

ALL SET FOR EID PARTY AT DHAKA CENTRAL JAIL

A day's respite from dreary days behind bars

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The table is full of traditional Eid delicacies with the air filled with aroma of spices. Guests arrive one by one after attending the Eid congregation. They embrace each other, exchange greetings and start savouring the delectable treats.

All this takes place at a place surrounded by a 16 feet high wall, guarded by armed squad.

This is no typical Eid gala, taking place at a Muslim house following the days of fasting. What is unique about this particular Eid party is that it is taking place behind bars.

Ramadan will bid farewell in a few days. Muslims are preparing for Eid-ul-Fitr celebration. Inmates of the Dhaka Central Jail will not be left out of the festivities.

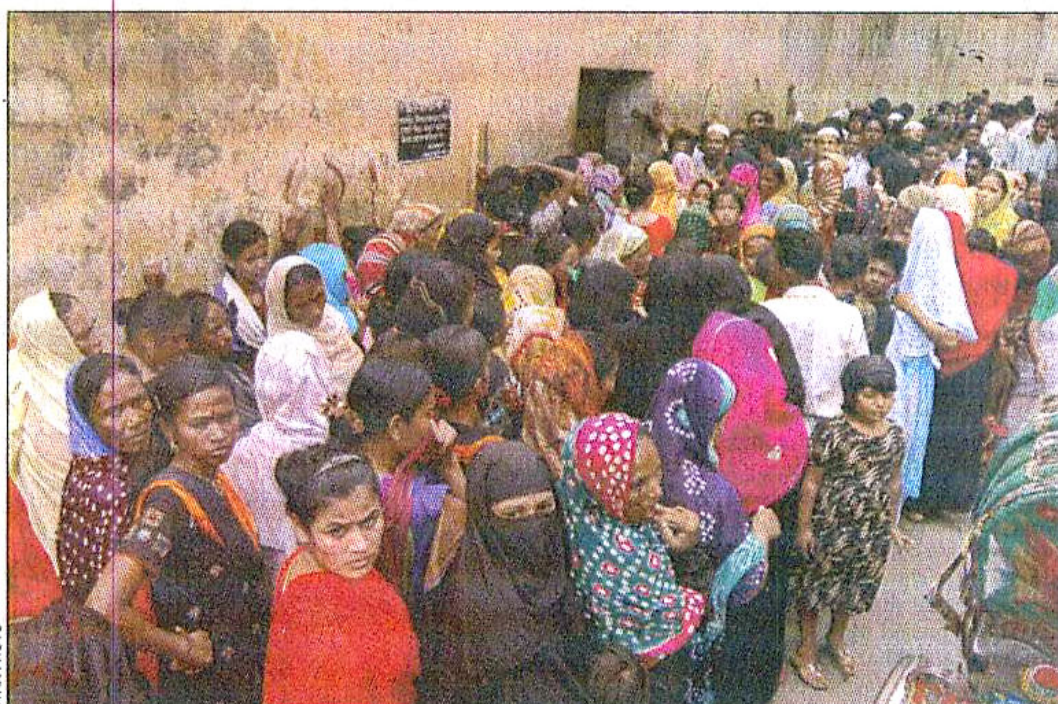
Like every year prison authorities are making special arrangements for Eid celebration, which will add colour to the dreary days behind bars.

"It may not be a lavish fiesta but the arrangement will definitely make the day joyous for the prisoners," said DIG (Prisons) Maj Shamsul Haider Siddiqui.

With only three days left for the biggest Muslim festival, the jail is being cleaned up and will be specially decorated for the day with festoons. Enthusiastic prisoners will take care of the cleaning, decoration, cooking and other important chores of the day.

A hundred prisoners tasked with kitchen duty will start their day early preparing food for around 10,000 inmates including convicted and under trial prisoners.

For others, the day will begin with early morning Eid congregation at the prison lawn. There is no in-house Imam at the jail. The inmates themselves will



Relatives at the main gate of the Dhaka Central Jail wait to meet their dear ones as Eid nears.

conduct the prayer.

Siddiqui said among the prisoners there is always someone with special religious knowledge. "We have several 'hafiz' among the inmates. One of them will conduct the prayer."

Sweets are an integral part of Eid celebrations. Right after the Eid prayer, ruti and semai (vermicelli) will be served. It will be quite ordinary at noon during launch with plain rice, fish, alur dum (potato curry) and fruits. The sumptuous feast will take place in the evening. Dinner will be served with mouth-watering pilau, beef curry and salad.

Siddiqui said per head cost for special diet for convicted prisoners has been fixed at Tk 49. Under trial prisoners will get food worth Tk 39. Around 170 VIP detainees will munch on something little more expensive. Expense for VIPs

would be Tk 89 per head.

Situated at Nazimuddin Road in old town, Dhaka Central Jail is the largest among the 66 jails in Bangladesh. Originally built for around 3,000 detainees, the prison currently houses around 9,647 inmates (as of last Thursday). The number changes almost every day.

Among the inmates, 9,058 are men and the rest 589 are women. The prison also houses 78 unfortunate children. They are not guilty of any crime but they have no other option but to live with their detained mothers in the jailhouse.

Eid celebration is nothing without new clothes. Male prisoners will receive lungi, females will get sari while their children will get special outfits. Ministry of Social Welfare will contribute to this part of the celebration.

Prisoners often receive special donation from outside as well. This year prisoners will receive topi, prayer mattress and other outfits.

Another feature of the day is the family members and relatives of the inmates will be allowed to meet them. No matter what their crimes are, relatives of the inmates flock to the jailhouse on the Eid day to pass on good wishes to their loved ones. Heavy steel bars, however, will separate the inmates from the visitors.

Visitors are allowed to bring food items but it will only reach inside the jail after strict security screening. Visitors can stay from 9:00am to 4:30pm. VIP detainees however will not be as lucky as the ordinary prisoners. Their relatives have to go through tough legal procedures to obtain permission to enter the special jails.

Vision for visually impaired

DU opens resource centre at Central Library this month

CITY CORRESPONDENT

For the first time after its inception Dhaka University is going to open a resource centre for its visually impaired students. The centre will be opened at the DU Central Library soon after the university opens end of this month.

K Fazlur Rahman, librarian, DU Central Library, said once the resource centre is open, 41 visually impaired students from 12 departments and one institute of the university will be able to read brailled books from the library.

"At present the visually impaired students record class lectures and later memorise them. It is their only way of learning," said Dr M Enamul Kabir, country representative of Sightsavers International which provides financial support for the centre.

The centre is equipped with Braille system books, computers with Internet connections, mobile portable devices, Braille printer and some other equipment necessary for visually impaired students. Eight students can use the centre at a time. It has a study corner with 72 copies of 24 brailled books selected as per requirement of the students.

Braille is a universal language through which visually impaired students can learn.

However, the required manpower to run the resource centre is yet to be recruited, sources said. Four staff are needed to run the centre in two shifts -- morning and evening.

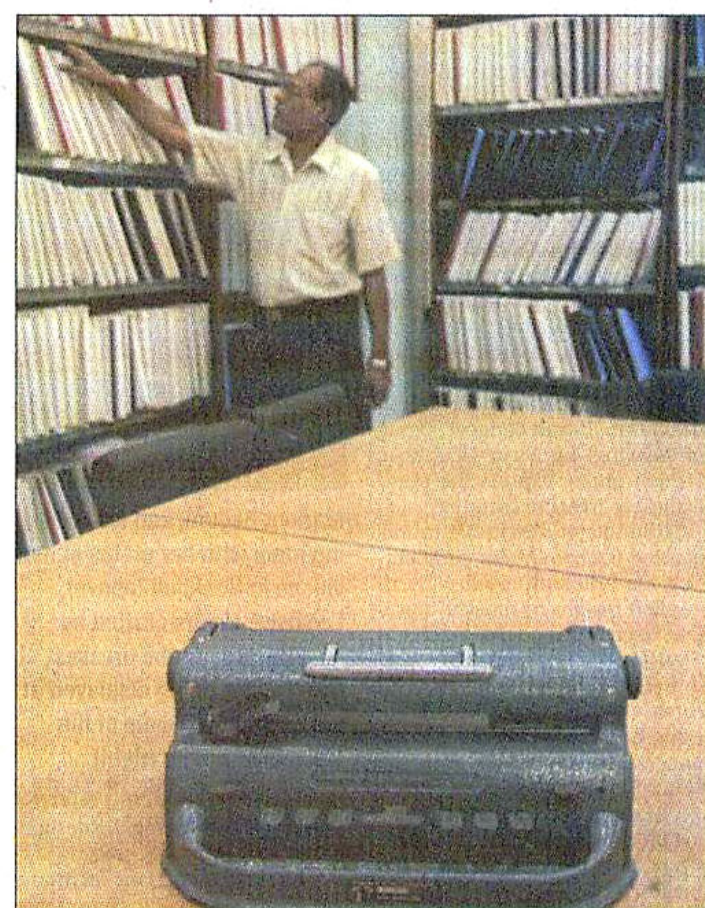
The sources said a proposal has been placed to the university syndicate to put advertisements in newspapers for the recruitment. Two new staff will be recruited and they will work with two senior existing staff of the library. All of them will be trained by Sightsavers to help visually impaired students learn through Braille method.

"The trained staff will compose required parts of a book and then transform them into Braille method," said the librarian.

"If anyone needs a particular chapter from a book that was not composed then we will be able to provide it within a very short time depending on the length of the chapter," he said.

Inaugurating the centre, Vice chancellor SMA Faiz said such centre is essential to ensure the access of visually impaired students to quality education.

Dr Kabir told Star City that it is a right of the visually impaired students to get educational facil-



The resource centre for visually impaired students at the DU Central Library. (Below) the Braille system of reading.

ities just like normal students.

He said the students will be able to browse Internet alongside reading books. There is a special software to help students recognise computer commands. The students will be given computer trainings so that they can browse Internet.

"Talking computers are arranged for them so that they can recognise the commands through headphones. We are using special software for this," he said.

Dr Kabir put emphasis on preparing students for the job market. "One reason for this skill training and making them computer literate is to prepare them for the job market."

"DU is our primary objective. Our next project would be to

open a similar centre at Chittagong University," he added.

Dr Caroline Harper, chief executive of Sightsavers, said in the inaugural ceremony that visually impaired persons should be educated and turned into human resources. She urged the visually impaired students to make their position in all sections of the society.

Sightsavers International has been working in Bangladesh since 1973 for the prevention of blindness and promotion of the rights of the blind people.

Dr Nazma Kabir, regional director for South Asia and the Caribbean of Sightsavers, was also present at the launching ceremony.

Eid shopping gains momentum

Eid is less than a week away. After being shut at home for two consecutive days due to heavy rain the city dwellers yesterday returned to their shopping spree. Popular markets in Gausia, Chandni Chawk, New Market and Gulistan areas were crammed with buyers as many also have to avail their trains or buses for home to join their near and dear ones during Eid.

