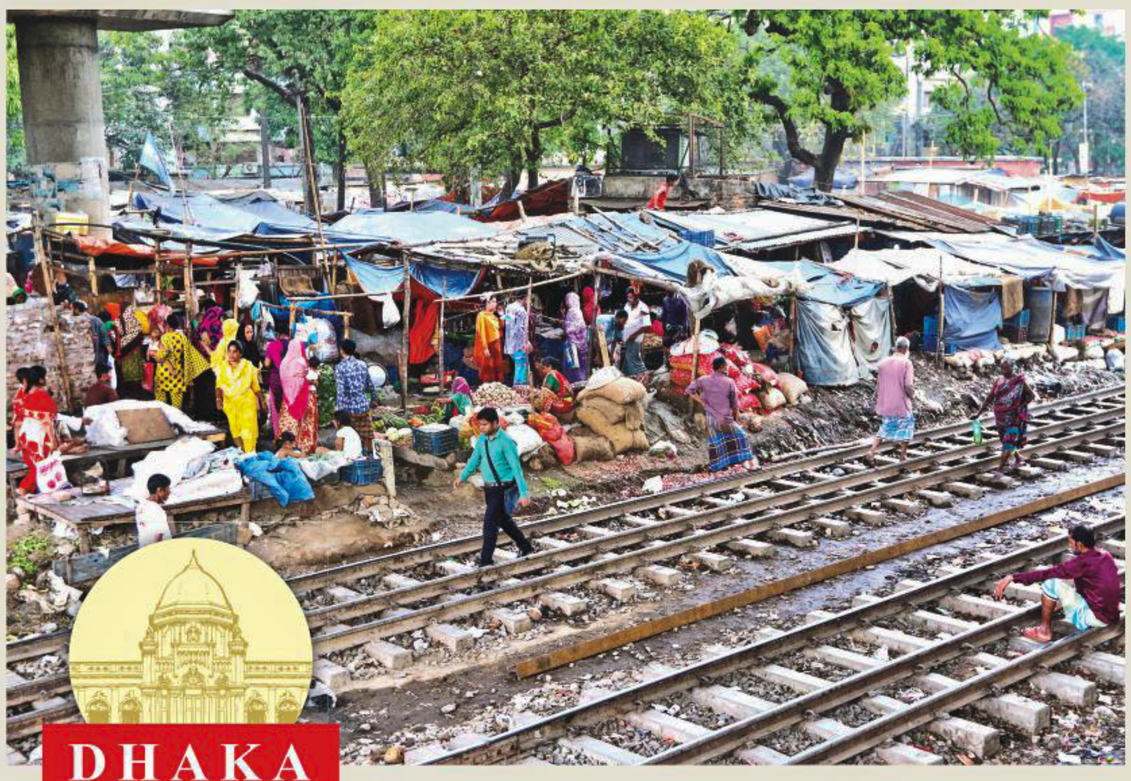
A bazar for 'unattractive' produce

|| SHAHEEN MOLLAH ||



DHAKA VIBE

Fruits and vegetables are sold at less than half the price at this bazar, because they have some imperfections. PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

In a perfect juxtaposition of poverty and progress, a rail-track beneath the Bijoy Sarani-Tejgaon flyover slithers its way past rows of shanties and a makeshift bazar where a few hundred vendors offer what appear to be everyday groceries.

Closer examination of the goods on sale, however, reveals a slight anomaly: the vegetables, particularly, look on the verge of going rotten.

The buyers, though, remain unperturbed. They do not consider the blemishes to be deal-breakers and instead use them to haggle down prices.

"Fokinni Bazar" -- as it is known to locals -- sells vegetables and fruits salvaged from the nearby Karwan Bazar, not pretty enough for the big markets.

The bazar comprises some 120 open-air stalls selling produce, and comes with its own unique origin story.

"This market started in 1983. Back then it was just 10 or 12 of us," Morjina Begum, a vendor, recalled. She said it all started when those living near the rail lines began collecting vegetables that fell off wagons or were thrown out for being "damaged".

After picking up the scraps, they took it to the bazar, and sold them for less than half the price. Morjina, with three children to support, began scavenging and selling -- earning around Tk 100 per day.

The market got its name not from its customers but rather the profession of those who had set it up. At the time, the vendors would beg for a living.

Today, the bazar benefits many financially-challenged residents of Dhaka. Although the initial consumers were dwellers of the nearby railway slums, soon residents from Korail slum, Shat Tola, railway colony slum and many more places started coming here to get their groceries.

Aklima Begum, a homemaker, said she has been shopping there for the past two years. The 27-year-old lives in a rented house in the nearby Nakhalpara Samity Bazar with her husband. He earns around Tk 11,000 per month, of which Tk 5,000 goes to rent.

"This is a very affordable option for many of us," she said.

Interestingly, not all shoppers here are insolvent. Some people also come here for the bargains on offer. With a good eye for vegetables or fruits, one can indeed buy a perfectly fine watermelon with minor bruises from a fall perhaps.

However, the market may be entering its final days. With frequent evictions, sales have already fallen. Plus, the market itself is on railway land and may soon be demolished.

"It will be removed," Yeasin Faruk, OC of Dhaka Railway Police Station, confirmed saying it had been illegally built and was allowed to stand for such a long time due to people's needs.

Perhaps soon, Fokinni Bazar will be gone. Its demise will deal a hard blow to the thousands who had depended on it for years.

Do you have a Dhaka Vibe story to share? Email us your ideas or reports to dhakavibeds@gmail.com

Exploited at home and abroad

Say speakers about plight of female migrant workers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

For Sumi Akter, the situation was not only strenuous but also stressful as the 22-year-old Bangladeshi worker at an RMG factory in Jordan had to work in a factory unit she was not trained for.

Before travelling to the Arab nation through middlemen in 2017, she took skills training to perform her duties diligently.

"But I was assigned work I had no experience or training in. The company allocated me to dyeing section where only men work... It was stressful and tough. I was not even paid properly," she said.

She said after paying Tk 80,000, the money she had borrowed to meet migration expenses, she returned home last year.

Sumi was sharing her experience at a meeting on "Safe and Fair Migration from the Perspective of Women Migrant Garment Workers" at Jatiya Press Club yesterday. Karmojibi Nari organised the event where Rahela Rabbani, its director, presented a study.

The study shows that shrinking opportunities in domestic RMG sector due to challenges including financial and other exploitation and automation, women workers are migrating, especially to Jordan and Mauritius.

However, due to a lack of access to accurate information and reliable sources, female workers become easy targets for brokers.

The study was conducted through focus group discussions, in-depth interviews of 15 women RMG workers and key informant interviews.

Referring to the expatriates' welfare ministry, the study cited that 48,890 women workers migrated to Jordan between 2010 and 2018 through G2G, a state-level recruitment system.

The number is likely to be higher, considering migrants who went abroad through brokers. Exploitation, discrimination and abuse are still a common ordeal women migrant workers face in Bangladesh and overseas.

The study suggested a 19-point recommendation including providing female migrant workers with language training, improving their skills, ensuring modest accommodation facilities, counselling, health services and bearable workload.

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DHAKA TODAY

THEATRE
Shesher Kobita
Venue: Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy
Time: 7pm

CONCERT
EIDA: *Insert Exotic Concert Name*
Venue: 3rd Space, Dhanmondi
Time: 5pm

THEATRE
Shutai Shutai Hena o Shapla
Venue: Bangladesh Mahila Samity
Time: 7pm

CONCERT
International Jazz Day 2019
Organiser: ABC Radio
Venue: Gulshan North Club
Time: 6pm

FESTIVAL
The Great British Food Festival
Venue: Latest Recipe, Le Méridien Dhaka
Time: 6:30pm

ART EXHIBITION
Art with Kindness
Organiser: Charity Right
Venue: Mrinal Haque Creative Arts, Gulshan 1
Time: 11am

T-SHIRT FESTIVAL
Banglar Gonji Festival 2019
Venue: Drik Gallery
Time: 3pm

CONCERT
Concert for Taoshik
This event is to raise funds for Taoshik's cancer treatment.
Venue: Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy
Time: 2pm