Project Lion is an ambitious conservation initiative launched by the Government of India to protect and expand the population of Asiatic lions — the last surviving wild population, found only in Gir Forest, Gujarat.

Announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his Independence Day speech on August 15, 2020.

Officially approved by the Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change on November 2, 2022, with a 10-year plan and a budget of Rs 2,927.71 crore.

Objectives of Project Lion:

1. Population Expansion:

Develop Barda Dungar Wildlife Sanctuary (100 km west of Gir) as a “second home” for Asiatic lions to reduce the risk of overpopulation in Gir and mitigate threats from natural disasters or disease outbreaks.

2. Disease Prevention and Healthcare:

Establish a state-of-the-art veterinary hospital in Sasan, Gir, which will serve as the National Wildlife Disease Diagnostic Centre.

Focus on monitoring and preventing Canine Distemper Virus (CDV) and Babesia — both have posed serious threats to lions in 2018 and 2020.

Ensure timely diagnosis and treatment of lions affected by diseases.

3. Strengthening Surveillance and Protection:

Use drone monitoring for real-time tracking of lion movements.

Install CCTV surveillance at forest entrances and exits to prevent poaching and unauthorized activities.

Deploy 33 Rapid Response Units (RRUs) for immediate rescue and protection efforts.

Create 100 new tracker positions to enhance lion rescue operations.

4. Habitat Development:

Improve prey base and water availability in both Gir and the upcoming Barda sanctuary.

Involve local communities in eco-tourism and conservation activities to ensure participatory protection efforts.

Significance of Project Lion:

Addresses the risk of population bottlenecks by promoting habitat diversification — essential as the entire lion population is currently concentrated in Gir.

Aims to build resilience against disease outbreaks by establishing modern veterinary infrastructure.

Enhances technological surveillance — ensuring real-time monitoring of lions and preventing

human-wildlife conflict.

Integrates local communities into the conservation model — promoting sustainable development through eco-tourism.

Challenges:

1. Resistance to Relocation:

Political and local resistance to moving lions outside Gujarat has delayed habitat diversification.

2. Disease Outbreaks:

Past outbreaks (like CDV in 2018) underscore the vulnerability of a concentrated population.

3. Human-Wildlife Conflict:

Expanding populations have led to lions venturing outside Gir, increasing encounters with humans.

4. Climate Change:

Altered weather patterns can impact the habitat and prey availability for lions.