



Undertrials Freed to Decongest Jails

Why in News

According to the **National Legal Services Authority (NALSA)**, around **11,077 undertrials have been released** from prisons nationwide as **part of the mission to decongest jails following the [Covid-19 pandemic](#)**.

Key Points

- NALSA has been providing **assistance to prisoners who are eligible to be released on parole or interim bail** under the relaxed norms, through its panel of lawyers.
 - The **[Supreme Court has ordered all States and Union Territories to set up high-level panels](#)** which would consider releasing all convicts who have been jailed for upto seven years on parole to decongest jails in an attempt to contain the Covid-19 outbreak.
 - The Bench suggested that **undertrials awaiting for offences entailing maximum sentence of seven years** also be extended a similar benefit.
- Local legal services authorities are actively assisting the high-level panels for identifying undertrials who could be released on bail during the present scenario.
- Till now, responses received from 232 districts reflect that **around 11,077 undertrials and 5,981 convicts have been released**.

National Legal Services Authority

- **Statutory Body:** It has been constituted under the **Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987** to provide free legal services to the **weaker sections of the society** and to organize Lok Adalats (an **[alternative dispute redressal mechanism](#)**) for amicable settlement of disputes.
 - **Section 12** of the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987 prescribes the criteria for giving legal services to the eligible persons.
- **In line with Constitutional Provisions:**
 - **Article 39A** of the Constitution of India provides that State shall secure that the operation of the legal system promotes justice on a basis of equal opportunity, and shall in particular, provide free legal aid, by suitable legislation or schemes or in any other way, to ensure that opportunities for securing justice are not denied to any citizen by reason of economic or other disability.
 - **Articles 14 and 22(1)** also make it obligatory for the State to ensure **equality before law** and a legal system which **promotes justice on a basis of equal opportunity to all**.
- **Chairman:** The **Chief Justice of India is the Patron-in-Chief** and the **second senior most Judge of the Supreme Court of India** is the **Executive Chairman of the Authority**.
- **At State and District Level:** State Legal Services Authority has been constituted to give effect to the policies and directions of the NALSA. In every District, the District Legal Services Authority has been constituted to implement legal services programmes in the district.
- It can be noted that the role played by NALSA and its networks is very much relevant to achieving the **[Sustainable Development Goal-16](#)**, which seeks to "**Promote peaceful and inclusive**

societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels".

[Source: TH](#)

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