

UPSC CURRENT AFFAIRS NOTES 10-11-2023

ONE YEAR OF PROJECT CHEETAH

A year after it was launched, Project Cheetah has claimed to have achieved short-term success on many counts.



Project Cheetah is India's ambitious initiative to reintroduce cheetahs after their extinction in the country.

Initiation

The initiative began on September 17 2022, when Prime Minister Narendra Modi released a group of cheetahs brought from Namibia into an enclosure at Madhya Pradesh's Kuno National Park.

Objectives

Project Cheetah aims to achieve the following ecological objectives:

Re-establish the functional role of the Cheetah in representative ecosystems within its historical range. Here the cheetah will serve as a flagship to save not only its prey-base but also other endangered species of the grassland and semi-arid ecosystems. Resources invested in these highly exploited and neglected systems will ensure better management and restore their ecosystem services for the country.



Contribute to the global effort towards the conservation of the Cheetah as a species.

Additionally, Cheetah's introduction is likely to improve and enhance the livelihood options and economies of the local communities.

One year of Project Cheetah

Project Cheetah has claimed to have achieved short-term success on four counts:

“50% survival of introduced cheetahs, the establishment of home ranges, birth of cubs in Kuno”, and revenue generation for local communities.

SURVIVAL:

The test of survival is in the wild, not in captivity where animals are under protective care.

According to India's official Cheetah Action Plan, the male and female cats from both Namibia and South Africa were to spend two and three months respectively inside bomas (enclosures) before being released in the wild.

In the 12 months since they arrived in India in September 2022, the eight cheetah imports from Namibia should have spent a cumulative 75 'cheetah months' in the wild.

However, in reality, they spent just about 16 'cheetah months' outside the bomas.

Together, the 12 South African imports should have spent a cumulative 67 'cheetah months' in the wild.

In reality, as the chart shows, they spent not even 11 'cheetah months' in the wild.

Yet, the project lost 40% of its functional adult population.

Of the 20 cats that arrived in India, six died (Dhatri and Sasha from Namibia; Suraj, Uday, Daksha, and Tejas from South Africa), and two were unfit for the



wild. Four cubs were born in India, three of which died, and the fourth is being raised in captivity.

HOME RANGE:

Only three cheetahs — Namibian imports Asha, Gaurav, and Shaurya — have spent more than three months at a stretch in the wild.

Even they have been stuck inside bomas since July. It is unlikely any of the cats would have established “home ranges” in Kuno.

REPRODUCTION:

The goal, as per the Action Plan, was: “Cheetah successfully reproduce in the wild”.

However, Siyaya aka Jwala, the Namibian female that gave birth to four cubs in Kuno, was captive-raised herself.

She was unfit for the wild and her cubs were born inside a hunting boma.

LIVELIHOOD:

The project has indeed generated a number of jobs and contracts for the local communities, and the price of land has appreciated significantly around Kuno.

No human-cheetah conflict has been reported in the area.

Compromises, mistakes

Three of the eight Namibian cheetahs — Sasha, which was the project’s first casualty, and Jwala and Savannah alias Nabha, who were never released outside the bomas in Kuno — were captive-raised, reportedly as “research subjects”. They were offered to India to meet the “hard deadline” for the import.

To get the cheetahs, India promised to support Namibia for “sustainable utilisation and management of biodiversity...at international forums”.

Weeks after the cheetahs arrived, India abandoned its decades-old stand by abstaining at the CITES vote against trade in elephant ivory.



In Kuno, captive breeding was attempted by putting the sexes together in hunting bomas. However, due to extremely low genetic variation within the species, a cheetah female is very selective in seeking out most distantly related males. That is why giving males access to a female not in heat can lead to violence.

The project got lucky with Jwala; it failed when two South African males killed the female Phinda alias Daksha in May.

The monitoring teams failed to intervene in time when three cubs succumbed to acute dehydration in May.

Maggot infestation in multiple animals — which would have affected their gait — also went unnoticed until the festering wounds under their radio collars killed two in July.

Kuno's carrying capacity

The project's original goal, "to establish a free-ranging breeding population of cheetahs in and around Kuno", has been diluted to "managing" a meta population through assisted dispersal.

The Cheetah Action Plan estimated "high probability of long-term cheetah persistence" within populations that exceed 50 individuals.

Cheetal is the cheetah's prime prey in Kuno where project scientists reported per-sq-km cheetal density of 5 (2006), 36 (2011), 52 (2012) and 69 (2013).

The feasibility report in 2010 estimated that 347 sq km of Kuno sanctuary could sustain 27 cheetahs, and the 3,000 sq km larger Kuno landscape could hold 70-100 animals.

After the project was revived in 2020, the Cheetah Action Plan assessed Kuno's cheetal density at 38 per sq km which could sustain 21 cheetahs, while a larger landscape of 3,200 sq km could support 36.

A single population of 50 cheetahs was no longer deemed feasible.

Looking Ahead

Since Kuno cannot support a genetically self-sustaining population, the project's only option is a meta-population scattered over central and western India.

But unlike leopards, which dominate this landscape, cheetahs cannot travel the distances between these pocket populations on their own.

A solution would be to borrow from the South African model that periodically translocates animals from one fenced reserve to another to maintain genetic viability.

But if this “assisted dispersal” becomes the new normal, the case for maintaining forest connectivity that allows natural dispersal of wildlife will be severely weakened.

Kedarnath Wildlife Sanctuary (KWS)

A case was recently registered against a chopper company by the forest department in Uttarakhand for purportedly landing a helicopter in a restricted zone of Kedarnath Wildlife Sanctuary.



About Kedarnath Wildlife Sanctuary (KWS):

Location:



The KWS, famously known as the Kedarnath Musk Deer Sanctuary, is located in the Rudraprayag and Chamoli districts of the state of Uttarakhand.

It was named after the famous Hindu temple of Kedarnath, which lies outside the northern border of the sanctuary.

Its alternate name comes from its primary purpose of protecting the endangered Himalayan musk deer.

It is the largest protected area in the western Himalayas.

The sanctuary was established in 1972, covering a total area of 975.20 km².

It lies in the upper catchment of the Alaknanda and Mandakini Rivers.

The altitude ranges from 1,160 to 7,068 m.

It is bordered by Kedarnath (6940 m), Mandani (6193 m), and Chaukhamba (7068 m) peaks in the north.

The area falls under the West Himalayan Zone in the Palearctic realm.

Vegetation:

It is covered with temperate forests.

The higher and upper regions possess the sub-alpine and alpine coniferous forests.

At high altitude, lush green meadows envelope the entire region.

Flora:

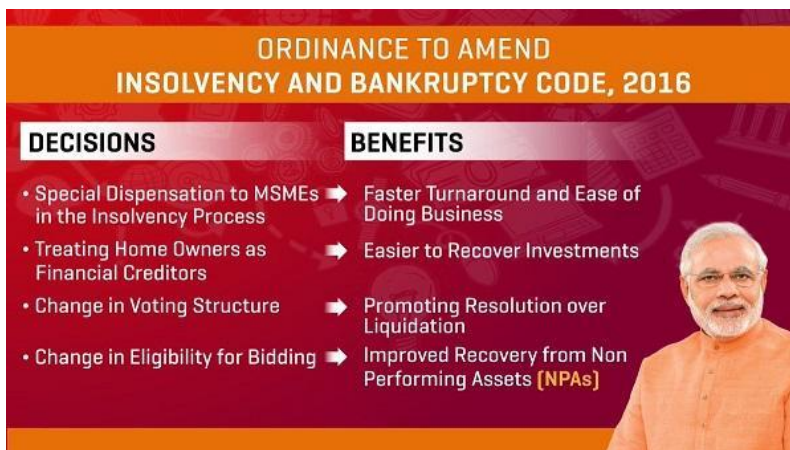
Oak, rhododendrons, Chir Pine and Alpine meadows along with several Himalayan flowering plants.

Fauna: Some of the mammals are Musk deer, Himalayan Thar, Himalayan Black bear, Snow Leopard, etc, and some birds like Monal, Koklass, and Himalayan Griffon, etc.

Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016

The Supreme Court recently upheld key provisions of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016 (IBC), which had been challenged on various grounds, including the alleged absence of due process and a violation of natural justice principles.

About Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016:



DECISIONS	BENEFITS
• Special Dispensation to MSMEs in the Insolvency Process	➔ Faster Turnaround and Ease of Doing Business
• Treating Home Owners as Financial Creditors	➔ Easier to Recover Investments
• Change in Voting Structure	➔ Promoting Resolution over Liquidation
• Change in Eligibility for Bidding	➔ Improved Recovery from Non Performing Assets [NPAs]

It is the bankruptcy law of India which seeks to consolidate the existing framework by creating a single law for insolvency and bankruptcy.

It provides for a time-bound process to resolve insolvency.

Applicability: The provisions of the Code are applicable to companies, limited liability entities, firms, and individuals (i.e. all entities other than financial service providers).

Timeframe for completion of the exercise:

Companies have to complete the entire insolvency exercise within 180 days under the IBC. The deadline may be extended if the creditors do not raise objections to the extension.

For smaller companies, including startups with an annual turnover of Rs 1 crore, the whole exercise of insolvency must be completed in 90 days, and the deadline can be extended by 45 days.

If debt resolution doesn't happen, the company goes for liquidation.



Who regulates the IBC proceedings?

The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI) has been appointed as a regulator and it can oversee these proceedings.

IBBI has 10 members appointed by the Central Government.

IBBI regulates insolvency professionals, insolvency professional agencies, and information utilities set up under the Code.

Who facilitates the insolvency resolution? A licensed professional administers the resolution process, manages the assets of the debtor, and provides information for creditors to assist them in decision-making.

Who adjudicates over the proceedings?

The proceedings of the resolution process will be adjudicated by the National Companies Law Tribunal (NCLT) for companies and the Debt Recovery Tribunal for individuals.

The courts approve initiating the resolution process, appointing the insolvency professional, and giving nod to the final decision of creditors.

What is the procedure to resolve insolvency under the Code?

When a default occurs, the resolution process may be initiated by the debtor or creditor.

The insolvency professional administers the process.

The professional provides financial information of the debtor from the information utilities to the creditor and manages the debtor's assets.

This process lasts for 180 days, and any legal action against the debtor is prohibited during this period.

What does the committee of creditors do?

A committee consisting of the financial creditors who lent money to the debtor is formed by the insolvency professional.



The creditors' committee decides the future of the outstanding debt owed to them.

They may choose to revive the debt owed to them by changing the repayment schedule or selling the assets of the debtor to get their dues back.

If a decision is not taken in 180 days, the debtor's assets go into liquidation.

What happens under liquidation?

If the debtor goes into liquidation, an insolvency professional administers the liquidation process.

Proceeds from the sale of the debtor's assets are distributed in the following order: First, insolvency resolution costs, including the remuneration to the insolvency professional; second, secured creditors, whose loans are backed by collateral; and third, dues to workers, other employees; forth, unsecured creditors.

UNESCO Declares Gwalior the 'City of Music'

The city of Gwalior in Madhya Pradesh has been added to UNESCO's Creative Cities Network (UCCN) for its strong commitment to harnessing culture and creativity.

Kozhikode from Kerala was also among the 55 new cities to join the network.

Gwalior's Musical Part (Background, Famous Musical Personalities, etc)

All the music gharanas of the country have their origins in the Gwalior gharana.

Gharana in Hindustani music is a community of performers who share a distinctive musical style that traces to a particular instructor or region.

Before Hindustani classical music was divided into various gharanas, Gwalior emerged as the first proper gharana of music.

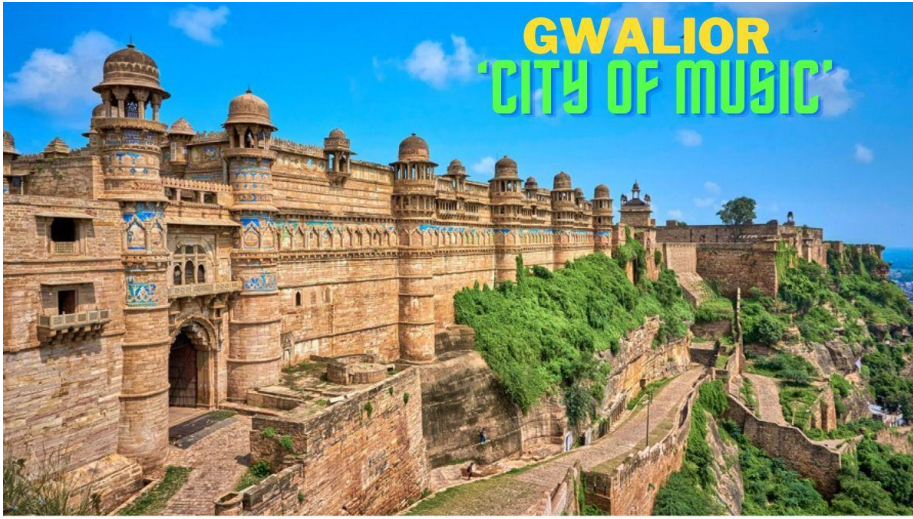
Hence, the Gwalior gharana is considered the most ancient and 'Gangotri' (meaning origin) of Khyal raga.

Khayal singing, as we know it today, emerged from dhrupad under the aegis of Gwalior gharana while incorporating the elements of qawwali.

Famous Musicians Associated with Gwalior Gharana:

Gwalior gharana music has thrived under the patronage of the erstwhile royal families of Gwalior such as Raja Mansingh and Scindias.

Raja Dungarendra Singh Tomar:



Raja Man Singh's great grandfather Dungarendra Singh Tomar, a musician himself, attempted a revival of Indian classical music through academic interest and patronage.

He is known to have gifted two music treatises in Sanskrit – Sangeet Shiromani and Sangeet Choodamani – to his friend and Sultan of Kashmir Zain-ul-Abdin.

The treatises comprised detailed discussions on music and musical instruments.

Raja Man Singh:

Dungarendra also composed Vishnupadas (songs in praise of Vishnu) with a unique style of singing that he passed down to Man Singh, who ascended the throne in 1486.

It's also believed that Man Singh invented dhrupad, in a classical genre sense.



Raja Man Singh's Horis and Dhamars also became quite popular. The king would take advice from Sufi saints, who were often musicians too.

In an attempt to popularize Indian music, he replaced Sanskrit songs with those in simple Hindi.

He also wrote Manakutuhala (Quest for Learning), considered the first treatise of music in Hindi, helping a wider audience to understand high art performed in kings' courts.

This made dhrupad more accessible, which now comprised Vishnupadas sung in ragas.

The king also built huge music halls in his palace and held regular music sessions. His music was also popular among Sufis as well as Muslim Sultans.

Tansen:

Mian Tansen born as Ramatanu to a poet and musician was one of Gwalior's early proteges.

At the beginning of the 16th century, he trained under Swami Haridas, who practiced dhrupad but the poetry was dedicated to Krishna instead of Vishnu.

Tansen understood and honed the Gwalior gharana style under the famed Sufi saint Mohammad Ghous and was the court musician for King Ram Chandra Singh of Rewa, Madhya Pradesh, for many years.

The story of his musical brilliance and knowledge travelled and Akbar invited Tansen to be a part of his court musicians in the Mughal court.

A Vaishnava musician, he first refused, but after Ram Chandra insisted, he go, he joined the court at the age of 60.

Abul Fazl's Ain-i-Akbari mentions 36 imperial musicians, out of which 15 were from Gwalior.

Baiju Bawra:

Baiju Bawra was born in Uttar Pradesh.

He had shifted to Gwalior to work as mentor of music for students in Gwalior and was patronised by Raja Mansingh.

Ustad Hafiz Ali Khan:

Born in 1888, he was a court musician in Gwalior but in the early 20th century, when music conferences became popular, he was one of the most popular artists to perform at these baithaks and was known for very fine musicianship.

He trained many significant musicians, including his son and foremost disciple Ustad Amjad Ali Khan and Pt Bhimsen Joshi for a few months, among others.

Other Famous Personalities:

Haddu Khan's son Bade Inayat Hussain Khan (1852-1922),

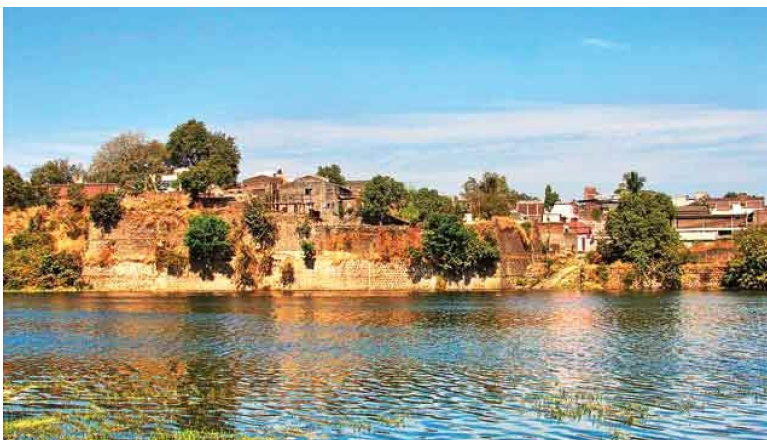
Vasudeva Buwa Joshi,

Balakrishnabuwa Ichalkaranjkar (1849–1926) who taught Vishnu Digambar Paluskar who later founded the Gandharva Mahavidyalaya which continues till today,

Famed educator BR Deodhar and Pakistani singer Farida Khanum among others.

Bhima River

The Bhima River has run dry, leaving 100 villages that relied on it in a difficult situation.



The Bhima River (also known as the Chandrabhaga River) is a major river in southwest India.

It is a major tributary of the Krishna River.

Course:

It originates in the Bhimashankar hills near Karjat on the western side of the Western Ghats, in the Pune District of Maharashtra.

Bhima flows southeast through the states of Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Telangana.

The Bhima River merges into the Krishna River at Kadlur (Raichur) in Karnataka.

This 861 km-long river has the Western Ghats on the west, the Balaghat Range in the north, and the Mahadeo Hills in the south.

It runs in a well-entrenched valley, and its banks are heavily populated.

The total basin area of the river is 48,631 sq. km, out of which 75 percent lie in the state of Maharashtra.

The river is rain-fed, and the volume of the river varies based on the monsoonal changes.

Major tributaries are the Sina and Nira rivers.

Pandharpur is an important pilgrimage centre located on the right bank of Bhima River.

SPEEDY DISPOSAL OF CASES AGAINST LAWMAKERS





The Supreme Court issued guidelines to expedite the disposal of criminal cases against Members of Parliament (MPs) and Members of Legislative Assemblies (MLAs).

These guidelines were issued in response to a plea filed in 2016, seeking the prompt resolution of cases involving lawmakers and advocating for a lifetime ban on convicted politicians from contesting elections.

The Representation of the People Act, 1951 (RP Act), introduced by Dr BR Ambedkar, governs the conduct of elections in India.

Section 8 of the RP Act deals with the disqualification of lawmakers on conviction for certain offences, including promoting enmity between groups, bribery, undue influence, hoarding, profiteering, or adulteration of food or drugs.

Section 8(3) specifically imposes a six-year ban on individuals convicted of offences with a minimum two-year sentence.

Supreme Court's guidelines include:

The court recommended the establishment of a "special bench" to monitor criminal cases against legislators.

High Courts were directed to undertake suo motu registration of cases against lawmakers to ensure their speedy resolution.

Priority should be given to cases against lawmakers that are punishable by death or life imprisonment. Cases punishable with five years or more imprisonment should also be prioritized.

The court suggested that cases could be heard by a Chief Justice-led special bench or a designated bench. These cases could also be listed at regular intervals, if necessary. The special bench may call upon the advocate general or prosecutor for assistance.

The Court acknowledged the difficulty in establishing uniform guidelines for trial courts across the country and entrusted high courts with the responsibility of devising effective measures to monitor and dispose of such cases.



High Courts were empowered to issue orders and directions for the effective disposal of cases against lawmakers. They could also direct the Principal District and Sessions Judge to allocate "subject cases" to specific courts.

Speedy Disposal of Cases Against Lawmakers

India is a vibrant democracy where people elect their representatives to the Parliament and the state legislatures. However, many of these representatives are facing criminal charges for various offences, ranging from corruption to murder.

According to a report by the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR), as of November 2022, there were 5,175 pending cases against MPs and MLAs across the country, out of which 2,116 (42%) were pending for more than five years.

The delay in disposing of these cases not only affects the credibility of the lawmakers but also undermines the rule of law and public confidence in the judiciary. Moreover, it allows the accused legislators to enjoy the benefits of office and influence the outcome of their cases. Therefore, there is an urgent need to expedite the trial of these cases and ensure that justice is done without fear or favour.

Steps taken to address the criminalization of politics and speedy disposal of cases against lawmakers

The Election Commission of India (ECI) has made it mandatory for candidates contesting elections to disclose their criminal antecedents, if any, in their affidavits along with their nomination papers.

The ECI has also directed political parties to publish the details of criminal cases against their candidates on their websites and in newspapers and TV channels at least three times during the election campaign.

The ECI has also launched a mobile app called 'cVIGIL' to enable citizens to report any violation of the model code of conduct or any malpractice during elections, including the use of money or muscle power by candidates or parties.

The Supreme Court has directed that special courts be set up to exclusively try criminal cases against MPs and MLAs and complete the trial within a year.



The Court has directed that criminal cases against lawmakers be given priority and disposed of expeditiously by the trial courts under the supervision of a special bench of the high court.

The Court has directed that interim protection or stay orders granted by any court in favour of any lawmaker should not unduly hamper or delay the trial process.

The Court has directed that electronic evidence be preserved and produced before the trial court without any tampering or alteration.

Challenges that hinder the speedy disposal of cases against lawmakers

The lack of adequate infrastructure, manpower and resources for the special courts dealing with criminal cases against lawmakers.

The frequent adjournments, transfers and appeals sought by the accused legislators or their lawyers to delay or derail the trial process.

The non-cooperation or interference by the executive or legislative authorities in the investigation or prosecution of criminal cases against lawmakers.

The intimidation or inducement of witnesses or evidence tampering by the accused legislators or their supporters to influence the outcome of the trial.

The low conviction rate and high acquittal rate in criminal cases against lawmakers due to weak evidence, faulty investigation or poor prosecution.

The absence of a clear legal framework or mechanism to debar convicted politicians from contesting elections or holding public office for life.

Way Forward to ensure speedy disposal of cases against lawmakers

The Centre and the states should provide adequate funds, infrastructure, manpower and resources to the special courts dealing with criminal cases against lawmakers.

The trial courts should strictly adhere to the time limit prescribed by the Supreme Court for completing the trial and avoid granting unnecessary adjournments, transfers or appeals to the accused legislators or their lawyers.



The executive and legislative authorities should respect the independence and autonomy of the judiciary and refrain from interfering or influencing the investigation or prosecution of criminal cases against lawmakers.

The witnesses should be given adequate protection and incentives to depose before the trial court without fear or favour. The trial court should also ensure that summons or warrants are issued to secure their attendance as per law.

The conviction rate and acquittal rate in criminal cases against lawmakers should be improved by ensuring proper evidence collection, investigation and prosecution. The trial court should also ensure that electronic evidence is preserved and produced without any tampering or alteration.

The Parliament should enact a law or amend the existing law to impose a lifetime ban on convicted politicians from contesting elections or holding public office. Alternatively, the Supreme Court should declare such a ban as a part of the basic structure of the Constitution