

NEED TIME TO THINK OVER WHETHER GIR LIONS SHOULD JOIN CHEETAHS AT KUNO: GOVERNMENT TELLS SUPREME COURT

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March 28, 2023 09:31 pm | Updated March 29, 2023 02:18 am IST - NEW DELHI

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File photo of two sub-adult Asiatic Lions enjoying Sunday winter evening at their open cage safari in Sakkarbaugh Zoo. The Union Government on March 28 told the Supreme Court that introducing lions into Kuno National Park, which is housing cheetahs from Namibia and South Africa, may lead to tensions. | Photo Credit: VIJAY SONEJI

Introducing lions from Gir in Gujarat into Kuno National Park may create tension between the pride and the cheetahs imported in the past few months from Namibia and South Africa, the government told the Supreme Court on March 28.

The government said it needs six months to re-examine whether members of the Asiatic lion population “thriving” in Gir need to be translocated to Kuno in Madhya Pradesh where the cheetahs are finding their feet in the new habitat.

The Centre recommended a “stress-free environment” for the cheetahs.

“The introduction of cheetahs in India is being done as per the guidelines of the International Union for Conservation of Nature. Post the mandatory quarantine period, the cheetahs have been released into larger enclosures and free ranging conditions.

“They have started hunting on their own. In order to provide the cheetahs a stress-free environment for successful establishment of the founder populations, it is not appropriate to introduce one more large carnivore species [lions] in the area immediately. It would be detrimental for the survival of both the species owing to inter-species competition,” the government said in an affidavit.

The government added that though cheetahs are known to coexist, the cheetahs which are competitively subordinate and vulnerable species should be released prior to the lions, the dominant species.

Eight cheetahs were [transported from Namibia to Kuno on September 17](#) last year in a “historic first wild-to-wild intercontinental translocation of a large carnivore”.

Subsequently, 12 cheetahs were brought from South Africa to Kuno on February 18, 2023.

The government said intensive workshops are being held for better cheetah management and successful establishment of a “cheetah meta-population” in India.

A cheetah, one of the eight translocated from Namibia, died at Kuno National Park, in Sheopur district | Photo Credit: PTI

The government and the National Tiger Conservation Authority said it was no longer necessary for them to take the guidance and advice of an expert committee appointed by the apex court in January 2020.

The government said the Asiatic lion population in Gujarat has grown by almost 29% in the last five years. The prides are dispersing into larger areas. Several meta populations of lions have been established across the landscape.

“The lion population is thriving with 674 individuals as per June 2020 estimates compared to 411 in 2010... For securing the future of Asiatic lions in the country, the Union government has launched the Asiatic Lion Project for long term conservation of the species,” the Centre submitted.

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