

CASE LAW UPDATES

Case Brief: M.C. Mehta v. Union of India

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Can a court protect clean air without ignoring Diwali or workers' livelihoods? In [M.C. Mehta v. Union of India](#), the Supreme Court permitted a tightly controlled experiment with only NEERI-approved green crackers.

Citation: M.C. Mehta v. Union of India, I.A. No. 208841 of 2025 in W.P. (C) No. 13029 of 1985

Date of judgment: 15 October 2025

Court: Supreme Court of India

Bench: Chief Justice B.R. Gavai and Justice K. Vinod Chandran

Relevant provisions: Articles [14](#), [19\(1\)\(g\)](#), [21](#), [25](#) and [47](#) of the Constitution, [Environment \(Protection\) Act, 1986](#), [Air \(Prevention and Control of Pollution\) Act, 1981](#), [Explosives Act](#) and [Explosives Rules](#), [Commission for Air Quality Management in National Capital Region and Adjoining Areas Act, 202](#).

Facts of the Case (M.C. Mehta v. Union of India)

The writ petition concerned serious air pollution in Delhi and the surrounding National Capital Region (NCR). Firecrackers add particulate matter and chemical pollutants to the air. During the festive season, this impact is worsened by winter weather and other sources of pollution, including stubble burning. The Court had dealt with the issue for several years through the [Arjun Gopal](#) line of cases and earlier orders in the present proceedings.

The Court had previously restricted conventional fireworks and prohibited harmful ingredients, including barium. The Government of the National Capital Territory of Delhi had also imposed a complete ban on the manufacture of firecrackers from 14 October 2024 to 1 January 2025. In January 2025, the ban was extended to the wider NCR.

Manufacturers, traders and workers in the fireworks industry sought for a relaxation of restrictions. They argued that a complete ban affected their livelihood and contended that “**green crackers**” were now available. These products had been developed and tested through the

Council of Scientific and Industrial Research-National Environmental Engineering

Research Institute (CSIR-NEERI). The Union Government and the Delhi Government were also open to a carefully regulated relaxation.

The Amicus Curiae warned that uncontrolled use could again produce dangerous smog and long-lasting health damage. The Court therefore had to balance the public's right to health with cultural practice and the right to carry on a profession.

Issues Before the Court

1. Whether the complete prohibition on firecrackers in Delhi-NCR should continue during the 2025 festive period.
2. Whether NEERI-approved green crackers could be sold and used under strict safeguards.
3. How the Court should balance the right to health under [Article 21](#) with livelihood, cultural practice and religious sentiment.
4. What enforcement, monitoring and air-quality safeguards were necessary to prevent misuse of the relaxation.

Arguments of the Parties

The manufacturers and traders argued that the ban had caused serious economic hardship to the fireworks industry and its workers. They relied on the development of green crackers, which were claimed to cause less pollution than conventional products. Their case was not for unrestricted use but for a controlled opportunity to sell approved products.

The Union Government, **Commission of Air Quality Management** (CAQM) and the Government of Delhi supported limited relaxation with safeguards. They proposed that only NEERI-approved products manufactured by registered units and sold by licensed traders should be allowed. They also supported time restrictions, prohibition of online sales and strict monitoring.

The Amicus Curiae opposed an approach that could become impossible to enforce. The concern was that conventional crackers might be sold as green crackers, that products could enter NCR from outside, and that the short festival phase could still produce a sharp pollution rise. The Court accepted that these risks required close supervision.

Judgment of the Supreme Court

The Supreme Court in the case of *M.C. Mehta v. Union of India* did not impose a complete permanent ban through this order. Instead, it permitted a temporary, test-case relaxation. The sale of green crackers listed on the NEERI website were allowed from 18 October to 20 October 2025. The permission was limited to some locations in the NCR.

The Court balanced festive practice and livelihood against public health. Tradition could not simply justify uncontrolled environmental harm.

What are green crackers?

Green crackers are not pollution-free. They are fireworks made with formulations intended to reduce emissions when compared with ordinary crackers. NEERI's registration process involved product testing and identification of approved manufacturers. Registration and QR-code systems were intended to help authorities distinguish genuine products from ordinary crackers carrying false labels.

The Court specifically noted the need for traceability. Only manufacturers registered with NEERI and holding the necessary licence from the **Petroleum and Explosives Safety Organisation** (PESO) could supply the permitted products. Products containing barium or products not approved by NEERI as green crackers were prohibited.

Time, place and product restrictions

The Court imposed several safeguards in *M.C. Mehta v. Union of India*:

- Sale was allowed only at designated locations identified by district authorities in consultation with the police.
- Only licensed traders could sell the permitted products.
- Bursting of crackers was restricted to 6:00–7:00 a.m. and 8:00–10:00 p.m. on the day before Diwali and on Diwali day.
- Firecrackers could not be brought into NCR from outside the region.
- Barium-containing crackers and non-NEERI approved products were prohibited and liable to confiscation.

- Joined series crackers, commonly called laris, could not be manufactured or sold.
- Online sale and purchase through e-commerce platforms were prohibited.
- Seized products without proper registration or licensing were to be confiscated.

Ratio Decendi

In the meantime, the protection of the environment and public health has heavily restricted firecrackers. But instead of treating all firecrackers the same, the Court adopted a balanced approach i.e. an evidence-based regulatory approach. Any relaxation must be limited, scientifically controlled, local and subject to effective enforcement.

The order reinforces that [Article 21](#) protects a healthy environment. Livelihood and cultural or religious expression cannot be exercised in a manner that causes serious and avoidable harm to others.

Importance for CLAT PG Students

This case is useful for understanding constitutional balancing. [Article 21](#) protects health and clean air, [article 19\(1\)\(g\)](#) protects livelihood but permits reasonable restrictions in the public interest and article 25 is also subject to public health limitations.

The case further illustrates the precautionary principle, continuing mandamus and the Court's use of scientific institutions such as NEERI. It also shows the difference between a blanket prohibition and regulated permission. Therefore the court preferred a limited, reviewable framework when it believed that a total ban is difficult to enforce but unrestricted use is clearly harmful.

Conclusion

M.C. Mehta v. Union of India did not declare that green crackers are harmless. It allowed a narrow and temporary relaxation as the Court was trying to balance health, livelihood and festive practice. The permission is narrow in terms of products, sellers, time, place and enforcement. In addition, remember that your right to celebrate or trade something does not override your right to clean air.