

# Living with (or without) neighbours

The hard truth embedded in urban living — neighbours are no longer how our parents described them. In fact, apartment dwellers do not even know who live opposite them in most cases, let alone associate with anyone in the building. But we, as a nation, are well known for our capacity to walk up to anyone and strike a conversation, so why this reluctance?

Looking back 20 years, the scenario was quite the opposite. Apartments were just popping up, but the total seclusion of today was unthinkable. Neighbourhood streets were never empty in the afternoons as children of all ages played, argued and hung around. Living rooms welcomed next door aunts for tea and chitchat.

Saying goodbye to a neighbour was a gloomy affair, intermingled with the anticipation and cheer of welcoming a new one. Somehow, all these metamorphosed into the sterile “don’t know, don’t care” style of current times.

Reminiscing the past, Kaiser, a new retiree, brought to life stories from his childhood. He spent the afternoons of his school years with his neighbourhood friends. The neighbourhood was his home outside of home. Kaiser still has a hard time wrapping his head around the notion of how insecure the social situation has become. His grandchildren hardly know any of the neighbours



in their apartment complex and apparently have no trouble with the seclusion.

Zaman, a resident of Dhanmondi, has a different view though. He spends his days busy at work at the Dhaka Stock Exchange. His wife works in a bank and his three children are buried in school work.

Free time is very limited for them and they would rather spend it on their own than associate with little-known acquaintances. He admits it sounds anti-social but

points out that meeting the neighbours requires a match in schedules which he does not have the time for. As long as he knows who they are and remains on daily greeting terms, he is satisfied.

As an all-out extrovert family, Fouzia and her family, however, are a rare sight. Living in Mohammadpur, she knows almost everyone around them, right down to their in-laws.

Growing up, she and her family moved a

lot for her father's government postings. She developed a habit of getting to know people. Fouzia cannot visualise the pigeon-hole like apartments where knocking on a neighbour's door is quite unwelcome.

A prominent concern is the cross section of people who are surrounding us. More and more security worries are arising and people tend to keep to themselves while keeping a watchful eye. Rather than greeting a new neighbour, residents try to get information about them through household help and other sources. No matter how much parents want their children to mingle with the neighbourhood children, there are boundaries that have widened like never before.

Dhaka, as a city, is bursting at the seams. With so many people all around, the mind starts playing tricks that a person has enough people around him/her. Sadly, this sense of quantity is nowhere near the human connection the psyche requires to function in the society.

As much as the modern lifestyle helps to make living as streamlined as possible, it sheds most of the niceties of human contact. We may have reached a point of no return, but the least that we can do is to greet our neighbours with a smile the next time we meet them.

**By Iris Farina**

## Neighbour: friend or foe?



I have not set an alarm clock for myself in quite a long time. My mornings start with the wails of a neighbour's eight-month-old son, which led me to finally invest in a pair of noise-cancelling earphones.



This is the prevailing scene for most of us living in apartment buildings in Dhaka. With mushrooming high-rises and a lack of proper urban design, our privacy has long been compromised and our comfort completely sold. While you can hardly do anything to change the structure of the apartment buildings, there

is certain basic etiquette that we should uphold in the spirit of being a good neighbour.

### PLEASE TURN IT DOWN

No one expects you to take a vow of silence inside your own apartment, but sometimes it is easy to forget that not everyone enjoys

listening to your favourite singer at 10am on a Friday morning as much as you do.

Minimise the volume on your television and music systems. Also ensure that your child is not staying up all night watching his favourite action movie at an unbearably high volume while the rest of the neighbourhood is trying to sleep.

Appliances such as drills, vacuum cleaners or blenders should also be used at appropriate times.

Lastly, no matter how rushed you are, please close your doors with ease. Apartment doors jolts people when slammed shut.

### DO NOT BE A GOSSIPMONGER

This is a universal rule. Respect your neighbour's personal space and privacy. Your next-door couple may be going through marital strife, but please do not engage in gossip regarding it. If you can hear a young couple getting into fights every night or a woman being subjected to domestic violence, attempt to help them not by publicising it to the entire community but through showing humility and sincerity as a fellow human being.

### THIS IS NOT A BUMPER CAR RIDE

This protocol may appear insignificant compared to the ones before. However, not abiding by it can be truly irksome. Always be aware of your parking space and do not double park. If you are having a party and are in need of space,