

## Supreme Court Bans Hand-Pulled Rickshaws in Maharashtra's Matheran, Citing "Inhuman" Practice



In a landmark ruling, the Supreme Court of India has ordered a complete ban on hand-pulled rickshaws in the eco-sensitive hill station of Matheran, Maharashtra. The Court, in a three-judge bench, condemned the practice as "inhuman" and a betrayal of the constitutional promises of social and economic justice. It has directed the Maharashtra government to phase out the rickshaws within six months and implement a scheme to replace them with e-rickshaws.

The Court's decision was a result of hearings related to an ongoing e-rickshaw pilot project in the town. For decades, hand-pulled rickshaws were a primary mode of transport in Matheran, where automobiles are prohibited to preserve its environment. However, the Court viewed the practice of one human pulling another as a violation of fundamental human dignity. The bench observed that individuals are compelled into such labor not by choice but by poverty and a lack of alternatives. The Court stated that continuing this practice 78 years after Independence and 75 years after the Constitution was enacted "would be betraying the promise given by the people of India to themselves."

The Supreme Court's order mandates that the state government must now provide a viable alternative for the rickshaw pullers who will lose their source of livelihood. The Court referenced a successful e-rickshaw model in Kevadia, Gujarat, where the state purchases the vehicles and

rents them out to genuine rickshaw pullers. It has directed the Matheran monitoring committee to identify all genuine rickshaw pullers in the town and decide on the number of e-rickshaws needed. The Court also warned that a lack of funds would not be an acceptable excuse for non-implementation of the rehabilitation scheme.

The ban is a significant development for Matheran, a popular tourist destination that attracts millions of visitors. While the move aims to uphold human dignity, it also raises questions about the immediate future of the rickshaw pullers. The state government now faces the challenge of a swift and efficient transition to e-rickshaws while ensuring the livelihoods of those affected are protected. The ruling underscores the judiciary's role in enforcing constitutional principles and advancing social justice.