

Kaavan's Rescue Journey from Pakistan to Cambodia

From [FourPaws.org](https://www.fourpaws.org)

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Our heaviest rescue to date – after years of isolation for the Asian elephant Kaavan, his loneliness finally ends!

For over three decades, Pakistan's only Asian elephant has been confined to an inadequate enclosure of the Marghazar Zoo in Islamabad, Pakistan. At just a year old, he was gifted from the Sri Lankan government, to the government of Pakistan in 1985 in order to build relations between the two countries. At six years old, Kaavan was joined by a mate, elephant Saheli from Bangladesh. The two elephants spent the next 22 years together, until tragically, Saheli developed an infection from the cuts caused by her chains and died in 2012.

Deeply affected by the death of his life companion, Kaavan showed signs of stress and aggression and caretakers of the zoo struggled to keep the large elephant under control. Chained in isolation and poor condition, Kaavan became the worlds loneliest elephant.

However, whilst Kaavan was isolated and suffering, a student in Pakistan, Dr Samar Khan, heard about the elephant and was joined by a large community of Pakistani's to share his plight, which triggered what began a long fight to free him from his misery! American superstar, Cher and her organisation, [Free The Wild](https://www.free-the-wild.org), began campaigning to help Kaavan. Finally, in 2020, the Islamabad High Court issued a decision for the immediate relocation of all the animals, FOUR PAWS was asked to step in.

Thanks to the quick response of American businessman [Eric Margolis](#), a long time FOUR PAWS supporter, FOUR PAWS was able to take over this huge challenge.

How to prepare Kaavan for his transport into a new life

Led by veterinarian, Dr Amir Khalil, our team travelled to Pakistan to begin the planning of the animals relocations. Together with the help of the Pakistani community, the [Islamabad Wildlife Management Board \(IWMB\)](#), American businessman Eric Margolis and Free The Wild, we wanted to transport the elephant to a sanctuary in Cambodia. However, moving an extremely heavy animal is no simple task and the months of organisation and training for Kaavan began!

A specially made crate was designed and constructed for the elephant, who weighs 4.35 tons (8,700 pounds). When the training crate arrived in Kaavan's enclosure, it was an amazing sight – it was as if he knew it was taking him to a better place! Dr Amir Khalil and his team, including an elephant trainer, spent long hours with Kaavan, developing a trust and bond along with daily positive training with him and the training crate, so that he felt comfortable entering the crate, ready for his transfer.



FOUR PAWS and most especially the team in Pakistan would like to thank all of you who have supported and believed in our work. We also want to give a special thanks to Eric Margolis, whom

without his undoubting support we would not have been able to even consider accomplishing this huge task.

The beginning of a new life has begun!

29th November 2020

As Kaavan's rescue day was finally here, the excitement and energy for this huge mission was felt not only on-site but by supporters throughout the world as they watched this thrilling and challenging mission taking place!

Cher was also on-site to cheer the elephant on, she sang to Kaavan as the final preparations for the transport were underway. The training crate was moved into Kaavan's enclosure, where the training paid off as Kaavan safely walked into the crate for the very last time. As the crate left the zoo Kaavan within - for the first time in 35 years, Kaavan's enclosure in the Marghazar Zoo was finally empty!

The team transferred the giant to the airport, where the loneliest elephant in the world was loaded on an aeroplane in Islamabad. Together with the team on-site, Dr Frank Goeritz, head veterinarian at the Leibniz Institute for Zoo and Wildlife Research and Dr Amir Khalil were right by his side throughout the whole trip to support him. Our partner Free The Wild and US-superstar Cher were awaiting the elephant in Cambodia.

"Kaavan was eating, was not stressed and he even slept a little bit whilst leaning on the wall of the crate! He behaves like a 'Frequent Flyer'. The flight was uneventful, which is all you can ask for when you transfer an elephant!" - Dr Amir Khalil, FOUR PAWS vet and mission leader.

The worlds loneliest elephant no more - Kaavan's arrival in Cambodia

Following the long journey from Pakistan, Kaavan was able to leave his transport crate and enjoyed a warm welcome with a juicy fruitcake and a banana tree leaves trail made especially for him.



Then, a very special moment for Kaavan and everyone who has followed his journey, after eight long and lonely years, Kaavan had his first integration with another elephant. Kaavan will finally have the chance to live a species-appropriate and peaceful life.

3rd December 2020

After eight long years Kaavan is finally able to interact with other elephants again. In his new home in Cambodia, he is slowly getting to know the other giants in the neighboring enclosure. Of course, he still needs time to fully get used to his new surroundings. We can only imagine how overwhelming this



23rd December 2020

An elephantastic new life! Three weeks ago, we brought Kaavan to the Cambodia Wildlife Sanctuary and as you can see, he is really enjoying his new home. He is in regular contact with the female elephants next to him and soon he will be able to move to a bigger outdoor enclosure in the jungle that is being built for him right now. We just love watching him thrive and being his happy self!

02nd March 2021

We want to sincerely thank the Cambodia Wildlife Sanctuary and their dedicated staff for taking such great care of Kaavan – we couldn't be happier for him!