



The Portuguese were the first among Europeans to step into Dhaka lured by its wealth aiming at only doing business. They set up many Kuthis (structures) here. However, it was the British who stayed in Dhaka for long. There was no relation between the Portuguese in Dhaka and those in Arakan and Swandip.

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Potteries on pavement

Growing street-side business of earthen, terracotta showpieces encouraging potters

SHAHNAZ PARVEEN

The street-side business of potters and terracotta showpieces are flourishing in the city helping hundreds of potters revive the traditional craftsmanship.

The biggest market of potters is located near Doel Chattar adjacent to Dhaka University campus, which stretches all the way to the High Court gate. There are several other street-side markets in Dhanmondi-6 on Mirpur Road, Dhanmondi-32 and also near Mirpur-10 roundabout.

A dazzling collection of terracotta items attracts enthusiasts from all walks of life as well as foreign tourists. The shops also sell showpieces made of wood, bamboo, jute, cane and ceramic, often stealing business from established boutique shops.

Traders said business at Doel Chattar started in early 1980s. A few people were involved at that time. Today there are around 70 shops in the makeshift market operating on the pavement.

Majibar Rahman, a vendor at Dhanmondi Road-6 said, "People used to prefer foreign decorative items even a few years ago. But pottery and terracotta showpieces have found their way back as their popularity is growing among the city people in recent times."

Earlier, only tubs for houseplants were the main item sold in these street-side shops. Now terracotta showpieces such as small sculptures, wall hanging, effigies of famous persons, animal figures, vase, ashtray,



Pottery items with artistic decoration put on display for sale near Doel Chattar.

A dazzling collection of pottery items attracts enthusiasts from all walks of life as well as foreign tourists. The shops also sell showpieces made of wood, bamboo, jute, cane and ceramic, often stealing business from established boutique shops.

candle stand and pen stand are the most popular items.

Most of the pottery products come from Barisal, Comilla, Faridpur and from places surrounding Dhaka including Dhamrai, Savar and Nabinagar.

Jute and wooden items on the other hand come from Bogra, Narsingdi, Rangpur and Kaliakoir, Majibar told Star City. "The traditional pottery of the country was almost on the verge of extinction. Today many of the potters are back in business as we are helping to sell their products," he said.

The sellers said they place order to the potters as per the

customers' demand. Some of the products available here are faulty items that did not make their way to established shops. However, it would be hard to identify the faults of the products as they are minor and the products are almost perfect, sellers claim.

Mofijul Islam, a vendor at Doel Chattar said apart from individual buyers major business comes from decorators these days. "Street side vendors are the main supplier of decorative items for wedding ceremonies, Gaye Halud, office decoration and various stage shows," he said.

Mofijul mentioned that the biggest sale takes place during festivals like Pahela Baishakh (Bangla New Year) and other such traditional Bangladeshi festivals. Other major customers are the film industry, theatre and package drama people.

The price of pottery varies according to the intricacy of design, size and rarity of the product. The price ranges from Tk 30 to 500, sometimes even more," he said.

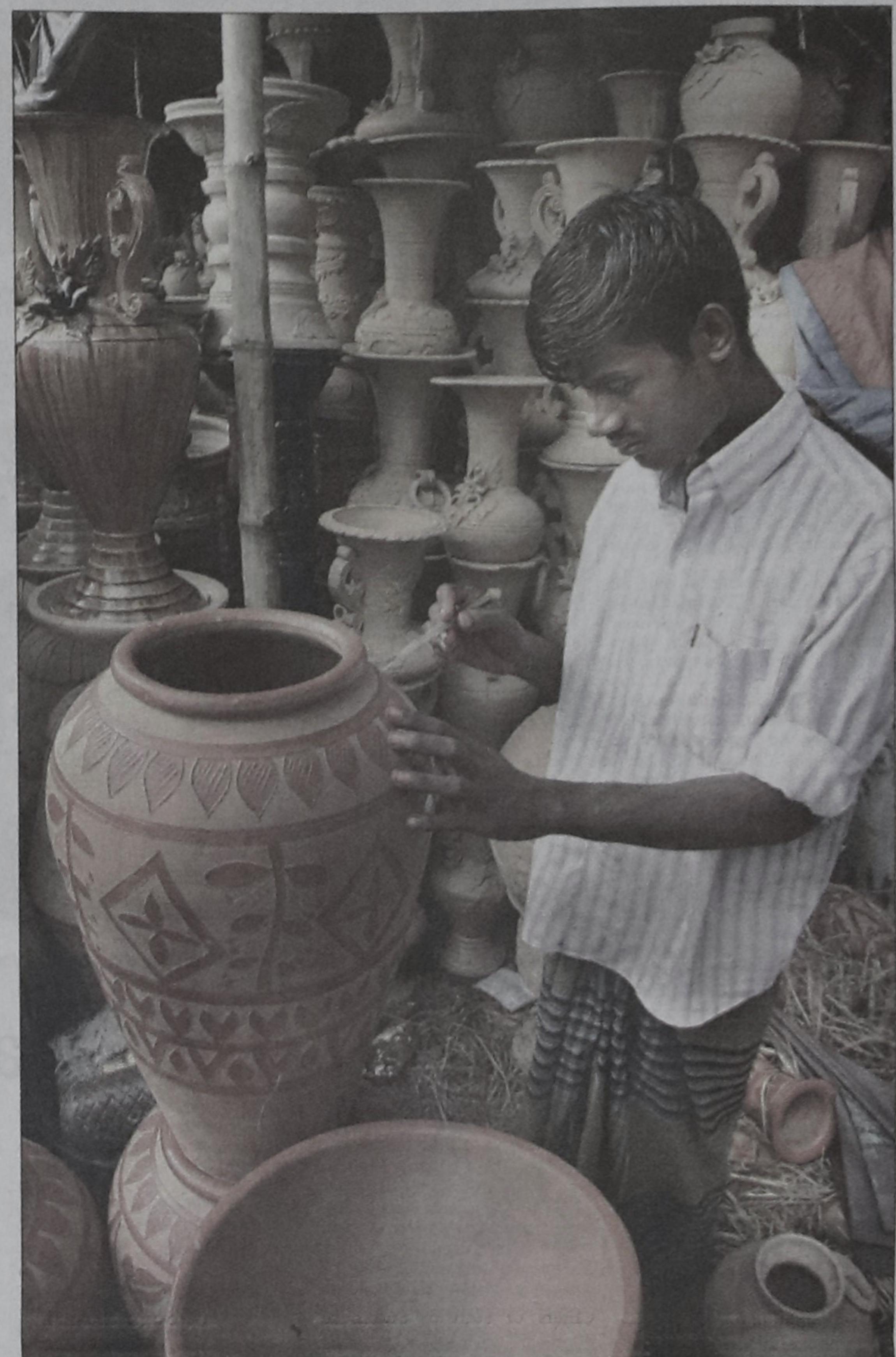
Most vendors make a sale of around Tk 2,000 to 5,000 per day. Shukur Ali Matbor, another vendor at Doel Chattar said the business has several setbacks that need to be addressed.

"We run our business from

the footpath as we have small investment. Although Dhaka City Corporation gave us permission to operate here, the fear of eviction always remains. It happened many times in the past," he said.

"The business is now quite good and growing but we suffer a lot during rain or storm. If we had a permanent market like the hawkers market at Gulistan the business will flourish even more," he said.

Most traders mentioned extortion as a major problem. Every street-side hawker has to pay a monthly amount otherwise they will face eviction, the traders said.



SYED ZAHR NASSIM

Security search causes nuisance for busy commuters

CITY CORRESPONDENT

The police check posts, set up to ensure safety of commuters and passer-by in city streets, have been a source of inconvenience for busy commuters.

Many people have alleged 'unnecessary harassment' by law enforcers at these check posts.

Haidar Ali, a resident of Tongi, a town to the north of the city, would certainly be one to agree.

On a sunny Sunday morning Haidar Ali arrived at the city for a job interview in an office at Mohakhali. He hopped up in an autorickshaw from Notun Bazar with a hope to get to the place in time.

As his autorickshaw was scooting its way through Banani, Haidar said, a police officer at a check post signalled the driver to pull over.

In the next half hour that followed, the lanky, soft-spoken Haidar had to go through a series of questions. He had to wait around for a while as the officers checked some other vehicles and commuters.

Haidar was finally let off after a body search and a peek inside his belongings.

"I was really nervous," said Haidar Mia, "I heard a lot of unpleasant things about the policemen in Dhaka."

By the time Haidar arrived at his interviewer's office that day, his appointment had already been called off for being late.

"Why did it have to happen on that very day on that specific time?" Haidar said with a tone of desperation.

"Anyone would agree that most of the people they interrogate turn out to be harmless commuters. It is the criminals that get away without even the slightest glare from them [police officers]," said Monjurul Kader, a resident of Baridhara.

Even a few years ago, police

searches in city avenues may have seemed unusual in free-wheeling Dhaka city but with rising reports of mugging, extortion, kidnap and even murder in broad daylight, random police searches have drawn grudging acceptance from commuters.

In the last few years, Dhaka dwellers have grown accustomed to a city with grim-faced police officers clutching batons and firearms to their chests.



Random security checks are usually greeted with grudging acceptance by commuters.

There have been increased use of ID cards and electronic scanners in office building lobbies while asking for opening bags for a search at shopping centres and libraries are quite common.

As part of different measures to curb crime in the city, law enforcement agencies are operating 102 regular check posts and 49 special checkpoints

throughout the city.

Reportedly, six of the check-points are located at the entry and exit points of the city.

"Checks are conducted to keep a close eye on the street conduct. The officers deployed in the check posts are instructed to monitor what is happening around them. They are also instructed to interrogate anyone who appears to be suspicious," said an official from the

checkpoints.

However, the idea of pulling over the car in the middle of a rush to the office or school can be anything but convenient to many, especially those requiring to reach somewhere within a specific time.

"I have to admit that some people may feel inconvenienced due to these procedures, but this is for the sake of safety of general people. We

Hossain, a Gulshan resident who had to face long interrogations at police check points twice over past two years.

"A few weeks ago, I was returning home in Mohammadpur at night from my friend's place. On my way home, the officials at Lalmatia checkpoint signalled my autorickshaw to pull over," said Saleh, a student of Dhaka College.

"Apparently they were suspicious because it was quite late. They made me open my guitar case, my bag, and also checked my student identity card before finally letting me go," he said.

Rizvi Hossain, an amateur keyboardist and an undergraduate student, had to go through similar experiences quite a few times.

"As I am a keyboardist, I have to move around in the city with a big coffin-like keyboard case. And people always like to stare at me and my keyboard case," said Rizvi.

Last month, Rizvi was on his way to his friend's place at Banani. He was stopped at the police checkpoint at Tejgaon Link Road. As expected, Rizvi was asked what was inside his case.

"When I said it was a keyboard, the officer looked very confused and inquired further," said Rizvi, "I pondered for a while as to how to explain the object I was carrying with me, when it suddenly hit me. I told him that I was carrying an electronic harmonium."

However, the police officer made Rizvi open his case and pull out his 'electronic harmonium' to prove to the officer that he was indeed carrying a musical instrument and nothing else.

"It took me a while to convince him that I was not carrying anything illegal or harmful. I am sure he had thought I had been carrying a state of the art weapon inside the case," said Rizvi.

Fresh earth filling in Gulshan Lake

CITY CORRESPONDENT

The authorities have started fresh earth-filling in the Gulshan-Banani Lake for construction of a connecting road, in disregard to the environmental laws, a High Court directive and widespread public outcry against the

move.

Md. Haider Ali, project director of the Gulshan-Banani Link Bridge had earlier said that they would start earth removal from lakebed by October 26.

But the project authorities are now filling truckloads of fresh earth into the lake to rebuild road no-35/A to connect one arm of the Y-shaped bridge with Gulshan road-34.

Local Government Engineering Division (LGED) is implementing the project.

The government declared the water body as ecologically in critical state in 2001.

The under-construction approach road between Gulshan road no-35/A and 34 is being built occupying a part of the lake's eastern bank, according to officials concerned.

The Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives (LGRD) ministry has undertaken the bridge project across Gulshan-Banani Lake without carrying out prior environmental impact assessment and environmental clearance.

The project authorities were required to obtain environmental clearance certificate as per Environmental Conservation Act of 1995 and in accordance with rule 7(6) of the Environmental Conservation Rules (ECR) of 1997.

They were also required to carry out a prior Viability Assessment Report, an Initial

Environmental Examination and an Environmental Management Plan, for the

project.

The project authorities earth-filled a huge swath of the lake for construction of ramp, cantilever and approach road of the bridge.

Implementation of the project started in October last year but obtained a site clearance from the department of environment in March this



Gulshan-Banani lake once again falls victim to earth filling in disregard to environmental laws.

keep on checking the vehicles, their passengers and belongings only to prevent unwarranted incidents," said an on-duty policeman at Banani check post.

"Although the security measures are par for the course, I believe a good many people are bound to feel very inconvenienced with the random searches," said Mujaffar