

HOME SWEET HOME

Carpenters at Louhajang upazila in Munshiganj build full wooden homes, ready to travel by truck or trawler from riverside workshops to faraway districts



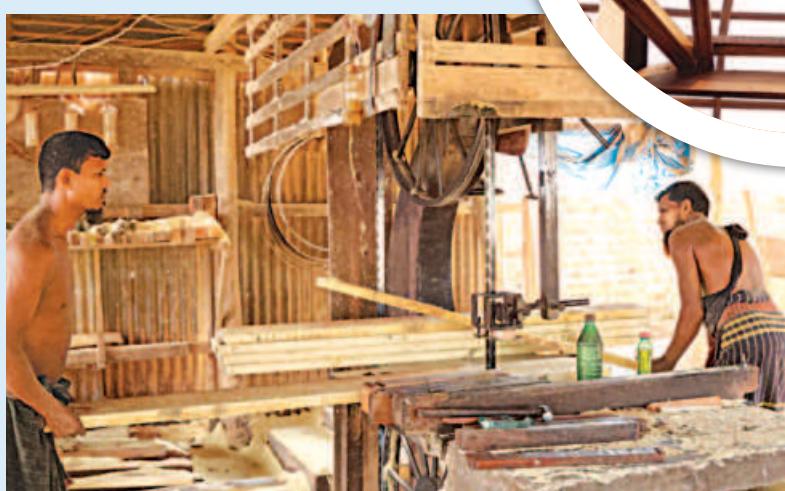
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No one is quite sure who first came up with the idea. Locals believe it emerged from life on the banks of the Padma, where the mighty river often devoured land and homes. They say someone might have wondered: what if houses could move?

That thought gave birth to an entire sector at Louhajang upazila of Munshiganj district. Over the past few decades, carpenters here have been building fully ready-made wooden houses, complete with doors, windows and tin roofs, that can be transported and set up wherever the buyer wants.

Around 100 traders now work in the upazila, where the Ghor Dour Bazar has become the best-known hub in the country for these portable houses. Each shop sells between two and five houses a month.

A HOUSE WITHOUT THE HASSLE
These structures appeal to people who want to avoid the hassle of collecting materials, supervising masons and



wood generally last 20 to 25 years.

Designs vary from small single-story homes to duplex-style builds. Some come with verandas, attached bathrooms or kitchens. Custom designs are also available, with delivery in 20 to 25 days.

THE CRAFTSMEN BEHIND THE WALLS

Each trader maintains several groups of carpenters, usually three to six workers per team. They take 15 to 25 days to complete a house depending on design and earn Tk 40,000 to Tk 60,000 per project. Individual monthly income ranges from Tk 10,000 to Tk 30,000, based on skill and contribution.

Shahid Mia, a mason who was working at one of the sites, said he has been doing this for the past 35 years. "At first, I used to work on a daily basis. Now, I work on a contract basis."

The job takes a lot of labour, but modern tools such as drills, routers and jigsaws have made it faster and more accurate. "It is a lot easier now," he said.

The reputation of the industry has drawn skilled carpenters from nearby districts. Some, like Narayan Madhu from Gopalganj, moved permanently after receiving job offers.

"People keep coming because they see others

buying houses at a low price but with good design," he said. "So, we try to make every house better."

Md Sazzad Hossain Baig, a shop owner whose family has been in this trade for 50 to 60 years, said his grandfather started the business. In earlier times, carpenters built wooden houses directly on buyers' land, often for families dealing with river erosion. "Now the houses are going everywhere."

"This is not a business where we make a sale every day. If we can sell four or five units in a month, that is good for us," said Baig.

In recent years, the industry got a good boost from social media promotions. The unique idea has attracted

attention, and content creators often feature it in their videos.

"Thanks to advertisements and video content makers, people all over the country know that they can buy this type of house at a low price. So, the houses are now going to almost every district either by truck or trawler," he said.

"Selling of readymade houses started mainly in the last one decade, which has become increasingly popular in the last five years," said Sakib Sardar, owner of Sardar Enterprise.

Abdur Rob, another experienced trader, said that several decades ago, they used to buy second-hand wood

more instead of making high profits from each sale. There is a huge competition, so everyone wants to sell more, even at lower profits. Additionally, wastage of wood is also very low in our process," he said.

Meanwhile, Sardar said profits have dropped in recent years because the prices of wood, tin and wages have risen sharply. People are also more cautious with spending in the current economy.

He claimed that wood prices have gone up by nearly 70 percent in four years, while tin prices have almost doubled. With strong competition, raising prices is difficult.

Apart from making, selling and



PHOTO: IBRAHIM KHALIL IBU



and build houses on buyers' sites. "As this area was a river erosion-prone area, two or three decades ago carpenters started to build houses so that these can be transferred if the river gets close to an area."

"Now, people want to build a house which is easy to build, and they do not want to take the hassle of building a house in their own place. So, we have started to build this type of transferable house in the last several years," he said.

Sellers say the houses are cheaper because they buy wood, tin and other materials in bulk and build in one place, which reduces wastage.

According to Abdur Rob, a house sold for Tk 7 lakh in Munshiganj would cost a customer about Tk 10 lakh to build on their own, along with time and constant supervision.

"We are focusing on selling

delivering the houses, Sardar added that carpenters also offer after-sale support. "If people need, we give after-sales services. If the houses suffer any damage during or after the delivery, we provide maintenance and repair services."

He also offered advice on how to keep the houses in good condition so that those last longer.

"There is a way of keeping these houses well. The enemy of this house is intense, direct long-term exposure to sunlight as it can bend the wood."

"My recommendation is to swipe motor oil once a year in the winter to keep the houses intact and good for more years," he said.

What began as a response to a shifting river has grown into a business built on convenience and affordability. Traders, workers and buyers agree on one thing. It solves a problem many want to avoid, the time, cost and oversight needed for conventional construction.

Standing among rows of completed houses, Ahadullah said he was hopeful about finding the right one.

"If I like something, I may even tell my friends," he said. "We could purchase it together and use it to spend our vacations on the farmland."



Tourism operators, farm owners and recreational land buyers are among the main customers. They use the houses as cottages, guest rooms or weekend retreats because they cost less than brick buildings and are pleasant to look at.

dealing with rising and unpredictable construction costs.

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When this correspondent visited the area last month, a house was being loaded onto a truck heading for Manikganj. Nearby, Md Ahadullah, a prospective buyer, was looking at options within his Tk 10 lakh budget.

"Me and my friends have a plan to build a house in our farmland in Madanpur of Narayanganj so that we can stay there for a couple of days during holidays. If we went for a brick building, the cost and the hassle would be much higher. Besides, the cost always goes higher than the initial estimation," he said.

"These wooden houses look beautiful and the price is reasonable, too. They are perfect for spending a vacation. It gives a natural vibe," he added.

Prices of those readymade houses range from Tk 2 lakh to Tk 50 lakh, depending on size, wood quality, thickness, design and interior features. Houses priced between Tk 4 lakh and Tk 5 lakh are the most popular. Those built with imported ironwood cost more but can last 50 to 60 years. Houses made from local