



EID PREPARATIONS IN DHAKA

The spice, the hustle, and the feast

RBR

The last two days before the grand Eid day are packed with frenzied fuss about anything and everything.

From buying a pair of leather slippers at the last moment from Elephant Road on Chand Raat or to airing out the old panjabi, starching and ironing it, (just in case you didn't go for a new one).

The lady of the house, along with her entourage, is the busiest of all because now is the time for all the month-long effort taken to fall in place — festival grocery shopping, getting fresh notes for Eid salami, booking henna artist, the salon girls, and barbers — everything must be done within the next 48 hours.

I love this hullabaloo, even though Eid rituals are now passé for me. Nevertheless, I put a meek effort into



setting the menu, which is a chore, only because I love spice and condiment shopping. Getting the right ingredients is another hurdle to cross, especially during festivals, because you do not want to compromise on the quality of spices and condiments; they make or break the dishes.

Spices and seasoning are used to enhance and temper flavours of any rich curry or Mughal recipe, and to cut the rawness of poultry, red meat, and fish, whereas condiments are add-ons and garnishes used while serving.

A tedious search for Rabri, which is a creamy clotted cream or malai, that goes so well with your vermicelli zarda, is a must. A dollop of Rabri with crunchy nuts on top of your delightful dessert of vermicelli, sautéed in ghee

and sweetened with sugar, cardamom, and saffron is the absolute Eid favourite. If you are not making your own Rabri from scratch, the city's sweet shops like Premium Sweets are selling it for around Tk 900 a kilo.

The almonds, pistachios, and sultanas, the fragrant green cardamom, the mild spicy rolled-out cinnamon, and nutmeg, to availing the best quality poppyseeds are tasks to be reckoned with. Karwan Bazar grocers stock them from Kaptan Bazar or Chawk Bazar, and sell them at a reasonable price. Like a hundred grams of poppyseed are sold for Tk 280, whereas the local grocery store in your lane sells it for Tk 450. They score their stock from Tongi, and there is the fear that half your poppy seed in those hundred grams is suji

or semolina. Poppyseed paste, along with cashews and almonds, is essential for any korma or braised with yoghurt gravy.

I found that mildly earthy-scented green cardamoms are pricey; Tk 550 to Tk 600 for a hundred grams is consistent in Karwan Bazar and any grocery store in your locale. Mace is Tk 350, while a single nutmeg is Tk 10. The one ingredient that you cannot do without is raisins; the spice markets are flooded with black sultanas and golden raisins; and all less than Tk 100. These prices are for hundred grams only. Aloo Bukhara or plums for your biryani cost Tk 80 or more, and maybe five or six pieces make for a hundred grams.

Gulshan 1 DCC market, Old Dhaka spice lanes, and Karwan Bazar are the best options to shop for Eid spices, seasonings, and condiments. Though all stores are now in a 'no-bargain' mode, open markets ensure quality and are fairly priced compared to superstores and local grocery stores.

Festival cooking for Eid-ul-Fitr is always elaborate; you opt for the best Dhaka cuisine with Mughal influence. Rich menus boasting lamb kababs, mutton rezala, koftas with tomato gravy, biryani, kheer, and firni have you spoilt for choices. I emphasised local taste because hands down, Dhaka's kacchi biryani recipe is the best in the sub-continent, for which, you need to get your hands on the best spices.

Plating the dishes, serving, and setting the table are all part of the grand showdown, and Eid lunch is where you shine the most.

Eid Mubarak to all My Dhaka readers.

BNP to take to streets again if people's interests are in jeopardy
Says Fakhrul

UNB, Dhaka

Warning of a plot to deprive people of their right to vote, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir yesterday said their party will once again take to the streets if the interests of the party and people are in jeopardy.

"We are not on the streets right now. We are going to people with iftar items and Eid gifts and standing by them in their joy and sorrow. But, if any obstacle arises against the interests of the party and people, we, the BNP, will take to the streets once again," he said while distributing Eid gifts among the poor in Beraid area of Badda.

Fakhrul called upon the people of the country to prepare for a movement, as a plot, both from within and outside the country, is underway to deprive people of their right to vote and delay the elections.

"We will not allow this to happen," he said.

He said over the past 15 years, their party leaders and activists have endured serious repression in their fight for the restoration of people's voting rights.

The BNP leader also mentioned that the people of the country were freed from Sheikh Hasina's "monstrous and fascist" regime on August 5 after 36 days of movement and the united efforts of political parties and students.

He said the interim government, led by Prof Muhammad Yunus, was formed with the primary responsibility of holding a national election by creating a level-playing field winin a short time.

"But whenever we discuss elections, many claim that the BNP only raises the issue of elections. It is natural for us to do so, as we have fought for that very cause," he observed.



Myanmar quake toll soars past 1,600

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with me, he might have escaped like me," she told AFP.

Elsewhere in Mandalay, AFP journalists saw dozens of people preparing to bed down for the night in the streets, preferring to sleep in the open rather than take the risk in quake-damaged buildings.

This was the biggest quake to hit Myanmar in decades, according to geologists, and the tremors were powerful enough to severely damage buildings across Bangkok, hundreds of kilometres (miles) away from the epicentre.

AFP journalists saw a centuries-old Buddhist pagoda in Mandalay that had been reduced to rubble.

"The monastery also collapsed. One monk died, some people were injured, we pulled out some people and took them to the hospital," said a soldier at a nearby checkpoint.

There are reports of damage to Mandalay Airport, which would complicate relief efforts in a country whose rescue services and healthcare system have already been ravaged by four years of civil war sparked by a military coup in 2021.

Junta chief Min Aung Hlaing

issued an exceptionally rare appeal for international aid on Friday, indicating the severity of the calamity. Previous military governments have shunned foreign assistance, even after major natural disasters.

The US Geological Service's predictive modelling estimated Myanmar's death toll could exceed 10,000 and losses could exceed the country's annual economic output.

The country declared a state of emergency across the six worst-affected regions after the quake, and at one major hospital in the capital, Naypyidaw, medics were forced to treat the wounded in the open air.

Offers of foreign assistance began coming in, with President Donald Trump pledging US help.

An initial aid delivery arrived from India, while China said it sent more than 80 rescuers to Myanmar and pledged \$13.8 million in emergency assistance.

Aid agencies have warned that Myanmar is unprepared to deal with a disaster of this magnitude. Some 3.5 million people were displaced by the raging civil war, many at risk of hunger, even before the quake struck.

Across the border in Bangkok,

rescuers were continuing to work yesterday as a second night drew in, searching for survivors trapped when a 30-storey skyscraper under construction collapsed.

Bangkok governor Chadchart Sittipunt told reporters that eight people had been confirmed dead in the building collapse so far, while at least eight others were rescued.

But he said 79 were still unaccounted for at the building, close to the Chatuchak weekend market that is a magnet for tourists.

"I can't describe how I feel — it happened in the blink of an eye," said construction worker Khin Aung, who escaped the collapse.

"All my friends and my brother were in the building when it collapsed. I don't have any words to say."

Sniffer dogs and thermal imaging drones were deployed to seek signs of life in the rubble — Chadchart said that the locations of about 30 people could be ascertained by radar.

Bangkok city authorities said they will deploy more than 100 engineers to inspect buildings for safety after receiving over 2,000 reports of damage.

Yunus' China trip may boost trade

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technical assistance.

Besides, around 30 Chinese companies promised to invest around \$1 billion in Bangladesh.

Foreign policy analysts point out that the two countries have yet to sign any agreement on Mongla port and acquisition of land for the Chinese Industrial Economic Zone remains incomplete.

"The pledges are fine, but it will take time," says Prof Sk Tawfique M Haque, director at the South Asian Institute of Policy and Governance of North South University.

The engagement with the Chinese businesses, President Xi's promise to encourage businesses to invest in Bangladesh are something that will bring Chinese investments to Bangladesh, he says.

"From that perspective, I would say there is success."

Prof Imtiaz Ahmed, executive director of the Centre for Alternatives, says the Chinese side mentioned the business climate in Bangladesh.

"I think Chinese firms will not invest here until there is a stable government led by a political party. I appreciate the engagement with the Chinese private sector though. It should continue," he says.

M Humayun Kabir, chairman of Bangladesh Enterprise Institute, says one must appreciate the fact that Beijing agreed in principle to start negotiations for a Free Trade Agreement and Investment Agreement with Dhaka.

"Once we have an agreement like

that, we will see substantial Chinese investments and production units here. That will be great for our economy," he says.

In his high-level meetings, Prof Yunus sought budget support, lower interest rates on Chinese loans, and waiver of commitment fees on loans.

The Chinese side spoke positively, but there was nothing concrete, says Prof Imtiaz.

"I don't think China will lower interest rates. But it may make concessions on the repayment period," says Prof Tawfique.

Experts believe China and India can play major roles in solving the Rohingya refugee crisis in Bangladesh. China was also engaged in a tripartite arrangement, which is not functioning now because of the conflict in Myanmar.

In the joint statement, the Chinese side expressed support for Bangladesh and Myanmar in finding a mutually acceptable solution through friendly consultations.

M Humayun Kabir says Bangladesh has been working in various ways to raise funds for Rohingyas, but the Chinese statement does not put much importance on the issue.

"There was no reference to the international conference that the UN is going to organise in New York in September," he says.

China announced that it would establish a hospital in Bangladesh and four hospitals in Kunming would treat Bangladeshis. Humayun sees this as the opening of a new frontier in China-Bangladesh relations.

All the three analysts appreciate the importance that Prof Yunus laid on the river management of Bangladesh.

China has experience and technologies in dredging and cleaning the rivers. This discussion should continue, they say.

Prof Imtiaz says Bangladesh welcomed the participation of Chinese companies in the Teesta River Water Management Project, but the issue is complex.

"There are still debates among hydrologists about the project's efficiency, especially the implications of dredging on the environment. Also, there is a lack of water upstream," he says.

Prof Imtiaz says Bangladesh, India and China need cooperation when it comes to the transboundary rivers.

Humayun Kabir says Bangladesh's mention that it opposes the "Taiwan independence" may raise questions.

"We could have been more careful in phrasing," he says.

Overall, Prof Yunus' visit has a significant symbolic and political value, he adds.

The visit takes place when Bangladesh's relations with India are strained.

Asked if Prof Yunus' visit will affect Bangladesh's relations with India, Prof Imtiaz says Bangladesh's relations with the two countries are separate and should be viewed from that perspective.

"Having relations with one does not mean severing relations with the other," he adds.

Easy ride home

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This time, however, Eid journeys have been relatively smooth, with no major traffic congestion reported on key highways for several days, except in isolated cases.

Yet, many passengers travelling on AC buses — except those run by a few reputed companies — were forced to pay extra due to the absence of a fixed fare for such services and a lack of proper monitoring.

Although the price hike is not as steep for non-AC buses, most private operators, particularly lesser-known companies, are still overcharging passengers ahead of Eid.

On Wednesday, mobile courts of the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority fined nine private bus operators for overcharging and failing to display fare charts.

THE REASONS

Mosharref Hossain, general manager of Hanif Paribahan, said the long holiday is the main reason behind the smoother journeys this time.

A rare nine-day Eid holiday began on Friday, giving people at least three days before Eid, assuming it is observed on Monday. Usually, people get only one day off before Eid.

"We used to spend six to eight hours stuck in traffic when heading to northern destinations. The situation is different this year," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

Additionally, the deployment of army personnel in congestion-prone areas has contributed to the smoother journeys, he said, adding that the phased closure of garment factories was also a key factor.

The staggered closure of garment factories had long been discussed but not properly implemented. As a result, thousands of workers create pressure on vehicles in the industrial belt, bringing traffic to a halt after a single-day factory closure.

This time, it was different. According to information from the Industrial Police yesterday, 4,229 out of 9,695 factories closed by Friday, meaning around 44 percent had shut before Saturday.

Saugatul Alam, officer-in-charge of Savar Highway Police Station, said passenger and vehicle pressure on the road increased yesterday. "However, no traffic jams were reported anywhere."

Our Savar correspondent observed many passengers waiting for vehicles at different bus stands, with some seen travelling on trucks and pickups.

Transport expert Prof Hadiuzzaman also attributed the smoother journey to the long holiday.

He noted that the daily cumulative capacity of road, rail, and launch services is around 7 to 8 lakh people, but these transport modes face 30 lakh to 60 lakh passengers ahead of Eid.

"So, our transport services and infrastructure cannot cope with the demand, resulting in commuters' suffering and risky journeys," he told this correspondent yesterday.

He pointed out that thousands of people take risky bike or truck rides or travel on train and launch rooftops due to the lack of transport.

"There is no option but a long pre-Eid vacation to tackle the pressure," said Prof Hadiuzzaman, also a former director of BUET's Accident Research Institute.

However, he added that long holidays are an ad-hoc measure, stressing that the decentralisation of various facilities from Dhaka to other regions is one of the key permanent solutions to the perennial problem.

Hadiuzzaman, who recently travelled to Bogura, said the SASEC Road Connectivity-2 project authorities had also removed some bottlenecks on the Dhaka-Rangpur Highway, which contributed to smoother journeys.

TRAINS AND LAUNCHES

Most trains have been running on schedule during this year's Eid rush, offering relief to passengers, said Mohiuddin Arif, divisional railway manager (Dhaka) of Bangladesh Railway.

During Eid rushes in past years, many north-bound trains ran late.

Yesterday, except for two intercity ones, all trains left on time from Kamalapur Railway Station, Arif said around 5:00pm.

He noted that Upakul Express was an hour and a half late, while Silkcity Express was delayed by an hour.

Azfar Hossain, director general of Bangladesh Railway, said that apart from the long vacation, strict monitoring and the absence of major rail incidents contributed to the smooth journeys this year.

Due to the long holiday, commuter pressure on railways was relatively lower, allowing trains to maintain their speed and schedule, he told this newspaper yesterday.

Meanwhile, the opening of the double-line Jamuna Railway Bridge earlier this month has cut travel time by 20-30 minutes, helping north-bound trains maintain their schedules, the BR DG added.

However, some trains were seen carrying passengers on rooftops despite the authority's attempts to prevent it.

At Sadarghat Launch Terminal, a larger crowd was observed yesterday, with thousands leaving Dhaka for southern destinations by launch.

A total of 108 launches left the capital on Friday, while 100 had departed by 8:00pm yesterday, said an official of the Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority.

Another 15-20 launches were expected to leave Dhaka last night, he told The Daily Star, requesting anonymity.

Russia captures two more Ukraine villages

AFP, Moscow

Russia yesterday claimed the capture of two villages in eastern and southern Ukraine, pressing ahead with its advance amid stumbling efforts for a ceasefire by US President Donald Trump.

The defence ministry said Moscow's forces captured the village of Shchebraki in the southern Zaporizhzhia region and Panteleimonivka in the eastern Donetsk region.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky meanwhile said Russia had launched more than 170 drones into Ukraine overnight, striking targets in the Dnipropetrovsk, Kyiv, Sumy, Kharkiv, and Khmelnytskyi regions.