

Hilsa brings back smiles to FISHERS

Braving a cyclone, a 65-day fishing ban and another spell of inclement weather, fishermen in Cox's Bazar finally got what they wanted, but challenges remain

MOKAMMEL SHUVO

"Only God knows how we survived. First, it was the cyclone, and then came the fishing ban, and then another depression. We could only hope for better days soon. But the wait was too long."

Fazal Ahmed, a fisherman from Kutubdia upazila in Cox's Bazar, was recalling the hard times he and his family had to go through since mid-May.

Not only Fazal, but most of the fishermen in the Chattogram region also sat idle for nearly four months since Cyclone Mocha hit the region in the second week of May.

As the cyclone system passed, after a few days, the government imposed a 65-day ban on fishing in the Bay. And then came another depression that flooded the region, making a voyage to the sea tough.

"We got hilsa worth around Tk 3 lakh when we set off for the sea after the ban lifted on July 23 but had to come back within three days because of the depression in the bay. That trip incurred us a loss of Tk 2 lakh," he said.

He said during that period he had to borrow money to meet his family's daily needs. This was the case for the other fishermen as fishing is the only occupation they know to earn their living.

Now, that the depression is gone, things are getting better for them.

Fazal's last fishing trip to the sea was a success.

"We were lucky this time. We

quickly caught around 7,000 hilsa fish worth around Tk 45 lakh," said a beaming Fazal.

Like him, Shakil and his fellow fishermen in the same area also got 4,000 hilsa and sold them for Tk 35 lakh.

"It's been a long time since we got hilsa in such large quantity. If the trend continues, we will be able to repay all of our debts made during the ban period," he said.



Both fishermen were talking to The Daily Star at Cox's Bazar Fish Landing Station recently.

Rubel Islam, publication secretary of Cox's Bazar Fish Traders' Association, said the market is now being flooded with hilsa, dropping their prices considerably.

However, he said a huge supply sometimes plummets prices, incurring losses for both the fishermen and traders.

Most of the fishing trawlers are getting 2,000 to 10,000 hilsa

per trip, he said.

Abdul Khaliq, a fish trader at the landing station yesterday, said they are buying hilsa weighing over 1kg at around Tk 1,150 per piece, while 900g-1kg hilsa is sold at Tk 1,050-1,120 per piece, and below 800g is Tk 800-930.

From the start of the month till yesterday, Cox's Bazar Fish Landing Station received 183.9 tonnes of hilsa. This time last

fishing, and they are getting good catches.

However, expressing concerns, he alleged that hundreds of Indian fishing boats were catching fish in Bangladeshi territory near Mohipur and Meghna estuaries. Those boats with advanced fishing mechanisms can catch large quantities of fish. If it is continued, our fishers will likely not get fish in the near future, he said.

Asked, he blamed the fishers' woes on the impractical and untimely fishing ban.

Delwar said local fishers set their timing for fishing depending on the full moon and new moon.

"We traditionally suspend fishing in the Bangla months of Ashar and Sharban, when the sea becomes rough. But the government officials set the date for the fishing ban following the English calendar (Gregorian calendar), which is piling misery on the fishers and also harmful for fish breeding."

The authority should impose a ban on fishing based on ground realities. The ban came a month earlier than required, he added.

He urged the authorities to consider changing the timing of the fishing ban.

He also alleged that "Around half the names in the government list for compensation during the ban period are not fishermen. So, a large number of fishers are left out of the government food assistance programme."



PHOTO: MOKAMMEL SHUVO



Historical Kadam Mobarak Mosque

FM MIZANUR RAHAMAN

Most of the Muslim devotees of the port city are unaware of a hidden gem of Islamic heritage in the heart of the city. The Kadam Mubarak Mosque, located in Jamal Khan in port city has been carrying the history of the Mughal era. But the most unique and interesting thing about it is that the mosque is believed to have a footprint of the beloved prophet Muhammad (pbuh) for the last 350 years.

It was established by Yasin Khan, a Mughal ruler of Chattogram, in 1719. It has a three-domed roof and four octagonal turrets.

The mosque has three rooms for prayers. The middle room is larger than the two others. The small room in the north has a footprint (Kadam Mubarak), which is believed to be the footprint of the prophet. Besides, the footprint of Hazrat Abdul Qadir Jilani is also believed to be preserved here.

Both the footprints are preserved on separate stones which are believed to be collected by the mosque's first Mutawalli Yasin Khan from Makkah and Baghdad. The mosque has three arches (Khilan), and on the south wall, there are three beautifully crafted Mehrabs.

It is decorated with stonework with vine designs, Arabic calligraphy, geometric patterns, and mosaic designs.

The mosque complex has a graveyard. It also has an orphanage, one of the biggest in the area.

Abu Tyeb Suman, a Muslim devotee told the Daily Star "Every time I visit this mosque, as a believer, I get thrills. A relic directly related to our beloved prophet is here. If taken proper measures, the mosque can be a major tourist attraction due to its historical values."

Mutawalli Azad Ullah Khan said some development works are now underway including expanding the complex with an Islamic Research Center.



PHOTO: COLLECTED

Dengue hits the port city hard

Experts say initiatives to control the disease still not visible enough

ARUN BIKASH DEY

With the number of patients increasing every day, dengue has already become a menace in Chattogram this month. And if proper actions are not taken, the outbreak threatens to wreak havoc in the region.

Around a hundred patients have been detected on average every day in Chattogram. For example, a total of 103 patients were detected on Sunday, 80 patients were detected on Saturday, 84 patients were detected on Thursday

and 91 patients were detected on Wednesday in Chattogram.

With number of patients increasing, the death toll of patients due to dengue is also increasing.

A total of nine patients died of dengue in the first six months (between January and June) in this year while a total of 37 patients died in the next two months (between July and August) taking the year's death toll to 46 in dengue till August 20.

On August 20, a total of two patients died of dengue while on

August 19, a total of three patients died of dengue in different hospitals in Chattogram.

A total of 500 dengue patients were admitted to hospitals in Chattogram in the first six months. However, since July, a total of 3920 dengue patients were hospitalized pushing the number of patients to 4480 till August 21 so far in this year, according to the data provided by Chattogram Civil Surgeon Office.

Experts say the actual numbers may be multiple times higher as the official data are collected from hospitals. There are a good number of patients who take treatment in-house and in the private chambers of doctors.

At present, a total of 226 dengue patients were undergoing treatment at different hospitals in Chattogram.

Though the situation is alarming, the initiatives taken by the authorities including Chattogram City Corporation (CCC) and Directorate of Health to prevent the breeding of Aedes mosquitoes seem to be insufficient, say city dwellers.

A survey was conducted in the port city by a group of researchers from Chittagong University under the supervision of CCC in 2021 to find out the breeding spots of Aedes. The CCC, later, took steps to destroy the larvae

in those areas.

However, no such survey was conducted in 2022 and this year so far.

Although a significant number of patients is found in rural areas this year, actions are missing to prevent the outbreak in those areas.

For example, around a hundred dengue patients have been detected in a single village named Sonaichhari of Sitakunda upazila this year but no anti-mosquito drive has been initiated in this village.

Contacted, Monir Ahmed, chairman of Sonaichhari Union Parishad, said they informed the upazila nirbahi officer and the office of Chattogram Divisional Director of Health Services, Chattogram but to no avail.

"We do not have logistic equipment to initiate an anti-mosquito drive ourselves," said the UP chairman.

The CCC, however, started a 100-day anti-mosquito crash programme on June 22. Later, CCC mobile court conducted some drives and fined some people as they found larvae of dengue in the surroundings of their abode.

According to civil society members and rights activists, the initiatives

taken by CCC are too little, too late.

"The situation didn't become like this in a day. We, civil society members and media people, have continuously been saying and writing about the dengue danger. But the authorities didn't take proper actions," he said.

Contacted, Chattogram District entomologist Entajer Ferdous said the CCC staffers should spray insecticides to kill flying mosquito during the evening and dawn, adding, at dawn and pre-evening time is the best time to spray mosquito insecticides as a study found that density of mosquito remains highest that time.

Contacted, CCC mayor Rezaul Karim Chowdhury said the CCC conservancy workers were spraying medicines in the breeding grounds of mosquitoes.

Rezaul said, "The CCC alone cannot prevent dengue; mass awareness is a must in this regard," adding, "The city corporation workers can only kill mosquitoes outside the house. So we have to keep our respective homes and yards clean."

Contacted, Dr Md Mohiuddin, Chattogram divisional director of Directorate General of Health Services, said they have already started surveying different areas in the city to find out the dengue hotspots.

He said, during the survey, Aedes larvae were found in areas including Khulshi, Sadarghat, Firringji Bazar, North Kattoli, South Kattoli, Akbar Shah, Colonel Hat, Shulak Bahor and Chandaon.

"We have informed the CCC about the hot spots of dengue," he said.



PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN