

The mandate for community dog rehab is, at best, a judicial fantasy and bureaucratic impossibility

Barking Up the Wrong Tree



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On Nov 7, 2025, Supreme Court mandated immediate removal of all community dogs from precincts of educational institutions, hospitals, sports complexes and transport hubs. The mandate is absolute: local bodies must capture these animals, sterilise them and, crucially, never release them back. Instead, they must be housed in shelters, *permanently*.

What has been overlooked is that the economic blueprint required to execute such a humongous mandate is non-existent in state balance sheets. One strongly hopes Supreme Court will reconsider its confinement diktat when it comes up for hearing on Jan 7.

As per Economic Survey Report 2024-25, India has about 15.5 lakh educational institutions. If we apply a conservative estimate of just 10 community dogs 'within and around' (as the court order states) each institution, we are looking at relocating some 1.5 cr dogs from educational institutions alone. This figure would exceed 2 cr if we add remaining areas specified in the order.

To house these 2 cr-odd dogs at a standard capacity of 200 animals per facility, state governments and municipal authorities would need to construct over 1 lakh new shelters overnight. We need to see this project in the context of basic infrastructural requirements.

1.19 lakh schools have no functioning electricity connection, and 61,540 don't have any functional toilet facility. Only 31,882 primary health centres, 6,359 community health centres, 714



Achhe din

district hospitals and 362 medical colleges exist in the country. A look at the housing sector further exposes the logistical nightmare of the new mandate.

It has taken 10 yrs of sustained focus and funds to provide 93.61 lakh homes for urban poor under PM Awas Yojana-Urban (PMAY-U). Yet, the court order effectively demands the 'forthwith' creation of shelters for, at the very least, 1.55 cr community dogs—a construction spree that would rival the scale of India's national housing projects, and surpass many other infra schemes for public good.

Where will these shelters be created? Minimum housing standards prescribed in Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Dog Breeding and Marketing) Rules 2017 mandate at least 42 sq ft to each dog, excluding all other necessary facilities like veterinary clinics, food storage, waste management zones and staff quarters.



There is a less expensive, legally compliant, more effective alternative: strict implementation of Animal Birth Control Rules 2023. An unimplemented order is worse than no order at all

Accommodating 2 cr-odd dogs would require acquisition of almost 20,000 acres of land. In a country where land acquisition is the primary bottleneck for highways, factories and airports, finding 20,000 acres exclusively for dog shelters is, at best, a judicial fantasy and bureaucratic impossibility.

Capex for land and construction is staggering. But it's the recurring revenue expenditure that's truly crushing. Unlike a bridge or road, dogs in shelters eat. Even if one budgets a frugal ₹40 for each dog a day for food alone—never mind cost of creating shelters, administrative costs, veterinary care, staff salaries, electricity, transport and water—the daily bill for feeding these 2 cr-odd dogs stands at ₹80 cr. Annually, this aggregates to a recurring expenditure of over ₹29,000 cr.

This annual cost is roughly $2.16 \times$ the entire budget of Department of Space for 2025-26 (₹13,416 cr), and $3.1 \times$ the budget allocation for Ayushman Bharat (PM-JAY) for 2025-26 (₹9,406 cr).

The irony is stark. We are debating a multi-thousand-crore outlay to remove dogs from public spaces that barely fulfils basic requirements of humans for whom it has ostensibly been created. A staggering 74.5% of elementary

schools don't even comply with basic infrastructure norms of Right to Education Act. Asking cash-strapped local bodies to divert funds from school roofs and toilets to build canine shelters is bad economics.

The most unfortunate part is that no one seems to have applied their mind to science, common sense, opportunity cost and economics related to the issue before prescribing the solution. This entire ₹29,000 cr exercise will not even solve the problem it claims to address.

► It's guaranteed to make matters worse.
► There is no availability of funds allocated for this project by state governments.

► There are far more pressing areas that need investment in infrastructure.
► The figure of ₹29,000 cr is just the cost of feeding dogs. Add to this the cost of constructing shelters, their operating costs and cost of basic healthcare in the shelters, not to mention the cost of rounding up and transporting dogs, and we are staring at stark impossibility.

There is a less expensive, legally compliant and more effective alternative: strict implementation of Animal Birth Control (ABC) Rules 2023. In the world of policy, an unimplemented order is worse than no order at all. By mandating a financial impossibility, we risk pushing municipal bodies towards the only free solution available to them: unlawful culling



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Smart money isn't on building over 1 lakh new shelters. It's on managing the problem where it exists in accordance with law. Investing in a high throughput ABC programme is not only humane but also fiscally prudent. It creates a stable, vaccinated dog population at a fraction of cost of mass confinement. Public policy collapses when objectives are reframed without resources, compassion without capacity, and commands without arithmetic.

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