

CORRUPTION BEHIND BARS: ONLY 3 CASES AGAINST TN PRISON EMPLOYEES IN 8 YRS

Activists say lack of public outcry, opaque functioning reasons for under-reporting of rampant corruption in prisons in the state

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THE state government's anti-corruption agency, Directorate of Vigilance and Anti-Corruption (DVAC) has registered 2,400 cases against government officials since 2016, but only three of them are against employees of the Prisons department, official data shows.

The latest case in the prisons department was registered last week against a jail superintendent, former jailor and an administrative officer of Madurai central prison after a nudge by the Madras HC. The other two cases were in 2018 - against an official of Salem prison and Puzhal prison.

DVAC's own statistics published on its websites erroneously show an even worse figure, indicating it has registered only one inquiry against a prison of-

ficial in the last eight years.

This comes at a time when complaints of corruption in prisons are being raised regularly; in 2020, a DIG reportedly sent a circular to all heads of jails with a list of corrupt practices, warning them of action. In comparison, the DVAC has probed at least 350 police personnel for corruption since 2016 while the number is several times higher in rural development, revenue and registration departments.

Activists and experts working with prisoners say this is definitely not because of lack of corruption. KR Raja, an advocate and prison reforms activist from Madurai, said bribes are rampant in prisons department, especially for postings and transfers. "Nobody bothers about prisons as there is a perception that people inside jails are sinners and hence don't deserve any



STORY IN NUMBERS

TOTAL CORRUPTION CASES BOOKED BY DVAC 2016-17 TO 2023-24

2,400

Against Prisons department officials 3

OFFICIALS UNDER INVESTIGATION BY DVAC SINCE 2016

1	350	1,000
Prison	Police	Revenue

Rural development 2,000

justice. If public funds are swindled from a scheme for farmers or the rural poor, officers will be afraid of a public outcry," Raja said, remarking "correctional services had become corruption service".

Henri Tiphagne, advocate and executive director of NGO People's Watch, said prisons is a closed system with no auditing by external agencies. "The prison manual prescribes official and non-official visits. But that

doesn't happen. Apart from the IPS officer at the top, rest all are drawn from the prison cadre. One person can't reform the system," he said. Echoing the same sentiments, advocate S Valliammal said if DVAC were to perform a surprise check, the entire prison's official setup would be tipped off when the sleuths enter the premises.

Raja prescribed regular inspections by the district collectors, SPs and other officials to prisons to bring in greater transparency. Tiphagne recommended periodic audits.

DVAC sources declined to comment when contacted.