



Three shoppers checking a kurta at a clothing store at the Aziz Super Market in the capital yesterday. As the country is set to celebrate the first day of Baishakh in colour, for the first time in two years thanks to receding coronavirus pandemic, shops like these are witnessing increased business activities.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Pahela Baishakh sales make a comeback

SUKANTA HALDER and MD ABU TALHA SARKER

Sales centring Pahela Baishakh have picked up as people from all walks of life, buoyed by the improvement in the coronavirus situation, are set to welcome the Bangla New Year in colour and festivity today.

The celebration to mark Pahela Baishakh, the biggest cultural festival in Bangladesh, was muted in the last two years owing to the crisis and related lockdowns. As a result, demand during the second-largest sales season after Eid-ul-Fitr had plummeted.

But the drastic fall in coronavirus caseloads and no death related to the virus in recent weeks mean people are in a joyous mood to celebrate the occasion, in a cheer for clothing and lifestyle brands, sweet retailers, and Hilsa traders.

Traders in markets and shopping malls in the capital city yesterday said they have been passing a busy time to handle the rush of shoppers for the last few weeks.

"Pahela Baishakh is getting a whole new look after a two-year lull. We are getting good response from buyers," said Mohammad Ashraful Alam, chief

operating officer of Aarong, which has about two dozen outlets.

Khalid Mahmood Khan, director of Kay Kraft, another fashion brand, says sales are going fairly well.

"As Pahela Baishakh has fallen in the month of Ramadan, people will celebrate it in a moderate manner. Some customers may cut the budget since Baishakh and Eid-ul-Fitr will be celebrated around the same time. So, we have taken preparations keeping the two festivals in mind."

Khan says the people whose income has not been affected by the pandemic or higher inflation are buying Baishakh-related clothing and other items.

SaRa Lifestyle Ltd, a sister concern of Snowtex Group, a garment exporter, recorded about Tk 50 lakh in Baishakh and Eid-related sales on Tuesday.

"The sales target was not attained in the last two years. As we are getting good responses from customers this year, we may attain our target," said Sharifunnesa Reba, director of the company, which owns eight outlets.

The Covid-19 situation has improved a lot, so there is no fear among people. "So, they can go shopping without any apprehension," she said.

A salesman at an outlet of Yellow, a clothing retailer owned by Beximco, at the Bashundhara City Shopping Complex, says sales have picked up.

The biggest garment wholesale market in Keraniganj, known as Poshakpalli, has recorded increased sales as well.

Hassan Mia, a wholesaler, made 30,000 pieces of panjabi, all of which were sold before the start of Ramadan.

"New demands are coming. But we don't have the capacity to supply them on time," he said.

As people will celebrate the Bangla New Year during the fasting month, it is a bit difficult to separate the exact volume of Baishakh-centric sales from those linked to Eid-ul-Fitr.

According to a survey of the Bangladesh Fashion Entrepreneurs Association, a platform of fashion organisations, conducted in 2012, fashion houses across the country sell around Tk 6,000 crore throughout the year.

More than 50 per cent of them are sold during Eid-ul-Fitr and at least 25 per cent are in the month of Baishakh.

Sweets are an integral part of the Baishakh celebration and items worth

around Tk 50 crore were sold all over Bangladesh during Baishakh before the pandemic arrived.

Sweet shops did not record significant sales during Baishakh in the last two years as the contagious virus kept the consumers at bay. Despite the petering out of the pandemic, the situation has not improved much.

"If we compare this year's business ahead of Baishakh with 2019, it is 10-15 per cent," said Mahbubur Rahman Bakul, head of corporate affairs of Premium Sweets.

Last evening, Mohammad Sujon, a senior salesman of Premier Sweets outlet in Karwan Bazar, however, said the sales were 70 per cent of the 2019 level.

People usually welcome Baishakh in the morning of the day eating Hilsa with watered rice, whether at home, in restaurants or in public places. But due to the fasting month, there will be no such arrangement this time, which has driven down the sales of the most popular fish in the country.

Still, the price of the fish is quite high. Traders at the capital's Karwan Bazar kitchen market sold a Hilsa fish

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Crops damaged by sudden surge of river water

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Boro rice fields in low lying areas of numerous districts in the country's northwest have been damaged by a sudden rush of water in the region, raising worries of losses due to reduced yields.

The char areas of Sirajganj, Bogura, Gaibandha, Lalmonirhat, and parts of Nilphamari and Kurigram have all been inundated for the last couple of days as various rivers that flow from India, including Jamuna and Teesta, have flooded their banks.

The untimely surge of water dashed the hopes of thousands of farmers in the northwest at a time when producers in the haor regions of Sylhet and Mymensingh are also suffering from huge crop losses due to flash floods.

The overflowing waters submerged boro rice crops on more than 7,000

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Farmers on a boat in Fulchhari upazila of Gaibandha are seen attempting to rescue their boro paddy before the overflowing Jamuna river does any more damage to the crop. Low lying fields in the country's northwest have been inundated for a few days now due to a sudden surge of water in rivers flowing from India.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

RESERVE HEIST No judgment given against prime accused: BB

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The Bangladesh Bank yesterday said that the New York County Supreme Court has not given any judgement in a case filed against the three prime accused in connection with the 2016 reserves heist.

The three accused are Rizal Commercial Banking Corporation (RCBC), Lorenzo V Tan, who was president of RCBC at the time of the cyber theft, and Raul Tan, a former treasurer of the Philippines bank.

The BB filed the case with the New York court in May 2020.

Six out of 20 defendants earlier applied to the court seeking a dismissal order on the case, according to a BB statement yesterday.

Of the six, the court dismissed the case against Bloomberry Resorts and Hotels Inc and Eastern Hawaii Casino and Resort located in the Philippines on April 8, it said.

The BB went on to hope that the court would give a positive verdict against RCBC, the prime

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Jet fuel prices hiked again

RASHIDUL HASAN

The price of jet fuel shot up again last week, the 13th hike in 17 months, which will force domestic carriers to raise fares, risking losing travellers and intense competition with foreign airlines.

The move from the Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC) comes at a time when the airline industry is struggling to just get back on their feet with the normalisation of air travel following the removal of restrictions to curb the spread of the pandemic.

Aviation experts said the local airline industry would lose its edge in the global market as the foreign airlines buy jet fuel at lower prices.

The price of jet fuel is now Tk 100 per litre after the Padma Oil Company, a subsidiary of BPC, raised it by Tk 13 a litre.

In December 2020, the price of jet fuel, which accounts for up to 46 per cent of the operational costs of an airline, was Tk 48 a litre.

The international price of jet fuel stands at \$1.02 (around Tk 87.92) per litre, according to the BPC.

Mofizur Rahman, secretary-general of the Aviation Operators Association of Bangladesh,

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Population census from Jun 15, digitally

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) is set to digitally conduct its sixth population and housing census for the first time from June 15 to June 21.

The BBS made this announcement during a press briefing at National Economic Council yesterday.

"Around 3.7 lakh enumerators will collect the data countrywide. To measure the data quality, we will conduct a post-census survey in 350 selected sample areas," said Md Dildar Hossain, the project's director.

The authorities will collect data from each household using a computer assisted personal interviewing system, geographic information system and tablet computers.

Bangladesh President Abdul Hamid is expected to unveil a memorial stamp on the project while Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will give a speech on June 14 making the announcement.

Speaking as chief guest, Planning Minister MA Mannan said he does not see the need for the intervals between each census to be of 10 years.

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STOCKS			
DSEX ▲		CASPI ▲	
0.16%		0.09%	
6,584.97		19,366.90	

COMMODITIES			
Gold ▲		Oil ▲	
\$1,979.25		\$101.67	
(per ounce)		(per barrel)	

ASIAN MARKETS			
MUMBAI	TOKYO	SINGAPORE	SHANGHAI
▼ 0.41%	▲ 1.93%	▲ 0.36%	▼ 0.82%
58,338.93	26,843.49	3,342.22	3,186.82