

# Middlemen rule at DMCH

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The Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) has been literally taken over by middlemen who in association with some employees are active in persuading patients out of the hospital and into private clinics.

The syndicate has become very strong with influential officials of the DMCH reportedly supporting the brokers in exchange of financial benefits. "Many staff members and patients have become their hostages," said an employee of DMCH.

The middlemen in the guise of a regular employee of the DMCH or a sympathetic person, trap the patients. They have access to every department of the hospital. They consult with the doctors, provide medicine and other

essentials and even inject or dress patients to gain their trust. Their main goal however is to woo the patients away to private clinics for which they receive commissions.

"We always pray to Allah so that He does not send anybody here for treatment. I have been working here for the last 10 years and I can tell you that your patient will not get proper treatment here," a broker was overheard telling a patient's attendant. He then tried to lure him into going to a private clinic.

"Here the treatment would take more than a month. You have to spend Tk 1000 a day, so that is Tk 30,000 a month. In addition to that there is the extra cost for operation. I can arrange everything at a private clinic for Tk 40,000 and you can go home

within seven days."

He also cited the lack of space, sincere doctors and modern equipment at the DMCH and was eventually successful in convincing the patient who had a tumor, and his attendant to move to Bridgetone Hospital. The overall cost was fixed at Tk 38,000 under a package agreement.

The incident mentioned above is a very common scene at every corner of the DMCH. According to sources at the hospital, at least 15 - 25 patients leave the DMCH everyday without completing the treatment. Sometimes, many serious patients are taken away without proper precautions which has even resulted in deaths.

"In such cases, we close the file and complete our duty by registering the person as an

absconding patient," said a senior nurse of DMCH.

The middlemen at DMCH had been ousted after a patient passed away at the hospital's gate in April. A group of middlemen were trying to take the bullet-hit victim to a private clinic and in the delay due to the skirmish, he died. But the brokers came back only after 10 days.

Apart from the brokers, drug addicts also roam openly inside the hospital and theft is a common happening.

When contacted, the hospital's authorities declined to speak to the press on the issue. The director of DMCH could not be reached for his comments despite several attempts.

## Traditional iftar of old Dhaka still hot favourite

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The ongoing drive by mobile courts against food adulteration has done little to prevent many *iftar* lovers from thronging some traditional *iftar* markets in Dhaka. Some of these markets offer a variety of items whose origins could be traced as far back as the Mughal, British and Pakistan era.

The oldest *iftar* market situated in Chawkbazaar of old Dhaka exist since the British era. Comprising a single line of makeshift shops, most of its shopkeepers have inherited the art of preparing various *iftar* items from their older generations.

"I learnt the art of making this dish from my grandfather," said Md. Selim, an *iftar*-seller for 15 years who specialises in making *boro baper pola* (a mixture of chickpeas, beef or mutton brains, minced meat, potatoes, *chira*, eggs, chicken 13 spices and ghee).

"It originated in the British era and it is sold only during Ramzan," he added. He could not say why it was named as such. "Probably because it is expensive and could be afforded only by the aristocrats," said Abdul Rahim, another *iftar*-seller in the city who also specialises in making the same dish.

"This was the food of the Nawabs of Dhaka during the British era," said Md. Ali Hossain, with 20 years of experience. He specialises in preparing *shuti kabab* (minced meat marinated with spices tied with a thread and roasted over a fire) .

*Jilapi* (a mixture of flour and *besan* fried in spiral shapes and cooked in syrup) is an integral part of *iftar* in present days. "But in those days, the nawabs



Boro baper pola-- one of the popular iftar delicacies being sold in Old Dhaka.

had *jilapi* after breakfast," said Kutubuddin, a specialist in its preparation.

"They ate *doi bora* (fried and spiced lentil balls dipped in

Apart from Chawkbazaar, another traditional *iftar* resort is Mama Halim, located in Kalabagan. "I learnt this art from two Pakistani cooks

ning more meat.

*Chola boot* (fried and spiced chickpeas) and *ghumni* (fried and spiced chickpeas) are the

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yoghurt) as supplements" said Md. Ali.

*Halim* , an *iftar* favourite among many, could easily be mistaken as a local dish. "It originated in the Pakistan era," said Sawan Mia, who has been selling *iftar* for eight years and inherited it as a hereditary profession. He specialises in making *shahi halim* (soup made of seven types of lentils, pieces of mutton or beef, wheat, yoghurt, beef or mutton brains and various spices).

worked in our house when I was a child." said its proprietor, Din Mohammad Monu. He also claimed that some unscrupulous businessmen were selling adulterated *halim* under his brand name.

Mama *halim* is made of six types of lentils, 110 spices, pieces and hooves of beef or mutton and saffron. It differs from the *shahi halim* in being thicker in texture and

most common *iftar* items even among the poor. "They originated in the Pakistan era too but are Bangladeshi in origin," said Md. Shahjahan of Chawkbazar.

Currently, other items of foreign origin such as burger, various Chinese dishes, fried chicken etc are gradually being added to the *iftar* menu, showing their popularity. But despite it all, the appeal of the traditional *iftar* items still lingers in the hearts of many.



Shoppers checking out the latest fashions in boutiques in the city, with Eid round the corner.