pulled more than 20 lakh people out of poverty between 2000 and 2010, according to a study by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) last year and DoF.

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While the plants that were damaged in the fields could not be recovered, the fishes that escaped the ponds amid the outgushing of water would not be lost ultimately.

"These fishes will be in the open water bodies. Hence, there will be no loss from the national perspective. It is only the farmers who will have to bear the losses themselves," said DoF Deputy Director Aquaculture Serajur Rahman.

DoF data showed that nearly 30,000



farmers, having 35,000 fish farms, were affected by the flood as of July 25.

And the number of losers and the amount of losses of growers are racing ahead every day as major rivers are flowing above the danger level, submerging districts in the northwest, northeast, central Bangladesh.

A large number of farmers there grow fish for livelihood.

Until 25 July, the water level in rivers in 18 districts was flowing above the danger level submerging low-lying areas, according to the special flood situation report by the disaster management and relief ministry.

"This is the first time in my 20 years of farming that floodwater came and washed away my entire investment," said Nawshad Ali, a farmer from Sylhet's Bishwanath, a flood affect sub-district.

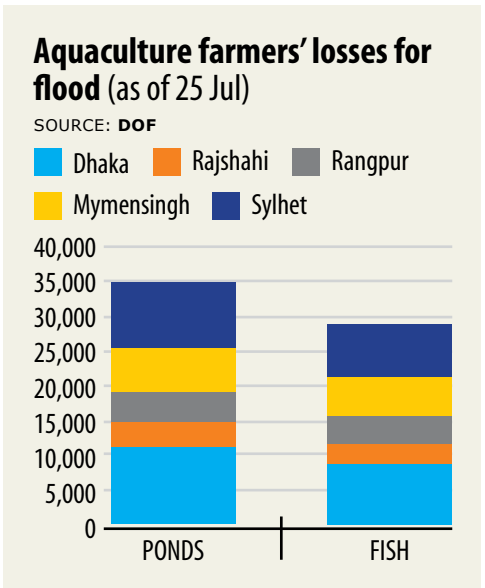
Ali has a 14-bigha pond that he enclosed with a net. The net was of no use against the might of the cascading water.

"There was such a rush of water," he said, adding that Tk 600,000 worth of fish might have gone out of the pond.

Badal Chandra, a farmer from Dewanganj of northern district Jamalpur, had a different experience to share.

The grown-up carps escaped his pond as the rising water level narrowed the height of the more than five-foot net he used around the enclosure to protect his farm.

A large number of grown-up fish have jumped over the net.



"It really is a very worrying situation. The tide comes suddenly, so we have to remain alert day and night," said Chandra, who lives on the bank of the Jamuna river.

Ariful Islam, a fish farmer at Nageshwari of the northern bordering district Kurigram, said the repeated flood has not only affected his farms but also dampened the prospect of selling fingerlings as no farmer wanted to invest amid the risk of flood.

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Bonus disbursement not up to the mark

Garment sector acts as saving grace

REFAYET ULLAH MIRDHA

The owners of many companies in Bangladesh's 42 various industrial, manufacturing and service sectors failed to provide their workers with festival bonuses for Eid-ul-Azha by yesterday, the stipulated deadline to disburse the annual allowance.

During a meeting last week, featuring government officials, union leaders and factory owners, it was decided that the Eid bonuses for workers of 42 different sectors would be disbursed by 27 July while at least 50 per cent their salaries for the month would be paid on 30 July.

The meeting also reached the consensus that employees should be urged to remain near their workplaces over the three-day Islamic celebration in a bid to prevent the spread of coronavirus.

"It is true that not all of the factories and companies could pay the bonus in a timely manner. However, the majority of them did keep to their commitments," said Fazlul Haque Montoo, president of Sramik Karmachari Okiya Parishad (SKOP), the country's top trade union.

Besides, there are many micro, small and medium-scale firms that are financially incapable of disbursing bonuses at the moment due to the coronavirus fallout, said Montoo, who was present at the meeting chaired by Begum Monnujan Sufian, the state minister for labour and employment.

Some of the remaining organisations could pay the bonuses within the next two or three days, he said.

Meanwhile, the progress of bonus disbursement in the garment sector seems adequate so far as about 74 per cent of the factories have released the fund in a timely manner.

Certain small-scale garment factories could face difficulty in disbursing festival bonuses as well as salaries as in previous years, said Sirajul Islam Rony, a former representative for employees on the minimum wage board for garment workers.

"We expect the remaining 26 per cent to pay the allowance within the next two to three days," said Khan Monirul Alam Shuvo, chairman of the PR Standing committee of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA).

The majority of the knitwear factories have disbursed bonuses in line with in mutual understanding between the workers and management, said Mohammad Hatem, vice president of the Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association.

As of yesterday, there were no untoward incidents reported in regards to not paying bonuses.

"That indicates that the payment rate was high yesterday," Hatem told The Daily Star over the phone.

Shibnath Roy, inspector general of the Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments (DIFE), endorsed Hatem's comments.

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Reckitt Benckiser profits off people's heightened hygiene habits amid pandemic



AHSAN HABIB

Reckitt Benckiser Bangladesh witnessed robust growth in sales and profits in the pandemic-ravaged first half of 2020 on the back of higher sales of hygiene products.

Profits of the local subsidiary of the Anglo-Dutch multinational consumer goods soared 54.28 per cent to Tk 27.17 crore in the first half.

Between January and June, sales grew 28.87 per cent year-on-year to Tk 258.57 crore.

"Our profits and sales grew in the quarter as the demand of

some of our products were high," said Md Nazmul Arefin, company secretary of Reckitt Benckiser Bangladesh.

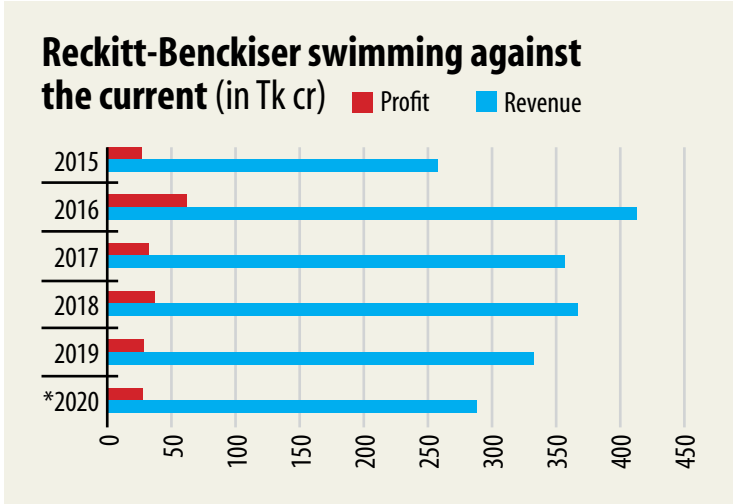
Reckitt Benckiser, which got listed in the Dhaka Stock Exchange in 1987, joined the group of the multinational companies listed with the DSE that made a profit despite the pandemic.

British American Tobacco's profit grew a whopping 69 per cent in the second quarter of 2020 on the back of lower operating costs.

Indian fast-moving consumer goods company Marico Bangladesh's net profit increased by 17 per cent to Tk 99.66 crore in the April-June quarter.

Reckitt Benckiser's earnings per share, subsequently, rose 54.26 per cent to Tk 57.51 in the first half and 53.39 per cent to Tk 33.47 in the second quarter.

The news though failed to cheer the market. The company's



stock traded 2.34 per cent lower at Tk 3,572 yesterday.

"Stock investors knew that Reckitt Benckiser's profitability is higher during the pandemic because the multinational

company's top-selling products are hygiene-related," said a top official of a leading stockbroker.

Incorporated in Bangladesh in 1961, the company is engaged in manufacturing

and marketing household and toiletries sanitisation products, pharmaceuticals and food products.

Its brands include Finish, Lysol, Veet, Dettol, Air Wick, Durex, Mortein, Strepsils, Woolite, Vanish and Harpic. In Bangladesh, the most popular product of Reckitt Benckiser was soap and Dettol.

In 2019, Reckitt Benckiser widened its market shares in the bar soap category and is holding the top position in the toilet cleaner category.

Owing to the pandemic, the company sees quite a few short-term challenges, such as supply chain disruptions, the volatility of international trade and currencies markets, general economic downturn across the world and Bangladesh impacting consumer confidence and affecting consumption patterns.

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Indian transhipped goods to pay Tk 2 a tonne in road fee

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

Dhaka has decided to charge Tk 2 per tonne per kilometre in road usage fees for Indian goods that would be transhipped using Bangladesh's territory, officials said.

New Delhi has not consented to the proposal of the communications ministry of Bangladesh yet and has rather requested Dhaka to slash the rates.

The road fee issue surfaced as India's first-ever trial run of transshipment of goods to its north-eastern states through the Chattogram port and Akhaura land port completed this month.

A vessel called MV Sejuti left Kolkata on 14 July and reached Chattogram sea-port on 21 July.

Its cargo of lentils and rods were loaded on four trailer trucks. The trailers carrying the goods reached Akhaura land port the following day. The goods were then loaded into Indian trailers that carried them further inland.

MV Sejuti contained goods weighing 160 TEUs (twenty-foot equivalent units). Four TEUs carrying iron and pulse were transported to Tripura and Assam and Bangladeshi importers brought the rest.

Chattogram Custom House collected seven types of tariffs on Indian goods.

The charges include Tk 30 for document processing per consignment, Tk 20 per tonne of goods for transshipment, Tk 100 per tonne as security charge, Tk 50 per tonne as escort charge, Tk 100 for other

administrative charges, and Tk 254 per container for scanning.

Electric lock and seal fees will be charged as per rules.

Road fees were not be charged for the trial run.

One or two more consignments would make a trip to India's north-eastern states this year using Bangladeshi soil on a trial run before full-fledged transshipment begins.

After the trial run, officials from two sides would sit to finalise the road fee, said a shipping ministry official.

The transshipment is being carried out using Bangladeshi vehicles, both on riverways and road network. The trial was supposed to start in March but got delayed

due to the pandemic.

Earlier in 2015, following years of persuasion from India, Dhaka and Delhi signed a letter of intent on the use of the Chattogram and Mongla ports.

Subsequently, the countries signed an agreement in 2018 and a standard operating procedure (SoP) during Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's visit to India in October last year.

According to the SoP, goods reaching Chattogram and Mongla seaports would be carried by four road, rail, and water routes to Agartala (Tripura) via Akhaura; Dawki (Meghalaya) via Tamabil; Sutarkandi (Assam) via Sheola; and Srimantpur (Tripura) via Bibirbazar.

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