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770 Hepatitis, 22 AIDS patients in Sindh jails

Only Rs120 per month fixed for prisoners' medical treatment

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KARACHI - Medical tests, conducted during present tenure in all the jails of Sindh, proved that at least 770 prisoners are suffering from Hepatitis while 22 from HIV/AIDS.

Meanwhile, the Sindh government has planned to extend the facility of primary schools in all the jails of Sindh to reform the characters of prisoners as primary schools in 14 jails are already working. Minister for Jails Haji Muzaffar Ali Shujrah informed this during question answer session of Sindh Assembly on Monday. The supplementary questions of the provincial legislatures were restricted only to three questions and majority of queries could not be taken up for supplementary questions.

The main question about the diseases among the prisoners were asked by PPP female member Humera Alwani which took almost over half an hour of the question hour.

Shujrah informed that medical tests of 10,000 prisoners were conducted during March this year which was the joint effort of the Islamabad and provincial government as this was the first ever step taken for the betterment of

health of the prisoners.

He said that medical treatment was also being provided to the prisoners who were found positive of Hepatitis-C in government hospitals as these tests were also very expensive and each of this test costs Rs9,000 in Pakistan.

He said the prisoners who diagnosed positive in medical test, keep separated from the other inmates in the jails. Furthermore, government with the help of the philanthropists and NGOs has started awareness programme among the prisoners as preemptive measure from the dangerous diseases.

The lecture programme on good health have also been managed for the prisoners in Hyderabad, Karachi and other jails.

The minister pointed out that the main reasons of these diseases were usage of drugs as most of the offenders have become drug addicts while the jails staff was also involved in supplying drugs in jails.

Shujrah praised the steps being taken for the facilitation and betterment of the prisoners and expressed fear that jails could be good hostels due to these steps. The facilities such as pure water, tea, ghee and food were also being provided to the inmates.

Responding to the supplementary questions, he said the numbers of male prisoners were in majority who were diagnosed positive in these diseases while one female prisoner was diagnosed positive of HIV.

Minister said dispensaries were functioning in 22 jails while 2 doctors in each dispensary were remain present every time.

On this occasion, Minister for Sports Dr Muhammad Ali Shah offered free of cost medical tests of the prisoners who diagnosed positive of Hepatitis. He said that preventive measures were necessary for this disease as mostly people spend lot of money to cure Hepatitis.

Replying to a question Minister for Jails said that presently meagre amount of Rs120 fixed for the medical treatment of per prisoner for a month. He further said his department had already sent a request to the chief minister for enhancement in the prisoners' medical budget.

Shujrah informed that the increase in food budget per prisoner has been approved by the CM, which will be enforced from next financial year.

Minister further said 35 primary teachers were teaching the prisoners in primary schools of

14 jails of the province while same schools could not be started in remaining jails due to shortage of the teachers.

He pointed out that his department has already made a request to the CM for approval of the recruitment of 22 teachers in jails. He made it clear that these teachers would not under control of education department while these would recruited by the jails department.

To a question, he said government had provided education to prisoners to the level of primary education while for higher classes, the prisoners could sit in examinations at their own expenses.

He informed that government has also started vocational training and computer education for prisoners. In this regard, minister cited an example that a prisoner who was a computer expert, was teaching computer to other prisoners.

Shujrah also informed the House that his department has also approached the competent authority for raise in salaries of Jails staff and officers as the prime minister and Sindh government had already announced that the salaries of Sindh police would be raised to the level of salaries of Punjab police.