

# How duck farming reshaped Chalan Beel's economy

AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU, *back from Sirajganj*

When monsoon waters from surrounding rivers pour into Chalan Beel, the vast wetland once famed as the "House of Fish" comes alive. For generations, fishing in the wet season and field farming in the dry season sustained its people. In recent decades, thousands of ducks have joined the ecosystem, gliding across the waters in their flocks, lifting people out of poverty and reshaping the economy.

For many families who could no longer live off fish or paddy, ducks have become the new lifeline. Once a full-time housewife, Momeena Khatun of Sirajganj's Naogaon village under Tarash upazila is a prime example.

A couple of decades ago, her family was fully dependent on field farming. The flowing water made it impossible to work for about five to six months a year. Poverty lingered until she bought 30 ducks.

"The profit was so good that I expanded my farm with 100 ducks in my second year. Now I have over 1,000 ducks in Chalan Beel at Mannan Nagar," she said. "We can easily earn a minimum of Tk 30,000 from each 1,000 ducks if we get full production."

Khatun is now considered one of the region's top success stories in duck farming. She is not alone. Over the past two decades, more than 200 duck farms have appeared across Chalan Beel, which spans multiple districts.

According to district livestock offices, about 25 lakh ducks are raised in Pabna, Natore and Sirajganj, though the real figure is likely higher since small family farms often go unrecorded.

Most farms are set up in Tarash and Ullapara upazilas of Sirajganj; Chatmohar and Vangura in Pabna; and Gurudaspur, Boraigram, and Singra upazilas of Natore. Sirajganj leads in numbers, with over 13,26 lakh ducks.

"The vast wetland provides ample food and a favourable environment for ducks to grow, turning the farms incredibly profitable," said AKM Anwarul Haque, district livestock officer (DLO) for Sirajganj.

Describing the process, Md. Bojil Rahman, a veteran farmer from Beelhori village in Natore's Gurudaspur, said, "We bring one-day-old ducklings before the monsoon floods the beel and nourish



Chalan Beel has seen a surge in duck farming in recent decades, lifting up the rural economy and bringing many out of poverty.

PHOTO: AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU

them in sheds for a month before letting them into the water."

The waterbody, with its seemingly unending resources, does the rest. "Within five months they start laying eggs."

Md Selim Uddin, Natore DLO, said more than 6.9 lakh ducks are farmed across three upazilas, producing 5 crore eggs and 9,000 tonnes of meat annually.

"Duck farming plays a vital role in the rural economy in Chalan Beel as commercial duck farming has been increasing."

The appeal lies partly in low start-up costs. "Simply setting up a shed beside the water body is enough. There is no extra effort needed," Uddin said, adding that vaccinations provided by livestock officials keep flocks healthy.

This has led to a dependable supply chain. Most eggs go to local hatcheries, which incubate them to produce new ducklings, while the rest are sold in markets within and beyond the districts.

"We are supplying most of the eggs to

hatcheries in Chalan Beel areas. Mannan Nagar in Sirajganj has become a hub of eggs and ducklings," said Md Saddam, a farmer.

Md Manju, who owns Palli Hatchery in Ullapara, Sirajganj, added, "There are about 100 hatcheries in the region that buy lakhs of eggs every month. I alone buy 40,000-50,000 eggs per month."

The growth of duck farming has created other new income streams. Ducks thrive on snails, leading many to catch them for sale.

"Each bag of snails is sold for Tk 350-400," said Abdul Motaleb, a snail catcher from Tarash upazila. Around 400 to 500 bags are used for snail collection across the beel.

Yet the practice has raised concerns. Md Mahabubur Rahman, Sirajganj district fisheries officer, cautioned, "Snails work as natural purifiers of water. Rampant catching could destroy the ecosystem. If natural water purification is lost, pollution will increase."

"Although commercial duck farming has been increasing in the vast waterbody, we have to be concerned for the survival of other animals in the waterbody," he added.

Urging a balanced approach, he said, "We must develop animal farming considering natural food sources. No single species should increase so much that it hampers others."

Sirajganj DLO Haque, however, believes duck farming itself poses little risk. "Chalan Beel has a sufficient reserve of natural snails. There is no harm in duck farming here."

Chalan Beel was once celebrated for its abundance of fish, but climate change, overfishing, and habitat loss have eroded that reputation. Faced with dwindling catches and flooded cropland, locals turned necessity into innovation.

By turning a flood into a resource, families have forged new economies, not without tension but with remarkable resilience.

## Eastern Bank to issue Tk 800cr bonds

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Eastern Bank PLC (EBL) has announced that its board of directors has approved the issuance of subordinated bonds worth Tk 800 crore to strengthen its Tier-II capital.

The approval came at a board meeting on September 24, EBL said in a disclosure published on the Dhaka Stock Exchange website yesterday.

With a tenure of seven years, the subordinated bonds will be issued through private placement.

The issuance remains subject to approval from the regulatory authorities concerned, according to the disclosure. The private commercial lender posted a profit of Tk 196.28 crore in the second quarter of 2025, up 11 percent year-on-year.

As of August 31, sponsor directors held 31.44 percent of shares, while institutions owned 43.06 percent, the public 24.93 percent, and foreign investors 0.57 percent, as per DSE data.

## China, EU stress cooperation as Trump tariffs bite

REUTERS

China's Premier Li Qiang and European Union chief Ursula von der Leyen stressed cooperation during their meeting in New York, as the world's No.2 and No.3 economies looked to defuse trade tensions while squeezed by US President Donald Trump's tariffs.

Von der Leyen, in a statement on her X account after the meeting on Wednesday, said she had discussed trade matters with China's No.2 leader on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly, and that she appreciated "China's willingness to engage with us in a spirit of mutual understanding."

Europe's concerns regarding export controls, market access, and overcapacity are well-known," she said.

China and the EU have spent the past two years on the brink of a trade war, which most analysts trace back to the European Commission's 2023 decision to open an anti-subsidy investigation into Chinese

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made electric vehicles, setting off probes into EU brands, dairy, pork and other goods.

But with Trump's trade policy squeezing both Chinese and European exports, Beijing and Brussels have had reason to seek a rapprochement.

Li Qiang said he hoped China and the EU could "uphold the original aspirations of establishing diplomatic relations," a statement from China's foreign ministry said on Thursday, adding that "he also expressed hope that the EU will fulfill its commitment to maintaining open trade and investment markets."

"As two important poles in the world, China and the EU should demonstrate responsibility and maintain strategic independence," the statement added.

Chinese trade officials have struggled to negotiate with Washington and Brussels simultaneously, with foreign industry groups complaining of lengthy delays while bureaucrats work long hours on contentious issues such as rare earth export permits.

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Monno Ceramic Industries, one of the leading ceramics producers in the country, saw a fall in profit in fiscal year 2024-2025 as rising finance costs weighed on its earnings. The company reported a 43 percent year-on-year decline in profit for the financial year that ended on June 30, 2025.

It posted earnings per share (EPS) of Tk 0.22, down from Tk 0.39 in the previous year, according to a disclosure posted on the Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE) website yesterday.

While the company achieved incremental revenue and organic sales growth during the year, the EPS dropped as finance costs increased compared to the previous financial year, Monno Ceramic said in the disclosure.

The company's net operating cash flow per share (NOCFPS) stood at Tk 5.44 in the negative, compared to Tk 0.17 in the negative a year earlier.

This decline in the NOCFPS was attributed to higher payments of advance income tax, interest, and suppliers during the period.

Its net asset value per share rose from the previous year owing to an increase in current assets.

The board of directors recommended a 2 percent cash dividend for the year, up from 1 percent in the previous year.

As of August 31, 2025, sponsors and directors held 37.43 percent of the company's shares, institutions 14.58 percent, foreign investors 0.10 percent, and general shareholders 47.89 percent.

REUTERS, London

As ChatGPT nears its third birthday, at least one in 10 retail investors is using a chatbot to pick stocks, fuelling a boom in the robo-advisory market, but even fans say it is a high-risk strategy that cannot replace traditional advisors just yet.

Thanks to artificial intelligence, anyone can select stocks, monitor them and obtain investment analysis that was once only available to big banks or institutional investors.

The robo-advisory market - which includes all companies providing automated, algorithm-driven financial advice such as fintech, banks and wealth managers - is forecast to grow to \$470.91 billion in revenues in 2029 from \$61.75 billion last year, marking a roughly 600 percent increase, according to data firm Research and Markets.

Jeremy Leung, who spent almost two decades analysing companies for UBS, has been using ChatGPT to chase stocks for his multi-asset portfolio since he lost his job at the Swiss bank earlier this year.

"I no longer have the luxury of a Bloomberg (terminal), or those kinds of market-data services which are very, very expensive," Leung said.

"Even the simple ChatGPT tool can do a lot and replicate a lot of the workflows that I used to do," he said, cautioning that

such a tool might however miss some crucial analyses as it can't access data behind a payoff. Leung isn't alone. The industry is growing fast and exponentially.

About half of retail investors say they would use AI tools such as ChatGPT, whose launch in November 2022 ignited

the AI boom on the markets, or Google's Gemini to pick or alter investments in their portfolio, and 13 percent of them already use these tools, according to a survey from broker eToro, which polled 11,000 retail investors across the world.

In the UK, 40 percent of the respondents



Traders work on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange in New York City. About half of retail investors say they would use AI tools such as ChatGPT to pick or alter investments in their portfolio.

## Paperwork over powerplay

MAHTAB UDDIN AHMED

One of my friends has been working with a government agency for the last three years on a project, bringing more than a decade of hard-earned experience to the table, as well as the rare distinction of having actually managed the kind of project they were struggling with. His company, of course, is only a few years old, having been started by him after three decades of corporate experience. The verdict? "Not enough years of company experience." It felt like showing up at a football match with Messi on your side, only to be told the team jersey was too fresh off the tailor's table. A chamber pulled the same stunt on a skill development bid, politely ignoring the fact that we had a world-class line-up of resources.

This isn't an evaluation; this is bureaucracy's favourite sport: worshipping forms while ignoring substance. They clutch "company age" the way a drowning man clutches a straw, never mind that the actual capacity to deliver is standing right in front of them. And of course, the excuse is always wrapped in polite jargon, "procedural requirements," "minimum experience criteria," which is just a sophisticated way of saying, "We'd already decided who to give it to." The humour is dark, but the truth is simple: in these circles, paperwork outranks performance, and logic has long been declared missing.

In one of these episodes, the corporate setup resembled something out of a satire: an MD who was a bureaucrat, a DMD from the defence forces, and an evaluation committee composed of teachers and more bureaucrats. None of them had ever managed a real business, but they were asked to decide who could deliver one. It was like calling in a cricket umpire, a music teacher, and a retired major to judge a cooking competition. They would check if the curry had proper file numbers, ensure the rice stood in attention, and then mark you down because you didn't follow the "approved syllabus." That's how proposals get evaluated here: by committees that know rules better than risks, and procedure better than profit.

When decision-making is guided by rigid checklists instead of real capability, the damage runs deeper than one rejected proposal. For a company, it means being locked out of opportunities despite proven expertise, leaving talent underutilised and morale damaged. For a nation, the cost is far greater. Innovation gets sidelined, fresh players are discouraged, and projects often land in the laps of those who "fit the form" rather than those who can actually deliver. Over time, this creates a culture where rules overshadow results, mediocrity becomes the norm, and the best minds either give up or look abroad. In short, the economy pays the price while the file pushers enjoy the illusion of "due process" or the comfort of saying "interests not served."

The problem of rigid, age-based eligibility can be overcome by shifting to best-value procurement, where capability, past performance, technical approach, and resources are given more weight than the incorporation date. Global best practices highlight this: the USTDA's Global Procurement Initiative promotes life-cycle cost and quality-based evaluation; the OECD recommends principles of transparency, fairness, and inclusivity; and the World Bank encourages "rated criteria" that reward technical merit and innovation. Committees should include sector experts, not just bureaucrats, while governments can support emerging firms through mentorship and policy reforms. Such approaches foster competition, reward real expertise, and ultimately deliver better outcomes for the nation.

However, the real tragedy, or comedy, depending on one's perspective, is that Bangladesh may be the only country where university professors hold more board seats and serve on national committees than business leaders themselves. From banks to telecom to chambers, there's always a professor sitting quietly in the corner, nodding wisely, sometimes without ever having run a business or balanced a payroll. Why are they there? Two possibilities. One: they are the hidden geniuses who understand every sector better than the practitioners. Two: they're simply there to stay quiet and provide the illusion of "neutral wisdom." Either way, the nation keeps confusing silence for strategy.

The writer is the president of the Institute of Cost and Management Accountants of Bangladesh and founder of BuildCon Consultancies Ltd

## 'ChatGPT, what stocks should I buy?' AI fuels boom in robo-advisory market

REUTERS, London

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In the UK, 40 percent of the respondents

to a survey by comparative company Finder said they have used chatbots and AI for personal finance advice.

ChatGPT itself warns it should not be relied on for professional financial advice and says its owner OpenAI has not released data on the number of people who use its chatbot to choose investments. "AI models can be brilliant," said Dan Moczulski, UK managing director at eToro, which boasts 30 million users worldwide. "The risk comes when people treat generic models like ChatGPT or Gemini as crystal balls."

Moczulski said it is best to use AI-generated platforms specifically trained to analyse markets as "general AI models can misquote figures and dates, lean too hard on a pre-established narrative, and overly rely on past price action to attempt to predict the future".

Finder asked ChatGPT in March 2023 to select a basket of stocks from high-quality businesses, with criteria such as levels of debt, sustained growth and assets that generate an advantage over competitors.

The selection of 38 stocks, which includes AI posterchild Nvidia and online retailer Amazon alongside consumer staples like Procter & Gamble and Walmart, has surged nearly 55 percent so far, almost 19 percentage points more than the average of the UK's 10 most popular funds, including those managed by Vanguard, Fidelity, HSBC and Fundsmith.