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## Fish farming in cages spreading out

Govt to frame policy to help it flourish in a disciplined manner

SOHEL PARVEZ

A new form of fish farming, known as cage culture, is expanding in flowing water of rivers and canals in various parts of the country, raising hopes for an increased production of fish.

Fishes, mostly tilapia, are now farmed in nearly 6,000 cages in rivers where such farming did not exist even a decade ago.

The practice, under which fishes are grown in mesh enclosures, has expanded as farmers have found it to be profitable because of the scope to grow a higher quantity of fishes in cages compared to ponds, according to fisheries officials, farmers and researchers.

Consequently, the fisheries and livestock ministry is working to frame a policy on cage culture in inland water, which remains untapped despite the huge potential to augment production of fish.

"We have taken an initiative to frame a policy to ensure organised expansion of the cage-based farming," said Syed Arif Azad, director-general of the Department of Fisheries (DoF).

He said cages are being built in rivers in a scattered manner and roles and responsibilities of stakeholders are not clear.

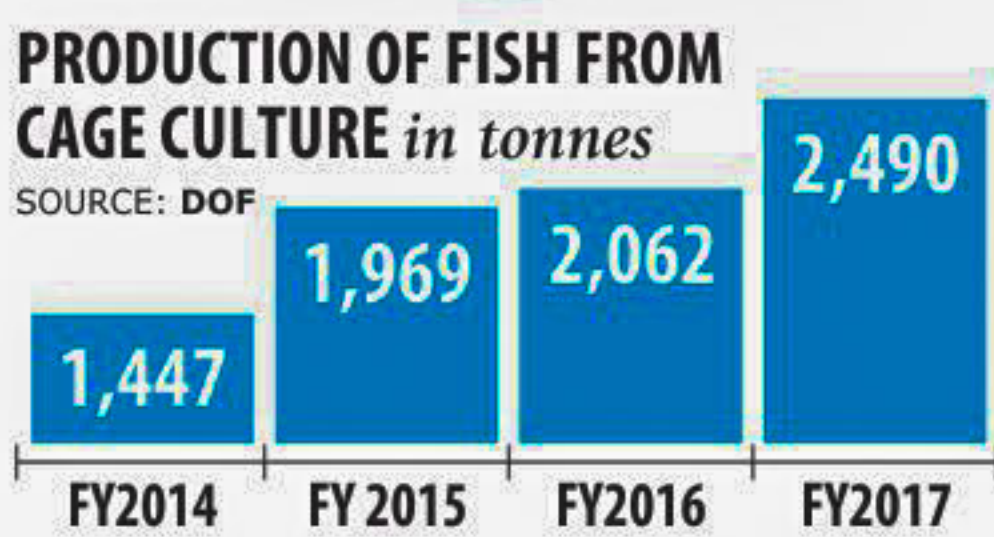
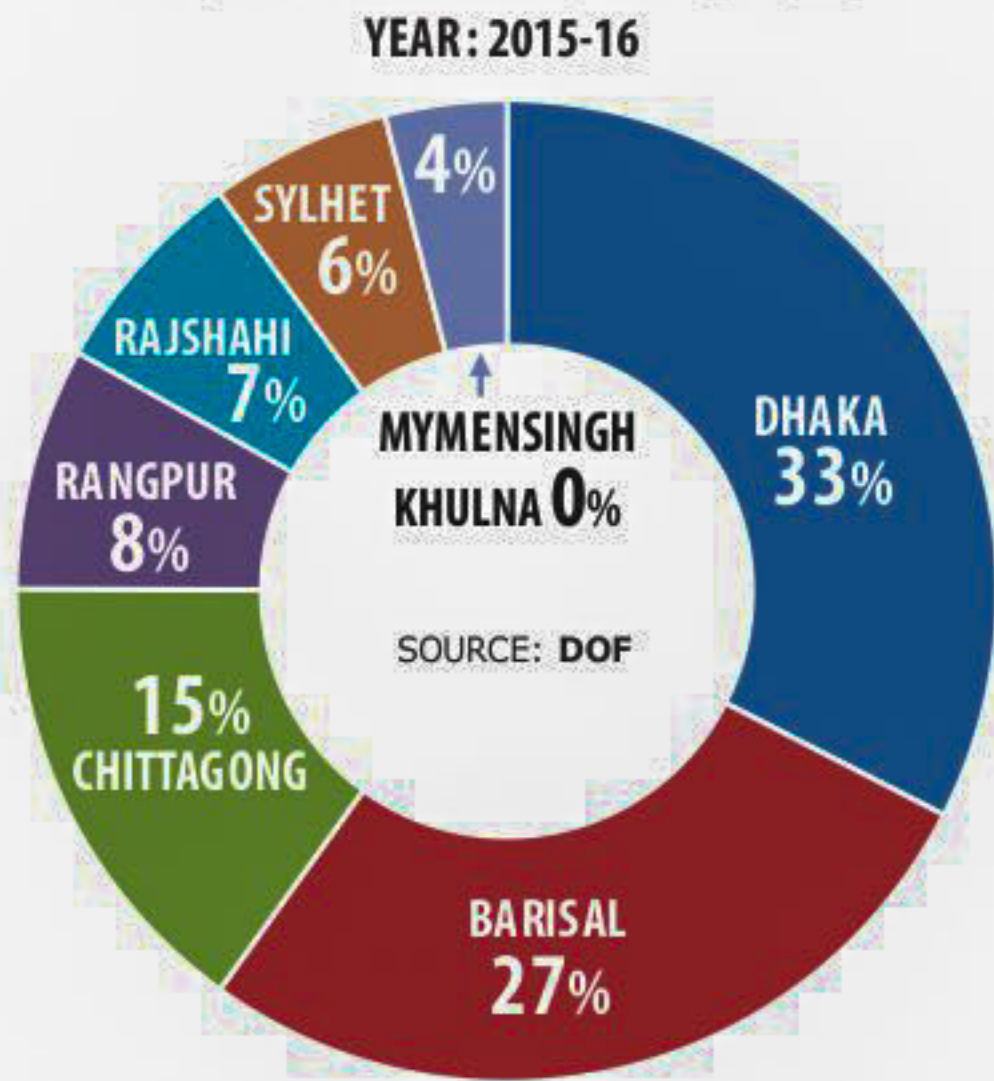
"The land ministry is the owner of the rivers while we grow fish. The private sector is also involved," he said.

Bangladesh has 8.53 lakh hectare areas of rivers and estuaries, and public water bodies represent lakes and swamps, according to the DoF.

Fisheries officials said cage culture can't only increase the overall production but also raise the contribution of open water bodies to the annual production of fishes.

Some 27 percent of the 38.78 lakh tonnes of fishes were produced in open water bodies in 2015-16. Aquaculture accounted for 56 percent of the

### DIVISION-WISE SHARE OF FISH FARMING IN CAGES



total fish output in the year, according to the DoF.

Officials said cage culture is practised in many countries in Asia, Europe, and North America. Bangladesh saw the beginning of the farming in the 1990s, according to Azad.

"New technologies of fish farming are coming up. We can't keep our water pool like rivers idle," he said.

The draft policy said cage culture is not flourishing as expected in absence of legally supported user rights to grow fish in flowing water, also depriving the government of revenues.

The draft policy seeks to include all flowing rivers and water bodies that are suitable for cage culture. It said interested people will have to apply to an upazila committee stating the name and location of the water body where they want to do cage culture.

A committee headed by the deputy commissioner will select the successful applicants based on the recommendations of the upazila committee, according to the draft.

The draft policy said cages should be built in an area having 10-feet depth and cages should be three foot above the bottom of the river.

Some 10-15 percent of the water bodies in the country can be used for cage culture if floating feed is used. On the other hand, cages could be established on 5 percent area of a river if sinking fish feed is used, according to the policy.

Mosharef Hossain Chowdhury, president of the Bangladesh Cage Culture Association, said cage culture in a flowing river is more profitable than farming in ponds.

"This is because of the leverage to grow more fish in cages than in ponds," he said.

A 200-square-foot cage can yield 700 fishes compared 150 fishes in the same area in ponds, according to Chowdhury.

Chowdhury began growing tilapia fish in 15 cages in the Dakatia river in Chandpur in 2008. Encouraged by high margins, he went on to increase the number of cages to 150 cages at one point.

He, however, reduced the number of cages to 40 in the face of soaring prices of feed, rising movement of vessels and oil spill from the vessels plying on the river.

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## 4G licences to be awarded on Feb 20

Grameenphone, Banglalink to attend spectrum auction today

MUHAMMAD ZAHIDUL ISLAM

The telecom regulator will finally hand over the much-awaited 4G licence to Grameenphone, Robi, Banglalink, and Teletalk on February 20, capping off months of back and forth between the government and the mobile operators.

The licence fee for the fourth generation network technology, which promises the fastest data speed from mobile devices, is Tk 10 crore.

All the operators are technically ready to roll out the service, so once they officially get the licences they can offer it to their subscribers, said Shahjahan Mahmood, chairman of the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission.

The top three operators have completed their preparations for 4G roll-out and have already launched campaigns to drum up excitement for the forthcoming technology.

A good number of customers of Grameenphone, Robi, and Banglalink have converted their SIM cards to 4G-compatible ones, according to market sources.

Meanwhile, the telecom regulator will organise a spectrum auction today in Dhaka Club, where only Banglalink and Grameenphone will participate.

Both the operators yesterday attended a mock spectrum auction at the BTRC office.

Robi, the country's second largest operator, and state-owned Teletalk will sit out the auction. Both the operators deem their existing spectrum to be sufficient for 4G.

As of yesterday, Robi has the highest volume of the spectrum (36.4 megahertz) in three different bands, and the entire spectrum is technologically neutral.

Technology neutrality allows operators to offer either of 2G, 3G or 4G services from

any band they see fit, a facility that helps in reducing the operational costs and improving the service quality.

Teletalk has 25.2 MHz spectrum and they are yet to attain tech neutrality, which would cost \$4.5 million for each MHz.

Banglalink, the country's third larg-



est operator, has only 20 MHz spectrum and plans to participate in bidding for spectrum on two different bands. It is likely to acquire 5 MHz from the 2,100 band and another 5 MHz from the 1,800 band.

For the 2,100 band, the government fixed \$27 million as the floor price for each MHz, and for the 1,800 band, \$30 million.

Grameenphone, which has 32 MHz of spectrum in three bands, will only bid for spectrum on the 1,800 band.

BTRC is expecting to collect about Tk 4,000 crore from the auction, said a top official of the regulator. The regulator will also get about Tk 1,000 crore from tech neutrality.

However, in the guideline it was stated that BTRC will earn about Tk 11,000 crore from the process.

## Trade deficit continues to widen

AKM ZAMIR UDDIN

Trade deficit almost doubled to \$8.62 billion in the first half of the fiscal year as fears of depreciation of the taka and pressure on foreign reserves mount.

If the trend continues, the trade gap will surpass \$19 billion this fiscal year, said Ahsan H Mansur, executive director of the Policy Research Institute of Bangladesh, a private think-tank.

The economist blamed the soaring demand for imports from businesses for the growing imbalance in the country's external trade.

During the July-December period last year, imports stood at \$26.31 billion, up 25.76 percent year-on-year, according to data from the Bangladesh Bank.

At the same time, exports rose 7.8 percent to \$17.69 billion.

### BALANCE OF PAYMENTS (Jul-Dec)

In millions of \$



If the trade imbalance intensifies, it will have a terrible impact on the foreign exchange reserves and will lead to further depreciation of the local currency against the US dollar, said Mansur.

"The majority of the banks are now facing greenback shortage amid the huge import demand from businesses," he added.

The rising trade gap dragged the current account deficit to an all-time high: in the first half of fiscal 2017-18, the deficit stood at \$4.76 billion in contrast to \$543 million a year earlier. AB Mirza Azizul Islam, a former finance adviser to a caretaker government, said that the lower export growth is one of the reasons for the record current account balance deficit.

"Remittance has recently increased, but it has yet to reach a desirable level," he said.

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## ADB gives Eastern Bank \$20m for apparel sector



Ali Reza Iftekhar, managing director and CEO of EBL, and Christine Engstrom, director of Private Sector Financial Institutions Division at the ADB, exchange documents after signing an agreement at a hotel in Dhaka yesterday.

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) yesterday signed an agreement with Eastern Bank Ltd (EBL) to provide the latter a \$20 million loan to help improve standards and quality in Bangladesh's textile and garment sector.

The loan will be used to finance socially and environmentally sustainable projects, specifically, the construction or expansion of factories meeting structural, fire and electrical safety standards, according

to a press statement from the private commercial bank.

It says Bangladesh was currently the second largest exporter of textiles and garments, accounting for about 15 percent of the gross domestic product and employing more than four million workers, 85 percent of whom were women.

Ali Reza Iftekhar, managing director and chief executive of EBL, and Christine Engstrom, director of Private Sector Financial Institutions Division at ADB, signed the agreement at a hotel in Dhaka.

"The textile and garment sector is an essential part of the Bangladesh economy, raising incomes for large numbers of workers, particularly women," said Engstrom.

"We are confident that our partnership will contribute to the improvement of the textile and garment sector," she said.

Manmohan Parkash, ADB country director for Bangladesh; Hassan O Rashid, additional managing director of EBL, and other senior officials from both organisations were present.

## ADP spending up 37pc in Jul-Jan

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The government's development spending rose 36.88 percent year-on-year to Tk 54,718 crore in the first seven months of the current fiscal year on the back of an increased use of foreign aid.

Project aid utilisation went up by 120 percent to Tk 23,336 crore during the period, according to the Implementation Monitoring and Evaluation Division.

In comparison, the use of the government's own funds rose 10.72 percent. However, development spending by state-owned enterprises declined 22 percent.

The government has set aside Tk 164,085 crore for development spending for 2017-18. But the rate of implementation has not been that higher compared to the total size as the use of the government's own fund witnessed a slow pace.

From July to January, the ministries and divisions spent 33.35 percent of the total outlay, slightly up from 32.41 percent in the same period a year ago.

Project aid utilisation stood at 38.63 percent of the allocation while it was 26.52 percent in the same period last fiscal year.

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## Two e-commerce sites get \$5m investment

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E-commerce platforms sindabad.com and kiksha.com got \$5 million from the Bangladesh-focused private equity fund Frontier Bangladesh in what can be termed as a roaring endorsement of the sector's bright prospects.

Launched in 2016, both the platforms are concerns of Zero Gravity Ventures Limited. From sindabad.com, businesses can purchase anything and everything needed to run a factory or office, whereas kiksha.com is a lifestyle e-store.

A top official of the Information and Communication Technology Division confirmed the investment but Zero Gravity declined to elaborate on the matter.

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## Train garment workers to save their jobs amid automation: experts

REFAYET ULLAH MIRDHA

Bangladesh should train its garment workers to improve their skills as 80 percent of them could lose jobs in the next 15 years due to automation, said fashion experts yesterday.

Job losses will take place mainly in

Asian countries such as China, Bangladesh, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Indonesia, said Anjali Gopalakrishna, a consultant of Fashion Tech and Digital Innovation in Singapore.

She said the automation would take place in the sector to meet faster lead-time and make the business

sustainable as fashions are rapidly changing worldwide.

"That's why workers must be trained so they can adapt to the changes," she said on the sidelines of Bangladesh Fashionology Summit at International Convention City Bashundhara in Dhaka.

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