



OLD DHAKA'S FOOD TRAIL

A nostalgic gastronomic adventure

RBR

I went to the Lalbagh area last Saturday to finalise an interesting project for My Dhaka readers (stay tuned), but this business meet-and-greet was unlike any I had ever attended or conducted. It was exactly the “Dhakai way” of dealings -- warm-hearted, raucous, and with a table full of delicious food.

Old Dhaka people genuinely have a way of winning your heart through your stomach. A simple cup of milk tea or a glass of chilled lassi with a kabab paratha roll is all you need to melt away.

I was waiting beside the fort gate in the parking lot that was lined with all sorts of snack vendors. The aroma of corn cobs being roasted on a coal fire, and peanuts being fried in a wok full of sand were inviting, but I chose to wait in front of an “aam shotto” cart.

Aam shotto is a sun dried mango pulp roll mixed with sugar. This mouth-watering tangy snack cart had a line of buyers, waiting to get a pack of either the sweet aam shotto roll, or the sour one with a dash of rock salt and chilli flakes. Jalaluddin, the happy vendor, earns around Tk 800 a day.

But it was the worn-out wooden cash box, which also served Jalaluddin as a cutting board, that stole my heart. I tried in vain to buy it off him, and after a lot of laughs and paper packets full of aam shotto, we exchanged our cell numbers -- with me promising to haunt him till he makes a new one for himself and sells off the old one to me.



PHOTO: STAR

This type of bizarre meets is only possible in the narrow lanes of old Dhaka, where there is no pretence of class hierarchy, and every person is amiable and fun-loving.

Finally, when my mates came, we walked to the Mughal Kabab restaurant at the corner of Horonath Ghosh Road, opposite the pocket gate of the fort, to discuss our business agenda.

Informal and random, this place had the best juicy and tender kababs, done just right -- khiri kabab, beef boti, beef sheekh with rumali roti, and shukha paratha were just simply delightful.

The meal reminded me of a tiny

three-storied kabab place beside the old Central Jail, where the evenings are at full gear, selling scores of orders of chicken tikka, chicken reshmi, mughalai beef sheekh, and parathas being sent down from the third-floor window, tucked in a bucket tied with a rope.

I had the best beef sheekh for just Tk 30 from an unknown roadside stall in Bakshi Bazar. Besides the popular restaurants, old Dhaka boasts tasty and tender kababs in all sorts of hole-in-the-wall restaurants.

I dare to compare the kababs here with Old Delhi, and

believe me, Dhaka's Mughal cuisine recipe should be the only one to follow. The hype that old Delhi kababs enjoy falls flat in front of our old Dhaka kababs.

Kababs, Nihari, biriyani, and chaaps are decadent here in Dhaka. Marinated beef chunks in skewers, slowly roasted in an open coal fire can give any Delhi minced meat sheekh a run for its money.

In my childhood, my grandmother's lavish two-storied mansion in Purana Paltan was right beside Baitul Mukarram masjid, and all those lanes had restaurants lined up. Breakfast during weekends was vegetable labra and paratha, and transparent suji halwa, and evenings were about kabab, paratha rolls, and puri.

Neem shukha or Bakarkhani, and shutli kababs were sold by vendors coming to your doorstep till the 70's. Jhalfrezi, brain masala, and offal kabab were all the rage at Ruchita, a posh eatery in the late 70's at Bangabandhu Avenue. The beef chaap of the Provincial Hotel at the stadium market was considered the supreme treat of the times. These food tales and legacy continue to hold to date, with just the shops relocated deep inside the belly of the old town, rather than being on the fringes of Old Dhaka.



Interpol red notice

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“These applications are filed in connection with allegations that emerge during investigations or through ongoing case proceedings,” he said.

Interpol plays a key role in identifying the locations of fugitives residing abroad, the AIG added.

In November last year, the Chief Prosecutor's Office of the International Crimes Tribunal formally requested the Police Headquarters to seek Interpol's assistance in arresting Sheikh Hasina and others deemed fugitives.

Will hold ‘best election’ in nation’s history

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Guest House Jamuna in Dhaka on Thursday.

ANFREL, a Bangkok-based independent non-governmental organisation comprising members from 18 countries, is dedicated to the advancement of electoral democracy in Asia. It has been actively supporting election observation, democratic reforms, and civic engagement across the region for over two decades.

The ANFREL delegation included Executive Director Brizza Rosales; Consultant for the Bangladesh Elections and Democracy Programme May Butoy; Senior Programme Officer for Campaign and Advocacy Tharindu Abeyrathna; Programme Officer Ayan Rahman Khan; and Programme Associate Afsana Aamey.

During the meeting, ANFREL shared details of its ongoing initiatives in Bangladesh, particularly its commitment to rebuilding independent, citizen-led election observation efforts. The delegation also discussed its activities in conducting stakeholder mapping and needs assessments, aimed at identifying opportunities to strengthen civil society engagement and promote electoral transparency.

ANFREL expressed its appreciation for the opportunity to engage in dialogue with the chief adviser and reaffirmed its commitment to continued collaboration with stakeholders in Bangladesh to support transparent and credible elections.

Since December 16 last year, Prof Yunus on many occasions stated that the next parliamentary election could be held either this December or next June, depending on the extent of reforms implemented by the interim government.

Yunus is spearheading a comprehensive reform agenda aimed at rebuilding key institutions and reshaping national priorities. Six key reform commissions have already submitted their recommendation reports to the government.

A National Consensus Commission, led by the chief adviser, is currently holding discussions with political parties to finalise which recommendations will be implemented.

Eliminate gender disparities in laws

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It further recommended a new law against sexual harassment, based on the 2009 High Court guidelines, ensuring clarity, strength, and reforms in rape laws to guarantee justice that is neutral in terms of gender, age, religion, ethnicity, language, and disability, with victim-friendly trials and clear accountability mechanisms.

The commission proposed amendments to the citizenship law, allowing Bangladeshi women to confer citizenship on their foreign spouses; the enactment of laws to protect victims and witnesses; the upholding of the rights of persons with disabilities; and the inclusion of domestic and sex workers under labour laws without criminalising sex work.

It also recommended the establishment of a permanent and independent Women's Commission to oversee and protect women's rights nationwide, and the restructuring of the National Women and Child Development Council, alongside amendments to its jurisdiction.

The commission urged the restructuring of the women and children's affairs ministry, and the integration of equal rights responsibilities into every ministry through Gender Equality Units, with measures for accountability, gender-sensitive planning, and the monitoring and evaluation of the gender budget.

In November 2024, the government formed the 10-member Women's Affairs Reform Commission with Shireen Parveen Huq, a founding member of Naripokkho, as its chief.

Other members of the commission are Maheen Sultan, senior fellow at the Brac Institute of Governance and Development; Advocate Kamrun Nahar, director of Naripokkho; Fawzia Karim Firoze, senior Supreme Court lawyer and president of the Foundation for Law and Development; Kalpona Akter, president of the Bangladesh Garment and Industrial Workers Federation; Dr Halida Hanum Akhter, women's health expert; Sumaiya Islam, executive director of Bangladesh Nari Sramik Kendra; Nirupa Dewan, former member of the National Human Rights Commission; Ferdousi Sultana Begum, gender and social development expert and former senior social development adviser at the Asian Development Bank; and Nishita Zaman, a student representative.

Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus directed the relevant ministries and divisions to promptly implement the commission's recommendations. He gave the directive after receiving the report at the State Guest House Jamuna yesterday.

“Let the recommendations that can be implemented quickly be carried out through us. Let us, through this work,

set an example for other countries around the world. The women of the world are watching this. They will review it. They will be inspired...”

“This is not just a women's issue; it's a matter of national importance. The report will be printed and distributed. It will be published as a book, like a textbook. It cannot just be shelved as a document; it must be made accessible to people.”

POLITICAL REPRESENTATION

The commission proposed transformative steps to boost women's representation in politics, such as introducing 300 seats for women in the national parliament with direct elections, thereby doubling the current total number of seats to 600.

Shireen Huq acknowledged the scepticism surrounding the proposal. “Although it may seem unrealistic to many, as there is currently no space for 600 people in the parliament chamber considering the country's population, [but] increasing women's representation is crucial.”

The commission's report stated, “If an upper house of parliament is established, 50 percent of the seats should be filled using a ‘zipper system’ -- alternating male and female nominees on party lists to ensure gender parity. The remaining half should be filled with non-partisan representatives, including those from women's movements.”

To ensure women's participation within parties, the commission recommended promoting democratic practices and creating an enabling environment, and formulating regulations to remove social and corruption-related barriers to women's political engagement.

It also strongly suggested that compliance with the provision of 33 percent women's participation in the Representation of the People Order be made mandatory.

At the local government level, each ward should have one general seat and one women's seat for the next three elections as a temporary special measure.

It further recommended establishing a system to ensure that female MPs are accountable to the wider community of women.

LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT

The commission recommended ensuring 24 weeks (six months) of fully paid maternity leave and two weeks of paid paternity leave across all sectors.

It also proposed amending the labour law to replace the term “maternity welfare” with “maternity rights”, prohibit dismissal during pregnancy and maternity leave, and include all necessary related benefits.

The commission called for the formal recognition of domestic and sex workers as labourers under existing labour laws, along with the recognition of women's work in the

informal economy.

To protect female migrant workers and support returnees, the commission urged amendments to existing migration laws, policies, and regulations.

It stressed the need for bilateral agreements and memoranda of understanding with destination countries to ensure safety, dignity, and effective monitoring, including quarterly and annual reporting.

It also recommended finalising and implementing a reintegration policy to facilitate returnee women's access to training, employment, and financial support.

For the next elected government, the commission proposed setting an equal minimum wage for male and female workers across all sectors to eliminate pay disparities. It called for annual revisions of the wage based on global standards and the introduction of policies to ensure a living wage.

OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

To address gender-based violence in public transport, the commission suggested incorporating specific provisions into relevant laws and ensuring their enforcement to guarantee safety and protection against violence and sexual harassment.

Emphasising the need for decentralisation and local-level development, Shireen Huq said, “We believe that only through decentralisation can the voices of grassroots women reach the national level. Those at the centre -- be they policymakers, politicians, or others -- will then be able to hear and respond to their pleas and demands.”

Other notable recommendations include ensuring access to modern, life-oriented education for girls that aligns with the labour market, the inclusion of comprehensive sex education, and efforts to reintegrate school dropouts and victims of child marriage into the education system.

Additionally, the commission recommends setting 18 as the minimum legal age of marriage for girls to prevent adolescent and high-risk pregnancies, and implementing the 2023 High Court directive to control unnecessary Caesarean sections.

It also calls for the revision of the 2013 National Policy on Older Persons to prioritise the health needs of elderly women, with effective monitoring and accountability mechanisms.

Furthermore, a nationwide system should be established to track maternal and neonatal deaths, identify causes, and address service gaps through corrective action.

The commission also urged the introduction of appropriate education for children with special needs and their inclusion in mainstream education.

Ensure youth-led

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With runaway inflation for three years, he said, restoring purchasing power through monetary policy is a priority.

He also emphasised the need to diversify exports beyond garments to sectors like leather, pharmaceuticals, plastics, and electronics. “We are working to attract foreign investment, but unless governance improves and corruption is checked, those efforts won't succeed,” he cautioned.

He described the current administration as transitional and said foundational reforms will allow future governments to build further. “We hope to leave behind positive changes that the next elected government may continue--or the people will demand it,” he said.

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir expressed optimism that the nation is headed toward positive change, saying interim government chief Prof Muhammad Yunus would succeed in resolving political and other challenges.

“We have problems, and these will be resolved. Much progress has already been made. Let us all help him [Yunus], help ourselves, and move forward,” he said.

Fakhrul asserted that the people of Bangladesh--not India, the US, or China--will determine the country's future.

He credited the youth as the driving force behind the nation's democratic and rights-based movements, from the 1952 Language Movement to the July-August uprising of 2024.

He also emphasised that there is no alternative to democracy. “And democracy cannot be imposed; it must be practised. The spaces for this practice must remain open.”

In the second session, Hossain Zillur Rahman, executive chairman of the Power and Participation Research Centre, said marginalised communities must be able to see themselves reflected in the exercise of power.

“Only then will grassroots people feel empowered,” he noted, stressing the need for a balanced distribution of authority within the police and local administrations.

Political analyst Dr Dilara Chowdhury said there can be no real empowerment of women in the country without their participation in policymaking.

“Women in Bangladesh are treated as second-class citizens, which starts from home and continues to the society and the state,” she said.

Without women empowerment, the dream of a discrimination-free Bangladesh would be illusive, she added.

Syeda Rizwana Hasan, adviser to the environment ministry, said the youth must be engaged more to build a new Bangladesh since they are not hesitant or cannot be restrained. “We need to understand the language and expectations of the new generation,” she said.

Anisuzzaman Chowdhury, special assistant to the chief adviser; Jashim Uddin, foreign secretary; Abdul Hannan Chowdhury, NSU vice chancellor; Farah Kabir, ActionAid Bangladesh's country director; and Assaduzzaman Fuad, the AB Party's general secretary, also spoke at the event.

Four students were awarded the Ambassador Serajul Islam Future Leaders Scholarship supported by a grant from the Dr Prabir and Mukul Roy Foundation. They are Fatema Tuj Johura and Arpita Paik from Dhaka University, and Shahnewaz Kabir and Samia Yesmin from NSU.

Do we need any fundamental

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exceptions should be finance bills and no-confidence votes, because those can destabilise a government.

“Our view is to strike a balance between the freedom of MPs and parliamentary stability. This is why we want this reform.”

The NCP also proposed that an individual may serve as prime minister no more than twice, and anyone who becomes prime minister would be considered ineligible to ever hold the office of president.

“We propose a cabinet-led government, not one led by the prime minister,” Nahid said.

Any amendment to the constitution should be done through referendum even if two-thirds of the members of the upper and lower houses support the amendment, he said.

The party also recommends making uninterrupted internet access a fundamental right.

Prof Ali Riaz, vice-president of the National Consensus Commission, delivered the opening speech at the day-long meeting between the NCP and the commission.

According to consensus commission sources, the participants discussed constitutional, judicial, and electoral reforms.

As all the topics were not covered due to time constraints, the adjourned meeting is likely to resume next Tuesday or later.

From the National Consensus Commission, Safar Raj Hossain, Badiul Alam Majumdar, and Iftekharuzzaman attended the meeting while Justice Emdadul Haque joined in the afternoon.

A martyr without a country

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At the time of his death, Mostofa was a 10th-grade madrasa student preparing to sit for the Dakhil exam.

His father Shafiul told this correspondent that when he stopped his son from joining the protests on August 4, Mostofa showed him a clip of Abu Sayed and said, “If Abu Sayed can give his life, if hundreds of our brothers can, why can't I?”

On the morning of August 5, as Mostofa was sneaking out to join the protests, he pleaded with a friend who spotted him not to tell his father where he was going.

That afternoon, he was shot. The bullet pierced through his back and exited through his chest, according to his inquest report.

He was rushed to a hospital. He breathed his last the following day, on the afternoon of August 6.

“My son was born on this soil. He was a student at a local madrasa. He would have sat for the Dakhil exams now if he had not been killed,” said Shafiul.

“Only because we are Rohingya and don't have NID cards, Mostofa's name was struck off the official list of martyrs.

“I don't care about the money. But Mostofa was born here, he went to school here, and he died for this country. He deserves the recognition.”

Nur Begum, Mostofa's mother, said, “Our biggest crime is that we are Rohingya. How else do we explain the disrespect and lack of recognition even after my son gave his life for the country?”

Besides Nahid and Tushar, the NCP delegation included Member Secretary Akhter Hossen, Senior Joint Convener Samanta Shermeen, Joint Convener Javed Russell, Chief Organiser Hasnat Abdullah, Chief Coordinator Nasiruddin Patwari, and Senior Joint Member Secretary Nahida Sarwar Niva.

In his introductory speech, Nahid called for a radical overhaul of the state structure, aiming to fulfil the aspirations of the July uprising and prevent the re-emergence of autocratic tendencies in future governments.

Regarding the Constitutional Reform Commission's recommendation of electing the president through an electoral college consisting of members of both houses and district council members, Nahid said the NCP proposed that all local government representatives be included in the voting process in addition to members of both houses.

The NCP calls for measures to ensure smooth transition of power as it believes that power transitions often lead to political turmoil, NCP Member Secretary Akhter Hossen said.

However, more discussions are needed on who will be at the helm during such transitions, he said, adding, “We are discussing how the chief adviser and other advisers will be chosen.”

Nahid said, “We propose that boundaries of the constituencies be redrawn. We do not want to go back to any previous boundaries. A new demarcation must be done through an independent Election Commission.”

The incident drew attention only after July Records, an organisation archiving the atrocities of the July uprising, discovered his story and posted about him on social media on March 26.

Since then, there has been a campaign to ensure Mostofa receives his due recognition.

On April 17, July Records and the Student Alliance for Democracy held a human chain in front of the Raju Memorial Sculpture on Dhaka University campus, demanding his immediate recognition.

Speaking at the demonstration, Umama Fatema, a leader of the mass uprising, said, “This is not just about money or compensation; it is about due recognition. We want the state to offer honorary citizenship to Mostofa's family.”

In addition to July Records, activist Koli Kayez and her platform, Empowering Our Fighters, submitted a memorandum on the matter to Faruk E Azam, the Liberation War affairs adviser, on April 4.

Contacted, Amirul Islam, personal aide to the adviser, said the adviser is aware of the issue and the ministry is currently reviewing the documents submitted.

Meanwhile, Md Salahuddin, deputy commissioner of Cox's Bazar, said, “Mostofa's family applied for his recognition as a martyr of the July uprising; however, we were unable to process the application since he had no NID. Now that the matter is with the ministry, the next directive will come from higher authorities.”