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SC rules on mercy-killing

'Living Will' will now permit doctors to carry out euthanasia

MEHNAZ YASMIN

Chennai: The Supreme Court's recent decision on euthanasia has defined what was not previously defined and has provided for a well set out comprehensive procedure to be followed for passive euthanasia, according to Nilofar Absar, an advocate practising in the Delhi High Court.

The Indian laws of euthanasia are the best one can "give to a society such as the one we live in where crime rates are extremely high," she added.

The Supreme Court in its ruling on March 9 announced that "persons of deteriorated health or terminally ill patients should be able to execute a document titled —My Living Will and Attorney Authorisation" for euthanasia.

An advance directive stating an individual's wish to end treatment will be given the status of a 'living will' and that "can be presented to the hospital" when the executant is unable to communicate his wishes due to his suffering from a serious terminal illness.

The court judgement followed Pinky Virani's plea in the case of Aruna Ramachandra Shanbaug, a nurse who went into a coma after



The SC ruled 'Living Will' to state an individual's wishes to end treatment

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she was sodomised by an attendant in the King Edward Memorial hospital in Mumbai. Shanbaug was in a permanent vegetative state for 42 years before she died of pneumonia.

Absar said, "It would be correct to say that passive euthanasia was

given the color of Law following the Aruna Shanbaug Judgement. However that did not lay down the guidelines to be followed while implementing the decision and did not provide for checks and balances in the system."

Neurosurgery resident Dr Sai

Sriram welcomed the judgement and said that the patient's wish to leave in dignity should be respected totally.

"It is an informed decision and the doctors are not taking it unilaterally," he said, adding that, the question was whether you want to prolong the suffering of the patient and his family, "both financially and emotionally".

About palliative medicine being used to counter the need for euthanasia, he said it involved administering stronger painkillers which again makes it another form of passive euthanasia. The Do Not Resuscitate (DNR) laws are not followed in India yet.

The right to live with dignity, according to the judgement, guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution means availability of food, shelter and health and does not include the right to die with dignity.

The right to die with dignity is however "inherent" and "inextricable" and hence the "right to die sans pain and suffering is fundamental to one's bodily autonomy and such integrity does not remotely accept any effort that puts the individual on life support without any ray of hope".

AMMK is TTV's new party

MEGHA KAVERI & JAGDISHOR PANDAY

Chennai: Sidelined AIADMK leader and RK Nagar MLA TTV Dinakaran launched his new party named Amma Makkal Munnetra Kazhagam (AMMK) in Melur, near Madurai on Thursday.

Unveiling the party flag, he said that this was "just an interim arrangement till the original party is retrieved from betrayers like Edappadi Palaniswami (EPS) and O.Panneerselvam (OPS)." His flag bears the colours of the AIADMK flag with a sketch of former Chief Minister J Jayalalitha in the middle.

"I will not rest till I get back the two leaves symbol from them," he announced at the function.

TTV Dinakaran, nephew of V.Sasikala, a long-time aide of Jayalalitha, had won the RK Nagar seat as an independent candidate, which had fallen vacant after Jayalalitha's demise. He contested on the "Cooker" symbol after having lost the "Two Leaves" symbol to Palaniswami.

AIADMK had split into two factions- one led by Sasikala, who nominated Palaniswami as the Chief Minister and the other led by Panneerselvam after the death of Jayalalitha. After Sasikala was imprisoned in the Disproportionate Assets case, the two factions merged, with Panneerselvam becoming



Amma Makkal Munnetra Kazhagam (AMMK) features a sketch of J Jayalalitha in its flag

THE WEEK

the Deputy Chief Minister. TTV Dinakaran was evicted from the party.

This led to a few AIADMK MLAs switching over to TTV camp. The case against those MLAs is pending in the Madras High Court.

This is the second party launch in Tamil Nadu in less than a month. Actor-turned politician Kamal Haasan launched his party Makkal Needhi Maiaam on February 21. Another actor Rajnikanth is all set to come up with a new party. Interestingly, Dinakaran and Kamal launched their parties in Madurai.

Dinakaran has the support of the 18 MLAs, all members of the AIADMK, who were disqualified by the Tamil Nadu assembly spea-

ker last year. They supported Dinakaran and expressed lack of confidence in the Palaniswami government.

AIADMK leader and Fisheries Minister D Jayakumar dismissed Dinakaran's party as a "mosquito" and called the ruling AIADMK a "lion".

Journalist Dharani Thangavelu said the launch a new party by Dinakaran might change the internal dynamics of the ruling AIADMK.

Social media user Srinivasan from Chennai tweeted, "So 'Amma' is more relevant today than 'Anna' and 'Dravidam'. This was in reference to the fact that the word 'Dravidian' which figures in most regional parties in Tamil Nadu is missing in the new party.

Traffic chokes '108' vans

KATHLENE REENA

Chennai: A 25-year-old woman died after an ambulance was unable to reach her on time in Tiruvudiyar on the East Coast Road here on March 13.

Kuppulakshmi was travelling in a share auto along with her family when the auto driver lost control and the vehicle overturned. Kuppulakshmi's leg was severely injured on impact. "A '108' call was made immediately but the ambulance took over two hours to reach them," said her husband Nagooran.

Residents living south of Chennai, on the busy areas of Old Mahabalipuram Road do not have easy

access to government-funded medical facilities as the nearest hospital is at least 30 km away in Royapettah.

Traffic on this 30 km stretch is a major impediment. Ambulances are unable to get to the patient in time, or are not able to return to the hospital so that proper treatment can be given.

"Most people are in such a hurry that they pay no heed to an ambulance. Sometimes, even if they are willing to move, traffic is so chock-a-block that they are not able to," says M. Selvakumar, a traffic policeman stationed on Kamarajar Salai, one of the busiest roads in Chennai.

Even though according to the Code of Medical Ethics, 2002, hospitals cannot deny treatment to road traffic accident (RTA) victims, private hospitals turn them away, making government hospitals the only choice.

"Private hospitals are reluctant to take road accident cases for two main reasons. One, it was earlier required for the police to be informed. Even now, these hospitals are still afraid of police harassment. Second, because it is unsure whether the patient can pay for the treatment he receives. More often than not, the treatment procedures are expensive and complex," says Dr. Gaurav Sharma.

GVK EMRI, the company that provides the '108' ambulance services, however denies the claims that ambulances are unable to reach the accident victim on time.

"In areas where there's more traffic, the number of ambulances are almost doubled. The ambulance is required to go to the hospital that the patient asks for. Private hospitals will not stop us from entering because we're carrying a road accident patient. The woman died because of her injuries and not because an ambulance couldn't reach her," said an official at the GVK EMRI.



Traffic snarls on busy roads block ambulances from reaching the spot on time

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Doctors seek OBC quota in PG seats

MEGHA KAVERI

Chennai: Various doctors and medical students associations of Tamil Nadu have come together to press their demand for 27 per cent reservation for Other Backward Class (OBC) in the all India quota seats in postgraduate medical courses in Tamilnadu.

Representatives from the Doctors Association for Social Equality (DASE), Government All Doctors Association (GADA), Service Doctors Welfare Association (SDWA), Tamil Nadu Medical Students Association (TNMSA), and Indian Doctors for Peace and Development (IDPD) presented their demands related to medical education here on Tuesday.

As much as 50 per cent of the PG seats in the medical colleges in Tamil Nadu is being earmarked as All India quota which is filled based on the results of the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET-PG). Their demand is to provide for OBC reservation in this quota.

"The current process of NEET-based admission is against social justice and reservation. We hereby ask the Tamil Nadu Government to request the Centre to take action and allocate 27 per cent for OBC candidates," said Dr. G.R. Ravindranath, General Secretary, DASE.

Till 2017, the candidates serving in government hospitals were given grace marks between 10 and 30 per cent in NEET based on the number of years they had served in those hospitals and reservation of up to 50 per cent in admissions. The Supreme Court, in 2017, had abolished reservations for in-service candidates, thereby directing the States to follow Medical



Dr.G.R.Ravindranath, the General Secretary of DASE speaking to reporters about the demands put forth by the associations.

MEGHA KAVERI

Council of India (MCI) regulations in this regard.

"The abolition of service quota reservation is detrimental to the government doctors and hospitals and the poor people. We want the decision-making power regarding reservations to be given to the State Governments and the MCI rules to be amended accordingly," said Ravindranath, referring to the SC judgement.

Other demands of the collective includes priority for candidates for Tamil Nadu for seats in

the colleges in the State, building helipad and establishing fire and trauma care centres in district hospitals, establishing emergency medicine and burn injury treatment as a separate course in the curriculum and increasing the state government doctors' emoluments and other benefits on par with that offered by the Centre.

The collective has requested the Chief Minister to write to the Prime Minister detailing their demands failing which the members of the associations plan to go on strike from March 20.

Pepper sprays not popular among Chennai women

KANISHKA SARKAR

Chennai: With increasing cases of stalking and eve-teasing in the city, women safety has become a major concern. However, pepper spray, a primary medium of self-defense is not very popular among women here.

Akhila, a student of Ethiraj College, said that most people here were not familiar with the concept of using pepper spray for self-defense. In fact, many here waited for something to happen to them and then learnt safety measures.

She added, "Even I haven't owned a pepper spray until now, but now that crime against women are on the rise in the city, we all must be cautious and keep such a handy device for safety."

After the 20-year old Ashwini was killed in front of her college, in broad daylight by a stalker, women in the city have become more alert while on the road.

However, when asked about the safety measures they take, they said they complained to the police or snapped back at the stalker, but other than that they didn't use any self defense techniques.

Another college student Niveditha said, "I travel in MTC buses and many a times people try and touch women inappropriately. Most women shout back and the

men shy away because of the crowd, however that may not be the case when one is alone, therefore carrying a pepper spray is a must."

Back in 2016, Swati, an IT sector employee was murdered by a stalker, at the crowded Nungambakam railway station, with mute spectators around. She was hacked to death at around 7 a.m. in the morning.

Even after such incidents, where no one stepped forward to help, it's high time women realize

that there will be situations where they might be alone and will have to act swiftly to escape the danger.

It is strange despite realizing the need to carry pepper sprays, which is handy and is as cheap as Rs. 130-180, not many women do it.

However, commenting on the availability of the product in the market Niveditha said that pepper sprays were mostly available only in malls, which was not an affordable option for many women.

Narayanan, owner of Cobra Pepper Spray Dealers in Thiruvanniyur, said that in the course of past few months the demand for pepper spray had increased but not as much as it should be. Explaining why there were not enough shops in the city he said, "There are no buyers. Only when

there are buyers, shopkeepers will start selling any specific product."

When college going girls were asked if any lectures or workshops happened on their campuses to teach simple self-defense techniques and train them against sexual harassment, most of them said that no such training took place.

However, Delviya, a college student said, "No such workshop has taken place yet in college, but back in school, we were taught a few self-defense measures. However, it is equally important to hold such workshops in college as well."

When asked if she used a pepper spray she said there were no shops in her area that sold pepper sprays and hence she had to buy it online.



Pepper sprays are still slow-moving goods in Chennai and is available only in select stores

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Riding without helmets

MD EYAMIN

Chennai: In the 10 minutes from 2.30 p.m. on Tuesday as many as 420 two wheelers crossed the



A man riding his moped without helmet at the Tharamani main road as he goes past vehicles. Two bikers were seen wearing helmets. MD EYAMIN

Chennai Central Station. At least one hundred of the riders were riding without helmets.

This is despite the regular crackdown by the police on people riding two-wheelers without helmets

and goes against the police claim that about 90 percent of motorcyclists wear helmet in Chennai.

According to the Traffic Police rules, wearing a helmet is a mandatory requirement for two wheeler

drivers. Those found without helmets would be fined Rs 1,000. Earlier it was Rs 100.

The Traffic Police Department has been organising awareness raising programme to increase the helmet use.

"The number of helmet users has been increasing," said R. Vellu, Traffic Inspector.

Vellu said "People are now awarded enough punishment for violating rules. They get away with a fine."

Others accused the police of taking bribes of Rs 50 to Rs 100 and letting the helmet-less riders get away.

"In my eight years of motorcycle riding, I was fined twice. First time I could manage the traffic police offering him a cup of tea and the second time by offering Rs 100," said V. Sathish, a sales manager of Yes Bank.

Sathish added that "Health problem is also responsible for less use of helmet. Due to use of helmet some people suffer from hair fall. And, some motorcycles don't have helmet locker."



Children between ages 8 and 18 sitting on the footpath by the exit gate at Chennai Central Railway Station LAKSHMIKANTH K A

Runaway children

LAKSHMIKANTH K A

Chennai: About 200 children between ages 12 and 18 were identified as runaway children and were rescued at the Chennai Central Railway Station, here, in the last six months, according to officials at Chennai Central office of Child India Foundation, an NGO that operates a telephone helpline called Childline, for children in distress.

"We see children coming in from states all over India, especially, Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, and Orissa. Usually they are 8 to 18 years old; they run away from home for all sorts of reasons - exams, running away from school, family problems like abusive and

alcoholic fathers.

Last week a group of 6 children ran away from their school in Coimbatore and told us that they came here to see Marina beach.

There are even cases of mental health problems in the children we rescued," said Malini, Coordinator, Child India Foundation, Chennai Central.

"Almost 90% of the cases, we were able to contact the parents and reunite the children.

Parents come down and collect their children. We have two bunk beds here at our facility, and we provide food and accommodation for a week till the parents arrive.

If it takes more than a week, the children are shifted to government homes," she added.

Malini also said that, though few, there are cases of child labour in the last few months - runaway children who start off as cleaners in tea stalls and other small hotels were sent to industrial areas like Ambattur for work. In such cases, it takes longer time to track the children, more than two weeks. "We go for rounds once every three hours, day and night. If we find any unattended children we bring them to our centre. When these children arrive, some find work at tea stalls, mechanic shops, and as hawkers selling toys on streets. Within ten days, they are tired from the work and want to go home; they wander around on the platforms and we find them," said V Ganesh, staff member at the NGO.

No facilities for the handicapped

Lack of handicap-friendly infrastructure makes people like Kumar's life harder every day.

JAGDISHOR PANDAY

Chennai: Siva Kumar, 31, is blind. A white-stick is his friend from childhood. He lives temporarily in Thiruvananthapuram and is a student of Tamil Language at the International Institute of Tamil Studies in Taramani. "Coming to college and going back to my room every day is hard for me. Using public transportation like bus and train is burden for people like us," said Kumar in his office.

Lack of handicap-friendly infrastructure makes people like Kumar's life harder every day. For example, the Rajiv Gandhi Salai IT expressway highway (45km) is a major road connecting Chennai with Mahabalipuram, in Kanchipuram district, and local train (19.8 km) connect Velachery to Chennai Beach are tough places for handicap people.

The purpose of building these networks are to make people to access it. But these infrastructures re-

S. Krishna Kumar, 58, is a temporally handicap person. He had an operation on his right leg knee.

He became friends with a stick for a few months. "But, I can't easily walk around from Tiruvanniyur (house) to Indiranagar," he lamented. "Though, I am temporary a handicap person I experienced many things in the short time." He questioned, "The train will stop for two minutes here. But, how will a handicap person get into the train?"

main burden for those handicap people.

V. Karthick, 34, is an officer at Directorate of Tamil Etymological Dictionary project in Taramani. He doesn't have legs and has been using a wheelchair from his childhood.

"But it is a tough job for me to attend office from house and a return back," he said. Moreover, there is no wheelchair friendly structure in his office too. "I have to roll my body every day to climb to the first floor of my office," Karthick added.

The entire infrastructure in local railway, express highway and government office's infrastructures is not handicap friendly people.

In local railway stations, there are no facilities for wheelchair people. At Indiranagar railway station, there are big ladder steps, pyramid like slope path where wheelchair can't move up and down easily, and no proper toilet system for handicap people.

S. Krishna Kumar, 58, is a temporally handicap person. He had an

operation on his right leg knee.

He became friends with a stick for a few months. "But, I can't easily walk around from Tiruvanniyur (house) to Indiranagar," he lamented. "Though, I am temporary a handicap person I experienced many things in the short time." He questioned, "The train will stop for two minutes here. But, how will a handicap person get into the train?"

He said that government should introduce the handicap friendly trains, roads, stations, and offices as soon as possible.

He added, "How a handicap person can buy ticket at the busy station like the Central Station in Chennai."

An officer Karthick said that even though government had given them a discount while travelling at the bus, but a conductor took more money from them.

"They will ask full money. Sometime they also ask wheelchair money saying that it occupied space in the bus," he said.

Towards a Smoke-Free Chennai

LAKSHMIKANTH K A

Chennai: The Prohibition of Smoking in Public Places Rules, 2008, seems to have reduced the instances of people puffing away in public, according to police sources.

"There are very few offenders we caught in the past few months.



A college student smoking in front of the Institute of Hotel Management in Taramani LAKSHMIKANTH K A

the entire day is gone for the offender. So next time, he will be more careful not to smoke in public places," Mohan added.

However, Sudarshan P, who is a non-smoker said, "People who do it still do it; they even smoke in the bathrooms of trains. I know people who were caught smoking in trains,

Most people go out of the station and smoke. They are very much aware of the no-smoking rule in railway stations and bus stands," said V Mohan, Inspector Railway Protection Force, Chennai Central Railway Station.

"The fine is just Rs. 200 and there is no jail term according to the law. What we do is this: we take him to the court, collect his identification details and the magistrate would book a case and levy a fine of Rs. 200 and in all this process

but they weren't asked to get out of the train. But there is more awareness among the public for sure. They won't stay quiet if someone is smoking around them in a public space."

L Ranganathan, who is a smoker, said "I don't smoke in public places as a matter of principle, but it is not so strict otherwise. Usually everywhere, if you are caught smoking they charge you Rs.200 and let you go. Sometimes they take you to court, but that is very rare."

Price-rise brings relief to vegetable vendors

KANISHKA SARKAR

Chennai: After two months of continuous drop in prices of vegetables in the Koyambedu wholesale vegetable market here, wholesalers finally found relief as prices showed a gradual increase.

However the prices of not many vegetables have increased drastically. For two weeks now, the price of beans has been increasing. It was between Rs. 8 and Rs 12 last week, and is now between Rs. 18 and Rs 22. It is being sold for Rs. 30-45 at retail shops, said Soundar, a wholesaler here.

Another wholesaler-cum-retailer, Ajith Kumar, said, "Except for yellow and red capsicum whose price has come down from Rs. 90 to Rs. 50, prices of all other vegetables have increased. Earlier when the prices were low, our wholesale and retail prices were the same. However, with the increase we are able to stabilize the business by stating fairly high retail prices."

Due to the drop, not many people were coming here since they got the vegetables at very low prices at their nearby vegetable shops itself, but now that the prices have increased buyers in the wholesale market have increased, he added.

Explaining the reason for the change in prices, Ajith said, "Now that the climate has changed and the yield has reduced, and there is no surplus. Therefore, prices have become stable. For instance, if earlier I was getting 600-700 boxes of vegetables, now I have to take only 500 boxes, which can be easily sold." P. Sukumar, treasurer of the



Wholesale vegetable vendors selling their produce at the Koyambedu Vegetable market. KANISHKA SARKAR

Koyambedu Vegetable and Flower market Association, said that the fluctuations in supply due to weather change happened every year. However, this year owing to the good yield, and surplus produce, prices unexpectedly dropped a lot. According to Sukumar, now that

P. Sukumar, treasurer of the Koyambedu Vegetable and Flower market Association, said that the fluctuations in supply due to weather change happened every year. However, this year owing to the good yield, and surplus produce, prices unexpectedly dropped a lot.

the weather in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka had changed, and vegetable supply had become stable, prices were on the rise by at least 10%. Prices were expected to increase further, however, only until March. In April again, there would be a marginal drop, he added.

