

Beyond deals and discounts

What DITF offers to the buyers and sellers

MIZANUR RAHMAN RAFI

Mr Sanjoy, 26, claims to be Indian and works as a shoe seller at a shop named 'Indian Footwear' at the Dhaka International Trade Fair (DITF). Although his shop offers various types of shoes, the first thing buyers notice is his persistent attempt to speak Hindi, from bargaining to every small detail. His performance is merely an attempt to prove the authenticity of his 'Indian' origin and his products.

Fifty metres away from the shop, we found the Haji Biryani stall. Naturally, they claimed to be the country's 'original and authentic' Haji Biryani.

Beyond this 'Indian language drama' or claims of authenticity, what does the DITF actually offer buyers?

With over 300 shops and sellers from seven countries, including India, Pakistan, and Turkey, the DITF features stalls for clothing, kitchenware, home decor, furniture, pickles, snacks, various rides, and health and hygiene products. Beyond tangible goods, some companies are offering flat-rate purchases or property-sharing options. Different shops are offering discounts ranging from 10 per cent to 50 per cent on their products.

Clothing and Footwear

The fair hosts a significant number of clothing and footwear stalls. Most clothing shops focus on women's apparel, ranging from sarees to three-piece sets and Western outfits.

Men have fewer options, with only a handful of suit-and-blazer shops available. However, these blazer shops offer substantial discounts; buyers can purchase a blazer for as little as 1,500 BDT. Conversely, women's clothing stores are offering even greater discounts, with some exclusive shops providing up to 50 per cent off.

The footwear section is dominated by 'foreign' shop owners rather than local brands. While two familiar local brands have set up stalls, they are not offering much product variety. On the other hand, a wide range of shoes was available in shops run by foreign sellers. Market observation reveals that while local brands are offering discounts, foreign shoe shops are not providing significant price reductions. Buyers have to spend at least 1,200 BDT for a pair of shoes.

Kitchenware and Home decor

The market for kitchenware and home decor is the most vibrant section of the fair. There is an abundance of stalls selling vegetable cutters, plates, bowls, and utensils. Additionally, everything from decorative home lighting to imported Turkish mattresses is available.

The highest discounts are found on plates, bowls, and utensils. Some items are being sold at fixed rates, such as 'Any item for 120 BDT.' 'Well-known' domestic brands are offering discounts of 15 per cent to 40 per cent on their

products, including stoves, buckets, baskets, water bottles, flasks, and rice cookers. Although there aren't many significant discounts on home decor products, a wide array of colourful items that can attract buyers is on display.

Pickles, Snacks, and Foods

A Bangladeshi fair is incomplete without pickles. Pickles made from almost every possible fruit—mango, olive, jujube—are available at the fair. However, sellers are unwilling to offer significant discounts, and due to high demand, pickles are mostly sold at fixed prices.

Domestic snack brands, however, are bringing good news for buyers. Customers can purchase almost all products—such as biscuits, noodles, ramen, cakes, and juices—at discounts of 5–20%. They are also offering significant discounts on various package deals.

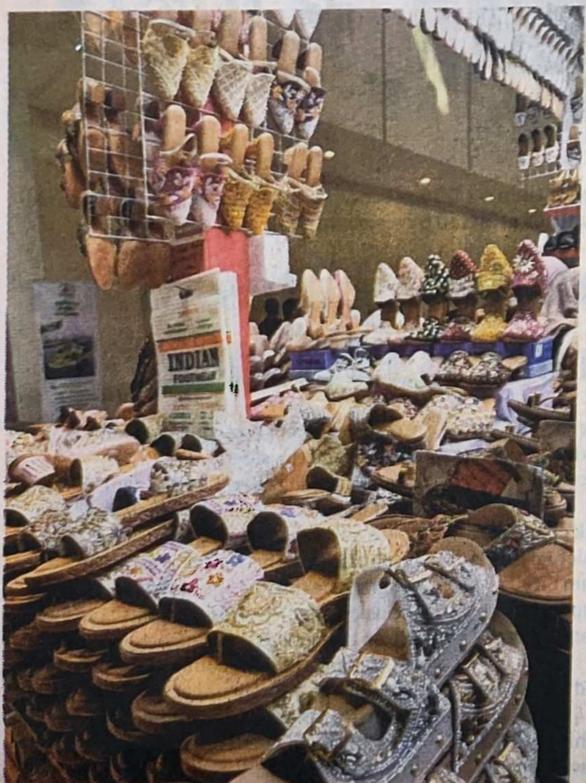
For heavier meals, in addition to a large cafeteria-cum-food court, there are stalls for the 'Original and Authentic' Haji Biryani and another domestic brand. Food prices are high; one has to pay at least 200 BDT for *Morog Polao*.

Handicrafts, Healthcare, and Hygiene

Various government agencies and some private initiatives have set up handicraft stalls at the fair. These shops offer neither special discounts nor attract a significant number of buyers. Several domestic brands have set up stalls to promote health and hygiene, placing considerable importance on women's reproductive health. Discounts are available on products such as sanitary napkins, hand wash, and body lotions.

Various rides

For children, the fair offers typical rides, games, and a ghost house. However, it is not just children; adults were also seen enjoying these rides. Depending on the type of ride or game,



Pavilions to vast space: Taking a deep dive into the heart of DITF 2026. — Photo by Author

visitors have to pay between 50 and 200 BDT. A spot check revealed there wasn't much of a crowd for the rides.

Beyond these products, stalls from local and well-known furniture brands were also spotted. Additionally, various real estate companies are present, offering flats and resort shares.

The fair management body remembers the July uprising. A dedicated corner displays moments from the July uprising, including photos of Abu Sayeed, Mir Mugdho, and Sharif Osman Hadi; pictures from the 1952 language movement to the 1971 liberation war are also displayed.

Are visitors and sellers satisfied?

Mixed reactions to the fair's satisfaction were observed among sellers, depending on their shop type. The previously mentioned Sanjoy said, "We are not getting the response we expected. The fair has just started; perhaps the number of buyers will increase over time. We

have a variety of shoes. I believe we can attract buyers."

Ride providers, as well, feel the same way. They firmly believe that visitor numbers will accelerate, and consequently, so will their business. They noted that visitor numbers are currently low because the fair has just begun, but hope for an increase in the coming days.

On the other hand, sellers of plastic products, kitchenware, pickles, and snacks are happy with the buyers' response.

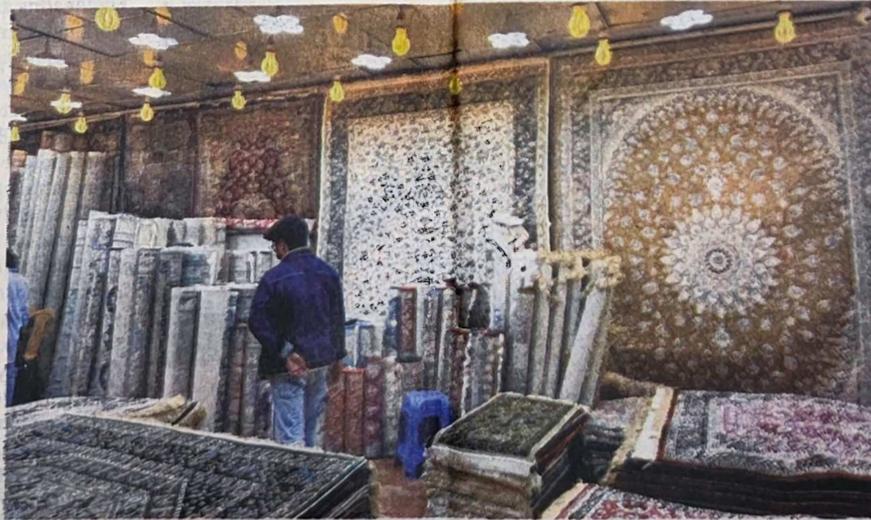
Visitors gave mixed reactions. Most were happy with the environment but criticised the lack of stall diversity.

Swasreeya Roy, a 24-year-old university student, shared her experience: "It was good, but it could have been better. All the stalls were of the same type. I expected there would be some traditional food items. I didn't even find any Bengali food during this winter season; it was all just fast food and biryani. Overall, it was okay."

Swasreeya, including a few other visitors, mentioned that they are satisfied with the management.

Another visitor, Saba, agreed with Swasreeya. She said, "It was decent but not very unique. Most of the stalls felt quite similar, making the experience somewhat repetitive." She also mentioned that while she was happy with the shopping experience, she missed the 'expected' cultural diversity.

DITF brings nations to exhibit their products and do business; however, the fair is limited to a few countries. Beyond the discounts, the fair is still part of excitement among the families who came to visit the place from the far side of the city. It has both the pleasure of hanging out with family and great deals, and the frustration of a long journey, followed by long, tiring walks in the dust.



The DITF displays various sorts of carpets.

mizanur2351@gmail.com



Agro-processing calls for strategic push

Without continuous innovation, both in product formulation and processing technology, the industry risks stagnation

writes

Wasi Ahmed

Despite the popular perception that Bangladesh as an agro-based country has immense potential for exporting agro-processed foods, the reality is hardly encouraging. The country has yet to make any significant headway in harnessing its advantages in this promising field. While agriculture continues to form the backbone of the economy, the leap from raw agricultural production to high-value agro-processing has remained stunted, with export earnings falling way short of expectations.

Industry insiders point to several obstacles holding back the sector. These are a lack of logistic support, insufficient research and development, high cost of investment and limited product diversification. These challenges are neither unique nor insurmountable; countries around the world have faced similar hurdles in developing agro-processing. What makes Bangladesh's case more worrying is that the underlying issue appears to be weak macroeconomic planning and policy support.

Experts are of the opinion that agro-processing with its deep linkages to millions of farmers' livelihoods holds more promise than most other sectors for simultaneously catering to domestic demand and expanding export earnings. Yet, despite being declared a thrust sector in the Industrial Policy, it has not received the focused policy attention, financial incentives or the strategic direction needed to transform it into a driver of export-led growth.

Declaring agro-processing a thrust sector has so far failed to bring about any meaningful shift. The numbers speak for themselves: export earnings from agro-processed products currently stand at just over US\$300 million—a modest figure when compared to the sector's potential and the size of the country's agricultural base. The growth in export receipts is too meagre to suggest any structural expansion.

At present, Bangladeshi companies export processed food items to more than 140 countries, including major destinations such as the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, China, Japan, and Australia. The product range includes spices, fruit juices, biscuits, pickles, potato chips and flakes, nuts, and fruit-based drinks. However, a closer look reveals that the primary consumers of these exports are Bangladeshi migrants living abroad. Their demand for familiar tastes keeps the trade afloat, but it also exposes a weakness: the industry has largely failed to diversify its consumer base or penetrate mainstream markets abroad.

The domestic market, however, tells a different story. With changing lifestyles, urbanisation and rising incomes, demand for ready-to-cook and ready-to-eat foods is expanding



rapidly. More than 200 food processing firms currently operate in the country, with the industry estimated to be worth US\$2.5 billion. Yet, only around a dozen of these companies are engaged in exporting, according to the Bangladesh Agro-Processors' Association (BAPA). This imbalance shows that the industry has grown primarily to satisfy domestic needs while struggling to establish itself globally. There is little doubt that domestic growth lays the foundation for competitiveness abroad. Modern technology is being adopted by many firms, enhancing production capacity and quality. With the right push, these same companies could tap into the overseas markets more aggressively. Even within the diaspora consumer base, scope for expansion is large, while beyond them lies the vast market of other South Asian and sub-continental migrant communities who share similar culinary tastes. But this will not happen automatically; it requires deliberate efforts in market research, branding, and product adaptation. One of the glaring gaps in the industry's current approach is its reliance on the domestic market model for exports. The same products designed for local consumers are sent abroad without sufficient adaptation to market-

specific needs. In competitive overseas markets, this strategy cannot hold for long. To succeed, exporters must go the extra mile by conducting targeted market research, complying with country-specific regulatory and sanitary standards and innovating to match local tastes and preferences. Product diversification is equally important. At present, Bangladesh's agro-processing industry has yet to fully capitalise on the abundance of seasonal fruits and vegetables. Pineapples, bananas, mangoes, and jackfruits, for example, are highly suitable for processing into juices, dried fruit, and other value-added products. Countries that have pursued this path with an emphasis on quality and compliance have achieved remarkable success. The sector's capital constraint remains a critical bottleneck. Agro-processing is investment-intensive, requiring modern machinery, cold storage, quality testing labs, and packaging facilities. Many small and medium enterprises which dominate the industry cannot afford these investments. Facilitating the sector through targeted incentives, particularly soft credit and low-interest loans, could transform its trajectory. Similar strategies have worked in the apparel and pharmaceutical sectors, helping

them become globally competitive. Moreover, institutional support for research and development is almost absent. Without continuous innovation, both in product formulation and processing technology, the industry risks stagnation. Government, academia, and the private sector must work together to strengthen R&D infrastructure, focusing on food safety, packaging innovations, and shelf-life extension. Export growth requires a long-term, coherent strategy—one that prioritises market diversification, branding, and quality assurance. Policy frameworks must not only provide financial incentives but also address infrastructure gaps, streamline regulatory procedures and create dedicated facilities for agro-processing clusters. Bangladesh's agro-processing sector sits at a crossroads. On the one hand, it enjoys a strong agricultural foundation, growing domestic demand, and a ready consumer base among the diaspora. On the other hand, it suffers from fragmented efforts, policy neglect, and a lack of forward-looking strategy. Without corrective measures, the sector is likely to remain a largely domestic industry with limited export contributions.

[wasiahmed.bd@gmail.com](mailto:wasihmed.bd@gmail.com)



সমকাল

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বাণিজ্য মেলা

পোশাক কসমেটিকস গৃহস্থালি পণ্যের স্টলে ক্রেতার ভিড়

■ রূপগঞ্জ (নারায়ণগঞ্জ) প্রতিনিধি

রাজধানীর উপকণ্ঠে রূপগঞ্জের পূর্বাচলে বাংলাদেশ-চায়না ফ্রেন্ডশিপ এক্সিবিশন সেন্টারে চলমান ৩০তম ঢাকা আন্তর্জাতিক বাণিজ্য মেলায় বিভিন্ন পণ্যে দেওয়া হচ্ছে মূল্যছাড়। কোম্পানিগুলোর পক্ষ থেকে আছে নানা ধরনের অফার। এতে সন্তুষ্ট ক্রেতা-দর্শনার্থীরা। তবে প্রত্যাশা অনুযায়ী বিক্রি না হওয়ায় হতাশার কথাও জানিয়েছেন বিভিন্ন স্টল-প্যাভিলিয়নের কর্মীরা।

গতকাল মঙ্গলবার বিকেলের পর থেকে মেলা প্রাঙ্গণে ক্রেতা-দর্শনার্থীর ভিড় বাড়তে থাকে। কসমেটিকস, পোশাক, ফ্রোকারিজ ও রান্নার সামগ্রীর স্টলগুলোতে তুলনামূলক বেশি ভিড় দেখা যায়। খাবারের স্টলেও ছিল দর্শনার্থীদের সরব উপস্থিতি। কারও নজর ঘর সাজানোর সামগ্রীতে, কারও আগ্রহ সাজগোজের পণ্যে। তরুণ-তরুণী, বয়স্কদের পাশাপাশি শিশুদের উপস্থিতিতে মেলা প্রাঙ্গণ ছিল উৎসবমুখর।

মেলা প্রাঙ্গণে দেখা যায়, পরিবার-পরিজন কিংবা বন্ধুদের নিয়ে অনেকেই স্টল ঘুরে ঘুরে পছন্দের পণ্য দেখছেন ও কিনছেন। কেউ আড্ডায় মেতেছেন, কেউবা ছবি তুলছেন। অনেক ক্রেতার নজর রয়েছে ছাড়ের দিকে। তাই এক স্টল থেকে অন্য স্টলে ঘুরে ঘুরে দাম যাচাই করছেন তারা। ক্রেতাদের আকৃষ্ট করতে বিক্রেতারাও দিচ্ছেন বিভিন্ন ধরনের ছাড় ও উপহার।

ঢাকার মিরপুরের পল্লবী থেকে আসা রফিকুল ইসলাম বলেন, 'পরিবার নিয়ে মেলায় এসেছি। এক জায়গায় প্রয়োজনীয় অনেক পণ্য পাওয়া যাচ্ছে। বাচ্চাদের বিনোদনের ব্যবস্থাটাও ভালো লেগেছে।' গাজীপুরের সাবিনা ইয়াসমিন বলেন, 'পোশাক আর ঘর সাজানোর জিনিস দেখতে এসেছি। কয়েকটি স্টলে ভালো ছাড় পেয়েছি। খোলামেলা পরিবেশে ঘুরতে স্বস্তি লাগছে।'

নারায়ণগঞ্জের সোনারগাঁ উপজেলার বাসিন্দা আব্দুল কাদের বলেন, 'প্রতিবছরই বাণিজ্য মেলায় আসি। এবার কিছু পণ্যে ছাড় ভালো পাওয়া যাচ্ছে। তবে আগের তুলনায় ক্রেতার ভিড় কিছুটা কম মনে হলো।'

বন্ধুদের নিয়ে ঘুরতে এসেছেন নরসিংদীর মাধবদী থানার কলেজ শিক্ষার্থী তানভীর আহমেদ। তিনি বলেন, 'খাবারের স্টল আর বাংলাদেশ স্বয়ার অংশটা বেশ ভালো লেগেছে। ইতিহাসভিত্তিক বিভিন্ন বিষয় তরুণদের জন্য প্রয়োজনীয়।'

চট্টগ্রামের পাঁচলাইশ থানার বাসিন্দা নাসরিন আক্তার বলেন, 'ঢাকায় বেড়াতে এসে মেলায় এসেছি। বিভিন্ন দেশের পণ্য একসঙ্গে দেখতে পেরে ভালো লাগছে। শিশুদের রাইডগুলো থাকায় বাচ্চারাও খুব উপভোগ করছে।'

গৃহস্থালি কিছু পণ্য কেনার জন্য মেলায় এসেছেন বরিশালের বাকেরগঞ্জ উপজেলার বাসিন্দা মোস্তাফিজুর রহমান। তিনি বলেন, 'এক জায়গায় সব পাওয়া যাচ্ছে। কিছু স্টলে ছাড় আরও বাড়লে সাধারণ মানুষের জন্য সুবিধা হবে।'

