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Weekly weather forecast for the city	Today	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	Low: 12 °C High: 21 °C Nice with plenty of sunshine	Low: 14 °C High: 23 °C Nice with sunshine	Low: 13 °C High: 22 °C Partly sunny and delightful	Low: 17 °C High: 25 °C Partly sunny and pleasant	Low: 15 °C High: 25 °C Nice with periods of sun	Low: 13 °C High: 22 °C Clouds and sun	Low: 12 °C High: 24 °C Partial sunshine

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Bird flu: Time to raise alarm

SHAHNAZ PARVEEN

Bird flu might take a very risky turn in the urban areas, especially Dhaka city, if proper measures are not taken at the right time. Consumers and poultry sellers of the city are not at all prepared to handle the alarming situation, experts warned.

Dense population, unhygienic market condition and lack of proper protective measures during poultry handling and meat processing pose serious health hazards for the city dwellers.

The experts also pointed out lax monitoring of the market, and lack of awareness among the poultry sellers and customers about the fatality of the killer disease.

Prof Mahmudur Rahman, director, Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR) said, "Dhaka city is extremely vulnerable especially because of the dense population and close living quarters, which increases potential for any virus transmission."

"If infected poultry birds are transported to the city regularly with the current unhygienic condition of our kitchen markets and practice of poultry processing, it would be a very hard task to contain the situation if the deadly disease strikes," he warned.

"When a case of infection is identified, all chickens around one square kilometre area have to be destroyed, which is literally impossible in Dhaka city," the professor said.

According to the Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock, so far bird flu has been detected in around 27 farms in Dhaka including Demra, Peelkhana, Lalbagh, Sabujbah, Mirpur and Savar. Besides, there are five such farms in Gazipur, which are not far from the capital.

Around 1.75 lakh to 2 lakh chickens are consumed in the city every day. To meet the need of the city consumers, truckloads of chickens arrive at night in the city's main wholesale markets at Kaptanbazar, Karwan Bazar, Nimali, New Market, Siphahibag and Mirpur section-1 from across the country. Business transaction in these markets takes place at night.

During a visit to the city's main kitchen markets, Karwan Bazar, New Market, Hatirpul and Mirpur section-1, this correspondent found signs of cleanliness efforts but it seems not enough to deal with the possible dangerous situation. Smaller kitchen markets in various neighbourhoods in and around the city are not getting any attention.

Live chickens are still kept in a very unhygienic condition in the markets. Faeces, feathers, blood and other wastes are left at the markets in a scattered manner. Mechanised de-feathering is still going on. These are all major conditions for spreading germs, experts said.

Despite campaign in the media, poultry sellers and the

owners and employees of poultry farms still lack basic knowledge of how to handle a situation involving bird flu.

Most of them are still oblivious of the fatality involving bird flu. Sellers said they had about it but does not think it is serious. Some think it is all a hoax. Not a single seller and workers were found wearing protective mask or gloves.

"If I wear mask my customers will think my chickens must be infected otherwise why would I be protecting myself? I don't want to scare away all my customers," said Mohammad Billal Hossain, a poultry seller at Karwan Bazar sitting right beside a pile of faeces and feathers.

Another poultry seller Amzad Hossain said, "We heard about bird flu last year. We had bad

business just for a few days and then it all got normal. I haven't seen anyone falling sick after getting near a chicken so far."

These are a few comments made by poultry sellers in the city at a time when the authorities have issued alert in parts of the country to tackle Avian Influenza.

Professor Rahman advised, "To reduce human exposure to

the virus it is most important to wear facemasks and gloves during the handling of poultry and poultry products."

Kitchen markets must be cleaned with disinfectants two times a day and poultry wastes have to be buried or burned. Poultry handlers in the market or at home must wash their hands several times. But these important things are still not being followed by sellers or customers.

Meanwhile, the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC), responsible for monitoring all city kitchen markets, has instructed that no live chicken be sold at the markets. Sellers were instructed to process meat in a separate corner of the market and keep that corner clean all the time, which is hardly being followed anywhere in the city.

Dr Md Azmat Ali, the chief veterinary officer of DCC, however said, "Without proper law this rule cannot be enforced. Besides, kitchen markets in Dhaka do not have proper infrastructures to follow such measures."

"For now DCC can only try the self-motivation programme so that the sellers play their own part. We had a discussion with poultry sellers of the city on January 26 about how to deal with possible bird flu situation," he added.

DCC has also prohibited mobile poultry vendors from selling poultry in the city's residential areas in a bid to control contamination. However, selling and buying from vendors is going on undisturbed in the residential areas.

Both the vendors and their customers mostly belonging to the underprivileged segment ignore any measures. Slum dwellers are in fact consuming chickens more than ever as the vendors are offering chicken at a reduced price.

Because of the bird flu situation price of broiler chicken has decreased in the market. Price of one kilo was around Tk 90 before the outbreak and now it sells at around Tk 60. People are opting for local breeds thinking that it is safer. This has increased the price of local breeds.

Azmat Ali said, "It would be completely wrong to assume that local breeds will be safer. In the kitchen markets all the chickens are kept in a cramped condition increasing the possibility of spreading the disease to all the birds."

"It is true that broiler chickens have less immunity. But local breeds are not often vaccinated properly so they too are prone to bird flu," he added.

Ali requested the customers not to buy poultry birds from street vendors. He advised the people not to allow such vendors to sell poultry in their localities. The wholesalers should not to sell poultry to such vendors, he said.

Bird flu has been detected in 30 out of the 64 districts across the country. About 3,57,197 birds have been culled since the first case was detected in February 2007.



A seller without gloves or mask at a kitchen market.

De-feathering can be deadly



Dangerous de-feathering on at Karwan Bazar.

The latest deadly strain H5N1 commonly known as bird flu spreads into human when they come in direct contact with birds such as chickens, ducks or wild birds (living or dead) infected by the flu virus.

Bird flu can spread during slaughtering and de-feathering of birds, and processing and preparation of the poultry for cooking.

It is also possible that coming into contact with droppings and nasal drips of infected birds could spread the virus to human beings.

According to World Health Organisation, since the H5N1 outbreaks started in 2003 this new health menace has so far claimed 216 lives all over the world, including at least 95 in Asia, most of them in Indonesia and Vietnam.

The symptoms of bird flu in human beings are very similar to the common flu symptoms and are therefore ignored. The worse threat about bird flu is that it may mutate into a new human influenza virus against which humans have no immunity.



Health workers spraying disinfectant on chickens at a poultry shop.

Dead chickens still on sale

Dead chickens are still being sold in Kaptanbazar, the biggest wholesale poultry market in the city, every night, sources said.

These dead chickens are usually bought by mobile vendors at a very low price who later sell the products in the city's residential and slum areas. Some hotels and roadside restaurants are regular customers of these dead chickens.

Abul Hossain Patwari, general secretary, Kaptanbazar Poultry Baboshayee Samity said, "A section of the poultry businessmen at Kaptanbazar are involved in this shady trade."

"Truckloads of sick chickens are being transported in the city every night. Many chickens die on the way to Dhaka. They are being sold before dawn."

Truckloads of chickens arrive at Kaptanbazar every night from across the county to meet the need of the city dwellers. Business transactions finish in this market by 7:00am.

Chief Veterinary Officer of Dhaka City Corporation Azmat Ali said, "DCC can only inspect market condition and try to motivate the poultry businessmen. We don't have any power to enforce the restriction."

Patwari on the other hand said, "We informed local police to look into the matter but they did not pay heed to our request."

Moreover, for protesting the sale of dead chickens a few days ago he was physically and verbally abused by the dishonest sellers.



GULSHAN SOUTH PARK DEVELOPMENT DCC fails to say 'no' to food court nuisance

TAWFIQUE ALI

At long last, the Gulshan South Park is going to be developed as a green public park but the authorities have trickily kept provision for a food court within the park.

A high-level advisory committee of Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) approved the architectural plan on January 14 for its development.

Shirin Shila, joint general secretary of Gulshan Society, said the presence of a commercial food court in the park is unacceptable. "We don't want any stuff like food court within a green public park," she said.

"We in Gulshan are already fed-up with nuisance of food courts and restaurants in the residential neighborhood. The only way out now seems to go to court for rectification."

The DCC's development plan for South Park contradicts its earlier action of building a 6 feet high solid boundary wall with ceramic bricks, as the authorities are now going to reduce the wall to 2.5 feet high with a see-through iron grill fencing above.

Following eviction of an illegal settlement of DCC's sweeper colony, the DCC authorities obstinately built the six feet high solid boundary wall defying protest of the local residents and environmentalists.

The park, also known as Taltala Park, had been illegally

occupied with the settlement of 416 sweeper families of DCC for long 25 years, though the Rajdhan Unnayan Kartipakha (Rajuk) entrusted DCC with its maintenance as a public park.

The park was freed from illegal occupancy in October 2005 but the DCC authorities seemed to be dubious in developing it as a green park. They moved to use the land for commercial purposes, despite clear directives from the Prime Minister's Office and repeated pressures from the Ministry of Housing and Public Works.

DCC Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka earlier told the Star City that their plan was to build a community centre at the site of Taltala Park alongside a green park.

In the wake of public outcry, the DCC was compelled to undertake a plan for the park's development. But the advisory committee on DCC park development, headed by noted academic Prof Serajul Islam, turned down DCC's proposed plans several times.

Finally, the committee accepted architectural design prepared by DCC's town planning section in cooperation with the engineering section.

DCC's Chief Town Planner Sirjaul Islam said the committee approved the plan on January 14 including proposals for developing a green belt, a children corner

equipped with non-mechanised rides, tree plantation and a corner for the blind.

The architectural design also includes provision for car parking, a swimming pool, drainage system, lighting design and sitting arrangements.

"We hope to start the development work by February," said Sirjaul Islam.

He said, "We will dismantle the existing six feet high solid boundary wall leaving two and a half feet height at the base with a see-through iron grill fencing above up to eye level so that the park remains visible from outside."

The DCC took over the land from the Rajuk in 1982 to develop it as a park.

DCC is entrusted with the development and maintenance of around 50 public parks and playgrounds in the capital but it has consistently facilitated encroachment and destruction of them denying the city dwellers openspaces.

State of most of the public parks is now deplorable.

Following a public interest litigation filed by Gulshan Society, a High Court bench on December 15, 2006 issued a rule on the DCC and its chief executive officer to explain why they should not be directed to refrain from using the Gulshan South park for any purposes other than developing and maintaining it as a green park.

QUEUE FOR NATIONAL IDENTITY CARDS



Voters in long queue collecting national identity cards in Uttara Friday. The distribution of the cards is being held at the office of the Uttara Kalyan Samity at Sector 5.