

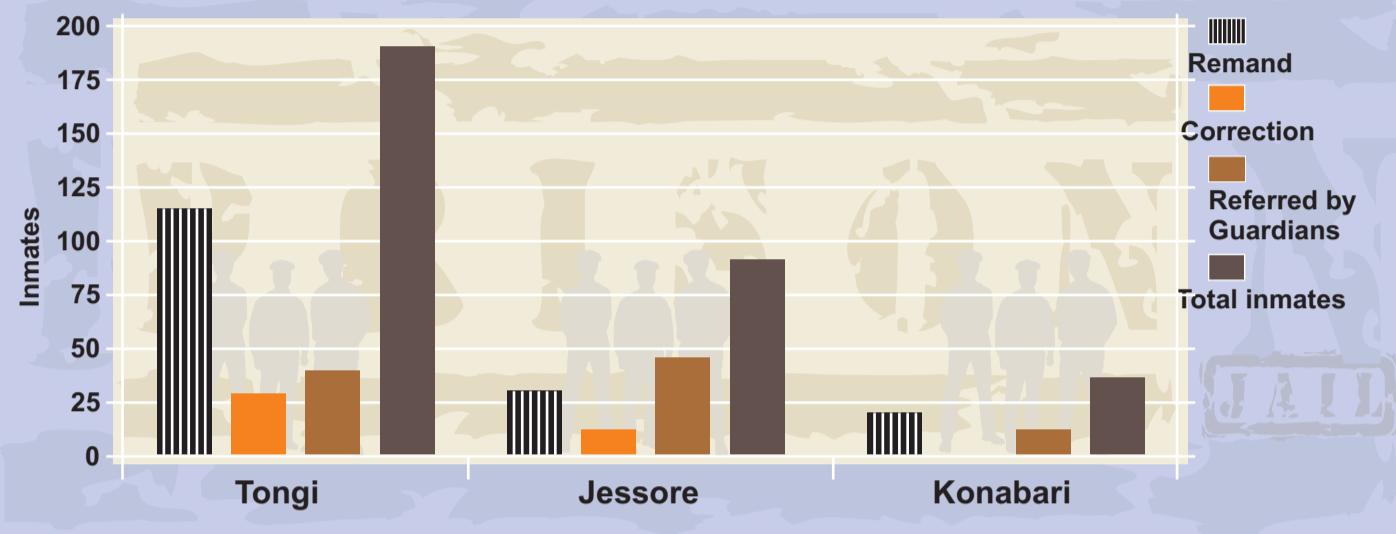
Motijheel in downtown was built during the Mughal period. During the time there was a big Mahal for Mirja Mohammad which housed a large pond known as Sukku Mahal's pond. The area was later named Motijheel. A mazar called Shahjalal's mazar where fairs were organised existed. Motijheel and Dilkusha gardens were in the same place earlier. The road dividing the two places was constructed during the British rule.

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# Correctional centres need correction

No proper age verifying mechanism; drug addicts and others kept together; teachers lack necessary background

## Juvenile correctional centres



### MIZANUR KHAN

Many inmates at juvenile correctional centres (now called Kishore Unnayan Kendra or Juvenile Development Centre) around the country are over the 18-year-old ceiling as there is no proper age verifying mechanism.

According to a source, a 25-year-old married man, waiting trial, has been kept at Jessore Kishore Unnayan Kendra (KUK). Similar cases are also common in other KUKs.

Usually it is the police or the court that determines the age. The caseworker and medical officer at the KUK do not have a role here. The centres receive young offenders following order from the court.

At present, there are some 320 'juveniles' staying in KUKs at Tongi, Jessore and Konabari.

The Tongi KUK has 193 inmates, Jessore has 91 and the girls-only KUK in Konabari houses 35.

"It is not possible to put an exact number on over-aged people staying in KUKs because the age

is not properly recorded," said Dr Syed Tariq-uz-Zaman, a researcher who had recently conducted a study on the three KUKs.

The research titled 'A Participatory Assessment of the Situation of Children in Kishore Unnayan Kendra: Bangladesh' was initiated by the Department of Social Services (DSS) and Save the Children UK (SCUK).

Teenagers at the KUKs generally share common accommodation. However, at Jessore they are separated according to the nature and status of offence. There are separate quarters for remanded and awarded cases. At the Konabari KUK, police referred cases are kept apart.

It has been observed that juveniles with past record of drug addiction have been sharing the same accommodation with other children at the KUKs and Dr. Zaman's study strongly opposes this practice.

"In future no drug addicts should be allowed in there and the superintendent should be given the power to reject them,"

the study suggests.

"This system is not logical. It is necessary to separate awarded cases with non-awarded (remand) cases. Among the non-awarded cases, there possibly are innocents and the victims. Associating them with children in conflict with law might spoil them."

"There are some children involved in hardened offence like murder who appear as heroes and regarded as role models by the others," the report observed.

Sources at KUKs say that there are dangerous criminal minds staying, some of whom have been accused of killing their parents, brothers and sisters even.

The correctional centres lack physical and psychological assessment capability to determine the level of educational and social background of the teenagers they receive.

"There are 13 assistant teachers at the three centres but only one of them has studied psychology," said Dr Zaman.

Dr Zaman noted that minor children are more likely to become victims of injustice as their recorded age is often above

the actual years. At the same time, those who are over 18 years can escape the punishment designed for adults by under-recording their age.

The study also said that this situation gives a section of corrupt law enforcing officials the opportunity to make money through manipulation of age related records.

The government is aware of the limitations in dealing with juvenile offenders. Minister for Social Welfare Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mujahid said that in the absence of a system in issuing birth certificates, there is always the possibility of criminals covering up their original age to take undue advantage of the law.

Dr Kamal Siddiqui, Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister said that the whole process is very complicated as law, home and social welfare ministries work together on juvenile delinquency.

"The PM's Office is now working on ways to ensure coordination of different government bodies in this regard," said Dr Siddiqui.

# High-rises to replace worn-out quarters in govt colonies

SABRINA KARIM MURSHED

The government plans to build multistoried apartment complexes inside the Motijheel and Azimpur Government Staff Quarters premises to provide more accommodation for employees.

According to the Ministry of Housing and Public Works' Department of Architecture, a proposal for constructing two 16-storeyed housing blocks has already been sent to the Prime Minister's Office seeking approval.

Department of Architecture sources informed that there are approximately 11,000 flats and apartments spread around Motijheel, Azimpur, Mirpur, Shahjahanpur, Sher-e-bangla Nagar, Sobhanbagh and some other areas of the city for government employees. However, these quarters fulfil only 10 per cent of the actual demand.

There is unused land in government colonies and some of the buildings have become vulnerable due to age and lack of maintenance. The architecture department wants to demolish a number of worn-out structures and build new apartments there. It also plans to utilise the free land.

The proposal includes construction of a 16-storey building on 22 acres of land of the staff



An aerial view of Motijheel colony.

quarters in Motijheel. Nine old five-storey flats will be brought down to make space. The new building will have 420 apartments.

The other apartment block will be built at the Azimpur staff quarters. The proposed location is adjacent to the Azimpur graveyard

where a row of tin-shed chambers known as 'Party House' had existed earlier. There will be 90 apartments in this building.

The Motijheel government colony has 1936 flats ranging from 500 square feet to 1800 square feet in size. The nine buildings to

be demolished have 360 apartments measuring 500 square feet. Built in the 1960s these are now housing class four employees. The new structure will have more floor space, as all the 420 apartments will be 800 square feet ones.

The class four employees living there will also enjoy the privileges of a community space, elevator, parking lot etc.

"As house rent deducted from the salary of class four employees is insufficient to meet the service cost of high-rises, the government has decided to bear the extra expenditure from its funds," said Selina Afroza, deputy chief architect of Department of Architecture.

Azimpur colony has 1686 apartments for first class gazetted officers. These were mostly constructed some four decades ago and have been built in the 1990s.

The fresh apartments will have 1250 square feet of floor space and will be allotted to senior first class gazetted officers. Department of Architecture sources said that there was a plan to construct the new high-rise by filling up a pond inside the colony premises. But thankfully, that controversial step didn't go ahead as it would have violated the Wetland Act informed the deputy chief architect.

She also assured that the proposed buildings have been designed in a way so that there is ample open space around. "We believe that the children of the apartments will get more chance to play and see greenery around them," said Selina Afroza.

Anandabazar slum has emerged as the safe haven for drug peddlers and addicts who were driven out of Agargaon and Bhashantek slums in an eviction.

The sales of Pathedine, heroin, Phensidyl go unchecked at Anandabazar slum, located on railway land in Chankharpool, not far away from Babupura Police Outpost and Police Bhawan.

Chankharpool is known as a hotbed of drug subculture for the youths, including students of Dhaka University, Dhaka Medical College and Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology.

Police stand guard at the nearby crossing and frisk or harass commuters in a show of beefed-up security measures, with the peddlers selling drugs inside the slum tucked away from view. Locals said police of the outpost get a share of drug money.

"The place is protected for drug peddlers and addicts," an Anandabazar greengrocer said.

An armed gang allegedly under transport leaders Ripon

### CITY CORRESPONDENCE

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