

# The White Gold

## The Shrimp Industry in Bangladesh



Bangladesh has a population of 150 million people on an area one third the size of Sweden, with only 9 million people.

The country's second largest export industry is farmed shrimps, 75% of which is the saltwater shrimp *bagda* (*Penaeus monodon*), and 25% the freshwater prawn *golda* (*Macrobrachium rosenbergii*).

An exhibition by the Swallows India-Bangladesh, 2008

Photographers: A.M Yasin Piyal, Belinda Meggitt and Thomas Harrison-Prentice

The installation movie "Voices from Paikgacha" is available on:  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=fV5JRpGgiqw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fV5JRpGgiqw)



Photographer: Belinda Meggitt, 2007

The world's largest mangrove forest, the Sundarbans, is located in Bangladesh, home to the Royal Bengal tiger, spotted deer and over 260 species of birds. As an important breeding place for water animals, it is essential for the country's fishing industry. Studies show that 38% of the destruction of the world's mangroves is directly related to the modern development of shrimp farms.



Photographer: Thomas Harrison-Prentice, 2007

In Paikgacha, north of the Sundarbans, the elderly can still remember the days when they were too scared to walk alone because of the dense jungle. Today, the *bagda* shrimp farms have taken over. The people who try to farm traditional crops complain about their small yields. The saltwater from the shrimp farms is destroying the fields, making them infertile.



Photographer: Thomas Harrison-Prentice, 2007

Since the invasion of the *bagda* shrimp farms most people in Paikgacha can't farm their land anymore. To survive, many men have to work as day laborers 12 hours a day, 7 days a week, as do many women and children. Guarding the shrimp farms at night is a lonely and dangerous job. The salary is low and it's not unusual that the workers have to wait months to be paid.



Photographer: A.M Yasin Piyal, 2007

Chakaria Sundarbans, in south-east Bangladesh, was once a lush mangrove forest. In the early 1980s the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank decided to fund shrimp farming in the area, and today the land is completely covered with farms. Locals are afraid of natural disasters, common to Bangladesh: the mangrove forest offers natural protection from hard winds and floods, and stabilizes the soil.



Shrimps are farmed six months of the year on Sonadia Island, and salt produced on the same fields in the alternate six months. Both industries have now rendered the soil infertile. When the land was used for rice production, 100 people could be employed in a field, but now, the shrimp industry employs only 40 people in the same space.

Photographer: A.M Yasin Piyal, 2007



Shrimp fry collection is common along the coast and rivers in Bangladesh. Combing the rivers with fine nets, collectors get paid between US\$0,5-1,0 per 10 fry, depending on the season.

Photographer: Thomas Harrison-Prentice, 2007



The by-catch during shrimp fry collection is very high, with estimates that for every one *bagda* fry, 1400 other micro zooplankton are caught and often left to die on the shore.

Photographer: Thomas Harrison-Prentice, 2007



Shrimp fry can also be produced in an artificial environment. Pregnant female shrimps are caught in the Bay of Bengal and sold to the hatcheries where the eggs are taken care of. The mother shrimps are very valuable and many fishing boats fish for them illegally, causing over-fishing of the species.

Photographer: Thomas Harrison-Prentice, 2007



The white gold pass through many middle hands before they reach the shops in the north. After harvesting, the shrimps are sold to a local buyer who sells them to the processing factories.

Photographer: Thomas Harrison-Prentice, 2007



There are around 130 processing factories in Char Rupsha in Khulna, with 30 of the largest employing over 300 people. Organic Shrimps Export Ltd is one of these. According to management, there are no organic shrimp farms in Bangladesh; the name of the factory is meaningless. They do not enforce any environmental standards – it would be too costly.

Photographer: A.M Yasin Piyal, 2008



Photographer: A.M Yasin Piyal, 2008

Getting permission to visit one of the larger processing factories is difficult; it's less complicated to get access to the smaller factories. The hygiene standards there are very low: workers do not wear gloves or hair nets, windows are wide open facing the streets, accessible by animals and insects, and the ice used to transport the shrimp between factories is unclean.



Photographer: A.M Yasin Piyal, 2008

Skin diseases are common among the workers in the processing factories. They often work without gloves when they process and clean the shrimps in chemicals before packaging. Salaries can vary between US\$ 30–45 per month, depending on speed and how much work the factory can offer.



Photographer: Thomas Harrison-Prentice, 2007

The *bagda* shrimp farms in Bangladesh are extensive. The density of shrimps per square meter is low, but the farms take up larger areas, lacking turbines to circulate the water. Algae therefore grow quickly on the surface and this gives employment to the locals: to remove the algae. Salaries are low and many develop skin diseases from working for long hours in deep water.



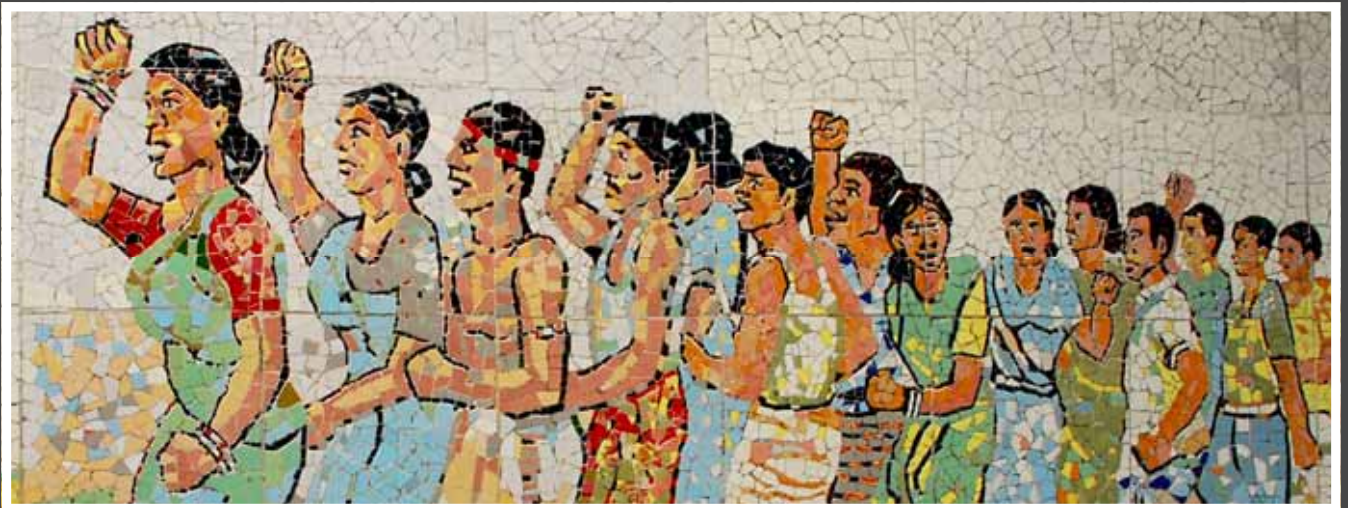
Photographer: A.M Yasin Piyal, 2008

In the rural areas, it's the women and children who collect drinking water. Around the *bagda* shrimp farms, many fresh water sources have been polluted by leaking saltwater from the farms; the closest fresh water well can be many kilometers away. Women and children are often verbally and physically harassed when they walk the long distance from their villages to collect the water.



Voimilla Rani Sardar and her daughter Beauty live in the village of Horin Kora. For 18 years they have managed to fight against the businessmen who try to construct *bagda* shrimp farms in the village. The fight began in 1990 when Voimilla was hit in her right eye by a shell splinter, reducing her visibility ever since. She and the other villagers are continuing to fight for their land and a better future for their children and future generations.

Photographer: Thomas Harrison-Prentice, 2007



On 7 November 1990, Korunamoyee Sardar, a landless woman, was murdered in the village Horin Kora. While protesting against the construction of *bagda* farms in the village she was shot to death. A monument has been raised in the village in her honor. Since 1980, 150 people have been reported killed in the struggle between the shrimp farms owners and the local villagers in Bangladesh.

Photographer: Thomas Harrison-Prentice, 2007