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

### 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

### 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.

# 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

# 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.

# **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

# 6. India's Conservation Efforts

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

# 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.

# 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.

# 8. Challenges in Conservation

• Habitat fragmentation and degradation due to infrastructure and tourism.

- 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.

# 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.

### 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

# 11. Quick Facts

Aspect
Species
IUCN Status

Detail
Snow Leopard (*Panthera uncia*)
Vulnerable

Aspect Found in India

Census (2025)
Largest population
Initiative
Programme Linkage

**Minister** 

Detail
Ladakh, J&K, Himachal Pradesh,
Uttarakhand, Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh
718 individuals
Ladakh - 477 individuals
#23for23
GSLEP, Project Snow Leopard, SECURE
Himalaya
Shri Bhupender Yadav

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