

Parimal Nathwani

Member of Parliament
(Rajya Sabha)

Member:

Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law & Justice
Consultative Committee, Ministry of Commerce and Industry

Permanent Special Invitee:

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Media Release

Adopt Gir Lion as National Animal: MP Nathwani's Plea in Rajya Sabha

March 13, 2012: Mr. Parimal Nathwani, rajya sabha member raised a case of world famous Asiatic lions of Gir in the House during question hour with a specific question of making Lion as the national animal. The ministry of environment and forest under the independent charge of Smt Jayanti Natrajan replied that Bengal tiger continued to be our national animal and there was no proposal under consideration with the government to replace it with the Asiatic lion.

The cause of Gir lions is closed to the heart of Mr. Nathwani and his question was slated as star question No. 3 during zero hours. It had expected to trigger a discussion on this important issue but unfortunately the house was adjourned in less than half an hour because of the pandemonium on the issue of human rights of the Tamil Population in Sri Lanka.

Undeterred Mr. Nathwani met the minister on adjournment of the House, reiterated his plea and requested the government to consider more funds for the Gir lions.

The government's reply stated that tiger was adopted as our national animal in place of lion in a meeting of the Indian Board for Wildlife held in 1972. The main reasons were that tiger was important worldwide, secondly it existed in as many as 16 states in the country and third the need for its strict protection; whereas lion was found only in one State.

The government however confirmed the fact that the Gir forest was the only wild population of Asiatic lion *Panthera leo persica* in the world. The population of Asiatic lions in Gir National Park, Sanctuary and other areas of Greater Gir was estimated at 411 by the Government of Gujarat in 2010; the reply added.

It was also said in the reply that the planning commission had approved in principle a project for 'Conservation of Asiatic lion in Greater Gir Region' to be implemented by Government of Gujarat over a period of five years at the cost of Rs. 262.36 crores including central assistance of Rs. 236.63 crores. The project also included creation of infrastructure for promotion of eco tourism in the Gir Forest.

Mr. Nathwani who is an ardent lover of Gir forest and the Asiatic lion, believes that Gir Lion has a strong case to be a national animal. He said that our national emblem too contained the figures of lions which itself made a strong case for making lion as national animal. Further, he said he would continue his drive for the cause of Gir lions. He added that it was high time there was a high power 'Project Gir Lions' headed by not less than the prime minister on the line of the one 'Project Tiger'.