and people brace for another round of price hike. In fact, significant changes in overall lifestyle can be seen as people practise restraint not only by staying away from food and drinks during the day time but also by curtailing other activities.

One major casualty of Ramadan is perhaps cultural activities. I missed especially those that are normally held to celebrate monsoon. There was hardly any such activity in the evenings. Even the monthly evening programme of the cultural centre of the Indian High Commission in Dhaka had very little.

But culture was not entirely absent from the month's fair. Various TV channels continued with their programmes of music and dance and didn't forget the death anniversary of Rabindranath Tagore. An addition was Islamic songs telecast by several channels, especially before *iftar*. Another type of programme that became my favourite is that of cooking, the contents of which were modified to demonstrate items suitable for the month, especially for *iftar*. What was interesting is that there was specialization and diversification _ one channel showing only soups, one only drinks and desserts, and some demonstrating items that can be prepared quickly. These programmes followed by devotional songs provided a perfect build up to the *iftar* time. Of course, that longed for time is no longer announced by a siren blaring from somewhere that used to appear mysterious to me during my childhood. With the advent of TV, that tradition is gone. But the ambiance is still no less attractive.

To me, a major attraction during Ramadan in Dhaka is Eid shopping. However, looking at and reading about new designs that come to the market on the occasion of Eid, I wondered whether it's only the young who are connoisseurs of new fashions and designs. Couldn't the designers and traders think of the not-so-young also while designing attires? Happily, however, my wife and I got a matching set of *saree* and *punjabi* (from a craft shop) as gift from my eldest brother and *Bhabi*. I must mention, they attracted a lot of attention when we wore them for parties.

Unfortunately, Eid shopping this year took a bad hit from four consecutive days of *hartal* at the beginning of the month. But we were not to be daunted. When we realised that shops were defying the call for hartal and were keeping open, we also followed suit and went for shopping by rickshaw. Out on the road, there was vehicular traffic in addition to rickshaws. And the shops also did have customers _ though a far cry from the crowd expected at that time. That created a hope in me that although enactment of anti-*hartal* law may not be feasible in a democratic country, people themselves will start defying calls for *hartal* that do not have any real rationale.



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

That *hartal* was taking its toll on the poor was clear from the way a middle aged man approached me outside my house and lamented the lack of business in his trade of selling vegetables. What really struck me was his request for *zakat* – something I didn't expect from a person who is economically active. Moreover, the increase in the number of beggars in the city was an indication of the persistence of poverty and destitution despite the much trumpeted success in poverty reduction and achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

In addition, there were the survivors of industrial disasters like Rana Plaza and Tazreen Fashions still to be fully compensated, and to the utter disgust of many, the former was declared as an act God. The routine struggle for getting workers paid before Eid was also on. Amidst such desperation and destitution, Eid returns to Bangladesh, and did so this time as well.

As usual, the build up to the Eid day was characterised by mass movement of people out of Dhaka, the struggle for tickets and places in trains, buses and launches, and Dhaka wearing a deserted look. What is not noticed so much is the number of people going out of the country during the holiday. It seemed to me that while common people return to their roots, the rich tend to drift away. ■