

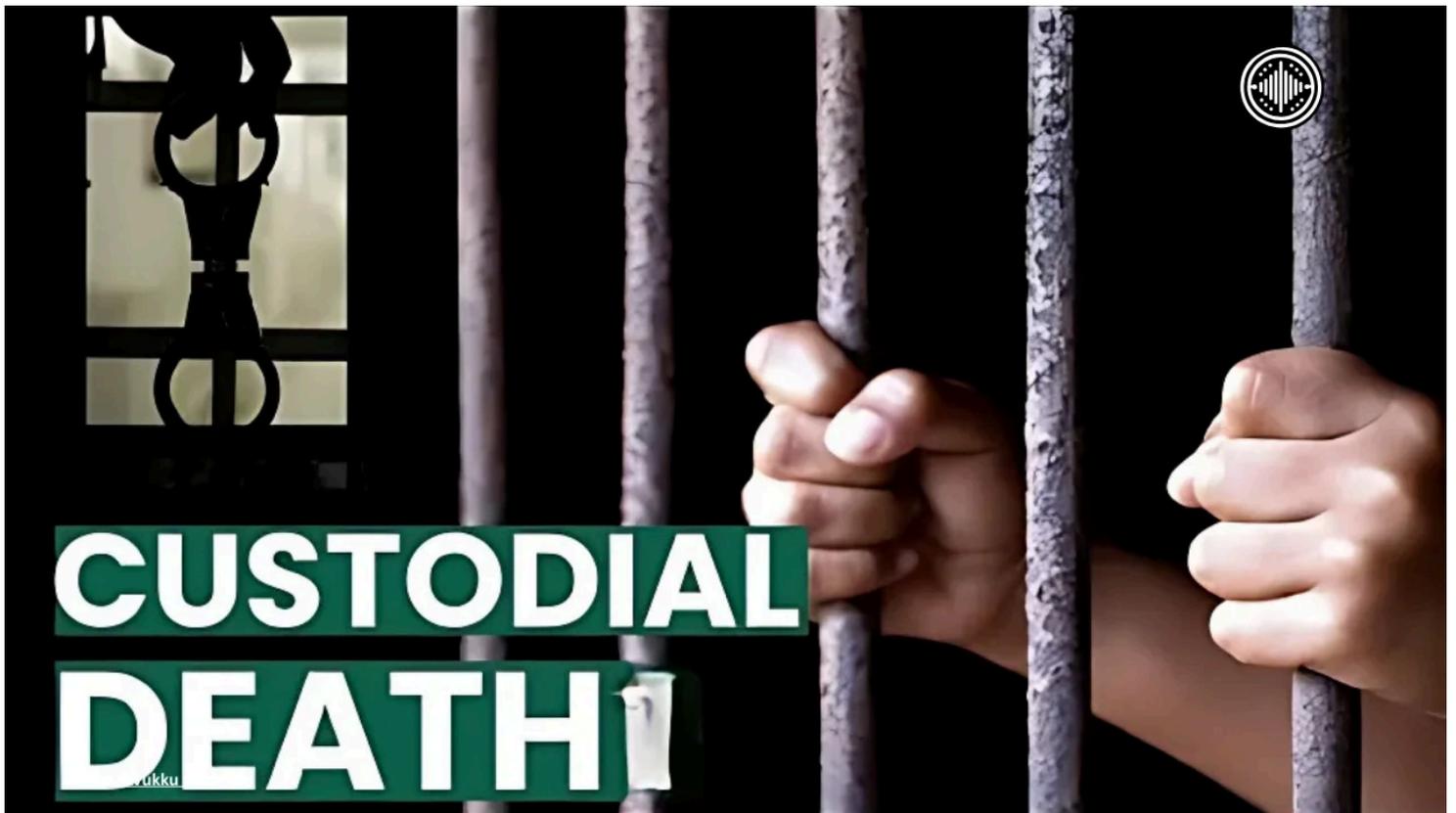
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Rajasthan Alters Custodial Death Inquiry Protocol

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The Rajasthan government has revised its official protocol for handling inquiries into custodial deaths, shifting from an earlier blanket policy of suspending all personnel at the concerned police station to a selective, case-by-case approach. The change, confirmed by senior state officials, is intended to allow the administration to make suspension decisions based on the findings of preliminary assessments rather than as an automatic step following an incident.

Under the previous system, all officers and staff attached to a police station where a custodial death occurred would be immediately suspended pending investigation. The new directive states that only those officers found directly responsible, or whose actions are under credible suspicion, will face suspension while the case is being examined.

The decision has sparked criticism from rights advocates, who argue that the shift could weaken the impartiality of custodial death inquiries. They warn that keeping potentially involved personnel on active duty during investigations could lead to interference with witnesses, manipulation of evidence, or other actions that may compromise the integrity of the process.

Concerns have been heightened by recent incidents in Jaipur, Bharatpur, and Sriganganagar, where multiple custodial death allegations have drawn public scrutiny. In some of these cases, families of the deceased and community leaders have accused police of using excessive force and then attempting to cover up the circumstances of death. Opposition leaders in the state have also voiced objections, claiming that the new policy reduces accountability and undermines public trust in law enforcement.

State officials, however, maintain that the revised protocol is designed to ensure a more balanced and fair handling of cases. According to the Home Department, blanket suspensions have, in the past, disrupted policing operations in districts, particularly in rural and high-crime areas where manpower is already stretched. Officials argue that a targeted suspension policy allows law enforcement agencies to maintain operational capacity while ensuring that any officer suspected of wrongdoing is removed from duties that could influence the investigation.

The state government has also emphasized that custodial death cases will continue to be subject to mandatory judicial inquiries under the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) and oversight by the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC). It has been stated that in serious cases, the Crime Investigation Department (CID) will be brought in to ensure an independent investigation.

Civil society groups remain unconvinced, urging the government to adopt stronger safeguards such as automatic suspension for any officer on duty at the time of a custodial death until the preliminary inquiry is complete. They stress that transparency, speed, and independence in the investigative process are essential to maintaining public confidence and upholding human rights obligations.

As Rajasthan continues to face scrutiny over custodial deaths, the implementation of the revised policy will be closely monitored by human rights organizations, legal experts, and the families of victims. The outcome of ongoing cases in Jaipur, Bharatpur, and Sriganganagar is expected to test the effectiveness and credibility of the new approach in practice.