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CALL OF THE SEA!

PHOTO: K TANZEEL ZAMAN

#HEALTH

CHOWDHURY TASNEEM HASIN

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The World Health Organization, WHO, declared the end of the COVID-19 pandemic on 5 May 2023, although the disease has continued to circulate. As of June, COVID-19 infections are growing or likely to grow in several areas. While vaccinated individuals tend to experience milder illness and recover faster, new variants are making silent moves.

FIGHTING FATIGUE AND WEAKNESS

What to eat during COVID-19 recovery

A proper diet is an important aspect of a COVID-patient's recovery. Nutritional recommendations will depend on physical activity and disease-related symptoms, and upon other comorbidities.

Balanced nutrition is vital for maintaining health, especially during an infection. Respiratory difficulties add an extra layer of complexity, preventing patients from eating effectively. People might not be able to eat enough food to meet their nutritional needs during COVID recovery.

Muscle wasting is the most common complication of critical illness, occurring in up to 50 percent of the patients, which can seriously lengthen recovery times,

impair immunity, and increase infection. Even those who did not require hospital support are afflicted with severe weakness, due to high catabolic condition during the duration of virus attack.

All this implies an underlying necessity of following dietary rules, such as:

Energy and protein rich nutrition according to the condition must be supplied.

Ensure enough vitamin C and antioxidants to improve the fighting capacity.

It is preferred

that every meal contains 25g of protein. Consume smaller-sized portions to prevent an empty stomach routinely, approximately 6–8 times per day. Ensure proper rest prior to the largest meal of the day. Soft foods and liquid can be less taxing for those that suffer from fatigue.

Add dried fruits and food to improve the calorie intake.

Limit consuming extremely hot food.

Limit the intake of lactose; opt for sour milk products such as yoghurt instead of sweetened milk products.

Strengthen the taste by adding herbs and spices. Mustard can be used to bring dishes to desired taste level.

For COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disorder) patients:

Calcium requirement is 1000–1200mg/day.

Vitamin D requirement is 1000 to 2000 IU per day for adults.

Fluid: 2 to 2.5 litres (in addition to the fluid lost). Use a short straw when drinking if there is vomiting tendency.



By Chowdhury
Tasneem Hasin

f / Beautina

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Healthy Glowing Skin - এ

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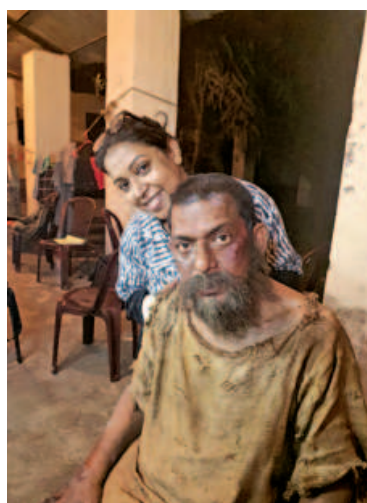
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THE ANATOMY OF A FACE:

Inside Atia Rahman's world of prosthetic makeup

To most people, a face is a face. To Atia Rahman, it's a map of memory, trauma, identity, and fiction. When she works, she is not just applying makeup but rather layering psychology, reconstructing time, and adding evidence to a character's backstory. Her job is not to beautify, it's to build a believable lie. Simply put, in Bangladesh's emerging world of screen prosthetics, Rahman is proudly defining what the work even is.

A web of mentorship and grit

"I didn't want to just do makeup," Rahman begins, "I wanted to do transformation." Her voice doesn't waver when she explains why she chose prosthetics over more conventional makeup paths.

In her mind, the face is a battlefield of emotion, pain, history, and imagination. And prosthetics? That's her weapon of choice.

Her journey took shape in Mumbai, where Rahman trained under renowned artists like Yasmin Rodgers and Bharat Godambe.

She recalls Yasmin's relentless belief in her: "Even when I wanted to go home, she made sure I finished all my classwork. She didn't stop believing in me."

Other names like Varuna Rana and

Sayantoni also form what Rahman calls her "power bank for life." The support did not just come from industry professionals — **her mother and her younger sister Ashfika Rahman**, too, remain her emotional anchors.

This foundation of discipline and care would later be crucial in an industry that demands both endurance and improvisation.

What it takes on set

Working on a Bangladeshi set with prosthetic makeup is anything but ideal.

"We don't even know what we're allergic to most of the time, except maybe food," she says. Latex, for instance, is a common prosthetic material that she herself is mildly allergic to. But there's more: prosthetic materials demand stable, cool environments, something most Bangladeshi sets don't provide. "These materials are designed to be stored in refrigerators," she explains. "That's rarely an option here."

Beyond technical barriers, there's the emotional labour.

Rahman doesn't slap on a scar or burn without understanding its backstory. For *Daagi* (2025), she consulted not just directors but also victims, doctors, and her

painful memory — Rahman herself is a burn survivor. She details, "I need to know how the burn happened, the angle, the intention behind it: Was it rage? An accident? That changes everything." It's part makeup, part forensic reconstruction.

She researches meticulously: the degrees of burns, the discolouration timelines, and even whether the victim was sitting or lying down when attacked. A character's injury is not just visual; it's psychological, situational, and deeply anatomical. "I'm not a doctor," she says, "But I have to talk to doctors just to get this right."

The anatomy of realism

This pursuit of realism means even basic materials like alcohol, essential for cleaning prosthetic adhesives, become a barrier.

"In Bangladesh, 75 or 99 per cent alcohol is considered restricted because of its use in operating theatres. So, I face harassment just trying to buy the requirements for my job," she remarks.

Without proper cleaning, prosthetics can cause rashes or worse. "Imagine trying to remove a bald cap without the right alcohol; it just doesn't work."

It's not just about artistry but also chemistry, logistics, and negotiation.

Changing tides in the Bangladeshi industry

When Atia started, prosthetic makeup was seen as "too foreign". Now, productions like *Karagar* (2022), *Kaiser* (2022), *Daagi* (2025), *Virus*, and *Rongila Kitab* rely on her expertise to tell richer stories.

Rahman explains, "Directors and producers are finally curious, and curiosity is turning into commitment".

That shift, however, is slow. Materials are still imported. Training is scarce, and the budget is often minimal. However, the demand is growing, not just for fantasy aesthetics but for textured realism: scars, ageing, psychological wounds made visible.

And that's the space Rahman is carving out, scar by scar, wrinkle by wrinkle. Her recent win for Best Makeup Artist at The Daily Star's OTT & Digital Content Awards is proof of that journey, not of embellishment but of embodiment.

In an industry still finding its visual language, artists like Atia Rahman are helping write a new one. It might not be a glamorous job, but it certainly is transformative and impactful. And it has only just begun.

By Ayman Anika
Photos: Courtesy

Guliakhali Sea Beach: A HARMONY OF WAVES AND GREEN

We knew the day would not go easy on us the moment we peeked out of the hotel window at 7 AM. Dark clouds were already having a board meeting over Chattogram and the sky looked ready to tip over. However, the show had to go on, the cameras were charged, and the car was already booked. We set out in search of the lesser-known Guliakhali Sea Beach with Inti bhaiya, my colleague on holiday mode, me on assignment, and our cinematographer Tanzil (yep, two Tanzils, double trouble).

It felt strangely calming to drive out of the city, soaking in light rain - Chattogram felt quiet and gentle, like a kind companion. Things became much more subdued as we left the city. The route narrowed and wound through rusty tea stalls, lonely villages, and the occasional confrontation with stubborn cows. We briefly forgot we were actually working since the world seemed to move slowly.

When we finally reached Muradpur, the last motorable stop, a local, casually informed us we would need to walk the rest of the way. Barefoot!

Thanks to the rain, the stretch to the beach had transformed into a wet clay runway. There was some light resistance, but soon we gave in to what was basically a complimentary mud



spa. Slipping, sliding, and grumbling, we made it through.

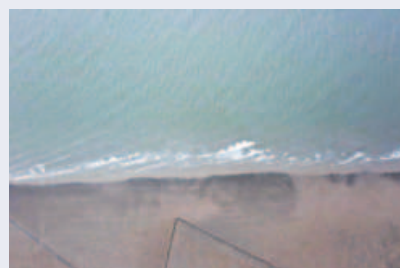
And then the view opened up.

Guliakhali does not try to impress you with rolling waves or the classic "beach photo-op" look. It just is. It seems as though someone took a beach, churned it into a mangrove forest, and then gently spread a grassy carpet on top. There are a lot of open grasslands, areas of shimmering water that cut through the green like silver veins, and mangrove roots that rise like natural sculptures. You don't arrive at Guliakhali; you ease into it.

Since we were early (or more accurately, wise enough to show up before the sun got serious), we had the whole place to ourselves. The only sounds were our footsteps squelching in the mud, the distant caws of birds, and Inti bhaiya making terrible jokes at our expense from a dry patch of land. You know a place is special when even the person who's supposed to

be relaxing starts chucking in ideas for better shots.

We spent a good hour just taking it all in. No distractions, no people, no Wi-Fi — not that you would expect any out here anyway. Apart from a tiny shack selling tea back near the main trail, Guliakhali has held out against commercial chaos. No beach rides, no



banana boats, and not even a child selling cucumber with salt and chilli. And maybe that's exactly why it works. You're not here to be entertained — you're here to notice things. Like the sound of stillness. Or the way the Keora trees spread their roots into quiet tidal canals. Or how the horizon looks strangely endless when it meets both green and grey.

It's a place that makes you slow down. Tanzil was busy setting up his shots while I found myself just walking aimlessly, sometimes stopping to photograph birds I could not name. While waiting for the tide to be right, a couple of boatmen waved from a distance. Guliakhali has a rhythm that is not in line with your timetable; it does

not rush and does not care if you are in one.

If you are planning a visit (and I'd recommend you do so before everyone discovers it), the route is straightforward: head to Sitakunda Bazaar, and from there take a CNG to Muradpur. The last bit is on foot, so dress like you might wrestle with the elements.

The entire trip from Chattogram can be done in half a day, provided you start early. But fair warning — it's not exactly picnic-friendly unless you pack everything yourself. There are no dustbins, so what you bring in, you take out. Simple rule: don't ruin what doesn't belong to you.

Swimming isn't advisable either. There are no lifeguards, and the terrain is too unpredictable. At best, you can dip your feet or hop onto a small boat if the local boatmen are around. Staying grounded, literally, is what makes it so appealing. Allow the grass-stained memories to linger, let the mud stick to you, and let the wind mess up your hair.

We sat in the car on the drive back, our trousers rolled up and our feet coated in a layer of mud, feeling oddly at ease. Inti bhaiya, now fully converted from mocker to muse, was already planning a second visit.

Maybe next time, we will come back without the cameras. Just to sit. And maybe watch the tide flirt with the grass one more time.

By K Tanzeel Zaman
Photo: K Tanzeel Zaman





#MUSING

Things Dhaka should learn from Chattogram!

As someone who has lived in Dhaka and Chattogram for a more or less equal number of years, I am here to tell you that the port city is much better than the capital. Admit it: Dhaka is overrated. Apologies to my Dhaka folks, but what you call 'jadur shohor' is in fact a boring, ugly, rude, and costly bundle of chaos! Truth hurts, but it's high time for Dhakaites to take some leaves off the Chittagonians' playbook.

A warm, hospitable community

If there is one thing that Dhaka city lacks, it is warmth (and we are of course not talking about the weather).

Have you ever been to a Chittagonian wedding? Or the much-coveted mezban? If you have, there is no argument that Chattogram beats Dhaka when it comes to friendliness and hospitality. While Dhaka people lose hair thinking how to cut the guest list short, Chittagonians invite the entire neighbourhood, at times literally!

Let alone the extended family, I have actually listened to 'miking' announcements where rickshaws roamed through an entire locality inviting everyone to a mezban through pre-recorded messages and loudspeakers.

Weddings too, are an elaborate affair, and a thousand guests are no big deal at all.

In Dhaka, neighbours don't know neighbours. The feeling of a community, albeit some exceptions, is quite non-existent, whereas Chattogram knows how to nurture friendships, not just in terms of ceremonies, but also with its everyday 'bodda culture'.

And 'bodda culture' tops bromance I tell you!

Hanging out does not always have to mean eating out

In Dhaka, recreation and time spent with

friends almost exclusively happen at food places. And as a people, Dhakaites for some strange reason have come to accept it.

Chattogram too has a plethora of amazing places to dine at. Moreover, let's not forget that the city boasts a number of delightful traditional dishes such as kala



bhuna. But what I truly appreciate about my friends in CTG is that their recreation does not always solely centre on food or restaurants.

I have lost count of how many times we went to Patenga Beach in the evenings or how many times we went to Cox's on day trips, and I cherish going to Foy's Lake in minutes or strolling at the War Cemetery,

and I admire casually hiking at Sitakunda or an unplanned weekend getaway to the hill tracts.

Imagine going to Gazipur, Mawa Ghat, or even 100 Feet without much plan! Dhaka's recreational activities are -- for lack of a better word -- rigid.

The art of slowing down

Dhaka people are always in a rush. These busy bees don't know how to relax and wind down. But are Chittagonians any less ambitious or hardworking?

Not at all! Perhaps they understand the value of priorities. I have seen more Dhakaites losing their souls in work or in pursuit of money than I have seen Chittagonians doing the same.

The rat race in Dhaka is unhealthy -- almost toxic -- and arguably that gives the city its cutthroat character. I don't think anybody will differ when I say that Dhaka is predominantly a ruthless and cruel city. Not Chattogram -- where people seem kinder, helpful and laid back.

Of pride and a sense of belonging

Chittagonians have a pride when it comes to their city. In fact, most regions and people outside Dhaka do.

It can be about a national or international personality -- be it in politics, cricket, or other fields -- if the person is from

Chattogram, the people are proud of the matter and love to talk about it.

They also unapologetically love their dialect! For an outsider, Chatgaiyya may just sound loud or even rowdy (as the cliché or stereotype goes), but to a fellow citizen, it is no less than a code -- one involving togetherness and an inexplicable bond.

From food to traditions to dialect, the people of Chattogram know how to own it and carry it with an immense sense of pride!

Compared to that, how many people in Dhaka really think of the city as their own? Some surely do, but many are homesick towards the place they had left, whilst a lot of the citizens do not care much about the city's charm or pulse.

A tale of two cities

So, is Chattogram really better than Dhaka? Being someone whose life can be quite equally divided between the two cities, I am -- well -- divided.

Every time I meet friends from Chattogram, they ask me, "How can you live in this unliveable city of Dhaka?"

I look away and smile. And then I slowly reply, "You won't understand."

But that's a story for another day!

By M H Haider

Photo: Collected

WHY YOU SHOULD EXPLORE CHATTOGRAM

The City of Stories, Shores and Surprises

With its layers of hills, history, half-forgotten temples, and crooked alleys, Chattogram captures the imagination of those who have the eyes of an explorer. The city unfolds slowly. It does not rush to impress you. No grand reveal, no urgent chaos. Having familial roots there, I never really got to explore it. And this time, I arrived with a new perspective and a pair of walking shoes.

The metropolis is not just worth your time; it's the experience you did not realise you needed — whether you are travelling alone, organising a family vacation, or simply wishing to lose yourself in tales etched on stone and the sea wind.

Let's start from the edge: the coast. Patenga Sea Beach is where most first-timers go, and for good reason. It's near the airport, has a reworked walkway and enough roasted peanuts to last you a week. But if you are the type who likes silence over selfies, Guliakhali Sea Beach (locals still call it Muradpur) is your place. The beach here is not flat sand — it's grass-covered land gently merging into mangroves and water.

Further north, Bashbaria Beach flaunts a long steel jetty that's half industrial, half poetic — best experienced around golden hour. And if you are lucky, you might find your way to Parki Beach, still largely untouched, where the river and sea blur into each other.

However, Chattogram is not just about the sea. Its hills and trails hold some of the finest waterfall treks in the country. Khoiyachora Waterfalls in Mirsarai is a quiet stunner — multiple tiers of clear water tumbling down the green, and yes, you can camp there if you are willing to carry your own gear and do not mind a couple of leeches during monsoon!

For a more accessible option, Sitakunda Eco Park is great for a quick forest trail, and the Jharjhari Trail inside it leads to a series of smaller falls, perfect for a day trip with friends or even children. There's also Kupitakum, Bandurkhum, and a few others you will only hear about from locals — nothing commercial, no signs, just

raw, living nature.

And then comes Barabkunda Agnikunda, a place that honestly feels like folklore. You walk up a dusty trail, joke about the heat, and then suddenly you are in front of a well that's on fire!

Locals worship it. Geologists are intrigued by it. And travellers? Well, most just stand there for a few minutes, quietly watching the fire float on the water.

For the history buffs, Chattogram has more than enough to keep you walking. The War Cemetery is both sobering and strangely peaceful. PK Sen Bhaban, better known as Sat-tala, is one of the city's



Karnafully River

earliest concrete buildings, built in the 1920s and a piece of architecture that still raises eyebrows.

Located in the old Circuit House, the Zia Memorial Museum holds both Liberation War antiquities and colonial antiques under one roof, while the Old Court Building, which is placed atop Fairy's Hill, functions as a watchful guardian over the port city.

Now, if you're travelling for food — and let's be honest, most of us are — you will be glad to know the city's culinary heritage runs deep.

Goni Bakery still bakes its biscuits in

firewood ovens the same way they have been doing for over 150 years. There's something charming about eating a piece of bread that predates your entire family tree. And Dorothy Fried Chicken? Possibly the only place where fried chicken comes with that proper "Chattogram spice slap" — flavour first, regret later.

And then, there are the places that do not make it into most guidebooks. Places that locals do not mention unless you ask twice.

Forest clearings near the hill lines of Mirsarai, makeshift camping grounds above Sitakunda, and streams where the only sound is your footsteps and the occasional kingfisher. These are not just "hidden gems" in the Instagrammable sense. They are quiet. Private. The kind of places that feel like a secret even when you are standing in them.

So, why Chattogram?

Because it does not fit into one neat box. It's not only for the thrill-seeker or the heritage buff. It's for people who want a little bit of everything: wilderness, salt and steam, legend and laughter. It rewards curiosity, not itinerary. Whether you're looking to camp under the stars, sip tea next to a colonial courthouse, or just sit still by a burning spring and wonder how fire can live on water, this port city has something that speaks to you. You just need to show up!

By K Tanzeel Zaman

Photo: K Tanzeel Zaman/Collected

Photo Credit: Amit-chowdhury, Ashikur-rahman, Md.Sumar, Mumtahina-tanni, Nishaan Ahmed, Safwan-Mahmud, Shehjad-Mobin, Tushar Das, Zafar Iqbal - Unsplash



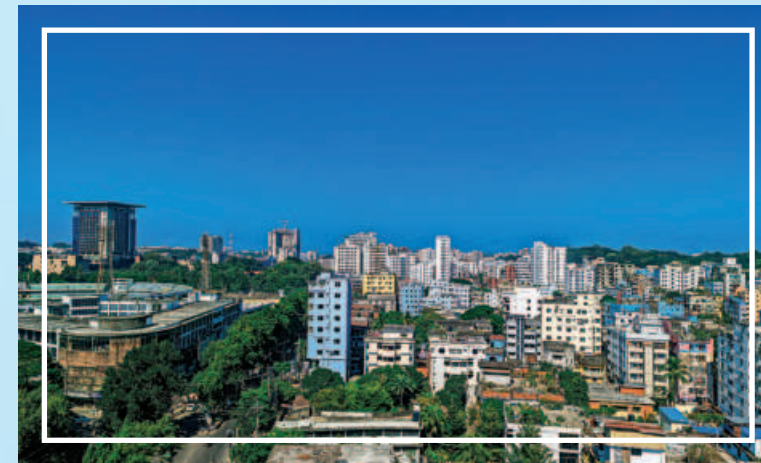
Chittagong Hill Tracts



Chittagong Hill Tracts



Sadarghat



Chittagong City



Chatgaiyya flavours: Recipes from Chattogram

From the bustling kitchens of Chattogram comes a bold and hearty array of flavours, rich with history and spice. In this recipe collection, we spotlight three beloved dishes, beef kala bhuna, beef curry, akhni biriyani, and steamed shutki curry that capture the essence of Chittagonian cuisine. Each recipe brings a taste of tradition, slow-cooked warmth, and the unmistakable flair of the region's culinary heritage.

BEEF KALA BHUNA

Ingredients

1 kg beef with bone, cut into medium pieces
For marination –
4 onions, finely chopped
5 green chillies
2 tbsp ginger paste
1 tbsp garlic paste
1 tsp cumin powder
1 tsp roasted cumin powder
1 tsp celery, powdered
3 bay leaves
2-inch cinnamon stick
6 green cardamoms
1 black cardamom
6 cloves
¼ tsp mace powder
1 star anise
2 dry red chillies
Salt to taste
For gravy –
5 onions, thinly sliced
200g plain yoghurt
1 tsp chilli powder
Salt to taste
250ml mustard oil (For frying and cooking)

Method

Wash and pat dry the meat.

In a bowl, take the meat along with a small portion of the chopped

onion, chopped green chillies, ginger-garlic paste, cumin powder, salt and 3 tablespoons of oil. Mix everything well.

Add all the whole spices and mix. Cover the bowl with a lid and rest them for 3-4 hours (preferably in a refrigerator).

Now, add roasted cumin powder and mix well. Heat oil in a pan and fry the rest of the chopped onion and dry red chillies until brown and crisp. Strain the onion and chillies from the oil and keep aside. Keep the flame on low. Add marinated meat to the same oil. Cook for around 45 minutes on low heat with frequent stirring. This step is for frying the meat.

Add beaten plain curd and fry for a further 15 minutes. The meat will start blackening by then. Now add the fried onion, and mix. Fry till the meat softens yet has the texture and shape. This will take 30 minutes more. The meat will release sufficient moisture. Cook till the meat turns blackish and the gravy has a semi-thick consistency.

Serve kala bhuna with rice or paratha.

to a bowl. Get a pot and add the soya bean oil then start heating the pot. Wait a few minutes for the oil to heat up then add the dry spices like black pepper, cinnamon stick, bay leaf, clove, and green cardamom. Stir these in the oil for about 5 minutes until you start to get that spicy aroma.

Now, add the sliced onions and stir until the onions are slightly caramelised but not cooked all the way through. After that, add 1 cup of water, stir, then add the powdered ingredients. These are turmeric, chilli, cumin, coriander powder, and salt. Coriander powder is slightly overbearing so it is advised you add half a teaspoon first, then add more if you do not prefer that ratio. Stir all the spices in, adding your ginger-garlic paste, and sauté 10 to 15 minutes until it all comes to a boil and you can see the oil surface above the spice mixture.

This is a good time to taste so you can adjust the salt level in the curry. Finally, add the meat and stir it well to coat in all

Method

Take cumin, coriander, cinnamon, cardamom, black peppercorn, nutmeg, mace and grind. Wash the meat and drain all the water. Heat oil in a large pan and fry the sliced onion until brown. Add meat, ginger and garlic paste, yoghurt, salt, bay leaves and the ground spices. Cook on medium heat for about 25-30 minutes or until beef is cooked and tender.

Add one cup of water, bit by bit, and stir the meat occasionally. Separate the meat, keeping the gravy and spices in the pan and set aside.

In the same pan, add the remaining water, ghee and milk, bring to a boil and add salt. Add washed and drained rice and cover. Once the water boils again, add the whole green chillies and cook on medium heat.

When the rice is about 50 per cent done, add the cooked meat. Mix carefully so that rice does not become mashed and cook covered, on medium-low heat. Turn off the stove but keep the lid on for 15-20 minutes



BEEF CURRY

Ingredients

1 kg beef
3 medium-sized onions
3 tbsp soya bean oil
500ml or 2 cups of water
2 tbsp ginger garlic paste
1 tsp turmeric
1 tsp chilli powder
½ tsp cumin powder
1 tsp coriander powder (optional)
2 bay leaves, cut in half
1 cinnamon stick, roughly 3" (halved)
4-5 cloves
8-10 black peppers
4-5 green cardamom
2 black cardamoms
Salt to taste

Method

First, wash the beef thoroughly and get rid of any excess fat and tissue. Slice the onions lengthwise and transfer them

the delicious spicy goodness. Cook at high heat for about 15 minutes, then add 1 cup of hot water and continue stirring it well. Now would also be a good time to taste and adjust the salt. Cook for about another 15 minutes. Turn the heat down and leave the meat for a final 30-40 minutes to rest.

After all that's done, garnish with some sautéed onions and coriander. Serve the dish with polao or ruti, and proceed to impress everyone with the ultimate beef curry!

AKHNI BIRIYANI

Ingredients

1½kg beef, small pieces
1kg aromatic rice
1 tsp cumin
1 tsp coriander
4 sticks of cinnamon, 2 inches each
4 green cardamoms
10 black peppers
½ tsp nutmeg
½ tsp mace
¾ cup mustard oil
1 cup sliced onions
2 tbsp ginger paste
2 tbsp garlic paste
½ cup yoghurt
3 bay leaves, 8 cup water
1 cup milk
15 green chillies
1 tbsp ghee (for flavour)
Salt to taste

before serving.

STEAMED SHUTKI CURRY

Ingredients

10-12 pcs loitya shutki/dried bombil
1 cup onion, chopped
1 tsp garlic paste
½ tsp ginger paste
1 tbsp green chilli paste
1 tsp red chilli powder
1 tsp turmeric powder
½ cup oil
½ cup coriander leaves, chopped
Salt to taste
½ cup water (for gravy)
1 medium size banana leaf (optional)

Method

Chop fish into inch-long pieces and soak in warm water for 20 minutes, to make it soft and clean. Drain the water and wash the pieces. Mix all the ingredients in a large mixing bowl and give a good mix with clean hands and marinate for half an hour. Get one steel box with a lid.

Transfer the marinade to the box. Cover the box with banana leaf and then close the box with the lid. The banana leaf will help to add a subtle sweet leaf flavour. Put the box into a steamer and steam for about 30 minutes over medium flame. Serve with hot steamed rice.

— LS DESK
Photo: LS DESK



#PERSPECTIVE

A foodie's Chattogram adventure

Chattogram does not exactly come up as the go-to vacation destination in my mind — that spot is reserved for Cox's Bazar. But I wanted to go someplace that celebrates my kind of food — Chattogram — the land of kala bhuna and mezban. So, I decided to make a trip out of it, and for once, have peace with travel buddies.

After checking in, I went for a quick stroll. Weirdly, and sadly perhaps, the area was surrounded by familiar food shops I know from Dhaka, so nothing 'authentic' right from the start. That, and people in Chattogram evidently don't have to wake up at 9 AM on a Saturday.

Defeated, I went back to the hotel and their breakfast buffet, bracing for disappointment.

There were less than nine items perhaps, so my mind was already hitting the 'meh' button, but the moment the paratha and spicy aloo dum hit my tongue, I was in paradise.

Now, I should mention that while I was on vacation, my other companions weren't. They were there to work, and they would be covering loads of things about Chattogram, including the food scene, so I decided to tag along with them.

By late afternoon, we were going to try this apparently famous old 'posh dining'. Sadly, the staff, it seems, forgot what customers and orders were, and decided that hanging out in the kitchen is more fun. So, we left.



think of that aloo bharta. In fact, I nearly ordered a big box of it to go, but everyone stopped me, citing it would go bad before we reached the hotel.

Day three started with a no-arguments visit to the hotel's breakfast buffet. The rest of the day was also quite uneventful, foodwise at least. Until of course, I went to this shop called Flavors.

From their cookies to their sweets, and most importantly, their crisps, sold in plastic containers, are simply divine. Why? Well, if you are old and get heartburn after eating crisps, like me, these are perfect. No issues, and it tastes lovely, just the right amount of spice, salt, and crunch. No judgement, but I bought nearly eight boxes of crisps to take to Dhaka.

Then, I visited an old friend: Gani Bakery. I bought two kilos of milk toffees and two kilos of biscuits, which ranged from good to great. The toffees were incredible, so amazing that I felt insanely jealous of the people who lived near and right across it.

If you have been keeping count, that's nearly five kilos of food in big-ish containers. I had to stop by Biponi Bitan to get a new backpack to carry them. While there, I also got to try falooda at the renowned New Liberty Drink House. While the falooda was great, it wasn't the main attraction for me. Rather it was the interior and the staff, or rather their uniforms. If you ever read Archie Comics (the old ones), you know Pop Tate's, and this feels exactly like that.

We wrapped the day at DFC (Dorothy Fried Chicken). This was apparently run by a Korean lady for the longest time and still uses her original recipe for the spicy Korean fried chicken.

We ordered some, and it was quite lovely. If I am being honest, Dhaka has better fried chicken, but considering how long this place has been running, and how recent the good Dhaka fried chicken is, you have to consider them nothing short of pioneers.

And so, my trip came to an end. My treacherous colleagues, quite selfishly, left for Dhaka a day earlier than me, and it left me time to ponder on my thoughts. I came here to experience Chattogram's Kala bhuna — which I was eating in my hotel room, having ordered it from the hotel restaurant — and mezban, but instead, I am

leaving with five kilos of biscuits and crisps, and pining for the aloo bharta from Bhabir Hotel. Not what I had in mind, but hey, I am not complaining!

By Intisab Shahriyar
Photo: Intisab Shahriyar



With the light fading, we decided to delay lunch and head to Patenga Beach instead. Since I love sea sides, the disappointment of the restaurant washed over quickly. However, when we got there, I was left disappointed once more — the once pretty beach and all its vast expanse were developed over, and the beach access, in that area at least, had been reduced to steps as you see in a village pond.

The displeasure was curbed somewhat by a very busy jhalmuri seller, who whipped up one heck of a Bombai chilli chanachur mix, and later, a mouth-watering (and eye-watering) naga fuckha. Try it if you ever

visit Patenga. Eating chanachur facing a sea breeze just isn't talked about enough.

We wrapped up the day by going back to GEC Mor because I insisted on having kala bhuna. Someone recommended Zamzam's restaurant, so we went there. While my colleagues ordered fish, I ordered the kala bhuna, daal, rice, and aloo bharta. Here's some sacrilege; I have had better kala bhuna in Dhaka, frankly. And so, day one was a bust, food-wise at least, except for the breakfast.

Day two started with a 'debate.' While I wanted the hotel breakfast, my colleagues wanted to try another place while on our

way to Guliakhali Sea Beach. As I was the oldest of the bunch, I couldn't really huff and puff, so I just went with it. But guess what? The eatery did not open at 8 AM on a Sunday. So, we had some mediocre breakfast at some random hotel down the road. All the while, I was making mental voodoo dolls for these nearly Gen-Z co-workers of mine.

In any case, breakfast over, we headed to Guliakhali Sea Beach, and it was a very memorable experience, but the meh breakfast and the empty stomach were intruding on this otherwise spectacular sight. We decided to go for lunch, and our chauffeur once again recommended a hotel, making my very young colleagues very excited.

The roadside eatery, as it turned out, hilariously called Bhabir Hotel, was packed to the brim with people. After some minutes, we managed to sneak into a table. There were no menus, no options. It was bhaat, daal, beef chuijhaal, tomato bharta, and aloo bharta, or get lost!

Now, I was quite perplexed. How is it that I am in Chattogram, and not being served mezban or kala bhuna at THEIR eateries? Food was served and we all dug in. Beef chuijhaal was ok, tomato bharta was nice, but the aloo bharta? That was transcendental. I have to be honest; it's been two months since this trip, and I still



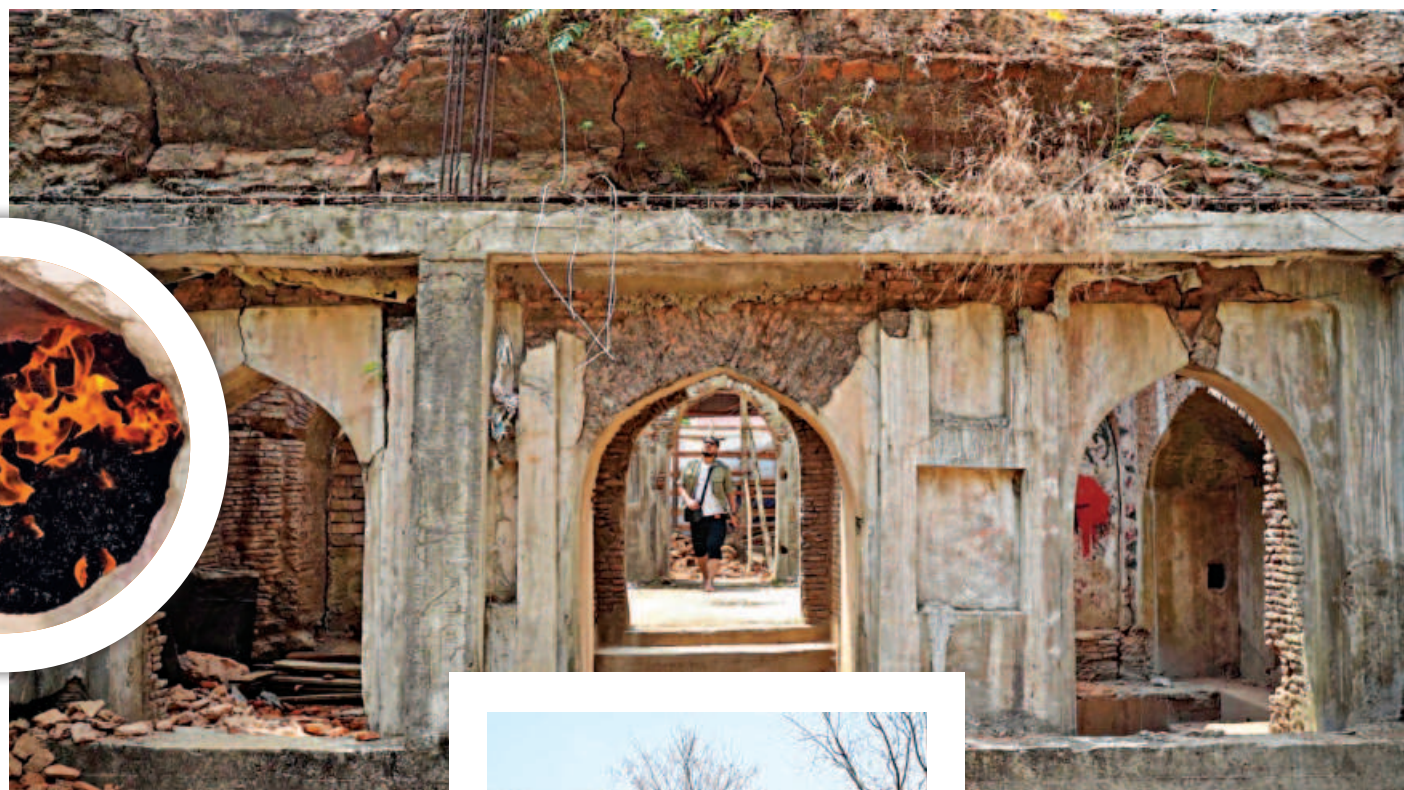
BARABKUNDA, CHATTOGRAM: Where fire rests on water and legends don't sleep

By the time we reached the base of the Barabkunda Hill, we were already three gulps into exhaustion: one for the heat, one for the humidity, and one for the grand mystery that awaited us uphill. It was just the three of us: Inti bhaiya, technically “on vacation” but somehow tagging along with a running commentary; me, with a drone in hand and slightly regretting the decision to wear full sleeves; and Tanzil, our cinematographer, whose camera had already started fogging up from the sheer effort of existing.

We rented a car from Chattogram City earlier that morning, weaving our way past the fading cityscape into greener territory. The road took us as far as it could, ending just shy of Barabkunda's sacred temple trail. Beyond that point, it was on us, and our legs.

Now, we didn't quite anticipate the full impact of Chattogram's signature midday sun hitting full throttle. Caps were urgently bought from a nearby bazaar. Inti bhaiya, somehow untouched by work stress, took this as his cue to declare me a full-time TikTokker specialising in “heatwave skincare routines” and proceeded to roast us just to keep his mind off the scorching sun.

But with sunblock melting off and slippers beginning to question their life choices, we hiked our way up past small forest clearings, past the trail of a waterfall that could have come straight out of a Bangladeshi folk tale, and finally, into the heart of the temple grounds where an ancient flame burns in perpetuity quietly on water.



water while devotees whisper their wishes around it — it's hard not to feel like you have walked into a page from myth.

Some say the flame marks where the right arm of Sati, Shiva's consort, fell, turning the place into a *Shakti Peetha*, a site of cosmic power. Others tie it to Sita, from the Ramayana, saying this is where her famous *Agni Pariksha* took place. In either version, what's certain is that the fire has become more than just a geological oddity — it's a living, breathing part of the area's soul.

And while we are talking facts — yes, there is a scientific explanation. According to geologists, the flame feeds on natural methane gas that seeps from deep



toward the temple road once you reach the Barabkunda Bazar area. The last stretch is a bit of a hike, so do wear comfortable shoes (and maybe prep a sun hat if you are brave enough to go at noon like us).

It's not yet the kind of place with a ticket booth or parking guidance. It's still raw. And maybe that's what makes it special.

Parting thoughts

We left the Agnikunda a little sunburnt, a lot more curious, and somehow quieter. There's something disarming about seeing a contradiction — fire on water — so casually exist. No performance. No explanations. Just an ancient flame doing its thing while life flows around it.



Yes, you read that right — fire, on water. And it has not gone out in centuries!

The Agnikunda: Sitakunda's unburnt offering

Tucked inside a modest, weathered temple structure lies the Barabkunda Agnikunda, a sacred flame burning on a shallow well of water. It doesn't flicker like a gas stove nor roar like a bonfire. It just...burns.

The locals believe it's divine. And honestly, when you see it up close — that yellow-orange flame floating on clear



underground. It bubbles up through the water and ignites when in contact with air. Think of it like a naturally occurring pilot light, minus the plumbing.

However, to reduce it to science alone would be missing the point. As we stood there, watching barefoot worshippers offer flowers and take blessings from the flame's water (which remains surprisingly cool), there was a strange calm in the air.

A place woven in quiet spectacle

The temple complex itself is humble. No

grand marble staircases or golden domes. Just old brick, slightly tilted shrines, and trees that have probably witnessed more prayers than any scripture ever recorded. Alongside the main flame, you will find smaller temples, each with its own little story, its own caretakers, and its own whispers.

After a few minutes of scrolling through the history e-books, we came to know that the flame had never been extinguished, not even during heavy rainstorms or the cyclones that pass through this belt. Some believe it first ignited during the Great Arakan Earthquake of 1762, when tremors split open the Sitakunda Hills, releasing gas and perhaps sparking this eternal fire. It's not exactly a volcano, but during that earthquake, locals claimed the hills “erupted” with fire and mud. The flame may well be a quiet survivor of that chaos.

How to get there (without melting)

Getting to Barabkunda is fairly straightforward. From Chattogram City, it's a 1.5-hour drive up the Dhaka–Chattogram highway. The site falls under Sitakunda Upazila, and locals will happily point you



And as we walked downhill, I declared, “I'm starting a podcast: ‘Burning Questions at Burning Springs.’” We laughed, but no one said no.

Because honestly? It is a place that leaves you with questions. And maybe that's the best kind of travel experience — the kind that does not hand you all the answers, just opens the door to something old, mysterious, and quietly burning.

By K Tanzeel Zaman
Photo: K Tanzeel Zaman

#REVIEW

Mohammad Shascchu Mia: Gulistan's own jhalmuri magician

Right in the middle of the madness that is Gulistan, there's a man who's been standing his ground for more than three decades, Shascchu Mama. Full name: Mohammad Shascchu Mia. For almost 35 years, he has been holding court at the same spot every evening (except on Fridays) serving up his legendary jhalmuri and haleem to anyone lucky enough to stumble upon him.

Shascchu Mia's hands move with the speed and precision of a magician, tossing puffed rice, chopped cucumber, tomatoes, green chillies, onions, secret masalas, and — wait for it — chunks of chicken wings, eggs, and even whole pieces of spicy chicken into a bowl. The result? A jhalmuri that, as many swear, smells and tastes no less than biriyani!

His story reads like a page out of Dhaka's own urban folklore. Born in Brahmanbaria, Shascchu Mia arrived in Dhaka as a seven-year-old, holding onto the shirt of his maternal uncle, who worked as a dishwasher in Gulistan's Stadium Market. That was in the early '80s.

The kid from the countryside soon found himself scrubbing plates, running errands, and learning the ropes of Dhaka's street hustle. After years of washing, waiting, and watching, he took a leap into selling cholabut, ghugni, haleem, biriyani, you name it.



Then came the flood of 1988, the one that washed away much of Dhaka, including Shascchu's little home in Islambagh, Old Dhaka. The family moved to Tikatuli, but Shascchu's culinary dreams stayed anchored at the Stadium Market.

Over the years, he experimented, blending what he knew from biriyani pots and haleem cauldrons into his jhalmuri. A handful of this, a sprinkle of that until what emerged was a fusion so bold it had people stopping in their tracks.

It's a family affair. Behind the small

table where he does his magic, you will find his wife instructing him with military precision and his son collecting money and answering queries from office-goers, vloggers, and the occasional curious journalists like us.

As the city lights flicker on and the call to prayer echoes from Baitul Mukarram, Shascchu Mama keeps on mixing, serving, and smiling — a little scoop of this, a pinch of that, a wink here, a smile there — all right in front of the six-number gate of Baitul Mukarram Mosque's market.

His prices start at Tk 30, but for those who want it all — the egg, the chicken, the spice, the story — it's Tk 120 for the special!

By Jannatul Bushra
Photo: Jannatul Bushra

◆ HOROSCOPE ◆



ARIES
(MAR. 21-APR. 20)

Travel or short trips will probably be your best outlet. Think before you act. Don't push your opinions on others. Your lucky day this week will be Monday.



TAURUS
(APR. 21-MAY 21)

Don't dwell on past regrets. Don't count on others to cover up for your shortcomings. Work along the way for best results. Your lucky day this week will be Monday.



GEMINI
(MAY 22-JUN. 21)

Put your creative ideas to good use. Be cautious of making any residential changes. Stabilise your position by locking up savings. Your lucky day this week will be Friday.



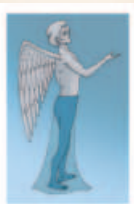
CANCER
(JUN. 22-JUL. 22)

Make time for some recreation. Make professional decisions that affect your position. Money may slip through your fingers. Your lucky day this week will be Friday.



LEO
(JUL. 23-AUG. 22)

You could find yourself caught in a one-sided relationship. Ask for help if you need it. Home changes will please everyone. Your lucky day this week will be Saturday.



VIRGO
(AUG. 23-SEP. 23)

Move forward if you want change. Family members may be difficult. Catch up on correspondence you've neglected. Your lucky day this week will be Tuesday.



LIBRA
(SEP. 24-OCT. 23)

Life feels a little You can help others more than they help you. Your emotions may be hard to contain. Contribute to organisations you join. Your lucky day this week will be Thursday.



SCORPIO
(OCT. 24-NOV. 21)

You'll get along well with clients. Someone may let you down. Home projects can bring family closer. Your lucky day this week will be Thursday.



SAGITTARIUS
(NOV. 22-DEC. 21)

Consider taking a vacation with your partner. Changes at home may happen quickly. Take a look at your career path. Your lucky day this week will be Wednesday.



CAPRICORN
(DEC. 22-JAN. 20)

Organise responsibilities clearly. Think twice before pursuing unrealistic goals. Focus on the domestic scene. Your lucky day this week will be Friday.



AQUARIUS
(JAN. 21-FEB. 19)

Emotional deception is evident. Seek guidance to unite the family. Plan outings to strengthen bonds. Your lucky day this week will be Monday.



PISCES
(FEB. 20-MAR. 20)

Be prudent and don't be misled. Avoid overspending on entertainment. Visit distant friends or relatives. Your lucky day this week will be Tuesday.



Tyfoon

Fabric Care

প্রথম ওয়াশেই কাপড়ের কঠিন থেকে
কঠিনতম দাগ দূর করে।

টাইফুন... লাগে কম, তাই সশ্রয় বেশী।



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KOHINOOR
CHEMICAL

Living room layout for a fun and relaxing atmosphere

These days, most living rooms are designed with the TV as the centrepiece. However, that often comes at a cost. The family members get so caught up with the plot of TV shows that they barely engage with one another.

What every living room really needs is a proper conversation area — a space where your family or friends can chat freely, comfortably, and without any hindrance. The goal is to make the space feel more intimate and welcoming so everyone actually wants to spend time together.

If creating a space for making meaningful memories is your priority, build your layout with that in mind. This way, you can choose furniture that supports the main purpose of the room.

First, understand the size of your living room. Then, decide on a colour palette and a theme even before purchasing your furniture. This ensures everything fits both the room and the vibe you want to create.



A simple way to create a conversational setup for your living room is to place two sofas positioned to face each other. Consider a pair of Baltimore two-seaters and a comfy single-seater accent chair to round out the space.

Positioning the seating this way encourages conversation and recreational activities. Nothing beats the joy of quality family time like gathering around a game in the centre of the room.

Place the coffee table at the centre of your seating arrangement. Not only does it complement the space, but it is

also conducive for keeping board games within arm's reach.

A spacious coffee table is a must as you can serve snacks on an impromptu karaoke night or place your board game there. This way, your seating area can also serve as a board game zone or karaoke zone.

When board games are in plain sight, they are more likely to get played with than

gather dust on a shelf.

Consider getting a corner table and placing it by the side of your sofa. You could even keep one ready-to-go chess board on the corner table. This can serve as a classy decor piece for your living room.

Use large-sized area rugs to highlight the different zones within your living room: seating area, chess game zone, karaoke zone, and so on.

If you have more people over often, opt for ottomans. They will be great to accommodate seats for extra players on game night, or just putting your feet up during a casual movie night.

To give your living room a focal point — the first thing visitors' eyes are drawn to when they enter the room — consider selecting an open wall that faces your seating area.

Finally, getting this new set of furniture can be a big investment for you. But it does not necessarily have to drain your bank account. Simply, look for a furniture brand that offers Equated Monthly Instalments (EMI), allowing you to pay for your purchases in equal monthly payments.

This option can help you pay off the furniture bills in manageable portions.

By Minhazur Rahman Alvee
Photo: Courtesy



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