MOST URGENT

Thiru Srinivas R. Reddy, IFS,
Principal Chief Conservator of Forests and
Chief Wildlife Warden,
Office of the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests,
Forest Head Quarters, Guindy-Velachery Main Road,
Near Kannigapuram Check Post, Guindy, Chennai 600032.

Thiru P.N. Sridhar IAS,
Commissioner
Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments (HRCE) Department
119, Uthamar Gandhi Salai, Thousand Lights West
Nungambakkam, Chennai, Tamil Nadu – 600034

Via post and e-mail: Commr.hrce@tn.gov.in; cwlw_wildlife3@yahoo.in
tnforest@nic.in

20 November 2024

Sub: Urgent request for the rehabilitation of distressed and dangerous elephant Deivanai, who trampled two men to death at the Subramania Swamy Temple in Tiruchendur, Tamil Nadu

Respected Sirs,

I am writing from People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) India on behalf of our more than 2 million members and supporters to request your urgent and necessary action to rehabilitate a 26-year-old frustrated female elephant named Deivanai who killed two men, including the mahout, at the Subramania Swamy Temple premises in Tiruchendur on 18 November 2024. This elephant is disturbed and dangerous, as she is suffering psychologically, and likely physically, and needs specialised care. We appeal to you to urgently rehabilitate her at a sanctuary experienced in the care of elephants traumatised from years of loneliness and chains, and where she can live unchained, without weapons, and in the company of other elephants to allow her to begin to psychologically heal from years of captivity.

The Hindu reported this incident: "*A few of the officials who had visited the shrine and held inquiries told The Hindu that the pachyderm may have overworked or suffered injuries during ceremonies. The pain could have irritated or aggravated it and turned violent. We have to physically examine it, they added.*" This report is enclosed as **Annexure 1.**

Various videos posted online by the devotees show that Deivanai exhibits stereotypic behaviours through repeated head bobbing and trunk swaying (video is enclosed as **Annexure 2)** which are signs well-recognized by veterinarians of severe mental anguish and distress. This very behaviour, which is only seen in distressed captive elephants and never in elephants in the wild, is a warning sign that the elephant is upset and may attack. Deivanai is constantly controlled with an ankush and has injury marks on her body (screenshot is enclosed as **Annexure 3**

PEOPLE FOR THE ETHICAL TREATMENT OF ANIMALS INDIA

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CIN: U74899DL2000NPL103217

and Annexure 4.). Media reports state that she is suffering from skin infection as well (enclosed as **Annexure 5)**. Her enclosure is nowhere near her natural habitat as she is often chained by multiple legs on a concrete floor with short metal chains (**Annexure 6** and **Annexure 7)**. Deivanai is also forced to bless devotees in exchange for money and to take part in rituals, which risks the devotees' lives.

Elephants in captivity, especially in temples, are commonly distressed, anxious, unwell, unpredictable and excruciatingly lonely. In nature, female elephants spend their entire lives with a family herd, but in temples, they are often forced to endure solitary confinement, with almost no regular interaction with others of their own species. Extremely frustrated, they pose a continued threat to the safety of mahouts, devotees, and even other elephants. Some dangerous incidents involving captive elephants used by temples in Tamil Nadu are enclosed as **Annexure 8.**

The mental health issues and the fatal attack on two people irrefutably demonstrate that Deivanai is suffering. To avoid deadly situations in the future, we respectfully request Tamil Nadu's Forest and Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Departments work together to rehabilitate Deivanai at a true sanctuary where elephants are never chained or threatened with weapons. **PETA India stands ready to assist by donating a mechanical elephant to replace Deivanai at Subramanya Swamy Temple.**

A mechanical elephant –which can shake its head, move its ears, swish its tail, and lift its trunk – would help the temple ensure human safety while providing a humane way to conduct rituals. The only costs involved in maintaining the 'elephant' would be electricity and staff accompanying it during public interactions. Pictures of the proposed mechanical elephant and the six life-size mechanical elephants donated by PETA India are enclosed as **Annexure 9.** Mechanical elephants are currently being used by several South Indian temples and were welcomed with much fanfare.

The Tamil Nadu Forest Department and The Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments (HRCE) Department are duty-bound to ensure the health and safety of captive elephants, their mahouts, and other humans around them. Radhe Krishna Temple Elephant Welfare Trust in Gujarat, Wildlife Rescue and Rehabilitation Centre in Karnataka, and Wildlife SOS in Uttar Pradesh are elephant sanctuaries that do not chain elephants or use weapons against them, and they are all equipped with experts in rehabilitating disturbed elephants by providing them with lifetime care and protection.

Thank you for your consideration. I can be contacted at 9910397382 or KhushbooG@petaindia.org.

I look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,

Khushboo Gupta
Director of Advocacy Projects
PETA India

Annexure 1

Tiruchendur temple elephant 'Deivanai' tramples mahout, his relative, to death

Published - November 19, 2024 08:22 am IST - THOOTHUKUDI

THE HINDU BUREAU

Tiruchendur temple elephant Deivani | Photo Credit: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

In a shocking incident, the temple elephant - Deivanai - at the famous Subramanian Swamy temple in Tiruchendur trampled the mahout and his relative to death on Monday.

Following this, the temple was shut for devotees till 3.30 p.m. Only after the pujas (parihara pujas) were performed, the shrine was open to the public at around 4 p.m.

It is said that when 'Deivanai' was in the fenced portion, the assistant mahout S Udaykumar (45) of VOC Nagar here was on duty and in charge of the pachyderm. His relative K Sisubalan (57) of Kanniyakumari was also present at the spot.

Suddenly, at around 4.30 a.m., the elephant had attacked Sisubalan. Shocked, when Udaykumar attempted to rescue, he too suffered assaults. While Sisubalan died on the spot, the assistant mahout was rushed to the Tiruchendur Government Hospital, where he died after the treatment failed, doctors said.

As the news spread, the head mahout Radhakrishnan came to the spot and sprinkled water on the pachyderm and it was sent back to the cage and chained as a precautionary measure, temple staff said.

Senior officials from the Forest Department arrived and held inquiries with the staffs in the temple. Doctors from the veterinary department and police officers were present. They examined the CCTV footage and watched the elephant's movements.

A few of the officials, who had visited the shrine and held inquiries told *The Hindu* that the pachyderm may have overworked or suffered injuries during ceremonies. The pain could have irritated or aggravated it and turned violent. We have to physically examine, they added.

When asked about the presence of the assistant mahout's relative, the officials said that the police probe was inconclusive.

Tiruchendur temple is the second (rendaam padai) shrine among the Aarupadai veedu (of Lord Murugan) which is famous and attracts large number of devotees from all over the globe for its annual festivals.

The death of two people in the shrine by the temple elephant shocked the devotees. Recounting their experience, some of the local devotees and shopkeepers in the vicinity said that they would seek the blessings of 'Deivanai' before entering the shrine.

Further investigation was on.

Published – November 19, 2024 08:22 am IST

Tiruchendur temple elephant 'De | Manoj Kumar | தம்பியுடன் அ

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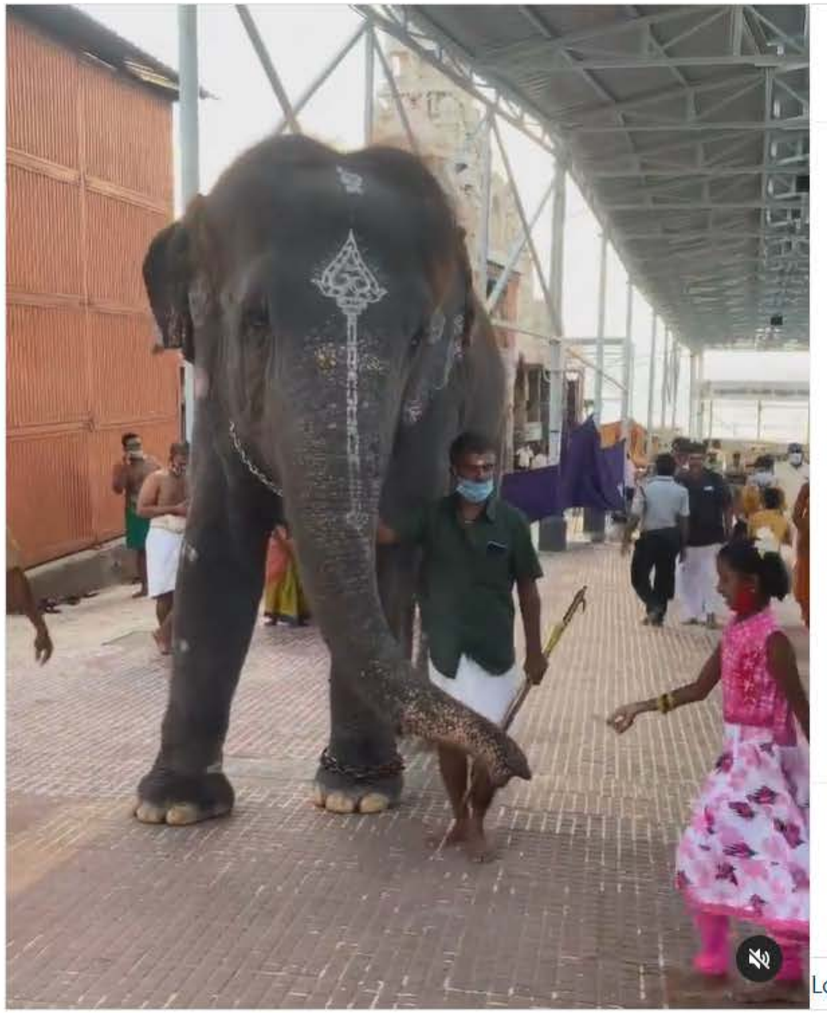
Annexure 3



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Annexure 4

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அருள் அனைவருக்கும்
கிடைக்கட்டும், Theivanai
Thiruchendur Subramanian wishes for
all ...

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#theivanai #thiruchendur #elephant
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Annexure 5

Tiruchendur: Deivanai elephant suffering from skin disease; Devotees banned from distributing food directly

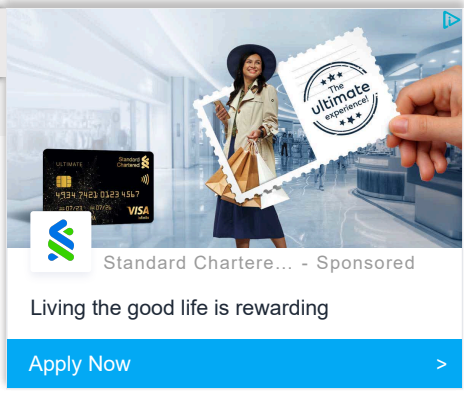
E.Karthikeyan
V.Aravindkumar

2 Min Read

Tiruchendur Subramania Swamy temple elephant Deivanai has been diagnosed with skin disease and the veterinarians have conducted a medical examination. Devotees were advised not to feed the elephant directly.

Published: 16 Mar 2023 3 PM

Updated: 16 Mar 2023 3 PM



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Doctors examining Deivanai

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Arulmigu Subramania Swamy Temple, Tiruchendur is one of the six Arupadai Veedu of Lord Mur
There is a 25-year-old female elephant named 'Deivanai' in the temple. There is a hall near the A
is tied. Deivanai elephant used to go round the prakaras of the temple every morning and evenin
days, it is customary to go around the chariot streets.

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Doctors who examined Deivanai

Devotees offer fruits and greens to the elephant and seek its blessings while going around with the pagans and at the time of tying the elephant in the hall. The Pagans divide the food that is put in the hall and give it to the elephant to eat. In this situation, Deivanai elephant is currently suffering from skin disease. The trunk, legs, back and tail are covered with warts and fungi. Deivanai has been feeling tired for the past few days.

In the presence of Arulmurugan, a team of medical experts comprising retired veterinary assistant director Dr Umakanthan, veterinarian Kalaivanan from Madurai and veterinarian Vinod Kumar from Tiruchendur examined Deivanai and treated her. Samples of the infection were collected at the site of skin infection and taken for clinical analysis.

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Skin infection in the leg

"Elephants generally eat only natural foods. It is possible that this elephant could have been infected by vegetables, fruits and food items offered by devotees. In it, there is an allergy to spoiled food items. As a result, the elephant's eating habits become unnatural. Henceforth, devotees should avoid offering fruits and other food items directly to the temple elephant. The skin infection will be cured in a month or two," said veterinarians.

Arulmurugan, chairman of the temple board of trustees, said, "Devotees should not offer fruits and food items directly to Deivanai. The elephant will be fed by elephant keepers. Separate boxes will be set up in front of the elephant shed.

1 மாத டிஜிட்டல் சந்தா முற்றிலும் இலவசம் Install App

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Consulting veterinarians

Devotees should put fruits, vegetables and greens in separate boxes that they want to feed the elephant. The Pagans would inspect the condition of the food and give it to the elephant what was clean. Steps will be taken to put up signboards in the temple corridors and elephant sheds for the attention of the devotees," he said.

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Tiruchendur temple elephant 'De | Manoj Kumar | தம்பியுடன் அ | THANIGAI THIAGARAJAN | #thiru

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Annexure 6

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Annexure 7

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factsheet

Dangerous Incidents Involving Captive Elephants Used by Temples in Tamil Nadu

The following incidents highlight the dangers of placing frustrated and upset wild animals in close contact with humans.

1. **Sep 2024:** In a tragic incident, a 54 year old female elephant named Subbulakshmi at Shanmuganatha Peruman temple in Kundrakudi died from severe burn injuries she had sustained during a fire accident at the temple as reported by *The Times of India.*

2. **May 2020:** In a shocking case, an elephant held at Tamil Nadu's Thiruparankundram Subramaniya Swamy temple trampled a mahout to death. *Behindwoods* reported that the elephant – named Deivanai – had lashed out at her captors a few times previously, and a similar incident took place in March 2018. She was just 7 years old when she was brought to the temple from Assam.

3. **May 2018:** *DT Next* reported an extremely disturbing incident in which Masini, an elephant at Samayapuram Mariamman temple, crushed and killed a mahout. At least eight devotees were injured in the incident. Shocked temple-goers fled for safety as Masini continued to trample on the body.

4. **April 2018:** An elephant attacked and killed a 35-year-old woman who tried to touch the animal during worship at a temple festival in Tirunelveli, reported *The Times of India.* The incident took place late at night near the temple where the elephant was tied.

5. **March 2018:** As reported by *The Times of India,* an elephant who was scheduled to participate in a temple festival trampled her mahout to death as he was beating her with a metal rod. The elephant, called Valli, tossed the mahout onto the ground with her trunk and trampled him. Valli was brought to Kanyakumari district from Kerala for the festival and was among other elephants who were made to take part in a grand procession.

6. **March 2018:** Elephant Deivanai, held at Thiruparankundram Subramaniya Swamy temple, attacked mahouts Ganapathi Subramaniyam and Kanagasundaram in March and another mahout later in the year. The elephant, whose certificate of possession expired in 2017, had also been violent at least a few times prior, according to police sources cited by *The Times of India*.

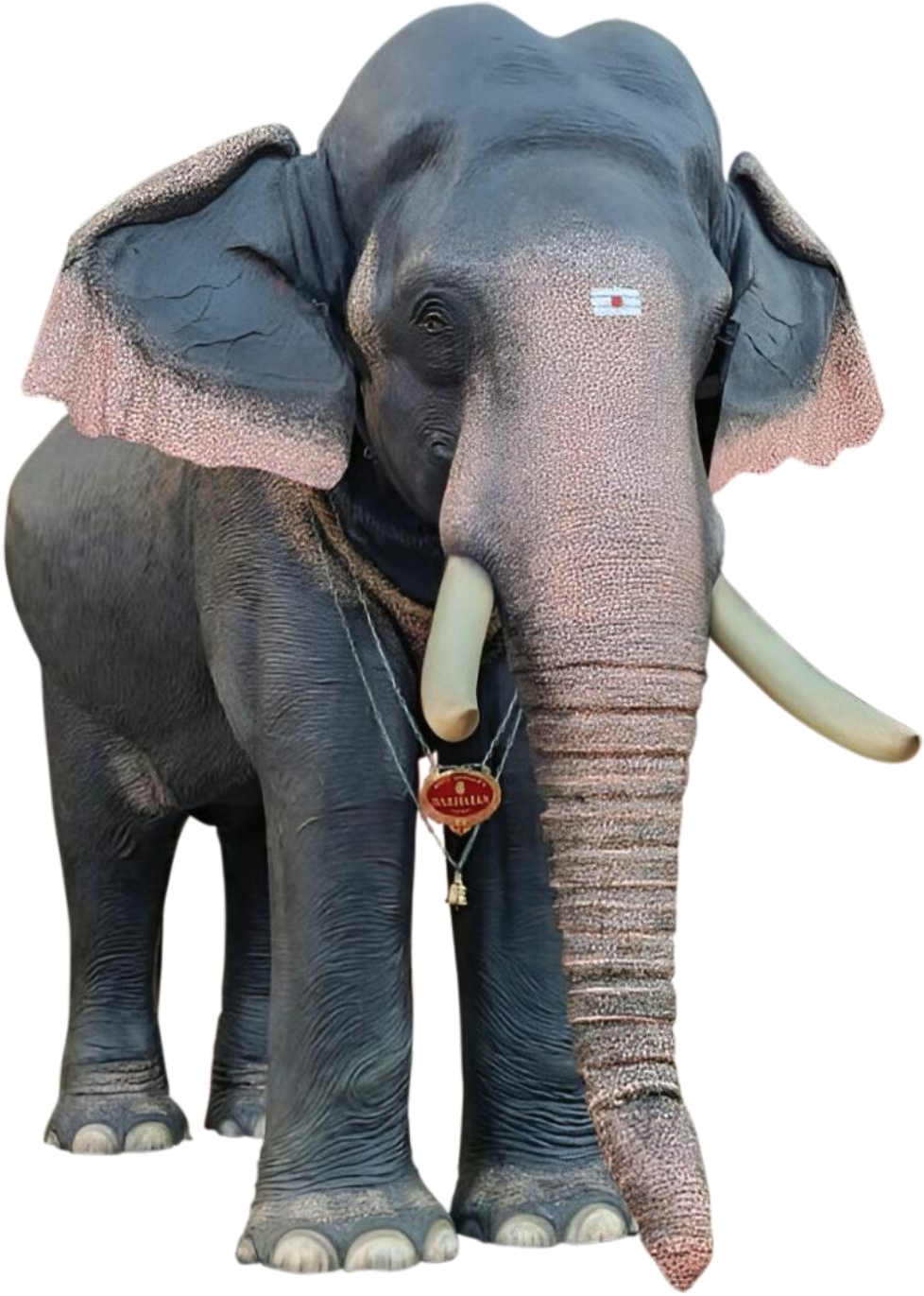
7. **April 2017:** Elephant Madhumathi trampled her mahout to death after being used at a temple festival near Marthandam in Kanyakumari district. *The Times of India* reported that the incident was triggered by the continuous transportation of the elephant to various temple festivals. Reportedly, the elephant was not fed properly and may also have attacked out of hunger. Madhumathi grabbed the mahout while he was riding on her back, threw him to the ground, and trampled him.

8. **December 2015:** Vignesh, an elephant hired for a temple procession by the Ayyappa Temple committee in Tirupur panicked and ran amok after firecrackers were set off. The *Deccan Chronicle* reported that the elephant ran through the streets, posing a danger to humans and public property. The incident prompted the police commissioner to ban the use of elephants for temple festivals in the city.

9. **October 2012:** Gomathi, an elephant kept at the Sri Mahalingaswamy temple in Thiruvidaimaruthur, crushed a devotee as the man worshipped. The *Times of India* reported that the elephant unexpectedly became aggressive, grasped the man with his trunk, and crushed him between his legs. He then threw the man against a wall. This incident sparked panic among other temple-goers. Gomathi is said to have previously attacked a few men who were under the influence of alcohol.

10. **October 1999:** A 3-year-old child sustained severe neck injuries, including a damaged windpipe and food pipe, when she was attacked by an elephant while visiting Mariamman temple in Samayapuram with her parents. *Sekar Reporter* confirmed that she is unable to eat solid food or speak decades after the incident.

Proposed Mechanical Elephant



PHOTOS OF MECHANICAL ELEPHANT

- Irinjadappilly Raman donated to Irinjadappilly Sree Krishna Temple in Thrissur

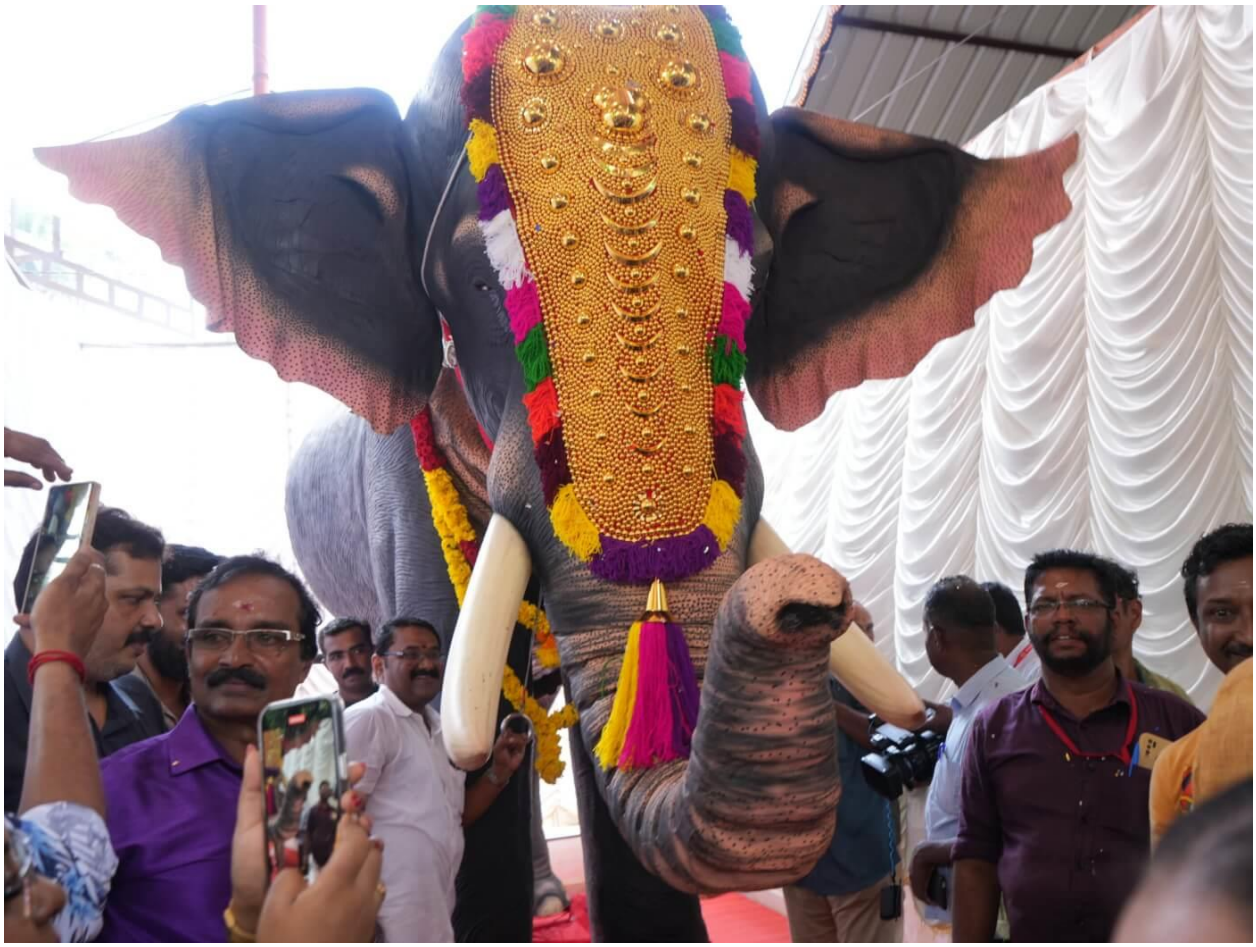
PHOTOS OF MECHANICAL ELEPHANT

Mahadevan donated to the Thrikkayil Mahadeva Temple in Kochi

PHOTOS OF MECHANICAL ELEPHANT

Shiva donated to the Suttur Math near Mysore in Karnataka.

PHOTOS OF MECHANICAL ELEPHANT



Baladhasan donated to Pournamikavu Temple in Thiruvananthapuram.

PHOTOS OF MECHANICAL ELEPHANT

Karnataka Minister Shri Ramalinga Reddy, MLA Dr Ranganath, Samyukta Hornad, and Karnataka Mahila Congress President Sowmya Reddy, Support First Mechanical Elephant in Nation Inaugurated at a Muzrai Temple, Yedeyur Sri Siddalingeshwara Swamy Temple

MECHANICAL ELEPHANT

THANK YOU