India Marks International Snow Leopard Day 2025 with #23for23 Initiative

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1. Context and Occasion

- **Date Observed:** 23rd October 2025
- **Event:** *International Snow Leopard Day*
- **Organised by:** Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC)
- **Key Leader:** Shri **Bhupender Yadav**, Union Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change

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2. Theme & Initiative – '#23for23'

- **Concept:** Encouraged citizens to engage in **23 minutes of physical activity** (like walking, yoga, running, etc.) to promote awareness about snow leopard conservation.
- **Objective:**
    - To symbolically connect **"23 minutes"** with **"2023 International Year of Millets"** and **2023's focus on conservation fitness**.
    - To involve citizens, institutions, students, and even **the Indian Army** in conservation awareness.
- **Focus:** Citizen participation and awareness for **snow leopard and habitat conservation**.

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3. Key Highlights

- India celebrated the day **nationwide**, showing the **collective responsibility** towards wildlife protection.
- Shri Yadav lauded the efforts of:
    - **Local communities** in Himalayan regions,
    - **Research institutions**, and
    - **Security forces (Indian Army)** for their role in protecting fragile

ecosystems.

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4. First-ever Snow Leopard Census of India

- **Conducted by:** Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) with **Wildlife Institute of India (WII)** and partner states.
- **Purpose:** To get a **scientific estimate** of the snow leopard population and distribution in India.
- **Result:**
    - **Total recorded:** 718 individual snow leopards across the Indian Himalayas.
    - **Regional distribution:**
        - **Ladakh:** 477 (largest population)
        - **Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, and Jammu & Kashmir** – remaining population.

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5. Conservation Significance

- **Snow Leopard (Panthera uncia):**
    - Also called the **“Ghost of the Mountains.”**
    - An apex predator and **indicator species** for high-altitude ecosystem health.
    - **IUCN Red List:** *Vulnerable*
    - **Listed in:**
        - **Schedule I** of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972
        - **CITES Appendix I**

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6. India’s Conservation Efforts

- **Under PM Narendra Modi’s Leadership**, conservation programmes have shown positive outcomes.
- **Key Programmes & Initiatives:**

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1. **Project Snow Leopard (PSL):**
    - Launched in 2009.
    - Aims at conserving high-altitude ecosystems through community participation.
2. **SECURE Himalaya Project:**
    - Joint initiative of MoEFCC and UNDP (funded by Global Environment Facility – GEF).
    - Focus on sustainable livelihood and conservation in snow leopard landscapes.
3. **GSLEP (Global Snow Leopard and Ecosystem Protection Programme):**
    - Launched in 2013 in Bishkek (Kyrgyzstan).
    - A multinational alliance of 12 snow leopard range countries, including India.
    - Aims to secure **20 snow leopard landscapes by 2020** and beyond.
4. **Community-based Conservation:**
    - Engaging local communities in **eco-tourism**, **livelihood diversification**, and **habitat restoration**.

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7. Ecological Importance of Snow Leopards

- **Role:** Keystone species of the Himalayan ecosystem.
- **Function:** Maintains ecological balance by regulating herbivore populations.
- **Habitat:** Harsh alpine and subalpine zones (altitude: 3,000–5,500 meters).
- **Range in India:**
    - Ladakh, Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim, and Arunachal Pradesh.

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8. Challenges in Conservation

- **Habitat fragmentation and degradation** due to infrastructure and tourism.

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- **Human-wildlife conflict** (livestock depredation).
- **Poaching** for fur and bones.
- **Climate change**, leading to shifting vegetation and prey loss.
- **Limited scientific data** due to difficult terrain.

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9. Way Forward / Government's Vision

- Strengthen **science-based monitoring** through camera trapping and genetic studies.
- Expand **protected areas** and **wildlife corridors**.
- Integrate **local community participation** in decision-making.
- Promote **transboundary cooperation** under GSLEP.
- Encourage **eco-sensitive tourism** and **awareness initiatives** like #23for23.

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10. UPSC Relevance

Prelims:

- Snow Leopard habitat and status (IUCN, Schedule I, CITES Appendix I)
- Project Snow Leopard, SECURE Himalaya, GSLEP initiatives
- Locations of snow leopard population in India

Mains (GS Paper 3 – Environment & Biodiversity):

- Government initiatives for wildlife conservation
- Community participation in conservation
- Role of science and monitoring in species protection
- Human-wildlife conflict in Himalayan ecosystems

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11. Quick Facts

Aspect	Detail
Species	Snow Leopard (*Panthera uncia*)
IUCN Status	Vulnerable

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Aspect	Detail
Found in India	Ladakh, J&K, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh
Census (2025)	718 individuals
Largest population	Ladakh – 477 individuals
Initiative	#23for23
Programme Linkage	GSLEP, Project Snow Leopard, SECURE Himalaya
Minister	Shri Bhupender Yadav

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