The 'boat village' of Barguna

Keeping a 200-year tradition afloat

SOHRAB HOSSAIN, *Patuakhali*

Over 250 families, out of some 900, of East Chunakhali village in Barguna are directly involved with the craft of boatmaking, earning it the nickname of "boat village". PHOTO: SOHRAB HOSSAIN

In the remote village of East Chunakhali in Barguna, the day doesn't start with an announcement from overenthusiastic roosters, but with the cling-clang of hammers and chisels. Walk through the alleys any time of the year, and you'll find house after house busy shaping timber and sealing planks -- men bending over raw logs, trimming them into smooth, curving ribs. The air smells of freshly cut wood mixed with the tang of tar and marine paint.

The village, located in Kukua union under Amtali upazila, houses some 900 families. Over 250 of them are directly involved in the craft of boatmaking, earning it the nickname "boat village."

For nearly 200 years, crafting boats has been the lifeblood of this riverside village. Every year, the artisans of Chunakhali build boats worth nearly Tk 2 crore, sustaining a centuries-old heritage while keeping the local economy afloat.

"People from faraway places know this as a boatmaking village," said Borhan Uddin Ahmed Masum Talukder, chairman of Kukua Union Parishad. "The trade has not only preserved our tradition but also improved the livelihoods of villagers."

A visit to the village reveals yards filled with small sheds made of tin or polythene, where groups of carpenters work side by side. Each pair of craftsmen can make one small boat, known locally as a "dingi," in a single day, earning about Tk 800 to Tk 900 each.

These light wooden boats are in high demand across the coastal belt. They are easy to maneuver in shallow waters and are used for fishing, carrying harvested paddy, or transporting goods to local markets.

For nearly every artisan, the craft is a generational inheritance. Elderly craftsman Barek Mistri, who has been building boats for 50 years, says it all began with Lalu Mistri.

"About two centuries ago, a man named Lalu Mistri started making boats here," he said. "Other villagers learned the skill from him. Many families followed his lead, and it became our main occupation."

Standing nearby, Muzammel Mistri described the costs involved. "A small boat costs about Tk 2,000 to Tk 2,500 to make and sells for Tk 3,000 to Tk 3,500. Bigger ones cost around Tk 9,000 and sell for Tk 12,000 to Tk 15,000."

The boats made in Chunakhali are sold in markets across Amtali, Kalapara, Galachipa, Gazipur, and Patuakhali. Since most of the timber is sourced locally, production costs remain low and profits higher.

"I came all the way from Lalua in Kalapara upazila to buy boats here," said Sattar, a fisherman. "The boats made in this village are durable and last longer than others."

Amtali Upazila Nirbahi Officer Mohammad Rokonuzzaman Khan acknowledged the economic potential of the village's craftsmanship. "Boats made in Chunakhali are in high demand," he said. "We're considering ways to support the artisans, including easy-term loans to help them expand their work."

Succession gap in Bangladeshi companies

MASUD KHAN

Succession planning remains one of the weakest aspects of corporate governance in Bangladesh. While multinationals operating here view salaries as long-term investments in leadership pipelines, most local firms continue to treat them as costs. This difference explains why professionals in multinational corporations thrive in structured, merit-based environments, while many of their counterparts in local businesses remain underutilised and frustrated.

Over the past two decades, family-owned conglomerates in garments, cement and trading have experimented with hiring professional managers. Yet genuine success stories are rare. The main reason is the dominance of owners in daily operations. On paper, professionals may appear empowered, but in practice, most significant decisions still flow back to the owner or the family. This stifles initiative, limits professional growth, and reinforces the belief that only the owner can run the business effectively. The result is predictable: talented managers leave, often for multinationals, where decision-making structures are clearer and career progression more systematic.

The contrast with multinational joint ventures is striking. In sectors such as fast-moving consumer goods, telecommunications and cement, professionals typically run operations, while foreign or institutional shareholders focus on governance and strategic oversight. Because ownership and management are clearly separated, managers are trusted to lead and are held accountable for performance. These firms consistently attract top graduates, develop leadership talent internally and maintain competitiveness in fast-changing markets.

The role of the first generation of Bangladeshi entrepreneurs is central to understanding this dynamic. Many of today's business leaders began from modest positions -- some as traders of raw materials, others on factory floors or in small tailoring shops. Through resilience and effort, they built enterprises that came to dominate their sectors. Their strength lay in hands-on experience and instinctive market knowledge. Yet this history also created a structural challenge: when such entrepreneurs employ professionals, they often expect them to display the same level of intuition and resilience that they themselves developed over decades. For most managers, this is an impossible benchmark to meet, fuelling mistrust and disappointment. For them, it is baptism through fire.

The issue becomes sharper when businesses move to the second and third generations. In many family-run firms, successors have studied abroad at leading universities. While this education offers valuable exposure, some heirs return reluctant to join their family businesses at all, while others attempt to impose foreign management styles directly. These models often clash with local realities, whether in garments, trading or manufacturing, creating friction with long-serving employees and undermining performance.

The broader pattern is clear. Family-dominated conglomerates often struggle with succession because authority remains concentrated in founders or heirs, leaving little scope for professional managers to develop. Listed firms and multinational joint ventures, by contrast, institutionalise leadership development and maintain a clearer separation between governance and management. They are better placed to attract and retain talent, adapt to change and sustain competitiveness across generations.

For Bangladesh's private sector to sustain its momentum, a change in mindset is essential. Professional managers must be given time and freedom to grow, without being judged against the lifetime of experience of founders. Owners should focus on strategy and governance, allowing managers to handle operations. Likewise, second- and third-generation successors should not be parachuted into boardrooms but should earn their positions by working through the ranks. Global education can enrich their vision, but only when blended with local experience.

Bangladesh's first-generation entrepreneurs have already shown what can be achieved through resilience and hard work. The next challenge is to ensure these businesses endure and thrive beyond their founders. By learning from the governance practices of listed companies and joint ventures, family-owned firms can institutionalise succession planning, build leadership pipelines and preserve their legacy for future generations. Without these changes, many risk stagnation. With them, Bangladesh's homegrown firms can continue their entrepreneurial journey with greater stability and confidence.

The writer is chairman of Unilever Consumer Care Ltd

Desco posts Tk 125cr loss, skips dividend

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Dhaka Electric Supply Company (Desco) reported a loss of Tk 125 crore for the 2024-25 fiscal year, as the state-run utility provider did not recommend any dividend.

Its loss per share stood at Tk 3.15, narrowing from Tk 12.72 in the previous year, according to a price-sensitive information disclosure.

The company's net operating cash flow per share rose slightly to Tk 15.93 from Tk 15.49 a year earlier.

The board of directors of the company recommended no dividend for FY25, citing negative retained earnings.

"The company incurred a loss in the current year, and its retained earnings are negative; as such, the board of directors could not recommend any dividend," Desco said.

As of September 30, 2025, the government held a 67.66 percent stake in the company, according to a regulatory filing.

In the company, institutional investors owned 23.65 percent, the general public 8.65 percent, and foreign investors 0.04 percent.

Stocks fall 1.53% amid bank, NBFI losses

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

AI GENERATED IMAGE

Shares at the Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE) ended the first trading day of the week on a lower note yesterday, dragged down by losses in bank and non-bank financial institutions shares.

The DSEX, the benchmark index of the bourse, shed 81.25 points, or 1.53 percent, to close at 5,202.46, according to DSE data.

It was the fifth straight session of decline, signifying persistently weak investor sentiment, as the DSEX lost 245 points during this period.

Other indices followed the pattern of negative performance, as the Shariah-based DSES and the blue-chip DS30 also slipped into negative territory.

The market closed in the red as all large-cap sectors posted negative performances, BRAC EPL Stock Brokerage Ltd said in its daily market update.

Turnover, a key gauge of investor activity, stood at Tk 542.55 crore, up from Tk 530.18 crore in the previous session, reflecting slightly higher participation despite the market slump.

Block trades -- high-volume transactions involving large numbers of securities -- contributed 2.6 percent of the overall market turnover.

Market breadth was firmly negative, with 47 issues advancing against 311 declining, while 38 remained unchanged.

Among the major sectors, NBFIs suffered the steepest decline of 2.40 percent, followed by the engineering sector with a 1.98 percent drop.

Bank shares lost 1.94 percent, food and allied shares fell 1.56 percent, fuel and power 1.30 percent, telecommunications 0.51 percent, and pharmaceuticals 0.47 percent.

CVO Petrochemical Refinery emerged as the most traded stock, posting a turnover of Tk 23.9 crore, said BRAC EPL.

On the performance table, Simtex Industries surged 9.88 percent to top the gainers' list, while Bangladesh Industrial Fin Co slumped 9.38 percent, making it the worst performer of the session.

Trump's crackdown on EVs hits home in the Battery Belt

REUTERS, *Stanton*

Stanton, Tennessee - population 450 - welcomed a massive new neighbor a few years ago: a Ford electric-truck factory and a joint-venture battery plant slated to employ 6,000 workers.

Ford's 2022 groundbreaking triggered an influx of construction activity into the former cotton-and-soybean farmlands outside of Memphis. Hard-hatted workers filled local diners. Developers scrambled to build homes and fire stations.

Stanton is quieter these days. Ford over the past 18 months repeatedly delayed phases of the project. The EV truck plant is slated to begin initial production in 2027 and start sending deliveries the next year, a timeline delayed several times from the original plan of coming online in 2025.

Ford said it "will be nimble in adjusting our product launch timing to meet market needs and customer demand while targeting improved profitability."

The Ford complex is part of the so-called Battery Belt, a swath of factories stretching across the US heartland that spans from Georgia to Indiana. Roughly two dozen battery projects worth tens of billions in investment have been announced this decade, promising to inject tens of thousands of jobs in Republican-dominated states like Georgia and Kentucky.

By last year, though, Americans' waning enthusiasm for electric cars led automakers to delay or scrap some factory projects. Now, the additional fallout from US President Donald Trump's recent policy changes is descending on the Battery Belt.

Ford CEO Jim Farley last week offered the prediction that electric-car sales could fall by around 50 percent following the Sept. 30 expiration of a $7,500 tax credit for buyers, echoing other gloomy forecasts for the EV market.

The uncertain fate of these massive, high-tech factories and their employment has rattled the small rural communities that spent years hitching their economic futures to these projects.

"That's on everybody's mind, quite frankly," said Allan Sterbinsky, who retired as mayor of Stanton in December and advocated for the site for years before Ford came to town. Some residents worry that Ford will never follow through on the plant, the former mayor says. Others hope the company will repurpose the 3,600-acre site if demand doesn't increase for EVs.

A Ford spokesperson pointed to the automaker's community work in Stanton, including grants to public safety organizations as part of a broader $9 million commitment to the area. A Reuters review of US battery-investment plans shows those worries are justified. The industry appears headed toward a huge glut of factory capacity, if all those projects were to move ahead as planned.

By 2030, the planned battery plants would provide the capacity to produce 13 million to 15 million EVs annually, according to figures provided to Reuters by research firm Benchmark Mineral Intelligence. But the industry now might only need about one-quarter of that factory space. S&P Global Mobility predicts only around 3 million EVs will be produced that year, and some would likely use batteries imported from other countries.

Ford Mustang Mach E electric vehicles are offered for sale at a dealership in Chicago, Illinois. Ford CEO Jim Farley predicted that electric-car sales could fall by around 50 percent following the September 30 expiration of a $7,500 tax credit. PHOTO: AFP/FILE

Some of that excess roughly 10 million-EV worth of battery capacity would likely be used for hybrids and extended-range EVs as well as the booming energy storage industry, but there is still a sizable gulf, said Stephanie Brinley, S&P Global Mobility automotive analyst.

The demise of the $7,500 tax credit - which had been in place for more than 15 years to persuade Americans to try green cars - is only the highest profile of several anti-EV measures put forth by the Trump administration. Combined, they further jeopardize battery projects and other electric-car-related investments, experts say. In the last few months several automakers have canceled, delayed or downsized EV projects.

Meanwhile, a pot of tens of billions of dollars available to companies that make EV batteries domestically has tighter restrictions that will likely reduce the amount of federal money that flows to the battery sites.

"All of a sudden, much of what was originally going to benefit from these credits now no longer can to a large degree," said Jennifer Stafeil, tax auto sector lead for KPMG.

Trump has said he is not anti-EV, but prefers that consumers decide what cars to buy, without government influence. He also has criticized EV-friendly regulations implemented under former President Joe Biden, which Trump has said were costly and threatened American auto jobs.

One of the nation's largest EV projects, Hyundai Motor's $12.6 billion assembly plant and joint-venture battery factory near Savannah, Georgia, is moving ahead. Last month the project suffered a setback when federal law enforcement raided it. Hyundai has said the fallout would delay the battery plant by at least two to three months.

In the three years since Hyundai announced the megasite, 21 suppliers have opened operations near the site.

"Hyundai is committed to offering a diverse product lineup, including internal combustion, hybrid, plug-in hybrid, and EV models. We understand that every customer is unique, and we strive to meet a wide range of needs," a spokesperson said.

The complex is gearing up to hire 8,500 employees by 2031, and is paying wages 25 percent above the county average, said Trip Tollison, president of the Savannah Economic Development Authority.

Tollison acknowledged that some in the community worry about the uncertain future of the nascent EV industry that underpins all that development. He is hopeful Hyundai can flexibly shift to hybrid production if the EV market doesn't take off.