



Nibedika, a private hostel for single women in Farmgate area.

SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

Woes of single, working women looking for a lone living

SHAHNAZ PARVEEN

Farzana Shifa, a 28-year-old single woman, was refused accommodation at least 30 times by landlords before she could finally manage one who sublet a room to her.

"When the landlords heard that I am single, want to live alone, the first reaction I got is a raised eyebrow, followed by a gesture of dismissal or rejection in a harsh tone," described Farzana who had to look for a space to rent after she lost her hall seat at the end of her university study.

When Farzana finally found accommodation after scouring Central Road, Katabon, Azimpur, Shonkor, Farmgate and Kathalbagan areas, a different ordeal began.

"Besides the rent being unreasonably high, I was always under scrutiny as if being a single woman is a crime. Parents and relatives were not allowed in my room. 'Don't do this and don't do that' always followed a simple conversation with the landlord," she added.

Farzana is one of the thousands of young single women facing difficulties finding accommodation in the city. Due to socio-economic changes during the last couple of years, internal migration of young single women to the urban areas has increased remarkably.

However, the housing needs of these women are either neglected or overlooked.

Traditionally, single women's independent living is still not permissive in the country. Landlords follow traditional social values and

prefer not to rent houses to unmarried women without family.

Most of these women with no close relatives in the city are forced to accept highly insecure, unprotected and uncomfortable housing arrangements, mostly sublet with other families and in government colonies together with other single women. Among them, the ones without monetary solvency is

ask why we live outside our family. They simply assume single women from respectable family do not live alone unless they are doing something immoral," she added.

Many single women have also mentioned high rent and bad living condition as a problem.

"Always the worst flat of the buildings are offered to us. I have no window in my room. Besides, the

finished one year at DU and so far I got no response from the dormitory authorities. They say the dorm is already overcrowded."

Economic, social and cultural changes have also led to a considerable rise in female-headed households who go through the same ordeal while renting houses. They often have to hide the fact if they are divorced or separated. "After failing to rent a house I had to lie. I told my landlord that my husband lives abroad," said a recently divorced mother of two.

Bangladesh Mahila Parishad General Secretary Ayesha Khanom suggests establishment of safe, affordable and quality hostels and housing facilities for single women by the government at subsidised costs. Non-government organisations and big private business houses can also play a part in this regard.

"Besides, it can be a huge business opportunity for the real estate firms who can easily establish housing complex for single women. It can be single-room flat of various ranges. It is being practised in neighbouring countries," she said.

"About 70 percent of the single workingwomen are garment factory workers. They bring a large amount of foreign currency for the country. We have to consider their housing needs which is being grossly ignored," she added.

However, most importantly, a change in mindset among the landlords is necessary. Women are a part of the society and reality takes them to many situations, which should be accepted with respect, she noted.

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always the less fortunate.

Some women find accommodation in a few private hostels that costs too much.

Workingwomen eagerly try for a seat at the government-run Karmajibi Mohila Hostel that has very limited seats and complicated procedures of admission.

Speaking to Star City most women mentioned insecurity as one of the major issues of concern.

Ayesha Khatun, a resident of Shankar, said, "I feel really insecure as I am being teased regularly by the local boys who learnt from the security guards of my building that me and my friend are living without a man in this house. They often throw stones at my window."

"I would prefer to live with a relative just to feel safe but I have no other option. People around never

landlord increases rent whenever she wishes. I have to pay 4,000 taka plus bills for a tiny space," said Farzana who lives near Farmgate.

A large number of single women include students of universities and colleges. The newcomers suffer at the early period as most public educational institutions fail to provide them with accommodation facility in dormitories. A large number of Dhaka university students have to find accommodation outside the campus even during admission test.

Government colonies near Dhaka University such as Palashy, Azimpur and Nilkhet staff quarters have always been major lodging areas for them.

Shimul Rahman, a first-year BBA student at Dhaka University living at Nilkhet said, "I have already

Poachers, peddlers active again

Illegal bird trading thrives despite a wildlife preservation act

RIZANUZZAMAN LASKAR

The smoggy mantle over the ever-sunny, humid city should be a cause for celebrations for many, but for the hundreds and thousands of migratory birds, which travel thousands of miles to this city every winter, it may not be a blessing.

The good news is their usual lodging places are as warm and welcoming as ever. The bad news is many of the feathered guests may not return to their homeland ever again.

"Every year, during this time starting from mid-November, countless numbers of wild ducks and herons are sold mostly for consumption on the streets of Dhaka," said an official from the wildlife circle of the Department of Forest.

"This is in fact the peak time of the year for commercial wild bird traders looking to trap and sell these birds for high prices," he said.

According to Bangladesh's Wildlife

Preservation Act of 1974, only creatures including dogs, cats, hares, lovebirds, pigeons and quails -- species that can be bred in captivity -- are permitted for commercial trading.

"It is a criminal offence to sell or purchase wild birds for keeping in captivity or breeding, but you can easily buy exotic birds that are bred in captivity," said an official at the Ministry of Environment and Forests.

However, varieties of vibrant and exotic birds species are being openly traded throughout the city while the authorities put a blind eye to it.

Local bird species like munia, parakeet, hill-mynah and dove have always been popular among the customers at pet-shops of Dhaka. In addition, the hundreds of species of ducks and fowls passing through the country during winter are also sold for consumption.

"Over a hundred species of migratory birds come to the country each year.

However, we have found that around 15 of these species are popular with the trappers and traders," said an official at the wildlife circle of the Department of Forest.

Most of the birds are captured all over the country and brought to the city only to be sold in many pet shops and on the streets, he added.

According to traders, there is a big market for wild waterfowls in the capital where a single bird can be sold at up to Tk 500.

The wild waterfowls are generally sold on the streets, with their feet tied and held upside down. They can be seen traded in the evening on Elephant Road, Nilkhet, Katabon, Moghbazar and Purana Paltan where most of the pet shops are located.

Experts say three of the most globally threatened waterfowls that pass through Bangladesh during winter are Baikal teal, the ferruginous duck and Baer's pochard.

The ducks are usually caught by nets in the wetlands of Sylhet and Srimangol and in coastal areas of Monpura, Nijhumdweep, Boyarchar and Chorpia.

The peak time for commercial trapping of wild birds is from November to February.

"Bangladesh is one of the most important locations in the world for these birds as two major migratory routes traverse it: the East Asian Austral-Asian Flyway and the Central Asian Flyway," said Monjurul Kader, an expert of World Conservation Union (IUCN).

Trading of birds for consumption began in the early 1980s.

"For high prices Dhaka has become a popular destination for the illegal bird trade. Traders can easily claim high price for all sorts of birds," said a vendor from Katabon.

Even though the Department of Forest is very much aware of the violation of the wildlife preservation law and open trade of endangered species particularly in and around the city, they can do little due to lack of awareness and adequate staff, sources said.

"I do not know if there is a law about trading of birds. If there was a law, how come no one (law enforcers) ever challenged me," said Munir, salesperson of a pet shop at Katabon who was seen selling cage-full of black-headed and white-throat munias.

Besides these pet markets, floating peddlers also take their stocks door to door while they balance pairs of cages full of small, chirpy wild birds on their shoulders.

Moktar Hossain, a roaming pet vendor who was seen with cages full of green munias and parrots told this correspondent that he is not aware if his birds are wild or were bred in captivity as he purchased them

from another trader.

"Birds are birds, does it really matter if they are wild or not wild because everyone likes them for what they really are," said Hossain.

A number of rare species tend to show up in the shoulders of these roaming vendors from time to time. Rare and exotic species of birds including spotted doves, rose-ringed parakeets, alexandrine parakeets, blossom-headed parakeets, red munias, green munias, black-headed munias, white-throat munias and some finches are seen being sold.

The customers do not know these birds could be on the list of endangered species.

Officials at the wildlife circle of Department of Forest claimed they have mobile patrol units operating in city streets to identify and charge illegal wildlife traders.

"We also send out special teams whenever we receive reports of illegal bird trades," said an official at the department.

According to him, the highest penalty for being associated with wildlife trade is two years' imprisonment or a fine of Tk 50,000.

Despite enforcement of the wildlife preservation act, trading of birds is still thriving, putting the existing eco-system in jeopardy, experts said.

"The Department of Forest should be blamed for not enforcing the wildlife act properly as it is their responsibility to both create awareness among the general people and assist the police authorities in identifying wildlife crime offenders," said Monjurul Kader.

"Without assistance from the Department of Forest police can barely do anything as they are not trained to identify wild birds and are therefore ill-equipped to handle the situation," he added.



STAR PHOTO

Every winter a large number of migratory birds fall prey to trappers and traders.

JOY FOR ALL, TRADE FOR SOME



STAR PHOTO

Flag vendors return to their seasonal trade as Victory Day approaches. The picture was taken from Manik Mia Avenue in front of The Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban yesterday.