Polity & Governance · GS - II

Examine the constitutional safeguards available to undertrial prisoners in India. Discuss the challenges in ensuring their health, dignity and access to justice, and suggest suitable reforms.

EXAM YEAR	PAPER	SUBJECT
DAILY PRACTICE 20/10/2026	GS - II	Polity & Governance

MARKS	WORD LIMIT
10	~150 words

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Answer Hint

Article 21, Article 14, presumption of innocence, undertrial detention, prison healthcare, legal aid, overcrowding, custodial accountability, judicial oversight, National Human Rights Commission, prison reforms and speedy trial.

Model Answer

Introduction

Undertrial prisoners are individuals awaiting the conclusion of criminal proceedings. Their detention must comply with constitutional safeguards and principles of human dignity, fairness and justice.

Constitutional and Legal Safeguards

- **Article 21:** Protects life, personal liberty and dignity, including access to necessary medical care.
- **Article 14:** Requires equality before the law and equal protection of the laws.
- **Legal aid:** Article 39A promotes equal access to justice through free legal aid.
- **Presumption of innocence:** An accused person is not treated as guilty merely because they are in custody.

Major Challenges

Overcrowded prisons, delayed trials, inadequate medical facilities, insufficient mental-health support and weak grievance mechanisms can undermine prisoner welfare. Deaths in custody require transparent investigation and appropriate accountability.

Way Forward

Authorities should ensure timely medical examinations, emergency treatment, independent inquiries into custodial deaths and regular prison inspections. Legal aid, speedy trials, periodic review of detention and appropriate alternatives to incarceration can reduce unnecessary detention. Technology and improved staffing can strengthen monitoring while protecting privacy and dignity.

Conclusion

Prisoners' rights are an essential component of the rule of law. Effective oversight, humane treatment and accountable prison administration are necessary to uphold constitutional values.

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