

7-MURDER VERDICT

Condemned cells in N'ganj jail crammed with convicts

STAR REPORT

Narayanganj District Jail had to keep more than one convict on death row in a single condemned cell to accommodate 12 prisoners who were given the capital punishment on Monday in the 2014 seven murder case.

The District and Sessions Judge's Court handed down death penalty to 26 accused and different jail terms to nine others. Of the 35 convicts in the case, 12 are on the run.

Following the verdict, 18, including 12 death row convicts, were taken to the Narayanganj jail while two to Kashimpur Central Jail-1 and three to Kashimpur Central Jail-2.

Narayanganj District Jail has 15 condemned cells with 13 of them already occupied by previous death row convicts, said jailer Asadur Rahman.

"So, we've to keep 25 convicts in 15 cells."

The jailer, however, said none of the convicts was getting any undue benefit.

Another jailer, preferring anonymity, said it is better not to keep more than one death row convict in a cell.

As per the jail code, one or three or five men (uneven number) can be kept in a condemned cell but two or four men (even number) should not be in one cell.

About the condition of the convicts in the sensational case, Asadur Rahman said most of them were depressed. Some of them were seen crying while being taken to the jail.

"Some of them have cried today [Tuesday]."

Meanwhile, Prasanta Kumar Banik, senior jail superintendent of Kashimpur jail-2, said death row convict Nur Hossain, Tareque Sayeed Mohammad and Belal Hossain of the seven-murder case were kept in three separate condemned cells. They were given designated clothes.

"They looked quite normal when they had food and during movement," Prasanta said.

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Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina addressing the opening plenary session of the World Economic Forum at the Congress Hall in Davos, Switzerland, yesterday.

PHOTO: PID

Parents caught napping by Uttara teen gangs

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local criminals. To show off strength, these gang members often move in motorbikes at high speed and honks and clash with other group members, said police and locals.

Most of the gang members are from higher and upper middle classes of the society. Some of them end up in taking drugs and mugging.

In many cases, they assault anyone who refuses to "show them respect".

Inspector (investigation) of Uttara West Police Station Abdur Razzak told The Daily Star the parents of the teen boys seemed to have absolutely no idea about the activities of their children.

"They don't even know where their sons are going and with whom they are mixing."

"Even at this early age, they are given motorbikes. Are not the parents responsible for looking after their children?" he said, adding that police alone could not stop such crimes.

According to locals, over two dozens of teen gangs operate in Uttara area alone. These include Disco Boys, Chhoton Group, Nine Star, Power Boys, Big Boss, Dark Shadow, Red Light, Dada Boyz, Dazzling Spirit, DSB, F.C R.TR, 15 Club, Nafiz Don, PL Rakib, Saiko

Ridoy, Dare Devil, Gongzilla, HNY and DarkSouls.

Their graffiti names can be seen on various streets and building walls.

Of the gangs, Disco Boys, Nine Star, Seven Star, Big Boss and Chhoton Group are most active. Their members frequently get involved in various crimes in the area and they are turning out to be more dangerous day by day, said locals.

Adnan, 14, had left Disco Boys and was seen with the members of Nine Star gang recently. He was beaten to death on January 6 allegedly over enmity between the two gangs.

Locals and police said the two gangs were formed following a school-time enmity between their leaders Shetu and Raju. Shetu, a petty criminal from Dakshin Khan area, leads Disco Boys while Raju heads Nine Star, showing their muscle power in some part of the Uttara area.

These gangs have victimised many others.

For example, a small trader in the Uttara Sector 11 kitchen market area has the marks of brutality on his body.

He had to have 122 stitches all over his body after he was assaulted and stabbed with sharp weapons by

the members of Disco Boys on December 9 last year.

His only fault was he told the gang that he did not know Raju, the leader of the opponent group, the trader told The Daily Star, adding that the attackers also took away his cell phone.

Two months before the incident, Raju had beaten up Chhoton, a member of Disco Group, Inspector Abdur Razzak told The Daily Star.

The trader was so scared that he did not dare to file a case against his attackers. Initially, he was not ready to talk to this correspondent but later agreed after he was asked by his mother.

The Daily Star is withholding his name for his safety reasons.

Contacted, Ali Akbar, president of Uttara Nagarik Kalyan Samiti, a platform working for the welfare of the residents in Uttara, said he had visited the trader at the hospital where he heard about three other assaults by the teenage gangs on the same day.

"Such assaults are now frequent and we are very worried," he said

Meanwhile, the killing of Adnan, a class-IX student, is making many parents in Uttara worried.

"My boy also hangs out with his friends. I was not worried before. But now fear has gripped me," said Mohammad Hossain, whose son

studies in the same class in another school.

Talking to this newspaper, several guardians, including Hossain, suggested that a close monitoring from the schools and the parents should be ensured so that the children do not go astray.

Adnan's murder was not an isolated incident but a result of the criminal activities of the teenage gangs, they said.

Asked, Ali Hossain Khan, officer-in-charge of Uttara West Police Station, denied police failure in tackling the gangs.

"We had arrested 10 to 12 members of such groups in the past. But most of them came out on bail and got engaged in criminal activities again," he said.

Several locals expressed their anger and frustration due to the "arrogant behaviour and movement" by the gang members. According to them, most of the gang members are "spoil brats studying in some well-known schools".

Adnan's uncle Ziaul Haque said his nephew had started hanging out with his friends "quite often" when he was a student of an English-medium school. For this reason, Adnan was admitted to another school later.

However, the director of the school said as far as he knew, his

students were not involved in any such gangs. "We are very strict when it comes to discipline."

HOW THE GANGS FORMED

In most cases, a leader of a gang is a school or college dropout or a local petty criminal, who is older than the schoolkids and so has some dominance in the area, according to several students of different schools in Uttara.

Through various means, the leader tries to trick the school-goers into joining his gang.

For example, the children are told if they have "good relations" with the "Boro Bhai" (big brother), they will have him by their side whenever needed.

If any member of the gang has any fight with anyone else, the entire gang teams up to help him out, said the students, wishing not to be named.

"If you have power, you can fight anyone. This is also related to respect and relations between seniors and juniors," one of the students said.

When the gangs are formed, their members gather and pass time at particular places, such as tea stalls and open fields, to show off their strength.

The gang members are also members of different social media groups which they use to communicate and issue threats to other group mem-

bers, said the students, adding that similar gangs are active in many other parts of the city, including Dhanmondi, Mohammadpur and Mirpur.

Contacted, Prof Zia Rahman of Dhaka University's criminology department emphasised on taking "timely steps" to counter the "abrupt changes" in the society and cultures for stopping such gangs.

"These teenagers are following the western culture and using the fastest communication like the internet. But we do not have the backup to tackle their bad effects," he said.

"Abroad, teenagers get proper counselling. If their parents are busy, they also get proper care at the daycare centres in their childhood," he said, calling for taking steps to raise awareness about the issue.

OC Ali Hossain Khan said, "We want to sit with the parents, the school authorities, the media and the respected citizens in the area to find out a solution to the problem".

Surveillance in Uttara area has been increased after the killing of Adnan, said a member of Uttara Sector 11 Kalyan Samiti.

Police have arrested three suspects over the murder of Adnan. One of them confessed to his involvement in the crime before a Dhaka court recently.

BDCyclists in Guinness records book

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BDCyclists, Bangladesh's biggest group of cyclists, has achieved a place in the Guinness World Records for forming the world's longest single line of moving bicycles.

"The longest single line of moving bicycles consists of 1,186 cyclists, achieved during an event organised by BDCyclists in Dhaka, Bangladesh, on December 16, 2016," reads an announcement on the website of the Guinness World Records.

"All cyclists remained in a continuous single line for the attempt," it said.

Contacted, Fuad Ahsan Chowdhury, a BDCyclists moderator, said they received an email from the Guinness World Records on January 16.

The announcement was published on its official website around 7:30pm yesterday.

"I cannot describe my feelings in words," Fuad told The Daily Star over phone around 9:45 last night when he and other members of the cyclists' group were celebrating the feat by cutting cakes at Manik Mia Avenue in the capital.

It is an immense pride for Bangladesh whose name is written on the website along with the December 16, the victory day of the country, he said.

The previous record belonged to Bosnia involving 984 cyclists. To beat it, 1,186 cyclists of BDCyclists paddled their bikes for nine kilometers in a single line on the Purbachal Highway in Dhaka on December 16 last year.

Starting near the International Convention City Bashundhara, they crossed Boalia Bridge over the Turag River and returned to the starting point in 30 minutes.

As per the Guinness rules, they

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Fire safety eludes most DCC markets

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But the market authorities were yet to have enough firefighting equipment except for some fire extinguishers.

Visiting the market in the city's Gulistan on January 4, The Daily Star found that there was no water spraying system in the six-storey building. Besides, there were no sand-filled buckets and hosepipe in any of the floors.

Shah Ahmed Badal, president of the shop owners' association, said they had 18 fire extinguishers.

However, none of those had expiry date attached.

A similar scenario was found with the age-old DCC Paribagh Super Market which is famous for antique items and jewelries.

Humayun Kabir, general secretary of the shop owners' association at the market, said city corporations should install firefighting equipment in markets as they collect revenue from shop owners.

"We don't have water supply now as Dhaka Wasa has snapped our connection after the city corporation failed to clear the bills. How would we douse fire if an emergency situation arises?" he questioned.

He said shop owners were bringing in water from other sources to meet essential needs.

These correspondents did not find any fire safety equipment in six DNCC markets in Karwan Bazar.

At Gulistan Underground Market, all the five fire extinguishers were found fit.

"These [fire extinguishers] were refilled only a few days ago," said Shahid Mollah, head of security guards. He, however, admitted that they have no training on firefighting.

Security guard Abul Hossain at Bangabazar Hawkers Market in Fulbaria said there were 54 fire extinguishers for 628 shops.



Fire extinguishers gathered dust in front of the office of Sundarban Square Market Shop Owners' Association in the city's Gulistan.

PHOTO: MAHBUR RAHMAN KHAN

No firefighting equipment was seen at Victoria Park Market, Ladies Park Market, Sadarghat Hawkers Market, Buckland Badh Market, Dayaganj Market, Kaptanbazar Super Market, Shyambazar Market and Thatari Bazar Market.

Sheikh Shamsul Alam Bulbul, president of Dhaka Mohanagar Dokan Malik Samity, said only a few of the 44 DNCC markets have firefighting equipment.

The corporation "never encouraged shop owners about firefighting preparedness and the traders' bodies didn't feel the urgency to ensure fire safety", he mentioned, adding that they were now in the process of installing firefighting equipment at super market-2 of Karwan Bazar.

FOLLOW BNBC
Talking to the Daily Star, Prof ABM Badruzzaman of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology said every market should keep its walking space and stairway clear. Besides, there should be enough exit points to save lives during fire incidents.

He said the authorities should follow the Bangladesh National Building Code (BNBC) for construction of markets and industrial and

commercial buildings.

There should be overhead and reserve water tanks to fight fire for a certain period. All commercial buildings should have fire extinguishers and hosepipes, added Badruzzaman.

Maj AKM Shakil Newaz, director (operations and maintenance) of Fire Service and Civil Defence, said there should be a hydrant system in every market in line with the BNBC.

The markets should also have sprinklers, hosepipes, fire extinguishers, smoke and heat detectors and trained firefighting teams, he observed.

Khan Mohammad Billal, chief executive officer of DSCC, said they requested different traders' bodies to take necessary steps to ensure fire safety.

"It's the duty of Fire Service and Civil Defence to take action against any market authorities who did not set up firefighting equipment," he said.

For maintenance and repair of shops, traders need to shift their goods.

"We offer traders space for temporary relocation, but they want shops of same size in advantageous positions which we cannot provide them with," said DNCC CEO Mesbahul Islam.

It would be easy for the city corporation to address safety issues if the traders cooperate with it, he added.

PRESS CONFERENCE
DNCC Mayor Anisul Huq yesterday said on several occasions they had asked the committee of Gulshan Kitchen Market (South) to take necessary measures to ensure safety, but the suggestion fell on deaf ears.

The mayor was addressing a press conference at the DNCC's Gulshan office.

Showing photographs of 12 dilapidated DNCC market buildings, Anisul said those were not only vulnerable to collapse, but also to fire.

Members of the 12 market committees were present.

Modi upbeat on ties with Bangladesh

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi yesterday pitched for "a thriving, well-connected and integrated neighbourhood" as his "dream" and said New Delhi has achieved greater political understanding with Dhaka through connectivity and infrastructure projects and settlement of land and maritime boundaries.

Inaugurating the second edition of Raisina Dialogue, the flagship conference of Indian external affairs ministry at the Taj Palace Hotel in New Delhi, Modi said, "India alone cannot walk

the path of peace. It is also a journey for Pakistan to make. Pakistan must walk away from terror if it wants to walk towards dialogue with India."

"Those in our neighbours who support violence, hatred and export terror stand isolated and ignored," he said in an apparent reference to Pakistan.

Pointing out that South Asians are joined by blood, history and culture, Modi said, "My vision for our neighbourhood puts premium on peaceful and harmonious ties with entire South Asia."

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3 shot dead

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with local weapons, went to grab the waterbody for fishing in Jarulia village around 1:30pm. But the waterbody was leased to local Dakkhin Nagergaon Matsyajibi Samabay Samity Ltd.

The clash ensued as the men of the Samabay Samity tried to resist Ekra and his men from grabbing the waterbody, said the OC.

Tajul, Shaharul and Uzal suffered bullet injuries. Shaharul and Uzal died at Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital and Tajul at Dirai Upazila Health Complex, the police official said.

The other injured were admitted to hospitals.

Contacted, Badrul Azad Rana, brother of Ekra, said there had been a longstanding conflict between Ekra and Dhananjay Sarkar, general secretary of Dakkhin Nagergaon Matsyajibi Samabay Samity Ltd, over taking possession of the waterbody.

He alleged that men of their rival group opened fire during the clash.

municipality Mayor Mosharraf Miah and Dirai upazila Chairman Hafizur Rahman were present on the spot. Both Mosharraf and Hafizur supported the activities of the Samabay Samity, Rana also alleged.

Talking to The Daily Star, both Mosharraf and Hafizur denied the allegation of their presence on the spot. They also claimed that they did not know the reason behind yesterday's incident.

This newspaper could not contact Dhananjay for his comment over the conflict with Ekra.

In another incident, 50 people were wounded in a clash between two groups of villagers over land grabbing in Manashinagar village of Sylhet Sadar upazila yesterday morning.

Locals said the clash broke out when Jain Uddin and his men tried to grab a piece of land of Ajman Ali of the village.

The wounded were undergoing treatment at Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital.

The situation was brought under control later, said Akhter Hossain, officer-in-charge of Jalalabad Police Station.