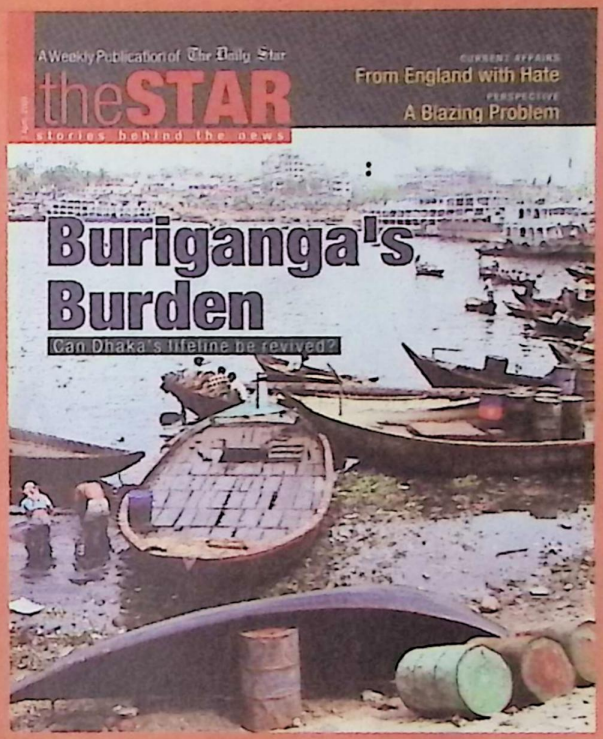
His opening statement was that he was neither a supporter of the AL nor BNP, as he did not have much faith in either party any more. I felt the need at this point to convey the fact to him that I too had no affiliation to either party so he could rest assured I would not take any of his comments personally. His main complaint was that the government, past and present, did not seem to be concerned with the welfare of the masses. One only had to look at the spiralling price of food which was rising day by day and as far as he could see there was no sign of respite. Empty promises do not feed empty stomachs. I asked him how his business was doing and he remarked that he was just about keeping his head above water. Thankfully people were still buying flowers.

He asked me rhetorically why the government did nothing to ease the traffic situation. "You have to be a Minister to get through the traffic" he added with a laugh. My puzzled look encouraged him to elaborate. "If you have a flag on your car, the traffic police let you pass, otherwise you have to wait till they decide to let the cars go. On top of that they block one road for 10-15 minutes and then let them go and then block the other side --- instead of helping they are creating a backlog of cars" I agreed with him as I had made more or less the same remark to someone the previous day. We then speculated whether the situation would ease up a little if people actually followed the rules and stopped when the lights turned red and went when they were green. Our conclusion was that there were just too many vehicles these days and the Dhaka infrastructure could not cope with the sheer volume on the streets.

The shopkeeper obviously had more on his mind and wanted to continue with our conversation."Why is the government wasting their time and spending tax payers' money changing the names of roads and buildings? Is it going to help the people who are dying on the streets knowing that the Bangladesh China Friendship Conference Centre has been changed to Bangabandhu Conference Centre? People still call the PG Hospital 'PG Hospital' and Jamuna Bridge 'Jamuna Bridge'so what did it achieve by changing the names in the first place?" He has a point. I myself am perplexed at this rather bizarre phenomenon where well-established institutions, roads and buildings are being renamed. How is it possible or even right? We seem to be on a journey, which is changing the historical face of Dhaka and that to me is a sign of arrogance and a show of hubris, which is distasteful. Surely there are so many other, far more important issues that the government should be tackling and their priorities should consist of some of the topics weighing on the mind of the shop keeper and millions of other like minded Bangladeshis. Maybe the government should take some pointers from the man selling flowers on the roadside.

By this stage my bouquet was ready and I thanked the florist for my flowers and especially for my rather enlightening encounter.



WRITE FOR theSTAR

The Star Magazine, which has just celebrated its 13th anniversary this year, is looking for young, energetic individuals who will be able to write on arts, culture, film and sports, and will also be able to write features on different events that the Editor might assign her or him to cover. To become a contributor you must be a Bangladeshi citizen residing in the country, at least 18 years old, fluent in both English and Bengali and will be able to work well in a team.

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Before you start sending in, remember that the sample article must be written in English in 700-1200 words. We do not publish poems and we are not expecting them as sample write-ups. Because of the huge volume of submissions we receive it will not be possible for us to acknowledge the receipt of your article. Please know that we strongly believe in the principle of equal opportunity; any attempt (other than your writing skill) to influence our decision will disqualify your submission.