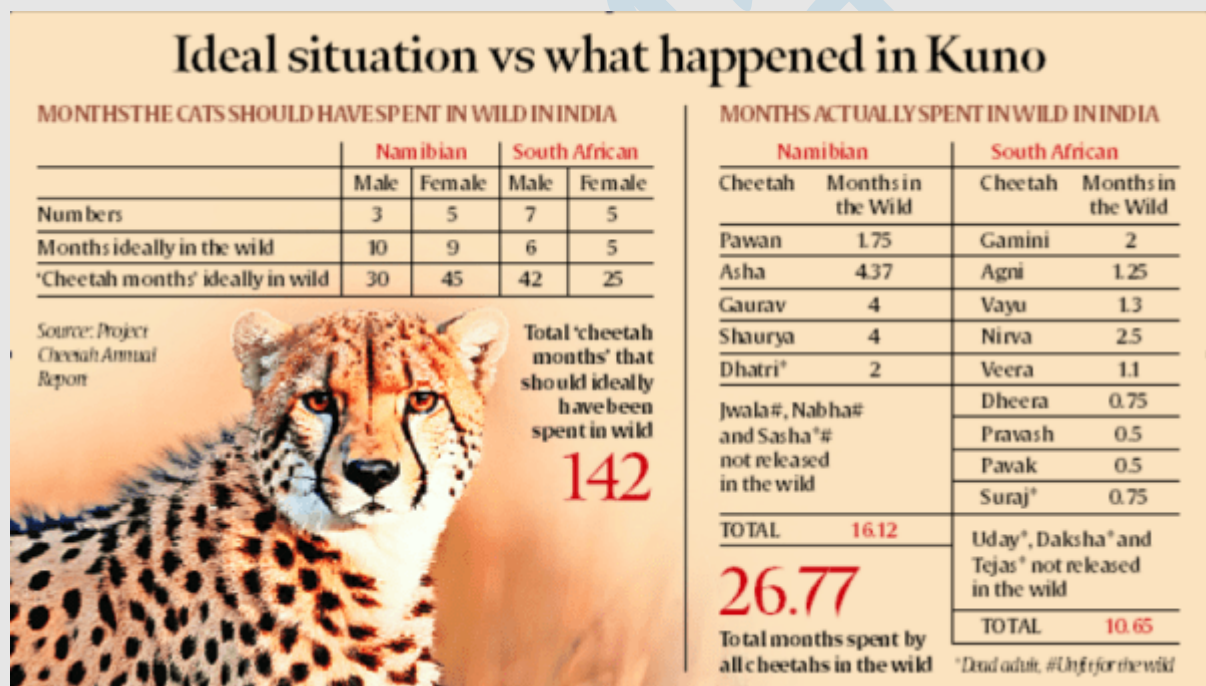


1. Project Cheetah: A Year in Review

After a year of launching Project Cheetah, India's ambitious plan to introduce African cats into the country's wild in Kuno in the State of Madhya Pradesh, the project claims success in four areas. However, a closer look reveals some challenges and compromises.

Survival in the Wild

While the project claims a 50% survival rate for introduced cheetahs, the real test is in the wild, not in captivity. The cheetahs from Namibia and South Africa were supposed to spend specific durations in enclosures before release, but questions arise about their actual time spent in the wild.



Establishment of Home Ranges

Only three cheetahs have spent more than three consecutive months in the wild, and even they have been confined since July. The establishment of "home ranges" in Kuno seems unlikely, raising concerns about the project's success in this aspect.

A home range is the area in which an animal lives and moves on a periodic basis. It is related to the concept of an animal's territory which is the area that is actively defended.

Reproduction in the Wild

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 boma (enclosure).

Impact on Local Livelihoods

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 and Mistakes

Died in Captive breeding: 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.

Reproduction attempt: 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 in March. But the gamble failed when two South African males killed the female Phinda alias Daksha in May.

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

Maggot infestation: 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.

Seasonal variation: The project experts had failed to factor in seasonal variation while sourcing animals from the southern hemisphere. The animals grew winter coats during the Indian monsoon, leading to prolonged wetness and infection.

Kuno’s carrying capacity

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.

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.

Paradigm shift 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.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Environment

Source: The Indian Express

2. Hollywood Strike Ends: Key Details of the Deal

After nearly four months of striking, Hollywood writers and actors have reached a tentative deal with film studios and streaming giants, bringing an end to one of the longest strikes in history.

Why the Prolonged Strike?

The strike, initiated in May 2023 by the Writers Guild of America (WGA) and the Screen Actors Guild-American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (SAG-AFTRA), addressed concerns related to outdated regulations in the entertainment industry. Shifting from traditional TV and theatres to streaming platforms triggered the need for updated worker protections.

Demands and Achievements

Workers demanded compensation amid evolving work practices, including increased minimum pay, residuals for streaming, and contributions to health and pension plans. The achieved deal, valued at over one billion dollars, includes substantial compensation increases, protections against AI threats, a streaming participation bonus, and advancements in pension and health benefits.

Deal Approval Process

While the deal is tentative, full details will emerge after SAG-AFTRA National Board review. A potential for the strike to continue exists if WGA leadership votes against lifting the restraining order, or if union members reject the deal in a ratification vote.

Concerns Over Worker Provisions

While celebrated, concerns arise over increased minimum pay and pro-worker provisions. Streaming platforms like Netflix and Disney may face pressure from investors, potentially affecting hiring and production. Worker criticism focuses on executive bonuses and questions about the claimed need for cost-cutting.

Impact on Hollywood Productions

The strike halted major projects like 'Deadpool 3' and a 'Gladiator' sequel. With the strike's end, these projects, along with others, are expected to resume production. Shows like 'Abbott Elementary' and 'The White Lotus' may also quickly return, following the earlier tentative deal reached by the Writers' Guild in September.

Next Steps in Deal Approval

The SAG-AFTRA National Board will review the deal, and upon its release, the full guild membership will vote on it before it comes into effect.

In summary, the end of the Hollywood strike brings relief, but ongoing concerns and the deal's approval process remain focal points in the industry's evolving landscape.

Relevance: GS Prelims

Source: The Indian Express & The Hindu

3. Why has the govt. issued a directive on deepfakes?

Introduction

On 8 November, the Indian government instructed "social media intermediaries" to remove morphed videos or deepfakes from their platforms within 24 hours of a complaint being filed, in accordance with a requirement outlined in the IT Rules 2021. The instructions came as deepfake videos of actors Rashmika Mandanna and Katrina Kaif surfaced online within the span of one week.

What are deepfakes?

Deepfakes have been around since 2017 and refer to videos, audios or images created using a form of artificial intelligence called deep learning. The term became popular when a Reddit contributor used publicly available AI-driven software to impose the faces of celebrities onto the bodies of people in pornographic videos.

Fast forward to 2023, deepfake tech, with the help of AI tools, allows semi and unskilled individuals to create fake content with morphed audio-visual clips and images.

How does deepfake technology work?

The technology involves modifying or creating images and videos using a machine learning technique called generative adversarial network (GAN). The AI-driven software detects and learns the subjects' movements and facial expressions from the source material and then duplicates these in another video or image. To ensure that the deepfake created is as close to real as possible, creators use a large database of source images. This is why more deepfake videos are created of public figures, celebrities and politicians.

The dataset is then used by one software to create a fake video, while a second software is used to detect signs of forgery in it. Through the collaborative work of the two software, the fake video is rendered until the second software package can no longer detect the forgery. This is known as “unsupervised learning”, when machine-language models teach themselves. The method makes it difficult for other software to identify deepfakes.

What do laws in India say about deepfakes?

India’s IT Rules, 2021 require that all content reported to be fake or produced using deep fake be taken down by intermediary platforms within 36 hours.

The Indian IT ministry has also issued notices to social media platforms stating that impersonating online was illegal under Section 66D of the Information Technology Act of 2000. The IT Rules, 2021, also prohibit hosting any content that impersonates another person and requires social media firms to take down artificially morphed images when alerted.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Science & Technology

Source: The Hindu