



Casting capers: Maneka sees animals in wrong role

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Highlights

- Union Women and Child Development Minister Maneka Gandhi has locked horns with the Animal Welfare Board of India (AWBI), accusing it of being lax in enforcement of rules that specify how wild animals can be depicted in films and television programmes.
- The board is India's apex body for ensuring that animals are not mistreated.
- In a July 23 letter to Union Environment Minister Harsh Vardhan, Ms. Gandhi, who is also known for her activism for animal rights, listed "blatant errors" by the AWBI subcommittee that screens applications from film-makers.
- She alleged that the committee did not seek details of the species being used, which were required to determine whether they were protected.
- It had even allowed their depiction in scenes that could promote cruelty to animals.
- The letter cites an instance of approval given for a scene showing animal sacrifice, which is against the Supreme Court's orders.
- The letter, cites an instance of the AWBI allowing the featuring of a hoolock gibbon, an endangered species, in a documentary film without enquiring from the film-makers whether or not special permission was obtained.
- In July, a TV show called "India's Next Top Model" was given approval for using animals and birds brought from outside the country, such as macaws and ball pythons, without verifying how they were sourced and whether requisite certificate was obtained for their import.
- While tigers, monkeys, lions, bears, panthers (including leopards) are banned from being exhibited under Section 22 of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, the government body has allowed their use on several occasions, Ms. Gandhi wrote in her letter.
- The subcommittee has granted requests for showing snakes and birds without applicants specifying the species.
- "All Indian snakes and birds except the crow are protected under the Wildlife Protection Act and any certification for performance or exhibition is only possible after permission from the Chief Wildlife Warden of the relevant State," the letter says.

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