



PHOTO: DURJOY BANGLADESH FOUNDATION

FOOD, ART, AND RESILIENCE

# 'Thil' brings culture, healing to table

RBR

What is hardship food? I had no idea. The thought of what people eat during natural calamities, war, displacement and such, never came to my mind. It is something we do not think about unless we start to live in destitution.

I came to realise this, and the profound impact nature bears during difficult times, while walking through Shankhari Bazar with Nahla Tabbaa, a Jordanian Bangladeshi interdisciplinary artist, chef, and curator.

Durjoy Bangladesh Foundation (DBF) recently hosted Nahla's culinary performance, a rather unique experience in Dhaka.

For Nahla, the grief and anger over the genocide in Gaza left a grave impression, out of which her work, "Thil", came into being.

"Thil manifested into a mythical creature that is both our collective shadow and rage over the injustices," Nahla says.

Thil, the Arabic word for shadow, is an intuitive artistic process and art installation that is iterative. Nahla continues to add contexts and perspectives that plague her mind with each repetition.

"Inside the Belly of the Beast" is another iteration of Thil, acquired by the Durjoy Bangladesh Foundation (DBF). The artist, in this edition of Thil, undertakes a culinary residency, imagining what the insides of such a powerful beast would taste like, while exploring tensions between the urban and the organic, the beautiful and the grotesque.

Nahla is a composed and meditative person by nature, and as a part of her healing, she sought answers in nature, folklore, mythology, and the Quran, exploring seasonal shifts and invasive plants as symbols of resilience, while she conceptualised "Inside the Belly of the Beast" and started working on a menu that was leaved from meals you have during hard times.

"The results are hybrid foods that have emerged from points across Bangladesh's history through famine, partition, and liberation, and my region is also currently experiencing war and famine. The food also celebrates wild and indigenous plants from both regions, and touches upon dishes that straddle trauma and joy. I deeply feel that nature is a witness to human atrocities," Nahla explains.

Nahla took inspiration from seasonal greens found

in Dhaka and twined them with what edibles she carried with her, and came up with a menu where each course was a revelation.

Her spiced ghee candles were a surprise act of talent, as the candle burns, melting the ghee, it turns to a dunk for your shrak bread and zaatar and kishkeh paratha. Her stinging nettle, khubaizeh, helencha shak, kalme shak, soup with alu bhorta gnocchi, gives our alu bhorta a star status.

Ilisha polao stuffed vine leaves, chicken paan with pomegranate molasses, marigold and pumpkin flower tempura with dukkah, was indeed a fusion menu between Bangladeshi and Arabian cuisine.

"It has been a learning experience for us at Durjoy Bangladesh Foundation, helping us realise how the Almighty has created nature to support humanity in different, sometimes adverse, conditions. As an art foundation, you may wonder why we're involved in practices beyond the traditional art forms. We like to challenge the boundaries of art, pushing it beyond conventional media and culinary performances and culinary arts, like Thil: Inside the Belly of the Beast, are very much an art form to celebrate," says Durjoy Rahman, Founder of Durjoy Bangladesh Foundation.

## Ganges treaty renewal: Bangladesh, India to hold expert meeting

### 11-member Bangladeshi team to visit India on March 3

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

Bangladesh and India are set to hold the 86th meeting of the joint committee of technical experts in Kolkata next week and visit Farakka regarding the renewal of the 30-year-old treaty between the two countries on sharing the waters of the Ganges, which is up for renewal in 2026.

An 11-member Bangladeshi delegation led by Muhammad Abul Hossen, member of the Joint River Commission (JRC), is expected to reach Kolkata on March 3 and immediately leave on a two-day visit to the joint observation site on the Ganges at Farakka until March 5 morning.

Thereafter, the delegation is set return to Kolkata for a two-day meeting, under the aegis of the India-Bangladesh Joint River Commission, at the Hyatt Regency hotel in Kolkata on March 6-7, according to a letter signed by RR Sambharia, senior joint commissioner (flood management).

Talking to The Daily Star this morning, Abul Hossen said they sit once a year to discuss cross-boundary rivers.

The Ganges is one of 54 rivers shared by India and Bangladesh, and long-standing differences over its water-sharing were resolved with the signing of the Ganga Waters Treaty in December 1996 by then Indian Prime Minister HD Deve Gowda and his then Bangladeshi counterpart Sheikh Hasina.

The treaty is due for renewal in 2026, and during ousted prime minister Hasina's last official visit to New Delhi in June 2024, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced that the two sides had decided to begin technical negotiations for its renewal.

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee is expected to play a crucial role in the efforts to renew the Ganges water-sharing treaty, even as she continues to oppose the Teesta River water-sharing treaty, despite India and Bangladesh having agreed on its text in 2011.

Banerjee had last year sent a letter to Modi, contending that the move to renew the Ganga Waters Treaty was "unilateral" and that the West Bengal government was not consulted. However, federal Indian government officials pointed out that an internal committee set up by the Jal Shakti Ministry in July 2023 included representatives from the Bihar and West Bengal governments -- the two states through which the Ganges flows before entering Bangladesh.

West Bengal nominated its representative to the internal committee in August 2023 and participated in three of the panel's four meetings.

## NCP to finalise charter, organogram soon

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It is also yet to finalise the size of the central convening committee and its members. However, the total size of the party would be more than 200.

At its official launch event on Friday, the party leaders announced a partial 60-member convening committee and said they would publish the full committee of the central unit through a press release.

The NCP leaders said as the holy month of Ramadan is starting today they will voice their demands to keep the prices of essentials within the purchasing ability of the lower and middle-class people.

"We have just launched the party. After holding several meetings and discussions in the party forum, we will finalise the programmes," a joint convener of the NCP told The Daily Star on condition of anonymity.

The party leaders will conduct organisational visits in different districts and upazilas. They will visit the families of those martyred in the July uprising and engage with the mass people to understand their pulse.

In their Facebook post, Hasnat Abdullah, the chief organiser (Southern Region), and Sarjis Alam, the chief organiser (Northern Region), wrote that they would soon meet the people of these two regions.

The independent, sovereign Bangladesh will soon witness the anti-fascist and pro-Bangladeshi student populace in the districts.

Apart from establishing its organisational framework, the NCP will continue to push for an election to the constituent assembly to formulate a new constitution.

"The new party is committed to rebuilding state institutions with a focus on democratic principles and justice. Bangladesh has not been presented as a political nation. We aspire to present it as a new political nation," Nasiruddin Patwary, the NCP chief organiser, told The Daily Star.

The NCP was floated on Friday in front of the parliament building in Dhaka with Nahid as the convener and Akhter Hossen as the member secretary.

Nahid stepped down from the interim government to take the reins of the party.

In his introductory speech, Nahid affirmed that the NCP will be a truly democratic, egalitarian and people-centred political force.

## Local polls not feasible by Dec

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He told reporters in Dhamrai that the commission's main focus was on the parliamentary election.

"We have not received any request from the government regarding local elections," he added.

### POLITICAL PARTIES AT ODDS

The BNP and its allies want the national polls before local ones while the Jamaat and the Jatiya Nagorik Committee want the opposite.

Mia Golam Parwar, secretary general of Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami, told a rally on Friday that to reduce public sufferings, local government elections should come before the national polls.

A day earlier, BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman, said, "When the government is failing to control the prices of essentials or maintain law and order, why is it trying to further complicate the situation...? People do not understand this."

The democracy-loving citizens, he added, believe that holding the local elections before the national one would open ways for the rehabilitation of "accomplices of the fugitive autocrat...," and those responsible for genocide, money laundering, and mafia activities.

On February 18, LGRD Adviser Asif Mahmud told reporters that it was

his personal opinion that holding the local government polls before the national election would be a good idea because the local government institutions could play an important role in organising a fair national election.

"But the final decision will come from the government after discussions with political parties," he added.

Meanwhile, the Local Government Reform Commission, in its preliminary report released on February 22, said it would be possible to hold local polls by June this year. It also said elections to all local government institutions could be conducted under a single schedule to save time and costs.

About this, EC Anwarul had said at the time that the commission was not officially aware of the recommendations.

In the last two weeks of February, the BNP, Jamaat, the Left Democratic Alliance, and several other political parties met the Election Commission separately.

At least eight political leaders, speaking at the first meeting of the National Consensus Commission on February 15, which was presided over by Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus, gave opinions against local

government polls before the national ones. Some warned that such elections could lead to "bloodshed and chaos".

EC officials also pointed out that the interim government removed the representatives of all local government bodies, except the union parishad, and appointed administrators to do the tasks of mayors and chairmen.

As a result, elections will be needed in 11 city corporations, 61 zila parishads, 494 upazila parishad, and 331 municipalities.

The last union parishad elections were held between June 21, 2021, and February 7, 2022. Many of the 4,575 union parishad representatives are currently absconding.

No local elections were held under interim or caretaker governments in 1990, 1996, and 2001.

Similarly, no union, upazila, or municipality elections were held between 2007 and 2009 under the caretaker government. However, elections to Sylhet, Khulna, Barishal, and Rajshahi city corporations were conducted on August 4, 2008.

The third upazila elections took place in 2009, almost 19 years after the previous election in 1990, which was held during the HM Ershad regime.

## Holy month of Ramadan begins

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Last night, the National Moon Sighting Committee announced that the new crescent moon was sighted in the Bangladesh sky.

This means that Shab-e-Qadr, the night of divine blessing and benediction, will be observed in the country on the night of March 27, the committee also announced.

The government has already set Ramadan office hours from 9:00am to 3:30pm for all government, semi-government, autonomous, and semi-autonomous organisations. There will be a break from 1:15pm to 1:30pm for Zohr prayers.

### CA GREETS NATION

Chief Adviser Dr Muhammad Yunus greeted the people of the country and all Muslims across the world on the eve of Ramadan.

"On the occasion of the holy month of Ramadan, I extend my heartfelt greetings to the people of the country and the Muslim Ummah," he said in a message.

Stating that the soul is purified

through self-restraint during this holy month of fasting and restraint, the chief adviser said, "It is a wonderful opportunity to earn the blessings, closeness, and forgiveness of Almighty Allah."

Dr Yunus mentioned that fasting plays a unique role in fostering mutual sympathy, harmony and brotherhood between the rich and the poor.

Inspired by the teachings of Ramadan, he urged all to avoid indulgence, jealousy, hatred, disorder and conflict and to protect the sanctity of Ramadan by practicing self-control, patience, and restraint in all aspects of life.

In addition to fasting, Dr Yunus encouraged all to recite the Quran and engage in prayers and worship throughout the month.

"May Almighty Allah grant us the strength to implement the teachings of Ramadan in our national life," he added.

Similarly, different political parties also greeted the nation on the eve of Ramadan.

## Govt taking steps to keep market stable

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of edible oil to ensure adequate supply.

"We are expecting that the supply of edible oil will improve in the coming days...we hope its price will fall and remain at a tolerable level."

The press secretary said that the Ministry of Commerce, the National Board of Revenue, the Tariff Commission, and the Bangladesh Bank are working collectively to keep prices in check.

"Thanks to a combined effort, we can already say that many essential products have become more affordable. The government remains committed to making further improvements during Ramadan."

### PRICES SHOW MIXED TRENDS

A price comparison report issued by the CA's Press Wing yesterday showed a mixed trend in food prices, with some staples becoming more affordable while others continue to get expensive.

According to data from the Trading Corporation of Bangladesh (TCB) and local kitchen markets, prices of key food items such as rice,

flour, and eggs have declined since January, while fish, chicken, and some vegetables have seen a rise.

Compared to Ramadan 2024, several essential goods remain cheaper, but concerns remain over volatility in the market.

### PRICE OF STAPLES FALLS

Rice prices have decreased marginally, with Najirshail and Miniket varieties dropping by Tk 2 to sell at Tk 80 per kg in February.

Non-brand wheat flour (atta) fell by Tk 5 to sell for Tk 40 per kg, while packaged flour held steady at Tk 50 per kg.

Lentils and pulses, including imported and local chickpeas, saw reductions between Tk 1 and Tk 14 per kg.

Egg prices have also declined by Tk 5 per dozen compared to January, now selling at Tk 125 per dozen.

Non-brand sugar has dropped by Tk 3 to Tk 120 per kg, while packaged sugar remains unchanged at Tk 125 per kg.

In a significant price cut, onions, potatoes, and green chillies have

become considerably cheaper.

Locally produced onions are now Tk 40 per kg, more than halving from last year's Ramadan prices.

Green chillies, both local and imported, have also plummeted by Tk 50 per kg compared to March 2024.

### FISH, POULTRY DEARER

While some staples have become more affordable, fish prices have surged.

Large pangas fish now selling for Tk 250 per kg saw a sharp increase of Tk 32 per kg in February, while medium-sized tilapia now selling for Tk 190 per kg rose by Tk 37 per kg compared to the previous month.

Large koi fish recorded the biggest jump, with a Tk 48 per kg increase since January.

Broiler chicken prices showed mixed trends.

The price of large broiler chickens at Tk 190 per kg fell by Tk 2.5, but smaller ones at Tk 200 per kg saw a Tk 3 increase.

Meanwhile, the price of the Indian variety of ginger is now Tk 120 per kg, rising by Tk 18.

## Announce polls roadmap this month

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democratic forces, will sit and re-determine how we would bring back democracy in the country," he said at a book launch event yesterday.

He went on to urge the chief adviser to grasp the urgency of the matter.

"August 5 didn't happen for the local government election. Some want to benefit from delaying the national election."

Salahuddin criticised the newly announced National Citizen Party's bid for a constituent assembly and a second republic.

"Those are their party declaration -- let it happen when you [the new party] will be able to do so. Those who raise these issues either do not understand the situation or are involved in a conspiracy to prolong the democratic process," he added.

However, in response to a query on the BNP's demand for the election roadmap, Chief Adviser's Press

Secretary Shafiqul Alam said the BNP may be pressing for a specific election date.

"We have already clarified that the roadmap has been provided. The BNP may now be seeking a precise date. We have stated that if political parties agree to proceed with minimal reforms, the election can be held within December this year," he said at a press briefing at the capital's Foreign Service Academy.

If the parties prefer elections after implementing additional reforms, there could be a delay of up to three months.

"However, after April, the Kalbaishakhi (mor'wester) and monsoon rains set in, which would make election logistics more challenging."

About starting dialogues between the National Consensus Commission and political parties, Alam said the discussions will begin very soon.