

Madras High Court asks Forest Department to regulate vehicle movement to temple located inside tiger reserve

The court passed the interim order following a writ petition that said over 50,000 people gather for the Maasi Magam festival at the Aadhi Karuvannarayar Bomma Deviyar temple in the Sathyamangalam Tiger Reserve, posing a hazard to wildlife

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Bharatha Chakravarthy on Tuesday, January 3, 2024, passed the interim order asking the Conservator of Forests and Field Director of STR to take all steps to regulate the festival to ensure least disturbance to wildlife in the tiger reserve.

The petitioner had submitted that though only 29 vehicles are allowed to enter the forest area from Karachikorai check-post to attend the festival, up to 50,000 people gather at the temple, cook food and stay there at night.

Appearing for the temple authorities, advocate G. Karthikeyan, said less than 7,000 devotees attend the festival and not all of them stay the night there. Detailing the steps taken to regulate the festival, the Forest conservator said a peace committee meeting is usually conducted 15 days ahead of the festival in which conditions are discussed and passed, to regulate the festival. The details are sent to the conservator and permission is obtained to conduct the festival.

The norms and regulations in the tiger conservation plan state that devotees are allowed to stay in the temple premises only on the night of the festival; only 100 vehicles per day are allowed during the festival, night patrolling by the Forest Department staff has to be done; firewood collection is not allowed in the reserve forest area; devotees are not allowed to use water from the Moyar river for any purpose and plastic items are not allowed inside the forest.

The judges asked the Forest conservator to implement the rules and guidelines, and file a report, and posted the case for its next hearing on March 15, 2024.

The temple is located inside the forest area falling under the Bhavanisagar Range of the Sathyamangalam Division, and members of Uppiliya Naicker community celebrate the festival every year.



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