



■ 100 cows starve to death at Simhachalam Temple

By VKL Gayatri -
VISAKHAPATNAM

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Around a hundred cows and calves have died of starvation at the Gosala of Sri Varahalakshmi Nrusimha Swami temple at Simhachalam here in just about a week, it is learnt.

Fifteen of them died on Tuesday and five on Monday, while 25 are said to be in a critical condition. According to sources, the deaths have occurred due to scarcity of fodder and water, cramped spaces and the unbearable heat turning the cowshed, which houses about 500 cows and calves, into an oven.

Ironically, as the temple administration officials scurried around making arrangements for the Lord's Nijaroopa Darsanam, Chandanotsavam et al, what they have clearly missed behind the glare of the decorating lights was the Gosala where the cows, revered by Hindus, are dying by the dozen.

The ghastly occurrence came to light on Tuesday, when locals and officials noticed the stench of decomposition emanating from the Gosala. A bewildered minister Ganta Srinivasa Rao jumped into action by ordering an immediate enquiry while tribal welfare minister P Balaraju rushed to the cowsheds and took the officials to task. According to Balaraju, 15 cows and calves died on Tuesday and five on Monday which, ironically, was an auspicious day on account of Simhadri Appanna's Chandana Yatra.

District collector V Sheshadri immediately dispatched a team of veterinary doctors to the cowshed and undertook rescue operations while Greater Visakhapatnam Municipal Corporation officials sent sanitary workers with vehicles to remove the carcasses. The collector also directed officials to hold a special veterinary camp at the cowsheds till the animals' health condition improves.

As the news spread, Viswa Hindu Parishat activists and local people rushed to the place in large numbers and demanded that the government punish the Devasthanam officials who were responsible for the death of so many docile creatures. VHP vice-president P Sharma alleged that over 100 calves and cows died in the past 10 days due to starvation and lack of drinking water. But devasthanam officials have not even responded to the serious situation, let alone take up rescue efforts or retrieve the carcasses, he said.

The executive officer's sprawling official bungalow stands on the same premises but, surprisingly, the stench of the decomposed carcasses did not shake the official, commented Ch Papa Rao, a senior citizen.