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Pranali Lotlikar | **Updated:** Friday, July 25, 2025, 02:18 AM IST



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Mumbai: The Maharashtra State Human Rights Commission (SHRC) has taken strong exception to the inhuman treatment and substandard conditions at Taloja Central Prison, raising concerns over dehumanising frisking procedures, overcrowding, food quality, hospital infrastructure, and CCTV protocol failures. Acting on multiple complaints, the SHRC has now initiated formal proceedings and directed the Chief Secretary of Maharashtra, the Additional Director General (ADG) and Inspector General (IG) of Prisons, Pune, and the Superintendent of Taloja Prison to file detailed replies within eight weeks.

A team led by SHRC Member Sanjay Kumar , Registrar Vijay Kedar and several others had visited Taloja Central Jail on June 18 following serious allegations about abusive frisking methods and the overall condition of the prison.

One of the most alarming findings relates to the method of body searches conducted on prisoners upon entry. The SHRC report states that prison officials admitted to requiring inmates to strip naked — including removal of undergarments — and bend over and cough inside a temporary enclosure to expose any contraband items hidden internally. This process, described by the Commission as “dehumanising, archaic, and degrading,” has no legal sanction and was deemed a gross violation of human dignity.

“In today’s era of technological advancement, such regressive methods are unacceptable,” the SHRC noted, recommending the urgent use of body scanners and other modern equipment to replace manual frisking.

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Taloja Central Prison, which became operational in 2008, was built to house 1,830 prisoners but is currently accommodating 2,155 inmates—an 18% excess. Although still lower than the overcrowding seen in other Maharashtra jails, the SHRC highlighted the strain this places on infrastructure and services.

The prison is divided into five circles, each with 16 barracks. However, several barracks, including those meant for high-security inmates and a 55-bed hospital, have been declared unfit for use, further intensifying overcrowding.

Out of the total prison population, only 116 are convicts; the vast majority are undertrials.

Further while speaking about the untrained prisoners forced to cook meals, the report says the prison kitchen, responsible for feeding over 2,100 inmates, is manned by 84 unskilled prisoners working in shifts. Cooking is done in cramped conditions, with night-shift inmates preparing breakfast the previous night. There is no designated dining area, and prisoners eat in their barracks. In a particularly disturbing incident, the jail superintendent revealed that when experienced inmate-cooks were released, the resulting meal was so poorly prepared that prisoners refused to eat it, leading to mass food wastage and rising tensions within the prison. "The state's policy of not sanctioning posts for professional cooks directly compromises prisoners' right to nutritious meals," the SHRC stated. "

The report criticises the prison for providing substandard bathing soap and raised questions about safety procedures, especially after jail officials were unable to answer queries about accidental injuries in the kitchen.

The SHRC also flagged serious gaps in the prison's CCTV monitoring system. Although 100 cameras with 15-day storage were installed in 2022 and another 351 cameras with 30-day storage added in 2024, the setup lacks real-time monitoring and proper protocol for maintenance or failure. Crucially, the current storage capacity violates Supreme Court guidelines, which mandate at least 180 days of footage retention. "There is no circular from the ADG Prisons Office detailing accountability, maintenance, or emergency procedures in case of malfunctioning CCTV cameras," the SHRC noted.

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The report highlights acute staff shortages in the prison. Out of 27 sanctioned posts for Jailor Group 2, only five are filled. Similarly, only 94 out of 313 prison constable posts are occupied, with a vacancy rate of over 70%.

The SHRC's report concludes that unless urgent reforms are implemented, the fundamental rights of prisoners—including their dignity, safety, health, and nutrition—will continue to be compromised.

The Commission expects responses from all concerned authorities within eight weeks.

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