



MY DHAKA

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

SKIP FANCY FLORISTS

Dhaka's wholesale flowers beat boutique prices

RBR

Dhaka still surprises me; can you believe that? Born and brought up in this city, I think I am a true ambassador of the town -- a little eccentric, a tad bit politically volatile, and very angry for no good reason.

Having lived here for a couple of scores and more, I take pride in the fact that I know Dhaka like the back of my palm. However, last Friday at the crack of dawn, Dhaka pulled a rabbit out of its cap for me -- the Shahbagh wholesale flower market.

I had heard about this wholesale and retail flower market many times. Still, I was under the impression that the few tin shacks, selling flower garlands and bouquets opposite the National Museum building, were all the fabled market had to offer. I never ventured beyond the walls of these flower shops and so had no knowledge that engulfed in darkness and lit by moonbeams, a wholesale flower market existed where farmers sell directly to traders.

The main trading begins around 2:00am and ends by 10:00am, but the vendors and small traders continue

for a while before going to their regular stalls and flower-selling spots throughout the city.

Heaps and heaps of marigolds, roses, jasmine, gerbera, tuberoses, and leaves lay on the ground of the area. The place is murky because of all the crushed petals and garbage; day-old unsold lots give out a stench as well. But the colours of the fresh flowers and the prices at which they are selling make up for all the nastiness.

I was floored when a young boy sold a dozen multi-coloured gerbera for only Tk 120. I asked him the price thrice, and he only smiled and said, "This is the wholesale market and not your street corner."

True enough, a stick of gerbera in any flower shop inside the city is Tk 30 each. The price of yellow, white, pink, and of course, red roses is between Tk 150 to Tk 200 for a bundle of 100 sticks. Young kids selling these roses at traffic

signals usually ask for Tk 250 for ten sticks.

This is the place where event planners go to buy their props. Besides flowers, the market has shops that sell everything a party planner needs, from scotch tapes to fabrics for pandals, fairy lights to wrapping paper, confetti, firecrackers -- the whole enchilada. Interestingly, these too sell at wholesale prices.

Intimate ceremonies have long been forgotten in our celebrations -- weddings, birthdays, anniversaries, even family or friends' get-togethers require party planners. When there is such a demand for all things pretty and flowery, no wonder flower farming has become important. You cannot import to meet mass demand.

Flowers thrive in sunlight. This is something our tropical country has in plenty. Jhikargacha in Jashore is the

major hub of floriculture, and places in other districts like Birulia in Savar, and Panchagar in Manikganj play along. Cultivation of tuberose, gladiolus, rose, marigold, lotus, gerbera, hyacinth, and chrysanthemum see year-round production.

Flower cultivation is a lucrative sector that is aiding the event management services, another emerging sector in Dhaka and other big cities, and thus, new production belts in Chattogram, Cox's Bazar, and Rangpur are added to the flower farming sector.

Extreme weather conditions like heat waves, incessant rains, and fog disrupt production and the prices go up, otherwise, the farmers are happy to cultivate all year round and sell at reasonable prices.

So, next time you just want to cheer up a dark corner of your home, give someone cut flowers, or even plan parties. Besides Shahbagh, Agargaon also has one such wholesale flower market as well, and occasional retailers like me are both surprised and impressed by the flurry of flower trading activity happening there, every dawn.



Iran fires missiles at US base in Qatar

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western neighbour Syria was also on full alert for a possible attack by Iran or Iran-aligned militia groups, a Syrian security source said.

Two US officials said Washington had assessed that Iran could carry out attacks targeting American forces in the Middle East soon, although the US was still seeking a diplomatic resolution that would see Tehran forgo any reprisal.

Since Trump joined Israel's campaign by dropping massive bunker-buster bombs on Iranian nuclear production sites on Sunday morning, Iran has repeatedly threatened to retaliate.

"Mr Trump, the gambler, you may start this war, but we will be the ones to end it," Ebrahim Zolfagari, spokesperson for Iran's Khatam al-Anbiya central military headquarters, said yesterday in a recorded, English-language video statement.

The attack came as Iran and Israel yesterday kept up attacking each other for the eleventh day.

Israel yesterday hit Revolutionary Guard sites and the notorious Evin prison in Tehran, calling them its most powerful strikes yet on the Iranian capital. Iran, in turn, fired missile barrages at Israel and vowed retaliation against the United States for the strikes.

Loud explosions rocked the Iranian capital, where Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz said the military hit "regime targets" with "unprecedented force", adding to speculation that Israel may seek to topple Iran's clerical leadership.

The targets included Evin prison, which Katz said "holds political prisoners and regime opponents", as well as command centres of the domestic Basij militia and the powerful Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.

The Israeli military said in a statement that the targets belong to Iranian forces "responsible... for defending the homeland security, suppressing threats, and maintaining the regime's stability".

Iranian media and the Israeli military said Israel also struck Fordow, a key nuclear enrichment facility buried deep in the mountains south of Tehran, to obstruct access routes to the site.

The Israeli attacks followed after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said it was "very, very close"

to achieving its goals in Iran.

On Sunday, the US hit three Iranian nuclear facilities -- Fordow, Natanz and Isfahan -- with aircraft and missiles in a military operation dubbed "Midnight Hammer".

Trump boasted the US strikes had "obliterated" Iran's nuclear capabilities, but other officials said it was too soon to assess the impact on Iran's nuclear programme, which Israel and some Western states consider an existential threat.

A day after the US top leaders tried to distance the strikes from an effort to regime change in Iran, Trump raised the question in a social media post.

"It's not politically correct to use the term, 'Regime Change,' but if the current Iranian Regime is unable to MAKE IRAN GREAT AGAIN, why wouldn't there be a Regime change??? MIGA!!!" Trump wrote on his social media platform.

US Vice President JD Vance and Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth, after the strikes, stressed they were not working to overthrow Iran's government, but warned against attacking any US interests and accepting "peace" that Trump offered.

Yesterday, sirens sounded across Israel, and AFP journalists reported blasts were heard over Jerusalem.

Iranian media said Israel's strikes hit a power supply system in Tehran, triggering temporary outages.

In Israel, the national electricity company reported "damage near a strategic infrastructure facility" in the south that disrupted power supply, without naming the location or specifying the cause.

Some details of the damage in Israel are barred from publication due to military censorship rules.

Israeli strikes on Iran have killed more than 400 people, Iran's health ministry said. Iran's attacks on Israel have killed 24 people, according to official figures.

After the US strikes, global markets reacted nervously, with oil prices jumping more than four percent early yesterday but dipping later in the day.

Meanwhile, Russian President Vladimir Putin yesterday said that "unjustified" US attacks on Iran's nuclear sites were pushing the world towards great danger and promised

to try to help the people of the Islamic Republic, though he gave no specifics.

Putin received Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi in the Kremlin yesterday alongside his Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, Kremlin foreign policy aide Yuri Ushakov and Igor Kostyukov, the head of Russia's GRU military intelligence agency.

"The absolutely unprovoked aggression against Iran has no basis and no justification," Putin told Araqchi, adding that he wanted to speak about ways to calm the crisis. "For our part, we are making efforts to assist the Iranian people."

Putin, whose army is fighting a major war of attrition in Ukraine, has shown little appetite for a confrontation with the US over Iran, just as Trump seeks to repair ties with Moscow.

Meanwhile, China urged both Iran and Israel to prevent the conflict from spilling over, warning of potential economic fallout.

China's UN Ambassador Fu Cong said parties should restrain the "impulse of force, avoid exacerbating conflicts and adding fuel to the fire," according to the state broadcaster CCTV.

Fu said parties, especially Israel, "should immediately cease fire to prevent the situation from escalating and avoid the spillover of war."

Iran was hurt "but the United States' credibility was also damaged -- both as a country and as a participant in any international negotiations," Fu added.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio called on China to help deter Iran from closing the Strait of Hormuz, a chokepoint for one-fifth of the world's oil supply.

The European Union's foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas said closing the strategic strait would be "extremely dangerous".

With Iran threatening US bases in the region, the State Department issued a worldwide alert cautioning Americans abroad.

Rafael Grossi, director of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), told an emergency meeting of the UN Security Council that craters were visible at the Fordo facility, but it had not been possible to assess the underground damage.

"Armed attacks on nuclear facilities should never take place," he added.

Patients from outside swarm city hospitals

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count dropped to 19,000 and his stool turned black.

According to Mizan, several areas in Daudkandi, including Donarchar, Shahapara, and Sabjikkandi, have been seeing a surge in dengue infections recently.

"My platelet count is now 1.16 lakh, and I'm feeling better," he told The Daily Star from hospital.

Another resident of Daudkandi, Noor Mohammad, 18, was also admitted to DMCH after developing headache, abdominal pain, and low-grade fever.

"I was diagnosed with dengue at a local hospital, but was referred to DMCH when my platelet count fell to 65,000," said Noor, who is now recovering.

Meanwhile, Mohammad Motaleb, 40, of Narayanganj, was admitted to DMCH on June 20 after suffering from fever, vomiting, and diarrhoea for several days. "I was initially treated at local Victoria Hospital, but they referred me to DMCH when my condition worsened."

Like Mizan, Motaleb and Noor, many dengue patients are being brought to Dhaka as their conditions worsen, due to inadequate healthcare facilities in upazilas and districts.

Dhaka Medical College Hospital, the country's largest public hospital, Muga Medical College Hospital and the DNCC Dedicated Covid-19 hospital, also major government facilities, are seeing a rise in the number of patients from outside the capital amid a steady spike in dengue cases nationwide.

Health officials and experts have warned that hospitals in Dhaka may face even more pressure if outbreaks spread further into districts that lack doctors and essential equipment.

Their concerns come as two more dengue patients died and 392 were hospitalised across the country in the 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday, marking the highest single-day hospitalisations so far this year. Of the 392, 305 were from outside Dhaka.

With these new figures, the total number of dengue hospitalisations this year stands at 8,150, of whom 6,353 (nearly 78 percent) are from outside Dhaka city.

Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) data shows that of the 34 dengue-related deaths so far, 15 occurred outside Dhaka.

Among the divisions, Barishal has reported the highest number of dengue

cases this year at 3,709. Other figures include: 2,558 in Dhaka (including both Dhaka city corporations at 1,797), 1,254 in Chattogram, 251 in Khulna, 217 in Rajshahi, 113 in Mymensingh, 26 in Rangpur, and 21 in Sylhet. The divisional tally, except for Dhakas, excluded the count in city corporation areas.

Speaking to The Daily Star yesterday, Cumilla Civil Surgeon Ali Nur Md Bashir Ahmed confirmed a high concentration of dengue cases in Daudkandi, especially Donarchar area. "We've informed the higher authorities about the situation."

Asked why so many patients from Cumilla are seeking treatment in the capital, he explained that Daudkandi is geographically closer to Dhaka than Cumilla city itself.

He added that although Cumilla Medical College Hospital and Cumilla Sadar Hospital have a combined 30 ICU beds, they are operating on a limited scale due to manpower shortages.

A DMCH doctor, preferring anonymity, said the hospital, as a multidisciplinary facility, often receives critical patients referred from upazila and district-level hospitals.

"For example, a dengue patient may require dialysis after going into shock, but many local hospitals lack the facility. In such cases, patients are referred to DMCH," he told this correspondent.

A nurse from DMCH's Tropical Medicine Ward, also speaking anonymously, confirmed that they have been receiving a large number of patients from Cumilla and Keraniganj in recent weeks.

A similar situation was observed during a recent visit to Muga Medical College Hospital, where many patients were also from outside Dhaka.

Brig Gen Md Asaduzzaman, director of DMCH, and Mezbahur Rahman, director of Muga Medical College Hospital, could not be reached for comments.

The DNCC Dedicated Covid-19 Hospital in Mohakhali, which now treats both Covid and dengue patients, is also witnessing a surge in cases from outside Dhaka.

"We estimate around 60 percent of our dengue patients are from Dhaka, the rest are from other districts," the hospital's Director Col Tanvir Ahmed told The Daily Star yesterday, adding, "Many travel to Dhaka seeking better treatment."

SITUATION MAY 'WORSEN'
A recent entomological survey by the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease

Ex-CEC Nurul Huda placed on 4-day remand

8 arrested in the capital including 2 former AL MPs, former MD of Islami Bank

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Former chief election commissioner KM Nurul Huda was placed on a four-day remand for interrogation in a case filed over alleged poll irregularities committed during the past three national elections.

Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Md Mustafizur Rahman passed the order yesterday afternoon after police produced him before the court with a 10-day remand plea, said a sub-inspector assigned to the court.

The same court also sent two former Awami League lawmakers -- Sabina Akter Tuhin, 46, from the reserved women's seat, and Mohammad Faisal Biplob, 55, of Munshiganj-3 -- to jail in separate cases.

Sabina was sent to jail in a case filed under the Anti-Terrorism Act, while Biplob was sent to jail in connection with the murder of Jubo Dal leader Shamim Mia.

Former CEC Nurul Huda, 79, was brought to the courtroom at 4:10pm amid heavy security. The magistrate entered the courtroom around 4:17pm, and the hearing began shortly afterwards.

During the hearing, Huda's lawyer informed the court that the charges brought against his client all fall under bailable offences under the Penal Code.

He also termed the case "legally flawed" and argued that it would "run contrary to the law" if Huda is placed on remand.

At 4:55pm, Huda spoke in the courtroom, telling the court that 15-17 lakh people were involved in conducting the 2018 election and that from Dhaka, there was no scope to monitor what happened in remote areas.

On Sunday, Nurul Huda, who oversaw the 2018 national polls, was arrested after a mob assaulted him at his Uttara residence.

Hours before his arrest, the BNP filed a case against him and 23 others with the Sher-e-Bangla Nagar Police Station over alleged irregularities in the 2014, 2018, and 2024 national elections.

The case also accused former CECs Kazi Rakibuddin Ahmad and Kazi Habibul Awal, who oversaw the 2014 and 2024 national elections, respectively.

The case further sued 10 election commissioners, deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina, and 10 others, including former home minister Asaduzzaman Khan, former IGP's Hasan Mahmud Khandker, Javed Patwary, and Shahidul Haque; former DMP commissioner Benazir Ahmed; former Special Branch of police chief Monirul Islam; and former chiefs of the NSI and DGFI.

The BNP claimed these individuals were responsible for voter intimidation and manipulation of the electoral process.

FIVE OTHERS ARRESTED
Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) arrested five more individuals, including the former managing director of Islami Bank Bangladesh, in separate drives in the capital early yesterday.

The arrestees are Monirul Moutla, 62, former managing director of Islami Bank; Tariqul Islam, 38, former central committee member of banned Chhatra League; Abdul Wahab, 58, president of Awami League's Ward-9 unit; Mehedi Hasan Babu, 43, joint general secretary of Jubo League's Ward-25 unit in Lalbagh; and Zakir Hossain Ali, 61, assistant office secretary of AL's Ward-92 unit.

According to a press release issued by the DMP, there are specific cases against all of them at different police stations. Police claim they were involved in a coordinated effort to destabilise the country.