

## NASHIK GAS LEAKAGE DISASTER- MAN MADE OR SYSTEMIC?

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### Abstract

On the 21st of April, 2021, at least 24 COVID-19 patients on life support died at Dr. Zakir Hussain Hospital in Nashik, Maharashtra, when a leak in a medical oxygen tank disrupted the delivery of the gas. The disaster occurred when the tank was being replaced after the oxygen level dropped. For at least half an hour, the enormous leak disrupted the crucial oxygen supply. The oxygen tank that recently leaked at a government-run hospital in Nashik, Maharashtra, killing 22 Covid-19 patients was turned on only 21 days before the tragedy. The Chief Minister's Office declared INR 5 Lakhs ex-gratia would be given to the deceased's kin, and a high-level enquiry into the Nashik incident has been launched. Several states are experiencing a medical oxygen scarcity, with Maharashtra being the worst-affected by the corona virus. Was the gas leak catastrophe in Nashik a man-made or a systemic disaster? Who was to blame for the disaster? Was the administration prepared to deal with a catastrophe of this magnitude?

**Keywords:** Disaster Management, Corporate Social Responsibility, Social Sustainability, Political and Legal Environment, Lockdown, COVID.

### Introduction

On the 21st of April, 2021, at least 24 COVID-19 patients on life support died at Dr. Zakir Hussain Hospital in Nashik, Maharashtra, when a leak in a medical oxygen tank disrupted the delivery of the gas. State Health Minister Rajesh Tope blamed the spill on a valve breakdown and claimed a high-level investigation had been initiated to determine if incompetence was to blame for the disaster (Exhibit I). The disaster occurred around 10 a.m., according to sources, when the tank was being replaced after the oxygen level dropped. For at least half an hour, the enormous leak disrupted the crucial oxygen supply.

**Exhibit I**



**Source:** Medical oxygen gas leaks out from a storage unit, which led to interruption in supply of oxygen to COVID-19 patients at Zakir Hussain Municipal Hospital, in Nashik, Wednesday, April 21, 2021. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/several-covid-19-patients-die-after-oxygen-tank-leak-at-nashik-hospital/article34375163.ece>

The oxygen tank that recently leaked at a government-run hospital in Nashik, Maharashtra, killing 22 Covid-19 patients was turned on only 21 days before the tragedy. The tragedy occurred on Wednesday afternoon at Dr Zakir Hussain Hospital in Nashik, Maharashtra, when patients on ventilators or oxygen assistance choked to death after their oxygen supply abruptly stopped due to a

fault in the main storage. Following a complaint from a senior inspector of Bhadrakali police station, Nashik Police Commissioner Deepak Pandey filed a FIR against unidentified persons under Indian Penal Code Section 304-A (causing death by negligence).

"The oxygen tank, with a storage capacity of 13 KL, was operationalized on March 31," according to another police officer, using hospital superintendent information. According to an official who was present at the scene, white vapours blanketed the region after the release. He added that the police learned that the oxygen tank belonged to the (Vadodara-based) Inoxeva Company and had been rented from Taiyo Nippon Sanso Corporation for ten years (a Japanese company which supplies industrial gases like oxygen and nitrogen to a wide range of industries). Patients were receiving oxygen via a pipeline from a round white-colored tank built on the hospital grounds, he said. The leak occurred, according to the official, as oxygen was being pumped into the tank from a tanker. Around 12.20 p.m., he added, the oxygen leak began. The person in charge of the tanker on the scene, as well as the hospital administration, attempted to stem the leak.

Later, the hospital administration summoned an engineer, who fixed the problem, and the leakage was stopped between 1.45 and 2 p.m., according to the official. "The patients perished as a result of the oxygen supply being disrupted as a result of the tank leak," he explained. He stated it happened as a result of "negligence and carelessness" on the part of some unidentified individuals.

### Exhibit II



**Source:** Oxygen leaking out of the main storage tank at Zakir Hussain municipal hospital in Nashik <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/nashik-hospital-oxygen-leak-saw-people-take-cylinders-from-the-dead-use-them-to-revive-kin-7283811/>

Vicky Jadhav, 23, recalled seeing individuals take oxygen cylinders from the bedside of deceased patients to try to revive their own family members, and doing the same for his own dying grandmother as a "dehumanising" experience. "It's awful to see individuals die in front of your eyes in less than an hour. But I can't get past the sight of people rushing to remove oxygen cylinders from the beds of deceased patients in the hopes of reviving their own loved ones. Even I tried, but it was futile," Jadhav explained. When Jadhav arrived at the hospital at 10 a.m. to meet his grandmother, she was in a serious state, with an oxygen saturation of only 38. But he noticed she wasn't getting enough oxygen and alerted the personnel, he added (Exhibit II).

The gigantic cylinders, on the other hand, were no substitute for the tank's high-volume air flow, and many critically ill patients could not survive without respiratory support. "It was a shambles as physicians and nurses attempted to resuscitate the people. After hearing that something had gone wrong, relatives hurried inside the ward... When we realised the oxygen had run out, families, including myself, rushed to grab these cylinders from the bedsides of patients who had died while receiving oxygen," Jadhav explained.

Meanwhile, the hospital administration stated that the personnel attempted all possible to resuscitate the seriously ill, but that the unexpected loss of high-flow oxygen was fatal. "We used jumbo and dura cylinders that were accessible at the hospital. Cylinders were also obtained from nearby hospitals. However, these cylinders could not replace the high-flow oxygen required by critical patients, resulting in their deaths," stated a nurse who did not want to be identified.



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According to the Chief Minister's Office (CMO), '5 lakh ex-gratia would be given to the deceased's kin, and a high-level enquiry into the Nashik incident has been launched. Several states are experiencing a medical oxygen scarcity, with Maharashtra being the worst-affected by the corona virus. Was the gas leak catastrophe in Nashik a man-made or a systemic disaster? Who was to blame for the disaster? Was the administration prepared to deal with a catastrophe of this magnitude?

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