

Chennai Corporation Softens Stance on Clearing Temple Near High Court

The Chennai Corporation took a 'U' turn on Wednesday and requested the Madras High Court to suspend its order passed on Tuesday, which granted permission to it to demolish the 'Needhi Karumari Amman temple' constructed unauthorisedly on NSC Bose Road abutting the High Court's compound wall.

The second bench of Justices SK Agnihotri and KK Sasidharan was told on Wednesday that the government's policy decision with regard to removal of construction of unauthorised temples at public places had not been made known to the bench inadvertently.

The bench was told that it would first attempt to persuade the encroachers to remove the unauthorised construction on their own. Only if the persuasion failed, it would resort to other statutory means to evict them.

The matter relates to a ‘temple’ built in memory of former chief

minister late MG Ramachandran in 1985-86, right next to the main entrance of the High Court. On Tuesday, responding to a contempt plea of social activist KR Ramaswamy, and the demolition order passed by the bench, the Corporation counsel gave an undertaking that the 'temple' would be removed and a compliance report would be filed by 2.25 pm on Wednesday.

However, Advocate-General AL Somayaji told the bench that the Corporation counsel had given the undertaking without proper instructions and that the government's policy on such religious structures too had not been brought to the notice of the court.

Corporation commissioner Vikram Kapoor filed an affidavit saying the government had evolved a policy with respect to removal, regularisation and relocation of temples, mosques, churches and gurudwaras in public places. "The policy envisages the constitution of state-level and district level committees to evict encroachments in relating to religious constructions. The policy provides for persuasion/motivation and the involvement of public at two stages, and where the first stage failed to yield results, eviction can be resorted to by invoking statutory provisions." The failure to tell the court about the policy was a bonafide mistake, Kapoor said, and tendered his unconditional apology for the same.

The bench gave the corporation two weeks time to comply with the demolition order and meanwhile Ramaswamy could file his objections, if any.