





Where old furniture FINDS NEW HOME

What one household no longer needs can become another's prized possession. As rising living costs push buyers towards affordable alternatives, the second-hand furniture trade is finding new customers and business opportunities

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Need to furnish your home but cannot afford new furniture? You are not alone. With rising living costs putting pressure on household budgets, many people are rethinking how they spend. Avijit and Mahima, however, found a way to furnish their homes without stretching their budget.

Avijit, a student who also works in Dhaka, spent months sleeping on the floor because he could not afford a bed. Showrooms quoted Tk 30,000 to Tk 50,000 for a double bed, while even nearby furniture shops asked Tk 15,000 to Tk 25,000.

A friend's suggestion led him to Facebook groups where people sell used furniture. There, he spotted a five-foot by seven-foot bed listed by a woman in Dhanmondi who was moving house.

She had bought it just six months earlier for Tk 16,000 and was now willing to sell it for half that price. Avijit eventually bargained it down further to Tk 6,000.

"My first experience of buying second-hand furniture was excellent," he said. Five months later, the bed is still serving him well.

Mahima had a similar experience. She furnished her rented room with a second-hand bed, wardrobe, table and chairs bought near Mohakhali Kacha Bazar.

"I don't earn much. What would my mother and I do with expensive furniture?" she said, explaining that her mother stays with her only occasionally.

Although she browsed online listings, Mahima preferred visiting shops to inspect the furniture and bargain in person. She found that many used pieces were still in good condition and could help furnish an entire room at a fraction of the cost of new items.

Their experiences reflect a growing trend among students, young professionals and families seeking affordable ways to furnish their homes.

A MARKET BUILT ON AFFORDABILITY

Selim H Rahman, chairman of the Bangladesh Furniture Industries Owners Association, said the second-hand furniture market was expanding as families moving into new apartments often bought new furniture and sold their old belongings.

This creates opportunities for people who cannot afford new furniture while giving used items a second life. He believes the market has considerable room to grow in the coming years.

Traders in Panthapath, Segunbagicha, Azimpur, Mohakhali and other areas said demand for second-hand furniture had grown over the past 15 to 20 years.



Second-hand furniture shops line a narrow alley in Panthapath, displaying wooden cabinets, tables and chairs as rising living costs boost demand for affordable options and create opportunities for traders. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTOS: STAR

"People can buy high-quality, durable furniture at affordable prices, which has driven demand," said Ali Akbar, who has run a furniture shop in Panthapath for 17 years.

His customers include students, families and working professionals.

There are no official figures on the size or growth of Bangladesh's second-hand furniture market. Global estimates, however, suggest strong potential. Research firms Mordor Intelligence, Technavio, Research Nester and Persistence Market Research estimate the market at $41 billion to $49 billion in 2026, with annual growth of around 5 percent to 8 percent expected through the early 2030s.

Most of the furniture sold by local traders comes directly from households, particularly when people move or replace their belongings, Ali said. Some customers even keep shopkeepers' business cards and contact them when they have furniture to sell.

The business, however, does not always offer high returns. A wardrobe bought for Tk 10,000 may require another Tk 5,000 for repairs and polishing. After resale, the shopkeeper may earn only Tk 1,000 to Tk 2,000 in profit before other expenses, he said.

For buyers, the savings can be substantial. Mohammad Jasim Uddin, who has traded in Panthapath for more than a decade, said a piece of furniture that costs Tk 20,000 new could be bought second-hand for Tk 10,000 to Tk 12,000.

He said a piece bought for Tk 5,000 and repaired at a cost of Tk 3,000 could fetch Tk 10,000 to Tk 12,000, leaving a gross profit of Tk 2,000 to Tk 4,000.

Jasim sells at least 30 pieces in an ordinary month, or around 360 a year. Sales can reach nearly 500 pieces annually during better periods.

"Sometimes you sit for a week without selling anything, and one day's sales make up for the entire week," he said.

Abul Kalam, another Panthapath trader who has been in the business for more than two decades, said customer numbers fluctuate widely.

"Some months, we don't even get 10 serious buyers. In others, the number rises to 40 or 50. There is no fixed pattern," he said.

TRADERS STRUGGLE AS SALES SLOW

Not all traders deal only in furniture collected from households.

Sunny, a Segunbagicha trader, also buys unsold factory stock and showroom-clearance items. He sometimes purchases mixed lots from Chattogram, with traders pooling money to buy large consignments through bidding.

His four outlets sell around 200 items a month, generating an estimated Tk 2.5 lakh to Tk 3 lakh in monthly profit before operating costs. Around a quarter of his customers are repeat buyers, while recommendations bring in others.

However, sales have dropped sharply in recent years.

"Around 2022-23, we could sell 20 to 25 pieces a day. Now, selling even five can be difficult," Sunny said.

Other traders also blamed rising living costs for their business woes, while some cited political uncertainty since August 2024.

Ripon Mia, who has been in the furniture trade in Segunbagicha for more than 25 years, said his monthly income had fallen from Tk 20,000 to Tk 40,000 to just Tk 5,000 to Tk 10,000.

Pavement clearance drives have added to their difficulties by reducing the space available to display furniture.

"Earlier, we could display more furniture, allowing customers to see the pieces as they walked past. Now, we cannot even put out four pieces in the space where we once displayed ten," Ripon said.



Sunny said videos of pavement stalls being cleared had also led some customers to believe the entire market had been demolished, even though shops inside were still operating.

In Azimpur, Chan Mia said his sons now run the family business. Although it continues to support the family, sales have slowed compared with previous years.

Rahim Kazi, who sells used furniture near Mirpur 14, reported similar difficulties, with fewer customers and slower sales.

Traders also pointed to growing competition. More furniture outlets have opened in Dhaka and elsewhere, spreading customers across a larger number of businesses.

Younger entrepreneurs are entering the market by buying furniture in bulk from established markets and reselling it through shops and online platforms.

FACEBOOK OPENS UP A WIDER MARKET

Social media has made it easier for people to sell furniture directly to buyers without going through traders.

Facebook groups allow sellers to post photographs, set prices and negotiate through comments and private messages.

A review of Facebook listings found that furniture trading groups had between around 81,000 and 441,000 members, with several recording more than 90 posts a day. However, these figures do not show how many transactions are actually completed.

For some entrepreneurs, online platforms have become the foundation of their businesses.

After his father's death, Sayem Ahmed left his studies and started Messrs Jhamela Kini, meaning "I Buy Hassles", in Mymensingh with limited capital to support himself.

The business collects unwanted furniture and household appliances, including televisions, refrigerators and computers, directly from households. It repairs the items and resells them.

"When people buy new furniture, they often don't know what to do with the old ones. We pay them in cash and collect the items from their homes," Sayem said.

Initially promoted through posters and leaflets, the business has since expanded to three showrooms and employs around 20 to 25 people. Its team collects unwanted items from up to 10 households a day, generating an estimated monthly income of Tk 1 lakh.

It now relies mainly on online sales to reach customers beyond Mymensingh.

"Customers place orders through our page, and we deliver across Bangladesh," a company representative said. Some buyers even pay through bKash without seeing the products in person.

A DIFFERENT SOURCE OF SECOND-HAND GOODS

Social media has also helped traders selling furniture recovered from dismantled ships reach customers across the country.

Hasan Imam, an MBA graduate with a regular job, has been selling such furniture and other goods in Bhatiari, Chattogram, for more than two years. He operates a physical shop in Faujdarhat and uses videos on social media to attract buyers.

He estimated that around 100 to 150 shops between City Gate and Madambibirhat sell goods recovered from ships, including furniture, crockery, cables and steel items.

Traders acquire these goods through competitive tenders after inspecting them. Hasan also buys furniture from office auctions but does not deal in used household furniture.

The price difference can be substantial. A two-door wooden wardrobe sells for Tk 15,000 to Tk 20,000, compared with Tk 50,000 to Tk 60,000 for a new one made of teakwood, he said.

His shop earns around Tk 60,000 to Tk 70,000 a month before expenses. After paying rent, staff wages and electricity bills, he is left with Tk 20,000 to Tk 25,000 in an average month.

Business has slowed recently, with customer numbers varying widely. Some months bring only two or three buyers, while customers visit every day during busier periods. Around 18 out of every 20 customers buy furniture for their homes, he said.



There are also opportunities to make money by trading in bulk. Traders sometimes buy ship consignments worth Tk 20 lakh and resell them to other dealers without collecting the goods themselves. Such deals can generate profits of Tk 20,000 to Tk 1 lakh, Hasan said.

Setting up a small resale business requires Tk 15 lakh to Tk 20 lakh in capital. Buying salvaged goods directly through tenders, however, may require at least Tk 1 crore.

Despite the recent slowdown, Hasan sees considerable potential in the business, particularly as online platforms allow traders to reach buyers far beyond their local markets.