



Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative



June 16, 2016

RIOTS IN VARANASI JAIL: A SEQUEL

FOUR RIOTS IN JAILS IN UTTAR PRADESH OVER THE LAST COUPLE OF MONTHS SPEAK OF A PENAL SYSTEM UNDER STRAIN, CRYING FOR A HUMANE OVERHAUL

Dear Friends,

Maja Daruwala, Director of the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, says in Outlook magazine that the conditions that led to the recent prison riots in Varanasi and elsewhere exist in every state...

With a nod to Elvis Presley's "Jail House Rock," in the article titled "*Number 57 Said To Number 3*," she writes:

"April was a cruel month for the Uttar Pradesh penal system. May has not been kind either. Riots broke out in four prisons across the state. Jailed men in Varanasi, Kaushambi, Deoria and Muzaffarnagar went on the rampage and attacked fellow inmates, jail staff and guards. Scores were injured in the fighting. During the April 2 riot at the district jail in Varanasi, the superintendent, Ashish Tiwari, was held hostage for about six hours and his deputy, who was severely thrashed, was admitted to hospital with serious injuries. Resentment had been simmering over several issues, including poor food, for a long time, but the immediate provocation for the riot was apparently rumours of prisoners being beaten up by guards. According to reports, the April 15 brawl in Kaushambi provoked when security guards 'asked' prisoners for a 'suvidha shulk' on Ram Navami. No doubt for the privilege of guarding them well. The prisoners refused and the guards beat them up. During the April 26 incident at Deoria district jail, prisoners were meting out their own brand of justice to a fellow inmate they suspected of being an informant. The guards intervened and the subsequent melee left 33—including nine prison officials—injured. On May 6, what started out as a heated exchange of verbal abuse between two gangs at the Muzaffarnagar jail soon escalated into a bloody fight in which razor blades, sticks and iron rods were freely used. Twelve prisoners and a guard were injured.

A high-level inquiry committee is probing the reasons for the fracas in the Varanasi jail. That is usual. Prison staff have been transferred. That too is usual. No doubt there will be some repercussions for the inmates: beatings, deprivations, solitary confinement, more criminal cases filed against them, and other punishments of which the press will not speak. That too is usual. All these incidents will soon fade from the news and the back story will remain untold.

That story is to be found in the overall condition of prisons across India. The Varanasi jail is probably typical of jails in Uttar Pradesh, indeed, across most of the country, where most prisons are old, overcrowded, short-staffed and neglected by the administration. The Varanasi facility was built in 1853—that's four years before the 1857 uprising. It is crammed full with almost twice the number of inmates that it can properly house and has just two-thirds of the staff it needs. Overcrowding puts sleeping pallets, shelter, water to cook with, drink and bathe in, sanitation and medical care, all under heavy strain. Just 18 per cent of the inmates are convicts. Eighty-two per cent are undertrials awaiting the end of some ongoing investigation or plodding through their trial. Uttar Pradesh's figures for undertrial prisoners are well above the national average...

We are attaching the full article published on 13 June 2016, [The Outlook](http://www.outlookindia.com/magazine/story/number-57-said-to-number-3/297251) <http://www.outlookindia.com/magazine/story/number-57-said-to-number-3/297251>. We hope you will find these updates useful and informative.

What you can do:

You can write to **Shri Dilip Kumar, Joint Secretary (Centre States) of the Ministry of Home Affairs** jscs@nic.in and to the legislator of your area to take necessary steps to stop violence in our jails. If you are writing to an MP elected from your constituency, ask them to raise a question in parliament on jail violence in the coming monsoon session. A sample letter is given below.

Dear Sir/Madam,

The violence in our prisons completely breaches rights of prisoners' to safe custody under the care of the state and right to human treatment as 'persons' as recognized under Indian law and by judiciary. Kindly improve prison budgets, staffing and training for prison staff. Improve prison inspections by constituting the Boards of Visitors who can timely detect problems and prevent the health of prisons from deteriorating further. Take suitable actions against those directly responsible for inflicting harm, cruel and degrading treatment on prisoners.

Write to us at chriprisonsprog@gmail.com with your comments and suggestions. You could leave us an email if you wish to subscribe to these updates.

Best Regards,

Sana Das

Coordinator, Prison Reforms Programme

Behind Bars, Not Beyond Justice

PRISON NEWS



Mumbai prison gang war? Inmates attack each other with metal plates in Arthur Road

Rupsa Chakraborty, Mid-Day

Four inmates of the Arthur Road jail were seriously injured after around 13 under-trials clashed in the overcrowded prison yesterday morning. A scuffle broke out between two groups, who used sharpened pieces of metallic sheets and edges of their plates as weapons to attack each other.



India's death row prisoners face horrific conditions, study finds

Vidhi Doshi, The Guardian

Prisoners on death row in India are living in inhumane conditions, facing unfair trials and horrific acts of police torture, according to a new study released by the Death Penalty Research Project at the National Law University in Delhi



Riot squads called into prisons on daily basis, MPs hear

Alan Travis, The Guardian

Justice committee report says tackling rising tide of serious disorder cannot wait for Michael Gove's 'reform' plans for jails.



Mexico prison riot: 49 killed in rival gang battle

Al Jazeera

Nuevo Leon governor says 12 people were also wounded after a riot broke out in Monterrey's Topo Chico prison.

Plastic bullets in prison to control warring inmates

Bhavika Jain, The Times of India

Mumbai: Following frequent incidents of fights among jail inmates, the state home department has decided to procure non-lethal weapons like plastic bullets and shields to control warring groups. Taking a cue from countries like Israel, jail employees will be trained to use these weapons if and when required.

Full Documentary 2016 - Gangs in Prison Lockdown Gangs War - Discovery Channel Documentaries

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When prison guards are violent blame culture- not bad apples

Jessica Pishko, *The Guardian*

The guard-on-inmate violence that makes it to the news – an inmate in a wheelchair thrown down the stairs, women in Rikers who allege rampant sexual abuse – is just a fraction of the violence that happens in prisons daily.



Bahrain report admits inmates beaten at notorious 'torture' prison

Middle East Eye

A Bahrain prison torture inspection panel has been accused of having its "head in the sand" after releasing a report on the notorious Jau prison that failed to address allegations of systematic abuse against inmates or the causes of a mass riot that left hundreds injured.

About Jail Mail

Jail Mail is a regular series of Prison Reform Updates from CHRI for readers interested in the rights of prisoners and the reform of prisons as a matter of public concern. The engagement of civil society in the management and monitoring of prisons and the rights of prisoners is vital to the transparency of this traditionally closed institution and to ensure the practical realisation of the rights of those behind bars. *Jail Mail* invites discussion between civil society members and those entrusted to oversee and manage prisons.

Evidence-based research and watch reports of CHRI's Prison Reforms Programme, interviews with critical stakeholders, topical issues and developments concerning the liberty of prisoners, and health of prisons in India and around the world will form the sources of *Jail Mail*. Its periodicity will depend on the urgency of issues and the interest they generate.

About CHRI and the Prison Reforms Programme

The Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI) is an independent, non-partisan, international non-governmental organisation, mandated to ensure the practical realisation of human rights across the Commonwealth. CHRI was founded in 1987 by Commonwealth professional associations; it is headquartered in New Delhi, India since 1993, and has offices in Accra, Ghana and London, UK.

The Prison Reforms Programme of CHRI is more than 15 years old. The programme focuses on improving prison monitoring through the strengthening of undertrial review mechanisms and prison visiting system nationally, and ensuring early safeguards against unnecessary pre-trial detentions, specifically in Rajasthan and West Bengal. The programme also advocates for timely repatriation of foreign national prisoners and immediate release of asylum seekers. Evidence-based research, advocacy, capacity-building of actors of the criminal justice system including prison officials, welfare and probation officers, criminal defense lawyers, magistrates, legal aid functionaries and civil society actors are the regular activities of the programme.

Leave us an email at chriprisonsprog@gmail.com if you wish to subscribe to these updates.

You could also write to us with your comments and suggestions.

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