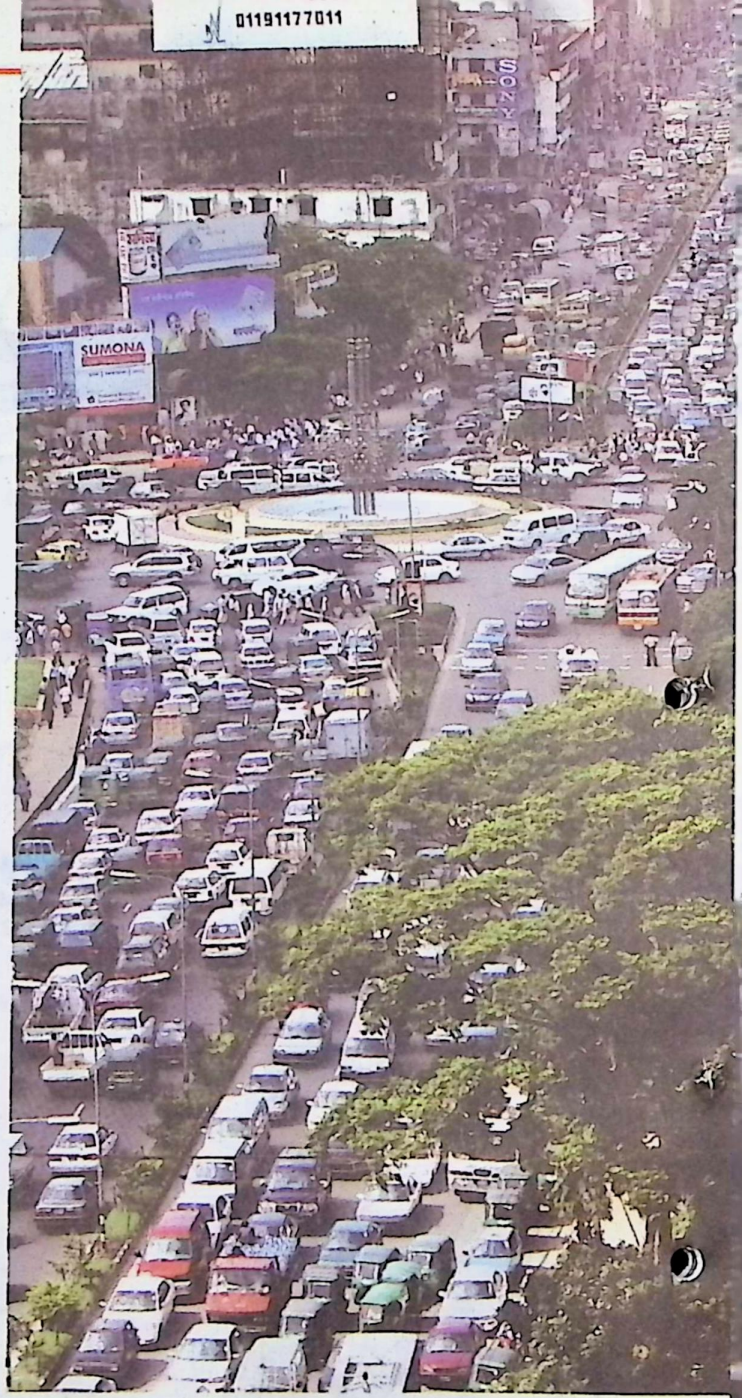
Daily Diatribe

NADIA KABIR BARB



Have you ever been in a situation where you meet someone - a complete stranger and they start up a conversation with you? Before you know it, you are privy to even the most intimate details of their life. At times the information you are given can be a little too personal and make you cringe. For some reason I find myself in this position time and time again. Not that I have a problem with it but there are times when a smile has instigated a monologue by the person sitting with me in the waiting room of my doctor's surgery, where the symptoms and ailment they are suffering from is described in rather graphic detail. On a few and extremely rare occasions when I have ventured to the gym, my fellow sufferers have thought it necessary to confide in me the reason for their sudden decision to lose weight, tone up or just work out! There have also been numerous times where shop keepers, taxi drivers, plumbers etc have struck up a conversations with me and I have found myself engaged in heated debates about religion and politics, small talk about the weather, exchanging tips on raising children and other topics ranging from one end of the conversational spectrum to the other. On my recent trip to Dhaka I found myself in one of these rather familiar situations and a random encounter with a shopkeeper inspired me to write this article.

I was sitting in a traffic jam and as the car seemed to move an inch every twenty minutes I got slightly frustrated with our rather protracted and incredibly laborious journey home and decided to stop and buy some flowers from the shop on the side of the road. It was at least better than sitting in stationary traffic for what felt like an eternity. As I stepped into the little shop which smelled of 'rajanigandha' and roses, I found my annoyance abating. Having surveyed the flowers displayed around me, and not really having found anything that grabbed my fancy, I asked the gentleman to make me a little bouquet. His assistant immediately started showing me various combinations of different varieties and colours of flowers and then proceeded to make my arrangement. As I waited, the shopkeeper looked out of the window and shook his head. Interpreting this as a sign of his dismay at the sea of cars, buses and rickshaws grid locked outside, I commented on how awful the traffic situation had become since my last trip to Dhaka. It was as if I had opened the floodgates to some pent up frustrations and he launched into a diatribe on the current political and economic state of the country. But his concerns were not only valid but insightful as well.