

DOWN TO EARTH

Lure of Sidewalk Eatables

By ASM Nurunnabi

There are numerous spots on the sidewalks of city thoroughfares where a variety of eatables are offered for sale from mobile and makeshift stalls. Such eatables range from seasonal fruits to basic diets like *dal bhat* and various kinds of beverages. The vendors of these eatables attract more business in those areas where people congregate in large numbers such as bus stations, steamer ghats, railway stations, shopping centres, etc. They constitute a conspicuous aspect of our city life.

A brief survey of this sidewalk business shows that seasonal fruits occupy a pre-dominant place in it. Now is the season of various kinds of fruits. We find in the bazars an abundant supply of them. Yet the irony is that the majority of our people being poor, many of such fruits remain out of reach of many of them.

Though most of our people, by and large, are hard pressed to spend extra money beyond their essential needs, they seem to harbour a definite craving for the native seasonal fruits. This perhaps explains the existence of so many food vendors on sidewalks and their brisk business at all seasons.

The conspicuous areas in the city where such fruit vendors operate extend from one end of Baitul Mukarram to the old railway gate across Gulistan and Stadium areas. They also operate in front of some important office blocks in the Motijheel Commercial area. The hospitals in the Shahbagh area also provide suitable locations for these fruit vendors.

To make their wares easily accessible to customers with small means, the fruits with some size are cut into small pieces carrying low price tags. A cursory view of the business in some areas suggested that the current favourites are cucumber, water melons, pine apples, papaya, green coconut,

Now DV-1 'surcharge'!

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long queues snaked in the crowded GPO building with people struggling hard for hours to have their mails stamped.

With the visa aspirants, vendors and touts milling, the GPO has also become a haven for those who want to earn some easy bucks.

Nobody could say how many US-bound mails were dropped at the GPO everyday as the DV-1 rush started late last month.

However, guesses ranged from 40 thousand to one lakh each day. Besides, post offices across the country also received thousands of DV-1 mails everyday.

On enquiry, the official concerned at the GPO said he had not received any allegation on illegal realisation of money by the postal department officials. He also declined to divulge any information on the volume of their daily receipt of DV-1 mails.

"We are stamping an average of 10 to 15 mails a minute," said one employee at the GPO counter in her frantic stamping activities.

"Nobody has the time to count," she said, declining to name herself.

The scene in the GPO was like this: people queued for hours, elbowed each other, reached the counters after long struggle, gave money to the teller and usually heard "don't worry about the change."

However, on insistence the GPO personnel were seen returning the change. "Won't you give us something when you are embarking on such a lucky venture?", the employees were heard saying.

Postal department officials said that due to the immense pressure from the public, the GPO employees have been working overtime with extended shifts everyday from 7 am until 8 pm non-stop, an effort that would bring an estimated Taka one crore to the national exchequer.

How much the GPO teller employees have been earning everyday?

According to a rough count, if 10 mails are stamped in one minute Taka two is realised per mail, the collection goes as high as Taka 15,800 a day.

Until June 15, the total realisation relating to the DV-1 mailing rose to about Taka two lakh and 34 thousand, according to the count.

Besides, a section of GPO employees were also seen realising money from people who wanted to avoid the mad rush

Editor: Mahfuz Anam

Printed & Published by A. S. Mahmud, Managing Director, on behalf of Mediaworld Ltd, 52, Motijheel C/A, Dhaka-1000, from City Publishing House Ltd, 90 Kakrail, Dhaka-1000. Editorial, News & Commercial Offices: House No 11, Road No 3, Dhanmandi R/A, Dhaka-1205. PABX: 500092-4, Commercial: 500091 (Direct), Fax No: 88-02-863035, GPO Box No. 3257, Cable: DAILYSTAR, DHAKA.

fruits, most of them are offered for sale either peeled off or cut into pieces which are kept without any cover. As a result, flies and dust settle on them freely. The same condition afflicts other food items. The lack of control by the authorities and the vendor's lack of knowledge about safe food handling pose a potential health risk to consumers.

Street foods in Dhaka though lacking in proper standard and thus posing a health hazard have come to stay. They represent an important economic activity considering their necessity and importance in the day-to-day life of certain socio-economic strata. The ramifications of street foods constitute a vast industry that involves thousands of people. It provides employment to a large segment of the population, who might otherwise remain unemployed including women and city migrants.

But the ways this business is conducted in most cases at present need to be changed with a firm guidance. With a view to raising them to a healthy standard, the health authorities should initiate action including, among other things, provision of clean environment, supply of clean water and use of safe raw materials for preparation of such foods. It also behoves the City Corporation to be vigilant in the matter.

Bangladesh is experiencing one of the highest urban growth rates in the region. Commensurate with this trend, the urban people's dependence on street foods has been making a significant growth. In this perspective, by ensuring proper hygienic standard for street foods, it may be possible to convert the attending problems of the trade into opportunities for developing into dependable food retailing outlets.

The decision followed a vigorous campaign by the main opposition leader Newaz Sharif against the leaders of Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party (PPP) including President Farooq Ahmed Leghari.

Sharif has accused Leghari of receiving kickbacks worth 500,000 dollars in a shady deal selling his farm land through the Mehran Bank Limited (MBL), a charge Leghari has denied.

Yunus Habib, chief of the private MBL, has been in jail since March on charges of misappropriating 2,100 rupees (70 million dollars) of deposits and 36.7 million dollars from the sales of foreign exchange bearers' certificates.

The commission will probe the bank's "operation and the manner in which it provided illegal gratification, advances, or any other benefits to government officers, public servants or those holding high

Speaker

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he added.

The Speaker held talks with the Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Sheikh Hasina on June 6 following a discussion with Prime Minister Begum Zia.

He reportedly had communicated the ruling party's position to the Opposition leader and later conveyed the outcome of the meeting with Hasina to Begum Zia.

The regions of Dhaka and Faridpur may also experience heavy rainfall at places, it said.

Meanwhile, our Staff Correspondent from Chittagong reports, torrential rainfall paralysed normal life in the port city yesterday.

It also triggered flash flood in most of the low-lying areas of the city.

The rainfall which has been continuing here for the last three days has intensified from this morning.

The city areas flooded by rainfall included Agrabad, Chakrabazar, Mogholtoli, Katalgonj, Kapasgola, Chakta and Bakalia.

UNB adds: Most areas in 25 unions of five Cox's Bazar thanas have gone under water after continuous rain during the last two days.

The affected thanas are: Chakoria, Ramu, Ukhia, Teknaf and Cox's Bazar sadar.

Road communication between Cox's Bazar and Chittagong remained cut off from 4 pm yesterday as the Chittagong-Cox's Bazar highway has gone under water at three places — Joarjanala of Ramu thana, Khurulia and Bangla Bazar of Sadar thana.

Khurulia diversion bridge has been wasted off by water.

The worst affected thanas are Ramu and Chakoria where about 30,000 people have become marooned.

The Bakkhali and Matamuhuri rivers are overflowing.

About 50 houses on the banks of Bakkhali river were eroded yesterday.

Shops and houses in Bazarghat, Rice market, Temple road and Goldighirpar areas of Cox's Bazar town have gone under two feet water.

Erosion made 650 families homeless in Sirajganj

SIRAJGANJ, June 17: Erosion of the river Jamuna has rendered some 650 families homeless during the last two days in Kazipur, Shahzadpur and Sadar thanas of the district, reports UNB.



The Emperor and Empress of Japan talk with Boutros Boutros-Ghali (C), the Secretary General of the United Nations. The royal couple toured the UN headquarters June 16 as part of their two-week visit to the United States.

— AFP photo

Body to probe Pak banking scam

ISLAMABAD, June 17: The government today appointed a judicial commission to probe a multi-million dollar banking

scandal allegedly involving top Pakistani politicians and generals, a minister said, reports AFP.

The panel headed by Supreme Court Judge Abdul Gader Chaudhury, will comprise five sitting and retired superior court judges. Interior Minister Naseerullah Babar also attended the news conference here.

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The Midnight File

Kashmiri leader killed

NEW DELHI, June 17: A leader of a Muslim militant group that is holding two Britons hostage in Kashmir was among 20 rebels killed by Indian troops, officials said Friday. It was not immediately known whether the killing of a deputy district leader of the Harkat ul-Ansar group in Sopore on Thursday night would set back efforts to free the hikers who were kidnapped last week, reports AP.

Rwandan truce talks stalled

KIGALI, June 17: UN-brokered ceasefire talks between rebels and the government army in Rwanda stalled today after a rebel grenade killed a peacekeeper and pro-government militia stormed a hotel housing refugees. The commander of UN forces in Rwanda, Major General Romeo Dallaire, said a date for the resumption of the talks would be announced later, reports Reuter.

Cerebral malaria claims more in Sunamganj

From Our Correspondent

SYLHET, June 17: The cerebral malaria epidemic in Sunamganj district remained unchanged with the killer disease claiming more lives during the last few weeks. The total number of deaths since January now stands at 268, an official source informed. Of them, 178 died in Tahirkhola, 83 in Dharmapasha and 7 in Biswamohorhat thanas. The disease in the meantime has spread to the adjoining villages under Dearabazar, Dharmapasha, and Sunamganj sadar thanas, the source said.

Meanwhile Medical experts from WHO after visiting the affected areas suggested spraying of anti-malarial insecticide in the areas. But the Health Department raised objections on the plea of environment pollution.

Caretaker govt can't replace elected one: Huda

Information Minister Nazmul Huda said that democratically elected government was the real government of the people which could not be replaced by a caretaker government, reports BSS. He was addressing as the chief guest at a discussion on "Parliamentary Democracy: Bangladeshi Politics" arranged by the Doctors' Association of Bangladesh at the BIRDME auditorium yesterday evening.

World Cup

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in the competition can be decisive under a new system awarding three points for a win in first-round games instead of two points as in the past.

At the Rose Bowl in Pasadena, Calif., Colombia's status as tournament favourite will be put to an early test by Romania. The South Americans qualified for the World Cup without losing a game and its runup included a 5-0 victory over Argentina. But Romania are hardly a pushover.

For the United States, their first appearance as hosts — against Switzerland — is immediately critical.

As Romania and Colombia loom later in the first round, Saturday's game at the indoor Pontiac Silverdome is likely to be the best shot for victory. Representing a country with little soccer tradition, the US players must reach the second round to avoid embarrassment.

The function was also addressed by Energy and Mineral Resource Minister Dr Khanda Mosharraf Hossain, Education Minister Jamiruddin Sircar, Amanullah Aman MP, Barkatullah Bulu MP, Begum Zia advised the JCD members to take part in politics side by side their studies but asked them to refrain from activities which are immoral and unethical.

The United States exited after the first round in 1990 but may get an early break this time: Adrian Knup, the Swiss team's high scorer is doubtful after aggravating an ankle injury in practice.

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