



MY DHAKA

Glimpses of Dhaka's IFTAR HISTORY

RIDWAN AKRAM

Four centuries ago, the Muslim population of Dhaka was relatively small. However, the arrival of the Mughals precipitated a shift. These individuals brought their own culinary staff, ensuring the availability of familiar fare.

They would partake in various types of bread and kebabs. Naan-taftan, an almond-infused naan roti, was prevalent in the Mughal army camp in Dhaka. Another popular item was shirmal roti, introduced to Dhaka from Agra by Mughal subahdars.

During this period, shirmal was prepared with semolina. These rotis were likely staples of the iftar menu. During winter, Akbari Nankhatai was added to the selection, accompanied by diverse kebabs.

A notable kebab of the era was Parsand's sheek kebab, prepared with substantial portions of meat, later known as suti kebab. Other varieties included mosallam kebab, shami kebab, handi kebab, tika kebab, tash kebab, and various fish kebabs.

Wealthy Muslims of the time partook in approximately 50 distinct dishes!

In 1639, Shah Shuja assumed the position of subahdar of Bengal. During his tenure, 300



PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Shia families arrived in Dhaka, introducing one Khorasan polao. The Mughals also prepared a dish akin to modern-day haleem -- incorporating meat, spices, lemon juice, and wheat.

Beyond savoury dishes, sweet preparations were also popular during the Mughal era.

In the mid-19th century, preparations for Ramadan commenced after Shab-e-Barat. Water vessels were cleaned, and new surahis, clay hookahs, and other items were procured.

These were brought home and scented with perfume.

During hot days, earthenware jugs were used to keep water cool, with rose and keora essences added for fragrance. At

that time, iftar was referred to as "roza kholai", signifying the breaking of the fast with food.

Preparations for iftar began in every household after zuhr prayer.

Women would proceed to the kitchen, where pre-soaked chickpeas and moong dal were prepared. Phuluri was made from the chopped dal, with efforts made to ensure it was served hot during iftar.

There were shorbot mixed with Zamzam water. The shorbot menu included faluda, tokma shorbot, bel shorbot, pomegranate shorbot, and lemon and tamarind shorbot.

Takhse Raihan was a popular variant of tokma shorbot.

After shorbot and dates, the

main iftar meal would begin, with individuals of all ages gathering at the dastarkhan. Various homemade muri dishes, sweet and savoury samosas, raw and fried dals, fruits, onions, and phuluri were procured from the market.

A sweet mixed food called "Golapi Ukhre" was also present, alongside roasted chira, dobhabja, tepipuluri, large mashkalai dal-boot, bakarkhani, and kebabs.

While diverse iftar preparations were made at home, residents of Old Dhaka consistently acquired items from Chawk Bazar. Both the affluent and the less privileged frequented the Chawk. Even in the early 20th century, the notion of iftar market in Dhaka exclusively referred to Chawk Bazar.

However, in the 1940s, the situation began to evolve, with temporary iftar stalls emerging in neighbourhoods due to increased demand.

Following the Partition of 1947, the growth of the middle class in Dhaka led to the incorporation of pitha puli from rural Bengal into iftar.

After the independence of Bangladesh, the scale and diversity of Ramadan and iftar arrangements increased significantly.



Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus alongside family members of this year's Independence Award winners at the Osmani Memorial Auditorium in the capital yesterday.

PHOTO: PID

7 EMINENT INDIVIDUALS RECEIVE THE INDEPENDENCE DAY AWARD OR INDEPENDENCE AWARD 2025 UNB, DHAKA CHIEF ADVISER PROF MUHAMMAD YUNUS YESTERDAY CONFERRED THE INDEPENDENCE AWARD 2025 ON SEVEN INDIVIDUALS, RECOGNISING THEIR GLORIOUS AND OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE NATION. THE CHIEF ADVISER HANDED OVER THE AWARD AT OSMANI MEMORIAL AUDITORIUM. PROF JAMAL NAZRUL ISLAM WAS GIVEN THE AWARD IN SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY CATEGORY WHILE MIR ABDUS SHUKUR AL MAHMUD (POSTHUMOUSLY) IN LITERATURE CATEGORY, NOVERA AHMED (POSTHUMOUSLY) IN CULTURE, SIR FAZLE HASAN ABED (POSTHUMOUSLY) IN SOCIAL SERVICE, MOHAMMAD MAHBUBUL HAQUE KHAN ALIAS AZAM KHAN (POSTHUMOUSLY) IN LIBERATION WAR AND CULTURE, BADRUDDIN MOHAMMAD UMAR IN EDUCATION AND RESEARCH, AND ABRAR FAHAD (POSTHUMOUSLY) FOR HIS ROLE AS A YOUNG PROTESTER. INTERIM GOVERNMENT ADVISERS, THE CHIEFS OF THE ARMY, NAVY, AND AIR FORCE, AND SENIOR GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS WERE PRESENT AT THE CEREMONY CONDUCTED BY CABINET SECRETARY SHEIKH ABDUR RASHID. SPEAKING AT THE FUNCTION, PROF YUNUS SAID, "THE NATION IS PROUD TODAY, BUT IT IS VERY PAINFUL THAT THESE PEOPLE WERE NOT GIVEN THIS RECOGNITION WHEN THEY WERE ALIVE." "WE REMEMBER THEM TODAY WITH GRATITUDE," HE SAID. NOBEL LAUREATE YUNUS SAID THE PEOPLE OF THE COUNTRY ARE DELIGHTED TO HONOUR THEM WITH THIS AWARD DESPITE IT BEING LATE. HE SAID THEIR WORKS WOULD INSPIRE ALL.

From gangster to freedom fighter

FROM PAGE 1

sleeping Bangalees, many fled the city but Nader did not, multiple elderly locals said.

Sensing the situation early in the night, Nader took position on the rooftop of the Isha Brothers building in Bangshal with 8 to 10 of his associates, armed with a revolver and a double-barreled gun. He set up an ambush, waiting for the Pakistan forces, they said.

After midnight, Pakistani soldiers began torching the slums near the mosque at the Rai Sahib Bazar intersection. Then they moved on to set fire to the sawmills of Nayabazar. As soon as their jeeps came within Nader's ambush range, he and his companions opened fire, taking the enemy by surprise. Several Pakistani soldiers were killed in the sudden attack, they added.

However, as the Pakistani forces outnumbered them and were heavily armed, they quickly regained control. The soldiers retaliated with gunfire, but by then, Nader and his men had retreated.

The next morning, on March 26, Nader took his family to safety in Manikganj, and returned to Malitola, ready for the next fight.

No one among Nader's fellow freedom fighters is alive today. Elderly locals said they heard about Nader's incredible bravery from his fellow freedom fighters when they were alive.

Abdul Majid, a resident of Basabari Lane in Tanti Bazar, is one of them.

"At that time, a Bihari named 'Sangram' supplied weapons to Nader's group in exchange for a hefty sum of money. Initially, Nader purchased weapons using his own and his gang members' savings. But as their funds ran out, he started collecting donations from residents of different neighborhoods to buy weapons to fight Pakistani soldiers," he said.

By mid-April, as Peace Committees started forming in various neighborhoods of Dhaka, Nader and his comrades had to restrict their movements for safety.

Several senior residents from Old Dhaka said that towards the end of May, the local Shanti Committee in Armanitola decided to hold a meeting where Khwaja Khairuddin, the convenor of Dhaka's Shanti Committee, would be present.

Nader and his associates planned an attack and bought some weapons from Sangram.

On the scheduled day and time, Nader and his gang members took position near the Armenian Church at Armanitola. However, Sangram and a notorious gangster from Malitola, known as Geda, had already informed the Pakistani army about Nader's plan.

To deceive Nader and his group, the Pakistan military arrived in Armanitola in a microbus instead of a military jeep. Before Nader and his group could react, the Pakistani soldiers in plain clothes surrounded them from three sides and launched an attack, locals said, citing Nader's fellow freedom fighters.

Nader and his comrades retaliated, but by then, it was too late—the Pakistani soldiers had already surrounded them from all directions. Seeing this, Nader decided to retreat while firing back, along with his comrades. In the process, a bullet struck Nader's leg. By that time, most of his fellow freedom fighters had managed

to reach safety.

"After being shot in the right leg, Nader crawled into Shabistan Cinema Hall. Then he climbed over a wall and escaped into the neighbouring house called 'Baghwa Bari'" said Munna Mia, 72, a resident of Malitola and Nader's cousin.

In a subsequent raid, the Pakistani

troops along with local razakars interrogated the residents of the house who handed over Nader out of fear. He was then taken to the Dhaka Cantonment, Munna said.

"There, the Pakistan army tortured him and then killed him," he added, citing Nader's fellow freedom fighters.

These freedom fighters include Mohammad Ali from Alu Bazar, Sadek from Siddik Bazar, Chorui Saeed from Golok Pal Lane, Shamsu alias Cenghis Khan from Mirpur, Abdulla from Shyambazar, among others, locals said.

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90, a resident of Kalta Bazar, told The Daily Star, "I had a good acquaintance with a Pakistan army officer. He once told me—if they had four more boys like Nader, the country would have gained independence much earlier."

The scene of Armanitola, where Nader fought his last battle against and was eventually captured, has changed completely.

During a recent visit, The Daily Star found that the Bagh Bari no longer exists. Shabistan, the cinema hall, is also gone. In its place, several residential-commercial buildings, including Prottyasha Plaza, now stand tall.

RISE OF NADER

Nader Mia was born in Malitola, but no one could say when. His father was a court clerk, and Nader was his eldest son.

He studied at Jagannath College and was involved with student politics.

However, before completing college, Nader became involved with local gangs.

One of his closest associates was Dulu Gunda, who later became widely known as the famous actor Faruk. In an interview nine years ago on Somoy TV, Faruk himself revealed that between 1967 to 1971, there were 37 cases filed against him.

But Monowara's happiness did not last long. Just two years after their marriage, war broke out and Nader joined the war, sending his wife to Manikganj. Monowara

was five months into her pregnancy then.

She received the news of her husband's death while in Manikganj.

Abdullah Bulu, Nader and Mary's only child, was born during the war.

After the war, Monowara returned to Malitola with her infant son, and later shifted to his brother's house in Keraniganj. Abdullah now runs a small business in Shyambazar and lives in Keraniganj.

"When people tell me, 'Your father was

like this, he did such courageous things,' I can't hold back my tears. My father gave

his life for this country, but he was never

truly honored," Abdullah said, with his

mother by his side.

During the Non Cooperation Movement in March 1971, shopkeepers in ration stores started hoarding goods to sell at higher prices, leading to a severe shortage of essential products. When the war broke out, Pakistani forces looted these ration shops. In this dire situation, Nader and his gang members broke into a ration store on Golak Pal Lane and distributed the stockpiled wheat, sugar, and rice among the local people, according to multiple elderly residents of Malitola.

"Nader may have had a bad reputation outside our neighborhood, but within our community, he had immense respect for the elders. Words cannot describe the level of honor he showed them. He also cared deeply for us younger ones," said Mohammad Habib, a businessman from Shyambazar, who spent his childhood and teenage years in Malitola.

SHAHEED NADER'S FAMILY

Today, the only sign of his contribution is an old, dust-covered signboard: "Shaheed Nader Smriti Sangsad, Established in 1972."

Locals said one of Nader's brothers had established the club after independence, but it no longer functions. No photographs of Nader could be found there.

Locals said Nader's brother Harun was also killed during the war. Their remaining family members still live in Malitola. Two of his brothers are alive, but they declined to talk about Nader. Nader's wife and son now live in Keraniganj.

'LOVE' IN TIMES OF UPRISING

During the turbulent days of the mass uprising of 1969, all of Dhaka was in turmoil. In such an intense time, Nader went to visit his friend Habil's house in Shahjahanpur.

There, he became fond of a girl named Mary, whose father passed away and whose mother lived in Barishal. Habil's parents were raising her.

Having fallen in love with her, Nader directly proposed marriage to Habil's parents but they refused. Later that night, Nader and Mary eloped, got married and returned to Malitola. Initially, Nader's parents did not accept the marriage, but after a few days, they changed their mind.

After the marriage, Nader changed Mary's name to Monowara Akter.

Speaking to The Daily Star, Monowara, 70, said, "Everything was going well. Though people outside called him a gangster, he had a kind heart. He was always out all day. But he loved me very much."

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