

MY DHAKA

# DURGA'S FEAST

## From luchi to payesh, tradition reborn

RIBR

The elaborate and painstakingly selected menu for the divine daughter is the best of South Asian vegetarian recipes; puffed up soft luchi (flatbread) that has a pearly sheen from being deep fried, potato curry, or alu'r daam as we call it locally, a mixed lentil curry and vegetable labra, and a hog plum or amra'r chutney.

I die for Durga's food fest -- I call it Durga bhoj payesh, a sort of rice pudding made with binni chal or sticky rice. Mandatory in the menu are the coconut balls, our good old naru made with jaggery. This is what Sharat's dreams are made of.

The community pujas have their own menu, made for the mass feeding; khichuri, which is basically turmeric rice with vegetables. It is called bhog or devi offering. But bonedi or elite Hindu households in Dhaka go for their best menu plan.

"Ma khay shontaner jonno," the verbatim translation of this quote by Srimati Shaha, Director of Kumudini Welfare Trust, relays that generally a mother feeds herself only to feed and replenish her children.

"The deep religious meaning behind her thought is that Ma Durga's arrival



PHOTO: STAR

calls for a festive and special menu. Though she does not partake in the food offering bestowed on her by humans. It is a symbolic gesture," explains Shaha, the matriarch of renowned pujas held at Kumudini.

Boudi or Mashi ma, as she is fondly called by her fans like me, goes on to describe the well-thought-out and meticulously prepared menu for Ma Durga. There is no chance of mistaking the Amish (non-vegetarian) and Niramish (vegetarian) food items. Rice dishes cooked or steamed in flavourful spices like cinnamon, cardamom, star

anise, and clarified butter, called Ghee Bhaat, are served with vegetable fritters, niramish, and an assortment of sweets made from ricotta cheese, which is cchana.

"The cherished puja sweet is Malpua, the mention of which is deeply rooted in our ancient texts. Big in size with a soft core and crunchy edges, Malpua is made with a thin batter of flour, and soaked in a simple sugar and aromatic syrup. Shaheb Barir Malpua was what people called them in our home," the graceful Srimati Shaha recalls.

Akhter Jahan, writer and educator, is best known for writing her personal stories and memories of Old Dhaka

in Sobbas or Khosbas, a Bengalinized dialect of Urdu and Hindi, that is native to Old Dhaka. She recalls in one of her memoirs about how she celebrated puja during her childhood.

"On the auspicious day of Ashtami, I was fortunate enough to be invited to a Banedi family's Durga Puja, where my father and I sat on the ground, feasting on luchi and payesh, spread on banana leaves. Amid the exchange of colourful platters of sweets, candies, and giant rosogollas, I would sneak a prasad, my tiny hands clutching sweet Naru, my Hindu aunts and friends would share. There would be a puja mela or fair near the mandaps. The fairs were like my magic portals, fun rides, and delicious snacks like spicy mirchini, fried lentil balls, jaggery, and sesame treats. Each bite was a tiny universe of flavour, and each purchase a prayer for happiness," Akhter Jahan writes.

The shared puja rituals and food silently made a bond with us, the non-Hindu neighbours. The sweet aroma and flavours mingling with the spices of their bhog remain our favourite vegetarian meal.

The colours of puja, the intoxicating smell of dhoop, and the maddening sound of Dhaks, and the ancient rhythm of Durga's worship, are my reasons to go Mandap hopping in and around Dhaka.

The Hindu community's soul beats the strongest during Durga Puja, and for us enthusiasts, the vibrant and pulsating festival is a testimony to a harmonious city's soul.

## Normalcy returning to Khagrachhari amid tight security

Section 144 still in force as residents return to work and travel

STAR REPORT

Traffic is returning to normal in Khagrachhari after the road blockade enforced under the banner of Jumma Chhatra Janata was suspended late Tuesday, bringing relief to residents.

Despite the suspension, Section 144, which prohibits public gatherings, remains in effect in Khagrachhari Sadar and Guimara upazilas.

During a visit to Shapla Chattar in Khagrachhari town yesterday, The Daily Star found vehicles moving freely and most shops reopening. Long-distance bus services also resumed around 9:00am. Law enforcers were deployed at key intersections, stopping and questioning "suspicious" individuals.

"I can finally return home today as the blockade has been lifted," said Anil Bikash Chakma at the Panchhari auto-rickshaw stand. He had been stranded in the town after a doctor's visit.

Truck driver Md Zainal Abedin said his family had suffered during the days he was unable to earn due to the blockade. At a bus counter, Anil Dev, travelling with his family to Rangunia, Chattogram for Durga Puja, said, "We had been unable to go home for days. Today [yesterday] we can finally leave."

At 9:00pm Tuesday, Jumma Chhatra Janata announced on Facebook that the blockade had been suspended following assurances from the district administration and out of respect for Durga Puja. The organisation said the suspension will remain in effect until October 5 but warned of tougher programmes if its eight-point demands are not met.

Khagrachhari Deputy Commissioner ABM Iftekharul Islam Khandker told The Daily Star that Section 144 would be withdrawn only if law enforcers deem the situation fully stable.

Protests erupted after a teenager was allegedly raped while returning home from private tutoring on September 23. Her relatives found her unconscious in a field around 11:00pm. Police later arrested one suspect, Shayan Sheel, while the victim's father filed a complaint against three unidentified men.

Anger over the incident sparked widespread protests under the banner of Jumma Chhatra Janata. The next day, the group called a blockade across the three hill districts.

Violence escalated on Sunday at Ramesu Bazar in Guimara upazila, where clashes between protesters, law enforcers, and locals siding with security forces turned deadly.

## Gaza bloodbath Dengue fight faltering

FROM PAGE 1

The International Committee of the Red Cross said intensified military operations had forced it to temporarily suspend activities in Gaza City.

Days earlier, the Doctors Without Borders charity halted its work in the city, where some UN agencies and aid organisations still operate.

Meanwhile, Hamas was examining a peace plan proposed by Trump and backed by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

The plan calls for a ceasefire, the release of hostages within 72 hours, Hamas's disarmament and a gradual Israeli withdrawal from Gaza.

A Palestinian source close to Hamas's leaders told AFP that "no final decision" had been made and that "the movement will likely need two to three days".

"Hamas wants to amend some of the items, such as the disarmament clause and the expulsion of Hamas," the source said.

They added that Hamas wanted "international guarantees" for a full Israeli withdrawal and guarantees Israel would not violate a ceasefire.

Gaza's civil defence agency -- a rescue force operating under Hamas authority -- said Israeli strikes killed at least 61 people across the territory yesterday.

Asked about a strike on a school-turned-shelter that the agency said killed eight people, the Israeli military said it had "struck a Hamas terrorist" and that "steps were taken in order to mitigate harm to civilians as much as possible".

## Heavy rains

FROM PAGE 1

may occur in the hilly regions of Chattogram, while temporary waterlogging is also likely in parts of Dhaka and Chattogram metropolitan cities.

Meanwhile, the Flood Forecasting and Warning Centre (FFWC) of the Water Development Board warned that flashfloods are likely in seven districts as major rivers continue to swell from heavy rainfall in Dhaka, Chattogram and Rajshahi divisions, as well as in India's Tripura and Assam.

The seven districts are Feni, Chattogram, Lalmonirhat, Nilphamari, Sherpur, Netrakona and Mymensingh.

FFWC said water levels in the Gomti, Muhuri, Selonia and Feni rivers in Chattogram division rose in the 24 hours till 6:00am yesterday and are expected to keep rising over the next three days.

In Rangpur division, water levels in the Dharla, Dudhkumar and Teesta may rise during this period, with the Teesta possibly reaching the danger level and temporarily flooding low-lying areas of Lalmonirhat and Nilphamari.

In Mymensingh region, the Kangsha, Someshwari and Bhugai rivers are also likely to swell, potentially reaching the danger level in Sherpur, Mymensingh and Netrakona, causing temporary inundation of low-lying areas.

The FFWC added that coastal rivers in Barishal, Khulna and Chattogram divisions are experiencing higher-than-normal tides, a situation expected to persist for the next three days.

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"If the authorities truly want to save lives, they must take steps to control mosquitoes systematically, and address the existing shortcomings," he told The Daily Star.

FEW ENTOMOLOGISTS

Entomologists, who study the characteristics of insects and the diseases they transmit, can track when mosquito populations rise, how far they have spread, and by what means. They also apply specialised survey methods to identify hotspots.

"An entomologist knows how to devise plans to control mosquitoes, just like a doctor knows which tests are required for a patient," Rahman said.

Entomologists play a vital role in guiding insecticide use -- determining which insects are present, where they are breeding, which chemicals to apply and at what quantities, and by which methods, he said.

Out of the 12 city corporations in the country, only Dhaka North City Corporation has an entomologist, said officials, adding that the corporations sometimes bring in entomologists on deputation from other government departments or district administrations.

Mofizul Hoque Shah, divisional entomologist at the DGHS, said that only 26 civil surgeon offices across the country have approved posts of entomologist. Apart from that, there are four posts at divisional directors' offices of DGHS and three at its headquarters.

But at least 18 of the 33 posts remained vacant, he told The Daily Star on September 25.

WEAKNESSES

Three periodic surveys are required every year to identify mosquito hotspots and assess their density, guiding the authorities to take measures to destroy larvae.

The DGHS usually conducts the surveys in the two Dhaka city corporations and several districts, leaving most of the country out of surveillance.

The agency, however, was unable to carry out the three surveys last year as the programme that funded the surveys ended in June last year, a DGHS official said, seeking anonymity.

The Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR) stepped in and conducted last year's pre-monsoon and post-monsoon surveys in association with DGHS.

This year, there was a delay in conducting the pre-monsoon survey. As the findings of the survey were published in mid-June, just a few days after the start of monsoon, the authorities didn't get enough time to take necessary measures, said the official.

Many of the recommendations made in the survey remain unimplemented due to poor management and a lack of manpower.

According to officials at two Dhaka city corporations, a significant number of field workers involved in mosquito control drives do not perform their duties properly, leaving many hotspots active.

Moreover, most other city corporations as well as municipalities lack dedicated personnel to carry out such drives.

Mohammad Rahmant Ullah, health

officer at Gazipur City Corporation, said that the corporation's proposed organogram, which includes posts of entomologist and technicians for mosquito control, remains pending with the LGRD ministry.

In the absence of dedicated manpower, the corporation has deployed staffers from waste management, engineering, and other departments to do the job.

Prof Mohammad Mushtuq Husain, a public health expert, said policymakers must recognise the importance of entomologists and other scientific experts and act accordingly if they want to build a healthcare system capable of responding to emergencies.

If it's not possible to create permanent posts and career structures immediately, entomologists should at least be engaged as consultants, he said.

When contacted on September 25, Abul Khair Mohammad Hafizullah Khan, joint secretary (Urban Development) of the Local Government Division, said the government has already taken up a World Bank-funded public health project, and one of its main components is vector management.

"In order to curb the spread of dengue, posts of specialists, including entomologists, have been created under the Improvement of Urban Public Health Preventive Services Project."

However, the recruitment of manpower under the project will take a considerable amount of time, he added.

## September deadliest, Oct peak looms

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Prof Kabirul Bashar, an entomologist at Jahangirnagar University, said, "Dengue comes in waves. When mosquito density is high alongside rising cases, it becomes very difficult to stop. Our forecasting model shows that cases will peak in October, start to decline in November, but continue significantly until January. Stopping it completely now is almost impossible."

Bashar stressed that while city corporations must intensify source reduction, breeding-site management, hotspot control, and other measures, everyone must act from their own position.

"Without active community participation in eliminating breeding grounds, controlling this outbreak will be extremely difficult," he said.

GM Saifur Rahman, an entomologist at National University, urged intensified mosquito-control drives in hotspots, including targeted breeding-zone eradication, adult mosquito elimination, and sustained

nationwide action.

He also called for community mobilisation through awareness campaigns.

WHY DEATHS ARE RISING

DGHS data show that 81 percent of dengue patients who died this year were admitted to hospitals only after suffering fever for three or more days, highlighting delayed hospitalisation as the leading cause of fatalities.

While disclosing the data at a press conference on September 22, DGHS Director General Prof Md Abu Jafor said early testing and timely hospitalisation are therefore crucial.

Of the deaths, 74 percent occurred within 48 hours of admission; 50 percent of patients died from Dengue Shock Syndrome (DSS); and 43 percent of the deceased had comorbidities.

HM Nazmul Ahsan, associate professor at Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College Hospital, noted that four viral infections -- influenza, dengue, chikungunya, and Covid-19 -- are circulating simultaneously,

leading to negligence in seeking medical care and late testing.

"Many patients fail to recognise warning signs such as severe abdominal pain, breathing difficulties, bleeding, extreme fatigue, or a sharp fall in urination. By the time they arrive at hospitals, their condition is often critical," he said.

He added that many critically ill patients are referred to Dhaka hospitals from districts, but delays in referral are also driving up fatalities. He urged district-level hospitals to strictly follow national treatment guidelines and treat patients locally.

Public health expert Mohammad Mushtuq Husain echoed the call for early treatment and stronger healthcare capacity outside Dhaka.

He stressed the need to strengthen secondary care hospitals to better manage vulnerable groups, including infants, the elderly, and patients with comorbidities, so that they can be stabilised before referral to tertiary centres.

## Doctors find 'no signs of rape'

FROM PAGE 1

Yesterday, Joya told The Daily Star that the team included the hospital's medical officers Mosharraf Hossain and Nahida Akhtar.

She refused to provide any details of the report, saying, "We have submitted the report to higher authorities, and they will handle further disclosure."

Contacted, Civil Surgeon Shaber said that the medical board had found "no evidence of assault".

"However, this is a matter for the court, which will determine the truth," he said.

The girl was admitted on the night of September 23, and samples were collected the next day, he said.

He added that they handed the report over to the investigation officer of the case and the superintendent of police immediately after receiving it on Tuesday.

Meanwhile, Kripan Tripura,

spokesperson for the Jumma Chhatra Janata, alleged that it was a "fabricated report by the government".

"We don't know of any rape case report being released this quickly in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. We demand a fair and proper investigation," he said.

The Daily Star's attempts to speak to the girl's family have not yet been successful.

The alleged incident took place on September 23 when the eighth grader was returning home from private tuition around 9:00pm. Her father filed a case the next morning with Khagrachhari Sadar Police Station against three unidentified men.

Protests and violence erupted over the incident under the banner of Jumma Chhatra Janata. Amid the violence, three people were shot dead and at least four others were injured on September 28.

## BCB set for controversial

FROM PAGE 1

Commissioner's office in Mirpur.

"Today cricket has 100 percent lost; there is no doubt about it. You talk loudly about needing to stop fixing in Bangladesh cricket; first stop the election fixing, then we can think about stopping cricket fixing.... This election has become a black spot for the BCB," he added.

BCB had previously decided to allow the 15 clubs to participate given the fact that there was no conviction against those clubs, leaving the issue to the jurisdiction of the EC, which initially dropped the councillors from the 15 clubs from the draft voter list, pending an appeal. Following the appeal, the EC allowed them to participate before Faruque's writ petition left the clubs' fate hanging.

The last-minute suspension of 15 councillors had apparently left Tamim disappointed as he was banking on those votes in the battle for 12 directors' positions from the Dhaka club category.

Tamim had been critical of the way the councillors were being nominated from districts and divisional categories.

The former Bangladesh skipper had previously blamed the incumbent BCB president Aminul Islam Bulbul of influencing nomination from the district and divisional sports associations after Aminul sent a letter on September 18 to the Ministry of Youth and Sports, asking to send councillors' names from the ad-hoc committees.

Four individuals, who were denied councillorship, had filed a writ petition on September 22, challenging Aminul's letter and the HC bench ordered a stay for 15 days on the operation of the letter. However, following a petition filed by the Ministry of Youth and Sports

challenging the HC order, the Supreme Court chamber judge stayed the HC order.

NSC, governing body of the country's sports, had dissolved the committees of all district and divisional sports associations and formed ad-hoc committees following the fall of the Awami League government on August 5, 2024.

The NSC had used its quota of two nominated directors to bring in Faruque and Nazmul Abedeen Fahim, which set the first precedent of government interference.

The NSC also brought in Bulbul following the same mechanism and instated him as a director, paving the way for the former captain to replace Faruque at the hot seat of the most financially solvent sporting body of the country.

Israfil Khosru, another councillor from Axiom Cricketers who withdrew his nomination, also alleged that a certain section of the government had interfered.

"There is blatant interference going on in the BCB elections. There is no election environment here.... A certain group within the government is interfering here. For now, that's all I can say. Very soon we will hold a press conference and reveal everything in detail," Israfil said yesterday.

There have been allegations from several councillors that government brought in their own people in the ad-hoc committee and eventually nominated their chosen councillors for the directors' elections.

Meanwhile, Lutfur Rahman Badal, another BCB councillor from a Dhaka-based club, felt that Tamim and others stepped away fearing defeat in the elections.

"As a candidate I feel that they made their calculations and came to the conclusion that they would lose," Badal told The Daily Star.