



URGENT

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20 May 2024

Dear Honourable and Distinguished Representatives,

CONCERN FOR THE WELL-BEING OF TWO JUVENILE ASIAN ELEPHANTS GIFTED FROM THE NEPALESE GOVERNMENT TO HH THE EMIR OF QATAR

The [Pro Elephant Network](#) (PREN) consists of a significant international community of diverse individuals and organizations involved with wild and captive African and Asian Elephants and comprising specific expertise, including, but not limited to, the fields of science, health, conservation, welfare and well-being, economics, community leadership, indigenous knowledge, social justice and the law.

Members of PREN have been informed that during a recent meeting between the Prime Minister of Nepal, Mr Pusha Kamal Dahal, and the Qatar Emir, Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, the Prime Minister of Nepal offered two juvenile Asian elephants to Qatar as a gift.

According to information provided by Manipuran Chaudhary, Chief of the Breeding and Training Centre at Sorsor in Sauraha, these elephants are a five year old male elephant known as Khagendra Prasad and a six year old female known as Rudrakali. Both juvenile elephants were born and trained at the centre, they are the offspring of a wild elephant, known as Ronaldo, who regularly meets with the herd at the centre.

According to [an article](#) published in the National Newspaper “Rising Nepal”, Rudrakali and Khagendra Prasad were offered to the Qatar Government as gifts under the Nepalese “Conservation Policy”.

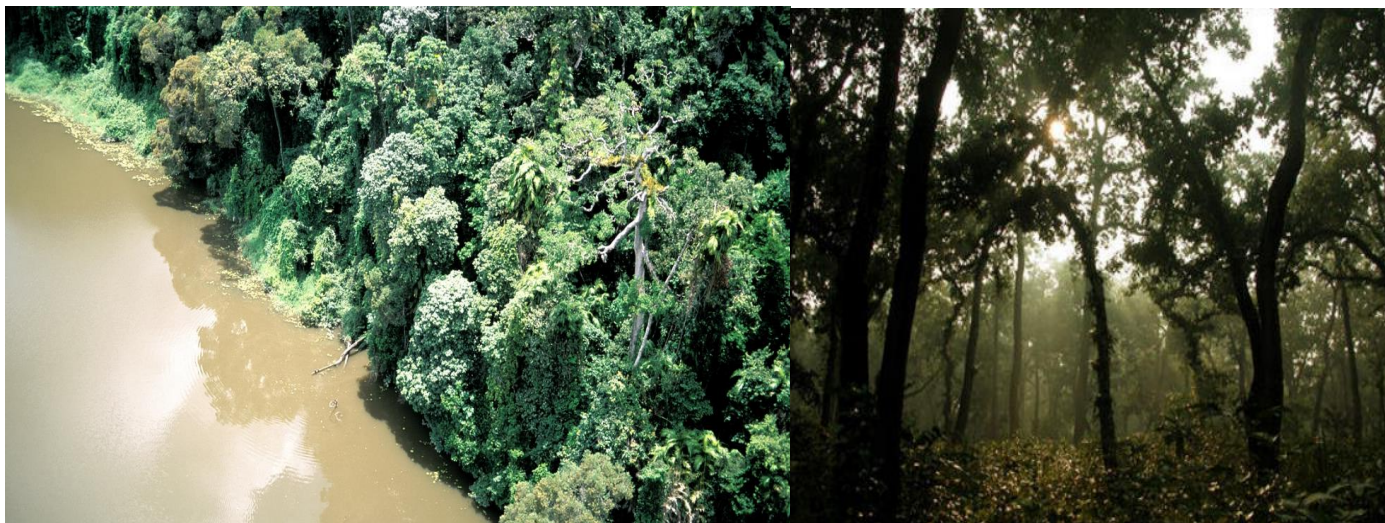
Badri Raj Dhungana, spokesperson at the Ministry of Forestry, has confirmed that the proposal to gift two elephants by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has yet to be formally confirmed by the Nepalese Cabinet.

“Elephants fall under the category of Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), no side can give and accept elephants without prior approval from CITES headquarters in Geneva. We have already obtained permission, but as far as I know, the Qatari side was waiting for Geneva’s approval. As soon as the permission is obtained, we will present the elephants to the Emir,” said Dhungana.

The mayor of Kathmandu Metropolitan, Mayor Mr Balen Shah has [strongly criticised](#) the proposed *elephant gift* and has questioned the legality and morality of “transporting wild animals to environments like deserts”.

Qatar is not a natural range state for either African or Asian elephants. The humid subtropical monsoon influenced climate of Chitwan National Park, where these elephants were raised, is characterised by [high humidity all through the year](#) and [yearly precipitation fall of 2,500 mm](#). In winter temperatures of 5°C to 18°C are the norm.

The two young elephants grew up having access to the rich vegetation of the [Himalayan subtropical broadleaf forests](#) which include Sal trees, Chir pine, Beleric, Rosewood, Axlewood, Elephant apple, Grey downy balsam and creepers such as Bauhinia vahlii and Spatholobus parviflorus.



The Himalayan subtropical broadleaf forests – Image Credit: [Ecology PG](#)

The Elephants will be exported to a [desert climate](#) and to an alien arid environment where their future is uncertain. Elephants in captivity rely on knowledgeable carers who are experienced with regard to their complex needs. Moreover, the elephants who live at the Breeding and Training Centre at Sorsor in Sauraha have daily access to indigenous habitats and communities of wild elephants.

In addition, PREN members who are guided by elephant well-being and welfare experts, academics, scientists, and conservationists are particularly concerned about this transaction because these young and vulnerable Asian elephants will be prematurely separated from their mothers and families.

Elephants are large-brained mammals who display [complex cognitive capabilities](#), and [sentience](#), and demonstrate [social needs](#) and [empathy](#), but most importantly, [determination](#).

The Asian Elephant is [able to use tools](#) and, together with only a few other non-human species, such as some great apes, dolphins, rays and the Eurasian magpie, passed the mirror test, proving [self-recognition](#) abilities and a sense of self-awareness.

When grown males inevitably come into their annual musth cycle, their testosterone levels rise steeply making them more aggressive; all attempts to manage captive males during this process through isolation, separation and confinement, will [impact their welfare](#).

All Elephants require access to expansive, diverse habitats and [move across long distances](#). They also need to be provided with opportunities for individual autonomy and socialization. These essential needs typically cannot be met in captive environments, leading to health deterioration and stereotypic behaviours reflecting the welfare-compromised environment. Stereotypic behaviour, the invariant restrictive and purposeless [repetition of motor patterns](#), remains the most widely [used welfare indicator](#) for captive Elephants in poor welfare conditions exposed to psychological stress and has direct physiological consequences [on the body's ability to function](#).

This includes neural dysfunctions, [brain damage](#) and [compromised survivorship](#).

Extensive [research](#) highlights how Elephants can suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), such for example, following forced separation from family members, and refers to how humans and elephants share the parts of the brain that are susceptible to trauma and the connections between the right prefrontal cortex and the limbic system and how this influences and can compromise individual's ability to regulate stress and emotions. [Research](#) also refers to “hyperarousal” or the inability to respond adequately, which could manifest as depression and severe agoraphobia, or on the other hand, “hyperarousal”, which is hyper-vigilance, such as, for example, in Elephants, when they charge with no provocation, or, in captivity, when they react aggressively even if there is no actual danger.

In terms of elephant enclosure size requirements and standards, [research](#) has emphasized that it is a mistake to use a human perspective when attempting to assess what size enclosures Elephants need. The report *Expansive, Diverse Habitats Are Vital for The Welfare Of Elephants In Captivity* emphasises that Elephants evolved to live in spaces 1,000 to a million times bigger than even a very large enclosure of 10 hectares. The fully referenced report, endorsed by 25 leading elephant specialists, concluded that a large quantity of quality space is critical for the good welfare of Elephants and that although nothing less than areas equivalent to wild ranges of 100km² (10.000ha) and upwards truly enable elephants to flourish, however, for those elephants that must remain in captivity, there is evidence to support a proposal that 100ha or more of diverse, natural habitat where to roam free, would offer individual Elephants the opportunity to live a fulfilling life.

In terms of the social aspect, elephants are highly social mammals and live in [particularly large social networks](#) with a highly organised structure involving strong family bonds that last a lifetime; these complex connections include vital relationships within [family members, bond groups, coalitions, and clans](#) and are extremely difficult if not impossible to replicate in captivity.

In addition, elephants are not monogamous, nor do they have a social structure of male and female pairs. [Females need female company and males need male company](#); however, the sexes also need to socialise for mating at times. Males will walk from female group to female group in search of oestrus females and remain only as long as to ensure that he is the sole breeder.

Asian Elephants are listed under CITES Appendix I. There are therefore numerous questions that need to be considered, including, but not limited to:

1. In terms of CITES, what will be the “Purpose Source Code” of this transaction?
2. What Asian elephant adaptation measures have been put into place in Qatar?
3. Will Qatar share their short and long-term Asian elephant management plan?
4. Which elephant scientists and elephant experts have been consulted?
5. What purpose will these elephants serve? Will they be captive? What type of captivity?
6. What is the grade of training of the carers in order to adequately take care of the two Elephants?
7. What is the cultural value of Asian elephants in the State of Qatar, in the Middle Eastern Arabic Peninsula?
8. Where will the elephants be kept?
9. How large will their enclosure be and what kind of vegetation will be maintained in it?
10. Who will be the Wildlife Veterinarians specialised in the welfare of Asian elephants and are they going to be available to offer prompt intervention, if required?

The undersigning members of PREN strongly recommend the urgent review of the gifting of these or other Elephants with a view to prioritising the welfare of the animals and urge the Cabinet to permanently reject this plan.

PREN elephant specialists are available to engage further if any assistance is required.

Yours sincerely,



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