

LIVING

Those Unofficial Holidays

Lavina Ambreen Ahmed



is nothing as refreshing as having yummy ice-cream or ice cool drinks while watching your favourite programme or maybe a movie on a hot, humid day. There goes your slim waistline. Perhaps you can also indulge in the Bangladeshi's popular pastime. What? Sleeping, of course and who knows, you might even break the longest slumber record (is there any??) and earn name and fame in a jiffy. Those of you, who probably arranged to go out that particular day, should take a peek through the window and count your lucky stars that you couldn't go. (That is, if it's the summer time). The glaring sun's rays and scorching heat is enough to drive anyone out of his/her mind, even at home, let alone go out in the open. On days like those don't rely on those new ultraviolet ray resistant snazzy shades guaranteed to protect your delicate senses.

OK, these suggestions were for the lazy ones amongst us, in other words the majority. But what about the minority? The studious, serious lot and the workaholics never engage themselves in such meaningless activities, they rather utilize that time to get more work done. If you are in the mood for some changes than clean up the house and show your hidden artistic talent in redecorating your room. Don't worry you have it, you know, the talent that is, if not, you had to find out sooner or later.

Here is an idea for the healthy, athletic and energetic ones: you can organize a neighbourhood, "walkathon" programme staying away from the potential trouble zones and hide at your nearest friend's or relative's place the moment you feel like quitting.

The biggest advantage of

these unofficial holidays are, that no unwelcome long lost relatives can turn up at your door step along with their brats, just as you were ready to hit the sack or had your mind set on doing some important work.

To some, hartals act as a form of relief. "To me it doesn't bear any political complications, just simply freedom from work and studies," chuckles a happy-go-lucky student. "No boring classes, no tiring routines, only a few hours of fun, what more could a student ask for?" he further adds.

A busy young career woman confides, "I see it as a break from the monotonous daily routine and relish the time I get to spend with my family."

Those were the advantages, well, the disadvantages too, are not all that few.

Apart from the fact that it triggers off violence, affects our already fragile economy, there are also some other problems. Suppose, there is an emergency and you have to go out. You won't find any vehicle to take you to your destination. What happens if one of your family members suffers from an accident and needs immediate medical attention?

All the medical institutions will remain closed that day, so where can you go? Also, from having to stay home for several hours one might feel like a caged animal and get very edgy and hard to deal with. After all how long can one watch the same old news every 30 minutes on BBC and CNN? Or even if you have Star TV connection, you'll get probably bored seeing the reruns of all the programmes on Star Plus, MTV, Prime Sports and the rest of the channels. Maybe there is a

psychological explanation for this but you'll always feel like going out somewhere, when you know it's impossible. The last minute cancellations of pre-planned outings might make you irritable and gloomier than ever. On the other hand, you're looking for some peace and quiet to catch up with your work or to get some shut-eye, when all of a sudden your "one-kid demolition squad" offspring shows



A casual embroidered "kurta" Courtesy: "Anokhi"

great enthusiasm and energy in playing a "war" game of good guys and bad guys with your neighbour's son — breaking down the whole place in the process. Or, the kid might even decide to play "20 questions" with you, without asking your permission of course. Rich and poor, people of all classes get fed up and annoyed at the frequent hartals.

Recently, a certain parent had to cancel his son's wedding reception at the very last minute, due to the "H factor." He complained what a major problem it was to shift it to a later date. Meanwhile a businessman exclaims, "Hartals interfere with our work to a great extent, it's always hard to make up for the time loss."

One must admit that the lower class people of the society are the biggest sufferers, the people who live from hand to mouth. "For us, one day without any work, means, one day without any food for the whole family," grumbles a rickshawpuller.

In addition to the hartals, there are numerous kinds of strikes e.g. the employees' strike, the bus/truck drivers' strike, the rickshawpullers' strike, the students strike, the doctor's or nurses' strike, or the most recent one the teachers strike — that goes on throughout the year.

Everyone wants to fulfill their demands, but the toughest part is, coming to a compromise.

What can be done? Nothing. Hartals have become an inseparable part of our daily life whether we like it or not. The best thing to do is accept it like our forefathers did and make the most of it.

For government may come and government may go, but hartals will remain in the society for good.

Travelling Toils in the Cities

by Fazya Haq

GOING about one's work in public vehicles is a perpetual headache in the cities. One form of transport is almost as bad as the other. There are not enough buses, rickshaws or autorickshaws to take people to their place of destination. The buses and other means of transport are poorly maintained. There is, as a consequence, such a demand for the existing tin traps that pass for buses and rickshaws that there is a desperate stampede to get some room in the vehicles. People have been known to even have accidents in the breathless and wild rush for a grip on the door to hang on to while the bus chugs forth.

The price of private transports are so high that the average person can never dream of having his vehicle unless the office where he works is prepared to provide him with it. And cases of offices providing individual transport is not that common.

As for long journeys by launch or railway, these too are experiences of being huddled together and milled about due to lack of space and better facilities.

Travelling remains a problematic experience. One has only to consider the sights and sounds around one in the main roads. Chugging and panting overloaded buses, tilting to one side and breathing out endless swirls of black smoke, go about with passengers slinging to the back and side. The top of buses sees human beings at times and not just piles of baskets and baggage. Spades, pick axes and shovels are also there hanging precariously from behind the body of the buses. If one were to seat oneself in one of the vehicles or take a close look at the means of transport one would be aware that they are packed so tightly with passengers that it is worse than the carefully packed sardines in a tin — the sardines have the luxury of the oil around their belly and fins but the poor people are huddled almost like cattle in goods trains.

Due to the limited buses there have been cases of children and old people being hurt in the stampede for catching the bus. Moreover, one can easily get injured from the precarious perches beside the bus windows or the staircase. As for the more delicate women, many are frightened out of their wits to go about in the bus and so force their parents and husbands with their limited income to give them bigger sums of money to pay for the rickshaw or the autorickshaw.

As for going by rickshaw, a means employed by thousands in the city, one has to cling on to the sides of these "self-ejecting-machines" as someone once called them, if one does not wish to have a tumble on the road everytime the rickshaw stops, and is hit by the one at the back, and which invariably has no effective brake, as the driver does not deem it fit to mend the brakes in time. The bumps that the passenger must suffer are innumerable as the rickshaw goes by the footpaths — where the cement and the stones have been worn off with monsoon rains. Anyone who has the misfortune to have a tumble on these footpaths often has a nasty experience, and if he should, by any chance, happen to get a cut on the form of a severe injury, there is so much of dirt piled on the way, that it is only too easy to get infected

unless one is treated immediately. People have even broken bones in rough rickshaw rides, specially if they happen to be old.

For a woman it is always a difficult task to travel alone. A friend of mine told me the other day of how she was going in a covered rickshaw in Dhanmondi past a college, lost in her own thoughts, when teasing boys stuck in their rough and rude hands into the rickshaw. Another woman informed how she abandoned

tance one pays Tk 20 to the baby-taxi driver.

The whining and haggling for "baksheesh" specially on the occasion of Eid or any other festive period becomes yet another fly in the ointment for the passenger who can barely scrape together the necessary pile of notes to pay for the cost of the legitimate fare. There is also the begging for the old "lungi" or "sari" or even a job in the house as a "chowkidar" after the trip is over. This only embarrasses the passenger further.

The question of having the



Rickshaw — a popular means of transport

her job which required evening travelling in a rickshaw by herself. Fixing the price of the fares of the rickshaw is another annoying matter. It is incredible how the rickshaw drivers will demand and get preposterous fares. This is specially around 2 pm when there is the change in the shifts in the rickshaws. The rickshawpuller will not only refuse to take the passenger for what one considers and knows to be the correct fare and one can waste as much as a half an hour merely waiting for a rickshaw to take one to the place of destination. The dearth of good means of communication permits the rickshaw driver to demand a high price. What is the cause of the high price, one may demand. The rickshawpuller will coolly reply that if the passenger had to have any other choice there is only the baby-taxi whose fuel prices have soared with the recent spiralling petrol prices. One may fail to see any clear logic behind what the rickshaw puller might be saying but one can only scream one's life out trying to argue with the man as there are numerous other passengers, with easy money, who will cater to his high demand and so reduce the consumer's resistance capacity. The muggings on the roads are another matter to dread.

There are then baby-taxis that go puffing and panting all over the roads, now competing with private buses and next with public buses and lorries for more room on the road. Apart from some of the rare baby-taxi stands in the city, it is again difficult to get the baby-taxis. There are no doubt a small fleet of taxis that stand outside the city's most expensive hotel who charge Tk 60 merely to cover what the dis-

rare luxury of owning a car of one's own remains a distant dream for thousands in the city. Where will one get the money to buy even a second-hand car? Should one manage to borrow and scrape together the sum, there is never enough to pay for the petrol, and the constant expensive repair works. The garages again are very costly, and if one does not know how to drive oneself and does not have complete knowledge of how the car runs and the manner in which the different parts should be repaired, one cannot afford to have the extravagance of a chauffeur, unless one is lucky enough to have one's office or company to pay for it.

What is obviously needed is more efficient and economical means of transport. By this one does not mean that the roads should be overcrowded with speeding rickshaws but that many more buses are required to meet the needs of the people. More baby-taxis could be introduced. Had the country not been such a rainy season, an underground system could perhaps have helped to solve the problem. As it is, should one dig the ground for subway nothing but pools of water would spring up. Along with buses and taxis the ferry system and launches could be made more enjoyable and less expensive. Cleaner and more spacious waiting rooms for passengers going by train and launch would help the people a long way. A few more refreshment shops and cleaner toilets would similarly make matters much more easy and pleasant. Even the airport remains so crowded that people sometimes prefer to go by train or bus, or possibly a car even though the journey is less enjoyable, as one is tossed for hours for endless miles.

Going for an Interview

by Sylvia Saleem

to get there and arrive a few minutes early to have a moment to collect your thoughts and take in the surroundings. When you are shown into the room your possible future boss will get up and shake hands and offer you a chair. Sit neatly and put down your bag and gloves so that you aren't likely to drop them in a fit of nerves or to fiddle with them while you talk. Fiddlers are very off-putting at interviews. You'll probably be given a test if it is a secretarial job, so have a pad and pencils with you (two, in case one breaks). Let the interviewer ask the questions, but try not to be monosyllabic about the answers. If he asks about your training, tell him about the part of it which in-

terested you specially. Most employers will ask about yourself and your home and hobbies. This is to get an idea of the sort of person you are, if you have enthusiasm and seem congenial and adaptable. Don't be tempted to prattle irrelevances, but give him some indication of your interests and background. For instance, if the job is with a firm of antique dealers tell your prospective boss about that course of evening classes you took last year on Furniture Through the Ages. It shows willing.

Look Interested

If there is anything you don't hear or understand, do

say so: it is always fatal to pretend you've understood and to come unstuck later on. Be alert and ready to smile and above all, be sure you know something about the firm you are wanting to join.

Voices are terrible giving-

away things — inclined to rise with nerves, or to become affected, so keep your low and speak clearly and naturally. At the end, if there are any questions you want to ask about hours, holidays, and so on, do so.

But always get over the idea that you are there because you really want to work, that alone could get you the job.

It was 11.00 O'clock on a Monday morning. Time for gynecology class at a medical college. The professor brought up a new issue open for discussion: "Suppose you were asked should abortion be legalised in our country what would you answer be?" Needless to say the class was a total chaos.

There were a variety of re-

Today's Women and Abortion

by Farhana Ahmad

actions from the contemplating silence to the sheer disbelief that anyone in their right mind could even condone such a thought. Everyone knows it is a controversial subject. Why, it

was one of the issues of the American Presidential election. So how can we, coming from a third world Muslim country with staunchly conservative background, even allow ourselves to think of such a thing which brought so much opposition even from the most developed country in the world?

Well, if we for one moment forget where we come from and our upbringing how would today's woman feel if such an issue should arise?

Most felt it was right only in certain circumstances and also the right of any woman who wanted it. A few cited medical reasons. If it would save the mother if she aborted the child, then it was permissible. Or, if the child was destined to be born with a deformity either physical or mental then it was all right. Or, if the child was unwanted many felt it would be better to have the

child surgically removed than to have it come out into the world only to suffer.

Like an article in the Reader's Digest once said, "No child asks to be born, if you bring it to this world there are certain responsibilities you have towards it." So how can a child survive with a negative attitude from the mother from the very beginning? Far better to let the mother have the choice of aborting it. Then there are the victims of rape who become pregnant. What would they do with a child that is a constant reminder of the most disastrous episode of their lives?

Once again, those who felt abortion was wrong under any circumstance were mainly the more religious ones and to a lesser extent, those who held strong views against it. One young woman stated that legalising abortion was like giving a monopoly to men and women

to lead immoral lives that our sense of values and our virtues in that sector will be as sadly lacking as our western counterparts.

One very positive thinking woman pointed out that women have been having abortions for a long time now. Legalising abortion will ensure that women go to hospitals or clinics where there are proper facilities and not run to the nearest unskilled person and as a result maternal mortality rate can be greatly reduced instead of woman dying from post abortion haemorrhage. This woman also pointed out that in her opinion legalising abortion had nothing to do with immorality. That being immoral or a moral was an individual thing and should not be generalised.

So before pointing fingers or criticising, those in favour of abortion, or back-stabbing which as a nation we are very good at doing, keep in mind it may be you or someone very near you who may need an abortion as a life saving measure or simply in terms of humanity. Then, should abortion be legalised? Think about it.



"Murder East Murder West" on Star Plus



"L. A. Law" on Star Plus

The Right Appearance

How you look is very important. Everyone is cheered and pleased by a bright, neat appearance. Wear something unfussy but smart — don't be tempted to dress like a budding film star for a job as under-matron at a boys' school! The most important impression to give is of care: clean collars and gloves, well-pressed clothes, polished shoes, no ladders in stockings, and no chipped nail varnish (keep it pale if you wear it at all).

Arrive Early

Give yourself plenty of time