

# Alien clothes take over Benarosi Palli

SHAHNAZ PARVEEN

Benarosi Palli at Mirpur, once the most popular destination for women looking for the elegant Benarosi and Katan saris, is now flooded with foreign clothes, mostly Indian.

The imported or smuggled Indian saris are slowly taking over the local products at the market ahead of Eid. The word 'Benarosi' however exists only in name.

All the latest arrivals that sparkle through the windowpane

in most shops are imports. The latest hits include Joypuri chiffon, Kanjibharam, Dulhan, Shanonda, Kachak, Monihar and Phulkoli.

In many cases Indian designs are being reproduced in the market with raw materials com-

ing from India. Hindi movies and soap operas have a profound effect on the designs.

"Various types of georgette and chiffon saris embellished with golden thread (jari), sequins, bids and stones are currently in vogue. We give the

customers what they want," said a storeowner.

"Women don't want Katan or Benarosi anymore. They have been wearing it for years. Now they want something new," he added.

Original weavers however differ with this statement. Mohammad Kashem, general secretary of Benarosi Palli Shop Owners Association, said that there are many women who still want Katan and Benarosi but its production has declined drastically.

Kashem's family is one of oldest in the area. His family along with many others, mostly weavers, arrived from Banaras, India during the partition in 1947. A large segment of the people who arrived here from Bihar later became the apprentice of these weavers.

Currently there are around 4,000 handlooms in the Benarosi Palli. Kashem informed that only 5 years ago the number was around 25,000 spreading all the way from Mirpur section 10, 11 and 12. The rhythmic whipping of handlooms all day was the most prominent sound in the area. The noise is gradually dying away.

The sales area however is expanding every day, outside the original Benarosi Palli. There are 98 stores in the area now. Majority of them keeps the spotlight on georgette and chiffon saris with Karchupi, Jari work with sequins, bids and stones.

Kashem explained, "There are various aspects that led to the fall of this glorious tradition. The most important reason is that it is no longer cost effective. Weavers



A weaver at work at the Benarosi Palli in Mirpur.

could not survive with their income so they moved on to other trade."

"A large segment of weavers learned Jari work. Another major reason is that the industry did not receive enough endorsement," he said. "The only factor that is still keeping Benarosi and Mirpuri Katan alive is that various fashion houses of the city is

sari costs around Tk 500.

Payment of the weavers depends on the design of the sari. It is around Tk 200 to Tk 400. A sari with intricate design takes more time to weave so it costs more. Mohajons often employed handlooms from other weavers. Per handloom rent is around Tk 200. In addition to this, there is house rent and

labour and investment that it is no longer cost-effective," said Mohammad Sonu, one of the weavers.

"My father was a weaver. I inherited the profession from him. But I never want my children to become what I am. It is very hard to survive as a weaver," he added.

There are also local politics

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still promoting them. They are our major customers."

Most weavers work for 'mohajons' who later sell their products to various shops. One of the mohajon explained, expert weavers take around 5 to 7 days to produce a Katan sari. One Katan requires around Tk 580 worth of yarn while Jari for one

electricity bill.

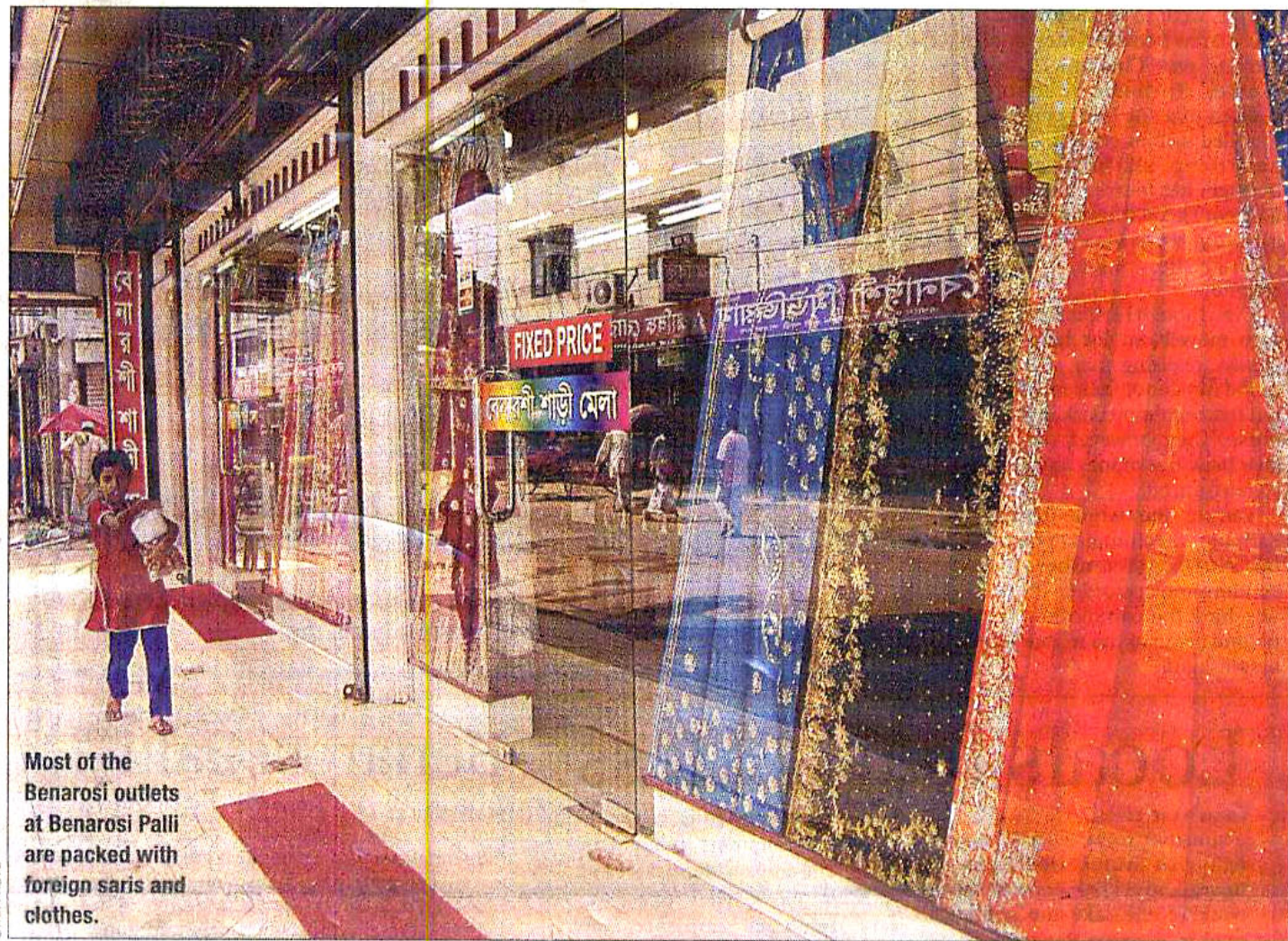
On the other hand, price of yarn is increasing every day. Yarn currently sells at Tk 720 per kg. Only a year ago it was around Tk 360. All these factors are making Benarosi and Katan sari less profitable.

"The profit is so meagre compared to all the excruciating

involved, said one of the senior weavers on condition of anonymity. "The Benarosi Palli and production is no longer in control of the original weavers who understand the value and tradition of the product."

In early 90s, the government announced that commercial

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Most of the Benarosi outlets at Benarosi Palli are packed with foreign saris and clothes.

## PROPOSED BRIDGE OVER GULSHAN-BANANI LAKE

# Locals fear a mess of traffic

TAWFIQUE ALI

The proposed bridge over the Gulshan-Banani Lake linking road-11 of Banani with road-41 of Gulshan is likely to mess up the residential area by worsening traffic situation, apprehend the residents.

They fear that the rush of traffic across the bridge would aggravate traffic congestion on roads 41, 44, 39 and 35 in Gulshan, with the linking of 60 feet wide commercial road-11 of Banani with 40 feet wide road-41.

They suggest that the 60 feet road-11 should be connected with road-34 of similar width at the Gulshan end, building an approach road along the west bank of the lake, as the road directly leads to Gulshan Avenue.

On the other hand, releasing traffic from the Banani end through road-41 at Gulshan end will create a detour, as the traffic load has to move through roads 44 and 39 to get to the main avenue of Gulshan, they argued.

A former ambassador and resident of road-41 said seeking anonymity that the project would further add to existing



A long tailback is an everyday feature at Banani Road 11.

traffic congestion in the neighbourhood instead of easing it, for which it has been undertaken.

Two other residents of the same road viewed that impact of the traffic volume would be minimum if it is diverted through road-34. They alleged that no notable survey activities or community discussion was carried out for the project.

The LGRD ministry has undertaken the Tk 12.47 crore project. Architectural and design plan firms have been engaged to provide consultancy.

Md Haider Ali, an executive engineer of the Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) who is project director of the scheme, said that primary aim of the Gulshan-Banani Bridge is to divert the internal traffic of Gulshan and Banani areas to offload the heavy rush on the Kemal Ataturk Avenue.

"Local traffic of the adjoining areas of Gulshan and Banani will now find easy passage without adding to traffic congestion on the Kemal Ataturk Avenue," he said. "The bridge is meant to divert only the local traffic of adjoining areas."

Kemal Ataturk Avenue remains clogged with heavy traffic load from Airport Road, Gulshan North Avenue and vast area of Banani, Ali said adding that the bridge will facilitate offloading the traffic bound to and from Gulshan and Banani.

About the possible traffic mess because of the bridge, he said that roads 41 and 47 at Gulshan end would be used as approach road with one-way traffic. The bridge would connect the road-11 of Banani with both the roads at Gulshan end.

Traffic from Gulshan end will take road-41 to cross the lake while traffic from Banani end will pass through road-47.

About the suggestion of connecting Banani with Gulshan across the lake through road-34, Ali said that it is a different project, which Rajuk is supposed to implement.

It will require either earth filling in the lake or land

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All but the children are seen at the Children's Corner at the Ramna Park.

# Vagabonds, addicts occupy Ramna Park's children's corner

CITY CORRESPONDENT

The children's corner at the city's Ramna Park has long been in a run-down state with the authorities concerned utterly neglectful of its maintenance.

Lack of maintenance is causing waste of public money spent for installation of various playing equipment in the corner. The swings, slippers, seesaws and other rides in the corner are either broken or worn out or stolen.

People in the neighbourhoods like Segunbagicha, Bijoyagar, Shantinagar, Fakirpur, Paltan and Kakrail expressed their frustration over

the authorities' negligence.

Though exclusively designated for children, not above 12 years of age, adults occupy the place. Vagabonds, floating prostitutes, drug addicts, ruffians and muggers roam around there freely with no security personnel deployed.

Swapan Mahmud, a resident of Fakirpur who took his three-year-old daughter to the children's corner on a weekend, said, "The situation is nothing but a nuisance that denies children their right to play."

Bipasha Rahman, a housewife in her early thirties and resident of Segunbagicha, took her eight-year-old daughter to

the place. But she was frustrated to see that the playing equipment are either broken or being misused by adults.

During a three-hour stroll at the corner on September 19, this correspondent found iron shackles and seats of seven swings, out of ten, broken and taken away while the corner was occupied by vagabonds and floating prostitutes.

Pimps and prostitutes were found using the rides. There were no security personnel.

A young couple from Paltan area came there in the afternoon with their tiny tot and was looking for a scope to grab any playing ride but to no avail.

Public Works Department (PWD) owns the Ramna Park. Civil engineering division of PWD installs rides and other facilities in the park while Arboriculture Department is responsible for its maintenance.

Sub-divisional Officer (SDO) of Arboriculture Department Md Moazzem Hossain admitted that the children's corner is invaded with unwanted elements but he justified it by saying that the park is open to all and he cannot ask anyone to leave it.

Hossain had said in mid-July that he would arrange a better security set-up within a week for

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The preparation for construction of the proposed Gulshan-Banani Bridge starts at the Banani end.