

# Exploring Persian cuisine

The Iran Cultural Centre, Dhaka and Hotel Sarina joined hands to organise a week-long Iranian Food Festival from 2 to 8 February, 2019. The event was held as an effort to share Persian cuisine, recipes, and stories with Bangladesh. Iranian master chef, Hossein Najmi, especially crafted the menu to give the locals a taste of all popular dishes in Iran. The food festival commenced with an inauguration ceremony on Saturday, 2 February, at Hotel Sarina. H.E. Mohammad Reza Nafar, Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Bangladesh, inaugurated the festival. Also present were esteemed ambassadors from Afghanistan, Iraq, Turkey and Oman.

H.E. Mohammad Reza Nafar, in his speech said, "It brings me great pleasure to share my culture with Bangladesh at this time, because 11 February marks the 40th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, and as a bridge between Bangladeshis and Persians, I want to share my history, culture and food to celebrate this day with you. There is something very special about food festivals, and development of diplomatic relations, we call it gastro-diplomacy. Our collaborative mission with this occasion is to conquer the hearts of Bangladeshi people through their appetite".

Although food is fuel, it is also an art. It is food that drives a nation's history, art, and civilisation. The most enduring legacy of Iran is their cuisine, and for many years, its greatness influenced the culinary culture of the Middle East.

There are over thousands of local Iranian dishes, that are regionally specific to different areas. Different parts of the Iranian terrain are homes to different vegetation, which gives each part of Iran an identity through their cuisine. What makes Persian food stand out from the rest is the cooking process. Each dish pays attention to the medicinal properties of the ingredients. The proportion of every ingredient plays a key role on the nutritional benefit of every dish.

Lastly, every equipment used to prepare the recipes are exclusive to the Iranian kitchen.

Saffron is the key ingredient of Iranian cuisine, it is what gives the Persian food it's distinguished mark. Another way to identify Persian cuisine is their stews, like the gheyme. Stews are a big category in itself, and they have a variety for all types of eaters, including vegans.

The menu at the Iranian Food Festival comprised a

variety of lamb items, chicken, and beef kababs, and a number of rice dishes. The entrée comprised of Persian barley soup with chicken and stuffed eggplant, also called the garni yarikh, along with a variety of bread items. There were special salads like the fattoush, eggplant bourani, and the tabbouleh. The main dishes included whole ouzi (lamb) served with rice, baghali polo, tachin, gheyme (Iranian stew), beef Hosseini Kabab, mirza ghasemi and sholezard. For desserts, there were mango mahalabia and basbousa,

amongst many others.

Special guest, chef Hossein Najmi said, "Iranian food is special to us because it is a result of our history, and we can connect with Bangladesh because it also has a rich history. Food is a content of history, and we can all connect at the dining table through amazing cuisines, and conversing about our roots."

By Sanumkia Siddiqui

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