

2025 LiveLaw (SC) 835

IN THE SUPREME COURT OF INDIA
PANKAJ MITHAL; J., PRASANNA B. VARALE; J.
Writ Petition (Civil) No. 779, 783 /2025; 25-08-2025
C.R. JAYA SUKIN *versus* UNION OF INDIA & ORS.

Animal Welfare – Vantara - Article 32 - Public Interest Litigation (PIL) - Supreme Court noted that present writ petition alleges unlawful acquisition of animals, mistreatment of animals, money laundering etc. with no material of probative worth or supporting evidence - Such petitions ordinarily be dismissed, but Supreme Court decided to call for an independent factual appraisal to verify the allegations, particularly given the accusations against statutory authorities - Directed constitution of a Special Investigation Team (SIT) composed of respectable persons of impeccable integrity and high repute to assist the Court by conducting a fact-finding inquiry - SIT is to report by September 12, 2025.

For Petitioner(s) Mr. Harsh Vardhan Singh, Adv. Mr. Akash, Adv. Mr. Amit Kumar, Adv. Ms. Sejal Sharma, Adv. Mr. Srajan Shankar Kulshrestha, Adv. Mr. Ashish Pandey, AOR Mr. Raghav Sabharwal, Adv. (Item-51.1) Mr. Raghav Malhotra, Adv. Mr. Harsh Vardhan Singh, Adv. Petitioner-in-person Ms. Ridhi Goel, Adv. Petitioner-in-person (Item-51) Ms. Divya Mishra, Adv. Ms. Yashika Anand, Adv. Md. Sadath Hussain, Adv. Mrs. Suresh Kumari, Adv.

For Respondent(s) Mr. Manish Tiwari, AOR Mr. Shardul Singh, Adv. Ms. Prerna Gandhi, Adv. Mr. Anish Shahpurkar, Adv. Intervenor-in-person, AOR

ORDER

1. These two writ petitions filed under Article 32 of the Constitution of India have been preferred in public interest. The petitions are based exclusively on news and stories appearing in the newspapers, social media and diverse complaints by non-Governmental organizations and Wild Life Organizations. These petitions make allegations against the private respondent, popularly referred to as ‘Vantara @ Greens Zoological Rescue and Rehabilitation Centre’¹ Jamnagar, Gujarat.

2. The petitions on the basis of the aforesaid material make accusations of wide amplitude viz, unlawful accusation of animals from India and abroad, mistreatment of the animals in captivity, financial irregularities, money laundering etc. The petitions are not confined to making allegations against the private respondent-‘Vantara’ but also cast aspersions upon statutory authorities such as Central Zoo Authority, The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) as well as Courts. In short, the petitions proceed to indict above referred institutions simply based upon media reporting.

3. Upon the reading of the pleadings, we find that what has been presented through these petitions are only allegations with no material of probative worth. There appears to be no supporting material.

4. Considering the sweep of the allegations made in the petitions inviting a counter from the private respondent or any other party will not serve much purpose. Ordinarily, a petition resting on such unsupported allegations does not deserve in law to be entertained rather warrant dismissal *in limine*. However, in the wake of the allegations that the statutory authorities or the Courts are either unwilling or incapable of discharging their mandate, more particularly in the absence of verification of correctness of the factual situation, we

¹ hereinafter referred to as ‘Vantara’.

consider it appropriate in the ends of justice to call for an independent factual appraisal which may establish the violation, as alleged, if any. Accordingly, we deem it appropriate to direct for constitution of a Special Investigation Team ('SIT') of respectable persons of impeccable integrity and high repute having long public service.

5. In view of the above, we constitute the SIT as under:-

As Chairperson :-

i. Justice Jasti Chelameswar (Former Judge of the Supreme Court of India) [jchelam53@gmail.com]

As Members :-

ii. Justice Raghavendra Chauhan (Former Chief Justice of Uttarakhand and Telangana High Court)

[office.jrsc@gmail.com]

iii. Mr. Hemant Nagrale, IPS (Former Commissioner of Police, Mumbai)

[hemantnagrale@hotmail.com]

iv. Mr. Anish Gupta, IRS (Addl Commissioner Customs)

[anishgupta.irs@gov.in]

6. The SIT shall examine and submit report *inter alia* on the following:-

- (a) acquisition of animals from India and abroad, particularly elephants;
- (b) compliance of Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 and rules for zoos made thereunder;
- (c) International Convention on Trade of Endangered Species of Flora and Fauna (CITES) and compliance with import/export laws and other statutory requirements concerning imports/exports of live animals;
- (d) compliance with standards of animal husbandry, veterinary care, standards of animal welfare, mortalities and causes thereof;
- (e) complaints regarding climatic conditions and allegations concerning location near an industrial zone;
- (f) complaints regarding creation of a vanity or private collection, breeding, conservation programs and use of biodiversity resources;
- (g) complaints regarding misutilisation of water and carbon credits;
- (h) complaints regarding allegations of breach of different provisions of law, trade in animals or animal articles, wildlife smuggling etc. as made in the articles/stories/complaints referred to in the petitions as well as generally;
- (i) complaints regarding issues of financial compliance, money laundering etc.
- (j) complaints regarding any other subject, issue or matter germane to the allegations made in these Petitions.

7. The SIT in reporting about the above may call for and receive information from petitioners, officials regulators, intervenors, or any other person including journalists who may wish their allegations to be examined. The SIT may inquire into any other aspect it deems appropriate to submit a complete factual report to this Court.

(a) The SIT shall be assisted fully by the Central Zoo Authority, the CITES Management Authority, the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, and the State of Gujarat, including its Forest and Police Departments. All private persons and entities, including Vantara,

shall also extend full co-operation. Any incident of non-assistance or non-cooperation by any person, authority or institution brought to the notice of this Court or noted in the SIT's report, would compel this Court to consider taking appropriate actions or to issue directions, including action for contempt.

(b) The respective departments of members of the SIT who are presently in service shall also extend the needed co-operation to the SIT.

(c) The Director General (Forests) Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change shall be responsible to provide all assistance for travel, lodging, logistical arrangements, and secretarial support to the SIT.

(d) The SIT may take expert assistance or opinion of any domain expert of their choice. (e) The SIT shall carry out a physical verification and inspection of the centre of Respondent-Vantara as well. The Secretary, Department of Forest of State of Gujarat shall be responsible to ensure complete assistance and co-operation to the SIT in the State of Gujarat.

(f) The SIT based on its findings shall also give its opinion on any action necessary and the manner in which such action may be directed by this Court.

(g) Liberty is granted to the SIT to apply for extension of time, if deemed necessary.

8. It is clarified that the above exercise undertaken by the SIT has been permitted only to assist the Court as a fact finding inquiry so as to ascertain the true factual position and to enable the Court to pass any further order, as may be deemed fit on the basis of the material furnished and contained in the report. However, this order neither expresses any opinion on the allegations made in the petitions nor this order be construed to have cast any doubt on the functioning of any of the statutory authorities or the private respondent- 'Vantara'.

9. The SIT is requested to conduct the fact finding inquiry entrusted to it forthwith and to submit the report, uninfluenced by any observations made hereinabove, by 12th September, 2025.

10. Once the report is so submitted, the petitions be listed on 15th September, 2025 to consider the said report and if necessary, to pass any further order, otherwise the petitions stand disposed of, as above.