



## Hilsa becoming pricey as export resumes

CITY CORRESPONDENT

Delicious Hilsa has become rare and pricey again with the resumption of its export on Wednesday to India.

Although it is off-season now, there was steady supply of Hilsa in the city markets. But within hours of lifting of ban on the export the fishes disappeared from the markets and prices shot up, said Laxman, a fish seller at Karwan Bazar.

"Big Hilsas have become rare in the markets as the exporters are hoarding them. In case you get a big one you have to pay double its price," said Laxman.

Even the reputed department stores in the city reported that they are not getting big Hilsas as before.

A medium-size Hilsa, which was sold around Tk 200 a month ago now sells at Tk 300-350.

"It will go up further in the next few weeks," warned a fish seller at New Market.

Besides India, five fish firms are also exporting Hilsas to the European countries from last month, a source in the fisheries ministry said. "Over 500 metric tonnes will be exported in the next few weeks," he said.

"The days of delicious Hilsa are over. They (people in Kolkata) will have 'joralish' (pair of hilsa) during Swaraswati Puja while we can not even buy one by any means here," lamented a Hilsa-lover at New Market.

Demand and prices of the fish go up in Kolkata during Swaraswati Puja as it is a part of the Hindu tradition there to have a pair of Hilsa on the occasion.

According to reports from Barisal, on the first two days of shipment on Wednesday and Thursday, about 43 metric tonnes of Hilsas have crossed Benapole land border and already reached the Kolkata markets Friday.

Yusuf Sikder, secretary of Barisal Fish Exporters Association, said the rate of shipment was 4 US dollar per kilogram this year.

Atul Das, president of Kolkata Hilsa Importers Association, told Sikder that the fishes are already being sold at Rs 250 a kg and expected to cross Rs 300 during the puja.

The government at a meeting of the Council of Ministers on July 4, 2007 decided to ban Hilsa export for six months and it came into effect from July 8.

An average of 40 tonnes of Hilsas were

exported daily to India through Benapole and 20 importing firms of West Bengal purchased the fish worth Tk 250 crore last year, sources said.

The volume of export was 3,414 tonnes in fiscal year 2006-07 and 4,495 tonnes in 2005-06.

According to Yusuf Sikder, the price of Hilsa rose with the rise in expenses of catching, as prices of nets, fuel and spare parts of the fishing trawlers went up.

The decision to ban Hilsa export was taken after an investigation team of the Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock submitted a report following visits to Barisal, Bhola and Cox's Bazar to find out the cause of excessive price of Hilsa.

The team was formed following media reports on high price of the fish in the local markets at peak season and sale of exported Hilsa in Indian markets at prices lower than the country of origin.

After the imposition of ban, the price of the fish in local markets came down by 30-50 per cent.

When asked, an official at the fisheries ministry could not say whether a similar ban would be imposed this year.

## city express

The latest crop of quotes from the city's press -- words worth repeating, we feel, for their humour, insight or sheer outrageousness. Star City does not necessarily support the opinions expressed in this column.

*"If the teachers protested during the August incident, they performed it as their duty for which they deserve reward, not punishment."*

-- Kabir Chowdhury  
Professor, Dhaka University

Told reporters as DU teachers and students demanded release of their detained colleagues and classmates staging sit-in, class boycott and human chain, on Wednesday. Source: The Daily Star

*"We should have sharp eyes whether the [National Human Rights] commission becomes a watchdog or lapdog."*

-- Irene Khan

Secretary General, Amnesty International

Told a roundtable titled 'Freedom of Expression in Bangladesh' at Drik Gallery, on Wednesday. Source: The Daily Star

*"To tell you the truth, none of our departments has any experience of [probing] corporate corruption."*

-- Lt Gen Masud Uddin Chowdhury

Chief Coordinator, NCC

Told the press admitting that the army, navy and air force do not have that kind of experience in investigation, on Friday. Source: The Daily Star

*"When anybody is placed on remand he or she is tortured ... I am a politician and not a criminal."*

-- Tarique Rahman

Detained BNP Senior Joint Secretary

Said when he was produced before the court of Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate for the hearing of a seven-day remand prayer, on Wednesday. Source: The Daily Star

*"I came here knowing that my new job is risky."*

-- Hossain Zillur Rahman

Newly appointed education adviser

Told reporters after taking oath, on Wednesday. Source: The Daily Star

*"The government will withdraw the state of emergency when the time comes."*

-- Major General (Rtd) Ghulam Mohammad Quader

Newly appointed adviser

Told reporters after a special meeting of the council of advisers, on Thursday. Source: The Daily Star

*"They [World Bank and IMF] don't run the country."*

-- Salehuddin Ahmed

Governor, Bangladesh Bank

Told reporters when they mentioned the forecast of 5.5 GDP growth by the WB and IMF while BB said it would range from 6 to 6.2 percent in the current fiscal year, on Thursday. Source: The Daily Star

*"Many things can be enlivened with arms but the economy is not one of them."*

-- Khondkar Ibrahim Khaled

An eminent banker

Said at a citizen's rally arranged by the Gono Forum, on Friday. Source: The Daily Star

Compiled by Durdana Ghilas

### FOLLOW-UP

## Leasing out public park to Wonderland was illegal

TAWFIQUE ALI

The lease of Gulshan Central Park to a private commercial company to develop Wonderland, an amusement park, has been made violating rules, says the report of a committee formed to review the lease contract.

Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) leased out three children's parks on commercial basis including a portion of Gulshan Central Park, Shamoly Shishu Park and Swamibagh Shishu Park through a contract signed on February 19, 2002.

Following public outcry over the lease, DCC formed the committee in August 2005 comprising chief executive officer, additional chief engineer, chief town planner, chief estate officer and others to report on status of the leased land and authenticity of the lease contract. It visited all three parks on August 22, 2005.

The committee in its report said that the deal was made without lawful authority.

According to the report, the contract was neither examined as per law nor approved by appropriate authority though the mayor's instruction in the note sheet was that it should be approved after proper scrutiny.

The mayor is supposed to sign any contract on behalf of DCC as per section 4 of Dhaka Municipal Corporation Rules-1984. However, the mayor can delegate the power to an official to sign the contract as per section 17 (1) of the

rules. "But the said rules were not followed at all in accomplishing the contract. The contract is therefore not binding upon the DCC," says the committee report.

According to official sources, mayor's opinion in the note sheet of this file has been rephrased using fluid (correction ink).

The report also pointed out an inconsistency that a 50-Taka stamp of the contract was purchased on February 20, 2002 but the deed was signed a day before.

The committee suggested legal actions against the persons responsible for these anomalies. But the DCC authorities are still sitting idle on the issue.

Dr Shahdeen Malik, a Supreme Court advocate, said if any action of an employee is found to have been improper and illegal, normally it is up to the organisation concerned to take punitive measures against the employee.

"DCC should have cancelled the lease as soon as it found the deal anomalous," he said.

In 1990, the DCC rented out five public parks including two at Dhupkhola and Kalabagan to Via Media, a private company, through tender and issued work order for developing commercial amusement parks but the ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Co-operatives stopped the DCC move.

The company finally got ministerial approval for three parks excluding Dhupkhola and Kalabagan, said managing director

(MD) of Wonderland GMM Rahman.

"It is not our concern what irregularities DCC officials resorted to in the leasing process," said Rahman. "We are not supposed to bother about how DCC or LGRD ministry leased out public parklands for development of an amusement park."

The contract was renewed last time in 2002 for three years.

"The position of DCC in this regard is very peculiar as they have neither renewed nor cancelled the contract and has been sitting on it for more than two years," said Rahman. "They have never maintained any correspondence with us."

DCC is entrusted with maintenance of around 50 public parks and playgrounds in the capital, but it has consistently facilitated encroachment and destruction of them, denying city dwellers open spaces over the past two and a half decades.

State of most of these parks now is just deplorable.

Both Gulshan Central Park and Gulshan South Park (Taltala park) are clearly earmarked as public park in the layout of Gulshan model town in the master plan prepared in 1962 by erstwhile Dhaka Improvement Trust.

But DCC leased out a big chunk of the central park in 1990 at a token price and allowed a 25-year settlement of DCC sweepers to occupy the Gulshan South (Taltala) Park.



Gulshan Central Park (top), part of which was leased out to Wonderland and (above) a food outlet at the amusement park.



Sabujbagh police station: Set for a revamped action.

## Cops, locals unite to tackle crimes

Bad days for Sabujbagh criminals as a 'wanted list' is underway

CITY CORRESPONDENT

In a renewed commitment to tackling crime in the 'crime infested' Sabujbagh, residents and local organisation leaders from different neighbourhoods are lending a hand to police for making a list of wanted criminals of the area, said police sources.

Presently, the list has around 30 names of local criminals including drug dealers and peddlers, robbers, automobile thieves and burglars, the sources said adding that the list is still in its primary stage. It will be updated regularly with the help of the locals while the informers will enjoy complete confidentiality.

"We are regularly discussing these matters [with local residents]. We are confident that soon we will have a comprehen-

sive list of hoodlums and criminals in the area," said an official concerned at Sabujbagh Police Station.

The idea was conceived during an Open Day -- an open discussion between the police and local residents -- at Sabujbagh Police Station. The Open Day is aimed at improving cooperation between the police and the citizens.

Syed Abdur Rouf, officer in charge (OC) of Sabujbagh Police Station, said, "Our focus is firmly on reducing crime and disorder. To get this done, we need help from communities and other social organisations."

"The local residents have a better idea of what goes on in their neighbourhood. So, they can help tackle a wide range of problems -- from anti social activities to more serious crimes," he added.

Over the years, Sabujbagh has earned the bad reputation of being a safe haven for notorious criminals in the city. Sabujbagh residents are living in a constant state of fear as crime in the area has gone up recently.

Sabujbagh Police Station is the lone police station for this vast and densely populated area on the eastern fringe of the city where Basabo, Madartek, Badda and Wahab Colony are situated.

Limited workforce, logistics and intelligence have been weighing down the efforts of Sabujbagh Police to keep crime and disorder in check.

"The community has a lot of problems -- land disputes, dowry-related problems, antisocial activities including drug addiction, gambling, theft, teasing women, etc. Most of the

times, the local residents and even the victims are fearful to report these," said an official from Sabujbagh Police Station.

"We are trying to bridge the communication gap between the police and the general public. We are asking them to come forward, make their voices heard and assist us to keep the criminal and antisocial activities in check," he said.

Sabujbagh residents were also optimistic and enthusiastic about the recent steps taken by the police.

"The police seem to be sincere in their efforts. They are paying close attention to what we have to say -- which is a good sign. However, how fruitful these meetings will be, will mostly depend on their [police] sincerity and effort. That is something only time can tell," said Mofazzal Hossain from

North Bashabo.

"This region has always been one of the hotspots in the city when it comes to criminal activities, mugging, petty theft and drug peddling -- you name it," said South Bashabo resident Shahjahan Islam.

"The worst part is that most of the incidents go unreported. Most of the residents are also afraid of reporting the illegal activities. Now that the police have reached out for our assistance, maybe things will get better now," he added.

Syed Abdur Rouf, the OC of Sabujbagh Police Station, said, "The open discussions have been really fruitful. Through these meetings, we have been able to identify different concerns of the local residents. With the help of the citizens we will hopefully be able to hunt down the local hoodlums as well."