

EDITOR'S NOTE

Our society has evolved — fuelled by changing tastes and preferences, colossal globalization, and ever-expanding smart technologies. And with it, our lifestyle has changed dramatically.

Twenty years ago, how many of us would even believe that one could order practically anything online with just a few taps on our smartphones? And how many of us could ever imagine travelling within the country as well as abroad

would become so commonplace?

These are just two things — the tip of the iceberg if you will — which we look closely in today's edition of The Daily Star's 32nd anniversary supplements. Be it a modern take on our eternal love for the sari, the evolving bakery scene in the capital, or the way we spend evenings at open mic sessions, this special supplement is a kaleidoscope of life and living in 2023.

One may claim that lifestyle is a subject people tend not to consciously think of, and yet, it affects us all in more ways than imaginable. We invite you to flip through the pages of this supplement, 'In with the New: Lifestyle Chronicles.'

Mahfuz Anam
Editor & Publisher
The Daily Star



Photo: Sazzad Ibne Sayed
Model: Antora and Torsha
Wardrobe: Mayasir By Maheen Khan
Makeup: Piyash
Styling: Sonia Yeasmin Isha



FAST AND SLOW FASHION:

What makes slow fashion work

The young are the typification of what's new and trending in the fast fashion world now. They are colourful and up-to-date on the latest fashion craze. They go to markets with pictures of the latest blockbuster and they buy the most trending Bollywood-inspired shalwar kameez or lehengas.

The older generation, on the other hand, is hell-bent on exclusivity in their wardrobe, and prefers to wear an elegant Tangail taant or a cotton jamdani on a casual day at work or at an elaborate dinner.

The style

statements of the two genres speak volumes about their choice in clothing and there comes the great contemplation of whether to promote fast fashion, which can be categorised as inexpensive, stylish, mass-produced clothes that harm the environment or slow fashion, which are natural hand-spun and hand-woven clothes

and a movement that advocates for environmental and social justice in the fashion industry.

Trendy fast fashion clothes end with the timer on which that particular vogue is running. Trends have a short shelf life; when a new item comes to the market, people will move on to that. There is nothing wrong with sporting fast fashion. Fast fashion is inexpensive

and a large number of people can sport it. These garments appeal to shoppers because they are affordable and closely follow the trend.

Meanwhile, slow fashion is the hand-spun Benarasi silk sari of our grandma's wedding trousseau. You can upcycle it or re-wear it. Slow fashion is also the canary yellow Rajshahi silk in hand-stitched nakshi kantha embroidered sari of today or the black jamdani sari in grey 'tiger's paw' motif. It can be the royal jamdani jacket, the indigo natural dye silk scarf, or a handloom, red and green, Tangail taant — slow fashion for us includes all Bangladeshi hand-spun heritage weaves and designs.

Slow fashion is stylish; it has an air of royal heritage to it. Wearing natural hand-spun and hand-woven clothes should be second nature to us. We have so much to boast about — the opulent Rajshahi silks, the fine jamdani, the Pabna sari, the gamcha, and the khadi. This is what the world is talking about now and how is it not trendy? Maybe some designs don't attract younger people but it is the designer's job to keep them fresh.

To promote clothes made with costlier slow fashion textiles for the young, who like to boast a contemporary style, designers can inject modernity into designs and cuts that are appealing to them. This way, the heritage aspect or charm of the clothing can last longer in the fashion world. Although they are pricey, slow fashion wears have a long shelf life, while fast fashion is two new trends away from a landfill.

"A girl can wear a shuti (cotton) sari, dui fita (two belt) sandal, with a plain blouse or starched jamdani paired with a t-shirt and look like a fashionista. It is her sense of styling a simple taant or jamdani sari that becomes the style statement and it is created by the person wearing it. The trick to styling slow fashion is how she carries it. The constant changes in fashion are mostly within the fast fashion industry which dictates how you wear it. There is not much styling involved. However, slow fashion can have mass appeal too, provided it becomes somewhat affordable," states Kuhu Plamondon, artist and textile/fashion designer.

"In power looms, which run on diesel, the young boys can manage to spin two saris a day, but weavers spinning a Jamdani take a minimum of three months to complete one. How will he ensure his food and expenses if he has to wait for his sari to sell after three months? Artisans must have a

salary and designated work hours and paid time off. Their art and products should be commissioned so that a designer does not have to worry about how the weavers will manage their next meal or when a customer will buy the product for him to flourish. Once his income and food are sorted, he needs to be nurtured, but sadly, no one nurtures a craftsman," she explains.

Just like pop music that catches up fast and vanishes into thin air equally fast, young people like trendy, affordable fashion that are easy to maintain. Polyesters took over mostly because it is machine washable. There is nothing wrong in it. Unfortunately, slow fashion has a niche clientele and the general populous simply can't justify spending extra for it.

"Slow fashion is my passion but it has to evolve, and designers also need to play a part; if slow fashion is made with textiles and yarns that are expensive, then only the privileged can afford it. This fashion segment then is not for everyone. Fashion on the streets has to be cheap and easy to maintain," Kuhu adds.

Haute couture may be an early example of the slow fashion movement, a one-off designer piece that becomes the pride of your wardrobe. It epitomises the principle of creating garments with both quality and longevity. For some, slow fashion couture is pricey and hard to maintain, but when you buy an expensive jamdani sari, it is a win-win investment. It's a heritage piece that can be worn and handed down to the next generation to upcycle as one desires. Its defining point is that it zeroes in on the problem of overproduction and overconsumption.

"We are flooded with junk from China, India, Pakistan; these fast fashion garments and designs will rule the market. Unless our deshi heritage weaves catering to slow fashion is commissioned by patrons and nurtured to flourish, it will die a slow and sad death," Kuhu says.

"From my days as an intern at Jim Thompson, I learned that village craft has a childlike simplicity in it. I should not enforce my knowledge, my way of organising matters, or my combination ideas onto theirs. It will kill their creativity and originality. It is a father-son tradition. When I went to the jamdani weavers to try out my Rajanigondha designs on my sari, I commissioned them and my friend Mustak Ahmed was my sponsor," she adds.

But being trendy and advocating slow fashion or fast fashion pairs with how you stylese your clothes, how you put yourself together and carry them. Slow fashion heritage weaves are forever trending; we just need to ensure that it is the choice for everyone else as well.

By RBR
Photo: Sazzad Ibne Sayed
Model: Surjo
Wardrobe: Wearable art by Kuhu Plamondon
Makeup: Orko
Styling: Sonia Yeasmin Isha





Embracing the slow fashion movement: IN CONVERSATION WITH SILMAT CHISTI

Slow fashion, as the definition roughly entails, is couture that is hand-spun and has its roots steeped in tradition, and is focused on sustainable and ethical productions. The Daily Star recently spoke to Silmat Chisti, Founder, NOBO Designs Pvt Ltd, also MD, Bangladesh SME Corporation Ltd. She shed some light on the Slow Fashion movement in Bangladesh.



The word slow fashion gets tossed around a lot these days. Yet, the definition is perhaps still not clear. So, first things first; what is slow fashion? There are many definitions of ‘slow fashion,’ and in many places, it may be a legally defined term, but to us, what it essentially means is a fashion movement that is mindful of life around us.

Clothing oneself is a fundamental human need and there are a million ways of doing so. Socially conscious consumers are now embracing slow fashion as a means of clothing themselves.

Slow fashion is a conscious movement to integrate life around us in both the production and consumption of fashion items and thinking through the consequences of every step. It is opposite to what is known as ‘fast fashion.’

Ideas that are integral to slow fashion include the use of ethically sourced natural yarn, preservation of heritage hand craftsmanship, minimising use of fossil fuel, fair pay and fair credit for artisans, eco-friendly production chain, sustainable ethical processes, etc.

Ethical practice is at the core of a vibrant slow fashion industry. You cannot pass off machine-made products as slow fashion. The role of government and trade/craft bodies is huge in vitalising slow fashion.

Training, exhibitions, economic incentives, monitoring, etc. are very much needed. The most important role of technology in slow fashion is that e-commerce platforms have created the ability to match buyers and sellers directly, cutting a lot of middlemen expenses. It also brings price clarity/efficiency along the value chain. It enables better documentation of a body of work by any craftsman over a lifetime.

So, is slow fashion part of haute couture?

Haute Couture is a highly defined term and is almost always used improperly. There are very strict guidelines as to what qualifies as ‘haute couture’ in Paris and only a handful of fashion houses globally qualify for the label.

If by haute couture you mean high fashion, then, no, all slow fashion is not high fashion.

High fashion also is a term that reflects production steps from end to finish, starting with the use of expensive textiles to the tailored final output and all else in between. Bangladesh does not have any meaningful presence in high fashion, yet.

There is a common perception that deshi wear automatically be termed as slow fashion. To what extent is that true? Do all deshi fashion wear fall into the slow fashion category?

All deshi fashion do not fall under the slow fashion category, but many of our heritage crafts do by nature of several factors, such as the use of human hands for craftsmanship, the use of centuries-old craft techniques that are eco-friendly, the use of local natural materials, recycling, etc.

How is fair trade involved in the production of slow fashion by local producers?

Fair trade is a very complicated matter. As a base, it assumes that all players in the value chain are adhering to a set of ethical practices and being compensated properly. All this is of course reflected in higher prices and slower production.

While in theory, this Utopian practice is wonderful, there are many practical hurdles in execution and for countries like Bangladesh, it may even translate to becoming non-competitive. Hence, there is always a balancing game that needs to happen. I believe in “as fairly as possible.”

How do you attract the general mass to slow fashion or is slow fashion only affordable to the rich?

Slow fashion will always be more expensive than fast fashion. There is no way around it. However, we can pay heed to our consumption patterns. Instead of buying 12 new things a year, we can reduce consumption to say, 6 things a year, of which 3 are “slow fashion” items.

I believe in buying “meaningfully,” buying as much local as possible but also in supporting craftsmen around the world.

A country like Bangladesh that makes its money from fast fashion should not knock fast fashion. Let us also be mindful that fast fashion, i.e., industrialisation, has enabled the majority of our population to be clothed. What we should instead focus on are reducing fast fashion pollution, equitable work conditions/pay for those employed in the sector, recycling industrial waste, and other such practical strategies.

Is it possible to wear deshi fashion products and always look trendy?

Absolutely! Bangladesh is a candy store for fashion choices. With our rich heritage in local textile options and our role as “tailors to the world,” there is nothing we cannot do in Bangladesh. What we can and should spend more time developing as a nation are world-class fashion designers who can use these materials and go the last mile of putting the final look together.

We still do not have meaningful world-class fashion brands in Bangladesh. While that is happening, we can continue to be our own stylists. I think it is very important to dress one's identity and not just buy “designer” to signal one's financial ability.

Additionally, it is very important to educate ourselves on local heritage crafts and craftsmanship and appreciate that it will not match fast fashion prices. For instance, very few of us understand or appreciate that Jamdani is the most difficult weave in the world and as such, will be priced higher than anything else. Or synthetic passed as silk will be cheaper than the real fabric.

As for styling ourselves, as step one, we would start by imagining what we would want in our ideal wardrobe. It should include a set of regular wear and a list of “collectibles.”. Step two would be to make a list of local businesses that source and produce locally. Step three would be the fun part. Mix and match and see what works. And the collectibles can be a lifelong project, matching milestones in life. Clothes don't make a person, and vice versa.

How do we bring diversity to slow fashion so that it becomes trendy for young people?

There has to be a bit of give and take and a lot of education at both buyer and seller ends. Slow fashion has to stop being “boring” and stereotypical and invest in design and cuts as a priority and young people have to switch from craving “something new and cheap, daily” to buying “mindfully.” It is an ongoing social process and we have to keep education at the forefront of both parties.

The slow fashion players have been more focused on capturing the export market, but I believe that the timing is right to focus on domestic consumption. As the country graduates into a middle-income economy, the local market seems ready for mindful fashion.

By Star Lifestyle Desk
Photo: Shahrear Kabir Heemel
Model: Shanila Mehjabin
Wardrobe: NOBO Dhaka
Collection: Bangladeshi Heshel, both hand-painted and digitally printed 100 count Egyptian cotton kota
Makeup: Shababa Rashid
Hair: Mia Bella Salon
Styling: Saki Kazi and Shezami Khalil

In the current fashion world, the sari, a traditional female garment of Bangladesh, India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka is all the rage. One of the most versatile garments in the world, the sari can be worn in more than a hundred ways. The rectangular piece of unstitched cloth, usually six yards in length, is commonly wrapped around the waist, pleated, and tucked over a petticoat with the other loose end of the fabric called 'anchal' drawn across the torso and draped over the left shoulder. A fitted blouse is also an essential part of this ensemble.

SARI The changing tale of draping

Considered quintessentially Indian, the sari has been influenced and inspired by many cultures and traditions. The first sari-like garment can be traced back to the Indus Valley Civilisation, which flourished in the northern parts of India around 2800-1800 BCE. Apparently, the first saris were made of cotton and soon, weavers learned to use natural dyes like indigo, turmeric, red madder, and flowers to bring variety.

Silk came into play around 2400 BCE. At that time, the sari was called 'sati,' meaning 'strip of cloth.' According to some costume historians, sati turned into 'dhoti,' which until the 14th century, was worn by both men and women. The idea is based on ancient sculptures that show women covering only the nether regions of their bodies. Both men and women were equally comfortable in leaving the upper half bare.

In some places, women would just wrap the fabric around their bodies like a sheath, the main purpose being to cover up. The length of the sari varied at different times as did the style of draping the cloth. Many of the Buddhist scriptures recorded that women wore breast bands and lengths of a third piece of cloth covering the head and shoulders like the modern-day 'orna.' They called the ensemble 'posak' or the attire. There was, however, no blouse or petticoat to accompany the sari.

Even in late 19th century Bengal, the sari was worn without a blouse or petticoat by the rich and the poor alike. Women draped the sari, which was shorter than today's standard six yards, in large box pleats to cover their lower limbs and wrapped the rest around their upper bodies leaving only the arms and hands visible.

The person who brought about a revolutionary change to this style was Jnanadanandini Devi, wife of Satyendranath Tagore, the elder brother of Rabindranath Tagore. As the wife of India's first Indian Civil Service officer, she had to travel widely to accompany her husband to various parts of home and abroad. She also had to adapt and invent styles to accommodate herself in the drawing rooms with European ladies. Sari without any kind of undergarment would have been considered scandalous in that community.

So, Jnanadanandini took inspiration from the fashionable Parsi ladies who had introduced the "Bombay dastur." The style shows draping their "Chinese embroidered crepe Gara saris in a quasi-Gujarati style," with the anchal coming in front over the right shoulder, held in place on their long-sleeved blouses with a brooch.

The Tagore family had already devised a tunic-like chemise in the style of Victorian ladies of England. Soon however, the cumbersome chemise was divided into a blouse and a petticoat; the blouse got a lot of attention, being decorated with lace, patchwork, and applique. Jnanadanandini reversed the Parsi straight style and drew the anchal across the bosom, to loop over the left shoulder and then bring it back under the right.

The front pleats of the modern-day sari were introduced by the Maharani Suniti Devi of Cooch Behar, who was quite a fashion icon in her time. According to some historians, the idea came from Ancient Greek sculptures, where goddesses are shown in flowing and pleated skirts. This addition allowed women to stride more freely than before. In the 1920s, chiffon and silk sari with gold jewellery became popular. Indira Devi, another Maharani of Cooch Behar, set quite a trend with white chiffon.

Saris became fashionable and more adaptable for middle-class women of Bengal when Suchitra-Uttam movies became popular. Suchitra Sen was undoubtedly the most glamorous actress of her time. Women copied not only her high-neck blouse and the Nivi style of draping sari, but also the way she spoke and carried herself. Apart from Suchitra, Supriya

Choudhury also drew attention with her chiffon sari and sleeveless blouse with dramatic kohl eyes. She became the iconic fashionable Bengali woman.

There is much to say about the sari and its accompanying accessories, but if we talk only about the different draping styles, and the people who invented and adapted the styles, the story would remain incomplete.

Along with the fantastic progression of the sari, there is also the sad tale of the weavers of Bengal. During the Sultanate and Mughal periods, Bengal was renowned for its textile, the most famous being the 'muslin' and 'jamdani.' But that rich culture was destroyed when the British took over. The industrial revolution of Europe introduced mass factory production and the hand-operated looms in the Indian sub-continent failed to compete. Even after its independence, Bangladesh continued to face a crisis in the textile industry.

Sometime in the late 1980s and early 90s, a renewed interest from various quarters started to revive the weaving industry. Even though the attention was sporadic, there have been a few dedicated fashion designers and houses that have been able to take Bangladeshi handloom and materials to international platforms.

One such name is Bibi Russel, the 'Dream Weaver.' Under the label of "Bibi Productions," she brought out her line of clothing. The rural 'gamcha' gained international fame when she organised her first international fashion show in 1996. Since then, the gamcha sari has been quite trendy.

Rina Latif is another acclaimed fashion designer who has taken Bangladesh to new heights. A conceiver of high-end clotheslines, she has made a name for herself through the khadi, muslin, and jamdani. Her work has been displayed in prestigious shows in Europe, India, and Pakistan and her brand is an internationally coveted one to have emerged out of Bangladesh.

Among the fashion houses, Aarong has saris of all ranges and types. A visit to Aarong is essential for sari lovers. Only last year, Azmeri Haque Badhon, "one of the most coveted actresses of Bangladesh," dazzled the audience at the Cannes Film Festival when she arrived in a beige jamdani sari with silver-toned intricate motifs. She carried herself with utmost grace, and she also gave due credit to the Aarong team for her sari and other accessories.

In recent years, the sari has garnered much attention in the western world as well. Many fashion shows have introduced sari-gowns, sari-pants, T-shirt saris, and other funky styles. Blouses have evolved as well with daring cuts, with various kinds of sleeves, fronts, and backs. The oldest garment in the world, the sari seems far from being called outdated. On the contrary, it is gaining new looks, audience, and popularity, while also being able to find more people interested in donning it.

By Sohana Manzoor
Photo: Shahrear Kabir Heemel
Model: Shanila Mehjabin
Wardrobe: NOBO Dhaka
Collection: Bangladeshi Heshel,
both hand-painted and digitally
printed 100 count Egyptian
cotton kota
Makeup: Shababa Rashid
Hair: Mia Bella Salon
Styling: Saki Kazi and
Shezami Khalil

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Can local cosmetics edge out the global competitors?

Cosmetics and toiletries have long been in demand. People of both genders now prioritise self-grooming. The people of Bangladesh are also a factor in this equation. According to recent studies, home-grown companies dominate the thriving Bangladeshi cosmetics sector, accounting for 60 per cent of the market. The yearly market for cosmetics and personal care goods in Bangladesh is estimated to be valued at over Tk 10,000 crore. Yet, the dominance of foreign-produced commodities has made it more challenging for local businesses to compete. According to studies on the development and sales of cosmetics and personal care products in the country, multinational corporations continue to benefit the most from the industry's growth. Many regional businesses, on the other hand, are thriving in their respective markets.

Unilever Bangladesh, Square, Keya, Marico, ACI, and many more critical local firms dominate the local market. These businesses collectively account for more than 80 per cent of the market share for local products, with Unilever accounting for 45 per cent.

Unilever is, by definition, one of the world's largest enterprises. Unilever's 400 brands are presently available on thousands of different things. The majority of the things we buy from well-known firms are familiar to us. Lux, Rexona, Axe Body Spray, Sunsilk Shampoo, Surf Excel, and other products come immediately to mind.

Zaved Akhtar, the managing director and CEO of Unilever Bangladesh believes that they are dominating the local market currently because they know how the international market functions. In his own words, "In the two decades I have been in Unilever, I

had been really fortunate because I got opportunities at many international assignments. My first assignment in international market was in 2004. I was the first Bangladeshi to take on this regional marketing post that required creativity."

Locally manufactured toiletries now account for a substantial portion of a market previously dominated by imports. The vast majority of commodities produced in this category are basic goods in high demand in the domestic market. The cosmetics and toiletries imports primarily target the market's middle and high-end segments. Most local shoppers are content with regional items as long as they work well and are reasonably priced. While the majority of producers concentrate on meeting domestic demand, many companies in Bangladesh have begun to export cosmetics and toiletries. The majority of regional manufacturers target middle-to-low-priced market segments.

But how did these local companies take the fight to multinational names and become industry market leaders remains a mystery. The solution is simple: these companies have mastered the concept of KYC. That is the essence of relatability. As more women in Bangladesh, both rural and urban, enter the labour force or pursue higher levels of education in order to acquire economic and social empowerment, conventional ideals of beauty are being challenged. Demand for consumer items such as skincare and cosmetics has and continues to revolutionise as a consequence of a shift in customer view of personal care and beauty.

M o h a m m a d Wahiduzzaman Sadi, the CEO of RiBANA, an organic cosmetic brand in Bangladesh, shared his

thoughts on the growing cosmetics industry.

"It was not only important to produce vegan, halal, and naturally-sourced beauty solutions for our brand, we want to be socially responsible as well. We collect raw materials from rural families around the country, thereby financially supporting them. Over the years, our team spent days and nights working on issues, feedback, and criticism to earn the trust of its consumers. RiBANA's long-term goal is to place Bangladesh on the map through acquiring international prominence," stated Sadi.

Herbal remedies derived from natural substances found in our subcontinent are also

gaining popularity. As a result, producing these items domestically becomes easier for local businesses. Customers are becoming more aware of the harmful effects of consuming chemical-intensive products as their use of the internet and social media grows. Furthermore, increased access to peer evaluations from community organisations or beauty bloggers has increased the number of people switching to local businesses that manufacture natural cosmetic goods. As a result, demand for organic, herbal, or clean-label cosmetics is increasing among urban clients, particularly among the youth.

Fariha Islam, a corporate professional, used international cosmetic and skin care products all her life. Before the rise of the local cosmetics industry, Fariha could hardly trust local brands, saying, "If I was out of my regular skin care products, I would have to wait for at least 3-4 weeks because of shipping. I had to always plan so that I never ran out of my regular cosmetics or else I would have to skip on my daily skincare routine, which was not an option for me."

RiBANA was one of the first local products that she used after a long time. "I was usually reluctant to use local products, but when several of my friends recommended RiBANA to me, I decided to give it a shot. And now I am a regular customer of their products. It's great seeing local brands doing so well in the industry and now I don't have to stock up on products because I can find them in stores

near to me. Also, it's good for my wallet too," added Fariha.

Another element that contributes to the appeal of local cosmetic companies is their affordability. Global brands may provide exceptional quality, but their price range is out of reach for the majority of people in our nation. Because local items do not need to be imported from outside, the price can be set at a reasonable level.

Another factor driving the growth of the local cosmetic sector is the increasing number of active male clients. Many online businesses, like Daraz, BanglaShoppers, and Shajgoj, provide sections dedicated to men's cosmetics and grooming items. Despite an increase in male customers, women continue to enjoy a substantial market share. Other factors, such as cultural and behavioural shifts, are also driving the cosmetic industry's consumer behaviour revolution.

Another group that has contributed to the development of local businesses is the population looking for "halal" goods. Growing sales of halal products show how ready Bangladesh is to capitalise on Islamic branding, as more businesses start to meet the rising demand for these products in the nation.

Bangladesh has great potential to significantly impact the cosmetics and toiletries market, owing to its advantageous geographic location, the availability of reasonably priced technical staff, and the availability of a sizable number of qualified specialists. Every local company has put a lot of effort into developing products of the highest calibre to gain the trust of their customers. Bangladeshi cosmetics investors have many different investment options. The market uses very little debt, has high operating margins, and is non-cyclical. It has experienced rapid growth, and future predictions indicate that this pattern will hold.

By K Tanzeel Zaman
Photo: Sazzad Ibne Sayed
Model: Tazrian, Tuba, Linda
Makeup: Masum
Styling: Sonia Yeasmin Isha



SHANTA
LIFESTYLE

THE HOME OF LUXURY FURNITURE



For far too long, Bangladesh's home décor scene had been plagued by inconveniences and limitations. Previously, consumers had to venture tirelessly to various parts of Dhaka in search of the appropriate lighting or tile to go with their furniture. Finding the right product that was of high quality and within your budget was exhausting

and stressful. Gone are the days of bypassing rush hour traffic to visit Purana Paltan for tiles and sanitary ware or buzzing through DCC to find a Chinese copy of the chandelier you saw on Instagram. The way people decorate is undergoing a significant transformation. A new profound appreciation for

modern, minimalistic home décor and architecture is taking hold of the population. Whether you are a Millennial living in a three-bedroom apartment with four roommates or a Gen-X building your forever home for your kids, spouse and ageing parents, Shanta Lifestyle has something for you. Shanta Lifestyle's sales and

interior design team will take you on a journey, analyzing thousands of swatches and customizability options provided by the brands to create a unique design that respects your budget and space limitations. You no longer have to stress and take a deep dive into the depths of Pinterest to become an amateur interior designer. If

you are now willing to create beautiful living spaces that reflect your style and personality, Shanta Lifestyle is the only location you will need to visit. Even though Shanta Lifestyle is located inside Tejgaon link-road, in the newly inaugurated Shanta Forum building, it's worth at least one visit; the store is designed to transport you to Europe, built to look like you entered someone's apartment, a truly aesthetically pleasing ambience that contradicts the clutter you're used to experiencing at other decor stores.

Hence, it's fair to say Shanta Lifestyle is leading a revolution in the home décor scene in Bangladesh. With its commitment to bringing international branded furniture and home décor solutions (tiles, marbles, lighting, carpets, accessories, etc.) to build a brand catalogue that appeals to people of all generations, backgrounds, budgets, ambitions, and mindset. Shanta Lifestyle is also the first firm in the city to introduce automation-controlled furniture, an award-winning and innovative collection from Natuzzi. The team at Shanta Lifestyle is committed to setting standards in the industry, which reflects in their detail-oriented commitment to customer satisfaction.

To fulfil the sophisticated demands of its clientele, Shanta Lifestyle has partnered up with several award-winning Global brands such as Molteni & C, Cattelan Italia, Natuzzi, Armani-DADA, DelightFull, Lutron, Grohe, INAX, Kale, and many more. These partnerships have enabled them to offer a comprehensive range of products and services, allowing architects and customers to create living space masterpieces. Let's take a sneak peek at their collection.



Octave by Molteni&C

As the exclusive franchiser of Molteni&C, Shanta Lifestyle hosts a plethora of exclusive collections from this globally beloved brand. The Octave is one of them, a sofa with a contemporary design that exudes sophistication and luxury. Its clean lines and minimalist aesthetic make it a perfect embodiment of modern elegance. Measuring up to 320 cm in length, this sofa offers ample seating space, making it ideal for grand living rooms or open-plan spaces, providing ample comfort to your family or guests. One of Octave's defining characteristics is its exceptional comfort. Its high-density foam cushions offer unwavering support, while its

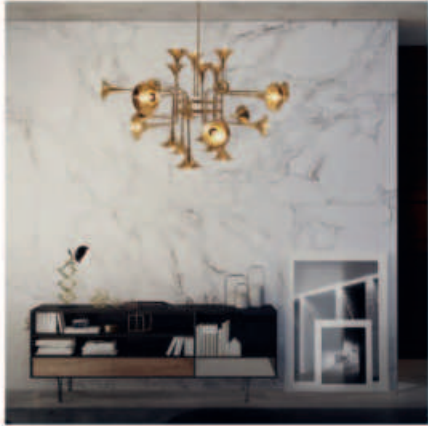
backrest pillows, filled with down feathers, promise ultimate relaxation. Upholstered in premium fabric and leather, the sofa's finish is soft, durable, and meticulously crafted. Adding to the sofa's sleek design is its stainless-steel base, a refined touch that elevates its poise. The sofa's solid beech wood construction ensures sturdiness and longevity, making it a timeless piece for any home. Its customizability allows for the creation of a personalized touch, enabling customers to choose from diverse sizes, materials, and finishes to create a unique sofa that suits their style.



Butterfly by Cattelan Italia

Cattelan Italia, Shanta Lifestyle's most popular brand, represents their design innovation, handcrafted finishing sophistication, and material elegance in their one-of-a-kind product, the Butterfly Dining Table. This exceptional furniture boasts premium materials and an intricate design, making it an ideal addition to a formal dining space. Expertly crafted from a harmonious blend of metal and glass, the Butterfly Dining Table boasts a sleek and contemporary appearance. The metal

base, finished in a brushed stainless-steel finish, features two gracefully curved legs that support the exquisite glass top. The glass top is not only durable but also features a beveled edge, adding a touch of refinement to the design. Inspired by the delicate form of a butterfly, the table's metal legs resemble butterfly wings. The table comfortably accommodates six individuals, making it ideal for both intimate family meals and grand dinner parties.



BOTTI 150 by DelightFull

When it comes to lighting up your home, Shanta Lifestyle offers a wide range of chandeliers and automated lighting that are made to impress guests. One such chandelier is The BOTTI 150 Delightfull, a masterpiece lighting design that glamorously enhances the interior. Inspired by the trumpet, a symbol of the golden age of Jazz, its sleek lines and refined elegance make it a perfect addition to contemporary or classic interiors. Crafted from the finest brass and aluminum, the BOTTI 150 chandelier is beautiful and built to endure. Its intricate metalwork results from expert craftsmanship, ensuring superior quality and longevity. The chandelier is also customizable, offering a range of finishes to complement diverse interior designs.

Functionality is a hallmark of the BOTTI 150 chandelier. Its twelve lights, arranged in a rhythmic pattern, provide ample space illumination. The lights are adjustable, offering the option to dim or brighten to suit the occasion. Furthermore, its use of energy-efficient LED lighting is both environmentally responsible and cost-effective.

If you are curious about the masterpieces mentioned above, you must see them upfront at Shanta Lifestyle's Experience Centre in Tejgaon, to truly understand and appreciate them. The traditional home décor scene in Bangladesh is changing, and Shanta Lifestyle is at the forefront of this revolution. With its commitment to quality, customer satisfaction, convenience, and sustainability, Shanta Lifestyle is helping people create beautiful homes that reflect their unique style and personality.



Wave by Natuzzi Italia

The Wave Sofa by Natuzzi Italia is an award-winning sofa with a magnificent expression of style and comfort that gracefully enriches its environment. Its distinctive wave-like design, a departure from traditional sofa aesthetics, is a defining characteristic that showcases its fluid curves and gentle contours, imbuing it with a soft and inviting appearance that blends seamlessly with both modern and timeless décor. At the core of the Wave's design lies an unwavering commitment to

comfort. Its plush cushions, comprised of high-density foam, provide steadfast support, while its backrest has been meticulously crafted to offer optimal comfort. Its upholstery is a delight to the touch, imparting a warm and welcoming ambience. The Wave's frame, crafted from the finest materials, is built to endure. Its sturdy construction, combined with its alluring design, makes it an ideal choice for those seeking a one-of-a-kind gem in their living room.

How unnecessary items get into our monthly budget

The first decade of the 2000s was rough, what with the 9/11 terror attacks, the War on Terror, and the Great Recession of 2008. So, at the cusp of 2020, we were all hoping for a more prosperous decade. Sadly, what we ended up with instead was a two-year-long global pandemic, a nearly year-long invasion of Ukraine by Russia leading to the largest refugee crisis in Europe since World War II. And now, as we are in the second month of 2023, we are staring down a looming economic slowdown that will have a global impression, brought on as a consequence of the pandemic and the war.

If the picture seems foreboding, it's because it is, and Bangladesh is not exempt from this global economic

a microscope and finding the luxuries in the necessity and stripping it out. If you are someone with one or multiple hobbies, this is doubly important. The effects of these stringent measures may not seem immediate, but they will pay dividends when the time is right. Although we want bad things to be done and over with, a long time to prepare will be valuable to those with foresight.

HOUSEHOLD NECESSITIES

Every household has more or less fixed expenses that are needed every month to function properly. These expenses go towards doing the groceries, paying the rent, medical bills/medicine, monthly bills, and clothing.

via online platforms if we run short, or break our grocery shopping down into two separate trips.

"On our days off, we usually try to spend it bonding with our families, so buying at the open markets was never on the cards."

Buying everything from retail stores is easily the first thing you should address, because you are not only paying for the produce, but also the service costs associated with having it stocked in these shops. For things like vegetables, fruits, oil, and condiments, it is always a good idea to start at the open markets because aside from getting the freshest products, you will also be able to haggle and get a good deal, sometimes up to 15 per cent less than what you would pay in retail outlets. As for meat, it is always cheaper to buy from your neighbourhood butcher than packaged meat, by under Tk 200.

If you have a tendency of ordering food on some nights, you can remedy that problem by keeping some frozen ready-to-eat meals/snacks on hand. It is also a good idea to give up on fancy foreign brands for any of your grocery items, as you are paying a lot more for something that is available from local brands, often for much cheaper, such as milk, cheese, bread, etc.

"With the rise in inflation, we had to change our habits. We stopped buying from retail outlets and made time to shop at open markets. Sure, it means we have also cut out a lot of luxury items such as chocolates, packaged fruit juices, crisps, and so on. We do keep some frozen meals in stock for the children," shared Afsara.

BILLS

Monthly bills take up a sizeable portion

of your monthly salary. Some of these bills are unavoidable such as utility bills, while others such as wages for any helping hands and if you happen to own a car, a chauffeur, are there to make your life easier. Just like everything, the price of utilities has also gone up, and just as the economy bears down on you, it also bears down on your hired help.

For your utility bills, which cover water, gas, and electricity, with the latter being the most expensive of it all. There are some steps you can take to keep the monthly cost as low as possible.

For your electricity usage, ensure you are running low-energy bulbs and lights throughout the house. You should also switch off everything in your room when no one is occupying it.

If you happen to have ACs, use them sparingly and for very short durations, and invest in sealing your room to retain the temperature as long as possible. A lot of energy is wasted because many people neglect to fully seal all crevices in a room with an AC. If you are living in a rented house/flat, it is also a good idea to have your meter inspected regularly so as to avoid it getting tampered with.

RENT

If you live in a rented space, this is considered the most 'wasteful' and largest of all expenses that nip at your monthly salary. Depending on where you live and the size of your flat/space, you could end up spending a fortune. If you are looking to make drastic saves to prepare for the rough months or years ahead, finding an affordable place is possibly the first thing you should do. Rents depend upon a lot of factors, but prime locations or areas demand a premium.

Intezar Habib is a 33-year-old working at a publishing company. He says: "My current place, where we have

stayed for the past 10 years, is right near the Gulshan lake, and the rent is nearly Tk 85,000 including service charge. That was a huge amount, but since my father didn't mind, and the location was convenient for him, and we tend to share expenses, I let it slide. But with tough times ahead, I find it way too risky financially to stay here.

"We have found a place near Banasree which is similarly sized to our Gulshan flat, but slightly deeper in the area, which will add some extra minutes to my commute, but it is worth it because the rent here is Tk 45,000. That's more than 50 per cent of our monthly expenses saved right there."

TRANSPORT

This is another area where you can make significant saves if you take out the luxury. With the rise in oil costs, ride-sharing apps are an immediate no unless there's an emergency. CNG usage is nearly as expensive, so avoid using one if you can help it. Rickshaws remain the only budget-friendly, and ecologically sound, mode of transportation left, but sadly, this is also not enough. Until the operation of the Metro Rail begins in earnest for all its designated locations, the most economically feasible decision is to use the bus. Yes, the fare has gone up in response to fuel prices, but for moderate distances, it still beats just about everything else on the road for price.

Tanzila Zarin, a 28-year-old graduate and a fresh applicant for a local advertising firm, regularly travels from Badda to her workplace in Farmgate. She had used a combination of rickshaw and ride-sharing apps until the pandemic.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10

"My current place, where we have stayed for the past 10 years, is right near the Gulshan lake, and the rent is nearly Tk 85,000 including service charge. That was a huge amount, but since my father didn't mind, and the location was convenient for him, and we tend to share expenses, I let it slide. But with tough times ahead, I find it way too risky financially to stay here."

slowdown. Most private sector companies and employees are already aware of the situation and have buckled down for the long haul, bringing about low turnovers at nearly every company, as well as further optimisation in the workplace to save costs and maximise output. Another telling example of the looming threat is inflation taking the price of everything to new heights.

Faced with this grim reality, the only course of action is to start being careful with our money. That starts with putting our monthly spending under

On average, a typical middle-class family of four spends about Tk 35,000 – Tk 40,000 on groceries alone. This involves a mix of buying from open markets when possible and from grocery retail stores for convenience. This is how it goes for Afsara Alam, a 42-year-old mother of two working for an NGO.

Afsara states, "Since both me and my husband are working professionals, nobody has the time to go to open markets and haggle for a bargain. We usually do our groceries either once at the start of the month, and restock



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How unnecessary items get into our monthly budget

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

Zarin states, "Before the pandemic, my fare on a ride sharing bike would be similar to a rickshaw, so I used them more often as they would save me more time. My monthly transport expenses were usually around Tk 7,000. After the pandemic, there has been a noticeable hike in fares, and rickshaws have also raised their fares."

"While I understand their side of the story, it does not change the fact that now, I need to spend Tk 11,000 plus just on commute. I am a new applicant and a fresh graduate, so my salary isn't that high, to begin with. I have finally resorted to using the bus to commute. It's a hassle for sure, but I have brought down my commute to Tk 2,000. That's a huge saving even compared to pre-pandemic times."

Dhaka is quite an expensive city to live in, and with rising inflation, the situation is only going to get tougher. In order to survive this, we need to start getting drastic with the cost-cutting, because salaries will not rise enough to meet increasing costs. In order to cope, it is time to start cutting out the luxuries that lie hidden in our daily necessary spending. And the sooner we take action, the easier the coming days of hardship will be.

By Intisab Shahriyar
Photo: Sazzad Ibne Sayed
Model: Hritika
Makeup: Sumon
Styling: Sonia Yeasmin Isha
Location: Shawpno



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Tips for buying an apartment in Dhaka



It is a dream come true for many Bangladeshis, irrespective of their income. Buying an apartment offers several advantages, such as convenience and security, and most importantly, owning a place you can call home, and not having to pay rent. Whether you are looking for the simple and affordable, or the luxurious that is the culmination of your dream home, it is important to know the basics on how to get started on the buying process.

And so, here are some things to know about buying a flat in Dhaka.

DECIDE ON THE FUNDAMENTALS

FUNDAMENTALS With the right research and some amount of luck, you can find an apartment that suits you. The first and maybe the most important step to take before buying a flat is to decide on the factors behind your selection. Maybe you have the budget to buy a small space in a prime location, but

with that same budget, you can buy a middle-sized apartment in another, less popular area. On the other hand, if you are set on a location that will offer you the most convenience, you may have to adjust the size of the apartment of your choice from a large unit to a smaller one.

Mahzabin Chowdhury, General Manager, Marketing, Bproperty — a leading real estate portal in Bangladesh, commented on the matter, saying, “Our buying recommendations

to consumers always depend on three factors — budget, size, and location. If they come with a set amount of money or have an apartment size in a designated area in mind, for example, 1,200 square feet in Mirpur, we can recommend them either brand new or used apartments that will fulfil all their criteria. We have seen that for people in the middle-income group, apartments of 1,200-1,600 square feet size are the most popular.”

CHOOSE THE RIGHT PARTNER TO BE CLEAR ON ALL TECHNICAL DETAILS

Perhaps, you have decided on the kind of flat you want to buy; the next step is to choose the right partner. Buying an apartment is one of the biggest decisions you will ever take, and that is why you have to choose the right partners to aid in your decision-making process. It may be a portal like Bproperty,

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14



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Cashless is the future

The food delivery man rings the doorbell. “Apa, here’s the naga momo that you ordered.” A bit muffled and more so happy that something appetising has been ordered by the teen in the house, I begin to look for my wallet, only to discover that the delivery boy had disappeared in a jiffy, setting the realisation that it’s no longer

the era of the paper note, but of the cashless society, which relies heavily on fintech companies and online banking; meaning the money had already been paid in advance!

“People find cashless transactions more convenient,” said Nahid Farzana, Head of Cards, Eastern Bank Ltd. (EBL), adding “The pandemic has made the

transition even more convenient.”

So, how can this fact be translated into the future of consumerism?

ONLINE SHOPPING

Many stores have turned to the e-commerce market during the pandemic. Many of the retail fashion brands had to close down their

physical outlets due to the rising cost of operations compared to the lack of direct sales. This is the time when most outlets took up space in the world wide web or only continued to work with their online existence.

Sabera Anwar, owner of Panache Hub and Sabera Anwar Designs, created the Go Deshi platform back in

2020, with a single ideology in mind; to help local brands survive through tough times.

“What started as a purely online brand with cashless payments and fintech support has grown to include a physical store after the pandemic.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 18









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Cashless is the future

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 17

But our online store is still famous, it's quite active on social media and our consumers still prefer to buy goods online where it's convenient for them," said the entrepreneur.

Though online shopping mainly got trendy during 2019-2021, it certainly changed the dynamics of the retail market. Even if people want to return to physical stores nowadays, e-commerce has proven to be a more convenient alternative to the previous retail landscape. Research suggests that this is pushing people to turn towards cashless methods of payment.

Fintech companies have started to become more mainstream as time progresses. The basic concept is that these digital applications are where one can store money online for any future digital transaction.

Research suggests that the working population are finding these solutions more convenient than a traditional bank.

HOW COMPANIES ARE ADAPTING

Banks and finance companies are adapting to the growing market for cashless transactions. They are creating more methods and avenues to proceed with this form of payment, making it accessible to everyone.

Syed Mubdi Munawar, Managing Director of Tradesworth Household Ltd, reflects on the importance of cashless payment in particular direct sales situations.

"To build strong relationships with our regular customers, we have installed the direct sales system through online or telemarketing into our sales policy, whereby our clients can order necessary household items whenever they want and a delivery man supplies the product in little to no time at all to their doorsteps.

Through this delivery process, we have learned that cash payment is



sometimes, a major hassle for the customers, and they prefer on-spot credit card payments or pre-paid fintech solutions as an alternative," he said.

Similarly, many of the marketing leaders agree with the above statement, credit cards are the new currency as most buyers have begun to use this specified mode of payment for any sort of transaction. Companies have made it more convenient for their customers to avail of their services by linking their cards to digital devices through apps. And with society becoming cashless, all companies will have to ensure that people have access to digital means of payment.

MORE CASHLESS PAYMENT OPTIONS

Fintech companies have started to become more mainstream as time progresses. The basic concept is that these digital applications are where one can store money online for any future digital transaction.

Md Hemayet, who is a chauffeur by profession, thinks such online financial

options are the best solution for him.

"Whenever I plan on sending a large amount to my village home, I use Bkash or Nagad as a medium, because they are so convenient. I don't need to go to the bank and make any requests, these can be directly done right here with a few taps on a smartphone while I am working. It's hassle-free and my time is not wasted."

Research suggests that the masses in Bangladesh, especially the working population are finding these new high-tech financial solutions more convenient than enrolling with a traditional bank.

HOW LONG BEFORE CASHLESS SOCIETY BECOMES A REALITY?

Recently, a couple who have decided to remain anonymous made a strong statement to this media – "Thank God we had balance in our international credit cards. Otherwise, we don't know how we would have survived in Dubai (a country that has largely gone cashless) even for a day. Not even the fast-food joints accept cash! We would recommend everyone before they travel

to a foreign country to google online about a country's preferred mode of payment. Otherwise, a nice trip can go down the drain."

This does not mean that the world is ready to go completely cashless. There is still some hope for the paper note!

Monjurul Abedin, a long-time teacher by profession and currently retired for some twenty years, has still not adapted to the concept of going completely cashless.

"I think credit cards encourage people to spend mindlessly and cause them to end up with huge debts. I am very much old-school and I still prefer to spend from what I earn as pension and Sanchayapatra profits every month," said the octogenarian.

People like Abedin and a few others may still revolt at the idea of going completely cashless, but they have to certainly make way for the future generation, who are keen on the concept.

Sajidul Haque, a second-year university student and also a teaching assistant at the university he studies,

prefers the cashless mode of payment any day.

"Of course, cashless is the way of the future! There's no point in making your wallet heavy when you can go cashless everywhere. Plus, it also keeps you safe from theft and robbery," revealed Haque.

Going cashless is the future

With so many countries around the world taking major steps towards a cashless world, it is only inevitable that Bangladesh will follow suit. It will be a major shift for the country, but if it is the direction that the entire world is heading, then there's no point in any sort of resistance. Rather, financial companies should be more proactive in this regard and make the transition from paper notes to cashless smoother.

By MMC

Photo: Sazzad Ibne Sayed

Model: Hritika

Makeup: Sumon

Styling: Sonia Yeasmin Isha

Location: Shawpno



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HOMECOOKED MEALS: Why they make sense in today's society

The argument for home cooking is perhaps one of the most observable phenomena of modern middle-class lives, which just keep getting busier. Many of us can still recall childhoods when anything from the store or bakery was quite a treat. Nowadays, however, as demands on our time take so many shapes, the concept of home cooking vs store bought and the benefits vs convenience dispute have become more pronounced. Add to that the lack of transparency in industrial food production practices, it is no surprise that celebrities, health gurus, and lifestyle influencers are all advocating for homecooked food.

Does that make the alternative a horrible choice?

On the contrary. Readymade, frozen, pre-processed and all the in-between versions of food are here to stay, and thankfully so, especially from the perspectives of busy professionals and mums with little children!

So, what is the fuss about home cooking? It simply refers to the preparation of food in a home setting, something that has been happening over household hearths for thousands of years, as opposed to a commercial or professional kitchen. Today, it can refer to a meal prepped

from scratch, or cooked with partially processed and some raw items that require more skills than just knowing the ingredients or recipe! Cooking techniques like stir-frying, baking, grilling, sautéing, and making mashed preparations are just a few mainstream skills that chefs at home are masters of.



Now, why is home cooking or homemade food recommended? For a variety of reasons, actually. Homecooked food is healthy, as preparing meals at home allows one to control the ingredients, which can help to make healthier choices. Home-cooked meals also tend to be lower in salt, and have no processed sugars or unhealthy fats that restaurant or pre-packaged meals may contain. Moreover, cooking at home can be less expensive than eating out or buying pre-prepared meals. The cost benefits can be reaped even more so with some planning and bulk buying of the pantry basics.

A damning argument that can be made against store bought food items is the sheer amount of uncertainty when it comes to its ingredients. We have all come across various scandalous news about companies substituting real/natural ingredients or chemicals with downright pollutants to save a buck. There have been already been plenty of cases of such in our country, some of which made nationwide news.



For those of us with environmental concerns on our minds, home cooking provides an opportunity to reduce our carbon footprint and reduce waste like packaging, and also food wastage when pre-packaged food is not sold and hits its expiration date. Plus, with home cooking, not only is the preparation process more efficient but also allows leftovers to be utilised.

A damning argument that can be made against store bought food items is the sheer amount of uncertainty when it comes to its ingredients. We have all come across various scandalous news about companies substituting real/natural ingredients or chemicals with downright pollutants to save a buck. There have been already been plenty of cases of such in our country, some of which made nationwide news.

There are also concerns about restaurant-bought food. It's no secret that many eateries have very unsanitary kitchens, which leads to contaminated food, as well as the presence of foreign debris like hair fragments or even something as dangerous as a nail or other metal/plastic pieces, or even the presence of insects like cockroaches, ants, etc.

But is healthy food the only concern? Not nearly, its preparation, and consumption form an integral part of our human existence. We associate food with sustenance, yes, but also joy, comfort, celebrations, and most of all perhaps, home! Our preferences for life are set up around the food on the table at home, and by extension, from the kitchen. Cooking and sharing meals at home can bring families and friends together and strengthen relationships. No wonder winter barbeques are so fun!

On a more personal level, cooking at home can be a very interesting and satisfying hobby, as well as a source of pride. Have you relished seeing family and friends indulging in something delicious you cooked yourself? Feels amazingly gratifying, surely. Moreover, food is also a strong connection to individual cultural roots, and home cooking allows individuals and families to preserve traditional dishes and cultural cuisines that may not be as widely available in restaurants or pre-packaged meals.

Cooking or prep time can also serve as an opportunity to relax and unwind, and enjoy some music or that favourite podcast in the background.

You could argue that store-bought food features a variety that home cooking may not match. But, does home cooking need to be one-

dimensional or boring? Not at all, and if learning new skills feels exciting, cooking at home is the perfect way to enjoy that, by practicing and perfecting knife skills, or trying out all new recipes. You could also spice up your routine with fun names and themes like Meatless Monday, Taco Tuesday, or Seafood Saturday to keep things interesting and bring variety to the home-cooked meal. One can also create intra-friends cooking competitions. Just think of all the possibilities with that one.

Family members nowadays rarely get to spend time with each other due to different schedules. But if a tradition can be set in a home to ensure that one home-cooked meal of the day is shared by everyone around the table at the same time, it makes for improved bonds and relationships, and the preservation of family values.

Eating together also allows family members to talk and share their thoughts and experiences, which

helps to strengthen family bonds and improve communication while ensuring nutritious meals. Eating home-cooked meals together can help to ensure that family members are eating a healthy, balanced diet, as they are healthier than take-out or fast food. Eating together nurtures an increased sense of belonging, and children who eat dinner with their families regularly tend to have better academic performance. Cooking at home together also opens up children to positive role models, and studies have found that people who eat together as a family tend to be more satisfied with their lives, and feel more connected to their communities.

So, next weekend, try and shop for the next 7 days of home cooking, and explore the benefits for yourself!

**By Sania Aiman
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Fresh fish or shutki?

Shutki is often on the list of favourite foods in a Bengali household. Those who love shutki love it for its intense aroma. Those who avoid it or don't like it, do so for the same reason as well. There is another group straddling the middle, who can't stand the smell shutki gives out during cooking, but love to eat it nonetheless. For them, shutki only becomes a delicacy once it's cooked and served.

It begs the question, however, that despite having so much fresh fish, why must Bengalis have shutki? It is true that many people who live along the riverside areas aren't particularly fond of shutki. For example, people in Patuakhali, Barisal, Bhola or Barguna prefer fresh fish. A lot of people in this region don't want to eat shutki, and they don't cook it either.

How did shutki come to be?
Shutki was the result of a necessity. This necessity was that of preservation. Fresh fish easily goes bad, so an old way of preserving fish was to dry it under the sun and turn it into shutki. The water content of the fish evaporates in this method. This practice of drying fish under the sun in open air is an ancient one.

In Bangladesh, shutki is produced between the months of October and April. The

share of sea fish derived shutki is produced in Cox's Bazar. Various chemicals and pesticides may be used during production to preserve shutki for extended periods of time, causing grave harm to the human body.

The heartland of shutki
No one ever visits Dubla'r Char in the Sundarbans, Saint Martin's Island, Sonadia, Maheshkhali, Cox's Bazar, Nazirtek, Ibrahimpur in Sunamganj, Mymensingh, the Chalan Beel region, or Sirajganj without bringing some shutki back with them.

The regions mentioned above produce shutki from both freshwater and saltwater fishes. The fishermen in these regions produce shutki from a sizable chunk of their catch, because shutki can be preserved for many days and it has high market demand. In fact, in times of trouble, many families live on shutki and the income it brings in.

Shutki is valuable
No matter how much some people might be put off by shutki, it's actually quite expensive. The most expensive shutki are the ones made from lakkha and rupchanda fish. A kilogram of good quality rupchanda shutki can go for anywhere between Tk 3,000 to Tk 4,000, and lakkha shutki goes for between Tk 4,000 to Tk 5,000. Chhuri shutki is sold between Tk 800 to Tk 1,200. The prices in Dhaka are usually much higher than

those in Chattogram or Cox's Bazar. The cheaper shutki is the mixed variety of different kinds of fishes. But the most popular by far is laitta shutki. Sweetwater shutki is usually made from small fish.

Mind-blowing chepa
Chepa is another shutki whose mere mention is a mouth-watering prospect. Even though it's mainly prevalent in the larger Mymensingh region, it's available in different regions of the country and known by different names, such as sidhol or sidoil, hidol (regional name in Mymensingh and Cumilla), and byarma (in the hill tracts). Its English name, "semi-fermented fish" is used when exported abroad.

Chepa is produced using puti shutki with traditional fermentation methods. The smell of chepa is so intense that for those who don't like shutki, it causes

much discomfort. On the other hand, those who like chepa shutki like it for its characteristic taste and smell.

Although chepa shutki is popular in Mymensingh and the greater Jashore region, not many people in the North of the country eat it, or are even familiar with it. In Kishoreganj, Mymensingh, Narsingdi, Sylhet, Cumilla and Narayanganj, chepa is the most highly produced variety of shutki. There is a lot of variety in its preparation as well. Many people have chepa shutki with chipped rice and rice cakes as well.

For a long time, I was unfamiliar with this shutki as I hail from Northern Bengal. Then I noticed one day that my cooking assistant at home made spicy chepa shutki with vegetables for their own family. That is when I first tasted it. I didn't like the taste or smell of it then. So, the question persisted, why do people like chepa shutki so much?

Later on, a co-worker's mother prepared some chepa shutki for me. It tasted heavenly. She made it with lots of garlic,

onions, and green chillies. Then I had a similar chepa bharta with a red chilli paste. The eating process involved a lot of tears and pain, but it was so good that I couldn't stop.

In Narsingdi, I had chepa shutki wrapped in pumpkin leaves. Chepa is prepared with aubergine, potatoes, taro, gourd greens, and loti. Others prepare it with taki or shol fish (varieties of snakeheads). I am now a fan of chepa shutki as well. A weekly dose of chepa has become the norm for me.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 24



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Fresh fish or *shutki*?

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 22

The shutki roundup
Other than that, people like having shutki of freshwater fishes such as rui, katla, puti, taki, shol, mola, dhela, tengra, bain, gochi, shrimp, etc. Among the shutkis made from saltwater fishes, only laitta may be the one that is affordable for the general public. Rupchanda, folichanda, lalpowa, chhuri, lakkha, jatka, choukka, guijja can all be turned into shutki. In the winter, when the lakes and canals dry up, people catch fish in bulk and prepare shutki from them.

Not forgetting nona ilish
The shutki that is made from ilish has a special name – nona ilish. Nona ilish is used in all sorts of delicious dishes, which is why it's a favourite for Bengalis, home and abroad. To make nona ilish, the gills,

No matter how much some people might be put off by shutki, it's actually quite expensive. The most expensive shutki are the ones made from lakkha and rupchanda fish. A kilogram of good quality rupchanda shutki can go for anywhere between Tk 3,000 to Tk 4,000, and lakkha shutki goes for between Tk 4,000 to Tk 5,000. Chhuri shutki is sold between Tk 800 to Tk 1,200. The prices in Dhaka are usually much higher than those in Chattogram or Cox's Bazar. The cheaper shutki is the mixed variety of different kinds of fishes.

intestines, and any remaining eggs are first removed before coating the fish with a mixture of salt and turmeric. Then its mouth is tightly bound with a bit of rope to make it airtight, and it is kept like this for 20-25 days to produce nona ilish.

Nona ilish bhorta with steaming hot rice, nona ilish with aubergine, nona ilish wrapped in leaves, nona ilish with pumpkin and gourd greens and even nona ilish curry with vegetables – they all make delightful dishes. To preserve nona ilish year around, they can be kept in freezers. It is said that shutki has higher calcium and mineral content compared to fresh fish. But it's not clear how much of the nutritional value remains after the

cooking process.

Nappi in the hill tracts
Nappi is a favourite among the communities of the hill tracts. Peoples make use of nappi to elevate the taste of their dishes. This is just another form of chepa shutki. Members of the Rakhine community in Cox's Bazar, Kutubdia and Maheshkhali usually produce nappi, which has the intense aromas of saltwater shrimp and other small fish. It includes some other ingredients as well. Even though it has an intense smell, those in the hill tracts believe it is second to none when it comes to elevating the flavours in a dish.

Nappi is wrapped in leaves from a banana tree and burned until it's hard before being applied to dishes. It can also be mixed with water and directly used in cooking. Other than the three districts in the hill tracts, nappi is highly valued in Chattogram, Barisal, Barguna, and Patuakhali. Every month, nappi is being exported across the border through Teknaf and the Chittagong Hill Tracts to India and Myanmar. In various restaurants in Thailand and even Indonesia and Sri Lanka, shutki items like nappi are being served.

The preparations of shutki
All these flavours of shutki rely on the different regional cooking methods to be able to express themselves fully. In some regions, they like having a brothy curry of shutki made from bigger fishes. Some people like a drier curry made with tomatoes. Aubergines, kochu, and potatoes are common in preparations of shutki. But shutki dishes across the board must be spicy. People in the northern regions have less shutki than people in the south, hence there is a smaller variety of preparations as well.

There are few hotels and restaurants in this country that don't serve some form of shutki. In the winter, shutki bhuna is sold with bhapa pitha and chittoi pitha on the streets of Dhaka. Those who don't want the sweet and coconutty taste love eating pitha with shutki, coriander or mustard paste.

By Shahana Huda Ranjana
Translated by Azmin Azran
Photo: Sazzad Ibne Sayed



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The economics of shutki trade

Drying is a common method of food preservation and has been part of human civilisation since ancient times. In many cases, it not only preserves the food but also elevates the taste. Dried fish or shutki maach is a glorious example. In Bangladesh, the popularity of dried fish is rising and there is a thriving shutki trade.

THE SHUTKI ITSELF

Shutki maach is made using the age-old method of preservation where the food item is dried in the sun and air, thus removing the water content. This allows for preservation that can make the fish last for months, even years. In Bangladesh, dried fish are commonly made using the native method where the fish is dried under the open sky. Of course, some new farmers are embracing modern

methods but the essence remains the same — let the sun do its work!

Even a few years ago, shutki was considered a delicacy but people are leaning towards trying new food and experience, and while shutki is an acquired taste for many, it keeps getting more popular in the country.

With many different recipes to try and so many different shutki available to choose from, it's easy to see why many people maintain a special attraction to this particular food.

TALES OF THE TRADE

Dhaka might not produce any shutki, but there are multiple trading spots in the city — Karwan Bazar, Rayer Bazar, and Jatrabari being the most prominent. But unfortunately, Karwan Bazar's days of shutki glory are all but over. Only a few of the shutki traders remain, while others have moved on to Rayer Bazar.

Rayer Bazar on the other hand is thriving, with almost 60 shutki shops. Shutki from all over the country is available here.

"I've been in this business for two generations. When Karwan Bazar was broken apart, we had no choice but to move here. I hear the few that are still there are having a hard time," said one Md Anis from Rayer Bazar.

The shutki trade in Chattogram is a whole different story. There is a market there named Asadganj, locally called Shutki Potti, and for good reasons.

Asadganj is the largest wholesale dried fish market in the country. Located by the Karnaphuli River and under the administration of Chattogram City Corporation, this place supplies shutki all over Bangladesh.

"Winter is the best business season for the shutki trade. We have more than 40 different types of shutki that we can offer at any time. And there are qualities of the same fish which also affect the price. Many people do not know this but depending on the origin of the fish, the taste can be very different," said Tanvir Hasan, Managing Partner of a shutki trading shop at Asadganj.

"Many people buy the wrong kind of shutki; the taste does not suit them and they end up hating it. But they (consumers) should let us know where they are from so, we can suggest the right shutki for them because it's impossible for everyone to become a shutki expert," he added, explaining that people from different parts of Bangladesh have a fondness for different types of shutki.

Almost 50 stockists and more than 260 wholesalers are involved in Asadganj Shutki Potti. It is estimated that annually, 20,000 to 40,000 tonnes of dried fish move through Asadganj wholesale market.

Shutki farmers bring their products to this market and sell them to the *araddars*.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 26



methods and using greenhouses to dry fish, but there is a marked difference in taste depending on which process is used.

Some fish are dried as a whole, some are sliced, others are cut open and have their intestines removed; some are salted and some are dried without salt. Different species and sizes of fish are dried using different

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The economics of shutki trade



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 25

The *aradars* then sell the products to the other shutki shops. People may also buy shutki directly from the *aradars*. Transportation, as well as packaging facilities, are available of course, for a price.

More than 40 different kinds of shutki are available here, which include, but are not limited to churri, loitta, icha, laksha, poa, salmon, rupchanda, painsha, kata, hilsa, salmon, moilla,

“We are presently trying to reach an agreement with some of the big brands in Bangladesh. There’s also an ongoing discussion with clients from UK so we are very hopeful to export in the coming days,” added the hopeful young man, who believes that shutki can be a brand and he is determined to prove it.

etc. If you can name it, they have it!

Shutki is brought here from Cox’s Bazar, Saint Martin’s Island, Rangbali, Sonadia, Kutubdia, Teknaf, Banshkhali, Anowara, and Maheshkhali.

There are a number of other shutki hubs in Bangladesh such as Syedpur, Massimpur, Bishwanath Fish Market, and Noapara. After Dhaka and Asadganj, Syedpur has the next big shutki market in the country.

Syedpur traders buy shutki from all across the country. Small species like puti and chanda come from the northern districts where freshwater shutki dominates. For the marine fish, they resort to the southern districts. The traders maintain regular interactions with their Chattagram’s counterparts.

This is how they collect local as well as imported variants, which come from countries like Myanmar and India. Within the country, Syedpur provides

supplies of feed meal (poultry feed and such) which is reliant on the shutki trade for its high protein content.

NEW POSSIBILITIES

Like all business, even the shutki trade has found a spot in the online marketplace. There are hundreds of small businesses and online shops from where one can order shutki. Home delivery service is being provided by most of them. Even dealers from big wholesale markets such as Asadganj and Syedpur are taking orders online.

“First, we wanted to launch a physical outlet and then move online but somehow we ended up doing it the other way around,” said Mizanur Rahman, Managing Partner and administrator of Shutkibazar.com, an online shutki shop who claims to be the biggest one in the country.

“We’re the biggest in the sense that

we have the biggest collection. Any shutki you want, just let us know and we will deliver. And of course, if you do not like the product, you can return it,” Rahman added.

He admitting that the COVID-19 blow was a difficult one but they are planning on opening multiple outlets all over the country.

“We are presently trying to reach an agreement with some of the big brands in Bangladesh. There’s also an ongoing discussion with clients from UK so we are very hopeful to export in the coming days,” added the hopeful young man, who believes that shutki can be a brand and he is determined to prove it.

Export possibilities of shutki are not new concepts and Bangladesh is already shipping a few different species of shutki to the UK, US, and middle-eastern countries. At least 20,000 workers get involved in Nazirartek

Shutki Palli in Cox’s Bazar during the production season. So, the dried fish trade is creating job opportunities as well as earning foreign revenue. Yet, this trade has not bloomed quite as much as one might expect.

It appears that there is high demand, possibilities and popularity of dried fish inside the country as well as abroad, but the shutki we produce is not even enough to meet the local demand. In fact, it’s barely 70 per cent and the rest are imported from India, Pakistan, and Myanmar. With proper supervision and investment, it is possible to meet the challenge. The time has come to cast a look in the direction of this trade and consider the future it might hold should it get proper support from the authorities.

By Ashif Ahmed Rudro
Photo: Sazzad Ibne Sayed

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THE SPICE TRADE:

A Bangladeshi perspective

Many argue that it was the beginning of the spice trade that paved the way for modern trade and economy. Spices have been part of human history for thousands of years; as early as our hunter-gatherer days when it was accidentally discovered that certain compounds enhance the taste of meat. Since then, spices have been used widely for culinary as well as medicinal purposes.

There remains a huge demand for spice worldwide and to keep up with that demand, the trade emerged in the

Indian subcontinent as early as 2,000 BCE with the trading of cinnamon and black pepper. Currently, in Bangladesh, spices boast a robust market worth approximately Tk 5,000 crore with a 2-3 per cent annual growth.

THE TRADER'S VIEW
Like any other business, the spice market has its peak season when the business blooms. In Bangladesh, it's the season of the two Eids, for obvious reasons. The market warms up before Ramadan and it stays buzzing until Eid-ul-Azha has passed.

The biggest spice wholesale market in the country is in Khatunganj, Chattogram. From this market, traders from all across the country collect their share of spices. Many businessmen have been part of this market for generations.

"I finished my MBA in 2014 and took over the family business. But before me, my father had been in this business for 52 years," said one Riazuddin, who has been managing part of the family business which goes by the name of 'Media Baniyalyay.'

Riazuddin has also started an online business by the name of 'Masala Bazar, Khatunganj' in which he plays the role of the CEO.

"Because of its very nature, online business isn't popular or is not even an option for wholesalers. Very frequently, we have transactions of Tk 50 lakhs or even Tk 1 crore a day, so you can imagine why this business is mostly done directly. But for those traders who are our regular customers, it's a different story. Sometimes, a phone call is enough", explained the young trader.

Whether you need the common spices like cumin, ginger, cardamoms, garlic, cloves, and bay leaf, or the rare ones like saffron, asafoetida, amchoor, long pepper, and black cardamom – you can find it all at Khatunganj.

"I haven't counted how many types of spices we deal with. Anything you want, we can supply. Mostly other wholesalers from across the country collect from us. But smaller businesses also reach out and we supply as they ask. We have no issue with packaging.

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The spice trade: A Bangladeshi perspective



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 29

There are some varieties of products and categories in the spice market but the most common are the powdered spices in the form of turmeric, chilli, cumin, coriander, beef masala and chicken masala, phuchka-chatpati spices, biryani masala, and even halim mixes. The powdered spice industry is growing popular because they have made cooking easier and they have almost replaced the mortar and pestle.

Aside from the attractive packaging, the spices come ready to be used

directly and the producers claim that it's produced with a certain standard.

"PRAN collects raw materials of powdered spice from its contractual farmers. We have one lakh contractual farmers who are cultivating crops for PRAN. Among them, around 10 thousand contractual farmers are dedicated to producing spice's raw material," said Kamruzzaman Kamal, Marketing Director of PRAN-RFL Group.

"We are the largest exporter of powdered spice from Bangladesh. PRAN boasts about 70 per cent of the spice

exported from Bangladesh in different countries, especially in Saudi Arab, UAE, Malaysia, Oman, Qatar, UK, France, etc.," he added, pointing out that the seasons have a heavy impact on spice market due to the production of crops.

There is a crisis of raw materials throughout the year, especially in the rainy season which is why raw materials of mixed spices are basically import based.

"PRAN is producing spices under five categories and we are still trying to introduce new items in the category of mixed spice and others. Some recipes

are very popular in India, Pakistan, the Arab nations, and other countries. But those are not available in Bangladesh. We make the spices for those popular recipes and offer them to our local consumers as well as export them", Kamal added.

He also observed that even today, the majority of Bangladeshis are using spices from the open market which means that the opportunities in the spice trade are very promising.

The spice market is dramatic, profitable, and certainly an indicator of the overall trade of the country. In

medieval times, spices dominated the majority of the trades. One of the main reasons why the Indian subcontinent was so appealing to colonisers was because of the abundance of spices in this region. Times have changed but the spice market has remained equally appealing to traders. Reality may be different but one can hope that our dependency on imported spices is lessened, and we end up exporting more one day.

By Ashif Ahmed Rudro
Photo: Sazzad Ibne Sayed

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Dhaka’s lively bakery scene



As a city, Dhaka is rich in terms of culture and tradition, and what forms a big part of our heritage is the food we have carried down from generation to generation. Apart from the usual Bengali cuisine that we have, with various renditions in the many regions of our country and some holding their unique specialty, Dhaka reigns in the bakery scene. From the gems of the old town to the now trending and

much-hyped fusion food as an offshoot of globalisation, the bakery scene of Dhaka has come a long way.

A hit of nostalgia

If we are to historically track down the bakery scene of Dhaka, bakarkhani is a good place to start. The story of the bakarkhani dates back to the Mughal period when it was widely popular among the merchants and citizens of

Dhaka. Now, bakarkhani is a food that has received recognition globally.

Fasttrack to some hundred years later, the bakery scene in the old town is still vibrant and we have now been introduced to the world of biscuits and cookies in various shapes, sizes, and flavours. Some of the oldest bakeries of Dhaka are Prince of Wales Bakery & Confectionery, Olympia Bakery & Confectionery, Ananda

Confectionery, and Yousuf Bakery & Confectionery.

“Patties, biscuits, and vanilla cakes were the prominent items back then. With minimal offerings, hot patties sold in tin boxes by hawkers would get us children excited!” said Taskin Rahman, Founder of The Food Talk, which is a Facebook community for food enthusiasts.

The ’90s saw the advent of cake shops

and bakeries that revved up the baking scene. With Sausly’s Foods bringing in new items like sugar puffs, Swiss Bakery with their plain cake, and Shumi’s Hot Cake Ltd. stunning everyone with their marvellous creations, it was a time when the bakery scene of Dhaka was abuzz, and we had something to look



forward to apart from white bread and biscuits.

Nevertheless, no matter how much the scene evolves in Dhaka, bakarkhani, biscuits, and patties will always be remembered as the original baked goods of Dhaka. They may be simple, humble food, but are crafted with the essence of culture and a hit of nostalgia.

Foreign influence

History may be etched but change is constant, and foreign influence in our local cuisine was the next big thing. Owing to the increase in travel worldwide, coupled with globalisation, we were introduced to a host of other cuisines globally from the 2000s. This not only gave us an assortment of options to satiate our taste buds but also made a gateway for a slew of bakery stores to open up.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 34





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Dhaka’s lively bakery scene

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 33

Shadman Shahriar, co-founder of Basic Kneads, a specialty food shop, remarked, “There exists a customer base for the authentic taste of global cuisines, and then there are ones who would rather prefer an infusion of our local tastes. However, overall, the preference for international cuisines has seen a good acceptance rate from people.”

One major addition from foreign cuisine that altered the bakery scene of Dhaka is the humble bread – apart from plain white bread, we now have a host of options to choose from including sourdough (which is the oldest bread in the world!), ciabatta, baguette, brioche, and a surge in liking for croissants.

Foreign influence in Dhaka’s bakery scene has shaped it up for the better.

From passionate bakers to entrepreneurs

Over the last few years, the introduction of e-commerce has made starting your own business extremely easy and affordable. Taking advantage of platforms as such, a surge in the number of home bakers turned entrepreneurs was seen. This was also fuelled by the pandemic when people started to explore food and try their hand at cooking.

Now, we see a lot of bakeries that are operating virtually and providing all sorts of delectable items, from humble homemade cookies to fancy multi-tiered wedding cakes. Making cakes that look like edible pieces of art using fondants and decorations got the cake business booming. From plain vanilla

pastries that we had during the ‘90s, we can now turn anything we imagine into a cake using fondants!

There are many bakers out there who started online out of sheer passion but then converted to brick-and-mortar stores based on their massive success, and one such example is Sugar Shots.

“It took us a few years, but we got there. Sugar Shots has moved out of their home kitchen and is now ready to bake from a commercial kitchen!” remarked Naba Habib Belim, co-owner of Sugar Shots.

More so, many avid bakers are now pursuing professional degrees in the culinary arts, something that was once upon a time unthinkable by many. This has produced several brilliant homegrown bakers; take The Flourist and Dessert Boutique by Nadia Lakhani for example.

What is next on the table?

The bakery scene has evolved massively over the past few years, especially in the last three decades, and it continues to do so. While these changes came through, knowingly or unknowingly, we have embraced the coffee culture, and it seems like a promising practice that is here to stay.

Embracing the coffee culture so vastly can be credited to the new generation of people consisting of millennials and Gen Z, who are too busy to cook and are always on the go. Thus, it is foreseen that shortly, more pop-up bakeries will open up that offer food on the go – maybe a quick croissant, sandwich, etc. We are already seeing



this trend in Dhaka – think of the success of Waffle Up!

Apart from that, cloud kitchen is another phenomenon that has grasped the bakery scene of Dhaka. The advent of cloud kitchens has enabled so many keen bakers to turn their passion into a profession and provided a host of

options for people to choose from when it comes to ordering online. Cloud kitchens and coffee shops are mushrooming all over the city and it is a matter of time before pop-up stores jump on the bandwagon.

The bakery scene of Dhaka has seen massive progress and has come

a long way, a journey that was filled with several milestones and surprises. We cannot wait to see what the future holds!

By Fariha Amber
Photo: Sazzad Ibne Sayed
Food: The Flourist







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DHAKA'S OPEN MIC SCENE: A platform for emerging artists to shine

The stage is set; you see an open platform in front of you, with the spotlight on the person holding the mic, what is going to happen? Will it be a stand-up comedy routine, which will make you laugh a lot, or a slam poetry recital that will awaken the artistic self in you, giving a timely nudge? Maybe the person will also have a guitar and start playing an original melody that you start singing along with; just think of any opportunity for artistic expression, and it will happen at an open mic venue.

Dhaka's open mic scene has evolved over the years, from humble beginnings to now being a platform for performers to highlight their talent and make a breakthrough in the industry. It is a vibrant scene, with stand-up comedy, solo musical performances, slam poetry, and more being featured. Among the venues, The Junction at Niketon, Banani's Jatra Biroti, and Third Space at Dhanmondi are prominent spaces that host open mic sessions frequently. If you want to become a performer, prepare yourself mentally and physically, and keep an eye out for upcoming events at these venues.



Stand-up comedy has carved out a solid niche among the Dhaka crowd who are always looking for something wholesome, with trailblazers like Naveed Mahbub providing a platform for up-and-coming performers. With Dhaka being a city in need of a laugh, this is an important industry, not only for its entertainment value but also for the community it brings together. In addition, Naveed's Comedy Club is a great place to hone your skills as an upstart stand-up comedian.

"I remember when we first started doing shows at open mic venues, there

weren't that many people present. Now it's good to see the venues have increased, along with performers getting their due recognition," said Amin Hannan, one-half of the Amin and Ashik standup duo who have become quite popular in recent years, performing in sold-out shows and just last year, performed at the inaugural Blender's Choice-The Daily Star OTT & Digital Content Awards 2021.

While stand-up comedy is enjoying its spot in the limelight, slam poetry has become a medium where you can articulate your thoughts in front of an

open-minded audience. Slam poetry is gaining momentum as a way to express yourself. It is an art form that has been around for a while and it is gaining more recognition in the modern world. It allows for an audience to be taken on a journey as the artist uniquely expresses their thoughts. Slam poetry is an opportunity for individuals to express their ideas, emotions, and stories in a powerful and captivating way. Last year, The Daily Star Books and SHOUT hosted 'Slam Poetry Nights,' with 18 participants taking the spotlight to perform their poetry and some

impromptu performances at the end. "In one of our SHOUT meetings, my team and I were discussing how we could create a platform for young minds to come together and express themselves, while also creating a unique kind of experience for said people. I had been following Button Poetry on social media, and earlier that day, I remember thinking to myself how nice it would be to be able to experience that in person. Therefore, the idea dawned on me to create something similar, within our city, and thus the inception of 'Slam Poetry Nights' happened," said Afrin Tarannum, Sub-Editor of SHOUT, The Daily Star.

"We received an overwhelmingly positive response since our first event, and it has only been getting better. We honestly could not have expected a better outcome and feedback from our performers and our guests. We have been told that Slam Poetry Nights has become a safe space for many of our performers and participants to share their minds and their art in one platform, and we wear it as a badge of honour," said Afrin, when asked about the response from the audience.

Emerging artists have a positive audience, but they still struggle to be heard. Open mic venues give them a platform and much-needed support, essential for providing opportunities and building their confidence. They have a community of like-minded artists and mentors to help them, as well as access to resources. It is important to provide support for these emerging artists in Dhaka so that they can continue to pursue their passions and achieve their dreams.

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While stand-up comedy is enjoying its spot in the limelight, slam poetry has become a medium where you can articulate your thoughts in front of an open-minded audience. Slam poetry is gaining momentum as a way to express yourself. It is an art form that has been around for a while and it is gaining more recognition in the modern world.



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Dhaka’s open mic scene:

A platform for emerging artists to shine

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 36

“We need more venues to accommodate the growing number of performers, along with providing them the right kind of support like sponsorships. As for the new artists, I would just like to say whatever is your craft, try to have fun with it and do things passionately, as now the interest for open mic artists is increasing, there would be scope for you to express your artistic self,” said Amin.

When asked how open mic events can help emerging artists, Afrin remarked, “During our events, each performer receives some time and the opportunity to communicate with their audience that leads to an open conversation about their art, the inspiration behind the art,



and everything in between. I believe open mic events such as Slam Poetry Nights allow readers to share their art and express themselves in an accepting and open-minded environment. Not only do they get the chance to experience first-hand how their art is being perceived, but it also allows room for constructive criticism.”

For many, these events provide a sense of community and belonging, as people come together to share their love of music, poetry, and other forms of self-expression. The intimate, unplugged setting of an open mic event creates a unique energy and connection between performers and audience members that cannot be found at larger, more commercial shows. Many audiences in Dhaka also appreciate the opportunity

to discover new, emerging talent at open mic events, and the chance to support local and independent artists.

“I used to watch stand-up comedians like Bill Burr and Russell Peters on YouTube and think about how nice it would be if we had similar performers here. Recently, I have discovered artists like Amin and Ashik and was surprised at how funny they were. Now, I am always on the lookout for any open mic events that are happening near me to experience not just stand-up comedy, but other forms of arts that encourage positive self-expression,” said Sifat Hossain, a final-year student from United International University, UIU.

By Fedra Al Hossain

Photo: Orchid Chakma



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The Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde in all of us



Do you consider yourself a nice person? If you nod, I shall disagree. If your answer is no, I shall still disagree. Blame it on the duality of human nature; we all have the capacity for both good and evil. It is a strange case indeed, that two people are living inside you. One of them is good, and the other, evil.

This reminds us of Robert Louis Stevenson's 1886 classic, *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, where a kind and well-reputed doctor drinks a potion of his own making, to transform himself into a beastly evil of a man. The good old Henry Jekyll becomes the sinister Edward Hyde, and then back to his former usual self when he consumes the elixir again.

But people often take the potion and become Mr Hyde in the office as well. You know that colleague who plays dirty 'corporate politics' and makes the office environment toxic? Yes, that colleague.

You are the same too. You are not a Victorian-era doctor in London; maybe a professional living in Dhaka in 2023. But you too, quite like our humble doctor, switch between two personalities, that also several times a day.

Let's start in the morning. To begin on a positive note, let's say you wake up fresh as Dr Jekyll. Breakfast may be quick, with you getting ready for the day's work. Nevertheless, the apple of the eye, your child, brightens up your day.

For him, you can endure any trouble and pain in the world. His one smile makes up for everything. He is your strength. One may imagine, when you see your little child, your face has "every mark of capacity and kindnesses" just like Dr Jekyll's.

He makes you want to be the person you have always aspired to be.

But something in you changes soon after when you are on your way to work. After kissing your baby goodbye, when you are on the road, the real world (read: Dhaka) hits you hard. Traffic is frustrating; not just the never-ending gridlock, but the chaos, the useless honking, heat, and humidity, those unruly drivers, and the darned jaywalkers!

No matter how angelic a human being you are, Dhaka will bring out the Mr Hyde in you. One cannot escape road rage. Slurs are thrown at each other almost constantly. And an accident that put a small dent or scratch will inevitably be followed by heated arguments, to say the least, and

sometimes brawls break out.

Well, next time, look at those angry faces on the streets. To me, they remind of Mr Hyde, who, as penned down in the book, "gave an impression of deformity without any nameable malformation, he had a displeasing smile..." When I see such things on the street, I don't bat an eye though, for I know that most of these people will probably revert to Dr Jekyll as soon as they get into their offices.

Now in your office, you are a completely different person. You are

Our final chapter happens when we get home. Perhaps late at night, when your loving child is fast asleep, you enter the bedroom, only to discover that somehow you have ended up in a skirmish with your spouse.

You turn into Hyde again. It is turmoil for both of you. Bitter exchanges or even worse...

Eventually, the lights are out as you go to sleep. In that silence and darkness of the night, a man and his wife lie still, thinking of how much the other has changed.

and back. His concoction was the result of a laboratory experiment whilst ours have been a result of society and human nature.

So, on our way to work in the morning, the cruel Dhaka streets infused with impatience, arrogance, and anger make the potion. When we backbite or take part in petty politics at the office, it is because of envy, over-ambition, and greed. In the privacy of our home at night, when we become vicious to our loved ones, we have sipped the potion that has been made with frustration, misery, and



all smiles, helpful, and professional; essentially, Dr Jekyll.

But people often take the potion and become Mr Hyde in the office as well. You know that colleague who plays dirty 'corporate politics' and makes the office environment toxic? Yes, that colleague. That colleague, who backbites, steals your ideas or takes all the credit, one who pulls co-workers down.

And yet, that same colleague, when out in the evening with close friends, metamorphoses into a sweet, social butterfly. Even there, it could be that Mr Hyde makes another appearance, but overall, he is happy, merry, and jolly; like Dr Jekyll, "surrounded by friends and cherishing honest hopes."

Surely, they both know that they love each other and that they are one unit in the core, but still, into the abyss of the night, one can't help but think how they married a Dr Jekyll only to later discover the hidden Mr Hyde. At that moment, before sinking into sleep, sometimes a thought about the spouse comes, as noted in the novella too, that he, Mr Hyde "must have secrets of his own; black secrets, by the look of him; secrets compared to which poor Jekyll's worst would be like sunshine."

And the cycle continues the next day and the day after that and so on.

And much like Dr Jekyll, you and I often sip this deadly tonic that causes transformations from good to sinister

the stress of the whole day.

Moreover, much like Dr Jekyll, we are also aware of the duality of morality and malice. As he confessed, "My two natures had memory in common..."

The novella informs us that eventually, the evil Mr Hyde becomes more dominant of the two. Dr Jekyll loses control of his alter ego, and Mr Hyde takes over completely.

What is the guarantee that the same will not happen to you one day?

By M H Haider
Photo: Sazzad Ibne Sayed
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The rise of our self-help industry

We were taught from an early age to excel academically, focus on getting good grades, and ace all of our exams. In schools and colleges, learning has always been more focused on academic courses, but what about self-improvement and personal development, which are equally crucial in people's lives? Bangladesh as a

entrepreneur, self-growth often comprises mental training, which may also include everything from stress management to goal-setting. Professionals usually have a great desire to enhance their time-management abilities to prioritise their jobs better and discover strategies to increase productivity without losing

keep going.

"There was a point when going to work started feeling like a punishment. I started to think the corporate world isn't for me," Alvee shared, expressing his frustration.

A book suggestion from a friend changed everything for him.

"When a close friend of mine introduced me to *The Discomfort Zone* by Farrah Storr, everything took a dramatic turn for me. Reading that book made me realise where my lacking was and helped me work on my shortcomings. Now three years later, as an Assistant Manager, I am thriving in my career," said Alvee.

So, why is there such a sudden interest in self-help books and specialists among Bangladeshis? — one might wonder.

The curiosity was not entirely unexpected. It may be challenging to stay motivated and keep moving forward with time as our lives become more and more chaotic by the minute. And the appeal of this genre is also heavily influenced by generation. According to a Market Watch poll, millennials spend a considerable portion of their money on self-improvement activities such as working out, life counselling, and well-being applications.

In the past, people used to be content with settling for less. We no longer want to be constrained by our surroundings now that the times have changed. We want to flourish and achieve whatever we can. This is the attitude that self-improvement gurus have used.

Lifestyle inflation has also played a crucial influence on the growth of this business in the country. As people earn more money, they have more options for how to spend it. More consumers would consider spending possibilities as their money rose after meeting their basic demands. An increasing number of individuals want to harness

the potential of self-improvement or soft skill development, which will be essential for professional success in the post COVID-19 era, when shopping, dining, and travelling take prevalence.

The self-help industry is a multibillion dollar sector globally. This is expected to be the fastest-growing industry in the world by 2027. People have recognised that encouraging themselves to achieve their full potential can be difficult. One element driving the industry's growth is the broad range of skills it can impart, from relationships to parenting and money management to identifying one's life's purpose, legacy building, and job progression. A self-help specialist supports every human desire.

Experts like Ghulam Sumdany Don, Solaiman Shukhon, and the youngest but most prominent of the lot, Ayman Sadiq, currently dominate Bangladesh's motivational business. The fascinating element of these three people is that they are all experts in distinct areas of self-development.

Ghulam Sumdany Don is a well-known corporate trainer who works directly with large corporations to assist their staff in attaining their maximum potential by strengthening their soft skills.

"If you are not brushing your soft skills then you are not just hampering your growth in life, you are going backwards and will never be able to make an economically sound life for yourself," said Don, explaining the need for soft skill training in Bangladesh.

Solaiman Shukhon, on the other hand, is a financial management expert who helps individuals make sound financial decisions.

Having the opportunity to work with different age groups, he has a fresh perspective regarding the youth and how lack of motivation is driving young talents out of the country.

"Globalisation is making the world smaller. In this era of Google, the business process and employment opportunities are changing. Everyone can see where the opportunities are waiting for them and how to take the opportunity. When they see a better life waiting in the other parts of the world, they become more practical than patriotic to take a decision," states Sulaiman.

And Ayman Sadiq's work is mainly aimed at the younger generation, who want to make the most of their abilities.

Remembering some of his initial days, he shared, "It was very difficult. I had probably gone through some of the most difficult days of my life. I would frequently lie on the carpet after filming a video and reflect on my life choices. It was a tough decision and involved a major trade-off."

Individuals like them had a difficult path. It required some time to persuade individuals that there is an urgent need for motivation among the people of Bangladesh. Initially, they had to reintroduce this notion to remove any negative connotation that the term "self-help" would have. They persisted though, and are now assisting individuals in many aspects of their lives.

No matter the definition, the notion of self-motivation or self-improvement is deeply ingrained in the individual's mental process. This is a notion that the individual seeking assistance must grasp. No one else can persuade someone to make the most of their time on Earth. Individually, the sector presents an excellent chance for anybody who wants to impart knowledge and make a big difference in people's lives.

By K Tanzeel Zaman
Photo: Sazzad Ibne Sayed
Model: Alfie Hossain Parul



nation has very recently realised the importance of self-help and what role it plays in our personal growth and the development of the economy.

Recognising and developing one or more areas of your life for self-improvement requires intentional effort. From the perspective of an

their mental health.

Take Alvee Rahman as an example. Once a fresh graduate, Rahman was very enthusiastic when he joined his first job. But after the first couple of months, he realised he was having a hard time coping with the corporate world and became demotivated to






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