

Not an ideal apartment culture



Although some parents prevent their children from interacting with neighbours, these kids still long for each other's companionship.

SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

PORIMOL PALMA

Families living in the city's apartments are becoming more and more socially alienated from each other, believe civil society members.

Some people might have lived in an apartment for a long time but chances are that they have remained oblivious to the existence of their next-door neighbours. It is often seen that birthdays, marriages, accidents and even deaths happening in one flat but fellow residents of the same apartment know nothing about that; observed speakers and citizens at a meeting arranged to discuss and share the concern regarding the behavioral pattern of Dhaka's apartment dwellers.

Sultana Alam, convenor of Dhanmondi Environment Development Alliance initiated the meeting in association with Ain O Salish Kendra (ASK) at the Dhaka Club on August 16.

The organisers and guests were unanimous in the opinion that the non-sharing attitude in residents of high-rise apartments in the cities, especially in cosmopolitan ones like Dhaka, has become a culture. This worrying trend is in stark contrast with the traditional Bengali values that advocate mutual cooperation and sharing of joy and sorrow with neighbors.

"People nowadays have become like machines. They live in different flats of the same apartment, but

never feel the urge to get introduced to each other.

"Although people of various regions, customs, intellectual levels stay in these apartments, they should remember that they are tied by a common Bengali culture that has a rich heritage," said Khurshid Erfan, co-founder of ASK.

Sultana Alam said that treatment of maids and domestic helpers in apartments, most of whom are brought from rural areas, reflected a low awareness level regarding human rights among their employers.

Employers prefer not to keep provisions for servants and drivers to stay. They are expected to make living arrangements elsewhere.

Children of most helpers are not allowed to step out of the confinement of the kitchen. There are even instances of children being locked inside rooms for days, said Sultana.

She suggested making apartment rules, especially regarding the salary, leave and working hours of the domestic help.

Abdullah Abu Sayeed, president of Bishwah Sahitya Kendra, said people in the apartments live like strangers without the knowledge of what was happening right under their noses.

He wanted a sharing mentality and joint effort of the residents which could turn their apartments into a joint-family and help combat any problem.

Dr Nyla Khan, director of Shishu

Bikash Kendro informed the forum that she receives numerous cases of sexual exploitation of children, many of whom work in apartments.

Khurshid Erfan pointed out that some parents tend to prevent their wards from playing and interacting with children of other flats.

"How will they learn to share and love others if they are not allowed to mix with their neighbors?" she asked.

Gita Chakraborti of ASK gave a positive picture of some ASK projects where affluent apartment owners had provided space and material for education and entertainment of domestic helps. ASK operates 14 such centers in the city.

"The concept of apartments in Dhaka City emerged for providing more space. It has even succeeded in its purpose, but at the same time, it has also added many psychological and social problems," commented architect Mobashwer Ahmed, president of Institute of Architects, Bangladesh (IAB).

Ahmed suggested formulating a standard apartment rules and guidelines for all the apartments in the city that would clearly narrate the do's and don'ts regarding security, conduct and policy.

The participants at the meeting agreed to form a committee which will work towards improving the social life of inhabitants of high-rise apartments. They also planned periodical meetings to discuss common issues of apartment dwellers.

Ministry disciplines Umrah agencies

KAUSAR ISLAM AYON

The Saudi government informed us that those nine agencies failed to bring back in time all the people they had sent to Saudi Arabia for Umrah. They also could not fulfil some other requirements

The Ministry for Religious Affairs has accused nine agencies that arrange travels to perform the *Umrah* of human trafficking and has cancelled their licenses.

"We have cancelled their permits on receiving specific complaints from the Saudi Arabian authorities," said Shahadat Hossain, senior assistant secretary of the ministry.

But the agencies concerned expressed their shock at the ministry's action.

Luftul Haque Nayeem, managing director of United Makka (Mecca) Madina Travels, one of the nine agencies, claimed that they received no prior notice about the cancellation.

"We have to renew our license every year. This year when we applied for renewal, the ministry declined saying that they have already cancelled our license," said Nayeem.

The agencies also complained that the government did not issue any information specifying their supposed wrongdoing.

But Shahadat Hossain denied it saying that the ministry had sent letters pointing out the irregularities.

"The Saudi government informed us that those nine agencies failed to bring back in time all the people they had sent

to Saudi Arabia for *Umrah*. They also could not fulfil some other requirements," said Hossain.

Hossain, however said that they did not cancel the licenses permanently and these agencies can get them back after satisfying the standards set by the Saudi authorities.

"We will give them another chance after verifying their performances. We will also look into the steps they have taken to correct their mistakes," Hossain said.

But Nayeem said that they haven't officially heard anything about their alleged faults.

"If the authorities do not tell us what we had done wrong, how can we prevent that?" asked Nayeem.

He also denied allegations of human trafficking against his agency.

Jamal Uddin Ahmed, proprietor of Labbayek Tours and Travels said that they were

victims of mistakes committed by their parallel agency in Saudi Arabia.

"I came to know from different sources later that the Saudi authorities had complained against the mismanagement at Jeddah Airport, which is the responsibility of our corresponding agency in Saudi Arabia," said Ahmed.

All the other agencies also denied links to human trafficking.

Three agencies, United Makka Madina Travels and Assistant Co. Ltd, Labbayek Tours and Travels and S M Islamia Overseas Ltd, have already applied for the renewal of their licenses.

The other agencies who have had their licences cancelled are Royal Air Service, M S Masud Travels, Arving Aviation, Haque Travels, Khaza Air Media Services and Makka Tours and Travels.

What's the use of letter-boxes

CITY CORRESPONDENT

People have shown little confidence in letter-boxes put up by the General Post Office (GPO) at various points in the city aiming to provide city dwellers with better and easy postal services.

Talking to the Star City, several citizens have expressed their dissatisfaction in depending on efficient collection and dispatch of letters from these letter-boxes.

"I dropped a letter to Sylhet four months back in the letter-box placed at the Suryasen hall of Dhaka University. The letter seemed to have vanished into thin air," said Asadur Rahman an economics student.

GPO authorities cannot provide the number of letters posted in these letter-boxes although they have provision to keep count. However post office officials claim that the service is smooth.

Some 269 GPO letter-boxes have been installed in the city with only one inspector to oversee and maintain them. These are divided into areas - the yellow only for the Dhaka City, the red for entire the country and the blue box - for overseas post.

Some boxes found not far from the Bangladesh Bank building are covered with posters confusing people of their utility.

"A letter-box in Shantinagar remains broken for long. The authorities have not taken any initiatives to repair it. How could one have confidence in using these letter-boxes?" said Amirur Rahman Talukder, a law firm executive and resident of the area.

Most letter-boxes are marked with the time of collection, but none of the three in front of Sonagora Hotel at Karwanbazar was touched till 16:20 pm on August 21 though the collection time indicated is 15:55.

"I dropped two letters to Netrakona in the box at Eskaton 15 days back, but the letters have not been received yet," said

Sarwar Hossain, a private tutor.

Makeshift shops curtain the letter-box with a scheduled collection time of 16:30 at Telecommunication Bhaban in Shahbagh.

"The postman does not maintain tim-

ings, but letters are collected during the day," said Rajjak Ali, owner of a cigarette shop.

"We believe that these letter-boxes serve the people well. Some people cov-

ered the boxes with posters. Whenever we receive any complaints we take immediate steps to mitigate the problems," said Rosina Sultana, Deputy Post Master General (DPMG) in charge of Dhaka.



PHOTO STAR

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HEALTH

Hospitals	8116061-62	Medical University Hospital-
Heart	Azimpur Mother & Child Health Training Institute- 8624827, 8624980	8612550-4, 8614545-9
National Institute of Cardio Vascular Diseases (NICVD), - 9130800, 9122560-59		Bangladesh Medical College & Hospital- 8115443, 9118202, Shamarita Hospital- 9131901
Burn		Suhrawardy Hospital -- 9130800, 912560-69
Dhaka Medical College Hospital	National Eye Hospital- 8117202, 8114807	Salimullah Medical Collage Hospital -- 7310061-4, 7319002-6
Cancer		Cholera Research Hospital (ICDDR,B)- 8811751-60
National Cancer Institute- 8014914, 8826561-65	Dental College -9002035	Monowra Hospital 8319802, 8318135
Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University-8612550-4, 861455-9		Blood Bank
Diabetes	Dhaka Medical College Hospital- 8626812-6	Red Crescent Centre- 9116563
Diabetic Research Hospital (BIRDEM)- 9661551-5, 8616641-50	Rushmoni General Hospital- 8317819	Sandhani (DMCH)- 8624040
Mother & Child Care	Holy Family Hospital- 83111731-25	Sandhani (SMCH)- 7310061, 7319022
Shishu Hospital- 9119119,		Dhaka Medical Collage Hospital- 8626812-9

MARKET CLOSED

Guilshan 1, 2 markets-Friday
Elephant Road-Friday
Bishal Center-Friday
Baitul Mukarram Market-Friday
Polwell Market-Friday
BCS Computer City-Friday
Isha Khan Shopping Complex-Friday
Rajlaxmi Complex-Friday
Stadium Market-Friday
Bangabazar Market-Friday
National Museum-Thursday
Ahsan Manzil-Thursday
New Market-Tuesday
Gausia Market-Tuesday
Mouchak Market-Sunday
Dhanmondi Hawkers Market-Tuesday
Dhanmondi Hawkers Market-Tuesday
Eastern Plaza-Sunday
Farmview Super Market-Sunday
Muktijuddha Jadughar-Sunday

TAXI CAB

Yellow Cab
Navana 9558065
Salida 9344477, 0171620881
Cosmo 9112959 and 8127191
Cab One 7113282-3
Nihon 8624741-2
Orion 9347277
Anudip 8125285 and 8127611

TRAIN TIMING

Subarna Express
Mahanagar Prabhati
Mahanagar Godhuli
Turna
Parabat Express
Joyantika Express
Upabon Express
Tista Express
Ekata Express
Upakul Express
Agnibena Express

Libraries, Cultural and Information Centers
Central Public Library- 8626001-4, Shishu Academy- 9564128
Shilpakala Academy- 8614673
Bangla Academy- 8619550
Islamia Foundation- 9550280, 9556407
Nazrul Institute- 9114602
Ford Foundation- 8116133
Alliance Francaise- 8611557
Information Resource Center, The American Center - 8813440-4, 9886395-9
British Council- 8618867-8, 8618905-7
Community Development Library- 8113769, 8113604
Goethe Institute Int'l- Dhaka- 9126525-6
Indian Information Centre & Cultural Library- 8615096
The Russian Cultural Centre- 9116314, 91185