



PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

DEEP SEA FISHING BOATS

Time demands, Chattogram delivers

Building each large boat costs around Tk 80 lakh to Tk 1 crore, while smaller ones take around Tk 25-40 lakh, said builders.

NAIMUR RAHMAN

"A boat in harbour is safe, but that's not what boats are built for" – John Shedd's famous quote paints a picture of the life of those who make a living out of making or sailing boats. It is, indeed, a life that demands constant movement.

For those who live near the seas and rivers, seeing giant boats float ashore after completing an extraordinary fishing trip or a long-distance journey is common; so is the jubilant mood such an event brings to the ports, ghats and their surrounding areas.

Years before the medieval era, fishing was mostly done using small dinghy boats, reed boats, rafts, canoes, inflatables, rampini boats, etc, constructed using tree barks. Archaeological excavations found evidence of dugout canoes being one of the oldest kind of boats.

But with the passing of time, as empires and nation states started taking off, fishing became intertwined with greater economic objectives, which led to the need to manufacture bigger fishing boats.

One such "new-age" boat is the fishing trawler, a particular kind of boat that catch



fish through "trawls", which are a kind of net made to entrap fish from the depths of the sea.

For Bangladesh, the manufacturing of these larger boats was mostly dependent on international trade. But with industrial and technological development, we are now building our own boats at a large scale.

In Chattogram, on the north bank of the Karnaphuli river, Kalurghat and Charpathorghata area, there are several establishments where massive fishing boats are manufactured from scratch. On top of this, they also transform inoperable boats by repairing and remodeling them into brand new ships.

The foundation and structure of deep-sea fishing boats are different from an ordinary boat, as these boats have to go deep in the ocean and survive the big waves. Anglers spend a month or more days on these boats for a single trip. This is why these trawlers are designed more like ships.

Each large boat can house 15-20 people and remains fit for at least 8-12 years. They come with large compartments underneath

the deck to store fish.

Manufacturing such a boat is quite a delicate and critical process, as there is little room for mechanical error. The process is divided into four parts. The major part consists of framing and shaping the wood into the exact form required by the design, while setting up engines, plating steel, welding and furnishing are other important components, said Md Akter, who has been building boats for over 24 years.

The whole process, including importing

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engines, carpentry, welding, and storage until delivery, is monitored by the authorities. Many companies make huge investments in the sector every year. Each company can construct three or four boats in the span of a year.

Building each large boat costs around Tk 80 lakh to Tk 1 crore, while smaller ones take around Tk 25-40 lakh, said builders. This includes wages for architects, forgers and smiths. Other accessories like durable nets, maintenance and residual outlays make the whole process an expensive one. However, bearing this is made easier by government endowments that the industry is provided.

Not much has changed at 332, Bakshirhat

The enduring legacy of herb store Pitambar Shah

MOHAMMAD SUMAN

Pitambar Shah, a Chattogram based herbal medicine and spice shop, has survived with its old business model, despite the huge changes in technology and pharmaceutical industry in the last 180 years.

The store still keeps its accounts throughout the year in the traditional way and celebrates Bangla new year's Halkhata festival from the start of their business.

Pitambar Shah's successors have been conducting business for four generations, and the store is renowned across the country and abroad for its unique collection of herbs and spices since 1842. There are myths that this store has everything you need from birth till death.

So what's available there?

Their elaborate list contains herbal medicinal ingredients and rare spices among other products including religious items.

The store sells common medicinal herbs and tree cortex like Arjuna bark, Ashoka plant, trifolia, zinc, hazrat stone, coral oil, neem seeds, neem oil, sandalwood seeds, sea foam, nageshwar flower, olive oil, copper coin, bakulgota as well as ayurvedic and Unani treatment products that one



can hardly name.

Besides, Iran's Meshak's Grain, Assam's red sandalwood powder, Kashmir's saffron, Tripura's kumkum, Odisha's bhurjapatra Himalayan birch, mugani, and kasturi make their list richer.

Herbal remedy was the main treatment in Chattogram region before the 19th century. The hill tracts was a source of herbal medicine, and many famous institutions were established in the port city around that time, namely Sadhana Aushadhalaya, Kundeswari Aushadhalaya and Mojaher Aushadhalaya, which collected their materials from Pitambar Shah store.

According to the Pitambar's descendants, the ancestral root of their family lies in India. They settled in Chattogram and Dhaka in 1840-42 and opened the shop with his [Pitambar's] two brothers Kunjalal Shah and Mukunda Shah.

As Kunjalal and Mukunda Shah had no children, Pitambar Shah's son, Bindu Madhab Shah took over the helm of the business. After Bindu, his son Biswanath Banik looked after the business, who then passed it on to the current generation – Bhaskar Madhab Banik and Ambar Madhab Banik, his sons.

Bhaskar Madhab told The Daily Star, "This shop is our only business... I don't know if the next generation will continue it. So far, we're committed to preserving the tradition and reputation of our predecessors." Almost 20-22 workers are working at the shop, who have been with us since their youth, he added.

This correspondent came across Kabiraj Hakim Ali (70) of Hatiya upazila in the shop. He said, "Kabiraji (herbal medicine practitioner) is our ancestral profession. Both my grandfather and father were in this profession. And we always come here for various herbal ingredients."

Return of the Bostami turtle

Population increasing due to authorities' efforts

Creative Conservation Alliance (CCA), a non-government organisation, has been working to conserve Bostami turtles since 2019, with financial support from the management committee.

SIFAYET ULLAH

Thanks to the authorities' conservation initiatives, the population of the endangered Bostami turtle has been increasing.

In Bangladesh, Bostami turtles are found in only a few water bodies. The pond by the shrine of Hazrat Bayazid Bostami in the port city is one of those.

Due to the decreasing population over the years, International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) declared the species "extinct in the wild" in 2002.

After that, the shrine's management committee took the initiative to increase the population.

Creative Conservation Alliance (CCA), a non-government organisation, has been working to conserve Bostami turtles since 2019, with financial support from the management committee.

Besides, Wildlife Management and Nature Conservation Division (WMNCD), Chattogram has also been providing support for breeding the turtles.

Asked about the earlier fall in population,



WMNCD official Nur Jahan said, "The turtles lay eggs in the pond's soft soil. But breeding was hampered, as the soil had hardened due to construction of structures near the water body, which created opportunities for crows, dogs and other animals to eat the eggs."

"In addition, fish in the pond eat baby turtles. So, an artificial breeding centre has been set up near the shrine to increase the population," she said.

"The number of Bostami turtles is now increasing due to proper care, and more than 300 turtles have been born in the last three years. The turtles have already been released into the pond," said Nur Jahan.

In 2004, when water from the pond was pumped out after miscreants poisoned the water body, 408 turtles were found, said a staffer of WMNCD. There has been no survey since then.

Farid Ahsan, a professor of

zoology at Chittagong University, who studied this black soft-shell turtle, in his 1984 survey recorded around 320 Bostami turtles in the pond.

In his study, Prof Farid had recommended a detailed demographic survey, long-term research and monitoring, introduction of a captive breeding programme, analysis of pond ecology, and study on the association between turtles and fish.

Contacted, Prof Farid said as the Bostami turtle is an endangered species, proper initiative should be taken to conserve it.

"No precautionary measures were taken to protect Bostami turtles till CCA took the responsibility," said CCA Chief Executive Officer Shahrar Caesar Rahman. "We are working on increasing the population and conserving the turtles in different parts of the country," he said.

According to the shrine management committee, 20 to 25 turtles die in the pond every year, and so, it wants the animals to be protected. "We have no objection regarding taking baby turtles from the pond for conservation purposes," said management committee secretary Habibur Rahman.

