



DESIGN: KAZI AKIB BIN ASAD

When holidays are not an equal privilege

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When Pahela Baishakh and Ramadan crossed paths this year, we got a day off to adequately celebrate while fasting, after two years spent cowering indoors owing to the pandemic at its peak.

What's even better is that Eid is near and so is another bout of holidays waiting to be spent with friends and family. No classes for the last days of Ramadan, and no exams at least until after the vacation. But that's not the reality for everyone when it comes to their own festivals, is it?

April 13 to 15 marked the calendar dates for Biju, Bishu, Sangrai, Boishu, and Changran – the prominent socio-religious festivals of the Chakma, Marma, Tripura, Tanchangya, and Mro people. While the delightful glimpses of the festivals adorned our social media timelines, a lot of us chose to skip over the fact that there was something very peculiar about it all. Instead of being back home with their beloved ones for the most important festivals of the year, most of their youth were observing small-scale on-campus celebrations at best.

These dates aren't recognised as public holidays in Bangladesh, and so all public and private universities, along with other educational institutions, remain open with complete disregard. As if it couldn't get any worse, many even choose this very same timeline for holding exams alongside regular classes, which was indeed the case this year. It's not even surprising considering how the situation is nearly the same for the religious minorities of this country as well.

Students get to have rather sufficient breaks for both Eid and a few more special occasions, whereas most schools and colleges only allow a break as small as 3 to 5 days for an occasion like Durga Puja, the celebrations for which last for as long as 10 days.

In between discussions about these issues, one of the most common suggestions people leave is to make these festivals optional holidays for the ones celebrating. Although it sounds like a solution, it's a bare minimum and has a very real chance of not working out.

For instance, if they were optional holidays indeed and that allowed the indigenous or religious minority youths studying in educational institutions across the country to take a leave in the midst of an ongoing academic session, there's no guarantee that they'd receive fairly compensated make up lessons owing to the core problems in our inefficient, conventional schooling system. The same goes for workplaces and honorariums in an extended scenario. Paired with the raging discrimination these people already face in every aspect of life in this country, this will only let others weaponise their rightful freedom of cultural and religious expression.

Biju is not supposed to be celebrated solely in a congested campus in the urban heat of April, with academic stress and suppressed sadness so palpable that it's apparent despite the smiling faces. Half of Durga Puja is not supposed to be spent running from class to class, jumping from assignment to presentation while merely reminiscing about the celebration.

This needs to change. And soon.

Hamama's problems smell like daruchini because she's dweep into them 24/7. Send help at fatin.hamama003@gmail.com

Homage to an uneventful Eid at home

ZABIN TAZRIN NASHITA

Eid is when your parents get more than two days off from work, when you get to make unreasonable demands for gifts, and the time to cop a decent sum of money as salami.

Despite all that, you don't always have the mental capacity to deal with all the socialisation. Especially if you've had a tough year and finally got a vacation after ages. Or, you're one of the unfortunate souls whose friends and favourite cousins have all headed to their villages, and your parents think it's best to stay in the city. Or, you might fall into the third category, who's too much of a homebody to entertain the idea of stepping out and having fun, even on Eid.

I'm a mix of all three. My family rarely goes to our hometown to celebrate Eid, and I'm a homebody who avoids socialisation.

Here's how a typical Eid goes for me. Dressing up real nice is the first thing I do in the morning, because it is Eid after all. Besides, it's important to show my mother I fully plan on wearing the super inconvenient clothes she advised me against buying.

Of course, the next few hours are spent sitting on the sofa and eating she-mai. One might say I'm overdressed for the occasion, but as a firm believer in going full glam for a quick grocery run I refuse to let that stop me.

By midday, the realisation that my mother was indeed right about the dress

being inconvenient will settle in. Tenuously, I soldier on while pretending that the stitches aren't digging into my arms and shoulders.

When evening rolls in, I use my inductive reasoning to conclude that since no guest paid a visit all day, I should not expect company in the last couple of hours either. However, just as I change into my ratty T-shirt and settle in front of the TV, the calling bell rings and the door opens to reveal every single one of my relatives who are in town.

I greet them with a smile, acutely aware of how I, advocate of dressing up for every little occasion, am the most underdressed person in the room.

Spending Eid this way can be quite relaxing, if not somewhat boring. A day without worries of deadlines hanging above my head isn't all that it's cut out to be, as sitcoms don't really feel right without the academic stress.

While it's not a totally bad day, I have to admit that scrolling through social media watching everyone spend their Eids much more eventfully is slightly upsetting.

So, if you're a homebody like me whose big travel plans for Eid is a quick trip to the drawing room, consider adding a couple other entries to your itinerary before you end up with a two-digit salami.

Zabin Tazrin Nashita is holding back the urge to overshare on the internet at fb.com/zabintazrin.nashita



Bored youth in their natural habitat on Eid day.

PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA