



PHOTOS: SAZZAD IBNE SAYED

Aam tel and the Bengali palate

RBR

My first encounter with the word "aam tel" wasn't in my own kitchen, but through the West Bengal series "Indubala's Bhaater Hotel". In my corner of Bengal, we always called it aam'er achar'er tel – the oil from green mango pickle.

The West Bengal name, however, carries a lyrical charm that instantly evokes the essence of this traditional Bengali creation: sun-cured raw mango pickle steeped in mustard oil, sharp, pungent, and deeply savoury.

There is more than love in aam tel; it is painstakingly made with thinly sliced unripe mangoes, cold-pressed mustard oil (ghani sorsher tel), and a medley of spices – panch phoron (fenugreek, cumin, nigella, black mustard, fennel), turmeric, and red chillies. The result is tangy and sour, with a fiery jhaj from the mustard oil that defines the Bengali palate.

Boishakh, the season of green mangoes, makes this fruit inseparable from the cuisine of the time. The tartness of unripe mangoes is celebrated in countless ways: sliced and sprinkled with salt and chili powder as a quick

snack, blended into cooling aam panna – or as we call it in Dhaka, kacha aam'er shorbot – cooked into tangy tok daal (lentils with mango), or transformed into fiery pickles like aam tel.

Green mangoes embody the spirit of Boishakh because they bring people together. Families and friends exchange love in the form of achar. On any given Boishakhi weekend in Dhaka, achar-making unfolds as part of the season's rhythm. Mangoes are sliced in kitchens, jars line verandas, and the pungent aroma of mustard oil mingles with the heat of April afternoons – all set against the ritual of placing jars out in the sun to cure. It is a sensory celebration of community and tradition.

The versatility of green mango makes it central to both festive spreads and humble home cooking, much like pithas during nobanno. Every household has its own method of slicing, spicing, and sun-curing, yet the essence remains the same: achar is the sharp, pungent heartbeat of Bengali cuisine.

While achar is beloved across South Asia, each region has its own spin. What sets Bengali achar apart is mustard oil –

perfected with cold-pressed mustard oil, sun-ripened fruits, hand-picked chillies, and freshly ground spices. More than food, Achari captures the soul of Bengali kitchens and preserves it in a jar.

My favourite from their menu is the Chalta Lila pickle, where the tang of elephant apple meets the sweetness of jaggery, without the harsh astringency. However, Tintiri, a raw tamarind dry pickle, is their best seller; one bite, and you will reach for the entire jar.

I liked Achari's nomenclature for its product line; Tintiri, for example, is the Sanskrit word for tamarind tree or fruit; Jolpaishatta is a deshi olive pulp chewy bar; Golpai, a rounded olive pulp preparation.

You'll find them at fairs and festivals such as the SME Boishakhi Mela 1433, scheduled for April 12-18, 2026, at the Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre, and at Alok Convention Hall on April 13-14 for the Arka Boishakhi Fair.

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4 assaulted by 'Azadi Andolon' in Shahbagh

Victims say they were targeted over gender identity; women harassed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least four people were assaulted by a crowd rallying under the banner of "Azadi Andolon" in the capital's Shahbagh last night.

The attackers reportedly targeted the victims after accusing them of being "queer" or "gender diverse". The incident took place around 8:00pm near the National Museum gate. Videos circulating on social media later showed a crowd throwing the victims to the ground and assaulting them.

The victims alleged that they were attacked without provocation and claimed that women in the group were sexually harassed during the incident.

Contacted by The Daily Star, Kazi Tahsin Agaz, a victim of the attack, said that around 20 people brought out a procession in the area, chanting slogans against homosexuality.

"While we were having tea at a roadside shop nearby, the group surrounded us... When we were about to leave, they started touching women inappropriately, sexually abusing them.

"We repeatedly asked them not to beat us, but they kept hitting us, targeting our heads."

Agaz added that the attackers were shouting slogans calling for violence against the LGBTQI community.

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Thakurgaon youth killed in South Africa

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Thakurgaon

A Bangladeshi youth was shot dead by unidentified assailants in Zonkizwe Township of Katlehong, Johannesburg, on Thursday night.

The victim, Sohan Hossain, 18, was the son of Md Dulal of Chikanmatli village of Thakurgaon's Ranishankoil upazila.

Sohan's paternal uncle, Sirajul Islam, who had taken him to South Africa about two months ago and employed him at his shop, said they were at the shop around 7:30pm (local time) when the power suddenly went out.

"At that time, two local men came to the shop and one asked for a candle and the other for a cigarette," he told The Daily Star over the phone.

"As Sohan went to take money for the candle, and I moved to get the cigarette inside the shop, I suddenly heard several gunshots. I saw him lying on the floor. He died on the spot."

Contacted, Rafiqul Islam, Thakurgaon deputy commissioner, said the administration would take necessary steps to assist in bringing back the body once the family approaches them.

US-Iran talks 'on track' amid truce violations

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On Thursday, Trump blasted Iran for doing a "very poor job" of letting oil through the strait. He also warned Tehran against trying to collect fees from ships crossing it. "That is not the agreement we have!"

Trump, in an interview with the New York Post yesterday, said that US warships are being reloaded with weaponry to strike Iran if talks in Pakistan fail to produce a deal.

"We have a reset going. We're loading up the ships with the best ammunition, the best weapons ever made – even better than what we did previously, and we blew them apart," the Post quoted Trump as saying.

"And if we don't have a deal, we will be using them, and we will be using them very effectively."

While Iran and Pakistan stated that the ceasefire included Lebanon, the US and Israel have since insisted that it is a separate issue.

Israeli forces launched the biggest attack of the war hours after the ceasefire was announced, killing more than 250 Lebanese in surprise strikes on heavily populated areas. Strikes across southern Lebanon yesterday killed more than a dozen people, Lebanon's state media said.

Meanwhile, air raid alerts sounded across Israel, including in the commercial hub of Tel Aviv and the southern coastal city of Ashdod, after rocket fire from Lebanon. There were no immediate reports of casualties.

In a shift on Thursday, Israel said it would open separate talks with the Lebanese government aimed at ending

the war there and disarming Hezbollah. A US State Department official confirmed the US would host an Israeli-Lebanese meeting next week.

Amid the gloom, a Pakistani source said "everything is on track" for the US-Iran peace talks to start today as planned.

Advance teams from both countries were already in place in the five-star Serena hotel in central Islamabad, where both delegations would stay for the duration of the talks. There were no face-to-face meetings planned for Friday, but Pakistan was relaying messages between them, the source said.

According to the Wall Street Journal, an Iranian delegation, led by Iran's foreign minister, Abbas Araghchi, and parliament Speaker, Ghalibaf, arrived in Islamabad late Thursday.

The centre of Islamabad was placed under complete lockdown for a hastily announced public holiday, with a security perimeter thrown up for a 3-km (2 mile) "red zone" around the hotel.

Although Trump has declared victory, the war did not achieve the aims he set out at the start: to deprive Iran of the ability to strike its neighbours, dismantle its nuclear programme and make it easier for its people to overthrow their government.

Iran still possesses missiles and drones capable of hitting its neighbours and a stockpile of more than 400 kg (900 pounds) of uranium enriched near the level needed to make a bomb. Its clerical rulers, who faced a popular uprising just months ago, withstood the onslaught with no sign of organised opposition.

Iran's agenda at the talks now includes demands for major new concessions, including the end of sanctions that crippled its economy for years, and acknowledgement of its authority over the strait, where it aims to collect transit fees and control access in what would amount to a huge shift in regional power.

Its new Supreme Leader Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei, yet to be seen in public since taking over from his father, released a defiant statement on Thursday saying Iran would demand compensation for all wartime damage.

"We will certainly not leave unpunished the criminal aggressors who attacked our country," he said.

The United States, for its part, wants Iran to relinquish the uranium, forgo further enrichment, give up its missiles and end support for regional allies – years-old demands left over from talks Trump abandoned two days before launching the war.

Pakistani officials remained tight-lipped about the arrangements for the negotiations, citing security and diplomatic concerns, but said the preparations were full steam ahead.

Apart from the foreign minister and Speaker, senior figures from Iran's Revolutionary Guard are also expected to attend the talks.

Officials said that delegations from Gulf countries, including Qatar and Saudi Arabia, which have faced heavy bombardment from Iran since the war began, would also be travelling to Islamabad and may take part in sideline talks.

ME war to cost Tk 36,000cr in extra subsidies

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supply chains, and international trade, the minister said, adding, "This will not only increase the budget deficit but also put pressure on foreign currency reserves, as an equivalent of about USD 3 billion will be required for import payments."

To address the situation, the government has taken measures to encourage efficient energy use, including closing government and autonomous offices at 4:00pm instead of 5:00pm, maximising daylight to reduce electric lighting and regulating air-conditioner temperatures, closing markets and shopping malls by 7:00pm, securing energy from alternative suppliers, ensuring timely subsidy releases to maintain uninterrupted imports and supply, and seeking additional budgetary support from development partners to ease fiscal and balance-of-payments pressures.

Khosru said that as an import-dependent economy, Bangladesh is not immune to this geopolitical reality, adding that despite the need for higher subsidies due to global energy prices, the government has decided not to adjust domestic prices for now, considering public hardship.

The government has already started working on formulating the budget for FY 2026-27, with the aim of establishing discipline across various sectors of the economy and addressing multifaceted pressures.

"We are fully aware of the immense expectations of the people from the first budget of the newly elected government. At the same time, we hope the public will also recognise the limitations we

face due to inherited challenges," the finance minister said, adding that the government's goal is not merely growth, but to build a sustainable, transparent, and inclusive economy.

Taking stock of the situation inherited from the Awami League government, the finance minister presented the state of macroeconomic indicators, social sector indicators, and institutional conditions across three key periods: the final fiscal year of the last BNP government (2005-06), the final fiscal year of the previous

Awami League government (2023-24), and the interim government's fiscal year (2024-25).

Over 16 years, the fascist AL government drove the economy to the brink of collapse through rampant corruption and unchecked plunder, while rendering the social and institutional sectors dysfunctional, Khosru said.

In contrast, under the BNP government, the economy's key indicators had been placed on a positive trajectory thanks to its farsighted and people-oriented economic vision, accelerating the pace of growth.

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"Much of that progress, however, has been undone over the last 16 years," he said.

Khosru told parliament that GDP growth fell from 6.78 percent in FY 2005-06 to 4.22 percent in FY 2023-24, while inflation rose from 7.17 percent to 9.73, despite overall economic expansion.

Over the same period, the taka depreciated from Tk 67.2 per US dollar to Tk 111, and further to Tk 121 in FY 2024-25, nearly halving its value and fuelling inflation, while broad money (M2) growth dropped from 19.3 percent to 7.7 percent.

Private sector credit growth declined from 18.3 percent in FY 2005-06 to 9.8 percent, and further to 6.5 percent in FY 2024-25, reflecting monetary mismanagement and structural weaknesses.

The tax-to-GDP ratio remained stagnant at 8.2 percent, while the deficit widened from 2.9 percent of GDP to 4 percent.

Interest payments surged from Tk 85 billion to Tk 1,147 billion, driven by heavy domestic borrowing that crowded out private credit. "Projects were overvalued... and billions siphoned abroad through corruption," the minister said.

Exports rose from USD 10.5 billion to USD 40.8 billion and imports from USD 13.3 billion to USD 63.2 billion by FY 2023-24, widening the trade gap and straining reserves. Remittances increased from USD 4.8 billion to USD 23.9 billion, while reserves stood at about USD 20 billion.

Under the interim government, remittances rose to USD 30.3 billion and reserves stood at USD 33.2 billion by December 2025.

Changes trigger debate in House

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These stipulate that the minister or state minister of cultural affairs will serve as chairperson of the museum's board, replacing the earlier provision for an externally appointed expert.

Opposition MPs denounced the changes as a breach of trust, noting that a special parliamentary committee had earlier decided 98 of the 133 ordinances issued by the interim government, including the museum ordinance, would be ratified unchanged.

After the bill was passed by voice vote, opposition members objected, arguing the amendments would bring the museum under government control. Speaker Hafiz Uddin countered that objections to amendments must be submitted in advance.

Jamaat MP Mir Ahmad Bin Kasem Arman protested, saying, "How could we possibly submit objections under such circumstances? We had not received the bill beforehand and were unaware of the amendments." The Speaker then announced a recess for Maghrib prayer.

After the break, Opposition Chief Whip Nahid Islam reminded the House of the committee's consensus. He said the amendments were introduced only

half an hour before the bill was tabled. "Anyone can propose amendments, and the opposition could have done so for all bills. But there was a consensus that no questions would be raised. Today the ruling party has broken that consensus in front of you. This is a breach of trust," he said.

"Such intolerance will not work, Mr Abdullah. This is not Shahbagh Square. This is parliament." Speaker Hafiz Uddin Ahmad

He also alleged the government used its majority to push through the changes, calling it "trickery and outright deception in broad daylight". Speaker Hafiz Uddin asked State Minister for Cultural Affairs Ali Newaz Mahmud Khaiyam to respond to the allegations.

Newaz admitted consensus had been reached but said the amendments were

introduced by a member and he himself saw those just yesterday. He also offered justifications for the changes.

Law Minister Md Asaduzzaman acknowledged the allegation was partly true but stressed that any private member has the right to propose amendments, which could be revised in future sessions.

Home Minister Salahuddin Ahmed echoed that the amendments did not originate from the government but from an individual lawmaker.

As tensions rose, the Speaker urged calm. "As the law minister said, there is a remedy if you are dissatisfied. I believe such discontent should not persist," he said.

At one point, NCP MP Hasnat Abdullah, a July uprising frontliner, shouted from the floor.

The Speaker rebuked him. "Such intolerance will not work, Mr Abdullah. This is not Shahbagh Square. This is parliament. Here you must wait patiently and listen," the Speaker said.

After prolonged exchanges, opposition MPs staged a walkout, protesting both the passage of the museum bill and the failure to ratify all 133 ordinances issued by the interim government.

44 of 94 ICU beds lie unused

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though some have ICU equipment, they don't have trained manpower," he said.

Between 2020 and 2024, a total of 240 ICU beds were installed in 22 districts under the Covid-19 Emergency Response and Pandemic Preparedness (ERPP) Project, funded largely by the World Bank.

Over 1,000 staffers, including medical officers and technicians, were recruited to operate the units. However, after their contracts expired in December 2024, the government neither reappointed them nor made any new appointments.

Under the ERPP project, Rajshahi division received 94 ICU beds: 40 at RMCH, 10 each at Shaheed Ziaur Rahman Medical College Hospital in Bogura, Shaheed M Monsur Ali Medical College Hospital in Sirajganj, Chapainawabganj District Hospital, and Joypurhat District Modern Hospital; eight at Mohammad Ali Hospital in Bogura; and six at Sirajganj General Hospital.

Officials said 44 of these beds remain non-operational outside RMCH and Shaheed Ziaur Rahman Medical College Hospital due to staff shortages. The paediatric ICU at RMCH has

been particularly strained. Authorities increased the number of ICU beds for children from 12 to 18 by reallocating resources for measles patients in critical condition.

"Only around 50 of the 94 ICU beds across the division are operational. The rest lie unused despite having equipment and infrastructure, as we lack manpower. We have repeatedly urged higher authorities to appoint staff," said the Rajshahi divisional health director.

Abu Hena Mostofa Kamal, in charge of RMCH's ICU, echoed him, saying the hospital faces overwhelming pressure because neighbouring districts lack trained personnel to run their ICUs. As a result, hundreds of patients from Rajshahi division, as well as Kushtia, Jhenaidah and Dinajpur, remain on waiting lists every month.

RMCH spokesperson Dr Shankar K Biswas said 119 children were admitted to the ICU last month, while 386 remained on the waiting list – 91 of them died before securing beds.

Among adults and elderly patients, 278 were admitted last month, while 614 were on the waiting list – 138 of whom died before getting ICU beds, he added.

RMCH authorities earlier this month sent a proposal to the health ministry seeking approval to establish a 100 bed ICU facility to address the crisis, Dr Shankar also said.

Health officials stressed the need for urgent measures, including fast-track recruitment, specialised ICU training, and decentralisation of critical care.

Without resolving the manpower crisis, ICU beds will continue to remain idle while patients die waiting for care that technically exists but remains inaccessible, they warned.

Dr Mozidul Islam, supervisor of Mohammad Ali Medical College Hospital in Bogura, said its eight-bed ICU has remained closed since the pandemic ended due to lack of staff.

Dr Akikun Nahar, superintendent of Sirajganj General Hospital, said the hospital's six ICU beds are also non-operational.

"We have the facilities but not the technical staff. We keep informing higher authorities, but no staff have been appointed yet," she said.

Repeated attempts to contact DGHS Director General Prof Dr Prabhat Chandra Biswas for comment were unsuccessful.