

BUMPER HARVESTS

Lebu everywhere!

RIZANUZZAMAN LASKAR and DURDANA GHIAS

City markets are flooded with lemons following a bumper harvest in Sylhet, Sreemongal and other parts of the country. Never has lemon as a commodity been cheaper and widely available than it is at present.

According to agriculturists, although lemons come from all over the country, the biggest chunk of the supply comes from Sylhet, Moulvibazar, Manikganj, Chittagong and the adjacent areas.

According to Tareq Rahman, president of Nursery Owners' Association, lemon plantation has marked a significant increase in recent times.

"As they are easy to grow and maintain, lemon plantation is rapidly expanding in the country, and so are the varieties. People are now cultivating lemon even in tubs on rooftops," he said.

Rakibul Bari Khan, a social forestry specialist from Brac, said the improved awareness in sowing good seeds to get healthy plants has been the driving force behind the unprecedented harvest of lemons and other fruits.

"The introduction of high yielding improved variety seeds and grafts are the reasons of lemon and other fruits revolution in the country," he said.

"People have started planting seeds in their homestead gardens. Lemon plants are often preferred as they take less space than mango or jackfruit trees. Another reason is the use of lemon plants as hedges," said Rakibul.

Earlier lemons were planted in some specific areas of the country but now these are being produced almost all over the country.

Abdul Matin, chairman of Karwan Bazar Kachabazar Arat

said truckloads of lemons are coming to Dhaka every day. The supply has been excessive since the last two weeks. The supply will be huge for another month or so until the ongoing season is over.

Now anyone can buy around 40 lemons at a throwaway price of Tk 10 at any vegetable market and even at road intersections from the floating vendors while its usual price was around Tk 1 to Tk 3 per piece. The price tends to shoot up to around Tk 5 per piece during Ramadan.

Lemon, the favourite citrus fruit used in sherbet and curries, comes in several varieties such as Kagoji, 12-month Kagoji, Shorboti and Elachi.

According to traders at Karwan Bazar, it is mostly the Kagoji and Elachi variety of lemons that have flooded the city markets.

Jahir, a trader from Karwan Bazar however told this correspondent that lemons sold in the streets are of poor quality and consist of those thrown away from the wholesale markets.

"Lemon has to be sold within a day of receiving it from the farmers because it would be of little value after it becomes reddish," he said.

"Now that demand is so poor in comparison with the unprecedented harvest, we are literally being compelled to give it away. A huge amount of lemons are just rotting for the lack of preservation facilities," he added.

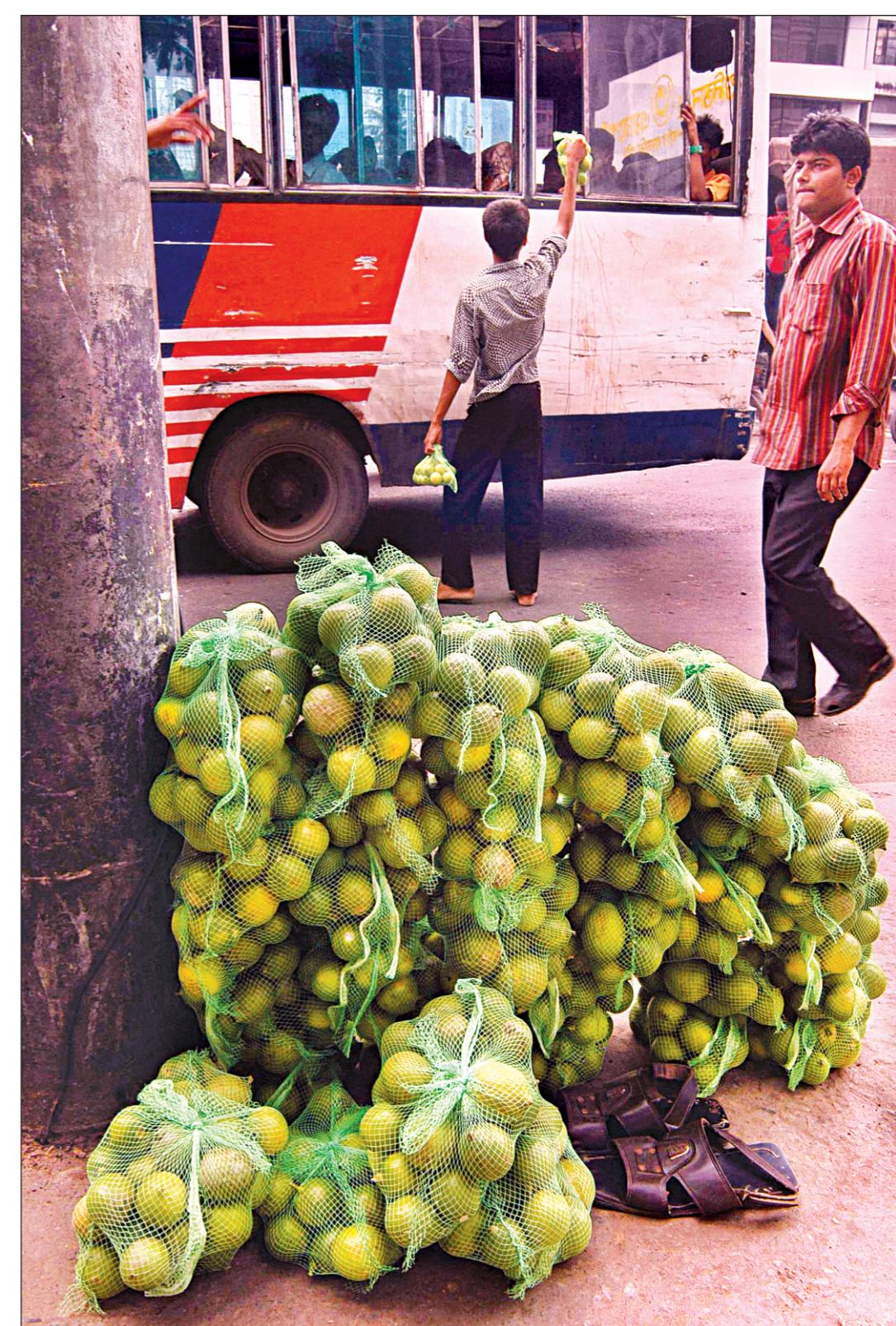
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A vendor selling cheap lemons to a bus passenger on the Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue (right). A wholesale trader with huge supply of lemons from Sylhet at Karwan Bazar (left).



source: accuweather.com

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WEEK AHEAD	Today	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	Low: 30 °C High: 33 °C Cloudy with a t-storm or two	Low: 31 °C High: 34 °C Cloudy with thunderstorms	Low: 30 °C High: 35 °C Cloudy, t-storms; very hot	Low: 29 °C High: 35 °C A t-storm or two; very hot	Low: 28 °C High: 35 °C Cloudy, t-storms; warm, humid	Low: 28 °C High: 35 °C A couple of thunderstorms	Low: 28 °C High: 33 °C Very warm and humid with rain

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STREET CHILDREN

Too little to raise hope

RAIHAN SABUKTAGIN

With thousands of vagrant children living on the streets in the capital, projects to shelter and rehabilitate them are limping due to insufficient funds and facilities.

As the government schemes and infrastructure virtually provide no support to these street children, their only ray of hope lies with the supplemental support provided by a few NGOs.

According to a survey conducted in 2004, around 2.5 lakh children are living on the streets of Dhaka and there are around 6.8 lakh of them all over the country. According to the survey, the vagrant child population is growing at an annual rate of 6.98 percent. Most of these homeless children are from destitute and underprivileged families.

Although the government, on paper, follows certain policies and has funds allocated for providing shelter and rehabilitating these children, the government assistant programmes turned out to be futile due to years of negligence and lack of dedication to address the issue.

There are 85 government orphanages and six shelter homes throughout the country that are virtually riddled with countless problems. Whereas the government department responsible to oversee these facilities lacks necessary organisational and financial resources, sources said.

"As the government is not being considerate enough to [assist] these unfortunate kids, we see their tender faces at different odd jobs including prostitution, drug peddling and even in criminal activities," said Nipa, an officer at a vagrant children drop-in centre run by an NGO.

According to sources, only around 11 NGOs out of a total of 8500 NGOs nationwide provide shelter and life skill training to these underprivileged children. Since these NGOs stop providing assistance to these children once they turn 18, the children once again become vulnerable as they face the real world without anyone to look out for them.



Two street children learning sewing at a center run by an NGO in Motijheel.

Surviving only on water

Dozens of families with children in Sadarghat area make a living by selling WASA tap water to launch passengers

SHAHNAZ PARVEEN

Shohag was only three when he arrived in Dhaka from Bogobdakhal, Barisal twelve years ago. Now 15, Shohag lives on selling water in discarded plastic bottles with southbound travellers at Sadarghat launch terminal.

"I arrived at this bustling Sadarghat in Dhaka with my parents without knowing that my fate is locked to this place. Today I earn my living by selling water to the travellers from my home district and other nearby districts," said Shohag.

Shohag said his day usually starts early in the morning collecting bottles from the Nimtoli area of Chankharpul in the old part of Dhaka. "Each bottle costs around Tk 1. We later fetch water from a tap near Kotwali thana. We have to stand in line for our turn for the free supply of water," he added.

Shohag sells around 60 bottles everyday and sends around Tk 2000 a month to his family back home.

Severe crisis of water in passenger launches has ushered in a new breed of traders in Sadarghat terminal -- selling bottles of water to thirsty travellers. Everyday nearly 250 launches operate from the Sadarghat terminal.

Except for a few, most of the launches do not provide water for passenger use, let alone safe drinking water for them. The passengers have to bring their own drinking water during their trip. And for use in toilets, they are forced to rely heavily on polluted water collected from river. This water scarcity gave birth to the informal trade of water in discarded bottles.

The water traders emerged during the last few years responding to the passenger demands. Previously, people on the go used to buy drinking water out of pitchers carried by the sellers. Water in

discarded bottles became more popular after mass marketing of bottled mineral water was introduced in the country.

their early teens, start vending bottles filled with tap water. A two-litre bottle usually costs Tk 5.

Majority of the launches set off at 5pm with southbound passengers. In the afternoon when passengers begin to arrive at the terminal, young boys, mostly in

tin.

A clan of around 12 trader families live in Balurchar. The clan has several 'mahajans' who usually hire young single boys like Shohag to do the water vending.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 22



Firoza readying her water bottles before going for sale.