



SC Questions Leprosy-Free Tag of India

Supreme Court ordered the government to take measures for the eradication of Leprosy and spread awareness about it to end discrimination.

Key Points of Judgment

- Supreme Court's observations on government actions against Leprosy
 - Supreme Court pointed out that though the country was declared leprosy-free on December 31, 2005, patients and their families continue to suffer from leprosy and its stigma.
 - Patients are denied their fundamental right to food. They are not issued BPL (Below Poverty Line) cards to claim the benefit of various welfare schemes such as the Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY). They are deprived of housing, basic civic amenities, adequate sanitary facilities, and rehabilitation programmes.
 - The Supreme Court referred to progress reports of the National Leprosy Eradication Programme (NLEP) to show that only 543 districts of the total 642 districts in the country had achieved the **World Health Organisation-required prevalence rate of less than one case of leprosy for 10,000 persons.**
 - The underestimation of cases of leprosy and the declaration of elimination of leprosy has resulted in the integration of leprosy in general health services. Thus, leading to diversion of funds which would have otherwise been dedicated to eliminating leprosy,
- Supreme Court's directions to Central Government
 - The court has directed the government to be transparent about leprosy and conduct periodic national surveys to gauge its detection rate.
 - Central Government should publish reports of the National Sample Survey on Leprosy conducted in 2010-2011.
 - Both the Centre and States should embark on **“regular and sustainable massive awareness campaigns”** to educate the public.
 - Awareness must be spread about the **Multi-Drug Therapy (MDT)**, which is freely available at health centers to completely cure leprosy under **National Leprosy Eradication Programme (NLEP).**
 - The court banned the use of “frightening” images of leprosy patients, instead it called for the use of “positive” photographs of those cured of leprosy in the campaigns.
 - Currently, the persons affected with leprosy live as a marginalized section in society, deprived of even basic human rights. Awareness campaigns should inform that a person affected with leprosy can lead a normal married life, can have children, can take part in social events and go to work or school as normal.
 - Court had asked the Centre to consider framing a law to repeal all laws that discriminate against those suffering from leprosy.

About Leprosy

Leprosy (Hansen's disease) is an infectious disease caused by *Mycobacterium leprae* that involves the skin and peripheral nerves. The disease mainly affects the skin, the peripheral nerves, mucosa of the upper respiratory tract and eyes.

- The National Leprosy Eradication Programme is a centrally sponsored Health Scheme of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Govt. of India.
 - Govt. of India started National Leprosy Control Programme in 1955.
 - NLEP was launched in 1983 with the objective to arrest the disease activity in all the known cases of leprosy.
 - In 1983 Multidrug therapy (MDT) was introduced in Phases.
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Multi-Drug Therapy

- Multidrug therapy (MDT) consisting of Rifampicin, Clofazimine, and Dapsone which are identified as the cure for leprosy. The MDT programme is supported by the World Health Organisation.
- Since 1995, WHO has supplied MDT free of cost to leprosy patients in all endemic countries.

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