

SUPREME COURT EXPRESSES CONCERN OVER CHEETAH DEATHS IN KUNO

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A Cheetah brought from South Africa is released in an enclosure at Palpur, Kuno National Park, Madhya Pradesh, in Sheopur on February 18, 2023. | Photo Credit: PTI

The Supreme Court on Thursday voiced a deep concern about the deaths of three cheetahs translocated from South Africa and Namibia to the Kuno National Park (KNP) of Madhya Pradesh.

A Bench led by Justice B.R. Gavai noted that the deaths had occurred within two months of their transfer to the KNP. It urged the Centre to “rise above politics” and consider shifting them to Rajasthan.

“Don’t bring party politics into this issue. Consider all the available habitats, whatever is suitable for them... Three deaths [of cheetahs] in less than two months is a matter of serious concern. There are opinions of experts and articles in the media. It appears that Kuno is not sufficient for so many cheetahs. There is too much concentration of cheetahs at one place. Why don’t you look for a suitable place in Rajasthan? Merely because Rajasthan is ruled by an opposition party does not mean, you will not consider it,” the Bench said.

Additional Solicitor General Aishwarya Bhati, appearing for the Centre, said the task force was seized of the deaths.

The experts in the force were investigating all possible aspects, including shifting them to other sanctuaries.

On March 27, a female cheetah named Sasha (from Namibia) died due to kidney ailment, on April 23, Uday (South Africa) died due to cardio-pulmonary failure and on May 9, another South African female cheetah named Daksha, died following a violent interaction with a male during a mating attempt.

“We came to know that the cheetah which died due to kidney related ailment was suffering from the problem before being brought to India. The question is how was that female cheetah cleared to be brought to India, if the feline was suffering from ailment,” the Bench said.

Ms. Bhati said autopsies of all the deaths were done and a task force was investigating the

issue.

“You are bringing the cheetahs from abroad, it’s a good thing. But they need to be protected. They need to be given suitable habitat. Why don’t you explore for more suitable habitat than Kuno?” the court asked.

Ms. Bhati said a cheetah had given birth to four cubs which showed that they were rapidly acclimatising in Kuno.

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