

COVID FALLOUT

At Sadar Bazaar, Rakhi fails to bring festive cheer this year

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HIT BY the lockdown and a lingering fear of Covid among customers, wholesalers at Sadar Bazaar are witnessing an unusually low demand for rakhis just over a week before the festival on August 3. Several traders are either relying on leftover stock from last year or have sourced substantially lower number of goods this season.

The demand remained low even on Saturday, when traders say most of their customers arrive at Sadar Bazaar mostly via trains from across NCR, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and other neighbouring states.

The wholesale rakhi traders source their products from Mumbai, Kolkata, Ahmedabad, and even Rajasthan. Most of their customers are local Delhi traders and those hailing from the National Capital Region, and beyond in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.

Fear of the virus, lockdown and the lack of the regular train



Wholesaler Rahul Dabla said he did not buy anything this year and was selling last year's stock of rakhis. Express

network—used by the traders to tour Mumbai, Kolkata and Ahmedabad for goods and also the means for traders to arrive at Delhi to buy goods—were cited as the main reasons for the drop in sales by most traders.

Ritesh Shama (34), a wholesaler at Sadar Bazaar, said, "There is a lockdown in UP on weekends, otherwise traders from Ghaziabad, Meerut, Baghpat, Faridabad and Lucknow, all come directly to this market by trains. Usually weekends are remarkably busy. We also tour

cities for rakhis by train, sometimes even flights. People value their lives also and are fearful due to the virus."

Another wholesaler Deepak Jaisal (37) reiterated, "We usually order Rs 1-15 lakh worth of rakhis, but did not this year as local trains were shut. Around 80 per cent of the trade is gone."

Rahul Dabla, a wholesaler at Sadar Bazaar, said, "I go to these cities on tour for 10-15 days in February-March to buy rakhis worth Rs 10-15 lakh, sometimes even worth Rs 20-25 lakh. With

local trains not running now, there is no demand. We haven't bought anything this year, we are selling last year's stock."

The Indian Railways is currently running only 230 "special trains" on important routes as against 13,000 regular trains before the pandemic. *The Indian Express* had earlier reported that even in these trains, as of July 22, full occupancy was reported only in 20 per cent of the trains.

Another wholesaler, Montu Khosla (60), said, "We are seeing only 40 per cent of our business."