

EVENT

Super Chef: The rise of the pretenders

WHEN Dilruba Shamim, a participant from Dhaka and part of the Top 12 from last year, brought her dishes to the judges, she knew that this was her last chance, ever. However, a victim to nervousness, the dish she cooked was not up to par.

The judges were unanimous in their decision to not hand Dilruba an apron and the participant herself seemed resigned to her fate.

"I will never make this mistake again," she told the judges. But, as has been mentioned so many times, in this competition there is no room for mistakes and second chances are enough of a rarity to not even be taken into consideration. However, second chances do happen, especially if one deserves it. That was the case with Navid Hassan.

Owner of an Italian Pizzeria, Navid Hassan and his wife, Farjina Amin, were both encouraged to join the competition by his wife's sister. With years of culinary practice behind him, Navid could be considered a nearly-proven. His dish of pan grilled chicken with pan fried potatoes and sautéed spinach looked impressive enough, but with his first look, Chef Tazammul Huq, executive chef of Watercress, already had reservations.

"You say its grilled but its actually burnt on top. It is black, not golden brown," he observed. Navid though stuck with his guns and urged the chef to taste his dish before making him up his mind. One by one each of the judges tasted the dish and each was pleasantly surprised by the end result. However, as a professional, Navid should never have burnt his dish to start off with. But, given the obvious talent, the judges



decided to hand him his apron.

But how would his wife fare? Farjina, formerly in the army as a lieutenant before a back problem restricted her endurance for the extreme requirements, met and fell in love with Navid over a meal.

"Our first connection was established through her love for food," she said. Indeed, she was happy that her husband had made it through but now it was her turn.

"I'd much rather win than him, but I will be happy if he wins too," she said both truthfully and diplomatically. She however acknowledged that her presence here was

down to her husband, who often taught her some of his techniques and actually taught her how to cook.

Farjina, after much deliberation, decided to go for broke and used the ingredients to cook up a concoction of her own, "Love Delight". As the judges heard her story and learned about her dish, they became more wary. Farjina could not explain which course her dish fit in but her innovation won over chef Tazammul. However, the other judges were not that satisfied and let her go on waiting.

And how would those on the waiting list

come out on top and go on to the Top 16? That too was announced. Shaheda Yesmin gave each participant in the waiting list exactly 15 minutes to cook up the best paratha, or the perfect paratha. Once the challenge was announced, a sudden hush fell over the studio.

"The perfect paratha?" every one murmured to themselves in disbelief. This seemed like too easy a task. How could these possible Super Chefs, some of the best in country, not make the perfect paratha? Well, they could but the challenge really was how many they could make. The participants were then divided into different groups and given 15 minutes to finish the task. Those present seemed transfixed watching the challenge take place. How could Jabunessa, Mehnaj, Sabrina, Bimasha and Marufa even be on the waiting list? They were supposed to be among the top.

Their presence showed that this was possibly the toughest culinary competition in the country today. As the pressure built, Marufa could be seen breaking down. The heat got to her and so did the challenge. But eventually, all the above made it, cooking the most perfect of parathas. However, could they make the best use of their second chance?

Only time will tell. Tune into Ntv every Sunday and Friday to catch the latest episode of Rupchanda -The Daily Star Super Chef 2015 and watch this face to find out what went on the whole week, both on and off the Super Chef screen.

By **Osama Rahman**

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