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National Conference on 'Criminal Activities and Radicalization in Jails'

Recently, a National Conference on '**Criminal Activities and Radicalization in Jails: Vulnerability of Inmates and Jail Staff and their Protection**' was held in New Delhi.

- The **two-day** conference was organized by the **Bureau of Police Research and Development (BPR&D)**.
- The conference will **focus** on the following issues:
 - To consider vulnerabilities at individual and gang levels and to suggest safety measures for the same.
 - To understand various facets of radicalization as well as de-radicalization in prisons.
 - To analyze and formulate the security and protection standards for prison staff.
 - To provide an interdisciplinary platform for correctional personnel to exchange and share their experience on prison reforms.
- The conference enforced an aspect of "**Correctional Administration**" in **Prison reforms**.

Correctional Administration

- A program that prepares individuals to plan and manage institutional facilities and programs for housing and rehabilitating prisoners in the public and/or private sectors.
- Correctional Administration includes:
 - Programme of the welfare of convicts/undertrials
 - Rehabilitation after release.
 - Involvement of Community.
- It also emphasized to convert **the prison as a centre of reformation**.
- **Challenges** addressed during the conference include:
 - Aggravation of sufferings during the process of imprisonment.

- Rehabilitating and streamlining convicts back into society,
- Overcrowding in prisons,
- A large number of under-trials,
- Inadequate prison infrastructure,
- Criminal activities and radicalization in jails,
- Safety of women prisoners and their young children,
- Shortage of funds and staff for proper prison administration.

Rights of Prisoners

- **Article 21** of Indian Constitution enforces **“Right to Life”** as a Fundamental Right.
- The Imprisonment itself is a punishment for a convicted person thus **prison conditions should not be an additional punishment.**
- Imprisonment deprives someone of their **liberty and impacts on certain other rights, such as freedom of movement**, but human rights and fundamental freedoms of convicts shall not be restricted.

Prison Administration in India

- **Article 39(A)** of Indian Constitution states that State shall ensure **Equal Justice and Free Legal Aid for poor.**
- Prisons being a **State subject**, its modernisation is undertaken by respective State Governments.
- In a number of judgements on various aspects of prison administration, **the Supreme Court of India has laid down three broad principles:**
 - A person in prison does not become a non-person.
 - A person in prison is entitled to all human rights within the limitations of imprisonment.
 - There is no justification in aggravating the suffering already inherent in the process of incarceration.
- **The Ministry of Home Affairs** is supporting the States/UTs in implementing the **E-Prisons Project** and has issued the **Model Prison Manual.**
 - **E-Prisons Project.**
 - It aims to introduce efficiency in prison management through digitization.
 - It supplements the **Prisoner Information Management system (PIMS)**, which provides a **centralized approach for recording and managing prisoner information.**
 - **Model Prison Manual**
 - It mentions Legal Aid, provides detailed information about the legal services available to prison inmates and also free legal services available to them.
 - It is intended to provide assistance to under trial prison inmates.

- **The National Legal Services Authority (NALSA)** had also launched a web application to facilitate the **under trial prisoners** for providing them with **free legal services**.

Source: PIB

Jan Soochna Portal

The State Government of Rajasthan has recently launched the first-ever **public information portal** named "**Jan Soochna Portal-2019**".

- The portal aims to **provide information** to the public about government authorities and departments empowering them with access to useful information.
- The portal was developed by the government officials in close collaboration with the IT professionals and civil society groups.
- It initially gives information of about **13 government departments** on a **single platform**.
- Information related to the availability of food grains & ration shops, **implementation of schemes** and their beneficiaries, land records and social security pensions, inter alia, will be available on a **real-time basis** on this platform.
- **Information kiosks** in *village panchayats* and **self-service e-Mitra centres** in the towns will be established to enable the people to access the information.
- The Department of Information Technology will serve as the **nodal department** for the development, operationalization, and maintenance of the JSP.
 - The norms and standards are laid down through the digital dialogue by the **advisory group**. And, to ensure that the responsibilities are carried out smoothly, the advisory group will be the **monitoring agency**.
 - **Grievance redressal** officers will be appointed so that citizens can keep a check upon the accountability aspect of the State government.
- The launch of this portal is in accordance with the true spirit of the **Right to Information (RTI) Act** and ensures compliance with **Section 4(2) of the RTI Act** that mandates the public authorities to **proactively disclose information** in the public domain.

Right to Information (RTI) Act

- RTI Act was enacted in **2005** with the aim to secure the citizens' access to information which is under the control of public authorities.
- The primary purpose behind this enactment was to promote **transparency** and **accountability** in the working of every public authority.
- **Section 4** of the RTI Act requires **suo-moto disclosure of information** by each public authority.
- In 2018, an amendment was proposed to the RTI Act that aimed at giving the Central

government the power to fix the tenure and salaries of state and central information commissioners, which are statutorily protected under the RTI Act.

The proposed move may dilute the autonomy and independence of Information Commissioners.

Benefits

- Jan Soochna Portal (JSP) is a **remarkable achievement** in advancing the Right to Information (RTI).

Now, the people would not need to file applications separately under the law to obtain information. They could **freely** access the information publicly

- JSP is unique for it ensures both- transparency accompanied by accountability.

Challenges

- The **digital divide** is a serious problem in India. To bridge this gap, utmost care must be taken to ensure that access points are open and free for all.
- There are huge challenges with regard to the **maintenance** issues and ensuring that there is **no abatement in the availability** of information.

Way Forward

- The need is to host the JSP in **decentralized locations**, right down to the municipal ward and panchayat levels. This will ensure that people have access to welfare schemes, revenue activities such as mining, and other service delivery issues such as health and education.
- The portal would eventually turn out to be an effective medium for the digital dialogue with the people as well as a strong instrument for ensuring transparency in governance.
- The need of the hour is that other State governments must follow the Rajasthan government's pioneering initiative and make people, including the marginalized sections, a part of the governance process.

Source: TH
