

SPOTLIGHT

Hard Times for Nandan Children's Fashion

This week, Star Lifestyle had an extend talk with Tahia Khalil, our Financial Advisor who gave quite an insight for small businesses that are hard hit in this COVID-19 pandemic, along with a survival plan. To put reality into perspective, Star Lifestyle is presenting three diversified business cases that include Nandan Children's Fashion House – a small children's wear provider; HammerStrength Fitness Club – a gym that relies on constant physical presence of clients; and a compilation of kindergartens.

In 1996, Nandan Children's Fashion had set out to change the scene with readymade stylish children's wear that did not burn a hole in the wallet.

Let us wind the clock back, back to the late '90s. Dhaka at that time had very little to offer in terms of quality children's clothes. Everyday frocks and the likes were taken care of at home, the go-to tailors needed quite a bit of hints, designs and photos to make something that was a bit fancy. Other than Aarong, the available ready to wear children's clothes



in New Market were hardly what one could make do with.

At that time, specifically 1996, Nandan Children's Fashion had set out to change the scene with readymade stylish children's wear that did not burn a hole in the wallet. With options for various sizes and exclusive designs, the name Nandan has been essential for those looking for a

set of trendy children's clothes.

Fast forward to 2020, with the store now one year away from celebrating 25 years, the COVID-19 pandemic has hit this small business with unprecedented shortcomings. When the stores, offices, schools and just about everything around the country were put into full shutdown in late March, 2020; it was roughly a bit more than two weeks away from Pahela Baishakh in April. And right around it was Eid-ul-Fitr, undoubtedly the biggest occasion for clothes shopping in the country. In fact, both these celebrations traditionally call for a good amount of focus on expenditure on new clothes, food, and all-around merriment.

However, as the countrywide shutdown edged past into the one-and-a-half month and carried well into the month of May, things were bleaker than ever for businesses all around. For Nandan Children's Fashion House, which is a moderate family initiative, this spelt unforeseen difficulties. Typically, small businesses like these reach their annual break-even with a respectable profit during the Baishakh/Ramadan season. But Nandan was left floundering to make ends meet.

Fixed costs like rent and employee salaries during the lockdown, with absolutely no sales, cut deeper into the rainy-day reserves and beyond. Nandan, which had a good footfall with three outlets in Dhaka, had to close down one store in Bailey Road, a place well known for its ever-bustling shops and stores. At this point, taking a loan or any other financial aid may seem lucrative at first, but paired with the already existing loans and liabilities, it only digs deeper into the financial burdens.

The owner and founder of Nandan, Irshad Ara, has not yet lost hope. Already, her Facebook page is highlighting the Eid-ul-Azha collection for the upcoming 1 August celebrations. However, her expectations are still to be tested against the reality of cost cutting of her buyers. On average, typical sales during the Eid-ul-Azha season is a bit less than half of the average sales during the preceding Eid-ul-Fitr. It is not just her ready-made clothes; her wholesale suppliers too have faced similar difficulties. Everyone is cutting down on costs and redirecting funds for the essentials only, and Irshad Ara is no exception. With a heavy heart, she has had to reduce her team of over 40 people without being able to pay them their dues.

Nandan is currently down to around 14/15 of the most indispensable members, who are being paid around half of their typical payment. If this situation persists any further, or worsens, Ara will have little to no incentive left to maintain her business.

Still, with renewed vigour, Ara has reopened her other two outlets with the recommended precautions, but in-store sales are yet to pick up. Her only sales so far have been via online, which too, have yet to see better days. As customer queries are trickling in, she hopes to pick up the pace even a little to keep her business afloat. Hope is after all, the thing Irshad Ara wants to bank on during the grim tones of this worldwide pandemic and its ripple effect on the economy.

Special thanks to Irshad Ara, owner and founder of Nandan's Children Fashion

Trying times for Hammer Strength Fitness Club

The health and fitness scene in the country as a whole has seen a transformation throughout the last decade, and all for the better. But not all gyms and fitness centres are up to par with the needs and demands that vary from one gym goer to the next. At the same time, equipment usage and trainer capacities too have a high impact on the serious visitors. Also, the ambience and the crowd can make or break the deal for the establishment. Balancing all these with an aim to provide good visitor experience, Hammer Strength Fitness Club had opened its doors in April 2012.

For any thriving gym, the heart of the business lies in the visitors doing their best to achieve their health goals. But the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020, with its propensity to spread at close contact, has put a hold to all sorts of gatherings, and gyms are no exception. Furthermore, with an imposed countrywide lockdown for a little over two months, the economic impact has been overwhelming.

Abul Fatah Saad, owner of Hammer Strength, however, is strongly optimistic. The club's social media page is a reflection of this, as it bears fact filled messages and encouraging quotes for the patrons. Following up on a client's fitness routine, both in and out of the gym is a typical day's work for a gym. However, just as work from home has translated into an at-home version for the



everyday white-collar office goers, the work of a gym trainer is not so linear. It may seem like a solution to have online one-on-one sessions with the trainers for suggestions. But trainers do not just talk to their respective charges, they need to physically be there to see what the person is doing.

From checking the correct posture and form during a planking exercise to keeping a careful eye on how a set of weight is being lifted, these are the things that cannot be checked through a webcam. Also, just about everyone is streamlining their expenses to

make the best use of available funds, and a gym membership has dropped to the bottom of the list for many. This, in turn, makes it impossible for trainers to hold their job.

Saad's gym in this context, is a shining exception. 90 percent of his staff are permanent, with a few recent hires. The club had paid up to 70 percent of their salary till the month of May, along with full Eid-ul-Fitr bonus. The difficulties are yet to be overcome as the gym is the main earning source for the trainers and such, and the possibility of a job cut also looms ominously. In this case as well,

the trainers and staff of Hammer Strength were assured none of them would lose their jobs, and they would be able to resume as things eased down. Saad believes that just as the trainers are an indispensable part of the establishment, it is his responsibility to look after them during these tough times.

Saad is now bidding his time to welcome the members back. After all, a gym is a social gathering place of sorts. To ensure visitor safety, precautions are being taken, with extra measures like limiting usage of equipment and cutting down of total days of operation, along with many other features for a fully safe gym experience. The gym's members have been constantly engaged through social media with workout video suggestions, online question answer sessions, and much more.

All that remains is to resume typical activities. Of course, things will definitely never be the same in every sense. The uncertainty still lingers as how long this pandemic situation will continue and what the after-effects would be. With all being said, Saad has chosen to focus on the present and make do with what he has at hand while giving importance to the most vital parts of his business — his trainers and his members.

Special thanks to Abul Fatah Saad, owner of Hammer Strength Fitness Club