

## How Much Do You Know About Hilsa? The National Fish of Bangladesh

**I am here to help you to know about Hilsa, our national pride!**

The Indian shad, *Tenualosa ilisha* (Hamilton), popularly known as Hilsa, GI (Geographical indicator) product of Bangladesh, belonging to the Family Clupeidae. *Hilsa ilisha* was renamed as *Tenualosa ilisha* by Fisher and Bianchi in 1984. However, the locally called 'Hilsa or Ilish' in use for more than over a century has stood the test of time. The Hilsa is considered as one of the most important commercial fishes dependent on the single species *Tenualosa ilisha* belonging to the habitats of Indo-Gangetic and Brahmaputra river basins. Though Hilsa is distributed wide geographical area but mostly abounded in Bangladesh, about 60-65 per cent of global Hilsa catch is reported from Bangladesh.

Hilsa shad (*T. ilisha*) is anadromous in nature, i.e., capable of withstanding a wide range of salinity and migrating long distance from marine habitat to up-stream freshwater. Hilsa lives in the sea for most of its life but migrates to inland freshwater. It starts spawning migration upstream during the southwest monsoon and consequent flooding of all rivers. The eggs are deposited in freshwater in river canal, creeks and hatching takes place within 23-26 hours at an average temperature of 23°C. Hilsa is relatively fecund & Numbers of eggs are found to be 144 thousand in 28 cm long fish up to 2.3 million in 44.5 cm long fish reported from previous studies. The fecund Hilsa is known as Mother Hilsa, prohibited to catch or illegal fishing during September -October about 22 days for ensuring safe breeding of Mother Hilsa. The peak-breeding period of Hilsa is placed during the full moon in September- October. Larvae and juveniles make their way downstream to the sea during the period of 5-6 months.



Fig 1. Hilsa filsa (*T ilisha*), national fish of Bangladesh; the photo has taken on June 06, 2016, when I was based in WorldFish center.

In about 6-10 weeks, fry grows to about 10- 26 cm and the size range known as jatka, prohibited to catch by Bangladesh government all year round. At this stage, they start migration to the sea for further growth and maturity and a year in the sea, Hilsa become mature and their spawning migration towards inland rivers starts again thus continuing the cycle. Hilsa may reach up to 60 cm in total length, may attain first maturity at the end of the first year or at the beginning of the second year.

The average Hilsa production of Bangladesh is about 496,417 lakh metric tonne/year that contributes to 12 per cent of the total fish production of Bangladesh & it soared gross domestic product (GDP) at a rate of 1.5 per cent. About 0.46 million people are either directly or indirectly dependent on it, about 2 percent of the country's total population (116 million) is involved in the Hilsa fishery either directly or indirectly for their subsistence. To increase natural production by ensuring safe breeding ground Bangladesh government declared 5 Hilsa sanctuary. All kind of illegal fish or jatka fishing, mother Hilsa fishing is completely banned and for the survival of the fishermen govt is providing 40 kg rice per family in each month during the ban period.

Hilsa, the king of all species has high demand due to its oily texture, mouth-watering flavor and unique taste, enriched with omega- 3 fatty acid which is good for controlling cholesterol and insulin level. The fats found are unsaturated in kind. This fish also contains proteins and other compounds, lipids and very low level of carbohydrates.

**“IF YOU VISIT BANGLADESH DON’T FORGET TO TASTE OUR PRIDE THE NATIONAL FISH,  
HILSA “**



Fig 2. Hilsa fishing by traditional fishing; Photo has taken Feb 26, 2016 during field visit when I was based in WorldFish center.