MY DHAKA

Why Bangladesh's furniture fair is TURNING HEADS

RBR

A furniture fair is not exactly my idea of an afternoon outing. However, when my expat friend, who is returning to Dhaka to finally settle down, decided to explore the local furniture market, the ongoing five-day National Furniture Fair at the International Convention City Bashundhara (ICCB) seemed like the right choice.

I was genuinely surprised to see how lively and crowded the fair was. The ICCB's four halls were packed with visitors, and that too on a weekday afternoon. A guard told me that tents outside would also open for the weekend rush. It felt as festive as any wedding or trade fair, with people browsing, negotiating, and taking photos.

The fair's success was visible from the crowd's enthusiasm over offers and discounts. Many stalls were offering a flat 10 percent off, and customers were making quick purchases. "The market was shaky after the July uprising, which made the middle and upper middle classes cautious about spending. But this year, our daily sales targets are being easily met," said Mohammad Anwar Parvez, Manager, Retail Sales for Hatil Furniture.

Leading brands like Akhtar, Hatil, Brothers, Nadia, Ayoto, Omega, JMG, Navana, Athena's, Partex, Regal, and Legacy are participating across 278 stalls, where 48 exhibitors are showcasing their latest designs and innovative products. The variety in materials, colours, and finishes was remarkable and highly competitive.

Among all, Ayoto Furniture stood out for its craftsmanship and unique approach. The brand began its journey through exports, aiming to represent Bangladesh as a complete manufacturing solution for contemporary furniture. "Our designs blend European elegance with local sensibility, which gives our creations both beauty and function," said Nipa Arif, Marketing Director of Ayoto Furniture.

I was fascinated by their artistic precision -- a chair with a whale-tail-shaped backrest instantly caught my eye for its elegance and minimalism. Their animal-inspired collection, featuring designs influenced by cheetahs and stingrays, reflected creativity and boldness rarely seen in local brands.

Visitors came from all walks of life -- young couples furnishing their first apartments, middle-aged families looking to replace old furniture, and elderly couples preparing for their children's weddings. My friend, meanwhile, was searching for terrace furniture that would suit Dhaka's weather.

The swing sets and garden seats of Chattogram-based dellArte were selling fast. "We focus on reasonable pricing and what truly benefits our customers," said Md Hasan Ali, Manager of Business Development.

Another crowd favourite, ISHO, showcased sleek and multifunctional pieces such as sofa-cum-beds, dining tables, and dressing units. Their stall in Hall 2 was buzzing, thanks to clever advertising that promised to bridge the gap between modern aspirations and market availability.

Almost every stall manager -- from major names to emerging brands -- was thrilled by the strong footfall and overwhelming response. Shoppers were trying out chairs, lounging on daybeds, and testing the comfort of sofas. Neutral-toned furniture in beige and cream, along with rich green faux leather rocking chairs, caught particular attention.

What impressed me most was the customer service. Despite the heavy crowd, sales staff remained polite, attentive, and eager to explain product details with genuine warmth.

Dhaka's sales executives, as my friend observed, "are surprisingly professional and courteous." She managed to find a few pieces she loved. "Having lived abroad in furnished apartments, my taste in interiors has changed. Now, I want locally made furniture that reflects both comfort and the city's climate," she said.

The fair reflects a growing confidence in Bangladesh's furniture industry -- an evolving sector that combines creativity with craftsmanship. With more people embracing local brands, this industry holds strong potential for export diversification and economic growth.

Salahuddin draws flak over July warriors remark

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The National Citizen Party yesterday lashed out at BNP's Salahuddin Ahmed, accusing him of defaming July warriors by calling them "collaborators of fascists" in a remark made to journalists in the morning.

NCP demanded that Salahuddin withdraw his comment and apologise to the fighters injured and the families of those martyred in the July uprising.

BNP Standing Committee member Salahuddin, however, denied the accusation and said his remarks were not directed at July warriors but at fascist forces.

After paying tribute at the grave of BNP founder and former president Ziaur Rahman at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar yesterday morning, Salahuddin said it appeared that a group of unruly individuals, posing as students under the banner of "July Warriors", caused disturbances ahead of the July charter signing ceremony outside the parliament on Friday.

"We believe they are fascist forces. Awami fascists are trying to create chaos through various means. No genuine July warrior or anyone involved in the uprising could have been part of it," he told the reporters.

A few hours later, NCP Convener Nahid Islam told reporters that Salahuddin Ahmed may have made the remark in error or lacked accurate information.

"Since he [Salahuddin] has been away from the country for a long time and was not here during the July uprising or on the streets at that time, perhaps he doesn't know who actually took to the streets, who fought, and who stood before the bullets," he said at a press briefing at his party office in Banglamotor.

"We demand he withdraw his statement, apologise to the fighters injured and the families of those martyred in the July uprising, and learn the true history of the July uprising."

Meanwhile, Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Shafiqur Rahman, in a post from his verified Facebook page, said yesterday that labelling July warriors as allies of autocracy will be regarded as a "grave indecency".

Without addressing anyone in particular, he wrote, "From any position of responsibility, we shall not make such comments about those proud people of the nation who risked their lives in the struggle.

"If anyone behaves in such a manner, the nation will not forgive them. As political leaders, we must act responsibly in all circumstances, Inshallah."

Contacted, Salahuddin told this newspaper, "In no way did I say anything directed at the July warriors. If they listen to my speech clearly, I actually said the July warriors are not connected with the [Friday's] violence."

Salahuddin said he spoke in favour of the July warriors. "In fact, I tried to save them. What I clearly said in my speech is that no organisation or person involved with the July uprising could be involved in this chaos.

"Before that, I said that the Awami fascist forces are trying in different ways to create chaos, and that was seen on Friday too. I said some so-called July fighters, who are not students, took this chance to create chaos."

Blaze guts cargo village at Dhaka airport

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A press release by Bangladesh Ansar and Village Defence Party said 25 Ansar members were hurt in the incident.

No other casualties were reported.

Our correspondent saw some rooms in the complex still burning around 11:00pm. Asked about it around that time, Brigadier Jahed said, "It will not spread further."

Cargo parking in-charge and witness Momin Majumder said he first saw the fire near the Skyview Airline office at Gate No-8. "At that time, the intensity was not high, but it quickly spread to a nearby courier service office and eventually reached Godown No-3, where imported mobile phones and electronics were stored.

"The airport's own firefighters tried to douse it, but it soon reached the DGR [dangerous goods] section, where chemicals were kept. Shortly afterwards, explosions occurred, and the blaze spread rapidly."

He added, "The flames then reached Godown No-1, where passengers' belongings were stored, and then spread to the area where valuable items such as gold were kept."

The extent of the damage is yet to be known, but C&F agents fear massive losses, with many valuable imports reduced to ashes.

Khairul Alam Bhuiyan, vice-president of the Dhaka Customs Agents Association, said, "We saw fires in the imported cargo section in 2013 and 2017, but they weren't as severe. This time, the entire section has been burnt."

The civil aviation ministry, the Internal Resources Division of the finance ministry, and Biman Bangladesh Airlines have formed separate committees to investigate the incident.

Meanwhile, Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus assured the public that the interim government was aware of the growing concern over the recent spate of major fires across the country.

In a statement issued by the chief adviser's press wing, he said, "We wish to assure all citizens that the security services are investigating each incident thoroughly and protecting lives and property with utmost vigilance. Any credible evidence of sabotage or arson will be met with a swift and resolute response.... Let us be clear: if these fires prove to be acts of sabotage meant to sow panic and division, they will succeed only if we allow fear to overtake reason and resolve."

Besides yesterday's incident, two more fires -- one at a garment factory and chemical warehouse in Dhaka's Mirpur, and another at a factory building in the Chattogram EPZ -- occurred within the past five days.

FLIGHT DISRUPTIONS

At least eight domestic and international flights were diverted to Chattogram and Sylhet, while hundreds of outbound passengers were stranded at HSIA for hours.

Four international and four domestic flights carrying 1,264 passengers and crew were diverted to Shah Amanat International Airport in Chattogram, our correspondent reported.

The international flights included two US-Bangla Airlines flights from Bangkok and Kuala Lumpur, one Biman Bangladesh Airlines flight from Singapore, and an Air Arabia flight from the Middle East. As of 11:30pm, all diverted flights had returned to Dhaka after operations at HSIA resumed.

Three international flights were diverted to Sylhet's Osmani International Airport, our Sylhet correspondent reported, while three domestic departures from there were delayed.

A Biman Bangladesh Airlines flight from Riyadh carrying 396 passengers landed in Sylhet at 3:31pm, and the passengers were moved to a lounge after about four hours. Two US-Bangla Airlines flights from Singapore and the Maldives landed there at 6:05pm and 6:15pm.

From Dhaka, at least over a dozen domestic flights were disrupted.

POOR PROTOCOL AT HSIA

Aviation expert Kazi Wahidul Alam told The Daily Star that the standard protocol required for import and export cargo villages at HSIA was not maintained. "The airport authorities should ensure international-standard protocols, especially regarding firefighting capacity at the cargo village."

He expressed concern over how long it took to bring the fire under control, adding that it was alarming that goods at the cargo village were not stored in a classified manner, with different types of items -- including chemicals and garments -- kept together.

Another expert, ATM Nazrul Islam, said HSIA authorities, in coordination with the fire service, should assess whether they have the necessary equipment to efficiently handle such large-scale fires.

DAMAGES BEYOND BURNING

Faruque Alam, general secretary of the Dhaka Customs Agents Association, said, "Hundreds of tonnes of goods were stored there, including imported materials from countries like China and the USA, readymade garments, industrial raw materials, pharmaceutical ingredients, essential vaccines, and electronic equipment.

"There were thousands of different items -- from urgent documents and books to costly industrial goods. Judging by the scale of the flames, it's clear that nothing remains there ... We believe the losses have already crossed Tk 1,000 crore, though a full assessment is still not possible."

Fazlee Shamim Ehsan, executive president of the Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association, told The Daily Star, "The losses cannot be measured only by the value of the burnt products.

"For instance, we imported 500 pieces of lace to produce 15,000 dresses. The fire may have destroyed those 500 laces, but the production of all the dresses will be halted."

Md Zakir Hossain, managing director of Delta Pharma Ltd, said his company was unsure about the condition of two consignments following the fire.

"One consignment landed yesterday [Friday] and another was scheduled to arrive today [yesterday] at 2:40pm. Even if the materials weren't burned, exposure to water could render them useless," he said, adding they could not assess the situation due to restricted access.

Inamul Haq Khan, senior vice-president of the BGMEA, said the fire at the airport's cargo village is an ominous sign for the country's export and import business, as international clothing brands may now worry about timely shipments.

Adding that many garment samples stored there were reportedly burnt, he said, "A massive fire in such a secured area of the country's premier airport is not a normal incident."

Anwar-ul-Alam Chowdhury Parvez, president of the Bangladesh Chamber of Industries, said, "These aren't just any goods -- they include urgent and valuable items. Many haven't even been cleared yet. This affects production timelines, delivery schedules, and severely hampers buyer confidence."

Notably, the same cargo complex had earned a perfect score in a UK Department for Transport audit for its additional cargo security measures a week ago.

Tk 1,200cr lost

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under government-to-government (G2G) arrangements.

Approved in November 2015, the SPM Project was implemented with funding from China.

China Petroleum Pipeline Engineering Company Limited (CPP) laid the 220-km dual pipeline -- 146km offshore and 74km onshore -- to transport fuel oil to Patenga from a floating buoy, 16km off the coast of Maheshkhali.

Two 36-inch diameter pipelines will carry fuel directly to Eastern Refinery Limited (ERL) in Patenga via a storage tanker in Maheshkhali.

Upon completion, CPP expressed interest in running the pipeline for three years, and the then Awami League government showed willingness to give the Chinese company the job without a tender.

However, upon assuming office, the interim government opted to float an international tender.

Mohammad Lokman, former managing director at ERL, said, "A Tk 8,300-crore facility remains idle without any economic return. Moreover, fuel oil worth around Tk 300 crore is stuck inside the pipeline."

He also warned that equipment could be damaged if the facility remains idle for an extended period. "Some pieces of machinery need to be operated continuously; otherwise, they become inoperative."

SHIPPING CORPORATION WANTS TO OPERATE PIPELINE

State-owned Bangladesh Shipping Corporation sent a proposal to the energy ministry through the shipping ministry on June 19, expressing its interest in operating the pipeline with assistance from a third party.

Commodore Mahmudul Malek, managing director at the shipping corporation, said they sought to run the pipeline under the Direct Purchase Method (DPM).

"Since the shipping corporation is a state-owned enterprise, we could not respond to the international tender," he told The Daily Star.

Asked, Rahman, director (operations) of BPC, said, "I am not aware of any proposal from the shipping corporation."

About the shipping corporation's plan, Malek said they intend to run the pipeline through an experienced foreign operator for the first few years.

"Working with a foreign organisation will help us build skilled manpower. Eventually, we will be able to assume full control of operations," he added.

5 cases filed, 2,900 sued

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Charge (OC) Imaul Haque told The Daily Star that four cases were filed on charges including assaulting police personnel, vandalising vehicles, setting fire to a control room, and illegally entering a restricted area.

Meanwhile, Dhanmondi Police Station OC Kya Swee Nue Marma said another case was filed against 70–80 unidentified individuals for assaulting police personnel, vandalising a police vehicle and obstructing law enforcers in the line of duty.

The unrest began when a group identifying itself as "July warriors" broke through police barricades and entered the parliament complex during preparations for the charter signing.

The protesters demanded state recognition for those killed in the July uprising as "martyrs", official recognition for the injured as "July Warriors", a roadmap for rehabilitation of martyr families, and legal protection for the wounded.

Around 1:15pm, police tried to disperse the crowd, triggering clashes that left several people injured on both sides.

Passengers suffer

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"I don't know how they are operating inside. I'm feeling scared," he said.

Like Azizul, many other labour visa holders expressed concern over the uncertainty, with several noting the significant cost of their air tickets.

Another passenger for a 7:30pm Emirates flight arrived at 4:10pm but struggled to get in.

Once inside, he was told the aircraft had not yet arrived as the airport was closed.

Visibly frustrated, he was seen leaving the airport around 5:25pm despite instructions for passengers to wait at the terminal.

"I don't think the flight will take off today [yesterday]," he said.

Inbound passengers faced similar uncertainty as their flights were diverted to Chattogram and Sylhet.

Abu Assad, who was waiting outside HSIA to receive his brother returning from Saudi Arabia after eight years, said the flight was diverted to Sylhet.

"He was scheduled to land here at 3:30 PM. The airline told them to wait inside the plane [in Sylhet], and they will fly back to Dhaka when the situation clears. He has already been waiting on the tarmac for more than two hours," he added.

The large crowds of onlookers also blocked parts of the airport road, causing severe traffic jams in the area. Army personnel were seen managing traffic from outside Terminal-3 to Abdullahpur.

An army personnel on traffic duty told The Daily Star they were working to keep one lane clear for emergency vehicles, such as fire brigade units, to pass quickly.

শ্রদ্ধাঞ্জলি

আজ ১৯শে অক্টোবর ২০২৫ ইং, (রবিবার) দেশের অন্যতম উদ্যোক্তা ও বিশিষ্ট ব্যবসায়ী এবং নাভানা লিমিটেড ও আফতাব অটোমোবাইলস্ লিমিটেড এর প্রতিষ্ঠাতা, আমাদের পরম শ্রদ্ধেয় মরহুম আলহাজ্ব জহুরুল ইসলাম সাহেবের ৩০তম মৃত্যুবার্ষিকী।

তিনি ছিলেন আমাদের আদর্শ, পথ প্রদর্শক এবং সকল কর্ম প্রেরণার উৎস। আজকের এই দিনে আমরা তাঁকে শ্রদ্ধাচিত্তে স্মরণ করছি এবং তাঁর বিদেহী আত্মার মাগফেরাত কামনা করছি।

সফিউল ইসলাম (কামাল)
চেয়ারম্যান
নাভানা লিমিটেড
আফতাব অটোমোবাইলস্ লিমিটেড