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Turning Hostile, Losing Justice: Justice Ananda Sen flags witness intimidation crisis

Infrastructure Alone Isn't Enough—Justice Must Feel Safe: Justice Gita Mittal



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THE JHARKHAND STORY NETWORK

Ranchi, April 12: The Judicial Academy, Jharkhand, hosted a high-impact training programme on “*Vulnerable Witness Protection and Infrastructure Development*” on Saturday.

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The event brought together members of the judiciary, government officials, police personnel, and legal experts to address growing concerns around the protection and participation of vulnerable witnesses in court proceedings.

Hostile Witnesses a Major Threat to Justice

Justice Ananda Sen of the Jharkhand High Court delivered a powerful message on the alarming rise in witnesses turning hostile during criminal trials. He stressed that this trend has become a serious hurdle to securing convictions in the Indian legal system.



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Beyond investigative gaps, Sen identified the vulnerability of witnesses—often due to intimidation or influence from powerful accused persons—as a core issue. He called for a proactive and collaborative approach to implement the *Witness Protection Scheme, 2018*, which classifies threats into three categories:

- **Category A:** Threat to life
- **Category B:** Threat to safety, reputation, or property
- **Category C:** Risk of harassment or intimidation

Building Safe Spaces: Infrastructure with Empathy

Justice Gita Mittal, head of the Supreme Court's Vulnerable Witness Committee and former Chief Justice of the Jammu & Kashmir High Court, led the session. She emphasized that vulnerable witness protection isn't just about infrastructure—it's about embedding empathy, dignity, and inclusivity into courtroom spaces.

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She praised the work of engineers and architects in transforming existing courtrooms into Vulnerable Witness Deposition Centres (VWDCs), especially in areas where constructing new facilities is not possible.



Delhi's Model Courts Offer Inspiration

The programme featured visuals from Delhi courts, showcasing model VWDCs that serve as practical blueprints for replication across Jharkhand. These examples demonstrated how thoughtful modifications—like separate entryways, comforting interiors, and soundproofing—can significantly reduce trauma for witnesses.

Supreme Court Directives Reinforced

Participants revisited the Supreme Court's guidelines in the *Smruti Tukaram Badade* case, which mandate:

- Notification or revision of VWDC schemes across all High Courts
- Formation of permanent VWDC Committees for training and implementation
- Infrastructure and manpower assessments
- Timely submission of cost estimates to state governments

Speakers also stressed the need for collaboration with the Ministry of Women and Child Development and state authorities for timely execution.

Voices United for Change

The training programme called for a holistic strategy that combines legal reforms, administrative commitment, innovative infrastructure, and compassionate judicial behaviour. Attendees reaffirmed their commitment to upholding the dignity, privacy, and psychological safety of vulnerable witnesses—an essential step toward restoring public faith in the criminal justice system.

Who's Who at the Event

The event saw participation from key stakeholders including: