

Death of temple elephant in Sivaganga district could have been avoided, say activists

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THE HINDU BUREAU

A group of activists representing various service organisations from different States have appealed to the Tamil Nadu Forest Minister and HR & CE Minister to immediately direct the police to register a case under Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (PCA) Act, 1960 and the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 following the death of Subbulakshmi, the temple elephant at the Shanmuganathan Temple in Kundrakudi, Sivaganga district.

Submitting a memorandum to the Ministers in Chennai, the activists released it to the media persons on Monday.

The memorandum stated that the pachyderm had succumbed to burns after a roof caught fire. Unable to escape the flames as the elephant was chained to a pole in a small enclosure, the 51-year-old had died. The incident appears to have been avoidable.

While the fire may very well have been an accident, the death was completely avoidable as real elephants are not required in temples. They should be in jungles for a healthy ecosystem, they said and added that like all elephants, who end up captive in temples, Subbulakshmi had spent many years — in her case, more than five decades, almost all her life — chained in a place most of the time.

And finally, the same chain that marked her relationship with humans as a captive elephant became the cause of her death, preventing her from escaping the fire that ultimately killed her.

Therefore, a preliminary offence report be immediately registered for breach of sections 9 read with Section 2(16) of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 (WPA) for causing the death of a captive animal; proviso to Section 42 for failing to ensure adequate facilities for care and upkeep of the elephant, and Section 51 of the WPA.

They further said that the elephant's death due to chaining in captivity and negligence and thus a complete disregard to her basic welfare and safety amounts to cognizable offences under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (PCA) Act, 1960 and the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023.

The police shall be informed to register an FIR under sections 3, 11(1)(l) and other applicable sub-sections of Section 11(1) of the PCA Act; and Section 325 of the BNS. The signatories to the memorandum included Arun Prasanna - People for Cattle in India, Tamil Nadu Dr Chinny Krishna - Blue Cross of India, Chennai **Prakash Sasha - Elsa Foundation**, Chennai Mini Vasudevan - Humane Animal Society, Coimbatore Suparna Baksi Ganguly - Wildlife Rescue and Rehabilitation Centre, Karnataka VK Venkitachalam - Heritage Animal Task Force, Kerala Vivek Viswanathan - Walking Eye Foundation, Kerala Norma Alvares - People for Animals, Goa Alok Hisarwala Gupta - Centre for Research on Animal Rights Khushboo Gupta – People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals India and Bharati Ramachandran - Federation of Indian Animal Protection Organisations.

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