

Sanjay Dutt gets six years RI, to appeal in Supreme Court

Nemesis came calling on Bollywood star Sanjay Dutt Tuesday when a special court sentenced him to six years' rigorous imprisonment for being in possession of 'dangerous weapons' in the 1993 [Mumbai](#) bombings case - bringing the curtain down on one of the world's longest-running terror trials.

A stunned Dutt was taken into custody and sent to the Arthur Road Jail as his lawyers declared they will immediately petition the Supreme Court for a review.

Fittingly, the last day of the 14-year-trial was packed with drama, as anti-terror TADA judge P.D.Kode turned down the 48-year-old Dutt's tearful pleas for leniency but allowed him to speak to his daughter in the US.

'Though the crime was not brutal, cruel, ghastly, inhuman, not anti-social, and not immoral and did not result in any harm to anyone, it was still a serious offence as the accused had encouraged others to break the law,' Kode told the courtroom.

Dutt, on whose shoulders rides about a billion rupees in investment from the Indian film industry, was also fined Rs.25,000 by Kode, who had been conducting the trial into the serial blasts that killed 257 people and injured many hundreds.

Kode, who had absolved the son of cinema icons Sunil and Nargis Dutt of terror charges but convicted him under the Arms Act, disregarded the actor's plea for leniency under the Probation of Offenders Act (PoA) for good behaviour during the trial period and refused to extend his bail.

After the sentence, Satish Manesinde, senior counsel for the actor, said a petition reviewing the sentence would be filed at the Supreme Court. 'It will be done without further delay. We will move it any day.'

In an emotion-laden moment, judge Kode permitted the actor, who has already spent 16 months in prison, to take a call from his daughter Trishala in the US and meet his family in prison, where he will be kept away from hardened criminals.

He did heed the star's request that he be sent to the Arthur Road jail along with his friend Yusuf Nulwala - amongst the last four men whose sentencing was read Tuesday.

Dutt, who heard the judge pronounce his fate with his head bowed low, appealed to the court for some reprieve and time to surrender, but to no avail.

'I committed a mistake,' an unshaven Dutt, dressed in white shirt and blue jeans, said with folded hands. 'Please consider my case and permit me to surrender after a few days. I have a lot of family matters to take care of,' the actor said, adding that his sister, Congress MP Priya, was pregnant.

'Give me just two days and I will come back,' he pleaded, but Kode replied that he could not do so now.

'I have no power now after pronouncing the sentence. I have been very considerate with you and

allowed you to be on bail since you were convicted on Nov 28 last year.'

The judge had been equally stern earlier in the day when he ordered the sentencing of the actor, convicted for possessing a 9 mm pistol and an AK-56 rifle that had been given to him in January 1993 by members of the underworld.

'If you want to protect your family, you can take a lawful step. But an unlawful step for the purpose cannot be considered noble,' the judge said, responding to Dutt's plea that the weapons were for self-defence and to protect his family.

'He not only committed a crime himself but also made others commit a crime by asking them to destroy the weapon,' Kode added.

'I have conducted myself well for the last 14 years. You know me better than even my family knows me,' an emotional Dutt told Kode.

Lawyers for Dutt, one of India's highest paid actors who starred in recent hits such as 'Lage Raho Munnabhai' and 'Shootout at Lokhandwala', said they were appealing against the sentence in the Supreme Court immediately.

Nulwala, one of Sanjay's three associates in the case, was given five years for destroying the AK-56 rifle. Kersi Adajenia was sentenced to two years on the same charge. But Rusi Mulla was given probation with a bond of Rs.100,000 and a surety of the same amount. He was directed not to leave Mumbai.

The four were the last of the 100 to be sentenced by the court, which took 10 months to complete the process from verdict to sentencing - sending 12 people to the gallows and giving life to 20.

Manesinde told IANS: 'We are saddened by the sentence like every person in the country. All his family members, friends, relatives and well wishers feel that the verdict was too harsh.'

He maintained that the actor's sentencing would not in any way jeopardise his relationship with the Bollywood film industry.

'Sanjay's producers and directors were informed well in advance of his likely predicament and they all resolved to stand by him, as they did when he was in custody in 1993 and 1995.'

'They have not asked for any refund (of advance money paid to him for projects) or expressed any reservation over the possibility of Sanjay's sentencing,' Manesinde said.

Bunty Walia, a long-time friend of the actor who usually accompanies Sanjay Dutt to court, was crest-fallen.

'This is not what he deserved. The sentence was very harsh. We had a lot of hope that he would be granted probation,' Walia said outside the high-security Arthur Jail, leaning against Dutt's white Toyota car, as it dawned on him that Sanjay would not be accompanying him back home this time.

Dutt's sentence shocked many in the film industry.

'I think film producers must be in a state of shock. Apparently Rs.1 billion was riding on his shoulders. It is too early to predict anything about his career after six years,' trade analyst Taran Adarsh told IANS.

Veteran Malayalam superstar Mammooty expressed his regret: 'Even though before law all are equal, I sincerely feel that this should not have happened to Sanjay Dutt.'

'I am heartbroken. Whatever punishment has been meted out far exceeds the error. People have forgotten the atmosphere at the time of error (the riots that followed the Babri Masjid demolition in 1992). We were under constant threats,' said yesteryear actress Saira Banu, who is a close family friend.

'Sanju rescued injured people from the streets even when bullets were flying and took them to the hospital. People make errors in such situations. My god, what a punishment!' she added tearfully.

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