

SC QUESTIONS 'LEPROSY-FREE' TAG FOR INDIA

Relevant for: Government Policies & Welfare Schemes | Topic: Welfare of Persons with Disability - Schemes & their performance; Mechanisms, Laws, Institutions & Bodies

The Supreme Court.

India “underestimated” leprosy and diverted funds meant to eliminate the curable disease for 18 long years, the Supreme Court said on Friday.

In its 22-page judgment, a Bench led by Chief Justice of India Dipak Misra pointed out that though the country was declared leprosy-free on December 31, 2005, the reality is “entirely different”.

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.

Suffering continues

“The underestimation of cases of leprosy and the declaration of elimination of leprosy has resulted in the integration of leprosy in general health services thereby leading to diversion of funds which would have otherwise been dedicated to eliminating leprosy,” Chief Justice Misra, who authored the verdict, wrote.

Meanwhile, patients and their families continue to suffer from leprosy and its stigma. They are even 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.

“At present, majority of the populace afflicted with leprosy live as a marginalised section in society, deprived of even basic human rights. This manifestly results in violation of the fundamental right to equality and right to live with dignity,” Chief Justice Misra observed for the Bench also comprising Justices A.M. Khanwilkar and D.Y. Chandrachud.

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