

Chittagong Fishing Harbour

Photographs by S Jayaraj

Text by S R Madhu

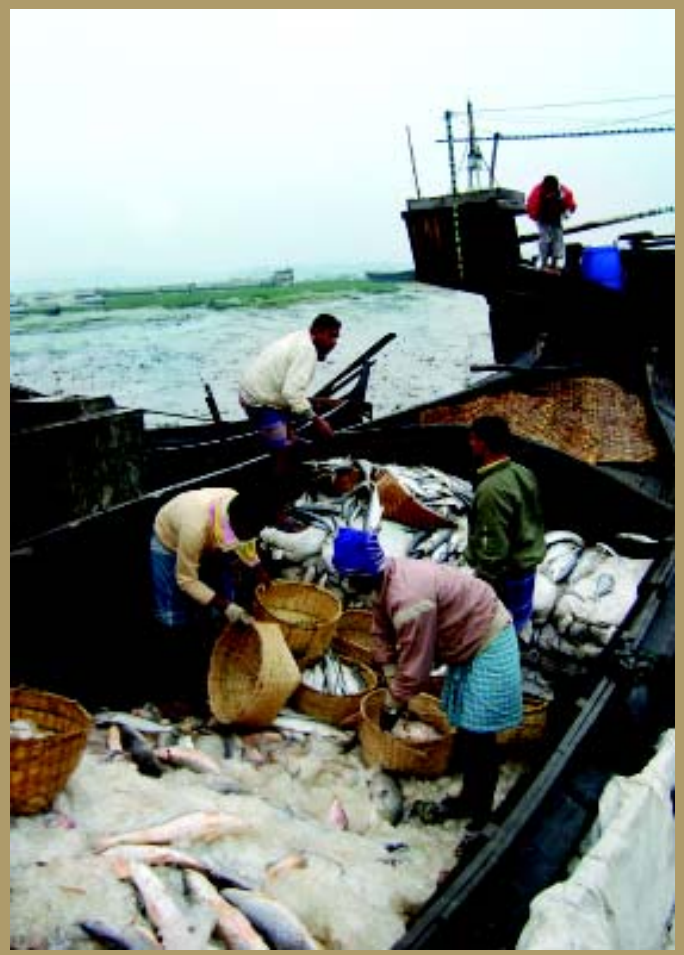
Chittagong fishing harbour best reflects the hurly burly of marine fisheries in Bangladesh – teeming with boats, fishermen and fish, with fish traders, vendors and labourers. Boats are setting out to sea or landing, buyers and sellers are haggling over the latest bonanza from the seas. Decibel levels are high as fish is unloaded, bargains are demanded and struck, and the fish moves out to markets in lorries, hand carts or cycle rickshaws.

The Chittagong fishing harbor, one of the biggest fish landing and berthing facilities in Bangladesh, includes the Patharghata Fishery Ghat and Monoharkhali BFDC (Bangladesh Fisheries Development Corporation) Ghat. Patharghata Fishery Ghat, a traditional landing site, handles more than 90 percent of the total fish landed in Chittagong. This Ghat has four fish landing points. While one point is operated by the Chittagong City Corporation, the other three are leased by the Chittagong Port Authority to private parties. The boats berth according to their convenience and pay Taka 200 per arrival and 2 percent of their total sale to the Point Authority. The Ghat Authority provides water, electricity and ensures security.

The adjacent Monoharkhali BFDC Ghat was established in the early nineties and has one landing point. Few boats land their catch at this ghat due to siltation problem. BFDC handles the catch at this site and the revenue earned from the commission accrues to the Government.

Some 46 percent of the 900 000 marine fishers of Bangladesh make their living from Chittagong and Cox's Bazar. The country's industrial fishery operates entirely out of Chittagong – you see industrial trawlers, gill netters, set bag netters, long lines and trammel nets – an





estimated 44 000 in 2006. Besides, small-scale fishermen make their living from the sea using dinghies, chandis and balams. The major fishing gear used in coastal areas and estuaries are gill net, set bagnet, trammel net, longline and beach seine.

Fisheries is one of the mainstays of the Bangladesh economy. It accounts for 4.86 percent of the GDP and 5.9 percent of exports, and supplies about 80 percent of the animal protein intake of its population.

The country's marine fish catch in 2005-06 was nearly half a million tonnes. (Inland fisheries accounts for the bulk of fish production of about 2 million tonnes.) More than 90% of the marine fish is landed by artisanal fishers, and some half a million people make a living from marine artisanal fisheries.

Important species caught include hilsa, catfishes, Indian salmon, sea perch, Bombay duck, snapper, pomfret, Indian mackerel, shark, rays and prawns. The industrial fleet focuses mainly on shrimps.

Over the years, the marine fishing fleet, of industrial as well as traditional craft, has expanded. But some stocks are being over-exploited, some others under-exploited, says Mr Md Rafiqul Islam, Director General, Department of Fisheries. Other problems with marine fisheries are lack of a reliable database, inadequate MCS (monitoring, control and surveillance), plus the impact of global warming and climate change.

Some of the solutions advocated are: management action to control fishing effort, to be supported by all stakeholders; access rights only to registered fishers; a marine resource database and an effective monitoring system.

The Chittagong harbour is life in the raw – the photographs on these pages provide glimpses. Harvesting the sea, for all its hazards, is perhaps easier for fishers than battling forces on land. Rarely is daily bread so hard earned.



