



#PERSPECTIVE

Is the Dhaka International Trade Fair (DITF) still relevant?

It used to be like this — every year, come January, Dhaka Trade Fair would open its door to all, promising unique products from foreign companies, or local companies bringing innovative products. Add to the fact that Bangladeshis love going to fairs in the chilly winter, and visiting the Fair soon became one of the most anticipated activities of the year. Fast forward to today, and while the fair is still going strong, something seems amiss, as many do not get the same vibe or excitement as before.

This ultimately brings out the question; is the Dhaka International Trade Fair still relevant, or has it become much more than just an annual fair?

“I remember going to the fair as a child with my



parents. We would see so many different things, especially from all the foreign stalls. It felt more like a festival than just a place full of stalls selling products. While I still go to the fair at least once every year, now the fair feels too much like an overpriced version of New Market where everything is found, but at a steep price, minus the excitement like before,” said Sahana Parvin, who used to come from Narayanganj to visit the fair.

One of the main criticisms of the DITF is that it hardly features anything unique anymore with an overwhelming number of stalls selling similar products making it difficult for visitors to find anything truly unique or innovative. Additionally, there are always hassles like the ‘buy one get ten free’ like deals that don’t really live up to its offer, or the skirmishes regarding food that charges an exorbitant price compared to regular restaurants.

Another issue is that the fair has lost its sense of community and cultural significance. The fair was traditionally a time for people to come together and celebrate, but in recent years, it has become more of a shopping event, with businesses focused solely on making sales instead of bringing innovative products, and visitors focused on finding the highest discounted products that can be found in other places. This has led to a lack of excitement and energy at the fair, leaving many visitors disappointed.



Despite these criticisms, the DITF is still one of the most popular events in Bangladesh, drawing in thousands of visitors each year. The DITF still has that pull among people who want to spend quality time with their friends and family. As the scope of doing something fun is quite limited for residents of Dhaka, DITF continues to be a must-visit opportunity when winter arrives. Moving the fair from its old venue of Agargaon to Purbachal has also been a big positive as the bigger venue of Bangabandhu Bangladesh-China Friendship Exhibition Centre has given the fair a much-needed modern facelift.

“It’s true. What we see at the fair can be found in any market or online, but I think the fair is still relevant because it is always fun to check out so many kinds of stalls in one area, as it is just not about going on a shopping spree, but rather get into the mood of the fair. The foreign stalls still offer quality goods like Turkish lamps or Kashmiri shawls. Hopefully, over the years, the fair will become better so that people can have a truly great experience when they visit,” said Abrar Hossain, a resident of Dhaka.

Since the fair is organised by the Export Promotion Bureau and the Ministry of Commerce, one of its most pertinent causes is the export orders that are placed there by international customers. In the 26th iteration of the Dhaka International Trade Fair (DITF), which ended on 31 January 2022 Bangladesh secured export orders totalling 16 million dollars. Additionally, throughout the month-long event, goods worth around Tk 400 million were sold, and Tk 15 million in VAT was collected. This year the turnover is expected to be even higher.

In order for DITF to be more relevant, it needs to focus on innovation and community engagement, rather than just being a commercial event. The fair must focus on creating a sense of excitement and cultural significance, and on providing visitors with a truly unique and enjoyable experience. Only then can it truly be considered relevant and an annual tradition to be looked forward to.

By Feda Al Hossain
Photo: Rashed Sumon

#EVENTS

Top 5 things about the Dhaka International Trade Fair (DITF) 2023

Residents of Dhaka and beyond love spending their days at fairs enjoying the sights and sounds. That is why it’s no surprise that Dhaka International Trade Fair (DITF) has become a must-see experience for everyone, being one of the most prominent trade fairs in the country. Bringing together businesses, manufacturers, and entrepreneurs from both inside and outside of the country to highlight their unique offerings. So, without further ado, let us look at the top 5 interesting things about the DITF this year.

Settling in at the new venue

The 27th edition of the Dhaka International Trade Fair (DITF) has successfully attracted visitors for the second year running to its venue at the Bangabandhu Bangladesh-China Friendship Exhibition Centre in Purbachal, despite some initial challenges. To enhance the convenience for attendees, the Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation has introduced 50 shuttle buses to transport passengers between Kuril and the fair venue. The move from Agargaon to Purbachal has made the fair more accessible to residents of neighbouring areas such as Narayanganj and Gazipur.

A grand entrance

Entrances for the Dhaka Trade Fair are always a magnificent affair with the organisers trying to display the grandiosity of the fair just as people are going to enter. To mark the monumental achievement of Bangladesh entering the Metro Rail age recently, Dhaka Trade Fair features gates with a Metro-Rail-themed design. It looked splendid and people were seen taking photos before entering the fair, making it quite the hit among spectators.

A large number of stalls

This edition of the fair features some 351 local and foreign stalls, pavilions and mini pavilions, marking a significant increase from the previous year’s tally of 225, highlighting the growing interest and participation in the fair. Spectators loved the opportunity to explore a wide range of options and discover new products and services, whether visiting the tech-infused stalls of Walton and Vision, or seeing the latest furniture from Hatil and other renowned brands. Uniquely designed stalls of Igloo and RFL also attracted a large number of visitors. A kid’s zone has also been built this year for the parents to take a break while the little ones are playing their hearts out.

Cashless transactions gaining traction

This year’s fair marks a significant shift towards cashless transactions, as bKash offered 50 per cent instant cashback on entry tickets, bus tickets, and parking tickets. To make transactions more convenient, people were able to purchase goods from stalls using their cards or mobile financial system platforms like bKash, with added incentives such as discounts and cashbacks. This not only makes it more convenient for consumers but also promotes a more secure and efficient way of doing transactions.

Exceptional things creating hype

A trade fair is not complete without products that gain attention for either their uniqueness, outrageous price, or both. Moreover, this time, the fair is not disappointing either, with products like Pilot Custom 823 fountain pen, if you are into stationery. This luxurious pen is not only beautifully designed but also features a nib that is plated with 14-carat gold, making it truly one-of-a-kind. The Pilot Custom 823 fountain pen is on display at the stall and is available for purchase at a price of Tk 26,000, making it the most expensive pen you can get a hold of at the fair.

However, even if that is not outrageous enough, this one is surely the most publicised product of the fair — the grandiose ‘Pori Palong Khat’ bed — fit for royalty with teak wood, sculptures of fairies and real heavy dangle earrings, all yours for the price of Tk 1 crore! The stall promised gifts of a motorcycle and gold jewellery alongside the bed if someone dared to buy it. At least we can say the stall successfully became the centre of attention at the fair thanks to the price tag of its product.

By Feda Al Hossain
Photo: Rashed Sumon