



The fire of Chattogram: Mezban

Mezban is not just a meal to Chittagonians. It's a ritual. A heartfelt excuse to gather, make amends, share news, or simply remind someone they still matter. For Chittagonians, mezban is not served — it's felt.

Shahidul Islam, the owner of "Nawab Chatga", opened his eatery in Dhaka with that same emotion in heart — to serve mezban that actually tastes like mezban. Not a watered-down version, not an imitation, but the bold, fiery dish he grew up eating in the heart of Chattogram.

"I once went to a restaurant in Bashundhara," he recalls. "They served something they called mezban, but it wasn't even close. It felt like someone had just read about mezban in a textbook and guessed the recipe." That moment made him ponder. If that's what people in the capital thought mezban was, someone had to set the record straight.

"After leaving my corporate career, the

idea of opening a Bengali restaurant in Dhaka kept coming back to me," he shares. "I just knew — if anyone was going to do justice to the authentic flavours of my home, it had to be me."

At "Nawab Chatga", authenticity is not a marketing line — it's a promise. Shahidul ensures his spices are sourced straight from Hathazari Bazar. The beef? Cooked slowly and steadily, the traditional way — in clay ovens over wood fires. No shortcuts. No compromises. Just deep, unapologetic Chittagonian flavour, served with pride.

"It has to taste like home," he says simply. And it does.

From the Hills: Hebang

Dhaka also brings the hills to the table, offering fresh, herbaceous flavours from the Hill Tracts, where indigenous recipes

add a whole new dimension to the city's food scene. Their flavours are as bold as the terrain they come from.

One such eatery is Hebang, an indigenous restaurant run by four sisters, where the air is thick with the earthy scent of bamboo shoots and slow-cooked meats. The journey of the restaurant began modestly in 2016, when the sisters started taking online orders, encouraged by university dorm friends who could not get enough of their home-cooked meals.

"They gave us the push," says Biply

Chakma, one of the co-founders. "What began in our kitchen turned into something we never expected."

By 2018, Hebang had opened a physical space, and soon, diners from across the city — not just from indigenous communities — began coming to experience the clean, understated flavours of the hills.

A city of a thousand tastes

Maybe that's what makes Dhaka's food scene so special — living here means falling in love with dishes you did not grow up with, discovering unfamiliar flavours, untold stories, and finding a sense of home in every bite. One day, you are chasing a taste from your childhood, and the next, you are craving something you only tried last year but now cannot imagine life without. And that's the magical part.

Dhaka does not just feed you — it connects you. To your roots, to each other, and to the beautiful, ever-growing mosaic of this city we all call home.

By Jannatul Bushra

Photo: LS Archive/ Sazzad Ibne Sayed, Chiangmi Talukder, Nawab Chatga, Jaba restaurant

