

Create leprosy awareness: SC

The court said it would examine the action plan and pass judgment.

The Supreme Court on Thursday directed the government to constitute a separate wing devoted to create and extend public awareness that leprosy is curable and not contagious.

A three-judge Bench led by Chief Justice of India Dipak Misra ordered All India Radio and Doordarshan to air programmes nationally as well as regionally in the States.

Chief Justice Misra said it was the “primary duty of the state to erase the stigma against those suffering from leprosy and nudge them back into the mainstream.”

The Chief Justice said there had to be “social awakening” to the fact that leprosy was curable and not contagious, considering the advance made in modern medical science. Afflicted persons could not be exposed to stigma which denuded them of basic human dignity.

Persons suffering from leprosy deserved the empathy from authorities as well as the society at large. They deserved to be treated with equality, the Chief Justice noted.

Earlier, the court had asked the Centre and the States to remove references to leprosy as a disability from statute books. It had noted that references to leprosy as a disability amounted to “statutory stigma.”

Panchayat level

Stressing the need for awareness campaign right up to the ‘gram panchayat’ level, the Bench said such measures would eventually help in eradicating the disease and ending ‘discrimination’ of sufferers. Attorney General K.K. Venugopal said steps were being taken to repeal legal provisions in laws which discriminated against leprosy patients.

(With PTI inputs)

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