

Weekly weather forecast for the city	Today	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	High 29C Low 18C Warm with plenty of sun.	High 29C Low 19C Sunny.	High 29C Low 15C Mostly sunny and warm.	High 28C Low 16C Partly sunny.	High 28C Low 16C Mostly sunny.	High 27C Low 15C Mostly sunny.	High 28C Low 16C Sunny.

## Land-grabbers get active as road via Hatirjheel delayed

SOHEL ISLAM

Red tape prevented the construction of the proposed Panthapath-Rampura Bridge Link Road from taking off on schedule in a six-month delay that gave land-grabbers a fresh chance to fill up a wetland the thoroughfare will run through.

The work on the 3km long and 200ft wide road, likely to link east and west of the city, was slated to begin in October this year and finish in June 2006.

"Because of administrative snags, the road may now start in April next year. On completion of the topographical survey of Hatirjheel, we sent the project proposal to the planning ministry a month ago," said an official of the DCC (Dhaka City Corporation), the implementing agency of the Tk 242 crore project.

"We have done our part in September, now it's the

government's turn to give the project the go-ahead. Once approval is granted, we will be acquiring land," the official added, asking not to be named.

If the plan is implemented, the perennial traffic jam will ease and a lot of commuting time will be saved, but commuters of the west part of the city have to travel long to reach Badda and Rampura.

Rajuk, city land developer, will develop plots around the road that stretches through Hatirjheel, one of the biggest water retention reservoirs in the city.

As much as 38 percent of the surface drain water in the city flows through Hatirjheel and streams into the Balu river. The DCC will construct a 100-foot wide drainage system along the road to continue the flow of surface drain water.

Under Rajuk's land development project, Karwan Bazar Kitchen and Fish Market and an unauthorised truck stand in Tejaon will be

relocated to Hatirjheel near Rampura. Rajuk is also learnt to be constructing some commercial complexes along the road.

Asked if the proposal was complete, a senior official of Rajuk, requesting to be anonymous, said, "No, we haven't finished our project proposal yet. The land survey is still on. It needs more time."

Cashing in on the delay, many land grabbers turned their eyes to 237.64 acres of Hatirjheel wetland, as it has yet to be properly planned and utilised.

The latest in a series of wetland protection act 2000 violations are two prominent housing projects, who have been filling up the Hatirjheel.

Gembind Union Logistic Services Limited (GULSL) that Rajuk pegged as a fake housing company advertises the development of a satellite city in Hatirjheel. The Daily Star in a recent investigation highlighted it as a phony company.



Hatirjheel, a vast wetland, is attracting land-grabbers as the road project connecting Panthapath with Rampura still remains uncertain.

## Matchmakers' masterstroke

Although the present generation gets enough opportunity to make their own choices for life partners, arranged marriages are still the dominant trend in our society



SABRINA KARIM MURSHED

All young people according to the Greek mythology worshipped Hymen, the God of Marriage. The bird 'Ghotok Pakhi' has legendary status as a matchmaker among the rural people of Bangladesh who view its arrival as a sign of impending matrimony.

The city of Dhaka also displays the same kind of importance to matchmaking but its much more institutionalised. The job of finding the right bride and groom is carried out by a number of agencies.

Although the present generation gets enough opportunity to make their own choices for life partners, arranged marriages are still the dominant trend in our society.

At least 150 matchmaking organisations are offering their services in the city. These agencies have encouraged hundreds of eligible men and women to come out of their shell of coyness in search of the perfect wife or husband. The agencies have also become

popular with parents who can now relax knowing that a good son or daughter-in-law can be easier to find than they had thought.

"One might think that arranged marriage has become outdated but in reality, it remains as important as ever as our society will never change," said Kazi Ashraf Hossain more popularly known as Ghotok Pakhi Bhai.

Pakhi Bhai, a pioneer in this sector, began working as a matchmaker 38 years ago. He has brought together at least 6,000 couples till now. At present another 3,000 candidates are registered with his organisation Ghotok Pakhi Bhai Private Limited.

Pakhi Bhai believes that arranged marriages are the better option since the man and woman concerned can assess each other's family background without being biased.

"In many cases of love marriage, couples do not understand each other even after a long courtship," he said. He claimed that there were less cases of divorce among couples whose marriages had been

arranged, as there was less expectation and practically no infatuation.

However, Pakhi Bhai has observed a change in the attitude of the grooms in recent times.

"They are fussy about looks and do not care about the family, education and sober nature. Almost 80 per cent of the guys asks for pretty faces which has not been the case in the past," he said.

The authorities of every matchmaking agency this correspondent talked to said that they their responsibility ended with arranging a meeting between a pair.

"We just help them find their desired type of person but after that, it is entirely their own responsibility to crosscheck for any information or query," said Ms. Sweetsy, another matchmaker.

Both Sweetsy and Pakhi Vai don't charge their clients at any fixed rate. They take whatever their client offers them in line with their financial state.

"We do not rip them off but we do accept money from

clients since it is the only source of earning for us," said Pakhi Bhai.

There are other agencies like Badhon where one has to register with a fee of Tk 1500 and pay another charge later if the marriage takes place. The rate is higher for expatriate people.

Slowly but surely matchmaking agencies are gaining popularity in the city. Some of the city dwellers find it really helpful.

"I do not have time to socialise as I am left exhausted after the day's office work. So arranged marriage is the only way to begin a family life for me. That's why I have registered with a matchmaking agency," said a young single male working at a private company.

Though the licensed agencies are of genuine help, one should always be aware of fake marriage bureaus.

"Often we have people coming to us saying that they have been swindled by agencies in the name of matchmaking," said an employee of a marriage agency.

## Most-sought-after grooms and brides

CITY CORRESPONDENT

Computer engineers of the country will be delighted hearing the news. At present they top the list for most sought after grooms according to the professional matchmakers of the city.

Those having a Masters of Business Management (MBA) degree come next in next in preference.

"Many people think an MBA degree ensures a good and secured job," said one of the matchmakers.

After the MBAs, BCS Foreign Service cadres and officers in the Administration cadre, doctors and pharmacists are most sought after. The matchmakers also informed that brides who are doctors themselves prefer to

## Computer engineers now top the list of eligible grooms while search for 'beautiful brides' still goes strong

marry a doctor groom.

Businessmen are at the least wanted as grooms who usually get married to brides coming from business-oriented families.

"Women and their parents from a fixed-income family have the notion that they won't be able to adjust to business people," says matchmaker Pakhi Bhai.

However, most of the matchmakers stated that the craze for an expatriate bachelor has lessened a lot in recent times. The change has come mainly after the September 11 horror of 2001 in the United States.

As for the brides, looks are of extreme importance. "Not only the grooms but their family members also search for the most beautiful bride," said matchmaker Sweetsy.

It is the trend of the patriarchal society to concentrate on beauty than other qualities and capabilities, matchmakers explained. However, educated people look for enlightened brides, they added.

## Unlicensed drugstores bribe their way up

AVIK SANWAR RAHMAN

At least one in five pharmacies in the city runs its business unlicensed in a malpractice that deprives the government of revenues but helps drug officials pocket bribes from licence seekers.

Bangladesh Drug Administration (BDA) sources say 5,100 drug licences have been issued up to September this year but over 7,000 dispensaries are operating, meaning close to 2,000 are without licence.

Yet, the statistics provided by the BDA, Bangladesh Chemists and Druggists Association (BCDA) and drug wholesalers could not be reconciled.

"At least two-thirds of our members do not have drug licences. This has created an imbalance in the association. We have requested the authorities to streamline the process of issuing drug licences, but we found no improvement," said a BCDA member.

The BCDA put the figure of licensed dispensaries at about 35,000 and said the numbers without appropriate licence are three times more, an illegal trend blamed on underhand dealings between a set of BDA officials and some BCDA members.

Next comes the version of a wholesaler at Mitford, a commercial hub of medicines: "At least one lakh drugstores are in operation and the number of newcomers is growing by the day." He added, "We get new customers almost every day."

"A six-member committee headed by a civil surgeon at a district level is responsible for issuing drug licence," said BDA Director Abdul Gani.

Although the BDA has nothing to do with

providing such licences, some of its officials, it is alleged, take bribes from drugstore owners to give them apparently fake licences.

The director said he heard 'rumours' of some BDA officials taking bribes.

A drugstore owner who has recently obtained a licence said: "It is not possible to get a drug licence without giving bribes to BDA and BCDA officials. This has been almost institutionalised, as the rate is Tk10,000, up from the normal fee of Tk1,500 a licence."

The lengthy, complex procedure to obtain such licences has created an environment in which dispensary owners show reluctance to go through the process.

Dispensary owners require pharmacist certificates or pharmacists as employees to have drug licences. One has to follow a two-year course to obtain a pharmacist certificate, which the dispensary owners described as unfeasible to those who cannot afford to wait for long to start the business.

"Why doesn't the BDA adopt a policy to provide drug licences for dispensaries where MBBS doctors practise?" a drugstore owner suggested.

"We want to pay legally for the licence, but it is up to the government to decide how simple they would like to keep the process and stop bribery," said a businessman who shied away from applying for the drug licence.

"None is stopping me running my store as a Tk 500 bribe to a drug superintendent is enough to solve the problem," he added.

The BDA director admitted the shortage of employees and said, "We have only six drug superintendents who are overwhelmed with heavy workload at the desk."



Many drugstores operating in the city are facing problems in obtaining licenses.