

Conservationists Appeal to President to Halt Elephant Transfers from Northeast



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New Delhi, January 25: An urgent appeal addressed to President Droupadi Murmu by conservationists and environmentalists from the northeastern states has brought attention to the controversial transfer of elephants from Arunachal Pradesh to Jamnagar, Gujarat. The memorandum expresses deep concern over the ethical and ecological ramifications of relocating these majestic creatures, calling for immediate intervention to halt such practices.

The appeal highlights the recent transfer of 20 elephants over a 3,000-kilometer journey, raising critical questions about the necessity of such "rescue and rehabilitation" efforts. Conservationist and environmental journalist Mubina Akhtar, a signatory to the appeal, emphasized, "The transported elephants are subjected to unnatural conditions, forced to adapt to a diet and climate entirely foreign to their systems. This goes against the principles of wildlife welfare."

Violations of Laws and Policies

The memorandum cites multiple potential violations of wildlife protection laws, including the **Captive Elephant (Transfer or Transport) Rules, 2024**, which mandate that a genetic profile of the animal be recorded in the Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change's (MoEFCC) electronic monitoring system before any transfer. However, it alleges that the recent transfers occurred without compliance with this rule.

Further concerns have been raised about the alleged smuggling and reclassification of wild-captured elephants as captive animals. "In 2022, healthy sub-adult elephants were transported with unclear ownership certificates. This lack of transparency fuels suspicions of illegal wildlife trade," stated Moloy Barth, President of the Early Birds conservation group.

Public Resentment and Need for Transparency

The signatories underscore the public's growing anger over the frequent and poorly justified transfers of elephants. These movements disrupt habitats, lead to displacement, and violate the **Wildlife Protection Act, 1972**, which affords Schedule I animals the highest degree of protection.

The role of the high-powered committee established by the Tripura High Court to adjudicate wildlife transfers has also come under scrutiny. Environmentalist Chandan Kumar Duarah from the Kaziranga Wildlife Society urged, "Civil society must be included in these decisions to ensure greater transparency and accountability in the process."

Key Demands in the Appeal

1. **Immediate Halt to Transfers:** Conservationists demand a moratorium on elephant transfers from northeastern states unless critically necessary for medical care. They also request that ownership certificates and valid permits be published on state forest department websites.
2. **Investigation into Past Transfers:** A high-level inquiry into allegations of illegal wildlife trade and violations of transfer rules is sought.
3. **Publication of Leased Elephants:** State governments should release a list of elephants leased out since 2001 and arrange for their return.
4. **Enhanced Transparency:** The memorandum calls for reforms to involve civil society in decisions about elephant transfers and habitat preservation.

Ethical Concerns and Environmental Impacts

The appeal challenges the ethics of transferring long-ranging mega fauna like elephants to confined artificial habitats. Experts argue that such relocations conflict with the objectives of **Project Elephant**, initiated in 1992 to protect elephant habitats, minimize human-animal conflict, and promote the welfare of captive elephants.

The signatories urge the President to safeguard India's "heritage animal" and ensure the Northeast's rich biodiversity is preserved. "India's progress over 76 years in protecting its natural heritage is commendable, but these actions undermine the very spirit of conservation," remarked Apurba Ballav Goswami of the Kaziranga Wildlife Society.

The appeal, signed by notable environmentalists and organizations, calls for an immediate reassessment of wildlife management practices to prevent further harm to the country's ecological and cultural legacy.

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