



## **CHITTAH**

### **India's Cheetah Translocation Project:**

➤ The government is now considering alternative conservation models, such as the **South African model of conserving cheetahs in fenced reserves.**

➤ **India's ambitious Cheetah Translocation Project** is facing a new set of challenges as two cheetahs have died, bringing the number of cheetahs left in the project to 18 out of the initial 20.

### **Causes of Death:**

➤ A South African study found that **predation was the biggest killer**, accounting for 53.2% of cheetah mortality. Lions, leopards, hyenas, and jackals were primarily responsible.

➤ **Cheetahs suffer very high cub mortality – up to 90%** in protected areas – mainly due to predation.

➤ In Africa, **the lion is the chief predator of cheetahs**; in India, where lions are absent (except in Gujarat), **leopards are likely to slip into that role** in potential cheetah landscapes.

➤ Other causes of mortality can be **holding camps, immobilization/transit, tracking devices**, and other wildlife killing cheetah (cubs) including warthogs, baboons, snakes, elephants, crocodiles, vultures, zebras, and even ostriches.



## What are the Options Available to the Project?

- The authorities are exploring the possibility of preparing Gandhi Sagar Wildlife Sanctuary in the Chambal River valley as the second home for cheetahs.
- Another option is to move a few cheetahs from Kuno to the safety of an 80-sq-km fenced area in Rajasthan's Mukundra Hills Tiger Reserve.
  - However, both options would mean shifting the project's goal from establishing the cheetah in **an open landscape to managing the African imports as a few pocket populations in fenced-in or restricted areas**.

## Way Forward

- The success of the cheetah project should **align with India's traditional conservation ethos**. India's conservation approach emphasizes **protecting naturally dispersing wildlife in viable non-fragmented habitats**.
- The Cheetah Project can choose to cut the risk by settling for the South African model of retaining a few pocket populations in fenced-in reserves.
  - However, keeping cheetahs in leopard-proof enclosures might not be a **sustainable solution**. Also, repeated sedate-and-recover interventions to restrict cheetahs to sanctuaries and national parks **can harm the animals**.