

# Fruits now a dream for low income group

CITY CORRESPONDENT

Fruits, local or imported, are now a dream for many, especially the low-income group. Mango now sells at Tk 90-100 a kilogram, banana (Sagor variety) Tk 36-42 a dozen and a piece of medium-size jackfruit at Tk 60-80. Only last year, the same, at the same time of the season, were sold at Tk 50-60, Tk 24-30 and Tk 40-50 respectively. "Fruits have become elusive. Every year they are going out of our reach," said Rafiqul Islam, 40, a primary school teacher. "It's really a shame for a father who sometimes cannot manage even banana for his

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two growing children," he lamented. "But days were when poor people used to live on jackfruit instead of rice. Because jackfruit was in abundance and cheaper," reminisced Amjad Ali, 60, a retired government official who was trying mango at the

Karwan Bazar fruit corner. Ayesha Banu, 22, a garments worker, said she could not afford to buy 'loving' jackfruit this year. She bought only two kilograms of mango during the peak season and that is all. "I bought a small piece of papaya for my ailing mother for

Tk 25 yesterday. Doctor told me to give her fruit but how can I manage it every day?" she posed.

Ayesha said she earns around Tk 2000 a month working for 10-12 hours a day in a knitwear unit. She lost her father recently and has two young brothers.

"Fruits remain a distant dream when you cannot even assure bread and water for three hungry mouths with such small amount," Ayesha said.

Amena Begum, 45, a domestic help, said she had to think twice before going for a pair of guava for her two grandsons.

"We always thought guava were for the poor. But it has also turned pricey".

A market survey showed guava, once considered as 'poor men's apple', has almost caught up with the prices of imported apple. Guava (kazi variety), now sells at around Tk 60 a kilogram while apple at Tk 85-90.

Pineapple that gets damaged in huge quantity every year, is also selling at Tk 35-40 a pair. They were around Tk 20-25 last year.

Amra, a local variety of sour fruit, sells at Tk 36-48 a dozen and 'lotkon', a sweet and sour wild variety, sells at Tk 50-60 a kilogram. Prices of both the items doubled compared to last year's.

Fruit wholesalers could not give any definite reason but many of them attributed the price hikes to transport and production cost and a few also pointed to population boom.



Fruits are becoming elusive for poor people.



STED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

# Orchid making its way into the city life

It looks like a flower fair when traders with a wide variety of flowers gather in the morning at the city's Shahbagh intersection. It has grown up as a hub of flower business over the last two decades.

This is an everyday picture. All types of flowers are bought here from different parts of Dhaka and its adjoining areas both for retail and wholesale. Apart from the sellers of a few outlets, most are floating.

Those who need a little bit more flowers for any function rush to the Shahbagh flower market adjacent to Bangabandhu Medical University and BIRDEM Hospital.

A few days back, Nurul Absar, programme coordinator of an NGO, was buying several baskets of flowers from a wholesaler of the market. "My boss' son is getting married and I've been requested to decorate the house with fresh flowers," a beaming Absar said in response to a query.

His baskets were full of a variety of roses, gladiolas, Indian marigold and tuberose and Orchid. Asked why he is buying so many orchids, Absar says, "Actually, I want to decorate the house in a unique way so that it is praised by all."

"Orchid is still a new type of flower in Bangladesh and it's much more attractive. It remains fresh longer than other flowers. This is why I'm buying it in larger quantity."

Apart from Shahbagh, there are some flower shops at Kantaban adjacent to Dhaka University. Farhana Mostari, an MA student of Dhaka University, is making a bouquet with orchids of different colours like magenta, white, off-white, yellow and

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orange. It looks simply gorgeous. "Today is my boyfriend's birthday. He's out of town now. Anyway, I'll keep the bouquet in his room so he can see my gift first when he'll be back tomorrow morning. I'm using orchid, though it's a bit expensive, as it stays fresh up to 10 days," says Farhana.

Things are changing in Bangladesh very fast. There have been changes in our culture too. These days many people prefer gifts with orchid than rose and rajanigandha.

Orchid of different colours like white, off-white, magenta, yellow, light pink and orange are available in the markets. "More variations in colour are on the way," says Shamim Rahman, a flower seller at Shahbagh market. The colour of orchid in our country is more nice-looking than those in Thailand."

Orchid made its way into Bangladesh about 10 years ago and it was costlier at that time. It used to come from Thailand. So commoners hardly showed any interest in the flower. Barely a year ago, some local farms experimentally started producing the flower in Tangail, Gazipur and

Kishoreganj. And its farming is expanding day by day.

Dr Jasim Uddin, a lecturer of Dhaka University's Botany department, said, "Orchid farming is much harder than that of other flowers. Two varieties of orchid are actually grown in two ways on earth and another on other things (parasite) like cocoon coir. Orchid grows better on that soil which has more iron, acid and humus. Orchid grows well in tropical and subtropical areas where temperature, humidity and rainfall are high. There is no specific time for the flower to bloom."

On the price of orchid, Aminul Islam, a flower shopkeeper, said, "The price was much higher when this flower used to come from Thailand. At that time we used to sell one single stick for Tk 25, which is why few people used to buy it. Now a quality stick sells at Tk 15 while a lower grade at Tk 8."

Experts say there is a bright prospect for orchid farming in Bangladesh. But the government seems to be reluctant to take any initiative to promote its farming and business. Currently, three organisations BRAC, Dipta and Wonderland Toys are cultivating

orchid at their own initiatives. Mohammad Nayan, marketing officer of Wonderland Toys, said that they have experimentally started producing orchid on four bighas of land in Rajendrapur of Gazipur district.

About the farming process, he said, "We are following the greenhouse process in orchid farming under the supervision of experienced agricultural officers. In this method, the plants are hung on bamboo trays. We have a plan to export flowers in the future."

Abdul Mannan, a gardener of Dhaka University's Shamsunnahar Hall, began farming orchid as a hobby. He said, "We can farm it at home by firmly wrapping the orchid plant in coir. Then it has to be hanged from any wall or any other way. About the future of orchid Dr Jasim said, "This flower has opened up a new prospect for our country and we should utilise it. There should be government initiative to cultivate the flower on a larger scale."

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Rupa Sarker, News Network

# Is it beef you are eating?

FROM PAGE 21 Sources from Dhaka City Corporation veterinary section confirmed the regular practice of mixing beef and buffalo. "It has been going on for years. We are regularly visiting kitchen markets. Mobile court is also operating regularly to prevent the malpractice", the official said.

"Butchers are supposed to keep a signboard declaring weather they have buffalo meat or not. But they only do that when we are around then they go back to their business the usual way", he added.

According to our source majority of the slaughtering takes place at Kaptanbazar, Moulvibazar in old part of Dhaka, in Karwanbazar, New Market, Mirpur section 1 and 11 and in Gulshan 1 kitchen

market. These places are the biggest suppliers of meat in hotels.

Almost all the customers at Gabtoli are butchers. Every night at around 11pm they transport their purchase from Gabtoli and they finish up slaughtering and meat preparation by dawn. The hotel owners of the city purchase the largest amount of meat.

"If a butcher buys three cows then he would definitely buy one buffalo with it," said one of the employees of the Hassil Gate.

The official from DCC also mentioned that the only way to end this practice is to develop modern slaughtering houses where there will be technology to process the meat and also modern packaging and seal system. It will

also make the meat more hygienic he added.

"I have heard of rumours that butchers mix buffalo meat with beef. However, there is no way we can detect it during purchase. We cannot do anything in this regard," said one of hotel owners at Chankharpool, requesting anonymity.

"We are not willingly feeding customers buffalo meat. If the butchers do mix buffalo meat then the customers should know that it is considered a halal food," added another hotel owner, also requesting anonymity.

Buffalo meat has almost no demand in the market and it is generally not available in the meat shops. "It is an open secret that beef in the city has buffalo meat in it. We all know

it, but we cannot do anything about it", said Haider Ali, a customer at Karwan Bazar kitchen market.

"We know that buffalo meat is halal and probably we have been consuming it for years without knowing, but when someone sells buffalo meat telling the customer that it is beef then he is definitely cheating," he added.

Butchers and meat sellers take capitalise on the low demand and low cost of buffalo meat by mixing it in with beef to make more profit from the high price of beef on the market. Meanwhile, the unsuspecting consumers are duped into paying high prices for something they did not mean to buy.

Butchers however, declined to admit to any wrongdoing.

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