

## Keep animals out of conflict, PETA tells Nepal PM

Under pressure from the former Maoist guerrillas to resign and pipped in the race for presidency by the communists, Nepal's Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala is now facing fresh demands - from an animal rights group that wants him to 'keep animals out of conflict'.

People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), a Mumbai-based group that works to prevent animal abuse, Friday sent a letter to Koirala, urging him to sensitise Nepal's border security forces to the plight of migrating animal herds.

PETA said it had been flooded with calls and letters after a 'shocking' media report that an elephant calf had been electrocuted along the Indo-Nepal border.

A herd of nearly 30 elephants from India's Darjeeling Hills was trying to cross the border and enter Nepal when Nepal's security forces apparently fired on it to prevent it from coming in.

While some of the animals were injured in the firing, a frightened calf that tried to run away rammed into the electric fence and was electrocuted.

A Darjeeling forest official was quoted as saying that the cause of the calf's death was determined from the burn marks on the carcass.

An Indian environmentalist, Animesh Bone, reportedly said the government of India should take up the matter with Nepal.

'Animals claim no nation,' said the PETA letter sent to Koirala's office Thursday. 'They are in perpetual involuntary servitude to all humankind, and although they pose no threat and own no weapons, human beings always win in the undeclared war against them.'

'For animals, there is no Geneva Convention and no peace treaty - just our mercy.'

PETA has urged the Nepali prime minister, known for his penchant for attending scouts' conventions and anniversaries of test tube babies, to ask Nepal's border security forces 'to be considerate towards animals and keep animals out of any conflict'.

It remains to be seen if Koirala would heed the call.

On Friday, he remained engaged in negotiations with the Maoists and the Communist Party of Nepal-Unified Marxist Leninist (UML) over the contentious issue of power-sharing.

The Maoists, who emerged as the single largest party from the April election, want him to hand over the reins of the government to them.

To secure the help of the UML, the former insurgents sealed a deal with the latter Friday, agreeing to give the communist party the prestigious post of president.

Though a ceremonial post, the first president of Nepal would be a key figure as he would replace deposed King Gyanendra as head of state.

Koirala's Nepali Congress party is being offered by the two parties the post of chairman of the newly elected constituent assembly, a poor third post akin to the role of the speaker in parliament.

It would be a highly unsuitable post for Koirala due to his advanced age and failing health.

Once he resigns as prime minister, it would be the end of a political career for the octogenarian leader whose own party is blaming him for its humiliating defeat in the election and pushing for a change in the party leadership.

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