

Piranha, African catfish bred and sold in abundance

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Dangerous piranhas and African catfish are now being bred in ponds and canals and sold abundantly in kitchen markets of the city in the absence of any restriction on breeding and selling of these alien fish which are risky to human health.

Piranhas and African catfish are voracious flesh-eating predators, schools of which even prey on human flesh.

Because of the lack of knowledge of what is going on, city-dwellers are buying the fish due to the low price.

Fish traders at Karwan Bazar told Star City that they were facing many problems because of the competition posed by the piranhas and African catfish sale.

"Unethical fish traders are selling piranhas under different names," said Md Milon, a pomfret seller at the Karwan Bazar kitchen market.

Milon said the pseudonyms for piranhas in and outside the city are *Korch* and *Thai Pomfret*.

Customers are fooled by the similarity in the appearance that piranhas have with pomfret, according to Milon.

"Both piranhas and pomfret are oval shaped and flat. There are other similar features too,"

Customers are fooled by the similarity in the appearance of the piranhas and pomfret but fish sellers said although piranhas and pomfret look alike, consumers could still differentiate them by a number of features that piranhas have

he said.

He pointed out that *korch* or Thai pomfrets (piranhas) sell rapidly than the normal pomfret due to the price difference.

"The prices of *korch* or Thai pomfret are only Tk 120 per kilogram. While the actual pomfret are around Tk 250 per kilogram," he said.

Similarly the prices of the native catfish are around Tk 400 per kilogram while the prices of African catfish are Tk 80-100 only.

"As such, the lower and lower middle class people are regular buyers of African catfish," said another fish seller of the Malibagh kitchen market.

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of features that piranhas have.

"*Korch* or piranhas have scales that pomfret hasn't. Also piranhas have a reddish hue while pomfret is totally white," said Karim, a fish-seller.

But there is little difference between the African catfish and the natural catfish, he said.

Piranhas, African catfish, silver carp and some other breeds of fish made their way into the Bangladeshi market in the late '90s.

As they were big in size and cheap, city dwellers began consuming them," said a fish trader.

Later customers stopped consuming most varieties because of the bitter taste.

But the piranha and African catfish are still being sold in the kitchen markets at Malibagh,

Karwan Bazar, Kanthalbagan, Agargaon BNP Bazaar, Maghbazar, Rampura, Mohakhali and other areas.

The piranha is bred in numerous ponds outside Dhaka, said a fish seller at Kalabagan.

"Businessmen in Gazipur, Tangail and nearby areas are making lakhs monthly from breeding and sale of piranha" he added.

Apart from the piranha, African catfish is also bred in the city.

Fish traders and city-dwellers, said that catfish is bred in ponds in Bashabo, Badda, Rayerbazar, and Mirpur.

"During a discussion with a few relatives of the pond owner in our area, I found that the fish is fed with stray dogs," said a resident of Maddhya Bashabo. "I stopped eating catfish on

hearing this," he added.

It is common knowledge that the catfish is fed human and animal faeces.

Consumption of this fish is tremendously risky to health, said Professor Dr Md Shahadat Hossain, director general of Health Services.

"Even though some bacteria and viruses are killed when the fish is cooked, there is there is always a concern of disease through chemical poisoning and diseases transmitted and carried by the animals that the fish feeds on," said Hossain.

These fishes also harm the natural habitat of other fish and are partially responsible for water pollution of the ponds where they are bred.

Breeding of piranhas and African catfish has been prohibited in most countries of the world. But such is not the case with Bangladesh.

A senior official of the Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock, on condition of anonymity, denied such breeding and sale.

"We had pointed out the problems that are caused by breeding of such fish. We cannot act legally against these unethical fish traders due to absence of a law against the breeding and sale," said the official.



Piranha -- the pomfret look alike.

PHOTO: AFP

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12x3