Project Cheetah

Prelims: Current events of national importance | Conservation

Why in News?

A high-level review meeting chaired by the Union Minister of Environment, Forest and Climate Change assessed the latest milestones of **Project Cheetah**, revealing significant progress in population stabilization, breeding, and landscape expansion.

Population as on May 2026

- **Total Population Status -** The cheetah population in India has grown to 53 individuals.
- **Indian-Born Population-** Out of 53 Cheetah, Indian born cubs are 33
- Indicating successful acclimatization, breeding, and cub-rearing under Indian climatic and ecological conditions.
- **Founder Stock Expansion -** The initial founder population translocated from Namibia and South Africa was recently supplemented by an additional 9 cheetahs from Botswana, diversifying the genetic pool.

Management outlook for Project cheetah

Project cheetah is moving away from managing a single isolated pocket to establishing a robust **metapopulation framework** across an interconnected central Indian landscape to allow natural dispersal and genetic exchange.

- **Primary Site: Kuno National Park (Madhya Pradesh) -** Serves as the primary site and launchpad for the population establishment.
- **Expansion Sites: Gandhisagar Wildlife Sanctuary (Madhya Pradesh) -** Prepared as the immediate additional habitat to support overflow and population expansion.
- **Nauradehi Wildlife Sanctuary (Madhya Pradesh) -** Identified for development in the next consolidation phase to strengthen the larger central Indian cheetah corridor.
- **Banni Grasslands (Gujarat) -** Preparatory work for habitat readiness & safety (species conservation) and prey augmentation has reached satisfactory levels to introduce cheetahs into this unique arid grassland ecosystem.

Ecological Insights

- **Ecological Adaptation -** Indicates a stable ranging behavior, high prey-utilization efficiency (primarily targeting local herbivores like chital), and absence of chronic physiological or thermal stress.
- **Open Natural Ecosystems -** Beyond species conservation, Project Cheetah acts as an umbrella initiative to restore India's degrading savannas, scrublands, and open natural ecosystems (ONEs), which host unique, threatened biodiversity.

For Reference: PIB | IAS Parliament

