

MOST URGENT

Smt Usha Sharma
Chief Secretary
Government of Rajasthan
Secretariat, C Scheme
Jaipur
Rajasthan 560037

4 November 2022

Subject: Rajasthan as a recognised hub of illegal wildlife trafficking and use of captive elephants and the inherent, active risks to safety, public health and cruelty to animals. Follow up on the urgent need to replace elephant rides with eco-friendly chariots and to prevent further incidents of locals and tourists being attacked.

Respected Madam:

I am writing to you from People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) India on behalf of our more than 2 million members and supporters and concerned citizens of the country to respectfully request that you forthwith direct the replacement of elephant rides with eco-friendly royal chariots and to bring your attention to the significant threat posed by captive elephants owners in Rajasthan, who, by causing suffering to elephants are putting both elephants and humans at risk. Since the state currently allows elephants to be used for tourist rides at Amer Fort and for events such as weddings and for movies, the owners control the elephants, wild animals by nature, with weapons and through oppression for these events, making the animals fearful and frustrated and causing them to run amok or lash out.

On 24 October 2022, a shopkeeper in Amer suffered multiple fractures of ribs when he was attacked by a female elephant named Gouri (**Annexure 1**). According to locals, the incident took place one morning when she was being taken to Amer Fort to give tourist rides. The same elephant has reportedly killed a man in Bhilwara, and in another incident in Amer, she attempted to grab a school child with her trunk. Prior to this, many incidents of elephants running amok, harming people, or destroying property have been reported around Amer (**Annexure 2**).

A majority of tourists worldwide now object to such exploitation and want other forms of rides and spectacles. A recent Save The Asian Elephants public opinion poll showed that 85% of the British public want that a complete marketing ban be imposed on venues that use captive elephants for rides and shows. In 2017, a World Animal Protection poll done with tourists found that more than 80% of respondents would prefer to see elephants in their natural environment and that about half of them found elephant rides in particular unacceptable. Public awareness has further grown since 2017. What's more, over 100 travel companies now refuse to promote elephant rides.

Through our letters dated 18 September 2020 and 28 January 2021 (**Annexures 3 and 4**), PETA India has requested that your good office take urgent action on the deaths of elephants in Rajasthan who were suspected to have tuberculosis.

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Further, we have submitted a proposal for replacing elephant rides with “Maharaja”, eco-friendly royal chariots, as recommended by the expert committee constituted by the Project Elephant Division of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change and appointed per the order of the Honourable Supreme Court of India. Sadly, no action has yet been taken based on this proposal, and another human death or accident is waiting to happen. This matter requires your kind, urgent attention for the reasons mentioned above and those given below.

1. **Keeping elephants near a smart city with a growing population that is already competing for space, water, and roads is dangerous for residents *and* tourists.** Elephants on roads are a threat to public safety as they can cause accidents, deaths, and destruction of property. The use of elephants also creates a sustained risk for humans in another way: any attack on a human is followed by beatings and other punishments for the elephant, which only serves to make the animal more frustrated and upset thus more susceptible to aggression.
2. **The majority of Rajasthan’s elephants are under the illegal possession of private individuals.** The Rajasthan Forest Department has filed a case against the owners of 61 elephants in this regard. **Recently, six more elephants have been illegally brought into Rajasthan, and three of them have been allowed to be used for tourist rides by Rajasthan’s Department of Archaeology and Museums and the Rajasthan Forest Department.**
3. **The use of elephants for rides, movies, and any form of exhibition in Rajasthan is illegal,** as none of the elephants used for rides are registered with the Animal Welfare Board of India, in violation of the Performing Animals (Registration) Rules, 2001, and a 2010 order of the Rajasthan government mandating this registration for the use of elephants in any type of performance, including rides.
4. **The elephant rides violate the provisions of the Wild Life (Protection) Act (WPA), 1972,** which mandates that adequate facilities for the housing, maintenance, and upkeep of animals be ensured to retain custody of a captive wild animal. An inspection committee report by the committee constituted by the Supreme Court noted that of the 98 captive elephants inspected, 22 suffered from irreversible eye problems and 42 had painful foot problems, including overgrown nails and flat footpads from walking on concrete roads.

There are countless examples to prove that no matter how much caution is exercised, captive elephants everywhere have mauled and killed humans. Due to the presence of close to 100 captive elephants in Rajasthan, the majority of whom are illegally allowed to be used commercially, the state has become a hub of illegal wildlife trade. Granting such permissions to owners of captive elephant has encouraged them to bring in more elephants illegally.

This grave situation requires an immediate response, and we therefore request that your government take urgent actions as outlined below:

1. **A policy decision under Section 40(2) of the WPA, 1972, be made to prohibit the entry of all new elephants into the state in order to manage the influx of illegally obtained elephants.** This policy will serve to inform the chief wildlife wardens of other states that no transport permissions will be provided for elephants intended for Rajasthan and that any unlawful movement will be swiftly intercepted.

2. **Elephant rides and commercial activities be stopped.** Such a move would protect human lives, enhance the safety and enjoyment of tourists, and save heritage and other property from destruction.
3. **All elephants in Rajasthan be sent to rehabilitation centres as approved by Project Elephant, where they can live unchained and in the company of other elephants.**

May I please hear from your good office on your approval of this proposal and the directions to be issued in this regard? I can be reached at KhushbooG@petaindia.org or on 9910397382. Time is not the government's or its citizens' friend in this matter.

Respectfully,



Khushboo Gupta
Director of Advocacy Projects