

# TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR



Is pitha a comfort food?

PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR

## Comfort Food vs. Grandmother's Diet

Ten years ago, I wrote a Tangents column called “Grandmother’s Diet.” The idea was this: in this age of processed and factory manufactured food, how does one choose what’s best for health? The notion – originally presented by Michael Pollan – is to avoid items that your great-grandmother (or, in my case, my grandmothers) would not recognize as food. This eliminates many of today’s unhealthy inventions such as breakfast bars, reconstituted cereals, sweets and candies, salty snacks and soft drinks, while encouraging consumption of wholesome food, particularly fresh fruits and vegetables.

Then there is comfort food. Comfort food makes us feel good. We crave it in troubled times when we are feeling down, tired or anxious. Eating comfort food, we feel rejuvenated and all seems well with the world. It is simply prepared (usually), presented without ostentation, and may have nostalgic or sentimental connotations. Foods that we loved in childhood are good candidates for comfort food.

Comfort food is culture dependent. Take the dish cooked the world over from simmering beef shanks, where the bone marrow slowly becomes one with the gravy. In Sylhet this dish is made with *shatkora* and called *poncha* – something that my mother made exceptionally well. But cooked without *shatkora*, it is called *paya* in the rest of Bangladesh; a meatier and spicier version is *nehari*. In Italian cuisine, *osso bucco* is a similar dish made from lamb shanks. And at opulent Chinese weddings, a soup of beef shanks simmered in milk is sometimes served as the banquet finale.

I have tried *osso bucco* and that Chinese bone soup. But, while they might be comfort food for the Italians or the Chinese, for me they were exotic. My palette was on guard because I didn’t know what taste to expect. It was adventure, not comfort. But with *poncha*, *paya* or *nehari* I know what to expect. That’s why they are comfort foods.

But is grandmother’s diet and comfort food one and the same? I was a lucky child because both my grandmothers were alive and active. They doted on me. From one I learned about fresh food. She took me to the market and pointed out the varieties, specially the fish. My other grandmother taught me about vegetables because she had a superb kitchen garden. And so to this day, small local fish, sautéed with a hint of spices, as well as robust helpings of fruits, spinach, vegetables and *daal-bhat* – these constitute my grandmother’s diet.

Grandmother’s diet is concerned with health, comfort food less so. The former is for the long-term; the latter is for immediate relief. Fat is important in comfort food, probably harking back to our hunter-gatherer ancestors who valued fat for its concentrated calories. Comfort food allows us to gratefully enjoy the moment like nothing else while forgetting the troubles of the world. Grandmother’s diet, on the other hand, helps reduce the risk of serious diseases and ill-health going forward. All this talk about food is making me hungry. Now where did I put that bowl of ice cream?

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### STAR REPORT

A “pilot project” of the government’s special countrywide mass vaccination drive at grass-roots level kicks off today.

The main campaign will begin on August 14. Authorities of different districts have taken preparations for the drive.

The preparations include setting up vaccination centres, building awareness and arranging on-spot registration.

Senior citizens, women and people with disabilities will be prioritised for jabs, said health officials.

Our correspondents from different districts reported on the preparation.

In Khulna, massive campaigns were launched to make the programme successful.

A total of 307 booths have already been prepared to run the programme. At least 200 people will be vaccinated in each booth daily.

### SPECIAL MASS INOCULATION DRIVE

## All set for ‘pilot project’ in rural areas



Anyone above 25 years old, who will come to the centre with their NID card, will be able to complete registration and will be provided with the vaccine.

RAJSHAHI CIVIL SURGEON MD QUIUME TALUKDAR

Two vaccinators and three volunteers will be deployed in each centre. Besides, a supervisor will be assigned for every three centres. All of them have already been trained.

In Rajshahi, authorities aim to inoculate around 77,000 people today, 52,000 from unions and municipalities, and the remaining 25,000 from the city corporation.

One vaccination centre has been set up at each of the 73 union parishads and 14 municipalities of

the district. Besides, 84 centres have been set up in the metropolitan area, said officials.

There will be a separate registration point in each centre. Anyone above 25 years old, who will come to the centre with their NID card, will be able to complete registration and will be provided with the vaccine.

In Sylhet, preparations are going on in full-swing for mass vaccination drives.

Mohammad Yahya, chairperson of Nijpat union of Sylhet’s Jaintapur upazila, said, “We’ve successfully prepared for mass inoculation by installing vaccine centres. We also ran a mass awareness campaign and are hopeful to see a lot of people at the centres.”

Tahmilur Rahman, upazila nirbahi officer of Gowainghat upazila, said, “We’ve mobilised volunteers in all unions to register freedom fighters on a priority basis.”

“We’ve also prepared registration facilities at the centres with help from Union Digital Centres,” he said.

In Rangpur division, the inoculation drive will be conducted in all 535 unions under eight districts.

Three vaccination booths have been set up in each union, and 200 people will be vaccinated at each booth daily, said Dr Motaharul Islam, divisional director (health) of Rangpur.

## Data discrepancy leaves Sylhet residents puzzled

	DEATH TOLL	TOTAL INFECTED
DGHS	825	42,975
DIV HEALTH OFFICE	761	43,461

Covid data in Sylhet Division (till Thursday)

DWOHA CHOWDHURY, Sylhet

How many people actually died of Covid-19 in Sylhet division since the beginning of the pandemic?

The answer could be 825 or 761 till Thursday morning, depending on who one asks.

The first number is according to data of Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), and the second was provided by Sylhet Divisional Health Office.

The discrepancy is not only in the death toll. There are mismatches in the number of total infections, district-wise deaths and infections, daily deaths, infection rate and the bed count at Covid-19 isolation units of hospitals.

For how long this has been happening could not be known, but the mismatch was seen in all daily numbers published recently.

However, officials of DGHS and Sylhet Divisional Health Office could not clarify the reason behind the discrepancy.

According to DGHS’s data, published on Thursday, a total of 517 people died in Sylhet district, 106 in Sunamganj, 80 in Habiganj and 122 in Moulvibazar.

But Sylhet Divisional Health Office data shows 574 people died in Sylhet district, 55 in Sunamganj, 36 in Habiganj, 61 in Moulvibazar and 35 at Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital.

DGHS data shows that a total of 42,975 people got infected till Thursday morning, while Divisional Health Office data says the number is 43,461.

According to DGHS data, 26,729 people got infected in Sylhet district, 5,003 in Sunamganj, 5,226 in Habiganj and 6,017 in Moulvibazar.

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## M’singh hospital overrun with patients



PHOTO: COLLECTED



MMCH simply has no more space for the incessant rush of Covid patients. Despite repeated extensions to its Covid unit, it still operates beyond capacity, and even had to put up a sign spelling out the situation.

MD AMINUL ISLAM, M’SINGH

“No vacant beds available for Covid-19 patients at ICU and Covid wards” -- reads the sign hanging in front of Mymensingh Medical College Hospital’s (MMCH) emergency department.

With the number of Covid-19 patients on the rise, the hospital has been struggling to tackle the situation for quite some time now.

Hospital authorities recently increased the number of Covid beds from 210 to 500, but this still wasn’t enough. As of yesterday, the number of admitted patients at the hospital was 580. Unable to find an empty bed, many patients were

seen being treated on the floor.

In the last 24 hours till 8am yesterday, 30 people died at the hospital. Of them, 16 died of Covid-19, while 14 had Covid symptoms, said Dr Mohiuddin Khan Moon, focal person of MMCH corona unit.

Besides, the hospital’s ICU beds remain at capacity due to the onrush of critical patients, said MMCH deputy director Dr Md Wayezuddin Farazi.

Though the number of ICU beds has increased from 20 to 25 after an industrialist from Bhaluka donated five beds on August 1, the number is still inadequate to deal with the situation.

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### NARCOTICS CASES

## Piyasha, Mou remanded again

COURT CORRESPONDENT

Model and former TV presenter Faria Mahbub Piyasha and model Mariam Akhter Mou were placed on remand in four narcotics cases yesterday.

Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Rajesh Chowdhury placed Piyasha on a two-day fresh remand after Investigation Officer Abdul Latif, a CID inspector, produced her before the court in a case filed with Gulshan Police Station, court sources said.

She was also placed on a six-day remand after two investigators submitted a 17-day remand prayer in two cases filed with Bhatara and Khilkhet police stations.

Meanwhile, Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Satyabrata Sikder placed Mou on a four-day remand after IO Probir Kumar Ghosh and also a CID inspector, produced her before the court in a case filed with Mohammadpur Police Station.

Piyasha and Mou were produced before the courts on completion of their three-day remand in two narcotics cases yesterday.

Detectives on August 1 arrested Piyasha from her Baridhara residence, while Mou was arrested from her Mohammadpur residence.

They also seized 780 yaba tablets and foreign liquor from Piyasha while 750 yaba pills and 12 bottles of foreign liquor were recovered from Mou’s residence.

## Want to work closely with Bangladesh

Says newly-elected Iranian president

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Newly-elected Iranian President Ibrahim Raisi wants to work closely with Bangladesh for mutual benefits of the two countries.

He made the remark when State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shahriar Alam called on him after taking part in the swearing-in ceremony on August 5.

This is the first time any Bangladesh delegation is attending the Iranian president’s swearing-in ceremony. Shahriar led a three-member Bangladesh delegation to Iran on August 3. He later paid a courtesy call on Raisi.

During the meeting, Raisi appreciated Bangladesh for hosting more than one million Rohingyas.

## Weekend sees quieter day

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Although the government extended the ongoing lockdown for another five days till August 10 to curb the spread of coronavirus, it seemed to have little to no effect on people as many were out on the street yesterday.

However, the number of vehicles and people was lower compared to the previous days as both public and private offices were closed.

There were fewer private cars, but many motorcycles were seen plying the streets, some of them rented on ride-sharing basis, though informally as ride-sharing apps remain paused. Many rickshaws were seen running on VIP roads.

Law enforcers were seen checking

vehicles randomly at major city points.

However, not all who came out were wearing masks. “It is tough to wear a mask while pulling a rickshaw under the sun,” said Anowar, a rickshaw-puller at Gulistan.

His passenger Md Sadeque also did not wear a mask. Asked, he said he has it in his pocket and only temporary took it off.

The scenario across different localities of Dhaka resembled a regular weekend with less traffic and people thronging markets to buy their daily essentials.

“We have come out from home to do some shopping as it feels like it’s [lockdown] been relaxed a bit,” said Nazmul Hossain a resident of Distillery Road in Gandaria, who was seen along with his six-year-old daughter.



Curiosity is ageless, the drive to be aware can be a never-ending pursuit. This veteran’s body may be on the decline, his eyesight may be giving up on him, but with sheer spirit he found a way to read his daily newspaper. By cupping his hand, he scopes into the lines, holding the pose until his heart is content. This photo was taken around 11am yesterday in Paltan area.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

## NEWS IN brief

### Teen stabbed to death in Kishoreganj

OUR CORRESPONDENT, M’singh

A teenager was stabbed to death allegedly by a youth over a trivial matter in Kishoreganj town on Thursday night.

Joy (16), son of Joyнал Abedin from the town’s Harua area, was a ninth-grader.

He borrowed a cellphone from one Fahim (20), son of Adam Bepari, on Monday, said OC Md Abu Bakar Siddiq of Kishoreganj Sadar Police Station, quoting locals.

However, Joy allegedly refused to return the phone.

On Thursday evening, Fahim found Joy in the area and asked for the mobile, leading to an altercation. At one stage, Fahim stabbed him. Joy succumbed to his injuries at Mymensingh Medical College Hospital, said the OC.

They arrested Fahim early yesterday, he said, adding that Joy’s father filed a case in this regard.

### CJ constitutes 12 HC benches for virtual hearing

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain yesterday constituted 12 separate High Court benches for virtually hearing and disposing of cases for five working days next week.

The benches will perform judicial functions from tomorrow, but they cannot hear anticipatory bail petitions.

Of the benches, nine are divisional (two judges) bench and three are single (one judge) bench, according to a notification issued by the chief justice.

A full bench of the Appellate Division headed by the CJ will conduct judicial functions virtually, says another notification by Supreme Court Registrar General Ali Akbar.

Earlier on Thursday, the chief justice at a full court meeting of the judges decided to run the virtual court functions across the country in a limited scale to deal with urgent cases till August 12 due to the ongoing lockdown.

### Two sisters, cousin drown in Rangpur

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Two sisters and their cousin drowned in the river Jamuneswari in Badarganj upazila of Rangpur on Thursday.

The deceased were identified as Rubina Akter (16) and Rabeya Akter (10), daughters of Rabiul Islam from Osmanpur village; and their cousin Sadia Akter (11), daughter of Saidul Islam.

Family said the three drowned while they were bathing in the river. At that time, there was heavy current.

Locals rescued and took them to the upazila health complex, where they were declared dead. Dr AHM Sanaul Haque said the three were brought dead.