



INTERNATIONAL PRISON NEWS DIGEST

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Welcome to the twenty ninth edition of the International Prison News Digest, a selection of news items from around the world on prison and the use of imprisonment. We aim in the Digest to cover all regions and include new developments in policy and practice, as well as information from official and intergovernmental bodies. The Digest is produced bi-monthly and this issue covers the period from 1 September to 31 October 2015. Please click on the blue highlighted words to access the news reports.

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Prison populations

As a result of congestion in [Uganda](#)'s 247 prisons, more than 28,000 of the approximately 45,000 prisoners spend their nights standing up. This state of prisons highlights what lawmakers yesterday called a crisis in the criminal justice system as authorities blame "perennial underfunding". MPs on the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) heard that five prisons had occupancy rates of above 500 per cent (Kisoro 906 per cent, Ntungamo 720 per cent, Kabale 651 per cent, Rukungiri 530 per cent and Gulu 508 per cent).

Legal experts have called for a radical rethink of the [Australian](#) criminal justice system after it was revealed that the number of full-time prisoners has increased by 22 per cent over the past five years. Australian Bureau of Statistics figures show a six per cent increase in the number of full-time prisoners from June last year and a 22 per cent increase from five years ago. The Northern Territory had the highest average daily imprisonment rate of 904 prisoners per 100,000 adults, while New South Wales had the highest average daily number of prisoners in full-time custody, followed by Queensland. Victoria recorded the largest percentage increase in unsentenced people in full-time custody during the past year, 34 per cent, compared with the national average of 11 per cent.

The [US](#) Justice Department announced plans to release about 6,000 prisoners early - the largest one-time release of federal prisoners - in an effort to reduce overcrowding and provide relief to drug offenders who have received harsh sentences over the past three decades. The early release follows action by the US Sentencing Commission - an

independent agency that sets sentencing policies for federal crimes - that reduced the potential punishment for future drug offenders last year and then made that change retroactive. The panel estimated that its change in sentencing guidelines could eventually result in 46,000 of the nation's approximately 100,000 drug offenders in federal prison qualifying for early release. The 6,000 figure is the first tranche in that process.

A new report by Human Rights Watch highlights the problem of prison overcrowding in [Brazil](#)'s 27 states, which is most pronounced in the state of Pernambuco. The state has space for 10,500 prisoners, but in August this year held more than three times that amount, according to official figures. Its Igarassu prison housed 3,788 prisoners crammed into cells designed for 507 people. The Curado Complex has space for 1,800 people, but held around 7,000. Overcrowding is also rampant throughout Brazil — home to the world's fourth-biggest incarcerated population after the United States, China and Russia. The Brazilian prison population grew by 161 percent from 2000 to 2014 to reach 607,000 prisoners in June last year, crammed into facilities designed to take a maximum of 376,000.

Despite efforts to decongest the Monrovia Central Prison, [Liberia](#)'s main prison, Chief Justice Francis Korkpor has said that the number of pre-trial prisoners there has increased and now comprises 84 percent of the prison's population. "This figure is unacceptable to our criminal justice system and those detained have had their rights violated," the chief justice, who once served as an acting prison supervisor, declared. The Chief Justice sounded the alarm when he toured facilities of the Magisterial Sitting Program hosted at the Monrovia Central Prison. The program, he said, is intended to fast track "minor criminal offences," which would decongest the prison facility.

A total of 145 prisoners in [Egyptian](#) prisons nationwide were released under a presidential decree on the occasion of Eid el-Adha according to the Ministry of Interior. Fifty eight prisoners were completely pardoned, while 87 others received a conditional release. Weeks later the Ministry of Interior announced it would release a further 331 prisoners in commemoration of the 42nd anniversary of 6 of October war. 218 prisoners out of the 331 were pardoned completely as they already served at least half of their prison terms, which must be at least six months. The remaining 113 were released on a conditional basis.

[Cuba](#) announced that it would pardon and release over 3,500 prisoners ahead of a visit by Pope Francis in September.

Health

One thousand prisoners at the Nsawam Medium Security Prison in [Ghana](#) have been registered onto the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS). This is to enable them to get easy and quick access to health care while in prison and on release. The initiative to register all prisoners was undertaken by the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection in collaboration with the National Health Insurance Authority (NHIA). The Director General of Ghana Prison Service expressed the prison services' gratitude to the Gender Ministry and NHIA for the initiative, explaining that prisons are a fertile ground for diseases due to overcrowding.

The [New Zealand](#) Corrections Department is to spend millions of dollars on treating prisoners for drug and alcohol addiction after they have been released. Two-thirds of prisoners have substance abuse problems and more than half of crimes were committed by people taking drugs and alcohol, the Corrections Minister said. "There is a range of drug and alcohol treatment programmes available inside prison. However, there is limited post-release support to maintain the life changes prisoners make... It is important they keep the motivation to stay free from substance abuse once they leave prison."

Treatment of prisoners

Ending years of litigation, hunger strikes and contentious debate in the [US](#), California has agreed to move thousands of state prisoners out of solitary confinement under the terms of a landmark lawsuit settlement. Corrections officials, who have long used indefinite isolation to control violent prison gangs, will cease the practice and return nearly 2,000 prisoners to the general population, according to the agreement. Some of those prisoners have been in isolation, without significant human contact, for more than three decades. The settlement agreement is subject to a comment period, hearings and likely acceptance by US District Judge Claudia Wilken. If she approves, the state will have a year to make the changes. Lawyers for prisoners and a federal magistrate would then monitor the outcome for two years.

Also in the [US](#), Virginia has overhauled its policies relating to conditions on death row. Only a few months ago, the condemned men held in the unit left their tiny cells just three days a week for showers, and an hour a day five days a week for recreation in a fenced outdoor cell. A sheet of glass separated them from family during visits. Now, the seven men awaiting execution get an extra half-hour of recreation each day, and officials are building a new yard with a basketball court and exercise equipment. They can associate with up to three other death row prisoners for an hour daily, and the state is building a room where they can watch TV, make phone calls, play games and send emails. They can hug and hold hands with relatives when they visit. The change in policy comes after months of legal challenges against the prisoners' conditions.

A [Venezuelan](#) prisoner rights NGO has reported that prisoners in one prison are resorting to eating cats due to food shortages. The NGO has have posted a video on its Facebook page showing prisoners ripping open a cat at the Metropolitan Penitentiary Yare 3, in the northern state of Miranda. Relatives of prisoners have made similar allegations in other prisons. In addition, they claim that prisoners are subject to cruel and inhumane treatment, such as beatings with blunt objects.

Also in [Venezuela](#), a fire at central Tocuyito prison killed 17 people and injured 11, the state prosecutor said in a statement. Eight women and nine men were killed by the fire at the prison in the state of Carabobo, the statement said. The cause of the blaze was being investigated but there was no immediate indication of how it started. The director of prison rights group Window To Freedom said prisoners told him an electrical fault had caused the fire. "It was due to negligence by authorities in not having adequate prison conditions," he said.

[South African](#) Constitutional Court Justice Edwin Cameron has released the report of his visit to the Pollsmoor Remand Detention Facility and Pollsmoor Women's Correctional Centre earlier this year. Justice Cameron stated in his report: "The extent of overcrowding, unsanitary conditions, sickness, emaciated physical appearance of the detainees, and overall deplorable living conditions were profoundly disturbing." He found that cell conditions were so filthy that detainees had "boils, scabies, wounds and sores from lice-infested bedding that has never been washed. Detainees are sick and can't access medicines due to persistent stock-outs of basic supplies, including tuberculosis medication. Little HIV testing occurs, and prisoners who require antiretroviral treatment remain undiagnosed. Detainees are locked in their cells for 24 hours a day and some are only given a chance to exercise once a month. Toilets do not flush and prisoners cannot take showers due to broken plumbing. Stuck in conditions that are 300% overcrowded, detainees are extremely idle and frustrated." The Detention Justice Forum said he had found detainees were treated "worse than animals".

Also in [South Africa](#), more than 4,000 prisoners were evacuated from the Pollsmoor Maximum Security Prison after two prisoners died from a rat-related disease due to "overcrowding" and "inhumane" conditions. The two prisoners died from leptospirosis – a disease carried in rat urine. The National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD) said that the disease was likely to spread across the prison and called for the facility to be cleared. The Police and Civil Rights Union (Popcru) in South Africa said that it was "severely disturbed" by the conditions within the prison and said it was a "state of affairs that exposes the negligent attitude displayed by those accountable for the wellbeing of prisoners".

Around 50 prisoners in [Malta](#)'s only prison went on hunger strike in protest over the fact that meals prepared in the prison kitchen were not up to standard, and that the kitchen was in a poor condition. Sources also said that some prisoners found insects in their food and that those who prepared their meals smoked in the kitchen. Previously a number of prisoners suffered an episode of food poisoning, which was later confirmed by the health and prison authorities.

[Armenia](#)'s government has promised a series of reforms aimed at addressing the country's prison system, which has come under fire for poor conditions including overcrowding and bullying. Now campaigners are drawing attention to the standard of the food provided for prisoners, which they say is unfit for human consumption. A 2014 prison report by Armenia's ombudsman noted the presence of mice in refrigerated rooms used to store perishable foodstuffs including meat, fish and butter. Other conditions were similarly unhygienic. In Yerevan's Kentron prison, for instance, cabbage was stored in a garage where it had turned mouldy. The ombudsman also reported a case in May 2014, in which about 20 prisoners at the Abovyan prison suffered food poisoning. An internal investigation conducted by the justice ministry found that they became ill as a result of eating tainted meat. A system under which prisoners were supposed to taste food and rate it for quality was open to abuse, the report said. "For example, during a visit to a penitentiary hospital, [it was noted that] signatures regarding food tasting and quality monitoring were delivered in advance, even before the lunch and dinner were cooked," it read.

The [Georgian](#) government has announced that from next year it will allow the Public Defender's Office to take pictures inside prisons. This will allow photographic evidence to be obtained in cases where there is suspicion of abuse, or when sanitary conditions are deemed questionable. The Prison Minister called the decision 'revolutionary.' Photos of prisoner abuse have played an important role in recent Georgian politics. In September, 2012, two weeks before a parliamentary election, a handful of videos taken inside prisons were leaked to the media. The footage showed prisoners being subjected to verbal abuse, violence and even sexual abuse. The release of the videos caused outrage, with hundreds of thousands of people demonstrating against the prison system, and may have affected the outcome of the election.

Prison violence

At least 12 prisoners were injured in a prison riot in the Londrina prison in Parana state, [Brazil](#). Television images showed prisoner clambering across the prison rooftop dragging several hostages - all fellow prisoners - with bound wrists and dangling them off the edge. The G1 news portal says three prisoners were thrown off the roof, with one hospitalised in a serious condition with head trauma. G1 says 1,140 prisoners are held at the Londrina prison, which was designed for 928. Officials say the riot ended the following morning when authorities agreed to study a list of prisoner demands. Among the demands were conjugal visits, better food and improved conditions. Also in [Brazil](#), three prisoners died and 14 others escaped during a riot in a prison in the southeastern town of Teofilo Otoni. The state government said in a statement that the dead prisoners were murdered by their own cellmates. The prisoners who rioted also damaged the wings where they are housed and set various objects on fire.

Two prisoners were killed and 49 others injured in a fire and subsequent riot at the prison in the [Peruvian](#) city of Chiclayo. The fire started during a dispute involving two groups of prisoners, when one prisoner doused another with liquid glue and set him on fire. The prisoner died of his injuries. The fire triggered a fight that ended in a riot, the Ombudsman's Office said. A total of 35 people, including 20 prisoners wounded by rubber bullets fired by prison guards and 15 corrections officers, were injured in the incident. Guards and police managed to regain control of the prison after a protest that lasted more than five hours.

The transfer of the ringleaders of two rival groups in the [Dominican Republic's](#) La Victoria prison led to a riot which left one prisoner dead and at least six injured.

Two riots broke out in the same prison in Cancun, [Mexico](#), in the space of one weekend. On the Saturday, a riot broke out that left six prisoners injured, four of whom were shot by prison guards as they tried to escape. According to the Red Cross, one of the men died in hospital after being shot in the chest by a guard. The following day another riot broke out, with the Red Cross confirming several injuries including one man with a head injury, another with a bullet wound in the buttocks, a third who'd been shot in the ankle and a fourth injury that involved a wound to the forearm. Outside the prison, relatives of prisoners demanded the dismissal of the prison director, who they say is responsible for the environmental problems that are causing tension and riots among prisoners.

Four members of the Barrio 18 gang's Sureños faction were murdered at the prison in Izalco, a city in western [El Salvador](#), the Attorney General's Office said. The bureau of prisons confirmed the information on its Twitter account without providing additional details. At least 31 prisoners, including 30 gang members ages 21 to 63, have been killed so far this year, the AG's office said.

Prisoners in [Guyana](#)'s Camp Street prison started a number of small fires to draw the attention of the media to their grievances. The prisoners' complaints included unfair and inhumane treatment by prison officials and some police ranks; some of whom they say are favouring some prisoners over others. Allegations include prison officers being paid to set prisoners up and cause fights among one another. "Dem does take out people from cells and let other prisoners beat them up in here." They also claim they are not being fed on time and are calling for intervention on their behalf.

The [Netherlands](#) is about to begin a major experiment in which people in jail will be given food supplements to determine if certain vitamins make them less aggressive. Aggressive prisoners in five Dutch jails and two youth offender institutions will be offered extra fish oil, vitamins and minerals to see if it reduces their violent behaviour from early next year. Previous experiments at a Dutch jail involving 200 prisoners resulted in a 34 per cent drop in incidents, according to reports. If the method proves successful, the justice ministry plans to offer it to more prisoners who have difficulty controlling their aggression.

Developments in rehabilitation

In the [UAE](#), Dubai Police's Punitive and Correctional Establishments department is developing an online shopping portal to sell products made by prisoners in Al Aweer Central Jail. A spokesman said most products are heritage items ranging from traditional wooden and brass boxes (mandoos) and model dhows to garden benches, dried palm-leaf enclosures (areesh) and money boxes. Items such as dolls, decorative metal cages, tables, kandouras, abayas, tissue boxes, bags, pillows are also made by prisoners. There are two separate workshops, one for male prisoners — in which 184 men work — and one for female prisoners, in which 40 women work. The women prisoners make dolls, stuffed animals, slippers, leather items, knitted items and perfumes. The men's workshop is located inside a large warehouse divided into small work areas for painting, carpentry, metalwork, sewing, drawing as well as mechanical tasks. The prisoners earn monthly wages and at the end of the year take five per cent of the total profit.

The [Malawian](#) Civil Society Education Coalition (CSEC) has hired 24 teachers to provide education services in prisons across the country. CSEC Executive Director said the move was aimed at improving quality of education in the prisons and prison reformation. He said CSEC has hired the salaried 24 teachers permanently, adding the training will be followed by more initiatives to ensure both access to education and the quality of education improves. He further pledged that the organisation will ensure availability of teaching and learning materials whilst a second phase of the project will involve informal education in trade skills. The project is being supported technically by the Centre for Legal Assistance (CELA), a local non-government organization working on promotion of improved prison

conditions, among others.

The [Singapore](#) Yellow Ribbon Prison Run has raised \$85,539 this year for the Yellow Ribbon Fund, which contributes towards rehabilitation and reintegration programmes for ex-offenders, their families and children. More than 7,500 people signed up for the run to show their support against the stigmatisation of ex-offenders. Following its launch in 2009, the annual Yellow Ribbon Prison Run has attracted over 56,700 runners in the seven runs, and raised more than \$674,000 for the Yellow Ribbon Fund.

A successful project for prisoners in Norway is now being implemented in [Romania](#), on Tataru Island in the Danube Delta. Over 50 prisoners, most of them spending their last years in prison, are allowed to support themselves, build their own houses, and learn the art of traditional crafts. Once the houses are finished they will live in them. This project lets prisoners learn traditional house building techniques and gives them the chance to work outside. In the evening, they return to prison. It is hoped that after being released from prison the prisoners will be able to find a job more easily thanks to their newly acquired skills.

A [South Korean](#) prison held a family reunion event for foreign prisoners ahead of the national Chuseok holidays, according to officials. Cheonan Correctional Institution in Cheonan, South Chungcheong Province, said that it offered a reunion opportunity for 27 foreign prisoners, Korea Correctional Service said. They included 16 Chinese, four Americans and others from six other countries. The reunions were aimed at supporting the psychological well-being of the prisoners who have been long separated from their family living abroad, officials said. One Uzbekistani prisoner was allowed to spend the night with his family in separate housing.

All [New Zealand](#) Corrections-run prisons are now either working prisons or well on their way to reaching that status, with the aim of helping prisoners lead crime-free lives on release, according to the government. In working prisons, all eligible prisoners are engaged in industry, learning and/or rehabilitation activities for 40 hours a week. "Working prisons help prisoners develop skills, experience and behaviour that will help them to find jobs and stability following release," said the Corrections Minister.

Sentencing and the law

A judge in northeast [Iran](#) has initiated a move to replace light prison sentences with an order for the defendant to purchase books to read by the time of the court session. The ruling can be applied to those who have committed infractions, misdemeanours and minor felonies, especially in cases which involve juvenile delinquency. According to the ruling, those detainees who are awaiting trial are instructed to buy five books, read them and present an excerpt to the court officials. The Iranian judicial system allows for alternative sentences to help reduce the population of prisons.

A bipartisan group of senators unveiled a bill that would make sweeping changes to criminal justice in the [US](#), including a long-awaited scaling-back of mandatory minimum sentences. If passed into law, the Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act will reduce the mandatory life

without parole sentence for a third drug or violent offence and the mandatory minimums on drug and gun possession. Notably, it would also expand the “safety valve” exception, which allows non-violent drug offenders with non-serious criminal histories to escape mandatory minimums. It would also allow some prisoners to earn time credits on their sentence to complete rehabilitation programmes. In an effort to reduce the disparity in sentencing between drug and violent offences, it also creates new mandatory minimum sentences of 10 years for interstate domestic violence resulting in a death, and a new mandatory minimum of five years for providing weapons for terrorists.

Serial home burglars in [Ireland](#) will face longer jail terms and may be refused bail, under new laws aimed at curbing home break-ins. The planned laws aimed at "prolific" offenders will result in District Court judges applying mandatory consecutive sentences for multiple offences committed within a 12-month window. Judges will also be allowed to refuse bail to offenders who have a previous conviction for burglary coupled with two or more pending charges. It comes amid Government concerns that the criminal justice system is not taking full account of the seriousness of home burglaries. The dedicated home burglary law, which the Justice Minister says is designed to "keep repeat burglars off the streets", has been approved by Government and is set to be passed later this year.

For the first time in [Slovakia](#)'s history, two prisoners sentenced to life in prison may be released on parole. The prisoners will be eligible to seek release after having spent 25 years in prison, which is in keeping with the Code of Criminal Procedure. The decision as to whether or not they will be released is to be made by the District Court in Trnava. The two men were the first people to be sentenced to life imprisonment for murder following the Velvet Revolution in late 1989. There are 41 lifers in Slovak jails.

In [Greece](#), drug dealers involved in trafficking that would bring profits of more than 75,000 euros will be sentenced to life imprisonment, according to a new ruling of the Supreme Court. The decision will now be used as a precedent in all cases involving drugs. Greece's penal code imposes life imprisonment on professional drug dealers who are caught with drugs worth more than 75,000 euros. In the case examined by the country's top court, two Albanian nationals, who were arrested for possession and trafficking, were apprehended with more than 3 kilos of cocaine worth 85,000 euros. Subsequently the police found another 30,000 euros and 3 kilos of cocaine in the defendants' homes. Their lawyers tried to divide the total value of drugs found, so that the defendants could avoid the harsher sentence. The court dismissed the proposal. The judges held that when more than one accused sells drugs judges must not take into account the monetary benefit they each expected but the entire amount.

Prison policy

[Georgia](#)'s criminal justice sector is undergoing a major reform that will transform the country's criminal justice system so it meets European standards and encourages a more tolerant attitude to prisoners and their families, according to the Minister of Corrections, who said prisoners' families and friends would no longer be charged to visit them. GPS monitoring bracelets are being introduced for prisoners on home detention and will initially be trialled on juvenile prisoners, he said. Another aspect of the reform involves training

industry staff to offer rehabilitation courses to prisoners. Specifically the Ministry plans to empower social workers in prisons to ensure better psycho-social support for prisoners.

The [Mexican](#) government is investing 1.2bn pesos (US\$72mn) to expand the infrastructure of federal high-security social rehabilitation centers (Ceferesos) and equip security and communications systems. This program seek to extend, adapt, build and equip about 15 hectares of correctional facilities to handle 1,110 highly dangerous prisoners, the finance ministry (SHCP) stated in a document on the development. The authorities will also build high-security buildings, service infrastructure, water infrastructure, and sanitary and electrical installations, among others. The issue of prison security and capacity has come under the spotlight after Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán, head of Mexico's Sinaloa cartel, recently escaped from a high-security prison for a second time.

The prisons watchdog in New South Wales, [Australia](#), has attacked a decision by the Corrective Services Minister to return 12 life-sentence prisoners to maximum security in response to a campaign by a radio host and tabloid media. The Inspector of Custodial Services, John Paget, has called for the men's status to be reviewed, because the decision breached the law and "populism should not, in practice, override legislation". Dr Paget told Fairfax Media that public calls for tougher restrictions on prisoners had become "almost a blood sport". "There are famous quotes from Churchill, Dostoyevsky and Mandela that how we treat prisoners is a marker of our civilisation," he said. The Ombudsman's office has also written to Corrective Services Commissioner Peter Severin to warn that as long as NSW has full-life sentences it is important "to ensure the system of managing offenders represents sound penal practice and basic human rights and does not simply respond to public cries for harsher prisoner management".

The [Cambodian](#) government has announced plans to upgrade a sub-decree on torture prevention to the status of royal decree in order to comply with its international obligations, but observers say that the proposed changes will do little to bolster the body's impartiality. Although Cambodia ratified the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention Against Torture in 2007, it has not established an independent national body to monitor and prevent torture in places of detention, which is required under the convention within one year of ratification. Cambodia's current body comprises officials directing the very prisons whose alleged rights violations they are meant to be monitoring, raising questions as to the body's independence. Civil-society groups have cast doubt on the appropriateness of incorporating representatives from prison and detention-facility management into any effective torture-prevention mechanism.

A new framework for internal prison inspections has been presented to senior officials of the State Penitentiary Service of [Ukraine](#) and the Heads and Deputies of pilot prisons in Kyiv, as part of a joint EU-Council of Europe prison reform project in Ukraine. Initial examples of inspection standards were offered and tested. The next steps were agreed, including the establishment of a Working Group on internal prison inspections and prisoners' complaints involving the heads of pilot prisons, senior managers on inspection issues and external partners. The same project also recently held a workshop on general prison management issues and the rehabilitative approaches, aiming to emphasise the importance of prison leadership styles, managing transition and concepts of prison as a tool for rehabilitation.

Private prison operator Serco is facing more than \$1 million in fines for its failings at [New Zealand](#)'s Mt Eden Corrections Facility. Documents released to 3 News under the Official Information Act show Serco has been charged a range of fines during the past 12 months for not doing its job properly and the costs could continue to mount. Failing to control prisoners to ensure a safe jail cost Serco \$50,000, unlawfully mixing prisoners cost \$100,000, and not meeting incident reporting targets and other contractual requirements cost \$150,000, according to the news agency. The biggest fine given to Serco was more than \$315,000 for failing to keep serious assaults down. Since the videos of fight-club style brawls involving Mt Eden prisoners surfaced in July, Serco has been landed with almost \$500,000 more in penalty notices. 3 News reported that recent fines have been issued for shortcomings including unlawful detention, \$25,000; failing to meet education targets, \$50,000; failing to ensure prisoner safety and welfare, \$200,000; breach of contract for serious assault rates, \$50,000; and a death in custody, \$150,000. During the past year Serco has been hit with a total of \$1,090,000 in fines. However, the prison is yet to be fined over the allegations of fight clubs and contraband that led to Corrections taking control of the prison.

In the [Philippines](#) the Justice Secretary has launched a new biometrics-based prison records system, saying that the Prisoner Management Information System (IMIS) would, among other matters, address the delay in the release of prisoners due to lost or misplaced records. Instead of relying on "hard copies," all the information on a prisoner would be automated under the IMIS. According to a press release, apart from allowing the "live capturing of prisoners' biometric information," the IMIS enables the "automated computation" of their remaining period of confinement, taking into consideration their Good Conduct Time Allowance credits, if any. "Prisoners with expired sentences should not be allowed to stay a day longer than the expiry date. With this system, that will be a reality," the Secretary said.

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