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Head Office Tel : 9565114, Logistics Office Tel : 9884851, Fax : (880-2) 9886531, E-mail : dac@aeilogis.com
Chittagong Office Tel : (031) 721085, Fax : (880-31) 710106, Internet : fedcgp@spctnet.com.smp.
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Ain't it amazing, whole city is shopping

By Mir A Zaman

Stifling traffic congestion, and mad rush at the colourfully-decorated and brilliantly-lit shopping malls define the last few evenings of Ramadan in the city. For one reason or the other, the shopping streak almost inevitably stretches well into the early hours of Eid day. Every year when other parts of the capital are in silent slumber, shopping malls like, Eastern Plaza, Alipara Plaza, Nahar Plaza, Dhanmondi Plaza and many others remain wide awake.

"It's amazing. It seems the whole city has forgotten to sleep. At two-thirty in the morning, you still have the rush, especially at the shoe stores," Imtiaz, a senior officer at a private enterprise, recollects experience of late-night shopping at New Elephant Road.

People like him almost deliberately keep something left for the last minute.

"Even if I'm through with shopping on the eve of Eid, I make it a point to go there at around midnight. It's fun."

Most people, however, make it a point to have things under control well before that. Many leave the capital to spend the Eid vacation with families in the country side. It's the sooner the better for them. There are other considerations, too.

"The best time to do shopping is during the first two weeks of Ramadan. The actual rush begins from the third week. Before that you can do shopping without having to worry about things like where to park your car, the infuriating traffic congestion, etc." said the young housewife. "Besides, you get a good bargain."

Beyond doubt, her wisdom comes from experience.

"The market actually heats up after the 15th of Ramadan. In the first couple of weeks, it is more or less quiet," said one salesman at one of the shops at the New Market. "There are a few who, to avoid the mad rush later on, do their shopping in the first two weeks."



Wait till I grow up

Eid shopping is fun for adults, but this child fancies a thing or two too, as she eyes up the colourful bridal dress.

— Star Photo: Zahedul Khan

months back I bought a sari from a shop in Eastern Plaza. The salesman had said he would take the sari back if there was any problem with the colour or the material.

She wore the sari and went to a party. When she came back home she found out she had become a photocopy of the sari. Colour from the sari spread all over her body."

What followed was even more embarrassing. When she took the sari to the shop, let alone getting a new one or her money back, the salesman simply denied having made such a promise.

"They were so rude. Ironically, the name of the shop is 'More Rekho' (Remember Me) ... you bet I will," fumed the young woman.

Such setback is not rare. Yet, it's always the sari that tops the list of the Eid-shoppers. *Shalwar-kameez, punjabee-pajama*, and in recent times, exotic fashion-wears like *lehenga*, are not far behind.

A *lehenga*, priced at a staggering 125,000 taka, became talk of the town for a few days earlier this month. Not everyone fancies buying such an expensive dress for the Eid. However, the boutiques in the city

have, more or less, had brisk business, so far.

"This year has so far been excellent," said a saleswoman at a boutique in Dhanmondi. "We are quite happy."

An 'expert' buyer was actually appreciative of this year's market.

"Strangely, I have so far had a peaceful shopping," said the young housewife. "This year, I didn't have to bargain for long. It seems all they want is to sell."

The street-side markets with a big clientele in the lower-middle and lower class of the society had a roaring business.

"We sell dresses worth 25,000 taka a day," said the 'salesman' at one 'shop' in the 'market' on the walkway along the Chandni Chowk under the foot-bridge. "Sometimes, it's a lot more than that."

His was not the only shop doing 'good' business. Even the small ones on the pavement along the Hawkers Market and Gausia Market have had their share of brisk business.

"Everyday I sell goods worth four thousand taka," said Roni, "that means a profit of around one thousand taka."

The traders like him buy three-piece (*shalwar, kameez* and *urna*) and two-piece (without *urna*) from Gausia Market.

"We usually ask three hundred taka for the three-piece set. We settle for 150 or 160," he shared his trade secret.

Ronnie, who used to work for a studio and was involved in production of the super-hit movie *Aab-e-Hayat* before quitting after a difference of opinion with the studio owner, has no complaints.

"I earn enough for myself and the family," he said. "I hope I will be able to buy some new clothes for my sons."

He has got two, one is three and the other just born. For them, he plans to get the best. He will surely have many shops to choose from.

DMCH all set to get burn unit

By Naimul Haq

The Dhaka Medical College Hospital is going to have a 50-bed burn unit to be set up at a cost of Tk 6.84 crore. The unit will start functioning in about six months, official sources said.

The money for the unit was allocated in April last year.

Initially, a three-storey building for the burn unit will be constructed near the new OT complex at DMCH, doctors said.

The country now has only five surgeons to treat burn patients. The number of doctors is far below the requirement, said Dr S L Sen, a consultant plastic surgeon at the hospital.

The existing eight-bed burn unit is very poorly equipped and it never received proper attention despite such a high incidence of burn cases. Most of these are burns from acid and fire," he told The Daily Star.

Dr Morrison, a Unicef consultant, said, "We are in the process of establishing a founda-

tion which will coordinate and work on the problems of acid attack victims in Bangladesh. Once the foundation is established, it will start raising funds from home and abroad to help the acid burn victims in particular."

Dr Morrison added, "The focus of the foundation would be raising of funds to help acid burn victims, improve medical facilities for their treatment and lastly initiate social mobilisation to educate people to prevent accidents from fire."

Talking to The Daily Star, plastic surgery specialist Prof D Paolo G Morselli from Italy said, "The field of plastic surgery needs desperate focus in Bangladesh. We are ready to train local young doctors."

Morselli led a seven-member surgery team to provide free treatment mostly to burn in-

jury patients at DMCH. During their two-week stay here, they performed plastic surgery on more than 400 patients and left behind a lot of equipment and materials for the department concerned.

There is no need to send patients abroad. If properly equipped and trained, doctors here can provide full-fledged treatment. We can provide training to local doctors," said Morselli who was on his sixth visit to Bangladesh.

On an average, five acute cases of burn come to DMCH every day. But most of them cannot be admitted due to lack of bed and facilities.

"We felt the need for strengthening the capacity of the hospital and already arranged to train doctors as a part of technology transfer," he added.

Opposition eyes series of post-Eid hartals

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before the elections.

The opposition parties also gave a 30-day ultimatum to the government for accepting the demands or face tough street agitation. The deadline expires February 5.

Some of the leaders at the meeting suggested a series of agitation programmes including hartals to resist the pourashava elections but others left those for further review today.

The proposed programmes included a four-day non-stop hartal across the country from the day before the pourashava elections until those are over, competent sources told The Daily Star last night. In such an eventuality, countrywide hartals would be observed from February 22 to 25, the sources explained.

Besides, the sources said, the meeting also discussed proposal for a nationwide hartal on January 26, the last day for submission of nomination papers for the pourashava polls. Suggestions for another hartal came to force the CEC to quit. It could be sometime after the Eid, one source said.

Another source hinted that the hartal of January 26 might be announced today while the rest after the Eid-ul-Fitr.

The meeting also proposed that other programmes like laying siege to EC, street demonstrations, public rallies and processions also be taken up the sources said.

M Shamsul Islam and Anwar Zahid of BNP, Kazi Zafar Ahmed and Kazi Firoz Rashid of JP, Quamaruzzaman and ATM Azharul Islam of Jamaat and Fazlul Haq Amin and two others of IOJ attended yesterday's joint meeting at Kazi Zahid's Banani residence in the morning.

Top leaders in the four-party opposition alliance also gave their instant reactions to the EC announcement of the election schedules.

In a statement, BNP secretary general said the announcement came ignoring the opposition demands which once again proved that the government wanted to win the pourashava polls with the "controversial" CEC in charge.

"Unless our demands are accepted, we'll be forced to boycott and resist the polls and launch an out-government agitation along with the people," Bhuiyan said.

JP chief HM Ershad, in a similar statement, also criticised the "unilateral" announcement of polls schedule and "indifference" to the four demands.

The JP can't participate in the elections because the government has destroyed the atmosphere for the polls by rejecting the demands.

Jamaat leader Quamaruzzaman, talking to The Daily Star, was also critical of the EC move for going ahead with the pourashava elections. "We can't accept the poll schedule..."

Fazlul Haq Amin of IOJ also made a similar statement.

Independent commission for privatisation suggested

By Staff Correspondent

A national independent commission should be formed to review the success and failure of privatisation process in the country.

The commission should include representatives from major political parties and both the private and public sector enterprises.

The suggestions were made at the concluding session of a seminar on privatisation in the city yesterday. The Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) organised the seminar at CIRDAP auditorium.

The reports of the commission should be presented and debated in the parliament and across the country to ensure full exposure and support to its recommendations.

The keynote paper titled "Outcome of Privatisation: The search for a policy" was prepared by CPD Executive Chairman Prof Rehman Sobhan and M M Akash of Dhaka University. The paper was presented by the latter.

The speakers observed that privatisation process in the country did not progress despite a favourable policy.

They pointed out that when a party remained in power, it supported privatisation and when out of power it opposed the same.

Both the public and private sectors have successes and failures in the country. So there is no clear-cut formula to be followed by the government.

Prof. Rehman Sobhan said, "The result of privatisation of industries was very disappointing as crores of taka were drained out closing the factories and throwing large number of people out of work."

He underscored the need for a parliamentary probe into the matter to reveal what has happened and where the money has gone.

Cabinet talks President's JS speech text

By Staff Correspondent

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday held a special meeting of her cabinet to scrutinise the draft of the presidential speech to be delivered in Jatiya Sangsad later this month.

During the two-and-a-half-hour meeting, the ministers and the state ministers discussed the sections of the draft speech dealing with the performances of their respective ministries.

The concluding session was presided over by Prof. Rehman Sobhan. The discussants included Jamil Uddin Ahmed, former deputy prime minister, K Z Islam of Nirmal International, Binayak Sen of BIDS, Shahidullah Chowdhury of Trade Union Centre, S M Zakaria of Privatisation Board, Rashed Khan Menon of Workers Party, C A F Dowlah of the World Bank, Prof. Anisur Rahman and labour leader Abul Bashar.

M M Akash, giving a brief review of the performance of industries still under public sector and those already denationalised, said the performance of both the sectors was "mixed".

The available data do not provide any robust evidence that privatised enterprises im-

Private cargo ready to take off

By Special Correspondent

Bangladesh's first private cargo air service takes off either today or tomorrow, carrying loads for Bangkok, civil aviation sources said.

The Bismillah airlines, a joint venture with a Thai company, would carry dry and perishable goods between Dhaka and Bangkok initially.

Antonov-12, a Soviet-made transport aircraft, has been leased by Bismillah from Russia to operate its services.

The civil aviation authorities gave the clearance to the company to fly on the new route on Wednesday, the sources said.

It had received permission in 1997 to operate from Dhaka to the Gulf and former Soviet Central Asian states.

But it failed to obtain clear-

ance from the Indian authorities to fly over its territory with an aircraft capable of air dropping from its ramp. They said the aircraft must go through a check by Indian officials.

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The available data do not provide any robust evidence that privatised enterprises im-

proved their performance," he said.

Referring to a study, Akash said that out of 498 enterprises disinvested by the government in 1993, 133 were found closed, 141 not traceable, 174 were not operational and only 214 were operational.

He stressed the need for further study on ways to improve performance of the privatised units and whether existing public sector enterprises could be reformed at all.

"When the government nationalised the factories, those were not prepared for it, and it denationalised, those were not capable of competing in a market economy," Shahidullah said. "They had to compete with world famous companies."

M M Akash, giving a brief review of the performance of industries still under public sector and those already denationalised, said the performance of both the sectors was "mixed".

But it would not have such restrictions from Myanmar which prompted the company to choose the Dhaka-Bangkok route.

The cause behind the suicide could not be ascertained immediately.

An UD case was filed with the police in this connection.

ANCHOR TOWER

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Limited office space available at Anchor Tower, the prestigious office building of the city. Interested parties are requested to contact Company Secretary, A&A Investment Ltd., Anchor Tower (10th floor), 1/1B Sonargaon Road, Dhaka-1205. Tel : 869521-4, 865895-8, Fax : 868861-62, E-mail : multmode@bangla.net.

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