

Whenever you close your door for a moment to yourself, you'll find us by your side. We may or may not knock but come on what's there to hide – we are like family. It's because we are so considerate, so caring, we never want to leave you alone. If you don't want people with you every single minute, every moment of your life, then there's something seriously wrong with you. The problem lies with you, my friend. Not us. We are the good Samaritans.

'Oh *bhabhi*, you need to be more social. Just relax. Why don't you clean up that mess and go to the parlour? I can choose your outfit for you.'

'Um... no?'

'Don't be shy, *bhabhi*. I'll help. Oooooohhhh! This is such a beautiful sari! Such pretty fabric. Pity, the colour is not right for you. Why don't you let me wear it one day?'

'Um... no?'

'Thank you, *bhabhi*. I am actually doing you a



CARTOON: RAKIB

Every Breath You Take

UPASHANA SALAM

Space. That's what's at the root of all your problems. We live in Bangladesh, for heaven's sake! If you can't find space in the whole of our calm, peaceful, beautiful country, how can you expect to find it at your home or in a café?

Why close your door? It only makes the caring neighbour more adamant to enter your room. 'Open the door, open the door, Open the door.'

'What happened?'

'My son threw up all over your table. I can't sit there anymore. Can you take care of that while I sit in your bedroom and browse through your *saree* collection?'

'Um... no?'

favour by taking this sari off your hands. What would you do with it, anyway? Now, let's take a look at your jewellery collection.'

We don't want to intrude on your space. God forbid, no! How can we when we don't even understand what that means? Privacy – how do you pronounce that? Do you mean that you *don't* want us to drop by at your place whenever we feel like it? Why can't we look over your shoulders to check your messages? What's wrong in going through your inbox? Are you hiding something? If you are, we have the right to know what it is. If you aren't, what then is the problem? ■

Bangladeshis are a very polite people. They are always wary about hurting other people's feelings, and are very conscious about being liked by you, you, and all of you. They can't stand the fact that someone might not be fond of them. And thus, they'll never speak ill of you. To your face, that is.

Once you are out of the hearing range, the *bhabhi* who was just seconds ago praising your brilliant daughter, now whispers to her cohorts, 'Her daughter is too fast.' 'What do you mean? Does she run fast?' asks one of her followers, 'No, no. She is... how do I say it... too modern! She wears jeans and t-shirts. And keeps the rickshaw hood down! After dark! Can you believe it?' The other woman will make sounds of agreement and your daughter suddenly becomes the girl-we-can't-let-our-daughters-be-friends-with.

To your face, your best friend will hug you, assuring you that she's always there for you. Once you are out of ear-shot, she'll immediately call her 'other' best friend to gossip



CARTOON: SHARIER

Can't Say it to Your Face Can't Keep it to Myself

UPASHANA SALAM

about your upcoming trip abroad. 'Can you imagine this? She's going all alone to a Western country! And her parents are allowing her! My parents would die before they ever let me do something like that! Anyway, as long as she's there, she might as well bring me everything I asked for.'

The best are the leaders and the politicians. 'You vote for me and I will always look after you. That's my promise.' Once the microphone is shut off and the media sent home, the same leader says, 'When do we

get out of this blasted town? Too much load shedding here! Once I'm elected, I'll make sure that I won't have to come here again and again.'

You'll find these people lurking around in every corner of this country. They are usually the ones with the fake smile on their lips and a blank look in their eyes. If you dare to approach one of them, be wary of what you say in front of them. They have a disease, you see. Let's be polite and call it inconsistency. You don't want to catch that from them, do you? ■