



ISLAMPUR

a business hub with centuries-old vibe

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Photos:
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If I listened carefully, amid the maddening hustle and bustle, cacophony of sounds, one might find a strange harmony in the chaos — a thing that links this place to a bygone era.

In 400-year-old Dhaka, a few places could survive the test of time retaining its essence. Islampur, a famous business hub since the time of the nawabs of Dhaka, is one of them.

I felt it when I first went to this place decades back. And the charm is still alive if anyone braves to traverse the narrow lanes and by lanes of Old Dhaka to reach Islampur, now a wholesale clothing district. It is as busy as it was 300 years ago.

The main market has evolved through the eras — from once souk-style stores it has now turned into a huge business centre. Rolls and stacks of fabric — gabardine, Chinese and local prints, chikankari, silk, corduroy — materials for upholstery, home accessories, the place has it all.

However, its crowded vibe is not for the faint of heart. You will see old iron pull carts loaded with fine fabric rolls snaking their way through the by-lanes, which are so narrow that two such carts cannot cross each other.

There is perennial traffic congestion in Islampur, you see open drains and potholes, yet even such irritants cannot quell the exciting energy of this place. Shoppers, traders

or middlemen can be seen busy with some sort of errand or the other as they flock to the place.

Islampur is the most fascinating market in town. From fine cotton *mulmul* to *markin* stacks, you find everything here at a bargain price. The peak season usually starts 10 days before the Shab-e-Barat and continues until the second week of Ramadan.

So, now is the right time to hop on a ride to this shopping zone.

I reside in the retro world and just like a *nawab* of the old days, I leisurely walk through this treasure maze and do my pre-Eid shopping and market check of what's new. What catches my fancy are the fabrics, unstitched pieces and ready-to-wear garments and of course, household linens.

I was introduced to this vibrant market in my childhood when my aunts and mother went on their customary Eid shopping spree. This place, I heard from them, was a shopping haven. It offered a variety of local and imported fabrics at very reasonable prices. Obviously, the market was for wholesale buyers but retail shoppers like my mother and I, have always been regulars.

I remember my maroon Lady Hamilton *shalwar kameez* styled in *zari* borders that I bought from there. The baby pink georgette maxi, floral printed 'Kabli' dress, and the *chikankari panjabis* for my father; all such purchases were done from Islampur's souk-styled stores. The

crowded lanes would be lined with stores stacking limitless types of clothing material for both sexes.

Later, when I began to keep house myself, I turned to this famous shopping area for cost-effective curtain material and sofa linings.

These are stories from some thirty-odd years ago but this market from way back in time remains as pulsating as ever; always accommodating people who look for bulk buys at affordable prices.

Keeping Eid in mind, hundreds of retailers flock to Islampur to buy fabrics, which are mostly used for tailor-made clothes ahead of Eid-ul-Fitr.

Islampur, standing on the banks of Buriganga since the Mughal period of Bengal, currently has more than 6,500 showrooms in and around 95 markets. If the small roadside makeshift shops count, the number will exceed 10,000. Around 60,000-70,000 people work in these shops.

"Buyers can strike exciting deals on various categories of fabrics from

leading fabric wholesale dealers; silk, rayon, polyester, georgette you name it and you find it there. This century old market place in Dhaka is the major part of Bangladesh textile wholesale market. You can get great deals on various types of textile products such as apparels and garments, home textiles, fabrics and yarns from leading wholesale dealers," says Ishrat Ahmed, owner of a children's wear store. He has been trading in Islampur since 1998.

From printed tissue fabric that designers hunt for, to complete their Eid collections, to the most traditional 'Bexi voile', the market has fabrics of every hue and texture. Fabrics from our local industries are keeping up with their quality with imported fabric from India, Pakistan, China, Thailand and Japan.

Dhakaiites also buy clothes worth crores of taka from Islampur during Ramadan to distribute them among the poor as Zakat.

An unlimited variety of imported and local yardage fabrics, ready-made garments, sarees, lungis, baby clothes along with fashion accessories such as

lace, buttons, and stones are available here.

Islampur's businesses make substantial financial turnover and come Ramadan the annual demand for locally produced cloth and imported cloth simply multiplies.

Factories in Narayanganj, Narsingdi, Tangail and Keraniganj are the major producers of yards for the traders of Islampur. Related businesses complementing the fabric market also profit from the business Islampur attracts and they are crucial for sustaining the whole chain of industries.

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You can access the wholesale market online now at islampurmarket.com. But I would recommend visiting the market in person to take in the energy of this incredible place.

Walking on the historic alleys, immersing yourself in the sights and sounds of this unique old market district might leave you with a surprisingly enriching experience.

