

Boutiques gear up for Baishakhi sales



POLASH KHAN

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FASHION boutiques, both in the capital and outside, spend busy time as the Bangalees all around are preparing to celebrate their biggest festival of the year.

Pahela Baishakh or the first day of the Bangla New Year that falls on April 14 is just a few days away. It is putting an extra pressure on the fashion houses and boutiques to cater to the people's expectations before the Bangladeshis through the streets.

Women in brightly painted saris and men in elaborately embroidered panjabis on the day seem to outsmart the revellers of earlier years - irrespective of age, gender, caste or creed, as soon as the sun rises on the day.

Although the occasion is short-lived, fashion houses say there is no dearth of

excitement among them to dress men and women in vibrant wavy seas of red and white and green and flaming colours.

Pahela Baishakh is a national holiday in Bangladesh and it is by far the biggest, the brightest and the most important celebration in the Bangla speaking community's annual calendar.

Women clad in white saris with red borders bedeck themselves with brightly coloured bangles, flowers, and tips on the forehead before leaving home early in the morning.

There are others who still choose salwar-kameezes but the colour combinations remain the same. Men wear white dresses to welcome the first day of the year.

Taslim Akter Moni, owner of Shanta Boutique and Tailors in the capital's Malibagh, supplies fatuas, panjabis and salwar-kameezes to two shops in a upscale shopping centre.

She has been running her dressmaking business for eight years, but said she would not put her products up on display in her own store, as she would not get right prices for them.

Saba Noureen, who owns a fashion house, Mekhola, in Mohammadpur, said the customers will have to pay higher prices for the dresses this time due to rising wages and costs of fabrics and other materials.

“I would not go for Baishakhi items, if the orders were not from Brisbane,” she said, adding that her second shipment of garment items such as fatuas, saris and salwar-kameezes would be airborne soon.

Her elder sister runs a shop in Brisbane, the Australian city. She, however, will also supply some items to a few permanent customers in Bangladesh.

Noureen said the customers are not likely to get dresses at prices they have been so far used to. “To maintain quality, I have to increase the prices as there has been a rise in the associated costs of trade. Many may not increase prices in fear of losing business, but then they will have to compromise with quality.”

The selling price of Noureen's saris start at Tk 1,300, which with quality of fabrics and added embellishments sees a Tk 400 rise on average, fetching the top-most price of Tk 6,000. The average price of a fatua is Tk 625, while the price of a short panjabi is Tk 650.

Like the capital city, Pahela Baishakh is observed and welcomed amid much festivity across the country.

Tanuja Rahman Maya, owner of Jessore-based handicraft store Rong Handicrafts, said she is getting busier as the Pahela Baishakh nears.

She said her fashion house is working on delivering short panjabis for men. “We are also bringing in fatuas for children with fantastic designs,” she told The Daily Star.

New and newer items such as saris, panjabi, fatuas and salwar-kameezes have been hitting the store since the first day of April, said Maya.

She said Jessore is a culturally advanced town in the southern region. “The district administration also regularly organises various programmes to welcome the Bangla New Year.”

Maya, who supplies boutique items

to some shops based in Dhaka, said they make quite brisk business, actually the second highest sales during the Pahela Baishakh season after the Eid-ul-Fitr.

Last year, Kamrun Nahar, owner of Gomti Fashion House at Aziz Super Market, the country's one of the top markets hugely popular with young generation, saw all her garment stocks sold out. “This year, I have ordered for more items as I expect a rise in sales this year too.”

Nahar, who herself designs her items, said they are focusing on adding more colours to clothes, instead of limiting to red and white commonly seen in the earlier years. “There is a shift in the taste of people. It is a festival of colours. They want more colourful dresses.”

She said although the prices of fabrics have increased to an extent, her shop would not hike the prices of items too much, as people come to Aziz Super Market for its reasonably priced garments.

A number of Pahela Baishakh items have already hit Nahar's shop from five sub-contractors in Mirpur, she said, adding that new dresses with new designs would continue to arrive every day until April 14.

More than 200 boutiques in Aziz Super Market always offer trendy and comparatively more affordable garment items during any festival in the country -- no matter how small and big the occasion is. The trend will continue, said shop-owners.

Popular fashion house Kay Kraft has also come up with new designs in saris, salwar-kameezes, tops, panjabi, fatua, shirt, T-shirt, children's garments, ornaments, gifts and home decors on the

occasion of Pahela Baishakh.

In case of colours, the fashion house has chosen red, maroon, orange, white, off-white, magenta and others. It has introduced garments of 25 types for children aged between two to 12, said Kay Kraft Director Khalid Mahmood Chowdhury. “The traditional fold art motif would dominate the design.”

He said their collection of panjabis and varieties in designs would be able to live up to the expectation of the customers. There are also budget panjabis.

Aarong, the country's leading fashion house, has brought in a raft of new collections.

In salwar-kameezes, there are a lot of variation in cuts, motifs and colours. Folk motifs are aesthetically expressed mostly through screen prints.

All new designs in saris will sport the traditional feel unharmed. The floral, ornamental and folk motifs are displayed through block print, screen print, embroideries and patchwork.

Taant saris are also an attraction. Works of appliqué, embroideries, block prints, screen prints and sequins etc have taken the beauty of the ordinary taant saris to a new exciting level. The spirit of Baishakh has been portrayed in panjabi, fatua and other dresses.

The students of Fine Arts Institute of Dhaka University are also preparing items to welcome the Bangla New Year.

“We know how to put on a show,” said Nazmul Hasan, a student of Oriental Art of the institute, while painting motifs on a paper mask.

fazlur.rahman@thedailystar.net



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Plush hotels ready to tickle the taste buds

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PLUSH and deluxe hotels and restaurants are planning to welcome Bangla New Year 1418 with Baul music, traditional dance, and mouth watering indigenous dishes for customers.

As the Bangladeshis' most popular festival nears, the hotels and restaurants are preparing to join the culturally rich Bangladeshis in greeting the New Year.

To give an exposure to Bangladeshi culture and highlight traditional Bangladesh, Dhaka Sheraton Hotel will organise a daylong “Baishakhi Utsab”.

The festival will kick off with the first rays of the sun on the first day of the Bangla New Year. There will also be the traditional Pitha at the lobby, which will be decorated with the traditional theme of Bangladeshi culture.

The occasion will feature daylong Bangladeshi music. The Pitha ghar in the lobby will serve special Bangladeshi refreshments.

Platinum Suites, the country's all suite bou-

tique hotel, in the heart of the business and commercial hub of Banani on road 11, will offer a package to the customers to enjoy live Baul music and buffet featuring traditional delicacies and receive complimentary gifts and face painting at Tk 1,050 only.

Radisson Water Garden Hotel Dhaka is going to celebrate the New Year with due festivity. Special Bangladeshi food items will be served at the restaurants of the hotel.

Water Garden Brasserie will offer special lunch and dinner buffet menu where different kinds of bharta of shutki, prawn, potato and eggplant and bhaji can be found.

At Pan Pacific Sonargaon, from April 14 to 16, there will be a Bangladeshi traditional fair in the Lobby Lounge area ornamented with a number of colourful stalls to offer Bangladeshi handicrafts, clothes, souvenirs and snacks.

A group of young artists will enthrall the guests with their astounding rhythms of dance and music while the guests will also enjoy the tantalising and splendid delicacies of different regions of Bangladesh.

Dhaka Regency will celebrate the day with additional flair and fanfare, with an extensive deshi lunch and dinner buffet of sumptuous indigenous delicacies, jhalmuri, fuchka and chatpati, live local music, Bangla cartoon festival for the kids, fortune telling with mysterious parrots, henna and face painting festivity.

The Grandiose Restaurant on Level 6 of the hotel will be transformed into a minefield of Bengali exposition.

Hotel Sarina will offer Bangla dishes during lunch and dinner on the day. A live music featuring traditional folk songs will also be part of the celebration.

The Westin Dhaka will decorate itself in a traditional style. The ambiance will give the customers the feeling along with traditional Bangladeshi foods from April 13 to 15.

This year Westin has arranged some cultural shows such as traditional Baishakhi live performance, Baul performance, face painting, mehndi utshab, and many more.

fazlur.rahman@thedailystar.net



Hotels like Platinum Suites will offer special delicacies on the first day of Bangla New Year.