

News

There are YouTube films showing stray dog attacks on children, elderly; don't make it a contest: Supreme Court



A Bench of Justices Vikram Nath, Sandeep Mehta and NV Anjaria made the comment in response to a statement by Senior Counsel Rajshekhar Rao.

The Supreme Court on Friday said that there are scores of videos on online sites like YouTube which show stray dogs attacking children and old people.

A Bench of Justices Vikram Nath, Sandeep Mehta and NV Anjaria made the comment in response to a statement by Senior Advocate Rajshekhar Rao appearing for a dog rights organisation. "If your lordships could see some movies that I have annexed," Rao said on behalf of Karan Puri foundation, a registered society taking care of street dogs at their own

expense in various parts of Delhi. "There are 'n' number of videos on YouTube where dogs are biting children and old people. We don't want a competition here," the Bench replied.

The stray dog matter gained national attention last year after a Bench of Justices JB Pardiwala and R Mahadevan ordered Delhi municipal authorities to round up and shelter stray dogs, drawing protests from animal rights groups. That order was later changed by the present three-judge Bench. It required vaccination and release of sterilised dogs instead of permanent sheltering.

In November 2025, the Court ordered the State governments and the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) to ensure removal of stray animals from the highways across India.

The Court had also ruled that government and private educational and health institutions should be fenced within 8 weeks to tackle the stray dog menace and prevent stray dog bites.

Stray dogs picked up shall not be released back to the same location from where they were picked up since doing so will defeat the directions given to regulate the issue in such institutional areas, the Court added then.

During the hearing yesterday, the Court asked the counsel to come prepared about a newspaper story that appeared in Times of India on December 29 titled 'On the roof of the world, feral dogs hunt down Ladakh's rare species'.

The article outlined how feral dogs have emerged as a by-product of increased tourism, military deployment and unmanaged waste in the cold desert. These dogs have now started preying on endangered wildlife in Ladakh and have started attacking people, the story said.

Arguments today

When the case was taken up for hearing today, Senior Advocate Krishnan Venugopal said, "In relation to the question of Ladakh, my client was also part of the problem. I have handed over a note on this topic."

Senior Advocate Mahalakshmi Pavani, appearing for pro-dog groups, said that women who feed stray dogs were being harassed by people. **"I want to highlight the situation of women feeders and caregivers. Under the cover of earlier orders, there are anti-feeder**

vigilantes. They are beating women, harassing women, the police are keeping silent on it," she said.

Pavani highlighted a particular episode in South India where vigilantes violently entered a woman feeder's house. **"File a FIR then if they are abusing women," the Court said. "FIRs are not being filed," Pavani replied. "Approach the High Court, don't make noise about this here," the Bench shot back. "There are derogatory comments made against women. it goes to the extent of saying women are sleeping with dogs for their pleasure!" Pavani contended. "You file a claim. If someone is saying this that's wrong," the Bench said.**

On the problem regarding feral dogs in Ladakh, Pavani said, "In the Ladakh story, the man himself says that the problem is man-made for food wastage etc."

Senior Advocate Shadan Farasat said that stray dogs have become a problem because of the failure of the State. **"This is a problem where the State has failed on its statutory duty to balance public safety and animal welfare. The trouble on the ground is dogs have become a menace at some level,"** Farasat said.

He then continued to read out some suggestions to tackle the problem.

- There has to be zoning of public places;
- There are some spaces which have to be stray dogs free, like schools etc. it's important;
- Direct mandatory feeding routines, name feeders, timings, etc, away from footpaths;
- Time-bound version of Animal Birth Control Rules (ABC Rules).

He also batted for strict application of ABC rules by the State with the help of municipal authorities. **"State wants to abandon ABC Rules. They can't do that under the law. They gave a duty to implement ABC. There is a supply crunch. So direct States to name the resource crunch. They can do it. Lordships don't need to watch it. There are large number of hospitals most of them run by state governments. State governments and local corporations have to work together. The real vet machinery is with the State. But the responsibility is of municipal officials. So they have to work together,"** he submitted.

Senior Advocate Madhavi Divan also proceeded to offer ideas to deal with the stray dog problem. **"I am going to suggest some options. We were suggesting an online**

dashboard at the state level which will monitor local authorities and to automate transparency, accountability and execution. We can have portable animal birth control tools. Instead of taking animals to ABC hospitals, they are put under general anaesthesia. They are kept there till they heal and then they are released back. We are short of actual stationary ABC Centres. The speed of sterilisation is being hindered. Having these portable units is thus a very good idea," Divan proposed.

Senior Advocate Pragyan Pradip Sharma, appearing for Sharmila Tagore, batted for methods like colour coding collars to spot aggressive dogs from non-aggressive ones. **"In our society we cannot have a one size fit all for removal of all dogs from the streets. The answer lies in science and psychology. The ABC Rules may not be perfect. Therefore it needs to be given a look. Legislature contemplated idea of street dogs and aggressive dogs. The release of a dog is noticed and adopted. It has been seen that once an aggressive dog comes and is treated and is given psychological care and are sent back to society. There are cases where the violence is repeated. But the dog has to be identified as an aggressive dog by the group. colour tagging collars can be done to identify dogs as who has bitten before etc. this has been done in countries like Georgia, Armenia etc,"** Sharma argued.

However, the Bench was not impressed. **"What is the number of those countries? Please be reasonable counsel,"** the Court said.

Senior Advocate Zal Andhyarujina appearing a dog welfare group, said that the population of stray dogs has to be contained. However, he said that merely removing wild dogs from streets will not help achieve that and sterilisation is the solution.

"As an organisation which works for welfare for stray dogs, we accept the view that stray dogs population should be minimised. The problem is legal and technical. The legal is how to best apply the ABC Rules. Scientific is how to gain control over dog population. The minute you remove a dog, however hard you try, the number actually increases. We have actually experienced good success in Bombay when it comes to capture-sterilise-vaccinate-release (CSVV). Nobody can accept a situation where dogs act aggressively. Sterilisation program goes hand in hand with the control of violent behaviour. Feeding stations are to be set up in consultation with all stakeholders in the neighborhood. My summary stance is that please don't stop what we have started. The rules should be made more effective," he said.

Senior Advocate Abhishek Manu Singhvi, appearing for an animal rights body, said that the scope of judicial involvement in the case is limited since the law and rules are near exhaustive. ***"I appear for a group called ACGS (All Creatures Great and Small). This is now not entirely a question about dog and humans. It's about certain constitutional values. The first point is that according to us, the statute and the rules strongly occupy the entire area. The rules form a smooth web. Judicial intervention works in interstices of gaps. Not where the government has intentionally not gone into. Your lordships goals are to do something good. But Your lordships are bound by the purpose of the legislature,"*** he said. "You can simply say Your Lordships are helpless also," the Bench said, not hiding its sarcasm.

Singhvi then did not mince his words and even referred to how the apex court was forced to reconsider its decision in the Aravalli case since the initial order was passed without taking into account opinion of domain experts.

He batted for taking into account expert opinion before giving orders in the stray dogs matter too. ***"Certainly. Your Lordships have all kind of limits. The obligation of the Court to uphold rights is in the "absence of legislation".***

Your Lordships will be building a new edifice if they enter into that area. While our amicus is great, the concept of amici are simply law advisors. They are not domain experts. Your lordships must have subject experts along with the amicus. In the recent Aravalli judgement, the reconsideration was because that committee had 90% bureaucrats - generalists, not subject experts. Reconsideration was done because the subject experts had to come in. It will improve the standard of your lordships orders. Aravalli is the most recent striking case. Willy nilly, your lordships have passed an order. And it is more final than final can be. The trappings of finality are if substantial problems are decided are not - absolutely yes. The 7th November order. The cost also is a finality. One cannot have initiation of cost and then reverse it. Obviously there won't be any demolitions. Even if your lordships agrees with me the order by its very nature is irreversible," he argued.

Senior Advocate Rajshekhar Rao also batted for the rights of stray dogs and asked whether the temporary orders passed by the Court earlier were proportionate to what was required. "Your lordships have passed a temporary order.

Your lordships never meant it to have trappings of finality. The idea of institutional and constitutional empathy has to be weighed. Your lordships have said that empathy must guide

behavior.

Is a direction which on the face of it on the teeth of what the law says, and we don't have the mechanism for it, and the voiceless dogs, in that backdrop. And the theory of proportionality. Was the temporary order the most proportional response? The article which we were asked to read yesterday, the converse of that is a story where stray dogs are running to protect a baby which was abandoned. This total destruction of animal territorial rights, whether it is appropriate to human safety. Proportionality analysis requires examining fit, necessity and balance. Somebody said this is perhaps a pilot project to deal with the unknown. But more importantly it is to find a way for the law to work where it is incapacitated because of various reasons.

Dogs have become a part of establishment and have found a way to live. Institutions may be allowed to take care of their problems. Your lordships have vast powers but they are circumscribed by some limits," he said