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## President suggests use of zakat to release inmates with unpaid fines

***\* Recalling his days as political prisoner, Mamnoon says prisoners are subjected to physical punishment and are meted out treatment that hurts their self-respect***

**ISLAMABAD:** President Mamnoon Hussain suggested on Wednesday that use of zakat could be considered for securing release on bail of prisoners who had served their terms but were still languishing in jails for inability to pay fines.

He made these remarks at a ceremony held for presentation of a report by the Prison Reforms Committee.

The president noted that the modern concept of imprisonment was meant to serve as an opportunity to improve spiritual and physical health of prisoners.

He also stressed the need for ethical and moral reform of prisoners, saying that such measures could help control crime rate in the country besides preparing prisoners to be effective members of the society.

Reforms in the country's prison system were inevitable for this to happen, he added. He noted that prison reforms undertaken in other parts of the world were a true reflection of Islamic teachings and Pakistan should not lag behind in introducing similar reforms. Prisons can be transformed into reforms centres, he said.

"The basic purpose of imprisonment should be to change mindsets. This is possible through good treatment and training of prisoners serving sentences," he said.

Hussain said that being a political worker, he had experienced incarceration. "I have personally observed conditions at our prisons," he noted, "Prisoners are not only subjected to physical punishment but are also meted out treatment that hurts their self-respect."

Hussain said such experiences must leave a debilitating impact on prisoners' psyche and give rise of feelings of revenge. "Such incarceration was of no use since it was resulting only in alienation of a certain segment of the society. Far from being beneficial, it was actually quite counter-productive," he added.

The ceremony was attended by Federal Ombudsman Salman Faruqi; Head of the Prison Reforms Committee Ejaz Ahmed Qureshi; former information secretary Syed Anwar Mehmood; National Commission for Human Development (NCHD) chairman Senator Razina Alam Khan; Higher Education Commission Chairman Dr Mukhtar Ahmed; Allama Iqbal Open University Vice Chancellor Dr Shahid Siddiqui; COMSATS University Executive Director Dr S M Junaid Zaidi; industrialist Sardar Yasin Malik; patron-in-chief of Pakistan Sweet Homes Zammurd Khan; and National Book Foundation Managing Director Dr Inamul Haq Javed. Separately, President Mamnoon Hussain said that the incidence of fatal diseases could be reduced by raising awareness among the public about principles of hygiene. He urged relevant government departments and medical organisations to play a role in this regard.

He was speaking to World Federation of Neurology chairman Dr Muhammad Wasay.

The president expressed concerns on reports about rapid rise in number of people suffering brain stroke, saying that government and private sector should come together to raise awareness about the causes of the disease and work jointly to improve treatment facilities.

Hussain welcomed the decision to observe July 22 as World Brain Day.