

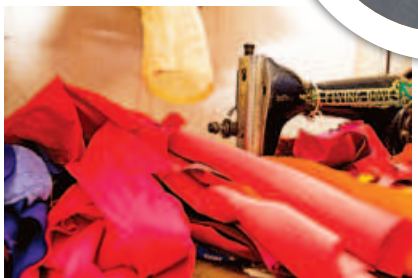


HOW DHAKA'S TAILORS bring Eid dreams to life amid Ramadan rush

RBR

Tailors typically enjoy star status at this time of the year. Besides your regular tailor, who takes your bespoke orders for dresses; there are tailors for upholstery work, who are no less busy and sought after now. And an honourable mention must be given to tailors sitting under a tree with a sewing machine to do your odd tailoring jobs – they too are in the limelight at present.

Come Ramadan, your toxic relationship with your favourite year-round tailor reaches an all-time high. The first day of Ramadan is too late for any order, whether for dressmaking, curtains, or sofa fittings. Your dearest tailor, who is always on your speed dial, will refuse to acknowledge you, ditching you without



thinking twice.

Such is my case now. Even though I have a “Mr Fixit” for all kinds of jobs – be it electricians, plumbers, fishmongers, locksmiths, blacksmiths, painters, or carpenters to make sure I am never in a fix – so naturally, I have seamsters for all sorts of tailoring tasks in this list. But they are all unreachable, out of network coverage, or cannot hear me for “poor



reception reasons”. All this, because I took a courageous trip to Islampur for furnishing shopping, just a dawn before Ramadan. That experience is another story all together. Giving myself all the credit for being on time this year, I called my furniture upholsterers – Rokon Uddin, my curtain maker; Golam Mostafa, who is for sofa covers; and Masud, for beddings, to place a few orders before Eid.

Rokon, the otherwise gentle lad, told me flatly that I would get my order after Eid. I knew he was kidding, but when he showed me his order list, and that the curtain makers in his factory were doing double shifts, I was scared. I eventually bullied him into accepting and stuck a deal that I would wait till Chand Raat, which is the eve of Eid day and is almost 28 days away, he kind of agreed, saying “Please do not be offended if I fail”, leaving my nerves in

tatters. Rokon's cart near Lalmatia is rolling year-round. He sells readymade curtains from Tk 250 to Tk 700 per piece, depending on the quality of the fabric provided, which he avails from places like Gazipur, Tongi, etc.

Golam Mostafa, on the other hand, says his orders have decreased in number due to people ordering online, but he has fixed clients, like me, who give customised orders.

“But this time of the year, I have one or two made-to-order jobs in a week,” Mostafa says.

Masud Miah, who has a sewing machine on the roadside near Jasim Uddin in Uttara, has young girls coming in for their dress alter orders, petticoats, burqa, or blouse making. I haunt him for my pants and pj length shortening, cutting off the sleeves of something or the other, and then making personalised tea cozies, shopping bags, and quilted potholders with those rags. There is reason for him



PHOTO: STAR

to shun me, especially now, when his otherwise dull trade is on demand.

Every trade in Dhaka is now geared towards Eid showdown, and all of us who fancy home décor ensure that our houses too, look impeccable and inviting for the festival. New linings and paddings, cushion covers, plants, etc – every minute detail is taken care of, and all these planning and prepping begin as early as the first day of Ramadan.

Dhaka's narrow alleys and posh thoroughfares see peaked activities now, the small-time local garment businesses and furniture furnishings shops give out subcontracts to tailoring sweatshops and embroiderers on the outskirts of the city like Kerniganj, Badda, Tongi, Uttara, Mirpur, to meet the demands for Eid sales.

For the festival razzmatazz to shine these tailors are like the shoemaker's elves, toiling through late nights to make your festival a happy one. Kindly give them their due regard this time around.

Tulip slams ‘false’ graft allegations

STAR DESK

Former Labour minister Tulip Siddiq has accused the Bangladeshi authorities of mounting a “targeted and baseless” campaign against her, BBC reported yesterday.

In a letter to Bangladesh's Anti-Corruption Commission, the MP's lawyers say allegations of corruption are “false and vexatious” and have never been formally put to her by investigators, despite being briefed to the media, the British public service broadcaster added.

Tulip stepped down from her role as economic secretary to the treasury, where she was tasked with addressing corruption in the UK's financial markets, in January.

The Hampstead and Highgate MP insisted at the time that she had done nothing wrong but chose to resign to avoid being a “distraction” to the government.

UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer, a close ally and representative of a nearby North London constituency, accepted her resignation in a letter, assuring her that the “door remains open” for her return.

When the corruption allegations emerged in January, Tulip referred herself to the PM's ethics adviser, Sir Laurie Magnus.

Sir Laurie said in his report that he had “not identified evidence of improprieties”.

However, he expressed that it was “regrettable” that Tulip had not been more mindful of the “potential reputational risks” associated with her connection to her aunt, Sheikh Hasina, the now deposed prime minister of Bangladesh.

The ACC is now looking into allegations that Hasina and her family embezzled up to £3.9bn from infrastructure spending in Bangladesh.

The investigation stems from a series of accusations brought forward by Bobby Hajjaj, a political rival of Sheikh Hasina.

According to court documents reviewed by the BBC, Hajjaj has alleged that Tulip helped broker a 2013 deal with Russia, which significantly inflated the cost of constructing a new nuclear power plant in Bangladesh.

In its letter to the ACC, Tulip's lawyers, Stephenson Harwood, repeat her claim that she was not involved in the nuclear plant deal in any way, despite being pictured at a signing ceremony in the Kremlin in 2013, with Sheikh Hasina and Russian President Vladimir Putin.

“It is not uncommon for family members to be invited to accompany Heads of State on state visits,” the letter says, adding that she did not know about any alleged financial irregularities.

It asserts that allegations suggesting a £700,000 flat in London King's Cross, gifted to Tulip in 2004, was “the fruits of embezzlement” are “absurd” and “impossible,” as the gift preceded the nuclear deal by 10 years.

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Bureaucracy falters without clear direction

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presented to the cabinet in the past month and a half.

Frequent transfers have also made such reforms difficult to implement, according to officials. The head of the public administration ministry's reform and research wing was transferred a few months after his appointment.

At least four additional secretaries have been appointed to the regulation wing, responsible for regulatory reforms, since August 5, but they too were soon transferred.

Mokhles Ur Rahman, senior secretary to the public administration ministry, would not comment on the matter when approached on Wednesday.

A secretary, speaking on the condition of anonymity, pointed to the Rules of Business, a key document for running the government. He said while the other rules outline proper procedures for governance, rule 33 allows the prime minister to overturn any decision, creating scopes for authoritarian decision-making.

But neither the Cabinet Division nor the public administration ministry has taken any initiative to amend this provision.

Additionally, the secretary said, the Land Registration Office is currently under the law ministry, but if it were transferred to the land ministry, land-related services would become more efficient.

However, even though the interim government has been in office for nearly eight months, no ministry has taken any initiative in this regard.

Asked about internal reforms, Cabinet Secretary Rashid said, “Reform is a long-term process. Some changes have already been made, but it may take more time for you to notice them. Some initiatives are ongoing, which will take even longer to become visible.”

An additional secretary said the chief adviser, at a meeting with top bureaucrats on September 3 last year, asked all the secretaries to present a brief outline of internal reforms for their respective ministries.

“Seven months have passed. Where are those reform proposals? Did the secretaries submit any proposals at all? If they did, what is the progress of their implementation? Is there any monitoring in place?”

In the daily operations of the government, the cabinet secretary, principal secretary, and the secretaries of key ministries such as public administration, home, finance, land, and education play crucial roles. These ministries, except for finance, are being led by officials who had retired long ago. There are allegations that these retired officials hold a “dismissive view” of the regular officers of the current administration.

Serving bureaucrats say their promotions remain stalled due to these contractual appointments.

At the same time, the contractual officials constantly make disparaging comments about regular officials which are affecting the administration, senior bureaucrats say.

Former secretary AKM Abdul Awal Mazumder, a public administration expert, told The Daily Star that a lack of coordination in the administration is evident.

“The kind of leadership required in a post-uprising period is missing among many top officials. Young officers are left without proper directions, and so it's only natural they will not take the initiative for reforms.”

Awal said there were opportunities in the post-August 5 period for administrative actions that did not require legal reforms. “However, ministries are not undertaking such initiatives,” he added. “It is the responsibility of the Cabinet Division and the public administration ministry to ascertain why no steps are being taken for reforms.”

Out of the 81 secretaries, 25 were appointed during the previous government while 56 by the current administration, including 17 on contract. However, this overhaul has not helped the civil administration become more efficient.

A secretary, speaking anonymously to The Daily Star, explained that secretaries do not execute fieldwork themselves; they ensure that the work gets done. “Many of the newly appointed secretaries have not held

key positions for a long time. So it is natural that they lack the necessary network. The administration is like a machine that needs to be kept running. It cannot be suddenly activated.”

When asked about ways to improve administrative efficiency, a joint secretary of the Cabinet Division said, “Since taking office, Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus has held only one secretary-level meeting on September 3. He visited the Secretariat only once, on November 20. Following the mass uprising, he should have visited each ministry in turn and conducted at least one secretary-level meeting every two months to infuse the administration with dynamism and energy.”

“If he was unable to make time, he could have delegated the task to an adviser. At the very least, the cabinet secretary could have held monthly meetings with all the secretaries to oversee internal reforms and monitor regular activities. Unfortunately, none of that is happening.”

Government insiders acknowledge the sense of stagnation within the bureaucracy. Lately, the chief adviser's press secretary, Shafiqul Alam conceded that the administration was unable to function at the desired pace. “There is now a perception that efficiency is secondary, while political favouritism is the priority. Unfortunately, this is the reality,” he said in an interview with a private TV station on March 12.

Tension in camps after arrest of ARSA chief

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Police, however, said that they are not considering the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) as a security threat in the camps.

“The militant group [ARSA] has no such strength to carry out any large-scale criminal activities in the camps now or take revenge for the arrest of its chief,” Mohammad Siraj Amin, additional deputy inspector general, also the commander of 14-Armed Police Battalion, told this newspaper.

He, however, said, “We are on alert to ensure security in the camps.”

Sources at the camps said a group of ARSA members are campaigning on social media that its chief is innocent.

On different pages and in social media groups, they are making posts portraying ARSA chief Ataullah as the leader of freedom fighters of Rohingyas fighting for their homeland against the genocide and persecution of Rohingyas.

They also demand the immediate release of the ARSA chief and other members.

According to Rohingya leaders, ARSA had full control over the refugee camps since 2018.

However, the group faced criticism and lost the support of the refugees after its name was linked to the killing of Rohingya leader Muhib Ullah.

Mohib, the chairman of the Arakan Rohingya Society for Peace and Human Rights, who advocated repatriation, was shot dead on September 29, 2022.

The victim's brother Habib Ullah claimed that ARSA, locally known as Al Yakin, was behind the assassination.

Although ARSA leader Ataullah denied the armed group's involvement in the killing, a former high-ranking ARSA commander, however, informed that ARSA leaders had discussed the assassination of Mohib, according to a report of the rights group Fortify Rights launched on Tuesday.

Rohingyas believe that ARSA killed Muhib to hinder Rohingya repatriation process.

The ARSA members are broadly accused of threatening the Rohingya youths, who are active and speak up

for their rights and repatriation.

A Rohingya youth seeking anonymity said, “As he started speaking on different platforms, meetings, and rallies regarding the rights of Rohingyas and their repatriation, some people known as the members of Al Yakin confined me.”

“They asked me to join their group. But when they realised that I would not join ARSA, they started threatening me. I had to take shelter in a safe place for many days due to their threat.”

Another Rohingya youth said after the arrest of ARSA chief Ataullah, the dominance of ARSA in the camps would diminish.

However, the Rohingya youth feared that some random attacks by ARSA could take place on their opponents or ordinary Rohingyas as the key associates of the ARSA chief, including Khalid, are still outside.

Solim Hossain, another Rohingya on request of not disclosing his whereabouts, said, “We are living in insecurity, fearing that the reprisal attacks by ARSA on its opponents

or members of Rohingya Solidarity Organisation (RSO).”

“A few days ago, a clash between the two armed groups left a mentally disabled youth killed in a crossfire,” he added.

According to the rights body, Fortify Rights, ARSA had a stronghold, especially in camps 13, 15, 17, 19, and 20, till November last year. The number of Rohingyas killed was 22 in 2021, 42 in 2022, 90 in 2023, and at least 65 in 2024.

Last year, Rab conducted operations in the refugee camps and arrested 125 individuals, including top ARSA members. On March 16, ARSA chief Ataullah and nine others were arrested in Narayanganj and Mymensingh.

Jasim Uddin Chowdhury, additional superintendent of Cox's Bazar police, also the district police spokesperson, said that Ataullah and six other ARSA members will be questioned in cases filed in Cox's Bazar. “Senior officials are being consulted on the matter.”

Tarique warns of extremists

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maintaining the country's secular character and strengthening democracy.

“We would like to draw the attention of the interim government that if it fails to control the evil activities of religious extremists and their radicalism, extremist groups and defeated fascist forces will once again bury democracy in the country,” he told at an iftar party via videoconference.

If that were to happen, Bangladesh could have an image crisis, Tarique said while addressing the iftar party at the Ladies Club organised to honour political leaders.

“To uphold the country's secular character, the democratic forces will pursue a political settlement that strengthens Bangladesh's democratic system. This includes bringing the fleeing mafia clique, responsible for massacres, to justice at any cost, while resolutely opposing extremism and religious fundamentalism,” said Tarique.

Tarique also urged the government to provide the public with a clear understanding of its action plan to maintain confidence among people. “If the outline of the interim government's activities or action plan were made clearer and more specific to the people, all doubts and hesitations in their minds would be removed.”

The BNP leader said it is true that the Awami League government was not overthrown merely to arrange a national election. “But it is even truer that the mafia regime collapsed due to the failure to hold a fair election. So, there is no room to consider any election simply as a matter of whether a political party can come to power or not,” he said.

Tarique also expressed concern about some advisers of the government and even one or two political parties speaking in a slightly different tone regarding the next election.

“We believe that if secondary issues are prioritised under the guise of a new political settlement, instead of honouring public expectations, it will send the wrong message to the people. Such a situation will ultimately pave the way for the resurgence of fugitive mafia regime associates.”

Tarique expressed the public

expectation that the interim government will give the highest priority to elections, paving the way for the formation of a “democratic government”.

He reiterated that if BNP is entrusted with the responsibility of governing the country in the upcoming national elections, the party will form a national government, consisting of representatives from pro-democratic political parties and elected public representatives.

Tarique expressed concern over the alarming increase in incidents of violence against women, children, and rape.

Noting that women make up half of the country's population, he said that without ensuring their safety, it is impossible to move the country forward.

“There is a need to deeply consider whether the security of our mothers, sisters, and daughters is in danger due to the government, administration, and law enforcement agencies being overly focused on creating new political settlements or any other tasks,” the BNP leader said.

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir said although the country has been freed from fascism, democracy is still elusive. “A democratic Bangladesh remains the main aspiration of the people.”

Emphasising the need for unity, he said that it is crucial to resolve issues relating to reforms through dialogue.

National Citizen Party (NCP) Convener Nahid Islam urged political parties to reach a political consensus so that there would be no room for “Mujibbadi” politics in the election and politics of future Bangladesh.

He said there are political parties to make the next election inclusive. “We believe that we bear the spirit of the struggle and the mass uprising that took place against Mujibbad [Mujibism],” he said.

Nahid hoped that a political unity would be there.

Jamaat Naye-e-Ameer Syed Abdullah Muhammad Taher said he on behalf of his party requested all to forge a national unity on four points – the independence and sovereignty of Bangladesh, a sustainable democracy, a fair election and a corruption-free Bangladesh.

2 girls raped in Rangpur

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In Patuakhali's Dumki upazila, a 12th grader was allegedly gang-raped on Tuesday evening.

The 18-year-old was the daughter of a man killed in police firing during the July uprising. A case was filed in this regard with Dumki Police Station yesterday.

According to the details of the case, the victim was on her way to her maternal grandparents' house after visiting her father's grave when she was attacked near the Munshibari area.

Suspect Sakib Munshi, 19, and his associate Sifat Munshi, 20, allegedly forcibly took her to a secluded area where they took turns in raping her.

The suspects also allegedly took photos of the victim and threatened to spread them online if she reported the

incident.

Dumki Police Station Officer-in-Charge Md Jakir Hossain said a suspect was detained for questioning and legal action would be taken accordingly.

In Rangpur's Mithapukur upazila, a 40-year-old man named Alam Mia was detained on Tuesday night for raping a girl with disability.

Police said the sixth-grader girl was returning home after tuition on Tuesday afternoon, when Alam forcibly took her to a cornfield and raped her.

As the girl cried for help, locals went there, but Alam managed to flee. However, the locals caught him around 9:00pm, as he was attempting to flee. They beat him up and handed him over to the police.