

## Humane stray dog plan needed, but climate is bigger fight: Acharya Prashant



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New Delhi, Aug 13 (IANS) Philosopher and author Acharya Prashant has urged a “humane and holistic” approach to controlling stray dog populations, responding to the Supreme Court’s directive to relocate all strays from Delhi-NCR to shelters within eight weeks.

“I understand the problem the Court is addressing, but I don’t agree with the solution,” the recipient of PETA’s Most Influential Vegan Award told the journalist.

He acknowledged the menace of unchecked stray populations, noting that India’s 60-70 million street dogs would rank as the world’s 20th most populous ‘country’ if counted separately.

In Delhi-NCR alone, there are nearly one million strays, he said. Rabies kills about 20,000 people in India each year, and dog bites affect around three million annually.

However, while respecting the sentiment of the court, he said he differed with the method. Relocating every stray to shelters within eight weeks, he argued, is impractical. Shelter capacity nationwide is far short of what’s required, and costs could exceed Rs 15,000 crore. Overcrowded facilities, he warned, risk becoming prisons of disease and neglect.

Moreover, he noted, global experience shows that mass removal creates a “vacuum effect,” with new unsterilised dogs moving in. Without humane infrastructure, shelters can become overcrowded holding pens for misery. Dogs, he stressed, need space, exercise, and the freedom to move, not just cages.

He pointed out that better models to tackle this issue already exist. Many Western nations, he explained, addressed their stray problems through Trap–Neuter–Return (TNR): capture, sterilise, vaccinate, and return the animals to their territories. Coupled with pet licensing, microchipping, strict anti-abandonment laws, mass rabies vaccination, and responsible feeding policies, TNR gradually reduces populations and disease risk.

Acharya Prashant recommended achieving 70 per cent sterilisation coverage in every district to sharply cut rabies risk, along with humane shelter reform and community education that links feeding with sterilisation.

On the activism triggered by the order, he said, was admirable to speak for another species but warned that single-species passion can obscure the greater emergency.

“Dogs are not endangered; they number in the crores. Meanwhile, more than 1,000 species in India are critically endangered or vulnerable, and hundreds to thousands of species vanish globally each

day due to human activity,” said the founder of the PrashantAdvait Foundation.

He said climate change, deforestation, and industrial animal agriculture were the main drivers of mass extinction, with just 8-10 domesticated species now making up 96 per cent of the world’s total animal mass, while millions of wild species have been reduced to the remaining 4 per cent.

“If you truly love animals, your first fight must be against climate change -- and for forests, clean rivers, and the protection of habitats. A species can go extinct without being killed; destroying its home is enough. We must think of the millions of species we may soon never see,” he said.

The stray dog crisis, he concluded, must be resolved “humanely and holistically,” with compassion for street dogs as mankind’s long-standing companions, but without letting focus on one visible species distract from the climate crisis that threatens millions of neglected species.

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