

**INDIA TO BE HOME TO CHEETAHS AFTER 70 YEARS**

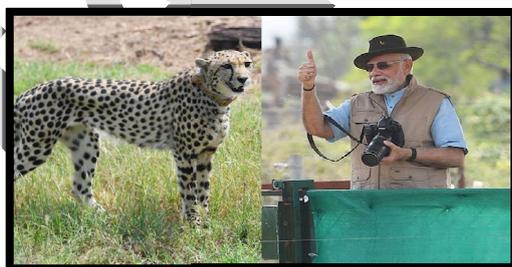
Eight African cheetahs are all set to move **from Namibia into their new habitat at the Kuno National Park in Madhya Pradesh**, September 17, on Prime Minister Narendra Modi's birthday. The PM is expected to release the five female and three male cheetahs into the Park's quarantine enclosures on Friday as part of his efforts to revitalise and diversify the country's wildlife and habitat, his office has said.

**The Cheetah**

The **last cheetah in India died in 1947** in Korea district in present day **Chhattisgarh**, which was earlier part of Madhya Pradesh, and the species was **declared extinct from India in 1952**. According to reports, the cheetah has lost 90 percent of its global habitat in the last 100 years. In addition, in many of the 31 populations of the cheetah, only 100-200 are left with their habitat consistently deteriorating. The '**African Cheetah Introduction Project in India**' was conceived in 2009, with a plan to introduce the big cat by November last year in Kuno National Park, but it suffered a setback due to the COVID-19 pandemic

**HOW WILL THE CHEETAHS BE BROUGHT TO INDIA**

The cheetahs will board a customised **Boeing 747-400 aircraft from Namibia's capital Windhoek** and arrive in Gwalior after completing an overnight journey lasting 10 hours and traversing 8,000 kilometres. The felines will then be shifted from **Gwalior to Kuno National Park (KNP)** in an Indian Air Force (IAF) Chinook heavy-lift helicopter. The cheetahs, aged between four and six years, will not be tranquilised for the journey. They will be fed two-three days before the journey and will be accompanied in the aircraft by three veterinarians. The aircraft bringing the animals has been sourced from a **UAE-based aircraft company** by Action Aviation. It carries the image of a tiger on its nose.

**WHY IS IT SIGNIFICANT**

**Dr Laurie Marker**, who has been an advisor to the Indian government on the cheetah relocation project for over 12 years told that this is the first time that a trans-continental project like this is taking off. The cheetah has gone **extinct in several countries** due to human activity, so it is our responsibility to ensure that it is brought back and preserved. Of course, the ideal situation would be to conserve animals because re-introduction is a difficult and long process. But once an animal becomes extinct, this is the only way," Dr Marker added.

**CHALLENGES**

Studies have shown that leopards have preyed on cheetahs in Africa, and similar fears are being expressed for Kuno as well, where around **50 leopards** are housed around the same area. According to experts, cheetah is a very delicate animal, they avoid conflict but remain in the target of competing animals. In Kuno, cheetah cubs can be at great risk from leopards, hyenas, wolves, bears, and wild dogs. In 2013, a research on cheetahs found in **Africa's Kgalagadi Park** showed that their cubs have **only 36 percent chance of survival**. Predatory animals are the main reason behind the death of their cubs.

**ELECTION COMMISSION OF INDIA LAUNCHED BLO E-PATRIKA**

The Election Commission of India has released a new digital publication 'BLO e-Patrika' at an interactive session held with BLOs spread across the states in India. In states/UTs, 50 BLOs from nearby states of Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, and Delhi joined the event physically at India Habitat Centre in New Delhi. Over 350 BLOs joined the meeting via video-conferencing from the office of Chief Electoral Officers (CEO).

The BLOs participated in the interactive session with the Commission sharing their **experience, challenges** they came across while performing their duties, and **success stories**. It was **first-of-its-kind direct interaction** by the Commission with the BLOs across the country.

### KEY POINTS RELATED TO BLO E-PATRIKA

- BLOs are the **direct links of the Commission** with the people.
- They are the **primary source of information** for every voter across the length and breadth of the country.
- The **BLO e-Patrika** is released to ensure a cascading information model for a **better informed and motivated Booth Level Officer**.
- The themes of the bimonthly e-Patrika include subjects related to **EVM-VVPAT Training, IT application, special summary revision, Minimum SVEEP Activities at polling booths, Postal Ballot facilities, accessible elections, Electoral Literacy Clubs, Unique voter awareness initiatives, and National Voters Day**.

## INDIA-RUSSIA RELATIONS: FROM HISTORY TO CONTEMPORARY TIMES

India has remained a reliable strategic partner of Russia traditionally and remembers the help Moscow extended to India in its toughest times in the past. The development of India-Russia relations has been a key pillar of India's foreign policy. Indo-Russian ties enjoy enhanced levels of cooperation in almost all areas of the bilateral relationships including political, security, defence, trade and economy, science and technology, and culture.

### THE PARTNERSHIP:

Russians and Indians, both value and share values like friendship and loyalty, and this is something that unites the people of the two countries and especially the members of their permanent bureaucracies in ways that outside observers rarely ever realize. The particularly **privileged strategic partnership between the two countries** has become stronger and more diversified over a period of time. In the field of defence, India has longstanding and wide-ranging cooperation with Russia. India-Russia military-technical cooperation has evolved from a buyer-seller framework to one involving joint research, development and production of **advanced defence technologies** and systems. **BrahMos Missile System** as well as the licensed production in India of SU-30 aircraft and T-90 tanks are examples of such flagship cooperation.



### KEY SECTORS OF COOPERATION:

Both sides cooperate in the peaceful uses of outer space, including satellite launches, navigation systems, remote sensing and other societal applications of outer space. It is worth mentioning that Indian astronauts, who will fly into space in 2024 aboard an Indian spacecraft, have received basic training in Russia, another enduring symbol of **India-Russia friendship**. In the area of peaceful use of nuclear energy, Russia is an important partner for India. It recognizes India as a country with advanced nuclear technology with an impeccable non-proliferation record. In Dec 2014, India's DAE (Department of Atomic Energy) and Russia's Rosatom signed the Strategic Vision for strengthening cooperation in peaceful uses of atomic energy. **Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant (KKNPP)** is being built in India with Russian cooperation.

### HISTORICAL ASPECT:

India and Russia shared decades of close linkages at the highest levels **during the Soviet era**. The tumult of the immediate post-Soviet years, however, reverberated through the Indo-Russia relationship as well, as the newly established Russian Federation sought to rebuild its foreign policy. The years immediately following the collapse of the Soviet Union saw the Boris Yeltsin administration adopting a **pro-Western foreign policy orientation**. For India, meanwhile, it was the time it began liberalising its

economy and looking to the West for trade and investment. Both countries, therefore, were occupied with domestic priorities while adjusting to a changed world order with the **United States (US) as the sole superpower**.

Even so, India and Russia both made efforts to revive their relationship. **In 1993 they signed a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation**, and a year later they followed it up with a Military-Technical Cooperation agreement. India would eventually become a leading importer of Russian weapons, following a brief period from 1990-93 when there was a sharp fall in the volume of arms sales.

However, there has been no parallel revival in economic relations. In the 1990s, disputes regarding rupee-rouble rate and repayment of amount owed by India continued. **The Russian economy's downslide, alongside competition from other fast-developing nations, as well as the opacity of laws in the post-Soviet state**, all contributed to the decline in the share of India in Russian trade. By 1996, Russia's trade with India contributed a mere one percent of Russia's overall trade.

The cultural and people-to-people contacts that had flourished during the Soviet Union period—bolstered by significant funding and scholarships for regular exchange—also dropped. The number of institutions in India teaching Russian language declined, as well as the number of students enrolled in these courses.

A renewed effort to strengthen the bilateral relationship was made at the beginning of the **presidency of Vladimir Putin in 2000**, when the annual summits between India and Russia were instituted. In 2010, marking a decade of the '**Declaration on Strategic Partnership**' between the two countries, the joint statement proclaimed that the relationship had reached "the level of a special and privileged strategic partnership."

## INDIA'S POSITION ON RECENT CONFLICT

- In the context of the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict, while the West has been critical of India's balanced position in accordance with its **policy of multilateralism**, Russia has displayed understanding vis-a-vis India's stand on the ongoing crisis. Russia's newly appointed Ambassador to India Denis Alipov recently expressed that India was taking a "fairly balanced position" regarding the Russia-Ukraine conflict. He further added that the current situation would not affect Russia-India cooperation in the military-technical sphere.
- In the pharmaceutical sector, Indian companies could fill in the void created by Western manufacturers. Vouching for enhanced cooperation with India on hydrocarbon supplies, the Russian Ambassador stated that if New Delhi showed interest, Moscow was prepared to closely study the possibility of **selling its S-500 system to India**.
- In view of the historical strategic ties between the two countries and in the backdrop of **Russia's "Special Military Operation" in Ukraine**, interaction with India assumes significant importance for Russia. Moscow considers political dialogue with India to be vital at this stage; and simultaneously recognises that with the expansion of Western sanctions, cooperation with India in the economic sphere has become all the more important. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov's visit to India, therefore, needs to be seen, not only in the light of ongoing operation but also from the prism of the vision of both countries to establish a long-term and strategically important cooperation. The relationship between India and Russia has a unique strength that has repeatedly shown that it follows its own logic and is immune to pressure from third countries.

## HOW THE APPROACH SHOULD BE

The process of **re-establishing the multi-dimensional relationship** has been long; it has also had to contend with the geo-political and geo-economic shifts both at the regional and global levels. This has required the two countries to overcome the old romanticism of the **Indo-Soviet ties** and engage at a pragmatic level. Today there is no denying the mutual trust and friendship that exists between the two countries. However, the divergences in the goals of the two nations have sharpened in recent times, fuelled by both bilateral and international factors – and have the potential to deeply impact the future of Indo-Russia relationship.