

# Good initiative for safe street food

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC) yesterday formally handed over 80 food carts to as many trained vendors at a ceremony with a view to ensuring safe street food and improving public health.

The carts were provided by the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) as part of its ongoing "Safe Food" programme.

Yesterday, the programme was organised at the city's Shahbagh intersection. DSCC Mayor Sayeed Khokon handed out training certificates to male and female vendors.

The trained vendors with these carts will cater hygienic food to city commuters and it will help save the city dwellers from various stomach diseases that occur as a result of consuming unhygienic street foods.

The selected vendors were trained jointly by the FAO and the DSCC for the last few months.

Of the total carts, 51 will be stationed at Shahbagh and the rest at Motijheel.

Brig Gen Mohammad Saidur Rahman, chief health officer of the

DSCC, said the FAO provided them with 51 carts, while 29 carts were given to the icddr, (International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh). Later, the icddr, handed them over to the DSCC.

The vendors were given training on how to cook food, preserve it safely and serve it in a hygienic way, he said.

They were chosen after scrutinising their information collected from the DSCC's zonal levels, he added.

The chief health officer said they would monitor the activities of the vendors to make sure they are selling food in a hygienic way.

The vendors will use gloves and wear caps and a specific dress. They also have got the DSCC's permission in written to run the shops.

Saidur said the FAO would provide 300 more carts to the DSCC under its ongoing programme.

Around six months ago, the icddr, had handed over 100 carts to vendors who are selling street foods in Motijheel.

Mayor Sayeed Khokon in the programme said they would not allow anyone to sell stale or adulterated food in the city.



Some of the 80 street food carts lined up in front of the National Museum in the capital. The Dhaka South City Corporation yesterday distributed the carts, provided by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), among 80 trained vendors, with the aim of providing safe street food to city dwellers. Top right, the trained vendors at yesterday's programme. Bottom right, DSCC Mayor Sayed Khokon along with FAO Representative in Bangladesh Mike Robson enjoying fuchka at a food cart.



PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

# HOARDING FOR PAHELA BAISHAKH 9.5 tonnes of hilsa fry seized in Ctg

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A mobile court yesterday seized around 9.5 tonnes of jatka (hilsa fry less than 10 inches in length) worth Tk 2 crore from eight fish cold storages in Chittagong city.

The court, led by Executive Magistrate of Chittagong District Administration Tahmilur Rahman, began the raid in Fishery Ghat area around 6:00am and continued it until 5:30pm.

"Acting on information that a huge quantity of hilsa fry is being stored in the cold storage, we conducted the drive and found the hilsa fry below 10 inches in length (25 centimetres) in the eight cold storages," he said.

For keeping the hilsa fry, owners of the eight cold storages were jailed and

fined under the Protection and Conservation of Fish Act, 1950, said Tahmilur.

Of the cold storage owners, five were fined Tk 5,000 each, while the three others were sentenced to different terms in jail.

"Considering the demand for hilsa in the upcoming Pahela Baishakh, owners of the cold storages bought the fish to sell them at a high price. We have distributed the fish among 50 orphanages and destitute people," said Tahmilur.

A team of Rapid Action Battalion-7 and officials of the fisheries department assisted in the raid.

Meanwhile, a coast guard team seized a fishing vessel with 15 kilogrammes of hilsa fry. The vessel too was fined Tk 5,000.

# Public bus, not autorickshaw

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The official said the ministry was against allowing more CNG-run autorickshaws on the streets but it had made the decision to ease the transport crisis in the city.

However, experts and studies say the opposite would happen.

Allowing more auto-rickshaws goes against the experts who had been pressing the government not to allow small vehicles on the streets and increase public transports to reduce congestion.

The Dhaka Urban Transport Plan of 1997 and Strategic Transport Plan of 2008 discouraged small vehicles as they carry only a few passengers but contribute to congestion greatly.

A city needs roads on 25 percent of its total area but Dhaka has only eight percent. The number of vehicles in the city is already seven times the capacity of the roads, experts said.

On top of this, an average 317 new vehicles hit the city streets daily.

"Efficient use of existing roads by replacing smaller vehicles with space-efficient vehicles, like buses, is the focus of different studies," said urban transport expert Prof Shamsul Hoque.

He said more auto-rickshaws would increase congestion in a big way. To maximise the use of the limited road capacity, the studies suggest controlling smaller vehicles and promoting public transports, he said.

However, he said even introducing new buses would not solve the problem.

In a disciplined traffic system, 15,000-30,000 passengers could be transported an hour in one direction. But the rate was only 2,000-5,000 on undisciplined streets like Dhaka, said Hoque who teaches at Buet's Civil Engineering Department.

The road transport ministry moved to issue the CNG licences last month following the withdrawal of cases filed for and against the issuance of the licenses, ministry officials said.

They said the ministry has sought opinions of the traffic police, city corporations and the Dhaka Transport Coordination Authority (DTCA) before issuing the licenses.

In its opinion, sent to Deputy Secretary Kamrul Ahsan of the road transport and bridges ministry last week, traffic police opposed the idea of allowing more auto-rickshaws on city streets.

They said it might worsen conges-

tion. They said there was no alternative to increasing public transport and discouraging smaller vehicles.

Additional Commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (Traffic) Khandaker Golam Faruk sent the letter that read, "New licenses for 5,000 CNG auto-rickshaws can be issued for public interest if it is not possible to take effective measures to add public transports."

Explaining the disadvantages of small vehicles, the letter said one small vehicle carries one to two passengers while big buses carry 40-50 people. "Four to six CNGs or private cars occupy the space of one bus but buses carry 10 times more passengers."

The letter said the city's existing mass transport facilities were in very poor shapes, considering two crore people live in Dhaka. The numbers of cars, minibuses and CNG autorickshaws were rather high and they were going up still.

The ministry is yet to get the opinion of the city corporations and DTCA.

Ministry officials said they got applications for approval of over 40,000 CNG licenses in the last three years.

CRISIS TO CONTINUE

The city's transport crisis would con-

tinue as neither the government nor the private sectors were likely buy large number of buses in the next few years.

A few private companies are adding buses to their fleets every year, but the government has not taken any move to purchase buses in the last three years, sources claimed.

Secretary of the Road Transport Division MAN Siddique, however, said they have a plan to buy 600 buses under a \$2-billion Indian loan. Transport Minister Obaidul Quader also mentioned this during a programme at the BRTC Bhaban in Motijheel yesterday.

Mayor of North City Corporation Anisul Huq in January said he would facilitate the introduction of 3,000 new buses.

Chief Executive Officer of Dhaka North City Corporation Mesbahul Islam said, "We are studying the process. It will take time. We are in discussion with five companies."

Khandaker Enayet Hossain, owner of Ena Paribahan, told The Daily Star that some 4,500 public buses run on that some 153 routes inside the capital.

But sources claimed that the real figure was much lower.



Workers loading seized jatka (hilsa fry) onto a truck in Chittagong city. A mobile team, with the assistance of Rab and fisheries department officials, seized around 9.5 tonnes of jatka from eight cold storages in the port city's Fishery Ghat area yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

# Hilsa delight for hoarders

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costs no less than Tk 10,000.

And the hilsa they are selling at exorbitant prices are not fresh, as the bulk of the supply comes from cold storages where the fish was preserved mainly in the peak catching season of July-September.

Many of the traders are even selling jatka (hilsa fry) at some kitchen markets in the capital.

The traders, however, attribute the soaring prices to surging demand before Pahela Baishakh and a drop in supply due to multiple factors, including a two-month government ban (March-April) on catching hilsa in a 340-kilometre area of five major rivers in six southern districts.

Whatever the facts may be, a large number of people are crowding kitchen markets to buy hilsa to celebrate the day with fried hilsa and

rice soaked in water, a culinary delight which evolved in recent years.

However, many have abandoned their hopes to buy hilsa this time.

"Can't we celebrate Pahela Baishakh without having hilsa? Of course, we can. All we have to do is to spend the money on something else instead of buying a stale hilsa," said Mahfuzur Rahman, a resident of Mohammadpur.

"Can you believe a hilsa weighing over a kilogram costs Tk 5,000? I will buy clothes for my kids with this money or may go to a nice place instead. That will be more fun," he said.

Mahfuzur, who works at a private firm, said "People are now mad for hilsa as if it was the main part of Baishakh celebrations."

Over the last few days, some users of social networking websites, especially Facebook, have been running campaigns, urging people not to have

hilsa on Pahela Baishakh.

Masum Ali, a banker in the capital, said despite the ongoing ban on catching hilsa, a huge quantity of jatka is being caught just for Pahela Baishakh.

"I saw news of law enforcers arresting traders with jatka over the last few days," he said.

In a daylong drive yesterday, a mobile court of Chittagong district administration seized a total of 9.5 tonnes of jatka worth Tk 2 crore from cold storages in Kotwali area.

Eight cold storage owners were jailed and fined for storing jatka.

Jamshed Alam, a physician who lived in the US for around a decade, said, "In foreign countries, the prices of many products come down before a big occasion, but the situation is the opposite in Bangladesh where we see a surge in prices before a festival."

# Change tactic for fighting extremism

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are denting the government's legitimacy, according to the report titled "Political conflict, extremism and criminal justice in Bangladesh".

"As the Awami League government's political rivalry with the Bangladesh National Party (BNP) reaches new heights, so has its repression."

The group says political conflicts between the AL and the BNP have resulted in more violence and a brutal state response.

"The government's excesses against political opponents and critics include enforced disappearances, torture and extra-judicial killings."

A permissive legal environment in Bangladesh is creating opportunities for extremist outfits to regroup and that was reflected in the killings of secular bloggers and foreigners and attacks on religious minorities last year, says the organisation.

"The government's reaction to rising extremism, including arrest and prosecution of several suspects without due process and transparency, is fuelling alienation that these groups can further exploit."

"Reconciling with the opposition and hence stabilising the state requires both political compromises and an end to the repressive use of law enforcement agencies," the group says. Politicising the police and using elite

forces, particularly the Rapid Action Battalion, to silence political dissent, are laying the seeds of future violence, according to the report that further gives critical views about the International Crimes Tribunal and the judiciary.

"By concentrating on targeting the opposition, the police are failing to curb criminality."

The prisons are overburdened with opposition leaders and activists, the think-tank says in the report.

The BNP and its ally Jamaat-e-Islami marked the anniversary of the disputed 2014 elections with indiscriminately violent strikes and traffic blockades, which were dealt brutally by the state, it observes.

"The BNP now appears less willing to resort to violence to unseat the government; its decision to re-enter the political mainstream gives the government an opportunity it should exploit by urgently resuming dialogue with the opposition."

Accepting legitimate avenues of participation and dissent would help regain some lost legitimacy and the trust of citizens in the state's provision of both justice and security, according to the report.

The international community can help promote political reconciliation, in the US and EU case, by pressurising Dhaka to respect civil and political rights, and in New Delhi's by

using close ties to urge the ruling Awami League to allow the opposition legitimate political expression and participation, the group says.

"There is no time to lose," it said, adding that if the mainstream dissent is suppressed, more and more government opponents may come to view violence as their only recourse.

The group recommends that to respect the constitutional right to free speech and dissent, the government of Bangladesh should withdraw all cases against journalists, human rights groups and other civil society actors, which are on "vague and dubious grounds" such as expressing views deemed "derogatory" of public officials or against the "public interest". The government should also end press closures and raids on media offices.

The think-tank also recommends the withdrawal of the 2014 National Broadcast Policy and removal of restrictions on online expression imposed in the Information and Communication Technology Act.

To push for a broader political reform agenda, it says the international community link some development assistance like the restoration of the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) in the US market to demonstrable improvements in human rights, free speech and association and fair trial.

# BAMBOO FOR ROD IN CONSTRUCTION Probe committee finds truth

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

An investigation committee has found the allegation of substituting iron rods for bamboo sticks in the construction of a government-funded biological research centre in Chuadanga to be true.

The three-member body headed by Soumen Shaha, director of the biological research wing of the Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) in Dhaka, submitted a report to the agricultural affairs ministry yesterday, sources said.

"We have found some irregularities," said Nirmol Kumar Dey, deputy director of the DAE, Chuadanga.

He is one of the investigators who visited the construction site on Saturday. They checked the construction schedule and examined materials used, different parts of the building, its walls and rooftop.

"We found irregularities in the construction of outside louvers [vertical structures at equal intervals creating a pattern to enhance the building's

beauty]," Nirmol said.

The committee in its report recommended demolishing all 36 louvers built around the two-storey building and reconstructing them, said another member of the committee wishing not to be named.

It also suggested suspending the construction firm, Joy Construction Ltd of Dhaka.

The DAE of Chuadanga last year got a fund of Tk 2.41 crore to build a research centre and lab in Darshana under Damurhuda upazila.

So far, 65 percent work has been done. The building was scheduled to be handed over to the DAE in June.

On Thursday, some local youths came to know about some gross anomalies in the work.

Workers were then forced to break a louver only to reveal bamboo sticks, prompting the authority to stop the work.

Meanwhile, two other committees - one by the district administration and another by the ministry -- were formed to look into the matter.

# Housewife found dead in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police yesterday recovered the body of a teenage housewife from her house in the capital's Uttara area.

Family members of Shirina Akhter Mina, 17, alleged that she was beaten to death by her in-laws.

However, the victim's in-laws claimed that Mina committed suicide by hanging herself from the balcony's grill of the house.

Police arrested Mina's husband Pias Rahman and mother-in-law Parul Begum after the victim's father Nurul Amin filed a murder case against them, said Hedayet Hossain, sub-inspector of Uttara Paschim Police Station.

Mina was married to Pias, a private university student, around five months ago. Her in-laws and husband had been asking for dowry ever since they got married, claimed Liza Islam Shahina, Mina's elder sister.

On Saturday, Mina's in-laws sent her to her parent's house at Rayerbazar, asking her to bring furniture as dowry. Her parents refused to give citing their poor financial condition.

She returned to Uttara the next day after her husband called her and her body was recovered yesterday morning.