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PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

In the evening the lakeside bustles with people seeking for refreshment.

kebab to refresh ourselves. The day seems incomplete without this treat."

It is at this point that we discover the main stimulator to lure all these Dhakaites: the kebab shops. One of the prominent kebab makers of Dhanmondi Lake area is Asgor. He claims to have all the 15 types of kebabs available in Bangladesh. He adds, "I am the direct disciple of Mustakim, the legend and guru of all the Kebab chefs of Bangladesh. He has taught me the recipes with his own hand. You will find these kebabs tastier than any other places of Dhaka."

What makes these kebabs so special? Of course the spices: the hot spicy seasoning of the kebabs creates a mouth watering aroma all over the place. But when it comes to revealing the recipe, the kebab makers are silent. Secrecy is strictly maintained. As Sheikh Iran, one of the master chefs, says, "All I can tell you is that all these spices are exported from Pakistan. And I maintain the original recipe of Mughal Kebab."

There are several stalls around Dhanmondi Lake (mostly beside the bridge of road number 8 of Dhanmondi) which make only kebabs and serve them with *luchi* (a fluffier version of the *puri*). With the highest price of TK 100 it's quite affordable for the people of all classes. Chicken, lamb, beef kebab of all kinds can be tasted here in the lake side sitting arrangements made by these stall owners. Spicy kebabs served with condiments like black salt, chilli sauce, onion slices and salad are enough to make a kebab buff forget all those wise words on healthy eating. Such is the case of Rahman and his friends. This group of senior citizens is talking about the current political situation while taking generous bites of the barbecued beef or chicken. Rahman says, "You see, all these health prescriptions at home make me sick. So here I come with my old comrades to have some fun, with food and of course a glass of burhani. Life is still beautiful, isn't it?"

Yes of course, life is beautiful here for the food lovers. But like Sumeira and Shahriar, not all are happy with these outdoor kebab kiosks. They stick to the safest bet – hot coffee. As Sumeira says, "Well, the food here certainly tastes good. But can anyone ensure us that they are serving us unadulterated food? In Bangladesh we should be sceptical about street food." Asgor begs to differ when we pose the question: "We don't compromise with hygiene. Our food is 100 percent pure..."

These open air stalls are certainly vulnerable to contamination. The vendors try to maintain quality but are not always up to the mark. If the lake management authority is a little strict on the issue, it will be the best place to meet and eat in Dhaka.

Dhanmondi Lake Park with all these stalls and kiosks has become a bustling meeting place for ordinary Dhakaites. In this crowded city, people are hungry to get a breath of fresh air. This tiny green spot fits the bill well. The kebab kiosks have obviously added a different attraction but it needs a planned approach. Having said that, if food courts grow like mushrooms in this park, this tiny abode of peace will soon be killed like other parks of the city.

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