Support to Poor Prisoners scheme

Prelims: *Current events of national and international importance | Schemes*

Why in news?

The Centre has updated its guidelines to assist poor prisoners who are unable to pay fines, arrange sureties, and in light of the unsatisfactory response from States and Union Territories.

- **Launched in –** 2023, a ***centrally sponsored scheme***.
- **Nodal Ministry –** Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)
- **Aim –** To provide financial aid to disadvantaged inmates who can't afford bail or court-imposed fines, helping with their release.
- **Implemented through –** State/UT Empowered Committees with funds channelled via the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB).

Key Features

- **Support Provided –** Payment of fines imposed by courts, assistance in arranging sureties for bail.
- **Target Group –** Prisoners from ***economically weaker sections*** who have completed their sentence but remain imprisoned due to unpaid fines or inability to arrange bail.
- **Local Committees –** District-level "Empowered Committees" (DC/DM, DLSA Secretary, SP, Jail Superintendent) assess and sanction aid.
- **Financial Assistance –** After verifying the prisoner's financial status, the committee may sanction ***up to Rs 25,000 for a convicted person & Rs 40,000 for undertrials*** to be deposited with the court to enable the prisoner's release
- Similar provisions apply to eligible undertrial prisoners.
- **District-level Empowered Committee –** Tasked with scrutinising and approving eligible cases.
- **Composition –** District-level committee will now include a nominee of the District Collector, the judge in charge of the prison, nominated by the District Judge.
- **Procedure for Convicted Prisoners –** If a prisoner cannot secure release due to non-payment of fine -
    - Jail Superintendent must inform the District Legal Services Authority (DLSA) Secretary within one week
    - DLSA Secretary verifies the prisoner's financial status
    - The case is recommended to the Empowered Committee
- **Exemption –**
- Does not apply to persons accused under

    - Prevention of Corruption Act
    - Prevention of Money Laundering Act
    - Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act (NDPS)
    - Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA)
    - Any other laws notified later.
- **Extended to heinous crimes –** including acts of terrorism, offences affecting national security, dowry deaths, rape, human trafficking, and offences under the POCSO Act.

References

1. The Hindu | Centre revises guidelines to help poor prisoners
2. Vikaspedia | Support to Poor Prisoners Scheme

