MY DHAKA

LOUHAJANG
the sweet capital of greater Dhaka

RBR

Today I take my Dhaka readers on a sugar-high day trip into the greater Dhaka region; our stop is Louhajang upazila in present-day Munshiganj, historically known as Bikrampur. Greater Dhaka encompasses multiple metropolitan districts while metro Dhaka is the dense administrative city core.

Louhajang's charm, blending ancient riverine diets, Pala dynasty traditions, and rich Mughal-Persian influences -- extends far beyond hilsa. Many of you may have taken the expressway for hilsa at old Mawa or Shimulia Ghat, yet how many know that a minor detour off the old ghats leads to the sleepy countryside of Louhajang? A place quietly curdling sweetness into memory.



PHOTO: STAR

If you've never planned the detour, now is the time. About 40 kilometres from Dhaka, anchored by the Padma Bridge, Louhajang is the sweet capital of greater Dhaka. Every sweet here is fresh, unadulterated, and steeped in Bikrampur's heritage, drawing food lovers who slip off the highway in search of something real, away from tourist bustle.

It is here that the moiras, who are more than mere makers of mishti but are heritage artisans, keep alive secrets passed down through generations. They have perfected dairy-based desserts over centuries, their craft rooted in instinct: milk curdled by touch and sight, sugar syrups judged by the feel of a string between thumb and finger, hours of stirring over open brick fires until the texture is just right.

From this oral knowledge and practiced instinct comes our traditional Patkheer, a GI-tagged layered kheer sweet.

Patkheer is the sweet constant in Louhajang; in winter its demand explodes, because Patkheer becomes the heart of patishapta pitha, the quintessential Bengali crepe of our harvest festivals. Summer carries its own temptation: the decadent ritual of swirling Patkheer into mango milk, then crowning it with a fistful of puffed rice for that irresistible crunch -- a guilty pleasure at its most luxurious.

But the locals insist that it is best enjoyed fresh in the morning, ideally paired with a cup of strong black tea.

My go-to sweet shop in Louhajang is Shree Durga Mistanna Bhandar in Halda Bazar, just ten to fifteen minutes from Old Mawa Ghat. The tin-roofed shop, run by Ganesh Ghosh and his son, carries generations of moira heritage. Ganesh learned by hand and heart from his elders, and years ago stunned me with a hot roshogolla straight from the pot -- soft, white dumplings of cchana, that is homemade cottage cheese, dissolving in syrup. His craft, once bound to his family, now lives on through Muslim moiras he has trained, widening the reach of Louhajang's sweet tradition.

Ghosh's roshogollas are made from fat-rich riverine milk, making it a fragile bite steeped in thick syrup, yet not too sugary. They stand apart from the spongy Kolkata style, reminding us how regional milk profiles and Moira instincts shape texture and taste. I realised this difference when I took my Kolkata friend here to taste our authentic roshogollas. While the core concept remains the same -- fresh cottage cheese (chhana) dumplings boiled in sugar syrup -- subtle regional differences exist between the roshogolla of Bangladesh and the rosogolla of West Bengal.

The Kolkata version, immortalised by confectioner Nobin Chandra Das in 1868, introduced semolina into the chhana, creating a sponge that traps syrup and springs back with each bite. Crisp white, cleanly shaped, and now protected by a GI tag as "Banglar Rosogolla," it is made for buoyancy.

In Bikrampur's old societies, the word moira carries respect, evoking a memory of the sweet maker bent over a mud stove, coaxing milk and sugar into something timeless. If you dare to slip off the Dhaka-Mawa Expressway for that ten-minute detour, prepare for sweet surrender. Ghosh's roshogollas --those delicate white sighs of sugar -- wait like a temptation that is too easy to give in to. Six vanish before you even notice, each one a mischievous indulgence that feels less like dessert and more like a delicious crime.

'Bangladesh, 40 nations helping China evade tariffs'
Claims US report; exporters bin allegation

REFAYET ULLAH MIRDHA

President Donald Trump's administration has accused dozens of countries, including Bangladesh, of helping China evade US tariffs, depriving the US Treasury of tens of billions of dollars in annual revenue.

In a report published on Thursday, the White House said more than 40 countries had participated in a shadow logistics network facilitating the flow of Chinese goods into the US under false labelling.

However, local exporters denied the allegation.

The European Union, Mexico, Canada, India, Japan and South Korea are among China's biggest enablers in the "Great Transshipment Scam", the Office of Trade and Manufacturing Policy said.

US officials accused Chinese exporters of hiding the true origin of their products by shipping them through third countries before sending them to American buyers. The practice allows exporters to exploit lower tax rates applied to third countries, effectively costing the US Treasury tens of billions of dollars a year, the report said.

The report places Bangladesh in Tier 3, comprising smaller economies whose low-cost labour, free zones, bonded warehouses and limited customs enforcement make them attractive for China-linked rerouting.

"We send 96 percent of our goods to the USA under the freight on board (FOB) method. So, it is not possible for local exporters to use third-country routes to evade US taxes," said Mahmud Hasan Khan, president of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA).

Under the FOB method, local exporters send goods from factories to the port of departure, such as Chattogram port, while importers bear the risks and pay the duties, he said.

The BGMEA president said the issue was insignificant for Bangladesh because local exporters do not send goods directly to the US.

Mohammad Hatem, president of the Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA), agreed.

"It is true that Bangladeshi exporters use Chinese fabrics and accessories, but they import them through legal channels," Hatem said.

He said the Bangladesh government closely monitors the process and had taken strict measures after similar allegations arose many years ago.

Toxic gas kills 9 at shipbreaking yard in Ctg

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Kamal Hossain, a local who joined the rescue operation, told The Daily Star that most of the workers were not wearing the proper safety gear. "I did not see anyone wearing a mask."

"After being brought to Chattogram Medical College Hospital, eight people were declared dead on arrival, while one was admitted," said Nurul Alam, in charge of the CMCH police outpost.

The death toll rose to nine after a worker died at a nearby private hospital in late afternoon.

At least six injured workers are currently undergoing treatment at different hospitals -- one at CMCH, two at National Hospital and three at BSBA Hospital. Of the two admitted to National Hospital, one is in the ICU while the other is under observation in the emergency room, according to hospital sources.

The deceased have been identified by police as Palash Jaladas, 35, and Sunny Jaladas, 23, of Bhatiari; Khokon Miya, 23, of Gaibandha; Habibur Rahman, 51, of Sitakunda; and Md Mansur, 55, Abdul Alim Sujon, 36, Md Rana Miya, 23, Nasir Uddin, 51, and Motiur Rahman, 17, of Sonaichhari in Mirsarai.

As families of the victims gathered at the hospital, the air grew heavy with wails of grieving relatives.

Sujon worked as a safety assistant engineer at the yard. He joined about a year and a half ago. His younger brother Abdul Awal Subhash told The Daily Star, "My brother died while trying to rescue others. He first carried one person upstairs, but when he went down again, he was overpowered by toxic gas."

Rana's cousin Md Kawsar said, "Rana started working at the yard about five or six months ago. He was unmarried. I received a call from his family in Gaibandha around noon and rushed to CMCH. When I arrived, I learned that he died."

YARD WAS WARNED

Mahbub Hasan, deputy inspector general of DIFE, said shipbreaking yard Ferdous Steel continued to operate without adequate safety measures even after officials warned them about several irregularities during a routine inspection.

"Following the inspection, a notice was issued to Ferdous Steel on February 2 this year," he added.

In the notice, the DIFE directed the yard to ensure fire and occupational safety and to refrain from operating on holidays.

"Despite several reminders, the yard authorities failed to implement the directives. So, a case was filed at the Chattogram Labour Court on July 15," Mahbub said.

DIFE Inspector Sahed Parvez Talukder, who filed the case, said they were trying to determine the cause of the incident.



OWNER DENIES NEGLIGENCE

Meanwhile, Ferdous Wahid, chief executive officer of Ferdous Steel, denied allegations of negligence, maintaining that the yard strictly complies with all safety protocols. He noted that since it was Friday, it was a non-operational day with no structural cutting scheduled.

"After workers noticed an unusual odour inside the ship, members of our Health, Safety, and Environment team went to inspect. When they went inside to check, they fell ill."

Wahid added that the vessel was being dismantled for over a year without any prior incident and that an internal investigation would be launched to determine the cause.

He also stated that all necessary government clearances were obtained prior to the start of demolition.

Asked about the clearance process, SM Shakhawat Hossain, assistant explosive inspector at the Department of Explosives, confirmed that the vessel was certified over a year ago.

"We inspected the ship prior to issuing clearance and found no harmful gas at that time," Shakhawat said. "We will now investigate how and why this gas accumulated and identify those responsible."

According to fishermen operating in the Bay of Bengal, the gas odour travelled at least half a kilometre from the accident site.

Muhammad Ali Shahin, a shipbreaking expert and head of advocacy at the non-profit organisation YPSA, described the incident as unprecedented.

"I have never seen such massive casualties in a shipbreaking yard," Shahin said, pointing to severe negligence by the yard authority.

Shahin explained. "Instead of slowly venting and cleaning the tank with proper precautionary measures, the yard management sent workers inside to extract the gas quickly.

"Although this yard received Hong Kong Convention (HKC) Green Yard certification, they failed to comply with its safety guidelines."

The incident comes despite the Hong Kong International Convention for the Safe and Environmentally Sound Recycling of Ships coming into force globally on June 26, 2025. Established by the International Maritime Organisation (IMO), the treaty mandates strict guidelines, including an Inventory of Hazardous Materials (IHM), regulator-approved Ship Recycling Plans (SRP), and rigorous occupational health and safety protocols.

COMPENSATION

Chattogram Deputy Commissioner Zahidul Islam Miah said, "We're overseeing the treatment of the injured. Families of all those who died will receive Tk 10 lakh in compensation. A team of chemists and an army unit are working to contain the gas."

He added that legal action would be taken if the company is found to be negligent after investigation.

Since 2014, 161 people -- including 12 this year -- have died in accidents at shipbreaking yards in Sitakunda.

Tarique likely to visit India

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There had been signs of improvement after the BNP government took office. But tensions resurfaced following deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina's media appearance in New Delhi on August 5, despite Dhaka's earlier request that India prevent her from making political statements from its territory.

The foreign ministry issued a strong statement, saying her remarks undermined Bangladesh's judiciary and sovereignty.

Foreign policy analysts believe that the Hasina issue may also have influenced Tarique's decision not to attend the BRICS summit.

On August 10, Trivedi met Tarique and Home Minister Salahuddin Ahmed before flying to New Delhi.

On the same day, Indian Research and Analysis Wing chief Parag Jain met Prime Minister's Defence Affairs Adviser AKM Shamsul Islam in Dhaka.

The following day, Trivedi met Modi.

India's Ministry of External Affairs posted a photograph of the meeting on social media, saying the high commissioner sought Modi's guidance on further improving relations with Bangladesh.

Tarique's first foreign visit as prime minister was to Malaysia, followed by China, despite India's invitation for a bilateral visit soon after he assumed office.

A former Bangladesh diplomat who was posted in New Delhi said, "Against this backdrop, India was eagerly seeking Tarique's visit to India -- I think this visit is extremely important not only for political reasons but also for economic factors."

Bangladesh needs energy support badly amid the US-Israel war on Iran that has affected global energy supplies through the Strait of Hormuz. India has interests in security, particularly in its Northeast, as well as connectivity and trade, the former diplomat said.

Water is another major issue: the Ganges Water Treaty expires in December, while the Teesta water-sharing agreement remains unresolved despite efforts dating back to 2011.

"While the Hasina factor remains, both sides can still come to a common understanding on the matter while advancing the issues that largely matter to the people -- trade and water," the retired diplomat said.

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the BNP chairmanship after Khaleda's death and became prime minister through the February election, is scheduled to attend a doa and munajat, followed by a financial assistance programme for the poor and disadvantaged at the T&T field in Korail in the afternoon.

Separately, the ruling BNP will organise doa and milad mahfils nationwide.

BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi made the announcement in a press release yesterday, calling on leaders and activists of the party and its affiliated organisations to observe the occasion with due respect.

Khaleda was born in Jalpaiguri, then part of undivided Bengal. Her father, Iskandar Mazumder, was a businessman, and her mother, Tayeba Mazumder, was a homemaker. Of three sisters and two brothers, Khaleda was the second.

In 1960, she married Ziaur Rahman, then a captain in the Pakistan Army.

She entered politics after Zia, by then president and founder of the BNP, was assassinated in May 1981. With the party facing internal divisions, Khaleda emerged as its central figure and became chairperson in 1984.

Her political identity was shaped largely by the movement against military dictator HM Ershad. Under her leadership, the BNP formed a seven-party alliance and joined the anti-autocracy movement. She was detained several times and became known among supporters as the "uncompromising leader" for refusing to take part in elections under Ershad.

In 1990, Khaleda and her principal political rival, Sheikh Hasina, joined the opposition movement that eventually forced Ershad from power.

The following year, Khaleda led the BNP to victory in the parliamentary election and became Bangladesh's first female prime minister. Her government oversaw the country's return from the presidential system to parliamentary government.

Her second term, following the February 1996 election boycotted by the major opposition parties, lasted only weeks. Her government then passed the constitutional amendment introducing the non-party caretaker government system, dissolved parliament and transferred power to a caretaker administration. The BNP lost the subsequent June election.

Khaleda returned to office in 2001 after the BNP-led four-party alliance won more than two-thirds of the parliamentary seats. Her third term ended in 2006 amid a political crisis over the caretaker government. Her years in power also drew criticism over corruption, political violence and the rise of militancy.

She was jailed in 2007 during the army-backed caretaker government and again in 2018 after being convicted in two corruption cases. She was conditionally released in 2020 during the Covid pandemic. The convictions were later overturned, and she was acquitted after the fall of the Hasina government in August 2024.

By then, years of illness had greatly reduced her public role. Still, in her first public address after six years of silence, delivered after the 2024 political changeover, she called for peace and urged people to reject the "politics of vengeance".

On December 30, 2025, she passed away at Evercare Hospital in Dhaka.

Explosion rocks ammunition factory near Rome

AFP, *Rome*

A powerful explosion rocked an ammunition factory near Rome but no injuries were reported, emergency services and the factory owner said.

Firefighters and police were at the site near Colleferro, a town about 40 kilometres (25 miles) southeast of Rome, and "complex operations" were under way, police told AFP.

The fire service later said 10 crews had been sent to the area and shared a video showing thick smoke but no visible sign of flames.

Videos shared on social media showed a fire at the factory followed by a massive explosion.

The plant is owned by European defence group KNDS and manufactures medium and large-calibre ammunition.

"We can confirm that no injuries have been reported," KNDS said in a statement.

"The circumstances surrounding the incident are currently being investigated and assessed by the teams on site," it added.

Italy's AGI news agency said employees had sheltered in secure areas at the facility.

The Corriere della Sera daily said that the fire started at a compaction press for explosive powder.

A child will be fatherless at birth

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"He was the head of the household," said Harendra, his voice breaking.

Palash was one of five siblings. His younger brother works at a salon, while his three sisters are married and live with their in-laws.

Once a fisherman, Palash had left the sea when it could no longer provide enough income, moving to the shipbreaking yards as a cutter.

He married Bhumika about 10 months ago. Relatives said they could always rely on him in times of need.

His mother, Shova Das, who suffers from heart disease, was inconsolable.

"He was our shelter. Today, we have lost everything," said his sister Sima Das.

As for Bhumika, she is struggling to accept that her child will grow up without ever knowing a father's love.



Palash

Palash was not the only breadwinner lost that morning.

Sunny Jaladas, another worker, who had left home after breakfast, never returned.

His father died when he was still a child, and his mother had raised him and his brother by working as househelp. Once Sunny began earning, she was finally able to quit her job and rest.

"There was happiness in their home after Sunny started earning," said his cousin Anik Das. "But that happiness did not last."

Two brothers, Md Mansur and Md Nasir, also died in the accident.

"They joined the yard together, and they died together," said their relative Kamal Hossain. "Their family has been destroyed."