

Victorias to be off Mumbai Streets in a year

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ORDER, ORDER | HC declares business to be illegal, gives govt time till Dec 31 to rehabilitate families of those associated with trade

Victoria carriages ordered to stop plying in a yr

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One year from Monday, Mumbai's iconic Victorias must vanish from city streets, because the Bombay High Court has declared the business to be completely illegal.

At present, the business comprises around 158 horses harnessed to Victorias and ten stables where horses are kept. 130 Victorias ply on busy roads such as Nariman Point, Colaba and in the suburbs. They provide livelihood to around 700 families.

On Monday, a division bench of Justice Abhay Oka and Justice A K Menon gave the State government a December 31 deadline for setting up a scheme to rehabilitate the families of those associated with the trade. Further the scheme has to include ways on rehabilitating the horses. The State has been allowed to consider any proposal as may be forwarded by animal welfare or-

ganisations that wish to take care of the horses.

The court took into consideration the stand taken by the Mumbai Traffic police, which had objected to the horses plying on concrete and tar surfaces. The Traffic police contended that the hard roads would hurt the horses, whose hooves were studded with nails. Moreover, that the horses would slip on smooth roads. Also that the Victorias were not a public conveyance within the meaning of the Public Conveyance Act and therefore could not be used as joy rides. The traffic police further said that it was not advisable for Victorias to continue to operate in view of the increase in the number of vehicles on city roads.

The BMC contended that none of the stables were licensed. Also, experts who visited the stables found them to be in unhygienic condition and lacking basic facilities for animal housing.



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The NGO Animals and Birds Charitable Trust in 2011 moved a public interest litigation before the HC, seeking proper implementation of regulations and timings allotted for plying of Victorias in the city and for banning them because their operations

amounted to cruelty to the horses. The NGO also argued that several horses and passengers had been injured in road accidents.

Subhodh Thakur, a stable and horse owner from Grant Road, said that on any given weekday, a Victoria earns around Rs2,500;

on weekends the intake can rise to Rs4,000. "My family depends on the business which my grandfather opened. The High Court has directed the State to come out with a rehabilitation scheme for us. I am told that when the carriages were stopped from plying in Delhi, the government offered auto permits to the horse owners. I don't mind if the State does the same here," he said.

"The High Court's decision is an important victory, both for the horses who will soon no longer be forced to haul heavy loads through Mumbai's busy streets and for the passersby, who will no longer risk being injured or killed because of these dangerous contraptions and the traffic hazard they cause," said PETA India's Director of Veterinary Affairs, Dr Manilal Valliyate. PETA was among the organisations that inspected the stables and reported their findings to the HC.