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**Press Release**

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**Camel herders: We want to save our camels, but a ban is not the solution**

 Leaders of the Raika camel herding community are deeply worried about the planned legislation of the Rajasthan government to ban the movement of camels across the borders of the state. While they appreciate the serious efforts of the government to save the camel, they do not believe that a ban is the right approach. According to Shri Ragunathdas , Mehent of the Akhil Bharati Raika Mahasabha temple in Pushkar, such a move will undermine the livelihoods of the Raika community that traditionally made a living from camel breeding. “If the ban is implemented, I fear that no Raika will take the trouble of bringing their camels to Pushkar. Over the last several years sales have already been down and this may be the death knell for camel trade.”

The Raika are world famous because of their sense of responsibility for the welfare of their camels – they believe it is their God-given duty to take care of them. Their relationship with the camel has traditionally been governed by a number of taboos, such as against the sale of female camels, the slaughter of camels, the sale of camel milk and the processing of camel milk. But in these rapidly changing times it is no longer possible to adhere to the moral standards of yore, as became obvious at a meeting held at the campus of Lokhit Pashu-Plak Sansthan in Sadri (Pali district) today. At the meeting, camel herders from the Maru and Godwar Raika communities shared their problems, concerns and suggestions how to save the camel.

Amanaram Raika from Anjiki dhani, Jojawar district Pali reported that camel numbers in his village declined by about 90% from 6000 in the mid 1990s to around 600 head today. “This is because we have no grazing to feed our camels, and we have no income. None of the young people are interested in the camel herding occupation for this reason. It has lost status and Raika girls no longer want to marry a camel herder.”

Shujaram Raika from the same village said that they sell their young camels at Pushkar mostly to the Meena and Jat communities who raise them for use as working camels. “It is not possible to keep more than one male camel in a herd, otherwise they fight and even kill each other” he elaborated to explain why the suggested ban on moving young male camels out of Rajasthan would be the end of his livelihood.

Another Raika, Buraram Raika said: The only solution for saving the camel is if there is a market for camel products. I am ready to sell camel milk which is very healthy, but it needs investment and infrastructure tailored to our needs.”

Hanwant Singh Rathore, director of LPPS and recent recipient of the Marwar Ratna award for his exceptional services to conserve the camel as part of Rajasthan’s heritage added “ We are grateful to the Chief Minister for her passion for camels, but a total ban will not serve the purpose. About 300 camels “saved” by animal welfare activists were dumped in Pali district. They were in a very sad condition – injured, blind, had broken jaws and were in constant pain. Then again they were sent away. This is also animal cruelty. If there is a ban, then government also must establish “unsthalas”, as for cows.”

German scientist Dr. Ilse Koehler-Rollefson who has studied the Raika camel culture for more than twenty years and shared the Marwar Ratna award with Mr. Rathore, cautions that bans on trafficking and slaughter have not proven effective in saving endangered farm animal breeds and species. She notes that in Muslim countries camel numbers are increasing because of demand for meat. “Of course the situation is entirely different in Hindu culture. Therefore in order to save the camel in India, there is urgent need for developing other camel products, such as dairy, wool and for ecotourism. For this purpose we need public-private partnerships.”