

MY DHAKA

DHAKA'S CULINARY STREET PERFORMERS

Live cooking stations captivate the city

RBR

Food prepared on the streets is nothing new in Dhaka. Darul Kabab of yester-Dhaka saw various kebabs on skewers, or seekh as it is called in Bangla, being grilled over an open fire or coal embers.

At least for me, this 1975 classic eatery, situated on top of a dabba or sink pond, introduced the experience of live cooking stations, and had awed me as a child.

And now, again in 2025 Dhaka, I was awestruck when I saw Tanim, a lanky lad in a black apron, rolling out pizza dough in front of Lalbagh Fort. His custom-made cart was unique in having a type of wood-fire deck oven, with personalised pizza sliders. But what got my attention was his confidence in his trade of making pizzas in a live station by the street.

Reserved in showing off his pizza-flipping skill, he had sausages, mozzarella balls, tomato puree, and his special pizza sauce along with a box full of mushrooms, black olives, and capscums. Even shakers of oregano were all conveniently stored in his neat cart.



"My best-seller is the 12-inch Cheese Blast pizza, which is Tk 599," Tanim says, without taking his eyes off the BBQ pizza order he was preparing.

He sells 30 pizzas from 6:00pm to 9:00pm. I could see regulars placing orders for their favourite take-out boxes. Youngsters jumped off their rickshaws, giving high-fives and going through his menu card, while others



PHOTO: STAR, COLLECTED

waited patiently on the stools near the cart for their orders to arrive.

"I have such carts in the Paribagh and Bangla Motor area as well. I have been in this business for the last seven years or so. And all my carts are running successfully," says Tanim.

"What I like is his focused attention in making the pizza in front of you and flipping it inside the oven," says Emdad, a bystander attracted by the fancy act of live cooking.

A few yards from Tanim's cart, was another pop-up stall offering pizza toasts, grilled on big iron fry-pans. This toast is a slice of a pizza but cut in squares like toast.

The street-food businesses are all the rage now, with ventures going for dishes and menus that are not exactly street food per se.

Julekha, an expert of Bangladeshi cuisine, sits in Lamatia from 6:00pm to almost 10:00pm with her mouth-watering vegetable labra, which is a slow-cooked seasonal vegetable dish. She adds her personal touch by throwing in some raw brown peanuts and a dollop of clarified butter. Her off the cuff menu offers Nolen-gur-payesh, a rice pudding made with jaggery, and Alu-r-Dal, a potato stew that is a famous recipe from Rangpur. She serves these with freshly rolled out and deep-fried luchi, a sort of fried flatbread.

Puffed up and piping hot luchi and labra is a quintessential Bengali dish. What is remarkable is that this weekend Bengali breakfast is easily available on a roadside cart, called Bistro on the Go.

Cooking in front of a crowd in an al fresco arrangement has its share of gimmicks and perks, and Dhaka streets are full of such live stations right after the sun sets, adding a sort of animated joy to the street food genre.

AL must be eradicated, not just banned

Says Adviser Asif Mahmud

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Youth and Sports Adviser Asif Mahmud Shojib Bhuiain yesterday said the Awami League must be eradicated politically and ideologically from Bangladesh.

He said this must be done through a ban following legal and social processes, such as a truth commission or precedents from other countries.

"The Awami League should not only be banned but also politically eradicated from Bangladesh. This is my personal stance. Now, discussion may take place on how it will be implemented. There are precedents of this in various countries," he wrote in a Facebook post yesterday.

"I have seen my brothers martyred by their [AL men] firing before my eyes. I have been a victim of disappearance; I have seen death up close. It is impossible to even think of the political rehabilitation of Awami League," Asif stated.

He also clarified the statement he made

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Rekha Gupta announced Delhi's new CM

THE HINDU ONLINE

India's Bharatiya Janata Party yesterday announced Rekha Gupta as the leader of the BJP's Delhi legislative party. She will be taking over as the next chief minister of Delhi during the oath-taking ceremony today.

Gupta will be the fourth woman CM of Delhi. Sushma Swaraj, Sheila Dikshit, and Atishi are the other women who have held the post.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah, Chief Ministers from BJP-ruled States, NDA leaders, Union Ministers, and other prominent figures will attend the oath-swearing ceremony today, a party top source told ANI.

A cultural programme featuring music and songs will precede the ceremony.

Around 30,000 guests have been invited to the ceremony. BJP leaders and workers from other states who were deployed for the Delhi Assembly elections have also been invited to the ceremony.

Election schedule likely by Oct

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The EC has to work on most matters with the cooperation of the police, presiding officers and others from the government – there is nothing wrong with it. The question is, what is the government's perspective on the election?

For instance, the previous government was determined to win the last three parliamentary polls at any cost. The first election (held in 2014) took place without the opposition parties, which was followed by an election that became widely known as "the midnight election" (due to ballot papers being stamped the night before the polls). The most recent election featured dummy candidates. Such election models are unheard of anywhere in the world. Such polls were not held even during Ershad's regime. The Deputy Commissioners appointed individuals from the Awami League and the Chhatra League as presiding officers.

Star: Has public trust been restored in the EC now?

MSH: People's trust has not yet been restored, and it cannot be regained overnight, especially considering the irregularities that occurred in the elections over the past decade. Therefore, I believe a lack of trust still persists, and restoring it remains the biggest challenge.

I would like to request the EC not to view their responsibilities as merely bureaucratic – they are extremely difficult tasks. When we were in the EC, regardless of our performance, people at least had some trust in us.

Star: How can the EC regain public trust?

MSH: There is no specific formula for this. Those in charge must understand who they need to communicate with and whom to invite for discussions. They must act independently.

Star: The Electoral Reform Commission has recommended that the delimitation process be carried out by a separate authority. The current EC reacted to it by saying that the move would curb its authority. What is your opinion?

MSH: Delimitation is a highly complex issue. In many countries, it is typically carried out by a separate commission. If the EC were to handle it, political parties might accuse them of bias. However, even if a separate commission handles this issue, it must adhere to the guidelines set by the EC. If implemented properly, I believe it will be a positive initiative.

Star: Now, let's turn to labour issues. What is happening with Beximco's factories?

MSH: The Beximco issue reflects the real situation in Bangladesh. The government has not shut down any factories. These factories are closing because many of these companies operate on bank loans

and subcontracts. Now that the banks are no longer providing loans to them, the factories cannot sustain themselves. Where will the banks get the money to lend when the companies have taken loans and not repaid them? From what we have gathered, around 27,000 workers were employed at Beximco. However, among the Beximco companies that took loans, 16 are untraceable. In other words, loans were taken under these companies' names and worker numbers were reported but these companies do not actually exist. Just from the state-owned Janata Bank, various entities of Beximco have taken loans amounting to Tk 23,000 crore. Can you imagine? If we include loans from other banks, Beximco has borrowed a total of Tk 40,000 crore. The question is, what happened to all that money? There is no clear record.

Star: You previously announced that Beximco's workers would receive their salaries by February.

MSH: According to our calculations, more than Tk 500 crore will be needed to pay their salaries. We have informed the finance division that this money must be provided on humanitarian grounds. At the same time, we are finding ways to create employment opportunities for these workers. The government is not in favour of shutting down any industry and will not take any action that harms workers. The government has so far disbursed Tk 55 crore and Tk 58 crore in two phases to support the workers.

Star: What will happen to the unemployed workers?

MSH: An American company has expressed interest in Beximco's entities and is currently evaluating the possibility of taking over the factories. If they move forward, decisions will be made regarding the bank loans. Besides, a Japanese business group has also shown interest in Beximco and plans to conduct a three-month pilot programme to assess whether the factories can be brought back into operation. If things move in a positive direction, the government will take the necessary steps to keep these industries running. I hope this will prevent the workers from remaining unemployed for long.

Star: If another company takes over, won't there be legal complications?

MSH: The Bangladesh Investment Development Authority is working on these issues.

Star: Companies under the Gazi Group have also suffered losses. What will happen to them?

MSH: No one has come forward regarding Gazi Group. I am not aware of any developments in this regard.

Star: Is the government still providing funds to any factories?

MSH: We had to provide funds to some factories on humanitarian grounds. However, this will not continue indefinitely.

Star: How would you evaluate the first six months of the interim government?

MSH: The greatest achievement of this government is that the state has not failed – it continues to function. For this, the main credit goes to the people of Bangladesh. However, I would have been happier if the situation had improved further. We have seen examples in Iraq and Libya of what happens after a leaderless movement. In Bangladesh, a government collapsed and left the country in the face of a sudden uprising. At that time, there was no opposition party in the parliament to take charge. It was at this critical moment that our government took over. Many even wanted the country to plunge into chaos and some still do. But the people have put their trust in our government.

Star: But people's expectations from this government were very high.

MSH: It took three months just to fully understand the real condition of the state. Banks were looted, reserves were in dire condition and the government faced enormous economic challenges. The law-and-order situation was practically non-existent. Yet, there has been remarkable progress in a short period. The credit for this primarily goes to the people. I am not claiming that the law-and-order situation has reached the desired level. If it had, the army would not have to be deployed outside the cantonments for such a long time. When the government of a country that relies heavily on imports collapses suddenly, there is a real risk of a famine-like situation. But we have started to recover from that. However, elements of the deposed government are still trying to destabilise the country in various ways.

Star: Regardless of the challenges, people still have high expectations from this government.

MSH: There is nothing wrong with that. But our biggest problem is a lack of patience. How can we achieve in six months what was not done in 16 years? We need to understand that.

Star: But people are questioning whether the government is on the right track.

MSH: According to people's expectations, the government's pace would ideally be 80 kilometres per hour. We might be moving at 40-50 kilometres per hour. To reach 80 kilometres per hour, we need to be given time.

Star: What is the progress on the amendment of the labour laws?

MSH: As a signatory to the International Labour Organisation conventions, we are committed to certain reforms. One of the discussions is whether a factory's workers can form a trade union if 15 of them agree. Tripartite discussions are going on among the government, employers and workers on this issue.

Star: Do you think the recent labour unrest in the garment sector will worsen in the future?

MSH: The government is not at all negligent in taking the necessary steps to address workers' problems. However, a vested group is instigating a section of workers to create trouble, which is a major concern.

Star: What is the current situation at the ports?

MSH: There were some initial issues after the uprising, but the situation is stable now. I have visited the ports three times and plan to visit more to ensure that port services improve rapidly. Some containers that have been at the ports for 20 years are still there. I have given instructions to address these issues.

Star: Is there any update on the deep-sea port? Do we need it? Will we be able to operate it? Sri Lanka built two deep-sea ports and then had to lease them to China.

MSH: We absolutely need a deep-sea port. The progress was stalled due to the strategic rivalry between China and India. But now Japan will carry out the project, so that issue has been resolved. We can operate it. Our existing ports are already performing well. Investors from Denmark, Singapore, Saudi Arabia and Dubai are eager to invest in our ports. Saudi Arabia has shown interest in taking full responsibility for Matarbari Port while China is set to build two container terminals in Mongla Port.

Star: Bangladesh's relationship with India appears stable on the surface, but is that truly the case beneath the surface?

MSH: Have we engaged in any conflict with India? Please show me one example. We have consistently spoken about maintaining relations based on equality. Is that a bad thing? The former prime minister herself admitted that Bangladesh has given so much to India that the country will never be able to forget it. Despite that, India did not allow Nepal and Bhutan to use our ports. It is because India values its relationship with the government, not the people of Bangladesh. We all saw how that relationship unfolded over the last 16 years.

Star: The issue of barbed wire fences along the border did not arise in the past. Why is it an issue now?

MSH: The previous government did not raise the issue, so no problem arose. Even when Bangladeshi people were being shot at the border, the Bangladesh government remained silent. Instead, they instructed the BGB to hold flag meetings to recover the bodies. But now, we are speaking up and expressing our concerns. If someone slaps me, I may not punch them, but I will at least slap you back. From our side, I do not see any hostility toward India. They are a big country – why should we seek conflict with them?

Govt going after officials involved

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voting" during the 2018 election would either be made OSD or forced to retire.

A total of 33 DCs were made OSD yesterday. The public administration ministry had earlier made 12 others OSD.

Last night, a senior official of the ministry told this paper that not all officials were equally guilty. A decision has been made to send those into forced retirement who were involved in seriously controversial activities and have served for more than 25 years.

"Those who have not served 25 years would be suspended, and departmental proceedings would be initiated against them. Officials involved in relatively minor controversial activities will be made OSD ... If someone voluntarily admits their wrongdoings and seeks an opportunity for correcting themselves, the government may consider," the official said.

Sources said the ministry may take disciplinary actions against several more officials today upon receiving approval from the president. A notification regarding the officials who would be forced to retire may also be issued.

Zelensky a dictator: Trump

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"It is simply wrong and dangerous to deny President Zelensky his democratic legitimacy," Scholz said.

Zelensky, who met Trump's Ukraine envoy Keith Kellogg in Kyiv yesterday, said he would like Trump's team to have "more truth" about Ukraine, a day after Trump said Ukraine "should never have started" the conflict with Russia.

The Ukrainian leader said Trump's assertion that his approval rating was just 4 percent was Russian disinformation and that any attempt to replace him would fail.

"We have evidence that these figures are being discussed between America and Russia. That is, President Trump ... unfortunately lives in this disinformation space," Zelensky told Ukrainian TV.

In Moscow, Putin said yesterday that Ukraine would not be barred from peace negotiations but success would depend on raising the level of trust

between Moscow and Washington.

Putin, speaking a day after Russia and the US held their first talks on how to end the three-year-old conflict, also said it would take time to set up a summit with Trump, which both men have said they want.

Trump's US policy reversal clashed with allies in the 27-member European Union, whose envoys yesterday agreed on a 16th package of sanctions against Russia, including on aluminium and vessels believed to be carrying sanctioned Russian oil.

The EU's diplomatic service has proposed boosting the bloc's military aid for Ukraine, aiming to show continued support for Kyiv, though no quick decision is expected.

The proposal says the main goals would be to supply at least 1.5 million rounds of large-calibre artillery ammunition, as well as air defence systems, missiles for deep precision strikes, and drones.

Killings at border

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according to sources on both sides.

The BGB delegation is headed by Director General Maj General Mohammad Ashrafuzzaman Siddiqui, while the BSF is led by DG Daljit Singh Chawdhary.

The meeting also discussed the BSF's border fencing.

The Indian force claimed that the already-built single-row fences were "as per the past agreements between the sovereign governments of the two countries, which the BGB should abide by".

In a counter statement, the BGB said that as per the understanding between the two sides, fencing should

be preceded by a "joint survey by border guards of both countries to decide where and how to set up the fences".

The ongoing meeting focused on measures to check cross-border crimes, including the smuggling of Phensedyl, yaba, other narcotics, and arms.

Sources said the overall atmosphere in the meeting was "friendly" and that sensitive bilateral issues were discussed "in a candid manner", even though strong arguments were presented.

The BSF yesterday hosted a dinner for the 14-member BGB delegation.

The summit in New Delhi was shortened to three days from five, and the talks have been "business-like", said sources.