



Tighter security measures have been introduced at all shopping complexes and malls.

Extortion decreases in markets on special pre-Eid security

SYED TASHFEE CHOWDHURY

With special police forces posted at the shopping complexes in the city, shop-owners reported a drastic decrease in extortion ahead of Eid, compared to that in previous years.

"We are quite satisfied this Eid season with the measures taken for the shoppers' and shop-owners' safety," said Mizu, a salesman of an apparel shop in Dhanmondi Plaza.

Hoodlums, drug addicts and extortionists usually target shops and the customers for collecting tolls during the two Eid seasons. The shop-owners are compelled to pay them toll in the face of threat and harass-

ment by the criminals.

As part of special security measures, the government has deployed 40 mobile teams of police and paramilitary Bangladesh Rifles troops at big shopping centres and transport terminals in the capital from the first of Ramadan.

Three policemen have been posted at each shopping complex. They patrol the markets from 10:30am to 11:00pm. Also, mobile courts headed by magistrates are in operation in the city to conduct instant trial of the muggers and extortionists.

The shop-owners said some so-called students also ask for toll from

the shops before Eid showing reasons of iftar party, milad mahfil, charity for orphanages and so on. They demand toll ranging from Tk 5,000 to Tk 20,000.

If the shop-owners refuse to pay toll, the 'social workers' refer to the names of ruling party student leaders and threaten them. "During Eid, they even demand up to Tk 50,000 from a single big shop," said a businessman in Elephant Road area.

Besides, some extortionists make phone calls to big businessmen and shop-owners demanding Tk 1 lakh to Tk 3 lakh, said a businessman on condition of anonymity.

The callers usually refer them-

selves to be the 'right-hand' or 'left-hand' of top terrorists like Kala Jahangir, Subroto Bain or Sweden Aslam.

"We hope the businessmen would report to the police after receiving such phone calls so that the police can take steps against it," said Ashraf Huda, commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP), when asked about the matter.

Most businessmen suggest introduction of caller-ID system on their telephone lines, which may be an effective tool to identify such callers. They, however, are a bit relieved this year finding effective measures taken by the government for their safety.

Time to send a card

SABRINA KARIM MURSHED

Greeting card outlets teeming with visitors in the capital exude the festive air ahead of the Eid-ul-Fitr.

Although the card culture was originally adopted from the west, it has become an inseparable part of Eid celebrations in this country for decades.

"Eid greeting cards convey good wishes for the Eid in a better way and in more appropriate words," said Suborna Kabir, a student of Eden College while buying Eid cards at New Market.

Nazrul Islam, Manager of Ideal Products which is one of the oldest greeting card houses in the country, said the trend has become increasingly popular over the years.

"We used to print books only in the 60s. However, we started printing

diaries, calendars, posters and greeting cards from the mid-70s to meet the demand of customers," Nazrul said.

He also informed that even ten years ago, Ideal Products had printed around four lakh cards during Eid but now it can not think of anything less than two crore.

Traders said the change in social norms and people's attitude led to the increasing popularity of greeting cards.

"There were times when people expected to be invited to a wedding personally. Now they do not mind if the host simply sends a card. Similarly greeting cards are the most in-demand during Eid celebrations as it helps to convey Eid wishes inside a tight schedule when it is hard to socialise," said Abdul Hamid of Zeenat Store at Dhanmondi.

Eid greeting cards are sought not

only by individuals but also by corporate offices for sending to partners, associates, customers and clients as a goodwill gesture.

A few years ago, card stores were limited in numbers across the city with New Market being the most popular destination.

Now almost every locality has a Hallmark or an Archies outlet providing international standard and brand greeting materials. However, while the price range in New Market remains between Tk four to Tk 50, the foreign ones can reach up to Tk 500.

Creating personalised greeting cards was once popular with children and even adults but that interest is fast diminishing.

"The personalised ones may not look as attractive as the ones bought from shops," said Silvia, a student of Fine Arts Institute of Dhaka University.



Patients worry as Eid draws near

SULTANA RAHMAN

Patients at different hospitals and clinics of the city might be deprived of proper treatment in the coming weeks as there will be very few doctors on duty during the Eid vacation.

Emergency patients stand to suffer most as doctors will go on leave from Friday, the week-end holiday. The three-day government holidays start from Saturday. The vacation mood might continue till November 19 (Friday) as there is a general tendency among people of not returning to work in time after the Eid.

"Many emergency patients go back without treatment or runs from one hospital to another during the Eid holidays," said a senior doctor at Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH).

"The small number of doctors and nurses who remain on duty are not adequate to handle the flow of patients. From my experience I can tell you that treatment and care is seriously neglected as the fourth class employees also go on vacation," he added.

For patients and their close ones, Eid holidays mean crisis of doctors, consultants, nurses, ward boys and hospital staff.

Iqbal Karim lost his younger brother during the last Eid break. Iqbal's brother died on the DMCH's corridor as there was no one to attend to him.

"I had rushed to the emergency unit of the hospital but there was no doctor or ward boy there," Iqbal recalled.

Authorities of different hospitals and clinics claimed that they take special preparations to ensure proper medical

facilities during any vacation and keep non-Muslim doctors, consultants and nurses on duty during Eid holidays. But sufferers said that the main problem occurs when hospitals receive critical patients in need of specialists' attention.

"During a vacation it is really hard to ensure proper treatment for critical patients because in most cases we can not offer them specialised doctors," said Dr Mohammad Ullah, emergency medical officer of Central Hospital.

Drugs are also hard to find during the Eid break mainly at government hospitals.

"Even on working days people do not get free drugs at the DMCH. How can they get them during holidays when most officials in hospital administration are absent?" said a DMCH staff.

In crisis situations the DMCH is the only place in city where patients are not turned away normally. But ward boys can hardly be seen at the emergency units of most government hospitals including the DMCH. It has also been alleged that many patients are deprived of basic drugs and medical supplies like syringes, gauze, saline and other essentials which are supposed to be provided free of cost at government-run hospitals.

"The DMCH has expanded from a 800-bed hospital to a 1700-bed one. But the number of fourth class staff has remained at 900. Everyday at least 1000 patients visit the hospital's outdoor section," said another senior official of DMCH.



Patients at the DMCH are anxious of their plight during Eid, with most doctors and staff taking their vacations.

Decoration business goes slack on Ramadan

CITY CORRESPONDENT

Decoration houses -- small or big -- are not in high spirits with the Eid approaching after Ramadan -- the small ones will lose business and the bigger ones are waiting for the end of the lull period.

Small decoration houses made the best use of this period decorating venues for iftar parties, but the big ones a bit downbeat, as there were no big events such as weddings.

Ramadan brings a month long restraint to society. People avoid celebrating events like weddings and other related functions. All big decorators suffered huge losses because of this.

"No marriages or big family programmes are arranged during the period. We have no business and no Eid celebrations," said Shahjahan, manager of Hazi Chan Mian & Sons, a decorator from Newmarket.

"We received orders to serve sev-

eral iftar parties. Clients ask for plates, glasses, large sheets, chairs, tables and dishes in small numbers. We make the best business from the iftar culture," said Monir Mia, proprietor of Bashundhara decorator, a small enterprise in west Dhanmondi.

Various government and non-governmental bodies, political and social organisations arranged iftar parties over the month. At the same time many other had family iftar parties.

"Iftar parties are ordinary arrangements and big decorators are not required to arrange them. I had an iftar party on the 21 day of fasting and engaged a small-time decorator to arrange it," said Zakir Hossain a resident of Kalabagan.

"I received a big order only on Monday, a few days to Eid. This business favours small service providers during Ramadan," said Mohammed Monir of New Decoration Centre of New Elephant Road.

