

# Tale of a bachelors' kingdom

## 2,500 single men live at Sardar Colony, the largest mess at South Kamalapur

SHAHNAZ PARVEEN

Jumbled up personal belongings, tangled mosquito net and untidy bed. Curtains hang loosely on the window of the small, dark room. Books and kitchen utensils are piled up right beside the bed. Clothes are in complete disarray on the veranda.

This is the general picture of the living arrangement at Sardar Colony, the largest bachelors' mess in the country. Located in the city's South Kamalapur area, the colony provides accommodation for around 2,500 men.

Residents of the colony however are not unhappy with the messy life. They said it is like having a picnic every day -- no strings attached, no one to give sermons, assert decrees on living arrangements or certain habits. And most importantly, household tasks are all taken care of. They all live like kings at the

colony.

For a single man, finding a suitable accommodation in this city is extremely difficult. Rejection and negative attitude is a common phenomenon. Most house-owners are reluctant to rent house to bachelors. Sardar Colony is an exception.

Back in 1984 a few good men thought of the misery that single men go through. The eight sons of late Aftabuddin Sardar created the biggest bachelors mess facility in South Kamalapur on a three-bigha land. There are nine buildings, including one eight-storey, two six-storey and two five-storey, for accommodation of bachelors.

Most of the residents at Sardar Colony work in government and private offices in Matijheel area. There are some students and unemployed people living there as well.

"Most landlords in the city do not want single males as tenants

and consider them unwanted. Every single male without a place in the city go through this problem," said Sanaul Haque Sardar, one of the owners of the colony.

"If anyone rents out a room to a single person, he imposes a certain set of rules. The only place available for them is the rooftop dwelling or the ground floor," he added.

Sanaul said, "When we first started we just wanted to lend a hand to the singles. At first a few tin-shed buildings were established in 1979. It became quite popular in the area. The demand was high, so we decided to expand the facility in 1984."

Sirajul Islam, working as manager of the huge colony for 22 years, gives details.

Every building has a caretaker and several security guards. There are 20 managers in the entire facility. The eight brothers sit at least once a month to discuss the

requirements of the colony people, Sirajul told Star City.

The rent ranges from Tk 1,400 to Tk 2,500 a month. The tenants pay electricity bill of their own, but water and gas bills are included in the rent.

The rooms have accommodation for four, six or eight persons. A room is usually rented out to one person who invites more roommates to live along. He is responsible for collecting the rent of the roommates.

There are five domestic help in every floor responsible for cooking, cleaning and often shopping for groceries. Monthly charge for domestic help is Tk 150. Every floor has kitchens and common toilets. There are letter-boxes in each building.

Unlike other bachelor's mess in the city, files are maintained with all the necessary information about the tenants.

"Morning is a very busy hour

here with every tenant getting ready for the day. By 9:00am the buildings become empty and stays that way the whole day. By late evening it becomes lively again," Sirajul describes.

He said collecting rent is never a problem and there are hardly any unwanted incidents.

Special sanctions about some particular issues are imposed. Female friends are barred from visiting the dwellers. Family members, however, are allowed to visit or even stay overnight in case of emergency. Also barred from the mess are alcohol, gambling and elements associated with too much revelry.

The colony is the source of livelihood for many people.

Around 300 domestic helps work at the colony. Hawkers sell around 400 newspapers. Cobblers, laundrymen and grocers in the area remain always busy. Vegetable vendors gather in front of the colony every afternoon waiting for their favourite customers to come back from office.

In time the colony produced many big names including ministers and secretaries. There are a few who simply never moved on and living there for more than 20 years.

One of the residents Mayeen Uddin Ahmed said, "There are many predicaments for single male in the city. Most landlords don't want single male in the first place. There are too many dos and don'ts. Sudden evacuation notice is a regular practice."

Mayeen, who studies at ICMA, said, "We don't have to worry about this anymore. The all male surroundings in a very organised environment are a wonderful opportunity for us. Being here is like being in heaven."

Nazrul Islam, another resident, said, "We may not enjoy the family ambience and the food may not be as good as at home but given the attitude of the landlords of the city we consider ourselves lucky. There should be more facilities like this."



Top, aerial view of the buildings of the Sardar Colony at South Kamalapur that house around 2,500 male members, above, interior view of a building.



COMMON LEISURE: Three bachelor tenants of the Sardar Colony enjoying TV in their room.

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# DCC move to drive out playground occupants

CITY CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) is going to remove structures of Gulshan Youth Club from the Gulshan Central Park and take control of the playground.

"I have ordered the DCC chief estate officer to evict any unauthorised entity and occupancy of Gulshan Youth Club from the playground," DCC Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka told The Daily Star on April 7.

Gulshan Youth Club has long been running its club activities occupying the playground.

The DCC will have its full control over maintenance of the field as per its own rules in the interests of the locals, said the mayor. The social welfare officer of DCC will run a small office at the ground, if required, for better maintenance.

"I have further ordered making proposals for development of the playground and sports and other facilities as per need of the locals," said Khoka.

DCC Chief Estate Officer Md Khalilur Rahman said he has asked the estate officer to make a spot visit to the playground. "We will go for necessary legal actions on the basis of findings of the visit," said Rahman.

Rajdhani Unnayan Kartipakkha (Rajuk), original owner of the parkland, has also served notice on the club questioning its authorisation of being at the ground.

"We have asked Gulshan Youth Club to explain the legality of occupancy of the playground," said Rajuk Chairman KAM Haroon. "We have not found any documents in support of their occupancy at the playground," he added.

According to sources at DCC, Gulshan Youth Club in a letter, signed by its President Rafez Alam Chowdhury, to the city mayor on March 30 asked for a permanent lease of a part of the playground in favour of the club.

But the mayor did not approve the lease and issued the eviction

order the following day.

DCC Estate Officer Khalil Ahmed said he has checked the relevant files and found that DCC has not authorised Gulshan Youth Club to occupy the playground, build its office building and run club activities there.

Recently in a similar drive in the wake of public outcry, Public Works Department (PWD) retrieved a children's park, lying at the intersection of roads no-3, 4, and 5 in Dhanmondi, from unauthorised occupancy.

Dhanmondi Cricket Academy had been occupying the playground for past several years without any authorisation and using it in an exclusive manner.

The PWD on March 25 pulled down two signboards of the occupier and put up its own signboard that reads -- the playground is meant for use of the locals for sports purposes and that it cannot be used commercially anyway.

## NEW MENACE AT TRAFFIC SIGNALS

# Beware of snatchers of car parts in guise of beggars

RIZANUZZAMAN LASKAR

A white station wagon abruptly pulls up beside the pavement. The car door swings open and the driver scuttles off. He starts chasing someone -- a shabby looking figure. Within seconds, the figure disappears in the crowd followed by his pursuer.

Yes, it is a snatcher getting away with a car exterior decoration piece he just stripped from one at a traffic signal in the city's Gulistan intersection.

A couple of minutes later, the driver -- panting and covered in sweat -- returns to his car. "He managed to get away in the heavy foot traffic. Had I noticed him a few seconds earlier I could have caught up with him," he said. "The man is most certainly a drug addict. He will now sell it to a garage or some scrap dealer to buy drugs."

Incidents like these are becoming common in city streets. They snatch away car antenna, sun shields, side mirrors or even the aluminium or steel logo of the car brand in the blink of an eye.

"They rip open an exterior car part with so much precision and dexterity. Even a car mechanic will need a few minutes to detach a sun shield from a car window. But they (snatchers) do it within moments," says Shahrier Ahmed, an automobile enthusiast.

"Honestly, they have to be fast, at both unhooking and running away, otherwise a wild beating would await them," he mockingly adds.

Most of these snatchers are drug addicts or petty thieves appearing as an innocent bystander or beggar like many others, law enforcers said.

Sohel Faruq, a traffic sergeant at Fakirapal said, "They hang around at traffic signals and intersections, looking for cars with items that can be snatched away. They even snatch cellphones and purses

from car passengers if they find the opportunity."

In last December, Nazneen Khanam, a non-resident Bangladeshi, lost her cellphone to a snatcher at the Gulistan intersection. Nazneen was writing a text message on her phone sitting beside a half-open window while the car was stuck at a traffic signal. A gangling fellow in ragged clothes snatched her mobile and tried to run away.

"It all happened so fast! I

Nazneen lost yet another cellphone a couple weeks later exactly in the same manner.

It is alleged that police officers, when the come to the scene, actually make things worse for the victims. Anjan Saha, a service provider, describes his experience.

"Once we managed to catch a snatcher while he was trying to scrap the sun shield from my car window. A crowd gathered and beat the thief up. I decided to leave the scene as I was



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felt like something clawed in my hands and then my mobile phone was gone. The chauffeur ran after the thief and managed to catch him. But the felon had already handed the mobile to someone else," said Nazneen.

Later Nazneen tried to contact with the person holding her cellphone and told him that she was willing to purchase it. "I told him that the phone had many valuable contact numbers and I would pay him for it if he returned it to me," she said.

Initially, the felon agreed to return the cellphone for a few thousands taka. But later he had a change of mind and decided not to answer any of Nazneen's calls.

getting late for my office. Just then a traffic sergeant showed up. He rudely accused me for creating nuisance for him now that he has to deal with the thief," he said.

Rounkul Islam, traffic inspector (DMP, East Zone), ruled out such complaints.

"There are traffic boxes in all the major intersections with a handful of officers always present to monitor the street. If incidents like street thefts catch their attention they will most certainly take appropriate actions," he said.

"If someone feels that the police are creating nuisance for them, it may just be a subjective opinion. I am sure the officer was just trying to help," he said.

## city express

The latest crop of quotes from the city's press -- words worth repeating, we feel, for their humour, insight or sheer outrageousness. Star City does not necessarily support the opinions expressed in this column.

*"Women are about half of the total population. Hence, their demand for equal rights is logical. Then why various incidents are taking place now centering the issue?"*

-- Chief Justice M Ruhul Amin

Said while addressing the inaugural session of a two-day workshop titled "Justice System Education Initiative on Gender Equality Issues" organised by Khan Foundation, on Friday. Source: The Daily Star

*"We won't be able to change people's food habit by asking them to eat bread and potato."*

-- Justice Habibur Rahman

Former chief adviser  
Said at the National Citizen's Dialogue, on Sunday. Source: The Daily Star

*"Let it be extended. How much further can it be extended? Everything has to come to an end."*

-- Sheikh Hasina

Awami League Chief  
Said regarding the army chief's service extension by a year while talking with her lawyers at Special Court 1 for the hearing on charge framing in the barge-mounted power plant case, on Monday. Source: The Daily Star

*"Whether we want it or not, people of this country want the two leaders."*

-- Prof Muzaffar Ahmed

Chairman, TIB  
Said at a roundtable, on Monday. Source: Bhorer Kagoj

*"We are aggrieved, surprised and concerned."*

-- Anwar Hossain

General Secretary, Dhaka University Teachers Association (Duta)  
Said after a Dhaka court stayed the Duta election for an indefinite period following a civil suit, on Thursday. Source: The Daily Star

Compiled by Durdana Ghias



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