OLD TALES OF NEW MARKET

What do you expect to take away from a shop that you visit on a regular basis? Some clothes if you are visiting a clothing store, gadgets if you are in an electronic shop or greeting cards from a novelty store. Shops only sell tangible objects that you have to pay hard earned money for. Dhaka's New Market, however, is much more than just a market for trade. It's a hub for nostalgia, a place to evoke special memories of bygone days.



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PHOTOS: PRABIR DAS

'Tis the season to be a shopaholic. Many of us, despite the weather and the toll fasting takes, are making our last harried stops at malls and boutiques for Eid clothes and gifts. We run in and out of stores, laden with bags, paying little mind to the surroundings, plush as they may be, for it is the goods these stores sell that we're interested in. But at Dhaka's historic New Market, the chief attraction might as well be its history, its famed past - that unmissable sense that generations of Dhakaites have stepped through its gateways in search of good bargains.

Old New Market

The year 1952 was a significant one for the people of East Pakistan. The central government of Pakistan had declared Urdu to be the sole national language in 1948, leading to extensive protests amongst the majority of East Pakistan. On February 21, 1952, students of Dhaka University and political activists organised a protest movement where a huge number of demonstrators were killed by the police.

The year marked the beginning of a people's struggle for freedom on one hand and the inception of one of the most ambitious municipal projects on the other. Completed in 1954, New Market was originally intended to cater to the needs of the elite population of Dhaka living in Dhanmandi and Azimpur. The market complex was built on 35 acres of land with a space for 440 shops. However, only 25-30 shops were launched during the initial years of the complex, leaving ample space for people to browse and shop in peace.