

State sessions judges get forensic training

In a first of its kind endeavour in the country, state sessions court judges are undergoing a three-day Orientation Course on Forensic Science, developed by the Maharashtra Judicial Academy with the Institute of Forensic Science, to help them better understand and weigh forensics-based evidence. P 6

State's sessions judges get lessons in forensics

Course Aims To Better Equip Courts

Sumitra Deb Roy | TNN

Mumbai: The rise in the application of forensic science to crack cases and nail the accused has prompted Maharashtra's judiciary to educate sessions court judges on the emerging field through a special course in the hope that it will leave them better equipped to appreciate and weigh forensic evidence.

Said to be the first of its kind in the country, the Orientation Course on Forensic Science was developed by the Maharashtra Judicial Academy in tandem with the government's Institute of Forensic Science over the last few months. The three-day course kick-started in the last week of August and has already been attended by a batch of 30 district and session court judges. The programme was created on the lines of similar, but longer, courses for judges in the US and UK, which leave them better placed to question investigating agencies.

The urgent need for the course was felt after the use of forensic science increased in solving criminal cases



COURTING KNOWLEDGE

- Maharashtra's session court judges are undergoing a three-day orientation course on forensic sciences and forensic services available in India
- During the course, they will learn about forensic psychology in crimes and crime detection
- The judges will be introduced to forensic techniques like lie detection tests, brain fingerprinting, and ballistics
- There will be lectures on explosives, narcotic drugs, toxicology and prohibition
- The course will cover lessons on DNA collection and identification of bloodstains as well as semen stains
- On the third day, the judges will be familiarized with forensic document examination, fingerprinting and medical evidence

ranging from terrorist bombings and thefts of infants from hospitals to drunk driving and dowry deaths. "The course will equip judicial officers to deal with such evidence in a more meaningful and effective manner," said Dr Shalini Phansalkar-Joshi, joint director, Maharashtra Judicial Academy.

The USP of the course, Joshi said, is a daylong visit to the Forensic Science Laboratory in Kalina, where judges learn about evidence collection and testing methods from forensic experts. "Judges will have a practical idea of

how evidences are collected, studied and their possible implications in determining or establishing a crime," she said. The course is likely to be longer during the induction training of judges.

Besides an introduction to the concept of forensic science, judges will be informed about its various classifications like forensic psychology, biology, ballistics, medicine, toxicology and the like. For the course, the organizers have roped forensic experts from the city as well as nearby states. India, they point out, has no such dedi-

cated course for 'experts of experts' as yet.

"With incidences of witnesses turning hostile in so many cases, dependence on science is bound to increase," said Dr Rukmini Krishnamurthy, technical director, Institute of Forensic Science. "The syllabus has been designed in such a manner that it is interactive, participative and involves group discussions. The first batch of judges who participated in the course shared their experience and dilemmas in judging cases where forensic evidences were used."

Corporates hire forensic experts

Sumitra Deb Roy | TNN

Mumbai: The enthusiastic response to the first batch of students graduating from the Institute of Science's forensic science courses has underlined the dire need for such experts in private and public sectors, which are increasingly facing complex crimes and cyber threats.

About 25 students from the first batch of post-graduate diploma in cyber forensic and laws have got a warm response from the banking and insurance companies, many of which have come forward to hire the graduates. The students of the institute's one-year diploma of forensic and related laws have got a similar reaction: even corporate hospi-

tals have shown interest in hiring them for their medico-legal cells.

There were apprehensions last year when the course was designed and approved in a record time by the Mumbai University along with the higher and technical education department of the state about its acceptability. "The response has been unexpected," said Dr Rukmini Krishnamurthy, technical advisor, Institute of Forensic Science.

Krishnamurthy is optimistic that other courses, like BSc and masters' in forensics, too will have several takers. "There is a Rs130 crore proposal that will see these courses started in a phased manner," she said. As yet, only Mumbai and Aurangabad provide the courses.

The institute has already upped the number of seats in the diploma courses to 40. Interestingly, the course has caught the imagination of many lawyers and law students who want to learn the intricacies of forensic science to argue cases better. A few cops too have enquired about the course and showed willingness to undergo the training to hone their skills in crime scene management.

A word of caution comes from cyber expert Vijay Mukhi, who says that the need for such courses in India could be limited as cyber crimes seldom reach the police or the court. "Unless the industry starts reporting such cases, there is little that forensic experts can do with the evidences they collect," he said.