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BAISHAKH

Star LIFE S

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splash of BAISHAKH

PHOTO: ADNAN RAHMAN
MODEL: TANIA
STYLING & FASHION DIRECTION: SONIA YEASMIN ISHA
WARDROBE: SHAHRUKH AMIN
MAKEUP: SUMON RAHAT
HAIR: NOYON

#LITERATURE

Gopal Bhar: Is he real or is it just folklore?

An adorable egg-shaped face, sharp eyes, bald pate, and orange and yellow clothing: that is the image that conjures up Gopal Bhar for generations of Bengalis. The term "Bhar" literally means a court jester or a steward/caretaker of the court, and our favourite jester here was also referred to as Gopal Chandra Nai, as he was believed to have come from a family of barbers or napits.

Despite being considered a major historic figure of the era and one of the nine gems in the King's court, it is surprising that, according to a number of scholars, including the famed historian Acharya Sukumar Sen, he is not even a real person!

Still, the magic of the folklore is so intense that his stories and his statues have endured the test of time, especially in Krishnanagar and around the palace of King Krishnachandra.

"He was the hero of our evening stories—his cleverness made us laugh and think," reminisces Mehnaz Majid, a teacher. "Gopal was a big part of my childhood, and it would be difficult to recreate the clean, innocent pleasure in a mascot of today."

Such reverence, even after years of the creation of this cherished character, warrants the question: what was so unique in Gopal Bhar that has compelled so many generations to remain loyal fans?

The answer lies in the way the stories have been written: they are a perfect blend of satire, moral lesson and comic relief. The character was intellectual, without being pompous, open-minded without pretension, used covert tactics to foil unethical conspiracies, and made use of his cunning mind to expose corruption without the use of brute force.

"His stories made moral lessons memorable without feeling preachy," Shaheer Alam, a young father, noted when sharing the tales with his own children.

While the anecdotes themselves entered print to delight young children, a growing readership among adults brought adaptations for theatres, radio and television, ensuring that Gopal's voice reached every household. It seemed as if Gopal Bhar was here not just to enthral children but also to serve a broader purpose. It became a medium through which adults could offer social criticism and start meaningful conversations on communal values of fairness and common sense.

While it may have seemed that Gopal Bhar was momentarily dethroned with a decline in the popularity of comics and print media, the beloved character with orange-yellow robes, round face, and bright eyes has found continuity and audience in other mediums such as animated series, anthologies, and cultural programmes.

The enduring success of Gopal Bhar is testimony to the fact that a solid character and stellar storytelling can outlive the shortest attention spans and live to tell the tale. Pun very much intended!

By Munira Fidai
Illustration: Ayman Anika

#LIFEHACKS

Hajj 2026: Dos and don'ts for Bangladeshi hajjis

It stands as one of the fundamental pillars of Islam. Hajj remains a deeply spiritual journey that every faithful Muslim cherishes the desire to perform. Because of its immense significance, executing this pilgrimage in a fair, fluent, and religious manner requires a meticulous plan. Hajj management is inherently a cooperative, bi-national operation. While the government of Bangladesh takes all necessary steps to support its citizens, the entire framework is ultimately guided by the regulations, timelines, and roadmaps strictly established by the Saudi government.

According to the official Hajj roadmap, the dedicated Hajj flights from Bangladesh have commenced. The departure window will remain open until the final flight leaves on 21 May, 2026. The holy Hajj is expected to take place on or around 26 May 2026, subject to the physical sighting of the moon.

This year, a total of 78,500 pilgrims from Bangladesh will be making the journey. For those already registered, almost 100 per cent of pilgrim visas have already been successfully processed and completed.

Medical fitness is no longer optional

In a bid to ensure the safety and well-being of all participants, the Saudi government has instituted a strict ban on performing Hajj without certified medical fitness. Individuals suffering from severe chronic conditions are strictly prohibited from making the pilgrimage this year.

The restricted list specifically includes those with severe heart disease, liver cirrhosis, kidney disease requiring dialysis, mental illness, risky pregnancies, tuberculosis, cancer patients actively receiving therapy, and advanced age conditions resulting in dementia or the inability to walk independently, etc.

Pilgrims are strongly advised to take this rule seriously. The Saudi government has warned that any traveller found lacking medical fitness upon arrival will be immediately repatriated from the airport.

Pre-flight logistics and luggage rules

Every registered pilgrim must hold a valid Bangladeshi passport with an expiration date no earlier than 30 November 2026. Before heading to the airport, ensure you have downloaded the visas from the e-hajj portal or successfully obtained them from the hajj agency concerned.

Timely arrival at the Hajj Camp in Dhaka is mandatory to ensure smooth boarding and immigration. Dhaka-based pilgrims must arrive at least six hours prior to their flight, and the rest must arrive at least one full day before their flight. Free accommodation is available at the hajj camp hostel, though food must be purchased from the canteen at one's own expense.

Luggage dimensions and limits

A pilgrim can carry a total of 46 kg of luggage in two trolley bags or any other bag or carton with a maximum of 23 kg each as check-in luggage. A handbag weighing 7 kg can also be carried as cabin luggage.

The check-in luggage should be 65 cm in length, 45 cm in width, and 25 cm in height, while the cabin luggage should be 45 cm in length, 35 cm in width, and 20 cm in height.

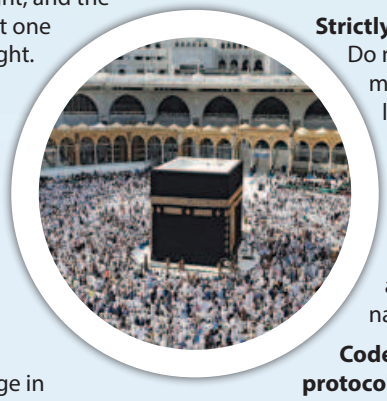
To avoid complications or fines at airport check-ins, pack strictly according to those dimensions.

Pro-tip for luggage

Always keep a fresh set of ihram clothes and basic daily essentials in your carry-on cabin bag. This ensures you have your ritual garb ready, even if your check-in luggage experiences delivery delays. Furthermore, if you require medication for conditions like diabetes or high blood pressure, you must pack at least a 50-day supply along with your official prescriptions.

To facilitate finding lost luggage, clearly write the pilgrim's name, nationality, passport number, PID number, roaming mobile number, Hajj agency name, and the guide's mobile number in English on the bags.

If the luggage is lost, it must be reported to the Bangladesh Hajj Office in Jeddah, Mecca, or Medina directly or through the agency's representative or the hajj guide.



Strictly illegal items

Do not pack intoxicating medicines, tobacco leaves, zarda, gul, shutki (dried fish), jaggery, cooked food, or perishable items. Carrying these will result in legal action and tarnish the national image.

Codes of conduct and protocols in Saudi Arabia

To maintain public order and ensure a smooth spiritual experience, pilgrims are expected to observe specific behavioural guidelines.

Upon landing, the Makkah Route Initiatives Service will ensure your check-in luggage is delivered directly to your hotel or designated home. While in the Kingdom, security and protocol are paramount. You must always carry your Nusuk card, Moyallem card, hotel card, and PID card.

Walking outside your hotel without your Nusuk card makes you liable for arrest by Saudi police.

Political activities, public demonstrations, begging, and any immoral or criminal acts are strictly forbidden and heavily penalised. Cooperate fully with law enforcement; obstructing or disrespecting Saudi officers carries severe punishments.

You will be assigned a certified Hajj guide (1 guide per 46 pilgrims). Rituals in Mina, Arafah, Muzdalifah, and Jamara must be performed collectively with your guide. Do not attempt to go throw stones at the Jamara alone, as the risk of getting lost or injured in the crowd is exceptionally high.

Healthcare and emergency support

If any pilgrim falls ill, free medical care and medications are available at dedicated clinics set up by the Ministry of Religious Affairs in Mecca, Medina, and Jeddah. General treatment is also accessible at Saudi Government Hospitals, if required.

If you happen to lose your way or find yourself separated from your group, you need not panic. You should try to find out the Bangladesh Hajj Mission office, Makkah or press the SOS button on the 'Labbaik' mobile apps or call the local emergency hotline directly at 009668001160029.

Return protocol

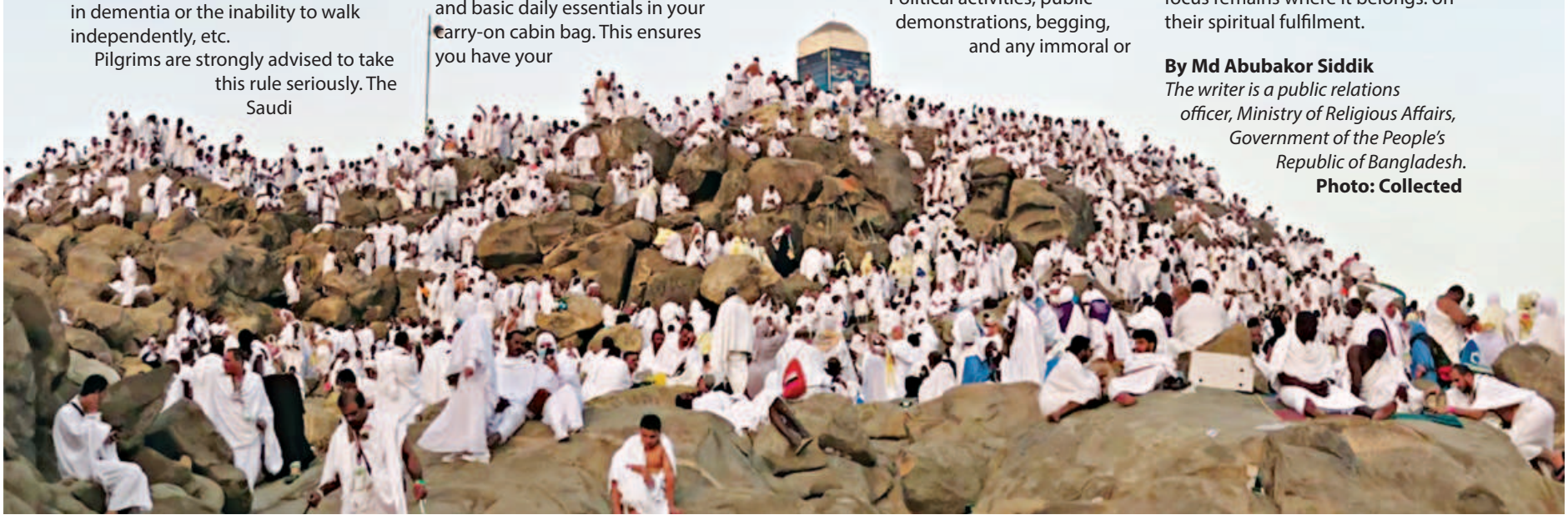
As your holy journey concludes, please ensure your return luggage does not exceed the weight limits enforced during your arrival.

Be explicitly aware that carrying Zamzam water inside your personal checked or carry-on luggage is strictly banned by the Saudi government. You do not need to risk packing it; a 5-litre container of blessed Zamzam water will be directly supplied to every pilgrim at the landing airport upon arriving back home in Bangladesh.

Hajj is a journey of discipline and devotion. By following these regulations, pilgrims can ensure their focus remains where it belongs: on their spiritual fulfilment.

By Md Abubakor Siddik
The writer is a public relations officer, Ministry of Religious Affairs, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh.

Photo: Collected



#EVENTS

Arka Boishakh 1433: A curated take on the Bengali New Year

Baishakh in Dhaka has long been associated with crowds, colour, and ritual. Yet, somewhere along the way, the experience became predictable. Arka Boishakh 1433, held between 13 and 14 April at Aloki, attempted to interrupt that pattern. Instead of simply recreating tradition, it asked what Baishakh could feel like today. The answer was not a grand spectacle but a carefully structured environment divided into zones, layered with interaction, and designed to encourage participation rather than mere observation.

For Asad Sattar, Founder of Arka Collective, the intention was clear from the beginning.

"I wanted to create something that truly celebrates the new year," he said. "Baishakh is a very important day in Bangladesh, but I feel it's not celebrated the way it should be anymore. The younger generation has not really experienced it the way previous generations did. What Ramna Park used to be for Baishakh — I would love for spaces like Arka or Aloki to become that new version. Something that respects heritage but also creates something new."

Breaking the mela into experiences

Instead of a single, overwhelming event, Arka Boishakh 1433 was built as a system of zones, each with a distinct function.

Khelaghor, the games and activity area, focused on interaction. It drew from traditional Bengali fair games but removed the distance between performer and audience. Visitors did not just watch — they played, explored, and engaged. The simplicity of the space worked in its favour. It did not rely on spectacle; it relied on familiarity.

Elsewhere, the Collective Mela served as the marketplace. However, unlike typical Baishakh bazaars, this was not about volume. It was curated, slower, and more intentional. Visitors browsed rather than rushed, discovering brands and crafts without the pressure of constant transaction.

This balance between activity and pause defined the event's rhythm.

Wearing culture, not just seeing it

Among the curated brands, there was a noticeable shift in how culture was being interpreted.

For Tahmina Shaily, founder of Shoilee, Baishakh was not just a moment to sell, it was an opportunity to communicate

identity.

"For Arka Boishakh 1433, I wanted something that roars with Bengali pride," she explained. "So, I introduced a limited collection featuring tiger motifs etched into jewellery. The tiger represents strength, just like the spirit of Pohela Baishakh. When you wear this piece, you are not just accessorising, you are carrying a symbol of Bengal's wild, untamed beauty," she added.

Her work reflects a broader shift among emerging designers and creators: culture is no longer being presented passively. It is being worn, carried, and reinterpreted.

At Bhojonaloy, the food zone, the approach was similarly grounded. Instead of reinventing Baishakhi cuisine, it leaned into familiarity. At one stall, Baishakhi from Bengal Bites offered a mix of traditional snacks and playful reinterpretations.

"We have mini chicken spring rolls, shingara, and peyaju. We are serving them both normally and as chaat," she explains. "And I have made handmade roshomalai."

Moreover, at the Collective Moncho, performances unfolded throughout the day — music, dance, and cultural programmes. However, the stage did not demand attention in the way traditional event stages often do.

New forms of participation

Beyond the main zones, smaller interactive corners added another layer to the event.

Tattoo booths, henna artists, caricature stations, and bioscope experiences created informal entry points into the mela. These were not headline attractions, but they carried a different kind of value and made the event personal.

For Avijit Saha, senior tattoo artist at Ink Park, the event offered more than just business.

"This is our second time at Arka, but first for Baishakh," he says. "It's been a very good experience. We are getting a good crowd. Many people are curious about tattoos."

That curiosity matters.

"People do not always understand tattoos fully," he adds. "Here, we get to talk to them, explain things. Many are getting clearer about it."

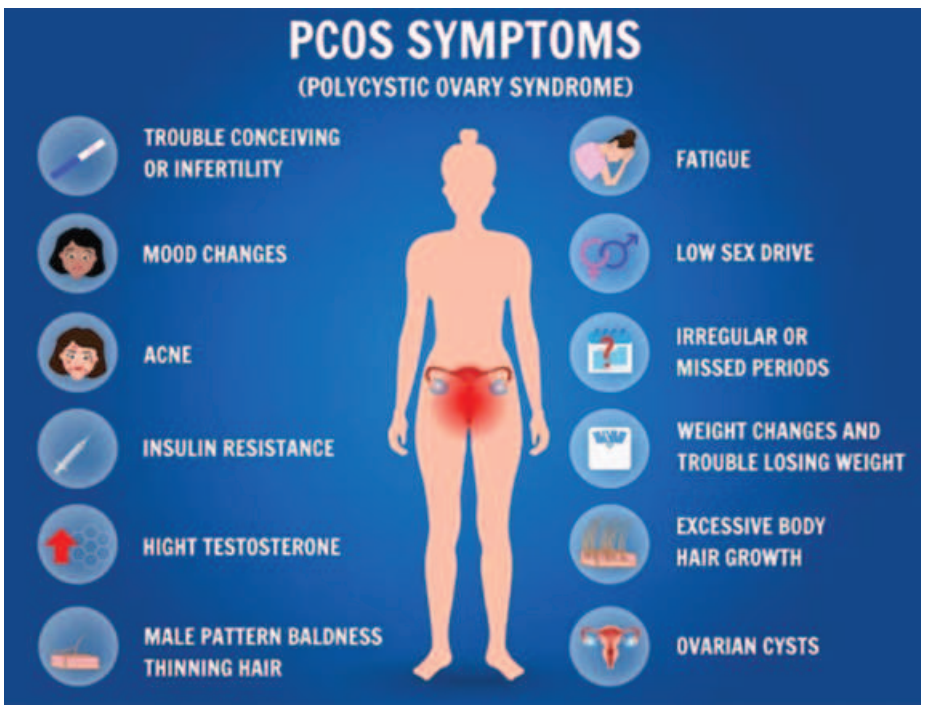
All in all, Arka Boishakh 1433 presented an alternative format for celebrating the Bengali New Year. Whether this approach can resonate beyond a niche, urban audience remains uncertain. However, it does reflect a broader shift in how cultural events are being organised in Dhaka. In that sense, Arka Boishakh 1433 was less about redefining Baishakh and more about testing a different way of presenting it.

By Ayman Anika
Photo: Silvia Mahjabin

#HEALTH & FITNESS

A METABOLIC MYSTERY

PCOS symptoms, medicine and management explained



A 2025 study finds that 5-15 per cent of Bangladeshi women diagnosed with polycystic ovarian syndrome or disease (PCOS/PCOD) experience menstrual irregularities, weight gain, infertility, ovarian cysts, insulin-resistance, and various cardiovascular complications. In light of growing PCOS diagnoses in the country, a gynaecology and obstetrics specialist shares her insight that could help patients curb flare-ups and maintain a healthy lifestyle.

Dr Tanzeem S Chowdhury, Professor and Head, Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology at BIRDEM Women and Children Hospital, reveals that PCOS may develop amongst girls and women between the ages of 16-20, especially if they have a family history of the condition.

"Women with a mother or sister who has these conditions are most likely to inherit the disease. A recent theory also suggests that environmental factors such as pollution can trigger this," she explains.

It has three main features where women of reproductive age develop high levels of androgen, aka male hormones in the body, which leads to acne and facial hair (hirsutism). Secondly, they experience hormonal imbalance in the form of irregular periods and, at times, no periods at all.

"The ultrasound imaging of these patients often shows ovaries which are bigger in size as a result of not releasing eggs regularly. If women show two or three of these symptoms, it's confirmed that they have this condition," she elaborates.

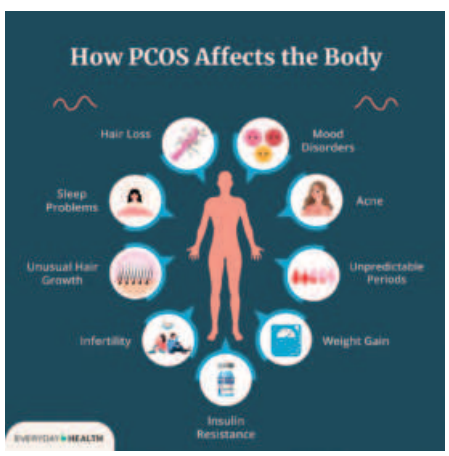
In addition, patients may also show symptoms like unexplained weight gain.

According to Dr Chowdhury, they must be diagnosed based on the history of their symptoms. Furthermore, doctors can also test different hormones through which they can recommend an ultrasonography, which can capture the increased size of the ovaries. The final diagnosis and treatment plan will depend on the ultrasound images.

If left undiagnosed and untreated, PCOS can lead to infertility issues that can make conception difficult in married women because hormonal imbalances increase the chances of miscarriage. Moreover, obesity in PCOS patients may also result in future health risks if nutrition and weight are not managed properly.

"Patients with obesity may develop diabetes. Apart from these, there are also risks of developing hypertension, high cholesterol, and cardiovascular diseases in future. Body image issues can also crop up, especially for those who experience thinning hair, acne and oily skin, thus leading to depression and anxiety, which can hamper their social skills," elaborates the gynaecologist.

Dr Tanzeem Chowdhury also emphasises that prolonged lack of menstruation causes women's endometrial lining to become thick. This can cause endometrial cancer (carcinoma) in the later years of life. Therefore, women who cannot naturally get their periods should be prescribed medication which helps them to have regular periods to ensure that they do not get cancer of the endometrial lining in future," informs Dr Tanzeem Chowdhury.



As most women are born with the condition, the closest thing to a cure is a functional reversal. In other words, managing the flare to ensure the symptoms are nipped in the bud.

"Eating enough lean protein, fibre and reducing carbohydrates such as white rice, bread or pasta, can regulate periods and reduce the growth of facial hair to an extent. PCOS patients must also exercise and manage their weight alongside sleep hygiene and mental well-being. Therefore, activities like walking, cycling, swimming, yoga and meditation can help manage obesity as well as stress, anxiety and depression," she suggests.

By Rubab Nayeem Khan
In frame: Dr Tanzeem S Chowdhury
Photo: Collected

> "Women with a mother or sister who has these conditions are most likely to inherit the disease. A recent theory also suggests that environmental factors such as pollution can trigger this," she explains.

Dressing *for* BAISHAKH and beyond

We Bengalis wait with bated breath throughout the year for the auspicious moment when all that is old and heavy upon our souls is washed away with newer, glad tidings. Making way for fresh energy that will bring goodness, joy and peace is hence embraced and celebrated with tremendous pleasure!

It is a fact universally accepted that we Bengali ladies love our sarees! It is the attire that makes our souls sing and sets our hearts aflutter with joy. Suffice to say that for Pahela Baishakh and the hot and humid days that follow, our first choice is always the saree! One is truly spoilt for choice as our local designers come up with fantastic designs for Baishakh that cater to every whim, fancy, and price point.

Gorod is timeless and will always look beautiful and resplendent when worn with traditional jewellery, and khopa adorned with beli phool. Jamdani is another favourite that will always look good in any shape and form.

Many designers have given a modern twist to handloom fabrics such as Muslin and Rajshahi silk, which are lovingly embroidered with karchupi, aari, and zardozi, but the blouse is the main character. With ruffles like clouds around the neckline of the blouse, the outfit is instantly elevated from traditional to high fashion!

Another interesting option is a halter neck blouse with an embellished neck and back that will give an appealing yet sophisticated twist to your saree. Perfect for fashionistas traversing through continents and cultures with aplomb, these blouses will surely add a fabulous feather to one's fashion quotient!

For those craving to try something different, fusion outfits are a great idea. A draped saree worn with a Chinese collar blouse with the waist cinched in with a belt is a great idea to blend eastern style with western influences.

Another idea is pairing a dhoti with a kurta-style blouse with the dupatta draped over the shoulder like one would a saree. A red silk cape worn over a white draped skirt will look fabulous and fun for those keen on pushing boundaries of fashion this summer!

By Sabrina N Bhuiyan
Photo: Adnan Rahman
Model: Tania
Style and Fashion Direction: Sonia Yeasmin Isha
Wardrobe: Shahrukh Amin
Makeup: Sumon Rahat
Hair: Noyon

#FASHION & BEAUTY

More than a decorative dot

The teep is often folded into the larger South Asian history of forehead markings, but in Bengal, it developed a distinct cultural life. That is why the accessory cannot be understood only as a religious symbol. It has long operated as an aesthetic and cultural one as well.

In many Bengali households, wearing it was once as routine as combing one's hair or putting on bangles. It was an ordinary act: a mother stepping out for a visit, a teacher getting ready for school, a bride's aunt preparing for a wedding function, a university student dressing for Pahela Baishakh, all might reach for a sheet of bindis almost automatically.

"I have been a teacher for almost two decades now, and I cannot remember a single day I entered the classroom without wearing one. Without it, the face just does not feel complete," says Runa Mehedi, a 48-year-old schoolteacher, voicing a feeling shared by many women across generations. That sentence captures something important. The teep is not worn merely as an add-on. It often serves as the point that completes the face's composition.

From sari to jeans: The changing life of the teep

A teep can be the last thing someone puts on before leaving home, but it is often the first thing people tend to notice. Small, circular, elongated, matte, glossy, black, maroon, or bright red — it sits on the forehead with a presence larger than its size. In Bengali culture, the bindi has never been just a beauty accessory. It has functioned as a sign of style, ritual, memory, and, increasingly, self-definition.

Today, it no longer belongs only to the familiar image of a woman in a white-and-red sari on a festival morning. It appears with cotton kurtas, office wear, handloom outfits, and just as naturally with jeans, shirts, crop tops, and sneakers.

"I am not wearing it to look traditional," shares Mrittika Saha, a 22-year-old university student in Dhaka, in a composite voice that captures a common sentiment among younger wearers. "I wear it because it feels like a part of my face now. Even with jeans, it does not feel out of place."

That shift is worth paying attention to.

From household habit to cultural marker

The trend grew through repetition. It appeared in homes, festivals, theatre, films, literature, and everyday life until it became part of the region's visual memory. The red dot on the forehead in particular became deeply tied to the cultural image of Bengali femininity. Paired with a sari, kajal, a loose bun, or fresh flowers, it became one of the most recognisable elements in Bengali dress.

This is partly why it carries such weight in public culture. It can locate someone socially and culturally very quickly. It can suggest familiarity with a certain style world, a certain domestic rhythm, a certain visual inheritance.

"I don't wear a sari every day, but I still wear a teep with my office clothes," says Farzana Rahman, a 35-year-old bank executive. "Sometimes it is the smallest thing in the outfit, but it changes how polished I feel."

In that sense, the teep does not require a fully traditional look to make sense. It has learned how to travel.

Jeans, sneakers, and street style

Perhaps the most interesting change is how the bindi has entered contemporary urban fashion. It is no longer restricted to sarees, shalwar kameezes, or festive attires. It now appears confidently with denim jackets, oversized shirts, tank tops, sneakers, and fusion wear.

This shift matters because it shows that it is no longer only inherited. It is being reinterpreted.

"I love to wear a black dot with blue jeans and a white shirt," says Tania Haque, a 24-year-old graphic designer. "Otherwise, the outfit feels too plain. The teep gives it a little sharpness."

Another composite voice, that of Tasfia Mumtarin Kangkhita, a 28-year-old dancer, frames it differently: "I like mixing things. I can wear sneakers, a loose top, silver earrings, and a small maroon teep. None of those things cancel each other out."

These voices reflect how young people often style themselves now. They are not always interested in choosing between modern and traditional rigidly. They mix both. The teep becomes one of the easiest ways to do that.

Expression, not obligation

As an accessory, the teep is no longer governed by one rulebook. For some, it remains linked to ritual or family habit. For others, it is a style statement. For some women, it carries emotional memory. For others, it expresses confidence. It can be soft, bold, playful, minimalist, or dramatic depending on shape, size, and colour. Their significance of in Bengali culture lies in its flexibility. It has survived because it adapts without losing recognition. It can belong to ritual without being trapped by ritual. It can belong to fashion without becoming empty of meaning. It can appear on the forehead of a woman in Jamdani or on that of a girl in denim and still make cultural sense.

And in Bengali culture, it has become a small but steady way of saying who you are, where you come from, and how you choose to be seen.

By Ayman Anika
Photo: Adnan Rahman
Model: Proma
Style and Fashion Direction: Sonia Yeasmin Isha
Makeup: Sumon Rahat

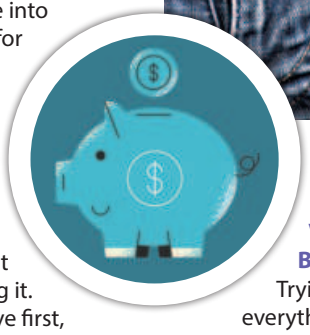
#LIFEHACKS

Simple and smart ways to save your money without sacrificing your joy

Saving money often comes with a familiar fear, an apprehension that you will have to give up the things you enjoy. Fewer outings, fewer small indulgences, and a constant need to say no, but it does not have to work that way. The issue is not spending itself, but how unstructured it can be. With the right approach, saving can become something that happens quietly in the background, without making life feel smaller. Simply, build a system that works quietly in the background.

50-30-20 RULE

One of the easiest ways to start is the 50-30-20 Rule. It splits your income into three simple parts: 50 per cent for needs, 30 per cent for wants, and 20 per cent for savings or investments.



What makes this approach effective is that it does not treat enjoyment as something optional. It is already built into the plan. You are not cutting out your lifestyle, you are organising it.

Another useful habit is to save first, not last. As soon as your salary comes in, move a fixed amount into savings. It could be 10 per cent, it could be 20. What matters is consistency. Whatever is left is what you spend, without guilt.

Over time, this takes the pressure off. You are no longer deciding whether to save every day. It simply happens.

VALUE-BASED BUDGETING

Trying to cut down on everything rarely works for long. It often leads to frustration, and, eventually, overspending.

A better approach is to be more selective. Spend on things that genuinely matter to you, and be a bit stricter with the rest.

This is where something like value-based budgeting comes in. Instead of treating all expenses the same, you decide what actually improves your day-to-day life. For some, it might be eating out with friends. For others, it might be fitness, travel, or even small comforts like good coffee!

A simple trick that helps is the 24-hour rule. If you want to buy something that is not essential, give it a day. More often than not, the urge fades, and you realise it was just a momentary impulse.

Saving money is not really about spending less. It is about spending in a way that feels worthwhile.

KEEP LIFESTYLE INFLATION IN CHECK

As income grows, spending tends to grow with it. It happens gradually. A slightly better phone, more frequent takeaways, and a few extra subscriptions. None of it feels excessive on its own, but together it can quietly eat into your ability to save.

One way to manage this is to save part of every raise. If your income increases, set aside at least half of that increase instead of adjusting your lifestyle to match it completely.

You can also set small limits for yourself, like deciding in advance how much you are comfortable spending on eating out each month. These boundaries are not meant to restrict you, but to keep things from getting out of hand without you noticing.

At the end of the day, saving money is not about saying no to everything you enjoy. It is about making sure your money is going where it actually matters.

You can still go out, treat yourself, and enjoy your life. The difference is that you are doing it with intention, while quietly building something more stable in the background, and that balance is what makes it sustainable.

By Mehdi Islam Mahi
Photo: Collected

How to stay calm under pressure

Have you ever been in one of those situations where it feels like everything is falling apart? It feels like too much to handle and the walls are closing in? The feeling of being overwhelmed; the inner monologue going "This is my doom. There's no way I can handle this".

Everyone gets those. The good news is, there are certain tried and tested methods to handle pressure better.

PRIORITISE THE TASKS

More often than not, the cause for feeling overwhelmed is induced because there's just too much to do. When this happens, take a pen and paper. List all the things you have to do. This ensures that you do not forget about them later and prevents the panic of missing something.

Once you have them listed, rank them by order depending on their urgency and importance. Then you go by the numbers, complete one task at a time, and check it off the list. The reason for doing this is to ensure that the most time-sensitive tasks are finished first. Thus, removing the chance of creating further catastrophe. If you have to cook and finish a writing assignment, the wise decision would be to do the assignment first since it has a deadline!

BREAK IT DOWN

If you have one very difficult problem, break it down into smaller tasks. Instead of just trying to solve it all at once, if you break it down into tasks, you can finish them one by one and get close to solving the problem. If you try to deal with the whole situation at one go, chances are the magnitude of the problem might overwhelm you. Turning the issue into tasks reduces the fear factor and helps you stay calm.

Consider your final thesis. I don't know a single person who did not freak out over their thesis. It's a huge task to finish. However, instead of trying to do as much as possible together, you should break it down into tasks like: Data analysis, looking for relevant papers, writing the methodology, creating the slides, etc. Multi-tasking is a very useful ability, but it does not always work for everyone.

Remember, one problem at a time!

IS IT IN YOUR HANDS?

Whenever you are in a crisis and starting to feel the heat of panic, ask yourself this: Is it in your hands? Is there something you can do about it? If it is in your hands, if you can do something about it, then there really is no reason to panic. You should start working to improve the situation. So, take a deep breath, actually, take three deep breaths, and get to it.

If it is not in your hands, then panicking would not help. What it will do, however, is waste time and take your mind off other important things. Unfortunate as it is, if the situation is no longer in your hands, then say your prayers, hope for the best, brace for the worst and get to the next task to avoid disaster in the future.

This simple change in perspective will help you calm down more than you realise.

WRITE IT DOWN OR DISCUSS IT

Sometimes, the situations are so dire that conscious thoughts do not seem to work. In such situations, write down your problems in your notebook and then read them later. This gives a sense of clarity, and many times, this will give you ideas about how to deal with your problem. You can also discuss the situation with trusted friends or partners. This helps bounce ideas. Sometimes, just thinking out loud will give you an idea that otherwise will not occur to you. And getting the problems out in the open has a surprisingly soothing effect.

Remember, inside your mind, the issues always appear worse than they actually are. If you freak out, the situation will only deteriorate. So, learn your breathing exercises, talk to your friends, stay hydrated and focus. You will be fine!

By Ashif Ahmed Rudro
Photo: Collected

#HEALTH & FITNESS

How to stay safe in a HEATWAVE

As heatwaves become more frequent and intense, staying safe requires more than just avoiding the sun. This guide brings together practical, everyday steps to protect yourself and your community. With a focus on prevention and awareness, it highlights how small changes can make a significant difference in coping with extreme heat.

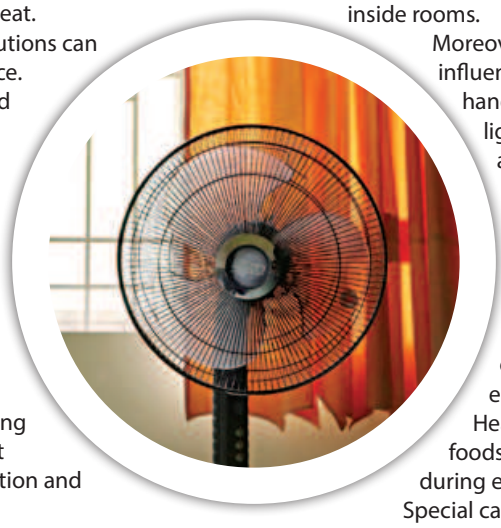
One of the most effective ways to stay healthy during heatwaves is proper hydration. Drinking water regularly throughout the day helps the body regulate its temperature. Health experts advise not waiting until you feel thirsty, as thirst already signals dehydration. Oral rehydration solutions or drinks with electrolytes can also help during very hot days.

Clothing choices also play an important role in managing heat. Wearing light-coloured, loose-fitting clothes allows air to circulate and helps the body stay cool. Cotton fabrics are especially useful as they absorb sweat and allow it to evaporate. Avoid tight, dark clothing, and velvet fabrics, which can trap heat.

Limiting outdoor activities during peak heat hours is another important step. The sun is usually strongest between late morning and mid-afternoon. If possible, plan outdoor work in the early morning or evening. When outside, using sunscreen, umbrellas, hats, or scarves can protect from direct sunlight.

However, keeping indoor spaces cool is equally important. Using fans, keeping curtains closed during peak sunlight, and ensuring proper ventilation can reduce indoor heat. Taking cool showers or placing a damp cloth on the body can help lower body temperature. Simple actions like switching off unused electrical appliances also reduce indoor heat.

Nature-based solutions can also make a difference. Planting trees around homes or buildings provides shade and reduces surrounding temperatures. Even small balcony gardens or potted plants can help cool the environment slightly. Rooftop gardening is becoming popular in cities, as it reduces heat absorption and improves air flow.



Indoor plants may also support a cooler environment. While they do not drastically lower room temperature, plants like aloe vera, areca palm, snake plant, and peace lily can improve air quality and create a fresher indoor atmosphere. This can make rooms feel more comfortable during hot weather.

Pouring water on rooftops during the hottest parts of the day is a common and effective local practice. It helps cool down concrete surfaces, which otherwise trap heat and raise indoor temperatures. Using temporary shading, such as bamboo covers, cloth sheets, or rooftop sheds, can also block direct sunlight and reduce heat inside rooms.

Moreover, food habits can influence how the body handles heat. Eating light meals with fruits and vegetables helps maintain hydration and energy levels. Foods with high water content, such as watermelon, cucumber, and oranges, are especially helpful. Heavy, oily, or spicy foods should be reduced during extreme heat.

Special care should be given to vulnerable groups. Children, elderly individuals, pregnant women and those with existing health conditions are more sensitive to heat. They may not always recognise early symptoms, so regular monitoring is important. Ensuring they stay hydrated and cool can prevent serious health risks.

Simple changes in daily routine can reduce heat exposure. Taking frequent breaks, avoiding overexertion, and resting in shaded or cooler areas are important. Carrying water, using handheld fans, or using a wet towel can provide quick relief when needed.

If someone shows signs of heatstroke, immediate action is necessary. Move the person to a cooler place, loosen tight clothing, and give water if they are conscious. Cooling the body with wet clothes or fanning can help reduce temperature. Medical help should be sought quickly if symptoms do not improve.

Community awareness also plays an important role. Checking on neighbours, especially the elderly, and sharing information can prevent emergencies. Collective efforts can reduce the overall impact of heatwaves in densely populated areas.

Prevention is better than a cure. Heatwaves are a growing challenge, but their effects can be managed through awareness and simple actions. From hydration and clothing to planting greenery and cooling rooftops, small steps can make a big difference. Protecting ourselves and others requires consistency, but it can help everyone stay safe during extreme heat.

By Sana Nawab
Photo: Collected

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#PERSPECTIVE

A tribute to our everyday roti

We are famously, and perhaps a bit too loudly, known as machh-e-bhaat-e-Bangali. It is, of course, our national identity. However, today, we want to talk about the roti. Why? Because let's be honest: if rice is served two times on our table, then roti is something that at least sits there once!

Now, before you start accusing me of anything serious, let me clarify — I am not here to question our machh-e-bhaat-e-Bangali identity, let alone attempt to replace it with a belon-piri.

I am well aware of the mandate. We are simply here to put the spotlight on the roti, because, frankly, why not? If you actually peer into a Bangladeshi kitchen at 7:30–9 AM, you will surely find a war zone of flour and a rolling pin — the belon-piri — that has seen enough domestic drama to write a memoir (which we will do some other day!). So, it's about time we gave our "circular" friend its due.

The roti, or more specifically, the flatbread universe, is vast, and the philosophy behind it is even deeper than the flour dust on your counter. I was reminded of this recently in the glass-and-steel heart of Banani. There, near Road 7B, where shiny SUVs pass by like they own the street, stands a man with a cart that doesn't quite fit in. In a place like Banani, where everything is polished and planned, his setup feels unusually ordinary.

It's a simple cart, really. However, if you look closer, you will see two clay stoves sitting right on it, fire quietly doing its job. No fancy equipment, no modern shortcuts. Just flour, heat, and habit.

When I asked him why he bothered with wood and clay in a world of cylinders and non-stick pans, he did not give me a marketing pitch. He gave me a legacy I will perhaps remember for a long time.

"I grew up on chaler roti," he told me, his hands white with flour. "To me, roti is the only meal I can have anytime, and it fills my stomach. And clay is life, wood is cheap — that's why I make it in a clay oven. You can't get this soul from a gas burner."

He's right. There is a structural marvel to a chaler roti. It is the sophisticated guest of the flatbread world, a far cry from the dependable, slightly modest atta roti we wrestle with every morning. But if the roti is prose, the paratha is a decadent, slightly scandalous poem. Walk into any local restaurant and watch the pech paratha being born.

And then there is the heavyweight champion, the Mughlai paratha. Encasing a heart of minced onions and eggs, it is less of a bread and more of a structural marvel of the deep fryer that demands a three-hour nap as a mandatory follow-up.

Our geography, too, is etched in this dough. In the North, the kalai roti reigns with a smoky, rustic defiance. Made from mashkalai (black gram), it is thick, it is tough, and it laughs in the face of "delicate" city palates. Eat it with a green-chilli-heavy bhorta, and suddenly the socio-economics of the Barind Tract begin to make perfect sense. Contrast that with the ethereal chita roti (the lace bread), splattered onto a hot pan with the flair of an abstract painter. It is the most "aesthetic" thing in your kitchen, even if you can never quite replicate the technique of your grandmother.

For the urbanite in a rush, there is the chapati, the humble, onion-flecked quick fix, or the street-side dal puri, alu puri, or even keema puri — the pocket-sized fuel cells of the working class. But if you seek festive elegance, there is the luchi, the golden, puffed-up queen of the breakfast table, or the rumali roti, paper-thin and folded like a silk handkerchief to catch every drop of seekh kebab spice.

Even our history is baked into the Bakarkhani of Puran Dhaka, carrying the scent of the tragic lovers Bakhar and Khani into every cup of dudh-cha. And while the garlic butter naan reminds us of our enduring love affair with the tandoor, the essence remains the same.

So, the roti list is long. And when you look at the sheer, slightly absurd and dizzying scale of it all, you start to suspect that the real peak of the agricultural revolution was not settling land or inventing the plough. It was that one dangerously optimistic person who looked at a handful of crushed grain, said, "Let's flatten this and see what happens," and somehow accidentally invented an entire civilisation's comfort food.

By Jannatul Bushra
Photo: LS Archive