

Shri Bhupender Yadav reviews progress of Great Indian Bustard Conservation, Grassland Restoration and Project Cheetah at Bhuj; Releases Gujarat Action Plan for GIB Conservation

Conservation succeeds when we Restore Whole Landscapes, Not Isolated Species: Union Environment Minister

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Union Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Shri Bhupender Yadav, today chaired a Review Meeting of Flagship Programmes at Bhuj, Kachchh (Gujarat), covering the conservation status of the Great Indian Bustard, grassland restoration and Project Cheetah. The Review Meeting was also attended by Shri Arjun Modhwadia, Cabinet Minister for Forest and Environment, Climate Change and Science & Technology, Government of Gujarat. Senior officials of the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, the Gujarat Forest Department, the Wildlife Institute of India and the National Tiger Conservation Authority were also present.



On the occasion, the Union Minister emphasised that conservation must move beyond individual species to the restoration of entire landscapes, combining scientific management, habitat restoration and community participation, and said India is working towards becoming a global benchmark in landscape-level conservation.

Shri Yadav highlighted renewed efforts to conserve the Critically Endangered **Great Indian Bustard (GIB)** in Gujarat, where, he noted, Kachchh supports an important but small and isolated population. Releasing the Gujarat Action Plan for GIB Conservation, prepared by the Wildlife Institute of India in collaboration with the Gujarat Forest Department, the Minister said it provides a science-based roadmap to establish a minimum viable population of over 30 birds and secure 200–500 sq. km. of safe, contiguous habitat. He added that the immediate focus is on the approximately 200 sq. km. Lala–Rawa landscape, with interventions including habitat restoration, grazing management, invasive species removal, predator management and mitigation of infrastructure-related threats.

Shri Yadav informed that significant on-ground action has already been undertaken to secure this population. He noted that in Naliya, around 11 sq. km. of grassland infested with the invasive *Prosopis juliflora* has been restored, and the enclosure secured with 30 km of predator-proof fencing covering 15 sq. km., alongside targeted management of nest predators. Shri Yadav further emphasised that GIB conservation is ultimately the conservation of Kachchh's open natural ecosystems, which, he said, also support the lesser florican, chinkara, desert cats, raptors, vultures and other specialised wildlife.



Referring to a pioneering ‘jump-start’ intervention, in which infertile eggs laid by wild GIB females were replaced with viable eggs from the conservation breeding programme, the Minister said the resulting chick from the second such attempt has survived beyond the critical first three months in the wild – a landmark result for the species' recovery in Gujarat. He further stated that a GIB Soft Release Centre has been developed near Naliya, which will house and acclimatise captive-bred birds from Rajasthan ahead of their eventual release, once appropriate protocols and habitat conditions are in place.

On **Grassland Restoration**, Shri Yadav underlined the ecological importance of grasslands, which, he said, cover nearly 24% of India's land area but remain among the country's most degraded and under-conserved ecosystems. He informed that a proposed five-year national assessment, in collaboration with the Wildlife Institute of India, ICFRE and the Forest Survey of India, with National CAMPA support, would provide a scientific basis for developing a national framework for grassland management, focusing on mapping, ecological assessment, restoration and improved management of Open Natural Ecosystems, including Gujarat's Banni Grassland.

Reviewing **Project Cheetah**, the Minister noted that India has established a growing population from 29 founder cheetahs, with the population now reaching 52 individuals, including 49 cubs born in India. He observed that the cub survival rate in Kuno, at around 68%, significantly demonstrates the potential for successful population establishment under appropriate ecological conditions. Shri Yadav further noted that the protected habitat for cheetahs has expanded to 3,428 sq. km. through the integrated management of

Kuno National Park and Gandhi Sagar, and that Banni Grasslands in Gujarat and Nauradehi Wildlife Sanctuary in Madhya Pradesh have been identified as future release sites. The Minister said the programme is increasingly moving towards landscape-level management, ensuring adequate habitat, prey base and ecological connectivity for the long-term recovery of the species.



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