

Most banks still say no to foil notes

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Following the countrywide flood, the number of people coming to banks to change foil notes for new ones has increased. But not all of them are having pleasant experiences.

There are complaints against nationalised and private banks that they often decline to exchange foil and torn notes with fresh ones.

"I went to a local bank to exchange my foil notes which had been damaged in the flood. But the bank refused to take them," said Rezaul Karim of Bashabo.

Karim had to go to the brokers who hang around the Bangladesh Bank head office to exchange foil notes where they keep a commission of one Taka for every Tk 10 note.

"Bangladesh Bank has issued clear instructions to all banks to accept foil notes at counters. It is mandatory to display the instructions in the banks so that people are aware of it," said Ziauddin Ahmed, deputy general manager (DGM) of currency management policy of Bangladesh Bank.

According to Bangladesh Bank's instructions on August 11, 2003 all banks have to exchange less damaged notes like two parts of the same numbered note. At least three fourth of the note should be submitted by the client.

The banks need to receive exchange notes from Bangladesh Bank for extremely torn, burnt and less than three fourth notes. Under such circumstances, the bank cannot exchange the notes at the counter and instead issue receipts. The clients receive the new notes through courier after paying the charges for the service.

Banks have also been instructed to hand

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Brokers around Bangladesh Bank make best use of the opportunity to exchange foil and torn notes for a commission of Tk 1 for every Tk 10 note.

over clients who try to exchange made-up notes and fake notes to the police.

There are allegations that the Bangladesh Bank delays exchanging notes with the nationalised and private banks and because of that, the banks feel discouraged to entertain foil notes at their counters.

"Bangladesh Bank needs time to sort out foil and fake notes. Many foil notes appear to have been re-issued in the market," said Ziauddin. But the DGM also said that the central bank deals with foil notes from the main office of the local banks and they get the exchangeable currency on a daily basis.

"A bank can show no excuses for not exchanging foil notes," said the DGM.

According to Bangladesh Bank statistics, on July 30, 2004 Tk. 17,287.32 crore was in the market and about 20 percent of it had come back as foil notes or had been exchanged with new notes.

"About 20 to 22 percent notes come back every year. We have enough printed fresh notes in our vault to deal with the exchange of foil notes daily," said Ziauddin.

According to the Bangladesh Bank, Tk. 19 thousand crore roll out everyday on an average. From July 2003 to June 2004, 58 crore 70 lakh separate notes came back in foil notes out of a total of 266 crore 80 lakh.

"The number of foil notes have increased due to the flood. As a special measure we have intensified our usual practice and instructed our staff to monitor banks by testing them with foil note exchange request. Our people are patrolling every branch so that bankers can not refuse to exchange foil notes," said Ziauddin.

Life logged in filthy floodwaters



CITY CORRESPONDENT

As floodwaters recede rather slowly because of poor drainage system, Kamrangirchar people are continuing to live in untold misery.

On a visit yesterday, it was found that Bara Gram, Hujur Para Ghat and Shial Khali are the worst affected areas where many people are still marooned in knee to waist-deep floodwater.

Water submerges the floors of the houses not built on higher grounds. The residents of these houses are still living in flood centers and do not know when they will be able to go back home.

People believe it would take at least two more months for the water to recede because of the poor drainage system in the area.

"We experience waterlogging every monsoon because of unplanned drainage system," said a shopkeeper.

Meantime, the situation has become unhygienic with more and more people contracting diarrhoea and skin diseases every day.

"The government should take immediate steps to combat diarrhoea here. Otherwise, the situation would become grave," said Ishaq Ahmed, a local resident.

Shortage of pure drinking water and the unhygienic environment make the area even more vulnerable to waterborne diseases.

Sharifa Begum, a 60-year-old woman, in her choked voice said, "Sir, please do something for me. I am suffering from foul smell and mosquitoes."

Kalim Bahadur, a house owner, said, "We could not go to the flood shelters for various social problems and received no help from the government."

A number of people also alleged that local party-men were politicising the relief operation. They are giving aid to those living around their houses, they said.

"We can only watch the government conducting a massive relief operation on television. But we are not beneficiaries," Wasim Ahmed, another resident, regretted.

BUZZING BEES



A hive with active bees, a sight rare in the city found in the premises of the Department of Public Health Engineering in Kakrail.

Spare a thought for spare parts

CITY CORRESPONDENT

Arif-ur Rahman inherited nothing but a small tin shed workshop when his father died 22 years ago. Fully aware that like his father he was never going to get any acknowledgement for his craft, Arif nevertheless decided to continue running the workshop 'Ashraf Engineering works'.

It produced spare parts and plant machinery for brick kilns, construction companies, textile and jute mills and other factories. Gradually he managed to expand the tiny place and now Arif has 18 employees working there.

Like Arif and his late father Ashrafuddin, a good number of workers are involved in making spare parts and machinery that are used in the country's light engineering sector. From pulleys, brackets and dice for jute mills to looms, rings, wheels, cardins, liners, pipes, gears and pinions for textile mills and other gadgets and spare parts for different uses are produced by them.

Spare parts workshops began to thrive in the city's Dholaikhal, Jinjira, Keranganj and areas adjacent to the River Buriganga in the 1960s to meet the demands of an ever-increasing number of industries in Dhaka and Narayanganj. At present about 200 workshops exist in Dholaikhal alone while thousands more are found scattered in other parts of the city.

According to Bangladesh Engineering Industries Owners Association, more than 30,000 light engineering units produce spare parts and small machinery across the country with an investment amounting to around Tk 10 crore. They are contributing roughly Tk 700 crore annually to the national economy through manufacturing about 10,000 items a year as substitutes of imported parts. The association also informed that some 15 lakh workers are employed in this sector.

These workers never receive any formal engineering education, but they learn the skills from colleagues and predecessors. They do not have any idea of patents or recognition, but there is always a sense of creative pride in them.

"I still remember how my father was delighted when he built a brick-crushing machine," said Arif.



Workers at spare parts work shops turning out parts and machinery used in the light engineering sector.

"These gadgets might look petty in the eyes of modern science but they mean a lot to the common workers."

The workshop owners said that business boomed during the late 1980s and early 1990s following an industrial boom in the area.

However, they added that smuggled cheap Chinese parts are becoming a threat.

"Nowadays, most people opt for the Chinese parts as they are cheaper," said Arif.

Moreover, most of the workshop owners do not have any organised business plan as they lack institutional education. They do not even have any estimation of investment and annual turnover.

The spare parts traders are also unaware of policies that might help

them in expanding their businesses.

"I do not know how to approach a foreign buyer," said Arif when asked if he plans to export his products although he was certain that spare parts export has the potential to become a big foreign exchange earner for the country if only the government assisted them.