

# THE PRISON PROJECT

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## *Testimony of Atikur Rahman*

### REVISITING THE PAST

Atikur Rahman's prison experiences spanning two years and eight months began on October 5, 2020, when he and three others were arrested by the UP police while they were on their way to Hathras to show solidarity with the family of the 19-year-old Dalit girl who died after being gang-raped by upper caste men on September 20, 2020.

The police detained the four—social activist Atikur Rahman, journalist Siddique Kappan, student Masud Ahmed and Alam, the driver—at Mant Toll Plaza PS, a little before Mathura. Over the next few months, all four were implicated in two anti-terror cases, one under the UAPA (case no. 199/2020) in which 4 others were also implicated; and another, an old PMLA case (case no. 02/2018) involving several others. In August 2022, Alam got bail and in February 2023, Siddique Kappan was released on bail. A few months later, on June 13, 2023, Atikur Rahman was also released on bail from Lucknow District Jail, and Masud was likewise released in March 2024.

## When PUDR met Atikur Rahman

Shortly after his release in June 2023, Atikur Rahman made several visits to AIIMS from his hometown Muzaffarnagar because of his chronic coronary condition—aorta regurgitation. At one point, he stayed in the CCU (Cardiac Care Unit) for over two months, between February and April 2024. During his many visits and prolonged hospital stay, PUDR held detailed interviews over five sessions for understanding his imprisonment experiences in two different jails during the pandemic times. Presented below in tabular form is Atikur Rahman’s prisonscape.

Date	Place	Custody/confinement	Duration	Reason	Comments
Oct 5-6, 2020	Mant PS Mathura	Police chowki	1 day plus	Interrogation in conspiracy case	All four interrogated
Oct 6-till end of month	Local school Mathura	Makeshift quarantine barracks	25 days approx.	Quarantine before entry to jail	All four quarantined
Nov 2020	Mathura District Jail	High Security ‘tanhai’ cell	14 days approx.	Isolation from others because of high risk case	All four incarcerated in single cell
Nov 2020	Surajpur, Gr. Noida	Police Station	2 days	Interrogation in PMLA case	All four Interrogated
Nov 2020-April 2022	Mathura District Jail	Barracks and jail hospital (from Aug 2021-April 2022)	Almost one and half years	Undertrial	Three shifted to Lucknow jail in Dec 2021 after NIA took over <a href="#">UAPA</a> case.
Nov-Dec 2021	AIIMS Nw Delhi	CCU	27 days approx.	Open-heart surgery. Returned to Mathura Jail	
March 2022	AIIMS N. Delhi	Emergency	2 days approx.	Treatment following paralysis symptoms in jail. Returned to jail.	
April 2022-June 2023	Lucknow District Jail	Quarantine barrack; regular barracks; jail hospital	1 year and 2 months approx.	Undertrial	In jail hospital from Aug 2022 till June 2023 because of paralytic attack

The above chart makes clear that for over a year Atikur Rahman’s prison experiences coincided with those of his three companions but thereafter his experiences were specific because of his health complications.

Drawing upon the interviews, the five-sections of the present write-up examine the quarantine facilities in Mathura and Lucknow jails, the repressive Covid protocols, and the abysmal health facilities for chronic inmate-patients. Given the range of reflections that the interviews raised, the write-up also addresses barrack lives of undertrials, prisoners' resistance especially over food quality, and the nature of incarceration in a high-security cell.

## **1. Experiencing Covid protocols in prison**

*On August 22, 2020, a news report showed that Mathura District Jail had recorded 1831 coronavirus cases in which 43 inmates died. Against a capacity of 564, the jail had 1516 prisoners, including 96 women inmates. The nature of overcrowding had also been brought to light by one well-known inmate, Dr Kafeel Khan, who had been arrested in January 2020 for his anti-CAA speech and lodged in Mathura Jail. In a letter written from jail in July 2020, Khan wrote: "in a jail made for 534 inmates, there are 1600 inmates kept with one barrack holding at least 100-125 of us. There are just 4-6 toilets". Khan was released on bail in September 2020.*

### **a) Abysmal makeshift-quarantine centre**

*Soon after their arrest on October 5, 2020, as per covid-driven prison practice of 2020, AR and his companions were quarantined for almost 25 days in a local girls' school, Ratan Lal Phool Katori Devi School in Mathura. The facilities and living spaces were 'sub-human'. In a small room, about 28 persons were stuffed and locked in without toilet facilities. Prisoners had to request the guard to open the door for them to use the toilet (and it was up to his 'mood' whether to allow it). No separate drinking water was available, and prisoners had to use the water from the bathroom. Offering namaz was difficult. Food was awful as prisoners were mostly served unwashed radish subzi and the driest of rotis. AR and his companions lived in the same set of clothes for 24-25 days. Even then, they were interrogated in the quarantine centre for several hours by the ED along with cameras.*

**b) Denial of medication and repressive quarantine procedures**

A few days before his arrest, AR's doctor at AIIMS had repeated his recommendation for a bypass surgery to correct valve malfunctioning. A coronary patient since childhood, AR had been under treatment at AIIMS since 2010. Hence, it wasn't surprising that he started feeling unwell while in quarantine as the jail officials did not give him the medicines his family had handed over. Since the jail doctor was unable to treat his symptoms, he was taken to the district hospital. AR recalls how he was treated as a terrorist as he was handcuffed in the vehicle and surrounded by armed guards in the hospital. He was sent back after an ECG, but the medicines prescribed were never given. Next, when he complained of uneasiness while being interrogated by ED officials in Surajpur PS, Greater Noida, he was taken to the District Hospital, but he was not given the prescribed medicines. Another time, when he was in the jail barracks in Mathura, he was taken to the District Hospital for a check-up, but he could only consult the doctor through glass doors because of reigning corona fears.

AR stated that for nearly two months, the Mathura jail authorities refused to give him his routine medicines which his family had handed over. Hence, each time he complained of uneasiness, they took him to the hospital and when he returned, he was quarantined in a separate barrack for three days.

AR believes that he was tested over 50 times and was quarantined at least 45-46 times for three days at a stretch during his imprisonment in Mathura jail.

AR was shifted to Lucknow Jail in April 2022, months after his companions were transferred. Once in Lucknow Jail, AR underwent the mandatory quarantine for 14 days in a first-floor barrack. The quarantine conditions were no different from that of Mathura, but because it was two years after the first Covid-wave, and because Lucknow jail had larger premises, the experience was better. Here too he was routinely quarantined (as many as 12-13 times) as he was taken for several fruitless hospital visits. Like in Mathura, he repeatedly raised his health concerns with jail officials and with those who came for inspection. But nothing happened.

## 2. Experiencing medical crises behind bars

AR's chronic heart condition resulted in a couple of major episodes behind bars. On August 22, 2021, while being taken by the police on the ED's order to appear at a Lucknow PMLA Court in connection with the PMLA case with his three companions, AR fell unconscious on the floor of the vehicle (he said he suffered a heart attack). While the other three were taken to Lucknow District Jail, AR was taken to a nearby primary health centre at Chandoli (Agra) for first aid. There, he was referred to Agra District Hospital where the duty doctor was angry with the security staff for transporting a critical cardiac patient without proper treatment. He was referred to SN Hospital Agra for further treatment. At SN Hospital, AR told the doctor about his medical condition and that he wished to be referred to AIIMS and not to Lucknow for further treatment. In the meantime, the Special PMLA court at Lucknow simultaneously directed the Mathura District Jail to ensure proper treatment. After the court directive and reference from the SN hospital for further treatment, AR was taken back to Mathura jail for securing orders from jail authorities before proceeding to Delhi. However, at the jail gate, he was refused entry by the Jailer and Jail Superintendent as they argued that his condition was serious. Finally, he was allowed entry at around 3 am on 23 August and admitted to the hospital ward.

In a press conference held shortly after by his family in Delhi, AR's lawyer stated that he had filed three applications (between December 2020 and May 2021) asking for proper medical care, but no directions were given by the concerned court. AR's lawyer then filed a writ petition in the Allahabad High Court in late July 2021 to facilitate his treatment in AIIMS, but it too languished without being heard. However, since AR continued to be confined in the hospital ward of Mathura Jail after his aborted journey to Lucknow, his lawyer moved yet another application before the High Court with two urgent demands: one, that the permission for the surgical procedure at AIIMS be expedited; two, that the jail authorities furnish a proper medical report on AR's condition in the hospital ward. The Allahabad High Court heard the matter in November 2021 and noted that the jail authorities had claimed before the Special PMLA court—which had intervened and was monitoring AR's follow-up—that the reason for the delay was because the authorities were awaiting sanction from the Inspector General, Prison Administration and Reform Services, for the expenditure required for the surgical intervention (a sum of Rs. 2 lakhs as well as 10 units of blood).

*In its order of November 23, 2021, the Allahabad High Court noted, “In spite of repeated orders dated 23.09.2021 and 12.10.2021 passed by Sessions Judge/Special Court, PMLA, Lucknow, which have been brought on record to this criminal misc. urgency and interim directions application but till date, the adequate medical facility has not been provided to the first petitioner.” It directed the AGA (Advocate General for the State of Uttar Pradesh) to take immediate and necessary action. Because of this enabling order, AR was admitted to AIIMS on November 25, 2021. On November 27, he underwent an open-heart surgery for valve replacement. While the police tried to get him discharged as soon as possible, he stayed for 29 days in AIIMS. He was then taken back to Mathura jail.*

*In December 2021, after the NIA took over the UAPA case, a local Mathura court transferred the case to Lucknow. Since the PMLA case was already registered before a special court in Lucknow, the jail transfer of all four from Mathura to Lucknow District Court was to happen in mid-December 2021. However, AR was shifted to Lucknow Jail on April 22, 2022, months after his three companions, obviously because he was undergoing surgery in AIIMS. On March 6, 2022, AR showed paralysis symptoms while he was alone in the hospital ward in Mathura. The jail doctor took him to the District Hospital which referred him to AIIMS. He was admitted to the Emergency in AIIMS and treated there for two days. His family also arrived but they were not allowed to be near his bed. When he had somewhat recovered, the police got him discharged and he was returned to Mathura Jail. His family was not told about his discharge.*

*Importantly, when he was transferred to Lucknow Jail in April 2022, AR pointed out that the transfer was carried out without proper judicial sanction from Lucknow ED court, the court which had intervened in his treatment and had recommended necessary medical follow up. He said that instead of the PMLA court, he was produced before the NIA/ATS court and was easily shifted to Lucknow District Jail as the judge agreed that his treatment was going fine. His family and lawyer were not informed.*



*Despite telling the Lucknow Jail authorities about his treatment in AIIMS and repeatedly telling them about the need for further follow ups in Delhi in August 2022, ( and the need for further medicines), he was not taken to AIIMS. Instead, after routine quarantine of 14 days, he was sent to the barracks. No proper medical check-up was done at the time of transfer from one jail to another.*

*On August 27, 2022, a year after his near-fatal crisis in the police van, AR suffered a paralytic attack in Lucknow jail. Importantly, since he was dependent on his medicines, his attack happened two days after his regular medicine dose got over. He was to be taken to KGMU hospital that morning, but he collapsed inside the jail premises. After primary treatment, he was taken to KGMU where he was fortunate to get treatment. However, he was taken back to jail within a few days without the knowledge of his family.*

*For a month and half, he suffered in Lucknow Jail hospital ward as he was unable to gain control over his muscle activities. Luckily, he survived and recovered.* Importantly, from the time of his entry till the time of his release, he was taken several times, at least twelve or thirteen, to KGMU but could not meet the doctor as the jail timings and hospital timings never matched. He inevitably arrived late and could not meet the doctor. Only once, in January 2023, when he was in the company of a high-profile prisoner (an ex-minister), he managed to meet the doctor and he got a further reference for a follow up at AIIMS. However, he was never taken to AIIMS.

## Prison and health facilities

According to a [2010 advisory](#) issued by the MHA (Ministry of Home Affairs), the Mathura and Lucknow jail authorities should have addressed Atikur Rahman's chronic condition as a "terminal illness" as the notification defines the term as "a medical term [meant] to describe an active and progressive illness that cannot be cured or adequately treated and that is reasonably expected to result in the death of the patient. It is also described as a malignant disease for which there is no cure and the prognosis is fatal. As defined by the American Cancer Society, "terminal illness is an irreversible illness that, without life-sustaining procedures, will result in death in the near future or a state of permanent unconsciousness from which recovery is unlikely. Some examples, among others, of terminal illnesses may include advanced cancer, advanced heart disease, full blown AIDS etc". A PUCL team which investigated the death of Kanchan Nannaware in January 2021 drew attention to this advisory as it noted that Yerawada jail authorities were aware in Jan-Feb 2020, a year before her death, that [Kanchan Nannaware was "terminally ill"](#). They did nothing to facilitate the recommended transplant or expedite her medical bail. She was left to die.

Atikur Rahman was lucky to have survived the denial of his routine medication for almost two months after arrest, an undiagnosed heart attack while traveling to an ED court in August 2021, a paralytic attack in Lucknow Jail in August 2022, and of course, the lack of proper medical care all through his incarceration. It must also be noted that because of the timely intervention of the Allahabad High Court in November 2021, he was taken to AIIMS, and he underwent an open-heart surgery for valve correction.

The extent of the spread of the pandemic in prisons has not been tabulated; perhaps, it will never be. But what is known is the lack of doctors, as shown by a [recent news report](#) regarding the number of doctors available for prisons in Madhya Pradesh as one for every 5500 inmates. Given the persistent state of health crises in prisons, it is surprising to note that the annual report on Prison Statistics prepared by the NCRB (National Crime Records Bureau) merely documents the types of 'natural' illnesses and provides no information on health infrastructure. The latest Prison Statistics Report ([2022](#)) records the kinds of illnesses which led to 1670 natural deaths in prison but gives no further information on the status of health facilities across 1330 prisons in the country (see Tables 8.2 and 8.3, PSI, 2022).

Notably, the [new Model Prison Act \(2023\)](#) has substituted the mandatory requirement for a doctor with the provisional understanding that "There may be a medical officer for every prison. If the post of the medical officer is vacant, then the medical officer or the doctor in-charge of the Government Hospital or the resident medical officer of the District Civil Hospital may act as the medical officer of the Sub-Jail or the District or Central Prison, as the case may be" (See Chapter V, sec 13).

At a time when there is global concern about vulnerability of prisoners, such a change in the new Act can only be speculated about.



### 3. Experiencing undertrial life

AR spent over a year and half in Mathura District Jail in a high security cell, in the general barracks and in the hospital ward, unlike in Lucknow where he spent more than most of his incarceration in the hospital ward. Hence, his account of Mathura is vivid and telling.

In 2018, a NHRC team visited Mathura District Jail for inspection, and it noted the abysmal conditions, compounded by severe overcrowding. Not only were many of the posts vacant, but the situation in the jail hospital was grim as it was “ill equipped” and the “number of beds” far fewer than the mandatory “five percent of the capacity or actual strength” of the Jail. The team found that the jail had never revised the daily allowances of Rs 40, 30, and 20, since 2011. AR’s experiences confirm these findings but also elaborate on how ‘terrorist’ undertrials are treated, and the continuing repression inside the barracks which inmates bear.

When AR and his companions were transferred to Mathura jail after the 25 days of quarantine in the local school, in Mathura Jail, the prison administration locked up all four in a single room called ‘tanhai’ (high security cell) which had a half bathroom built in the room. It was ordered by the Jail Superintendent that the room would remain locked all 24 hours and that food would be given from underneath the grill gate. Because of protest (see next section, Resistance and Repression), they were soon shifted to an overcrowded barrack. There was no space to shift or stretch. Only a durree was provided which had to be folded for sleeping because of lack of space. Each person was supposed to get 8 rotis for lunch and dinner but they would often get 5 or 6 rotis. Breakfast would be daliya or chana boiled or buns, but the quality of the food was abysmal. Daily newspapers were not provided; hence, for almost a month, AR and his companions were not aware that UAPA charges had been levelled against them. There was no contact with his family either.

**Based on his prison experiences at both jails, AR flagged the following conditions:**

- Every new inmate who was quarantined in Mathura Jail was either expected to pay 2500/- to the jail administration or was put to work in the quarantine area. This practice of taking money in lieu of labour was called 'ginthi' and it was not acknowledged officially. Those who couldn't afford were set to unnecessary and punishing labour, such as sweeping, chopping, hoeing beds, or wet mopping kuchha paths (dirt tracks) through the day till 4pm. They were paid nothing as this was 'mandatory labour' for their quarantine.

- Mathura Jail has a hospital inside the premises with two duty doctors (employed on contract basis) and one pharmacist. Since AR stayed nearly eight months in the Hospital ward, he observed how the financially or politically strong patients were given beds on payment basis (2500/- per bed). The entire process of admission and treatment was well-oiled through a corrupt system of taking money. AR said that he saw those who came from underprivileged backgrounds or those connected with cow slaughter or smuggling cases were beaten and tortured in the hospital ward. Likewise, addicts were beaten into submission. Hence, medical officials colluded with the police insofar as they either were partisan towards well-off prisoners or vindictive towards those who were hated. The common chronic ailments which AR noted were related to mental disorders, kidney problems, skin infections apart from cancer and heart diseases.

- In Lucknow jail, AR felt that the delay involved in taking a patient from jail to hospital was both bureaucratic and deliberate. It was bureaucratic as delay is built into the jail system: jail takes time to process applications, to find officials and vehicles for taking an inmate to hospital. It was deliberate as AR noticed that important prisoners were given 'speedy' treatment. In this regard, he was lucky to have been in the company of an ex-minister while being taken to KGMU hospital. The entire health process was an ordeal for AR's family as they were not informed about his health status, but had to bear all medical expenses, outside of hospital stay and procedures.

## 4. Resistance and Repression

Atikur Rahman described himself as a 'social activist' who was an active participant in the anti-CAA protests of 2019-2020, and whose decision to go to Hathras was fuelled by a similar activist need (even when he did not personally know Siddique Kappan). Hence, behind bars, AR was not willing to give up protesting patent acts of injustice. But as his narration shows, AR realized that the success rate of protest strategies behind bars is much lower as jail officials use diverse techniques of intimidation and attacks. Not surprisingly, Mathura jail does not have a history of protests even though, in 2014, general inmates protested the VIP culture accorded to a gangster, Rajesh Sharma, alias Taunta.

AR and his companions were unwilling to agree to the repressive measures adopted by the jail administration against them. At the 'tanhai' cell, all four went on a hunger strike to protest their 24-hour lock-in and the fact of unwashed dishes on which food would be dumped. The warders and watches abused them. But the four refused to bow down and AR was their spokesperson. The Jailor unsuccessfully tried to get some Muslim convict warders to 'explain' to them to eat. Finally, when the jailor's aide came to intervene, AR placed three conditions: one, the gate should be opened as per jail manual rules; two, the belongings that were intercepted at the time of entry should be returned; three, the money that families had given for them should be returned. In no time, the whole matter was resolved after the jailor arrived. They were also shifted to the barracks.

Sometime in January 2021, AR protested the poor quality of the morning daliya. A farmer's son, he could recognize the insect-ridden daliya that was served, and despite entreaties from other inmates and intimidation from the convict warders, he took a 'sample' to the Jailor for inspection. On his way to the jailor's office, he had an altercation with the head warder who tried to prevent him. But AR refused to relent. The Deputy Jailor told AR and his companions to learn by cooking their daliya (which AR felt was a fair proposal) but matters got complicated as the Circle Head complained against AR's netagiri.

Consequently, all four were forced to work for the whole day in the kitchen. Finally, after the Superintendent came, the punishment ended. AR was welcomed in the barrack by other inmates. Interestingly, the following day AR was called to the office of the deputy jailor where he was given a chair and was shown relevant case papers. He was allowed to contact his lawyer from the office. The 'daliya' also improved somewhat.

Again, sometime in March/April 2021, AR took up the matter of food quality and demonstrated to an inspection officer the rotten quality of spinach that was served for lunch. However, matters turned difficult as the jailor called him to find out about the complaint. And, in front of him, the convict writer and warder were beaten. This incident caused him to rethink his strategy of raising issues as it could lead to others being beaten.

The two accounts of protests over food provide critical reflections on how prison authorities deny and repress prisoners. On the one hand, it is patently clear from the NHRC 2018 jail visit that Mathura Jail has had endemic issues of cleanliness and lack of facilities in the kitchen, and the report noted that there were "no procedures to measure food quality and quantity" (see S 7 of the report). The report has had no effect as two years later, in his letter from jail, in July 2020, Dr Kafeel Khan, had said that prisoners, were served only "watery dal and boiled vegetables". Hence, it can be seen, that despite official concern, prison food continued to remain below nutritious levels. But what the two incidents also show is how the jail authorities use age-old repressive tactics to deflect attention from problems raised by prisoners. Besides the standard punishment of forcing prisoners to work in the kitchen in a bid to make them earn their bread, there is the other method of compelling agitating prisoners to witness beating of fellow prisoners in a bid to make them withdraw their protests. Both methods are effective.

### Profit, Penitentiary and Piety

The grim irony with which Mathura Jail has been carrying out food reforms can be gauged from the fact that in October 2021, a news item reported that the jail authorities were mulling over a proposal of creating a 'jail-themed' restaurant outside its premises in order to enable and rehabilitate prisoners who had served their full term, and to create variety for consumers who “are curious about life inside jail and many want to taste prison food because of astrological beliefs”. The proposal was mooted by the “Uttar Pradesh Apradh Nirodhak Samiti, a semi-government organisation, [which has] an aim to provide employment to rehabilitate inmates after their term ends and to let people have a glimpse of the life inside”.

Amazingly, the Chairman of the Samiti, Umesh Sharma said that “The ambience of the restaurant will be in keeping with the jail theme. The entrance will be designed like a prison gate and the interiors will comprise prison cells with dining tables and chairs. Handcuffs, waiters in prisoners' uniforms, red lights and other fixtures will be added to give an authentic look of the jail.” The project, estimated to cost Rs 25 lakh, will also have a home delivery system. Sharma said “Mathura is the best district to launch such a project as it attracts people from across the world due to its association with Lord Krishna, who was also born in prison.”

## 5. 'High-Security' Carceral Ambitions

Atikur Rahman and his companions were lodged in what is called 'tanhai' or a cell meant for high-risk prisoners. The possible reason for keeping them in this cell and not in the mulahiiza ward (where newcomers are lodged) was because of the nature of the offence for which they were incarcerated. In the last thirty years, jail architecture and carceral terminology have undergone a shift to include newer wards/cells/barracks meant for 'high-risk' prisoners, be it the Maharashtra anda cells where Prashant Rahi was incarcerated, or Mathura's tanhai where AR and others were lodged.

India has, as per the Prison Statistics India, 2022, a total of 1330 prisons of various kinds ("574 Sub Jails, 428 District Jails, 148 Central Jails, 91 Open Jails, 42 Special Jails, 34 Women Jails, 10 Borstal Schools and 3 Other than the above Jails"). But the new high-risk prison envisaged in the outskirts of Delhi is technologically different and is part of the new carceral vision, entitled "Modernization of Prisons", which entails, what a circular of the Ministry of Home Affairs says, "a project for a period of five years starting from FY 2021-22, for using modern-day security equipments in Prisons and to facilitate the task of reformation of prisoners, including setting up of High Security Prisons in some States". News items have reported that for decongesting Delhi's Tihar Jail and for ensuring better security for high-risk prisoners, a new "high-security prison" will be built in Narela and the total land area earmarked will be 40.2 acres. The project is estimated to cost 140 crores of which the Centre will bear the costs for 100 crores. The draft prison model suggests pioneering use of technology as there will be round-the-clock automatic security system, eight watch towers, and surveillance control rooms. The Director General (Prisons) said that the construction of the cells will be such that there will be minimum interaction between prisoners and that the jail will have "in-built jammers inside the wards". The complex will have 20-meter-high walls to prevent inflow of contraband items. Video-conferencing facilities, solitary confinement cells, and medical and administrative blocks are all envisaged in this plan.



*How will such high-security prisons affect prisoner rights can be speculated but such an arrangement will minimize, if not erase, court visits and hearings. It is not clear whether the video conferencing will be connected to external courts or whether an entire court complex will be created inside the jail. The erasure of court visits will have long term effects on prisoner rights in raising matters before the court physically. Likewise, it will surely make family visits and handing over of food or medicine items more arduous as there will be greater security and bureaucratic check-ins.*

*But what is baffling is the historical vision that has been outlined in news report for the new Delhi high-security prison. It is said that the design will be modelled along the lines of the colonial Cellular Jail in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. It bears remembering that in May 2023, the Government's Press Information Bureau (PIB) had lauded the Prime Minister and the Home Minister's decision to "review and revise colonial-era outdated Prison Act in tune with contemporary modern day needs and correctional ideology." The PIB circular said that the pre-Independence Act was guided by the colonial vision of "keeping criminals in custody" and which had no provision for reform or rehabilitation of prisoners. The new prison Act ("Model Prison and Correctional Services Act, 2023) is apparently designed to meet the newer needs of reform and rehabilitation. Without speculating on how high-security prisons are envisaged within this plan of reform and rehab, it is worth asking why a colonial jail built well over a century ago, and a jail which was meant to discipline and punish recalcitrant prisoners, should be the model architectural blueprint for a present-day carceral facility? Is it a case of selective amnesia or is it that the colonial penal inheritance continues to have a profound impact on our understanding of crime and punishment?*