

## Chittagong chronicles

WELL, to tell you the truth, Chittagong's been pretty dull lately. Naturally, we have the incredibly constant rain drizzles to blame for this. Sitting at home, listening to romantic music, munching on tidbits while watching the rain, is certainly an appealing prospect for many (after enduring study torture in preparation for their exams), but the novelty of laziness soon wears out and restlessness sets in. Even though hardly any outdoor plans are possible in this weather, teens still seek solace from boredom, amidst friends. The teen hangouts have definitely been flourishing in business this season!

Somehow, rain always makes my mouth water for hot and spicy treats. If the same goes for you, then don't forget to hang out at 'Dhaba' or 'Wai Kiki' (Kulshi). They have excellent dahi fuchka and chotpoti. The lights are just perfect, and the interior is cozy and relaxing. These are places where you can chat for hours, as long as you don't make yourself sick with too much chotpoti!

However, if you aren't an avid fan of chotpoti, you can always stop by at 'Snoopy' (Prabartak Circle), or 'Sizzle' right next to it. During afternoons, the environment in 'Snoopy' is vibrant and animated, giving you a lovely 'feel' of being right in the thick of things, as soon as you walk into the door. It's a great place to see, be seen, gossip and know the latest. Not a 'Snoopy' has good snacks and kababs, although 'Sizzle' isn't that bad either! Don't try 'Sweetmax' or 'Swiss', cause anyone young hardly goes there anymore.

Although few people actually enjoy



chilled drinks during wet weather, I am sure there are many who would simply adore hot coffee for company. In that case, check out any one of the many coffee hangouts, although I'd certainly recommend 'Issy Food' (in Ispahani More). Being a lot like 'Western Grill' (Dhaka), the fast food's pretty good, and the coffee's excellent. One plus point about Issy is that they play very selective music. You don't need to go through the agonizing torture of listening to songs that are five years old!

While you're at it, check out the new place just opposite Issy, 'Pittstop Café'. A little bird told me that the owners decided to launch this café, when they determined that there were hardly any popular 'hangouts' for youngsters in Chittagong. Hmm, seems to me that there are quite a few hangouts around already. Let's see how Pittstop fares though, shall we? Anyway, till we meet again, this is Jen saying 'Ciao'!

By Jennifer Ashraf

## Food for thought

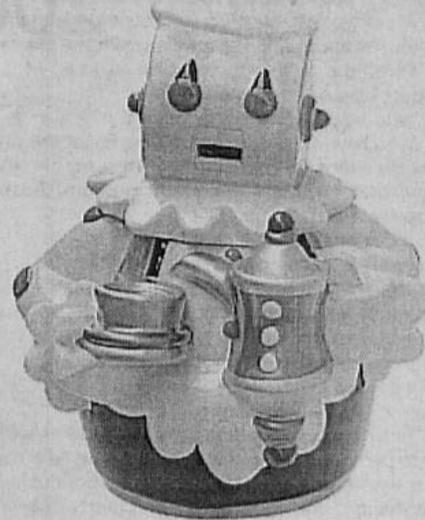
I shouted, "Bua, get me a cup of tea". Within a couple of minutes, the hot beverage was right there in front of my eyes. After wallowing in lethargy a little longer, my pre-programmed mind that somehow learned that tea breaks off laziness, made me ask for another cup. Again, it was placed in front of me within minutes.

This is the story of almost of everyday life for many of us. However, to our own disgrace, little do we stop to thank or sincerely appreciate those helping hands who allow us to live like royalty, who make our wishes come true in a finger's snap. Let alone thanking them, how many of us actually notice them at the first place?

In Bangladesh, domestic help is something that we see from the moment we place our feet in the blue planet. Ordering them around is something we learn from our elders faster than we pick up anything else. Hence, it's so normal to us that we do not realize the immense value of these people in our life. We only do so when we have to tear ourselves away from that favourite television show or that essential phone conversation to make that cup of tea or coffee, and we actually MISS them when we have to go abroad and live there.

Do we even think of those underpaid workers who keep our dirty streets from becoming even dirtier? Yes, I know that the job is not done properly. However, it's not their inefficiency rather the shortage of workers that cannot fulfill of what we expect—the spick and span streets.

It's not the big things that make us feel good, but the trivial things that make our lives incredible. For instance, if we wake up to find fantastic weather outside, we feel rejuvenated. On the other hand, if the sun is radiating unbearable heat, we go crazy. Weather does drive our mood. Hardly anyone stops to look at nature. I know, in this city, pollution of all kinds make the green trees turn into a nameless colour, but have you ever been to a village and smelled the air? How revitalizing that feeling is. Those who migrated in city in search of a job leaving the



villages can tell the difference.

For want of a nail, the shoe was lost,  
For want of a shoe, the horse was lost,  
For want of a horse, the rider was lost,  
For want of a rider, the battle was lost,  
For want of a battle, the king was lost,  
For want of a king, the kingdom was lost,  
And all that happened for want of a shoe nail!"

This shows how we underestimate certain values in us.

As Robert Frost puts it, find sometime to stand and stare at nature. Next time you enjoy a delicious meal at the restaurant, send a word to the chef that it was excellently prepared, and when a tired salesperson shows you unusual courtesy, please mention it, because they make your day, and your life beautiful.

By Maherin Ahmed

## Invasion of the baby sister

I felt a pudgy paw, five wet fingers land on my cheek. I looked down to see that the tight little bundle of fair sweetness lying next to me was stretching. Chickie, I thought. Thinking that I'm talking about a cat? No. I'm talking about my five-month-old baby sister, who I, after much debating named Thea Ariana Mahboob, only to eventually call her 'Chickie'. And how could I not? After all, she does have all the sweetness of a little chick.

Having spent nineteen years as an only child, Chickie's birth brought me infinite joy. Sometimes I think I love her more than life itself and even more than my Maa. I'm yet to figure that one out. In any case, Maa will understand!

Oh Chickie! Where do I start? But let me clarify. 'Chickie' isn't her only unofficial nickname. I call her 'Lulturani' and 'Drool School' when she's spattering the heavens and earth with her drool. I call her 'Poopy Queen' when she is on her expedition to the loo. I call her 'Fuddu' (short of full of *dushtami*) when she is up to mischief and I call her 'Cutie Patootie' when she gives me one of her lopsided, toothless grins. I guess God has given us an angel to play with.

Chickie came into our lives after Maa's turbulent, ailment-infested pregnancy. But Maa proudly says that the moment Chickie grins, she forgets everything she had gone through to get Chickie.

A completely child unfriendly house for over a decade, Chickie's arrival has changed our home into a messy version of Babies' R' Us. With rattles, squeaky toys, nappies, swings and bouncers haphazardly strewn across, even a blind guy could take a job at saying that this house was home to a baby.

Our house isn't the only thing to have changed. Our lives have changed as well. Previously we didn't have to worry about coordinating schedules, staying out late or going to whimsical shopping sprees. But now Chickie makes the decision.

On my summer vacation, I have spent a good portion of my break entertaining Chickie while Maa goes off to work. Mind you, I'm not complaining. Chickie is growing on me: drool, peepee, poopoo and all! Previously I used to go back home after a day's work and switch on the tube. Now my first inquiry on entering the house is, 'Where's Chickie?' Now I only switch on

the tube for Chickie's benefit, who like me is turning into a TV-holic (it's a genetic family disorder!).

My family and friends say that Chickie is evoking my maternal instincts and giving me a free motherhood training at her own expense. When I think about it, I grudgingly have to agree. After all, how many about-to-be-twenty year-olds do you see, sitting at work and wondering what their baby sister is up to? Not many, if any, I believe.

Now all the songs I hear are edited for Chickie's entertainment. Thus if you hear me singing 'It's the time for Chickie' instead of 'It's the time to Disco' then don't feel perplexed. I know the song I just have to sing it to Chickie's tunes!

I could go on rambling about Chickie and how she smiles, how she babbles, how she rolls over, how she sucks her fingers and so on and so forth but then I would probably end up writing a novel. Chickie is now the joy of my life. Her arrival has made me wonder if I really do want to spend my life away from her, living abroad. For the moment, though, I can't answer that call. After all, right now, it's the time for Chickie!

By Tahiat-e-Mahboob

## Freedom of speech

PEOPLE always called her a reticent, young girl, never expressing any opinions or sharing a thought. 'She never has any,' said some. She would just sit there listening, indifferent, complacent. Once in her room, she would take out her journal from her lock drawer and pour out her complaints, anger, emotions and wounds. No one ever gave her a chance. She wanted to be a journalist, and everyone had laughed on her face. She wanted to take it up as a challenge, just to show them that yes, she can. Even though everyone discouraged her from doing so, she pursued her interests. And now, she was a successful journalist, well known by the people of her country, and, ironically, better treated by her family and relatives.

It was almost a year back when a publisher had come to her asking her to write a book. It had been one of the best moments of her life. She had said yes to the proposal, without even thinking about what she was to write about. Just a month ago, her book had finally come out. It was amazing how her book sold so well, considering the fact that this was the first book she ever wrote. That was probably because of her eminence as a journalist. There were lots of praises, gestures of appreciation, but at the

same time, there was controversy. She did not care, really, that there were some people who thought she wrote too much about opinions that she should not have. In fact, she liked it. More people read the book that way. She knew that those who had nothing better to do other than to rebuke the ones whose opinions did not match those of their own, would revolt. And they did. It was all so typical.

She wrote about sensitive issues. She wrote about dark truths no one talks about. She wrote about horrible things that happened to her or to close relatives or friends. She wrote about her views on politics and the situation of her country. She revealed truths about some very influential and important people. A lot of people knew about them anyway, but no one had the courage to speak up.

She looked around. It was getting dark. She had to go home. She stepped out of the library. There were no rickshaws in sight. She started to walk down the alleyway. The light breeze felt good against her face, fanning her short hair. She scanned the road once more, and at that very moment, out of nowhere, came four men with their faces covered. Before she even knew it, they were stabbing her face. Excruciating

pain shot throughout her body, and she fell to the ground.

The next time she woke up was in a hospital. She could hear voices, but could not see their sources. She touched her eyes; yes, they were open. She reached out for anything close to her. She held something and brought it close to her eyes. The horrible truth dawned upon her. She was blind. Those men had dug out her eyes so that she could not see anymore. They wanted her to stop writing, to stop voicing her opinions. She knew exactly who they were, even though she had not seen their faces. But what proof did she have? Would she get proper judgement? They were influential men. They could easily buy their innocence.

In a country where anyone who expresses his or her opinions, views and way of looking at things are either stabbed, hurt in such a way that he or she will no longer be able to write, or is murdered, where is the freedom? Where is the independence? A silent tear ran down her cheek. No, they would not succeed. She was not afraid. She would go on speaking the truth. She still had a voice. They would have to slit her throat to make her stop. No one could deprive her from her freedom of speech.

By Marwa

## POEMS



### My Father

Father these words are now sent  
With only the best of intent  
You're friendly and nice  
Shall I say it twice?  
Especially for you this is meant  
Outsiders soon join in the throng  
The minute that you come along  
Your warm friendly style  
Shines right through your smile  
You love to help people belong  
Of the fathers' I know you are the best  
You're one of a kind, I suggest  
You taught me a lot  
At times I forgot  
But with you as a father I am blest  
By Shafquat Haque