



#REVIEW

DHAKA'S "FOKINNI BAZAR"

Where every taka matters

Amid the relentless rhythm of trains rumbling past, a different symphony of life plays out every day near the rail line of Tejkunipara. Here, an unassuming kitchen market, "Fokinni Bazar" has been thriving for years. You may ask, why such a name? It is because the market is a lifeline for many — from day labourers to garment workers — and here, the city's less privileged stretch their hard-earned money in ways unimaginable elsewhere.

The Tk 10 economy

"You can even buy grocery items worth Tk 10," says Md Elias, who owns a shop at Fokinni Bazar and has been a chicken trader for three years. "Sometimes people cannot afford to buy a whole chicken; so, they buy gizzards and livers at a lower price. You can even buy cooking oil and lentils for Tk 10 or 20 too!"

The market's defining feature is its inclusivity. Here, even the smallest of budgets is welcome. With as little as Tk 10, one can walk away with a handful of vegetables, a piece of fish, or even cooking oil. It's a place where even the poorest can shop with dignity, finding ways to feed their families without feeling excluded.

This hyper-affordability creates a sense of community among the buyers. Vendors, many of whom share similar economic struggles, often show leniency, offering a little extra to a familiar face or a known neighbour. Take a walk around the market, it will appear to you like a microcosm where empathy thrives amidst adversity.

Waste not, want not

What sets Fokinni Bazar apart is its unique inventory. Vendors here do not stock

glossy, picture-perfect produce. Instead, they specialise in salvaging the unwanted. They scour stockpiles from larger markets, collecting vegetables deemed unfit

for regular sale — slightly bruised tomatoes or wilted greens that did not meet the

aesthetic standards of upscale shoppers.

Broken eggs, often discarded elsewhere, are sold here by the dozen, their yolks intact and no less nourishing.

"We pick up what others throw away," says Shahana Begum, a vendor who has been selling here for the past year. "These vegetables may not look good, but they cook just fine. My customers know that."

For many vendors, this practice is not just a business model but a mission



Operating along the railway tracks comes with its own set of risks. Trains barrel through the market multiple times every day, their thunderous presence forcing vendors and buyers to halt their activities momentarily and clear the tracks.

Despite the obvious dangers, the market persists. The proximity to the tracks is not just a matter of convenience but a necessity born out of limited options. For many vendors and buyers, moving elsewhere is simply not feasible. The tracks, therefore, become both a lifeline and a tightrope.

With that said, the vendors of Fokinni Bazar are unsung heroes and many of them are women who juggle their roles as breadwinners and caregivers, their resilience etched into their weathered faces.

They rise before dawn, source their goods from various corners of the city, and spend long hours under the



to ensure that nothing goes to waste. Buyers, in turn, embrace this ethos out of necessity and practicality. In a world where food waste runs rampant, Fokinni Bazar emerges as an unlikely hero, proving that one person's discard can be another's treasure.

A market of necessity

Fokinni Bazar is no sprawling, organised grocery hub. Instead, it is a makeshift haven of affordability, operating on the fringes, both literally and metaphorically. Vendors set up their stalls on either side of the railway tracks, their precarious positions mirroring the unstable lives of their patrons.

scorching sun or drenching rain, all to make a modest living. Begum remarks, "For us, every piece of vegetable matter, no matter how bruised or wilted they are. No one here feels any shame in buying them."

In the grand mosaic of Dhaka's urban life, Fokinni Bazar occupies a tiny, unassuming tile. But its impact is immeasurable, feeding not just the bodies but the spirits of those who rely on it. It is a place where waste finds worth, and every Tk 10 carries the weight of survival, resilience, and dignity.

By Ayman Anika
Photo: Prabir Das / STAR