

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT, FOREST AND CLIMATE CHANGE

RAJYA SABHA
STARRED QUESTION NO. 96
TO BE ANSWERED ON 15.12.2022

Delay in translocation of Asiatic Lions from Gir Forest

96. SHRI KAPIL SIBAL:

Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT, FOREST AND CLIMATE CHANGE be pleased to state:

- (a) whether Central Government is planning to move the Asiatic Lions from Gir Forest to another location, if so, the sites earmarked and the timeline and if not, the reasons therefor;
- (b) the reason for the delay in the movement of the lions from their habitat in Gir Forest since the Supreme Court judgement in 2013;
- (c) the reason for not listing the translocation in the 25-year roadmap of Project Lion; and
- (d) the details of the Asiatic Lions that have died in the Gir Forest till 2022 since the Supreme Court judgement and the steps taken to protect the lions in the Gir Forest?

ANSWER

MINISTER FOR ENVIRONMENT, FOREST AND CLIMATE CHANGE
(SHRI BHUPENDER YADAV)

(a), (b), (c) and (d) A statement is laid on the Table of the House.

STATEMENT REFERRED TO IN REPLY TO PARTS (a), (b), (c) and (d) OF THE RAJYA SABHA STARRED QUESTION NO. *96 REGARDING DELAY IN TRANSLOCATION OF ASIATIC LIONS FROM GIR FOREST BY SHRI KAPIL SIBAL DUE FOR REPLY ON 15.12.2022

(a) A Committee was constituted by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change with a view to assess the suitability of habitat for lions in potential sites in Gujarat and make recommendations regarding facilitation of natural dispersal of lions and the modalities for establishment of lion population in newly identified sites in the State of Gujarat. The Committee has recommended a participatory management approach for expanding lion population, greater involvement of communities and awareness and sensitization programmes, especially in newly occupied territories. The Ministry is providing financial assistance to the State of Gujarat for lion conservation activities including for habitat improvement, water management, grassland development and prey augmentation. These activities will also facilitate the natural dispersal of lions beyond the Gir landscape.

(b) The lions have moved to forested patches through conducive corridors and are now distributed in nine districts of Saurashtra namely Junagadh, Gir Somnath, Amreli, Bhavnagar, Botad, Porbandar, Jamnagar, Rajkot and Surendranagar constituting 53 Talukas covering a sprawling expanse of around 30000 sq. km which is termed as the Asiatic Lion Landscape.

However, in compliance of the directions of Hon'ble Supreme Court of India in I.A. No. 100 in Writ Petition (Civil) No.337/1995 in Centre for Environment Law, WWF-I vs Union of India & Others vide their order dated 15th April, 2013, the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has constituted an Expert Committee under the Chairmanship of Additional Director General of Forests (Wildlife), MoEF&CC. The committee has met six times. The State Specific Empowered Committees have also been constituted in the State of Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat under the chairmanship of their respective Chief Wild Life Wardens for overlooking the translocation process. The translocation will be done only after mutual consultations between State specific empowered committees of the two States covering all aspects of translocation including evaluation of the habitat proposed for the translocation, procedures and guidelines required to be followed for translocation and also the safety and security aspects of the translocation.

(c) As per the document titled '*Project Lion: Lion @47 vision for Amrutkal*' the Barda Wildlife Sanctuary, Gujarat has been identified and assessed by the Wildlife Institute of India as a potential site where a population of 40 adult and sub-adult lions can be accommodated in the larger landscape of Barda-Alechhills and coastal forests through natural dispersal.

(d) Incidences of deaths of Asiatic Lions due to various factors such as natural deaths, train hits, electric shocks, falling in well, infighting, disease etc. have been reported in and around Gir Forest.

The important steps taken to protect lions includes:

- i. Listing the species in Schedule-I of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972, thereby, according it the highest degree of legal protection from hunting.
- ii. The Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 provides for punishment for violation of its provisions. The Act also provides for forfeiture of any equipment, vehicle or weapon that is used for committing wildlife offence.
- iii. Asiatic Lion has been identified by Ministry as one of the 22 Critically Endangered species for focused recovery program under the Centrally Sponsored Scheme of 'Development of Wildlife Habitat'.
- iv. Financial assistance is provided to the State Government of Gujarat under the Centrally Sponsored Scheme of 'Development of Wildlife Habitats' for the conservation and protection of Asiatic Lions and their habitat.
- v. Appointment of 'Vanya Prani Mitra' (Wildlife Friend) in villages around Gir area.
- vi. Wireless Network in and around Gir area for fast communication.
- vii. Checking Nakas on entry points for keeping track of movements of vehicles and people.
- viii. Law enforcement authorities in the State of Gujarat maintain strict vigil against poaching of wild animals, including Asiatic Lions.
- ix. Wild Life Crime Control Bureau has been set up to gather intelligence about poaching and unlawful trade in wild animals and animal articles and to achieve inter-state and trans-boundary coordination in enforcement of wildlife laws.
- x. The Ministry has formulated the 3rd 'National Wildlife Action Plan' for a period of 2017 to 2031 to save wild animals, including Asiatic Lions in the country. The Plan focuses on landscape approach in conservation of all wildlife irrespective of where they occur.
- xi. The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change released the Advisory for management of Human Wildlife Conflict in February 2021 and guidelines in June, 2022, which also provide for improvement of wildlife habitats.
- xii. In order to further strengthen conservation of wildlife, Eco-Sensitive Zones (ESZs) are notified around National Parks and Sanctuaries under the provisions of the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986.
