

## DHAKA INTERNATIONAL TRADE FAIR 2005

# 10 days to go, much left to be done

IMRUL HASAN

With only 10 days left before the inauguration of the month long Dhaka International Trade Fair (DITF) 2005, the participants are fighting against time to complete preparations before the opening.

"The Export Promotion Bureau (EPB) has already completed 70 percent preparatory work while the participants have done only 60 percent. We hope the total work will be completed before December 5," said SM Ashraf Islam, director of DITF.

Participants, on the other hand, alleged that the time given by the organisers to decorate and build the pavilions at the fair is very short.

"I doubt whether the preparatory work could be finished on time. We have only 25 days, although we need at least 40 days

for the work to be completed," said a participant.

A letter from the Export Promotion Bureau (EPB) was sent recently to prospective participants of the fair stating that a pay order for the booking of the pavilion, required documents and a photocopy of the allotment paper should be submitted at the EPB office on a particular day only.

"Because of the limitation in time, I doubt whether I would be able to submit the papers or not," said another participant requesting anonymity.

Ashraf Islam agreed that there are time constraints, but also said: "Since the venue of the fair is right next to the Bangladesh China Friendship Centre where the Saarc summit was held earlier in the month, it was not possible, for security reasons, to allow the

participants to commence work."

The fair was originally scheduled for early November but due to Eid-ul-Fitr and Saarc Summit, the DITF steering committee later fixed the new schedule for the month-long fair.

EPB sources said a total of 423 local and international companies and trade associations will showcase their products in 70 pavilions, 70 mini pavilions and 278 stalls in the fair.

The participants said that they are concerned about the security in the fair in the context of the current law and order situation. But an EPB official said: "We will do our best to maintain discipline and tight security in the fair."

DITF steering committee has decided to allocate 10 premium pavilions, 14 premium mini pavilions, 35 premium stalls, seven

drinks shops and six restaurants to the local entrepreneurs at some lucrative locations in the fair venue.

"Ninety percent of the stalls and pavilions will be allocated to local companies and the rest to the foreign ones," said a high official of EPB. "We are providing extra facilities and suitable places for the stalls of local firms," he said.

Business firms from as many as 14 countries including China, Malaysia, Thailand, India, Pakistan, Bhutan, USA and South Korea will participate in the fair.

The Export Promotion Bureau (EPB) and the commerce ministry will organise the DITF-2005. The prime minister will formally inaugurate the largest exposition of local and international products on December 10 which will continue until January 9, 2006.



Work on a pavilion goes on at the DITF venue.

## MSCS MOBILE CLINIC PROGRAMME

# Creating awareness among the homeless

CITY CORRESPONDENT

Although some of the poor in Dhaka City are slum dwellers, a larger section comprises of the floating population.

Of the few organisations working to improve their plight Marie Stopes Clinic Society (MSCS) takes precedence having started a mobile health care service.

A 'need assessment' was carried out in these areas to identify health problems before the programme was launched by MSCS in April 2002 and in November the same year the programme to provide health care and family planning services to the homeless in well-equipped mobile clinics at seven spots in the city began.

"Our aim is not only to provide this service but also to create awareness on health-care among those living on streets, rail platforms with no fixed source of income," said Dr. Kazi Golam Rasul, general manager (advocacy

& communication) of MSCS.

The headquarters -- Dhaka-1 -- at Elephant road covers the southern part of Bangabandhu National Stadium, near the High Court Mazar, at the Sadarghat launch terminal and AGB Colony on Saturdays, Sundays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays.

Another clinic -- Dhaka-2 -- operates at Mohakhali serving the people of Mirpur-1 Mazar, and the railway station areas in the Cantonment and Tejgaon on Saturdays, Mondays and Thursdays.

"To establish a referral service network, the head office and the respective clinics supervise and monitor the programme closely," said an official of MSCS, Lalmatia branch.

"Each mobile team comprises of one doctor, a nurse and one field coordinator. They work for three hours from 7:00 to 10:00 pm on the specified days, covering around 60 patients each day," said

Dr. Rasul.

The patients are expected to register themselves at a nominal fee of Tk 5, which includes the cost of medicine for each visit, said Syed Saad Mustafa, programme officer of MSCS.

The service is organised with the assistance of two volunteers from each locality who work to create awareness in health and family planning among the homeless.

The volunteers and field staff are implementing Behaviour Change Communication (BCC) activities like film shows, folk songs, group meetings and individual counselling sessions.

When asked how the people reacted to the programme, an officer of Dhaka-2 said: "Initially there was hardly any response, but now with the awareness created they visit us quite regularly."

"I come here twice a month for check-ups. I am very satisfied with their service," said Sahina

Sultana, from Mirpur-2 who is receiving treatment from a mobile clinic in Mirpur-1.

But some showed frustration with the services of the clinics.

"At the beginning the service was satisfactory but now the standard of the medicines they provide is deteriorating," said a floater near the High Court who receives treatment regularly.

In reply, Dr. Rasul said: "We don't think that the quality of our service is going down. We provide the same standard of service in 350 centres of the country."

At the inception, the Department for International Development (DFID), a donor agency from the British Government financially supported the mobile clinic programme till November 2004, said Dr. Rasul.

"But now we are continuing the programme with our own funds," he added.

# Bad days for flower traders at Shahbagh

SHARMIN MEHRIBAN

The street-side flower traders at Shahbag are experiencing a decline in sales and demand as a result of cultural changes and rising prices.

They attributed the increased prices of flowers to low production, high prices of preservatives and regular collection of tolls by the police.

"Use of chemical fertilisers and deteriorating soil quality could be the causes of the low production that has led to the increase in price. A bunch of 100 roses that cost Tk 150 last year would now cost Tk 500," said Shaon, a trader.

"Moreover, our sales have declined as social and cultural programmes are not held as frequently as before," said Russel, another salesperson. The use of flowers in these programmes has also been decreasing, he observed.

The traders sell the flowers on the footpath at Shahbag from 6:00am to 12:00pm. The flowers are kept either at the traders' homes or in the closets behind the footpaths.

Suppliers bring truckloads of flowers to Dhaka from Jessore, Savar and other places every morning. Some flowers are imported from India and Thailand.

The traders could not specify how the suppliers had access to the imported flowers and whether these require any taxes. Asked if local flowers are exported to other countries or is there any potential, they expressed their ignorance.

The traders said some 20 types of flowers are available at Shahbagh. The local ones include rose, *rajanigandha*, *gada*, lotus, gladiolus and *chandramallika*. The imported ones are jarbera and orchid. Leaves such as *debdaru*, *kamini* and *patabahar* are used in making bouquet.

The average price of a local flower is between Tk 5 and 15 per piece whereas an imported flower costs Tk 20 to Tk 25. Roses are most suited to the local climate, according to a trader.

The traders have reasonable excuses for the rising prices. "The materials for making a flower basket that cost Tk 15 last year would now cost at least Tk 30," said Ripon, a salesperson.

He also added that the imported flowers need preservatives and could be stored for 15 days whereas the local flowers contain no preservatives and could be stored for three days with the water being changed regularly.

Biplob, a shop owner, pointed the high cost of preservatives that increased from Tk 40 to Tk 100 or more.

He said due to lack of preservatives, a huge volume of flowers are wasted every day.

However, farmers and gardeners buy the decayed flowers for making compost. Street children and lipstick companies also collect the unsold flower petals.

The traders alleged that they have to pay tolls to the police for using the footpath. "We

pay Tk 60 a day to the police. This is another reason for the increased price," said another trader.

A number of the flower shops operate under the Shahbagh Bottola Chinnomul Ful Baboshayi Samitee, an association of the street-side flower traders, who pay a certain fee to the association. Other shops operate independently.

Most flower traders feel that it would be very convenient if they could have a permanent indoor market. "Perhaps it could prevent wastage of flowers," said Bonya, a shop owner.

When asked if the traders ever approached the government officials to set up an indoor market for flower traders, she replied: "We are illiterate people and do not know how to approach them. Even if we did, they would not listen to us."

Syed Mozaffar Hossain, an executive engineer of Dhaka City Corporation, said no decision has been taken to construct an indoor market for the Shahbag traders.

"An indoor market would definitely be convenient for us but it would not increase the demand for flowers," said Ripon.



Flower sellers along the footpaths of Shahbagh wait for customers.



Patients wait for their turn at a mobile clinic in Mohammadpur.