

Cattle trade rules: Supreme Court extends stay, new rules likely in August

New Delhi: The Centre on Tuesday told the Supreme Court that a set of amended rules governing trade in livestock and transport of cattle are likely to be notified by the end of August.

Noting this, a bench headed by chief justice J.S. Khehar extended a stay on the Centre's cattle trade rules to all the states until the amended rules are notified. It disposed of a batch of petitions challenging the cattle trade rules.

Additional solicitor general P.S. Narasimha, appearing for the Centre, said that the ministry of environment and forest (MoEF) was seized of the issue and was working towards defining the amended rules.

"The Centre is taking a fresh look and will put in place a better regime to regulate livestock market and animal market, one that will serve the interest of all," Narasimha said.

In May, the Union environment ministry had notified the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Regulation of Livestock Markets) Rules 2017, tightening trade in livestock and transport of cattle to ensure their welfare at animal markets and also prevent smuggling.

The rules banned trading in cattle for slaughter at animal markets. The rules included buffaloes in their definition of cattle, raising concerns that they would jeopardize the buffalo meat export business as the supply chain of spent buffaloes will be disrupted.

The Central rules drew criticism from various quarters, including opposition parties, who argued that they virtually ban the sale of cattle in the country.

This time around, to avoid controversy and ensure a consensus, the Central government is planning a consultation process including a national level meeting of all stakeholders, after which the government would address contentious issues and reframe the rules. Given the sensitive nature of the issue, the effort will be overseen by the Prime Minister's Office (PMO).

A draft of the proposed amendments to the rules will be put up online for feedback following which the rules will be finalized and notified, said a senior official of the environment ministry, who requested anonymity.

"The ministry is proceeding very carefully as PMO is overseeing each and everything," the official added.

One activist noted that laws on cow slaughter already existed in many states and that concern over the rules put in place had surrounded the inclusion of buffaloes in the definition of cattle.

"But if they drop (only) buffaloes then the rules won't be worth the paper they are printed on. Why waste public time and money," said N.G. Jayasimha, managing director of Humane Society International India, an NGO working on animal rights, and who was one of the members of a panel that drafted the controversial rules.

Twenty four states currently have in place either partial or full restrictions on sale, transport or slaughter of cows. The north-eastern states, and Kerala and West Bengal are exceptions, but the new regulations are likely to affect these states as well.

crackIAS.com