

**PANDEMIC COVID – 19**

**ORISSA HIGH COURT: RISING TO THE OCCASION**

Covid-19 has had a huge impact on the judicial process in the Country and Orissa High Court is no exception. The pandemic COVID-19 has left no room for any speculation as to when it would come to an end. In order to maintain the administration of justice in the State amidst Lock Down/Shut Down/Unlocks, the Orissa High Court has rise to the occasion and demonstrated resilience and efficiency.

The Orissa High Court have adapted quickly to the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure that justice continues to be served as efficiently and expeditiously as possible. Although circumstances changed on a daily basis, the Court have done what best could be done to maintain the administration of justice following the COVID-19 protocol.

With periodic assessment of outbreak and review of the situation prevalent, functioning of the Court is being regulated from time to time. During the initial phase of Lockdown the Court functioned with two to three Benches on alternative days of the week. On 04.05.2020 the extent of functioning through Video Conferencing was scaled up to five Single Benches on every working day of the week and one Division Bench on every Tuesday and Thursday. On 26.05.2020 the functioning of Court through Video Conferencing was again scaled up to seven Single Benches on every working day and one Division Bench on Tuesday and Thursday. On 09.06.2020 the functioning was further scaled up to one Division Bench and seven Single Benches on every working day. Since 24.08.2020 the Court is functioning with three Division Benches and six Single Benches on every working day.

Statistics reveals that **24,936** cases have been disposed of since 23.03.2020 till 16.10.2020 as against institution of 38,882 new cases. **207** Division Benches and **616** Single Benches have functioned through Video Conferencing during this period. The disposed of cases includes **9,188** Bail Applications u/s. 438 Cr.P.C. and 439 Cr.P.C., **12,837** Writ Applications and **2,243** Contempt Petitions. Besides, 568 other matters were disposed of which include Criminal Appeals, Writ Appeals, First Appeals from Orders, Civil Miscellaneous Petitions, Criminal Miscellaneous Petitions, Criminal Revisions and Applications u/s. 482 Cr.P.C.

The normal functioning of the Court having largely affected due to pandemic since last seven months, efforts have also been made to hear old matters and Jail Criminal Appeals where appellants are in custody since more than 10 years along with urgent matters. Reserve Lists of old cases are published for respective Benches for the ensuing month requesting the learned Advocates to file written notes of arguments in advance. Due to cooperation of the Bar it has become possible to dispose of **103** numbers of cases which were **more than 10 (ten) years old** including thirty years old Criminal Appeals, twenty years old Second Appeals and ten years old Writ Petitions and other matters. The disposed of cases include **5 (five)** numbers of **30 (thirty)** years old Criminal Appeals and **23 (twenty-three)** numbers of **20 (twenty)** years old matters which includes **9 (nine)** numbers of Criminal Appeals and **10 (ten)** of Writ matters. Jail Criminal Appeals which were of **15 (fifteen) years old and 10 (ten) years old** have been also disposed of.

Learned members of the Bar and the Government Advocates are extending their cooperation in disposal of old matters through Video Conferencing.

In view of the difficulty associated with the lockdown, willing lawyers and litigants have been facilitated to file cases through e- filing as well as Drop Box. While the learned members of Bar have been requested to conduct cases through Video Conferencing from their homes/offices and provision has been made to that effect. For the lawyers and litigants who have no access to IT services, they have been facilitated with e-Seva Kendra. Lawyers and litigants have been permitted to download digital copies of orders and Judgments from High Court website. The Government Authorities have been asked to accept copies of such orders as equivalent to certified copy of the order after due verification from the website of the High Court.

The High Court also facilitated its employees with flexible working time, work at home, and prioritize on mental wellbeing by conducting awareness camps. The employees were educated about COVID-19 symptoms and preventive measures. Back to back Covid tests were conducted to rule out the spread of virus. A dedicated Covid Care Center has been made functional for the employees of the High Court.

It has been also contemplated that the High Court will function with full working strength of Judges from 02.11.2020, for the present, by virtual mode.

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