

# Bogura artisan jewellery businesses stare at losses amid pandemic

MOSTAFA SHABUJ, Bogura

Around 30,000 artisans from 10 outlying villages of Bogura sadar upazila in Rajshahi are involved in making jewellery with about 66 per cent of them being women and youths who earn between Tk 500 to Tk 4,000 each week from the trade.

Around 10,000 women from Dharampur, Atapara, Fulbari, Baropur, Moglispur, Jhongari, Joypurpara, Shikarpur, Joytika, Ashorpur villages were involved in making cigarette filters just 15 years ago, according to local jewellery traders and makers.

Now though, they craft artisan jewellery at their homes and earn a good amount of money every week, they said.

Besides, some 5,000 youths (mostly girls) also earn roughly Tk 500-1,000 weekly from the trade, which helps them live better, they added.

During a visit to these villages on November 28, this reporter found that the women and youth from almost each and every household was involved in making artisan jewellery.

"Ten years ago, I used to make cigarette filters and fill them with tobacco at home," said Ranjana Begum, an artisan of Baropur village.

At that time, women were paid Tk 10 to make 1,000 filters.

"But now, by working as a craftsman of artisan jewellery for a nearby trader, I have been getting Tk 2,000-4,000 weekly for the last 10 years," she added.

Similarly, Rina Khatun, an artisan of Dharampur village, said she earns Tk 1,000-1,200 each week for the ornaments.

"This business changed our lives. Now, 2,000-3,000 women of my village have become self-reliant through the trade," Khatun added.



The 30,000 antique jewellery makers of 10 villages in Bogura are now struggling to earn a living due to a sharp fall in demand for such ornaments after the Covid-19 outbreak. Many have already changed their profession while some had to sell their jewellery factories as well.

MOSTAFA SHABUJ

The youths in these areas are also earning a living by crafting ornaments at home and are subsequently able to contribute to their families, said Saidul Islam, a jewellery trader of Dharampur village.

Khushi Akter, an 11th grade student aged 17, said during her off-time, she makes artisan jewellery from home.

"I earn Tk 500-600 each week and spend for my own purposes," Akter said, adding that there are around 400-500 boys in the area who do the same.

The business is slowly growing in value and is currently worth about Tk 37 crores annually.

The country's artisan jewellery industry took off just 25 years ago on the outskirts of Dharampur, when the goldsmiths started making some small-sized copper ornaments along with gold.

The business eventually spread across the adjacent 10 villages, said Md Zakir Hossain, secretary of Dharampur Shop Owners' Samity.

Several varieties of artisan ornaments are made in the area with most of the raw materials—such as copper and brass—being imported from India.

Over the last 10 to 15 years, many gold jewellery showrooms have turned into artisan shops while many goldsmiths have shifted to crafting antiques as the price of gold started rising in the country.

Besides, many traders who lost a lot of capital on the gold business are the main clients of local artisan jewellery makers in Bogura, according to local traders. Various retailers, hawkers come to Bogura every day to buy antiquities for more major markets.

Women from all over the country are even selling the artisan artisan jewellery through online shopping portals, Hossain said.

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## Ploughs turn out to be cosmetics Import consignment seized for false declaration

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A huge amount of cosmetics, roughly the volume of three containers, were seized at the Chattogram port yesterday for being falsely claimed to be ploughs in import declarations.

Customs officials will be able to ascertain the exact value of the seized items once the listing is complete in a day or two.

For ploughs, the tax is only 1 per cent while for cosmetics it ranges anywhere from 89 per cent to 131 per cent, officials said.

The Dhaka-based Saleha Trading declared it to be 30 tonnes of ploughs imported from Singapore. The consignment arrived at the port on January 19 this year.

Custom officials made the discovery when unlocking the containers at a port yard on Thursday.

"We had our suspicions and conducted a full physical inspection to find that the containers were full of cosmetics," Rezaul Karim, assistant commissioner of customs, told The Daily Star.

"We notified the importer several times to receive the consignment after physical examination but they did not give any reply," he said.

## SME Foundation launches campaign to promote local products

### DESPERATE BID TO PROMOTE SMEs

25 slogans have been prepared promoting use of SME products

Encouraging quotes of the prime minister will be used as slogans

The slogans will be spread through print, electronic, online and social media platforms

Special features will be published on local dailies

Talk-shows will be organised and text messages will be sent under govt arrangement



### STAR BUSINESS DESK

SME Foundation yesterday launched an online social campaign to encourage people to use more products made by the local small and medium entrepreneurs to help them recover from the losses caused by the ongoing pandemic.

The foundation has also prepared 25 slogans to promote

use of such products through print, electronic, online and social media platforms, SME Foundation Chairperson Masudur Rahman said at the online event.

The state agency will send the slogans to different government and private organisations through letters and emails to raise awareness, he said.

Under the campaign, slogans will

be made utilising the quotes of the prime minister where she encouraged the use of local products.

It will also add pictures of different SME sectors in the leaflets and video clips of the speeches given by the launch programme's chief and special guests will be posted on Facebook, SME Foundation's website and electronic media.

READ MORE ON B3

## Bida beefs up its one-stop service

### STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Availing an environment clearance certificate from now will take just a third of the time previously required, thanks to the One-Stop Service (OSS) portal of the Bangladesh Investment Development Authority (Bida).

Previously, it took investors some 150 days to get the nod from the Department of Environment.

Now, it will be available anywhere between a week and 45 working days for new or running industries based on the trade category and submission of required documents.

Applicants will be able to make payments online and witness in real time the application's progress with the service provider and get feedback on any official unmet requirement.

The certificate will be issued as soon as the service provider gives its approval.

This certificate issuance is one of the 14 new services, including 12 of the environment department, now available at the OSS. The other two are of Bida and the Office of the Registrar of Joint Stock Companies and Firms.

"The ministry [for environment, forest and climate change] is providing services to the investors to improve the business environment and create employment opportunity along with increasing investment," said Environment Minister

Md Shahab Uddin yesterday.

"There is no pending application of investors at economic zones and approval is being given without any hassle and in timely manner," he said while addressing the virtual launching of the 14 services by Bida Executive Chairman Md Sirazul Islam.

Applications through OSS are being received and given approval, he said.

Previously, 21 information-related services were available, including 14 of Bida and one each of the registrar, the National Board of Revenue and Sonali Bank.

The new inclusions enable verification of national identity cards via the Election Commission Secretariat and issuance of both land use clearance certificates from Chattogram Development Authority and of security clearance from the Public Security Division for foreign nationals.

Bida's goal is to integrate as many as 154 services from 35 agencies, all to facilitate investment in the country.

Ziaul Hassan, secretary to the environment ministry, urged investors to contact him when faced with any unexpected hassle.

Bida is working to ensure an investment-friendly environment and to improve the country's ease of doing business status, said Islam.

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## Facebook faces US lawsuits that could force sale of Instagram, WhatsApp

REUTERS, Washington/Palo Alto

Facebook Inc could be forced to sell its prized assets WhatsApp and Instagram after the US Federal Trade Commission and nearly every US state filed lawsuits against the social media company, saying it used a "buy or bury" strategy to snap up rivals and keep smaller competitors at bay.

With the filing of the twin lawsuits on Wednesday, Facebook becomes the second big tech company to face a major legal challenge this year after the US Justice Department sued Alphabet Inc's Google in October, accusing the \$1 trillion company of using its market power to fend off rivals.

The lawsuits highlight the growing bipartisan consensus to hold Big Tech accountable for its business practices and mark a rare moment of agreement between the Trump administration and Democrats, some of whom have advocated breaking up both Google and Facebook.

The complaints on Wednesday accuse Facebook of buying up

rivals, focusing specifically on its previous acquisitions of photo-sharing app Instagram for \$1 billion in 2012 and messaging app WhatsApp for \$19 billion in 2014.

Federal and state regulators said the acquisitions should be unwound - a move that is likely to set off a long legal challenge as the deals were cleared years earlier by the FTC.

"For nearly a decade, Facebook has used its dominance and monopoly power to crush smaller rivals, snuff out competition, all at the expense of everyday users," said New York Attorney General Letitia James on behalf of the coalition of 46 states, Washington, D.C. and Guam, Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina and South Dakota did not participate in the lawsuit.

James said the company acquired rivals before they could threaten the company's dominance.

Facebook's general counsel Jennifer Newstead called the lawsuits "revisionist history" and said antitrust laws do not exist to punish "successful companies."

She said WhatsApp and Instagram have succeeded after Facebook invested billions of dollars in growing the apps.

The government now wants a do-over, sending a chilling warning to American business that no sale is ever final," Newstead said.

Newstead also raised doubts about alleged harms caused by

Facebook, arguing that consumers benefited from its decision to make WhatsApp free and rivals like YouTube, Twitter and WeChat did "just fine" without access to its developer platform.

In a post on Facebook's internal discussion platform, Chief Executive Mark Zuckerberg told employees he did not anticipate

"any impact on individual teams or roles" as a result of the lawsuits, which he said were "one step in a process which could take years to play out in its entirety."

Comments were turned off for Zuckerberg's post, as well as for other posts on the lawsuits shared by Newstead and Chief Privacy Officer for Product Michel Protte, according to copies viewed by Reuters. Newstead also warned employees not to post about the cases.

Facebook did not immediately respond to questions about the posts.

Zuckerberg told employees in July that Facebook would "go to the mat" to fight a legal challenge to break up the company, calling it an "existential" threat, according to audio of internal company meetings published by The Verge.

Although breakup remedies are rare, some antitrust experts said the case was unusually strong given damning statements by Zuckerberg plucked from Facebook's own documents, like a 2008 email in which he said "it is better to buy than compete."



Facebook Chairman and CEO Mark Zuckerberg testifies at a House Financial Services Committee hearing in Washington.

REUTERS/FILE

## GLOBAL BUSINESS

## NEWS In Brief

### SoftBank shares surge on \$11b DoorDash investment gain

REUTERS, New York/Tokyo

SoftBank Group Corp shares surged 11 per cent after the investment conglomerate scored a \$11.2 billion gain in the value of its stake in DoorDash Inc following the US food delivery app's blockbuster stock market debut.

SoftBank, which invested \$680 million in DoorDash in the last three years, saw the value of its 25 per cent stake in the company rise to \$11.9 billion on the first day of trading in New York. SoftBank's shares climbed as much as 19 per cent in Tokyo trading and closed at new two-decade highs at \$8,306 yen.

DoorDash shares ended trading up 87.5 per cent following their debut on Wednesday, valuing the company at \$68.4 billion, more than four times its valuation in a private fundraising round six months ago.

### Smartphone shipments in China fall 17pc in November

REUTERS, Shanghai

Domestic smartphone shipments in China plunged 17 per cent in November from a year earlier, extending a run of double-digit declines in the world's largest phone market, government data released on Thursday showed.

The numbers suggest that handset demand in China remains weak despite the country's fast recovery from the coronavirus crisis, and that manufacturers such as Apple Inc and its rivals will have to fight harder for a smaller pool of customers.

