



PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

# Hope and relief for dried fish producers

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ARUN BIKASH DEY

The peak season for dried fish has kept producers in Chattogram busy at work, with collection, sorting, drying, piling, warming, packing and storing going on in full swing. Due to favourable weather and high demand in the market, they are expecting a good share of profit this year. According to the producers, the period between late Ashwin (October) and early Falgun (March) is considered as peak season for dried fish.

Take Bastuhara Khetchar. Located on the banks of the Karnaphuli, it is one of the major hubs for dried fish production. Visiting the area recently, this correspondent saw some makeshift structures erected in its fields to facilitate activity during these busy months. Around 20 species of fish, including Ribbon (Chhuri), Bombay duck (Loitta), Faissa, Poa and prawns were being dried in the area.

The area is buzzing with not only workers busy with the daily grind but also with children's laughter. In between playing, they also lend a hand to their parents' work. Meanwhile, toddlers rest in their mothers' lap while they continue to sort dried fish.

Md Jasim, a worker, said a kg of dried fish can be produced after drying around four kgs of raw fish. According to the workers, the entire process requires seven to 10 days to be completed. Once the fishes are completely dried, producers send them to warehouses, mostly located in Asadganj, from where wholesalers buy them.



This correspondent found over a 100 karbari (producers) busy with work in their fields. Around 20 workers, both male and female, work under a karbari. However, there's a discrimination in wages between male and female workers.

For example, one Fatema Akter said she works for eight hours a day and receives Tk 350 for her work, while male worker Mainuddin said he works for 10 to 12 hours and gets Tk 600 a day.

Asked about this, Abdus Shukkur, president of Bastuhara Tower Dried Fish Producers and Marketers' Cooperative Association, claimed since male workers do the more labour-intensive work, they are paid more.

Meanwhile, workers said a good production mostly depends on the weather. "A good quantity of dried fish got

decomposed last year due to unfavourable weather in the peak season. The market rate fell as well, yielding me a loss of Tk 5 lakh," said Nurul Absar, a producer.

"But the rate is far better this year and so is the weather. I expect to make a good profit," he added.

Another producer Abdur Rahim informed that he incurred a loss of Tk 7 lakh last year due to the lower prices. "This year, I'm making a profit on every trip," he said.

Currently, a kg of chhuri is priced between Tk 700 and Tk 1,600 in the wholesale market, while a kg of loitta is sold between Tk 400 and Tk 650, a kg of faissa between Tk 450 and Tk 600 and a kg of prawn between Tk 700 and Tk 1,200.

"I have made a profit worth Tk 2 lakh so far this year, and expect to cover the previous year's losses with this," hoped Rahim.

## CCC's expensive puddle

SANJOY KUMAR BARUA

When Chattogram City Corporation (CCC) constructed two swimming pools in 2015, it was hailed by the residents. They were constructed at a portion of the city's Jatisangha Park area.

But after laying abandoned for seven years, the authorities have now taken a puzzling initiative to demolish the pools, reportedly built at a cost of almost Tk 4 crore.

"In 2012, CCC took the initiative to build the two swimming pools, along with a gymnasium. The construction of the park was completed in June 2015," said architect Abdullah Al Omar, city planner of CCC.

"We're going to demolish the pools soon. They were constructed without planning, with many technical faults," said Omar.

"The pools are 120ft long and 50ft wide. One is eight feet deep while the other is eight and a half feet," he added.

Asked how much CCC spent to construct them, architect Omar refused to answer and suggested contacting CCC Chief Engineer Rafiqul Islam in this regard, saying he'd know better about the matter.

When contacted, the chief engineer reluctantly said he didn't know how much money was spent for the pools either.

However, reports from different media outlets found that CCC spent around Tk four crores during construction.



Rahul Guha, executive engineer of Public Works Department (PWD), Chattogram (Div-1), said, "Once the swimming pools are demolished, we'll start our development work there within 4-5 months."

Meanwhile, this is some kind of a double-whammy for the Jatisangha Park. Ziaul Haque, a local of the area, informed this correspondent that the park had been shrunk to facilitate the swimming pools and gymnasium inside it. However, they were supposed to be added attractions for the park, but if they're demolished, even that hope is gone.

Delwar Mazumder, former chairperson of the Chattogram Center of the Institution of Engineers, Bangladesh, said, "It will be a punishable offense if the hard earned money of citizens is wasted



just because of someone's ignorance." "If there's any technical fault in the construction process, the authorities should prioritise solving the problem as opposed to demolishing the swimming pools," he said.

## Rangamati's AMPHIBIOUS MARKET!

NAIMUR RAHMAN

Rangamati's Samata Ghat is more than just a ghat. Situated right beside the Banarupa Bazar, it is a go-to place for people of the hill tracts, who use it to trade and transport their daily essentials.

Traders from around 100 villages under six unions come here on small boats or trawlers to sell their products. But they don't just offload their items at the ghat, rather, they sell from their boats too, which turns the ghat area into a floating market of sorts.

While some traders get down to the ground and sell their items at the market, some choose to sell directly from their boats. The latter type is preferred by those who buy in bulk and then re-sell the goods themselves.

The floating part of the market says a lot of about the locals and their lives. Although it's far from a conventional in the context of Bangladesh, its popularity among locals indicate how normal such a system is for them.

Available at the market are everything, from vegetable and herbs, to fruits, to even clothes.

Traders sling bamboo baskets on their backs to carry their products around the market. These traditional baskets are called "Kalang" by the Chakmas, "Pargin" by the Marmas and "Kabang" by the Tipras.

Prices here are cheaper than the regular market. Traders say they don't just do business for profit, but also look out for people's best interests. They said another reason they can afford to sell at lower rates is that they sell

produce directly here, rather than going through middlemen or other intermediaries.

Traders said their fruit and vegetables are of the highest quality and are grown without pesticides.

The narrow roads of Banarupa Bazar hosts the history and culture of the area's people. This spills over to the floating market as well, which serves as an attraction for tourists or those who

come from other areas.

Whether you're looking for fresh produce, a new piece of jewellery, a unique gift, or just something different to spice up your dishes, Samata Ghat is the place to go in Rangamati.



PHOTO: NAIMUR RAHMAN