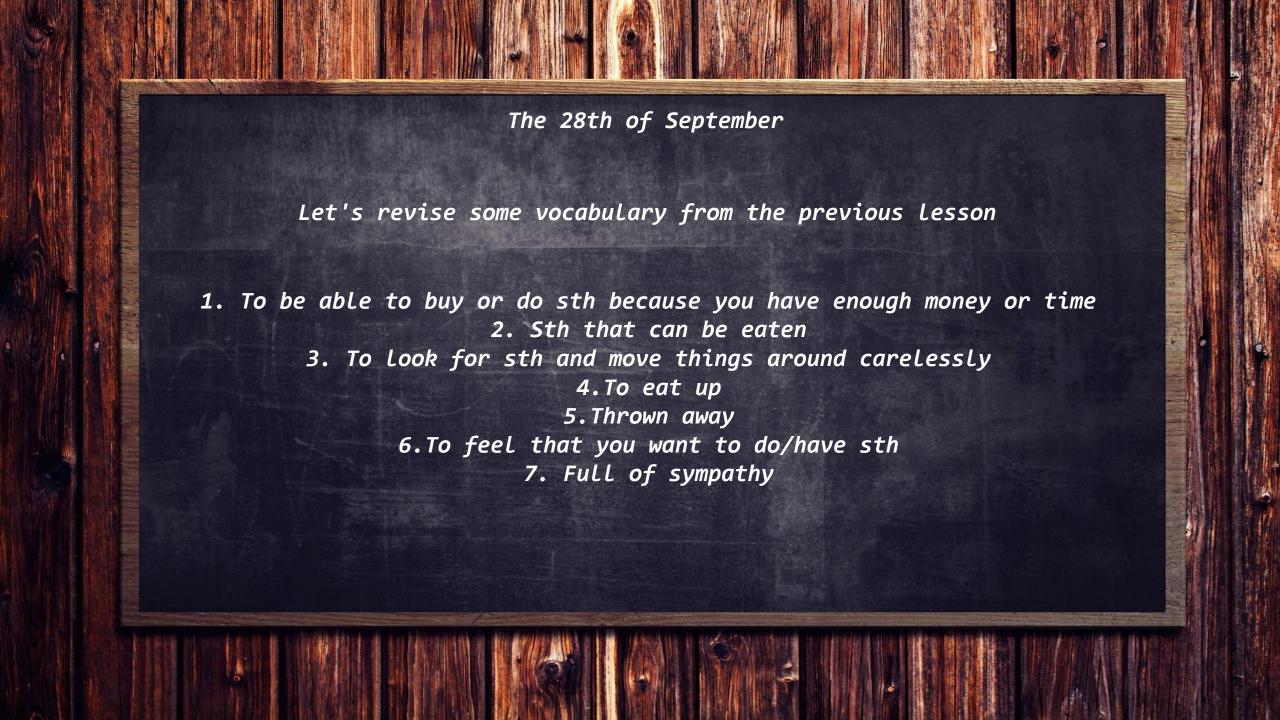
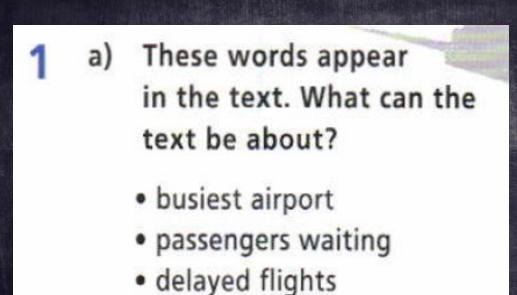
Heathrow is my hom

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· departure hall

passport and ticket

permanent residents

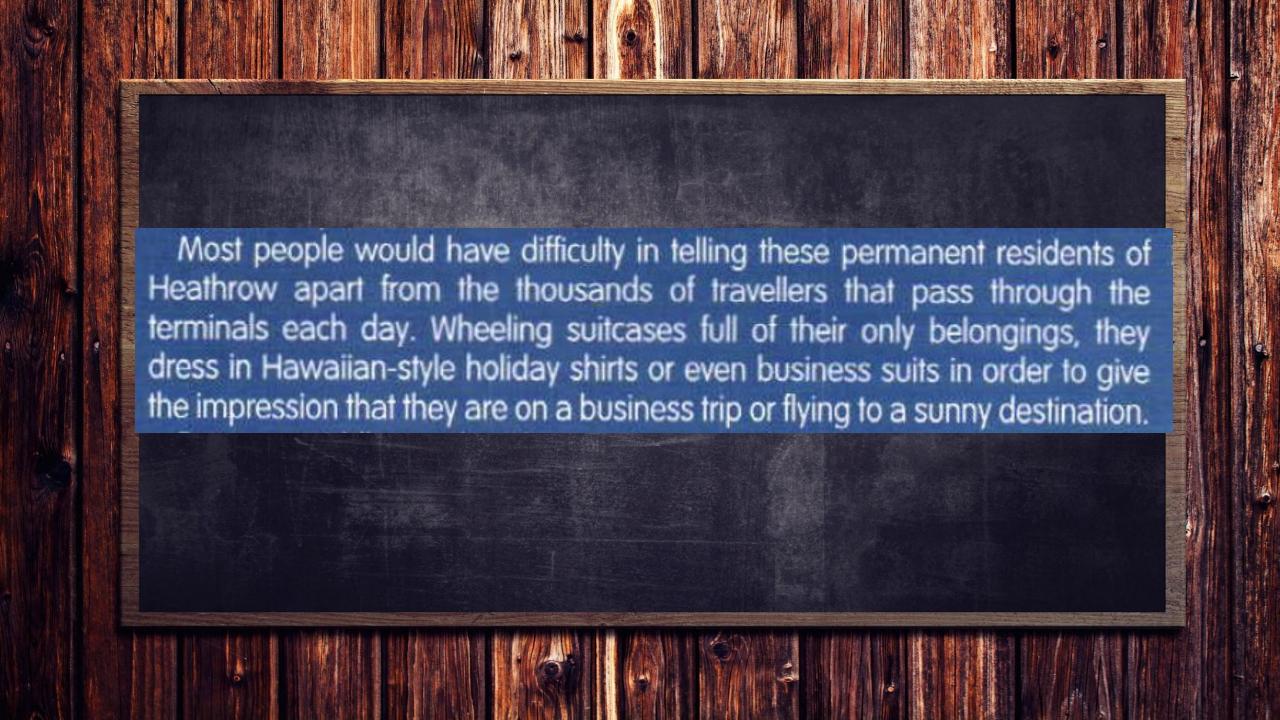
· leave the terminal

business trip

wheeling suitcases

- · loud announcements
- bustling passengers
- security staff
- · cold bus terminal
- escape from debts
- legal problems

s dusk approaches at Heathrow, Europe's busiest airport quietens A down for the night. Night cleaners begin their shifts and passengers waiting for delayed flights curl up on benches in the departure hall. One woman, Eram Dar, has found a cosy spot on the floor next to a vending machine. There is nothing to distinguish her from the waiting passengers 5 around her, except that she has no passport and ticket and is in no hurry to leave the terminal. For well over a year now, it has been her home and she isn't the only one. Eram is one of well over 100 people who live permanently at Heathrow airport.



Eram, a middle-aged ex-law student who became homeless after she could no longer pay her rent, actually considers herself fortunate to live in Heathrow. She says, "I liked it here immediately. I have never felt lonely because there are so many people. I don't mix much with the other homeless, although they are of all ages and from every walk of life. We all recognise each other, but I just like to keep to myself." There are showers in every terminal where Eram can stay clean and presentable. She can sometimes help herself to food passing by the caterers, and while away her time reading magazines and newspapers left behind by passengers.

It's difficult not to suspect that Eram is just putting on a brave face. It's hard to believe she's truly satisfied with this way of life. Once a week, she travels to 2 London to pick up a cheque for £60 from a charity. "The cash goes nowhere," she says. "Buying food at the airport is expensive. I don't eat anything at breakfast because, if I do, it makes me feel more hungry." Living in Heathrow isn't easy for Eram. Besides being awakened by the jangle of coins as a passenger buys something from the machine, loud announcements and 3 bustling passengers, she has to engage in a full-time cat-and-mouse game with the police and security staff. It's illegal to sleep at Heathrow unless you have a flight to catch, so along with the rest of Heathrow's homeless population, Eram has to wash and change her clothes every morning in order to not stand out from the crowd and be detected. If she is, she faces a night in 3. the cold bus terminal or worse, being thrown out into the rain. "The builders who work overnight at the airport are very kind and don't report the homeless to the authorities," she says. "The cleaners turn a blind eye too."

Night workers aren't the only ones trying to help this unusual group of people. Broadway, a homeless charity, visits the airport weekly to offer the airport's homeless temporary accommodation, help to get travel documents for migrant workers and attempt to reconnect people with their families. But, as a Broadway worker points out, "Homelessness is a way of life. It can be very difficult to convince people to receive help." Like the passengers escaping to sunny holiday destinations, many of Heathrow's homeless are also in search of escape from debts, legal problems or family responsibilities.

