

IN THE HIGH COURT OF ORISSA AT CUTTACK

W.P.(C) No. 14706 of 2022

AND

W.P. (C) Nos. 9056 of 2013, 19625 of 2015 and 22421 of 2015

W.P.(C) No.14706 of 2022

*Gita Rout*

....

*Petitioner*

Mr. Ashis Kumar Mishra, Advocate

Mr. Afraz Suhail, Advocate

W.P.(C) No.9056 of 2013

....

*Petitioners*

*Balagopal Mishra and another*

Mr. G.P. Mohanty, Advocate

W.P. (C) No.19625 of 2015

....

*Mrinalini Padhi*

*Petitioner*

In person

W.P.(C) No.22421 of 2015

....

*Dwija Dalpati*

*Petitioner*

Mr. Gautam Misra, Senior Advocate assisted by

Mr. A. Dash, Advocate

*State of Odisha and others*

....

*Opposite Parties*

Mr. A.K. Parija, Advocate General assisted by

Debakanta Mohanty, AGA and

Mr. Ishwar Mohanty, ASC

**CORAM:**

**THE CHIEF JUSTICE**

**JUSTICE M.S. RAMAN**

**Order No.**

**ORDER**

**22.12.2022**

11.

1. The Court has had the benefit of a power point presentation by Dr. Raman Sukumar giving a detailed explanation of the present active elephant corridors in Odisha. He has identified nine of them, two of which form part of the earlier identified fourteen elephant corridors. He has, in the virtual presence of the Joint Task Force (JTF) headed by Dr. Manoj Nair, the Chief Conservator Forests and the Field

Officer of the Similipal Tiger Reserve as well as in the physical presence in Court of the learned Advocate General and Senior Counsel as well as counsel appearing on behalf of the respective Petitioners, made certain useful suggestions on how to ensure safe passage for elephants across Odisha. He has emphasized the need to provide additional bridges to link two important reserves viz., the Sambalpur Reserve and the Mahanadi Reserve where at least 70 to 75 per cent of the elephant population of approximately 2000 in Odisha today are active. Dr. Nair states that in the action plan that will be drawn up by the JTF, many of these elements will be addressed. The power point presentation of Dr. Sukumar be kept as part of the record and copies thereof be provided to all learned counsel for the parties.

2. An affidavit dated 21<sup>st</sup> December, 2022 has been filed by Dr. Nair, the Chief Conservator of Forests explaining the scheme of “Gaja Sathis” and stating that in the current year, the scheme has been scaled up and 5457 volunteers have been engaged in 1177 villages. It is stated that a “Jana Surakhya Gaja Rakshya” scheme has been rolled out to encourage public community partnership having provision for solar fencing with 90% cost being borne by the State. Also to prevent electrocution of elephants and other wild animals, bare conductors in the elephant movement areas to the extent of 2,354 kilometers have already been insulated out of the identified stretches of 3,814 kilometers. It is stated that, in addition, another 4,444 kilometers of bare conductors and 31,000 electrical points have also been identified. Based on the data of human-elephant conflict, 32 Ranges in 19 Divisions have been identified to be the

most conflict prone Ranges. The affidavit also lists out the interventions made for habitat improvements including creation of 34 water bodies, renovation of 26 water bodies, 44 water harvesting structures and meadow development over 200 hectares and over 1 lakh bamboo seed ball plantation.

3. A list of the Gaja Sathi volunteers has been enclosed with the affidavit. As regards the re-mapping of elephant corridors, although the affidavit encloses as Annexure-T/1 series, maps showing those corridors, Dr. Nair states that steps are being taken through Project Elephant, Government of India to confirm the viability of the corridors pursuant to a meeting held on 22<sup>nd</sup> April, 2022 under the Chairmanship of the Director (Project Elephant), Government of India. Steps have been taken to declare the Similipal-Kuldiha-Hadagarh traditional elephant corridor as Conservation Reserve under Section 38 of the Wildlife (Protection) Act.

4. As regards the incident of an elephant death in Similipal, it is stated that three Forest Officials have been arrested under the Wildlife (Protection) Act and forwarded to the Court of the SDJM, Udala and remanded to the judicial custody.

5. The Court inquired from the Field Officer, Similipal of the circumstances under which one of the witnesses in the case of elephant poaching had committed suicide. The Court has been assured that in the said case a charge-sheet will be filed at an early date and the case taken to its logical conclusion.

6. Certain further suggestions have been given from the side of the Petitioners by counsel appearing on their behalf in the virtual presence of the JTF Dr. Nair will take those into consideration while drawing up the action plan. It will be open to the respective counsel to give their written suggestions to the JTF at the earliest.

7. List on 18<sup>th</sup> January 2023 at 10.30am.

**(Dr. S. Muralidhar)**  
**Chief Justice**

**(M.S. Raman)**  
**Judge**



*S.K. Guin*