

# Fresh fish or *shutki*?

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**The shutki roundup**  
Other than that, people like having shutki of freshwater fishes such as rui, katla, puti, taki, shol, mola, dhela, tengra, bain, gochi, shrimp, etc. Among the shutkis made from saltwater fishes, only laitta may be the one that is affordable for the general public. Rupchanda, folichanda, lalpowa, chhuri, lakkha, jatka, choukka, guijja can all be turned into shutki. In the winter, when the lakes and canals dry up, people catch fish in bulk and prepare shutki from them.

**Not forgetting nona ilish**  
The shutki that is made from ilish has a special name – nona ilish. Nona ilish is used in all sorts of delicious dishes, which is why it's a favourite for Bengalis, home and abroad. To make nona ilish, the gills,

**No matter how much some people might be put off by shutki, it's actually quite expensive. The most expensive shutki are the ones made from lakkha and rupchanda fish. A kilogram of good quality rupchanda shutki can go for anywhere between Tk 3,000 to Tk 4,000, and lakkha shutki goes for between Tk 4,000 to Tk 5,000. Chhuri shutki is sold between Tk 800 to Tk 1,200. The prices in Dhaka are usually much higher than those in Chattogram or Cox's Bazar. The cheaper shutki is the mixed variety of different kinds of fishes.**

intestines, and any remaining eggs are first removed before coating the fish with a mixture of salt and turmeric. Then its mouth is tightly bound with a bit of rope to make it airtight, and it is kept like this for 20-25 days to produce nona ilish.

Nona ilish bhortha with steaming hot rice, nona ilish with aubergine, nona ilish wrapped in leaves, nona ilish with pumpkin and gourd greens and even nona ilish curry with vegetables – they all make delightful dishes. To preserve nona ilish year around, they can be kept in freezers. It is said that shutki has higher calcium and mineral content compared to fresh fish. But it's not clear how much of the nutritional value remains after the

cooking process.

**Nappi in the hill tracts**  
Nappi is a favourite among the communities of the hill tracts. Peoples make use of nappi to elevate the taste of their dishes. This is just another form of chepa shutki. Members of the Rakhine community in Cox's Bazar, Kutubdia and Maheshkhali usually produce nappi, which has the intense aromas of saltwater shrimp and other small fish. It includes some other ingredients as well. Even though it has an intense smell, those in the hill tracts believe it is second to none when it comes to elevating the flavours in a dish.

Nappi is wrapped in leaves from a banana tree and burned until it's hard before being applied to dishes. It can also be mixed with water and directly used in cooking. Other than the three districts in the hill tracts, nappi is highly valued in Chattogram, Barisal, Barguna, and Patuakhali. Every month, nappi is being exported across the border through Teknaf and the Chittagong Hill Tracts to India and Myanmar. In various restaurants in Thailand and even Indonesia and Sri Lanka, shutki items like nappi are being served.

**The preparations of shutki**  
All these flavours of shutki rely on the different regional cooking methods to be able to express themselves fully. In some regions, they like having a brothy curry of shutki made from bigger fishes. Some people like a drier curry made with tomatoes. Aubergines, kochu, and potatoes are common in preparations of shutki. But shutki dishes across the board must be spicy. People in the northern regions have less shutki than people in the south, hence there is a smaller variety of preparations as well.

There are few hotels and restaurants in this country that don't serve some form of shutki. In the winter, shutki bhuna is sold with bhapa pitha and chittoi pitha on the streets of Dhaka. Those who don't want the sweet and coconutty taste love eating pitha with shutki, coriander or mustard paste.

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