

## SPOTLIGHT

# A new step towards greater recognition Sonargaon as World Crafts City

The early morning breeze and the slightly cloudy skies promised a respite from the blistering summer's day. And I merrily started for Bhargoan, a quaint village near the banks of Shitalakha, in Sonargaon.

The otherwise lacklustre village was buzzing with activities. A fact that was evident from the turn of the main road, where busy looking men, dressed in their finery of white Jamdani panjabis, were eagerly awaiting the arrival of the jury from the World Crafts Council (WCC), accompanied by representatives from the The National Crafts Council of Bangladesh (NCCB) and the Bengal foundation; and stalwarts of heritage weaves and crafts in Bangladesh — Muneera Emdad, Dr Halima Hossain, and Naushin Khair.

And all because they want to put a tag on Sonargaon as 'World Crafts City.' The NCCB and the Bengal Foundation is in discussion with the WCC to recognise Sonargaon as a World Craft City.

The proposal was presented before the WCC earlier this year, with an aim to revive the glory days of the heritage weave. A four-member team from the WCC was already in

pond and plucking lotus flowers — a typical 'deshi' scene that fills your heart with an unexpected serenity. "These are the weavers' children, hardly five or six years of age, and soon, they will be introduced to 'bulis' — the method of transmitting the technique of Jamdani production from a master to his apprentice," Islam pointed out. Islam, who himself is a weaver, had four looms at work with different commissioned pieces along with his team of eight weavers.

"Frankly, if a master weaver could earn Tk 700 a day, and his apprentice between Tk 450 and Tk 500, only then it is possible for the artisans to fully sustain their basic needs. The monetary dynamics of our lives are quite complicated; we are living a life that is far from the ideal state. Now, a master weaver gets only Tk 400 and that too after working from dawn to dusk, and at times, till the wee hours of the night.

"Be it the heat, the rain, or any illness — we cannot imagine taking rest for a single day, because this money pays for my daughter's schooling. I have to take her to a doctor if she is sick, and feed her more than just sautéed lotus," Islam expressed openly.

Yet, the recently commissioned work for the Jamdani festival has perked up their zeal and passion.

"The designs we used on the saris are replicated from pieces of the bygone era. This intricate and hard work has put hope in our minds that we can document old designs and precise weaving to produce more intricate and delicate sari pieces. Actually, a design depends on the fineness of the thread. The finer the thread, the more detailed and intricate the designs," he explained. "This is why Jamdani prices vary from Tk 3,000 to Tk 2,00,000. The designs are unique to Bangladesh, and I can guarantee that no one can produce what we make from just *bulis*," says

Faizul Islam of Faizul Jamdani Weaving Factory.

The recognition of World Craft City comes with benefits, including the creation of opportunities for co-operation and partnership between other designated crafts cities globally.

"In order for Jamdani to be recognised on the global forum, Bangladesh must arrange exhibitions, attend fairs, and organise fashion shows. Once recognised, collectors from around the world will be able to avail Jamdani directly from Sonargaon.

"On a national level, we can try to make our daughters include at least one heritage loom in their bridal trousseau. It is not that they cannot afford it. We can have theme-based holuds, where only 'deshi Jamdani' will be worn. Jamdani has always attracted patrons of the upper echelon of the society who were fascinated with this product. This trend among affluent members of society should be revived," said Muneera Emdad, of Tangail Saree Kutir.

"Jamdani will have a niche market, but if we do proper branding of this traditional textile, it will be possible for weavers like Din Islam to earn Tk 700 a day," added Emdad.

A five-week Jamdani Festival 2019 is now the talk of the town. Elegant pieces commissioned by Aarong, Aranya, Kumudini, and Tangail Saree Kutir are on display, proving once again that with some support, Jamdani weavers of Sonargaon can weave their dreams again.

The Jamdani Festival 2019 is organised by Bangladesh Jatiya Karushilpa Parishad (National Crafts Council of Bangladesh, NCCB), in collaboration with the Bengal Foundation.

— RBR

Photo: LS Archive/Sazzad Ibne Sayed/Aarong

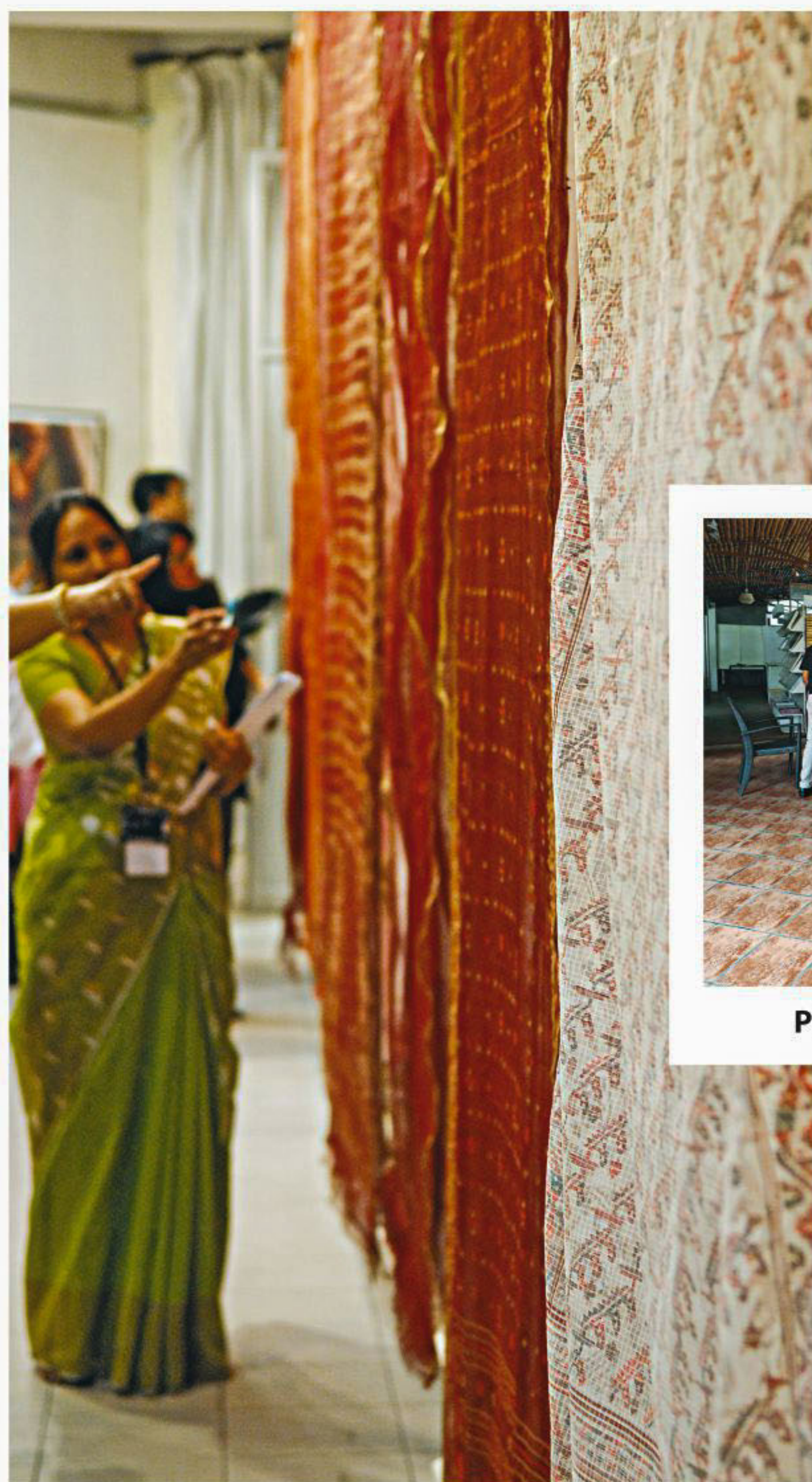


Photo courtesy: Bengal Jamdani Festival

Dhaka to assess the prospects, and this remains the last step towards having the distinction.

I was ushered by Din Islam of Momin Jamdani Ghor towards his homestead, and we stopped by his looms to take a look at the works already in progress.

Walking through the brick lanes and broken bridges, I saw little children swimming in the nearby