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Guarded and gated: how safe is safe?

While such developments can protect residents from external criminal elements, they cannot guarantee protection from those inside

By THEAN LEE CHENG
starbiz@thestar.com.my

A couple of weeks ago, drugs worth about RM145mil were raided in two locations in Desa ParkCity and a serviced apartment block in Jalan Ipoh, KL. It was one of the largest drug haul year-to-date.

Over the past 20 years, many have opted to live in a gated-and-guarded (G&G) environment. To bring down the crime rate, owners and residents in non-guarded projects have put up their own perimeter fencing and boom gates, and hired security guards after getting the green light from the local municipalities.

In today's G&G communities, what do you really keep in, or out?

Malaysian Institute of Property and Facility Managers (MIPFM) president Adzman Shah Mohd Ariffin lives in such a development.

"We were among the first to move in. There was always a party going on in one of the houses and taxis used to come in the middle of the night and take away boxes of stuff. It turned out that they were using the house as a meth (methamphetamine) lab," Adzman says.

He is now resident association chairman and informs security to report any suspicious activities, legal or illegal, or when residents make a nuisance of themselves.

Adzman says security personnel need to understand their duties and responsibilities. They have the duty to look after the interest of everyone living in a particular community, but must not condone crime.

"If a resident is keeping too many cats and causing a nuisance, something has to be done. It is also the responsibility of residents to foster neighbourliness....look after each other," Adzman says.

Rahim & Co chief executive officer for real estate agency Siva Shanker says G&G living is a trend which has caught on.

"If a new development is not a G&G project, it will be a challenge to sell it. But people must also recognise the fact that while G&G developments can protect them from the robbers outside, they cannot protect them from those inside.

"It is not the fault of the joint-management body if your neighbour steals your shoes, just as it is not the fault of the house if my brother steals from me.

"As for residents getting to know one another, that is a social thing. The truth of the matter is, we have become a generation which does not talk to our neighbours," says Siva. "So, it has nothing to do with the house, or the G&G community. It is just human nature."

Being nosy helps

The National House Buyers Association (HBA) says the best deterrent is for landlords



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Chang: Close cooperation can help reduce incidents of crime



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Security guards taking down details of visitors who are entering Bandar Damai Perdana

to use some common sense and for neighbours to be a little nosy.

Some red flags include tenants who:

- > offer to pay rental at way above market rates,
- > offer to pay rental months in advance, for example, six months at a time,
- > decline to sign any rental agreement, and
- > decline to give identification documents, such as the driving licence and MyKad details when entering into a tenancy agreement.

Know your neighbours, as this can potentially reduce crime, HBA honorary secretary-general Datuk Chang Kim Loong says.

"Close cooperation can help reduce incidents of crime. Be wary of what is happening in your neighbourhood. Do not hesitate to report 'happenings' firstly, to your Resident Association (RA), Rukun Tetangga (RT), local council, assemblyman, the nearest police station and the immigration department," he says.

He says the current serious overhang, especially for properties priced above RM300,000, further compounds the problem.

"There are many properties which have been sold but which remain vacant. Owners of such vacant properties may have to lower their expectations to find tenants or buyers," he says, but be prudent. It is not good for units to be vacant.

He says vice or any form of criminal activities are the responsibility of the police and the immigration department.

"Security companies employed by joint-management bodies, management committees and their property manager are to monitor the traffic flow of owners/occupiers and for its general security.

"They are not anti-narcotic, anti-vice personnel or immigration representatives to ensure that there are no illegal foreigners staying there. At best, they can report to the relevant authorities if they suspect anything.

Banning short-term stays

Chang says HBA does not agree with residential strata parcels being used for short-term rental periods such as Airbnb.

> Security issues

With short-term stays, there is a lot of

coming in and going out and this does not foster a sense of security - which goes against the very reason why permanent occupants move into such developments in the first place.

> Maintenance and upkeep

Permanent occupants of a strata parcel will be more invested to ensure that their flats/apartments/condominiums and the surrounding environment are well-maintained.

Short-term occupants may not have the same mindset, resulting in maintenance issues and damaged public property.

> Residential rates

Owners typically pay residential rates for their utility and assessment bills. But if their units are used for commercial purposes, then they should be charged commercial rates.

Be wary of what is happening in your neighbourhood.

Datuk Chang Kim Loong

> Insurance risk

In the event of a fire, insurance companies might not compensate if the properties, originally insured as residential units, have been put to commercial use. This puts the occupants, including the short-term ones, at risk.

Chang says G&G communities - which are stratified projects - and non-strata guarded communities have reduced break-in incidents.

"The benefits of such G&G features far outweigh the potential negative cost such as criminals using such properties as a hub for their illegal activities," says Chang.

The HBA has recommended to the Housing and Local Government Ministry to have in place a set of federal legislation to govern and regulate G&G communities.

Currently, the initiatives are undertaken by local councils based on respective state government guidelines only, he says. Because of the current oversupply of high-rise projects, he says developers sometimes convert units for short-term stay by entering into a lease-back arrangement with buyers. This is done in an official manner instead of owners entering into such arrangements themselves.

"But please read the fine print and get independent legal advice before executing these purchase and lease-back agreements," he says.