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Moved to Kasab cell, handler cries 'haunted'

SAMYABRATA RAY GOSWAMI



Ajlmal Kasab

Mumbai, Feb. 7: Ajmal Kasab has been hanged, now his handler is feeling "haunted".

Actually it's his cell in Arthur Road Jail that's giving Abu Jundal the creeps. The cell is the same one where Kasab was held in solitary confinement before his execution in November last year.

"He was upset about being placed in the cell and kept awake almost the entire night, calling out to the guards sometimes. He told them he felt the cell was haunted," said a jail source.

Jundal, alleged to be a key conspirator behind the November 2008 attacks in Mumbai, had been lodged in Delhi's Tihar jail after Saudi Arabian authorities deported him to India last year.

On Tuesday, he was brought to Mumbai and put into the specially constructed 10ftX10ft cell that had been vacant for over two months since Kasab's execution.

Apparently, the Maharashtra government doesn't want to let the Rs 5.7 crore it spent on securing Kasab's cell go waste.

"The Kasab story is now over, but that doesn't mean we let so much money go waste," said a police source.

The cell, in the jail's yard No. 12, has an attached toilet, an unbelievable luxury in Indian prisons. "The attached toilet was specially constructed for the purpose of security. The cell also has CCTV cameras that are monitored personally by the jail superintendent in his chamber or by his deputy. Six guards are posted right outside the cell," the jail official said.

The oval-shaped cell has reinforced steel walls and a 20ft-long, bomb-and-bullet-proof tunnel within the jail premises to connect it to the special court where the 26/11 trial was held.

"The plan is to try Jundal in the jail court. That's why he has been housed here. The jail court, where Kasab was also tried, has multi-tier special security and a direct 20-metre corridor that leads to the courtroom through high reinforced concrete walls. It is just 30 metres from the cell where Jundal has been kept," the source said.

"If Jundal is tried in the special jail court, which handles only one case at a time, there would be a speedy trial," he added.

Jail sources said Jundal did not touch his evening meal on Tuesday. "He ate breakfast and lunch on Wednesday and Thursday, but avoided dinner and kept to himself," said an official.

Jundal is being served food prepared at the jail mess. Kasab's food was prepared by special cooks.

This is not the first time though that Jundal has been in this cell.

In April 2012, Mumbai police had flown him down from Delhi to bring him face to face with Kasab. "Kasab was surprised but not shocked to see him there. The two spoke before the police and Kasab was near deferential to his one-time trainer. It was during this meeting that Kasab had identified Jundal as their handler and one of the key conspirators of the 26/11 attack," said Ambadas Pote, then DCP (crime), Mumbai police, who was present in the cell at that time.

The two also had an exchange of words, with Kasab alleging that Jundal had a substantial role in the conspiracy and Jundal claiming his role was limited to that of a Hindi and Marathi tutor.

Police sources said Jundal had also organised 10 student identity cards from Maharashtra colleges for the 10 attackers who left 166 people dead when they stormed Mumbai on November 26 four years ago.

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