

MOST URGENT

Shri D Jayaprasad IFS
Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (Wildlife), Chief Wildlife Warden
Kerala Forest Department
Forest Headquarters, Vazhuthacaud
Thiruvananthapuram
Kerala 695014

27 June 2024

Via e-mail and post: cww.for@kerala.gov.in

**Re: Urgent request for the rehabilitation of distressed elephant
Lakshmi, who trampled a mahout to death at an elephant safari in
Idukki district, and the permanent closure of all illegal safari parks**

Dear Shri Jayaprasad:

I am writing from People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) India and our more than 2 million members and supporters regarding the recent disturbing incident in which a frustrated elephant named Lakshmi killed a mahout at a safari park in Kallar, Idukki district, where she would have been used for tourist rides. Elephants are known to lash out after becoming frustrated by the cruelty of captivity. We appeal to you to urgently rehabilitate her at a sanctuary where she can heal from the trauma of captivity and live without weapons and chains.

Elephants used for safaris and tourist rides are commonly distressed, anxious, unwell, and unpredictable and pose a continued threat to the safety of tourists and other elephants. They must not be used in public places for exhibition, performance, or entertainment.

A close look at the video of the incident reveals that the mahout, who had a stick in his hand, repeatedly jabbed the elephant's legs in order to get her to stand against a platform where people could jump on her back for a ride. As captive elephants are trained using weapons, the sight and use of the stick clearly resulted in a trauma response in this sensitive animal.

This year, numerous incidents of captive elephants attacking humans have been reported:

- An elephant named Gouri ("ride no 86") attacked a female Russian tourist in February in the main courtyard of Amer Fort near Jaipur. The same elephant severely injured a male shopkeeper in Amer in October 2022.
- Also in February, an elephant at Blangad Bhagavathy Temple in Chavakkad injured four people.
- In March, in Pattambi near Palakkad, an elephant brought there for a temple festival ran amok, injuring one human, causing the death of two cows, and damaging property.

Affiliates:

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- PETA Foundation (UK)
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- PETA Germany
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- In another incident also in March, during the Arattupuzha Pooram festival in Thrissur, one elephant charged at and chased another, causing severe panic among thousands of devotees, including children, who ran for safety.
- In April, at a ceremony at TV Puram Sree Ramaswami Temple in Vaikom, Kottayam district, an elephant suddenly turned violent and attacked and killed a mahout.
- In the same month in West Bengal, a mahout was killed at the ISKCON Mayapur temple by one of the two elephants kept there.

According to figures compiled by the Heritage Animal Task Force, captive elephants killed 526 people in Kerala in a 15-year period. Thechikottukavu Ramachandran, who has been in captivity for about 40 years and is one of the most used elephants in Kerala's festival circuit, has reportedly killed 13 individuals – six mahouts, four women, and three elephants.

Elephants are highly intelligent and social animals, and captivity denies them the vital activities and interactions that are important to their health and happiness, such as foraging for food, moving around (which aids in the prevention of foot and leg problems), taking dust baths, swimming, and – most importantly – socialising with their families and other elephants in accordance with their nature.

The frustration of being held captive, chained in place for hours when not used for rides or other activities, along with the trauma of being abused with weapons, leads many elephants to develop and display abnormal behaviour. At their wits' end, frustrated elephants often try to break free or attack humans.

Allowing wild animals such as elephants to be used in public involves risking avoidable incidents in which frustrated, angry elephants attack humans. Mahouts then tend to beat and punish the animals in response, exacerbating the risk of attack when the same elephants are used again.

The Kerala Forest Department is duty-bound to ensure the health and safety of captive elephants, their mahouts, and other humans around them. PETA India, therefore, requests that the Kerala Forest Department ensure permanent closure of all illegally operating elephant safari parks and order the immediate rehabilitation of elephant Lakshmi at a sanctuary where she can live free from chains and weapons. Vantara in Gujarat, Wildlife Rescue and Rehabilitation Centre in Karnataka, and Wildlife SOS in Uttar Pradesh do not chain elephants or use weapons against them, and they are all equipped with experts in handling disturbed elephants. Similarly, we encourage that any other illegally held elephant also be sent to one of these sanctuaries for care.

Thank you for your consideration. I can be contacted on 9910397382 or at KhushbooG@petaindia.org.

I look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,



Khushboo Gupta
Director of Advocacy Projects
PETA India