

News

Supreme Court orders nationwide accessibility guidelines including wheelchair-friendly spaces, accessible toilets for disabled prisoners



The order aims to address systemic neglect in prisons, providing basic infrastructure, medical care, and family support for

The Supreme Court of India has ordered all States and Union Territories to adopt a uniform system ensuring accessibility, support services and rights protections for prisoners with disabilities [Sathyan Naravoor v. Union of India & Ors.]

The order passed on December 2 expands the safeguards earlier laid down by the Court in L Muruganantham v. State of Tamil Nadu and requires detailed compliance from prison authorities nationwide.

The apex court ordered that prisons must provide wheelchair-friendly spaces, accessible toilets, ramps and sensory-safe environments, and that all States and Union Territories must implement these steps without delay.

The Bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Justice Sandeep Mehta issued the directions while hearing a petition brought by activist Sathyan Naravoor. The petition wanted better legal and infrastructural framework for people with disabilities (PwDs) lodged in Indian prisons, either as under-trials or convicts.

The Court noticed the petitioner's grievance that,

"The prison system all over the country is not providing to the PwD inmates the requisite facilities needed for addressing their specific needs. Instead, these prisoners are being housed under the same conditions as non-PwD inmates, thereby subjecting them to identical treatment in total disregard to their specialized needs."

The petition further claimed that the experiences of several disabled prisoners show how most prisons still lack accessible toilets, ramps, and mobility assistance. It said that even years after the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 (RPwD Act) came into force, prison manuals and infrastructure remain unchanged, leaving inmates dependent on others for daily needs and limiting their dignity and freedom.

The petition mentioned prior cases, including those of GN Saibaba and Stan Swamy, to highlight systemic neglect. Saibaba, a wheelchair-bound academic, and Swamy, who had Parkinson's disease, faced difficulties in prisons that added to severe health and mobility issues, underscoring the urgency of reform.

A central feature of the order is the decision to apply the L **Muruganantham** v. State of Tamil Nadu and Ors. accessibility framework nationally.

The earlier decision had laid down detailed directions on accessible prison infrastructure, medical care, disability-responsive manuals, and periodic audits, which

the bench has now extended to all prisons across the country.

In addition to the existing framework, the Court added six new national-level requirements for prisons:

Extension of Muruganantham routes nationwide.

All States and Union Territories must follow all the directions without exception.

Creation of a dedicated grievance redressal method.

"Every State and Union Territories shall establish a robust, independent and accessible grievance redressal mechanism specifically designed for prisoners with disabilities", directed the court.

The bench stressed that timely registration and resolution of complaints were objectives.

Access to inclusive schooling.

The bench ordered that no inmate should be denied the chance to pursue educational programs just because of a disability, and prisons have to provide the necessary accommodations.

Application of Section 89 of the RPwD Act in jails.

Section 89 sets penalties for violations of the Act. The Court directed that the penalties should also apply, with appropriate adjustments, to prisons across the country, and it asked authorities to educate prison staff and legal-aid workers about them.

Structured plan for assistive gadgets.

The Court accepted the need for security but asked every State and Union Territory to provide a detailed plan for getting, keeping and safely using assistive aids and mobility aids in prisons.

The Court asked for reports that must explain the procedures, infrastructure, buying process, supervision rules and security steps to ensure these aids are given to inmates.

Enhanced visiting rights.

Prisoners with benchmark disabilities must receive expanded visitation chances to keep family contact and ensure monitoring of their needs, as directed by the court.

All States and Union Territories are expected by the Supreme Court to submit thorough compliance reports within four months.

In order to fully implement the Muruganantham framework as well as the new directives given in this case, these reports must describe the actions that have already been taken and those that are planned