

## Delights of mouth-watering pithas

Although footpath is the first stop for many, some malls and restaurants are now trying to make the winter cakes available to all classes.

SHAHNAZ PARVEEN

With a kerosene stove, two aluminium saucapans and some other kitchen utensils, Saleha Begum, a middle-aged woman was preparing scrumptious vapa pitha (a kind of cake) right on the footpath on the Dhaka University campus on Saturday evening.

For a crowd of a dozen gentlemen hustling around Saleha, the roadside vapa pitha prepared with crushed rice, grated coconut and molasses, is a popular winter delicacy.

"I become nostalgic whenever I try pitha on the footpath. It takes me back to my childhood when my grandmother used to prepare pitha in the backyard at dusk. The entire family used to gather round the fire and babble on for hours," said Abdul Hamid, a city corporation driver while gulping the cake's last morsel and ordering another one.

The scene that Hamid described is a matter of the past for city people. In Dhaka the art of preparing winter pitha and munching the delight beside the warmth of a fire can only be experienced on the footpath with seasonal vendors like Saleha.

With the hustle and bustle of modern city life, the tradition of making winter delicacies at home is gradually declining. In the urban areas commercial-made pithas are gradually replacing home-made pithas. Many specialised shops now sell costly pithas.

Footpath is the first stop for many as it is easily available and the cheapest source of pitha. Usually vendors involved in seasonal trade shift to pitha making and selling in winter. In most cases the entire family gets involved in the business.

Saleha and her 12-year-old son start before noon with grating coconut and grinding rice. They sell pitha from 3:00pm to 10:00pm every day. She earns around Tk 500 daily and sometimes even more on special days like Victory Day and the New Year, Saleha said.

Only a few items like



Times are changing as many malls and department stores are now bringing a variety of traditional winter cakes to all classes of people. Their cakes are gaining popularity as the retailers do brisk business.

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vapa or chittoi are available on the footpath. For more variety a trip to specialised restaurants and fast food shops is a must.

Mouth-watering names such as Kheer Puli, Narkel Puli, Chandra Puli, Chittoi, Jamai Pitha, Jhal Jamai Pitha, Kola Bora, Patishapta, Malpoa, Bhapa Pitha, Bhapa Puli, Dudh Puli, Dudh Chittoi, Jhal Bou, Calcutta Puli, Shahi Puli, Phool Pakon, Nokshi Pitha, Surjomukhi, Lobongo Lotika, Chicken Pitha, Jhal Chingri Pitha Bhapa are sold at some restaurants at prices as low as Tk 5 per piece and upto Tk 200 per kg.

The essential ingredients for pitha making are rice, wheat flour, molasses, sugar, coconut, ghee or oil. Sometimes nuts are used.



Meat and vegetables are also used in preparing some pithas such as Shabji (vegetable) Pitha, Jhal (hot) Patishapta and Mangsha (meat) Patishapta. Sometimes fruits, mostly jackfruit, palmyra fruit, coconut and banana, are also used. These pithas are named after the fruit they are made from. A special category of pitha is prepared by covering plant leaf and is usually named Pata Pitha.

A few restaurants have recently become popular for having these mouth-watering names on their menu. Khabar Dabar Pitha Ghor at Bangabandhu Avenue, Bikrampur Pitha Ghor at Kalabagan and Prabantana at Mohmmadpur are the most popular outlets that sell

pithas in the city. Yousuf Bakery and Ambala also sell pithas.

SM Shafiqul Islam, manager of Pitha Ghor, said their business started during Pakistan period with a different name. The legacy is being carried on by the next generation of the original master chefs. The outlet also trains new apprentices.

"Pitha is not a traditional item in most restaurants as it takes time and precision to prepare pithas. We are the first specialised outlet in the city that started selling pitha before our independence. The idea is to revive the lost flavour of pitha in the city life," he said.

Shafiqul said 12 items are currently available at their restaurant. Except for



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Most city dwellers enjoy all sorts of mouth-watering pithas at street side shops.

vapa pitha, all the other items are prepared in their kitchen in Demra.

Department stores also boosting pitha sell these days. Agora organises two pitha festivals during winter in its four branches in the city.

Shams Haider, head of operations, Agora, said their first pitha festival started on December 1 and will end on December 17. About 40 types of pithas are available in the designated pitha corner. They are preparing vapa pitha inside Mirpur and Moghbazar outlets while other items are supplied by homemakers involved in catering business.

"Every district in the country has its own variety of pitha. However, the recipes of pithas are gradually vanishing from the urban areas as city folks rarely make pithas at home while trips to villages are also declining," said Haider.

He also said during the next pitha festival scheduled to begin in January, Agora plans to bring pitha makers from various districts and demonstrate some of the rare and intricate recipes for their customers.

Organising pitha festival, pitha making competi-

tion and poush mela (winter festival) by social and cultural organisations is also gaining popularity in the city.

Adda at Narigrantha Prabantana is one of them. Apart from organising yearly pitha festival the outlet offers some of the delicacies throughout the year.

Sayyida Akhter Kumkum, coordinator, Prabantana, said, "Pitha making is our cultural heritage. It is a food of celebration. Every pitha, its intricate process of making and design has a story to tell. It symbolises people, nature, harvest and our way of life."

"But most importantly it builds a bond between relatives, friends and neighbours as making pitha is some kind of a social event. Sharing it with everyone is a custom which brings everyone closer to others," she added.

The tradition, however, is changing. Our children nowadays know about western pastries more than they know about local pithas, she lamented. "Pitha also requires some special variety of rice. If pitha making fades away then these rice species will go extinct."

## city express

The latest crop of quotes from the city's press -- words worth repeating, we feel, for their humour, insight or sheer outrageousness. Star City does not necessarily support the opinions expressed in this column.

"We want to utilise the immense potential of the new generation of voters to prepare them to face the challenges of globalisation in the 21st century"

-- Sheikh Hasina  
AL Chief

Said on Friday, while reading out the key points of the party's election manifesto. Source: The Daily Star

"Independence and sovereignty of the country is safe in BNP's hand and only the BNP-led alliance can solve the present crises of the country"

-- Khaleda Zia  
BNP Chairperson

Told a public meeting on Friday in Sylhet, while inaugurating her party's campaign for the upcoming polls. Source: The Daily Star

"The sector commanders have made public a list of 50 war criminals. Eight war criminals got nomination from a major electoral alliance while another alliance nominated two war criminals as its candidate"

-- Manjurul Ahsan Khan  
CPB President

Said while opening election campaign at the Central Shaheed Minar on Friday. Source: The Daily Star

"All the cases filed against me are false and I myself would go to the Baitul Mukarram Mosque and hang myself if those are proven true"

-- Monowar Hossain Dipjol  
Arrested film actor and BNP leader

Told newsmen while replying to a question after his arrest on Thursday. Source: The Daily Star

"We should avoid the culture of rejecting election results. We should accept the people's verdict"

-- Khandakar Delwar Hossain  
BNP Secretary General

Remarked while talking to journalists at his NAM flat on Thursday. Source: The Daily Star

"The extremists have tarnished the image of Islam as a religion of peace. Awami League will do everything to restore the image of Islam"

-- Matia Chowdhury  
AL presidium member

Said on Saturday, while speaking at the inaugural ceremony of the AL media centre at Dhanmondi. Source: The Daily Star



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Site for Aminbazar landfill: When completed, it will be responsible for the proper disposal of half of the city's solid waste.

## Work on second sanitary landfill at Aminbazar starts from Feb

HELEMUL ALAM

Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) is going to set up the city's second sanitary landfill at Aminbazar to bring the whole city under landfill system.

"We have almost completed the tender process for purchasing heavy equipment and after getting the equipment we will start physical work on the landfill," said Tariq Bin Yousuf, project director of DCC's Landfill Improvement Project.

He said DCC will give work order to the selected firm by December 15 (today) to purchase three bulldozers and three excavators that will cost Tk 11 crore. The equipment are expected to be purchased by February next year.

"We are hoping to start the physical work from February," he said.

Yousuf said they are also purchasing 27 garbage trucks at a cost of Tk 7 crore under the project and tender evaluation for this has already been completed. Awarding of contract is now awaiting the corporation's final approval.

"We are expecting to get the garbage trucks by June," he said.

The Executive Committee of the

National Economic Council (Nec) in August this year approved the Tk 65 crore project, which is scheduled to be completed by June 2008.

DCC sources said innovative and environmentally-friendly techniques will be applied at the country's second modern sanitary landfill at Aminbazar for the proper disposal of half of the capital's solid waste.

The first such landfill costing Tk 46.63 crore was inaugurated in October 2007 at Matuail where solid waste from five out of ten DCC zones are dumped.

The waste from the rest of the zones will be dumped at the Aminbazar landfill upon completion of the project, said Tariq.

He said as the Matuail landfill is not large enough to serve the remaining five zones of the city, DCC is forced to dump solid waste from these zones at conventional dumping grounds, causing hazards to human health as well as the environment.

According to a study conducted under the Solid Waste Management Master Plan formulated in 2005, the total amount of waste generated in the city every day is around 3,400 tonnes

and almost half of that is dumped at Matuail.

"With successful completion of the Aminbazar landfill project, the entire city will come under a modern system of sanitary landfills for waste disposal," said Tariq, adding that the landfill would be set up on 50 acres of land.

To protect the environment from groundwater contamination, soil pollution and air pollution by methane (generated by decaying organic waste), modern and scientific systems will be installed at the proposed landfill.

The overall environment of Dhaka city will improve with the implementation of the new landfill project as biodiversity in and around Aminbazar will be conserved by taking measures against soil, water and air pollution, Tariq said.

Rubberised landfill liner will be in place to prevent groundwater and soil contamination by liquid produced from the decomposition of waste within the landfill and the liquid will be treated before they are released into nearby natural water bodies, he added.