

A IN RE: PROPER TREATMENT OF COVID 19 PATIENTS AND
DIGNIFIED HANDLING OF DEAD BODIES IN THE
HOSPITALS ETC.

(Suo Motu Writ Petition (Civil) No.7 of 2020)

DECEMBER 18, 2020

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**[ASHOK BHUSHAN, R.SUBHASH REDDY AND
M.R. SHAH, JJ.]**

Disaster Management: Covid 19 pandemic – Directions passed with regard to fire safety measures in Covid Hospitals – State Government and the Local Administration to make more provisions for treatment of Covid patients – Strict and stern action be taken against those violating the Guidelines and SOPs – State Governments to issue necessary directions with regard to deployment of more police personnel at crowded places – Permission for celebration and gathering be not granted unless essential – There should be a mechanism to check the number of people attending such function/gathering – Authorities to undertake more testings and implement weekend curfews and take measures for sealing containment zones – Regarding gathering organised by political parties, Election Commission of India issued broad guidelines for conduct of General Elections/Bye Elections during Covid 19 – All the State/Union Territory to issue necessary directions to ensure compliance of those guidelines – States and Union of India granted four weeks time to file affidavit bringing on record various measures taken.

F CIVIL ORIGINAL JURISDICTION: Suo Moto writ Petition
(Civil) No.7 OF 2020

(UNDER ARTICLE 32 OF THE CONSTITUTION OF INDIA)

G IN RE: THE PROPER TREATMENT OF COVID 19
PATIENTS AND DIGNIFIED HANDLING OF DEAD BODIES IN
THE HOSPITAL ETC.

H Atul Nanda, AG, Tushar Mehta, SG, K.M. Nataraj, ASG, Nalin Kohli, AAG, K.V. Vishwanathan, Ms. Manisha Lavkumar, Dr. Manish Singhvi, Jayanth Muthuraj, Sr. Advs., Kumar Anurag Singh, Addl. Standing Counsel, Shantanu Sharma, Gurmeet Singh Makker, Rajat Nair, Kanu Agrawal, Prashant Singh B, Raj Bahadur Yadav, Saurabh Mishra, Mohd.

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Mukesh Kumar, applicant in person.

The following Order of the Court was passed:

ORDER

1. We have heard Shri Tushar Mehta, learned Solicitor General for India and learned counsel appearing for various States. By our order dated 27.11.2020 passed in this proceeding we have taken suo motu cognizance of the incident which happened in Rajkot, Gujarat on 26.11.2020 resulting in death of Covid patients in the Covid Hospital. The Court has also taken notice of earlier incidents of fire in Covid Hospitals. Learned Solicitor General had submitted that immediate steps shall be taken and the report will be submitted. State of Gujarat was also directed to submit the report.

- A 2. Affidavits have been filed by Union of India on 30.11.2020 and
11.12.2020. The Union of India in its affidavit dated 30.11.2020 has
brought on record the letter dated 28.11.2020 issued by Ministry of Home
Affairs, Government of India. The Government of India issued advisory
to all the States to prevent the recurrence of fire incident in Covid
Hospitals and Nursing Homes. The Union of India has called for the
B status of implementation of guidelines issued in reference to preventing
recurrence of fire accidents in Hospitals, status of 'No Objection
Certificate', report regarding inspection and re-inspection of Hospitals
and Nursing Homes. In pursuance of the orders issued by Union of
India to all the States, status reports were sent to the Union of India
C which has been compiled in Affidavit dated 11.12.2020. Although different
States and Union Territories have taken measures and conducted
inspections, found out shortcomings regarding prevention of occurrence
of fire in the Hospitals and Nursing Homes, further, audits and inspections
are required to be taken. Few States have also filed their separate
affidavits enumerating their steps taken by them in compliance of the
D advisory and requirement for. The Union of India has directed the States
and Union Territories to update their respective local building bye laws/
fire services synchronising them in line of "Model Bill on maintenance
of fire and emergency service, 2019", circulated by Ministry of Home
Affairs on 16.09.2019.
- E 3. The State of Gujarat has filed separate affidavit bringing on
record the directions issued by the State and the details of inspection
undertaken and audit of few dedicated Covid hospitals. It has further
stated that a nodal officer for fire safety has been appointed in dedicated
covid hospitals (Government and Private hospitals). We with regard to
F above, issue following directions:-
- 1) All States/Union Territories should appoint one nodal officer
for each covid hospital, if not already appointed, who shall
be made responsible for ensuring the compliance of all fire
safety measures.
 - G 2) In each district, State Government should constitute a
committee to carry fire audit of each Covid hospital atleast
once in a month and inform the deficiency to the management
of the hospital and report to the Government for taking follow
up action.
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- 3) The Covid hospital who have not obtained NOC from fire department of the State should be asked to immediately apply for NOC and after carrying necessary inspection, decision shall be taken. Those Covid hospitals who have not renewed their NOC should immediately take steps for renewal on which appropriate inspection be taken and decision be taken. In event, Covid Hospital is found not having NOC or not having obtained renewal, appropriate action be taken by the State.

4. The State of Gujarat has also brought on record the notification appointing Justice D.A. Mehta to undertake enquiry with regard to fire in Shrey Hospital, Navrangpura, Ahmedabad, in addition to enquiry in to the incident of fire in Uday Shivanand Hospital, Rajkot. The State to extend all cooperation to the Enquiry Commission so that Enquiry report be submitted at early date and the appropriate remedial action be taken by the State.

5. Due to unprecedented Pandemic, everybody in the world is suffering, one way or the other. It is a world war against COVID-19. Therefore, there shall be Government Public Partnership to avoid world war against COVID-19.

6. Right to health is a fundamental right guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution of India. Right to health includes affordable treatment. Therefore, it is the duty upon the State to make provisions for affordable treatment and more and more provisions in the hospitals to be run by the State and/or local administration are made. It cannot be disputed that for whatever reasons the treatment has become costlier and costlier and it is not affordable to the common people at all. Even if one survives from COVID-19, many times financially and economically he is finished. Therefore, either more and more provisions are to be made by the State Government and the local administration or there shall be cap on the fees charged by the private hospitals, which can be in exercise of the powers under the Disaster Management Act.

7. Despite the Guidelines and SOPs issued, for lack of implementation the Pandemic has spread like wild fire. A strict and stern action should be taken against those who are violating the Guidelines and SOPs, whoever he may be and whatever position the violator is occupying.

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A 8. Every State must act vigilantly and to work with the Centre harmoniously. It is the time to rise to the occasion. Safety and health of the citizens must be the first priority, rather than any other considerations.

B 9. People should understand their duty and follow rules very strictly. It is the duty of every citizen to perform their fundamental duties as guaranteed under the Constitution of India. By not following the Guidelines/SOPs issued by the State from time to time, such as, not wearing the masks, not keeping social distances, to participate in the gatherings and the celebrations without maintaining social distances, they are ultimately not damaging themselves but they cause damage to the others also. They cannot be permitted to play with the lives of the others and they cannot be permitted to infringe the rights of other citizens, like right to health guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution of India.

D 10. There is a need to help and guide our people to implement the guidelines and the SOPs issued by the Government, either the Union or the State, such as, wearing of masks, keeping the social distance etc. In many States, despite the huge fine recovered, such as, Rs. 80 to 90 crores in the State of Gujarat alone, people are not following the guidelines and the SOPs. There must be a strict implementation by the authorities so as to ensure that the SOPs and the guidelines issued from time to time are strictly adhered to and followed by the people. Additional Chief Secretary (Home)/Secretary (Home) of respective States shall ensure the strict implementation of the SOPs and the guidelines with the help of the concerned Superintendent of Police/District Superintendent of Police and the Police In-charge of the concerned police station.

F 11. We have already issued various directions with regard to measures to be taken to contain the Covid-19. We once again reiterate the State to issue necessary directions with regard to following measures so as to effectively monitor and supervise the implementation of various SOPs and guidelines.

G i) More and more police personnel shall be deployed at the places where there is likelihood of gathering by the people, such as, Food Courts, Eateries, Vegetable Markets (Wholesale or Retail), sabzi Mandies, bus stations, railway stations, street vendors, etc.

H ii) As far as possible, unless must, no permission shall be granted by the local administration or the Collector/DSP for celebration/gathering even during the day hours and wherever

- the permissions are granted, the local administration/DSP/ Collector/Police In-charge of the local police station shall ensure the strict compliance of the Guidelines/SOPs. There should be a mechanism to check the number of people attending such function/gathering, such as, the particulars with respect to how many persons are going to attend the celebration/gathering, timings during which the celebration/gathering is to take place etc. A B
- iii) There shall be more and more testing and to declare the correct facts and figures. One must be transparent in number of testing and declaring the facts and figures of the persons who are Corona Positive. Otherwise, the people will be misled and they will be under impression that everything is all right and they will become negligent. C
- iv) Whenever directions are issued under the Disaster Management Act directing the corporate hospitals/private hospitals to keep 50% or any other percentage free municipal beds, it must be strictly complied with and there shall be constant vigilance and supervision. D
- v) There shall be free helpline numbers to redress the grievances of common man, when there is non- compliance of the directions by the private hospitals/corporate hospitals. E
- vi) Curfew on weekends/night be considered by States where it is not in place.
- vii) In a micro containment zone or in an area where number of cases are on higher side, to cut the chain, they should be sealed and there should be complete lockdown so far as such areas are concerned. Such containment areas need to be sealed for few days except essential services. The same is required to break the chain of virus spread. F
- viii) Any decision to impose curfew and/or lockdown must be announced long in advance so that the people may know and make provisions for their livelihood, like ration etc. G
- ix) Another issue is a fatigue of front row health care officers, such as, Doctors, Nurses as well as workers. They are already exhausted physically and mentally due to tireless H

A work for eight months. Some mechanism may be required to give them intermittent rest.

12. One more issue has been raised before us regarding gathering organised by Political parties. The Political parties organise different proceedings in connection of election as well as in reference to election of different level including the General Election which are to take place in few States next year.

13. The Election Commission of India has issued broad guidelines for conduct of General Elections/Bye-Elections during Covid-19 in August, 2020. With regard to campaign of political parties following are the guidelines issued by Election Commission of India: -

“13. CAMPAIGN BY THE POLITICAL PARTIES/ CONTESTING CANDIDATES

1) **Door to Door Campaign:** - Subject to any other restriction(s) including extant COVID-19 guidelines, a group of 5(five) persons including candidates, excluding security personnel, if any, is allowed to do door to door campaigning.

2) **Road Shows:** -The Convoy of vehicles should be broken after every 5(five) vehicles instead of 10 vehicles (excluding the security vehicles, if any). The interval between two sets of convoy of vehicles should be half an hour instead of gap of 100 meters. (In supersession of Para 5.8.1 of Returning Officer’s Handbook 2019)”

3) **Election Meetings:** - Public gatherings/rallies may be conducted subject to adherence to extant COVID-19 guidelines. District Election Officer should take following steps for this purpose.

(a) District Election Officer should, in advance, identify dedicated grounds for public gathering with clearly marked Entry/Exit points.

(b) In all such identified grounds, the District Election Officer should, in advance, put markers to ensure social distancing norms by the attendees.

(c) Nodal District Health Officer should be involved in the process to ensure that all COVID-19 related guidelines are adhered to by all concerned in the district.

- (d) District Election Officer and District Superintendent of Police should ensure that the number of attendees does not exceed the limit prescribed by State Disaster Management Authority for public gatherings. A
- (e) DEO should depute Sector Health Regulators to oversee that COVID-19 instructions/guidelines are being followed during these meetings. B
- (f) The political parties and candidates concerned should ensure that all COVID-19 related requirement like face masks, sanitizers, thermal scanning etc. are fulfilled during each of these activities. C
- (g) Non-Compliance of Instructions:- Anybody violating instructions on COVID-19 measures will be liable to proceeded against as per the provisions of Section 51 to 60 of the Disaster Management Act, 2005, besides legal action under Section 1988 of the IPC, and other legal provisions as applicable, as specified in Order No.40-3/2020- DM-I(A) dated 29th July, 2020 of Ministry of Home Affairs. District Election Officer should bring this to the notice of all concerned. D
- 4) Allocation of public spaces must be done using Suvidha app in the manner already prescribed by Commission.” E
- 14. All the States / Union Territories to issue necessary directions to ensure compliance of aforesaid guidelines and guidelines although were issued by General Election/Bye Election, that can be implemented by different States with suitable modifications with reference to Elections of other organisations to ensure safety of people in general from Covid-19. F
- 15. We allow further four weeks’ time to all the States and Union of India to file affidavit bringing on record various measures as indicated in this order for consideration and further directions. G
- List after four weeks.