

COVER STORY

The year without Baishakh and Eid

What we face in this pandemic is not only the loss of human lives, but also the death of small/cottage industries. The last decade saw a boom in the fashion industry of Bangladesh. Thousands chose fashion/styling as a career. Entrepreneurs invested crores and looked forward to the bustling sales, during Pahela Baishakh and Eid 2020.

Lacs of workers looked forward to bonuses and over-time pay.

Instead, today, fashion entrepreneurs are struggling to survive. Many small firms fear that the pandemic will wipe out businesses and kill the livelihoods of hundreds of thousands of workers.

So, allow us to start safe trading, starting Ramadan! Allow the fashion industry to survive.

— **Humaira Khan, Proprietor Anikini, and Anokhi by Humaira Khan**

PATHOS OF THE ARTISANS

Deen Islam, a Jamdani merchant (*mohajon*), hailing from Sonargaon, looked forward to reaching sales peak during Baishakh and Eid. He almost fell flat on his face when the pandemic ruined Baishakh first, and then rolled on to destroy Eid-ul-Fitr.

The saddest part is neither Islam nor anyone from the Jamdani village see an end to the horrific days of struggle. They hear only rumours, much of which lead to the belief that things might only get worse for them, the already struggling artisan community of Bangladesh!

In a morbid tone, Islam confessed to us the pitiful situation of the Jamdani artisans of our country.

“There are no sales in the Demra and Noa Para market (Haat Bazaar). Artisans (*taantis*) who work as freelancers are dying out of hunger. The only advantage that we have, both the merchants and the artisans, is that we live in our own village, and we have roofs over our heads.

“Agriculture has become the main source of income today. If this situation continues and we are unable to pay the artisans any longer, they will permanently shift towards a new profession, and this trade (handloom) will die once and for all,” said Islam.

While discussing losses, Deen Islam provided a precise calculation. During Ramadan, his estimation was to sell approximately 50 saris, earning him an average of Tk 45,000 per sari, of which, Tk 5,000 (from each sari) would be paid to the artisans working for him. The rest of the collections would help in future investment into threads, preparation work by the womenfolk of the village, hiring new workers, and feeding his family of eight, who were all dependent on him for their livelihood.

“I make good money, and with it, I am able to support few families — my relatives and my own,” said a troubled Islam.

Inquired on financial support from the retail outlets to which he had been selling or the government, he was prompt to say that such incentives are yet to materialise.

Photo Courtesy: Anokhi by Humaira Khan

