The news from Sydney the other day included a gruesome story about a woman who'd died alone in her apartment and hadn't been discovered for a number of weeks. The news story reported her neighbours had noticed the stench of rotting flesh but had not called the police because they did not want to be involved. In Australia it happens that sometimes people lay dead for weeks or even months in their homes unnoticed, because they live alone and nobody comes to visit. It's difficult to imagine such a situation occurring here.

A few minutes later my rickshaw nearly scraped the bumper of a nearby car. The driver yelled a few words as my rickshaw driver kept silent, but it was the car which was parked askew from the curb. Evidence of scrapes and bumps is to be seen on any car or bus in this city that has spent more than a day out of the showroom, and what has always impressed me is even when such situations get heated, the drivers of each vehicle are usually able to sort it out themselves and get on their way without too much delay. It seems assumed that a car in Dhaka will have a few dents on it. In Sydney where such scrapes are much rarer, drivers usually swap insurance details, fill in claim forms for compensation and sometimes even small incidents involve the police or a court case.

Another few metres and a good ten minutes further along, I noticed a rickshaw driver at road's edge resting with his feet up on the handlebars. Having given up the hope of moving anywhere, he was playing a bamboo flute instead. It was the very definition of playing in the traffic. Undoubtedly he was somewhere far away, entirely oblivious to the hubbub of the road drowning out his song; I imagined in his village sitting on a set somewhere among



In Australia it happens that sometimes people lay dead for weeks or even months in their homes unnoticed, because they live alone and nobody comes to visit. It's difficult to imagine such a situation occurring here.

the rice fields, relaxing in the tranquility of the countryside, enjoying a breeze. Every single commuter stuck there in the jam must have wanted to join him. I know I did.

It's inevitable that sometimes when stuck in a jam, when it takes three times longer to arrive somewhere than it should, we curse this city. It's an easy matter to long for a few more freeways, orderly traffic flow and convenience. And while I must confess I am saved the worst of it for I live close enough to work to walk, I think that as well as being annoyed about Dhaka's traffic jams it's worthwhile to keep aside a small smile for those intimate, personal moments in other people's lives that traffic jams make us witness to, what makes a Dhaka traffic jam an organism of humanity and an expression of this city's life, while in Sydney, when jams occur, they're not much more than an impersonal row of cars.

And if you still doubt you can enjoy Dhaka's traffic then think of this: we complain of the huge number of rickshaws that add to the congestion we make ourselves, most of us, hypocrites, for we're never including the one we're sitting on. ■