JailVaarta: Innovative software to facilitate Video Conferencing of Prisoners with Relatives

JailVaarta is a simple, economic and effective solution providing prisoners and their Relatives an easy way to interact without visiting Prison. More than one person can interact through this online system at the same time. This system helps in saving both money and time. JailVaarta would help motivate prisoners to reform their lives and after the prison term to turn out as orderly citizens in the society.

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JailVaarta is an innovative application developed by NIC, for primarily facilitating the prison inmates and their relatives to interact conveniently without the relatives visiting prison. In our society people, especially women show reluctance to visit prisons due to the social stigma attached and the complexities of procedural formalities for such visits. JailVaarta's online video conferencing (VC) facility is an effective solution for this, as even the request for the facility can be made online. This initiative, first of its kind in India is second in the world, next to Singapore.

OBJECTIVE

The prime objective of JailVaarta is to enliven the hope of prisoners to reform their lives and after the prison term to return as orderly citizens in the society. JailVaarta helps to eliminate complexities and expenditures incurred for arranging visitor-prisoner meetings and also enable investigation officers to question the under-trials without the court's permission to take them out of prison.

THE PROCESS

JailVaarta is a simple, economic and effective solution, which uses the NIC Vidyo Portal software and a web cam with internet enabled PC. No other specialized client software is required at the user- visitor end. Relatives are required to go through the following steps in order to conduct a video conferencing session:

> **JailVaarta has been a great service and is motivating prisoners who are now engaged in activities like bakery, laundry, mobile food canteens for a better tomorrow once they are released. This is the main intent of our department and JailVaarta is helping a lot.**
>
> **SOMESH GOYAL, IPS**
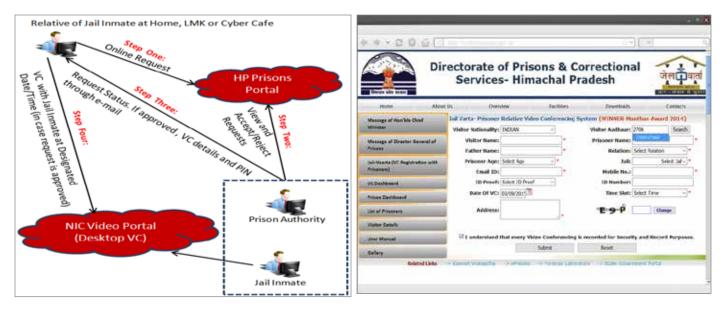> Director General of Prisons & Correctional Services
> Himachal Pradesh

1. Visit the website of HP Prisons and Correctional Service Department, Himachal Pradesh.

2. Click on to the link 'JailVaarta' and provide details of prisoner and visitor, such as name, age, visitor's ID details, email, mobile number etc.

3. Agree with the terms that the recording of entire JailVaarta session would be carried out and kept for reference and investigation purposes when required.

4. The Jail Authorities will then receive a request through the online system (based on Login/Password). A decision is taken by the authorities based on the merit to allow or reject the Video Conferencing.

5. Once the permission is granted,

the visitors/relatives will receive a PIN number and a hyperlink through SMS and E-mail for conducting VC on a set date and time.

The courts and investigating officers can also interact with the accused in prisons through VC. The above diagram shows how a session of JailVaarta is facilitated:

IMPLEMENTATION

The JailVaarta Application has been successfully implemented in all the 20 prisons (2 Model Central Jails, 9 Sub Jails, 7 Open Air Jails, 1 District Jail and 1 Borstal Jail) of Himachal Pradesh.

The main user community is relatives of the prisoners lodged in the 20 prisons of Himachal Pradesh. About 655 VCs have been conducted successfully out of the 1092 VC requests received so far. Of these, 20% requests were from foreign countries such as UK, USA, Finland and Russia. About 50% of total prisoners have made use of this facility during the last two years.

The second main users of JailVaarta are the prisoners. It helps them to remain in touch with their beloved with the hope of a better future after the prison term.

The Police officials, Lawyers and NGOs are the third important users. JailVaarta enables them to interact with the prisoners for official purposes or to facilitate requirements on humanitarian grounds. Besides, Himachal Pradesh Prison Authorities use the application as the security arrangements to be made is minimal to conduct the prison-relative interaction.

BENEFITS

- More than one person can interact at the comfort of being at home.
- Prisoner can get a feel of the home environment.
- Can avoid relatives' social stigma attached in visiting prisons.
- Saves commuting time and money.
- Improves convenience of the authorities by reducing visitor crowd at the prison premises.
- Can facilitate interaction with lawyers, counselors, preachers etc.
- Beneficial to reduce any corrupt practices or avoid any discretion in granting permission for visitor-prisoner meeting.
- Can avoid contraband or illegal items being passed on to the prisoners.
- Lesser security arrangements required eluding prison escapes.

- Enables the investigating officers of police to question the under-trial prisoners without permission of the Court.

TECHNOLOGY

The JailVaarta software developed by NIC Himachal Pradesh is an important component of the website of Himachal Pradesh Prisons Department (http://hpprisons.nic.in). Developed with ASP.NET technology for sending VC permission/approval requests, JailVaarta uses NIC's Vidyo portal, as all the prisons of HP are having Desktop VC accounts. It has been integrated with the e-Prison software for fetching record of prisoners for booking the VC requests, which are also implemented in all the HP prisons. JailVaarta has been integrated with Aadhaar number of citizens residing in Himachal Pradesh and the data is fetched directly from Aadhaar database.