



## **Press Release**

### **JAIPUR ACTIVISTS TO ORGANISE A PROTEST TO DEMAND BETTER CONDITIONS FOR ELEPHANTS AT HATHI GAON**

Jaipur, 28 September:

After the news of 4 elephants that died in Hathi Gaon, Jaipur came to light, activists have turned to the Forest Department and Rajasthan Government for answers. There has been no income for the elephant owners or exercise for the elephants due to the pandemic affecting tourism as noted in statements by the department. Unconvinced by this response, local organisations and activists lead by Help in Suffering and Angel Eyes are organising a nationwide digital protest and a protest rally at Albert Hall and candle light vigil at Amer Fort on October 1st.

A recent Animal Welfare Board of India (AWBI) report cites that “out of 102 elephants, 19 captive elephants were observed to be blind, either unilaterally (right or left eye) or bilaterally (both eyes), rendering them unfit for any work, as the safety of the elephant and the people are at high risk if such wild animals are used at public places and for rides. Moreover out of 91 elephants screened for tuberculosis (TB), 10 elephants were found to be positive for tuberculosis.” Yet they were allowed to interact with other elephants and tourists, and were used for rides. TB is a zoonotic disease putting humans and animals at risk. Two out of the 4 elephants in question (numbers 99 and 64 – Rani and Chanchal, respectively) had tested reactive for tuberculosis (TB) in 2018 during the AWBI inspection, but were declared TB-free by the Rajasthan Forest Department in 3-5 months, while actually it takes at least 6-12 month’s intensive treatment for any elephant to recover from TB. These facts are alarming.

Neither the Forest Department, the Animal Husbandry department, nor the owners are taking responsibility for the deaths, and yet these animals continue to be owned despite their Schedule 1 status as per the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972.

Managing Trustee, Help in Suffering, Timmie Kumar said “The owners of the elephants and the Forest Department want us to believe that the elephants suffered health issues as they were not getting sufficient exercise as compared to before the lockdown as tourism has come to a standstill. They are playing the sympathy card hoping that once travel and tourism resume the tourists will have bought into their lies. They claim that they treat the pachyderms as family members. Is this how a family member is treated? Do they keep their family hungry and thirsty, locked up at all times, and in poor health? Unfortunately, the elephant owners have very large egos; when they were approached by local volunteers to offer help for food they flatly refused. ”

Mariam Abuhaideri, Co-organiser, Help in Suffering said “In just a matter of months the elephants have perished due to negligence and lack of adequate care. Exercise is independent of rides. They can make arrangements for the elephants to get proper exercise. Why can’t we be sensitive to these gorgeous sentient creatures? Going up the hill to Amer on hot tar roads is bad for the elephants and their feet. Their eyesight gets affected , they get ankush wounds, their skin gets discoloured, and the don’t get enough water to drink because the elephant owners have primitive thinking. Numerous studies confirm that captive elephants develop high level of stress. There is a direct link between captivity and poor health. The conditions at Hathi Gaon are appalling, to say the least, and all in the name of heritage and business.”

The all-day event would begin at Albert Hall at noon, then take the form of a digital protest complete with a tweet-a-thon, live sessions, and digital activism, followed by a candle light vigil and the observance of a 2-minute silence at Amer Fort at 6 PM for the fallen elephants. Social distance norms will be observed.

“We urge the government of Rajasthan to protect and not let the elephants die constantly in the name of heritage and tourism , there have been 20 odd elephants who have died in the past few years and 4 of them in the recent months . There are various disease wide spread in haathi gaon and which are killing elephants and the forest department is covering up the whole issue and protecting the wild life trade that is happening right under their nose. These are lives we are talking about. There should be no business with Wildlife. What is the purpose of the forest department if not to protect Wildlife?” wonders Abhishek Singh, Founder of Angel Eyes.

Some worthwhile points to ponder:

8 elephants died because of foot rot earlier. 10 elephants were declared TB positive and no information is there on their conditions. Constant cruelty and inhuman conditions of Hathi Gaon will be disastrous for the remaining elephants .

The following should be immediately addressed if the lives of the remaining have to be saved .

- Food and water in adequate quantity
- Immediate medical check up for TB and other disease .
- Scrutiny should be done for injured and ailing elephants and those not fit for rides should be sent to an animal rescue center.
- No new elephants should be permitted into the state.

Activists fear that if the conditions do not improve, more elephants will perish in Hathi Gaon, making the cultural centre unfit for the jumbos.

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