

Weekly weather forecast for the city	Today	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	High: 27° C Low: 16° C Abundant sunshine	High: 28° C Low: 15° C Plenty of sunshine High	High: 26° C Low: 15° C Pleasant with lots of sun	High: 26° C Low: 17° C Plenty of sunshine	High: 27° C Low: 18° C Mostly sunny	High: 26° C Low: 17° C Mostly sunny	High: 26° C Low: 18° C Sunny

# 20-year-old buses still on the roads

No concrete steps to stop pollution and nuisance created by these buses

FAIZUL KHAN TANIM

Despite the ban on 20-year-old buses plying the streets, most buses and minibuses are violating the ban, causing pollution as well as traffic congestion because of the decrepit conditions they are in.

Instead of bringing the practice to a halt by seizing these faulty buses, both the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) and Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) are blaming each other for the nuisance these vehicles create, while residents are experiencing pollution, traffic jams and accidents.

"It is not our duty to stop these buses. We are not law enforcement agencies," said a BRTA high official.

BRTA authorities are holding the traffic department of DMP responsible for taking bribes and letting the buses ply the streets. Requesting anonymity, a BRTA high official said: "If

traffic police just sends the registration number of such faulty vehicles to our office, we will check details and find out its manufacture date. It should not be a problem locating and confiscating them".

In reply to the BRTA official's allegation, DMP officials said that BRTA issues license and fitness certificates for these buses adding that even the shabby-looking vehicle has an updated license and fitness certificates, which is why no action can be taken.

Other DMP officials said in most cases, the buses are painted fresh and dents mended to give a new outlook though the inside is totally trashed but nothing could be done, as the papers are updated.

Meanwhile commuters suffer with intense traffic jams due to the increasing numbers of these faulty buses. Residents complained that the vehicles with run-down engines are

halted by the sides of the roads for indefinite times lengths.

"Not only do the engines cease, but they release a large volume of black smoke," said Hannan Abdullah who travels along the Karwan Bazar-Gulshan route.

Other residents and commuters said the tyres of most buses are worn-out and are prone to skidding and accidents.

These buses halt at any point on the street to pick passengers, with each bus blocking the flow of traffic for at least 15 minutes. Also if an engine suddenly fails, the road is blocked for an indefinite period of time, said Ashrafuz-zaman Babu, a Government official from Segun Bagicha.

Apart from worn out tyres, these buses do not have side view mirrors, indicators or even brake lights. Without the indicators or brake lights, vehicles following these buses are confused with which direc-

tion the buses are going to move.

"I have hit a few of these buses from behind. They move in zigzags on the street. Unless the driver at the back is careful, you end up hitting them often," said Abdullah Moazzem, who drives his own car.

Urban experts said that traffic officials do not need papers to bring such buses to task. Any bus imbalanced because of excess passengers, having no lights or guards and emitting black smoke, should be taken off the streets right away.

A BRTA high official could not give the number of such buses plying the streets. When asked, he said the authority was preparing a list.

Another official from the same office said although officially the BRTA states that 25 to 30 percent of the total buses and minibuses are running without proper permits and are 20 years old, the figure

is actually 90 percent.

BRTA has no magistrate or magisterial powers to confiscate these buses, said another official.

"A 15-day continuous drive from a BRTA mobile team with assistance from us could straighten matters," said Deputy commissioner of DMP traffic, in-charge of both North and South zones, Feroz Al Muzahid Khan.

"Since BRTA experts can locate the out-of-date vehicles without fitness, a representative must be present during the operations. The traffic department would do anything to minimize the current traffic congestion," Feroz added.

Buses with the Bengali character 'Cha' are 20-year-olds, said BRTA sources. The sources added that the estimate shows approximately 3,500 buses and minibuses out of 4,000, now plying city roads, are either older than 20 years or approaching the 20-year span.



Buses over 20-years still ply the roads causing pollution and traffic jams.



A scene from the Karwan Bazar kitchen market.

## No respite from price hike

SHARMIN MEHRIBAN

Middle class people in the city are struggling to cope with the latest hike in the prices of some essential commodities like sugar, edible oil and milk powder ahead of Eid-ul-Azha.

The price of packed edible oil like soybean rose to Tk 55-56 a litre from Tk 51-52 a month ago while sugar price soared to Tk 48-50 a kg from Tk 36-38 six weeks ago. The price of a 500g packet of milk powder was around Tk 135 early last month and now it rose to Tk 140.

"I can restrict the consumption of milk and sugar but not edible oil," said a housewife at Moghbazar. "We are helpless as the prices of essentials are on a constant rise."

Retailers said the prices of these commodities have risen due to increased wholesale prices while the wholesalers attributed the price hike to delayed supplies and decreased imports.

The wholesalers at Karwan Bazar said the purchasing costs of sugar, edible oil and milk powder have increased over the last few weeks due to scarce supply caused by low import.

"Supply of these commodities is inadequate to meet the high demand," said a wholesale trader. "Import has

declined due to the persisting high price of dollar," he explained.

Small traders usually buy these commodities from the wholesalers in Karwan Bazar. Their supplies come from the importers and distributors based in city's Moulavibazar.

"Our selling prices depend on how much we buy from our suppliers," said a small trader in Moghbazar. He said the wholesale price of almost every brand of milk powder such as Milk Vita, Diploma and Dano has increased that pushed up the retail prices.

The wholesalers in Karwan Bazar said that a 50-kg sack of sugar cost Tk 1,850 over a month ago whereas in the current month it costs Tk 2,250.

The increased prices of sugar and edible oil have in turn led to the price hike of condensed milk that contains sugar and palm oil. The wholesale price of a 48-can carton of condensed milk was Tk 1,295 last month whereas it is now selling at Tk 1,400.

Bashir Uddin, the proprietor of Bashir Traders and Borhan Traders, a large-scale distributor of powdered milk in Moulavibazar, said powdered milk is imported from Europe and Australia and the import price has increased due to the high dollar price.

"The price of skimmed milk

is the same as before but a carton of full-cream milk that weighs 12kg now costs Tk 3,550 which was Tk 3,500 last month," he added.

Delwar Hossain, vice president of Bangladesh Wholesale Edible Oil Merchants Association and joint secretary of Wholesale Sugar Merchants Association, said prices of such commodities depend on the whole process of demand and supply, import duties and dollar price.

According to him, the local production of sugar is too inadequate to meet the domestic demand due to which sugar is imported from Brazil and Thailand. But the dollar price hike and high import duty have led to a price hike of sugar imported from international market.

Delwar said the supply of sugar in the local market would increase if the government reduces the import duty, now fixed at as high as 73.5 percent. Sufficient supply in the market to meet the local demand would ensure price stability, he added.

About the price hike of soybean oil, he said its import price was Tk 1,700 per maund a month ago but in the beginning of this month, it rose to Tk 1,850 because the scarce supply. The price is now getting stable with supplies coming from abroad, he added.

## AUTUMN FAIR AT BSCIC

# Trainee artists display their products

NOVERA DEEPTA

Shilpi from Jessore participated in a training programme in Dhaka conducted by Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation (BSCIC) five years back.

She never dreamt she would exhibit her own products at a fair one day and today she is one of the 90 young craftsmen that took part in the 5-day Autumn Fair organised by BSCIC.

Optimistic about sales and profits from her stall, she said: "We have enough exposure for our products and I

hope to get orders in large quantities."

The fair was held at the corporation's design centre from January 1-5.

It had about 90 stalls exhibiting and selling their hand-made products such as bed covers, night gowns, t-shirts, kanthas, panjabees, 'three-piece', bags, cushion covers and, wall-hangings, most of which were on Nakshikanthas at the fair.

Other products included handicrafts, leather and metal craft, jewellery, ceramic, cane and bamboo-made goods with prices ranging from Tk 50 to Tk 5,000.

Tandra Islam a regular fairgoer had visited the fair to buy a traditional Nakshikantha-stitch saree for her mother.

"I come to these fairs because the products, especially the clothes are unique in design and the prices are reasonable in comparison to the boutiques in the city," she said.

The objective of the exhibition, according to the chief designer of the Design Centre, Kamal Uddin Ahmed, was to inspire trainees of different departments of BSCIC and to help popularise their products in the market.

Kamal Uddin Ahmed also said the BSCIC organises four fairs a year, to coincide with spring, the rainy season, and autumn, with a vision to make fresh craftsmen confident and encourage them to be self-dependent in a competitive market.

This was the 25th such fair held at the BSCIC premises. The corporation usually arranges these fairs for those who have just finished their training. The ex-trainees of BSCIC, who had their course last July to September, participated in this autumn fair exhibiting their own hand-made products.

Kanta, another visitor to the fair, was highly impressed with the products were on display and for sale. "The delicate needlework, use of colour, exclusive designs and regional diversity of these products made the art balanced in all respects," she said.

BSCIC's Chairman, SR Osmani inaugurated the fair on January 1. A special exhibition centre was available where experimental products including pottery, ceramics, cane and bamboo-made goods by the trainees of BSCIC were on display.

## 'Abandoned' high-rise project causes dilemma in BFDC

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Fisheries Development Corporation (BFDC) is in a dilemma over construction of a 15-storey building in Karwan Bazar, the site of which has been 'abandoned' after excavation where accumulated wastewater is breeding mosquitoes and emitting stench.

For the last three years the gutter, in the middle of the busy commercial area and in front of Dhaka Wasa Bhaban, is seriously causing health hazard. The wastewater stagnated in an area of about 10 kathas (nearly 8,000 square feet) is visibly contaminated where dead chickens and other dangerous wastes float.

BFDC officials blamed the contractor of the site for breaching rules and abandoning the construction project. They alleged that Ima Construction Co was awarded the job 'illegally' in 1998 and that the company had no prior experience in construction.

They said the construction

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company demanded payment immediately after it completed the foundation breaching its agreement with BFDC.

According to the agreement, the company could only ask for the payment on completion of each floor. At one stage of the row with Ima Construction, BFDC officially cancelled the contract

and sought to complete its construction with another company.

At this stage Ima moved to court and brought a stay order on the construction. Eventually Ima withdrew its case and BFDC was given back the right to continue construction. But company again filed a petition with a lower court for arbitration

and the matter till date remains unresolved.

Chairman of BFDC Sharif Taibur Rahman said that they were uncertain about when the construction work could be resumed. "We cannot say anything until the arbitration is completed," Rahman said.

General Manager of Ima Construction Rakibul Islam

denied the allegations and said that BFDC officials had agreed to pay for the first phase of the building foundation during several meetings but later refused to comply.

"We are trying to settle the matter as soon as possible and clean up the area, and restart construction at the site," Islam said.