



PORT CITY in festive mood

Eid shopping gains momentum in Chattogram

PHOTO: RAJIB RATHAN

ARUN BIKASH DEY

With Eid-ul-Fitr inching closer, sales in different shopping malls and roadside markets in the port city are picking up.

Two years since the pandemic, people from all strata are crowding the shops to purchase their most sought after attires.

During a visit to different shopping malls and street markets, this correspondent found that shoppers expressed a mixed reaction over the price of attires.

Bipani Bitan (popularly known as New Market), one of the most sought-after destinations for well-off customers, was seen abuzz with shoppers yesterday.

Md Sagir, president of Bipani Bitan Traders' Association, said sales have been gaining momentum in a total of 500 shops in the market everyday since the 15th of Ramadan.

"We couldn't do business in the past two years due to the Covid-19 situation, but the traders are hopeful to cover the losses this year," he added.

Like Bipani Bitan, other high-end shopping malls, including Ameen Centre, Sammar Ocean City, Central Plaza, Mimi Super Market, Akhtaruzzaman Centre and Bali Arcade were packed with Eid shoppers.

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MD SAGIR
president of Bipani Bitan Traders' Association



Shoppers from middle and low income groups were also busy shopping at different locations.

Shahedul Azam, a private job holder, went to Tama Kumandi Lane at Reaz Uddin Bazar in Chattogram to shop with his family for Eid.

"We couldn't physically shop in the past two years during Eid, but this time, as the Covid-19 situation has improved, we've come here again," he said, adding, "However, the

afternoon to midnight."

People are also rushing to South Land Centre and Johur Hawkers' Market for buying men's wear, including shirts, pants and panjabis.

As South Land Centre and Johur Hawkers' Market are both famous for their stock of export quality shirts and pants throughout the year, male shoppers retained their tendency to rely on these



price of items seems to be a bit high."

"For middle income groups it's crucial to shop within budget, which I can do here easily," said Shahriar Ahmed, another shopper.

Tama Kumandi Lane is extremely popular among middle-income group shoppers," said Ahmed Kabir Dulal, general secretary of Tama Kumandi Lane Merchants Association.

"Around 10,000 shops in 110 malls are now buzzing with Eid shoppers from

places for their Eid shopping.

Different models of casual shirts, t-shirts, jeans and gabardine pants are available in this market with the price ranging from Tk 300 to Tk 1,500.

"Sales are gaining momentum as customers are taking interest in some newly designed garments that we brought in this year. Since clothes aren't sold here in fixed price, customers always enjoy the chance to bargain here," said Md Farhad, a salesman at Johur Hawkers' Market.

Made in Khalifa Patti

Six-decade-old market still a go-to destination for originally designed clothes

MOHAMMAD SUMAN

The ringing sound of hundreds of sewing machines floats through Khalifa Patti in Chattogram every year before Eid-ul-Fitr. At least eight to ten people are hard at work round the clock in every shop of the market.

Almost six decades ago, this market was established at Ghatforhadbeg of the port city, where 3,000 employees are working at 400 shops at present.

Khalifa Patti is famous for making originally designed clothes as per customer's demand. The market's traders make all kinds of dresses after collecting clothes from Islampur in Dhaka and Teri Bazar area of the port city. Every trader here is well-versed in the latest fashion trends.

Visiting the spot, this correspondent saw that the shop staffers were displaying clothes to customers. Some workers were cutting clothes, some were sewing and others were busy pressing the clothes.

The shops also sell plain clothes and ready-made garments including three-piece, lehenga, skirt, saree, panjabi and children's clothes.



Employees said even though the market is busy throughout the year, the crowd multiplies before Eid.

Alam Hossain, owner of Noor Fashion, said, "We've been doing business here for three generations. We're constantly making new designs of clothes. At the same time, we follow designs that are in fashion."

Mohammad Russell, proprietor of Five Star Garments, said, "Clothing is made here for a minimum of Tk 150 and a maximum of Tk 10,000. These affordable prices are only possible since our artisans and workers are designers of the clothes."

"We can replicate almost any design with perfection," he prided.

Shahjahan, a worker of Samiya Fashion House, has been working there for 45 years. He said before 1980, the garment items made here were sold only in Chattogram's retail markets. But at present, Khalifa Patti's clothes have become popular all over the country.

Samsul Alam, general secretary of the Khalifa Patti Traders Welfare Association, said, "The market will be able to go into production on a larger scale if a separate zone was created. We'll be able to contribute more to the economy and increase employment."



Local shoemakers IN CRISIS

SIFAYET ULLAH

Chattogram's handmade footwear industry usually hits peak season during Ramadan, however, this year, the industry is set to undergo losses as the demand for local shoes has been decreasing.

Traders said demand has declined as the market is being flooded with shoes made in mechanised factories, mostly imported from China and India.

As a result, 300 handmade footwear factories in the port city have been shut down in the last seven years. More than half the labourers have switched to other professions.

Traders said the high price of raw materials and lack of wholesale buyers are the main issues faced by this industry.

During a recent visit to the East and West Madarbari, Kamal Gate, Jalsha Market and Nalapara areas of the port city, this correspondent saw that factory workers were making shoes and packaging them.

Workers said they have been using 90 percent rexine and 10 percent leather to



make a pair of shoes.

Mohammed Sadek, owner of Tarik Shoes, said, "The splendour of this industry is lost. Now we're just trying to survive somehow."

According to the Chattogram Khudra Paduka Shilpo Malik Group, Chattogram city had around 600 shoe-making factories, employing around 10,000 workers before 2015.

Majority of the entrepreneurs came from outside Chattogram, mostly from Bhairab and Manikganj.

Azher Uddin learned to make shoes from a very young age. Currently, he is working at a footwear factory named Mitali Shoes.

"Every month some of the factories here are closing down. If this continues, one day the handmade footwear industry will be lost. We'll lose our jobs as well," he added.

Monjur Khan, president of the Paduka Shilpo Malik Group said, "The pandemic has created a new crisis in the industry. We thought as it was over, we'll make some profit again. But we aren't able to make any due to the price hike of raw materials."

Patiently threaded, diligently made Eid ushers in hope for karchupi-zardozi artisans

MD NAZRUL ISLAM

With Eid approaching, the artisans of the port city's Bihari Palli, who specialise in zardozi and karchupi work (intricate designs done by hand with beads and metal thread embroidery) are working day and night to straighten out their orders at different boutiques of the region.

In these "boutique" factories in and around Jhautala Bihari Camp, zardozi and karchupi worked attires are being crafted with skillful hands, sharp eyes, and unrelenting patience. Once finished, these garments reach the city malls, where customers purchase them as Eid attires.

According to the artisans, even though there are two weeks left for Eid, the owners of the boutique houses have stopped taking new orders from the first week of Ramadan due to work pressure.

At present, 200 artisans work in various boutique houses in Jhautala and Bihari Palli.

Once, the area used to remain busy almost the entire day. However, ever since imported clothes from foreign boutique houses increased, their work decreased significantly.

Many artisans had to shift to other professions due to a lack of work throughout the year. Female artisans started working at garment factories while many of the men migrated to different countries in the Middle East.

"The work pressure increases a month before Ramadan. Usually, we do this type of embroidery on sarees, ornas, and different types of dresses. Besides, we also get orders to do this type of work on Burkhas," Jalal said.

Talking about their busy schedule, Jalal said the artisans are now working two shifts every day.



Now there are just about 15 boutique houses in the area.

Md Jalal has been involved in this profession for the last 15 years. He owns "Choice Karchupi House", a boutique in the Wireless Colony area on the west side of Jhautala station.

Jalal runs this boutique house with 15 workers. Their descendants have also been involved in this work. In addition to their studies, these young artisans are learning how to make these handicrafts from scratch from their fathers, uncles, and aunts.

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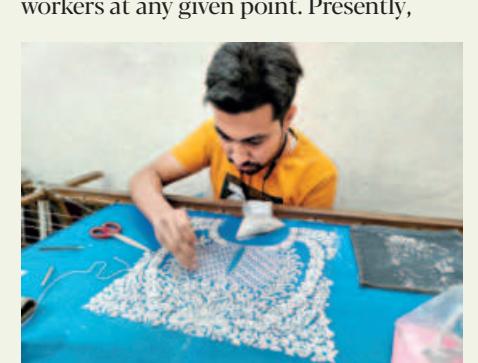
Talking about their busy schedule, Jalal said the artisans are now working two shifts every day.

"Even though Eid work orders give the

artisans some hope, the amount of work we receive throughout the year is still very little," said Md Saeed, manager of Anusha Boutique.

He said the demand for ready-made garments in the market is increasing day by day and people are losing interest in the local zardozi crafts.

Md Rubel, an artisan at Anusha Boutique, said, "Before, we could hire workers at any given point. Presently,



since many have shifted to other professions, it's extremely difficult for us to hire workers when the workload increases." He said due to the reduction in work, many craftsmen have to sit idle throughout the year. For which, many had to close their factories.

The artisans lamented that the tradition of zardozi-karchupi embroidery may cease to exist if the present situation continues.