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24 COVID-19 patients in Nashik die without oxygen as gas leaks

Valve malfunction in hospital led to the incident, says State Health Minister

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
PUNE

At least 24 COVID-19 patients on life support died after a leak in a medical oxygen tank disrupted the supply of the gas at Dr. Zakir Hussain Hospital in Nashik, Maharashtra, on Wednesday.

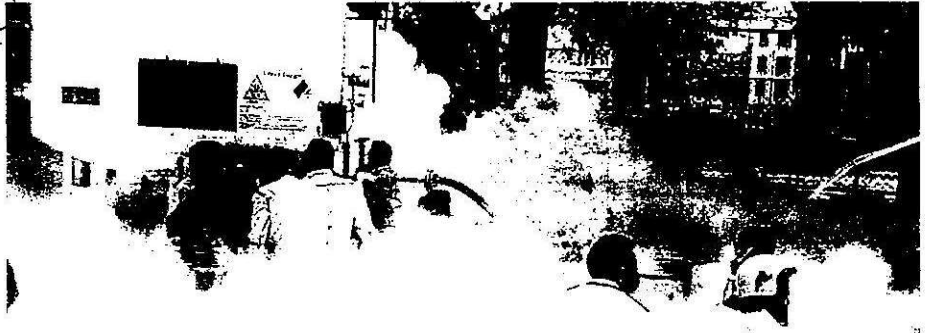
Attributing the leak to a valve malfunction, State Health Minister Rajesh Tope said a high-level inquiry had been ordered to ascertain if negligence had caused the tragedy.

Sources said the tragedy unfolded around 10 a.m. when the tank was being refilled after the oxygen level went down. The massive leak caused disruption in the vital oxygen supply for at least half-an-hour. A fire brigade team had to be rushed to the hospital to contain the leak.

157 patients

Mr. Tope said 61 of the 157 patients in the hospital were in a critical condition and required oxygen.

Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray, expressing grief over the incident, announced a thorough inquiry. "The kin of every patient who died will receive a compensation of ₹5 lakh. I appeal to the people not to indulge in any kind of politics," he said in a statement.



Tragedy unfolds: Medical oxygen leaking out of a storage unit at Dr. Zakir Hussain Municipal Hospital in Nashik on Wednesday. •PTI

Mr. Thackeray said the tragedy showed the need to be careful in the struggle against the pandemic. "We have been facing the pandemic for more than a year now and the available doctors and medical staff are working day and night to save lives of patients... Such incidents should not happen in the future. The administration will have to work very carefully to prevent any such occurrences that could erode the morale of the health personnel," Mr. Thackeray said.

Nashik Collector Suraj Mandhare said the tank belonged to a private vendor. "Apparently, technicians tried to fix the valve when

low pressure caused the leakage," he said.

"Currently, the other patients are being supplied oxygen from the repaired tank. They are in a stable condition, as per medical authorities," Mr. Mandhare said.

Chaotic scenes erupted on the hospital premises as relatives of patients converged on the scene of the tragedy. They accused the Nashik Municipal Corporation authorities of not giving them proper information on the incident.

PM 'anguished'

Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed anguish over the incident. "The tragedy at a hospital in Nashik be-

cause of oxygen tank leakage is heart-wrenching. Anguished by the loss of lives due to it. Condolences to the bereaved families in this sad hour," he tweeted.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah and Congress leader Rahul Gandhi also condoled the deaths of the patients. Mr. Gandhi urged the Maharashtra government to provide all assistance to the affected.

The tragedy comes at a time when Maharashtra, the worst-hit State in India in terms of COVID-19 cases and fatalities, is reeling under an acute shortage of oxygen.

Maharashtra tightens restrictions

Govt. offices to function with 15% attendance

STAFF REPORTER *9/3/21*
MUMBAI

Contrary to speculation over a complete lockdown in the State, the Maharashtra government on Wednesday night issued guidelines that only tightened restrictions.

Under the new guidelines to kick in at 8 p.m. on Thursday, all government offices

can operate only with 15% attendance, except for emergency services directly connected to management of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Private offices should function only with 15% of their total strength or five persons, whichever is more. For work required for essential services, offices can work at no more than 50% of their total strength.

Wedding ceremonies may be conducted as a single event in a single hall, not ex-

tending beyond two hours, with a maximum of 25 persons attending. Any family flouting the rules may be fined ₹50,000 and the location closed till pandemic is over.

Private passenger buses can ply only for emergency services, and at only 50% of the seating capacity, with no standing travellers.

For inter-city or inter-district travel, the bus service operator must restrict halts to a maximum of two in a ci-

ty. Thermal scanners shall be used. Alighting passengers shall have a mark stamped on their hand for 14 days of home quarantine.

For public passenger transport, trains, metro and mono rail services shall be used only by government personnel, and passes, and tickets will be issued based on government identity cards. Medical personnel and those needing medical treatment are allowed to use public transport.