

Islampur, the hub for wholesale fabric business was named after the Mughal subahdar in Bengal -- Islam Khan Chisti, who was appointed by Mughal Emperor Jahangir in 1608. Being near the river Buriganga, trade and commerce always flourished here. According to the book "Kingbadantir Dhaka (The Myths of Dhaka)" by Nazir Hossain, the British had set up agencies to conduct wholesale clothing business in Islampur in 1773, during the Company era. Since the British period, even today, Islampur is the largest wholesale clothing material market in Bangladesh.

Anything from bed-sheets to expensive garment materials are available in Islampur Market. A large collection of Saris like Jamdani, Rajshahi silk, hand paints, batik; girls' wear like shirts, three pieces, colourful laces; men's wear like shirt-pant-Punjabi pieces, lungi (a traditional garment worn around the waist) are of plenty here. Furthermore, cloth-pieces of all sizes, small equipment related to dress making, like needle, buttons, sewing threads and tapes can also be found.

Usually, the perpetual hustle and bustle of the narrow zigzag streets of Islampur symbolises the chaotic environment of the market. But the streets face so much more in Ramadan! Retailers rush to Islampur a month before Ramadan and start stocking up their shops with new fabric materials. Apart from these, vans and rickshaws loaded with various colourful materials is a universal scene here. Besides the local buyers, retailers from different districts of the country come here to buy Eid goods.

As Eid-ul-Fitr is just a couple of weeks away, the wholesalers of Islampur have no respite to talk to people. You would find that some of them are showing different clothes to the retailers, some are measuring whole clothes; some are busy taking notes of the sold goods while others are keeping records of prices. The retailers are seen loading bundles of fabric materials on rickshaws, cycle-vans or pick-up vans.

"The demand of ladies wear, especially three pieces is very high," says 50-year-old Md Faruque Hossain, the owner of 'Faruque and Sons'. "We have a large collection of three pieces within a range of 350 takas to 2,000 takas. All the designs are unique as these are made in



FESTIVAL

ISLAMPUR THE TRADITIONAL EID BAZAAR

NILIMA JAHAN
PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

our own factory." Faruque has been doing this business for the last 25 years. According to him, the amount of sales this Eid is quite satisfactory. Quite a lot of them, however, are reporting low sales compared to the previous years.

Moreover, the sales of men's wear and different home textiles like bed sheets, curtains, towels, cushions, have also increased for Eid. "The bed sheets are sold on an average rate of 100 to 165 takas," says 40-year-old Idris Ali, a staff at 'Tisha

Home Fashion'. The owner of 'Tisha Home Fashion' has been continuing this business as a part of family heritage for years.

"I have come here thrice for buying whole and gauge fabrics for Eid," says 53-year-old Hakima Begum, a buyer from Char Bhadrans upazila of Faridpur district. "I have been coming here to buy my goods for the past 18 years, just because of the reasonable price and good quality of fabrics."

The Islampur market may not be the best choice if you want to shop in a relaxed manner, as many like to do nowadays – air conditioned, proper facilities for customers etc. However, the market does carry generations of heritage and stories of legendary salespeople. It's a unique experience just walking down the streets of Islampur. The historic Islampur bazaar opens every morning at 9:30 am and closes at 8:00 pm, every day, except for Fridays and government holidays. ■



INITIATIVE

Less than a decade ago, when a cyclone hit the south-west-coast of Bangladesh, authorities, though aware, were not prepared for the massive damage that was to follow.

In the dark hours of November 15, 2007, Cyclone Sidr struck the south west coast of the country with winds up to 240 kilometers per hour. The high tidal waves, flooding of low-lying areas, damage of homes, roads and bridges – this category 4 storm had, in a nutshell, destroyed lives of many. The second natural disaster to hit the country in a year, Bangladesh was clearly vulnerable to frequent hydro-meteorological hazards – and to become worse because of climate change.

Cyclone Sidr destroyed more than a million households in the south-west region alone. The number of deaths was estimated at 3,500, with more than a 1,000 still missing, and over 55,000 people sustaining physical injuries.



FROM SHELTERS TO SCHOOLS

ELITA KARIM

PHOTOS: DARSHAN CHAKMA



In the wake of Cyclone Sidr, along with the government many private organisations had come forward to offer support and rehabilitation. Grameenphone, as part of its rehabilitation plans in the SIDR affected areas, committed to provide financial assistance to build four education center-cyclone shelters.

The cyclone shelters are used as education centres throughout the year to provide non-formal primary education to underprivileged children of the locality and they are named as Alok Deep (lighted island). One of the shelters in Sarankhola, an upazila in the Bagerhaat district in the division of Khulna, has now been transformed into a regular-running school. The three-floored shelter-school, with an open ground floor, is divided between students ranging from ages 4-9 years accordingly. "We share this space with the

little kids as well," says a 9-year-old boy, pointing to the first classroom on the first floor. Surely enough, children as young as 3 and 4 years of age take up a little space in the classroom, colouring and learning how to count.

Resource Development Foundation (RDF) and Shushilan, two local NGOs that operate in the selected areas, are responsible for the overall management of the project Alok Deep, including the construction and operation of the schools. Each of these school-cyclone shelters are two-storied buildings along with an adjacent playground.

Such initiatives, where segments of society are provided with support to eventually become independent, financially and also intellectually, are appreciated. One hopes that many more will come forward to right what went wrong. ■

