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Govt guidelines for disabled during national anthem: Maintain maximum alertness physically

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Representative photo. The Union home ministry has come out with guidelines to be followed by differently abled when the national anthem is being played in theatres.(Sanchir Khanna / HT File)

The Union home ministry has issued guidelines on how people with disabilities can show respect when the national anthem is being played in movie halls or public functions, saying they should not move and position themselves “maintaining the maximum possible alertness physically”.

The home ministry's December 21 guidelines follow the Supreme Court's modified order that exempted physically challenged people from standing during the national anthem. They also spell out how those who have a hearing disability, mild intellectual disabilities or are visually challenged should show respect to the national anthem.

In November last year, the Supreme Court ordered cinema halls to mandatorily play the national anthem before the screening of a film and directed that the audience must stand in respect.

It subsequently modified its order on December 9 following a plea that disabled people should be exempted. Attorney general Mukul Rohatgi informed the apex court that the Centre will issue guidelines within 10 days.

The protocol says while a person who is on a crutch should become stable (non-mobile) to the "extent of maximum alertness" those with hearing disability "if capable to stand, shall stand with attentiveness."

"... there must be appropriate indication on the screen that the national anthem is being played or sung as the persons with hearing disability is likely to miss the auditory cues. Suitable instructions may be given in the form of captioning as well as in sign language on the screen so that the persons with hearing impairment are well informed that the national anthem is being played," the guideline says.

The rules give relaxation to people with severe intellectual disabilities but say that those with mild intellectual disability without associated conditions “can be trained to understand and respect the national anthem.”

The guideline also calls for generating public awareness “so as to avoid any unwarranted incident against persons with intellectual disabilities as some of the persons with intellectual disabilities may not exhibit physical disabilities.”

The national anthem is already played before movies in some states – such as Maharashtra – but the measure is often controversial, with instances of people beaten up for not standing up for the anthem.

Last October, award-winning writer Salil Chaturvedi - who suffers from spinal injury - was beaten up at a Panaji multiplex for not standing up while the national anthem was being played.

It was last ordered to be played in cinemas in India after the country’s 1962 war with China but the practice was discontinued in 1975 after most moviegoers ignored it.

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