

Motijheel in downtown was built during the Mughal period. During the time there was a big Mahal for Mirja Mohammad which housed a large pond known as Sukaku Mahal's pond. The area was later named Motijheel. A mazar called Shahjalal's mazar where fairs were organised existed. Motijheel and Dilkusha gardens were in the same place earlier. The road dividing the two places was constructed during the British rule.

Chickens, eggs back on the menu

SHAHNAZ PARVEEN

After a few months break consumers in the city are again opting for chickens and eggs as the bird flu scare is diminishing fast.

Sellers at kitchen markets said their sale of poultry, both live and dressed, is slowly recovering.

Chicken and egg went off the menu most of Bangladesh households after bird flu infested almost half of the poultry farms around the country. Most of the restaurants also stopped serving chicken items.

Jahanara Aktar, a customer at Karwan Bazar said, "We haven't heard of anyone in Bangladesh dying of bird flu. Children like chicken. So it is back on our menu."

"Vegetable, beef and fish sellers are taking advantage of bird flu situation and increased the prices," said Alek Munshi, another customer at the same market who bought broiler chicken from a store.

"Since it is safe to eat cooked poultry and egg and everything else is pricey too, so why not bring it back in the menu," he added.

Price of chicken however is still high -- especially the local breeds are costlier.

At Karwan Bazar one kilogram of local breed chicken costs about Tk 180 while broiler chicken Tk 90. Superstores in the capital are charging around Tk 225 for one kilo dressed chicken.

According to the Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock, around 150,000 poultry farms in Bangladesh produce 320,000 tonnes of meat and over five million eggs annually.

According to the Bangladesh chapter of the World Poultry Science Association (WPSA), in October 2007 monthly consumption of poultry meat in Bangladesh was around 26,600 tonnes, which came down to 12,000 tonnes during the four-month period until February 2008, marking a fall of nearly 55 percent.

Total loss incurred by the poultry industry is more than Tk 4,200 crore. Bird flu has been confirmed at farms and households in 47 out of 64 districts.

Sources at the Department of Livestock Services said bird flu infection is gradually easing up.

In February around 93 farms were infested, which came down to 60 in March.

"We are hoping the situation will improve with warmer weather approaching," said a high official from the department. Easing up bird flu condition and improved sale are raising hopes among the poultry farm owners and businessmen.

Abul Hossain Patowari, general secretary, Kaptanbazar Poultry Baboshayee Samiti, said, "We had to deal with a serious blow during the last few months. The sale at Kaptanbazar had decreased around 40 percent during the period."

Patowari added that before bird flu episode Kaptanbazar used to receive more than 100 truckloads of live chickens a day from across the country.

"The sale is not like before, but it is improving very slowly. There is a high demand for local breeds," he said.

Md Sirajul Hoque Bhuiyan, general manager, Aftab Poultry, said, "The awareness campaign on TV, radio and in newspapers seems to be effective."

"Our main customers including top hotels, restaurants, fast food and mega shops almost stopped taking dressed chickens but they are back with us," he added.

In February Aftab sold around 33,000 kgs of chicken, which increased to 80,000 kgs this month.

Zakir Hossain, deputy manager (retail and customer care), Kazi Farms, said, "We experienced a slump in sales in January. Now there are chances that the market will be stable gradually as the people's negative attitude is changing fast."

Kazi has eight retail outlets and home delivery services in the city, which sold about 63,000 live chickens this month. The sale was only 25,000 in January.

With the sales improving, market hygiene situation is back in its original condition.

Apart from a few major markets, poultry waste is not being taken care of properly in most kitchen markets around the city. Poultry sellers still care very little about personal safety and continue to work manually without safety gears.



Chicken sale has started recovering from slump as the bird flu fear is diminishing fast.

PLOTS ENCROACHING ON GULSHAN-BANANI-BARIDHARA LAKE

Rajuk's compromising stance alleged

TAWFIQUE ALI

The authorities have taken a compromising stance in implementing the development project on the Gulshan-Banani-Baridhara Lake to accommodate the plots created encroaching on the water body during past two decades, alleged sources at Rajuk and environmentalists.

Rajdhani Unnayan

Kartripakha (Rajuk), implementing agency of the project, submitted a Tk 327.15 crore (revised) development project in September and out of the total project cost Tk 297.42 crore has been proposed for land acquisition alone.

Meanwhile, Rajuk has undertaken construction of walkway along the lake banks under a Tk 5-crore project. But rampant

encroachments into the lake are forcing the under-construction pathway to take a deviated course.

Asked about the plots created within the lake area, Rajuk Chairman KAM Haroon said, "Nothing can be done where structures have been built. We are going on with the construction of walkway accommodating the existing physical conditions."

Mubasshar Hussain, president of the Institute of Architects Bangladesh (IAB), said that the government should cancel allotments of those plots created encroaching on the lake.

"Anyone responsible for creating plots earth-filling into the lake and for official allotment of those must be brought to book through detailed investigation," he said.

Prof Nazrul Islam, honorary chairman of the Centre for Urban Studies (CUS) and chairman of the University Grants Commission, said there are examples that the government can rectify many wrongdoings if it intends.

According to sources at Rajuk, all concerned with the task of protecting the lake have been beneficiaries of the encroachments. Naturally, demarcation and conservation of the water body have all along been mere eyewash.

Almost all the plot owners on the lake bank have encroached upon the lake, grabbing land in addition to their original allotment of 5 kathas. Many plot owners presently possess up to 10 to 12 kathas, the sources said.

Rajuk itself has created plots earth filling into the lake and officially allotted extra land created encroaching on the lake by powerful land grabbers, they said.

The issue of land acquisition is a very tricky game that involves a strong syndicate of powerful land grabbers, developers and a section of Rajuk officials.

"In most cases, it is a messy situation of requisition and derequisition with the plot claimants holding forged documents," said an expert, who has worked on this particular lake. "The ploy yields a huge amount

of public money for the plot claimants."

Prof Muzaffer Ahmad, president of the environmentalist group Bapa, said, "Past experiences show that Rajuk's walkway itself is a way of facilitating encroachment."

Architect Iqbal Habib, whose architectural consulting firm Vitti Sthapati Brindo was hired for the lake's development project in 2000, said that the walkway itself now has been built earth filling into the lake in most cases.

Almost all the land on the lake bank and that created by earth filling have been converted into plots and allotted by Rajuk, he said.

"Government's compromising stance to accommodate encroachment on the lake will only inspire the encroachers and land grabbers," he said.

Rajuk has been changing alignment of the lake area to facilitate its trade of housing plots reducing the lake area substantially time and again, alleged Iqbal. "It does not have any specifically defined layout of the water body."

Following a Public Interest Litigation filed by Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (BELA) in 1999, the Supreme Court certified a layout map of the Gulshan Lake and directed the government to maintain it.



Mushrooming makeshift structures occupying a portion of the Gulshan-Banani-Baridhara Lake at Shahjapur point.

STAR PHOTO

Super fast hassle-free money transfer

Special counters at local post offices soon to do the job in 'just 10 minutes'

CITY CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka dwellers will soon be able to enjoy speedy and secure electronic money transfer at the local post offices thanks to a joint venture between the Postal Department and Western Union.

Under a five-year contract with the Postal Department, the internationally famed money transferring company will soon open special counters in designated post offices so that people can easily collect remittances sent from abroad.

The venture aims to alleviate hassles and remove insecurities in transferring money or making payments in both local and international addresses, sources said.

"We are trying to take the Postal Department to a new level so that the general people can get better services and more benefits," said an official at the General Post Office (GPO).

Initially, around 30 post offices will operate special coun-

ters to handle money-transferring jobs. Besides the capital, another 420 post offices throughout the country will also offer similar services.

"As per the contract, we are launching our services through 450 post offices in Bangladesh in the first phase. The number of such postal Western Union money receiving points will increase gradually," said Anil Kapur, managing director of Western Union for South Asia.

Under the project, the designated postal offices will run the special money transferring desks for the next 5 years. Usual fees will be collected by the Western Union while the Postal Department will receive 25 percent in commission from the money-transferring organisation.

Western Union's electronic money transfer system allows a person to collect money sent from any part of the globe within 10 minutes. The recipients do not require having any

bank account or so to collect the amount.

"It can be termed as a super fast hassle free method to transfer money and remittances," said a General Post Office (GPO) spokesperson.

According to the sources at the GPO, the Postal Department is awaiting the Bangladesh Bank to sanction a reserve account for Western Union. Once endorsed, the Postal Department will then transact the money through a state-run bank, preferably the Sonali Bank.

"We only deal in local currency. That is why we will need the assistance of a bank to convert foreign currencies into taka," said A K M Rafiqul Alam, Additional Director of the Postal Department.

The new scheme comes at a time when the postal department's services are experiencing sharp decline with the advent of efficient and convenient alternatives. Majority of Dhaka dwellers these days consider

postal services as outdated and awkward.

Sources at the General Post Office (GPO) however claimed that the venture with the Western Union is the beginning of the postal department's pursuit for more efficiency and better services.

"It is needless to say that the postal department have been lagging behind when it comes to technology and innovation. But, the Postal Department is still one of the most trusted and secure means for money orders and remittances," said an official at the GPO.

Postal Department Director General Mobassherur Rahman brackets the venture as a boiling point in delivering services to people.

"Now people will be more encouraged to transact money in legitimate ways rather than using illegal and murky means," said Mobassherur Rahman.

Bangladesh Postal Department has a tremendous reach over each and every cor-

ner of the country. Teaming up with such a gigantic organisation will allow us to expand our services to a huge population," said Anil Kapur, adding that the Western Union will provide logistic support to the Postal Department.

According to sources, each of the designated post offices will deploy specially trained officials who will be responsible for overseeing the money transferring process. These officials receive training from the Western Union to ensure efficient services.

"Since we are specialised in providing money transferring services, we are optimistic that our participation in the process will be of considerable help to everyone, especially the people living in the rural areas," said Anil Kapur.

Postal officials believe that the general people would be greatly benefited from this new service at post offices.

"While the main purpose of the project was to make it easy

for villagers to receive money remitted by expatriate Bangladeshis, everyone will benefit from it in time of need," said a GPO spokesperson.

"It will be really helpful if I can collect the money from the local post office," said Masudur Rahman, a resident of Tongi who has a son working in a middle-east country. He travels all the way from Tongi to Dhaka to receive the money.

"This is undoubtedly a good decision of the Postal Department. A lot of people like myself will surely benefit from it," said Rehnuma Akter. Rehnuma's husband works in Malaysia. "We hope their service will be able to keep the reputations of a private organisation like the Western Union," she added.

Earlier, the Postal Department also made a similar contract with the Department of Immigration and Passport (DIP) for easing the process of pass-

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.

"There is no famine in the country. The prices of essentials have gone up following the price-hike on the international market ... this is not unusual."

-- Mirza Azizul Islam
Finance Adviser

Told newsmen when asked whether there is any famine in the country, on Friday. Source: The Daily Star

"It is not possible to guard the entire railway lines 24 hours a day."

-- Mohammad Abul Kashem
Chief Engineer, Bangladesh Railway

Told a reporter after criminals stole 3,510 rail's metal clips between Banani and Cantonment railway stations putting trains at risk of accident, on Friday. Source: The Daily Star

"We apologise for we could not hold the trial of war criminals while in power."

-- AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury
President, Bikalpathara Bangladesh

Said at a discussion at the Dhaka Reporters' Unity, on Friday. Source: The Daily Star

"Price hike of rice in such a way would not have happened if the government had recognised the problem on time and imported food when its price was low."

-- Prof Qazi Kholiquzzaman
President, Bangladesh Economic Association

Told a reporter, on Saturday. Source: The Daily Star

"Despite huge allegations against the politicians, now it is proved that only politicians can run the country properly."

-- Maj (Rtd) Hafizuddin Ahmed

Acting secretary general of the pro-Saifur faction of BNP
Said at a discussion at a community centre at Gulshan, on Monday. Source: The Daily Star

"It's not a matter of poverty but consciousness. If everyone is aware citizens can bring a lot of change."

-- John E Core

An Air Quality Monitoring Project (AQMP) consultant from Portland, one of the cleanest cities of USA
Told a reporter when asked about the air quality of Dhaka, on Wednesday. Source: The Daily Star

"Do not ever forget Operation Searchlight on March 25, 1971. Do not ever forget the genocide that took place that night."

-- JFR Jacob

Visiting retired Indian general who took part in the Liberation War
Told a journalist, on Thursday. Source: The Daily Star

Compiled by Durdana Ghias