

Dhaka Day by Day

Eid Shoppers' Syndrome

by Aasha Mehreen Amin



If there is anything the Dhakaite loves to do, it is go shopping. With such limited entertainment options the city has to offer, shopping is perhaps the easiest way to forget one's worries and let oneself go. Eid, bringing with it the obligation to live it up and be charitable to oneself and others, is the perfect excuse for the Dhakaite to go market-crazy.

This craziness can get to the point where nothing will stop the city dweller from rushing to the shops to lighten the burden of hard-earned savings as quickly as possible. It is almost as if he or rather she, for admittedly it is the female who is the most susceptible to the compulsive shopping syndrome, is in an unbreakable trance. Walking around with a glazed expression, frenziedly grabbing every saree, shalwar kameez or glittering trinket in sight is a common symptom at this time of the lunar month.

The state of the city's roads is enough proof of this. Being caught in the middle of one of Dhaka's regular traffic jams is bad enough. But being stuck in a jam a few days before Eid is as much fun as sitting in a fanless room in August with a sweater on. With the *rojadar's* (fasters) rushing home for *iftar*, not to mention buying their *pijama* and *beguni* at the very last minute and the Eid shoppers flocking to the bazaars, the roads are choked with cars, rickshaws, baby-taxis, buses, and anything else that has the potential to move, including the two-legged city dweller.

Popular shopping areas like Hawker's Market, New Market, Chandni Chawk and Aarong are the main culprits, attracting the crowds with their promises of big bargains and the 'latest' in clothes and accessories. The shops and markets remind one of hives buzzing with greedy bees. The sheer numbers of shoppers at these places seem to defy the notion that we are in an inflationary period. A puzzling question may bug the logical economist: if prices

are high and incomes are low, how come there are so many consumers in the market? The answer is that the Dhaka consumer has the peculiarity of being a compulsive buyer whether he (or she) can afford it or not. The city dweller swears by the motto 'we live only once and that too, for today' and so splurges and splashes a whole month's salary plus the Eid bonus, for that special day — Eid, that only comes twice a year.

As for the shoppers, they can be grouped under several categories. There is the harried, middle-aged housewife who has to buy new clothes for her immediate family, in laws, sister-in-law's husband's sisters, the staff and their families, 'zakaat' sarees and *lungis* from the wholesalers and then, maybe, just maybe a crepe silk saree for herself. There is the young single woman who already has too many clothes overflowing from her wardrobe but still just has to get the crinkly cotton material at 280-taka per metre for her fifth shalwar kameez set. There is also the young single man who must select the best looking, *punjabi* in town for his extracurricular activities which mainly consists of 'bird watching' on Eid day, after the morning prayers.

These are not, however, the only beneficiaries of this manic Eid shopping syndrome. Apart from the shop-keepers there are the lakhs and urchins who demand and usually get, their own Eid bonus from guilty shoppers in the form of *Eid er bokstush*. But it is the muggers, pickpocket and robbers that seem to make the most of this time of shopping binges. With consumers' pockets bulging with hard cash, these creatures have a bonus time looting. For the unlucky shopper, alas, it means a whole month's salary plus a bonus gone in the blink of an eye. Then again it may also mean the perfect cure for shopaholics. Until the next Eid at least.



FESTIVE FERVOUR: On the occasion of holy Eid-ul-Fitr a lady getting her palms hennaed in a fair in the city yesterday. —Star photo

Call to double initiatives to raise literacy rate up to 50 pc

Dr Abdullah Al-Muti Sharfuddin, director of NGO coalition Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE), yesterday called for at least doubling the present government and non-government initiatives to raise the literacy rate up to 50 per cent by the year 2000, reports BSS.

Speaking at a press conference here, Dr Sharfuddin said, the government has laid high emphasis on literacy and fixed target to raise the adult literacy rate to 62 per cent and enrol 95 per cent children in the primary schools by the year 2000. But unless we can intensify our present efforts through a total social movement, four crore people will remain illiterate by 2000, he said referring to a World Bank study.

Secretary of CAMPE and director of Gano Sahajya Sangstha (GSS) Dr F R Mahmud Hassan, member of CAMPE executive council and executive director of Bangladesh Association for Community Education Azizul Haque and coordinator of CAMPE Habibur Rahman also spoke on the occasion.

The press conference was organised to mark the fifth founding anniversary of CAMPE, the national literacy coalition of the country's leading NGOs.

Dr Sharfuddin, also a popular science writer, observed that unless a vast change is brought about, particularly in the education system of the government primary schools, it would be very difficult to eradicate illiteracy from the

country. He said, 50 per cent of the children enrolled in Class One in the government schools drop out in Class Five while the average attendance in classes is only 60 per cent.

Dr Sharfuddin recommended to make the number of teachers double to give each student due attention. The present teacher-student ratio in government schools is one teacher for 64 students.

Dr Sharfuddin also stressed increasing contact hours in school for effective education.

A primary school student in the country spends 440 hours in school per year compared to 800 hours in neighbouring countries, he said adding that due to the inadequate school hours after completion of five years of primary school life, only one third children achieve up to the mark level.

Dr Sharfuddin further observed that the number of primary schools are very insignificant to enroll all the eligible school-going children although the NGOs are backing up government in this regard. The strong political commitment is the prime need for fighting illiteracy effectively, he said.

Providing a comparative study between the government and the NGO-run schools, he

said, an NGO school spends 800 to 1000 taka per student while the amount is about Taka 2000 in government primary school. Despite this, attendance in the NGO schools are more than 90 per cent because of their modern teaching method and strong monitoring and supervision system, he said.

Azizul Haque said, unless a child is given due care, he will never feel encouraged.

He said, despite the shortage of teachers in government schools 20 per cent of them remain absent everyday widening the gap of ratio between teachers and students.

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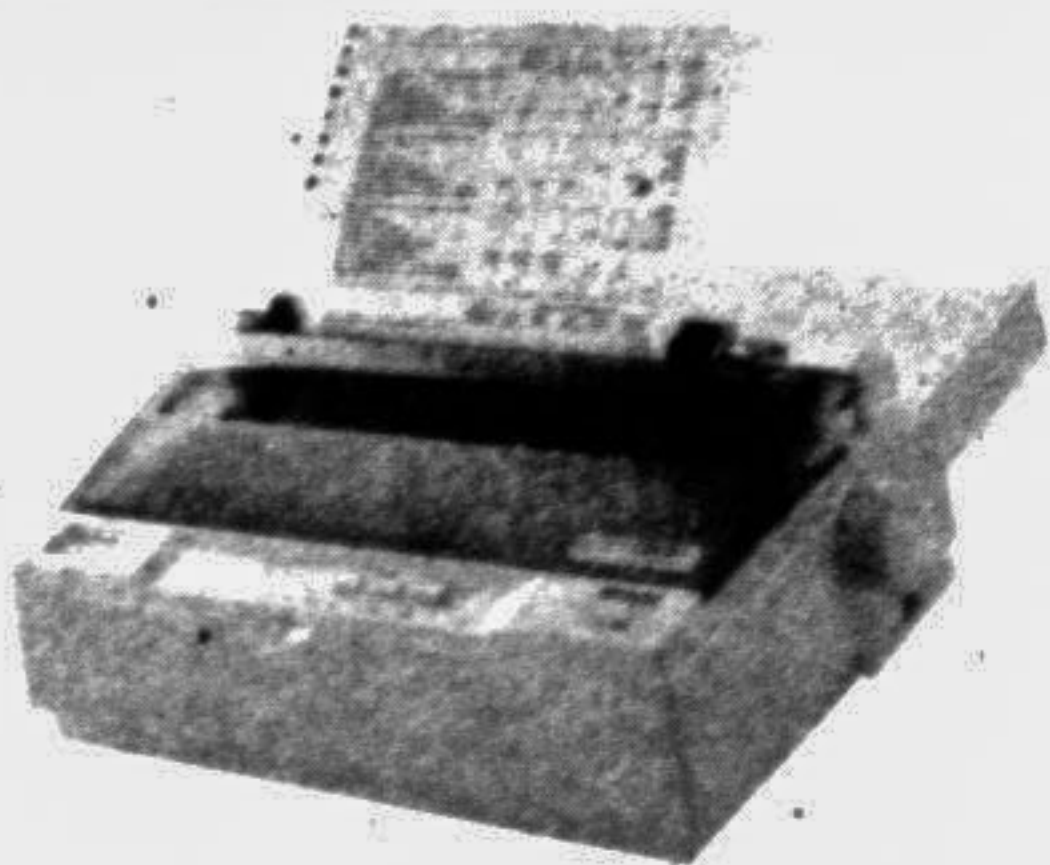


As exchanging Eid greetings has become an in-vogue thing, increasing number of people gather each day to buy Eid cards at the various shopping arcades everyday. This photograph was taken yesterday. —Star photo

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New BGCTA body

A 12-member executive committee of the Bangladesh Govt College Teachers Association (BGCTA) was formed in the city recently for 1995-96 says a press release.

The members are: president — Shamsul Haq; deputy president — Abul Hashem, vice presidents: — Prof Ibna Inam, Abul Kalam Ilyas, AKM Nazrul Islam, Shaifur Rahman and Manzurul Islam; secretary general — Syed Md. Faruk; Dy Secretary general — Anil Chandra Sarker; treasurer Md AB Siddique; Organizing secretary — Obaidur Rahman; dy organising secretary — Selina Akhter Jahan.

New trust fund at DU

A former student of the Physics Department of Dhaka University donated Tk 100,000 for establishing at the varsity a new trust fund styled Razzak Shamsun Physics Research Award. UNB reports quoting a DU press release.

A senior post-doctoral research associate in the Ohio State University in the United States, Sultana Nurun Nahar, handed over the money to DU Vice-Chancellor Emajuddin Ahmed on February 23.

An annual research award in the discipline of Physics (both general and applied) will be funded with income of the fund and given for the best academic feat and performance in research on recommendations by the DU Academic Council.

Nurun Nahar made the donation to the memory of her parents - Razzak and Shamsun.

Indian sarees, clothes seized

Police seized contrabands valued about Tk 70,000 from a house in Nandi Para of Sabujbag thana and arrested one person in this connection on Friday, reports UNB.

The recovered items include 275 pieces of Indian sarees and 44 metre clothes.

A case has been filed against the arrested Kamaluddin.

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