

With skin in the export game crocodile farm live up to

FEATURE

HASAN JAMILUR RAHMAN SAIKAT

To date, the farm has exported over 1,500 skins to Japan and other countries

Hatiber, a village in Bhaluka upazila of Mymensingh district, is quiet, green and lush like any typical village in Bangladesh. At first sight, it seems like a place no one would visit unless necessary.

Yet, hidden in this village is Reptiles Farm Limited, home to nearly 3,000 crocodiles (adult and juvenile). There, time seems to stand still over a cluster of ponds. Dozens of crocodiles lie motionless on muddy banks or beneath the water's surface, appearing more like sculptures than living creatures. Their scaly bodies blend seamlessly into the surroundings, giving the illusion of stillness and calm.

But this peace is deceptive.

Once a day, farm workers arrive carrying baskets full of chicken, beef and fish to feed the reptiles. The still water erupts into chaos as the crocodiles thrash and snap, fiercely competing to claim their share. Within minutes, the commotion subsides, and the creatures return to their silent vigil, waiting for the next meal.

Established in 2004 on just a 15-acre plot near Mymensingh, this is Bangladesh's first commercial crocodile farm, built with the vision to transform an unusual animal into an export commodity.

The farm's journey has not been smooth, though; over two decades, it has weathered management changes, mounting debt and legal battles.

It was in December 2004 that writer Mushtaq Ahmed established the farm, opening an entirely new export sector for the country.

To make this vision a reality, he procured 75 crocodiles, including 15 males, from Malaysia's Junction Crocodile Authority, spending around Tk1.5 crore. Six acres were dedicated to crocodile ponds and rearing facilities.

The species reared here is *Crocodylus porosus* — a salt-water crocodile that thrives even in clear freshwater. Bangladesh's warm, humid climate has proven ideal for them.

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CROCODILE EXPERT AND
REPTILES FARM LTD



Export game, can Bhaluka's live up to its potential?

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The farm also attracts curious visitors, who now have to pay Tk150 per person for a pass to roam around and check out the crocodiles.

The farm's operations grew steadily in its early years. In 2010, it began its export journey by sending frozen crocodiles to a university in Germany, marking Bangladesh's entry into the international crocodile trade.

No part of a crocodile goes to waste; crocodile leather remains one of the most expensive materials for high-end handbags, shoes and belts.

However, farm manager and crocodile expert Dr Abu Saim Arif believes Bangladesh's crocodile farming potential remains untapped. "Besides leather, crocodile bones and teeth sell at high prices globally. There is strong demand for these in France, Germany, Italy, China, Japan, South Korea, and many other countries."

He added, "If these byproducts were sold in the domestic market, it could bring huge profits. Also, with government approval, crocodile meat could be supplied to hotels at home for the foreigners and also abroad, helping us earn valuable foreign currency."

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The farm continued to expand under Mushtaq's vision, establishing modern incubators, hatcheries, separate sheds for different age groups, and a leather processing unit. But to fund its growth, Reptiles Farm Limited borrowed Tk58 crore from International Leasing and Financial Services Limited (ILFSL), mortgaging the farm as collateral.

However, the management repaid only Tk20 crore, and over time, the outstanding defaulted amount grew to around Tk108 crore.

Then, in 2013, ownership was transferred to fugitive banker and businessman PK Halder — who controlled the majority shares of ILFSL — and his associates.

In 2014, the farm exported 430 crocodile skins to Japan, earning nearly \$200,000. The following year, another 400 skins were shipped, generating approximately \$165,000. To date, over 1,500 skins have been exported to Japan and other countries, reflecting growing global demand.

But as financial distress deepened, legal battles and corruption

allegations followed. The farm fell into severe neglect and mismanagement. Crocodiles were left without adequate food or care, and the maintenance of ponds and enclosures deteriorated.

In 2022, ILFSL filed a petition with the High Court, which appointed a six-member committee to manage the farm. When the court-appointed board took charge on 12 February 2022, they found around 1,730 crocodiles on the farm, including a very ill one. Years of carelessness had taken a toll. Crocodiles were dying regularly, and staff morale was low due to unpaid wages and an uncertain future.

Finally, after years of legal and operational limbo, the farm was auctioned and sold for Tk38 crore to Ud-dipan, a non-government organisation with plans to revive and restore its lost potential. The sale was a turning point for Reptiles Farm Limited, offering hope of rebuilding what was once envisioned as Bangladesh's golden gateway to crocodile exports.

Life on the farm: Breeding, feeding and growth

Despite management and financial

challenges, crocodile rearing at the farm remains systematic. Baby crocodiles are fed minced chicken and beef daily to support their rapid growth, while adult crocodiles receive chicken, beef and fish once a week. The amount of food given is carefully calculated to be about 20% of each crocodile's body weight, replicating their natural feeding habits.

Crocodiles are notoriously territorial and highly aggressive creatures, often engaging in violent clashes with one another. On crocodile farms, workers commonly use the term "fighting disease" to describe the injuries sustained during these confrontations—wounds that can become infected and, in some cases, prove fatal.

Though they may appear calm most of the day, during winter, when they bask in the sun, crocodiles are among the most dangerous animals to handle. They lack the ability to distinguish friend from foe and can attack even their caretakers if given the chance.

The breeding season for crocodiles at the farm primarily occurs during the monsoon. Female croc-

odiles lay eggs within a week of beginning to build their nests. Typically, they lay between 20 and 80 eggs at a time, with each egg roughly the size of a goose's egg. The eggs are collected and incubated at a controlled temperature of 32°C, hatching within 80 to 86 days.

Newborn crocodiles, approximately 12 inches long at birth, are moved to special incubators for 72 hours until their navels absorb the remaining yolk. They are then transferred to nurseries. By the age of two years, the young crocodiles are sorted by size and moved to ponds. Each pair of crocodiles requires around 80 square metres of space to live healthily. Male crocodiles grow faster than females, reaching commercial size sooner.

At the age of three years, their skin becomes suitable for leather production. At this stage, each crocodile's skin can be sold for an average of ~~Tk50,000-60,000~~, depending on quality. Globally, crocodile skins measuring five to seven feet in length sell for between \$400-600, depending on the size of the animal and the texture of its skin.



US TARIFF HIKE BEGINS TO BITE BEFORE TIME

Apparel exporters feel pricing pressure from European buyers



Most US buyers pause in placing new orders amid tariff uncertainty

JASIM UDDIN

Bangladeshi apparel exporters are getting under fresh pricing pressure from European buyers under shadows of a predeclared steep US tariff hike as they increasingly shift focus to the European Union in quest of new orders to fill production gaps, industry-insiders say. Most US buyers are refraining from placing new orders due to the uncertainty surrounding the potential tariff rises, prompting manufacturers to turn more actively to the EU market.

Industry people have said European buyers are taking advantage of the situation, attempting to lower product prices as thousands of Bangladeshi exporters approach them in a scramble for orders.

"The share of orders from US buyers has fallen to about 50 per cent. To bridge this gap, apparel exporters are now exploring opportunities with EU buyers," says S.M. Majedur Rahim, Director at Giant Group.



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"Even when US buyers are placing orders, the volumes are small. Some have already offered lower prices for repeat orders, citing tariff pressure. It's unfair to expect exporters to bear the cost of tariffs," he adds.

Major EU retailers such as H&M and Inditex -- who also have significant business in the US -- have reportedly

"I couldn't accept the order at that price. The total value of the order was \$750,000. Losing the deal has made it difficult to keep the factory running," he added.

The United States is the single-largest export destination for Bangladeshi garments. However, exporters had earlier warned that the impact of US tariff hikes could spill over into Europe --

now asking for price reductions on new orders."

He added that EU buyers are taking advantage of the situation, being aware of the global market scenario and the installed capacity of the Bangladeshi apparel industry.

Officials at the buying house further noted that orders from some promising non-traditional markets -- such as India

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"Even when US buyers are placing orders, the volumes are small. Some have already offered lower prices for repeat orders, citing tariff pressure. It's unfair to expect exporters to bear the cost of tariffs," he adds.

Major EU retailers such as H&M and Inditex -- who also have significant business in the US -- have reportedly reduced their order volumes by 10 to 20 per cent out of fears surrounding the oncoming US tariffs.

"There's growing uncertainty among buyers with exposure to the US market regarding the outcome of ongoing tariff negotiations. A 35-percent reciprocal tariff on Bangladeshi exports to the US is set to take effect from 1 August," says Majedur Rahim.

"European buyers are viewing this as an opportunity to renegotiate and reduce apparel prices -- even some have already done so," he further notes. According to data from the National Board of Revenue (NBR), 2,377 Bangladeshi firms exported to the US in FY25. Of these, 801 depend on the US for more than 50 per cent of their total exports, making them particularly vulnerable.

Collectively, these companies exported \$6.62 billion worth of goods globally in the last fiscal year (FY2024-25), of which \$5.05 billion -- or 58 per cent of Bangladesh's total exports -- were to the US. Bangladesh exports nearly \$10 billion worth of goods to the United States annually, including apparel, leather, plastic, and agro-products. EU buyers trying to capitalise on tariff pressure: "One of my buyers from the Netherlands, who used to purchase garments at \$3 per unit, has now offered a price that is 25-30-cent lower per unit, citing Trump-era tariff policies," said Fazlee Shamim Ehsan, CEO of Fatullah Apparels.

"I couldn't accept the order at that price. The total value of the order was \$750,000. Losing the deal has made it difficult to keep the factory running," he added.

The United States is the single-largest export destination for Bangladeshi garments. However, exporters had earlier warned that the impact of US tariff hikes could spill over into Europe -- the largest trade bloc.

"Due to the new US tariff policy, inflation has already risen on that market, and buyers have started reducing their apparel orders," Ehsan observed.

He further noted, "The ripple effects of the new US tariffs have begun to influence European buyers as well. Some of them are now offering lower prices than before."

When US-bound RMG exports suffer, it will impact other markets as well, since buyers often source from one country for multiple destinations, says Shovon Islam, Managing Director of Sparrow Group, adding: "The consequences will cascade."

Echoing Shovon's concerns, the country manager of a European apparel brand, speaking on condition of anonymity, said, "If the tariff issue is not resolved in Bangladesh's favour, it could reduce our business opportunities here."

He further stated, "Although the US market accounts for less than 10 per cent of our total sales, it would no longer be a viable business case for us to produce goods for them from Bangladesh. We may have to consider alternative sourcing options."

Traditionally, he added, it takes at least three years to develop a vendor.

The head of business development at PDS Group--the largest multinational buying house in Bangladesh--also speaking on condition of anonymity, said, "Some of our EU customers are

now asking for price reductions on new orders."

He added that EU buyers are taking advantage of the situation, being aware of the global market scenario and the installed capacity of the Bangladeshi apparel industry.

Officials at the buying house further noted that orders from some promising non-traditional markets -- such as India and South Korea -- are also shrinking. This is due to factors that include non-tariff barriers in India and local political as well as global economic challenges in South Korea.

Exporters also fear tariff impact could hurt market competitiveness.

President of BGMEA Mahmud Hasan Khan Babu says that if an additional 35-percent tariff is imposed, US buyers are likely to shift to alternative sourcing destinations unless Bangladeshi exporters agree to offer discounts. However, entrepreneurs argue that offering a 35-percent discount would make it extremely difficult to sustain business operations.

The BGMEA President further states, "If Bangladesh faces higher tariff rates than countries like Vietnam, India, and Pakistan, it will not bode well for our export sector."

The main concern for Bangladeshi apparel exporters is that rival countries such as Vietnam, Indonesia, India and Pakistan enjoy significantly lower tariff rates on the US market.

As a result, Bangladesh risks losing work orders to these competitors, potentially putting millions of jobs at risk and raising fears of labour unrest in the sector.

Currently, Bangladesh exports to the US at an average tariff rate of 15.5 per cent. If the proposed 35-percent reciprocal tariff is finally imposed, the total tariff burden would rise to an uphill 50.5 per cent.

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