

## Shambo the 'sacred' bull faces slaughter again

The life of Shambo, the bovine TB-infected bull in a Hindu temple in Wales, once again hangs in balance after a court of appeal Monday ruled that the earlier decision of the Welsh Assembly to slaughter it was 'justified'.

The animal had got a reprieve last week when a judge in the high court had ruled that destroying Shambo would be unlawful. The animal is based in the Skanda Vale temple where priests and Hindu groups have been campaigning for its life to be spared on the ground that a bull is sacred in Hindu religion.

However, the Welsh Assembly appealed against the ruling. On Monday the court of appeal ruled that the rural affairs minister, Jane Davidson, had acted lawfully when she refused to make an exception for Shambo as a sacred bull.

The judge said: 'I have come to the conclusion that the minister was entitled to make the decision she did in regard to the very considerable problem presented by BTB. The decision to eliminate the risk by slaughter and not to permit an exception to the slaughter policy was, in my judgment, justified.'

The decision was justified even though Shambo's slaughter would be considered by the community as a sacrilegious act and 'a very grave and serious interference with their religious rights', the judge found.

Jonathan Crow, solicitor representing the assembly government, said the slaughter had been ordered to protect health, and that the policy was the way to achieve it. Crow said Ms Davidson had understood that slaughtering Shambo would interfere with the community's right to practice religion, but decided that it was still necessary to protect public health.

Mark Hoskins, representing Skanda Vale, told the appeal judges that killing Shambo 'would be comparable to killing a human being'.

One of the monks, Brother Alex, said after the ruling: 'Obviously we are disappointed with the decision. We will review our position and see what our options are.'

Swami Suryananda, also known as Brother Michael, said: 'We have put a very strong case across about our rights, and those of all Hindus, to freely practise religion by recognising the sanctity of life. This decision seriously disregards the principal tenets of Hindu dharma.'

'We are devastated that an animal in our care might be taken away for slaughter, even though it hasn't yet been proven to be a threat to anyone. The law needs to be broad enough and should include viable alternatives such as isolation and treatment to achieve their purpose so that they don't cut across people's ethics, religion or conscience.'

'We don't cull infected humans, we treat them. The same is the case for zoo animals, so why can't the government use their discretion in exceptional circumstances to provide such an option within the law on BTB?'

Ramesh Kallidai, the secretary general of the Hindu Forum of Britain, said: 'To kill such an important symbol of the Hindu religion on the basis of a subjective and unreliable test is not only incomprehensible but also sacrilegious'.

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