



REPORTABLE
IN THE SUPREME COURT OF INDIA
EXTRA ORDINARY APPELLATE JURISDICTION

SPECIAL LEAVE PETITION (CIVIL) NO(S). 13374-13375 OF 2025

**NEW DELHI NATURE SOCIETY
THROUGH VERHAEN KHANNAPETITIONER(S)**

VERSUS

**DIRECTOR HORTICULTURE
DDA & ORS.RESPONDENT(S)**

J U D G M E N T

Mehta, J.

1. Heard.
2. The controversy involved in the instant special leave petitions revolves around the translocation of hundreds of deer from A.N. Jha Deer Park, Hauz Khas, New Delhi¹ to different wildlife sanctuaries/Tiger reserves in the State of Rajasthan as well as within New Delhi.
3. The detailed facts relating to controversy are already delineated in the order dated 26th November,

¹ Hereinafter, being referred to as “A.N. Jha Deer Park”.

2025 wherein this Court gave the following directions: -

“22. In light of the foregoing discussion, and to ensure that the welfare of the deer population is secured in accordance with the statutory framework prevailing in India and internationally accepted conservation guidelines/norms, we issue the following directions:

A. The Central Empowered Committee (CEC) shall conduct an on-ground survey of A.N. Jha Deer Park and file a detailed report before this Court within eight weeks. The report shall specifically enumerate:

- i. the present population of deer in the Deer Park;
- ii. the ecological carrying capacity of the Deer Park, based on space, fodder availability, veterinary infrastructure, and enclosure design;
- iii. the maximum number of deer that can be sustainably and humanely maintained at the Deer Park; and
- iv. the surplus population, if any, that must be considered for translocation.

B. The CEC shall further undertake an inspection of the release sites, i.e., Ramgarh Vishdhari Tiger Reserve and Mukundra Hills Tiger Reserve in the State of Rajasthan and file a status report within eight weeks. The report shall specifically enumerate:

- i. the number of deer actually present and surviving;
- ii. habitat suitability, availability of forage and water, predation risks, and mitigation measures;
- iii. veterinary monitoring mechanisms and post-release protocols;
- iv. compliance with guidelines issued by the Central Zoo Authority and the IUCN Guidelines.

- C.** The **CEC** shall also prepare a comprehensive roadmap for any future translocation, detailing the scientific methodology, identification and tagging processes, procedural safeguards, transportation protocols, veterinary requirements, ecological feasibility studies, and post-release monitoring framework, in strict conformity with the domestic statutory regime and IUCN Guidelines.
- D.** All concerned authorities shall extend full cooperation to the **CEC**, ensuring timely support, information sharing, and access to necessary sites, required for implementing these directions. Any failure or delay in compliance shall invite appropriate action.
- E.** The DDA shall, within eight weeks, place on record a comprehensive report detailing the past and present status of land formerly designated for deer enclosures, including the unexplained reduction of more than 20 acres reported in the Evaluation Reports.
- F.** The DDA is directed to refrain from organizing, permitting, or facilitating any commercial events, private parties, or non-conservation related gatherings within the premises of the A.N. Jha Deer Park or its surrounding ecological buffer zones. The use of the said park for such purposes is inconsistent with its designation as an urban ecological zone and captive animal enclosure. Instead, DDA may develop and implement a non-commercial public outreach programme, which shall include periodic educational visits for school and college students, guided nature walks in collaboration with recognized environmental NGOs, and biodiversity awareness campaigns, in order to foster a culture of ecological sensitivity and civic participation in conservation efforts.
- G.** Until further orders of this Court, no additional translocation of deer from A.N. Jha Deer Park

shall be carried out by the respondents or any other authority.”

4. In compliance with the aforesaid directions given by this Court, the Central Empowered Committee has submitted a detailed report dated 6th March, 2026, running into 428 pages, along with suggested Standard Operating Procedures for translocation of the animals. For the sake of convenience, the important observations and recommendations contained in the said report are extracted hereinbelow: -

“17. For assessing the carrying capacity of the existing deer enclosure, the CEC examined the Guidelines for Establishment and Scientific Management of Zoos in India, 2008, issued by the Central Zoo Authority (CZA). It prescribes a minimum outdoor enclosure area of 1,500 sq. metres per pair of spotted deer (*Axis axis*), excluding areas utilised for barriers, shelters, pathways, and service infrastructure. **Treating approximately 70% of the gross enclosure area as net usable open space, the existing enclosure at A.N. Jha Deer Park, measuring about 10.26 acres (41 ,500 sq. metres), provides an estimated usable area of about 29,000 sq. metres. On this basis, the enclosure can sustainably accommodate approximately 19 deer units (pairs), resulting in a scientifically assessed carrying capacity of around 38 deer. Applying the CZA-prescribed optimal sex ratio of 2 males to 3 females, the enclosure can optimally sustain approximately 15 male deer and 23 female deer.**

[.....]

20. Pursuant to the submissions made by the petitioner, the CEC inspected certain additional areas within the A.N. Jha Deer Park that could, in theory, be considered for relocation or expansion of the existing deer enclosure. The CEC also briefly visited Arun Jaitley Park, Sin Fort Road, New Delhi, as suggested by the petitioner, to examine its suitability as an alternative site. **However, the CEC is of the considered view that relocation of deer either within the same park or to other urban parks under the management of the DDA would merely shift, rather than resolve, the existing management concerns. In the absence of substantive improvements in habitat quality, enclosure design, staffing, veterinary infrastructure, and scientifically informed population regulation measures, such relocation would likely recreate similar welfare and ecological issues over time. Accordingly, intra-park or inter-park relocation within Delhi cannot be regarded as a sustainable long-term solution. In contrast, scientifically managed translocation of captive-managed spoiled deer to ecologically suitable wild landscapes constitutes a rational, sustainable, and we are compliant management response.**

[.....]

52. **The CEC therefore finds that, when undertaken with appropriate scientific and regulatory safeguards, the translocation of captive- managed spotted deer into ecologically suitable tiger reserves is scientifically justified, ethically defensible, and consistent with the applicable national statutory framework as well as internationally accepted conservation norms. The CEC further observes that natural predation upon translocated prey species represents successful ecological integration into the wild and contributes to population regulation, enhancement of genetic fitness, and maintenance of trophic balance. The presence of**

viable predator populations in both Tiger Reserves is indicative of habitat integrity and ecological completeness, and augmentation of prey species, including spotted deer, serves to stabilize predator dynamics while reducing ecological pressures on alternative prey species and adjoining landscapes.

COMPREHENSIVE ROADMAP FOR ANY FUTURE TRANSLOCATION

53. Wildlife translocation has emerged as an important conservation and wildlife management tool aimed at addressing ecological imbalances, mitigating human-wildlife conflict, and strengthening wildlife populations through scientifically planned interventions. However, such measures involve complex ecological, ethical, and legal considerations, requiring careful planning, regulatory oversight, and adherence to established conservation principles. **This Hon'ble Court has directed that the CEC shall also prepare a comprehensive roadmap for any future translocation, detailing the scientific methodology, identification and tagging processes, procedural safeguards, transportation protocols, veterinary requirements, ecological feasibility studies, and post-release monitoring framework, in strict conformity with the domestic statutory regime and IUCN Guidelines. Accordingly, a detailed exercise was done by the CEC with involvement of Shri Sanjay Shukla, Former Member Secretary, Central Zoo Authority and Shri R. Hemantha Kumar, Former Deputy Director General, MoEF&CC to frame comprehensive Guidelines on Animal Translocation seeking to establish standardized procedures grounded in statutory requirements, international best practices, and animal welfare considerations, ensuring that future translocation initiatives in India are undertaken**

in a transparent, scientifically sound, and ecologically responsible manner.

RECOMNENDATIONS

54. Taking into account all the relevant factors, including field observations and the Central Zoo Authority (CZA) Guidelines, the CEC recommends that the existing deer enclosure at A. N. Jha Deer Park be regulated in accordance with its scientifically assessed carrying capacity, with particular emphasis on the following:

- i. In accordance with the extant CZA norms, the enclosure can sustainably and humanely accommodate 38 spotted deer (Axis axis), with an optimal sex ratio of 15 males to 23 females.**
- ii. The aforesaid population of 38 spotted deer may continue to be maintained at A. N. Jha Deer Park only upon formal recognition and approval of the facility by the CZA, and strictly subject to full compliance with all conditions and prescriptions stipulated by the CZA.**
- iii. In view of the larger public interest and the association of A. N. Jha Deer Park, with the city of Delhi, the CZA may consider granting the requisite recognition to A. N. Jha Deer Park, subject to full compliance with all recommendations contained in the CZA inspection report dated 17.12.2025. The status of compliance with the aforesaid recommendations shall be monitored by the CZA, and a compliance report shall be submitted to the Central Empowered Committee (CEC) within a period of six months from the date of such recognition.**
- iv. In addition to compliance with CZA recommendations, the following immediate and time-bound remedial measures shall be implemented at A.N. Jha Deer Park:**

- a. All non-functional water troughs shall be repaired and made fully operational at the earliest, preferably before 01.03.2026;
- b. Exclusion plots shall be created within the enclosure and planted with native grasses and fodder species to facilitate habitat enrichment and controlled grazing;
- c. Supplementary green fodder and concentrate feed shall continue to be provided in addition to natural forage;
- d. Dedicated night shelters shall be constructed within the enclosure to provide adequate protection and resting space for deer during nocturnal hours;
- e. The damaged capture boma presently located within the enclosure shall be repaired immediately to eliminate safety risks to the animals;
- f. Native trees, shrubs, and grass species shall be planted along the periphery of moats and barriers to improve habitat quality; and
- g. Designated and safe public viewing areas shall be developed to allow regulated public access without compromising animal welfare.
- v. The CZA shall exercise continuous regulatory oversight over A.N. Jha Deer Park, monitor compliance with the applicable guidelines, and place periodic compliance reports before the CEC. The CEO may conduct an inspection of the park at least twice a year and suggest mid-course corrections, if necessary.
- vi. The Delhi Development Authority (DDA) shall constitute an independent advisory committee comprising subject-matter experts and civil society representatives to promote transparency, public engagement,

- and participatory management of A.N. Jha Deer Park.**
- vii. **The DDA shall urgently fill all vacant sanctioned posts at A.N. Jha Deer Park, including Malis, one Veterinary Officer, one Wildlife Biologist, and one Curator, as the availability of trained manpower is essential for effective animal husbandry, habitat management, and emergency response.**
- viii. **All lakes and water bodies within A.N. Jha Deer Park shall be rejuvenated, desilted where required, and provided with an appropriate aeration/oxygenation mechanism to improve water quality and overall ecological function.**
- ix. Taking a broader ecological perspective, the DDA shall undertake plantation of native fruit and forage trees and shrubs across all DDA-managed parks to enhance urban biodiversity, support native wildlife, and mitigate pollution in the NCT of Delhi.
- x. With respect to long-term management of the retained deer population at the A.N. Jha Deer Park, the DDA shall consider the adoption of non-invasive and scientifically validated population regulation measures. The CZA shall engage and fund the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) to design and implement a pilot project on immunocontraception in spotted deer at A.N. Jha Deer Park. The outcomes of the pilot project may serve as a scientific basis for managing surplus deer populations, including in other zoos across the country.
- xi. **Relocation of deer to other areas within A.N. Jha Deer Park, or to other DDA-managed parks, would merely result in a spatial transfer of the existing problem. Therefore, intra-park or inter-park relocation of deer, without addressing the fundamental issues of carrying capacity and population regulation, does not constitute a sustainable or long-**

term management solution and shall be rejected.

- xii. In the event that A.N. Jha Deer Park is permitted to continue operations, the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) shall identify and scientifically select 38 deer (15 males and 23 females) to be retained at A.N. Jha Deer Park under improved management and welfare conditions. The remaining surplus population shall thereafter be translocated in a phased manner, under the overall supervision of the Central Zoo Authority (CZA). The Rajasthan Forest Department, in coordination with the WII, shall undertake such translocation to Mukundara Hills Tiger Reserve (MHTR) and Ramgarh Vishdhari Tiger Reserve (RVTR), ensuring strict adherence to all prescribed protocols relating to capture, handling, transportation, acclimatisation through soft release, and post-release monitoring.
- xiii. All future translocations shall mandatorily follow soft-release protocols. Direct hard release of deer into free-ranging conditions shall not be resorted to. Telemetry collars shall be deployed on a representative subset of translocated deer to enable scientific assessment of survival, dispersal, recruitment, and mortality, and to inform adaptive management.
- xiv. Systematic and standardised post-release monitoring protocols shall be institutionalised at all release sites, including periodic documentation of herd size, age-sex composition, habitat use, and predator-prey interactions, with records maintained in a retrievable and auditable format.
- xv. Specialised prey transfer vehicle similar to those available at MHTR shall be mandatorily utilised for all future prey translocations in

the country to ensure humane, safe, and stress-minimised transport of animals.

- xvi.** The CZA shall develop a detailed and standardised protocol for the mass capture, handling, and safe transportation of herbivore species in cases involving translocation from zoos or captive facilities to natural, free-ranging habitats.
- xvii.** The step-wells (Bawris) and lakes within MHTR and RVTR shall be identified, revived, and rejuvenated in a time-bound manner, as these traditional water structures constitute critical ecological assets for sustaining wildlife, particularly during lean and dry periods.
- xviii.** The rivers passing through MHTR and RVTR, while constituting important natural freshwater systems, were observed to be severely degraded and functionally reduced to wastewater drains as they traverse urban settlements downstream of the reserves. These river systems and their catchment areas shall be managed in an integrated and judicious manner, including provision of adequate pollution abatement and wastewater treatment facilities, so as to restore their ecological integrity. Such interventions may serve as model examples for river conservation in forest landscapes across the country.
- xix.** The Highway corridors connecting Jaipur to Ramgarh Vishdhari Tiger Reserve (RVTR) and Mukundara Hills Tiger Reserve (MHTR), as well as the associated roadside stretches, were observed to be largely devoid of tree cover. The National Highways Authority of India (NHAI), in coordination with the Rajasthan Forest Department, may undertake immediate plantation of native tree species along these corridors to improve landscape connectivity, mitigate edge effects, and enhance the ecological attributes of the surrounding landscapes.
- xx.** The Rajasthan Forest Department shall take immediate steps to fill all vacant positions at

RVTR and MHTR, and submit a compliance report to NTCA in this regard.

- xxi.** The CEC observes that invasive alien species, such as *Lantana camara* and *Parthenium*, etc., are rapidly colonising forest patches within MHTR, RVTR, and adjoining landscapes, posing a serious threat to native biodiversity, habitat quality, and ecosystem functioning. In this context, the systematic management interventions, including manual, mechanical, and scientifically evaluated biological control measures, may be undertaken to control and manage invasive alien species in protected areas and forest landscapes.
- xxii.** The CEC further notes that there is presently no comprehensive national or state-level legal framework addressing the prevention, control, or management of invasive alien species across various landscapes. Invasive alien species, whether plants, animals, or microbes, pose a real, imminent, and long-term threat to the country's biodiversity and ecological security. The CEC, therefore, requests that this Hon'ble Court may consider taking cognisance of this issue at a national level and, if deemed appropriate, issue directions for the formulation of a coordinated legal, policy, and management framework to address invasive alien species across India.
- xxiii.** Habitat and water management measures, including maintenance of man-made waterholes supported by solar-powered borewells, shall be continued and strengthened, particularly during lean and dry periods, to support wildlife populations.
- xxiv.** Natural predation by tiger and leopard populations at recipient sites constitutes an intrinsic ecological process and shall not be treated as an adverse outcome of translocation, provided releases are scientifically planned and monitored.

xxv. The draft comprehensive roadmap (ANNEXURE R-12) prepared by the CEC for future wildlife translocations, incorporating scientific methodology, identification and tagging protocols, procedural safeguards, transportation and veterinary requirements, ecological feasibility assessment, and post-release monitoring framework, in conformity with the applicable statutory regime and IUCN Guidelines, shall be examined by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MOEF&CC) and implemented, with such modifications as may be deemed appropriate, within a period of six months, and compliance shall be reported to this Hon'ble Court.

[Emphasis supplied]

5. In substance, the report of the Central Empowered Committee affirms the decision to translocate the deer to appropriate wildlife reserves. It notes that the Central Zoo Authority, in exercise of its powers under Section 38H(6) of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972, has cancelled the recognition of A.N. Jha Deer Park as a “mini zoo”, on account of persistent non-compliance with zoo management norms, failure to regulate the deer population, and the expiry of its licence in August, 2021. Under such circumstances, the continued retention of the deer at the said park is impermissible in law, there being no duly recognised statutory authority to ensure their

proper management. The report further records that the deer population has increased exponentially due to the absence of effective population control and sterilisation measures, thereby necessitating their translocation.

6. It may further be noted that the High Court of Delhi, *vide* order dated 19th July, 2024, disposed of the writ petition filed by petitioner herein upon taking on record an additional affidavit dated 18th July, 2024 filed by the Delhi Development Authority². In the said affidavit, it was stated that, as a policy decision approved by the Vice Chairman, DDA and endorsed by the Lieutenant Governor of Delhi, approximately two dozen deer would be retained at A.N. Jha Deer Park, subject to renewal of its “mini zoo” status by the Central Zoo Authority, and that necessary steps would be taken to obtain such approval. It was further indicated that the remaining deer could be translocated to forest areas in neighbouring States, having regard to the limited carrying capacity within Delhi and concerns relating to poaching. In view of the aforesaid stand and the

² For short, “DDA”.

willingness expressed by the DDA to abide by applicable guidelines, the High Court of Delhi permitted the resumption of the translocation process in accordance with the terms set out in the affidavit.

7. Pursuant thereto, certain number of deer were translocated to the Mukundara Hills Tiger Reserve (MHTR) and the Ramgarh Vishdhari Tiger Reserve (RVTR). However, as recorded in the report of the Central Empowered Committee, the said exercise was undertaken in a manner that was unduly harsh and not in consonance with established principles governing wildlife translocation. The report observes that the deer, having been confined to a controlled habitat for a considerable period, had no exposure to open forest ecosystems, thereby rendering such abrupt relocation unsuitable and potentially detrimental to their survival and well-being. In this backdrop, the Central Empowered Committee has underscored the necessity of adopting a carefully structured and scientifically informed mechanism for translocation, ensuring due regard to habitat acclimatisation, animal welfare, and ecological sustainability.

8. Learned counsel representing the petitioner vehemently and fervently contended that the decision to translocate the deer from the A.N. Jha Deer Park is unjustified and unwarranted. It was submitted that there exists sufficient contiguous and adjoining land in and around the A.N. Jha Deer Park which can be suitably utilised for accommodating the increased deer population that has arisen due to breeding in captivity. According to the learned counsel, instead of resorting to translocation, which may expose the animals to significant stress and survival challenges, the authorities ought to explore the alternative of habitat expansion within the existing precincts. It was further urged that such an approach would ensure continuity of a controlled and familiar environment for the deer, while effectively addressing concerns of overcrowding without necessitating their relocation to unfamiliar forest ecosystems thereby causing a grave threat to their survival.

9. However, having regard to the fact that the Central Zoo Authority has already cancelled the recognition granted to the A.N. Jha Deer Park as a “mini zoo”, and further taking into account that the local authorities lack the requisite financial resources

as well as infrastructural capacity to effectively sustain and fulfil the objectives for which the said deer park was originally established, the continuance of the existing arrangement does not commend acceptance. This position is further reinforced by the opinion of the Central Empowered Committee, an independent expert body, which has categorically observed that the A.N. Jha Deer Park does not possess the requisite carrying capacity to sustain such a large population of deer. We cannot be unmindful of the fact that deer, being a wildlife species, ought not to be confined to cages or restrictive enclosures save in exceptional and compelling circumstances duly justified in law and on ecological considerations.

10. In this backdrop, and upon a conspectus of the material placed on record, we are of the considered opinion that the impugned order dated 19th July, 2024 passed by the High Court of Delhi, whereby the additional affidavit filed by the DDA proposing relocation of the deer from the A.N. Jha Deer Park, with retention of approximately two dozen deer subject to obtaining recognition from the Central Zoo Authority, was accepted, as well as the impugned

order dated 24th January, 2025, whereby the application seeking recall of the order dated 19th July, 2024 came to be dismissed, cannot be said to be unjustified or suffering from any legal infirmity. On the contrary, the said course appears to be a pragmatic and reasoned approach considering the facts and circumstances of the case.

11. In view of the foregoing discussion, we deem it appropriate to issue the following directions: -

- A.** All the recommendations contained in the report of the Central Empowered Committee, quoted *supra*, are hereby accepted.
- B.** The concerned authorities are directed to take necessary steps for the relocation of the deer from A.N. Jha Deer Park in a time-bound manner, under the supervision of the Central Empowered Committee, and in strict adherence to the draft guidelines on Animal Translocation as framed by the Central Empowered Committee.
- C.** It is directed that retention of up to 38 deer at A.N. Jha Deer Park as recommended by the Central Empowered Committee shall be permissible only subject to the grant of requisite

approvals and clearances by the Central Zoo Authority. The DDA shall ensure that it develops and upgrades the necessary logistical capacity, infrastructure, and adequately trained human resources for the upkeep and management of the said deer population. The DDA shall ensure that the retained population has an optimal sex ratio of 15 males to 23 females. Such retention shall be effected only upon and in accordance with the permissions granted by the Central Zoo Authority. In case, the DDA is unable to attain these mandatory compliances, appropriate application may be moved in this Court for clarification/further directions.

- D.** The concerned authorities shall take all necessary and proactive steps to comply with the other recommendations made by the Central Empowered Committee.
- E.** In view of the fact that the area comprising the A.N. Jha Deer Park, Hauz Khas, New Delhi stands declared as a protected forest, it is hereby directed that, under no circumstances, shall the nature or status of the said area be altered, and

the same shall continue to be maintained as a protected forest at all times in the future.

F. The draft comprehensive guidelines prepared by the Central Empowered Committee for future wildlife translocations, incorporating scientific methodology, identification and tagging protocols, procedural safeguards, transportation and veterinary requirements, ecological feasibility assessment, and a post-release monitoring framework in conformity with the applicable statutory regime and IUCN Guidelines, shall be examined by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change and implemented, with such modifications as may be deemed appropriate, within a period of six months. **These guidelines deserve to be, and shall be, imparted statutory status. A compliance report shall be submitted to this Court in respect of this direction.**

G. The Registry is directed to forthwith transmit a copy of this order, along with the report of the Central Empowered Committee, to the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change for necessary compliance.

12. With the aforesaid observations and directions, the instant special leave petitions are closed.

13. The matter shall be listed on 19th January, 2027 for receiving the compliance report concerning the directions issued in **paragraph 11(F)** *supra*.

.....**J.**
(VIKRAM NATH)

.....**J.**
(SANDEEP MEHTA)

NEW DELHI;
APRIL 27, 2026.