

Good crowd, but no sign of good shopping yet

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Shoppers swarmed the city's shopping malls on Friday, the third weekend in Ramadan, but their Eid shopping spree is yet to pick up pace.

People now mostly spend time window-shopping -- browsing and checking out possible buys while waiting for the Eid bonus expected to be disbursed from this week.

Storeowners on the other hand fear a dry festival season this year as price hike of the essential goods has added extra pressure on people's budget.

"This Friday we had a good crowd, however the sale was not as good as we expected," said one of the salesmen at a readymade garment store at Bashundhara City.

"People are browsing a lot. They are checking out the expensive items but in the end they are buying the cheaper ones," he added.

Another seller at Chadni Chawk market said, "The price hike of essential commodities has an impact on the prices of clothing. It is already mid Ramadan. Average sale is half of what we sold this time last Ramadan," he added.

At Rifles Square market, a storeowner said, "As usual we have prepared for Eid with a huge collection including many brand items. Eid is our best season. But we have doubts about the sale this year. We are afraid that we will not be able to sell the entire lot."

Most of the sellers said customers are buying only children's wear. The customers echo them. "We are giving preference to children, holding back from shopping for ourselves," said Shiful



The city shopping malls are teeming with crowds but most shoppers are yet to start buying.

Begum, a shopper at Bashundhara City market.

"Everything is pricier than last year. May be after getting the Eid bonus we will think of shopping for others," she added.

Another shopper said, "Usually every year we present gifts to relatives. This year it will not be possible."

Meanwhile, foreign goods, mostly Indian items in georgette and chiffon are dominating the sale in shopping malls, especially in women's wear segment in the city's main shopping zones -- New Market, Chadni Chawk, Gausia, Hawkers' Market, Bashundhara city, Rifles Square, Raja Plaza, Eastern Plaza, Shoppers World or Almas.

Popular Bollywood soap operas have a direct influence on women's line-up in most shopping centres. Several new

designs such as Gypsy, Anarkali, Mughal-e-Azam, embellished with golden thread (jari), sequins, bids and stones are becoming the latest crush of many young women this year.

Floral pattern is the most popular motif in women's clothing. Cotton with hand stitches is the chosen style for men's panjabi. Popular boy's outfits have cartoon characters on them. Boys in their late teens prefer trendy casuals in jeans and t-shirts with frayed collars in bright colours.

In various fashion houses of the city, cotton and handmade local items are also attracting customers. Their Eid line-up is mostly decorated with hand embroidery, block print, hand paint, patchwork and screen-print on handmade fabrics made in Narsingdi, Sirajganj, Tangail

and Comilla.

In the last few years Dhaka city saw a mushrooming development in fashion houses. These designer shops played a major role in reviving the handmade local products. A major fraction of the city customers are opting for these products this Eid.

Meanwhile, hawkers are back in business on the footpaths of Dhaka after their eviction in mid-January and they seem happy.

"This year's specialty is we are enjoying a toll-free business opportunity," said Imam Hossain, a hawker beside the Baitul Mukarram national mosque. Around one-lakh professional street vendors and thousands more seasonal hawkers have set up their makeshift trade centre at 18 points alongside the 10 holiday markets in the city.

"People mostly buy from us on

their way to someplace. This is the best part of our business because in every split second someone walks through the footpath of Dhaka and many of them become our customer," added Imam.

"We have experienced huge loss and regular harassment during the past few months. We are just happy to be back in business," said Romjan Ali, another hawker from Farmgate.

Many hawkers, however, said that thousands of people displaced by floods joined their trade in recent times increasing the competition. "Sometimes we have more hawkers than customers," said Romjan.

The 18 places where the hawkers are now allowed to sit every day are Gulistan, Baitul Mukarram, Doel Chattar, Farmgate, New Market, Jurain, Postogola, Jatrabari, Motijheel, Mohakhali, Amtoli, Mirpur Stadium, Mirpur-1 Shah Ali Mazar area, Gabtoli, Mirpur Rokeya Sarani, Gulshan-1 and Uttara Rajuk playground.

Among these places Gulistan, Baitul Mukarram, Mouchak, New Market-Gausia, New Elephant Road, in front of Bashundhara City Farmgate, Mirpur 1 and 10 are the busiest. Hawkers sitting near the New Market-Gausia shopping zone are the most popular.

City has also turned into a carnival for the weavers with several handloom fairs going on in many places in the city, displaying a wide range of handloom products. After the floods these fairs are helping the weavers to overcome the losses, said the organisers.

Bangladesh Jamdani Manufacturers and Exporters Association is holding a month-long Jamdani fair at Shilpakala

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This artisan at Shankhari Bazar is molding an idol of goddess Durga as the Durga Puja is about three weeks away. Preparation for the Puja, the biggest festival of Hindus, is in full swing in the city with many areas already buzzing with activity.

Move to restore parks, playgrounds



TAWFIQUE ALI

The government has at long last planned to take necessary measures to reclaim and restore the city's public parks and playgrounds, mostly occupied and in bad shape.

A 10-member committee has been formed to prepare and submit a list delineating the locations and latest state of the parks and playgrounds under custody of different agencies within the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) area.

The committee formed on Sept 5 was asked to report within 15 days but the hope for bringing the parks back to proper shape is fading as the committee has not yet met. Twelve days have already elapsed after the committee started working.

Parks and playgrounds under the custodianship of DCC are in a deplorable state due to poor maintenance of the scanty breathing spaces crucially needed for the city dwellers.

Some of these parks exist only on paper while some seemingly in abandoned condition.

DCC itself is unaware of the number of parks and playgrounds under its responsibility.

According to the DCC information guide, it has 47 public parks while its estate department says 41 parks. According to a recent survey of DCC, it has 61 parks.

Some of these parks and playgrounds are in possession of different organisations for exclusive and commercial uses.

LGRD ministry at an inter-ministerial meeting on September 5 formed the committee to get a comprehensive picture of the city parks and playgrounds. The committee will make recommendations for restoration and conservation of them.

The committee will collect information about the parks and playgrounds from all the agencies concerned including DCC, Rajuk, PWD, BTTB, Railway, BIWTA and sports ministry, according to meeting sources.



Government steps to restore the city's public parks may change the looks of the park at the English Road (top), turned into a bus stand, and the T&T playground at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, occupied by handloom fairs at most times of the year.

Unruly truckers still enter city in restricted hours

RIZANUZZAMAN LASKAR

During the lull in traffic right after the Iftar, city streets are suddenly taken over by a number of unusually fast but heavy vehicles -- delivery trucks and lorries.

These gigantic vehicles, with their horns blaring and violating the restriction on their entry to the city between 8:00am and 8:00pm, are seen running amok inside the capital between 6:00pm and 7:00pm as the traffic personnel feel dozy at their posts after facing hours of hectic pre-Iftar traffic battle.

"Everyday, on my way back home from the university, I notice fleets of heavy trucks honking their ridiculously deafening horns and racing with each other on the streets near Gabtoli as if the street is their racing track," said Fahad Mahmud, a Mirpur resident.

"The other day I saw one of the trucks almost hit a CNG auto rickshaw that got in its way. They [truck and bus

drivers] seem to have been liberated from traffic regulations and drive in a way as if the streets belong to them," he added.

A large number of heavy trucks are seen speedily through the thoroughfares of Sayedabad, Jatrabari, Pallabi, Uttara, Mirpur, Gabtoli, Postogola and other areas during the Iftar hours.

While most of these heavy vehicles are inter-district cargo carriers transporting goods to and from the capital, fleets of trailers can also be seen carrying construction materials across the metropolis.

This correspondent witnessed a number of heavy trailer trucks recklessly speeding through Malibagh rail crossing toward Mouchak Market at 6:35pm on Saturday. One of the trucks even almost hit a CNG auto rickshaw. No official from the traffic department was seen at the intersection while the trucks were zooming through the road and at the same time honking their deafening

horns.

"I admit that a few of on-duty traffic personnel tend to take a breather during the Iftar hours since the traffic during that time is usually light. Besides, some of us are also fasting and therefore have to take Iftar," said a traffic sergeant on duty at Karwan Bazar intersection.

The official admitted that although they come across a few heavy trucks speeding through the city streets before 8:00pm, they usually overlook the violation.

"As those [heavy vehicles] are allowed to enter the city streets from 8:00pm, entering an hour or so much earlier would not really make much of a difference," he rationalised.

Trailer truck drivers, however, alleged that they have to bribe their way in the city. According to Enamul, a trucker from Mymensingh, the amount of bribe usually depends on the

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A traffic police sergeant fines a driver of a lorry for entering the city in restricted hours.

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