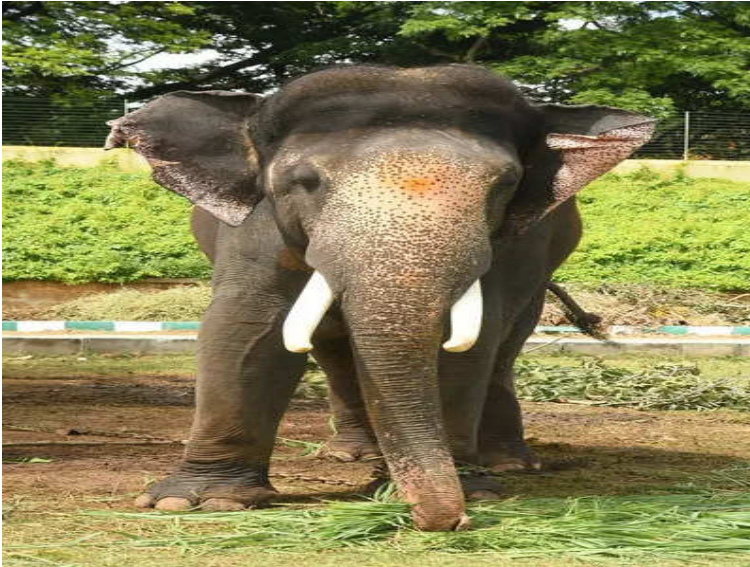


Forest dept training elephants to select lead Dasara jumbo for future

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Mysuru: The forest department is preparing to select the next lead elephant for future Dasara celebrations by the end of Dasara 2024.

The decision will be based on the elephants' performance during upcoming rehearsals and weight training sessions, where officials will assess their obedience to commands and interaction with their handlers, known as mahouts and kavadis.

As the current lead elephant, Abhimanyu, is expected to retire after the 2025 Dasara celebration, the forest department is shortlisting potential successors for the demanding task of carrying the golden howdah, which is the USP of the Mysuru Dasara celebration.

The lead elephant must carry approximately 1k weight, including the golden howdah, on its back and walk a distance of five kilometres from Mysuru Palace to Bannimantap Parade Grounds amidst a sea of devotees and tourists on Vijayadashami day. The grand procession marks the culmination of the ten-day Dasara festival.

According to forest official sources, Mahendra and Dhananjaya, who are in their early 40s, are likely contenders to succeed Abhimanyu. They possess majestic and appropriate physical features, are obedient to their handlers, and remain composed during training.

Conservator of forests Malathi Priya stated, "The onus of selecting second-line elephants is on the forest department. We will examine their performance and strength during the training sessions and then shortlist the tuskiers for the bigger task. The decision, however, is taken by the high-power committee about the successor."

Deputy conservator of forest (wildlife) IB Prabhugowda mentioned that six tuskiers, including Abhimanyu, who will carry the howdah this year, will be tested for the task. As Abhimanyu is expected to retire in two years on superannuation, the second-line elephants are being groomed.

The selected elephants will undergo weight training, starting with carrying sandbags equal to the weight of the howdah, and gradually increasing the weight before mounting a wooden replica of the golden howdah to test their patience.

Four elephants—Abhimanyu, Gopi, Dhananjaya, and Bhima—have done well in carrying the weight, approximately 550 kgs, during the training with ease. Two other tuskiers, Sugreeva and Mahendra, will be tested for carrying weight to test their endurance.

The handlers' confidence in handling and controlling the tuskiers will also be examined.