



Advisory on Importing Live Exotic Animals

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Why in News

Recently, the **Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change** has issued an advisory to streamline and formalise the process of **importing live exotic animals**.

Many exotic species of birds, reptiles and amphibians are imported into India for **commercial purposes**.

Key Points

- **Exotic Animals:**
 - The term exotic does not have a set definition but it usually refers to a wild animal or one that is **more unusual and rare** than normal domesticated pets like cats or dogs.
 - These are those species which are **not usually native to an area** and are introduced to an area by humans.
 - The advisory has defined them as those that are mentioned under the Appendices of the **Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora** (CITES) but not under the **Schedules of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972**.
- The **major reason** for issuing the advisory is to regulate trade because the issue of **zoonotic diseases** is linked to wildlife. With this advisory, it will be known how many such exotic animals are there in the country.

- **Provisions:**

- For **import and disclosure** of exotic animals and their progeny already in India.
- A person trying to import a live exotic animal will have to submit an application for grant of a licence to the **Director-General of Foreign Trade (DGFT)**, under the **Ministry of Commerce and Industry**.

Earlier, these imports were happening through the DGFT but they were beyond the purview of the forest departments and the chief wildlife wardens were not aware of them.

- The importer will also have to attach a **No Objection Certificate (NOC)** of the chief wildlife warden of the state concerned along with the application.
- For those people who have already imported exotic animals, a **declaration will have to be made within six months**.

However, if the declaration is made after six months, documents related to the provenance of the animal will have to be submitted.

- **Criticism:**

- Being an advisory, it **does not have the force of law** and can **potentially incentivize illegal trade** by offering a long amnesty period.
- Matters such as the **spread of invasive species** as well as zoonotic diseases had not been taken care of in the advisory.
- The growing **domestic trade in exotic species of wildlife is not listed** under the various appendices of CITES (such as sugar gliders, corn snakes), which limits the scope of the advisory itself.
- There is **no mention of the welfare standards of captive facilities** that could **lead to 'legal' backyard breeding** of wildlife with poor to no welfare concern of the wild animals involved.
- There will be a **high chance of transmission of pathogens across the species barrier** if the ministry fails to issue any consequent guidelines on maintenance and care of animals in different facilities.

Way Forward

- The advisory should be appreciated for its effort to introduce some regulation even though India's regulation of the trade in exotic animals is severely lacking.
- Proper regulations are required for the exotic animal trade which take into account its true risks and costs.

Source: DTE