

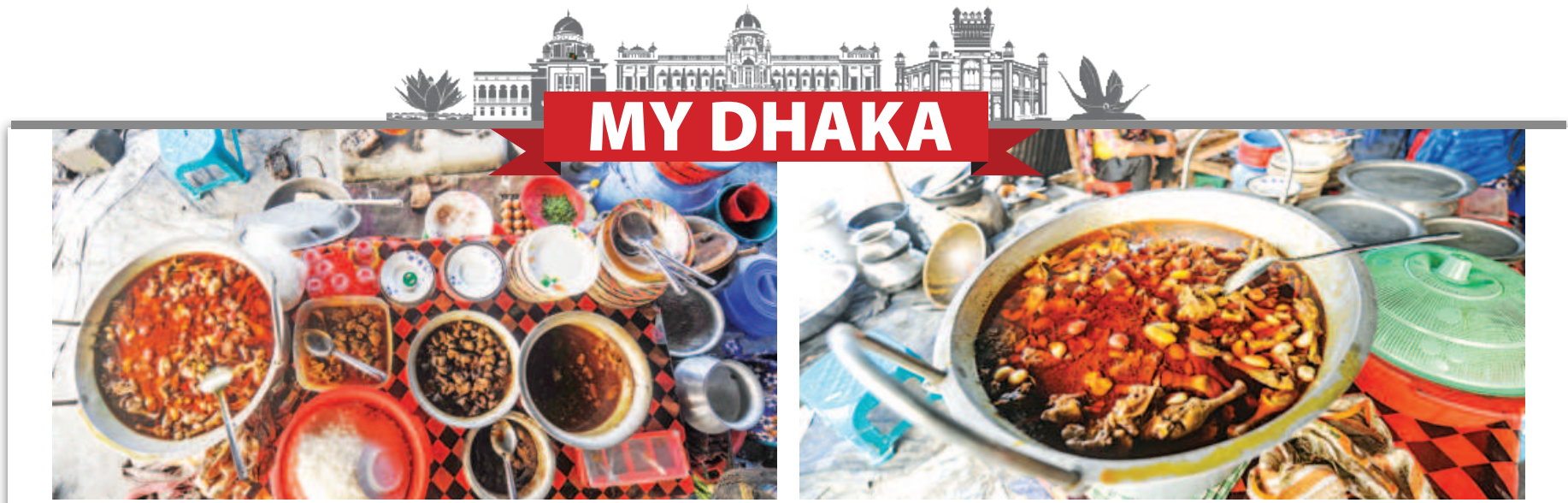


PHOTO: SHADAB SHAHROKH HAI

Why wait for winter? Dive into Dhaka’s dazzling duck delights!

RBR

It is duck season, period. Even if winter is nowhere to be seen or felt, the local kitchen markets are quacking up a fat duck show to tease our cravings.

Md Shujon, a 30-year-old poultry trader who owns Apon Broiler in Uttara kitchen market, said, “Waterfowls like ducks and geese are naturally fatty and have the presence of fat in their muscles and skin, which helps keep them warm while in water, and during winter. This is the only reason why winter is called duck season.”

In Dhaka markets, there are two distinct duck categories, one from the commercial duck meat farms or chash-er-hash, as known locally. The other is the free-range local deshi hash.

“I get my stock load from Fulbaria in Mymensingh, where the local women raise 20-30 ducks and chickens in their homestead pens. They let them loose

in the morning to feed themselves,” Shujon explains.

Since ducks are natural foragers, they can find food like worms, slugs, roots, frogs, insects, snails, fish, plants, and crustaceans in the pond on their own. This natural feed makes them hardy. At the same time, ducks on the farms are fed farm feed or broiler feed, which gives their meat a tad too much softness. Our deshi palate desires the free-range local fat ducks of winter.

However, people opt for the grass-fed geese or raj hash, which are selling between Tk 700 to Tk 800 per kilogramme in kitchen markets in Dhaka. However, keep in mind, the prices vary daily. One such

duck can weigh almost 4kg and can feed a group of 20 people.

Interestingly, come November, Dhaka streets are swarming with pop-up stalls selling chittoi pitha, which is practically a steamed rice cake, and duck curry. Every year,

there is a new addition to the pitha condiment menu, spilling out of the regular mustard, chilli, or dry fish paste. For more than a few years or so, hash bhuna, which is a Bengali winter red curry of duck dunked in mustard oil and cooked in assorted spices and coconut milk, has become an exotic side dish to the bland chittoi and is found by the roadside on chilly evenings.

Mehdi and his mother Rozina have

a makeshift food stall in Neela Market, situated in Bholanathpur, Sector 1, Purbachal New Town, Dhaka. Mehdi’s sister Shilpi runs a separate shack with the same menu. They make chapti (which is like a savoury crepe), chittoi, and hash bhuna.

“On any given Friday, we prepare a curry of 15 to 18 ducks to cater to our customers,” Mehdi reports, adding that it has become a mass favourite street food now. Just last Friday, he sold Tk 25,000 worth of this delicacy.

There are tens of such food stalls, each offering its specialty to the menu by extending it to fried tripe, offal, and kebabs. Neela market is accessible from the Purbachal Expressway and weekenders from Dhaka need to cross the Balu Bridge to access this very happening street food haven. And like a cherry on top, they have sweet shops offering hot roshogolla, and laal mohan.



Democracy

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able to stay with you expressing my differences,” said Ali Riaz, also a distinguished professor of Illinois State University in the US.

The political analyst also spoke strongly about ensuring accountability of political parties and changing the political culture to build the country in line with public aspirations.

Law Adviser Asif Nazrul said there are two types of democracy – minimum democracy and ideal democracy.

“If we want an ideal democracy, we’ll have to carry out some reforms,” he said, adding that every institution has been destroyed by Sheikh Hasina.

He recalled the sacrifice of the victims of the July uprising, and said their sacrifice meant that a mere election is not enough. “We need to ensure that the judiciary remains independent, opposition parties play their due roles in parliament and no prime minister can become fascist.”

He said he does not believe that so many people sacrificed their lives just for a minimum democracy. “We will have to implement some reforms to reflect public expectations for an ideal democracy.”

He called for patience and unity, and said while criticism of the government is welcome, the critics also need to offer solutions.

Explaining the situation behind the oath-taking of the interim government under the existing constitution, Asif Nazrul said that in the first few tumultuous days after Hasina’s fall, no one questioned the process of oath-taking, and no one spoke about forming a “revolutionary government”. “Perhaps the situation wasn’t like that at the time. Situation did not allow [us] to make a well-thought-out decision. If this decision to go along the constitutional line was wrong, then the constitutional path is wrong for everyone,” he added.

Political analyst Zahed Ur Rahman, also a member of the Electoral Reform Commission, however, said a minimum democracy should be ensured first to march towards an ideal democracy over time.

“We will have to leave utopian thoughts. We’ll have to march forward with pragmatic thoughts,” he said, and warned against setting the expectation too high.

Unama Fatima, spokesperson of the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement, criticised the government for being in a “very weak position.”

(Full story online)

Sheikh clan’s lust for duty-free cars

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Uddin (Sheikh Rubel) and Sheikh Belal Uddin (Sheikh Babu).

Of them, Sheikh Jewel was the MP of Khulna-2 and Sheikh Helal of Bagerhat-1. Sheikh Sharhan Naser Tonmoy (Sheikh Tonmoy), the son of Sheikh Helal, was added to this close circle after being elected MP from a Bagerhat constituency in 2018.

In practice, the five brothers did not have much sway over the party decisions.

What they had was the identity that they were Hasina’s paternal cousins bearing the weighty Sheikh name – enough for them to lord over the southwestern parts of the country, especially Jashore, Khulna, Bagerhat, Satkhira and Jhenaidah.

They were key to securing party tickets and hence used this influence to extract as many favours as possible from MP hopefuls, including the benefits afforded to MPs.

Besides, the locals had a strong belief that the royal family had a specific quota at their disposal and wielded significant influence when

it came to recruitment to government jobs, transfer and tenders of development works of those districts. The Daily Star has learnt from local AL leaders.

This trend developed over a decade as every AL nomination seeker for three to four districts of the southwestern parts was under the impression that without satisfying that ‘royal family’, party nomination is next to impossible for them, they said.

For some nomination seekers who were not prominent themselves, showering the royals with gifts was the custom and handing over the duty-free car was the unspoken rule. Some of the MPs did not even see their brand-new sports utility vehicles but had to pay for registration, fitness certificates and taxes.

“I just signed the form. I never even saw my car. But I paid all the taxes for the years,” a former MP of a Khulna constituency told The Daily Star, wishing anonymity as they have not abandoned the hopes of becoming a lawmaker someday.

He does not know where the vehicle is at present and if it is still intact.

“I don’t know whether it has been burned in the tumult since August 5. Now, I am really not sure if I should even pay the taxes for the SUV,” he added.

But with the royals hiding safely in India and away from public outrage, one hapless MP is at a loss over what to do with the taxes and payments since they don’t even know whether those cars are still running in the first place.

His predecessor from the same constituency, who was an MP from 2014–2018, was luckier.

He had used his duty-free SUV for just a day before he had to hand it over to the royal and sign a post-dated deed of sale as MPs are allowed to sell their vehicles within five years of import, according to local sources.

It was almost the same for another MP of the 2018–2024 government from an adjacent district.

The former lawmaker, who had previously held a top position in AL’s student wing, had pledged to give his duty-free SUV but could not get enough time to

import a car and duly wet the royal beaks.

According to parliament members, the extended Sheikh clan typically started communications with the potential MP aspirants from Jashore, Khulna, Bagerhat, Satkhira and Jhenaidah well before the elections.

Aspirants also sought the support of the royals to lock in the nomination.

The former MPs said the royal family members were powerful and it was not difficult for them to find who Hasina had picked for each constituency.

In reality, the royals had little influence within the party but pretended to have substantial sway in the decision-making process about the nominations.

But they would pounce on the chosen MPs for gifts that included their duty-free cars as soon as Hasina, also the AL president, had made her decision.

Sometimes, there were miscommunications.

For instance, before the January election, one royal communicated with the wrong aspirant since their names were rather similar.

One was Sheikh Rashedul Islam and the other was

Rashiduzzaman Morol for Khulna-6 constituency.

“They had mistaken one name for another,” two AL leaders of that district told the Daily Star while recounting the anecdote.

One of the Sheikh family members had settled with Rashedul Islam as his possibility was higher than Rashiduzzaman, according to sources.

But Hasina gave her nod to Rashiduzzaman, which was revealed on November 26.

This left Rashedul in a spot of mortification as he was sure of his candidacy given the lavish gifts he furnished to the royal.

The royal though quickly swooped in on the AL nominee and claimed his token ‘gift’.

The winning MP duly obliged and made his commitment to satisfy the royal family much before the election, according to a close associate of the immediate past MP.

The former MP, however, could not get enough time to import his vehicle.

The Daily Star could not reach the royals for comment.

Two families filed separate general diaries about their missing members.

THE HUMAN TOLL

Every two or three days, Amena walks from her home to the factory gate and keeps looking at the building, as though it were her son and brother’s grave. “What else is there to do?” asks the grieving mother.

Asma Khatun, a resident of the Borabo area, said she lost three members of her family: her husband Sujan Mia, 28, sister-in-law Mafia Begum, 30, and brother-in-law Ratan Mia, 35.

“I can’t bear to look at my children’s faces.”

Rafiur Rabbi, senior vice-president of Narayanganj Nagorik Committee, said, “It is definitely a failure of this government that a proper report on missing persons has not been released. They cannot shirk their responsibility. They should have been more responsible in this regard.”

BNP won’t sit idle if polls not held in reasonable time Says Goyeshwar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP standing committee member Goyeshwar Chandra Roy yesterday said he does not oppose the ban on Chhatra League but posed the question as to what his own party would do if it was banned.

During a discussion at the Jatiya Press Club, Goyeshwar warned that the BNP leaders and activists would not sit idle if the next national election was not held within a reasonable time, reports UNB.

“We want the people who own the country to elect their representatives to form a parliament. We want formation of the next government with peoples’ votes cast in a free, fair and impartial election. This was the main point of the revolution,” he said.

The BNP leader said the nation has entrusted the interim government with the responsibility to hold the next general election to restore the people’s voting rights.

He said his party will give the government a reasonable time for holding the next parliamentary polls. “Once that time is over, the BNP under the leadership of Tarique Rahman will certainly not sit at home. We will take necessary actions based on reality in the future.”

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Hasina has not resigned: Nanak

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Awami League leader Jahangir Kabir Nanak has claimed Sheikh Hasina is still the lawful prime minister of the country, and she has not submitted any resignation letter.

Nanak, a presidium member of the party, made the claim in a live video on his verified Facebook page at 8:23pm yesterday.

He described the interim government led by Professor Muhammad Yunus as “illegal, unconstitutional, and a government of usurpers”.

In the 10:52 minute video, Nanak said that Hasina had not submitted any written resignation letter. “This means Sheikh Hasina is still the legal prime minister of Bangladesh.”

He accused the interim government of establishing a “fascist regime that is undermining democracy in Bangladesh”.

“A few militants and misguided youths have forced judges to resign by holding them hostage. Police stations are being besieged and law enforcers are being attacked. A culture of anarchy, chaos, and looting across every sector has been introduced,” he said.

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Decision only

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The next day, Law Adviser Asif Nazrul said the president lied, and it was akin to misconduct. He questioned the president’s mental capacity to serve.

Later, the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement demanded the removal of the president.

On Tuesday, several hundred protesters, under the banners of Raktim July 2024 and Shadhinota-Sharbobhoumotto Rokkha Committee, attempted to break through the security barriers in front of the Bangabhaban.

After a meeting between a BNP delegation and Prof Yunus on Wednesday, the party said a vacancy in the president’s post at this moment would create a constitutional vacuum, which “the nation does not want”.

Meanwhile, the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement and the Jatiya Nagorik Committee at a press briefing yesterday evening called for national unity for the scrapping of the 1972 constitution and the removal of the president.

POSSIBLE BAN ON AL?

Replying to a question about banning the Awami League, Rizwana said there were no discussions in this regard at yesterday’s meeting.

“The language of the movement and our language should not be the same.”

At the briefing, Mahfuj Alam, special assistant to the chief adviser, said, “We’ve received proposals from political parties [on

banning the AL]. The government is considering it like any other issue.

“It’s about dialogue. It’s about the consensus of the political parties. The government will decide on the matter after discussions with all the parties.”

BAN ON BCL

Rizwana said the reason behind banning Chhatra League was clearly stated in the gazette, adding that the media reported that BCL activists, wearing helmets and police uniforms, were involved attacking protesters.

BCL played the roles of goons during all student movements since the 2018 road safety movement.

“People in responsible positions had said the Chhatra League was enough to punish the protesters. It [the AL student wing] was used to suppress the movement.

“Another reason for banning them [BCL] was that they did not stop even after the July genocide,” Rizwana said.

“None can forget the killing of Abrar Fahad and Biswajit. There’s no scope for the government to sit and watch the activities of a terrorist organisation.”

Mahfuj said BCL is now a banned organisation.

“There are legal barriers against publicising anything regarding Chhatra League. Those of you who are in the media should take note of this so that you don’t play any role in publicising propaganda of the terrorist organisation.”

Those who’re threatening

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the interim government believes in the freedom of the mass media.

The ministry further said it would take legal action against those involved if any such incident occurs.

Meanwhile, Mahfuj Alam,

special assistant to the chief adviser, at a press conference in the Foreign Service Academy, yesterday said the government will not tolerate any attack on the freedom of expression. “Legal action will be taken against those who attempt such activities.”

Correction

In the story headlined “The plot thickens over the call for president to quit” of yesterday’s issue on the front page, Law Adviser Asif Nazrul was quoted as saying, “Nothing specific. We have said everyone should be careful so that no new constitutional or political crisis is created in the country. If anyone wants to do that, we will face it together.”

In fact, it was BNP standing committee member Nazrul Islam Khan who had said that. We regret the error.