

# **Gujarat CM directs to promote Eco-Tourism in protected forest areas and to frame visitor policy guidelines**

During the 26th meeting of the State Wildlife Board held in Gandhinagar under the chairmanship of Bhupendra Patel, it was announced that the Jessore Sloth Bear Sanctuary has been included in the National Programme for Bear Conservation by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.

According to the Chief Minister's Office (CMO), the meeting—attended by Forest and Environment Minister Arjunbhai Modhwadia and Minister of State Pravin Mali—also noted the sighting of a tiger in the Ratanmahal Sloth Bear Sanctuary. Officials indicated a strong possibility that the tiger could establish a permanent presence in the sanctuary.

In this context, discussions were held on initiating community participation and training programmes for residents in tiger conservation and protection, in collaboration with the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA).

Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel emphasised that the increasing number of tourists and visitors to Gujarat's protected forest areas must not result in disturbance or harm to wildlife. He directed the Forest Department to promote responsible eco-tourism and to frame clear visitor management guidelines to safeguard ecological balance.

The meeting also deliberated on plans to identify a suitable sanctuary in the near future for Gujarat's growing leopard population, including rescued leopards requiring protected habitats.

Additionally, around 18 proposals related to infrastructure development—including roads, water supply, optical fibre connectivity, renewable energy projects, power transmission lines, and other essential facilities within sanctuaries and national parks—were placed before the Board for approval.

MLAs Mahesh Kaswala, Devabhai Malam, Smt. Maltiben Maheshwari, and other members participated in the meeting, offering valuable suggestions for

wildlife conservation. The meeting was conducted by the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, Dr Jaipal Singh.