



As trawlers return from the Bay of Bengal, hilsa catches are being carried to a landing centre in Cox's Bazar. Fishermen say lighter hauls this year are failing to cover their costs.

Hilsa slips out of reach as sea catches plummet

Overfishing of juvenile fish and bad weather curb hauls

MOKAMMEL SHUVO

Many people are yet to taste hilsa this season because of exorbitant prices, while the peak period for catching the national fish draws to a close. Fishermen in the Bay of Bengal say this year's hauls are far smaller than last year's.

In most cases, the catch does not even cover the cost of going to sea.

Last week, two fishing boats of Hasan Ali, a resident of the Tekpara area in Cox's Bazar, came back with barely 200 hilsa between them. The fish, a staple of festivals and family gatherings for many Bangladeshis, once filled his nets.

But this time, one trawler landed only 30 hilsa and the other 150. Hasan sold the lot for Tk 1.5 lakh, much lower than the Tk 8 lakh he spent on fuel, ice, supplies, and wages.

"Since the 58-day government fishing ban ended on June 12, we have been able to make four trips to the sea. Three ended in losses, and one helped us recover the cost," said a frustrated Hasan, whose colleagues have faced similar experiences.

Hilsa has become scarce not only in Cox's Bazar, one of the main landing points for marine fish, but also in key fishing grounds such as Patuakhali on the southern coast.

Cox's Bazar contributed 7 percent of the total hilsa catch of 5.21 lakh tonnes in fiscal year 2023-24, according to the Yearbook of Fisheries Statistics of Bangladesh.

Fishermen describe spending hours casting nets without finding a single fish. Many have been in the trade for decades and know no other work.

But as catches decline, staying afloat financially is becoming harder for them.

"There are no fish in the sea. What can



we do? We had to return almost empty-handed," said Nurul Afsar, a boatman who went out with 22 fishermen on his large trawler early this month.

Afsar said the sea was rough, so they came back early. He said the trip cost his firm about Tk 4.5 lakh in fuel, ice, food, and wages, but the catch was too small to recover it. He lost nearly Tk 2.5 lakh on that voyage.

"If this continues, our business will sink," he commented.

Meanwhile, with supplies falling, hilsa prices have gone beyond the reach of many households. In Dhaka, the fish was at Tk 900-2,200 per kilogramme yesterday, nearly 7 percent more than a month ago and 29 percent higher than the Tk 800-1,600 last year, according to the Trading Corporation of Bangladesh (TCB).

Asked why hilsa numbers are falling, fisherman Hasan said hilsa catchers

used to use nets with wider gaps. But many have now switched to fine-mesh "current nets" that trap even the smallest fish. "Indiscriminate catching of juveniles is emptying the sea," he said.

Delwar Hossain, secretary of the Cox's Bazar Fishing Trawler Owners' Association, said that from mid-August to mid-October, juvenile hilsa, known locally as jatka, swim close to shore in shallow water.

Once they reach about 400 grammes, they move into deeper seas. "But during this growth period, thousands of trawlers from areas such as Kutubdia to Mohipur use fine-mesh nets, indiscriminately destroying the jatka," said Hossain.

"As a result, they cannot mature into adult hilsa, and production is falling day by day. If this continues, hilsa may disappear from our seas," he added.

At Cox's Bazar, hilsa weighing 1-1.4 kg is at Tk 1,800 each wholesale, higher

than a year ago. According to Hossain, both scarcity of hilsa and middlemen are pushing prices up.

Ashish Kumar Baidya, manager of the Cox's Bazar Fish Landing Centre, said hilsa supply is decreasing day by day.

"Fishermen are catching less in the sea, so even wholesale prices remain high," he said. Only 356 tonnes of hilsa were landed at the Cox's Bazar centre in the past three months, compared with 1,628 tonnes in fiscal year 2024-25.

Md Raja Mia, general secretary of the Fish Traders' Association of the Mohipur Fish Landing Centre in Patuakhali, said very few hilsa are being caught this season compared with previous years.

"Although some jatka have been caught, hilsa of one kilogramme or larger in size are very few. This time all traders are counting losses," he said, adding that each small trader has lost nearly Tk 5 lakh this year.

"The losses of big traders are even higher. If such losses continue, many fishermen will be forced to leave this profession," Mia said.

Patuakhali supplied 13 percent of the country's hilsa catch in 2023-24, according to the Department of Fisheries.

About the catches, Patuakhali District Fisheries Officer Md Kamrul Islam offered a hopeful note.

"There is abundant movement of hilsa in the sea. However, this year, due to frequent low pressure and adverse weather, fishermen have not been able to go to the deep sea to catch fish. Once the weather becomes favourable, fishermen will hopefully get a large number of hilsa," said Islam.

[Our Patuakhali correspondent Sohrab Hossain contributed to this story.]

Building women leadership in boardrooms

ZAREEN MAHMUD HOSEIN

Bangladesh has raised the proportion of women on boards to nearly one in five seats, ahead of South Asia. Yet only 6 percent of independent directors are women. The task now is to build a credible pipeline of qualified women for oversight roles that protect accountability and market trust. The Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission (BSEC) has extended to December 2025 the deadline for appointing at least one female independent director. Deadlines alone do not create leaders; pipelines do.

Recent Dhaka Stock Exchange data show women hold 6 percent of independent director seats, up from 5 percent in 2024, and 19 percent of overall board seats, compared with South Asia's 13 percent. Globally, women occupy about 20 percent of board seats. The EU targets 40 percent by 2026, and the US is nearing 30 percent. Without a stronger talent pool, Bangladesh risks losing ground. In banking, the pipeline narrows from 19 percent at the entry level to 6 percent as independent directors. This is less a failure of talent than of structure, visibility and opportunity.

Governance is not a box-ticking exercise. It underpins credibility and long-term value. Strong boards attract investment, manage risk and endure.

The Institute of Chartered Accountants of Bangladesh (ICAB) has about 150 female members, some already serving on boards, who bring financial expertise, ethics and risk management aligned to fiduciary duties.

"Female chartered accountants bring financial acumen and integrity to the boardroom. To unlock their potential as independent directors, ICAB must focus on structured orientation and strategic onboarding," said Suraiya Zannath, vice president, ICAB.

"ICAB is committed to building a sustainable pipeline of women leaders. This is not just about inclusion; it is about better governance and stronger markets," said NKA Mobin, president, ICAB.

Boards also benefit from leaders in law, banking, business, academia and civil society. There are already role

models. BRAC Bank has been a pioneer, with leaders such as Farzanah Chowdhury, managing director and CEO of Green Delta Insurance, who served as its corporate leader and is now its independent director. Senior ICAB women can mentor cross-sector candidates and position ICAB as a hub for practical governance capacity building.

To translate mandate into momentum, ICAB and its partners should: maintain a directory of board-ready women chartered accountants; collaborate with IFC, BSEC, DSE, BICM, FRC, universities and global institutes on hands-on training; deploy experienced ICAB women directors as mentors; and convene forums connecting women professionals with nomination committees. Collaboration with the Institute of Chartered Secretaries of Bangladesh (ICSB) can fuse financial and governance strengths. I was trained by IFC on corporate governance and board readiness, a programme ICAB can adapt at scale.

"Independent directors must bring objective oversight, protect stakeholder interests and strengthen governance through diverse perspectives and strategic challenges. The focus now is on building a sustainable pipeline and working with professional bodies to ensure that skilled, qualified individuals are ready to serve," said Lopa Rahman, ESG Officer - Advisory Services, IFC South Asia.

"Strong governance depends on transparent reporting and credible oversight. Women independent directors can play a vital role in reinforcing accountability, and the FRC stands ready to work with professional bodies to bring more of them into boardrooms," said Md Sajjad Hossain Bhuiyan, chairman, FRC.

The BSEC extension should be a catalyst, not a formality. Expanding training, mentoring, and networks can make appointments strengthen competitiveness rather than just compliance. As Sheryl Sandberg wrote in Lean In: "In the future, there will be no female leaders. There will just be leaders." With a robust pipeline, that future is within reach, and Bangladesh can show that good governance and gender diversity go hand in hand.

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New iPhone 17 unveiled in Moscow

REUTERS

Russian resellers unveiled Apple's new iPhone 17 in stores on Saturday, as major retailer Restore reported a sharp rise in pre-ordering this year.

Strong demand for Apple smartphones offers a sign that consumer demand for popular products has yet to falter in line with a wider economic slowdown in Russia. The country has seen 20-year-high interest rates and a budget deficit of over 4 trillion roubles this year.

The iPhones' popularity in Russia has endured Apple halting sales in 2022 and suspending services like Apple Pay in the wake of Western sanctions over the invasion of Ukraine. In Russia, the phones also command higher prices than in Western markets.

"This year we have 66 percent more preorders than last year," said Lyudmila Semushina, PR director for Inventive Retail Group, which owns tech retailer Restore.

"There is a huge fan base that will never exchange iPhone for anything else," Semushina said in the Restore branch at Afimall City, located in the futuristic Moscow International Business Centre amidst some of Europe's tallest skyscrapers.

The US tech giant rolled out the iPhone 17 range globally this week, introducing a new design, updated cameras, and the new Air model.

"It is worth thinking about switching from my current phone to the iPhone Air. This is a major update," said customer Oleg Kochetkov, adding that Russians are increasingly using iPhones for FaceTime after the government restricted WhatsApp and Telegram call services.

"There are a lot of new features that attract me. First of all, the cameras," tech blogger Sergei Yepikhin told Reuters.

H-1B workers abroad race to US as Trump order sparks dismay, confusion

REUTERS, San Francisco/New York

Panic, confusion, and anger reigned as workers on H-1B visas from India and China were forced to abandon travel plans and rush back to the US after President Donald Trump imposed new visa fees, in line with his wide-ranging immigration crackdown.

Tech companies and banks sent urgent memos to employees, advising them to return before a deadline of 12:01 am US Eastern Time Sunday (4:01 am GMT), and telling them not to leave the country.

A White House official on Saturday clarified that the order applied only to new applicants and not holders of existing visas or those seeking renewals, addressing some of the confusion over who would be affected by the order.

But Trump's proclamation a day before had already set off alarm bells in Silicon Valley. Fearing they would not be allowed back once the new rule took effect, several Indian nationals at San Francisco airport said they cut short vacations.

"It is a situation where we had to choose between family and staying here," said an engineer at a large tech company whose wife had been on an Emirates flight from San Francisco to Dubai that was scheduled to depart at 5:05 p.m. local time (12:05 a.m. GMT) on Friday.

The flight was delayed by more than three hours after several Indian passengers who received news of the order or memos from their employers demanded to deplane, said the person

who spoke on condition of anonymity. At least five passengers were eventually allowed off, said the engineer.

A video of the incident was circulating on social media, showing a few people



PHOTO: REUTERS/FILE

US President Donald Trump speaks before signing an executive order directing federal agencies to recommend changes to a temporary visa program used to bring foreign workers to the United States to fill high-skilled jobs during a visit to the world headquarters of Snap-On Inc, a tool manufacturer in Kenosha, Wisconsin.

leaving the plane. Reuters could not independently verify the veracity of the video. The engineer's wife, also a H-1B visa holder, chose to head to India to care for her sick mother. "It's quite tragic. We have built a life here," he told Reuters.

On the popular Chinese social media app Rednote, people on H-1B visas shared their experiences of having to rush back to the US - in some cases just hours after landing in China or another country.

Some likened the panic they felt to their experience during the COVID-19 pandemic, when they urgently flew back to the US before a travel ban took effect.

"My feelings are a mix of disappointment, sadness, and frustration," said one woman in a post with a user handle "Emily's Life in NY."

The woman said she had boarded a United Airlines flight from New York to Paris, which started taxing, but after some back-and-forth with the airline the captain agreed to return to the gate to let her off the aircraft.

Feeling what she described to Reuters as "insignificant" and "shaken," she canceled the planned trip to France, abandoning plans with friends, including some who were flying in from China, after she received a letter from her company's lawyers asking employees abroad to return to the US.