



Empty baskets are stacked and a handful of mango sellers are open for business, *left*, at the Baneshwar fruit market devoid of buyers yesterday. Just six days ago on June 10, before the drive against formalin-tainted fruits began, the very market in Rajshahi was vibrant, *right*, with tonnes of mangoes changing hands.

PHOTO: MOHAMMAD MASUD

DELICACY FOR THE DEPRIVED



PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

The underprivileged reap the benefit after a mobile court has "destroyed" chemically treated mangoes and litchis in Karwan Bazar yesterday.

Kit itself unfit

FROM PAGE 1

various products, including tobacco smoke, dyes, carpets, building materials and furniture. Some amount of natural formaldehyde also exists in fish, fruits and vegetables, he said.

"Fruit ripening agent ethephon is widely used. But its level after 24 hours of use gets very low. It is not harmful below 2ppm. So, should the farmer or trader be punished if the very device reads high level of ethephon?"

In Bangladesh, mobile courts put the food items in a polythene packet and measure formalin inside it with the handheld device.

Monirul Islam said if fruits, fish or vegetables are put in a polythene packet, there could be chemical polyethylene glycol emerging from the polythene. This might interfere with the reading.

The device comes under question at a time when mobile courts and DMP are conducting drives to check formalin use which has created widespread panic among consumers.

"I am totally scared of fruits in Dhaka, and have stopped buying mangoes and litchis. Now we are trying to buy fruits directly from our village home in Dinajpur," said Dina Farhana, a nutritionist working at an NGO.

She said children and pregnant women who need to eat fruits daily are suffering the most in nutritional terms, and urgent action is required to prevent a mixing of toxic chemicals, which causes various health hazards.

The mobile courts in their drives across the country destroyed nearly nine tonnes of fish, some seven tonnes of fruits, 480 litres of milk after "detecting formalin" in the two years since April 2012.

Besides, joint teams of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) and Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institution (BSTI) from Tuesday started checking all the consignments of fruits at eight entry points of the capital. These teams also use Formaldehyde Meter Z-300.

SELLERS SET OUT TO BE GOOD



PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

Fearing mobile court drives, fruit sellers of Pallabi in Mirpur keep their shops closed and try to hold a meeting to decide not to sell formalin-tainted fruits.

NO SCIENTIFIC ASSESSMENT?

The Department of Fisheries (DoF) first imported the instrument through international tender from the US manufacturer, Environmental Sensors Co, under a project titled Control of Formalin Use in Fish Preservation and Mass Awareness Campaign in early 2012.

In the initial stage of the project in 2011, the DoF had signed a memorandum of understanding to buy over 16,000 formalin detection kits developed by the Bangladesh Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (BCSIR), commonly known as the Science Laboratory.

"We found the Science Laboratory [BCSIR] kit is not able to detect formalin below 5ppm. So, we had decided to import a digital device that can measure the toxic substance anywhere," said Dr GM Shamsul Kabir, director of formalin control project.

The digital device can measure formalin from 0-34 parts per million (ppm) and at -20 C° to +40 C°. Also, it

is easy to use, he added.

Under the three-year project involving Tk 5 crore, they bought 80 devices at a cost of Tk 1 crore and distributed them to every division and district of the country for the mobile courts to conduct drives.

Asked if any technical committee had recommended importing the instrument, Dr Kabir said, "The fisheries department did it. Everybody on the steering committee of the project also approved it."

The steering committee was comprised of officials from the ministries of fisheries and planning but none from any scientific organisations. The then fisheries ministry secretary Ujjwal Bikash Dutta chaired the committee.

On Monirul Islam's findings, Kabir said, "If he [Monirul] has found something, he should share with us. Scattered remarks are not expected."

Nasima Khan, principal scientific officer at the Institute of Food Science & Technology of BCSIR, said they did not get any invitation from the DoF in

CLOSED FOR BUSINESS



PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Workers sleep next to empty crates of fruits at Karwan Bazar fruit market as mobile court drives put many shops temporarily out of business.

this regard.

"We are hundred percent confident about our kit. At the field level, it can measure formalin from 5ppm. At the laboratory, the range starts from 2ppm," she said about the kit developed by BCSIR.

She refused to make any comment on the imported machine.

However, following in the footsteps of DoF, the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industries (FBCCI), Dhaka City Corporation, Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP), the Directorate of Consumers Rights also purchased Formaldehyde Meter Z-300 from Tracer Electrocom Bangladesh, the lone importer of the tool.

Helal Uddin, vice president of FBCCI, said the tool even gives reading of formalin when kept at an office room where there were no fruits or vegetables.

He said the DMP, which has started massive inspection at the entry points of Dhaka, should not destroy fruits on

the basis of tests done by the instrument.

"The fruits should be sent to the Science Lab or the BSTI for tests before destruction," Helal Uddin said.

Dhaka University Pharmaceutical Technology Professor ABM Faroque observed that the formalin detection kit developed by the BCSIR was more than enough.

"The problem of formalin is getting bigger. Does that mean that now we will all be importing the expensive kits from abroad? I do not think so," he said.

He said industrial and lab demand of formalin in Bangladesh is no more than 100 tonnes.

According to the National Board of Revenue, formalin import in 2011-12 was 205 tonnes, 24 percent less than in the previous fiscal year.

"After import, formalin is sold to the small shops, especially hardware shops. Tell the mobile courts to raid those shops to stop its widespread use," Faroque said.

Cambodian PM arrives

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Red carpet was rolled out as Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen arrived yesterday morning on a three-day official visit to Dhaka.

He was received by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport around 9:50am.

Later, Hasina introduced the Cambodian PM with her ministers, the chiefs of the three services, other senior civil and military officials at the VVIP terminal of the airport.

The Cambodian prime minister is leading a 27-member team that includes Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Hor Namhong, Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Oku Rabun, Minister of Culture and Fine Arts Phoeuring Sackona, and several other ministers and senior government officials.

The Cambodian delegation was then taken to Sonargaon Hotel.

Later in the afternoon, Hun Sen visited the National Mausoleum in Savar where he placed floral wreath, signed visitors' book and planted a sapling. He also visited Dhaka EPZ.

The Cambodian PM spent some time at Dharmarajik Buddha Maha Bihar at Sabujbagh in the capital. Later, he joined a dinner hosted by the Federation of Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI).

Commerce Minister Tofail Ahmed and State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shahriar Alam will call on Hun Sen separately at Sonargaon Hotel today.

The Cambodian PM will also visit Bangabandhu Memorial Museum at Dhanmondi and place wreath at the

SEE PAGE 9 COL 4

It's poorly planned

FROM PAGE 1

Agriculture at the AKM Giasuddin Milky Auditorium in Khamarbari.

The speakers at the seminar said while there were reported presence of formalin and chemicals in fruits, none has exactly been able to pinpoint the level of their acceptability. The destruction of the seasonal fruits was unreasonable, they said.

The Dhaka Metropolitan Police had set up eight check points around Dhaka to prevent formalin-tainted fruits entering the capital. Since Friday, it also began drives in city markets.

The DMP was destroying tonnes of formalin-tainted fruits, mainly mango and litchi, the two major seasonal fruits.

Anwar Faruque said agriculture scientists have not been consulted before such a drive.

He said farmers would lose interest in investing in fruit cultivation in the coming years and ultimately people would be deprived of nutrition.

Enamul Hoque, former director general of the Department of Agricultural Extension, claimed that farmers usually do not use formalin in mangoes but they sometimes use a small amount of ripening agents, carbide or ethephon.

"These are gaseous and soluble. Even, formalin is soluble. If one washes the fruits before consumption, it is free of danger," he claimed, terming the drive poorly planned.

He suggested that agriculture officials be included in the drives.

Kamal Uddin, executive chairman of Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council, said preservatives are used

in storing foods, fruits and pickles and it is nothing new.

The problem was the level of their application, he said.

Agriculture ministry Joint Secretary Mosharraf Hossain said, "It is necessary that scientists, relevant ministries, farmers, traders and civil society members look at the issue seriously and find a solution."

Addressing as chief guest at the inaugural session, LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Syed Ashrafur Islam urged all to plant more fruit-bearing trees to ensure nutrition for all.

Agriculture Minister Matia Chowdhury said more agro-processing industries were needed to be set up to expand fruit cultivation, which could meet nutritional demand and earn foreign currency.

Vacation of schools

FROM PAGE 16

Bangladesh Coast Guard Act-2014 with a provision of capital punishment for mutiny offences.

The proposed law has been approved to make the Coast Guard a disciplined, skilled and effective force, Cabinet Secretary M Mosharraf Hossain Bhuiyan told reporters after the meeting.

The law has outlined steps for various mutiny-related offences, trial procedures, formation of court martial and provision for appeal, among others, he said.

The previous law, formulated in 1994, was incomplete as there was

no specific directive about discipline among Coast Guard members, Mosharraf said.

While drafting the new law, assistance has been taken from the newly-formulated Border Guard Bangladesh Act, the Navy, and Ministry of Public Administration.

The cabinet also directed the authorities concerned to review the draft and make necessary suggestions before sending it to the law ministry for vetting, he said.

The cabinet meeting fixed the office hours during Ramadan for government, semi-government,

autonomous and semi-autonomous organisations from 9:00am to 3:30pm, with a 15-minute break from 1:15pm for Johr prayers.

The Supreme Court, banks, insurances and financial institutes, railway, post offices, hospitals and other emergency service-providing organisations will fix their time schedule according to their regulations.

The cabinet also approved a proposal for the signing of two agreements with Cambodia during Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen's ongoing visit to Dhaka.

Japan provides

FROM PAGE 1

He also said implementation of all the projects, under Japan's 35th official development assistance loan package, and BIG-B would pose a series of challenges to Bangladesh.

"But they also present an unprecedented opportunity for change. There is much sea for Bangladesh to sail across, but Jica will always be with you. Let us set out on a new voyage for a brighter future," Tanaka said.

The power plant at Matarbari will start supplying electricity to the national grid by 2022, according to a press release of the ERD.

Jica and ERD signed four other projects.

As per one of the agreements, Japan will provide \$231 million for a project aimed at enhancing the efficiency of gas use to ensure gas supply for vital economic growth.

Jica will also lend \$300 million for the development of five city corporations -- Rangpur, Gazipur, Narayanganj, Comilla and Chittagong -- through reform of governance, city planning and infrastructure construction.

The \$149 million signed for a haor flood management and livelihood

improvement project will be used to construct flood management facilities and rural infrastructures in haor areas to boost vulnerable farmers' livelihood.

Jica will also lend \$97 million in the form of agricultural loans and agricultural training services to be provided through microfinance institutions to increase productivity and diversity of marginal farmers.

Mohammad Mejbahuddin, secretary of ERD, and Mikio Hataeda, chief representative of Jica, penned the deal.

Speaking at the event, Finance Minister AMA Muhith recalled Japan's role soon after the birth of the country in 1971 and in the last four decades.

Jica is the largest single bilateral development partner of Bangladesh and most generous one among all development partners in providing loans.

The loans have been provided at only 0.01 percent interest per annum and with 40-year repayment period and 10-year grace period.

In the last 41 years, Tokyo has given Bangladesh more than 1 trillion Japanese yen (\$9.81 billion) in loans, 500 billion yen (\$4.9 billion) in grant and 65 billion yen (\$638 million) in technical cooperation.

Magical Messi

FROM PAGE 1

only on his mind but on that of the team. He was statistically the worst player on the pitch in the first half, losing possession 15 times. But coach Alejandro Sabella made a tactical change, and the shackles were removed. A different player emerged.

After the match, Messi admitted to an Argentine TV channel that the goal

meant a lot to him personally.

"In the first half we were too deep and that hampered our attack. The second goal was a relief for everybody and especially for me, because it was good to score," Messi said.

"The Maracana was great, I had no doubt it would be like that. We keep working towards the dream," Messi added.