

MOST URGENT

ITEM NO.801 Court 2 (Video Conferencing)

PIL WRIT

S U P R E M E C O U R T O F I N D I A
R E C O R D O F P R O C E E D I N G SSMW (C) No. 5 OF 2021

IN RE

ALARMING NEWSPAPER REPORT REGARDING
KANWAR YATRA IN STATE OF U.P.

Date : 14-07-2021 The Court has taken cognizance of the matter.

CORAM : HON'BLE MR. JUSTICE ROHINTON FALI NARIMAN
HON'BLE MR. JUSTICE B.R. GAVAICounsel for the parties

For Union of India

Mr. Tushar Mehta, Solicitor General
Mr. B. V. Balram Das, Adv.

For State of Uttarakhand

Dr. Abhishek Atrey, Adv.

UPON hearing the counsel the Court made the following
O R D E R

We were a little disturbed given today's headline in the "Indian Express" of 14.07.2021 about the 'Kanwar Yatra', which is likely to be held from 25.07.2021. This Court has taken Suo Moto cognizance of the newspaper report and thus issues notice to the Union of India and the States of Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand to file their early response. The Newspaper Report headline states as follows :-

"AMID FEARS of a possible third wave of Covid-19, the Uttarakhand government on Tuesday suspended the kanwar yatra even as neighbouring Uttar Pradesh is pressing ahead with the annual ritual that sees a heavy movement of pilgrims

across states in the northern belt.

At a meeting on Tuesday with top officials of the administration and police, Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami discussed apprehensions of a possible third wave of Covid-19, the recent detection of the Delta Plus variant in the state, and the experience of other countries that have witnessed a resurgence of covid cases. Sources said the government also sought the view of experts before arriving at the decision to cancel the yatra.

Speaking to reporters, Dhami said, "We decided to cancel the yatra, according topmost priority to human life...A lot of discussions were held on the issue over the last few days. Our officials held talks with neighbouring states. The outcome of this is that in view of the pandemic and with a new variant detected in the state, we do not want Haridwar to be the center of the pandemic....People's lives are our priority. We can't play with that.....we won't take any chances."

Uttarakhand's decision to suspend the yatra comes even as the administration in UP has started preparing for the yatra - "with restrictions".

UP Additional Director General (ADG) Law and Order, Prashant Kumar, said that this year, the yatra will be held from July 25 to August 6.

Officials said that in 2019, the last time the yatra was organised, nearly 3.5 crore devotees (kanwariyas) had visited Haridwar while over 2-3 crore people had visited

pilgrimage spots in Western UP."

The headline just above this headline speaks about the Prime Minister's statement when he met the North-Eastern Chief Ministers that when people ask about the third wave of the Covid-19 virus striking the citizenry of India, it's upto us to stop it and we cannot compromise "even a bit".

Given the disparate political voices, all speaking at the same time, it is important that the relevant Secretary, Union of India, respond to this news report. Given the fact that this Yatra is to take off from 25.07.2021, it is necessary to fix a short time period for this case. Affidavits will be filed by Friday morning, the 16th of July, 2021, responding to the aforesaid news article by the relevant Secretary, Union of India; Principal Secretary to the State of Uttarakhand; and Principal Secretary to the State of Uttar Pradesh.

List the matter on 16.07.2021 (Friday).

A copy of this Order be given *Dasti* to Mr. B. V. Balram Das, standing counsel for Union of India, Dr. Abhishek Atrey, standing counsel for the State of Uttarakhand and Mr. Pradeep Mishra, standing counsel for the State of Uttar Pradesh immediately.

The Registry is directed to send a copy of this order to Hon'ble the Chief Justice of India forthwith.

(JAYANT KUMAR ARORA)
COURT MASTER

(NISHA TRIPATHI)
BRANCH OFFICER