SPECIAL FEATURE

Lunch time mania

Clink and clatter, corporate conversations, and meaningful meetings – this is the scenario you can expect to see if you ever walk into a restaurant during lunch time, specifically in a commercial area. And the same is true for an office canteen. However, lunch time for office goers is not as superficial as it seems. There exists a connotation within these conversations and walls of the restaurants and canteens during luncheon.

At noon, eateries in the commercial hubs of Dhaka, such as Motijheel, Gulshan, and Farmgate are usually buzzing with suited, white-collar employees devouring lunch. It is a spectacular scene to witness groups of colleagues joyfully laughing over an incident at office, or a triad of people formulating new and innovative ideas, or just a couple of people quietly eating food. This bustling environment usually lasts from 1PM to 3PM, defining the situation of lunch time mania in Dhaka.

Satisfying the rising demand

The altering demand of people, the rapid pace of economic development combined with the revolutionary turn in the restaurant industry in Dhaka are shaking things up. While five years ago, there were limited options for choosing the mode and source of lunch, the alternatives now are innumerable. This has also led to better affordability and higher availability.

"Initially, we only served food of a particular price range. However, after a few months of operation we realised there exists a demand within the corporate sector for more affordable lunch on a regular basis. To fulfil this need, we revamped both our menu and the restaurant and are now able to cater to a large pool of loyal customers daily," said Mohammed Shahidul Islam, managing partner, Nawab Chatga.

Seeing this as a good business opportunity, a vast number of catering services and restaurants are popping up in commercial areas. Family style restaurants, fast food stores, catering services, and food delivery apps are all serving towards satisfying the lunching requirements of office goers. These food hubs are further classified, ranging from fine dining restaurants to small scale eateries, catering to the demand that exists in a flexible manner.

Health and hygiene

While there are myriad options available, the question lingers, are they actually fulfilling the vast demand that exists?

Most people are now health conscious and look for hygienic and healthy options. Because this is the decision of consuming lunch on most days of the week, the source must be decided conscientiously.

"Although the availability of lunch is better than ever now, it would be great

to have more catering services that serve homelike food of the best quality without the addition of extra spices and condiments for the sake of better tasting food," said Rabeya Moyeen, senior project manager at a research institute located in Gulshan.

As people age and become prone

towards a healthy living, there persists a growing concern regarding source of food they are consuming. Most people cannot find a trustworthy and reliable source of lunch depending on which they can order food every day, setting aside the looming concern of health and hygiene. Despite many commercial areas housing dozens of eateries that serve homelike food, there exists a dearth of such dependable food sources.

However, there is a lucky bunch of office goers who have the privilege to enjoy homemade food every day of the week. This is often the case for entrepreneurs or office goers who live in the same neighbourhood as their workplace.

"Being a gym owner and having a health-conscious perspective, I am lucky to be able to have homemade food delivered to my office, coming right out of my home kitchen every day," said Fatah Saad, owner, Hammer Strength Fitness Club.

Deshi cravings

A proper lunch is customary in our culture, and while many office goers crave homemade, deshi delicacies, it is always not possible to have such kind of food.

Reazul Islam, deputy managing director, AB Bank, stationed at their office in Motijheel said, "I usually pack lunch from home because I prefer to eat what I would typically have if I were back home. But sometimes, unwillingly, I have to resort to order a takeaway lunch box from restaurants nearby."

And there are many more like him. Despite the vast availability of various cuisines, homemade food is irreplaceable. Some people willingly forego purchasing lunch from the office canteen, nearby restaurants, or catering services because they are accustomed to the deshi palate.

Call them boring eaters, but truth be told, we Bengalis are more comfortable to our very own deshi delicacies than we realise. After all, nothing compares with the delight of having a steaming plate of plain rice, along with thick lentil curry, fried fish, and a side of spinach amidst all the hustle and bustle.

Imagine the disappointment on a child's face if he opens his tiffin box to find such an assortment of food — he would probably skip having anything in his tiffin break than to face this embarrassment among friends.

Remember sitting in class at college while getting a hunger pang and daydreaming about rushing to the canteen to get that hot plate of khichuri bhuna after class?