LEESBURG, United States: The traditionalists don’t like it, but the “Black Friday” shopping frenzy is as much a part of Thanksgiving Day in the United States as turkey and pumpkin pie.

And it’s only Thursday. Americans will spend tens of billions of dollars over the four-day holiday and there was certainly no messaging about at Leesburg Corner, a Virginia outlet center only a short drive from the US capital Washington.

It was hardly time for the roast turkey and stuffing to settle when most shops opened there on Thursday, Thanksgiving Day, for a 24-hour bonanza of breathless commerce that this year will stretch overnight and drag on until 10 pm yesterday.

“I think everyone had many things were packed by midnight: nearly 100 people queued to get into Kate Spade New York as the clock ticked into Black Friday and the cold night air dropped a degree or two further. Meanwhile they had been waiting at the door of Coach before even opening the shop.

Likewise at J Crew and Sunglass Hut. Hide and Miho, a couple originally from Tokyo but living locally, snapped up two winter coats within the first hour from DKNY. “We got 50 percent off, but with another 20 percent off on top of that. Those coats are one for each of us because here is pretty cold,” said Hide, clutching three bags in one hand.

‘Maybe all night’

‘The long Thanksgiving weekend is the kickoff to the US holiday shopping season, and Black Friday has long been considered the critical day that turns retailers’ books from red to black. But there has been criticism of those retailers that throw their doors open on Thanksgiving instead of actually waiting for the deals.

Don’t the store workers deserve a day off to spend with their families too? “They don’t have to work. I guess they do it for the money. They are not being forced here,” said Henri Brown. 17, who along with his 15-year-old brother Will was among the first in. “And they might enjoy the rush of people,” added a young man, who forked out over $130 in the first hour and proclaimed himself highly with his early purchases: two jackets—a dark blue one he was already wearing-sunglasses and trousers. Vera Luo, a 19-year-old from China studying in Washington, came armed with a suitcase—she was ready to fall to burst with new acquisitions that she said would be more expensive in China. She and two friends paid $60 for a taxi from the US capital and they were in it for the long haul.

“I have no idea where my friends are when I will find them,” said the econometrician, clasping a directory of the more than 100 stores in the complex. “So far I have only bought lens solution, but I have a budget of $500 and I want to buy a bag from Coach, “I don’t know how long we will be here. Maybe all night.”

Tactical approach

Mamadou Niasse, 48, a cyber-security engineer originally from Senegal, declared himself something of an old hand in the art of the post-Thanksgiving splurge. “It’s not the cheapest time in the year. After Christmas is cheaper, but I came today because there are more options—nothing is left after Christmas,” he said sably. He too was through the doors early but was taking a more tactical approach, refusing to jump right into the spending bonanza. “I am well-prepared and have a list of four brands I want-Columbia, Tommy Hilfiger, Calvin Klein and Ralph Lauren—and I will get,” he said firmly.

Jeanette, a local who gave her age as “104,” was another refusal to get carried away by the discounts of more than 50 percent. Taking a breather on a bench while her daughter and grand-daughter did the running about, she had scouted a Michael Kors purse online before moving in for the kill for just over $100. “I did not want to pay the high price before but it was on a pretty big discount,” she said with a glint in her eye, rubbing her cheeks to stave off the cold. — AFP

UK HOUSE PRICE INFLATION SLOWS TO 11-MONTH LOW

LONDON: The annual rate of increase in British house prices fell to its lowest level in nearly a year this month as the property market continued to lose momentum, figures from mortgage lender Nationwide showed yesterday. Nationwide said house prices rose 0.5 percent in the year to November, the smallest increase since December last year, and well below June’s near-10-year peak of 11.8 percent.

“The outlook is not very positive appreciably off its early-2014 highs, we suspect house prices will generally rise at a much more sedate rate over the coming months,” said Howard Archer, chief UK economist at IHS Global Insight.