

## Ombudsman chides Punjab over slow pace of jail reforms

78,160 prisoners in 89 jails across Pakistan

By Our Staff Reporter

ISLAMABAD: Federal Ombudsman Syed Tahir Shahbaz on Tuesday expressed annoyance over slow progress in the implementation of jail reforms in Punjab and for not allowing the members of district oversight committees (DOCs) to visit jails.

Presiding over a meeting on the implementation of jail reforms recommendations in line with the directives of the Supreme Court, the ombudsman directed the representatives of three other provinces to submit by March 15 the reports on jail visits by DOC members.

An official of the federal ombudsman's office told *Dawn* that they were required to submit the report on the implementation of jail reforms recommendations to the apex court on March 18.

The ombudsman had ordered all the provinces to constitute DOCs in each district — comprising renowned members from all walks of life — to monitor implementation measures.

Senior adviser to the ombudsman Hafiz Ahsaan Ahmed Khokhar informed the participants of the meeting that presently there were 78,160 prisoners in 89 jails of the country against their capacity of 56,353 prisoners.

Giving a break-up, the adviser said that there were 25,195 convicts, 48,780 under-trial prisoners, 1,955 women and 1,225 juvenile prisoners, besides 4,688 condemned prisoners in these jails.

According to an official handout, a representative of the home department of Punjab informed the meeting that they were still working to finalise the terms of reference and standard operating procedure (SOP) for the DOC members, and in this respect, prison rules were being modified for their visit to jails.

Expressing concern over the slow progress in the implementation of jail reforms, the ombudsman said he would not tolerate the casual attitude of the prisons and home departments of Punjab as he had to submit a

quarterly implementation report to the apex court. He directed them to submit the ToR and SOP to his office within a week and finalise it within 15 days.

He said that since all the recommendations to constitute the DOCs had been framed after consultations with all IG prisons, no delay in the implementation of jail reforms recommendations would be tolerated. He also said that no hindrance would be accepted in the visit of the DOC members to jails.

The representatives of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Sindh and Balochistan prisons informed the meeting that they had constituted the DOCs and also received the reports of their first visits.

The KP representative informed the ombudsman that they had appointed one psychiatrist and a doctor in all jails of the province.

The ombudsman asked the representatives of the other provinces to replicate the action of the KP government and appoint a psychiatrist in each jail.

The representative of the Punjab government said they had formulated the Juvenile Justice System Act under which separate juvenile courts would be established and all juvenile jails in the province had been declared as schools.

He said that approval for the construction of jails in Chakwal, Chiniot and Khushab had already been accorded. He also informed the meeting that the construction of one more jail each in Lahore and Rawalpindi had also been approved.

A senior joint secretary of the interior ministry said that the construction of Islamabad district jail was under way.

Balochistan IG prisons Malik Mohammad Yousaf presented a horrible picture of the jails in the province, saying that out of the 11 prisons, Mach and Sibi jails were mud-constructed, whereas Loralai jail was constructed in 1884. He said that the health condition of the prisoners was also very poor and there were 181 patients with HIV (aids) and HCV (hepatitis). He said that one doctor each had been appointed in Quetta and Mach jails.

The ombudsman directed the representatives of all the provinces to ensure the presence of doctors in jails and assured them that medicines would be arranged with the help of philanthropists.