



PROXY EATERIES OF OFFICE CANTEENS

The pulse of Dhaka's CORPORATE LUNCHTIME

JANNATUL BUSHRA

If you ever happen to walk past any busy corporate neighbourhood in Dhaka during lunchtime, you are in for quite a sight!

Suited-up CEOs and managers, standing on the sidewalk, casually sipping tea with their executives. Why? Because nothing unites the ranks like the desperate need to escape the monotony of office canteen food.

From steaming plates of tchhari to comforting khichuri, they're all on a mission to find something—anything—that doesn't taste like yesterday's reheated regret.

Whether it's the cosy tea stalls of Motijheel, the biryani houses in Karwan Bazar, or the budget-friendly spots in Mohakhali, these proxy canteens serve as unofficial extensions of Dhaka's workplaces.

"For me, it's not just about food; it's about escaping the office walls. Our entire team comes here almost every day to catch up over a quick meal," says Ahsan Kabir, a mid-level executive working in a financial firm in Banani, while pointing at Star Kabab.

"Our office canteen food is like a broken record of blandness," quips Tanisha Rahman, an HR professional in Tejgaon, adding, "But on this corner of the road, we get to try something new almost every day, and the prices don't burn a hole in our pockets!"

While many offices have in-house

canteens, a significant number of employees prefer the bustling roadside eateries, small cafes, and budget-friendly restaurants nearby, which we are referring to as 'proxy eateries'. For many, these humble eateries are the Goldilocks zone between outrageously pricey fine dining and the endlessly repetitive office meals.

However, lunchtime at these eateries isn't just about eating; it's a daily ritual where colleagues catch up, teams brainstorm, and unexpected connections are made over plates of khichuri and chicken curry.

Conversations flow as easily as the steaming cups of tea, turning casual chats into fresh ideas, workplace friendships, and even future business ventures.

"I actually met my business partner at one of these spots in Banani," says Shamsul Alam, the founder of a start-up.

"Back then, we worked at different companies, but after enough lunch breaks spent sharing ideas, we decided to start something together," he shared.

Many of these small restaurants operate in tight spaces, with kitchens that might not meet ideal sanitation standards. Still, regular customers seem to turn a blind eye as long as the food remains delicious, affordable and



healthy enough to not call in sick the next day.

"There have been times when we complained about hygiene, but honestly, the food here is too good to resist.

We just make sure to pick places that at least maintain basic cleanliness," says Mehedi Hasan, an IT professional.

Meanwhile, these eateries are not just places to eat; they are hubs of corporate gossip. Employees vent their frustrations about difficult bosses, talk about office politics, and share industry rumours over their meals. The restaurant workers, who hear these conversations daily, are often well-

informed about the inner workings of the surrounding offices.

"You'd be surprised how much we know about the managers and executives of these offices," laughs Kamal, a waiter at a popular coffee shop in Gulshan.

"People come here, order their food, and then start complaining about their bosses. The CEOs eat here standing! If we ever wrote a book, it would be a bestseller!"

These eateries do more than serve food. They serve a space where ideas are born, friendships are strengthened, and corporate life finds a moment of solace amidst deadlines and emails.

Complaint filed

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They also submitted 84 First Information Reports (FIRs) filed over the killings and injuries to "BNP members and supporters" during the mass uprising.

Newspaper clippings, audio and video footage, and list of 848 names were also submitted, Salaudinn told reporters.

The complaint mentioned the names of deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina, former home minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal, ex-law minister Anisul Haq, and 500 other named and many other unnamed individuals as accused.

It said the crimes were committed to wipe out the BNP.

Earlier, on January 9, BNP lodged two complaints with the International Crimes Tribunal about the "extrajudicial killings of its 2,276 leaders and activists" and 153 incidents of enforced disappearance from 2008 to August 5, 2024.

Shab-e-Barat

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Ramadan. It falls on the 15th night of Sha'ban, the eighth month of the Islamic calendar.

The Islamic Foundation (IF) has chalked out programmes at the Baitul Mukarram National Mosque in the capital, an IF press release said.

The IF will hold waz (religious sermons), doa mahfils, special prayers, recitation from the Holy Quran and Hamd-Naat at Baitul Mukarram National Mosque this evening.

Religious Affairs Adviser Dr AFM Khalid Hossain will deliver an Islamic sermon at the Baitul Mukarram Mosque highlighting the significance of Shab-e-Barat around 6:30pm.

Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus issued a message yesterday greeting all Muslims of the country and elsewhere across the world on the occasion.

On this day, a huge number of devotees visit the nearest graveyards and offer special doa and munajat seeking eternal peace for the departed souls of their near and dear ones.

People also distribute money, food, and sweet among the poor and destitute.

Modi brings tariff

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administration of Trump's predecessor, Joe Biden.

Before the Trump meeting, Modi said he had first held a "very good" one-on-one meeting with tech billionaire Musk, who has launched an aggressive effort as Trump's right-hand man to overhaul the federal bureaucracy.

The Indian premier posted pictures of himself shaking hands with the beaming SpaceX and Tesla tycoon in front of US and Indian flags, with several children on Musk's side of the room, and Indian officials on the other.

"We discussed various issues, including those he is passionate about such as space, mobility, technology and innovation," Modi said on Musk's X social network, adding that he had spoken about "India's efforts towards reform."

Yesterday morning, Modi met with newly elected director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard after landing in Washington, DC.

BNP, Jamaat on collision course

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It also cited a strong disagreement among political parties regarding the proportional representation system.

Fakhru yesterday said that holding local polls before the national election would push the country further into instability.

"The sooner the [national] election is held, the easier politics will become. The people will return to a stable situation," he said at a press briefing at the BNP chairperson's Gulshan office.

He said the election is crucial for two reasons. "Firstly, for restoring stability, and secondly, for improving governance in the country, which is currently facing significant challenges."

Fakhru also expressed concerns over the state of education at universities and colleges, saying, "It is very difficult to address these issues without an elected government."

Yesterday, Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus, now in Dubai, said the national election could be held in December this year.

Late last year, he had hinted the polls could be in late 2025 or mid 2026, after which the crack in BNP-Jamaat relationship started becoming more visible.

The BNP and its allies had been saying they want the national election

with minimal reforms done so that the elected government can carry out all other reforms. They have also been pushing for the polls to be held in the middle of this year.

The Jamaat has been demanding polls after necessary reforms and without any hurry.

When Yunus on January 8 said they were simultaneously preparing for national and local body elections, it pushed the parties even further apart.

After a BNP delegation met Yunus on Monday, Fakhru told the press that the government assured the party of working to hold the national election by December this year. "We're making it clear, as we did in the past, there will be no election before the national polls."

Jamaat Ameer Shafiqur Rahman at a rally in Sylhet that day said, "Fundamental reforms are necessary before the election. Without implementing some basic reforms, a fair election will not be possible. If an election is held under the current circumstances, it will be an election genocide. We do not want that. We want elections to be held only after a conducive environment is established."

Yesterday, the Jamaat delegation met the EC even though it is no longer a registered political party. Not being

registered with the EC renders the Jamaat unable to run in elections.

Parvar said their appeal to get their registration restored was pending with a court. He hoped they would get justice.

The four-party alliance, including the BNP and Jamaat, was formed in 1999 to strengthen the movement against the then Awami League-led government.

In the 2001 election, the BNP-led alliance won a landslide, and two top Jamaat leaders were made cabinet members.

But the alliance fared poorly in the 2008 election.

In 2012, it became a 20-party combine as several other parties joined in.

The next year, the HC declared Jamaat's registration with the EC illegal on grounds that some provisions of the Jamaat charter went against the country's constitution and election laws.

In the face of widespread criticism for its ties with the Jamaat, which opposed the Liberation War and had sided with Pakistan, the BNP had been keeping a distance from the Islamist party for the past few years.

The 20-party alliance dissolved in December 2022 after the BNP asked its allies not to use the name of the alliance.

National polls probably this December

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Conference Venue. Yunus is currently visiting the United Arab Emirates to attend the summit.

In response to a query, Yunus said that some of the interim government's priorities include ensuring law and order and rebuilding the country, society, and institutions, which he said had completely failed under the previous autocratic government led by Sheikh Hasina.

To rebuild the country, the government is going through a process of reforms. It established 15 reform commissions focusing on law and order, police, the constitution, the election system, and other areas, he said.

"These commissions are reporting back with their suggestions and recommendations on necessary changes. Now, we have what we call a consensus-building commission. We will go to the political parties and so on, see which are the recommendations all agree."

"So that we take that as a charter and then implement an important election," Yunus said.

Earlier on December 16, in a televised address to the nation, Yunus said that the next general election could be held either at the end of this year or in the first half of next year, depending on the reforms political parties agree to.

Major political parties, including the BNP and its allies, have said they want

the national election with minimal reforms. They believe it is possible to hold the next polls by the middle of this year.

The Jamaat-e-Islami favours national polls after necessary reforms but without any hurry. The Jatiya Nagorik Committee also supports national polls after reforms based on the reports of the commissions.

Asked about any intention to continue holding a leadership position after the election, Yunus said, "I made it very clear. When my job is done, hand over the responsibility to the elected government. I go back to what I enjoy doing most and this is what I believe in my life. I want to continue with that."

Yunus said that his government took power at a time when everything, including the economy and the administration, fell apart. Billions of dollars were taken away from the banking system. So, the government's job was to rebuild the banking system and the economy.

"We are trying to get this [laundered] money back. It's a very complicated procedure," he said.

The interim government had broad international support and everybody wanted to support the rebuilding of Bangladesh, the chief adviser said.

"We want to build a new Bangladesh. The old Bangladesh is completely corrupt. It was corruption-ridden."

Yunus also said he was relieved that the Office of the United Nations High

Hasina bore command responsibility

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"The way the system was set up — the military, police and paramilitary forces were all under the [former] prime minister," he said, adding that the senior political leadership was fully involved and had complete knowledge of everything happening on the ground.

"It has to be investigated what the individual roles and responsibilities were, but it's evident that this was a coordinated, systematic response to the protests."

Alleging the politicisation of the police forces, he said, "A reform process going forward would include separating policing from politics."

The OHCHR report on the July uprising says security forces and law enforcement agencies were under the direct control of Hasina and the former home affairs minister with "no institutionalised parliamentary or independent oversight."

It called the brutal crackdown on protesters "crimes against humanity" and said that with Hasina's central role in the chain of command established, she too can be accused of

those crimes.

"OHCHR has reasonable grounds to believe that the crimes against humanity of murder, torture, imprisonment and infliction of other inhumane acts have taken place, as part of a widespread and systematic attack against protesters and other civilians seen as potentially joining or supporting the protests, in furtherance of the former Government's policy to violently suppress the protests to ensure its continuation in power."

"It would appear that a significant number of the killings by State security forces and Awami League supporters would amount to the crime against humanity of murder, as set forth in Article 7 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court," said the report.

Article 7 of the Rome Statute states that crimes against humanity require a "widespread or systematic attack directed against a civilian population, with the perpetrator knowing that the conduct was part of, or intended for it to be part of, the attack."

Bangladesh is a signatory to the statute.

2nd phase of Biswa Ijtema

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they should use alternative routes via Mohakhali-Bijoy Sarani-Mirpur-Gabtol, according to a DMP press release.

Additionally, inter-district buses, trucks, and heavy vehicles have been advised to avoid Abdullahpur and Dhour Bridge intersections, instead using routes through Mohakhali-Bijoy Sarani Gabtol.

Vehicles from northern districts via Nabinagar, Baipail, and Ashulia should avoid Kamarpara/Abdullahpur crossings and opt for Savar Gabtol or Dhour Bridge-Mirpur Beribadh routes.

For vehicles arriving in Dhaka via Airport Road, a U-turn near Radisson

Send Hasina back for trial

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"It has been proven that she is a fascist. She has committed oppression, torture, and genocide in this country," he added.

The BNP leader further said, "We are calling upon the Indian government today to immediately return her [Hasina] and her accomplices to Bangladesh and hand her over to the government for trial. This is our expectation."

Responding to the OHCHR's recommendation against banning political parties, Fakhru said, "We have made it clear that the people will decide. The people will decide

UN report will be used as evidence in ICT trials

Says Chief Prosecutor Tajul Islam

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The chief prosecutor of the International Crimes Tribunal has said the UN Human Rights Commission's report on the July massacre will be used as an irrefutable piece of evidence for trials of crimes against humanity.

"There is no basic difference between the OHCHR report and the evidence found by the ICT investigation agency," Mohammad Tajul Islam told reporters at his office yesterday.

"The UN report on the July-August killings indicates that the Awami League government launched a wide-spread and systematic attack to annihilate student protesters. This is a clear and strong piece of evidence of crimes against humanity," he said.

The UN report makes it clear that the Awami League, Chhatra League, Jubo League, and different security forces followed the plans and direction of then prime minister Sheikh Hasina, AL general secretary Obaidul Quader, former

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Make sure law enforcers adhere to the rule of law

HRW urges govt

STAR REPORT

Human Rights Watch has urged Bangladesh to ensure that law enforcement agencies act neutrally and respect the rule of law to prosecute political violence.

The New York-based rights group issued a statement yesterday, a day after the United Nations unveiled its findings on serious human rights violations by the security forces in their brutal response to the 2024 student-led mass uprising.

Citing the UN report, HRW mentioned that law enforcement agencies, including the police, border guards, the Rapid Action Battalion, and intelligence services, were involved in extrajudicial killings, indiscriminate firing, mass arrests, and torture during the crackdown.

The UN report estimates that up to 1,400 people were killed between July 1 and August 15, 2024, with the vast majority shot dead by security forces.

The interim government, led by Nobel laureate

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