



Romance warms up urban business

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LOVE is in the air, and not only because of Valentine's Day. The Bangla calendar gives its own reasons to rejoice love and festivities. Spring began on Sunday and the season is meant to spread love and colour, in shades of red and yellow, for the next two months.

With traditions playing a strong role in the festivities, Valentine's Day adds glamour to parties and events. On the other hand, symbols of the winged Cupid mean business for many.

Rahim Sheikh, a 57-year-old flower vendor in Shahbagh area, identifies Valentine's Day as a special day, when people of all ages consider flowers a must-buy.

"No matter what a person's age, they must buy flowers; even if a single rose stick," he said. "However, young people buy more."

"This makes the day a top money-making day for the flower industry. Sales on this day often accounts for nearly 20 percent of annual holiday transactions," said Sheikh.

Roses are just one of many options. Flower choices have become more diverse in the winter season. Roses that also come in new sizes and more vibrant colours look good in bouquets with other flowers are well. This is what makes demand for flowers reach a peak, he said.

However, high romance sometimes translates into high price for consumers. Vendors may ask for Tk 40 for a rose on the day. On other days, a rose would cost a fourth.

Roses are brought into the capital primarily from Savar, Gazipur and Jessore these days, while quality of the flowers varies, he said.

Apart from roses, traders collect other flowers from different districts, such as Jhenidah, Chuadanga, Bogra, Rangpur, Manikganj, Narayanganj, Mymensingh, Chittagong and Sylhet.

Around 100 street flower vendors in the Shahbagh area expect a rise in sales, as the entire month of February is marked with different celebrations, including International Mother Language Day on February 21 and the month long Ekushey Book Fair.

Sheikh sold flowers and bouquets worth Tk 40,000 on the first day of Falgun and Valentine's Day last year.

Meanwhile, high-end flower shops, like Ferns n Petals, are also busy. Ferns n Petals is a florist that imports flowers from India and Thailand. It

has received nearly 2,000 advance orders for Valentine's Day this year.

In addition to flowers, the other oldest agent of love is the greetings card.

Archie's Gallery and Hallmark are two gift outlets that have seen continued growth in sales over the years. Technological innovations and advancements cannot diminish the appeal for paper cards that are used to greet near and dear ones.

Rumana Ali, an executive at Archie's Gallery in Baridhara, said sales of greetings cards are actually increasing by the year.

"I have been working here for the last two years. My observation is that sales are growing every year. This is because the number of young people is increasing, and students are the biggest buyers of cards on these days," she said.

According to industry insiders, the card business bagged around Tk 300 crore in 2010, while at least 20 percent of total card revenue comes from Valentine's Days sales.

In addition, three lakh personal greeting cards are sold across Bangladesh each year on occasions, such as Eid, Valentine's Day and Friendship Day, while about 30 lakh corporate greeting cards are sold.

Local companies including five-star hotels, restaurants, gift shops, telecom operators, radio stations, bakeries, boutiques, lingerie stores, beauty salons and printing houses are also meeting client demands during this season of romance.

For five star hotels, the day is as busy as for any other special day. The hotels prepare to earn around Tk 20-30 crore in combined additional revenue on Valentine's Day, said industry insiders.

MA Awal, sales director of Sonargaon Hotel, said middle and upper middle-income groups, join hands with the upper echelon of society to celebrate the special days.

"These days, more people celebrate Valentine's Day, and naturally, we get more clients at our hotel on this day," he said.

"Along with reservations, we get many guests who come to eat out."

Razeen Abhi Mustafiz, assistant public relations manager of Radisson Water Garden Hotel Dhaka, said the hotel arranged special menus at all its restaurants yesterday.

Sublime, a restaurant at Radisson, offered elegant candle light dinners to flare up the



romance. While guests were entertained with Valentine's Day cakes and pastries, fruitcakes and freshly baked cookies at the Chit Chat Deli Café.

In recent years, most urban couples are moving from traditional gift exchanges to dining out, helping local restaurants mark brisk sales.

Diners including Pizza Hut, KFC, Bella Italia, Nando's, Coffee World, Flambe, Casablanca and Spaghetti Jazz, all jazzed up efforts to serve the Valentine's crowd.

Other must-buy items for the day were candies and chocolates.

"All types of chocolate brands -- local or imported -- generated good sales," said an executive at Almas Super Shop.

Brands like Cadbury, Aero, Snickers, Maltesers, Twix, Mars, Ferrero Rocher, Meiji Almond, Black Chocolate, Safari and Toffee Crisp are popular, she said.

Radio, television and newspapers are also smiling ear to ear with growth in sales surrounding Valentine's Day and the season of love.

According to industry insiders, the radio stations broadcast the highest number of advertisements for Valentines, as radio ads are cheaper than those on any other form of media.

The four FM radio stations organised different quiz contests and lucrative awards, like dinner with a star, for the day.

According to a research conducted by the Ban-

gladesh Brand Forum, the radio is the fourth largest advertising vehicle with four percent of total expenditure, which accounts for around Tk 40 crore a year.

Most boutiques also launched new collections for Valentines and spring shopping.

Aarong, Kay Kraft, Bibiana, Onnomela, Nipun, Sadakalo and Deshal have come up their latest collection of saris and other trendy outfits and home décor items.

They are offering attractive discounts on several items. The boutiques are expecting brisk sales as well this season.

Beauty salons are also abuzz these days. Kaya Skin Clinic, a newly launched salon, has offered gift items including skin care products for clients.

The celebrations are endless. People are looking forward to pamper themselves with scopes of ice-cream as well.

Baskin Robbins, one of the oldest international ice cream chains, is ready to entertain guests with 1000 different flavours of ice cream and sherbets.

Rainbow, Dolce Vita, and Danish chain Andersen's are also there to attract guests to the sweet, creamy, smooth and delicious world of ice cream.

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Romance in symbols

Why February 14?

It was Pope Gelasius who declared February 14 to be Saint Valentine's feast day around 498 A.D. It could be because that's when Valentine was martyred a couple of hundred years earlier.

February 14 is also the day that birds supposedly begin their mating season.

It's in the cards

The oldest surviving Valentine dates back to 1415. It was a love poem written by Charles, the Duke of Orleans, to his wife during his imprisonment in the Tower of

London after his capture at the Battle of Agincourt. He wrote her a series of poems, 60 of which are preserved in the British Library.

Exchanging valentines (or cards) didn't catch on in America until the early 1700s, and in the 1840s a woman named Esther Howland sold the first manufactured valentines.

Signs of the heart

The heart shape is one of the oldest and most common icons, used as far back as the pre-Ice Age in Europe. Graphically, it is

related to signs for fire, flight, union and togetherness. It is also a variation of the Arabic symbol for the number 5.

In the Christian trilogy of faith, hope and charity, the heart stands for charity.

In Sweden, the shape is associated with the derriere, and is an old symbol for a unisex bathroom.

Cupid is as cupid does

In Roman mythology, Cupid is the son of Venus, the goddess of love, hence his connection to romance. (His counterpart in Greek myth is Eros, the son of Aphrodite.)

Cupid himself fell in love once, with a mortal woman named Psyche. Although their relationship suffered from an interfering mother-in-law and the tensions that arise when gods marry beneath their class, it all worked out in the end. Psyche was made a goddess herself later on.

It was the ancient Romans who portrayed Cupid as a winged child carrying a bow and arrows, with which to pierce the hearts of lovers. It was Jeremy Piven who portrayed Cupid in the 1998 sitcom about a man who was either the Roman god of love - or a nutcase.

