

# Despite law, mentally disabled inmates kept in prisons

CITY CORRESPONDENT

Mentally disabled prisoners are being kept in prisons although existing law provides for sending them to mental hospital or shelter homes for treatment. According official sources, 25 such prisoners are now in the Dhaka Central Jail while about 225 others languishing in 18 other jails across the country. The prisons authorities claimed that they are providing proper treatment to those prisoners. They also pointed out that they don't have adequate manpower to ensure security of prisoners in hospitals. "We have shortage of workforce to arrange security for them," Shamsul Haider Siddique, deputy inspector general of

Convicted prisoner Kartik Chandra Saha, 30, hailed from Savar, has been identified as a schizophrenia patient but the jail authorities have kept him in the Dhaka Central Jail instead of sending him to a hospital

prisons, told Star City. "Who will bear the responsibility of those prisoners if we send them to mental hospitals or shelter homes," he said when asked why they are not sending the mentally disabled prisoners to hospitals as per law. Abonti Nurul, a staff lawyer of Ain O Salish Kendra, said that jail is not a suitable place for treatment especially for the mentally disabled people. They should be taken to proper places for treatment. Ain O Salish Kendra has already submitted a writ petition to the High Court for ensuring rights of such prisoners, she said. Abonti said the mentally disabled prisoners, including convicted and under-trial people, should not pass their life in jail and their rights should be protected as per laws of the land. She said convicted prisoner Kartik Chandra Saha, 30, hailed from Savar, has been identified as a schizophrenia patient but the jail authorities have kept him in the Dhaka Central Jail instead of sending him to a hospital. Kartik is now being treated at the prison under the supervision of doctors from Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University Hospital. Kartik was convicted in 2004 but his punishment was stalled as per law, as he was identified as a mentally disabled person. His punishment will resume after he regains his mental soundness. Abonti said Kartik could complete the punishment if he was mentally fit and could start a new life after the jail term. But he has to stay in jail despite his illness and wait for regaining mental soundness. "This is a clear violation of human rights," she said. According to section 3 of the Lunatic Act 1912, the government is responsible for the shelter and treatment of the mentally

disabled persons. Sections 14, 16 and 23 of the act provide for medical check-up of such persons and sending them to hospitals taking a decision within a month after his or her mental disability is proved. The "Disability Welfare Act" was enacted in 2001 with a view to protect the rights of the mentally disabled people. Besides, a National Coordination Council was also formed to take initiatives for the welfare of the disabled. Hafizul Islam Mia, director general of the Department of Social Welfare said Bangladesh Disability Foundation is working under the National Coordination Council but it does not have any programme for the mentally disabled.

# Ward commissioner helps occupy footpath

TAWFIQUE ALI

Aiming at securing footpath dwellers' votes in the forthcoming Dhaka City Corporation (DC) elections, a local ward commissioner installed a tube well on the Shantinagar main road, linking it to an underground water supply pipe, to enhance their living facilities, allege locals. The water outlet is mainly meant for the floating people who have been occupying half-a-kilometre of the footpath stretching from Lutfa Academy up to Nila Maternity along the busy main road. "We see crowds collecting water in buckets and drums and some bathing at all times of the day," said Zafri Ahmed, a Shantinagar resident. The outlet has been set up on a small supply line fed with Wasa water between the footpath and the main road at the west corner of Lutfa Academy. Locals further alleged that not only dwellers on the footpath utilise this facility, but shopkeepers at Shantinagar kitchen market and surrounding areas and water vendors collect water from this outlet all day long. This has added to the water crisis in the locality, they said. "We have been suffering from acute water crisis for the last two



The work of encroaching footpath is going on in full swing at Shantinagar.

months as we had never done before," said a housewife in the neighbouring Chamelibagh. Shantinagar residents said that they could not force the slum dwellers who have been occupying the footpath for more than five years to leave, as they are backed by the ward commissioner. The dwellers also occupy footpath to run various makeshift shops obstructing the pedestrian passage. "I set up the water outlet for the sake of the poor people," said the ward commissioner Khondker Abdur Rob, "This has no relation with elections but with humanity," he said. Asked whether he has authority to set up water outlet in this manner, Rob said: "This may be illegal, but I did it for the people." Regarding his consent to slum dwellers' occupying the footpath, Rob said that they have been there for long. "Why should I run bulldozer on these people being a public representative?" he asked, adding that the footpath they are occupying is in front of an abandoned house. "I will evict them if the rich

people who occupy footpath randomly with their expensive posh cars parked here and there are punished," Rob said. Influential people in this city illegally occupy even the smallest open space left near a high-rise building, he said. "Has anyone taken any action as yet?" he asked. President of Communist Parry of Bangladesh (CPB) and a resident in Chamelibagh Manjurul Ahsan Khan, said: "Apparently, the action is not aimed at favouring the poor, but at serving some vested interests." If his intentions were pure, he could have hired a water lorry from Wasa and found an alternative dwelling place for these people," Khan said. "We too have been facing acute water crisis for last two months," he added. The ward commissioner should have resorted to some legal permanent arrangement for the betterment of these dwellers. Another factor that contributes to the water crisis in this locality is a syndicated attempt to draw water for the rich under special arrangement from Wasa's main supply line at Shantinagar intersection violating rules in connivance with dishonest officials, Khan said.

# Dhaka: Yesterday, today and tomorrow



Shawkat Hussain

The Daily Star (TDS): What is your early memory of Dhaka? Shawkat Hussain (SH): I have lived in Dhaka all my life. We used to live in a house with a big compound in Purana Paltan in the fifties that house is now a well-known kindergarten school. I remember feeling very lost in the afternoon of a day in February in the Purana Paltan inter-

section; the roads were totally deserted. Later I realised that it was something to do with Ekushey February. The year was circa 1955. TDS: What was the city like when you were young? SH: We left Purana Paltan in 1958 and began to live in a house in Dhanmondi. The road where our was ended in cul-de-sac. At that time there were only one or two-storied buildings and a friendly environment with a sense of communal harmony amongst the neighbours. Mirpur Road was a single dust track. There were ponds in Dhanmondi and we could hear the croaking of frogs when it rained. Now all the old buildings are gone; huge apartment complexes have come up. The house I grew up in is gone too. TDS: What do you miss most in the city as compared to your early days in Dhaka? SH: I miss the ease with which we could move from one place to another. Earlier it was much quieter and the traffic was so disciplined.

TDS: How have the changes in the city influenced your life? SH: The changes in the city have restricted my life considerably. I now hardly go out unless it is necessary. I hate the traffic and pollution. However, an affluent new middle class has come up and now we have a city with a private university at every corner, fancy shopping malls, diagnostic centers and so on. This must have made the life of some people easier, but not for me. TDS: Which part of Dhaka in your eyes, we should be proud of? SH: I, unfortunately, do not feel proud of anything. We spoil whatever we touch. Dhanmondi used to be such an excellent residential area. Now there are many private universities, dozens of hospitals, hundreds of schools and supermarkets, which affect the quality of a neighbourhood. Gulshan was nice too but now even the lake has been encroached by influential land grabbers. A good city should have good public space, public conveniences,

libraries and parks and footpaths you can walk on. We don't have any of this. What is there to be proud of? TDS: Is today's Dhaka the city you want to live? SH: Dhaka has turned into one of the worst cities in the world. But unfortunately I don't have any choice but to live here. I wish some things would improve but I know they won't, not with the kind of leadership we have. TDS: What do you envisage for Dhaka in the future? SH: I would like to see a good transport system similar to that of Bangkok. This city has an elevated transport system. But I am not sure whether it will happen or not in Dhaka. The authorities must take some serious and immediate steps in this regard. Dr Shawkat Hussain, a professor of the Department of English in Dhaka University spoke to Wahida Mitu.

Prof Hussain is saddened at the thought of the increasing onslaught on the existing water bodies of the city including the Gulshan Lake.



STAR PHOTO

## city express

The latest crop of quotes from the city's press -- words worth repeating, we feel, for their humour, insight or sheer outrageousness. Star City does not necessarily support the opinions expressed in this column.

"We are least bothered whether anyone accepts it or not"

-- Khaleda Zia Prime Minister

Said about the opposition's refusal to accept the next caretaker government, at a public meeting at PC High School ground, Mouvibazar, on Saturday. Source: The Daily Star

"The kind of roads that I have built in Sylhet cannot be found even in London"

-- Saifur Rahman Finance Minister

Said at a public meeting at Hawapara, Sylhet, on Friday. Source: Prothom Alo

"No lawmaker is above the law. The police have no choice but to go into action"

-- Lutfozzaman Babar State minister for home affairs

Told reporters about the 'unprovoked' police action on senior Awami League lawmakers during hartal, on Wednesday. Source: The Daily Star

"I should tell you a story but I have no time now. It is not possible to comment on everything. But what they [National Democratic Institute] said was completely Lacking in courtesy"

-- MA Aziz Chief Election Commissioner (CEC)

Told reporters about the comments made by National Democratic Institute, a Washington based election monitoring team, about him, on Monday. Source: The Daily Star

"Though justice KM Hasan have a political history, he is neutral"

-- Barrister Nazmul Huda Communications Minister

Said at a session in Jatiyo Sangsad about the potential chief adviser of caretaker government, on Thursday. Source: Prothom Alo

"In the last general election, we voted and only for that our houses were set on fire, lands were grabbed, our daughters and wives were raped, young men were tortured and we were driven out of homes"

-- A Hindu leader Bathuadanga, Kaliganj, Satkhira

Told the visiting European Union representatives, on Friday. Source: The Daily Star

"A fake picture was published in a daily showing a female activist partially stripped due to police beating"

-- Moshir Rahman BNP MP

Said in JS sessions in reply to the opposition's accusations on police actions, on Wednesday. Source: The Daily Star