

SPOTLIGHT

In the world of house rentals, there are two kinds of tenants- 1) 'normal' people, 2) single or bachelors.

'Normal' people are married with family. When it comes to renting houses, they go to see a number of places and agree on the one that meets all their requirements. The landlord has a brief talk with the family, and if everything checks out, he happily hands over the keys to his new tenants.

The bachelors' case is a quite different. When it comes to renting a home, this category is least wanted and most interrogated.

Dhaka has always experienced an influx of young students and professionals, who leave their family behind in their hometowns, in hope of a better life in the city. In fact, there are around 3.5 million unmarried individuals living in different areas of Dhaka. Some of them are college students, who come here to attend college right after completing their Secondary School Examination. Some are university students. Some of them are young professionals- doctors, engineers, journalists, bankers, garment workers. But, when it comes to the landlords, unfortunately, all of them are identified to be a part of one single category- bachelors.

"When it comes to house rent, being discriminated on the basis of marital status, no matter how absurd it may

FITTING IN THE 'MISFITS'

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PHOTO: KAZI TAHSIN AGAZ APURBO

the other house owners are scared and reluctant to rent out their houses to bachelors because they don't want to get into this kind of trouble. The landlords think it is alright to rent out to family or married people, ignoring the fact that many of the terrorists could also be married couples. Based on what happened recently, generalising every single tenant will be a wrong thing to do. The DMP needs to play a strong role in keeping people away from stereotyping every young tenant."

"I have always considered putting on signboards prohibiting 'bachelor tenants' in my house and based on my previous experience of dealing with single tenants, I have come to this solution," says Sikander Chowdhury, a landlord of Bashundhara Residential area.

Why so?
"When all the tenants were bachelors, the maintenance cost of my flat rose, as they used to keep the place dirty and didn't care much about hygiene. I had to repeatedly remind them to keep the place clean. They used to never pay their rent on time. I can give you a list of reasons," he says with a laugh. "Now seeing the present situation I think I made a wise decision," he adds.

Historically, even before the recent incidents, renting apartments for

bachelors has always been a nightmarish experience. Just because of their single status, in many cases, they have to compromise with a number of things.

"We are forced to accept arbitrary rent hikes and go by a list of rules, which in many cases don't make any sense," says Inzamamul Haque, a student of Dhaka University, currently living in a mess in Farmgate. "We cannot invite any guests to our place and are not allowed to go to the balcony or the rooftop. We have to come back home by 10 PM. There is no such thing as privacy for us; you can expect a surprise visit from your landlord any time of the day. And if you don't follow any of these rules, you might face eviction."

Especially after the Kalyanpur raid, rumour broke out that house owners were asked not to rent their houses or flats to bachelors. Meanwhile, the Dhaka

Metropolitan Police also continued carrying out raids in their hunt for suspected hideouts of militants, particularly at bachelors' mess and flats in different areas of the capital.

"There is the fear factor working among both the tenants and the house owners," comments Dr Habib. "Young students and those having jobs are now spending days in serious uncertainty as many landlords are either serving notices to bachelor tenants or declining to rent out houses to them in fear of harassment."

Single tenants living at the residential messes in the city, on the other hand, are gripped by a sense of panic of getting evicted at any time. Feeling their fundamental rights are being threatened, the Bangladesh Mess Organisation formed a human chain in front of the Jatiya Press Club, protesting the harassment of mess

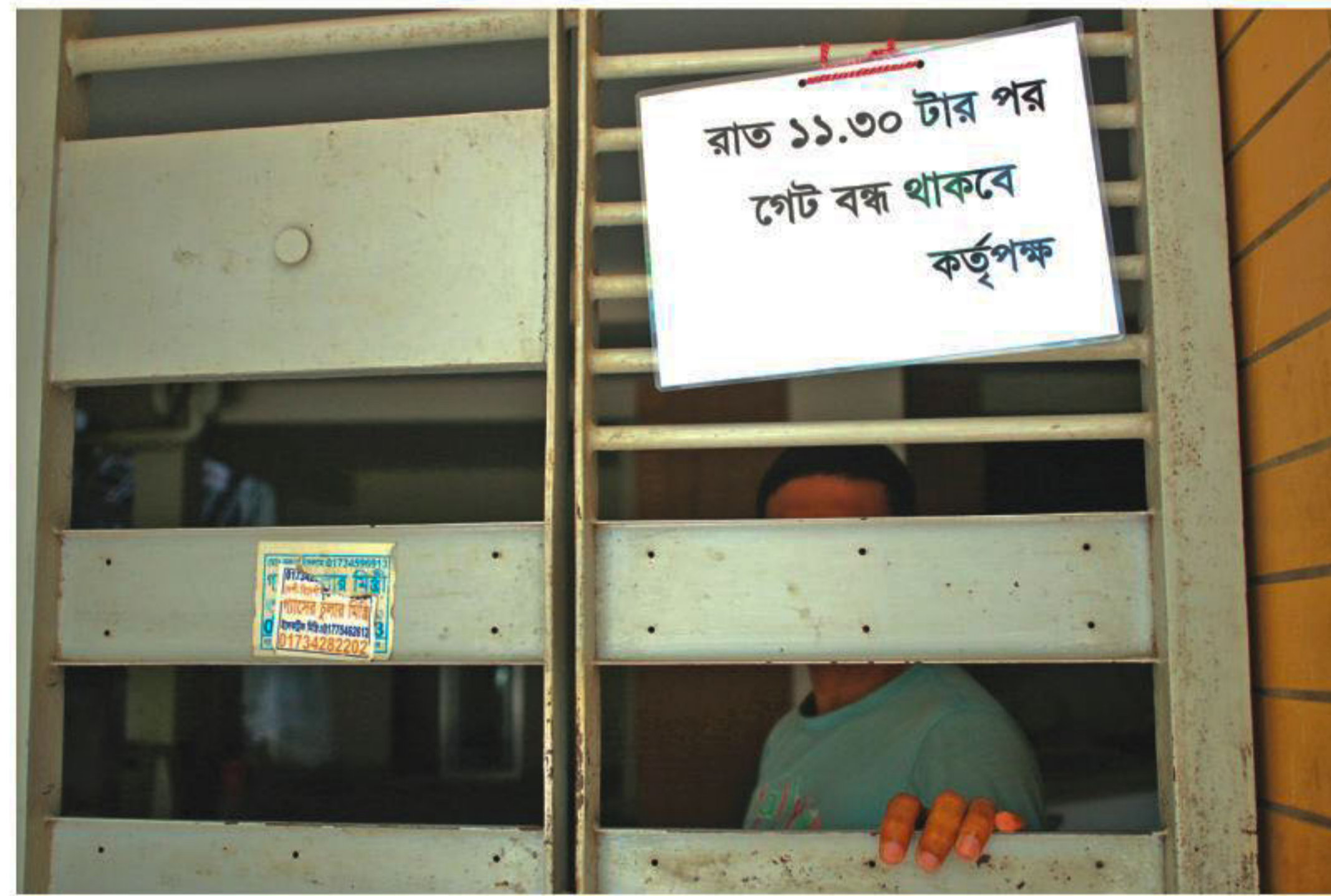


PHOTO: NILIMA JAHAN



Following the July 1 attack on Holey Artisan Bakery in Gulshan and the anti-terror operation in a house in Kalyanpur on July 26, the situation for young people living in different places of the capital have worsened tenfold. As some landlords have been arrested for allegedly sheltering Dhaka attackers and concealing tenant information from police, many have become reluctant to rent out rooms to bachelors.

sound, has always prevailed in the society," says Dr. Shah Ehsan Habib, Professor of the Department of Sociology, University of Dhaka.

Bachelors are troublemakers – thus is the belief of most landlords, and the reasons are socio political, says Dr Habib. "Recently in the Kalyanpur raid, the landlords too were accused of sheltering the terrorists without verifying their identities and were eventually arrested. All

dwellers during anti-militant drives by law enforcers.

Tenants' Council, a platform of unmarried people, organised another event in protest against the rise in rent for bachelors, where the demonstrators brought pillows and laid them on the street in front of the National Press Club, illustrating the 'lack of housing for them'.

However, the recent statements given by Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) might bring some relief to these bachelor tenants, where the police reiterated that they did not give any instruction to house owners to evict their bachelor tenants. "We have just asked house owners to keep us updated by submitting detailed information of their tenants to respective police stations," says Masudur Rahman, Deputy Commissioner (media and publication) of DMP. "We want to ensure overall security for everyone," he adds.

It is up to the house owners to whom they wish to rent out their premises, though, but there is definitely no ban, he adds.

"We have only asked the landlords to collect the National Identity Cards (NID), or a copy of passport, their photographs and other details of their tenants in a prescribed form and submit those to the

police station concerned," he further says. "Steps will be taken against those who will not comply with the instruction."

Md Zunaid Ali, a house owner in Uttara, has no reservations about renting out flats to bachelors, as they abide by the rules and regulations. "I have been renting my building out to university students for half a decade and I will keep using my building for that purpose. Generalising the situation will not solve this problem. I have always stressed on a written agreement with my tenants and they have always agreed to it. As I am the one renting out my property, it is my responsibility to have an idea of my tenants' whereabouts," he says.

The stereotypes make it increasingly difficult for single tenants to rent a place. "Our society has a low tolerance level for bachelors," Dr Habib says. "Not only the house owners, families who share the same apartment complex with bachelors believe that they are a bad influence on their children, and create a hostile environment for everyone else. So they don't prefer having that kind of 'disruption'. This is nothing but a stereotype, and like so many other stereotypes cherished by us, this too needs to be broken." ■