

# Eid, approaching summer boost Rajshahi silk sales



PHOTO: AZAHAR UDDIN

As Eid draws near, the clatter of looms fills the air at silk factories in Rajshahi. Clockwise from the left, the recently taken photos show workers placing dyed saris on line for drying at Usha Silk factory, silkworm cocoons at Bangladesh Sericulture Development Board, and women busy at work at Sopura Silk Mills Limited, in Rajshahi city.

## SHOHANUR RAHMAN RAFI

The words Rajshahi and silk remain nearly inseparable in the culture of Bangladesh. Ahead of Eid-ul-Fitr – which coincided with the stuffy mid-spring weather this year – the appeal of Rajshahi silk has surged. Factories across the city are busy with work, while seasonal shopping gains momentum.

Rajshahi silk was officially registered as a Geographical Indication (GI) product in 2017, reinforcing its prestige. For many buyers, wearing silk is not merely a fashion statement – it is about embracing a legacy passed down through generations.

Every year, Eid, puja and other celebrations bring renewed demand for the city's iconic fabric. The Eid shopping rush is especially visible in the silk showrooms of the Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation (BSCIC) industrial area, where several privately owned silk mills operate their retail outlets alongside production units.

### NO REST FOR LOOMS

As Eid draws near, an energetic clatter of looms fills the air at Sopura Silk Mills Limited. Looms run at one side of the compound, while artisans remain busy dyeing threads, weaving saris and adding delicate handwork on the other side. The showroom has been operating since 1980.

An expansive showroom is also housed in the compound, where shoppers browse through rows of vibrant garments – traditional saris, panjabis, sherwanis, three-piece outfits, shirts, and scarves of various types and lengths.

According to Saidur Rahman, manager of the company, the Eid season always brings a surge of customers.

"Both Eids are busy, but this Eid [Eid-ul-Fitr] usually sees even larger crowds," he said. "We offer a wide variety of fabrics, including Balaka silk and raw silk."

The price of silk garments varies widely depending on quality. "Our saris start from around Tk 3,000 and can go up to Tk 50,000 or Tk 60,000," he added.

"Rajshahi silk is traditional, and that is why it continues to have strong demand."

Nasima Khanam, a customer searching for a suitable Eid outfit at Sopura Silk Limited, said silk remains her preferred

choice for special occasions. "It is part of our heritage. Silk is completely different from other fabrics," she said, adding that the fabric is exceptionally comfortable. "Even though the price is a bit higher, I still prefer it."

Another shopper, Tasnia Hosne Afrin, said this year, Eid coincided with mid-spring. Winter has ended, and the season is starting to warm up. In this weather, silk clothing offers optimal comfort. "Silk is very comfortable to wear in

in 1961 and was later brought under the Bangladesh Silk Development Board in 1978.

In its prime, the facility played a major role in meeting the country's demand for silk yarn, which currently stands at about 300 tonnes annually.

However, the factory was shut down in 2002 due to sustained losses, and has remained closed for years before reopening on a limited scale in 2018. At the time of closure, it had 63 looms and produced about 116,000 yards of silk

"After the factory restarted, we began producing and selling Garad saris, printed saris, two-piece outfits, scarves, shawls, Motka fabric, Dhupian fabric, Balaka fabric and printed fabrics," he said.

He added that the factory once operated showrooms in several divisional cities across the country, but now only one sales centre remains active.

Much like the Sopura compound, the Rajshahi Silk Factory premises also have a small sales centre. However, customer turnout remains quite low due to a lack of publicity. Despite the disappointing sales, the factory continues to trudge along, keeping alive a legacy that dates back decades.

### DOMESTIC YARN PRODUCTION SUFFERS

Silk threads are produced by silkworms, locally known as polu poka. Producing silk requires the sacrifice of large numbers of these insects. For example, more than 250 silkworms are needed to produce enough silk for a single tie. A sari requires about 5,000 silkworms, while producing enough silk for a shirt requires roughly 2,500.

Till 1991, the demand for silk yarn in Bangladesh was around 200 tonnes, half of which was produced domestically, while the rest was imported, said Liakat Ali, president of Bangladesh Silk Industry Owners' Association.

Currently, the country's demand for silk yarn has risen to about 500 tonnes, but only around four tonnes are supplied by domestic producers, with the remaining demand met through imports. Lower tariffs have made yarn imported from China cheaper and more widely available, which now dominates the local market.

As Chinese yarn floods the market, demand for local silk yarn has consequently dwindled. It has also affected mulberry nurseries.

Silkworms are fed mulberry leaves, so mulberry nurseries are set up exclusively to facilitate sericulture. Such nurseries have dwindled significantly, with many privately run nurseries shutting down, affecting thousands of silk farmers who have since shifted to other crops, while only 11 government-run nurseries are now operating in different parts of the country.



PHOTO: AZAHAR UDDIN

Eid shopping gains momentum at Sopura Silk Mills Limited in Rajshahi city.

warm weather. People prefer comfort," she said.

### PRODUCTIVITY WHITTLED DOWN AT STATE-RUN FACTORY

While private showrooms enjoy a festive uptick in business, the scenario remains different at the government-run Rajshahi Silk Factory, located near the Railgate area of the city.

The factory was originally established

fabric annually.

At its peak, the factory employed nearly 600 officials, staff and workers, but now only 20 daily wage labourers keep the operations running. Currently, 20 power looms are in operation, producing around 6,000 metres of silk fabric each year.

Abul Kalam Azad, former manager of Rajshahi Silk Factory, said the factory is back to producing a range of silk products.

# Indian source says Iran to allow India-flagged tankers through Hormuz

REUTERS, New Delhi

Iran will allow Indian-flagged tankers to transit the Strait of Hormuz, a conduit for 40 percent of the South Asian nation's crude imports, an Indian government source said on Thursday, but an Iranian source outside the country denied any such deal was reached.

India, the world's No. 3 oil consumer, said on Thursday the foreign ministers of the two countries have had three conversations in recent days and the latest one this week focused on "issues pertaining to the safety of shipping and India's energy security".

"Beyond that, it would be premature for me to say anything," foreign ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal told a weekly media briefing.

The Indian source, who was briefed on the matter, declined to be identified, citing a lack of authorisation to speak to media, while the Iranian source said the matter was a sensitive one.

On Thursday, the Suezmax tanker Shenlong, carrying Saudi crude, arrived at a port in Mumbai after transiting the strait. The Liberia-flagged vessel was the first crude carrier to reach India from the Middle East since the war between Iran and the United States and Israel broke out in late February, according to LSEG data. The customer is state-run Bharat Petroleum Corp said a source with direct knowledge of the matter.

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# War disrupts fertiliser supplies, puts food security at risk

AFP, Paris

With production in the Gulf countries at a standstill and gas prices rising, the war in the Middle East is disrupting the supply of fertilisers and posing risks for food security.

A third of fertiliser shipped by sea comes from the region and cannot make it to the global market as Iran has effectively closed the Strait of Hormuz.

That has sent global fertiliser prices soaring, with the UN expressing concern in particular about the impact on developing countries.

**THE GULF IS A KEY MANUFACTURER**  
Natural gas is a key feedstock to make artificial fertilisers, and with its ample gas supplies the Gulf region has become a key manufacturer.

The region produces nearly half of the sulphur sold worldwide and a third of urea – "the most widely traded fertiliser of all", said Sarah Marlow, global editor for fertilisers at Argus Media.

It also produces a quarter of globally traded ammonia, another feedstock for fertiliser production, she said.

Major food producing nations like the United States and Australia source much of their urea and phosphate from the Gulf

nations.

Brazil, the world's leading soybean producer, imports most of its urea from Qatar and from Iran, which also exports to Turkey and Mexico.

India relies upon Saudi phosphate. Asia is particularly dependent upon

on the Gulf: it imports 64 percent of its ammonia and more than 50 percent of its sulphur and phosphates from the region, according to 2024 figures from Kpler.

But since the start of the conflict, which has seen Iran launch retaliatory strikes against its Gulf neighbours following US

and Israeli strikes, production has had to be shut down at fertiliser production facilities, particularly in Qatar.

And the Strait of Hormuz remains largely un navigable.

A Chinese vessel loaded with sulphur was able to leave on March 7, but around 20 other ships were still waiting as of the middle of the week, according to Kpler, which tracks commodity flows.

### GLOBAL REPERCUSSIONS

While Europe appears at first blush to be less exposed, sourcing just 11 percent of its urea from the region, it will likely be impacted indirectly.

Morocco is a big supplier of phosphorus-based fertilisers to Europe, but is dependent upon the Gulf for sulphur used in their manufacturing.

The EU also imports 26 percent of its urea from Egypt, but the country is confronted by a halt of natural gas supplies from Israel by pipeline, pointed out Argus Media consultant Arthur Portier.

"Egyptian urea has gone from \$500 per tonne at the start of the war to more than \$650. There is a direct impact on the price of fertiliser" for European farmers, he said.

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Farmers load sacks of fertiliser into a seeder on a wheat field in Nanyang, Henan province, China. Asia is particularly dependent upon the Gulf: Asian countries import 64 percent of their ammonia and more than 50 percent of their sulphur and phosphates from the Middle East.

PHOTO: REUTERS/FILE