



PHOTO: COLLECTED



## Dhaka's evolving love affair with strawberries

RBR

When locally grown strawberries first hit the Dhaka market, still in their trial runs, the fruits were as sour as sour could be. But trust us, Dhaka vendors, we've created a desi-styled street snack, like a bhorta mix, to go with it.

I first stumbled on this strange concoction around the Dhaka University campus, but dared to try it from a vendor sitting under the Karwan Bazar overpass.

Strawberries always felt like an exotic fruit, out of my reach. They belonged to rich tea parties or fancy breakfasts, savoured with melted chocolate, cheesecake, or Greek yoghurt. For the rest of us, they were too sour to bother with.

That changed once I picked a chunk from the recycled newspaper packet and let the vendor's spice mixology hit me.

The sweet and sour taste of the strawberries clashed with the heat of green chillies, the tang of mustard oil or kasundi, which is a local fermented mustard sauce or relish, and the

sharpness of rock salt -- all put together, worked delightfully well.

It was not mashed like a bhorta, but chopped and mixed, giving sour strawberries a fiery street-food identity. It became, and still is, a seasonal favourite in Dhaka.

However, after years of trial and error, local strawberries are now sweet, juicy, and plump, enticing people like me to even try going on strawberry-picking trips on the outskirts of Dhaka.

Picking your own strawberries from the fields is slowly but surely becoming an adventurous attraction. And with families and farmers posting reels and selfies among the vibrant red rows of the fruit, the only tune echoing in my mind is the timeless Beatles favourite: "Let me take you down, 'cause I'm going to Strawberry Fields... Nothing is real, and nothing to get hung about... Strawberry Fields Forever."

But getting here wasn't easy. Commercial strawberry cultivation in Bangladesh took years of tests and trials, since the fruit is not traditionally native to the country. Pioneer cultivators faced losses in the



early years due to poor quality and hesitant buyers. The bigger challenge was to acclimatise strawberries to our tropical/sub-tropical climate and soil.

Fast forward to today: the net result is a bumper harvest of sweet, juicy strawberries. Social media is now flooded with advertisements inviting Dhaka residents to pick strawberries straight from the fields in Kurigram, Lalmonirhat, Rajshahi, and Bogura. The sandy loam soil of these areas in

winter gives the right conditions for growing the profitable local varieties called Rabi 1, Rabi 2, and Rabi 3.

Now, things are looking good. Local strawberries are giving the imported ones stiff competition in terms of look, colour, size, and taste. And we, as buyers, have finally taken to the flavour -- adding the fruit to our ice cream scoops, or making jam and compote to enrich our home-made confectionery.

Street prices vary between Tk 550 and Tk 1,200 per kilo in Dhaka markets, and Tk 250 to Tk 500 for wholesalers. And with Ramadan underway, strawberries have found a new role. After a long day of fasting, their hydrating juiciness offers both comfort and nourishment, making them a seasonal blessing on our iftar tables.

They slip easily into our iftar spread -- whether tossed into fruit chaat, blended into a lassi, or simply eaten fresh after dates. They bring a refreshing sweetness to break the day's fast. A fruit packed with vitamin C, antioxidants, and natural sweetness that was once seen as too exotic, too sour, now feels right at home on Dhaka's iftar tables.

## Stay on message

FROM PAGE 1

of anonymity. The prime minister also emphasised that transparency must be reflected in all official activities and that the government's image should be upheld with responsibility and integrity.

Tarique also reviewed the attendance of ministers and state ministers and thanked a few cabinet members who had stayed beyond office hours to complete their work.

Earlier on Sunday, he had expressed anger at his cabinet members for not maintaining proper office hours and directed them to adhere strictly to official schedules.

The law ministry yesterday issued an office order directing all officers and employees to ensure regular attendance at work.

Absence without permission, leaving the office without permission and coming late to the office must be avoided, it said.

The ministry also instructed everyone to be present at their respective offices by 9:00am and not to leave before 5:00pm.

If any officer or employee remains absent without permission, leaves the office without approval or arrives late, disciplinary action will be taken against them, said the office order.

Earlier yesterday, Tarique attended his office at the Armed Forces Division in Dhaka Cantonment for the first time since becoming the PM.

He later went to the Secretariat, where Chinese Ambassador to Bangladesh Yao Wen paid a courtesy call on him.

Tarique subsequently chaired

an inter-ministerial meeting on the launch of the Farmers' Card programme aimed at ensuring fair prices for farmers' produce.

"Real farmers must be identified and government services must reach them directly. Agriculture is the main power of the economy. So, we must ensure the highest use of technology to improve the living standard of farmers," he said at the meeting held at the Secretariat.

The smart card system is being introduced to reduce the influence of middlemen and to make sure farmers can easily receive their fair dues and government subsidies.

After being informed about the technical details, distribution system and database progress of the Farmers' Card, Tarique directed officials to implement the programme in the field as soon as possible.

He is likely to formally inaugurate the Family Card distribution programme on March 10.

The government will launch the programme on a pilot basis in one ward of 13 upazilas: Korail slum in Banani, Pangsha, Patenga, Banchharampur, Lama, Khalishpur, Charlesson, Dirai, Bhairab, Bogura Sadar, Lalpur, Thakurgaon and Nawabganj.

The card will be issued in the name of the female head of each household. To ensure smooth implementation, committees will be formed at the upazila, union and ward levels.

In each upazila, a first-class officer will be designated as the supervising officer for the selected ward, with the upazila tag officer providing

necessary support.

Funds for the current fiscal year will be allocated to the social welfare ministry from the finance ministry's block allocation.

Financial assistance will be disbursed to beneficiaries through any scheduled bank or mobile financial service of their choice.

Under the plan, one ward will be selected in each upazila, with 1,000 families in every ward receiving a Family Card.

If implemented in 10 upazilas, a total of 10,000 families will come under the first phase. The Daily Star has learnt from people with direct knowledge of the discussion.

Priority will be given to the rural poor, landless families, farm and day labourers, people unable to earn, widows and women-headed households.

Only one member per family will be eligible, and beneficiaries of certain existing schemes may not receive overlapping benefits.

Data from programmes such as the food ministry's food-friendly scheme and the women and children affairs ministry's Vulnerable Women Development programme may be integrated into the new system.

The ministry officials will outline eligibility criteria, administrative structure, monitoring mechanisms, expenditure details and technological management.

If the report is submitted and approved on schedule, the pilot phase could begin in the first week of March, said a state minister asking not to be named.

## Govt to review 'harassment' cases filed

FROM PAGE 1

of their involvement. Among them are several prominent businesspeople and other well-known, distinguished members of society."

He said the authorities have been asked to review the cases and take steps to ensure those falsely implicated do not suffer any further.

Responding to a question, the [home minister] said no separate committee will be needed for this. "This is the police's job and they'll do it," he said, adding that no deadline has been set but a report "will be submitted quickly".

Asked whether journalists are among those affected, he replied, "All people are included. The rule of law will apply to everyone."

Adding that there was no need to single out any profession, he said, "If they are accused in cases under the ICT Act, they will be tried under that law. Those accused in other cases under general provisions will be tried accordingly. There is no reason to harass any particular [profession] separately."

According to a recent Transparency International Bangladesh report, 1,785 cases -- including 837 murder cases -- linked to crimes against humanity during the July uprising had been filed nationwide as of November 19, 2025.

The watchdog expressed serious concern over what it termed the "indiscriminate filing of cases" following the uprising. It estimated that around 150,000 people across the country have been accused.

The report cited widespread allegations of "case trade", retaliatory filings, political harassment and extortion, including threats of inclusion or promises of exclusion in cases. In many instances, law enforcement agencies accepted cases without proper investigation due to pressure, it said.

### NEW PROBE BODY FOR BDR CARNAGE

A significant development, the home minister announced that the government would form a new commission to reinvestigate the

2009 BDR carnage at Pilkhana.

"As per our decision to ensure justice, we will set up another enquiry body to investigate the BDR carnage," he said, responding to a query about implementing the recommendations of the interim government's commission.

### FRESH CONSTABLE RECRUITMENT

Salahuddin also told reporters that recruitment to the post of police constable during the Awami League government's three terms would be scrutinised following reports that some individuals secured jobs by forging their names and permanent addresses.

"Police have been asked to investigate such incidents."

Addressing the manpower crisis in the force, he announced the urgent recruitment of 2,701 constables through the existing process, which will begin soon.

The minister also promised justice for around 650 sub-inspectors and sergeants who were "unfairly" disqualified at the final stage of recruitment in 2006.

He noted that although a file seeking their reinstatement had previously been sent to the chief adviser's office following a court verdict, it had not been approved. "They will certainly receive justice and be reinstated."

In a shift from recent policy, Salahuddin announced the cancellation of the lottery-based system for appointing officers-in-charge and superintendents of police. The system, introduced during the interim government, was deemed "not transparent" by the minister.

"From now on, postings will be based on service records, skills and qualifications. Only those deemed competent by the police department will be assigned to appropriate positions," he said, adding that he [directed] district SPs to stop providing political protocol and to strictly adhere to statutory guidelines.

### FIREARMS AND PASSPORTS

The home minister also said the

government will review and, if necessary, cancel firearms and ammunition licences issued during the 17-year tenure of the Awami League government, alleging that many were granted on political considerations.

He added that around 10,000 firearms have become illegal after holders failed to deposit them as directed by the interim government.

To curb the influence of brokers at passport offices, he proposed appointing "enlisted assistants" similar to the model used in sub-registry offices.

"These representatives would provide services for a fixed fee to assist those who struggle with the online application system."

### WARNING AGAINST MOB CULTURE

Salahuddin reiterated the government's commitment to end "mob culture", warning of punitive and decisive action. "I have already said the mob culture in Bangladesh has ended. We will react strongly and take prompt action if it occurs anywhere in the country."

He added that the "era of realising demands by occupying roads and highways" is over and that all demands must be raised through due process of law.

### Literary Award 2025

FROM PAGE 1

are: Mohon Railhan (poetry), Nasima Anis (fiction), Syed Azizul Haque (essays/prose), Hasan Hafiz (children's literature), Ali Ahmed (translation), Mustafa Majid and Israel Khan (research), Farseem Mannan Mohammedy (science), and Moidul Hasan (Liberation War).

The press release added that the executive council of the Bangla Academy approved the Bangla Academy Literary Award 2025 based on the recommendations of the nomination committee and in line with the decision of the award committee.

## 2 held over rape of woman in Bhola

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barishal

Two people were arrested yesterday in a case filed over the rape of a woman in Bhola's Tazumuddin upazila on Sunday night.

The case was filed against three main accused -- Rakib, Shakil and Rasel -- yesterday afternoon, shortly after which Rakib was arrested.

The other arrestee Jewel was apprehended on suspicion of aiding the three, Sushanta Malo, officer in charge (investigation) of Tazumuddin Police Station told The Daily Star.

Police said operations were underway to find and arrest Shakil and Rasel.

The victim's family and police said the 25-year-old mother of one was on her way home from a religious programme around 9:00pm when the three youths from a neighbouring village intercepted her, forcibly took her to the bank of the Meghna river and raped her throughout the night.

Locals found her in critical condition in an orchard near the site of the incident yesterday morning.

Speaking to journalists, the victim's mother said, "My daughter told me three people did this to her -- Rakib, Shakil and Rasel. All three used to be my daughter's classmates in school."

"They wanted to kill my daughter and dump her body in the river," she alleged, adding, "We couldn't find my daughter throughout the night."

SEE PAGE 10 COL 4

## ICT prosecutor alleges corruption against Tajul, Tamim

### Both reject accusations

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A prosecutor of the International Crimes Tribunal has raised serious allegations of corruption and irregularities against Tajul Islam, the immediate past chief prosecutor of the court, and fellow prosecutor Gazi Monwar Hossain Tamim.

In a Facebook post yesterday, Prosecutor BM Sultan Mahmud alleged a series of irregularities, including money exchanges and questionable handling of high-profile cases.

According to the post, in late November last year, the wife of Abzal, an accused in the case over the killing and burning of six bodies in Ashulia, entered Tamim's room in the evening carrying a heavy bag.

"After noticing the matter, we immediately went to Tajul Islam's room and informed him. No action was taken; instead, we were scolded," Sultan alleged.

He further claimed that Tamim later admitted in front of others that Abzal's wife had visited his office. "The chief prosecutor only asked why the accused's wife had gone to his room. The matter ended there," he said.

Sultan alleged that Abzal was later made a state witness and eventually acquitted in the final verdict.

He also raised concerns over the Chankharpu

SEE PAGE 9 COL 4

AFP, Hamoi

Unauthorised drones disrupted more than 50 flights at Vietnam's Danang international airport during the busy Lunar New Year holiday, state media said yesterday.

Two separate incidents last week saw flights delayed or forced

into holding patterns before landing when authorities detected drones flying dangerously close to aircraft, the Thanh Nien newspaper reported.

It was not clear who was operating the drones or how close they came to the aircraft.

However, a total of 54 flights

were delayed because of the drone incursions, Thanh Nien said, citing airport authorities.

Danang airport officials did not immediately respond to AFP's request for comment.

Vietnam bans the private use of unmanned aerial vehicles and high-intensity lighting around airports.