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HC: Install user-friendly software in prison kiosks

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Madurai: Taking into account that details in the information kiosks in prisons are made available only in English and Hindi languages, the Madras high court has directed the authorities to install user-friendly software within four months, so that the prisoners can access the case details using the kiosks in their own language.

Justice N Sathish Kumar said that the superintendent of the district/ central prisons shall make a list of all eligible life convicts who are entitled for premature release. Such exercise shall be done once in every four months in January, May and September. Such identification shall be done every year without fail, so that the eligible convicts' fate will be decided by the advisory board.

The authorities shall ensure that whenever an order is passed by the state government rejecting the premature release, the said order should be communicated to the prisoners within a week, enabling them to take further action challenging the order of rejection of premature release, said the judge.

The judge further directed the district legal services authorities to appoint advocates who have sufficient practice in the criminal side to visit the jail and collect the materials. The appointment of legal aid counsel should not be made in a mechanical manner. Only after proper assessment of the ability of the lawyers to handle the situation by interacting with the prisoners to collect the details, the appointment should be made.

The court was hearing the petition filed in 2020 by Rathinam, a resident of Andipatti in Theni district who sought for compensation as his son Chokkar was kept under illegal confinement for more than nine months at the Madurai Central Prison despite the fact that the HC had acquitted him in 2019.

The court passed the directions after taking into consideration the recommendations submitted by the petitioner's counsel Henri Tiphagne, to avoid such mistakes in future, which would affect the liberty of the prisoners.

The judge took note of the fact that disciplinary action had been initiated against the then superintendent of Madurai Central Prison. However, the further action against the erring officials is not reflected in the counter affidavit filed by the authorities. The judge sought a status report in this regard. On the compensation for illegal custody, the same will be decided later, said the judge.