

Friday Special

Is readers' love for books fading?

Turanur Islam

If you are a bookworm and have a deep affinity for old books, then the Nilkhet book market in Dhaka is a paradise for you.

It all started in the 1970s when some scattered shops started selling books and stationery to students. A book market sprawled out of those after 1974. Since then, Nilkhet has been a hub for both old and new books for students and people of Dhaka and elsewhere.

The emotions of touching a 10- or 50-year-old book, the printing styles and the reputation of publishers have been bringing the buyers back and keeping the market going for decades.

Unlike the western and touristy countries, there are not a lot of sellers and buyers of old collectables here. Although the lack of antiquing does not hamper the value of old books of Nilkhet, which is situated opposite of the always busy New Market, the bookshop owners are finding it hard nowadays to find buyers.

There is another reason behind the appeal of old or second-hand books — specially the textbooks. Readers, mostly students, want to buy them at a cheaper rate and at Nilkhet, they can do that without putting much pressure on their wallets.

During a visit to Nilkhet, this correspondent met Sumaiya Islam, a fourth-year student of BGMEA University of Fashion and Technology, who came from Uttara to buy some books.

Talking to The Business Post while buying the books from Nandail Literature Book Centre, she said, “Old books are like time capsules. You are not just buying a book. You are buying a piece of history.”

Jagannath University student Mobarok Hussain came to Nilkhet to buy a book named “Bengali Culture: Over a Thousand Years” by Ghulam Murshid.

At first, he searched for a second-hand copy of the book as it is cheaper. Failing to find an old copy, he opted to buy a photocopy version to save a little more money.

Asked why old books are becoming scarce, a salesman at Alvi Book House said, “We usually buy and collect books from private collectors and various other sources. But we stopped sourcing books temporarily after the Covid-19 pandemic greatly reduced our sales.”

Alvi Book House is one of the few shops in Nilkhet with a vast collection of rare and old books. The shop is in trouble as they are struggling to sell.

Another salesman at the store, Mustafa said online book selling business and PDF books are among the notable reasons why sales are going down.

In the era of technology...

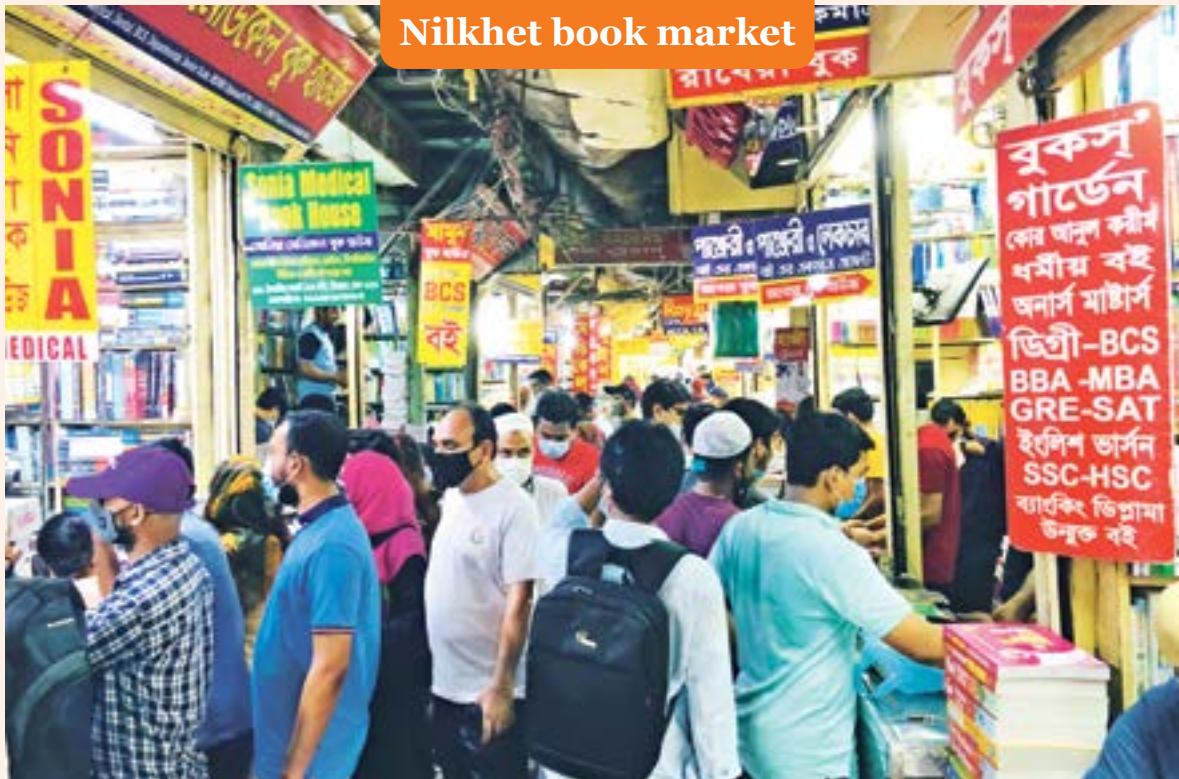
At Nilkhet, many people buy pirated books, also known as photocopy prints, instead of the old ones because they look new. But the pirated books now cost more as the increase in paper price has also pushed up the photocopying charges.

In theory, the rise in pirated book prices should divert customers toward old books. But according to sellers, sales are still decreasing amid the post-pandemic recovery period.

Nayeem Islam, who has been working in book shops for over a decade, told The Business Post that not many people want to buy books in this era of technology.

“Most from Generation Z do not like reading books and young students who really want to read books sometimes go for downloading PDFs. There are not many people anymore who appreciate the emotion of touching and smelling a book,” he said.

The best-selling old book genre in the market is literature, mostly by Humayun Ahmed, Humayun Azad, Rabindranath Tagore, Sarat Chandra



Shamsul Haque Ripon.jpg

Chattopadhyay, Samaresh Majumdar and some other Indian writers.

According to sellers, old books published by Indian writers and publishers are in high demand. People also tend to collect Seba Prokashoni books that are comparatively expensive. But the most expensive ones are Bangla books published in Russia by Bengali publishers, which are at least several decades old and are among the rarest.

Academic books losing relevance? The sales rate of old academic books at the capital's oldest and largest book market is more upsetting.

Md Shah Alam of Alam Book Centre is selling books since 2008. At first, he was a hawker and sold old academ-

Nilkhet book market

ic books and magazines. He rented a small shop at Nilkhet six years ago as the sale was good.

“The business was promising but the pandemic spelt a disaster for sellers like me. Since things started to return to normal, we have been trying to recover from our losses. But the ever-changing syllabuses, short suggestions and the supplement culture have greatly affected our sales,” he said.

“Books are getting outdated within six months. How can we sell books in this situation?” he said expressing frustration.

Redwan Khan, a sociology student at Dhaka College, could not find a textbook from last year after searching for an hour. “Students don't read the

whole book. We photocopy a part of it or sometimes take pictures of the pages we need to prepare for the exams. But what do we do when we can't find the books?”

Talking to The Business Post, bookseller Robiul said, “Students only study to pass the exams. Higher secondary and primary level students now read supplements and get a short syllabus [because of the pandemic]. They don't need the whole textbook or guide-books. That's why sales are down.”

More problems

At present, there are over 500 book shops at Nilkhet market which are members of three cooperative societies that oversee the needs and main-

tenance of the market. The number of shops increases every year but owners or tenants are distressed about the decreasing sales rate.

The book market also has some legal issues that are hampering the collective efforts to improve the conditions of almost 5,000 people, including shop owners and workers.

Moreover, the total data for the market's sales and profit is not available as all three cooperative societies lack proper management and coordination.

Many traders have lost their capital during the pandemic and are yet to recover the losses. At the same time, with the number of shops increasing, the traders said they are not making the same amount of sales and profit as they used to from the little number of buyers who still come to the market.

Md Gias Uddin, a director of Islamia Market Traders Multipurpose Cooperative Society Ltd, said, “There is an ownership issue over the land upon which the market is situated. We are trying to get a lease to build a multi-storied market.

“Without an organized market system, it's very difficult to get loans and develop the business to attract more customers.”

He continued, “We won't be able to solve all the issues. Even if we manage to develop the multi-storied market, we still won't find enough customers in future as there aren't that many lovers of old books, most of the people now depend on smart technologies and not all guardians nowadays encourage their children to read books.”

Collective efforts from the administration, sellers and readers have become necessary to rejuvenate the love for books and increase readership along the way. Otherwise, the decades-old Nilkhet book market may face more crises in the near future from which it would not be able to survive.

India's top court gives all women the right to abortion

Agencies

India's Supreme Court ruled on Thursday that a woman's lack of marital status could not deny her the choice to abort a pregnancy at any time up to 24 weeks, a decision hailed by women's rights activists.

The right to abortion has proved contentious globally after the United States Supreme Court overturned in June its landmark decision in Roe v Wade that had legalised the procedure in the US, according to Reuters.

“Even an unmarried woman can undergo abortion up to 24 weeks on par with married women,” said Justice DY Chandrachud of India's Supreme Court, holding that lack of marital status could not deprive a woman of the right.

A law dating from 1971, the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) Act, had limited the procedure to married women, divorcees, widows, minors, “disabled and mentally ill women” and

survivors of sexual assault or rape.

Thursday's decision came in response to a petition by a woman who said her pregnancy resulted from a consensual relationship but she had sought abortion when it failed.

The ruling is a milestone for the rights of Indian women, activists said.

“A huge step forward,” lawmaker Mahua Moitra said on Twitter.

The court added that sexual assault by husbands can be classified as marital rape under the MTP law. Indian law does not consider marital rape an offence, though efforts are being made to change this.

“In an era that includes Dobbs v Jackson, and makes distinctions between the marital status of women who are raped — this excellent judgment on abortion under the MTP Act hits it out of the park,” Karuna Nundy, an advocate specialising in gender law and other areas, said on Twitter.

She was referring to the case that led to the US judgment.

BANGABANDHU SATELLITE 1

Sun outage may cause broadcast disruptions

Staff Correspondent

The broadcasting services of Bangabandhu Satellite-1 might get disrupted for eight days from September 30 because of sun outage.

Bangladesh Satellite Company Ltd (BSCL), in a statement on Thursday, said the disturbance might happen every morning between 9:29am and 9:42am.

The statement, signed by BSCL Managing Director (Additional Charge) Md Shafiqul Islam, said the interruption in or distortion of geostationary satellite signals might occur due to the interference of the sun.

The problem may occur for eight minutes on September 30, 11 minutes on October 1, 12 minutes on October 2, 13 minutes on October 3, 13 minutes on October 4, 12 minutes on October 5, nine minutes on October 6, and three



minutes on October 7.

Audiences of private televisions which operate through the satellite may witness disruption in the broadcast.



An aerial view of the Rohingya camps in Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar on Thursday

- AFP Photo

HATE SPEECH

Facebook must compensate Rohingyas

AFP . Paris

Facebook should pay reparations to the hundreds of thousands of Rohingyas forced from their homes in Myanmar in a campaign exacerbated by rampant online hate speech, Amnesty International said in a report Thursday.

The Rohingyas, a mainly Muslim minority, were targeted by Myanmar's military rulers in 2017 and driven into neighbouring Bangladesh, where they have since lived in sprawling refugee camps.

Victims' associations and rights advocates say the violence was ramped up by Facebook's algorithms, saying they play up extremist content that encourages harmful disinformation and hate speech.

“Many Rohingyas tried to report anti-Rohingya content via Facebook's 'report' function” but to no avail, “allowing these hateful narratives to proliferate and reach unprecedented audiences in Myanmar,” Amnesty said in its report.

It noted the revelations from the whistle-blower “Facebook Papers” divulged

in October 2021, indicating that company executives knew the site fuelled the spread of toxic content against ethnic minorities and other groups.

Three legal suits have been lodged against Facebook by Rohingya representatives, in the US and Britain as well as with the OECD group of developed

represent crumbs from the table of the company's enormous profits — simply add to the perception that this is a company wholly detached from the reality of its human rights impacts,” Amnesty said.

The NGO urged Facebook to undertake “proactive human rights due diligence” across its platforms, but also called on national authorities to step up their oversight.

“It is imperative that states fulfil their obligation to protect human rights by introducing and enforcing effective legislation to rein in surveillance-based business models across the technology sector,” it said.

Facebook has vowed to revamp its corporate values and operations in response to pressure to clamp down on false information, particularly with regards to politics and elections.

The company has forged partnerships with several media companies, including AFP, intended to verify online posts and remove those that are untrue.



BBC

BBC to cut hundreds of jobs at World Service

AFP . London

Nearly 400 staff at BBC World Service will lose their jobs as part of a cost-cutting programme and move to digital platforms, the broadcaster announced on Thursday, paring down its Iranian-language service among others.

The BBC, which marks its centenary next month, said its international services needed to make savings of £28.5 million (\$31 million) as part of wider reductions of £500 million, which unions blamed on the UK government.

In July the broadcaster detailed plans to merge BBC World News television and its domestic UK equivalent into a single channel to launch in April next year.

BBC World Service -- one of the UK's most recognisable global brands -- currently operates in 41 languages around the world with a weekly audience of some 364 million people.

But the corporation said audience habits were changing and more people were accessing news online, which along with a freeze on BBC funding and increased operating costs meant a move to “digital-first” made financial sense.

“Today's proposals entail a net total of around 382 post closures,” the public service broadcaster said in an online statement.

Eleven language services -- Azerbaijani, Brasil, Marathi, Mundo, Punjabi, Russian, Serbian, Sinhala, Thai, Turkish, and Vietnamese -- are already digital only.

Under the restructuring plans they will be joined by seven more: Chinese, Gujarati, Igbo, Indonesian, Pidgin, Urdu and Yoruba.

Radio services in Arabic, Persian, Kyrgyz, Hindi, Bengali, Chinese, Indonesian, Tamil and Urdu will stop, if the proposals are approved by staff and unions. No language services will close, the broadcaster insisted, although some production will move out of London and schedules would change.

The Thai service will move to Bangkok, the Korean service to Seoul and the Bangla service to Dhaka.