

[2025 LiveLaw \(SC\) 913](#)

IN THE SUPREME COURT OF INDIA  
CIVIL ORIGINAL JURISDICTION

**PANKAJ MITHAL; J., PRASANNA B. VARALE; J.**

WRIT PETITION (CIVIL) NO. 783, 779/2025; SEPTEMBER 15, 2025

**C.R. JAYA SUKIN versus UNION OF INDIA & ORS.**

**Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 (WP Act, 1972) - Recognition of Zoo Rules, 2009 (Rules 2009) - Central Zoo Authority Guidelines – Held, Vantara’s acquisition of animals in Green Zoological Rescue and Rehabilitation Centre run by Reliance Foundation at Jamnagar, Gujarat is as per regulations - SIT was constituted including retired judges and senior officials - As per SIT Report - all animal acquisitions, imports and welfare practices strictly confirmed to statutory requirements under the WP Act, 1972, Rules 2009, CITES, Customs Act, 1962, and PMLA, 2002 - SIT noted that specific animal transfers like that of ‘Madhuri’ elephant and held that such transfers were effected in compliance with High Court and Supreme Court orders and were found lawful - Import permits and statutory documentation were held to be conclusive - Neither Courts not authorities could re-examine underlying foreign legal compliance after valid CITES and Indian permits were issued - Noted that facilities exceeded statutory and international benchmarks, mortality rates were consistent with global averages, and allegations of cruelty, trafficking, misuse of funds or commercial trade were dismissed as baseless - Supreme Court directed closure of all complaints or proceedings on the same set of allegations, barring further judicial or administrative scrutiny on issues for furnishing the full SIT report to Vantara - Petitions dismissed. [Paras 4-7, 9-12, 14, 17]**

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**ORDER**

1. Heard the petitioner-in-person, Mr. Harish N Salve, learned senior counsel assisted by Mr. Manish Tiwari, learned Advocate-on-Record and Mr. Shardul Singh, learned counsel and Mr. Tushar Mehta, learned Solicitor General of India.
2. These two Writ Petitions were filed in public interest making allegations about Greens Zoological Rescue and Rehabilitation Centre and Radhe Krishna Temple Elephant Trust (for short, ‘respondent – Vantara’).
3. This Court vide order dated 25.08.2025 noted that the allegations made in the Writ Petitions were unsubstantiated and were without any probative material. Yet, considering the gravity of the allegations and the claims made that authorities were unwilling or incapable of conducting an investigation into those allegations, we constituted a Special Investigation Team (SIT) comprising of Hon’ble Mr. Justice Jasti Chelmeswar (Former Judge of the Supreme Court), Mr. Justice R.S. Chauhan (Former Chief Justice,

Uttarakhand and Telangana High Court), Mr. Hemant Nagrale (Former Commissioner of Police, Mumbai) and Mr. Anish Gupta (IRS) to undertake a fact finding inquiry and to investigate the matters as mentioned in the order dated 25.08.2025.

4. As directed, the SIT filed its report and summary with annexures and pen drives on 12.09.2025. The report filed in sealed cover was opened and perused by us. It indicates that the SIT with the help of multiple Central and State agencies, regulatory and enforcement bodies, had examined reports and affidavits, conducted site visits, obtained expert opinion and granted personal hearings. The SIT during the inquiry covered the entire range of allegations not only concerning acquisition of animals, smuggling, laundering, but also regarding welfare and husbandry, conservation and breeding, climatic and location issues, and financial and trade improprieties.

5. It is also evident that SIT coordinated with the Central Zoo Authority, wildlife Crime Control Bureau, CITES Management Authority of India, Central Bureau of Investigation, Directorate of Enforcement, Directorate of Revenue Intelligence, Customs Department and the Jurisdictional Police and carried out a thorough and extensive investigation into complaints particularly those listed in Schedule A of the summary of the report. The SIT after thorough investigation in coordination with the above multiple agencies clearly opined and concluded that there is no violation of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, Recognition of Zoo Rules, 2009, CZA guidelines, Customs Act, 1962, Foreign Trade (Regulation and development) Act, 1992, Foreign Exchange Management Act, 1999, Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002, Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 or the Convention of International Trade in Endangered Species of wild Fauna and Flora.

6. The Court has no hesitation in accepting the conclusion so drawn in the report. Thus, as no contravention of law has been reported by the SIT, the complaints particularly those listed in Schedule A in the summary of the report stand closed.

7. On the basis of the report of the SIT, the Court is of the opinion that the receipt of animals by the respondent - Vantara by rescuing them from various situations and housing them in the rescue centre for conservation, and breeding programs have gone through a complex multi-layered/multijurisdictional statutory approvals, procedure and documentation. The imports of the animals have been made only after issuance of valid permits. Once the imports of animals is fully documented and supported by valid permits, it is not open for anyone to go beyond the said permits and to dispute the validity attached to such permits or official acts. The import clearance in India is after various checks and compliances which are regulated and enforced by multiple statutory authorities as recorded by the SIT in the summary of the report. It is pertinent to mention that repeated inquiries into the affairs of Vantara pursuant to multiple complaints/petitions filed from time to time have culminated with findings of no violation of law whatsoever. Thus, there is apparently no merit in any of the allegations of animal smuggling or laundering.

8. On the aspect of welfare standards to be adopted and followed for the conservation and preservation of the animals at Vantara, the SIT after taking expert opinion has found that the Vantara facilities exceed prescribed benchmark and the mortality figures align with the global zoological averages. Upon consideration of the entire record, we are more than satisfied that the facilities at Vantara in certain respects exceeds the prescribed standards of animal husbandry, veterinary care and welfare as well as the statutory benchmarks laid down by the Central Zoo Authority. Independent bodies such as Global Human Society after site inspection and audit through a team has certified that respondent - Vantara has not only complied with but exceeded internationally recognised benchmarks. It has been

awarded 'Global Humane Certified Seal of Approval' which is of significance as it provides independent validation of standards of welfare and conservation of animals.

9. The periodic inspection by the Central Zoo Authority and the Chief Wildlife Warden of Gujarat, along with assessments by CITES reinforced the above conclusion. The allegations of deficiency in welfare standard are therefore unfounded.

10. On the so-called allegations of misuse of carbon credits, water resources, or financial impropriety, the SIT has found them to be baseless relying upon responses from agencies like CBI, DRI and ED. The Deputy Director, Enforcement Directorate from whom the SIT sought expert assistance clarified that there is no breach of provisions of the prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002. The SIT deprecated the allegations and aspersions cast upon the statutory authorities, court appointed high power committee and also on the Courts. The respondent - Vantara in the past has been subjected to judicial scrutiny number of times and the allegations were rejected most of the times at every level/forum. Accordingly, to permit the cycle of speculative complaints or petitions to continue despite such authoritative determinations in the past would be wholly unjustified and an abuse of the process.

11. The SIT has noted with approval the decisions of the High Powered Committee headed by Justice Deepak Verma(former Judge of the Supreme Court) with regard to matters related to transfer of elephants in India.

12. While accepting the report and the summary with the Schedule A thereof, we direct as under:

(i) The proceedings of the report of the SIT i.e., its report and annexures including the pen drive be re-sealed and kept confidential but complete copy of the same be furnished to the respondent – Vantara, may be electronic copy of the same for its own use and record subject to an undertaking that it shall not be disclosed to third parties;

(ii) The summary of the report which is exhaustive in itself as it does not carry comparable sensitiveness or attract the same degree of confidentiality but provides a faithful account of the conclusions reached by the SIT, shall not be treated as confidential;

(iii) In terms of the recommendations contained in the summary and having regard to the exhaustive investigation conducted by the SIT aided by statutory enforcement agencies of the Central and the State, the complaints/petitions including newspaper reports, articles, catalogues as mentioned in Schedule A to the summary stand duly investigated and closed;

(iv) No further complaint or proceedings based upon such same set of allegations shall be entertained before any judicial statutory or administrative forum was to secure finality, obviate repetitive inquiries and investigation on issues concluded by the SIT;

(v) The respondent - Vantara and the concerned authorities are directed to consider and implement the measures suggested by the SIT;

(vi) We may leave it open to the respondent Vantara to pursue its remedies in accordance with law for the deletion of any offending publication or for any action against those responsible for the misinformation or for actions for defamation or private complaints under the BNS, 2023 and if any such proceedings are initiated, they shall be dealt with on their own merits by the competent court/authority.

13. Before parting, we record our appreciation for the painstaking efforts of the SIT for conducting the inquiry with commendable, thoroughness and fearlessness and with all

promptness. We direct that an honorarium of Rs.9,00,000/- each shall be paid to the three members of the SIT, Hon'ble Mr. Justice Jasti Chelmeswar (Former Judge of the Supreme Court), Mr. Justice R.S. Chauhan (Former Chief Justice, Uttarakhand and Telangana High Court), Mr. Hemant Nagrale (Former Commissioner of Police, Mumbai). We are not granting any remuneration to the fourth member, Mr. Anish Gupta (IRS) of the SIT as he is still a serving member. Nonetheless, this Court records its special appreciation for the work done by him and for his valuable assistance. The Court also records its appreciation to the expert consulted by the SIT especially Mr. Maheep Gupta (Former PCCF) who assisted the SIT during its visit to the Vantara to assess the ground position. Let honorarium of Rs.2,00,000/- be paid to him also. The Court also records its appreciation to the serving officers Mr. Mohit Jangid (IRS) and Mr. Abhishek Kumar (IFS) for their assistance rendered to the SIT. We note with approval the functioning of the High Powered Committee headed by Justice Deepak Verma(former Judge of the Supreme Court of India) and record our approval to its decisions. The aforesaid honorarium shall be disbursed by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change. The Director General (Forests) shall ensure that the honorarium is paid to the concerned persons within two weeks from today.

14. Since, the petitions were disposed of on 25.08.2025 and was kept only for the purposes of submission of the report of the SIT, we direct that the record of these petitions be consigned to record.

15. The summary of the investigation, finding and recommendations of the SIT shall form part of this order.

16. The Registry is directed not to weed out the report of the SIT with its annexures and the pen drive.

17. Pending application(s), if any, shall stand disposed of.

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