

Jessore sets the benchmark

THE Rupchanda-The Daily Star Super Chef 2015 began anew, with Jessore as the setting for its re-birth. It was a fitting choice, considering how once before in our history, it was Jessore that showed us the way. With the first audition rounds of Super Chef set for Jessore, the city was once again thrust into the spotlight as trail-blazers and it did not disappoint.

The participants from Jessore must have decided on their own to set the standard for the audition rounds and 106 people showed up just for that purpose. As is the case with all competitions, Super Chef 2015 brought forth individuals whose desires were intricately linked with their human endeavour. Many showed up, not just to win, but to prove that they were capable of holding their own on the biggest platform in Bangladesh for aspiring chefs and those who wished to solidify their reputations. The journey thus began with 106 individuals but at least for the day, only a handful would continue towards the final destination; the Super Chef crown.

All 106 participants sat for the grueling written exams, poring through 50 questions, testing their knowledge in almost all spheres of the culinary arts. From basic ingredient knowledge to nutrition, the questions helped assess which participants were prepared for what lay ahead. Of the 106 participants, 21 were then selected for the cook-off. These 21 would stand before the judges, winners from the previous Super Chef, and display whatever they managed to cook within the 30 minute



time line. The dishes served were exemplary on most occasions, but it was the human story behind each dish, that was truly enduring.

It wouldn't be a remarkable statement to say that while the dishes may be forgotten, the hands behind them wouldn't. Therefore, to truly grasp the nature of Super Chef and what it has become in a year's time, one would only need to look at the participants in Jessore. Blending in with the housewives whose prowess was proven last year, stood advocates, news reporters, NGO workers, professional chefs and businessmen.

Seemingly from worlds apart from the

culinary ones, these people from different professions all united under one simple belief, that they had more talent than what was on the surface. Some made a mark while others faded into dust. But from within the dust, a phoenix had every right to rise and one did just that, setting a precedent for others.

Moinul, from Khulna, entered the competition last year but failed to progress from the regional round. Instead of using that as an affirmation to pursue something else, Moinul took the time to learn cooking for 3 months under Tommy Miah and returned again this year with much more to offer. As it stood, Moinul's perseverance paid off. Moinul, who dropped out of college, also recently chose to return to his education, and with his Super Chef acceptance, perhaps now he can be an example for all those who refuse to believe that second chances



and hard work go hand in hand.

But Moinul's is just one example from many. Six more individuals got the YES card to progress to the next round to be held in Dhaka. Among those who didn't qualify, most said they were determined to return next year, better prepared than before. But this is no surprise; we Bangladeshis are a resilient people and this quality was on full display in Jessore. What does the next round in Bogra hold? A lot more surprises if the Jessore auditions are anything to go by.

The Rupchanda-The Daily Star Super Chef 2015 goes to Bogra, where more second chances will be given and more winners will be found.

By Osama Rahman
Photo: Osama Rahman

AMAR EKUSHEY GRANTHA MELA 2015

The book craze starts...

BOI Mela is not just a *mela*; it is definitely more than that. We know the tinge of excitement we feel when walking to a book shop. It is only natural then, that a mammoth book fair would elevate you to ecstasy. Boi Mela is something we look forward to for one whole year, something that you absolutely must go to or take your children to.

Amidst *hartals* and blockades Amar Ekushey Grantha Mela 2015 had begun. This year too, the grounds of the fair have been Bangla Academy premises and extended to a part of Suhrawardy Udyan.

More spaces have been allocated for the publishers to set up their stalls. About 351 stalls set up in the fair. Among them 92 institutions had set up their stalls on the Bangla Academy premises and 259 institutions at the Suhrawardy Udyan.

Both Bangla Academy and Suhrawardy Udyan have been decorated in a very artistic way. The stalls' themes were based on subjects like International Mother Language Day, Liberation War, etc. Visitors are very happy about the spacious arrangement



of the book fair. After all, with the lush greenery of the age-old trees in the premises, the environment is indeed very refreshing, and there are a lot of places to sit and dwell with your friends or get a glimpse of your favourite writers.

In celebration of the 60th anniversary of Bangla Academy, an International Literary Conference was also held, where around 40 literacy personalities and academicians from different countries participated. The regular programmes (cultural events, book launching ceremonies, et al) of the fair are also taking place.

The fair authority said that this time it had taken additional security measures for the fair-goers. About 75 close circuit cameras for the police have installed to ensure the security.

Fair timings: 3pm - 8.30pm (weekdays); 11am - 8.30pm (weekends); 8am - 8.30pm (21 February).

By M H Haider
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